

**WHERE
THE LORD
IS LEADING US**

The Word

**Redesigns
Our Journey**

EUROPE - CANADA/QUEBEC

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ENTERING EUROPE AND CANADA/QUEBEC
SO AS TO EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE
OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Presentation of the Superior General



Dearest Sisters,

We are beginning yet another stage of our “Pauline pilgrimage” to the continents to which the love of Christ has sent us (cf. 2 Co. 5:14).

With the heart of Paul, we “entered” immense Asia and diversified Oceania, and then visited the “continent of hope”: Africa-Madagascar. Now we are crossing the threshold of Europe to rediscover our roots and also contemplate the fruits of our presence here. Roots are fundamental because the future springs from them, and fruits are visible signs that a plant is healthy.

So let us enter modern Europe—a multi-religious, multicultural, multi-ethnic, post-Christian continent—and take note of how different it is from the Europe in which our Institute was born and where it has worked for decades. Let us contemplate this continent’s victories for freedom and civilization, and laud it for its many resources and the universal values that Christianity helped forge. But we must also admit that Europe is currently in crisis with regard to its values, which are being hotly debated; that it is enacting laws that are often in contrast to the natural law and to the genuine good of people and society, and that it is a continent dominated by relativism.

“Troubled Europe,” in which some citizens want to remove crucifixes from public venues and prohibit minarets.... Confused and ambiguous Europe, in which other citizens “defend” the crucifix as a symbol of the continent’s cultural identity, brandishing it like a sword

to reject immigrants, thus compromising the already rocky road to integration and dialogue.

Certainly the crisis that Europe—and under many aspects also Canada/Quebec—is undergoing is serious. Nevertheless we want to examine the situation clearly, in a healthy and realistic way, with the eyes of hope, so as to take on specific responsibilities with regard to this continent and nourish our dreams about our Pauline future here.

This means we must listen to what the Spirit is telling us, drawing inspiration to an always greater degree from the example of St. Paul, the evangelizer of Europe (cf. Acts 16:6-9). The Apostle had to face situations similar to those of our own time. In fact, the situations he confronted were even more challenging than the ones we face today. But he entrusted himself to the power of God and worked with great commitment and clear-sightedness, using creative strategies to establish missionary bases and organize a communications network with the help of his collaborators.

Like Paul, we too want to regard Europe's current situation as a "sign of the times" and to be, in this context, witnesses of life and hope—first of all to one another and then among our brothers and sisters on this disoriented, insecure and dispirited continent.

Of course our sisters here will continue to age and perhaps to decrease in number.... But today, *more than ever*, we need to entrust ourselves to the Lord and to his promise, striving *more than ever* to reaffirm the primacy of God, to revitalize the Pauline identity, to promote a "culture of vocations," to discern new possibilities for our Pauline presence, to increase our network of collaboration, and to "come out of ourselves" so as to reach out to others.

Only a religious Institute that is based to an ever greater degree on the theological virtues, that is ever-more holy and that conforms its life and activities to the priorities of God will succeed in going far" (Fr. José Arnaiz).

In this way, our mission will become a witness to dialogue, faith and love, especially for the younger generations.

It is truly worthwhile to embark on the adventure of building Europe. [...] More than ever, the path is open before us. This is not the time to slow down our march or stop by the side of the road. Let us not forget that we are disciples of the One who says to everyone: “*Do not be afraid. Rise up and walk!*”¹

Let us apply to ourselves this statement of the participants in the recent plenary assembly of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences. And with Mary, the Mother of Hope, let us say: “‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ (Rv. 22:20) Walk with us; support us; enlighten us.”

Affectionately,

Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General

SOME DIRECTIVES WITH REGARD TO METHOD

- The first part of our itinerary consists of *lectio*, that is to say, a prayerful reading of the Word, which should be done personally, utilizing the Bible texts indicated.
- The second part consists of meditation: first carried out personally, and then shared on the community level.
- Afterward, each sister is invited to write a prayer to share with her community.
- Our meditation on the Word can then be expanded to contemplate our Congregation’s situation on the continents of Europe and Canada/Quebec so as to welcome the invitation of the Word to “*get up and go into the city....*”

¹Final Message to the participants in the plenary assembly of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences held in Paris from 1-4 Oct. 2009.

1. FOR LECTIO



“WE WERE BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY IN A SINGLE SPIRIT”

The Challenge of Unity

Let us welcome our Lord and Master, who wants to spend time with us, and adopt the attitude of a disciple, who gives absolute priority to listening to the Word: “the better part” that no one can take from us and that sustains our daily effort to strive for unity.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [...] For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. [...] Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Co. 12:4-7, 12-14, 27).

In this passage, Paul is expounding on one of a number of issues he sought to clarify for the Christians of Corinth in his first letter to that community, namely: the *divisions among them*—a situation that characterized even their celebration of the Lord’s Supper (1 Co. 11:18), and which seems to have been determined (and which they seem to almost have justified) by the variety of gifts present within the community.

But these gifts, the Apostle declares, come from the One and Triune God:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone (1 Co.12:4-6).

What the Apostle wants to emphasize is “the contrast between the plurality of gifts distributed and the single Source from which they all come.”²

God is not a “serial” Creator, a puppet master who is ridiculed and rejected by those who deny his existence and relegate him to the world of fairy tales and myths that pre-dated scientific knowledge. God is the life-giving power that permeates every space and moment of our daily lives. He is present in our joys and sorrows, our labors and daily routines, our times of bonding with others and our times of alienation from them. He is present in war and peace. He is present in every major and minor event of human history, as if that event were the only one taking place. It is in this sense that Paul says it is the same God who is at work in all things.

God always transcends our ability to understand him, love him and speak about him. Truly, all we can do is remain in adoring silence before him. Nevertheless, we must make the stumbling attempt to tell others who he is for us. This is the small act of mediation we can carry out today on behalf of the Word entrusted to us: to offer others the witness of a life lived under the sign of God.

A key word in Paul’s vocabulary and in this particular discourse is *charism*,³ a term that evokes the gratuitousness of the divine initiative:

“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rm. 12:6).

Although we have different gifts, they are not meant to divide us from one another but to unite us to each other. Our diversity is

²R. Fabris, *Prima lettera ai Corinzi. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, Pauline Editions, Milan 1999, p. 168.

³“The word is used seventeen times in the New Testament—sixteen of those times in the Letters of Paul. And out of those sixteen occurrences, fourteen are found in the letters that can be positively attributed to the Apostle. In 1 Corinthians alone, Paul uses the word “charism” seven times—five of them in chapter 12 (*ivi*).

in view of a greater good—"the common good"—that comes from the will of God himself, from his plan of love for humanity, for our community, for each one of us.

Why does God distribute his gifts in this way? So that each of us will need everyone else. I need you because you have a gift I do not have. God gave it to you to use on my behalf. And I must use the gift given to me by God on your behalf.⁴

St. Paul proposes the image of the human body to concretely illustrate the concept of unity in diversity. The body is one, even though it is made up of many different parts, all with different activities and degrees of dignity. Yet every member of the body is necessary if it is to function in a balanced and efficient way.

The human body is the "star" of today's Western culture (and many other cultures too). It has been exalted and demeaned, absolutized and scorned. Today, more than ever, it has become an "instrument of communication." It sends out messages that are meant to provoke, to draw attention and to communicate how a person interprets his/her style of life. Today the human body is pampered and cared for to the point of exaggeration, at a great waste of time and money. We focus on it as if it were the sum total of the human being, sadly neglecting the spiritual dimension of the person.

The absolutization of the body fosters the exaltation of the individual, who feels fulfilled to the degree that he/she is successful, holds offices of power, appears on television, etc. In this cultural context, it is clear that the language of faith, the Christian message, runs the risk of becoming less and less significant. But at the same time people today are showing signs of yearning to rediscover the spiritual dimension of life—to find its source and the essential connection between body and spirit.

"As it is with the body...so it is with Christ." Christ is the head; each Christian is a member of his body, grafted onto him through the power of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Baptism ("baptized by the same Spirit") and through the daily effort to "drink of the same Spirit." Our common call to witness to our faith in the God of Jesus

⁴P. Ricca, *Paolo come apostolo ecumenico*, p. 5, *pro manuscripto*.

Christ reinforces our union. We are one in the Spirit of God, who is a Spirit of communion, of unity.

The Holy Spirit creates unity. He alone is capable of filling us with the desire to examine things more profoundly. He makes us dissatisfied with simply living from day to day, trying to carry out well the duties entrusted to us. Instead, he continually reawakens in us and in others the sense of our ultimate end—the reason why we are here on earth.

If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Lk. 11:13)

Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians reveals that he correctly understood the invitation of Jesus, who urges us to ask for the gift of the Spirit so as to satisfy our continual yearning to live a genuine, God-oriented life.

With the help of the Spirit, we are able to resolve even apparently insurmountable problems. We can imagine how hard it must have been for Paul and the Corinthian Christians to accept the fact that they had substantial differences concerning the way they viewed the world and the culture in which they lived ("Jews or Greeks, slaves or free"). But fidelity to Christ and the hope of living in unity in him should be reason enough to strive to overcome our problems. We are one body in Christ, his members. We are different, yet united in Christ. Christ is the most effective "glue" on the market today! He is the source of every reason we have to strive for unity. And the path to pursue in doing this, "the best way of all," has already been pointed out to us by Paul. It is the way of *love* (cf. 1 Co. 12:31; 13:1ff.).

Our efforts to forge unity among ourselves place us at the heart of Fr. Alberione's thought and project, and his teaching on this subject is still very timely and urgent:

Today I suggest that we pray using the words of Jesus Master himself. In that prayer—known as his "Priestly Prayer"—Jesus asks four times "that they may be one" (Jn. 17:11). That there be unity! To what point? Jesus offers us a sublime example: "As you and I, Father, are one" (APD 1963, p. 272).⁵

⁵ G.M. Ferrero, Editor. *Un anno con Don Alberione*, Rome 1992, p. 135.

2. FOR MEDITATION



Comparing our lives with the Word leads us to re-examine our style of life and the choices we make each day. Are we or are we not ready to live with others in the spirit of communion/unity that the Holy Spirit wants to create among us?

When we speak about Europe, we should keep in mind that for the past fifty years the entire continent has been pursuing a very definite project on the economic, political and social levels: that of *unity*.⁶ In fact, the motto of Europe is “*Unity in diversity*”: a goal that is gradually being achieved, although not without problems, including major ones such as the continent’s wide diversity of languages, cultures and traditions. But in reality, it is precisely this diversity that constitutes and gives value to the unity of the body.

And what is true for the nations of Europe is also true in many respects for the *Paulines of Europe* and for our Canada/Quebec Delegation. Our sisters must pool their energies and resources, but it is not easy to determine the paths to follow so as to harmonize so many different “voices” and promote itineraries that will help everyone feel that they are one body.

The Spirit is the source of our communion. It is he who creates unity in love and gives each person different gifts for the common good. The Spirit is the Gift of the Father in Christ the Lord—a Gift that is concretized in our lives in the form of many individual gifts.

⁶ On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, at that time French Minister of Foreign Affairs, proposed that the countries of Europe share their coal and steel productions so as to prevent new wars between the nations of this continent. This proposal is considered to be the “seed” of the European Union. Today, 9 May is celebrated as “Europe Day”—an occasion to promote activities that reinforce unity among the many different peoples who live here.

To embrace this logic means to once more focus our attention on the primacy of faith.⁷ It means rediscovering the grace of Baptism as the source of our faith and the possibility of deepening it because we realize that our belonging to Christ the Lord is not a finished, “once and for all” experience but the continual beginning of a new life.

But God has so arranged the body...so that there may not be disagreements within it, but each part may be equally concerned for all the others (1 Co.12:25).

The challenge of unity is above all the challenge of communion, that is to say, the challenge *to take care of one another*, renewing our sense of belonging to an entity that goes beyond our community, delegation or province. This presupposes the ability to rise above our personal interests and our many diversities with regard to number, structures and prospects, in a spirit of *sharing with* the others.

The image of the unity of the body and the diversity of its members reminds us that each member works in harmony with the others to achieve the body’s goal of attaining a better quality of life. The same is true of the Paulines of Europe and those of the Quebec Delegation: what is at stake is our quality of life and the gift that was entrusted to us by the Spirit through Fr. Alberione, namely, *the Pauline charism*.

When we “take care of one another” in the various countries of Europe and in every country in which we live and work, *we take care of the Pauline charism*.

⁷Final Document of the FSP 9th General Chapter 2007, n. 7.

3. FOR SHARING



“All the Daughters of St. Paul form a single family, therefore they all have the same spiritual and temporal interests.... Everything belongs to the Congregation so everyone should work for its progress” (“I Carry You in My Heart,” n. 280).

Inspired by the timeliness and power of Maestra Thecla’s words, let us share ideas among ourselves concerning:

- the most important steps we need to take to strengthen unity among ourselves;*
- how to express today our sense of belonging to a single family, the Congregation.*

4. FOR PRAYER



The flag of the European Union is a symbol of its unity and identity. It consists of a circle of twelve gold stars set against a blue background, representing solidarity and harmony between the peoples of the “Old World.” The number of stars does not stand for the number of countries that belong to the Union. Instead it symbolizes perfection, completion and unity.

Let us accept the invitation the Lord is extending to us today and write in the space below, in the form of a prayer, what we want to do to help foster and live unity in diversity.

.....

.....

.....

Prayer

In the intention of its creator, Arsène Heitz, the blue background and twelve stars of the European flag are Marian symbols.

With Pope John Paul II, we entrust to Mary, the Mother of Hope and of Europe, the journey of growth this continent must carry out so as to attain its dream of unity.

Mary, Mother of hope,
accompany us on our journey!
Teach us to proclaim the living God;
help us to bear witness to Jesus, the one Savior;
make us kindly towards our neighbors,
welcoming to the needy,
concerned for justice,
impassioned builders of a more just world;
intercede for us as we carry out our work in history,
certain that the Father's plan will be fulfilled.

Dawn of a new world,
show yourself the Mother of hope and *watch over us!*
Watch over the Church in Europe:
may she be transparently open to the Gospel;
may she be an authentic place of communion;
may she carry out fully her mission of proclaiming,
celebrating and serving the Gospel of hope
for the peace and joy of all.

Queen of Peace,
protect the men and women of the third millennium!
Watch over all Christians:
may they advance confidently on the path of unity,
as a leaven of harmony for the continent.
Watch over young people: the hope of the future;
may they respond with generosity to the call of Jesus.
Watch over the leaders of nations:
may they be committed to building a common house
which respects the dignity and rights of every person.

Mary, *give us Jesus!*
Grant that we may follow him and love him!
He is the hope of the Church,
of Europe and of all humanity!
He lives with us, in our midst, in his Church!
With you we say: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rv. 22:20).
May the hope of glory
which he has poured into our hearts
bear fruits of justice and peace!

(John Paul II)⁸

⁸Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (28 June 2003).

ENTERING OUR “COMMON HOUSE” WITH PAUL



“We form one body”

All together, as a Congregation, let us welcome the invitation we have received from the redesigning process to feel that we are one body, to share our resources and frailties, to reflect and work together in a spirit of co-responsibility and in deeper communion.

Accompanied by St. Paul, whose precious legacy is concretized for us today in the experience of a diversity of members in one body, let us look at Europe and allow ourselves to be challenged by the words of the Holy Father and a reflection on the consecrated life. Let us then contemplate Quebec through the eyes of Cardinal Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada.

By Vocation, Christian Europe Is Called To Be “One Family”⁹

[...] This year Europe is commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I wished to acknowledge this event in a special way by going to the Czech Republic. On this land, sorely tried under the yoke of a painful ideology, I was able to give thanks for the gift of the regained freedom which has enabled the European continent to rediscover its integrity and unity.

You have just described, Mr. Ambassador, the reality of the European Union as “a zone of peace and stability that gathers 27 States with the same fundamental values.” This is a felicitous presentation. However, it is right to point out that the European Union did not endow itself with these values; rather, these shared values brought it into

⁹Benedict XVI, *Address to His Excellency Mr. Yves Gazzo, Head of the Delegation of the Commission of European Communities to the Holy See, Vatican City, 19 October 2009.*

being and have been, as it were, the force of gravity that has attracted to the nucleus of the founding countries the various nations that have successively joined it with the passage of time. These values are the fruit of a long and tortuous history in which, as no one will deny, Christianity has played a leading role. The equal dignity of all human beings, the freedom of the act of faith as the root of all the other civil freedoms, peace as a decisive element of the common good, human, intellectual, social and economic development as a divine vocation (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, nn. 16-19) and the sense of history that derives from it are as many central elements of the Christian Revelation that continue to model the European civilization.

When the Church recalls the Christian roots of Europe she is not seeking a privileged status for herself. She wants to act as a historical memory by recalling first and foremost a truth increasingly passed over in silence, namely, the undeniably Christian inspiration of the founding Fathers of the European Union. More profoundly, she also wishes to demonstrate that the basic values come mainly from the Christian heritage which still today continues to nourish it.

These common values do not constitute an anarchic or uncertain aggregate but form a coherent whole which is ordered and expressed historically on the basis of a precise anthropological vision. Can Europe omit the original organic principle of these values that revealed to human beings both their eminent dignity and the fact that their personal vocations open them to all other human beings with whom they are called to constitute one single family? Does not letting oneself slip into this forgetfulness mean exposing oneself to the risk of seeing great and beautiful values compete or come into conflict with each other? Furthermore, do they not risk being exploited by individuals and pressure groups desirous of imposing their own interests to the detriment of an ambitious group project which Europeans are waiting for which is concerned with the common good of the continent's inhabitants and of the whole of our world? This danger has already been perceived and reported by a number of observers from very different horizons. It is important for Europe not to allow its model of civilization to fall apart, piece after piece. Its original dynamism must not be stifled by individualism or utilitarianism.

The immense intellectual, cultural and economic resources of the continent will continue to bear fruit as long as they continue to be fertilized by the transcendent vision of the human person, who constitutes the most precious treasure of the European heritage. This humanistic

tradition in which many very different branches of thought can be recognized, makes Europe capable of facing the challenges of the future and of responding to the expectations of its population. It is mainly a question of seeking the correct, delicate balance between economic efficiency and social requirements, the safeguard of the environment and, above all, the indispensable and necessary support of human life, from conception to natural death, and of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. Europe will really be itself only if it can preserve the originality that has constituted its greatness and is likely to make it in the future one of the major actors in the promotion of the integral development of individuals, which the Catholic Church considers as the only way to remedy the imbalances in our world.

For all these reasons, Mr. Ambassador, the Holy See follows with respect and great attention the activity of the European Institutions, with the hope that by their work and their creativity, they may honor Europe, which, more than a continent, is a “spiritual homeland” (cf. *Discourse to the Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps*, Prague, 26 September 2009). The Church desires to “accompany” the construction of the European Union. [...]

*Where Is Quebec Going?*¹⁰

From the outset, I state my conviction that the crisis of values and the search for meaning are so profound and urgent in Quebec as to have serious repercussions on public health as well, and this is generating enormous costs for the health system. For four hundred years, Quebec society has rested on two pillars, French culture and the Catholic religion, which form the basic armor that has allowed the integration of other components of its current pluralist identity. Nonetheless, this armor has been made fragile by the weakening of the religious identity of the Francophone majority. [...]

The real problem—taking up the rather vague expression that encourages the spread of the fashionable slogan “religion in private or in church, but not in public”—is no longer that of “the place that religion occupies in public places.” And what are public places? The street, the park, the media, the school, city hall, the national parliament? Should the monuments dedicated to Monsignor François de Laval

¹⁰ Marc Ouellet, “Dove va il Quebec? A proposito di fede e laicità,” in *Vita e pensiero*, 2008/4.

and to Cardinal Taschereau be removed from public view? Should the greeting "Merry Christmas" be prohibited by lawmakers and replaced with "Season's Greetings," to be more correct? Have the religious symbols that are characteristic of our history, and therefore part of the makeup of our collective identity, become annoyances and bad memories to be hidden away? Must they be eliminated from public places in order to satisfy a radical secularist minority that is the only one to complain, in the name of the absolute equality of citizens?

Quebec's real problem is not, therefore, the presence of religious signs or the appearance of new religious signs that intrude in public places. Quebec's real problem is the spiritual vacuum created by a religious and cultural rupture, by the substantial loss of memory, which leads to a crisis in the family and in education, leaving citizens disoriented, dispirited, vulnerable to instability and attracted to fleeting and superficial values. This spiritual and symbolic vacuum undermines the culture of Quebec from within, dispersing its vital energy and generating insecurity and a lack of grounding and continuity with the evangelical and sacramental values that have nourished it since its origin.

A people whose identity was substantially shaped over centuries by the Catholic Faith cannot from one day to the next purge itself of its essence without grave repercussions on all levels. It is this that has led to the disorientation of young people, the precipitous drop in marriages, the low birthrate, and the frightening number of abortions and suicides, to mention just a few of the consequences, in addition to the precarious situation of the elderly and of public health. To finish, this spiritual and cultural vacuum is maintained by an anti-Catholic rhetoric full of clichés, which unfortunately is found too often in the media.

This fosters a true culture of shame and disdain in regard to our religious heritage, and destroys the soul of Quebec. The time has come to ask ourselves: "Quebec, what have you done with your baptism?" [...] Quebec is ripe for a profound new evangelization, which is already appearing in certain areas through important catechetical initiatives, and also through common efforts to return to the sources of our history.

The Future of the Consecrated Life in Europe ¹¹

[...] With regard to the future of the consecrated life, one conviction stands firm: it did not come into being through human will but through the initiative of the Holy Spirit. If then, precisely because of its variety of expressions, it can be considered a charismatic project, then it is only the Spirit who will decide its future. By this I do not mean to invite religious to passivity and resignation. Rather, I appeal to them to live their vocation dynamically so as to intensively live their choice of God and remain alert to the ways in which the Spirit is prompting the Church today. In fact, consecrated persons are asked to manifest the same openness and docility to the Spirit that their founders and foundresses exhibited.

I foresee that the consecrated life today can move in three possible directions and I have given these routes the deliberately provocative labels of uselessness, distraction and vulnerability in the conviction that the consecrated life here in Europe has a future as rich as its past.

The Need for Uselessness

[...] In a society noted for hyper-efficiency, consumerism and utilitarianism, the consecrated life follows another route. Here in Europe, almost everything today is tainted by self-interest. Nothing is gratuitous any more. Everything is done in view of personal advantage, that is: what the doer can gain from it. Many religious Institutes have been (and perhaps still are) tempted to convey the impression that they are vigorous and “useful” by running good schools, efficient hospitals, etc. But when changes in politics or in society, else a shortage of personnel on the part of an Institute, force it to confront the fact that it has become “useless” to society, then the situation becomes dramatic.

[...] Let us not waste time and energy asking ourselves if we serve some purpose. The future of the consecrated life lies in its ability to rediscover the gratuitous dimension of its vocation. [...] The consecrated life came into being as a result of a burning desire to belong entirely to God, so as to be able to say on the existential level, with one’s entire being: “I have no God but you”; “My God and my all.” The fundamental and all-embracing choice of the consecrated life is

¹¹ F. Ciardi, “Inutilità, distrazione, vulnerabilità: punti forti della vita consacrata,” in *Dove ci porta il Signore. Vita consacrata nel mondo. Tendenze e prospettive*, Pauline Editions, Milan 2005.

to make God the ideal of life by consciously and continually rediscovering his love. This is the *non-sense*, the “uselessness” to which the consecrated life must return. It is not a utilitarian “uselessness” because it is totally gratuitous, motivated exclusively by love, which, in order to qualify as such, does not seek personal gain.

The fact that in Europe the consecrated life is perceived as a poor and marginalized existence is a great opportunity. It obliges consecrated persons to question themselves concerning the profound meaning of their life. They no longer have to be worried about appearances. Instead, they can plunge down to the root of their being and rediscover their genuine *usefulness* to both the Church and society, namely: the fact that they are a sign of a gratuitousness and freedom that society has lost and toward which it wants to be led back.

The Need for Distraction

A second point that merits attention concerns one of the maladies of the consecrated life in Europe today: excessive withdrawal [from society]. Laziness, disappointment, the hope of a quiet life, individualism, accommodation to a comfortable lifestyle, calculated reasoning, the fear of taking risks, a shortage of new energies—all these realities can slowly lead religious to content themselves with doing the minimum and to become self-preoccupied. It is time that consecrated persons “distract” themselves by looking beyond themselves, remembering that the consecrated life came into being for the sake of humanity. It is time that religious rediscover what it means to dedicate themselves to all people so as to be living expressions of God’s love for humanity, like Jesus, who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Modern Europe needs to rediscover its soul. “Give Europe a new soul.” “Rediscover the Christian roots of Europe.” These statements question the consecrated life profoundly. It was first of all monasticism and then [the active congregations of] men and women religious who helped give birth to Europe and move it in a significant direction. Has the consecrated life lost the power it once possessed to offer proposals to humanity? We have no time to sit and lick our wounds when the Church and society are crying out in anguish. The wounds of the consecrated life will heal to the degree that religious try to heal the wounds around them, opening their eyes to a changing world so as to share “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (GS 1), drawing ever closer to the people of today so as to

love them, serve them and give them hope. But this too must be done selflessly, in a spirit of complete gratuitousness, without expecting any recompense: "We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty" (Lk. 17:10).

The Need for Vulnerability

A final aspect I would like to focus on is the instinct for self-preservation—a form of self-defense often employed by the consecrated life in Europe when it is faced with the prospect of extinction or with an uncertain future. In some cases, this is expressed by an attitude of closure on the part of individual Institutes, whose members are encouraged to erect defensive walls so as to safeguard their charism, traditions, specific purpose and activities. An Institute "raises its drawbridge" to avoid contamination, thinking that in this way it will preserve its "purity." The danger is that an Institute with this mindset, in an extreme effort to defend its identity, runs the risk of adopting an attitude of non-acceptance when faced with new or different things, until it finally reaches the point of becoming impervious... perhaps even to the promptings of the Spirit to the Church today.

I want to say: "Tear down those walls because we don't have anything to defend!" Instead, we have many things to give and receive, in a sincere communion of charisms, no matter where these are to be found. We have everything to gain. We can finally breathe deeply, expand our horizons, let new air into our house. The consecrated life will have a future if it becomes permeable, vulnerable, to the breath of the Spirit and his intermediaries, which should be welcomed with simplicity and humility. This is the attitude Pope John Paul II asked the whole Church to adopt when he held up the spirituality of communion as the spirituality of the new millennium (cf. NMI 43). [...]

At this point in time, it means facing together the challenges of the new evangelization, of the rapport between the consecrated life and the laity, of globalization, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of the credibility of the religious life in a secularized, multicultural and post-modern society. Rather than let itself be guided by preventive measures or lose itself in sterile polemics, what the consecrated life in Europe needs is the courage to strive for a genuine fraternal communion overflowing with esteem and mutual trust. In short, religious need to get to know one another better and reach full communion with one another so as to look beyond themselves and work together as a single, powerful charismatic body for the good of the Church and all humanity.

LOOKING AT OUR TERRITORY FROM A WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVE

THE FSPs IN EUROPE AND CANADA/QUEBEC UP TO 31 OCTOBER 2009

Circumscrip.	Foundation	Members	Communities	m. age
Italy	1915	641	43	74,9
Albano	1948	74	1	75,36
France	1935	19	2	66,79
Germany	1964	14	3	55,79
Great Britain	1955	24	4	66,17
Portugal	1950	28	4	61,93
Spain	1946	36	5	67,69
Generalate	1936	59	1	65,36
Borgo A. Rome	1988	8	1	46,88
Mascherino, Rome	1989	9	1	72,22
Poland	1986	6	1	49,00
Romania	1993	7	1	57,71
Russia	1994	4	1	49,25
Czech Rep.	1993	5	1	43,00
Canada/Quebec	1952	17	3	67,41

Vocations

	Aspirants and Postulants	1st and 2nd year Novices
Italy	1	–
Albano	–	–
France	–	–
Germany	–	–
Great Britain	–	–
Portugal	–	1
Spain	–	–
Poland	1	1
Romania	–	1
Russia	–	–
Czech Rep.	–	1
Canada/Quebec	–	–

SOME CHALLENGES FACING OUR CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS OF EUROPE AND CANADA/QUEBEC

Europe has been called “a great pantheon” because of its complexity and lack of specific points of reference, in which “the prevailing anthropological model seems to be that of “the person without vocation.”¹² This situation is shared by Canada/Quebec under many aspects, as we have seen. And yet, “this Europe of many souls...possesses unexpected energies.”¹³

This declaration, rich in hope, can also be applied to the FSP presence on the continent with the oldest history of evangelization and to Quebec, where we are called to infuse fresh vitality into the Pauline charism so as to contribute in an effective way to the new evangelization. All this requires us to make a new effort to:

- *redesign* our spiritual and community life from the perspective of fraternity, so as to be a prophetic sign and a sign of holiness;
- *redesign* our mission in a spirit of co-responsibility and sharing among ourselves and with the laity, attentive to the “signs of hope,” open to the challenges of dialogue, unity and itinerancy, aware of the urgent need for formation—and to do all this in a strong spirit of unity with the Church;
- *redesign* our pastoral work for vocations, which is becoming more and more our priority of priorities, by cultivating a true “culture of vocations,” that is, by adopting a new mentality and approach to vocations and by implementing innovative strategies in this area;
- *redesign* the map of our Pauline presences in Europe.

¹² *New Vocations for a New Europe*, 11.1c.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.1d.

OTHER IMPORTANT AND URGENT CHALLENGES

Our sisters and communities can make a contribution here by listing other challenges and commitments to which the Pauline mission in Europe and Canada/Quebec can respond:

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“NOW YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST”

*“They must begin from Bethlehem”
In the Footsteps of Our First Sisters*



The continental stage of the process of redesigning our presences prompts us to celebrate the memory of our “Bethlehem” here in Italy, the cradle of the Pauline charism, and in Europe. The faith and courage of our first sisters can cast light on our journey.

ITALY

**“VERY DEAR , BEAUTIFUL AND ARDENTLY DESIRED
IN JESUS CHRIST”**

The Community of Rome

In the first days of 1926, there was an unusual amount of activity in the front courtyard of the FSP-SSP residence in Alba—the Pauline Family was preparing to open a new community in Rome!

The Daughters of St. Paul later described the moving farewell that took place on the evening of 13 January 1926 in this way:

Before leaving, the whole group gathered in the chapel to receive the Theologian’s blessing. Everyone was happy at the thought that our dear sisters would be close to the Pope, but being parted from them was not easy. However, we will always be close to them in spite of the distance, because we are all attached to the same plant (our House) and we all share the same thoughts, ideals and yearnings.

On 15 January fourteen boys, led by Blessed Timothy Giaccardo (1896-1948), and fourteen girls between the ages of 15-20, led by M. Amalia Peyrolo (1899-1980), set out for Rome.

Upon their arrival, the Daughters of St. Paul took up residence in a small house on Via Porto Fluviale, 9. It consisted of 5 bedrooms, a

study, a refectory and a kitchen in which the young women also prepared the meals for the SSP community.

The girls and boys took turns running the typography that had been set up in a large shed behind the storeroom of the ex-Salomone Typography (located on the corner of Via Ostiense, 73). They began their apostolate by printing the weekly bulletin, *The Voice of Rome*, in different editions for different dioceses, and by also printing 63 parish bulletins.

The typography's management office was located in a small room on the ground floor of the FSP house on Via Ostiense. Next to it, the Daughters of St. Paul opened a book shop and a lending library, both run by M. Amalia.

Often the FSP and SSP communities would visit the tomb of St. Paul. Walking down the Via Ostiense, they were filled with joy and deeply moved to think that the Apostle himself had tread those same cobblestones many centuries earlier on his way to Rome in chains. The young Paulines struck up a warm friendship with Abbot Ildefonso Schuster (1880-1954), Abbot of the Basilica of St. Paul, who was very attentive to their needs.

In September 1926, the first FSP students arrived in Rome and the five bedrooms in the house were no longer enough for a community that now number more than 30 members. Fortunately, a bigger building was available on the same street. Now empty, it had previously been used as a storeroom by two businesses: the bottom floor by a fish company and the upper floor by a hardware firm.

Thus, in November 1926, the Daughters of St. Paul found themselves living next door to the Society of St. Paul. The typography was transferred to a large room in their new building.

Fr. Alberione followed the activities of both communities through fatherly letters and frequent visits. In a message to Fr. Giaccardo, he wrote:

I was very pleased to hear your account of how the Daughters are doing and to learn that they have taken on some of the many duties M. Amalia was performing almost singlehandedly, thus lightening her load a little. It is very encouraging to know that the Daughters are filled with zeal and are placing all the talents they received from the Lord at his service (24 Dec. 1926).

The most lasting and fruitful works are those that reflect the work of the Redemption. In this too, Jesus is Way. [The FSPs] must begin from Bethlehem: tiny, hidden, overlooked, opposed, but bearing within themselves the seeds of life.... This is the situation of their Roman community, which is very dear and beautiful, and which we ardently desired in Jesus Christ. People are not born adults, nor should they grow up too quickly or "under glass." The maturation process must not be forced, like plants cultivated under a bedding of straw. Otherwise, the fruit will not be firm: it will be bland and will not have the nutrients necessary to sustain life. And the Lord wants the Daughters to be healthy, vigorous plants, with many branches loaded with fruit! (1 Jan. 1927)

"NOT ONLY TYPOGRAPHIES"
The First "Branch Houses"

After opening a community in Rome and establishing a point of reference in Turin, it seemed the time had come to go beyond regional borders and expand the apostolate, which up to then had been limited to typographical work.

On 11 September 1928, Fr. Alberione wrote to Fr. Giaccardo:

I see always more clearly that it is necessary to open book centers, not only typographies.

Since the juridical approval of the Daughters of St. Paul was imminent, the Founder began to think about new foundations.

Fr. Desiderio Costa and Fr. Paul Marcellino were assigned the task of investigating opportunities for opening new houses. They found that the cities of Salerno and Bari were the most promising in this regard and on their visits they took note of buildings that could serve the needs of a new Pauline community. In almost every case, these locales consisted of two ground-floor rooms: one of which could be used as a book center and the other as living quarters.

In general, the Founder asked the Daughters of St. Paul to open these new communities and thus their expansion began. In groups of two or three, they set out for the cities chosen by the Founder, over-

flowing with faith but equipped with little training for their mission and with the same poverty that had characterized the beginning of their Institute. Prior to their departure, Fr. Alberione would send a letter of introduction to the bishop of the diocese, telling him about the FSPs and their mission, or else he would give the letter to the sisters to take with them.

Our first FSP missionaries were M. Marcella Voerzio (1899-1980) and M. Andreina Binello (1909-1994), who went to *Salerno* on 5 Nov. 1928. They were warmly welcomed to the diocese and immediately moved into their new house on Corso Garibaldi, 152.

On 15 Nov. 1928, a second group of sisters—M. Francesca Cordero (1899-1985), Sr. Anna Merla (1889-1946) and Sr. Cherubina Cordero (1908-1991)—set out, this time for *Bari*. They stayed for a week with the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Ivrea and then moved into their own residence on Via Dante Alighieri, 29.

On 19 Nov. 1928, Fr. Alberione sent out a third group of FSP missionaries, who headed for Verona. M. Bartolomea Vivian (1903-1984), Sr. Emanuella Marini (1900-1934) and Sr. Serafina Milani (1919-1984) stayed with the Daughters of Jesus for a month, then opened their own small community in Via S. Cosimo.

Maestra Thecla either accompanied these sisters on their trips or else visited them a few days later, sharing the problems, adventures and uncertainties that typify all beginnings. So we can say that from early November to Christmas 1928, Prima Maestra was intensively engaged in the work of *opening new foundations*.

From Alba, the Founder too kept an eye on these FSP pioneers, who were blazing completely new trails. He took an interest in everything: their lodgings, health, spirit, juridical practices, possibilities for carrying out the diffusion apostolate.... He encouraged the sisters to move ahead but at the same time to always remain in communion with the Motherhouse in Alba. For example, he wrote to the community of Salerno:

I am counting very much on your zeal and on the grace of God. [...] You and the Alba community are one and the same. You are not a business outlet. So behave as if you were in Alba. Above all: love your Mother as devoted daughters and love one another as members of

the same family. If you do this, then everything else will fall into place on its own. The greatest law is the law of love.

Salerno: The "Eldest Child"

The following account was written by Sr. Marcella Voerzio, one of the founding sisters of the Salerno community, the first "branch house" opened by the Daughters of St. Paul:

On 1 Nov. 1928, immediately after evening prayer, Primo Maestro called all of us back into the church. There, he exposed the Blessed Sacrament, gave a copy of the Gospel to five sisters getting ready to leave for different cities in Italy, delivered a heartfelt sermon and concluded with Eucharistic Benediction.

On the morning of 2 Nov., we took the first train for Salerno, making a short stopover in Rome. The freight train carrying our books, bookshelves and beds had already left a few days earlier. When we reached Rome we stayed with our sisters, who had just moved to Via Grottaperfetta and were living in great poverty. We remained with them until 4 Nov., when we received a telegram from Salerno informing us that the freight train had arrived. We left that very evening and arrived in Salerno the next morning.

After attending Mass, we got the keys to our house from the owner of the building and then began a series of trips to the train station to collect all the things we had sent ahead of us. When we finished, the owner invited us to dinner. It was 5:00 p.m. by then and Sr. Andreina Binello and I had had nothing to eat all day except a cup of coffee that morning.

Fr. Mario Martorano advised us to fill a bucket with water to use the next morning because the water and gas had not yet been turned on in the house. Worn out, we put two mattresses on the floor, dropped onto them and slept until morning.

The next day, we did some hasty personal cleaning and then went to a nearby church for Mass and our practices of piety. On the way home, we walked around the downtown area to see what it was like. We noticed that everyone was looking at us with amazement because of the way we were dressed. We wore a jacket over our habit and no

veil, which they considered somewhat eccentric, but at that time [in our Pauline history] we wore the veil only when we went to Mass.

Two days later M. Thecla arrived. How happy and heartened we were to see her! With her, we made our first visit to the Archbishop, who gave us a warm welcome and said he was very happy to have us in Salerno. He told us to let him know if we ran into any problems.

Returning home after this visit, we started to put together all the shelving we had brought from Alba. It was not an easy job, but under the supervision of Prima Maestra we positioned the book cases as best we could.

When night came we still didn't have the beds assembled, so once again we slept on the floor, laughing at the situation in which we found ourselves. Once we had the book cases in place and filled, we turned our attention to the kitchen. Since there were no cupboards, we divided a packing case into two sections: one for plates and one for pots.

Prima Maestra left the next day for Bari. With great regret, we accompanied her to the train station and returned home a little downcast. We were sorry she was gone but we were also happy that our sisters in Bari would have her comfort and help, since they were in a similar situation.

Our first idea [for the apostolate] was to help people get to know us by printing a monthly bulletin to disseminate in the city. We talked about this with the Archbishop, who approved our plan but said that first he wanted to talk to all the parish priests to let them know about us. He also said he would ask a young woman to accompany us to the different parishes in the city, thus facilitating diffusion.

In February, the first issue of the bulletin, *The Voice of St. Matthew*, printed in Alba, came out and we began to distribute it. With the help of the Archbishop, we also opened a library in the seminary and in St. Peter and St. Augustine parochial schools.

In May, we began to visit the families not only with our monthly bulletin but also with some books on the Blessed Mother and Don Bosco, in honor of his beatification.

On 8 August, we officially initiated the propaganda apostolate with a visit to the town of Baronissi. We were met at the train station

by a welcoming committee from the local Catholic Action group. In church, the pastor presented us as “apostles of the Good Press” and explained the need for good reading and how to promote it. In that parish, a group of “Cooperators with the Good Press” was set up and several of its members were chosen to disseminate good reading. In September, we continued the propaganda apostolate in Montecorvino, Battipaglia, Foiano, Mercato S. Severino, etc.

For us, every town was a field of apostolate and nothing could dampen our zeal to take the Word of God to everyone.

Verona: A Christmas Marked by Dreams

On 19 November 1928, M. Bartolomea Vivian, Sr. Emanuella Marini and M. Serafina Milani left Alba on the 4:30 a.m. train, which stopped at Alessandria, Mortara and Milan before it finally reached Verona at 4:20 that afternoon. M. Bartolomea recounts:

It was November so the days were short. As soon as we got off the train, we took the streetcar to St. Fermo Church, where we ate the modest lunch we had brought with us. Afterward, we set out for the house of Mr. Balzaro, a lawyer who was also the director of the weekly newspaper, *Ridding Italy of Blasphemy*, printed by the Society of St. Paul in Alba. Mr. Balzaro was a great help to us. He gave us an enthusiastic welcome, saying that we would find good people and zealous priests in Verona. He accompanied us to the house of the Daughters of Jesus because the things we had sent ahead of us from Alba had not yet arrived.

The Mother General of that Institute, M. Imelda Soave, received us very kindly, saying: “The first things you need is a good dinner, then a good bed. You are welcome to stay with us until your belongings arrive and you get settled.”

The following day, after our practices of piety, we went to take a look at the building on Via S. Cosimo, stopping to visit the parishes we passed and inform their pastors that we would be opening a book center stocked with the Gospel and other books. We offered to print a bulletin for them, the last page of which would contain the news proper to each parish. We explained that the bulletin was printed in Alba, so they could send their news to us and we would forward it.

We also assured them that we ourselves would distribute the bulletin to the families. We felt that this initiative would be a very good way to make contact with the people of the area, let them know about the opening of our book center and recruit our first cooperators. Three pastors immediately accepted our offer.

Two weeks later, the book cases for our shop arrived from Alba, along with a Brother from the Society of St. Paul to help us put them together. We divided the room into two parts: the front section for the book shop and the back section for our living quarters. We used the larger packing cases for tables and the smaller ones for chairs. When all was ready, we took our leave of the kind Daughters of Jesus and moved into our new home.

Prima Maestra had already started her visits to our first branch houses: Salerno, Bari and Cagliari. Before we had left Alba, she had told us she would be coming to see us sometime in the first half of December and we were already looking forward to celebrating the Christmas novena with her.

When she arrived in Verona, the weather was very cold. It was the famous winter of 1928-1929, during which the temperature dropped below 0—something it hadn't done in years. With M. Thecla, we began the Christmas novena in our "home" in the back of the book center, where we had also set up a small prayer room.

The furniture sent to us from Alba included a small cast-iron stove, which we put in our prayer room to warm it a little. We used that same stove to cook our meals, which usually consisted of cabbage. Naturally the odor of cooking cabbage permeated the entire room, alerting everyone in the book center as to what was on the menu that day! In fact, our more frequent clients began to ask, "Do you *always* eat cabbage?"

For Christmas, we went to Midnight Mass at the convent of the Daughters of Jesus because we did not yet have our own chapel. The sisters invited us to have some hot milk with them afterward, but our thoughts flew back to our own place and to the traditional Piedmontese polenta that Prima Maestra had already prepared and had left warming on the stove. Back home, we ate our polenta and then went to bed. After Mass on Christmas day, we spent the rest of our time in the

back of the book center with the light on and the shutters drawn. Prima Maestra helped us pass the time by making plans for the future, telling us about the many beautiful things we could do once we had a proper house and chapel. We felt like we were children once again, dreaming of enchanted places very different from our daily reality....

After the holidays, Prima Maestra began to talk about leaving, but before she went she left us with several recommendations:

“Pray a lot. The Lord will bless you and will give you a sure sign that he has chosen you by sending you vocations. Learn to serve the clergy and the faithful well and try to find new ways to carry out the apostolate. Do not let your attachment to the Motherhouse weaken and be sure to follow all the directives you receive from there. Don’t make any purchases without permission. For meditation and spiritual reading, use the books suggested (*Preparing for Death, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, The Way to Health, The Glories of Mary, Spiritual Diary, The True Spouse of Christ*).”

She kept her promise to send us a typewritten copy of the hours of adoration the Theologian guided in the Temple of St. Paul in Alba each month for the whole Pauline Family. These transcripts were our food, our vitamins.

OTHER COUNTRIES OF EUROPE

A RECEPTION BOTH HOSTILE AND COMPASSIONATE

Foundation of the Lyons Community

In hindsight we can say that our first community in France was clearly destined to do great good because from the outset it was beset with one problem after another. In 1932, Sr. Clelia Bianco and Sr. Claudia Negri made an initial attempt to open a house in this country but evidently the time was not right because they were unsuccessful. A second attempt was made in June 1925, when two sisters from our Turin community were sent to France by Primo Maestro, who told them: “It doesn’t matter that you are uneducated and don’t know the language. The Lord will do everything.”

The sisters left with a large trunk containing some personal belongings and many copies of a poorly-printed French Bible filled with typographical errors. They lived in a run-down furnished room for two months before they were able to find better living quarters, and with the help of some good-hearted Italian immigrants they furnished their new apartment with the essentials.

For awhile the only kitchen equipment the sisters possessed was a single pot, which meant that they had to heat and eat their soup before they could prepare the rest of their meal. They had no blankets to protect them from the autumn cold so with great creativity they stitched together donated hanks of wool to serve this purpose. During the day, our missionaries went out on propaganda. When they returned home, they would turn on the gas, heat some water, and warm themselves with its vapor.

Their first propaganda trips helped them “test the air” of their new apostolic territory. Political sentiment at the time was hostile to Italians because many French people disapproved of the Italian government’s determination to claim Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

But the problems the sisters experienced due to their poverty were nothing compared to the hostility (and also compassion) they were subjected to as foreigners who did not know French and who were considered by many to be Protestant propagandists due to the material they disseminated (especially those famous Bibles). In many different towns of the St. Jean de Maurienne and Moutieres dioceses, Sr. Zeffirina Baldi and Sr. Maria Mussi underwent long hours of interrogation in the local police stations until the authorities were satisfied as to their identity.

Another problem they faced was the fact that they did not have suitable books for propaganda. All they had were a large supply of those poorly-printed Bibles, a few lives of the saints and the leaflet, *The Seed*, which they left with every family.

But in spite of everything, they received a number of generous offerings, which however were sent to help our first FSP overseas foundations in China and the Philippines.

In time, the sisters found better living quarters in the parish of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. There, they immediately set aside one

room as a chapel so as to have the Blessed Sacrament close to them. Their piety and spirit of sacrifice touched the pastor's heart and he took them under his wing. He reprimanded the parishioners who, in their ignorance, scorned the sisters, saying sternly: "Leave them alone. They pray a lot."

THE SACRIFICES OF THE DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS *Foundation of the Barcelona Community*

The first three Italian sisters sent to Spain—Sr. Costanza Bianciotto, Sr. Fedele Milani and Sr. Candida Perrone—left Rome on 16 August 1946. On their way to Barcelona, they followed the advice of Fr. Timothy Giaccardo and made a one-day stop-over in Lourdes, then spent several days in Bilbao, where they were warmly welcomed by Fr. Costa. When they resumed their journey, Fr. Costa asked a Pious Disciple to accompany them since she spoke Spanish and was familiar with the local customs.

The small group reached Barcelona on 25 August in the pouring rain. When they arrived at the address they had been given, they did not find the welcome they had been expecting. They rang the bell several times and finally the door opened. A disheveled, severely-stooped man stared up at them, then demanded to know who they were and what they wanted.

Our sisters recount:

We had been assured that the house was small but adequate and that we would be able to remain there at least for the immediate future. Instead, what we found was a newly-opened school of some sort, consisting of a few elderly women and a dozen children. When we told them that an acquaintance of ours had paid one of the people at this address in advance for our sojourn here, everyone looked at us blankly. No one knew anything about it. By that time it was almost dark, the rain had turned into a downpour and we had only a few coins among us. What were we to do?

The women came to a decision among themselves and charitably took us in after all, leading us to a damp, dark ground-floor room, the home of mice and spiders. The room did not have a door and its glassless window opened onto the street, providing the curious with a good view inside.

We encouraged one another by saying, “Didn’t Primo Maestro tell us many times that it is always good to begin from Bethlehem, by which he meant, to begin with a spirit of poverty and self-surrender, so as to please Jesus?” And with that thought to fortify us, we grabbed a broom and duster and set to work, our hearts suddenly light and filled with trust. We did the best we could to clean our quarters—which we considered truly providential—and then settled down to sleep on four cots, not even bothering to ask ourselves how long we would be there. We felt sure that God was with us so the uncertainties we would face the next day did not bother us. We stayed in that room for about a month, until we finally managed to find better lodgings.

The day after our arrival, we memorized a few essential words in Spanish and then set out to visit the families.

“Buenos días, señora. ¡Ave María purísima!” (We learned that this was the typical Spanish religious greeting.)

“Buenos días, hermanitas. ¡Sin pecado concebida! Qué quiere?”

“Somos las misioneras de la Buena Prensa, y pasamos para difundir la Palabra de Dios.”

And our books, accepted with big smiles of thanks, passed from our hands to those of the women and girls who opened their doors to us. From the very first day, we could see that the Lord was guiding those good people, making them receptive to us and to our fledging apostolate. Those were comforting moments in a time filled with the many sacrifices that went hand in hand with our difficult foundation period.

“THREE CONSOLATIONS: THE GOSPEL, THE BLESSED MOTHER AND THE EUCHARIST”

Foundation of the Porto Community

The *Conte Grande* steamed into the harbor of Lisbon, Portugal on the afternoon of 17 September 1950. The disembarking passengers included two Daughters of St. Paul, Sr. Nazarena Martins (a Brazilian sister) and Sr. Maria Nives Mechis. Their purpose: to open an FSP community in the city of Porto. Waiting for them on the dock were members of the Society of St. Paul, who had opened an SSP commu-

nity in Lisbon in 1946. The two FSP missionaries spent ten days in the capital as guests of the Pious Disciples. While there, they made the first contacts they needed to carry out their mission in Portugal.

Afterward, they set out for Porto, stopping over in Fatima, where they entrusted their new foundation to the Blessed Mother. In Fatima, they stayed with the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows, who suggested that they seek out the same Institute in Porto, assuring them that they would be readily welcomed by the community and would be able to stay there during their first days in the city.

The two Daughters of St. Paul reached Porto on the evening of 2 October and were indeed warmly received by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows. Unfortunately they were not able to find a house of their own right away, so after 15 days they accepted the hospitality of the Spanish Dominican Sisters who ran a boarding school in Porto and remained with them for two months.

Accompanied by a good woman of the parish, our missionaries immediately went to see the Bishop of the Porto Diocese, Antonio Ferreira. In spite of the letters of recommendation they carried, the Bishop remained skeptical about our Institute and its mission, finally granting the sisters permission to remain on a temporary basis, as a kind of "trial."

Their first days of propaganda were filled with many different problems and obstacles: the people's indifference to strangers; a high level of illiteracy; a depressed economy; opposition to collective propaganda.... Even the weather seemed to be against them. But a good Daughter of St. Paul never lets herself become discouraged by any difficulty and our missionaries were heroic in their determination to establish our Institute in Portugal.

At the beginning of December they left the Dominican Sisters for their own "nest"—a small rented house in Rua do Ameal. Even though their new residence was shabby and empty, they were delighted with it. It seemed like a palace to them and their first meal in their own home was a big event.

On 9 December, the sisters joyfully celebrated the arrival of another Brazilian FSP, Sr. Dionisia Michels, who had been sent to reinforce the little community.

Maestra Paolina came to visit the sisters for Epiphany 1951 and stayed for three days, comforting and encouraging the community in its difficult beginnings. At the end of January two more sisters arrived: Sr. Timotea Ferraretto from Brazil and Sr. Alfonsa Gemelli from Italy; and in March another two: Sr. Dolores Melis and Sr. Paola Macalli.

Our Porto community now had seven members and the sisters began to think about finding local vocations. With the arrival of good weather, they formed 3 teams of propagandists and set out to visit other dioceses. In general, they were warmly welcomed by the local pastors and religious communities, although there were some exceptions. In one parish, the pastor had just warned his flock to beware of Protestant missionaries who were going door to door in that area. Two days later the FSPs arrived and began to visit the families of the parish. Naturally, everyone thought they were Protestants and refused to answer their doors. Indeed, a band of boys, thinking that the sisters were men dressed up as religious, chased after them with big sticks. There was nothing to be done—the timing was bad and so our missionaries were forced to move on to another town.

In May 1951, the struggling little Porto community received a special grace. Primo Maestro had arrived in Lisbon to visit the SSPs and as soon as he heard about the problems the Daughters were facing he climbed aboard a bus and made the 6-hour trip to Porto to see them. With what great joy and gratitude the little group of FSPs welcomed the tired figure standing on their doorstep! Primo Maestro blessed them and told them to fill their house with merits: “The more problems, the more merits!” he assured them. “And you have three big consolations: the Gospel, the Blessed Mother and the Eucharist!”

BEGINNING WITH MARY, QUEEN OF APOSTLES

Foundation of the London Community

On 20 May 1955—the vigil of the Feast of the Queen of Apostles—the first four Daughters of St. Paul set foot in England. The Society of St. Paul had opened a house there eight years earlier and two members of the community were on hand to greet the sisters when they

reached Victoria Station. They loaded our missionaries and their luggage into a van and took them to their house for some refreshments before entrusting them to the care of an Italian woman, with whom they stayed for the first week.

The four sisters—Sr. M. Rosaria Visco (Superior), Sr. Pierina Enriquez, Sr. Mary Connell and Sr. Natalia Bonifacio—set out immediately in search of a small furnished apartment, which they found at 10 North Terrace. They remained at this address for six months.

The sisters had big dreams of transforming the immense city of London by means of the Pauline apostolate but in the beginning they had to be satisfied with preparing meals for the Society of St. Paul.

On 31 May, two of the sisters abandoned domestic chores to make a round of “exploratory” propaganda. How delighted they were that the first book they diffused was on the Blessed Mother. The book, *Mystical Rose* by Cardinal Newman, also happened to be the *first* book printed by the SSPs of England on their *first* printing press.

On 28 June three more sisters arrived and so the diffusion apostolate began to expand. On 31 July, our missionaries held a very successful Bible Day among the Italians of Bedford.

That same day, they also joyfully welcomed the arrival of Prima Maestra, who was making her first visit to the new community. On her second visit, she was accompanied by Primo Maestro. They inspected a plot of land in Langley, about 20 miles from London, where the first house of the Daughters of St. Paul would later be built, just a short distance from the SSP residence.

On 5 August 1955, the sisters held another Gospel Day for the Italians of Bedford. On 1 September they took charge of the SSP book center located at Beauchamp Place, n. 29. Another sister, Sr. M. Emma Mossio, arrived from Italy to help staff the center, and the small community continued to grow as a result of the entrance of several Irish aspirants.....