

# A RELIGIOUS TV PROGRAM IS PROGRAM FOR EVERYONE



Is a religious TV program meant to be viewed only by believers? Is it conceived, written, and performed only for “the garden of the faithful”? This is an important question. In a time characterized by thousands of TV channels, where one can find programs for hunters, fishers, tennis players, rock music, etc., does faith run the risk of becoming just another segment of

the viewing market? Should it be fenced in to protect it? Should it be a privileged place available to those who are passionate about a certain category of things? But can faith be considered “a certain category of things”? Like mystery novels or science fiction?

No, because it's not. Faith is not a hobby nor is it a personal passion to be cultivated with other like-minded people. It is impossible to think of a product that recounts faith as just another sector of the market industry and thus open to cynical attack.

Instead, the instruments of communication must be used to reach as many people as possible—those, as Blessed James Alberione taught, who live on the fringe of life (an expression of Pope Francis that Primo Maestro would have loved). “Where is humanity going?” Fr. Alberione wrote. “Where and how and toward what goal is it moving, this humanity that is continually renewing itself on the face of the earth?” Pay attention here, because we are a part of this humanity and sooner or later we all wind up on the fringe of life. By humanity I mean the hordes of people that flood the streets every morning on their way to work. We too are part of this pressured crowd that never has enough time,



that lives superficially, in a continual rush, and that risks reaching old age without ever having understood how God sees things—without being aware of the tender, loving gaze with which he regards us every moment of our life.

When I began to produce a religious TV program, I immediately realized that I could not let it become a ghetto: it had to be open to everyone. Indeed, I have come to see that my program has to be even more open than it already is. It isn't a case of throwing wide the door; it's a case of breaking down the walls so as to interact directly with life on the street. Why? Because, to my way of thinking, a TV program that speaks about faith is the only kind of TV program understandable to everyone. It is a genuine public service. There is no need to believe in order to ask the questions common to all of us. And every living, breathing person asks these questions because they touch our daily life. Questions like: How can I grow? How can I face the aging process? How can I raise my children? Why have children in the first place? And what if it is not possible to have them? What is my vocation in life? What are my plans for the future? We have questions about our mistakes, our hopes, our illnesses, our joys; questions about death, wealth, poverty, justice. My program doesn't give textbook answers to these questions. It explores them by recounting personal experiences, stories, the words of the saints, the teachings of the Pope, offering everyone God's perspective of things. Who talks about things like this today—even outside “religious” circles, that is, among the laity? Even without naming God. No one. Life has been numbed by most of the media. People have told me: “But if you speak about God, you color your topic and cut yourself off from others.” Which is the last thing I want to do. So my answer is: You can't respond to needs without pointing out a goal. A vague answer is of no help to anyone.

In fact, believers listen to my program so as to understand life better, while unbelievers can find in it something to use as a measuring rod. So a religious TV program is a fruitful meeting point. It is not a half-hour catechism lesson. It is neither the pride of a minority group nor the dictatorship of the majority.

Nevertheless it is communication and thus has its rules. Popular appeal is one of these. We should not be afraid of directing our message to the crowds, to the average person. We should not be afraid to speak about everything, using the language of today. Jesus himself used parables. This means that we should not resort to intellectualism, as happens all too often. Another rule concerns the industrial aspect of production, that is to say: format, huge audiences, global choices, major investments, cross media. These should all be bound together by a spirituality of communication, which is currently lacking, but which can be discovered by those who study Fr. Alberione more profoundly. In witnessing to a bonding of spirituality and culture in the world of communications, the Founder of the Pauline Family continues to show us the way through his intuitions.

*Rosario Carello*