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From vision to mission: the Union and Family

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Introduction:

We were asked to make a contribution at the UAC – Congress. We agreed spontaneously without having reflected what that would imply for us. But later we found it fascinating after all to give some thought to this topic even more so on account of our different charisms given to us by God. In addition we can say that family is an ever present theme in our “Apostolatskreis”, since 11 out of 12 members are living in a classical family-situation.

First of all we would like to introduce ourselves:

Monika Urban will do this personally at the beginning of her presentation.

My name is Alois Wittmann / *and the mine is Roswitha Wittmann*. We have been married for 27 years / *and have two grown-up children*. We both have studied medicine; I am working as a general practitioner / *and I am occupied in the same practice as a “manager of everything”*. For both of us it is a great gift to be members of the large Pallottine family / *and we both are grateful that our apostolic group (that is the Apostolatskreis Hofstetten) has become a true home for us*.

The topic of Family is a wide field. And so it is only justified that we have decided to take two perspectives. According to our different inclination to deal with the topics my wife and I will concentrate more on theory; and Monika Urban will then share her experience of practical life.

From the experience of our own family situation and that of others we have developed a thesis and have tried to look at these with “Pallottine eyes” to see how life in the UAC could enrich life in our families. Starting with the question “the Family and the UAC” we have finally come to the realization of “the Family as UAC”.

In the appendix to this report there are quotations from Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation “*Familiaris consortio*” on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. They demonstrate how well the UAC is at home in the Roman church.

Preamble

Long before the social phenomena of tribe, race, people, nation and state appeared in the history of humankind, human beings lived as couples and as families.

One may not forget that society has its roots in this basic relationship; this basic relationship is the core or essence of society and guarantees its continuance.

And one may not forget that this basic relationship has not been made by human beings, but has been created by God: in his wisdom he realized that being alone is not good and, therefore, he created a suitable partner for man.

Man and woman, each as person is a full human being, however, totally complete only in their mutual relationship. Does this not reflect God’s nature? Three divine persons, each one God in Himself, however, completed only in the Trinitarian community.

The triune God could create the human being in this image only as a loving person in community.

2 – Union and Family (Wittmann, 2010)

The basic relationship, the couple, is not a community of only two but a community of three: founded and kept alive by God, who is love.

So we have already realized two aspects of Pallottine spirituality:

- God, the infinite love.

- Human beings in community with their equals.

If one wants to look at partnership and family with a Pallottine outlook, one first has to consider what is specifically Pallottine. It is good to visualize this again and again in order not to drift away from our Pallottine identity:

God is love – each person is created in God's image – Jesus is the apostle of the Father and he reveals God's nature through his actions – Each person is called to be an apostle, to make known God's nature by following Jesus – It is our aim to make ourselves and the world holy through love.

Maybe all this has been explained rather briefly, and it certainly is nothing other than the nature of the whole Church.

But it remains a basic charism that is fundamentally Pallottine:

Everyone is called to apostolic life in communion with like-minded persons.

Statements

I

If we now reflect on the family in this way, we will find surprisingly much of the Pallottine charism in what makes up this social and ecclesiastical core-community.

Vincent Pallotti himself derived the destination of human-kind towards loving community and cooperation from God's Trinitarian nature and from the creation of human beings in the image of God. **(1)**

In the first place and in the most intensive way this community can be seen in the partnership of two people loving each other and being of one mind. **(2)**

Because Christian couples have consciously taken God into their relationship, they are living not only a secular but also a spiritual life.

Through their love they are showing God's love and are witnesses of salvation. **(3)**

Opening themselves for and living in God's love, married couples are not only recipients but also givers. Through procreation and the education of children they participate in the act of creation and in this way they are co-workers of the loving God. **(4)**

Marriage can be seen in a great variety of aspects:

As a legal community, as a community of interests, as a working association, as an economic community, as a supply service, as a sexual community, as a reproductive community – but also as a community of faith, as sacramental community.

Always, however, it is community, union; and precisely in respect of that the UNION has great competence to inspire the family as a community of love, to support it as a community of prayer and hope, and to make it a community with a vision which is fruitful in what is good.

II

The recognition, appreciation and advancement of the special God-given charism belongs necessarily to the nature of Pallottine spirituality. This charism can contribute towards the building up of the kingdom of God. This can be said for oneself, for one's chosen partner, and even more so for the children given by God.

This partnership grows with the children and remains united in love towards one another and towards God. In this the partners have two fundamental tasks:

3 – Union and Family (Wittmann, 2010)

- Respecting the children as persons.
- And supporting the development of their character, their charisms and their calling. **(5)**

Is it not the desire of people to form their partner according to their own wishes?

And is it not the desire of parents that the children should develop according to the parents' wishes?

How different Pallottine freedom is which allows people to go where God wants them. One must make the effort, however, to listen carefully, to look closely and to bring to light.

III

Today more than ever people, especially adolescents, are exposed to various dangers during their spiritual development.

Particularly in these days of the anonymous masses the family can be a place of lived individuality and personality. **(6)**

Particularly in these days of danger and pressure through so-called public opinion and in these days of enticement by the media, the family can be a place of truth and freedom. **(7)**

Especially in today's secular and anti-clerical times the family can be a place of a deep proclamation of faith. In the Pallottine sense this is happening in a respectful, loving togetherness whereby each one can give and receive. **(8)**

Vincent Pallotti did not want the community founded by him to be an end in itself, but a means for a purpose namely leading people to God and so building up the Church. In the same way the family should not be closed in, but open to the Church and the world.

It was important for Pallotti to recognize the conditions of time and place and act accordingly.

*With respect to families, this means including the situation of families in our times. **(9)***

Particularly as lay Christians in families we as UNION members can influence the world through living our faith in an authentic way.

IV

At all times, however, it is also clear that families, even Christian ones, are not always islands of happiness. All the misfortune of this world can be reflected in them. In this case it is necessary to survey the whole life of Christ just like Pallotti did and follow Jesus also in sorrow.

Questioning our faith in personal difficulties and in those of our families is a daily battle.

So in the family one can mature in life and can practise Christian virtues like patience, forgiveness and reconciliation and the acceptance of failure.

Finally, the family is also a wide mission field when one's partner or children do not follow God's call.

*So a truthful and firm witness even in the greatest difficulties is required. **(10)***

And who could claim that he or she himself holds fast to the faith at all times and in every situation?

Who is totally free of doubts and temptations?

And who does not need the helping hand of a loving partner and a loving child?

V

One can see that the universal Church is reflected in the family, which is truly a church in miniature. Just as the universal Church in its practical life refers to Jesus as prophet, priest and king, so the domestic church of the family should be a believing, proclaiming, serving and therefore healing community. **(11)**

*Even if today the value placed on the family deteriorates, even if Christian family life becomes increasingly difficult, the Christian family as a way of being church will make an important contribution towards the world's evangelization. **(12)***

Final Comments

Back to Vincent Pallotti and the Union of Catholic Apostolate:

Our main trait is: being called and sent, **ecclesiastical sending**, of each person, and in community, in order to help build up the Kingdom of God, **i.e. to revive faith and re-ignite love over and over again.**

*The smallest possible cells, the primitive cells so to speak, and also the germ cells, are Christian families. According to Pallotti's ideals, marriage and family could be an ideal and typical form of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. And as such families are, like all Pallottine inspired groups, **cenacle communities**: Communities opening themselves to the Holy Spirit, communities with Mary as their model, she who tells us to **Do whatever Jesus says to you.***

Moreover, in Pallotti's vision, these cenacle communities are places of spiritual retreat and reflection on oneself and on God in a bustling world, and at the same time places of the kind of active charity that this drifting world calls for.

Thus, true faith is shown and witness is given to God's nature as the infinite love.

APPENDIX:

From the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II "On The Role Of The Christian Family In The Modern World"

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

- (1)** God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (n.11).
- (2)** How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! (n.13)
- (3)** Christian marriage ... constitutes the natural setting in which the human person is introduced into the great family of the Church... (n.15); Marriage as a communion of two persons participates in the event of salvation (cf. n.13). Parents' education of their children within marriage is really and truly a "ministry" of the Church (cf. n.38).
- (4)** By receiving the love of Christ the spouses are a saved community, and they are called to become a saving community by communicating that same love of Christ to others (cf. n.49). The mission to educate is rooted in their participation in God's creating activity (cf. n.38).
- (5)** As an educating community, the family, must help human beings to discern their own vocations ... (cf. n.2). The family must educate the children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God (n.53).
- (6)** The family can take human beings out of their anonymity, keep them conscious of their personal dignity, and actively place them, in their uniqueness and unrepeatability, within the fabric of society (cf. n.43).
- (7)** As a 'Church in miniature', the Christian family, with evangelical discernment, offers a service to the truth, to freedom and to the dignity of every man and every woman (cf. nn.4 e 49).

(8) The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth (n.2). In a family which is conscious of this mission all the members evangelize and are evangelized (n.52). They must be "of one heart and soul" in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them, and through their shared commitment to works of service to the ecclesial and civil communities (n.50).

(9) Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the family is by nature and vocation open to ... society (n.42). It is, in fact, to the families of our times that the Church must bring the unchangeable and ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it is the families involved in the present conditions of the world that are called to accept and to live the plan of God that pertains to them (n.4).

(10) The work of evangelization can never be separated from the sufferings of the apostle... Parents must face with courage and great serenity the difficulties of the evangelization ministry... (cf. n.53). Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice (n.21). In and through the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, God comes to them (*and makes them share in the saving*) love of Christ for His Church (n.51).

(11) The family is a believing and evangelizing community, a community in dialogue with God, a community at the service of human beings (cf. n.50). The Christian family is called upon... to be a sign of unity for the world and in this way to exercise its prophetic role (n.48). The Christian family has a priestly role and is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the world (cf. n.55).

(12) This apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan (n.52). This is no less than the rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family (cf. n.6).