



## **"Let yourself be transformed"**

### **Evangelizers with Spirit: Notes on the Place of the Pauline Apostolate**

(fr. Antonio Iraldo Alves de Brito, SSP<sup>1</sup>)

*The title "Evangelizers with Spirit" points to our permanent commitment to change and that the XI General Chapter challenges us: to let ourselves be transformed, changing our way of thinking. This brings us back to the Apostle Paul's goal: until Christ is formed in us (Gal 4:19). Our way of thinking and acting should be Christ's way of thinking and acting, that is, the configuration to him. Fr. James Alberione has made this his program of life. He allowed himself to be shaped by the Spirit.*

*The apostle Paul was convinced that evangelizing was not a privilege but an obligation. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). It is a certainty that the preaching was not just the result of his personal abilities. The apostle's preaching is the fruit of the spirit. As Pope Francis teaches, "Spirit-filled evangelization is not the same as a set of tasks dutifully carried out despite one's own personal inclinations and wishes" (EG, 261).*

*The change or transformation, therefore, has in itself, among other elements, renunciations, pain, death and rebirth. Hence, the nature of our Charism consists, as it were, in a constant "metanoia" so as not to be imprisoned in old mummified schemes that would no longer say anything to the humanity of our time. Alberione bequeathed us a lifestyle that does not allow us to "grow old in ideas," and neither does it imprison us behind the walls of material structure and worldly logic. Our charism has the constant characteristic of renewal, so there is in us the mark of the spirit of youth that stimulates us in the mission.*

### **To Evangelize is to Communicate**

*"The greatest saints, if they lived today, would use the microphone to spread, with fervor and joy, their message of truth, justice and peace" (Fr. James Alberione).*

*Alberione learned his enthusiasm for communicating the Gospel by meditating the Pauline Writings especially the Letter to the Romans. We have inherited the charisma of communication. This is the Pauline's reason for being and acting. It is about that fundamental challenge: "talk about everything Christianly", with creativity not to "plant where others have already planted," always renewing interest in the culture of*

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Fr. Reymel Ramos SSP.

communication.“ Thus, I aspire to proclaim the gospel not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on another’s foundation” (Rom 15:20).

Perhaps here it was the case of touching the reality itself, of stepping on the ground, as they say. Thinking about the General Chapter that calls us to change our mentality, the question would be: What is new about our charism in the Church today in terms of communication? This is central. Alberione generated us exclusively for communication. Obviously, in the Church there are a multitude of initiatives related to communication. Our difference is that the communication phenomenon is our reason for being; it's a matter of life and death.

It happens that we often conceive of communication only as a means, that is, the technique. Among the many refrains of today, repeated to the point of exhaustion, is that we are living the best phase in terms of communication and its technical apparatus. This is good and even true. It turns out that we should also be suspicious of exaggerations or a certain deification of the technique itself, as if the means alone had magical powers. It is always current that which Alberione was insisting about the importance of the education to the good use of the means (of communication), that which says the hate wars in the internet, in "social networks." The main challenge for us seems to be that we do not lose sight of our field of action and we prepare for it continuously.

With the pandemic implosion of the new coronavirus at the beginning of the year 2020, we saw with greater intensity the need for a connection with human warmth, in addition to the coolness of the screens' fire. Impeded from the presence, we had to use night and day network communication. In addition to the apparatus itself, there are bodies that communicate. Without a living body and other bodies, there is no communication, there is a connection. Connection is not expected from the body. Links are expected. The body is not a totem. It is a tentacle that captures the other. The body is the media par excellence.

By locating the germinal moment of communication in the body, one avoids totemizing the means, the media, and the belief in its autonomy, as well as its omnipotent decision, is removed. The perception of the social fact expands and a complex instance is included, endowed with its own imperatives, with historical and cultural density (BAITELLO, 2008, p. 98).

Human communication is, in the foreground, the search for the other. To communicate is to seek to build and maintain bonds. Who communicates shares something with the other, in a reciprocal process. “Communication is always about seeking relationships and sharing with others. It crosses all activities: leisure, work, education, politics; it concerns all social media” (WOLTON, 2006, p. 13). Communication is an exchange. It occurs when the sender and the receiver interact as equals. Communicating, therefore, is cohabiting. So, there is no communication without respect for the other. For us, there is simply no recipient. There are interlocutors. This is in line with what the Superior General said in his 2020 Annual Letter about a “Synodal Congregation”:

In the absence of communication, which is expressed concretely in openness to God and to the other – whether this “other” is one or more interlocutors - an effective synodal path is impossible. In this way, communication plays an essential role, which certainly manifests itself in language, behavior, attitudes, choices, where listening, words, silence, dialogue and discernment enter. (CASTRO 2020, n. 3).

Pope Francis has insisted on the service of communication that collaborates with an authentic “culture of encounter.” He stresses the importance of the media and points out: “In a world like this, media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. Good communication helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity.”<sup>2</sup>

This motivates us to think about the medium and the message. It is known that, in less than a hundred years, the telephone, the radio, the press, the cinema, the television, the computer, the internet, the networks were invented and “democratized.” All of this reduced the conditions for exchanges and relationships. Above all, the distances were reduced, as advocated by the communication theorist McLuhan, with the so-called “global village.”

However, it should be noted that such a village does not always manage to understand each other. It is not difficult to perceive the most varied forms of exclusions and divisions caused at a time when the media should include and unite. Francis' pontificate has been concerned with the sharp divisions within humanity, the multiple forms of exclusion, marginalization and poverty, as well as conflicts for which economic, political, ideological and even, unfortunately, religious causes converge.

Pope Francis has been a necessary voice. Since the beginning of his pontificate in 2013, his forceful word has crossed the borders of the Catholic Church. His speeches and gestures express a pastor's heart and ears, capable of feeling and hearing the pain of the world. Moreover, he becomes a strong sign of mobilization, action and transformation. At the height of the pandemic, when many insisted on the speech to save the economy, he spoke in solidarity and presented himself as a true leader, conveying hope and insisting with world leaders to give primacy to the care of people. The pope's attitude was one of vigilant presence on behalf of suffering humanity.

In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (launched in October 2020), an expression used by “Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel” (“Fratelli Tutti,” I), the text of Pope teaches us all the value and the urgent need for fraternity and social friendship. It is a call for us to wake up from the possible sleep of indifference and strive for true universal solidarity.

The challenge, therefore, with regard to our charism, is to combine tools with ever more democratic and humanizing values. It is not a question of condemning or deifying the technique but adding it to the construction of a world of peace, without

---

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis' Message for the 48th World Communications Day: “Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter.”

exploitation, tyranny, violence or lies. This requires thinking. Here is the biggest challenge. The place of the Pauline apostolate requires a profound reflection on the complex phenomenon of communication. It is impossible to keep up and be up to date with the tangle of communication technology but it is possible to create small and even large initiatives when before we have a systematic basis of thinking about certain means and the language that fits each one and the main thing: using them to touch people's existence.

## **Final Words**

These brief notes are not intended to conclude anything. The only intention here is to encourage an open dialogue so that a possible debate can be expanded according to our specific mission. For this reason, I conclude with three concerns: 1) there is no doubt that our performance in the “digital environment” requires and will demand a great effort from all of us. This is crucial. 2) To support the work, and I mean financial return, we will need strategies in the digital environment. This requires us to surround ourselves with the advice of specialized people which includes data sciences and algorithms. Perhaps, we are producing a lot of content for the internet. But we would certainly need better strategies. In Alberione's time, he didn't understand everything either but he surrounded himself with trained people and advisors. 3) Finally, in addition to the professionalism that our apostolate by nature imposes, we are not entrepreneurs or executives of a corporation. We are apostles. As the title of this text says, we are “evangelizers with Spirit.”

Jesus teaches us that in order to know and live the will of God, a change of mentality is necessary. Goodwill is not just enough to follow him. It is not enough just to pose as “I am a Christian,” “I am Pauline.” What Jesus expects of us is courage; and courage is an action of the heart. The ancients believed that courage was allocated in this organ. The very root of the word courage has the same prefix as the word heart (cor). From this, we can say that courage emanates from the depths of our being. It is, therefore, an intense, profound commitment.

The change in mentality, therefore, has to do with the ability to get rid of obsolete schemes, fixed ideas, proud and overbearing thinking. It is metanoia, that is, the integral transformation of behavior, of character. It is spiritual depth. It is a total turning point to take on a new lifestyle. There is no pretense here. It takes a lot of courage to assume an authentic lifestyle, as Jesus taught and lived. Alberione bequeathed the model to us: the Apostle Paul, to configure ourselves to Christ.

## **Bibliographical References**

- BAITELLO, Norval Jr. *Corpo e imagem: comunicação, ambientes, vínculos*. In: RODRIGUES, David (Org.). *Os valores e as atividades corporais*. São Paulo: Summus, 2008.
- CASTRO, José Valdir de. *Uma “Congregação Sinodal” a serviço do Evangelho na cultura da comunicação*. Carta do Superior Geral aos coirmãos da Sociedade de São Paulo. Roma, junho de 2020.

FRANCISCO, Papa. *Fratelli Tutti: Carta Encíclica sobre a fraternidade e a amizade social*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2020.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Exortação Apostólica Evangelii Gaudium*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2019.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Mensagem do Santo Padre Francisco para o 48º Dia Mundial das Comunicações: Comunicação a serviço de uma autêntica cultura do encontro*. Vatican News, 1 jun. 2014.

MURPHY-O'CONNOR, Jerome. *Paulo de Tarso – História de um Apóstolo*. Traduzido por Valdir Marques. São Paulo: Paulus / Edições Loyola, 2007.

WOLTON, Dominique. *É preciso salvar a comunicação*. São Paulo: Paulus: 2006.