

***LET US REDESIGN OUR ECONOMY
ECONOMY-APOSTOLATE:
A GREAT CHALLENGE***

Sr. Maria Gabriella Santon, Bursar General

LET US REDESIGN OUR ECONOMY **ECONOMY-APOSTOLATE: A GREAT CHALLENGE**

When we met in January 2009 in an enlarged Council meeting which gave birth to the Redesigning Project which at present is orienting and maximizing the resources of the Congregation, we underlined the importance of redesigning also our economy.

By then, the world economic crisis which, like a drop of oil extending all over the planet, has just begun. We did not realize then how much the world crisis would have repercussion on our economy and consequently on our apostolate. We were saying that it was important to make effort on some areas, like: to increase production and diffusion, to lessen expenses, to verify how we were living Pauline poverty and to re-dimension our communitarian and administrative expenses, to utilize better our resources and to improve solidarity among ourselves.

In the Continental Meetings of Redesigning and in the InterChapter we have taken a turn towards a leap in quality in redesigning our economy: we want it to be more open to the mission and promote communion, solidarity and the importance of work. In this meeting on the Apostolate and Economy, we shall take up again the topic so as to give continuity to the reflection we have started. It will not be a matter in itself but it presupposes all those which we have previously reflected on.

Our resources at the service of the mission

When we speak of redesigning the apostolate and above all, of finding adequate and efficacious responses to the challenge of evangelization, we cannot ignore the great importance of economy. If we do not take up a serious redesigning of the economy, the redesigning of the apostolate might not have continuity and efficacy. We should be aware of the importance of making immediate options at the economic level so that our actual resources could continue to sustain our mission.

We know the close relationship between apostolate and economy and we know that for not any reason should we jeopardize this, but in practice this conviction often remains in the theoretical level. As a Congregation we find ourselves at a crossroad. We are facing great challenges. On one hand the apostolic activity impels us and the desire to respond to the expectations of our audience stimulates us to seek new channels of diffusion, to open up ourselves to the new technologies, and to risk with courage. On the other hand, we are aware that our economic resources are dwindling and that to promote apostolic activities in communication today requires a lot of resources. Where to source these resources if not from the activities themselves?

The equilibrium between these two dimensions: apostolate-economy is one of the big challenges we face in this historical moment because we should not forget that

economy is at the service of the apostolate and the apostolate gives continuity and solidity to the economy. To forget this mutual relationship is to risk apostolic bankruptcy.

There are no easy solutions regarding this issue, at least not that I know of. Together, we should seek to reinforce this bond so that the economy can stand up to the threats it is facing. How true today what our Constitutions say:

Our apostolate involves the use of vast means and complex administrative Activity. Apostolic enterprises, community life, formation, the very spirit Of the Congregation are conditioned by material goods, either by their abuse Or by excessive restrictions. All this demands wisdom and balance. (Consti 178).

In 1955, Primo Maestro said to the Daughters of St. Paul:

The Pauline Family should obtain what it needs from redaction, which, being the primary work, is the most necessary and most difficult, and therefore should earn more; obtain it from the technical stage (the production of books and films), from propaganda of books and films; these should be the source of the ordinary maintenance of the Institute. Life has its needs; it should be provided for by our work. (FSP55,p.560).

Administration: the fourth wheel of the Pauline cart

The spirit that guides us in the administration of temporal goods is the same one that animates and sustains our choice of evangelical poverty (Consti, 177).

In the central part of article 45 of the Constitutions, we find the summary of the vision of our Founder; it is very broad and positive:

We live [poverty] with responsibility along the positive lines indicated by the Founder as “poverty that renounces, produces, preserves, provides, builds” (Consti 45).

We can dwell on these verbs which characterize our poverty:

1. *Poverty which renounces*: “Renunciation of administration, of independent use, of comfort, taste, preferences; everything we have is only for our use.” (UPS 1, p. 447). Jesus used only once the verb renounce, but many times he used the verb leave, with varied nuances which are very enlightening. He used it above all to express that he should be preferred to things, persons, friends (cf. Mt. 19:29). All these requires discernment in order to distinguish what is necessary and what is superfluous, regarding things, persons, cultures, relationships, rest, familial affections, etc. In the light of the Gospel, our renunciation (our “leaving”) is truly a great riches, a growth in humanity. Fr. Alberione adds:

The spirit of poverty that deprives. Let us learn to deprive ourselves of certain things. Let us not be too demanding. Sometimes we meet people who always demands and never think to give, who do not know how to deprive themselves of anything (FSP 5, p. 557).

2. *Poverty which produces*: “Produce through your assiduous effort. Produce much in order to give to our works and to persons” (UPS 1, pp. 447). The verb produce is synonymous to fruitfulness, to testimony. “Every good tree produces good fruit” (Mt. 7:17); the seed sowed on good soil produces thirty, sixty, one hundred (cf Mt. 13:23). It is also a paschal verb: the seed that dies “produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24). It is fecundity and apostolic fruitfulness. “In this is my Father glorified, that you produce much fruit” (Jn. 15:8).

Therefore the first exercise of poverty consists of producing. One who wastes time, who looks only at the others and does not produce, should confess himself. Produce and produce intelligently. It is not possible and should not happen that a book, a film a magazine should be constantly passive” (FSP-SDC 155).

Use time well. Produce! Be it in redaction, in the technical phase, in diffusion or propaganda. Use time well. In our Institutes work is a must (cf AD 124-130; UPS 1, 456-458).

3. *Poverty which conserves*. This verb has a very wide meaning. In the Gospel the verb conserve is synonymous with responsibility: “I have conserved in your name all those you have given me and I have kept them” (Jn. 17:12). It is imitating Mary who “kept the Word in her heart” (Lk 2:51). Paul stretched the meaning even more and extended the verb conserve to the charismatic patrimony (cfr. 1 Cor. 11:2), to faith (Rm. 14:22; 2Tim 4:7), to transparency of life (cfr. Acts 24:16, 1 Tim 5:2). Poverty that conserves is above all the poverty that conserves in one’s heart. But it is also the poverty of one who conserves the things she uses:

Conserve! Keep things in their proper place. A sister uses the car and it deteriorates within one year; another one instead uses a similar car and keeps it running well for two or three years. Things should be conserved. Conserve them for a long time and in a good condition. Conserve well the houses. Sometimes the roof needs repair, sometimes it is the kitchen. Then, there might be other needs in the bookstore, in the agency, etc. (FSP-SdC 156).

Conserve the goods and respect the goal for which they are destined. To conserve is to save so as to have sufficient resources for progress in the apostolate. Conserve the immovable goods, the structures destined for particular purposes. Do not waste things. Consumeristic society influences us to subscribe to the slogan, “use and dispose”. We too are sometimes victimized by this philosophy; it costs us to recycle. But by simply doing “use and dispose” we ruin the economy and also ecology.

Let there be poverty that saves, so that we can carry out greater works. The Institute is growing and every now and then, there are new necessities (FSP 55, p.557).

4. *Poverty which provides*: this is participation to God’s actuation who always provides (Ps. 104,28). This presupposes a vigilant and maternal heart which looks to the needs of others forgetting oneself. It requires a strong sense of belonging to the

community and to the Congregation so as not to be a burden as St Paul would say, to provide with one's own hand to the needs of the community (cfr. Acts 20,34).

Provide for the needs of the house, of the Institute. The bursar should provide.

Provide in the correct sense, according to the needs of one's health. If there is need for the heater, switch on the heater. If a sick Sisters needs something particular, provide for that particular thing; if there is need for medicines, provide for those medicines. Provide and provide in charity (FSP-SdC 157).

A wise and good administration looks at the needs of the members of the Congregation, and provides for what is necessary so that the mission may develop its apostolic activities and progress.

5. Poverty which builds up: this is a thoroughly Pauline verb and makes poverty blossom into charity. Paul extends this verb into prophecy, into mutual help in the Church. Building up refers also to progress. Poverty and progress are not antithesis. For Don Alberione and Maestra Tecla "progress" was a continual refrain. Progress in spiritual life, in study, in the apostolate, in economy (FSP46, pp.37-38):

There is a need for a period of greater calm and formation in the religious life, in study, in the apostolate, in poverty. The Lord wants the Daughters of St. Paul to exceed in holiness, in zeal and in poverty (CVV, 32).

On this fourth wheel, your Institute should not be found wanting in progress, both as individuals and as an Institute. If we live poverty well, we also make a good impression, and we do good. No one should be poorer than us in material things but no one should be more sociable than us when it comes to behavior. The Institute should be poor and rich at the same time; poor in our personal observance of poverty, but rich in the means of the apostolate (FSP 46, p. 38).

From the charismatic point of view we can affirm that administration (poverty) is truly the fourth wheel of our Pauline cart. It is important that during this process of redesigning we will not forget to balance the four wheels so that the cart may proceed well. Therefore we should save this fourth wheel and make it progress. To save our economy is to save the apostolate.

Inter-relationship between apostolate and economy

The need for a greater interaction and integration between apostolate and economy is evident. In many surveys, dialogues and meetings of apostolic sectors the urgency is continually pointed out. But judging from results, it seems that there had been not enough effort to resolve certain practical problems which by now has become chronic.

Would this not be the moment and the venue to ask ourselves seriously how we can save our economy and give to the apostolate the needed openings to respond today to the challenges of the mission and the new means? Our economy is affected by the

world's economical crisis. We do not know what awaits us in the future and we should not close our eyes before this reality.

Analyzing the charismatic values which should sustain our apostolic choices in our desire to give a relevant and challenging response, I think we can summarize everything in two words: wise administration. What is a wise Pauline administration? In theory, we all know what is a wise administration. In practice however, we find enormous difficulties in administering well our resources and making them fruitful for the mission.

To administer is to collaborate and to coordinate

We cannot speak of wise administration if there is no collaboration and coordination among apostolic sectors. An intelligent involvement of everybody is needed in order to arrive to a healthy equilibrium between production, diffusion and economy. Most of the time, this does not happen. Hence, those who produce fill up the stockroom, those who diffuse do not appreciate and do not propagate Pauline products, and they who have to pay have no money. As you see, it is a vicious circle. Full stockrooms do good to nobody. The new technology gives us the possibility of digital printing for which we can print only the copies we foresee to diffuse. Perhaps production will cost more because of the diminution of copies and we will have less income, but we will not have losses and this is already a gain. To produce many beautiful things which do not arrive to the audience is useless and do not produce fruits. Let us listen once more to what our Founder tells us:

Everybody should be in agreement like the artists who present a beautiful work.

How many disconnected and disorganized energies are wasted in desires, trials, and delusions! It is necessary that the bread of spirit and of truth be prepared together (UPS).

It is urgent that we learn to decide together what we should produce and together seek new forms of diffusion. We should have the courage to change, to progress and seek together new experiences, to give to our book centers and centers of diffusion a new look, to render them more attractive and efficient, even from the economical point of view. All these can be realized only through a coordinated management and a healthy economy, fruit of a "titanic" effort by everyone.

In order to survive, our society makes varied alliances at different levels. Instead, we find it so hard to maintain even just the alliances prescribed by the congregation, by our being religious and members of a family, alliances which are prescribed by our Constitutions. If we do not open our apostolic horizons on the continental and international level, we will remain always at the same point. Primo Maestro said, "not to progress is to regress".

To administer is to find the right balance

A good coordination should also seek the right balance between income and expenses. So that the mission may progress, every apostolic activity should be self-supporting. Primo Maestro used to say:

The initiatives should be life-giving, alive. Let them be self-sustaining, otherwise the apostolate will die. Then, what will happen? Everybody should be aware of this! At times a work may temporarily be passive, but not forever. That work is not life-giving. It consumes the work of others. Works should be vital, productive (FSP-SdC n.155).

Today we face a preoccupying reality: our expenses increased much more than our income. If diffusion had diminished, then the administrative and communitarian expenses should have diminished too. But in reality it is not so. All of us have the great responsibility to make apostolic choices which respond to the actual needs of the mission and at the same time, self-sustaining. This is not the sole responsibility of the bursar but of everyone: superiors, apostolic sector heads, of every sister. The necessary factors in order to arrive at a right economic balance are sobriety in life style, good use of time, of goods and resources.

To administer is to have a good organization

A wise administration should also give much importance to organization. Let us organize ourselves in order to organize the good. The organic organization of our mission is indispensable. It saves energies, economic resources and time; it brings us surely to good results. To work without good organization is to waste time and energies. To organize ourselves well means also to know how to work in team. It is to give possibility to everyone to put at the disposition of the mission, the talents, potentials, cultural and professional gifts. Let us not waste the talents God has given us for a mere antipathy.

We should be testimonies of work done in collaboration, in peace without competition, without avidity for profit, without measure and calculations but with generosity (UPS).

Naturally, organization should be done well and according to our measure. We cannot put on clothes too large for ourselves. Certain macro-organization which we have assumed are not sustainable professionally and economically. Informatics systems which are not according to the measure of our activities put us on the risk of economic and apostolic bankruptcy.

A deep and sincere verification of our apostolic and economical organization at all levels is urgent. Every apostolic sector should assume its own responsibility and in close collaboration with the administrative sectors carry out the necessary changes in order to improve and render every activity more functional and efficient.

Conclusion

I conclude with the words of Primo Maestro:

Let administration be according to the principles of Jesus and Paul. We should take care of everything that God has provided, then provide for ourselves and do charity to others. Just God has given us the great gift of created the world and has given many good things to nature. We should be grateful: grateful for the telephone, for the radio, for the wheat that grows, for the airplane, for atomic energy. All these we call human inventions, that is; humans, by studying the works of God, have found some forces which God has deposited in nature.

Every invention is a chapter of praise to God; it is discovery of what God has placed in nature. And how many good things he has deposited in ourselves which we do not utilize well enough! We do not use well our fantasy, the heart, the mind, the relationship with our neighbor. We do not utilize specially all the means that Providence has given us for our apostolate. The Lord has put before us treasures, and there are many more within us, treasures which we do not even know how to discover (FSP 55, p. 554).

Let us hope that in this meeting on the apostolate and economy we shall truly discover the treasures that the Lord has put in our hands in order to carry out our mission in the world today, that we may learn to administer well, making our resources bear fruit economically, “one hundred for one”.