



ANNUAL LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT PAUL

THE PAULINE EDITOR*

ARTISAN OF COMMUNION IN A CONNECTED WORLD

Dear Brothers,

The grace and peace of Jesus Master be with you all!

This annual Letter comes to you while we are still in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic which, since it broke out, has caused and continues to cause a strong impact on the daily lives of the entire humanity, with significant negative effects on people's lives, on institutions and on the society as a whole.

Even within our Congregation, we have experienced its dire consequences, especially among those confreres who have been infected and among those who, unfortunately, became victims of it. The pandemic has also reached many other people we know, members of the Pauline Family, relatives, lay collaborators, acquaintances and friends. Its effects still continue to be felt in the daily life of many of our Circumscriptions, in the life of our confreres and our communities, in the areas of formation, apostolate, administration, economy etc.

Through this annual Letter, we wish to situate ourselves in this troubled reality, but already in the perspective of post-pandemic time, even if it is not yet possible to predict with certainty the end of this very nebulous period in our history. In any case, we start from the principle that *«the pandemic is a crisis, and we do not emerge from a crisis the same as before: either we come out of it better, or we come out of it worse»*¹. Of course, we want to come out better, while realizing that, if on the one hand there are problems, on the other hand there are also new opportunities and possibilities and to look at this time as a concrete occasion for the growth of everyone.

In the midst of this global health crisis, we are called to face the challenges of evangelization in the field of communication in an increasingly connected society. In this regard, we note that the pandemic itself – which is the development of an infectious disease on a global scale – has been favoured, in its rapid spread, by the connectivity linked to the great ease of movement made possible by means of transport, allowing fast and wide-ranging in a now hyper-connected world, which however does not necessarily mean being more united and integrated.

In fact, since everything is interconnected, the humanitarian crisis we are experiencing, and which puts us in front of human limits, is not only a health crisis but at the same time

* In all the official documents of our Congregation such as *Opera Omnia*, Acts of the International Seminars etc., the Italian word **Editore** was translated into English as 'Publisher'. However, the term **Editor** (English) is very significant in our context as it fully expresses the rich charismatic heritage left to us by our Founder. This will become clearer as one reads through this letter.

¹ Francis, *General Audience*, 19 August 2020.

also an environmental, social, economic and cultural crisis, with evident ethical and religious resonances. Certainly, however, we are not alone in this “crisis”. As Pope Francis acknowledged, this global tragedy has raised the awareness that we are members of a world community that sails in the same boat, where the evil of one goes to the detriment of all, and that no one is saved alone but can only be saved together².

Even at the level of the Congregation, we can say that we are all in the “same boat”. This is an observation that should push us to join forces to look together at the horizon that guides us towards the future. Given the circumstances, the objective of this annual Letter is precisely in this line: to try to offer a proposal for reflection that helps us to evaluate the signs that the pandemic has left in our lives and in the apostolate, and to think about what we must do on the path of recovery that awaits us to respond to the challenges of our mission today.

We intend to undertake this relaunch in the light of our identity as “Pauline Editors”. In fact, we believe that it is a fundamental commitment for all of us to return to the values of our own identity, taking it as a true source of inspiration and placing it in the current culture of communication, in a world increasingly connected to the web, an essential condition for making concrete choices.

In this perspective, we have divided this reflection into three parts: we will begin by treating the identity of the Pauline, in his vocation as “Editor”³, starting from the thought of Blessed James Alberione. Here we will present some of its characteristics⁴, trying to situate the Pauline Editor in the context of the culture produced by the means of social communication in which our Founder lived. These are just a few ideas, which are already known, but to which it is always worth returning.

In the second part, we will refer to the current culture of communication, trying to present some challenges for our apostolate in the digital environment, characterized by networking. From this new reality, we will underline, starting from an anthropological and not so technical vision, the great turning point that has taken place in communication, emphasizing the “relationships” favoured by the user’s protagonism, which has given rise to a great revolution if compared to the context of the communication in which our Congregation was born.

Finally, in the third part, we will take some characteristics from Jesus and the Apostle Paul, which enlighten the person of the Pauline Editor and which push him to strain forward as a true “artisan of communion” in today’s culture of communication.

At the end we will offer some questions, with the aim of helping not only to analyse the period of discomfort we are living in but also to take on a more daring and creative role, as Pauline Editors, in a society in permanent connection.

I. Recovering the identity of the Pauline Editor

Let us start with a consideration: we can certainly get out of this pandemic better starting from our identity as “Pauline Editors” with all the charismatic meaning that this expression entails, that is, as men who commit themselves to resemble Christ, taking care of all

² Cf. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 32.

³For in-depth study on the identity of the Pauline Editor, we also recommend reading the Annual Letter of Father Silvio Sassi (published posthumously on 26 November 2014) entitled *Evangelizing in Communication Employing Communication. “Rekindle the gift you have received”* (in *San Paolo*, no. 446, November 2014). It proposes the reading and updating of the book *Press Apostolate*, a publication that Primo Maestro considered a real “directive manual of formation and apostolate”.

⁴ It is important to keep in mind some principles, criteria and dispositions that must regulate the way of living and acting of the Apostle of the Edition according to the vision of Don Alberione, and which can be found in the book *Press Apostolate* (of 1933) and in subsequent updated editions: *Apostolate of the Edition* (1944), *Apostolate of the Editions* (from 1950) and in the edition of the *Opera Omnia* published in 2000.

aspects of the person (mind, will and heart) and in an “integral” formation (human, Christian, religious, charismatic and apostolic).

We can come out better not only in terms of “good intentions”, but as people who live the Pauline spirituality as a true lifestyle⁵ in the sphere of consecrated life, and who take on, with zeal and prophecy, the mission in the field of communication. In fact, this is how our Founder thought of the Pauline Editors: «His initial idea was for a Catholic organization of writers, technical people, booksellers and retailers; Catholics to whom he would give direction, work and a spirit of apostolate. Toward 1910, he took a definitive step. It became much clearer that the writers, technical personnel and promoters [would have to be] religious men and women⁶. On the one hand, [this would] lead people to the loftiest perfection – the perfection of those who also practice the evangelical counsels – and to the rewards of the apostolic life. On the other hand, [it would] give more cohesion, stability and continuity, [not to mention] a more supernatural sense to the apostolate. [He was] to form an organization, an organization of religious. Here efforts would coalesce, dedication would be total and the doctrine purer»⁷.

In the light of the Pauline charismatic heritage, we underline at least four aspects of the identity of the Pauline Editor which we already know but still appropriate to recover for their permanently contemporary value.

1.1 “Exuding” God

The first thing that seems important to us to highlight is that the Pauline apostolate was started with the press apostolate, understood in the original conception of Don Alberione as true evangelization and real preaching, equivalent in everything to the oral one.

An expanded vision of the equivalence between oral preaching and “printed” preaching appeared in the second edition of the book *Press Apostolate*, – in the year 1944, published under the title *Apostolate of the Edition*⁸. From then on it is any edition print, radio, film – to be equated with the oral one⁹. From this point of view, our Founder stated, «the machine, the microphone, the screen are our pulpit; the printing house, the production, projection and broadcasting room is like our church»¹⁰. The bookstore itself becomes church and pulpit¹¹.

At this point it was clear to Don Alberione the meaning of the word “edition”, understood as «a work or word that proceeds from a human thought: printed matter, films, radio and television projections, a work of art, a musical entertainment, etc.¹². However, the Founder was aware that for the Pauline Editor, however, this is not reduced only to editing a few

⁵ Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul*, “Sanctity, a style of life”, 2016.

⁶ Especially referring to the Daughters of Saint Paul who have the same charism as the Society of Saint Paul.

⁷ James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae*, 23-24.

⁸ It is also important to consider the passage from “Pauline writer” to “Pauline editor”. «It is necessary to pass from the idea of “author” to that of “editor”: looking closely at the fruit of the Pauline “authors”, it is impossible to continue to argue that everything must be written by us; it is time to define ourselves as “editor”, who chooses the authors, who translates from abroad when the national authors do not satisfy him, who launches the ideas he wants with his publications and who organizes the work of others...». «In the 1950s, with the creation of the Central Editorial Office, the autarchic idea of the “writer priest” was put into crisis to pass to the “Pauline editor” (Silvio Sassi, *The Pauline Editor 1914-2014*. Intervention prepared on the occasion of the Frankfurt Book Fair, 7-13 October 2014, in *San Paolo*, no. 447, January 2015).

⁹ Cf. Giancarlo Rocca, *The concepts of editor-editorial-edition in Don Alberione*, in *Acts of the 1st International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, Ariccia-Milano, 17 September-2 October 1988, p. 31.

¹⁰ James Alberione, *Carissimi in san Paolo* (1971), p. 832.

¹¹ James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei I* (1960), 316.

¹² James Alberione, *Carissimi in san Paolo* (1971), p. 166.

thoughts: «*The thoughts he formulates must enter to illumine the minds of readers, radio listeners, cinema and television spectators*»¹³. The edition must enlighten the minds of the recipients!

Let us remember that the word “edition” derives from the verb “to edit”¹⁴, which in turn derives from the Latin *edere*, which means “to bring forth”, “to give birth”, “to put in public”. For the Pauline Editor¹⁵, however, publishing takes on a particular meaning, which we can express as “drawing from oneself to enlighten others”, assuming that he has the “light” within himself to radiate; that he has, that is, an “apostolic soul”: «*She who first of all is in love with God*»¹⁶.

In fact, in the thought of our Founder, the Apostle is a temple of the Holy Trinity, which operates in him supremely to the point of exuding God from one’s pores: with words, works, prayers, gestures, attitudes; in public and in private; from his whole being. The Apostle lives in God and communicates God!¹⁷.

God, however, is not only the light that illuminates the Pauline Editor, but is also the first reference of his mission. God is the editor par excellence. In fact, Don Alberione will say that the Heavenly Father is the Editor of the Son... The Divine Son, the Editor of the Gospel... The Holy Spirit is the Author and Editor of Sacred Scripture¹⁸. The whole Trinity is itself “Editor”.

In this same perspective, Mary is understood as the Editor of the Word made man – «*Edidit nobis Salvatorem*” says the Liturgy. *The Blessed Virgin gave us the Saviour. It uses the verb “edidit”*»¹⁹–, Saint Paul is the one who, with his letters, exercised the true apostolate of the editions²⁰ and the Church is “the editor of God”²¹. These are all references that give a profound theological sense to the identity of the Pauline Editor.

1.2 The pastoral spirit

The apostolate of the editions in Don Alberione’s thought is also priestly. Since there is an equivalence between oral preaching in the Church and preaching through editions, the priesthood gives a particular meaning to the life of the Pauline Editor who exercises his mission starting from the double expression: Priest and Disciple. His activity starts from the Church and is at the service of the Church, considering that the priest is not a man

¹³ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1220.

¹⁴ The Latin entry “editor” derives from *editus*, past participle of *edere*, formed from the verb *dare* with the prefix *ex* (“out”), therefore, to let out, to emit, to give birth. Since the seventeenth century, both the Italian *editore* and the English *editor* and the French *éditeur* have had the double meaning of a “scholar who takes care of the edition of a work of others” and “entrepreneur who publishes a book”. Soon, however, the English clearly distinguished the entrepreneurial function from the editorial one: *publisher*, “one who publishes”, is the publisher, while the *editor* is the one who takes care of the text (Cf. <https://unaparolaalgiorno.it/significato/editore>). However, to understand the meaning that Don Alberione gave to the word “editor”, we must always go back to its Latin root.

¹⁵ Among the texts on the Pauline Editor we point out: Franco Pierini, *How Don Alberione’s concept of editor was born and how it developed*, in *Acts of the 1st International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, Ariccia-Milan, 17 September-2 October 1988, p. 39; Giancarlo Rocca, *The concepts of editor-editorial-edition in Don Alberione*, in *Acts of the 1st International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 25; Silvio Sassi, *The Pauline Editor 1914-2014*, op. cit.; Giacomo Perego, *Being editor according to the spirit of Don Alberione*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of Pauline Publishers*, Ariccia, October 16-21, 2017, p. 253.

¹⁶ James Alberione, *Meditazioni e Istruzioni*, Daughters of St. Paul (14 July 1931).

¹⁷ Cf. James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei IV* (1962), 278.

¹⁸ Cf. James Alberione, *Unedited Manuscript* (1938), SSP General Archives.

¹⁹ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1051.

²⁰ James Alberione, *Carissimi in san Paolo* (1971), p. 809.

²¹ James Alberione, *Il Raggio* no. 3 (1958), p. 69.

who lives for himself but who writes in his own banner “I-God-People”²², who must work with “zeal” for the salvation of others.

The ordinary minister of the apostolate of the editions is the priest and the extraordinary minister is the one who works in union with him²³. All those who work in communion with him²⁴, starting with the Disciples of the Divine Master, participate in the “priestly zeal”, all united in the same apostolate. All are “apostles”²⁵. The priestly character projects a supernatural light on the places and means of the apostolate.

All participate in the pastoral care, which is “*the great art of giving God to men and giving men to God in Jesus Christ*”²⁶. Therefore, all are called to have a “pastoral heart”. The words of the Founder are precisely in this line, when he exhorts us in this way: «*May our heart be “pastoral”, that is, a lover of souls; zealous for their salvation, patient in works, constant in adversity. Be like the Good Shepherd: I am the Good Shepherd and I give my life for the sheep; I know them, I defend them: I nourish them. May our heart be like that*»²⁷.

The Pauline Editor must be zealous for the people with a “pastoral heart”. Here the people are not understood as an “intangible” entity, but as concrete in its existential reality. «*Men must be given to God, taking them as they are and where they are*»²⁸. Therefore, it is indispensable, as the Founder insists, «*to know the souls, to know the needs, to study the tendencies, to study where souls can be taken, how to multiply the good, which organizations are needed*»²⁹.

In this regard, it is appropriate to recall a fact recounted by Don Alberione himself which clearly illustrates the importance that the Pauline Editor must give to the audience he addresses: «*At the beginning of each sermon, of each article, Canon Chiesa used to write: Who do you want to address yourself? Who are your readers and listeners? And what do you want to give in this sermon or in this article?... Always keep in mind these... points: To whom I want to address myself? What do I want to say that is advantageous, useful? What are the needs of readers?*»³⁰.

The meaning that Don Alberione wanted to give to the Pauline apostolate in the light of the priestly ministry is still valid today, but it is appropriate to keep in mind that «*the re-elaboration of ecclesiology by Vatican II, identifying the Church as the “people of God” and with the illustration of the complementarity between “common priesthood of the faithful” and “ministerial priesthood” (cf. Lumen gentium, nos. 10-14), has fully involved all the baptized in evangelization, albeit with different functions: “Since the whole Church is missionary, and the work of evangelization is a basic duty of the people of God” (Ad gentes, no. 35)*»³¹.

The ecclesial character of the apostolate of the editions remains up-to-date, which includes “priestly zeal”, an attitude that can be linked to the sensitivity of “taking care”, which has its roots in the ability to love and serve the people in their concrete situation in which they live. We can say that love, service, pastoral heart, priestly zeal, the ability to take care,

²² Cf. James Alberione, *Notes in Pastoral Theology*, 1915, pp. 1-2.

²³ Cf. James Alberione, *Apostolate of the Edition*, 1944, p. 47.

²⁴ «*Moved by the convictions expressed in “Notes on pastoral theology” and in “Woman associated with the priestly zeal” on the role of the laity and in particular of women, and observing the concrete needs of the Press Apostolate, Don Alberione, using the category of “quasi-priest”, extends the Pauline priesthood to the consecrated layman, to the nun and to the lay person who works in the world, referring to 1Pt 2:9*» (Cf. Silvio Sassi, *Evangelizing in Communication Employing Communication*, op. cit.).

²⁵ Cf. note 1 in *Apostolate of the Edition*, 1944, p. 47.

²⁶ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1205.

²⁷ James Alberione, *Press Apostolate*, 1933, p. 102.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

²⁹ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1200.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, no. 1188.

³¹ Silvio Sassi, *Evangelizing in Communication Employing Communication*, op. cit.

are some of the permanent values of the identity and mission of the Pauline Editor that come from the charismatic heritage we have received and which cannot be ignored.

1.3 The “Word”, light of every content

But, what does the Pauline Editor have to offer concretely? It is the Founder himself who answers this question: *«We must fulfil our mission which is to spread faith, morals, worship. The rest is just a side dish that serves to give greater results and to make what we teach better accepted... We are only sent for this. We must reflect on this point which includes our whole vocation. This is everything what a “Pauline” should be»*³².

Dogma (faith and doctrine), morals and worship, but always illuminated by the Bible. Indeed, Don Alberione himself affirms that *«in the apostolate of the editions, proper to our institute [Society of Saint Paul], the book that we must particularly spread is the Bible: above all and first of all, and always»*³³ and that *«Scripture constitutes the backbone of dogmatic theology, moral theology, ascetic theology and pastoral theology. Sacred Scripture is the basis of Canon Law, it is the nerve of the Liturgy, indeed it constitutes its essential part... Sacred Scripture is that which forms the substance of Christian thought; the one that presents us with the means of grace and holiness»*³⁴.

The Word of God is the central message of the apostolate of the Pauline Editor, without which his mission loses its meaning. Don Alberione’s warning is strong and enlightening: *«Some institutes are ending because they have not fulfilled their mission well; this is passed on to others who will do it better. If we do not carry out our mission well, the Lord will be able to replace us. There is always a danger of deviating from the special purpose! The Word of God will always have to be preached: there will always be souls to be saved. The means may vary, but the preaching must remain»*³⁵.

It is true that the Pauline Editor must *«first of all, give the teaching that saves. Imbue all thought and human knowledge with the Gospel»*, but he must always be aware that his apostolate also consists in *«not talking only about religion but talk about everything in a Christian way»*³⁶. In fact, *«after having given everything concerning morality, dogma and worship, one can also give what concerns human progress, as Saint Paul says: “Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely” [Phil 4:8]»*³⁷.

Obviously, as we have learned from Don Alberione, the Bible is not only the book that the Pauline Editor must disseminate but, first of all, he must welcome it in his heart, convinced that *«whoever bases his spirituality on the Bible has a whole, complete prayer: the one that pleases God»*³⁸. Only then will the Word be able to enlighten everything and everyone!

1.4 With all means

The Pauline Editor, from what we have inherited from our Founder, uses all the technical means in the work of evangelization: *«It does not matter whether one means or another*

³²James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1046.

³³*Ibidem*, no. 1040.

³⁴James Alberione, *Per un rinnovamento spirituale* (1952), pp. 94-95.

³⁵James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1065.

³⁶James Alberione, *Abundates divitiae*, 87.

³⁷James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 1044.

³⁸*Ibidem*, no. 709.

is used; it matters that there are ardent hearts and souls who want to pour out everything of themselves into the hearts of men. Here is the soul that wants to do the apostolate, whatever the means it uses: press, cinema, radio, school, small talk, etc.»³⁹.

This shows to us that the Pauline Editor cannot identify his apostolate with a particular medium, but must be open to using all means to reach the people, always considering that «the world will understand us if we use, in order to communicate with it, current means»⁴⁰. It would be to limit the scope of the Pauline apostolate if it were identified with a specific means of communication. This is what we understand when Don Alberione says, referring to the press: «the Congregation is not tied to the book. We are not attached to the form, we are attached to the Gospel, to the Catechism, to the Church»⁴¹.

An essential fact about the means of communication is that the Founder had an overview that can be summarized as follows: one medium does not exclude the other. He wisely noted that «the latest inventions of cinema, radio, television have in no way diminished the powerful influence of the press. On the contrary, they have broadened their field of action and with it form a united whole in the apostolate of the editions»⁴². Therefore, he can affirm, considering the reality of the communication of his time, that press, cinema, radio, television proceed side by side; four complementing forces, four rulers of thought, of the world.

This overview helps us to understand that today like yesterday, adopting the quickest and most effective means does not mean abandoning the “traditional” apostolate. The most important thing is to reach everyone with the message of salvation, whatever be the chosen means and form. This consideration reminds us of the words of Pope Benedict XVI, when he affirmed that in the Church we venerate the Holy Scriptures even though the Christian faith is not a “religion of the Book”: «Christianity is the “religion of the Word of God”, not of “a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word”. Consequently the Scripture is to be proclaimed, heard, read, received and experienced as the Word of God, in the stream of the apostolic Tradition from which it is inseparable»⁴³.

Similarly, for Don Alberione himself, we do not belong to the “Congregation of the book” but to that of the “Word”. It is true that even today the press apostolate continues to be the most important means of our apostolate and that we must continue to do it well and with creativity. However, we cannot forget that we are at the service of the Word, lived, proclaimed and “incarnated” with all the languages of communication. «The Word of God will always have to be preached: there will always be souls to be saved. The means may vary, but the preaching must remain»⁴⁴.

2. The Pauline Editor in a connected world

With the advent of electronic means of communication, Don Alberione broadens his vision that from “press apostolate” it becomes, first, “apostolate of the edition” and, then, “apostolate of the editions” to include all communication tools in addition to printing –

³⁹ James Alberione, *Haec Meditare* II, 7 (1947), p. 133.

⁴⁰ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 347.

⁴¹ *The Instruments of Social Communication in the Thought of Primo Maestro* (1964), p. 65.

⁴² James Alberione, *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei* III (1960), 203.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 7.

⁴⁴ James Alberione, *Haec meditare*, II, 8, pp. 58-59.

cinema, radio, television, etc. –, leaving it open in the future to assume all *«the fastest and most effective means that human intelligence will discover»*⁴⁵.

Today, with the development of digital technologies, communication is undergoing a radical change, as we will see below. Let us remember that *«if communication changes, the historical realization of the Pauline charism is modified in all its elements»*⁴⁶. This change, of course, does not mean breaking with the use of the “traditional analogue media” (press, radio, television, etc.) but to integrate them into the new communication reality, which is becoming more and more multimedia, cross-media and transmedia.

The actual challenge for the Pauline Editor is to live the fidelity to the foundational charism, assuming not only the new communication spaces created by the digital environment, but also entering the mentality and logic of the new culture, born from a world in continuous connection in the web, which creates and fosters “relationships”. Before entering into this theme, let us make some reference to the logic of communication in which “the apostolate of the editions” was born.

2.1 The linear vision of communication

Don Alberione belongs to a historical period in which communication was strongly understood in the context of the mass media, that is, instrumental communication as a means of transmission and dissemination of ideas, voice, images, etc., to a large and dispersed audience. *«An author has a message to express through the languages of the various media and which he communicates to a crowd of receivers who are influenced in the way desired by the broadcaster’s strategy. It is a communication that, in fact, is a simple transmission: the author realizes the programmed effects on the public in one direction. [...] The very nature of those technologies, the means of mass communication during that time, motivates him to keep the same organization of work (editing, technique and diffusion) even with the necessary adjustments according to the expressive laws of each instrument»*⁴⁷.

Resorting to the power of the technical means to put them at the service of the Gospel finds its justification in the conviction that with these tools it is possible to spread the good or propagate evil, in a linear model of communication, which starts from the author to the recipient, who does not have immediate and significant possibility to react. On the other hand, the power of the authors was overestimated: whoever owns the medium has a great influence. Hence the rush to “oppose the press with the press”. Finally, the power of the press and mass media was taken for granted: they shaped mentalities and attitudes.

After the Second Vatican Council, the Church has taken steps forward in the understanding of communication. In fact, it passes from the idea of individual means to the vision of a “culture”. Thus, there is a growing awareness that *«involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications»*⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St. Paul*, art. 2.1.

⁴⁶ Silvio Sassi, *Introduction*, in *Acts of the Seminar, “Actualization of the Pauline Charism in the Third Millennium: Spirituality and Mission”*, Ariccia, 18 June-3 July 2008, p. 46.

⁴⁷ Silvio Sassi, in *Acts of the Seminar “Actualization of the Pauline Charism in the Third Millennium”*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 37.

It is important, however, to bear in mind that *«although Don Alberione expresses himself with the terminology of “means of communication”, named individually or as a whole and, especially after Vatican II, with “instruments of communication”, his work of evangelization is not of an “instrumental” character, but it is authentic complete evangelization: “the written preaching alongside oral preaching»*⁴⁹.

This overview and the values inherited from the charism, some of which previously underlined regarding the apostolate of the editions (that is, the theological sense, priestly zeal and pastoral heart, the priority of the Word of God, modern means...), they cannot be neglected by the Pauline Editor, or else risk losing the meaning of his life and mission in the current culture of communication. The challenge is the fidelity to these aspects of the Pauline apostolate, immersing oneself more and more in the mentality of the new culture and in the new logic of communication that quickly creates and amplifies the network connection and fosters “relationships”.

Certainly, the mass communication model that inspired our Founder has not disappeared. Although this information system will survive, understood in the form of “one-all”, we note that the “all-all” model typical of telematic networks in the digital environment is constantly growing. Concerning communication, this is one of the great changes, or at least one of the most significant one that the Pauline Editor must avail of.

From linear communication we move to network communication by means of IT devices, especially computers and smartphones. The Pauline Editor must realize that he lives in an increasingly connected reality and that this type of communication, which is the very sphere of his mission, gives his apostolate a historical turning point.

2.2 Time of change, time of crisis

As we have just explained, among the changes that we see in today’s culture, there are those that have occurred in the field of communication, especially with the advent of digital technologies. In this regard, we can ask ourselves some questions, including: do we know the grammar of the communicative environment marked by connection and network communication? Do we know how to live, work and evangelize in this culture? Perhaps trying to answer these questions can cause some discomfort, mainly if we realize our digital illiteracy.

In fact, *«we discover ourselves as “digital illiterates” or even only as “digital immigrants”, who stammer some indispensable word, provoking uneasiness, anxiety, sense of being foreign, discouragement»*⁵⁰. This can cause a crisis and, consequently, can lead us to assume at least two different attitudes: either indifferentism, as if this reality did not exist, and then we try to take refuge in a world according to our own fantasies; or an awareness that pushes to overcome this feeling of uneasiness and to awaken one’s desire to learn and fully assume the new reality.

It is certain that the context in which we live – social, political, cultural, religious – affects our life, but a possible “crisis” is always connected to the person and not so much to the external situation. In fact, *«crisis is a situation, a way of placing oneself in relation to a reality.*

⁴⁹ Silvio Sassi, in *Acts of the Seminar “Actualization of the Pauline Charism in the Third Millennium”*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁰ Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Communication Models for the Church in Today’s World*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of the Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 108.

*Crisis is the situation of the person: not external reality, but the person situates himself or finds himself situated in a relationship of crisis with it*⁵¹.

Crisis is a human condition and is always linked to decision. To get out of a crisis, decisions have to be made. One possible way out is to face the situation with resilience, that is, in a positive way, drawing from it all the opportunities it hides. We have already talked about the crisis, when we said that «*the pandemic is a crisis and a crisis from which one does not come out the same*».

Obviously, if people go into crisis, the same institution to which they belong will go into crisis because this is made up of people in flesh and blood, with their qualities and weaknesses, with their fears and their creativity. Institutions are nothing more than a set of personal relationships structured around a mission. If its members go into crisis, the mission itself goes into crisis.

It is essential, therefore, to face the crisis together, trying to make those decisions that are favourable to the common good. We need to join forces, sharing together values and strategies around the same ideals where roles, different for each, are carried out with an overall vision⁵².

2.3 The logic of network communication

The current challenge for the Pauline Editor is not only to take on new technologies in the digital field, but to “decide” to enter the logic of online communication and “see” in this reality a large and wide horizon for producing human relationships⁵³. In fact, «*the digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people*»⁵⁴, a network of concrete people, who in the face of the darkness and uncertainties of the times need light and of hope. It is to these people that the Pauline Editor is called to bear witness to the Gospel and to proclaim it with the languages of this communicational reality.

The Pauline Editor must realize that it is necessary to be on the Internet to evangelize on the Internet. It is important to bear in mind that on the internet⁵⁵ the word “net” must be understood in a very particular sense, as it is not built according to hierarchical principles, but it is like a large globe-shaped spider web involving the entire earth without borders or centre.

Communication on the Internet has its own logic. There is no centre that supports everything and it does not happen in a linear but “rhizomatic”⁵⁶ structure. «*The image of*

⁵¹ L. De Candido, “Crisi”, in *Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità*, edited by Stefano De Fiores and Tullo Goffi, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), San Paolo, 1985, pp. 336-337.

⁵² Cf. Santiago De La Cierva, *La comunicazione di crisi nella Chiesa*, Roma, EDUSC, 2008, p. 15.

⁵³ Cf. Federico Badaloni, *Rethinking the Role of the Publisher Today*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of the Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 192.

⁵⁴ Francis, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day, “Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter”*, 01 June 2014.

⁵⁵ «*Internet, more than a means of communication and transport, it is an environment. A cultural, social, technological, media environment. An environment in which we communicate, socialize, produce, consume, sell, create culture, travel*» (Vincenzo Comodo, *Consacrati on line. Rotte per la navigazione dei religiosi in Internet*, Milano, Ancora, 2006, p. 17).

⁵⁶ The metaphor of the “Rhizome” is surprisingly connected to the Internet, understood in its broadest sense of intertwining and production of multilevel meanings. The appearance of the Rhizome, due to its branching, connection and extension, expresses a very interesting conceptual representation: any point is connected to each of the others through a multidirectional expansion.

the net invites us to reflect on the multiplicity of lines and intersections⁵⁷ that ensure its stability in the absence of a centre, a hierarchical structure, a form of vertical organization. The net works because all its elements share responsibility»⁵⁸.

If a point or a node – which has value in itself and is defined in relation to the whole – is removed or added, the structure of the Internet reorganizes itself accordingly. More than a unidirectional flow of information – as books, TV, radio – communication on the digital network does not take place according to a single direction, because each Internet user, that is, a regular Internet user, builds his navigation route in an autonomous and unique way.

We reiterate that the Internet is not just a “structure”, but an “environment” of relationships and has become an integral part of the personal and social life of today’s man. *«The Internet is not only something external to life; it is a condition, a manner of living. Not only one uses the Internet, but one lives in the Internet, and we are called to live there as “salt and leaven of the earth”, as “witnesses” and as “missionaries” of the new life in Christ»⁵⁹.* In this environment, the Pauline Editor is called to be present as someone who not only has a message to offer, but also someone who has to receive and share, not as an anonymous person, but with his precise identity and style of Pauline life.

2.4 Inhabiting the digital environment

The digital environment undoubtedly characterizes contemporary society. Large swathes of humanity are immersed in it today in an ordinary and continuous manner. It is a real square, a meeting place where people spend a large part of their day connected.

It is now not just a question of “using” communication tools, but of “living” in a widely digitalized culture, which has profound impacts on the notion of time and space, on the perception of oneself, others and the world, on the way of communicating, to enter into relationships with others, to learn and study, to work, to get information, to pray, etc.⁶⁰.

For this reason, the Pauline Editor needs to know this environment and to assume it as a social space where, through human interaction new forms in the dynamics of communicating and relating to people are born. Therefore, the first thing is to know this reality, because *«a rather deep understanding of this environment is therefore the prerequisite for a significant presence there»⁶¹.*

On this journey it is essential to realize, first of all, that the digital environment is not a reality parallel to the “physical-presence” or purely virtual one, but is part of the daily life of many people, as we have already stated. In other words, the digital environment is not limited to connecting devices (computers and electronic devices) to each other, but is above all the activation of human relationships in a space where people are not simply present as a “mass”, but each in his individuality, with innumerable possibilities of relationship and participation.

⁵⁷ In the IT field, the term “node” is used to refer to a device connected to a network, which is able to communicate with other devices that are connected to the same network.

⁵⁸ Francis, *Message for the 53rd World Communications Day*, «“We are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). From social network communities to the human community», 24 January 2019.

⁵⁹ Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Communication Models for the Church in Today’s World*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of the Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 107.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on the Young*, 3-27 October 2018, no. 21.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *Message for the 47th World Communications Day: “Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization”*, 12 May 2013.

We repeat that in the digital environment the user is not a passive agent as can generally happen in the face of traditional means. We emphasize the aspect of the protagonism of users because this causes a strong impact on our apostolate. In fact, users *«not only choose the navigation route, but become co-authors, putting in the attic the classic distinction between the broadcaster and receiver, between producer and consumer: today the sender is only partially an “original” with more or less sacral value, while the receiver assumes some functions of authorship or co-authorship and the distribution of media materials that were formerly the source of the broadcasting apparatus»*⁶².

Finally, people pass through the digital environment with their infinite desires for contacts, consumption, information, sharing of life, research, entertainment, contents, etc. They bring with them their needs and concerns, certainties and doubts, expectations and even frustrations, goodness and badness, etc. Thus, as they are, people are looking for many things, including spaces of truth, welcome, recognition, peace... and also of God. They are data that, associated with many others, give us ideas and notions for “our” specific pastoral care in the digital space.

2.5 The challenges of the digital pastoral care

The digital environment is also the place where people seek religious experiences. In this regard, the Magisterium of the Church is aware that *«there should be no lack of coherence or unity in the expression of our faith and witness to the Gospel in whatever reality we are called to live, whether physical or digital. When we are present to others, in any way at all, we are called to make known the love of God to the furthest ends of the earth»*⁶³.

If it is true that learning from our Founder, the bookshop is a temple and the printing plant a pulpit, it is equally true that the digital environment is an essential place for us to bring God to people and help them create a bond with the Church. In this sense, we are challenged to try to discover and deepen the dimension of religious experience in the digital environment in order to make the most appropriate apostolic choices.

The first thing we want to underline with regard to digital pastoral care is that, in this context, it is convenient to rethink the purpose of our mission as a “service” and not so much as a “product”, even if it is clear that products exist. The logic of service places man at the centre in his singularity and, starting from his needs, as someone who “chooses” among many possibilities. Whereas the logic of the product often focuses on what we think can “sell” more, but that does not always correspond to the real urgency of the user.

Therefore, there must be on the part of the Pauline Editor, the ability to identify existing or potential communities and to listen to and understand the needs of those who are part of them. He must have the ability to create unique digital and real places to enable a certain type of dialogue and sharing, which is able to offer the solution to the real needs of individuals or communities⁶⁴. It means first creating a relationship and then offering the message concretized in the “product”.

A second observation is that despite the positive aspects of the digital environment for our mission and considering the innumerable possibilities of obtaining data, the Pauline Editor must be careful in his pastoral work not to produce “editions” created in the

⁶² Cf. Ivan Maffei, *Religious Aspects*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of the Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁶³ Benedict XVI, “*Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization*”, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Cf. Federico Badaloni, op. cit., pp. 193-194.

editorial offices, in front of a computer. Yes, it is true that it is essential to be on the web, but it is also essential to be careful not to be closed in it, with the risk of moving away from the interlocutors “where and how”⁶⁵ they are, as we have already mentioned above.

The digital environment can put us in front of the reality of the interlocutors – with their wounds and their anxieties, with the doubts and fears they carry in their hearts⁶⁶– but if we do not open ourselves to the encounter, even physical, we remain external spectators, despite technological innovations that have the ability to put us in front of an augmented reality⁶⁷ in which we seem to be immersed⁶⁸.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that a digital pastoral care cannot be a set of individual initiatives but must arise from a common project. The Pauline Editor belongs to a community of people who live the values proper to consecrated life⁶⁹ and who dedicate themselves to the same apostolate according to the institutional charism. He is not a solitary evangelizer but participates in an “eminently common”⁷⁰ apostolate. The community is, first of all, the place where the Pauline Editor is called to exercise a “connected” and “networked” life and from this experience to make the world his parish.

Finally, even if the technical quality of the connection is an essential requirement to open the channels for communication, the quality of relationships is the goal that the Pauline Editor must aim at in pastoral care, that is, a communication that leads to a true encounter⁷¹ with God and with other persons. Since communication is central to his mission, he should be the first to feel called upon to promote encounter⁷² in the context of his pastoral work, starting from his identity as a man of communication of God, as a true artisan of communion⁷³, in whatever environment he finds himself.

3. Artisan of communion generated by the Gospel

Starting from all that we have explained above and considering the current culture of communication, we can affirm, without claiming to exhaust the definition, that the Pauline Editor is *«a man called by Christ and consecrated to be an apostle of communication, to be essentially an “editor”, who gives form to an experience, who writes or translates his personal and community life of faith and encounter with Christ in words, texts, images, sounds, videos, bytes or in any other form that the technology gradually develops; but also in experiences and initiatives*

⁶⁵ Cf. Francis, *Message for the 55th World Communications Day, «“Come and See” (Jn 1:46) Communicating by Encountering People Where and as They Are»*, 23 January 2021.

⁶⁶ Dario Edoardo Viganò, *Communication Models for the Church in Today’s World*, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

⁶⁷ Augmented reality is a relatively recent and constantly evolving technology. If we wanted to define it, in a very generic way, we could say that it is the representation of an altered reality in which artificial and virtual information is superimposed on the normal reality perceived by our senses.

⁶⁸ Cf. Francis, *Message for the 55th World Communications Day*, op. cit.

⁶⁹ *Constitutions and Directory of the Society of St. Paul*, art. 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, art. 15.

⁷¹ Cf. Francis, *Message for the 48th World Communications Day, “Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter”*, 1 June 2014.

⁷² Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul, “Apostle Communicators, for a culture of encounter”*, 2018.

⁷³ “At the origin of the word communication there is the term “communion”. Communication is always a search for the other and for sharing. It has the ability to break the barriers we build around ourselves, the closed circle of our self-sufficiency and allows us to look for the other, to recognize his otherness, his specificity, his difference in relation to our person” (Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul*, 2018).

where every language is at the service of the inculturation of the Gospel with and in communication. One who, after the example of Mary, gives (edit) the Saviour to the world»⁷⁴.

As Pauline Editor, his mission consists not only in disseminating content on the various analogue and digital platforms, but in being ‘himself’ a “man of communication”, who “excludes God from his pores”, a man who creates and cultivates relationships, both through direct contacts with persons, that is “in presence”, and through computer networks.

In his mission, the Pauline Editor has in front of him some essential references to follow. The first is Jesus, who not only offers the “content” of the message, but he himself is the “method” of communication. He is the “perfect communicator”⁷⁵, the Master – Way, Truth and Life! – who teaches how to create and cultivate relationships. Secondly, Saint Paul, the disciple «*who knows the Master in his fullness*»⁷⁶, and who not only proclaims the Gospel in words and with his writings, but he himself is a man of communication, skilled in networking with community and with his collaborators.

3.1 Jesus, Editor of the Gospel

Jesus, the Divine Son, in the expression of Don Alberione, is the Editor of the Gospel. He is the first point of reference for the Pauline Editor, not for the texts he developed, because he did not write anything in person as his disciples did, but for the life he lived. Christ himself is the “eternal Gospel” (EG II). He is the communication of the Father: «*He reveals the Father to us, in the Spirit and opens us to Trinitarian life, as “communion” of the three divine Persons*»⁷⁷.

The Trinity is not a set of three “individuals”, but a community (in perfect harmony!) of three “persons”. Indeed, «*God is not Solitude, but Communion; he is Love and therefore communication, as love always communicates; indeed, it communicates itself in order to encounter the other. In order to communicate with us and to communicate himself to us, God adapts himself to our language, establishing a real dialogue with humanity throughout history*»⁷⁸.

This communication, this “dialogue” of God with humanity, therefore reached its perfection in Jesus, the Word made flesh: «*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*» (Jn 1:14). The spirituality and logic of the incarnation illuminate the life and apostolic work of the Pauline Editor.

3.1.1 Love incarnated in relationships

In the light of the Incarnation, we can say that «*the Son himself is the Word, the Logos: the eternal Word became small – small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us. Now the Word is not simply audible; not only does it have a voice, now the Word has a face, one which we can see: that of Jesus of Nazareth*»⁷⁹. In him, the Word becomes liberating and redeeming for all humanity!

The Incarnate Word has left us the example of how to communicate with the Father and the Spirit in moments of silence and recollection and also of how to communicate with men especially with those most in need. In fact, Jesus «*spoke from within, that is to say,*

⁷⁴Editorial Guidelines. Identity, contents and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate 2018, 1.2.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Communio et progressio*, no. 11.

⁷⁶ James Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae*, 159-160.

⁷⁷ Maria Regina Cesarato, *Jesus Master, Original Model of the Communicator*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar on the Pauline Mission for the Mission*, op. cit., p. 285.

⁷⁸ Francis, “We are members one of another” (Eph 4:25), op. cit.

⁷⁹ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 12.

from out of the pressure of His people. He preached the Divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to his people's way of talking and to their patterns of thought»⁸⁰.

Through communication, Jesus created relationships in continuous contact with persons in their existential realities. As our Founder reminds us, «the Son of God came down from heaven to us (formam servi accipiens); he came to look for sinners to the point of being accused of being too familiar with them; he lowered himself in conversing so as to explain himself with similes and parables and simple words even to the shepherds, the people, the children. Noble and simple at the same time, accordingly»⁸¹.

Letting himself be guided by the criterion of the Incarnation, the Pauline Editor is called to proclaim the Gospel, both by incarnating it in himself and by “materializing it” with all the languages of communication: with writing, with sound, with music, with image, through the press, radio, television, cinema, with analogue and digital communication.

An important fact of Jesus' communication is that the power of love is the basis of his words and his actions. This is the path that he also indicates to his disciples, when he leaves them the new commandment which must be the engine of life: «I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another» (Jn 13:34-35).

It is the love that every person brings – and the Pauline Editor! – to expand the mind and heart, which leads to forgiveness and mercy, which creates relationships, generates fraternity and leads to service. In fact, «love, by its nature, is communication; it leads to openness and sharing. If our hearts and actions are inspired by charity, by divine love, then our communication will be touched by God's own power»⁸².

In this perspective and with reference to the Pauline apostolate, we can affirm that, precisely because love generates communication, it is communion, it is dynamic, it is creative... The words of our Founder are stimulating when he affirms that «love, true love is inventive. When you have fire in your heart (not something sentimental and vaporous), you will find many initiatives and many productions. True love is what is shown with the daily effort for the apostolate: it makes us think, run, organize»⁸³. It is this love that enlightened the apostle Paul and transformed him into a man of relationships and led him to work in a network and in communion in view of the mission. We shall develop further this thought.

3.2 Paul, the “connected” apostle

Let us start from the axiom that Don Alberione has left for us and according to which for the Pauline Editor «the original is Jesus Christ; the form is Saint Paul»⁸⁴. In fact, «from Paul, the Pauline Editor captures the ability to intercept the concrete questions of the world (at the ecclesial, community, social level, etc.) and his effort to adapt the language to each recipient. Then, it takes the dimension of a pastoral spirit and universality, prophecy, zeal and total com-

⁸⁰Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, *Communio et progressio*, no. 11.

⁸¹ James Alberione, *Press Apostolate*, 1933, p. 107.

⁸² Francis, *Message for the 50th World Communications Day. “Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter”*, 24 January 2016.

⁸³ James Alberione, *Haec meditare* II, 8 (1948), pp. 179-180.

⁸⁴ James Alberione, *Vademecum*, no. 653.

mitment, passion and capacity to listen, audacity and the ability to build a network of collaborators, apostolic dynamism and the sense of responsibility. From him he learns to do everything for the Gospel»⁸⁵.

We have already stated that the Pauline Editor must make use of all communication tools and that the digital environment is an open field to be explored. Certainly, if Saint Paul lived today, he would also have used e-mail, WhatsApp and social networks. But obviously, he would not fail to give importance to direct contacts with individuals and communities.

This is what we see in Paul's correspondence, that is, his concern for concrete persons: *«the communities, the faces, the names (some of which, as we have seen, are recurrently mentioned), the situations and the contexts that Paul cites naturally, interpreting one by one the interlocutors of his speech, by making the letter a vehicle of “targeted” meaning precisely to a name, address, destination»⁸⁶.*

Yes, but to share what? First of all, to share the experience of the encounter that, by grace, he had with Jesus who died and rose, and to announce his love and mercy! In the perspective of “Paul the communicator”, we want to reflect here below on some aspects of his life which, we believe, are important for the life of the Pauline Editor: all taken from the Letter to the Romans which Don Alberione considered the main model for the apostolate of the editions.

3.2.1 The model of the editions

We could have taken many aspects of Saint Paul's life and highlighted how they can inspire the Pauline Editor in his mission but we preferred to start with the affirmation of our Founder where he asserts that *«the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans is the first and main essay of the apostolate of the editions, the exemplar on which every Pauline edition should be modelled»⁸⁷.* Let us remember that this letter was so dear to Don Alberione that he himself wanted to represent it in a beautiful picture in the church dedicated to Saint Paul in the Mother House, Alba. As he himself affirms, *«the picture as a whole represents well the nature and purpose of our apostolate: to bring the Gospel to all peoples, of all times»⁸⁸.*

It is to the community of Rome that Paul transmits the conviction that his mission is to proclaim the Gospel and that the centre of the Gospel is the person of Jesus in his earthly life, death and resurrection. We know that Paul, when he wrote the Letter to the Romans, did not yet know the community personally but he already had it in his heart and had an ardent desire to encounter it (cf. Rm 1:11).

But, we can ask ourselves that in what aspects does the Letter to the Romans inspire the Pauline apostolate? In a text of 1958, Don Alberione tries to explain – and here we briefly expose – three characteristics that must be part of the identity of the Pauline Editor⁸⁹:

- a) Be well imbued with the Spirit of Jesus Christ in order to be full of what you want to give. If we want to bring good to souls, we must possess it because no one gives what he does not have.

⁸⁵Editorial Guidelines. *Identity, contents and interlocutors of the Pauline apostolate* 2018, 1.1.

⁸⁶Giuseppe Mazza, *Saint Paul, Communicator Model*, in *Acts of the 2nd International Seminar of the Pauline Publishers*, op. cit., p. 213.

⁸⁷James Alberione, *Pauline Spirituality* (1962), p. 88.

⁸⁸*Idem*.

⁸⁹James Alberione, *To the Daughters of St. Paul*, 1958, pp. 53-59.

- b) Saint Paul adapts the principles of the Gospel, interprets them, explains them and dedicates his time to men, particularly pagans, at least what is necessary for them. It is always necessary to keep in mind who the audience is, who are the readers, who are the recipients, and give that which is good for them, either directly or indirectly.
- c) Zeal. Saint Paul had all peoples in his heart. Love for all souls especially those who live in darkness and in ignorance.

In fact, in the Letter addressed to the Christian community of Rome, after having presented himself as «*slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God*» (Rm 1:1), Paul reveals his open and universal view regarding his mission, as when he says: «*To Greeks and non-Greeks alike, to the wise and the ignorant, I am under obligation; that is why I am eager to preach the gospel also to you in Rome*» (Rm 1:14-15).

Today, in an increasingly connected society, Saint Paul continues to inspire the Pauline Editor to have a great openness of heart and mind. In this regard, the words of our Founder are very timely when he says: «*To acquire an expansive heart, an apostolic heart, the heart of Saint Paul*»⁹⁰. And again: «*Whoever approaches Saint Paul gradually transforms himself, learns to live like him, to pray like him. Whoever loves Saint Paul soon opens his heart, becomes generous, extensive in his views*»⁹¹.

3.2.2 Online evangelization

Although the apostle Paul lived in a period of history in which there were no digital technologies, he was already exercising his mission in the dynamics of networks with the resources of his time. Reading his letters, we realize his ability despite the difficulties, to create and sustain relationships both with those who were distant and those who were close to him, especially his collaborators. We can see that relationships were not superficial but were born of at least two basic and related convictions: love, as a force that generates fraternal relationships and the conviction of being part of a body.

In Jesus, his Master, Paul learned that love is the fullness of the Law (Cf. Rom 13:10) and that it leads to fraternal relationships (Cf. Rom 12:9-21). It is from this conviction that Paul took love as the basis of his life plan and human relationships to the point of saying to the Christians of Rome: «*Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour... Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation... Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good*» (Rm 12:9-10,16,21).

From his encounter with Jesus, Paul learned that the man of faith who lets himself be guided by love does not walk alone but with God, with others and in community. He is fully aware that to be a Christian is to be part of a body: «*For as in one body we have many parts and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another*» (Rm 12:4-5).

⁹⁰ James Alberione, *Prediche del Primo Maestro* 5 (1957), p. 161.

⁹¹ James Alberione, *È necessario pregare sempre* 2 (1940), p. 362.

The metaphor of the body and the members teaches us that the Christian life is founded on communion and otherness. In this perspective, we understand that the people who belong to the community are not strangers or potential competitors, but brothers in the deepest sense. Paul helps us to see that in Christ we discover otherness in a new way, as an integral part and condition of relationship and proximity⁹².

These principles are at the basis of Paul's life and mission and also of the evangelization in networking he conducted. In fact, Paul creates around himself a network of people who work together, in synergy, like a real team. They are the *synergoí* or "collaborators"⁹³. Only in chapter 16 of the Letter to the Romans does a large list of names of persons (men and women) appear to whom Paul addresses his greetings and, through some of them, to the ecclesial groups to which they belonged. These contacts indicate that, in addition to being an "editor" of letters, he cultivated personal contact with them. The "letter" was a form of distance communication fixed in writing, which extended the oral communication that had already taken place directly.

Returning to today's communication reality, as we have mentioned, the digital environment becomes a challenge for the Pauline Editor as a place to create relationships in view of the proclamation of the Gospel. However, «*digital connectivity is not enough to build bridges. It is not capable of uniting humanity*»⁹⁴. In fact, «*today's media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences*»⁹⁵. In the pastoral care of communication, it is therefore necessary to integrate the digital environment with the physical world which can never be replaced.

3.2.3 The renewal of the mind

The Apostle Paul is aware that he has a content to transmit – the Gospel! – and that in order to follow Jesus a constant integral renewal is necessary, a condition which is to free oneself from the ideologies of the world or from all those ideas that do not correspond to the Gospel. His exhortation to the community of Rome is from this point of view: «*Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect*» (Rm 12:2).

The two decisive words "transform" and "renew" invite us to become new men, transformed into a new way of existence. Certainly, Paul, in making this exhortation, does not speak of a theory but of one of his life experiences. This is the process that he himself went through as the Founder explains: «*Saint Paul was converted in his mind: he completely changed his ideas*». And he adds: «*To convert ourselves in the mind, we too have to change our ideas. It is necessary to embrace the maxims of today's Gospel*»⁹⁶.

It is in the mind that we accept the Gospel and reject the "things" of the world, not only on a rational level but also on a practical level. It is right when Don Alberione says that «*everything comes from the mind. If one does a good work, it is because he thought of it and then wanted it and then did it. So always, the first point to look at is the mind. And if there is any*

⁹² Cf. Francis, "We are members one of another" (Eph 4:25), op. cit.

⁹³ Rinaldo Fabris, *Tutto per il Vangelo*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), San Paolo, 2008, p. 56.

⁹⁴ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 43.

⁹⁵ Francis, *Laudato si'*, no. 47.

⁹⁶ James Alberione, *Esercizi e meditazioni del Primo Maestro*, Daughters of St. Paul (1952), p. 75.

sin or some imperfections, some defects, it is first in the mind. Oh, sanctify the mind, that is, according to the truth. Use the mind, the intelligence well»⁹⁷.

It is from the mind that conversion is born as a “change of direction”. In this sense, the life of holiness is nothing other than letting oneself be led by the “mentality” of the Gospel, a mentality that involves feelings, will, piety, human relationships, all of life. It is from the mind that apostolic renewal is born. Therefore, if we want a dynamic and apostolically renewed Congregation, a renewal of the mind is necessary.

Our apostolate, which works with “editions” in the context of contemporary communication, requires an ever-renewed and creative mentality with regard to content, working method, means, organization, etc. An “old” mentality is always a great danger. The wheel of the Pauline cart of “study” (understood as “studiousness”, *studiosità*)⁹⁸ orients us in this direction, that is, it leads us to constant commitment for updating, factors that depend precisely on the mind so that it does not grow old.

However, it is necessary to clarify that an “old mentality” is not always necessarily linked to the chronological age. Old age is a grace and a gift from God. An “old mentality” depends more on each person at any age than on age. In fact, we can find elderly people with a “young” mentality who still dream, as well as young people with an old mentality, without any plans and without a soul.

So you need a mentality that is always young! As Don Alberione affirms: *«Nevertheless, one gets older! It is true. But let it be clear. The clergy will be always young: if he keeps up to date in his studies; if in piety he lives his time; if in his pastoral activity he adheres to the needs of the people; if he knows how to conserve his physical energies, as far as possible, with a regulated life; if in every time he lives in Jesus Christ who is always young; and in the Church, which never gets old»⁹⁹.* Live in Jesus, be always young, as Saint Paul did! Here is the secret of eternal youth.

4. Let us strain forward

Dear brothers, certainly in this Letter many other arguments could be added regarding the chosen theme. This is just a proposal for reflection with the aim of thinking about our mission in this troubled times we are experiencing and finding new ways to face it. In fact, the situation of discomfort, which is global, pushes us to rethink our Pauline life in all its dimensions. Considering, therefore, that we are all in the same boat and that each of us is important in it, there is nothing left for us but to undertake the journey in synodality¹⁰⁰, which is above all a journey of listening, where one listens to the other and everyone tries to listen to what says the Spirit.

We reiterate that everything is connected. The pandemic itself is a proof of this. We too, like so many other people around the world, have experienced quarantines and isolation, fright and fears, disorientation and uncertainty. Our daily life has also changed and we have had to review our programs and projects, resize expenses and investments, rethink the economy due to economic losses.

⁹⁷ James Alberione, *To the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master*, VIII (1963), p. 369.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul*, “Study in view of the mission”, 2017.

⁹⁹ James Alberione, *Carissimi in San Paolo* (1971), p. 275.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul*, “A ‘Synodal Congregation’ at the service of the Gospel in the culture of communication”, 2020.

Now is the time to resume the journey, not closed in our auto-referentiality but by looking objectively at the concrete situation of the people we are called to serve; people who live in a globalized world and for this very reason even in the midst of the “critical situations” that continue to multiply: among them we want to mention hunger (for God and for bread!), unemployment, misery, disease, uncertainty about the future, fear and loneliness and many other wounds and pains.

We cannot be accomplices of the “globalization of indifference”, but we must always be urged to carry with a prophetic voice the Gospel through our apostolate and, where necessary, not only spread it, but also “denounce” injustices and the realities that do not correspond to its proposal.

During this time, we have learned more than ever how the caring relationship presents itself as the fundamental paradigm of human coexistence. We have seen this and we continue to see it clearly, for example, in the dedication of health workers, who generously use all their energies, sometimes even at the risk of their own health or even their own life, to alleviate the suffering of the sick. We too, through our apostolate, are called to give our part, to take care with a “pastoral heart” of the people to whom we address ourselves!

Insisting on the recovery does not mean, of course, that in this period of pandemic our Circumscriptions have done nothing and have remained inert. We have seen the commitment to carry out, even with difficulty, paper publications and also various initiatives in the digital field such as the transmission of the Mass or the Rosary by streaming, interviews, book launches, meetings, conferences and seminars, productions of videos on YouTube, etc. Everything is a sign that the difficulties have also led us to look for new opportunities and pushed us to advance more and more in the immense territory that is the digital environment. We must continue on this path, obviously not as “individual evangelizers”, but together in a circumscription project that contemplates the various initiatives.

* * *

We reiterate, by way of conclusion, that the connection we have spoken of is obviously not limited to the media or the digital environment. We are called to situate it in the broader context of an “integral ecology”¹⁰¹ that involves all human, social and environmental dimensions.

Everything is connected and in this connection people have an essential role! «Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another»¹⁰². In this perspective, we are called, as Pauline Editors, to feel the need for each other starting from the reality of our communities, striving to build fraternal relationships – marked by mercy and harmony between generations – in the appreciation of each person, also of our elderly and sick confreres who enrich us with their apostolate of suffering and prayer.

In our resolve to do everything for the Gospel in the culture of current communication, the Word of God and the Eucharist, as well as moments of personal and community prayer become essential nourishment for growing in love, communion and audacity in

¹⁰¹Cf. Francis, *Laudato si'*, nos. 137-162.

¹⁰²*Ibidem*, no. 42.

view of our mission¹⁰³. These are the privileged references in which we can find the light necessary for discernment, in search of the answers to the questions that this time poses to us.

Considering what we have set out, we suggest some questions that we believe will be useful to deepen some points that have emerged to help our personal and community reflection:

1) Recovering the identity of the Pauline Editor

- a) What are the “immutable” aspects of our identity as Pauline Editors that we consider necessary to strengthen in our life and in our mission in the culture of communication?
- b) How are we carrying out the apostolate with the press and other “traditional means”? What are the difficulties we have encountered in this regard (and are still encountering), especially in this time of the pandemic, and what opportunities have we perceived?

2) The Pauline Editor in a connected world

- a) What are we doing concretely that demonstrates, not only that we are integrating traditional means of communication in the digital environment, but that we are in fact moving from a linear vision of communication to the logic of online network communication which favours relationships?
- b) What are the challenges in order to realize a true “digital pastoral care”? Where are we in this regard?
- c) How are we living the Pauline integral formation in order to face the various needs of our apostolate?

3) Artisan of communion generated by the Gospel

- a) Considering Pauline spirituality as a “style of life”, what do Jesus and Saint Paul teach – in particular in the Letter to the Romans – the Pauline Editor about his commitment to be a true “artisan of communion” in the current culture of communication?
- b) How are we living “communication”, in reference to relationships (with God, with ourselves and with our confreres, with our interlocutors, with the Pauline Family, with the local Church, with other institutions)? What kind of apostolic initiatives lead us to create relationships with people, both in the digital environment and in direct personal contact with us?
- c) Are we able to work in “synergy” with our confreres and with our lay collaborators in an effective synodal journey in view of our mission? What difficulties do we find? How are we to overcome them? What space does the Word of God and the Eucharist occupy in our life as nourishment for this journey?

¹⁰³ Cf. *Annual Letter of the Superior General of the Society of St. Paul, “I do all for the Gospel, in love, in communion and with courage”*, 2015.

4) Let us strain forward

- a) Considering the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, in what areas of Pauline life do we need to “reinvent ourselves” in the light of the Gospel and of the institutional charism? What new apostolic initiatives can we undertake to respond to the needs of the people we are called to serve? Today what is the most appropriate model of apostolic organization for a Congregation whose charism is communication?

Let us look to the future with hope, trying to renew every day, the “Pact” with Jesus Master, in which we recognize our incapacities and insufficiencies, and we entrust our concerns and our questions to Him, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, in the certainty that he will give us light, “good spirit, grace, knowledge, means for doing good” and everything necessary to continue in the joy of evangelizing.

We conclude with a prayer¹⁰⁴ that can also become a real program of life for the Pauline Editor in the challenge to be a man of communication with God and to do everything for the Gospel in an increasingly connected world.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Help us to recognize the evil latent
in a communication that does not build communion.
Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.
Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.
You are faithful and trustworthy;
may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:
where there is shouting, let us practise listening;
where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;
where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;
where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;
where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;
where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;
where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;
where there is hostility, let us bring respect;
where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

Fraternally,

Rome, 30 June 2021
Solemnity of Saint Paul the Apostle



Valdir José De Castro
Father Valdir José De Castro, SSP
Superior General

¹⁰⁴ Francis, *Message for the 52nd World Communications Day, “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). Fake news and journalism for peace*, 24 January 2018.