

# LIVING THE MISSION WITH THE CHURCH TODAY<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of the Union to the mission of the Church in the world of today

Fr. Ângelo Lôndero, SAC<sup>2</sup>  
Santa Maria (RS) – Brazil  
angelo@pallottism.com.br

*The best gift that a person can receive is to know Jesus; to have found him has been the greatest event of our lives; to make him known with our words and our work is our joy (Document of Aparecida, 29).<sup>3</sup>*

## 1. Introduction

I begin this reflection by saying that I would like to be listened to as a brother rather than as a lecturer, as a brother who wants to share, albeit with a certain amount of fear and trembling, a theological and pastoral reflection centered on the field of ecclesiology, a reflection that takes as its starting point the reality in which I live, Brazil, and by extension the Latin American continent. I would like it to be a sharing from the heart between brothers and sisters.

In order to understand my reflection it is important to clarify at the outset that we think with the head, we formulate ideas from where the feet are planted, and therefore every point of view is nothing other than a view from a point. This means it is necessarily limited and does not have a world-wide vision.

As I began to write this presentation I thought of where my listeners would come from. Having reminded myself of the extension of the Pallottine family in the world I arrived at the conclusion that many would indeed come from regions where the work of evangelization requires a great deal of self-giving and sacrifice. The passage from the Book of Revelation came to mind: “These are the people who have been through the great persecution” (Rev. 7,14).

This presentation is part of the Congress programme, “Living the Mission with the Church today”, a reflection on the contemporary Church, the priorities and challenges, indicating perhaps some lines of activity for the mission of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. It will attempt to deepen our consciousness of our mission as evangelizers in the Church and in the world of today in the light of the charism and spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti.

The theme proposed to me is extensive and very complex. Because of time restrictions and my own limitations the theme will be presented in a synthetic manner, however I extend an open invitation to others to carry on the lighted torch and thus continue to build on the work begun here.

## 2. The World, the theatre of human history, engages us in dialogue

Here we will look at how the contemporary world in which the Church is to carry out her mission of evangelization presents itself, because it is necessary to have a diagnosis of the illness before action is taken to remedy it.

In his Gospel St. Matthew offers us an incisive warning in recalling the words of Jesus which exhort us to observe the signs of the times in order to understand the present time (Mt. 16,2-3).

The Second Vatican Council, which took place 45 years ago, said that in order to realize her mission the Church had to analyse at every moment the signs of the times and then interpret them in the light of the Gospel, so as to respond in a manner which is appropriate for every generation to the questions that people pose regarding the meaning of life, both present and future<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Professor of Theology (systematic theology) in the Pallottine Faculty, Santa Maria; formator in the Colégio Máximo Palotino (mayor seminary) and Director of the Istituto Sudamericano di Studi Pallotini.

<sup>3</sup> Final text of the V General Episcopal Conference of Latin American and the Caribbean, which took place from May 13<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> 2007, at Aparecida (São Paulo). Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated the Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, n. 4. Cf. The Union of Catholic Apostolate, General Statutes, art. 18.

We live in a time of extraordinary agitation with profound and successive socio-cultural changes or shifts which shake our world creating new and serious challenges for the mission of the Church. A glance at today's world through the eyes of disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ and continuators of the work of St. Vincent Pallotti will lead us to perceive the lights and the shadows of our times. This change of epoch, which is more than a period of transformation, causes us pain, however it does not bring us to a state of desperation because we trust the promise of Jesus of Nazareth: "And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28,20).

These profound transformations which are characterized by the phenomenon of globalization, have a world-wide range and, in varying degrees, affect the entire world and all dimensions of human life. Without any doubt we live in very special times and there are no simple or quick answers for such complex questions. It is almost as if all the questions posed to us have changed just when we had found the answers. The happenings in our world perplex us.

### 3. Church – World – Kingdom of God

The title of one of the documents of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council<sup>5</sup> affirms that it is not a case of the world being found in the Church but of the Church in the world. The Kingdom of God is found both in the world and in the Church. The People of God are present in all the nations of the earth and the Church is a sign of salvation in the world. The Church wishes to be understood starting from her mission in the world. Today we can verify a rediscovery of her ecclesial identity and a return to her mission to redeem in this world. Taking as her point of departure an intuition that is profoundly missionary and open to the world, the Church is called to grow in her sense of her own identity in order to know her mission because the order of being determines the order of acting. In the opening address of the second session of the Council (29.09.1963), Paul VI affirmed: "there is no doubt that the Church both desires to and recognizes herself as being obliged by intrinsic necessity and obligation to say clearly what she thinks of herself"<sup>6</sup>. She has received from the Risen Christ the mission to "make disciples of all peoples" (Mt 28,19). Here we see that the heart of the mission is not 'to go out', 'to depart', but 'to become a disciple' and invite others to become disciples<sup>7</sup>.

A further affirmation that sheds light on our mission comes from the document of Puebla where we read: "The Church has acquired little by little an increasingly clearer and deeper consciousness that evangelization is her fundamental mission and that it is not possible to fulfil it without making a permanent effort to recognize reality and to adapt the Christian message to the person of today in a dynamic, attractive and convincing manner"<sup>8</sup>.

So it becomes clear that the fundamental mission of the Church is evangelization which takes as its starting point the reality of the world. It is necessary to listen both to God and to reality, or better again, to listen to God in reality.

The identity of the Church is shown in mission because, according to the expression of Paul VI, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize"<sup>9</sup>. This is the equivalent of saying: the Church is made, she builds herself, in evangelizing. The day when the Church ceases to evangelize she is then no longer the Church of Jesus Christ.

Together with the consciousness that her fundamental mission is evangelization she understands that she cannot fulfil her mission without perceiving the changes that take place in reality. The mission is not a flight from reality into a merely spiritual world but rather must lead her to the heart of the world.

In the Woody Allen film called 'Sleeper' a man suffering from an incurable illness was frozen and placed in cold storage until a cure for his illness could be found. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century scientists defrosted the man and cured him. When he woke up he thought that he had only been asleep for eight hours. But he used different clothes, he spoke an arcane language and did not know anybody he met on the street. I

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<sup>5</sup> The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – *Gaudium et Spes*.

<sup>6</sup> VATICAN II. *Mensagens, Discursos e Documentos*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1998, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. COLZANI, G. *Teologia della Missione*. Padova: Messagero, 1996, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> *Evangelização no presente e no futuro da América Latina – Conclusões da III Conferência Geral do Episcopado Latino-Americano*. 4 ed. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1979, n. 85.

<sup>9</sup> PAUL VI. *Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*. 1975, n. 14.

would not like the same thing to happen to us! The story of this film is similar to certain situations in which the person does not see that the world has changed and he or she continues to live like a sleeper who wakes up in a new and unknown time. If we do not know the actual situation today and do not put forward our charism in a new way to the men and women of our time, we run the risk of being like Woody Allen's sleeper<sup>10</sup>.

#### 4. The major challenge to the Church: to understand the new situation of the world

The Church is also living a fascinating stage in her history but one that is also complex and challenging.

Society today experiences a deep crisis of economic, cultural and political paradigms or models and the same is true in the field of religion. There is a search for meaning, Victor Frankl said that persons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had greater means at their disposal for living but had much less reasons for living and that "man can bear everything except a lack of meaning".

This continues to be valid as spirituality responds to an acute aspiration of the human soul. Paul VI said that "We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit"<sup>11</sup>. This is why we observe today an intense search for spirituality. It is the "return to the sacred" and the "thirst for God" present in all social classes. André Malraux foresaw that the 21<sup>st</sup> century would "be mystical or would no longer exist".

Gabriel Marcel spoke of the person of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as one who is fragmented, as one who, having lost the divine dimension in his life, has also lost its interior unity. As long as he or she does not open up to the transcendent the person will remain fragmented and unhappy, as St. Augustine said: "God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until the rest in you". This appears to be profoundly true at the beginning of this century.

Many persons believed that religion would be destroyed by technology, science, democracy, reason and the market forces, however, these same forces are in fact cooperating to make it stronger. Today, with the Internet, young people can speak with the whole world and come to know new religions; the Internet has become a temple, perhaps it has even become the ideal means of access to a religion that does not subject itself to a discipline. In religion, just as in politics and customs, there is a rebellion. Children no longer follow the religious practice of their parents. Many young persons say they are Catholics, that their faith has not changed, but they do not go to church, for them faith does not depend on the Church.

Social instability is reflected in the field of religion. Just as the person of today does not have a life-long profession it could also appear to be the norm that he or she does not maintain the same religious practice throughout life. One takes from religion only that which is useful. One changes one's religion according to need or taste.

An individualistic mentality is also widespread in the area of religion. People choose their own religion in a pluralist context. Even while maintaining allegiance to a religious institution they tend to choose beliefs that are subjectively pleasing and show a weakened sense of belonging to the institution.

The number of those who reject adherence to any religious institution and who maintain that their convictions are an "invisible religion" with little or no external practice, is increasing.

Religion is looked at from a utilitarian perspective, as a search for interior well-being, or as a therapy or a remedy for all ills, or as a means to success in life and in business, this can be seen in the so-called "theology of prosperity".

This is the reality of contemporary man. And it is in this reality that the Church is called to proclaim with courage, enthusiasm and creativity the perennial message of the Gospel.

It is within this reality that we are called to speak of a God who many people no longer know, of whom they have heard but who are distant from him in daily life, so distant that many have forgotten him. Others fear him and because of this they run away from him.

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<sup>10</sup> "A deepened understanding of the charism leads to a clearer vision of one's own identity, around which it is easier to build unity and communion. Clarity concerning one's own charismatic identity allows creative adjustment to new situations and this leads to positive prospects for the future of the institute. A lack of clarity in this area can easily cause insecurity concerning goals and vulnerability with respect to conditions surrounding religious life, cultural currents and various apostolic needs, in addition to the obstacles it raises regarding adaptation and renewal." **Fraternal life in Community**. N. 45. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE.

<sup>11</sup> PAUL VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 75.

## 5. A charism at the service of the mission of the Church

It is with the strength of the charism that we inherited from St. Vincent Pallotti, and in compliance with the call of the Pope, that we want to seek possible responses to the challenges of the world of today. At the end of this first decade of the present millennium we are summoned as continuators of the foundation of Vincent Pallotti to offer our specific contribution to the evangelizing mission of the Church. John Paul II expressed this very well in the homily he preached in the Church of SS. Salvatore in Onda, Rome, on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1986: "Continue to multiply your commitment so that which Vincent Pallotti prophetically announced and the Second Vatican Council authoritatively confirmed, becomes a happy reality and all Christians be authentic apostles of Christ in the world!"<sup>12</sup>.

We are all responsible. Responsible for our era, for the lives of our brothers and sisters; we are responsible to our own Christian and missionary consciences, we are responsible before Christ, the Church, history and before God.

Vincent Pallotti perceived with great sensitivity the enormous needs of his time, both of the world and of the Church. He lived in an era which was deeply perturbed by the consequences of the French and Roman Revolutions. In the turbulent times in which he lived and worked he identified the challenges, some permanent and others circumstantial, and with a profound Gospel spirit he sought responses to the spiritual and material needs. Vincent Pallotti saw the world with the gaze of Christ, Apostle of the Father, he felt the need to "reawaken faith and the awareness of the call to the apostolate"<sup>13</sup> of all Christians and to thus multiply the number of Gospel workers.

As Pope John XXIII said, Vincent Pallotti "did not content himself with the common ministry, but he thought up new means to make God known and loved"<sup>14</sup>.

May Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father help us to possess Vincent Pallotti's apostolic heart in order to feel today the call of God to the field of evangelization and to seek new methods of apostolate, divesting ourselves of all that distances us from fidelity to his charism.

Benedict XVI in his letter to the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean, referring to the Document of Aparecida, says that in it "there are numerous and opportune pastoral indications which are based on rich reflections in the light of faith and of the present social context"<sup>15</sup>.

One of the first indications identified in the document is the call of the missionary disciples of Jesus to a profound conversion: "The pastoral conversion of our communities requires that we go beyond a pastoral approach that is simply one of conservation towards a pastoral approach that is decisively missionary"<sup>16</sup>. It goes on to say: "This firm missionary decision must fill all ecclesial structures and all pastoral plans of the dioceses, parishes, religious communities, movements and all institutions of the Church. No community should be exempt from entering decisively with all its strength into the constant processes of missionary renewal, and outdated structures which no longer favour the transmission of faith should be abandoned"<sup>17</sup>.

According to the Aparecida document conversion is a fundamental exigency for the Church herself before the invitation to conversion is directed to those whom her mission addresses. In a time of global change the Church also has need of change, however not merely from the pastoral point of view but change "in her way of being": she needs to be evangelized anew in order to become a Church that is full of impetus and evangelizing ardour. Conversion constitutes first of all an invitation to the Church and then to the world.

This is affirmed by Paul VI: "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to

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<sup>12</sup> *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX, I, 1986, p. 1899.

<sup>13</sup> The Union of Catholic Apostolate, General Statutes, art. 12.

<sup>14</sup> ACTA SAC V, p. 367.

<sup>15</sup> Documento de Aparecida, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Documento de Aparecida, n. 365.

<sup>17</sup> Documento de Aparecida, n. 370.

the new commandment of love. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel<sup>18</sup>.

Conclusion: the disciple, the missionary<sup>19</sup> must be evangelized in order to be evangelical and to be able to evangelize.

## 6. A new way of being Church

One of the objectives of this reflection is to suggest some areas for the mission of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, offering our contribution to render more effective our Pallottine apostolate in living our mission with the Church today.

Vincent Pallotti dreamt of a Church in which there would be no room for mere spectators. Looking at the presence and the work of the Pallottine family in the world, we note that his dream has, in part, become reality because he did not dream alone. Here the words of Mons. Helder Camara are appropriate: "If somebody dreams alone it is merely a dream. But, when we dream together it is the beginning of a new reality". Today signs exist that encourage us to dream. As a point of reference to help us to discern our evangelization I will present in a simplified manner two ecclesiological notions or two concepts of Church and from them will draw two pastoral approaches.

a) The ecclesiological concept or model which was prevalent in Vincent Pallotti's time still exists. It is that of a Church which presents herself as a series of pyramidal relationships in which there is a radical distinction between the hierarchy and the laity and in which clerical power predominates. Such a mentality can be found in a declaration of Pope Gregory XVI (1831-1846) and later confirmed and amplified by Pope Pius X in the encyclical *Vehementer nos*, of February 11<sup>th</sup> 1906.

I quote Gregory XVI: "Nobody can ignore that the Church is an unequal society in which God reserves for some the mission of commanding (of being in charge) and for others that of obeying, these latter are the laity; the first are the ecclesiastics"<sup>20</sup>.

"It follows that the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors."<sup>21</sup>

Such an affirmation is hard to justify in the face of the words and, above all, of the spirit of the New Testament: "If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all" (Mk, 9, 33-37).

It is therefore necessary to overcome possible structures of supremacy or domination in the name of Jesus Christ who revealed himself as servant, especially in the example of the washing of the feet. Jesus' option was one of service and not one of power. And the Church must be thus, as Pope Paul VI said during the Council: "The Church declares herself, in a certain manner, to be the servant of humanity"<sup>22</sup>.

b) The other concept is one which seems to be more in harmony with the Gospel and sees the Church as a community formed by fraternal relationships and in which all persons have the same dignity. This is affirmed also by the General Statutes: "The equal dignity of the members of the Union is founded on their common likeness to the Creator and on the common priesthood of the People of God. This is expressed in a plurality of vocations to the life of the lay faithful, to consecrated life and to the ordained ministry which are all so interrelated that each helps the other to be solicitous for continuous growth and to offer its own specific service"<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> PAUL VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 15.

<sup>19</sup> In this text the term "missionary" is used not only in the sense of missionary '*ad gentes*', but also to denote 'apostle' and 'evangelizer'.

<sup>20</sup> Apud Guido Zagheni. *A idade contemporânea. Curso de História da Igreja*, v. IV, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Encyclical *Vehementer nos* (11.02.1906), n. 8

<sup>22</sup> BIFFI, F. *Il magistero dei Papi*. In: *Seminarium*, 35, 1983, p. 347.

<sup>23</sup> The Union of Catholic Apostolate, General Statutes, art. 7.

Therefore, it is a model of a Church in which all are brothers and sisters, consecrated by faith and by baptism, bearers of charisms which they are called to place at the service of the ecclesial community and of the world, and who assume jointly the diakonia (service) and the ministry of Jesus (cf. 1Cor 12-14; Rm 12).

In this way we are all servants who form in the world a people of witnesses of the love of the Father.

As followers of Pallotti and as continuators of his mission we are, I believe, called to work in perfecting this second model of the Church which presents itself with very clear characteristics, three of which I would like to underline.

## 7. A servant Church

A Church which renounces power and presents herself as ministerial: "In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission"<sup>24</sup>. In the spirit of Vincent Pallotti we dream of a Church which is totally geared to ministry. This means that the lay persons<sup>25</sup> are not merely invited to the apostolate but that they have the right and the obligation to participate in it: "The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself"<sup>26</sup>. Christians as disciples of Jesus are missionaries from their baptism. As heirs of the charism of Vincent Pallotti we must give back to the laity the ecclesial citizenship they received in baptism and we must not treat them as servants of the clergy. The foundation of being a Christian is in the sacrament of baptism and not the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Paul VI on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, said: "I also am sure that Vincent Pallotti was a precursor. He anticipated by a century the discovery that in the world of the laity there exists an enormous capacity for good which prior to this was passive, dormant, timid and incapable of expressing itself. In shaking up the conscience of the laity he caused new energy to blossom, he gave to the laity a consciousness of their own possibility of doing good, he enriched the Christian community with a great number of vocations. He fostered, not a passive and tranquil acceptance of faith but rather, an active and militant profession of this same faith. Vincent Pallotti taught us to honour the vocation of the laity, or as we are wont to say today, the adult state of the laity"<sup>27</sup>.

It is worth recalling here an affirmation of the Conference of Santo Domingo: "That all lay persons be protagonists of a new evangelization, of the promotion of the human person and of the Christian culture. The constant promotion of the laity free from all clericalism is necessary"<sup>28</sup>. "In a word, Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body"<sup>29</sup>.

"But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity"<sup>30</sup>.

The fulfilment of the mission of the Church is the task of each Christian and of the ecclesial community in its entirety. The ecclesial subject is the entire People of God in so far as it is an ecclesial community.

## 8. A Church of mercy/the Samaritan

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<sup>24</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup> "The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world." **Lumen Gentium n. 31.**

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 3.

<sup>27</sup> São Vicente Pallotti visto por Paulo VI. In: LÔNDERO, Ângelo (Org.). *Horizontes Pallottinos*, Santa Maria: Biblos, 2002, p. 321-327.

<sup>28</sup> Documento de Santo Domingo, n. 97.

<sup>29</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* n. 31

At the start of this point let us recall the words of John Paul II: "On this occasion I wish to exhort each one of the members of the Union to contribute in a concrete manner to the realization of the desire of the Founder as expressed in these words: "in looking at the poor or in thinking of them...I wish to become food, drink, liquor, clothing...I would like to be transformed into light for the blind, speech for the dumb, hearing for the deaf, health for the sick"<sup>31</sup>. Love for the poor should, therefore, constitute a primary and intrinsic exigency of the Union. Each one is to have a particular commitment in favour of the abandoned and marginalized brothers and sisters, to defend the life of young persons, of the aged and of the excluded: to promote charitable initiatives aimed at helping ones neighbour in their corporal and spiritual needs; as well as to instruct, console, comfort, forgive and bear others with patience. These are the works with which St. Vincent showed fraternal charity and contributed to the building of a civilization of love"<sup>32</sup>.

So it is easy to conclude that in accordance with the dream of St. Vincent Pallotti we must work so that the Church have the sentiments of the good Samaritan.

The Gospel reveals God who, moved by compassion, becomes the neighbour of those who most suffer. The God revealed by Jesus is concerned with the suffering of each and every person. He overcomes suffering not through discourses addressed to those who suffer but by liberating them from their tribulations.

The world has never, in the course of its history, lived this paradox so intensely: we live surrounded by death and yet we consider ourselves as being happy. We are convinced that we are journeying towards a better world while all our paths are full of suffering and of dead bodies. The presence of sin manifests itself in all the crosses which people impose on other people. There are millions of crucified persons who are hanging from some kind of cross<sup>33</sup>. Jesus, in his preaching and in his life, singled them out as privileged, he called them 'fortunate, or blessed'. He came to alleviate the crosses of life, to create a world in which nobody would need to place crosses on the shoulders of their neighbour.

In this way suffering, injustice and the cross, illumined by Christ, challenge us to live as a Church of the Samaritan (cf. Lk, 10,25-37), while remembering that evangelization always goes hand in hand with the promotion of the person and with authentic Christian liberation"<sup>34</sup>.

The good news of the Kingdom announced by Jesus must engage us and question us in the face of the suffering of our neighbour, as Paul VI said during the Council<sup>35</sup>. "In the face of every man and especially when his tears and pain render it transparent, we can and we must recognize the face of Christ". These faces are sacred icons, true images of God.

Faced with the suffering that exists in the world we must return to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk, chap.15). The first and the most Gospel-like conduct of the person who evangelizes will be the mercy of the Samaritan. The Church as a Samaritan is called to reproduce the words and the gestures of Jesus, listening to and hearing the clamour of those who have fallen on the wayside like the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mk, 10,46): a pilgrim Church, inserted into the history of people and of cultures, with time to stop and draw close to them and to heal their wounds without a fixed time frame for the end of the journey, or pilgrimage.

A Church which, as Pope John XXIII said at the opening of the Council, "prefers to call on the medicine of mercy rather than using weapons of punishment. She wishes to show herself as the loving mother of all persons: benevolent, patient, full of mercy and of goodness, and also towards her children who have distanced themselves from her"<sup>36</sup>. And so the Church of Christ cannot close her heart to any person no matter how lost he or she may appear to be. She must imitate Jesus who said of himself that he is "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt. 11,19).

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<sup>31</sup> PALLOTTI, San Vincenzo. Opere Complete, X, 15-16.

JOHN PAUL II. Message of this Holiness, John Paul II on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of St. Vincent Pallotti (21.04.1995).

<sup>32</sup> JOHN PAUL II. Message of this Holiness, John Paul II on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the birth of St. Vincent Pallotti (21.04.1995).

<sup>33</sup> Wages that are on the poverty level, discrimination, illnesses, wretchedness and every form of social exclusion.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICT XVI. Discurso Inaugural da Conferência de Aparecida, 3.

<sup>35</sup> PAUL VI. Homily at the Public Session of 7.12.1965: the religious value of the Council. In: KLOPPENBURG, Boaventura. Concílio Vaticano II. v. V. Quarta Sessão (set.-dez.1965). Petrópolis: Vozes, 1966. p. 499.

<sup>36</sup> Vatican II. Mensagens, Decretos e Documentos. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2007, p. 32.

In the Gospel we see that Jesus identified with those who suffered, he could not contemplate an affliction without being moved by it. His interior turmoil was reflected in his words and in his eyes: "So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick" (Mt 14,14).

Jesus, with infinite sensitivity, identified with the needy: it was Jesus himself who suffered hunger, thirst, was naked, sick and in prison (cf. Mt. chap. 25). It is necessary to recover Jesus' preference for the poor of this world as recommended to us in the General Statutes: "promote the implementation of the preferential option for the poor and the excluded, in combating the causes of poverty"<sup>37</sup>, because this form of violence is put in place with greater impunity when it is caused by our selfishness.

We are invited to continue Jesus' mission and to do what he did<sup>38</sup>, that is, we are to make present the signs of the Kingdom, making the choices that he made for the least of society, for the marginalized and the abandoned, appreciating them and recognizing their dignity. To serve Jesus Christ in their disfigured faces becomes a source of spirituality which nourishes and feeds our pastoral practice.

Our faith proclaims that "Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of man"<sup>39</sup>. This is why Benedict XVI affirmed: "The preferential option for the poor is implicit in a Christological faith in which God became poor for us in order to enrich us out of his poverty" (cf. 2Cor. 8,9)<sup>40</sup>.

This option arises out of our faith in Jesus Christ, God made man, who became our brother (cf. Heb. 2,11-12). It is not an exclusive option, nor is it one that excludes, because the Church of the Crucified Lord cannot know any form of exclusion. If this option is implicit in a Christological faith, Christians as disciples and missionaries are called to contemplate in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters the face of Christ who calls us to serve him in them: "The suffering faces of the poor are the suffering faces of Christ"<sup>41</sup>. The poor represent the heart of the challenge of the work of the Church, both her pastoral work and also our Christian conduct and behaviour. All that relates to Jesus is related also to the poor and all that concerns the poor calls out to Jesus Christ: "Every time that you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me"(Mt. 25, 40). John Paul II stressed that this biblical text "projects a shaft of light on the mystery of Christ"<sup>42</sup>. Because in Christ the great become small, the strong become weak, the rich become poor"<sup>43</sup>.

The reason why Jesus came into the world must be always be present in the life of the disciple, of the missionary (both female and male), who realize or fulfil the project of the Father: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (Jn. 10,10).

God brought life to birth where death reigned. He transformed sorrow into joy, suffering into consolation. Jesus' way of being and of acting interprets God's way of loving and must be our manner of acting and of loving as continuators of his mission; a mission which emerges gratuitously from our hearts, which arises from an interior motivation and because of it we are moved by a force that nothing can hold back, like the experience of St. Paul: "I should be punished if I did not preach the Gospel". (1Cor 9,16).

Starting from a faith encounter with the person of Jesus, in contemplating his life and his mission, we become fascinated by him and we follow him in order to become like Him. The mission begins with a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI confirms this when he states: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"<sup>44</sup>.

Nobody better than Vincent Pallotti had experience of such an encounter with Jesus Christ, and it is because of this that he was an untiring apostle.

We know that the news of the death of Vincent Pallotti spread very quickly throughout Rome, saddening the hearts of the Romans, and especially the hearts of the poor and the sick. They were all as sad and afflicted as if they had lost their very own father. While the church bells tolled announcing the entry of the good and faithful servant into the joy of his lord, a much stronger bell tolled and was heard in the voice

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<sup>37</sup> The Union of Catholic Apostolate, General Statutes, art. 16,f.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. General Statutes, art. 19.

<sup>39</sup> JOHN PAUL II. Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, n. 67.

<sup>40</sup> Discurso Inaugural de S. S. Bento XVI na V Conferência Geral do Episcopado Latino-Americano, n. 3.

<sup>41</sup> IV CONFERÊNCIA GERAL DO EPISCOPADO LATINO-AMERICANO – Documento de Santo Domingo. 4 ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1993, n. 178.

<sup>42</sup> JOHN PAUL II. *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Documento de Aparecida, n. 392-393.

<sup>44</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Deus caritas est*, n. 1.



of the populace, it was the voice of those who had seen with their own eyes the works of mercy that Vincent Pallotti did and because of these they were able to say without fear of error: “A Saint has died”; “the apostle of Rome has died”; “the father of the poor has died”. God spoke through the mouth of his people.

A witness of that time said that “Vincent Pallotti possessed the spirit of Jesus Christ, he was a perfect model of a priest, a true apostle of Rome. And we would have been truly blessed if he had been left to us for a longer time”<sup>45</sup>.

Pallotti was a great follower of Jesus Christ. He incarnated Jesus Christ, the apostle of the Eternal Father and made him present to others. Just as Jesus Christ walked the roads of Palestine, Vincent Pallotti walked the streets of Rome speaking of Jesus Christ to all and repeating Jesus’ gestures of tenderness.

## 9. A Church which evangelizes by witnessing

It is not enough to speak of God, we must bear witness to him through a holy life incarnated in our daily routine. The witness of one’s life is the first and the irreplaceable form the mission takes in order that the proclamation be credible.

This is what Paul VI says: “for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life... it is the first means of evangelization. “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world... by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus -- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity”<sup>46</sup>.

This is why the most perfect form of evangelization is through the witness of faith in one’s life. In other words the disciples of Jesus in every place and time must live the Gospel in their own lives so that it can be seen in them that God continues his work of salvation in the world. The presence of the Church in the world expresses as a sign, prophetic gestures,, she points to the victory of the Kingdom of God over the power of evil which was accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth, who both died and rose again. A danger exists for us of creating a breach between faith and life, between the proclamation and our way of life. Contrary to the Gospel and to what is proclaimed is the giving of scandal and above all the scandal given by the “professionals” in the field of evangelization. We can even be a counter-sign, an anti-Gospel with our lives, with our attitudes, with our omissions, with our material goods, with the manner in which we present the Church of Jesus.

The person who evangelizes is obliged to practice what he or she preaches, St. Gregory admonishes us to do this: “There is a law for the preacher: to fulfil that which he preaches”<sup>47</sup>.

Following the same line of thinking St. Anthony of Padua proclaims: “The Word comes alive when deeds speak. Let the discourses cease therefore and let the works speak. We are sated with words but empty of works. [...] the one who destroys doctrine with his works preaches in vain”<sup>48</sup>.

However we do not lack persons who live what they pray and preach as John Paul II affirms: “In our own age, there are many (witnesses) ... often unknown heroes who give their lives to bear witness to the faith. They are *par excellence* the heralds and witnesses of the faith”<sup>49</sup>.

Therefore witness, of which the first and principal proclamation is fraternal charity, cannot but be the characteristic of the followers of Jesus. “Be this...everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn. 13,35).

## 10. The Church of my dreams

a. A Church that is contemplative and prayerful, a disciple in listening to the Word. A Eucharistic Church of praise and thanksgiving for the Kingdom among us: “The Church makes the Eucharist and the

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<sup>45</sup> MONTANI, Francesco Fabi. Funerali ed elogio dell’abate D. Vincenzo Pallotti fondatore della Congregazione e Pia Società dell’Apostolato Cattolico. In: **Apostolato Universale**. Anno XII, n. 23/2010, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> PAUL VI. *Evangelii Nutiandi*, n. 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. III, 1999, p. 1357.

<sup>48</sup> *Liturgy of the Hours*, v. IV, 1999, p. 1357-58.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 45.

Eucharist makes the Church<sup>50</sup>". A Church which is born from the heart of the Trinity: "the Church has been seen as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"<sup>51</sup>.

b. A Church that is open to the newness of God, attentive to the breath of the creative Spirit from whom the charisms come, who opens new paths, offering new responses to the sufferings of humanity.

c. A fraternal Church, loving and joyful, of linked hands in a plurality of ministries. A Church in which there is great space for liberty and diversity, in which co-responsibility unites more than the law does and enthusiasm more than imposition.

d. A servant Church and one that is poor<sup>52</sup>, simple and humble, more committed to service than to power, more open to tenderness and forgiveness than to condemnation. A Church which renounces privileges and security.

e. A Church in which lay persons will be the great protagonists throughout the journey of the ecclesial community. The lay person "is the person of the Church at the heart of the world and the person of the world in the heart of the Church"<sup>53</sup>. A Church in which women also have a right to protagonism.

f. A Church that is both a disciple and a missionary, an announcer of the good news of the Kingdom of Christ. A kerygmatic Church which announces the essential: Jesus Christ, the crucified one and the Risen one. A Church in which all the people of God, full of missionary ardour, bring the Gospel to the very ends of the earth.

g. A prophetic Church which recaptures the true worth and the voice of the prophet, so as to avoid the very grave danger of a Church closed in on herself and ever further away from the person of today. A Church which announces the Gospel with courage, is capable of defending those to whom society does not render justice, putting a stop to the continuation of the oppression of the poor and the spilling of the blood of the innocent. (cf. Jer. 7,1-15).

h. A pilgrim Church, always on a journey, inserted into the history of persons and of cultures. A pilgrim Church in the world, with time to stop for those who have fallen on the way, who will tend to their wounds without a fixed time frame in which to conclude her journey.

i. A Church which bears persecution and death for the sake of the Gospel. A Church which assumes the Cross for the cause of justice which the Lord calls blessed in the Gospel. It was Jesus himself who said: "If they persecuted me they will persecute you" (Jn 15,20). And we, the Pallottine family cannot forget our five Argentinean martyrs. According to the motion approved by the XVIII General Assembly of the SAC, they are "martyrs for justice and for having prayed and lived the Gospel"<sup>54</sup>.

j. A Church which works for ecumenism in accordance with the desire of Vincent Pallotti, a desire which he expressed right from the very start of his foundation. He longed for the moment when there would be one flock and one shepherd, a desire close to the heart of the good and foretold by Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 10,16)<sup>55</sup>. A Church of dialogue which welcomes all differences<sup>56</sup>.

## 11. Final considerations

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II. **Redemptor Hominis**, n. 20

<sup>51</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL II. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. CONGAR, Yves M.-J. *Igreja serva e pobre*. Lisboa: Logos, 1964.

<sup>53</sup> Documento de Puebla, II, 3.

<sup>54</sup> This General Assembly considers that our five confreres killed in Argentina in 1976, to be martyrs of justice for having prayed and lived the Gospel. They are: Fr. Alfredo Kelly, Fr. Alfredo Leaden, Fr. Pedro Dufau, and the seminarians Salvador Barbeito and Emilio Barletti.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. The Union of Catholic Apostolate, *General Statutes*, art. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. The Union of Catholic Apostolate. **General Statutes**, art. 15-16.

This Second General Congress of the Union of Catholic Apostolate must become for each one of us and for the Church of Jesus Christ, an evangelical trumpet which reawakens missionary consciousness and calls all Christians to continue the mission of Jesus because “Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history”<sup>57</sup>.

As disciples and missionaries of Jesus in his Church we feel that we are called by hope. John Paul II in his message to the participants in the XVII General Assembly of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate (06.10.1998), affirmed: “My dear brothers, look to the future with hope and welcome with trust the challenges of the Third Millennium, aware that Christ is with you and that he is the same “yesterday, today and always” (Heb. 13,8). May he give you his Spirit, who knows how to guide you into the fullness of truth and of love!”<sup>58</sup>.

We must, therefore, recover our pilgrim state like Moses: “I am a pilgrim in a foreign land” (Ex. 2,22). Animated by the Pallottine charism and spirituality we are pilgrims of hope in all five continents.

I conclude, paraphrasing the Document of Aparecida:

“Stay with us O Lord, accompany us, even though we may not always have recognized you. Stay with us because the clouds are thickening around us and you are the light; delusion insinuates itself into our hearts but you make us burn with the certainty of Easter. We journey and are tired, but you comfort us with the breaking of bread in order to proclaim to our brothers and sisters that you truly are risen and have given us the mission of being witnesses of your resurrection.

Stay with us O Lord, when the clouds of doubt, of weariness and of difficulties encircle our Catholic faith; you who are the truth and the one who has revealed the Father, illumine our minds with your word: help us to feel the beauty of believing in you”<sup>59</sup>.

With the help of God I have concluded this reflection on the theme of living the mission with the Church of today. Forgive me if I have said very little or too much. If my words have been sufficient then do not thank me, but with me give thanks to God<sup>60</sup>.

Finally I pray to you Jesus the Nazarene, that together with Mary, Queen of Apostles and the star of evangelization, you fortify our faith, sustain us in our daily difficulty of living “amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God”<sup>61</sup>, so that we may be your disciples and be missionaries who have the same vigour that St. Vincent Pallotti had.

### **Questions for reflection and for studying the text:**

1. In this changing world who is the disciple of Jesus, and how can one be his disciple?
2. What are the reasons, according to the Church, for recovering a missionary ardour?
3. How can the Church of mercy be a friend of the poor and of sinners without being a friend of sin?
4. Pastoral conversion requires that one go beyond pastoral practice that is merely one of conservation, it requires a decidedly missionary pastoral outlook. How do you see this in your life and in your community?
5. In the on-going processes of missionary renewal out-moded structures which no longer favour the transmission of faith must be abandoned. In your opinion what are these structures?
6. What is the Church of your dreams, and what is your project for the Church?
7. What face of the Church would you like to build and what should its most visible characteristics be?
8. With the strength of our Charism and of our spirituality, what could be the contribution of the Union to the Church’s mission of evangelization, above all in the concrete situation in which you live?

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<sup>57</sup> JOHN PAUL II. *Redemptoris Hominis*, n. 1.

<sup>58</sup> JOHN PAUL II. *Messaggi, Omelie, Discorsi alla Famiglia Pallottina*. A cura di Jan Kupka SAC. Roma: Istituto S. Vincenzo Pallotti, 2007, p. 172.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Documento de Aparecida, n. 554.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. St. Augustine *De civitate Dei*. Bk. XXI, para. XXX. Citado por Eduardo C. B. Bittar. *Curso de Filosofia Aristotélica – leitura e interpretação do pensamento aristotélico*. São Paulo: Manole, 2003.

<sup>61</sup> St. Augustine. *De civ. Dei*, XVIII, 51,2: PL 41,614; Cf. SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8.

9. What might be the concrete ways in which all the members of the Pallottine family could join forces for sharing spirituality and for ensuring more effective apostolic collaboration?
10. Is the Christian and Pallottine formation which I have received sufficient in order to understand the Pallottine charism and spirituality and to enable me to be an apostle in the Church today?