



# Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - September 2013

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## EDUCATION AND THE NEW EVANGELISATION

### 1 – The new mission to evangelise and the contemporary urgent social need

This short text is an effort to stimulate reflection on the relationship between the proposed "new evangelisation", Pallottine thought and the needs of contemporary society in many different areas, particularly in the fields of education and youth in the rekindling of Christian faith.

Many are baptised, but still need greater discernment and reflection on the foundations of their Christian convictions; beyond this, the spreading of the values present in the Gospel should permeate the practice of the Catholic educator and faithful, thus allowing the formation of youth consistent with a life plan of love and charity, a clear necessity in our days - this includes their individual mission as Christians along with the dimension of historical-social needs. *International meetings for youth, pilgrimages to shrines of ancient and recent origin and the flowering of movements and ecclesial associations are clear signs of a continuing religious sense. In this context, the "new evangelization" requires that the Church know how to discern the signs of the Spirit at work, addressing and educating people to the Spirit's manifestations, in light of a mature, informed faith "until attaining the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13) [1].*

### 2 – Revive faith, a Pallottine mission

The proposal to revive faith in Christ calls us to carry out actions inspired by the teachings of the Gospel. This is a special mission for formal and informal educators who have faith in the Word as the foundation of their lives, the Gospel as a reference point and the example of Saint Vincent Pallotti as an example of apostolic action. Furthermore, it is fundamental to ask ourselves: to what extent do our plans and actions satisfy effectively the needs of our students and of the other people involved? What is our concrete commitment to the new proposals and platforms for the "new evangelisation"? Do our proposals really face up to

the need to carry on the process of evangelisation according to the specific cultural characteristics and realities of every situation in which we are involved?

The Synod Fathers, who gave the most recent guidelines for new evangelisation, affirm: *"Everywhere indeed we feel the need to revive a faith that risks eclipse in cultural contexts that hinders its taking root in persons and its presence in society, the clarity of its content and the coherence of its fruits. It is not a matter of starting again, but of entering into the long path of proclaiming the Gospel with the apostolic courage of Paul who would go so far as to say "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16) [2].*

These proposals are fully in harmony with the desires of Pallotti - the need for instruction and for missionaries of Jesus as instruments to bring people close to their "primary origin" through the Gospel and through charity. Every Christian, each in his or her own time, has experienced and will experience the challenges posed to missionaries and pastors. *Saint Vincent Pallotti, founder of the Union of Catholic Apostolate (OCCC IV, pp. 1-3), has left us the brief formula "revive faith and rekindle charity" as a spiritual heritage, which he saw as a remedy for the problems of faith and of charity in his time. He realised that the faith of his contemporary Christians had become insipid and that their charity had grown cold. In order to help the Church to face this problem, he saw the urgency of reviving faith and rekindling charity among Catholics.* Thus, like Pallotti, we Catholic and Pallottine educators, engaged directly or indirectly in educational processes, must reflect, question ourselves and renew our daily practical actions - often an arduous task but, however, an urgent social necessity. What are we doing each day to revive our faith and our charity and that of others?

### **3 – A "new world" and a new evangelisation**

The term "new evangelisation" has been used from the end of the 1970s. Pope John Paul II directed the pastors of the Church to act in an innovative way according to the concrete needs of the people with whom they were in contact. This period in which the proposal was elaborated was characterised by profound and constant changes, which gave rise to many tensions. From the moment the new evangelisation was announced, it was clear that it was in harmony with the Second Vatican Council. The present day exhibits particular characteristics when compared with the 1970s and 1980s; however, the need for action to strengthen faith and a life enlightened by the Word, in this world of conflict which is seeking answers, seems urgent to all of us educators. If what is written in the last

lines above cannot be considered a rule, it is still evident that it points to the urgent need for a reflection on the actions and practices which have compromised the quality not just of evangelisation, but even of human existence itself on our planet, as well as on the best ways and means of communication in the process of contemporary evangelisation.

In periods of transformation and of major questions, the action of Christians in expressing and spreading the Gospel according to the needs of the society in which they are inserted is fundamental. Pallotti, attentive to the Word as a source of inspiration and direction for human existence, is an example of dedication to reviving faith in others in the light of the Gospel. His life story is living proof of his search for the ideal way to revive faith in a changing society. As an apostle, he was faced with the most difficult challenges to living faith in his time, and so it was necessary to rekindle it; this, no doubt, has had a significant influence in the development of the Pallottine apostolate up until today. Christians must be attentive to the guidance of the Church in the project of evangelisation in order to draw close to God. *With the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has rediscovered that the transmission of faith, understood as an encounter with Jesus, takes place through Sacred Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit* [3].

Education plays a fundamental role in revitalising the contemporary process of evangelisation. The Gospel, for Christians not simply the greatest book, but also called to be their fundamental living rule of life, is made present in the human condition and reality and makes concrete the will of Jesus to the extent that Christians and the Christian community allow themselves to be continuously challenged and transformed in the ongoing process of dialogue with the living Word. The guidelines for the new evangelisation are very clear on the need to welcome the Word of God, to revive faith in Christ, as fundamental pillars of the Christian life. For Pallotti, reviving faith means exercising Christian charity with commitment - it is in charity that God becomes visible.

What we call new evangelisation does not provide an objective practical manual or theory regarding what should be done or how the process of evangelisation should be implemented; nevertheless, it does indicate a clear path which is no less challenging for those engaged as leaders in this process of evangelisation. We are all invited to revive love for Jesus Christ in an intense form through the Word, through faith and through the exercising of charity.

Contemporary society clearly indicates the need to adopt new methods and offer new experiences in spreading theory regarding Christian values and in concrete actions within and beyond the traditional educational sphere. In this sense, it is the responsibility of Christians to reflect on the quality of charity and how this can bear witness to our personal relationship with Christ in our everyday lives, since Christianity particularly proposes personal friendship with Jesus and with each person of the Blessed Trinity.

Guaranteeing an effective education in faith and charity to young people is one of the greatest challenges which the worldwide Catholic community must face; without doubt, this moment demands an innovative, perhaps even "revolutionary", spirit, but without losing the essence of the teachings of Christ and all of their historical and social dimensions.

### **Part of the official prayer for WYD**

Oh Holy Spirit, Love of the Father and of the Son, with the splendour of Your Truth and the fire of Your Love, shed Your Light upon all young people so that... they may bring faith, hope and charity to the four corners of the earth, becoming great builders of a culture of life and peace and catalysts of a new world.

Amen!

[1] *XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Lineamenta "The new evangelisation for the transmission of the Christian faith", n. 8.*

[2] *Message to the people of God from the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, October 26th 2012, n. 2.*

[3] *Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation - Dei Verbum, 7s.*

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