

---

# **FR. ALBERIONE'S PEDAGOGY OF INTEGRALITY: *THE "FOUR WHEELS"***

Agatino Gugliara, ssp



**Agatino Gugliara**, a priest of the Society of St. Paul, concentrated his studies on the Fathers of the Church. He is currently the superior of the SSP community in Catania, Italy. He also carries out animations for the Pauline Family and guides courses of spiritual exercises.

## Fr. Alberione's Pedagogy of Integrality: *The "Four Wheels"*

Agatino Gugliara, ssp

The theme I would like to present to you at this Seminar is the image of the "four wheels." In the pedagogy of integrality, this picture is very familiar to us. From the time we entered the Pauline Family, we have always found the four wheels in every sphere of our life—a sign that it is a method that is lived and put into practice.

This method should be understood as an integral part of the "revolution" brought about by our charism. Luigino Bruni, an Italian economist, attempted to write a charismatic history of the economy. Manuals on economy usually include a history of economic institutions. Bruni points out that the charisms in the Church, instead, brought about much more important revolutions. One example among many is that of St. Benedict with his motto: *work and pray*, which in a certain sense lies at the beginning of the development of our "four wheels." Benedict brought about a true revolution in his historical period because he unified dimensions of life that were previously separated (the spiritual life and the life of work). In the Greco-Roman world, those who worked did not study, and those who studied or dedicated themselves to contemplation did not work. Only slaves worked. While a Benedictine monk prayed and studied, he also performed manual labor that allowed a host of important activities to flower around the monastery: the carding and spinning of wool, shoemaking...activities that later gave rise to guilds. In short, in the view of this economist, these early forms of activity were the precursors of our modern industrial society and they sprang from the Benedictine formula, *Pray and work*. Moving forward in time, we can also say (perhaps with amazement) that the first European "banks"—in reality, pawn shops—were set up by the Franciscans, who had made the vow of poverty, because it was the most effective way to save many of the common people from usury.

Charisms, therefore, led to a true revolution in the socio-economic field not only on the level of activities but above all due to the way religious lived. In our modern and post-modern age, it would be very interesting to re-read our style of life from this perspective, since it is founded on the "four wheels" as a "remedy" for a splintered and discordant world.

Another premise: the image of a cart moving ahead on four wheels (an expression of integrality) has its roots in Pauline thought because in St. Paul we find the ideal of the complete person. In fact, 2 Timothy 3:17 says: "so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient (in Latin, *perfectus*), equipped for every good work." Fr. Alberione used this citation as the title of the month-long course of spiritual exercises he guided for the Society of St. Paul in 1960: "*Ut perfectus sit homo Dei*": "So that one who belongs to God will be well-prepared, well-equipped." Paul does not mean *perfectus* in the sense of being without defects. The word [in Greek, *artios*] means "complete," "ready," "well-equipped." Taking these words of Paul as his point of departure, Fr. Alberione developed the idea of a person who is whole under every aspect. This wholeness derives from being in Christ and its purpose is to continue his mission.

For us, it is significant to reflect on the fact that this idea of personal completeness/wholeness is already expressed by our Founder at the end of his account of the event on which our charism is founded, namely, *the night of light*. Speaking about this experience, which occurred when he was sixteen years old and which we are all very familiar with, Fr. Alberione says almost like a footnote:

His overriding thought was that in view of one's own salvation and in view of a more fruitful apostolate one needs to develop the whole human personality: mind, will and heart.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Alberione, *Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae* [AD], n. 22.

The Founder wanted to place this thought, which he repeated later, alongside the moment in which he received the light of Christ from the sacred Host. Therefore, the need to develop the whole human personality is an aspect we can consider to be an integral part of our founding charism. The whole human personality carrying ahead the [Institute's] mission is obviously connected to the fact that the Master to whom we have handed over our life is an *integral Master*, the whole Christ. The integral development of the whole human personality and an integral spirituality are closely connected. In AD 159, Fr. Alberione notes that various spiritualities have given emphasis to one or another aspect of Christ, and then says:

But if one then moves on to the study of St. Paul, one finds the Disciple whose knowledge of the Divine Master is complete; he lives the whole Christ; he scrutinizes in depth the mysteries of his doctrine, of his heart, of his sanctity, and of his humanity and divinity: he sees him as Healer, Victim, Priest; he presents the whole Christ to us as he had already proclaimed himself to be: Way, Truth and Life.... In this devotion, Jesus Christ completely embraces and conquers the human person.

Precisely because the person is called to live and relate to the integral Christ, Christ himself asks for a complete development of the faculties of the person.

With regard to mission, Fr. Alberione said in a meditation to the Daughters of St. Paul:

You are a supernatural teaching Institute by means of the Apostolate of the Press. May your Institute be complete, that is, may it represent Jesus-Truth through your teaching; Jesus-Way through your practice of the religious virtues, and Jesus-Life through your prayer. In this way, may you represent the whole Master.<sup>2</sup>

We must bring the whole Christ! Obviously this calls for men and women disciples who continue the mission of Christ in a complete way.

This said, we can now better understand the image Fr. Alberione uses of a cart moving ahead on four wheels. AD 100 lists all the elements of this image:

*The whole person* in Jesus Christ, in view of loving God completely by means of one's intelligence, will, heart and physical strength. Nature, grace and vocation: everything is for the apostolate. It is a cart that runs on the four wheels of sanctity, study, apostolate and poverty.

*The whole person*, because the person is grafted onto Christ, who gave himself to us integrally: an integrality that seems to be the will of God for our modern times. (Fr. Alberione does not say this explicitly but it can be intuitively grasped in his thought.) In fact, as he said in our earlier citation, while other spiritualities focused on one or another aspect of Christ, now the Master asks to be represented and lived completely—a sign that our present times really need this.

The image of a cart is very interesting. As Fr. Galaviz rightly underscored,<sup>3</sup> precisely because we are so familiar with the “four-wheel method” and put it into practice, we run the risk at times of not stopping to analyze the four aspects. We fail to take into consideration or else we forget that the image is a unitary one, that the four wheels are the wheels of a single cart. So, first there is the cart—we can't take this for granted—a *cart that moves ahead on four wheels*. But what is this cart? Actually, there is no single answer to this question. In the quote from Alberione cited earlier, we understand that the cart is the Pauline, the whole person, considered in Christ.

In a brief excerpt on education found in the text *Carissimi in S. Paolo*, Fr. Alberione encourages us to apply this image to the human being:

To rebuild the unity of the person. One should see if the cart has four wheels. In this way, a vocation will reach its goal.<sup>4</sup>

Every Pauline, or every vocation called to this mission, must be a whole, complete vocation.

---

<sup>2</sup> FSP34-39, p.482.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Galaviz, *Il “carro” paolino.* *Orientamenti per lo sviluppo integrale dei consacrati paolini secondo gli insegnamenti di don Giacomo Alberione*, Society of St. Paul, Rome, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> *Carissimi in San Paolo* [CISP], p. 131.

In other talks, Fr. Alberione broadens this vision, revealing that the cart is no longer the individual Pauline but the whole Congregation. For the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Daughters of St. Paul, he used the image of the cart in a collective sense:

The Congregation is like a cart that moves ahead on four wheels: spirit, study, apostolate and poverty. This is the cart that brings the Gospel to souls and on which we must remain if we are to do this.<sup>5</sup>

See how the picture has changed? From the cart that is us, to the cart that is our religious family—a cart on which we are perched and which enables to move ahead so as to carry out our evangelizing mission.

Speaking to the Apostoline Sisters in 1957, Fr. Alberione underscored that the whole Pauline Family is this cart: “We and the whole Pauline Family are like a cart that has four wheels, that is to say, the spiritual part, the intellectual part, the apostolic part and the formative part.” In this citation lies both the Pauline as an individual and our whole reality as a Family, to which each of us must contribute personally so that our mission will continue. The two aspects complete each other. The Founder said this explicitly:

May everyone move ahead under all four aspects, as we were taught ...all making their particular contribution of spiritual, intellectual and physical strength so that the journey of the Congregation will be sure and swift, knowing that every contribution sanctifies and elevates and is a charity that multiplies merits.<sup>6</sup>

Fr. Alberione also says that this cart moves ahead *balanced* on its four wheels: *balanced* on them. The word conveys a sense of stability: the four wheels serve to give stability to the cart. It is obvious that if we remove a wheel from a cart, it will be unbalanced. Therefore we must consider the aspect of *balance*. For Fr. Alberione, balance is one of the most important elements [of the cart]. By attending to every aspect of life, a Pauline lives in a balanced way.

In a talk to Superiors (General, provincial and local), Primo Maestro recommends that they make a self-examination and provide for all four parts:

It is relatively easy to focus on and promote the progress of one or two parts [of the cart]. But it is complex to see to it that all four of its wheels move ahead in unison. In order to do this, prayer, advice and reflection are needed so as to appoint well-balanced persons to offices of greater responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

A person who is balanced, therefore, rests firmly on all the aspects of life. When one part is neglected, the result is imbalance. One wheel is not enough [too enable the cart to move ahead] and if one of the four wheels is missing, this lack cannot be overlooked.

For Fr. Alberione, this was also a criteria for vocational discernment:

Knowledge is not the only requirement of a vocation. Neither is it the only requirement of a top-rate theologian, apologist or polished and fascinating writer.

Therefore it is not enough that a person is well-equipped in just one aspect of life. Here is another example, using a complementary image:

One wall, even though it might be a main wall (like knowledge), does not constitute a house.<sup>8</sup>

A single wall—even though it might be a main one—does not make a house. What is important is that the house be complete, that is to say, what is important is that the candidate have a unified life and cultivate this unity more and more.

The other aspect is that our cart *moves ahead* on its four wheels. That is to say, the cart is not at a standstill. It is in motion; it is dynamic. And its movement must of course be synchronized. If Fr. Alberione were speaking today, I wonder if he would use the image of an automobile... It is not by chance that when wheels are put on an automobile or when one of its wheels is changed, the the

---

<sup>5</sup> FSP54, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> CISP, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup> CISP, p. 169:

<sup>8</sup> CISP, p. 131.

vehicle has to then be tested for alignment and balance. In this way, all the wheels will move together smoothly, thus ensuring that the car is stable and does not jolt or swerve. Therefore, harmony among the wheels is important also when it comes to the movement of the cart. Just as we must be firmly balanced on the four wheels, so too those wheels must ensure smooth movement. Harmony is a sign of the integration of the various aspects of life, which enables the Institute, the Pauline Family and its individual members to move ahead well. A lack of harmony puts the movement of the cart at risk.

It is also clear that movement implies a *goal*: we are moving in the direction pointed out to us by Christ. The aspect of movement reminds us that our holiness is not something static. It is dynamic. I'm sure we all remember how strongly our Founder insisted on this. In his work *Sanctification of the Mind*, he reminds us of the need to *make progress*:

Saint is not someone who is exhausted, worn out, without energy—a semi-conscious person who does not know how to take part in life.... A saint is not someone tightly wrapped up in him/herself but a person who never stops growing. His/her coat of arms is: *Proficiebat!* (*Move ahead!*). Holiness is life, movement, nobility!<sup>9</sup>

To make progress, to move ahead, is one of the principal aspects of our life; it is essential to it. To stop, to allow ourselves to be blocked, is a sign that something is dying out.

But this movement has a very specific beginning and direction. With regard to this, Fr. Alberione helps us understand that it is God who moves/takes action well before anything we might do. He is the origin of our movement. In 1957, the Founder said to the Apostoline Sisters: “This cart is God alone. He put it in motion and propels it forward. Our imperfections, deficiencies and shortcomings put spokes between the wheels, causing them to grind to a halt.”

Even before making it a command on the ethical level—that is, we *have to* move ahead—Fr. Alberione prompts us to reflect on the fact that the protagonist of this movement is God. It is God who set us in motion; it is God who placed us in time to continue a mission and he is its source. Naturally it is up to us to ensure that this movement continues, that it aims at a precise goal, that it remains on track and is carried out smoothly. Because without this harmony we run the risk of deviating. In fact, one of the problems of movement is that of “jerks and jolts”:

The four wheels of the cart must move in unison, without jolting and without jeopardizing the cargo they are transporting.<sup>10</sup>

Jolts are a sign that there is an obstacle (either of our own making or one that suddenly turns up on our path) or that the four wheels are not properly balanced.

It is obvious that the image used by Primo Maestro suggests that the cart is a *transportation vehicle*. This means that it must not only be well balanced and able to move but also that it carries something. What good is an empty cart? And the content of our cart is the Gospel! Our cart takes the Gospel to other people, so its “cargo” is considerable. And precisely because it is such an important cargo, we have to be careful. Getting stuck is not only a personal problem; if our cart grinds to a halt, so does the divulgation of the Gospel. Once more, Paul lies at the basis of this thought: he is the Apostle who lived in such a way that the Gospel would race ahead; he was the Apostle who never stopped because he knew he was an instrument of God’s action in the world.

Therefore, there is a risk that the cart might get stuck and come to a halt, as well as the risk that the whole vehicle might go over the side of the precipice if it is moving awkwardly or in the wrong direction.

As you may have noticed, I have not stopped to reflect on the individual wheels of the cart, which would have been a very interesting discourse. Instead, I have concentrated my attention on the cart as a whole, which is also very important. The Itinerary drawn up for this year’s courses of spiritual exercises for the Pauline Family here in Italy is centered on *Jesus Truth* and it includes a

---

<sup>9</sup> *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ut perfectus sit homo Dei* [UPS], II, n. 117.

quote from Fr. Alberione that struck me deeply. In it, he reflects on the theme of divine Providence, linking it to the four wheels:

Divine Providence reveals itself to us in the areas of spirit, study, apostolate and poverty. This means that the Lord gives us the graces we need to become holy, to acquire the knowledge necessary to produce helpful editions, and to support our members and activities.<sup>11</sup>

Primo Maestro's vision of divine Providence was much wider than ours. We limit ourselves to believing that the Lord will provide our daily bread and the things we need to continue our mission.... Instead, divine Providence encompasses everything and gives the various elements an order of precedence. And Fr. Alberione declares that the first wealth we have received is the means of grace, which take precedence over economic goods. He then goes on to say:

The Pious Society of St. Paul has many devotional practices and those who carry them out in spirit and truth will reach sanctity. [...] Abandoning some or all of them means closing one's hand to divine Providence.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the first means of divine Providence is all our practices of piety, which we have in abundance and which we sometimes take for granted. In second place [in the order of precedence], Fr. Alberione mentions what we call today "human resources," that is, all the gifts God has given us, all the skills we have acquired through study and personal application:

Those who sincerely commit themselves to study—whether they be teachers or students—and take advantage of every chance to learn, will be favored by the Lord. They will receive the grace to understand things well, to retain that knowledge and to communicate it to others fruitfully: divine Providence in knowledge!<sup>13</sup>

And with regard to the apostolate, he says:

Divine Providence pours itself out stupendously on those who dedicate themselves with zeal to the apostolates of the Word and the editions. Even though they might not be particularly gifted, preachers and writers will accomplish an effective work in souls and in society.<sup>14</sup>

In his order of precedence, Fr. Alberione puts economic resources in third place. These resources are to be acquired first of all through our apostolate because that is the primary and privileged context in which divine Providence is manifested. And finally, everything given to us by Providence—whether it be through practical assistance or offerings (and sometimes this takes place in mysterious ways!)—is so that the Pauline Family can continue its mission.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Anima e corpo per il Vangelo*, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*