



1915-2014

99 Years of **ABUNDANT RICHES**

The Hour of God Strikes

"Tomorrow is a very important day: it is the 50th anniversary of my first meeting with Prima Maestra Thecla. *That was a day of blessing.*" Fr. Alberione spoke these words in June 1965, exactly 50 years after that meeting took place in the Church of St. Damian—a meeting that changed the life of Maestra Thecla and left an indelible mark on her vocation. It was an event that caused *the hour of God to strike* and favored the concretization of "a vocation that was new in so many ways" (cf. AD 109-110).

In 1923, Teresa herself penned an account of what took place during that encounter: "When I met the Theologian for the first time," she wrote, "he spoke to me about a new institution of daughters who would live like sisters but who, for now, would start by working for the soldiers. On my part, I was immediately enthusiastic."

Fr. Alberione's meeting with Maestra Thecla helped to make more explicit the "definitive step" he felt prompted to take concerning "generous souls who would feel what he felt"... namely: "writers, technical personnel and evangelizers, but men and women religious...so as to give greater unity, stability and continuity, and a more profound supernatural spirit to the apostolate" (cf. AD 17, 24).

This intuition developed in step with his reflection on woman's potentials in the work of evangelization, which he had already expressed in his book, *Woman Associated to Priestly Zeal*—a text that served as almost a "genetic blueprint" of his feminine foundations. In 1938 he wrote: "As far back as 1910, you Daughters of St. Paul were thought about, desired, prepared for, brought to life and raised to the point you have reached today."

Maestra Thecla: A Woman Truly Associated to Priestly Zeal

The young Alberione's conviction that the priestly mission is also part of woman's mission in the Church became a reality by means of Maestra Thecla's vocation.

In the pre-foundation text, *Woman Associated...*, he extolled woman's presence at the side of man, saying: "The great male benefactors of humanity and the great male saints of Christianity always had at their sides the gentle figure of a woman, of a female saint, who could be said to have completed their work. At the side of St. Benedict, the great patriarch of western monasticism, was St. Scholastica. At the side of St. Francis of Assisi was St. Clare. At the side of the Dominican priests are the Dominican sisters. At the side of St. Francis de Sales was St. Jane Francis de Chantal..." (WA, p. 67). We could extend this list by adding that at the side of Blessed James Alberione were Maestra Thecla and Mother Scholastica....

From the very beginning, Maestra Thecla acted as an intermediary for the Alberionian charism, placing herself with complete trust in hands of God's chosen instrument. During the Institute's foundation period she wrote: "I have great trust in the Lord but also in the Theologian because I know that he was sent by God, so wherever he goes I too can be sure of not making a mistake."

And in her case, this meant accompanying the development of an Institute that "began from nothing." Under her guidance, the community grew and came to a keener awareness of its apostolic mission, cultivated a more profound relationship with the Divine Master, and adopted a style of life characterized by simplicity, a supernatural spirit and quickness.

Maestra Thecla did not follow the Founder blindly but with docility of heart, in the sure knowledge that God was using him to point out the path to her. Thus she wrote in 1950: "I have complete trust in his words." And in another letter written that year: "Act like a father who corrects his daughter. You know that I am in your hands. Use me as you would a handkerchief. I am always very afraid of not doing things well and of leading the Daughters of St. Paul astray...."

Co-participant in God's Plan and Co-responsible for It

Fr. Alberione considered Maestra Thecla to be his co-participant in God's plan and co-responsible for it: he kept her informed about every step he took; he urged her to accompany him on his visits to the houses; he asked her opinion about problems and initiatives; he directed her to set down norms for the apostolate so that the sisters "will do good and will not damage their spirit"; he counselled her to arrange things in such a way that there would be a good relationship among the Daughters of St. Paul and his other feminine Institutes.

Prima Maestra received and implemented every directive of the Founder with the wealth of her personal gifts, or else she offered him input based on her experiences that enabled him to carry out a more profound discernment in cases where the will of God was not yet clear.

In speaking to the Daughters of St. Paul, Fr. Alberione emphasized that Prima Maestra Thecla was their *mother* and that they should follow in her footsteps: "The docility of the Daughters of St. Paul to Prima Maestra explains their rapid development and the success of their apostolate."

Accompanying Fr. Alberione on his long apostolic trips by land, sea and air, she was the recipient of his confidences and shared his joys and sorrows. Many things she said and wrote give us glimpses of this communion of spirit. On 16 October 1939, she wrote to Maestra Paolina Pivetta: "By now you have heard that I had to leave urgently. I was asked to see if I could offer a little assistance to Primo Maestro, who needs help badly. Never before have we faced such pressing material needs. I feel so sorry for him—there is nothing I wouldn't do to be of some help...."

On 2 September 1954, the Founder told the FSPs to receive Prima Maestra's words as if they were his own: "We are not talking here about two thoughts. It is just one thought, which I believe is the thought and desire of God."

In a spirit of thanksgiving and joy, let us celebrate a *day of blessing*, during which we are all united in reflection, prayer and the desire to respond with generosity to the gift we have received. For this purpose, you might want to use the outline for an hour of adoration contained in this booklet.

Warmest greetings and affectionate best wishes to everyone.

Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan
Superior General