



## E-BULLETIN #89

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 167

### what exactly is the Union? [1]

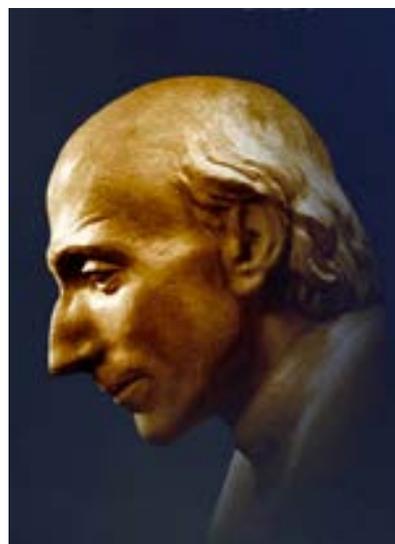
What exactly is the Union of Catholic Apostolate? Not an unfamiliar question! It continues to be asked all over the Pallottine world and should not frighten or annoy us. It is an indication of the greatness of the prophetic inspiration of St Vincent. For the same reason, we do not so easily come across experts on Pallotti who can answer all questions with absolute clarity and authority. Rather we are all in the process of discovering, learning and experiencing. This is our responsibility and it cannot be passed on to others.

#### I UNION OF CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE: A CALL TO ONGOING DISCOVERY

Many documents describe the essential elements of the Union. Its nature is beautifully expressed in the General Statutes: *"The Union of Catholic Apostolate, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a communion of the faithful who, united with God and with one another in accordance with the charism of St Vincent Pallotti, promote the co-responsibility of all the baptized to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and in the world, and to bring all to unity in Christ."*

However, the vast majority of members continue to give different answers to this question. The following are *some* of the answers which contain elements of truth but, perhaps, not the complete truth:

1. ***UAC means empowering laity in the Church:*** But the Union cannot be limited to laity alone. UAC cannot grow and flourish, in my opinion, without the ample support of the Core Communities of the Union.
2. ***UAC means SAC:*** Without doubt, the SAC has the most vital role to play in the realization of the Union. But SAC alone is not the Union.
3. ***SAC members, Pallottine sisters and lay persons together constitute UAC:*** While these three components are important for the Union, there is something more to it. It is a gift in service of the Church.
4. ***Lay people who have made an apostolic commitment constitute the Union:*** Some tend to think of the goal of the Union as having as many lay persons as possible, who have made the



apostolic commitment. It is an important part of the Union but is not everything. These persons should be enabled to make their commitment to the mission of the Church, always inspired by the spirit of our Founder.

5. ***Establishment of structures as envisaged in the General Statutes is the primary task of the Union:*** It is necessary to establish the structures as mentioned in the General Statutes, GCCs, NCCs, Assemblies, Congresses and Secretariats etc. While structures are important, the primary aim of the Union is to form genuine apostles of Jesus
  
6. ***UAC as an apostolic force in the Church:*** The core of Pallottine charism seems to be deeply related to the key word "apostle". The God of infinite love and mercy sends Jesus as apostle of the Eternal Father. We are all called to imitate this Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Therefore, the entire life of Jesus is to be the only rule for all Pallottines. To be authentic apostles of Jesus is the vocation and mission of each one of us. As Pallotti himself says, *"God has commanded each one to procure the eternal salvation of his neighbour; and since in carrying out such a precept we must imitate Jesus Christ who is the Apostle of the Eternal Father, therefore the life of Jesus Christ, which is his apostolate, should be the model of the apostolate of everyone; and as all are called, rather obliged to imitate Jesus Christ, so all, in proportion to their condition and state, are called to the apostolate..."* This was also the message given by Pope John Paul II in his homily at the church of San Salvatore in Onda in Rome on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1986: *"Continue to increase your commitment so that that which Vincent Pallotti prophetically announced, and which the Second Vatican Council authoritatively confirmed, may become a happy reality, and that all Christians become authentic apostles of Christ in the Church and in the world!"*

In conclusion we can say that the UAC is not an end in itself. It is a means, an instrument, a "way of being" and living Christian discipleship. UAC tries to create an apostolic force in the Church, of authentic apostles of Jesus, through the revival of faith and rekindling of charity in the hearts of everyone. It is not just a question of forming a separate Pallottine group; it is a spiritually and apostolically animated group of persons who, in turn, work ceaselessly to realize the apostolic vocation and mission of the faithful in the Church and the world. We must consider the following as **indispensable elements** for the realization of the charismatic vision of our Founder.

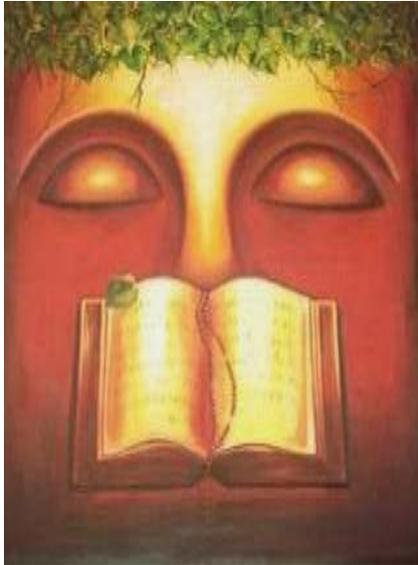
### **1. Interpreting the charism according to the signs of the times**

A charism is relevant to the extent that it is able to respond to the needs of the time. Pallotti's prophetic vision emerged as a response to the need to "revive faith and rekindle charity" in a strongly anticlerical, secular world of his time. We are facing almost exactly the same type of situation in the world today. On the one hand, there is the great need to proclaim the Gospel to the millions who did not have the opportunity to listen to the Good News especially in the continents of Africa and Asia; on the other hand, there is the urgent need to re-evangelize the strongly secular, individualistic Western World which boasts of a Christian culture. There is also the perennial need to reawaken the spirit of charity so that the earthly blessings are shared with the millions of poor and the under-privileged in the world. The situations and needs of the countries, continents and local churches are so totally different and hence the first step should be to discern the signs of the time and respond adequately to them by interpreting and implementing our charism with creativity and courage. This will be the first necessary step to be taken for a "New Evangelization" "ad intra and ad extra."

How can the Pallottine charism be a response to the challenge of "New Evangelization"? Though we have dealt with this question on a number of occasions, we have found relevant answers to it. If we reflect on the person and mission of Pope Francis ever since his election, the obvious response to this question that we get is that it is only by returning to the Jesus we encounter in the gospel and by bearing witness to him that we can become true Christians and apostles.

## 2. Developing more of the contemplative dimension of the UAC

Let us not forget that the Pallottine charism was the fruit of an intense spiritual journey of a saint. Pallotti's writings amply testify to the depth of his spiritual and mystical experiences and to his apostolic commitment. His desire for total transformation into Jesus, the Apostle of the Father was unparalleled in his mystical writings. At times we tend to reduce UAC to some sort of a theological, intellectual or even



juridical construct devoid of such a deep spiritual content. Without having a taste of the spiritual experience of Pallotti, one can hardly understand what we mean by UAC. Hence, the priority should be placed on making a spiritual journey with Pallotti in view of a deeper apostolic commitment in service of God and of humanity. As UAC General Statutes state: "The specific spirituality of the Union is the following of Christ, Apostle of the Eternal Father. In faith and charity, the members of the Union are determined to remain united with the crucified and risen Christ ever present among them (Cf. Mt 18, 20); they strive to imitate his love for the Father and for all persons, seeking to live his life-style and apostolate as perfectly as possible." Returning to the very life of Jesus, living the gospel values in our daily life, is the only way of evangelizing ourselves and the entire Church. It all begins with a personal conversion, the change of hearts, *metanoia*, as Jesus wanted. In fact, the UAC which is marked by communion with God and others can never be realized without concentrating more on the mystical and contemplative dimension of the Pallottine charism.

## 3. Communion as the core of the ecclesial vision underlying the UAC

We all know by now that the Ecclesial model that Pallotti followed was that of communion, participation, a novelty in his own time and a common vision after Vatican II. We are also aware that regardless of the courage and vision of Vatican II, such a model of communion is still a dream in many parts of the world. Hence it has become a pleasant mandate for the Pallottine family to work for the realization of such an Ecclesial model. The parishes are the privileged place for the realization of the Union. In this Ecclesial vision, a parish is the place where each of the faithful is able to realize his apostolic vocation as an apostle of Jesus. Such an Ecclesiology of communion should become the foundation of our personal apostolic mentality, of our communities and of our entire Pallottine Family.

*Are we working towards such an Ecclesiology of communion in all areas of our Pallottine life and apostolate? What will be the effect of such an ecclesial vision on our formation?*

## 4. "Pedagogy of the Cenacle"

One of the urgent needs today is to develop an attractive and practical pedagogy of UAC formation. Perhaps we may have to search for different models of formation, according to the particular situations of countries. But the essential elements will have to remain the same. We can draw inspiration and guidance for UAC formation from the original image of Cenacle presented by our Founder himself. We might rightly call it the "Pedagogy of the Cenacle" or the "Cenacle Model of UAC Formation". The following are some of the elements of this model:

- a) The Holy Spirit, the creative, transforming Spirit, as the principal agent of formation
- b) Mary, Queen of Apostles as the spiritual guide and example
- c) The Upper Room, symbolizes a community of believers gathered together
- d) Listening to the Word of God and breaking the Bread in a spirit of sharing and fraternity
- e) Inner transformation of persons into apostles of Jesus as the transforming experience
- f) Going forth from the Cenacle as apostles and missionaries to bear witness to the Good News

- g) The spirituality and charism of St Vincent Pallotti as the inspiration as well as the spiritual and apostolic foundation. Hence, we can say that the Union of Catholic Apostolate, best exemplified by the Cenacle, is the crucible where apostles of Jesus are formed and sent out. The Cenacle can and should become the nucleus of Pallottine formation at all levels.

The present meeting is held precisely to face the challenge of formation of the Union members. We need to learn from each other and enrich other through these days of sharing of our experiences in this field. Hence the question is: *how is UAC formation done in various parts of the Pallottine world?*

## 5. Missionary Dynamism

The apostles never remained enclosed in the Cenacle. Transformed from within, they went forth to the ends of the world to proclaim the Good News. The Cenacle experience has a strong missionary dynamism; it impels one from within. In fact charity by its very nature urges one to go out of oneself towards God and others. Hence our motto: *"the love of God urges on"*.

If the UAC is to become attractive and relevant as a means of formation for authentic Christian discipleship, it has to be followed up with concrete missionary commitments. Otherwise it will never be more than pious thinking. Christian commitment is measured by concrete actions of charity, as mentioned in the Last Judgment. "I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was stranger and you made me welcome..." (Mt 25, 31-46). These conditions relate to the most ordinary and bare necessities of life. It is this realization that prompted Pallotti to become all things to all. His prayer is also equally concrete. "I would like to become food to feed the hungry, clothing to cover up the naked, drink to quench the thirst of the thirsty..."

There are so many needs in the world. There are cries for help all over. The nature of the needs might differ slightly from place to place but the human condition as a whole remains the same. There is so much spiritual poverty in the developed world; there is so much human brokenness and material need in the developed and developing world; there is terrible material poverty in many of the poor countries. Perennial wars only add to the misery. A spirituality that does not care for the human person created in God's own image and likeness cannot be authentic. Therefore every member of the Union, if he or she wants to be an authentic apostle of Jesus, will have to do what the Master himself did. There is no mission other than the mission of Jesus. Living the Pallottine spirituality means being filled with the spirit of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. This means a constant awareness of being sent, living for the other. Hence let us remember that, without the spirit of mission, we are destined to stagnate and die.

*What are the different missionary commitments that the members of the Union undertake in different parts of the Pallottine world?*

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