



## **"Let yourself be transformed" ...to work in a team**

(Fr. Walter Lobina, SSP)

"I strain forward." This expression, of Saint Paul (Philippians 3:13), is a strong point for Don Giacomo Alberione. He strongly feels the prophetic impetus and the mission God entrusts to him: "to do something for the Lord and for the men of the new century with whom he would live" (Abundantes Divitiae, 15). And he is not content with "writings in a Christian way", because "this is possible for every Christian writer". Fr. Alberione, for himself, and for every Pauline apostle, demands more: "The apostle, however, must go further. He has his specific mission: to extend in time and space the work of God the author of Holy Scripture" (The Apostolate of the Edition, 159).

A challenging mission. For this reason: "Projecting himself mentally into the future he felt that in the new century generous people would experience what he was feeling; and that teamed up into an organization..." (Abundantes Divitiae, 17). He perceived the need for an organization of people drawn by his own inspiration.

The organization becomes a fundamental element: "The need for a new band of apostles, that from then on these things always dominated his thoughts, his prayer, his spiritual work and his yearnings. He felt an obligation to serve the Church, the women and men of the new age, and to work with others in an organized way." (Abundantes Divitiae, 20). His initial idea was for a Catholic organization of writers, technical people, book-sellers and retailers; Catholics to whom<sup>1</sup> he would give direction, work and a spirit of apostolate... Toward 1910 he took a definitive step. It became much clearer that the writers, technical personnel and promoters [would have to be] religious men and women... [He was] to form an organization, an organization of religious. Here efforts would coalesce, dedication would be total and the doctrine purer. (Abundantes Divitiae, 23.24). "What counts today, more so than in times past, is organization," (Ut perfectus sit homo Dei, I, 382). "A large, powerful organization, of ancient spirit and modern forms, that is to say, the Publishing Apostolate exercised not by individual initiatives, but by initiatives of a universal character which has an army of prepared members... an army of religious, who propose as a special purpose to exercise the Publishing Apostolate" (The Apostolate of the Edition, 53-54).

But how to structure this organization? Fr. Alberione had two models before him. The Fordhist model, in the secular sphere, decidedly hierarchical, managerial and vertical; and the clerical one, equally hierarchical and vertical. The organization he established, therefore, can only be of this type, but it is theologically motivated. The structure is hierarchical in that it descends from Christ to the various categories of people. First comes the priests, called to preach the Gospel. Fr. Alberione proposes a new model of priest, the priest-writer, apostle of the good press. The priest

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian text notes here that the conjunction "and" stands for the pronoun "to whom".

is called to write, just as he is called to preach. Oral preaching and printed preaching are different only in the manner, not in the content nor in the obligation to preach, reserved to the priest. It thus transfers to the priest-writer's environment the realities typical of the Parish. But since preaching with the instruments of communication requires much more collaboration than oral preaching, here are the disciples, with the task of multiplying the preaching of the priest. And thus to reach the faithful.

Fr Alberione sees in a positive and integrated way this hierarchy, which in the Fordist model little by little reveals the negative aspects, because everyone responds and participates in the same mission of evangelization. In fact, following the same inspiration and the same mission creates a strong cohesion among the religious, since each one, according to his possibilities and the mandate received,

gives his contribution to the publishing apostolate. It is a real teamwork, following the same inspiration and mission.

More than a century has passed since Fr. Alberione realized his apostolic dream. Many things have changed, especially in terms of communication models and organizational structures.

"Whoever stops or slows down is outdated," wrote Fr. Alberione (San Paolo, May 1949). The following year he took up the words of Card. Elia Dalla Costa: *"Either we look courageously at reality, beyond the small world around us, and then see urgent need for a radical change of mentality and method, or in the course of a few years we will have made a desert around the Master of life; and life, rightly, will eliminate us as dead, useless, bulky branches"* (San Paolo, November 1950).

All too evident in today's world. Which, among other things, has continued its technological development by immersing us in the culture and mentality of digital and network communication. The ever more rapid changes today require the Church and the Paulines to have the same apostolic courage as Fr Alberione.

The first revolution is in communication: we have moved from information at the center, which was spread unilaterally among the many users, to the multitasking individual at the center, who selects the increasingly cross-media and trans-medial information.

Therefore, the relationship between the preacher of the Gospel and the people to whom it is addressed definitely changes. In the past he was an undisputed reference point, and his words had to be welcomed. Today he finds himself one of the many people who offer a message; and it is the user who chooses the one that seems most congenial to his life, the one that brings him the maximum benefit. This means that the Apostle must be able to inspire his audience, so that his message is chosen, shared, and participated. In modern terms of marketing we speak of evangelist and influencer, a current reflection of the biblical prophet and apostle, capable of witnessing and winning people to the covenant with God.

It also changes the structure of communication, which is omni-channel, cross-media and Trans-medial. These are new ways of thinking and communicating; a communicative system that also determines the organizational structure, functional to the new reality. We are not talking about future realities, but about a real, current need. The objective of the new form of communication is to create experience, to excite, to develop intense relationships.

An essential ingredient is a great story to tell "together". And the story of salvation is unique in this.

The second revolution concerns the organization itself. Over time, we have moved from the pyramidal, hierarchical, bureaucratic organization, in which the organizational function and its

efficiency are optimized; to the matrix organization, with the cross-sectionality of functions and the overcoming of boundaries within the same organization; to the horizontal organization, with the optimization of the participatory function: the objective is that everyone feels part of the organization, and therefore invests in the sense of belonging, identity, and motivation; to the network organization, with the optimization of the community function and oriented towards the objectives to be achieved: the focus is on innovation, overcoming boundaries and making the organization flexible and changeable. To these is added the organization of inspiration: it is the one that starts from "why" things are done; this "why" inspires how to structure oneself, how to act, and the things to achieve. It is a return to Fr Alberione's original idea, albeit in new forms, which involves everyone (Paulines and lay people) in the unique mission and apostolate of publishing.

The pyramidal scheme typical of evangelization has also changed. The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is clear in this regard: "*The whole people of God proclaims the Gospel... All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.*" (*Evangelii gaudium*, III,120).

The model of leadership also changes decisively. The leader today is the inspiring, driving, and involving element in carrying out the mission. He is no longer the one who commands and to whom it is necessary to obey, but the person who knows how to make the most of individual skills for innovation that reaches the public.

Leadership, moreover, is no longer vertical, but is increasingly diffused: it is characterized by co-responsibility on the part of all members; it is based on the quality of contributions; critical, creative and strategic thinking is valued; the culture of the charism is shared in responding to the demands of history.

Which Pauline, then, for today? Fr. Alberione emphasized: "Our apostolate requires science. First the common science, then the science of the media... The Lord, however, above all, asks us to use these media by a group of saints" (St. Paolo, March 1968). These Paulines, today, would be called Paulines 5.0. They are the Paulines who know how to strain forward and have as their toolbox the Gospel and a whole range of skills.

It is necessary, therefore, to recover the mission, vision and values of St. Paul; to think, in a cross-media and trans medial way, of contents consistent with the mission; to have an organization suitable for the new communicative reality and the apostolate of evangelization. Above all, it is necessary to have a shared leadership and to involve all Paulines in the choices, to come together to find solutions, and to identify ways of communication and content.

Working in a team is a very important resource. The only one capable of responding adequately to today's modes of expression. Teamwork remains one of the secrets of success. We are called to walk together, capable of "teamwork", a team of apostles to evangelize. To think and always have a "St. Paul Group" perspective. The Apostolate is of St. Paul. Events, roles, products, personalities... they are not to be bound to themselves, but to the Society of St. Paul. Sharing improves the quality of work, to the benefit of the group itself and consequently also of productivity. It is a matter of building trust, developing motivation, facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge, stimulating a sense of belonging based on a common inspiration, and ensuring that everyone is proud of their work, of their apostolate.

The need for a religious organization focused on the proclamation through the media remains strong. In this field, one cannot remain halfway and simply try, in some way, to survive. Here, one

must not be "a new-born "; one must start out already as grown-up. This requires: unity, knowing how to strain forward, team spirit, and the ability to express the face of Pauline communicators of the Gospel. We are called to be apostles: "The Apostle is the one who carries God in his heart and radiates Him around" (Fr. Alberione, St. Paolo, December 1950). We are called, in the world of communication, not only to be professionals, but "Pauline professionals", consecrated persons who live and proclaim Christ in the world of communication. We are called to an exemplary life, to be witnesses, evangelists and influencers. We are involved in the process of showcasing, typical of our day-to-day life, in its three requirements: presence, visibility, credibility.

Whatever the current situation, it is good to remember that in the beginning there was a great dream, something important for people. You have to think in that direction. To the initial vision. And never forget it.

Returning to the authenticity of the Pauline mission would bring us back to the uniqueness and splendour of the Gospel, from which all our products should derive. It would bring us back to an awareness of our identity, and would eliminate the inconsistency between the products we make and our specific mission as evangelizers.

We are called to proclaim Christ explicitly, to communicate a clear Christian identity and to be more courageous in seeking the signs of the divine in this contemporary world. We are called to realize a "religious" work. Let us not limit ourselves to making products with religious content or vaguely religiously inspired ones. Our task is to make religious products that announce God incarnate in history. So that, according to the Apostle John (20:31), the listener may believe in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, and, believing, have eternal life.

Involvement in the mission and vision would give communicative passion and team spirit to people engaged in the Society of Saint Paul. And it would inspire the public.

To welcome the new that is coming, with the demands it entails, to respond to the appeals of today's people, to have the Word of God as the centre of reference: these are the elements that characterize the Pauline way of life. Hence, to strengthen ourselves in what is ours precisely through missionary commission and with the guarantees that Christ gives us.