



ANNUAL LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL  
TO THE CONFRERES OF THE SOCIETY OF ST PAUL

**STUDY**  
***in view of the mission***

Dear Brothers,

After proposing in the annual letter last year the theme of holiness<sup>1</sup> as a style of life, I now invite you to deepen, in this year 2017, the dimension of study, another essential aspect of our life as apostle-communicators. Both of these “wheels” of the “Pauline cart”, according to the charismatic legacy we have received as a gift from our Founder, Blessed Fr James Alberione, constitute, with apostolate and poverty<sup>2</sup>, the foundations of our life and mission of proclaiming the Gospel in the culture of communication.

This letter does not pretend to present any novelty at all. Its objective is, continuing the thought of our Founder on study, to try to see how we live this specific dimension today, in a historical period characterized by “epochal changes”, involving all sectors of human life, especially the cultural one<sup>3</sup>. And this is exactly from a context where men and women are themselves “creators” and actors of a culture strongly marked by global communication, fashioned in a very particular way in digital networks, where «new subjects with new styles of life, ways of thinking, of feeling, of perceiving and of establishing relationships emerge»<sup>4</sup>.

To what extent do we understand the changes through which the entire humanity is passing through and the institutions themselves? Do we feel really prepared to live and proclaim

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<sup>1</sup> “Sanctity” is the term that Fr Alberione used to name the first wheel of the “Pauline cart” in the book *Abundantes Divitiae Gratiae Suae*, a work regarded as his testament. As we know, however, he also used, to designate this wheel, other terms such as “piety”, “spirit”, etc. The name “sanctity”, «even though it may seem exaggerated, is very appropriate because the sanctity of a person is proportional to his adherence to God, and this finds its primary means in the interior life» (Juan Manuel Galaviz Herrera, *Il “carro” Paolino*, Roma, Società San Paolo, 1993, p. 108). The most important element that we can glimpse in this reality, in the variety and richness of its meanings, is that it must be lived in an integral form, including the other dimensions of the Pauline life: study, apostolate, poverty.

<sup>2</sup> «The whole person in Jesus Christ, in view of loving God completely: intelligence, will, heart and physical strength. Nature, grace and vocation: everything [is] for the apostolate. A cart that runs on the four wheels of sanctity, study, apostolate and poverty», cfr. James Alberione, *Abundantes Divitiae Gratiae Suae*, no. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 52.

<sup>4</sup> General Episcopal Conference of Latin America, *Document of Aparecida*, no. 51.

the Gospel and Christian values in the cultural environment of today? Do we know the current reality of communication? What must we do to be apostle-communicators in the area of study to meet the challenges of our mission? These are some of the questions that I am sharing with you, trying to give some concrete answers with this reflection.

Faced with this complex theme, we will try to present some ideas that, among many others, can help to look at this important dimension of our lives, which directly relates to our “being” and our “doing” as Paulines. For this reason, let us present initially the purpose of study in the Pauline tradition, in order to try successively to deepen the role of the mind in this activity, especially situated in today’s culture and subjected to many stimuli. We will then attempt to deepen study defined as “*studiosità*” with a brief reference to the experience of our Founder. We will deal later on the themes of “commitment” and “aggiornamento”, aspects derived from study, essential for the momentum of our apostolate. At the end, we will make reference to the importance of living in the school of Jesus Master which, in truth, is the first school in which we are called to participate, without which we lose the sense of our “study in view of the mission”.

## I. The purpose of study

We know that Fr Alberione did not write a comprehensive treatise dealing with study. Those which he has left are the thoughts expressed on several occasions to the various institutions of the Pauline Family, in which he gave importance to study either generically or by reference to some sciences in particular, making direct reference for example to theology, to the Bible, to liturgy, to philosophy, to history, to sociology and to other areas of human knowledge.

In the first instance, we can affirm that study, in the vision of our Founder, is not restricted to a mere intellectual knowledge closed in on itself, but always has a practical purpose. For him, «study is for life; life is for eternity; everything is for God»<sup>5</sup>; «that which does not serve life is a useless baggage, but that which serves must be abundant [...] that one “live” what one has learnt in school»<sup>6</sup>.

Study and life, therefore, must go together because everything must be oriented to what one should do in life. And what one should do? Obviously, when Fr Alberione speaks of “doing” it refers particularly to the apostolate. In fact, «the entire formation must be poised and ordered in a special way for studies with respect to the proper apostolate of the Pauline Family»<sup>7</sup>; «study for the Pauline has for its immediate end the apostolate»<sup>8</sup>; «knowledge is accomplished only when experience is joined to study; book and practice well fused form the humble and effective Pauline in his apostolate»<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, study is necessary to prepare oneself, to carry out the apostolate in the cultural context of the time in which one lives. Considering that «every apostolate is an irradia-

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<sup>5</sup> James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo* (a cura di Rosario Esposito), Roma, Edizioni Paoline, 1971, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> James Alberione, *I nostri studi*, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni San Paolo, 1998, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, op. cit., p. 168.

tion of Jesus Christ»<sup>10</sup>, we can say that the purpose of study is rightly «the glorification of Jesus Christ Master; Master as he is the Way, Truth and Life; where every man reaches his highest personality and humanity finds truth, justice, peace»<sup>11</sup>.

The thoughts stated above render quite well the idea for us to remember that, according to Fr Alberione, in our Congregation and in the Pauline Family, one does not study for one's own personal benefit but to address increasingly better the challenges of the apostolate; the apostolate, ultimately, is the “fruit” of study<sup>12</sup>. In the light of these affirmations, we can, therefore, ask ourselves up to what point do we give adequate importance to study and if this is really geared to our specific mission.

## 2. To begin with oneself: the mind

Study is an activity that belongs to the realm of the mind, which is the human dimension responsible for creating thoughts, which includes reasoning, comprehension, memory, imagination, emotions ... But for the Pauline to perform well the mission, it involves the need to develop the faculties of the mind always well integrated with other capabilities. «In other words: our identity as Paulines involves in itself the harmonious development of the mind, the will and the heart, otherwise, our conformity to the whole Christ is inadequate and not effective»<sup>13</sup>.

Getting back at the thought of our Founder, we see that study depends on the effort to involve the will and the heart in the development of the mind, with the objective to understand and interpret the reality and to always acquire new knowledge. This means that balance is necessary, that is, «it is necessary that the mind and heart develop in harmony to support the will, just like the two legs that have to carry the body. The heart will then give good contribution to the mind, so that many things are revealed and discovered for love [...]. Souls that have loved piously inasmuch as they have learned!»<sup>14</sup>.

Fr Alberione was aware that the mind, in particular, strongly interferes with the person's life, thanks to its “absorbing”, “organizing” and “transmitting” capacity<sup>15</sup>, so that it can be affirmed that «man is what he thinks»<sup>16</sup>. Thoughts are the closest friends of man<sup>17</sup> and they determine his actions: «From the mind comes everything. If one does a good deed, it is because he thought of it and then he wanted it and then he did it. Therefore, the first area to watch always is the mind»<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, IV, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>11</sup> *San Paolo*, August-September 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Vademecum* (edited by Angelo Colacrai), Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni Paoline, 1992, no. 286.

<sup>13</sup> Silvio Pignotti, “Integralità”. *La passione del Paolino*. Letter for the year 1993-1994, Roma, Casa Generalizia SSP, 20 agosto 1993, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, op. cit., p. 1192.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Santificazione della Mente* (uso manoscritto), 1956, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> James Alberione, *Santificazione della Mente*, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Santificazione della Mente*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> James Alberione, *Alle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro*, VIII, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, Casa Generalizia delle Pie Discepolo del Divin Maestro, 1986, p. 365.

These considerations, made some decades ago, were not present in the sciences that, today, demonstrate how the mind intervenes in the deepest human neurological reality and how it arrives also to produce physiological effects<sup>19</sup>. The ideas we have about ourselves, about the world and everything around us, affect strongly the effectiveness of our daily action. In this perspective, it is also affirmed that our beliefs can shape, influence and even determine the degree of our intelligence, of our health, of our relationships, of our creativity, consequently affecting the level of happiness and personal fulfilment.

This makes us look carefully at the world we live in and, more precisely, at the culture dominated by communication, the environment in which we are constantly exposed to a high amount of information and contents that come to us from paper to digital forms, and they provoke different sensory stimuli that somehow interfere in our thinking.

In this complex universe, it is necessary then “to discipline the intelligence”. But what does it mean? Fr Alberione would say that it means using the mind to search for the truth, for the attainment of virtues, for sanctification. This makes us think how for him there is a close link between the spirit, the apostolate, study and human formation that, working in the same person, take on increased effectiveness and complement each other<sup>20</sup>. In fact, «deep meditation, profound piety, intense study are necessary for a good preparation for the apostolate: if not, one who is empty, what will he say?»<sup>21</sup>.

Considering, therefore, that every good and every evil have their first source and expression in the mind<sup>22</sup>, the first and irreplaceable nourishment of the mind of the apostle-communicator can only be the Gospel: «the Gospel to read, meditate, pray, and translate into daily practice: “the Gospel must be the first reading, the first knowledge for all: so, no other spiritual reading is more important (DF 49)”»<sup>23</sup>.

Pope Francis, from the beginning of his Pontificate, does not tire of urging the Church to return to the Gospel, reminding us that «whenever we make an effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world»<sup>24</sup>. In the perspective of our reflection, we cannot forget that to return to the Gospel and turn it into a way of life depends, first of all, on every person, in his openness to welcome it with the mind, the heart and the will.

### **3. Studiosità: a path to undertake**

Study for Fr Alberione is not limited to academic formation, even though this is meritorious, but it should be understood as “studiosità”, an expression already present in the tradi-

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<sup>19</sup> I refer in particular to the “neurolinguistic programming”, the science that deals with the influence that language has on our mental programming and the various functions of our nervous system.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>21</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 967.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> Guido Gandolfo, “Gesù, il Maestro” nella spiritualità secondo don Alberione, in *Gesù, il Maestro. Ieri, oggi e sempre. Atti del Seminario internazionale*, Ariccia 14-24 October 1996, Casa Generalizia della Società San Paolo, p. 391.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 11.

tion of the Church. In fact, *studiositas*, a term dear to our Founder, is a Latin word that St. Augustine used to oppose *curiositas*, which is «a sort of trivial encyclopaedism, an uncontrolled desire to know things that explodes in all directions, and that sometimes misses the fundamental issues. *Studiositas* in the Augustinian sense, however, includes methods and passion for the truth»<sup>25</sup>.

The passion for the truth, which supposes deepening, is the sense of study that we also inherited from the Pauline tradition. This means that “*studiosità*” is not reduced to a purely informative reading. «Study itself, “*studiosità*” in general, must qualify the Pauline. Who, in the idea of the Founder, should feel the need to reserve each day the indispensable space for “*studiosità*”: selected readings, updating, deepening of a subject, specialization in one area of our apostolic horizon...»<sup>26</sup>.

The theme “*studiosità*” invites us to make some reference to the culture in which we live in, which is exactly the environment in which we are called to cultivate it. In this sense, it is important to consider that, in addition to being evangelizers “with” and “in” communication, we are citizens of the world and, therefore, immersed in an environment of information and contents that come to us especially through the traditional technical media (press, newspaper, radio, TV ...) and digital networks. It is fitting, then, to ask ourselves: relating to the theme of study, how do we cultivate “*studiosità*” in a communication environment so beautiful and with many possibilities of contact, but also sometimes so noisy? How do we behave and how far have we put the resources of modern communication at the service of our integral formation?

The abundance of data and information to which we are exposed daily, in a fast and sometimes with astonishing pace, many times may become an obstacle for the depth of thought. We receive so much of contents that, unless we make a selection of what is essential to our real needs, we run the risk of working in vain. In other words, we can get in touch with many “contents” but keep almost nothing in the memory. This is an appeal especially directed to those who are present in the digital networks. It is worthwhile, then, to ask ourselves whether in this fascinating universe of communication we behave as “scholars” or as merely “curious” in the sense that we have described above.

For *studiositas* to be effective, it requires that one should regain a sense of deliberation and calm, indispensable ingredients of the mind, needed for deepening. «Learning, knowing, reading, go hand in hand, a precise step, deliberate and measured: asking for time, graduality and passion»<sup>27</sup>. It is also necessary to value silence: «In silence we listen and we understand ourselves better, a thought is born and acquires depth; we understand with greater clarity what we want to say or what we expect from another, we decide on how to express ourselves»<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Giovanni Tridente and Bruno Mastroianni, *La missione digitale. Comunicazione della Chiesa e social media*, Roma, Edizioni Santa Croce, 2016, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Guido Gandolfo, “Gesù, il Maestro”, op. cit., p. 390.

<sup>27</sup> Giovanni Cucci, *Internet e cultura. Nuove opportunità e nuove insidie*, Milano, Ancora-La Civiltà Cattolica, 2016, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization. Message for the XLVI World Communications Day*, 20 May 2012.

In the culture in which we live in that presents numerous occasions for distraction, to actualize study in the profound meaning of *studiositas* is a real and serious challenge. However, if we succeed the benefits that we will have are numerous. In this sense, what our Founder says is very timely, in reference to the benefits of this undertaking: «If you are very clear, if you understand things well, if contemplated, if you try to remember, if in substance you are convinced of study, you will do much good. One will act, in fact, when one knows. A lamp of a hundred candlepower illuminates a large department; but a lamp of fifty candlepower illuminates half; a lamp of five candlepower just lights only for one. Those who have little knowledge will illuminate one»<sup>29</sup>. May we make *studiositas* an integral part of our Pauline life-style!

#### 4. The experience of Fr Alberione

One of the first observations that we learn from Fr Alberione, about his personal experience of study, is that it refers to an activity related to actual life, both with regard to his personal projects and to projects of the various institutions that he himself founded. By studying, the Founder tried to understand the time in which he lived, and to open new paths to the future.

Let us take two moments of his life, where he tells first-hand the importance he has attached to this aspect. The first takes us back to the time when he was in elementary school and he had just revealed the desire to be a priest. He himself testifies: «His studies, piety, thoughts and behaviour, even recreation periods, were oriented toward this goal»<sup>30</sup>. As noted, the option for the priesthood had become an end to be reached which also included study.

There is another occasion in his life wherein study appears to be fundamental. It is verified when he remembers the famous night that separated the XIX century from the XX: «The Eucharist, the Gospel, the Pope, the new century, the new means, on Count Paganuzzi's thinking regarding the Church and 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 organization. [...] From then on, these thoughts were the inspiration of his reading, his study, his prayer and the whole of his formation. This idea of his, which at first was quite confused, became clearer and with the passing of time became more specific»<sup>31</sup>. From this brief quotation, it captures well that for our Founder study is not reduced to mere curiosity. For him it was a reality necessary to respond to God's call and to the needs of the Church and humanity of the time in which he lived.

It is interesting to observe how Fr Alberione felt the need to go beyond the studies planned in his priestly training, such as philosophy and theology. He himself tells the desire to deepen the various sciences on its behalf, such as history and cultivate reading about several issues related to the Church: «For five years, twice a day, he read a passage from Rohrbacher's History of the Church and for a further five years, Hergenröther's version. For eight

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<sup>29</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 230.

<sup>30</sup> James Alberione, *Abundantes Divitiae*, op. cit., no. 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 20-21.

years, in his free time, he read Cantù's *World History* before moving on to the *History of World Literature, Art, War, Navigation, Music* in particular, *Law, Religions and Philosophy*. His reading of the *Civiltà Cattolica*, from 1906 up to the present, and then *L'Osservatore Romano*, the *Atti della Santa Sede* and encyclicals (from Leo XIII onwards) were continual nourishment»<sup>32</sup>.

Regarding the life of the institution, he already inculcated the importance of study to the members of the Congregation from the beginning, even when the young in formation, because of the apostolic needs, they did not have enough time to study. It was a time of the congregational history in which «the boys undertook to do everything possible in study, in work, in prayer and in the practice of poverty»<sup>33</sup>. Let us recall that in this context, dating back to 1919<sup>34</sup>, the “Pact” or “Secret of Success” was born.

Exactly on 5 January of that year, Fr Timothy Giaccardo left a note about the Founder's guidelines on study, with respect, that is, to the formation to the printing apostolate: «Studying half the time and learn twice; studying, that is, an hour and learn for four hours. He made a pact with the Lord. The young of the Good Press would not receive a complete education only on study. They should also work, but to be apostles of the Good Press they must know much more than the ordinary priests and lawyers»<sup>35</sup>. In short, even in the midst of difficulties, never one had to abandon study!

In this exhortation is perceived how precious time was for Fr Alberione, understood as a gift of God, and could not be wasted on unnecessary things, as he insisted in 1954: «Here is the cleric reading for ten minutes, every day, a book of asceticism, or sociology, history, literature, etc., subtracting the time in useless conversations and easy dissipation and indifferent readings, a very precious kit is acquired more than the companions. The same is true of the Disciple who arrived to a real competence in some parts»<sup>36</sup>.

Our Founder was aware that study, when it is lived in the sense of *studiositas*, helps to open the mind to meet the challenges of the mission. The insistence to have an open mind and a big heart is present in his exhortations, as this passage explains: «Universality! Do not have a narrow mind, a small mind and see only its own opening. Listen and try to help even from one house to another. When there is a small and a narrow mind, it is doubtful if there is a vocation, because one lives with selfishness, we do not see except ourselves and a few small circle of people around. [...] Have a big heart! The heart of the Apostle, the heart of Jesus! Expand your heart!»<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, nos. 66-67.

<sup>33</sup> Giuseppe Barbero, *Il Sacerdote Giacomo Alberione. Un uomo - un'idea*, 2ª ed., Roma, Società San Paolo, 1991, p. 296.

<sup>34</sup> Fr Alberione began to explain this prayer, by sections, and have it recited since 6 January 1919. The formula, in its first complete edition, became part of the *Prayer Book* in the year 1922. Cfr. Giuseppe Barbero, *Il Sacerdote Giacomo Alberione*, op. cit., pp. 296ss.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Timothy Giaccardo, *Diario*, Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni San Paolo, 2004, p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, op. cit., p. 1089.

<sup>37</sup> James Alberione, *Spiegazione delle Costituzioni* (uso manoscritto), Ariccia, 1961, p. 83.

## 5. Commitment and *aggiornamento*

Studying is the intellectual activity that allows the opening of the mind to the different realities in which we are immersed: the reality of God, of man, of the Church, of society, of culture, of communication, of the various sciences, etc. With regard particularly to the religious reality, Fr Alberione believed that «everyone must commit himself to religious instruction, to know God better and to improve the service of God. Everyone has to always improve himself, educate himself, in his office, in social relationships, ministry and apostolate»<sup>38</sup>.

The term “commitment”, present in this exhortation, is an idea to be highlighted. In fact, before the question «what does “study” mean?», the Founder responds: «It means commitment. It must accompany us until death. It must engage all to want to learn new things. In life, we cannot always do things the same way. We must make progress every day; perfect them every day. After twenty or more years, one must not be at the same point as before. No one can say, “I am no longer a student”. We are all committed to learn»<sup>39</sup>.

Commitment is in view of knowing the reality in all its dimensions and, where renewal is necessary, has for its aim to seek new ways. In this perspective, we can say that one of the purposes of studying is *aggiornamento*, a vital attitude to overcome immobility. Let us recall that the word “*aggiornamento*” has now been made famous by St John XXIII and adapted by his successor, Blessed Pope Paul VI: «The word “*aggiornamento*” which we have adopted as expressing the aim and object of our own pontificate. Besides ratifying it and confirming it as the guiding principle of the Ecumenical Council, we want to bring it to the notice of the whole Church. It should prove a stimulus to the Church to increase its ever growing vitality and its ability to take stock of itself and give careful consideration to the signs of the times, always and everywhere proving all things and holding fast that which is good»<sup>40</sup>.

*Aggiornamento*, considering the nature of our apostolate, shows us that «we must do good to those who live today, and we form the Pauline personnel that there is today»<sup>41</sup>. Now, «it is necessary to prepare oneself well for the apostolate, because we have to work in modern society, taking it as it is, considering it in its current situation. It is necessary that we adapt ourselves to the various dispositions in both the redaction and diffusion: the world will understand us if we will use, to communicate with it, the current means. Therefore, do not think, “we have always done it this way”. With the passing of the years we must adapt ourselves to the conditions of the time in which we live»<sup>42</sup>.

The word “*aggiornamento*” can be understood in the sense of “progress”<sup>43</sup>, considering that «our life cannot always be flat, horizontal. Our life must be a kind of a growth»<sup>44</sup>. We must, therefore, make progress through continuous *aggiornamento* in all aspects: in the spiritual life, in study, in the apostolate, in the economic part<sup>45</sup>. Our Founder believes, however,

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<sup>38</sup> James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

<sup>39</sup> James Alberione, *Spiegazione delle Costituzioni*, op. cit., p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Papa Paolo VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 52.

<sup>41</sup> James Alberione, *Spiegazione delle Costituzioni*, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>42</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 347.

<sup>43</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 352.

<sup>44</sup> James Alberione, *Alle Pie Discepoli del Divin Maestro*, VIII, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 389.



that to update oneself it is necessary to work on “reforms”. He, therefore, warns: «Speaking of *aggiornamento* can also lead to dangers, that is, understanding badly what *aggiornamento* means. The dangers are three: 1) to want to reform others first of all and not ourselves; 2) to reform what cannot be reformed; 3) not wanting instead to reform what needs to be reformed»<sup>46</sup>. Once we can “convert” ourselves to *aggiornamento*, then the doors to rejuvenation open, so necessary in order to face the challenges of our mission.

*Aggiornamento* is fundamental, especially there where we see inertia in the apostolate, where for years the same things are done, always reaching out to the same people, sometimes aware that this will not go very far. Indeed, «or we boldly look at reality, beyond the little world around us, and then we see the urgent need for a radical revolution of mentality and method; or in the space of a few years we will have made a desert around the Master of life; and life will rightly eliminate us as dead branches, useless, cumbersome»<sup>47</sup>. It is urgent to wake ourselves up and let us realize that the world, increasingly complex, is making its own trajectory and will not wait for us. Aided by study, we must realize the changes and try to see the world as it is and not as we want to imagine it.

## 6. At the school of Jesus Master

It is true that intellectual formation and all the initiatives of *aggiornamento* are necessary for the mission. However, the deepening of study, as part of the tradition of the Pauline Family, supposes bearing in mind an important “school”, without which we lose the significance of the dimension of “*studiosità*”. It is the school of Jesus Master: «For how long time passes and how studies progress, Jesus remains the only Master, infallible, whose doctrine is eminent, reliable, indestructible»<sup>48</sup>. This school is fundamental and it begins by encountering Him<sup>49</sup>.

This aspect makes us recover the idea of what is the basis of all the formation of the Pauline: «“Only one is your Master, the Christ” (Mt 23:10). He is unique as what he affirms: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). All of *studium* (= effort) will then be directed to Christ Master, from him one takes energy and tends to him, to the point of making the Pauline another master, either as an individual or as a “moral body”, the Pauline Family»<sup>50</sup>. But what is the meaning of “Master” for us? What repercussion in our life has this term addressed to Jesus?

As what the Gospel of Matthew makes us understand, Jesus is not a teacher like those who «sit on the chair of Moses», that is, the scribes and Pharisees, who present themselves as “masters” and that, however, they say and do nothing, they live the religion of “appearance” and at the service of their own selves. Even Jesus warns on the incorrect use of the term “rabbi” by one who, in reality, wants to take advantage of people, especially the poorer ones.

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<sup>46</sup> James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 352.

<sup>47</sup> James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo*, op. cit., p. 807.

<sup>48</sup> James Alberione, *Spiritualità paolina*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, Pia Società Figlie di San Paolo, 1961, p. 267.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Promotion and Formation Centre, *Catechesi Paolina* (uso manoscritto), Società San Paolo, Roma, p. 279.

Jesus is the Master in the sense that He is the guide<sup>51</sup>: «Jesus is the “truth” (fidelity to the Father!)», who becomes the “way” (guide!), who brings us to “life”. Jesus is the guide not only with his words, but also principally with his testimony, with concrete actions: «Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves» (Jn 14:11). The disciple is called to remain in Jesus and to learn in his “school of life” to walk in an integrated way.

In this perspective, it is expected of us that, on the part of the disciple, we would listen to Him. We recall that «in the Bible the same verb *shama*’ means both “to listen” and “to obey”. Therefore, *shema*’ Israel is not only “hear, O Israel!”, but also “obey!”»<sup>52</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to “listen” in order to “comply” with the project of life that Jesus offers us. Just what the first disciples did, so did the Apostle Paul, who from being a persecutor became a follower of the “Way” (cfr. Acts 22:4), to the point of saying: «It is no longer I, but Christ lives in me» (Gal 2:20).

Joining in the project of Jesus Master requires, first of all, entering into the logic of love that inspired him. With regard to this essential point, it is interesting to observe in the passage of Matthew already mentioned as Jesus affirms, addressing his disciples, that «only one is your teacher and you are all brothers». Jesus does not tell them «you are students» (like those who learn a lesson in theory), but «you are brothers». This means that the first lesson we must learn from the Master is «to be brothers». He himself gives us an example: «Just as I have loved you, so you also should love one another» (Jn 13:34).

The school of Jesus Master is the school of life that “generates brotherhood” and brotherhood is born of love. Love is the first identity of the disciples of Jesus. Only by entering in the logic of this love can we exercise our Pauline vocation as “teacher”<sup>53</sup> or “guide”. It makes no sense to want to teach others to live the Gospel, through the beautiful messages transmitted through the means of our technical apostolate if, first, we do not strive to live them in our houses, with the witnessing of love and service, despite the difficulties.

## 7. Conclusion

Dear brothers, we could really live study from the perspective of *studiositas* and so direct it to the good of our mission<sup>54</sup>! Today, «in the current conditions of culture and communication, intellectual formation of the Pauline is more important than ever in order to introduce

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<sup>51</sup> It is important to deepen the meaning of the word “rabbi”. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider the explanation given by Msgr. Gianfranco Ravasi at the *International Seminar on Jesus, the Master*: «Master is a term with certain ambiguous aspects. In fact, literally it means “my great” (from *rav*, great, powerful). So, it’s a prestigious title. It is a component that also belongs to other languages: the Latin *magister* means one who is “magis”, that is, “greater”, superior to the other; and the French *maître* is “lord” and, as such, is lord of the other. Thus, one is able to understand a phrase of Mt 23:8-10: “Do not be called Rabbi: for only one is your *didaskalos* (master) and you are all brothers. And do not be called *kathegetài*”. “Kathegetài” is a word translated from the Vulgate with *magistri*; actually the term in Greek means: one who guides, one who shows the way, the path. Why do not be called *kathegetài*? Because “only one is your *kathegetès*”, your guide», (cfr. Gianfranco Ravasi, *Il Maestro nella Bibbia*, in *Gesù, il Maestro*, op. cit., pp. 227-228).

<sup>52</sup> Gianfranco Ravasi, *Il Maestro nella Bibbia*, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. Giacomo Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*, II, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>54</sup> To deepen the relationship between study and apostolate one can read the *Acts of the International Seminar on Pauline Formation. Formation for Mission*, Ariccia, 12-23 October 1994.

the Christian proposal in a context where fragmentation, temporariness and discontinuity predominate»<sup>55</sup>. In this culture, we are called to prepare ourselves to do everything for the Gospel!

In the path of evangelization, we have as a reference the Apostle Paul, who was able to open up to the culture of his time to proclaim Christ, after the experience of encountering him on the road to Damascus. Apart from the answers that he gave to the concrete pastoral situations, Paul was an intellectual in the most committed sense of the word, as he was able to be a zealous Pharisee<sup>56</sup>. He was not contented of receiving and transmitting mechanically what the Church had given him earlier. He tried to interpret, rework, re-found. Perhaps, more than others, he was been able to use the “creativity” of the Christian in combining the fundamental evangelical fact with concrete, cultural and vital situations of the various human and ecclesial environments<sup>57</sup>.

Now is our time. The society in which we are called to witness to the Gospel, “with” and “in” communication, is not “another world”, but it is the environment where we live. We are aware that «as social beings, the society is in us with its culture, its laws, its language, its customs. The individual being and society are therefore inseparable and the relationship is complex»<sup>58</sup>. It is certain that, in some aspects, we are determined socially, but we ourselves, as individuals and communities, we can transform society with “inventions” specifically inspired by human and Christian values.

*Studiositas* is the path that allows us to “create thought” and to give our contribution to the formation of a new mentality in society, in giving an impression and a new direction to humanity, as our Founder thought (and tried to do!), in his audacity<sup>59</sup>. For this, it is also necessary to have an intellectual formation involving the human, spiritual, apostolic, charismatic, professional and other aspects, to meet the challenges of our time.

So, concretely, what importance do we place on our formation? Do we live it in an integral manner, that is, considering all the dimensions of our person? Do we take time to study either personally or as a community? In some Circumscriptions the *Ongoing Formation Week* is organized, a positive initiative in the area of study: in places where there is no such proposal yet, what could be possibly done? Does the *Formation Iter* of our Circumscriptions meet the demands of the *Apostolic Project*? The pedagogical option (about studies of Communication and of the Bible), forcefully reaffirmed in the last two General Chapters, draws our attention to this important area of the apostolic activity: how do we face this challenge?

Let us not forget that the wheel of study is that which helps us to “reinvent ourselves”. It is not about changing the Gospel or the Charism, but to live the essence of the Gospel and of the Charism, responding to the needs of the men and women of today, with “creative

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<sup>55</sup> Silvio Sassi, *Abundantes Divitae Gratiae Suae. “Rekindle the gift you have received”. Creative fidelity at a hundred years of the Pauline charism, Letter of the Superior General, in San Paolo - Bollettino Ufficiale della Società San Paolo, Anno 86, no. 437, August 2011, p. 23.*

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. Romano Penna, *Paolo di Tarso. Un cristianesimo possibile*, Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni Paoline, 1992, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Edgar Morin, *Sette lezioni sul pensiero globale*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2016, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 1337.

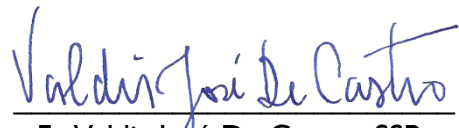
fidelity”. It is to them that, the real people, with their difficulties and hopes, we are called to bear witness to Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life with our “Pauline lifestyle”.

In this journey, we can certainly find difficulties, especially when we deal with our limitations. As what Pope Francis recalls for us, «our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing»<sup>60</sup>.

May the Spirit of the Risen Lord inspire us and enlighten us in the field of study. With faith and hope, and taking seriously “*studiosità*”, we can progress forward every day, never stopping, neither in the path of holiness, nor in the work of the apostolate. Forward! Always advance forward!<sup>61</sup>.

Faternally,

Rome, 16 April 2017  
Easter Sunday – The Resurrection of the Lord

  
Fr Valdir José De Castro, SSP  
Superior general

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<sup>60</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 121.

<sup>61</sup> Cfr. James Alberione, *Vademecum*, op. cit., no. 354.