

## **UAC IS THE AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF THE CHARISM OF OUR FOUNDER<sup>1</sup>**

*L'UAC È L'ESPRESSIONE AUTENTICA  
DEL CARISMA DEL NOSTRO FONDATORE*

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I wish to share with you some of my positive experiences that I had during the visitations to different Provinces and Regions, since October 2017. I only mention a few of them, mostly within the Society. Then I will make some general observations regarding the UAC. I can appear to be centred mostly on the SAC, presumptuous or even a little heretical for one or the other. After 40 years of life as a Pallottine, I should have the courage to share with you what I think about our Founder and his charism. My experiences in the last General Assembly of the Union and the events after that only strengthened my resolve to share these points.

### **1. Recent Positive Experiences**

- a) The demanding missionary works of our confreres in Bolivia, by reaching out to the needy people of this country, are very much in tune with the invitation of Pope Francis to move out to the peripheries. Having visited many communities of the Sisters of Marian Institute in Bolivia, I was deeply impressed by the sister's apostolic works, especially in caring for the needy children and youth. The more radical our living of the Gospel, the greater the joy in our consecrated life.
- b) The missionary commitment of the confreres of the Lumen Christi Province, India, and especially their works in the fields of education and care of children are very impressive. I also

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<sup>1</sup> The report was presented during the meeting of the General Coordination Council of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, Rome, 21<sup>st</sup> april 2018.

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came across many lay members of the Union who are prayerful, service-minded and humble, especially those attached to our retreat centre Shanti Niwas, Bilaspur.

- c) The commitment of the confreres of Santa Maria Province to the formation of laity in the spirit of our Founder throughout the Province is remarkable. There are some members who have made their apostolic commitment, but the primary focus of such a formation, both for most of the confreres as well as for the lay people, is to form them into good disciples of Jesus, rather than enlisting them as formal members of the Union. This is a big debate in many parts of the world. We have thousands of people who live the spirit of our Founder in South America and make themselves active apostles in the parish. I am sure St. Vincent Pallotti is very happy with that, since his mission was always in service of the Church. However, we must also make efforts to invite people to become formal members of the Union.
- d) A number of Symposiums were organised in many countries (entities) in connection with the Bicentenary of the priestly ordination of St. Vincent Pallotti: Major Seminary, Mysore; Hochschule, Germany; Konstancin, Poland; and many more. There have been good responses from all the Provinces and Regions for this jubilee year.
- e) Good reception of my Book: “The Spirit of the Priesthood according to Saint Vincent Pallotti”. A couple of other publications are underway. The doctorate thesis of Fr. Tomy Philip with the theme Pallotti as Spiritual Director is also a great contribution. I am personally asking the confreres studying in various Universities in Rome to deal with various Pallottine themes, including those found in the UAC General Statutes.
- f) The Society is strongly committed to establishing new missions in service of needy people of God anywhere in the world. The latest missions founded or in the process of founding are: Sri Lanka, Burkina Faso, Siberia (Russia) and Uganda. Implanting the charism of our Founder in a new country would require a lot of blessings from God, personnel and materials resources. Often

it requires a couple of years of work before a mission is established. That is how the Society is present in as many as 56 countries today.

- g) The celebrations of the Bicentenary of the priestly ordination of St. Vincent are planned for representatives of newly ordained priests from various entities in Rome from 15-19 May 2018. The important events are open to all members of the Union.

## 2. Challenges

I wish to share with you some personal impressions on the way the Union is moving ahead presently. I made my first consecration before my Provincial in the Society of the Catholic Apostolate in 1978. I love my Founder and long to do everything possible to make him and his spirituality and charism known and loved by God's people. I have been working in the General Administration of the Society since the last 17 years. Hence there is some experience, passion and responsibility in dealing with this topic.

- a) The UAC is the authentic expression of the charism of our Founder, as the Church and various Popes have pronounced it unequivocally. The General Statutes of the Union lay the spiritual, apostolic and juridical foundation. In light of lived experiences, there are certain numbers of the Statutes which need to be evaluated and updated, according to established norms. At times, any talk about evaluating and updating a particular number of the Statutes is met with trepidation as though we are almost trying to change something of the Sacred Scripture. All Statutes and Constitutions require updating according to the needs of the time. We had the courage to change something in the Law SAC even regarding UAC. Doing so is not a sign of weakness but showing flexibility based on reality and the work of the Spirit.
- b) UAC is basically an "International Public Association of the faithful" in the Church. We associate ourselves for realising the mission of the Church; something mentioned clearly in the Statutes. But I have the impression that many, including myself, had

not understood it. It was Fr. Denilson Geraldo, our Jurist who explained it to us. This is going to be a theme for our Provincial/Regional Assemblies and important meetings, as far as possible. This will be a theme also for the forthcoming meeting of Major Superiors in Rwanda in October 2018.

- c) The SAC Law states: “The Society endeavours to revive the faith of the entire people of God, to re-enkindle their love and to spread these virtues throughout the whole world...”(Law SAC, n.2). The SAC works for the entire people of God, and will associate with other members who are imbued with genuine apostolic spirit, following the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti. I am sure that the Sisters and the entire Union is supposed to do it. I say this because at times some speak as though the Core Communities do not exist or do not have the right to exist on its own. The SAC, as a Society of Apostolic Life within the Church, is not existing only to look after a few people who claim to belong to the Union. The Gospel and the people of God all over the world are the principle beneficiaries of our apostolic and missionary works. Neither is the UAC an end in itself. It is an instrument, a way of being and auxiliary body of the Church. It is not that the primary mission of the Core Communities is to form laity; we are at the service of the Gospel and entire people of God. In this work, we become partners, provided our aim is the mission of the Church. UAC means, priests, religious and laity working together for the realisation of the mission of the Church, respecting the vocation of each component. Otherwise, SAC, UAC or any community or group can become a self-serving, self-focussed group- as Pope Francis often reminds us. It would be worth examining ourselves to see if we are persons who are just closed up in our group. Having seen the great pastoral needs around the world, I hope and pray that the Society- and even the entire- Union may never become a naval gazing group living for itself. Each new mission that the Society is trying to found is a response to the cry of God’s people. Otherwise, the confreres or the sisters have no need to work in Siberia with the minus 20°C temperature. If we do not have a strong missionary dynamism, whether it is SAC, UAC or any other community, we are destined for decay and death. No doubt about

that. Sorry to say, this is one of the principle difficulties within the Union. Where the members have a strong spiritual and Pallottine formation coupled with concrete apostolic works, the Union will flourish and will have sense. Otherwise it will be only a question of many meetings and paper works. Honestly, that would be an injustice done to God's people who are waiting for us.

- d) The UAC as a public association in service of the mission of the Church will be most effective when each one of us becomes a missionary disciple of Jesus. Once the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with the request to make his two sons, James and John to sit one at the right and one at the left of Jesus in the Kingdom. "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink"? Jesus asked (cfr. Mathew 20:20-22). The desire to sit at left and right in the Kingdom was a mere human consideration. If we are genuine and humble disciples of Jesus, the constant concern about equality does not arise. My impression is that this is the constant worry of some members of the Union. As for me, I will have the greatest respect for any person who lives Christian discipleship with zeal, humility and generosity, regardless of his or her state of life. If that is missing, it is nothing but an ideological, human, power struggle. All of us can be prone to such a temptation and it is not limited to any particular group. If we are led by the Holy Spirit, by the genuine spirit of discipleship, there is no place for power struggle. Hence the need for a profound spiritual formation for discipleship in the spirit of the Gospel for all of us.

In this sense, I was very much edified by what I have seen in many parts of the Pallottine world. When God's people of all vocations gather and form together for authentic discipleship, in the spirit of the Cenacle and move out to serve God's people- especially those in most need- there is much Christian joy and communion. A deep spiritual life and a profound commitment to the mission are two indispensable conditions for authentic discipleship. Being transformed in the Cenacle and moving out to the peripheries to serve God's needy people are life-giving movements. This is the prophetic vision and desire of our holy

Founder. Seek first God's Kingdom and its righteousness and everything else will be added to us (cfr. Mathew 6:33).

Hence let me say very sincerely: I am not unduly worried about UAC, its structures or administration. This is not the ultimate goal of my life or vocation as an ordained minister in the Church. As Christians, Jesus Christ and his life-giving message must guide us. And our experience of the infinite love and mercy of God must impel us to share the Good News of Jesus with our fellow human beings. For examples, my actual concerns today are about the mission in Vietnam, to see how I can find a few more missionaries to serve the people there; I am trying to see how we can sustain the mission in Papua New Guinea where we have only three confreres working in the most difficult conditions; I have to find some financial resources to help our Major Seminary in Poland to set up a Centre for Family and Youth apostolate; I have to see how the wonderful collaboration with the Pallottine Missionary Sisters in Zambia can be encouraged and helped to build up the school and dispensary; I have to work with the Provincial team in the Raipur Province in India to ensure that all the children under our care are cared for and protected; working with the Argentinean Region, we are trying to see how the charism of our Founder can be shared with as many people as possible in the Spanish-speaking world, etc. Every Major Superior has such concerns.

How great are the works of the Pallottine Sisters working in so many countries reaching out to people in need, making great sacrifices! How encouraging it was to find so many lay persons – mothers, fathers, and youth – in Poland and Brazil, longing to hear the message of our Founder! These are the works of the Union! No time to lose and no energy to be wasted. I am grateful for the dedicated service of the members of the Society. In the same way, I thank God for our religious Sisters and the mothers, fathers, daughters and brothers who work hard to bring up their families. How nice it would be if we can make a child smile again? Will not God reward us if we protect and educate the girls children, where justice is denied to them? When there are so many cries for help from God's people, let me confess, I would prefer to be in one of the missions rather than being here in order to work with God's people, if the UAC is not able to

bear concrete fruits for the Church. Probably that would happen in the future if we are not able to bear concrete spiritual and apostolic fruits. Let us focus our attention on God and His people rather than circling around the airport, and never landing the plane. When the plane finally lands on the ground, even if one engine is damaged, as it happened in USA recently, we can say we have reached our destination and begin to bear testimony to the Risen Lord. Always inspired and guided by St. Vincent Pallotti. Happy birthday to St. Vincent, Mystic and Apostle.