

THE ECCLESIASTICAL AND SOCIAL COMPROMISE FOR THE UAC¹

IL COMPROMESSO ECCLESIALE E SOCIALE PER L'UAC

Jacob Nampudakam²

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, hearty welcome to this inaugural Eucharistic celebration of the fifth Ordinary General Assembly of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Let us thank God for the safe journey that we made from distant lands. There is no better word than “family” to describe the nature of our group: a family of spiritual sons and daughters of St. Vincent Pallotti, gathered together this morning to listen to the word of God and break the bread together, in the spirit of the Cenacle.

The present Assembly deals with some key words and concepts related to the Pallottine charism: communion, collaboration and coresponsibility. The diverse Pallottine resource materials and the General Statutes of the Union explain very well these key concepts and hence there is no need to repeat them here. The Church has acknowledged and accepted several times the authenticity and relevance of our charism for the Church and for our times and hence the task before us is to nourish and nurture it.

From my little personal experience, I wish to point out four aspects that could foster and strengthen the ecclesial communion among us, the core of our charism.

First of all, it is to be remembered that God alone is the source of communion. The Blessed Trinity is the most perfect example for it. Hence, we have no other option but to be rooted in the life of the Most Holy Trinity. The more God-centred we are in reality, the more the life of Jesus becomes the fundamental rule of our life and apostolate, the greater will be our spiritual communion. The Union is not just a

¹ It's the homily for the opening Mass of the V General Assembly of the Union of Catholic Apostolate (Rome, 24-27 January 2018) that has been said by the General Rector of the SAC on 24th January 2018.

² Don Jacob Nampudakam è Rettore Generale della Società dell'Apostolato Cattolico.

social gathering; it is the gathering of the disciples of Jesus in the Cenacle. Hence, we say with our Founder: “My God, my All forever”.

Secondly, we realise that collaboration will be most fruitful when we are able to understand and respect the diversity of vocations and gifts and use them for the common good of the Church. A lay person has a respective vocation in the Church; a religious sister has her legitimate place in the Church and so also an ordained minister. Consecrated individuals and communities too have their place in the Union. At times I find a certain exaggerated effort from some within the Union to establish a rigid equality of all the members, bordering at times even on ideological considerations. By being the image and likeness of God and as baptised Christians we all share the same dignity and responsibility in the Church, also as emphasised by our Founder. But equality does not mean that a man should become a woman, a lay person must take the place of an ordained minister or a religious sister should act like a lay person. If such efforts are made, that can only be expression of insecurity and a low self-image regarding one’s own vocation and state of life. The Union has a complex juridical composition and hence overlapping and overstepping into the rights and responsibilities of the various components of the Union can only lead to confusions and conflicts. As St. Paul says, “there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all” (1 Cor. 12:4). No single component alone makes the Union; all of us together, form that apostolic force intended by our Founder.

Thirdly, the Union of Catholic Apostolate is best understood when we know and experience the spiritual and mystical itinerary of our holy Founder. Starting with his experience of the infinite love and mercy of God, there is an entire spiritual journey to make for anyone interested to be part of his spiritual family. We need to return to his original writings if we wish to absorb the spirit of Pallotti. This means, above all, we need to kneel and pray, and spend hours in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and must engage in divine contemplation of the most divine model of perfection: Jesus Christ. These words might sound old fashioned and not in tune with the tenets of a modern way of living Christian life. Yet the simple truth is, as our Founder showed through his life, only a holy life, modelled after the life of Christ, bears fruits for the Church, whatever may be our state of life. “Let our life be always at the foot of the Cross, for in Him, we shall find ever greater happiness”, prayed St. Vincent.

Fourthly, the Union is a public association of all the faithful in service of the mission of the Church. As Can. 298 §1 states: “In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavour to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit”. Following the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti, all of us have received the mission to promote the co-responsibility to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and the world, bringing all to unity in Christ (cfr. General Statutes, n.1). It is here we are united, as an apostolic force in the Church, as missionary disciples of Jesus. If I may confess my conviction, we have no time to focus on our self-interests but we need to listen to the cry of God’s people anywhere in the world. Endless meetings, discussions and planning will serve very little if we are not ready to dirty our hands and get into the actual field of the Church and the world. The Union is no luxury club but a group of the faithful associating themselves in service of the mission of the Church, concretely and not in merely in words.

In these last 30 days, I have visited two demanding missionary areas of our Society. The first one was in Bolivia, with extremely high mountains, treacherous roads and extreme climatic conditions. I was particularly touched not only by the works of our confreres but also by the Sisters of the Istituto Mariano di San Vincenzo Pallotti. I visited most of their communities and was amazed by the work they do for the little children and the youth. Life is hard and risky but the joy of the Gospel is found in abundance. Secondly, I visited our Province Lumen Christi in North India. Again, life is hard in many ways. Twenty-one thousand children study in our 28 schools, all the schools named after St. Vincent Pallotti. Besides, there are also hundreds of children in our boardings and hostels. Similar works are done also by the Pallottine sisters all over India. Once again, we realise that it is only the radical living of the Gospel that brings joy and apostolic fruitfulness. For me, the Union means very little if it is not engaged in the mission of compassionate Jesus.

Declaring the World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis said: “Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth” (1

Jn 3:18). These words of the Apostle John voice an imperative that no Christian may disregard. The seriousness with which the “beloved disciple” hands down Jesus’ command to our own day is made even clearer by the contrast between the empty words so frequently on our lips and the concrete deeds against which we are called to measure ourselves. Love has no alibi. Whenever we set out to love as Jesus loved, we have to take the Lord as our example; especially when it comes to loving the poor. God’s way of loving is well-known, and John spells it out clearly. It stands on two pillars: God loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:10.19), and he loved us by giving completely of himself, even to laying down his life (cf. 1 Jn 3:16)” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017, 1).

The Holy Father continues in these words: “At the heart of all the many concrete initiatives carried out on this day should always be prayer. Let us not forget that the ‘Our Father’ is the prayer of the poor. Our asking for bread expresses our entrustment to God for our basic needs in life. Everything that Jesus taught us in this prayer expresses and brings together the cry of all who suffer from life’s uncertainties and the lack of what they need. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he answered in the words with which the poor speak to our one Father, in whom all acknowledge themselves as brothers and sisters. The Our Father is a prayer said in the plural: the bread for which we ask is ‘ours’, and that entails sharing, participation and joint responsibility. In this prayer, all of us recognize our need to overcome every form of selfishness, in order to enter into the joy of mutual acceptance” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017, 8).

The Holy Father exhorted all the clerics in these words “I ask my brother Bishops, and all the priests and deacons who by their vocation have the mission of supporting the poor, together with all consecrated persons and all associations, movements and volunteers everywhere, to help make this World Day of the Poor a tradition that concretely contributes to evangelization in today’s world. This new World Day of the poor, therefore, should become a powerful appeal to our consciences as believers, allowing us to grow in the conviction that sharing with the poor enables us to understand the deepest truth of the Gospel. The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practise in our lives the essence of the

Gospel” (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, First World Day of the Poor, 19 November 2017, 9).

We are all poor in one way or the other. It is a spirituality of the poor, of the missionary disciples of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, that will make us equal and dignified before God. If we follow such a spirituality, there will be no struggle to look for a place to sit in the right or left side of Jesus in his Kingdom, as the mother of Saints James and John desired; in this case, there would be no fear of UAC becoming a third order of the three Core Communities of the Union nor should these Communities fear of losing their identity and juridical autonomy. In all these, St. Vincent Pallotti, the Roman priest, the mystic and prophet of communion must be our model and inspiration. May Mary, Queen of the Apostles, St. Vincent Pallotti, our Blessed Martyrs and Blessed Elizabeth Sanna intercede with God and obtain all the necessary grace needed for a spiritually and apostolically fruitful General Assembly of the Pallottine Family. We pray together: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and renew the face of the earth. Amen.