

**PRIMA MAESTRA THECLA  
IN THE TESTIMONY  
OF FR. JAMES ALBERIONE**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY  
OF FOUNDATION OF THE PAULINE FAMILY

The text *Abundantes Divitiae*, written by Fr. Alberione for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of foundation of the Pauline Family, includes this testimony about Maestra Thecla in its appendix. The numbers at the beginning of each paragraph correspond to the numbers of the AD text.<sup>1</sup>

**PRIMA MAESTRA**

Rome, 14.04.1954

232. Primo Maestro had confided and proposed the idea of forming a feminine religious Family alongside the masculine one just begun. Several good young women were recommended to him, but they were not well known to him and were no longer very young. He quickly discovered that, just as for the first Family so for the second, some persons who entered did not have a vocation to the true religious life.

233. And yet it concerned what was most essential: the religious life; intelligence and love for the specific apostolate would be developed gradually in those who were docile to the voice of God. This concern lasted several months.... Then the seminarians and those already united [to the project] as spiritual cooperators celebrated the month of May, asking the Lord to provide for the feminine Family. At the end of the month, he was told: “In Castagnito d’Alba there is a young woman from a good family, who would do well because of her piety, intelligence, docility and goodness.... But there are two problems: her poor health and the fact that she has only attended the village school.” “Let her come,” replied Primo Maestro. “The Lord will give her sufficient health and the wisdom necessary for her office: ‘When the Lord wants [something]....’”



234. There were obstacles, but they were overcome especially with the help of the seminarian (today parish priest of Barolo), who is the brother of the young woman who is now the Prima Maestra of the Daughters of St. Paul. The manner in which events unfolded clearly revealed the hand of God.

She [Teresa Merlo] entered and the first thing she did was fall ill, but she had already aroused in everyone an almost reverential esteem. So everyone renewed the commitment with the Lord contained in our *Pact or Secret of Success*, which came to our aid on important occasions and for big needs. Some continued to object: “She will give her all to the new Family but it will be very little, if she doesn’t end up being a burden because of her health.”

But the *Pact* was renewed again and again...and the whole matter showed how the Lord works almost imperceptibly but effectively, and that goodness and sound judgment outweigh physical sturdiness and intellectual preparation.



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<sup>1</sup> *Abundantes Divitiae*, Pauline Editions, Rome 1985, nn. 232-239; *Considerate la vostra vocazione*, Pauline Editions, Rome 1990, Circular Letter n. 210.

235. In the beginning the Family of the Daughters of St. Paul encountered quite a few stumblingblocks...but everything served to win for Teresa (as she was called) the affection of the Daughters and the esteem of everyone. So true was this that when it was announced one day to the by-now large number of young women who had gathered together (those who did not have a true vocation to the religious life having left) that she had been chosen to be their superior, there was unanimous approval.

236. Her progress in piety, the religious life, docility, love for the Institute, for the apostolate and for souls steadily increased. The work she does today would be too much for even a physically robust person: it is all a gift of God.

She was a constant help to Primo Maestro:



1) in giving a good formation to the Daughters of St. Paul, who started from zero and who have attained a spiritual, intellectual and apostolic formation that is acceptable and operative everywhere: in simplicity, a supernatural spirit and quickness;

2) in launching them on their specific apostolate, an unusual one for that time, and difficult [to understand] according to human reasoning. And yet, writers, speakers, those involved in the technical sector, in diffusion and in the fields of cinema and radio, were formed under her guidance.

237. 3) in overcoming problems, which were many, some due to persons, some due to the financial situation, some due to misunderstandings, some due to the times, some due to sickness and death, etc.

4) in establishing the Pious Disciples and the Pastorelle Sisters: she played an important role in the birth, growth and approval of both Congregations; she supported and advised them; she gave them financial help, she made sacrifices for them and has earned the gratitude and trust of both Families.

238. Her example and goodness made a greater impact than her authority. She balanced gentleness with firmness, prudence with fortitude. The Lord truly supported her physically and guided her with supernatural light as Primo Maestro saw for himself on many journeys [they made together] to visit the Houses.

Thus the Daughters of St. Paul grew in number, houses and initiatives, and have spread to about twenty countries.

239. In her, the Daughters of St. Paul possess a twofold book: that of her exemplary daily life, first of all; then a second, printed, book could be written concerning her practices and frequent conferences to the Sisters, her many general and particular advices, her writings published in the circular, *Regina Apostolorum*, etc. All together, these would form a large and impressive book that would be a real treasure for all the Daughters of St. Paul, especially those far away and those who, having been sent to other countries, are not always able to approach her, or who come in contact with her only briefly during her visits.