



FAMIGLIA PAOLINA

50° anniversario del *dies natalis* del Beato Giacomo Alberione 26 novembre 2021

In heaven I will take care...of communicators

When Fr. Alberione was about to leave this earth and return to the Father, on November 26, 1971, he received a visit from St. Paul VI, the pope who had called him “a wonder of our century” and who, a few months earlier, had approved and promulgated the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, published by order of the Second Vatican Council on the occasion of the Fifth World Day of Social Communications.

The document of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications expressed the realization that: *The unity and advancement of men living in society are the chief aims of social communication and of all the means it uses. These means include the press, the cinema, radio and television. The constant improvement in the media puts them at the disposal of more and more people who in their daily lives make increasing use of them. The Church sees these media as “gifts of God” which, in accordance with His providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with His plan for their salvation (1-2).*

This is what Alberione had sensed at the beginning of the twentieth century, what he suffered for, worked for, and preached about, convinced that evangelization by the “most rapid and effective means” progress could provide was a pastoral necessity. That is why he gave birth to a family of men and women apostles, composed of ten institutions, which gradually spread throughout the world. By a singular coincidence, that Instruction saw the light just before the long life of this indefatigable founder came to its end, as if to give further confirmation of his prophetic vocation to proclaim the Word in the different languages of social communication, an anthropological and cultural phenomenon even more so than a technological one, and which in the 1960s and 1970s reached enormous development.

An all-round communicator, Alberione personally experienced many aspects of the arts, crafts and professions linked to the world of publishing and communication, creating networks of relationships permeated by human and Christian values. A journalist, writer and editor of the *Gazzetta d'Alba*, he welcomed in 1914 the first young men, the future Paulines, to the *Scuola Tipografica Piccolo Operaio*; later he sent the first young women, the future Daughters of St. Paul, to Susa, where they were assigned to compose, print and distribute the diocesan newspaper *La Valsusa*; from the very beginning he involved many lay people in the *Unione Cooperatori della Buona Stampa*.

The Pauline publishing activity, which began as a small seed centered around the printing of Gospels, Bibles, catechisms, hagiographies and bulletins, gradually flourished over time in the various fields of theology, pastoral care, current events and culture,

through the production of books and numerous periodicals, faithful to the motto “*speak about everything in a Christian way*”. How many journalists, writers, illustrators, graphic designers, typesetters, proofreaders...have collaborated with the Pauline publications he initiated? How many booksellers, dealers and distributors have come into contact with the fruits of his works, even beyond Pauline or ecclesial circles? How many readers, how many educators? It's impossible to count.

Deeply convinced of the importance of images and audio visuals, Fr Alberione launched himself and his spiritual sons and daughters into the production of short catechetical films, in which he sometimes appeared as an “actor” or worked behind the camera. He supported the start and development of the production of records, radio and television programs. But all this was not enough to quench the thirst to reach everyone, which sustained him on his long journeys by ship or plane across the five continents, crossing the paths of a humanity always on the move and wandering with his mind into the future to understand its goals. Rather than considering his mission concluded, he seemed convinced that death would not interrupt his particular service to the Kingdom, but rather would transform it into a new, broader and more fruitful task.

Indeed, he wrote: ***It is as a servant that I intend to belong to this marvellous Pauline Family, both now and in heaven. There, I shall concern myself with those who use the most effective modern means to do good...***¹ His earthly life alone did not seem sufficient to contain the full extent of the grace he received, and he had a presentiment that many aspects would manifest themselves later, *in future centuries*. His story ends on the threshold of the evolution of information technology, social networks and the digital world, which he was not able to know, even though some of its premises were present at the crossroads of the 60s and 70s: the project to create a computer network for the communication of messages (Arpanet, 1969); the introduction of the snail symbol: @ and the sending of the first email (1971); a few years later the TCP/IP protocol, for interconnecting networks or the Internet, would be born (1978). However, his prophetic *leaning forward* made him glimpse, or simply wish, that, albeit in a mysterious way, he could continue to “take care” of those who were an active, responsible and supportive part of this new era. Half a century after that November 26, 1971, many members of the Church and of the Pauline Family are present on the Net and in social networks, fueling blogs, websites, stores, communities, online radio and digital television that can interact with millions of interlocutors. Nonetheless, all these are still just drops in the ocean of an increasingly interconnected humanity, yet one that continues to suffer from so many walls of hatred and separation, visible or invisible, as Pope Francis never tires of pointing out. The development of technological innovations continues rapidly, from the field of tourist space travel to that of artificial intelligence, but not so integral human progress, including the growth of a shared ethic and the patient construction of social friendship, where all can truly feel like brothers and sisters, committed to the care of our “common home.”

For this reason, it is important to remember the figure and the message of Blessed Alberione, to make him known and to pray to him. Those who work in the field of communications on earth need someone from heaven to support them in their daily commitment to the service of good and to continue to “take care” of them.

Bruna Fregni, fsp

¹ G. Alberione, *Abundantes Divitiae Gratiae suae*, n. 3.