



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PAULINE GENERAL CHAPTER**

Friday, 15 May 1998

Dear Religious of the Society of St Paul,

1. I am pleased to offer my cordial welcome to all of you who, at the end of your General Chapter, have wished to show your affection and to renew your fidelity to the Successor of Peter by this visit. I greet Fr Pietro Campus, the new Superior General, and in thanking him for his courteous words on behalf of those present and the whole congregation, I offer my best wishes that under his guidance your religious family will grow in complete fidelity to the charism of your founder, the Servant of God Fr Alberione, and in generous commitment to evangelization. With him I greet the new members of the General Council and all the religious, who in various parts of the world are offering the Church a remarkably contemporary apostolic service by following Jesus the Teacher, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and by making him known through a careful and professional use of the modern instruments of social communication.

2. Your congregation, dear religious, was born of the faith and heart of a great apostle of our time, Fr Giacomo Alberione, who, in view of the disturbing signs of 20th-century dechristianization, felt called to proclaim the Gospel and to serve the Church on those frontiers where the challenges to evangelization are the most complex. He realized that the mass media were a vast mission field, for which it was essential to provide competent professionals, suitable tools, and above all, religious personnel with a high ascetical and spiritual standard. At the heart of this enormous apostolic endeavour he put the Eucharist, from which he knew how to draw inner, spiritual energy. It was in the Eucharistic mystery that he found that missionary enthusiasm which marked his entire life. He succeeded in involving many men and women in his programme of evangelization and social recovery, forming them in ardent love for Christ and in the desire to proclaim him in the modern areopagi.

On the threshold of the third millennium, you are called, after the example of Fr Alberione, to be effectively and appropriately active on the demanding frontiers of communication, to offer a spiritual dimension to the projects and hopes of our contemporaries. This involves the use of modern business practices and new management styles. However, if this

activity is to retain its authentic apostolic dimension, it must be supported and animated by generous fidelity to the original charism. That is, every Pauline religious, in harmony with the founder's spirit, must be able to find in an intense and prolonged meeting with the Lord and in the constant rediscovery of the roots of his own vocation the true reasons for his ecclesial and missionary service. What use would modern business methods and powerful publishing equipment be if those who managed them were not imbued with a deep supernatural spirit, in full harmony with the Church's Magisterium?

On his uncertain and frequently difficult way towards truth and complete self-development, contemporary man will find Christ the Teacher if he meets evangelizers who can look at his problems with attention and sympathy, but who are also ready to offer authentically evangelical answers, guaranteed by full communion with the Church and with her Pastors. In this matter your guide and teacher is your own founder, who understood the secret of a modern and effective proclamation of the Gospel. His witness commits you to accepting his prophetic insights with total openness and to following his footsteps in order to continue his distinctive missionary work for the people of our time.

3. Your Chapter is taking place on the eve of the centenary of that "holy Pauline night" which is well-known to you. It was a decisive moment in the life of the young Alberione, who at the time was a seminarian in the Diocese of Alba: during the long prayer vigil in which he awaited the beginning of the 20th century, he understood the special call that the Lord was entrusting to him. At that singular moment in his life "the Eucharist, the Gospel, the Pope, the new century, the new means ... the need for a new band of apostles were so firmly rooted in his mind and heart that later they continued to dominate his thoughts, his prayer, his interior work and his aspirations".

Dear religious, the time we are living in is also providential for you because, with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 now at hand, every Pauline religious, on the threshold not only of a new century but of a new millennium, must be committed to reflecting on the founder's experience itself and to making his own the ideals that were at the heart of his spirituality and his evangelizing activity. I hope that every project in your communities will be based on that longing for holiness which distinguished Fr Giacomo Alberione. Indeed, "the call to the mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness. A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness: 'Holiness must be called a fundamental presupposition and an irreplaceable condition for everyone in fulfilling the mission of salvation in the Church'.... It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and co-ordinate ecclesial resources.... What is needed is the encouragement of a new "ardour for holiness" (*Redemptoris missio*, n. 90).

In the history of many religious institutes, a close comparison between the ideal requirements of their charism and the concrete situations of the apostolate has led to moments of tension and even of suffering. In your work too, the need to establish a functional and at the same time evangelically authentic relationship between the religious institution and modern business methods has caused difficulties. To help you overcome them, I have appointed as my delegate Bishop Antonio Buoncristiani, whom I cordially thank for what he is doing to support you. The time has now come to face and to resolve these difficulties in a spirit of faith, with complete docility to the demands of the kingdom and with constant reference to the Church's Magisterium.

Sincere fidelity to the primacy of religious life over every other demand will help to solve the problems that have arisen in recent years and to identify the necessary norms for supervision, mobility and professional training required by the new

conditions. Through a widespread recovery of religious zeal, the members of the Society of St Paul will be able to seek and to find, in a spirit of dialogue and brotherhood, suitable solutions for the desired apostolic renewal in accordance with the founder's instructions. The unity of your congregation will make a valuable contribution to this, while respecting the responsibilities of each individual Province.

4. As the theme of your General Chapter, you have chosen a saying that was dear to Fr Alberione: "The world is your parish". Your founder saw the apostolic dimension of his sons as closely connected with the ministry of the Successor of Peter whose "parish" is, in fact, "the world". In November 1924, he wrote: "We must be the faithful interpreters of the Pope's words and addresses. We do not claim to be anything else: and God will give us the graces to do this.... It is not up to us to advance theories: we will stay close to the Pope; we will strive to follow the Pope's direction faithfully". For the same reason, he wanted that "in the Pious Society of St Paul, in addition to the three usual vows, a fourth be added, that of fidelity to the Pope as well as to the apostolate".

We can certainly say that total harmony with the Magisteriums of Leo XIII and St Pius X, the two great Pontiffs who with their wise activity promoted the renewal of the parish in its pastoral and social commitment, was the norm which inspired Fr Alberione's exceptional apostolate. He was particularly drawn to the renewal of catechesis and liturgical life, in addition to being interested in the Church's social teaching and the first steps of the biblical movement: he wanted to offer all this through the apostolate of the press and the other means of social communication.

I hope that reflection on the theme chosen by your Chapter will not only strengthen your harmony with the founder's charism, but will commit you to adopting and living all the deep motives that were at the root of his apostolic insights, to contribute with renewed enthusiasm and confident hope to evangelizing the Pope's immense "parish", in constant communion with the local Churches and the universal Church.

5. Dear brothers, your General Chapter, which begins a new phase in the life of your institute, is closing in Easter time, the time of mission. My hope is that at this moment you will not only be able to hear the call of the Lord who sends you out again into the whole world to proclaim the good news of the Gospel to every creature using every means (cf. Mt 28:19), but also the invitation humbly to walk the way of the disciple, in order to follow Christ generously, even to the Cross. I hope that all the congregation's Provinces can be open to new horizons of brotherhood, communion and fruitful apostolate.

With these wishes, I entrust you to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin, and to the prayers of Bl. Giaccardo and Ven. Fr Alberione, while as the pledge of a new and abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, I affectionately impart a special Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your confrères and to the entire Pauline family.

