

Conclusion of the International Encounter on the Apostolate-Economy

Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan

We are concluding these days of grace in which we experienced an abundance of wealth on the charismatic, ecclesial and cultural levels...above all the wealth of our universality.

It is always a celebration when we can get together from every part of the world and share the beauty of our vocation. And it is truly consoling and gives us great hope to see how many of our young sisters, on every continent, are cementing themselves in the editorial apostolate. I think that this meeting, like the one we held here in July on the theme of formation, offers us a beautiful and youthful picture of our Congregation and is a sign of the future for evangelization.

God, our good Father, accompanied us with his benevolence, predisposing every detail [of our agenda]: from the speakers, who enlightened our journey and offered us powerful stimuli, to the rich and passionate sharing sessions during which courageous guidelines for the future of our mission were delineated, to the joy of being together... These were challenging and important days first of all for us because they offered us the possibility of a regenerating pause—a time of formation in which to contemplate the splendid gift of the Pauline mission and, in particular, “the grace of the editorial apostolate” as the pre-eminent expression of our *Pauline teaching ministry*.

Together, we rediscovered the editorial/publishing apostolate as the heart of our mission. And we looked ahead to find new paths and modes for responding more effectively and fruitfully to the mandate we have received.

We saw the need to prepare ourselves always better, including professionally; to look beyond our horizons, beyond our consolidated structures; to improve the quality of our content and of our organization so as to reach a greater number of recipients, in particular young people, families, women and those who, perhaps without realizing it, are waiting to meet Christ; to share our resources more extensively and to explore the possibility of carrying out common projects.

The Spirit engendered in us the need to be open to ever-greater collaboration among our circumscriptions, with the Pauline Family (above all the SSP) and with the Church; to identify effective ways of increasing an interest in reading. And, with regard to improving the quality of our mission, we felt the call to make *innovative* choices that prod us to experiment with new channels and modes of production. In these days, we were urged on to use all our creativity, intelligence and energy so that the Good News might reach everyone.

Perhaps we felt in the depths of our hearts the gentle rebuke of the Founder when he said with amazement and sorrow to our first sisters studying theology:

I am very much afraid that you will not succeed in understanding the treasure the Lord has placed in your hands and that you will not make your own the heritage he wants to leave you (FSP35, p. 164).

It is probably true that with the passing of the years, confronting various difficulties and crises, we have reduced his thought a little and have failed to understand the full breadth and depth of the Pauline vocation, and for this we sincerely ask forgiveness.

I would love to be able to use the same mystical and poetic language that Fr. Alberione employed when he spoke about the Pauline mission and, with deep conviction, defined it as *lofty* and *exciting*; when he took it for granted that every Daughter of St. Paul is “the pen of God; the voice of God” (FSP54, p. 255); when he equated us with the evangelists, “moved and guided by the Holy Spirit” (cf. *Ibid.*); when he urged us to “let ourselves be clothed by the action of the Holy Spirit so as to speak living words...” (*Ibid.*, p. 256), explaining in a colorful and humorous way that living words “bounce around like frogs on twitchy legs....”

Sharing the great challenges that await us, we perceived—perhaps in a new way—our poverty, weakness and inadequacy in the face of our very beautiful and demanding vocation. And above all we perceived more forcibly the need to “enter into the Pact,” our covenant with God, so as to respond from his perspective to the pleas that touch our life and mission.

We are not the first in the Congregation to feel the huge disproportion between our call and our reality of great inadequacy. The faith of Maestra Thecla is a great inspiration to us today too. Sr. Rosaria Visco (1916-2005) recounted:

When Fr. Alberione wanted the sisters to begin the writing apostolate, prepare catechism texts and launch *Così* [a magazine for young women], Maestra Thecla did not hesitate. She had no doubts and she did not allow herself to be tempted by discouragement. How many times *we* were discouraged but she would vigorously remind us to have faith in God and in the graces of our vocation! If things were hard, completely new and superior to our strength and skills on the human plane, she would always insist: “We have to have faith...total faith! And we have to pray because prayer is our strength and God’s weakness!” She personally lived the *Secret of Success* and she wanted us to live it too....

And Sr. Ignazia Balla (1909-2003) recalled:

Maestra Thecla had the audacity and zeal of an apostle who looks far ahead, sustained by the faith and fortitude of a great ideal.... She used to say: “We must never lose the conviction that we are good for nothing and that it is the Lord who acts.”

Today too we must truly believe that it is the Lord who does things, who works in our weakness and frailty.

Toward a Bolder Pauline Prophecy

In your group work, you tried to express in the *Editorial Guidelines*—the final draft of which the General Government will look over and then approve—the Pauline prophetic response to the appeals the Lord is addressing to us at this time in history. You identified some essential elements that, if concretized, will give a particular “color” to our mission and help us develop our *Pauline publishing houses*:

- more faithful to the charism (*identity*),
- more creative and courageous (*method/style*),
- more attentive to the needs and languages of today (*content*)
- more missionary (*recipients/new evangelization*)
- better prepared (*formation*)
- better relationships (*collaboration*)
- better organized and sustainable (*organization*).

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32)

As we conclude this Encounter, we feel among us the living presence of the Apostle Paul, the inspired *writer of charity*, who confirms our apostolic mandate. He not only entrusts the Word to us

but entrusts our very persons to the Word—the Word that generated us, calls us, forms us, shapes us, guides us, inflames our hearts; to the Word, which is “like a book of fire.”¹

We are entrusted to this Word so as to become, more and more, “women of the Word,” “women of the covenant,” apostles who with faith and humility nourish themselves on the Word, hold it aloft, clothe it in beautiful colors, “break it” so that it can touch the hearts of everyone, bringing them life, light, hope, peace, love and welcome; so that it can reach the peripheries and new frontiers of thought, of prophetic dialogue with religions and cultures (cf. *Draft of the Work Instrument* for the 11th General Chapter, 30).

Apostles of the Word who revitalize our awareness of being “branded by the mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (EG 273) and who strive to re-ignite our faith so as to “speak the words of God” and communicate his thought (cf. PP, p. 696): this is our identity, our physiognomy, in the Church.

In the 20-day course of spiritual exercises for FSP superiors held in 1961, Fr Alberione voiced the heartfelt plea:

It is necessary that the spirit be felt! We must give the supernatural.... The sisters work, write and print, perhaps they even spend long nights in the apostolate to get things out on time. Money and health are poured into the work; the sisters hurry here and there.... Superiors, think of your responsibility! We cannot deceive our daughters. We must help them feel that it is the truth—salvation—that we must bring to the world! Sometimes I feel like crying because I have certainly not been able to reach everyone, and while I am looking at one thing, something else collapses.... But God sends us out for this [purpose].... Do those many millions of souls weigh on us? Note well what I am saying: the apostolate must be *spiritual*; what we give through the apostolate must be spiritual! (cf. SdC, p. 255, English edition)

My thanks to everyone...

My thanks to all of you for participating in this event in a responsible and full-involved way.

My thanks to the members of the coordination team—Sr. Anna, Sr. Natalia, Sr. Gabriella, Sr. Lucia, Sr. Shalimar—who guided the work of these days with discretion and wisdom and who did not overlook any desire, expectation or hope....

My special thanks to the speakers for their competent and passionate input.

My thanks to the moderators, group secretaries and the sisters of the editorial team, who interpreted and expressed the wealth that was shared.

My thanks to the simultaneous translators—Sr. Teresia, Sr. Susanna, Sr. Margaret—and to the sisters who produced the written translations and the translations of the information flashes sent to the Congregation.

My thanks to the sisters who wrote the news bulletins and to the sisters of SICOM for the material they posted on our website and social media circuits; my thanks also for the many pictures posted of this event.

My thanks to the sisters who animated our liturgies.

My thanks to Sr. Lucia Simula and those who helped her to prepare meals and snacks with so much care and creativity.

My thanks to Sr. Ancy and the sisters of the Generalate for their welcome, prayers and daily self-offering, which were a great support to our work.

¹ Expression used by Pope Francis in his *Preface* to an edition of the Bible for Young People (2015).

“Get up and go forth...”

Now we are getting ready to “scatter” once again to the four corners of the world, in the footsteps of Paul, Alberione and Thecla, to proclaim to everyone the joy of the Gospel, to “inhabit” the boundless territory of communication with a new heart, so as to be genuine “bearers of Christ,” living and active members of the Church...apostles called to *offer everyone the charity of the truth*.

We set out on our journey trusting in the Promise...and precisely because of this Promise, we can and must regain the ability to dream.

Pope Francis reminds us:

We are heirs to the dreams of our fathers, heirs to a hope that did not disappoint our founding fathers and mothers, our older brothers and sisters. We are heirs of our elders who had the courage to dream... We do well to welcome the dreams of these people in order to prophesy today and rediscover that which at one time inflamed our hearts. Dreams and prophecy together. The memory of how our elders, our fathers and mothers, dreamed, and the courage to prophetically fulfill that dream (2 February 2017).

Dreams are important. They keep our horizons wide open, help us to embrace them and to cultivate hope. They are the most luminous stars, pointing out a different journey for humanity.... Big dreams are fruitful; they sow peace, fraternity and joy.

The religious life becomes sterile if it loses the ability to dream, to “think big.”

Let us take back to our communities the ability to dream big and beautiful things for our mission; let us become rays of hope and positivity, of certitude that the grace of God will continue to accompany and sustain us. Today too, faith can accomplish real miracles.

Maestra Assunta Bassi confided:

What do I feel when I think about the Congregation’s journey? I ask myself: how did we do it? I am convinced that Jesus, our Master, has kept his promise. He was with us and he made it possible for the Congregation to expand and multiply its apostolic initiatives.

Everything happened in the “style” of God, who does great things in simplicity, poverty, silence.... Our soul is moved when faced with the Lord’s fidelity and infinite goodness. Do not be afraid! He is the One we must count on.