

ACTUALIZATION OF GALATIANS 2: 20 BY CONTEMPORARY PAULINES

Presented by

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Introduction

The Letter to the Galatians is regarded as a doctrinal letter and one of the undisputed letters of the apostle Paul. The historical context of the letter lends credence to this claim. The oratorical nature of the letter enables us to catch a good glimpse of the personality of Paul as a man full of zeal for God and committed to his course. Paul had preached the good news among the Galatians and he was successful. But not long after he left, other preachers, maybe some who were apostles before Paul arrived and preached a gospel different from what Paul had preached? What is this?

Paul had preached that we are justified by faith alone and the works of the law are not what saves a person. Among the works of the Law would be included the prescriptions of the Law such as the law requiring circumcision for Jews who are male. Consequently, the new preacher had preached that gentile would have to be circumcised first before being accepted into the new community of believers. Paul was so increased that the Galatians had quickly abandoned the good news he preached to them. Hence, there was the need to remind them what that good news is all about. Secondly, Paul felt that Galatians abandoned his gospel because they felt his authority was probably not at par with the other apostles. So, in the Letter to the Galatians, we see a man anxious to justify his claim to apostleship and by implication the validity of the gospel he preached. In doing this, Paul stated categorically that he received the good news from Jesus Christ, and his commission is divine, not of human origin, and he was not delegated by any human person, contrary to his commission by the Sanhedrin to go to Damascus. This personal encounter would play a key role in the life of Paul because it changed his life completely. “Now service of Christ has delivered him from

such motivating vainglory... his conversion has freed him from the “yoke of slavery,” which was the Mosaic Law with its emphasis on human achievement.”¹

Having established that his commission was of divine origin, he again shows the veracity of his gospel and that it enjoyed the approval of the Jerusalem Leaders. The point according to Paul is that in Christ, we have secured ourselves from the Law and ‘the Flesh’ (5:1,13; cf. Rom 6:18,20,22) Paul then went to great details to show what Christ has done for humanity, it is through Christ that we die to the Law, having been crucified with Christ. The result is obvious, we have become a new creation since Christ now lives in us. It is thus possible to live for God. We can trace the spirituality of the Paulines to this understanding. “Faith in Christ does not substitute a new norm or goal of action; rather it reshapes man anew internally, supplying him with a new principle of activity on the ontological level of his very being. A symbiosis results in man with Christ, the glorified *Kyrios* who become as of the resurrection a “vivifying Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45), the vital principle of Christian activity.”²

For through the law, I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; in so far as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.” (Gal 2:19-20)

The human being for the world is not the old man again, but a new person. If it were the old man, the world is doomed. Are you Paulines of today new beings in Christ? Are you living for God and is God in you? *We shall explore this question later!*

The Society of St. Paul

The Pauline Congregation is a Society of Apostolic life. In the Church they are grouped under the Consecrated Persons. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines Consecrated life as

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to the Galatian*, 49: 13, in Jerome Biblical Commentary,

² Joseph A. Fitzmyer 49:19

a stable form of Christian living by those faithful who feel called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. It “is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church”³ Since the members of the Society of St. Paul, popularly known as the Paulines, which include fathers, brothers and sisters owe their existence to blessed Alberione, their mission today cannot but be linked and rooted in the spirituality and mission of Blessed Alberione. For him, “the spirituality of “Jesus Master, Way, Truth, Life” presents an integral view of everything. In this Pauline Method of Jesus Master Way, Truth, Life, there is completeness: It presents the complete Jesus, complete religion, complete human person, complete redemption, complete formation, complete apostolate, etc.”⁴ In other words, we know that for the Paulines⁵, Jesus is the truth to believe, the way to follow and the life to share. This is another way of leading the whole person to the person of Jesus. Paulines are specially devoted to St. Paul the great evangelizer and apostle and are encouraged “to know him, to imitate him and to pray through his intercession.” In *Abundantes*,⁶ we hear Blessed Alberione say “All must consider St. Paul the apostle as father, master, exemplar and founder. In fact, he is all this (sic) Through him the Pauline family was born, by him it was nourished and raised, and from him it has received the spirit.”⁷ St Paul, according to Fr. Alberione, is the faithful interpreter of Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life. “It is from St. Paul that the Pauline Family takes the spirit.”⁸ Put differently, the Pauline mission is “to give the whole Christ, Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life to the World using all suitable means of

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 944.

⁴ (cf. AD 159).

⁵ The Pauline Family is made up of five religious Congregations, one Lay Association and four Secular Institutes.

⁶ Alberione, *Abundantes Divitiae Gratiae Suae (Opera omni)*, 1998.

⁷ George Kaitholil, *Spirituality of Blessed Alberione, Saint of the Media*. St. Pauls: Bandra, Mumbai, 2009, 244.

⁸ <https://stpauls.com.ng/spirituality-and-mission-of-the-pauline-family/>

modern media, and more generally, to address the spiritual needs of the modern world in a modern way.”⁹ In your own words,

...the members of the Society of St Paul are invited to be creatively faithful to the Charism of our Founder Blessed James Alberione. The Society demands the members to have an in-depth knowledge of the principal elements of our Pauline identity in the Church. We are challenged to live our consecrated apostolic life and the mission of evangelization through the communication media in the context of the socio-cultural and ecclesial changes of our times.¹⁰

The Paulines are therefore, bear witness to the Gospel in a specific way and through this way they serve the Church announcing the Good News through the means of social communication. “What the Paulines aspire is to live fully the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Master, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in the spirit of St Paul the Apostle under the protection of Mary Queen of the Apostles.”¹¹ To carry out their mission, the Paulines use the means “our Founder used, the machine, the mike, the screen as our pulpit, and the press, the cinema hall, the projection studios as our church. And in the changing times, we put into use the most modern means of communication in the culture of communication. Steps have to be taken to introduce trained laity into the field of digital communication when we lack Pauline personnel.”¹² In other words, in an online explanation of the Pauline logo, I understand that the two dimensions of the mission of the Society of St Paul intersect: “To serve the Word of God in the world and to help the world rediscover the truths in the events and experiences of life.”¹³ In other words, communication media is just a tool, the goal is still and always will be Christ, such that those who read what is published, or listen to what is proclaimed through

⁹ <https://stpauls.com.ng/spirituality-and-mission-of-the-pauline-family/>

¹⁰ <https://stpauls.com.ng/pauline-mission-in-the-church/>

¹¹ (cfr CD 1, 2 & 7).

¹² (cfr AGC X, 13.5).

¹³ <https://stpauls.com.ng/logo-2/>

the media will also come to know, love and follow Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Thus, there **is a lot to learn from St. Paul.**

Paul's contribution to the evangelization

Based on available evidence from Scripture, it is abundantly clear that no other apostle or any New Testament figure, other than Jesus contributed as much as St. Paul to the spread of the Christian faith. What his direct contributions and what can we learn from him?

Orthodoxy

Paul fought for the true faith. He defended the faith whenever possible and his angst in Galatia was because he felt the Galatians had abandoned the true faith. When he clashed with Peter, it was because he felt Peter was not being true to the gospel. (Gal 2:11-14) Victor Paul Furnish asserts that "It is conceivable that the Antioch affair actually preceded the Jerusalem consultation¹⁴ and is mentioned after it in the letter only because it is Paul's best evidence for the validity of his mission." Every Christian, especially Paulines must be seen to be orthodox, that is loyal to the true faith. This is what you are called to preach, not your own principles and philosophy. In a world of loose values and ever changing values, Christians must never be without a proper understanding of the Christian ideals, and like Paul, we must make it our priority to teach the true faith to others. As the saying goes, "Nemo dat quod non habet", "No one gives what he does not have!"

Zeal

The zeal of Paul is unparalleled, not for once did we see him flagging in spirit. Today, for many of us, it is difficult to sustain the same spirit throughout the cause of a project, but we must learn it from Paul. If we fix our focus on Jesus, it should not be difficult to accomplish. We

¹⁴ Victor Paul Furnish, The Letter of Paul to the Galatians, p.828 in *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Edited by Charles M. Layman. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1971.

are surrounded by many things that are vying for our attention today, nonetheless, Christ must be the vivifying spirit of our life and mission, and He is alive and active. As we have seen with Paul, he became a new man, a new being. He was a man on fire and on mission, two qualities that all great men possess and that enabled them to accomplish their goals.

Alberione was a man filled with zeal for God's work. He established many congregations to cater for all, that is, priests, sisters and the laity.

All things to all People

Paul knew the task ahead of him was going to be complex. He knew that people have different needs and that he would have to reach them all, hence he made himself all things, so that he would be able to reach all. "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22)

We must keep the context in mind because Paul is not advocating a total surrender to the world such that we lose our identity or that the Gospel truth is no longer discernible. Not all. We know Paul preached to both the Jews and Gentiles. As a Jew, he identified with the Jews and even used his Jewish identity to prove he was still faithful to the traditions of the elders. As a Romans, he used his identity to escape harsh treatment from the Centurion. When he was with the Gentiles, he did not impose on them the Jewish law. Yet, he didn't embrace the loose life of the Gentiles. He accepted the decision of the Jerusalem council about what is expected of the Gentiles. (Act 15:28-29) Hence, we must understand this Pauline saying as referring to personal conduct. Paul did not intend it to be a guiding principle or method for Church planting or a mission approach, whereby we feel compelled to do anything imaginable for the spread of the Gospel. We must always keep in mind that "the end does not always justify the means."

Knowledge

Paul was a knowledgeable man. Even as a Rabbi, we can say he went to the best School and studied under the best professor, Gamaliel. He went through this to gain the required knowledge that enable him to be a good instrument. Blessed Alberione also touted study as an essential element of formation. He said that:

Training for work is a of immense benefit fo life and eternity...When trained for work, a young man gets used to study, to lofty thoughts, to be energetic, to be creative to live as a true person and as a good citizen... To train a young person to work is the greatest charity, the greatest good that we can do for him, for life and for eternity.¹⁵

You are to pursue and acquire knowledge, not for the sake of knowledge, but to help you to lead others to Christ. “Blessed Alberione said “In the first place give the doctrine that saves. Imbue all thought and human knowledge with the Gospel. Do not speak only of religion but speak of everything in a Christian way.”¹⁶

How has the Pauline gone about this in the world? From its inception, Blessed Alberione emphasized the use of the means of communication for evangelization. Alberione was quite convinced the traditional means of evangelization even at his time were not adequate to accomplish the task of evangelization. The Society has seen tremendous changes in this regard, from just using the press, to engaging in the publishing apostolate then to using the latest means of communication. This is in line with St. Paul’s saying “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1Cor 9:22-23) It is thus clear that contemporary Paulines must avail themselves the use of modern means of communication.

¹⁵ Carissimi, 1079-80)

¹⁶ Abundantes, 97

According to Blessed Alberione, “Preaching by the word of mouth somehow corresponds to tradition; preaching in print somehow corresponds to Holy Scripture.”¹⁷ To priests, Blessed Alberione said “The Pauline priest should, on account of his vocation, take care of editing and transmitting the doctrine that saves, through the work of editing articles, books, films etc. As long as we stay on the foundation, there is nothing to fear: “We are founded on the Church and the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and this conviction inspires confidence, joy and courage.”¹⁸ This is the way to reach the people of our time.

Embrace of the Modern world

Paul used every available opportunity to preach the good news, the prison, the Areopagus, the court environment etc. It is obvious today that we must reach our people in their natural elements, on the fields, the marketplaces, on social media etc. Your involvement in the Publication media is thus a powerful tool. From my analysis of the Pauline apostolate in Ibadan, you have done well. But your foray has been in publication and sales of books. We need more social media content. We need more video content to reinforce many aspects of the Christian faith. What would Paul do if he were alive today?

Blessed Alberione answered this question well and you, sons, and daughters of Blessed Alberione should know his answer but let me remind you again. He said in *Carissimi*;

If St. Paul were alive, he would continue to burn with that double flame of the same fire: the zeal for God and His Christ and the zeal for the people of every place. And to make himself heard, he would ascend the most elevated pulpits and multiply his words through means of actual progress: press, cinema, radio, television. His doctrine would not be cold and abstract. When he arrived at a place, he did not just appear for an occasional conference; he stayed and formed: to obtain the consent of the intellect,

¹⁷ UCAS 1934, p.3

¹⁸ Abundantes, 209

to persuade, to convert, to unite to Christ, to set people on a fully Christian life. He did not leave a place until there was moral certainty of the perseverance of his people. He left everywhere priests to continue his work; he often returned there with his words and writings; he wanted news of them, stayed with them in spirit, prayed for them.¹⁹

I am waiting for that day when the Paulines, especially in Nigeria will debut a TV station, for religious programmes and human empowerment to counteract the decadent content that are daily beamed to our homes. The Catholic Church has benefitted immensely from social media. The platforms have allowed us to share the contents of our faith and our people are better for it. However, I believe we need more TV contents addressed to the various segments of our Church, children, youth, adult etc, or arranged along topical content such as faith matters, sex matters, motivational talk etc. In the present landscape of Nigeria, this is still largely missing or too little to cater for the number of Catholics we have.

Catholicism is rightly regarded as a religion of the book. We love books and have been custodian of great works for centuries, but today, the shift is already onto digital library and digital books. In the advance world, some books can be downloaded free of Charge, while some pages of others can be read at no cost. You might need to explore this option.

Witness of life

I asked before if you are truly living for God? Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking we are the sum of our work. No! We are much more than what we do. Because of this mistake, work has become the only important thing for many. Through their work, many project themselves to the world instead of Christ. If Christ is no longer the centre of your work and ministry, who are you working for? We have been given this life from the heart of the Church, *ex corde ecclesiae*. Hence, we have an obligation to the Church. We serve God in

¹⁹ Blessed Alberione , Carissimi, 1152 cited by George Kaitholil, Spirituality of Blessed Alberione, p.249

his Church and not apart from the Church. On configuration with Christ, Blessed Alberione says that:

Life in its essence is a preparation for eternity; the object of the Divine Master's teaching is eternal salvation -how to obtain it and how to lead others to it. Spiritual progress means growth towards configuration with the Divine Master. This configuration must go hand in hand with commitment to the mission. Mission is the specific environment of living, working, and becoming like Christ.²⁰

In other words, our work must be integrated into our life, there should be no dichotomy. No wonder, Blessed Alberione enjoins in the following words: "Let us make of ourselves the pen and tongue of God, through Jesus Christ, our Master."²¹ If this is the case, for instance, with EWTN, another Media apostolate located in the USA, at the service of the Church, there would be no conflict with the Pope as recently alluded to by Pope Francis.²²

It has been quite a while I visited the Pauline Bookstore at Ikeja and Enugu, but I am a bit familiar with the one in Ibadan. In this era of social media, one would expect a more visible presence of the Pauline Bookstore in the social media, either announcing the arrival of new books or promoting others or even offering people reviews that could motivate them to purchase books. Such presence should also provide people with opportunity to know if what they want is in stock instead of traveling long distances only to get there and the materials are not in stock. As a Society dedicated to preaching the good news through the instrumentality of the media, the presence of social media should lead to a rethinking of your apostolate. The future is upon us, and it is digital. There must therefore be a paradigm shift in the way things are done. Take a cue from *Fr. China Justin Mbaeri*, a member of the Oblates of St. Joseph, who has carved a niche for himself through the social media. He sends out homilies, doctrinal

²⁰ George Kaitholil, *Spirituality of Blessed Alberione, Saint of the Media*. St. Pauls: Bandra, Mumbai, 2009, p.194.

²¹²¹ Blessed Alberione, *Carissimi*, 53 cited by George Kaitholil, *Spirituality of Blessed Alberione*, p. 196.

²² www.Americamagazine.org/faith/2021/

talks on FB and this can reach thousands of people. Another Nigerian priests *Fr. Omokugbo Ojeifo* who frequently engages celebrities in debates online and through this can enlighten the public. These two priests have assumed a global or international outlook and we need more priests in their footsteps. What better place to look for them than among the Paulines, a society dedicated to the use of modern media?

COVID-19 also exposed the world to a “new normal”. In terms of engagement with others and the world, the social platforms saw an upsurge, while activities that rely of physical contact were reduced. This should make us have a rethink about our religious engagement. How do we reach out to people if we cannot be in touch with them physically? This virtual lecture is a pointer to the direction we should be going. This can become a day to day activity and not just occasional event.

Formation is vital in the actualization of the goal of Galatian 2:20. Formation of your candidates to the priesthood and the consecrated life. Formation, as you know begins with the selection of the right kind of candidates. You must be able to discern from the pool of aspirants, candidates in love with God and not in love with the world, candidates with a good work ethic, candidates who are motivated to work for the people. Those candidates must be willing and ready to sacrifice themselves, to let go of themselves, so that they may be filled with the fullness of God that will enable them to become all things to all people. This leads us back to the biblical focus of this lecture, Galatians 2:20.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Blessed Alberione said this verse was responsible for his own complete transformation. In other words, Paul played an important role in his own formation and transformation, hence

sons and daughter of Blessed Alberione must embrace the same spirit of St. Paul so that their transformation may also be like that of their founder. For Blessed Alberione, this passage is rich and power, he says it is “a synthesis of opposites”:

... to sacrifice one’s life in order to save it; to love everything to gain everything. And the peak of the paradox is that poverty becomes wealth; abasement, exaltation; virginity, motherhood; slavery, freedom; sacrifice, beatitude; service, apostolate; death, life. *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20)*²³

Conclusion

In a polarized world, Paulines of today must allow themselves to be crucified with Christ, your natural tendencies must give way to the ideals Christ puts before us in the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt. 5) The world is waiting to hear the good news through you. As vital an instrument you can be, it is not you or me the world is anxious to see, but Christ himself and we must let him shine through us. As we can see in the larger Church, the Church, that is the Catholic Church, though ontologically universal, we know that for many centuries she was not global, the Church was predominantly European and American. Today, our Church is becoming global, Pope Francis, through his appointments is ensuring that in the governance of the Church, people and experts from the margins are now being included. Your Society must become global also, not just in the diversity of your candidates, but in your decision making process and governance. Just as the Church is looked upon to be the voice of the voiceless, through your various apostolate, give voice to the voiceless, to those on the margins, especially women and the persecuted.

As you have embraced the world of communication, use it to bring joy to the world. Our world is saturated with evil and lots of bad news. We need a change, let that change – that of

²³ Alberione, *Ut Perfectus Sit Homo Dei*, (Opera omnia), Milano, 1998, 1, 55

bringing joy to the homes of people, and filling hearts with love and hope be your goals also.

Let your contact with people be a source of inspiration to them, so that Christ may be all in all for all people. Like St. Paul, give yourselves to Christ and he will make of you a better gift to the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this reflection with you.

God bless you all.