



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Newsletter of May 23, 2010,
Pentecost Sunday

Dears Friends,

"**N**EWSPAPERS, film, radio, and television are the fastest and most effective instruments of the Catholic apostolate today, and should be used with the greatest urgency. The future may have even better ones for us. At present, the apostle could wish for nothing better to bring God to men, and souls to God." Father James Alberione, who wrote these lines in April 1960, dedicated his life to this apostolate. He was beatified on April 27, 2003.

The influence of a thought in print

Giacomo (James) Alberione was born on April 4, 1884 in San Lorenzo di Fossano, in the Piedmont region of Italy, and was baptized the next day. He had three older brothers, a younger sister who died in her first year, and one younger brother. For the Alberiones, a poor peasant family, faith, work, and trust in Providence were of primary importance. From his first year in primary school, when he was asked about his future, James replied with determination: "I will be a priest!" This plan illuminated his childhood years. Father Montersino, the parish priest at Saint Martin's in Cherasco, in the Alba diocese where the Alberiones lived, helped the young man deepen the Lord's call and respond to it. Admitted to the minor seminary in Bra for the 1899-1900 school year, James devoured many books. One of them disturbed him to the point that his superiors thought they would have to send him home. This painful incident helped mark out the path for his later apostolic efforts. From then on, he knew from experience the influence—for good or for ill—that an idea expressed in print can have on minds.

About the means of social communication, the Second Vatican Council teaches, "The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. The Church recognizes, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss. Indeed, the Church experiences maternal grief at the harm all too often done to society by their evil use" (Decree *Inter mirifica*, on the media of social communications, December 4, 1963, no. 2).



Blessed Giacomo Alberione

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In October 1900, James entered the seminary in Alba (Piedmont). Right away, he met Canon Francesco Chiesa, who would be his friend and advisor for 46 years. On November 1 of that jubilee year, Pope Leo XIII published the encyclical *Tametsi futura*, in which, after emphasizing that humanity can find salvation only in Christ the Redeemer, he invites the clergy to make use of all means to make His Person and His doctrine known. This papal declaration made a deep impression on the young Alberione. From then on, directives from the head of the Church would guide him in all the decisions he would make. He later wrote: "We must be faithful interpreters of the Pope's words and advice. We do not claim to be anything else—and God will give us the grace to do this."

During a night of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, on December 31, 1900, James was enlightened by a unique grace—God wanted him to help spread the Gospel using the new means of communication. It would entail setting up an organization of writers, printers, booksellers, and distributors, with the goal of bringing the Christian message on a grand scale to the hearts of the masses. At the same time, he was aware of his own inadequacy and the need for the Eucharist to find light, comfort, and victory over evil. He would often remind his spiritual children of the Eucharistic origin of their mission: "You are born of the Tabernacle, of the

Eucharist!" From then on, his entire life would be directed by the idea of being "a new type of apostle, a man of his time making use of the most efficient means to spread thought, the same means used by the Godless to spread their error."

"Speak about everything, but in a Christian way"

James Alberione received priestly ordination on June 29, 1907, the feast of the martyrdom of Saint Paul, who was to become the patron saint of all the institutes he would establish. After a short pastoral experience as an assistant priest in a parish, during which he met the young Giuseppe Giaccardo, who would later be his first collaborator, Father Alberione, to everyone's surprise, was named spiritual director of the seminary in Alba. He prayed a great deal, studied, and made himself available for preaching, catechesis, and conferences in parishes. His reading enabled him to deepen his understanding of society and the Church of his time, and of the new needs and changes that were appearing on the horizon.

On October 20, 1913, a providential event occurred—Father Alberione was offered the position of manager of the diocesan newspaper, enabling him to put into practice the inspirations he had received from God in prayer. On August 20, 1914, the day of the death of Pope Saint Pius X, his work officially began in Alba, with the founding of the Society of Saint Paul, a community of Priests and Brothers who, in taking Saint Paul as their model, desire to be messengers of the Word of God, with the help of all the means of social communication. "Talk about everything," he would say, "but in a Christian way!" This apostolate, like that of the Apostle, knew no limits—"Your parish is the whole world." The founder believed that since humanity is made up of both brothers and sisters, there must also be consecrated women as well as men. The next year, Father Alberione founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Saint Paul with the help of Thecla Merlo. Slowly but surely, in the midst of difficulties, the Pauline family took shape. The goal that the founder held out for all his followers was complete configuration to Christ: welcoming Christ, the Way, Truth, and Life, in all one's being—in one's intelligence, will, heart, and physical energies. This orientation was codified in a booklet titled *Personality and Configuration with Christ (Donec formetur Christus in vobis, cf. Gal. 4:19)*.

Father Alberione had a very lofty idea of religious life: "The religious state is rooted deep in the Gospel. The eight Beatitudes proclaimed by the Divine Master make clear that Christianity will always remain a living paradox for the world—foolishness to some, a scandal to others. For us, it is truth and divine reality. The religious state is for them also a paradox, for it is Christian life lived completely according to the Gospel—sacrificing one's life to save it, losing all to save all. At the

summit of this paradox, poverty becomes wealth; renunciation, exaltation; virginity, maternity; servitude, freedom; sacrifice, beatitude; service, apostolate; death, life! *For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me (Gal. 2:20).*" Without diminishing in any way the essential witness that the lay faithful give through their fidelity to baptismal grace, a witness on which the Church of today greatly depends, consecrated men and women remain particularly effective in the work of spreading the faith. "The present hour," said Father Alberione, "is truly the hour for religious. If they are well chosen and well formed, the Church finds in them an immense resource to put at the service of her universal mission. It has been thus during the most troubled periods of her millennial history. Religious whose souls have been tempered by the practice of piety, study and obedience, emerge from their silence to be the vanguard of battle and contribute effectively to the triumph of Christian and Catholic civilization. Today we face needs of incalculable size and depth."

Astonishing novelty

On November 23, 1921, Father Alberione submitted to his bishop a request for his Society to be recognized as a diocesan religious institute. The prelate referred the matter to Rome, but it was received there with little enthusiasm for two reasons: one, directives given by Saint Pius X stipulated that the number of new congregations be limited; but mostly, it was the novelty of the enterprise. Was it legitimate for a group of religious to consecrate their lives to spreading the Gospel solely by means of the press, while abandoning the traditional methods of preaching and teaching? In July 1923, the nascent project looked as though it might fail. As a result of an overly austere regime of life, Father Alberione fell gravely ill, and the medical diagnosis left no hope—tuberculosis. Leaving for a rest in a small village, he meditated and spent more time with the Lord. Every day, he meditated on a passage from the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius. After a month, contrary to expectations, the patient recovered his health. "Saint Paul healed me!" From then on, the words attributed to the Eucharistic JESUS would appear in the chapels of all the houses of the Pauline family: "Do not be afraid. I am with you. From here I want to enlighten. Be sorry for your sins."

Father Alberione knew all too well that the battle against the forces of evil could not be won without the support of souls completely dedicated to prayer. That is why, on February 10, 1924, a community was founded for the purpose of adoring the Divine Master in the Holy Eucharist, in reparation for sins committed by the press. The Sister Disciples of the Divine Master, consecrated to the Eucharistic vocation, would immerse themselves in the devotions that are the hallmark of the Pauline

family: JESUS, master and shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life; MARY, mother, mistress and queen of the apostles; and Saint Paul, apostle and missionary. The founder appointed the young Orsola Rivata to be the first superior of the new community. "When you adore the Blessed Sacrament," he directed her, "think of yourself as representing humanity before JESUS, to offer to God the feelings and needs of all men, so that He might give strength to the weak, and light to those who live in darkness; that souls might avoid sin; that sinners might repent; that persons consecrated to God might be filled with zeal and holiness. JESUS has entrusted you with the 'ministry' of representing humanity at the foot of the tabernacle. Your vocation is a service of charity!"

Until then, the work of the new religious had primarily been the publication of books, but Father Alberione had the intuition that magazines would be another powerful means of proclaiming the Gospel. He had already created *Vita Pastorale*, a monthly magazine for priests, in 1912. *Famiglia Cristiana*, a weekly magazine for families first appeared in 1931. In 1933, *Madre de Dio* was created "to reveal to souls the beauty and grandeur of MARY." He would later write, "MARY brings the heavenly light that spreads gently through souls, where darkness and ignorance have taken hold. MARY softens hearts, inclines them to good, sanctifies morals, and spreads benevolence. MARY puts understanding and affection in homes; she gives docility to children, and patience and diligence to all." In 1937 *Pastor bonus* appeared, a monthly magazine in Latin that addressed pastoral topics and provided deeper reflection of a Biblical and theological nature. *Via, Verità e Vita* (*Way, Truth and Life*), a monthly magazine aimed at spreading Christian doctrine, was launched in 1952, as was *Vita in Cristo e nella Chiesa* (*Life in Christ and in the Church*), to help readers "get to know the treasures of the liturgy, and to promote them in order to better live according to the mind of the Church." He did not forget the young—the bi-monthly *Il Giornalino* was published for them.

The Pauline family grows

After houses were opened in Rome and several other cities in Italy, the congregation spread abroad—to Brazil and other South American countries, the United States, Europe, China, Japan, the Philippines, and India. In 1937, Father Alberione launched an apostolate of film. His opponents were numerous—how could religious serve the Church by producing films? Nevertheless, the Holy See supported his efforts, and the *Società Anonima Romana Editrice Filmi* was established. In October 1938, the Father founded the third congregation for women—the Sisters of JESUS the Good Shepherd (the Pastorelles), whose vocation consists of helping priests with pastoral care in parishes.

Throughout his life, Father Alberione demonstrated an astonishing fortitude in accomplishing the plans he

felt inspired to bring to life. He never gave in. "The only defeat in life," he said, "is to capitulate in the face of difficulties and abandon the fight... It is well worth the trouble to fight for wisdom and truth." Prayer is what makes this possible: "God works for those who work for Him. So let us always act as though everything depends on us; and pray and hope in the Lord as though everything depends on Him." Nevertheless, he remained a realist in the face of the constraints of the earthly condition: "*Mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body)! God is life! You do not have the right to 'kill' your body through play or even through work, just as you do not have the right to diminish your energies and your capacities through imprudence or negligence. Rather, seek to develop them with good training. Cultivate your artistic abilities, improve your productivity, broaden the sphere of your activities and knowledge! For yourself and for society. Enrich your personality by paying more attention to the truth than to appearances. When you do everything you can to increase your productivity, you imitate God Who is pure act, you become closer to Him. Be it intellectual, moral, or manual, work is also a mortification."

"That which remains to be accomplished"

The Second World War did not stop the spiritual progress of the founder, confined to Rome by the circumstances. While waiting for the return of conditions favorable to his apostolate, he devoted himself to adoration and contemplation to an even greater extent. Yet it was in the midst of the war, on May 10, 1941, that Pope Pius XII signed the decree that granted the Society of Saint Paul its status as a pontifical religious institute. At the end of 1945, Father Alberione was able to take up his pilgrim's staff again. He traveled around the world to meet and encourage his Sons and Daughters. His motto was: "Turn towards the future! Do not think about what has been accomplished, but of what remains to be accomplished" (cf. Phil. 3:13). The Far East made an impression on the priest: out of these countless multitudes of people, how many know JESUS CHRIST?

The 1950s and 1960s were years of consolidation for the Pauline family, which had undergone a boom of expansion—vocations, foundations, publishing, various projects, professional training. In the book *Abundantes divitias gratiae suae* (*The Abundant Gifts of His Grace*, cf. Eph. 2:7), published in 1954 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the foundation, Father Alberione gave an account of the graces granted to the Pauline family. On September 8, 1959 a fourth women's congregation was born, the Sisters of MARY Queen of Apostles, dedicated to drawing and keeping attention focused on the divine vocation that each person receives from God. From 1958 to 1960, four secular institutes would complete the large Pauline family tree—Our Lady of the Annunciation (consecrated lay women), Saint Gabriel the Archangel (consecrated lay men), JESUS Priest (diocesan priests),

and the Holy Family (couples). The Union of Pauline Cooperators, lay people of all ages who seek to extend the Pauline work into their own environments, had been established in 1917.

From 1962 to 1965, Father Alberione took part in the Second Vatican Council as a Council Father. Although his health did not allow him to participate personally in the debates, he felt an immense joy on December 4, 1963, when the council's decree on the use of the media for evangelization was promulgated. "Now," he said, "you can no longer doubt. The Church has spoken." On June 28, 1969, in an audience granted to Father Alberione and a large group of his Sons and Daughters, Pope Paul VI expressed himself in these words: "Here he is: humble, silent, tireless, always vigilant, ever recollected in his thoughts, moving from prayer to work, ever attentive to the 'signs of the times,' that is, to the most effective ways of reaching souls. Our dear Father Alberione has given the Church new instruments to express herself, new means to add vigor and breadth to her apostolate, a new awareness of her mission of evangelization through mass media. Dear Father Alberione, allow the Pope to rejoice in your long, faithful and untiring work, and the fruits it has produced for the glory of God and the good of the Church."

On November 26, 1971, Father Alberione entered his death agony. Alerted by his secretary, Paul VI personally went to his bedside. When he arrived, the sick man had already lost consciousness. The Pope asked if he had received all the sacraments, then kneeled beside the bed, said the *Pater* and the *Ave Maria*, got up, and gave him a final absolution. One hour later, the founder passed away at the age of 87. Today, the Pauline family numbers

Blessed James Alberione, obtain for all men and women the gift of the Holy Spirit, that they might open their hearts to the light of Christ and receive the word of His Vicar with docility.

Dom Antoine Marie
O.S.B.

about 8,000 members, spread across more than 50 countries.

Peter's voice

Since Father Alberione's death, the means of communication have gained extraordinary potential, as a result of tremendous advances in technology—a potential that is not without new problems. The Internet allows near-instant access to information, but has given rise to new forms of inhuman dependence. The Pontifical Council for Social Communications declared in 2002:

"Parental supervision should include making sure that filtering technology is used in computers available to children ... in order to protect them as much as possible from pornography, sexual predators, and other threats. Unsupervised exposure to the Internet should not be allowed."

At the same time, the Internet makes the Church's teaching more accessible. Not only major texts of the Pope—encyclicals, constitutions, etc.—but also shorter ones, such as the Wednesday audiences, are easily available to everyone in multiple languages on the Vatican website: <http://www.vatican.va/>. During his weekly audiences, the Holy Father delivers a short but rich lesson that inspires the desire for an authentic Christian life. Father Alberione would have rejoiced at the ease with which the faithful can now hear the voice of Peter's Successor. He said, "Nineteen centuries of history show that the Lord guides His Church, our Church. The barque of Peter continues her perilous crossing on a rough sea, never ceasing to carry in safety, to the port of eternal happiness, those who entrust themselves to her."

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