I was asked to speak to you on spiritual formation in the heart of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. I believe that the problem of formation in general in our Pallottine family is not a question of a lack of good intentions nor is it due to a lack of doctrinal orientations. However formation becomes inoperative when clear pedagogical choices and appropriate programs are lacking. In fact, what we are lacking in our Union are **concrete programs and a pedagogical tradition**.

Therefore, I do not propose to read to you what the General Statutes or other documents say about spiritual formation in the heart of the UAC\(^1\), rather I wish to focus on two points in this presentation:

**First: As the apostolate is, so shall formation be**

**Second: Formation for holy cooperation**

### As the apostolate is, so shall formation be

Perhaps it is necessary to state at the outset that nobody forms his or herself out of mere self-interest. In fact “formation in itself does not make sense if it is not oriented towards the apostolic goal or objective of the Union. As the apostolate is, so shall formation be! Formation must always be in function of the apostolate. Nothing will be gained from formation if it is not oriented towards the apostolate. What is our apostolate? We are the Union of Catholic Apostolate! Our principal field of activity is the **Universal Apostolate**\(^2\). And because our apostolate is universal then so too must our formation be universal. We must form ourselves and form our members for open and generous horizons, or parameters!

The fundamental goal of all formation is described by Pallotti in these terms:

> ...not to go back, but rather to always live a more perfect imitation of the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ; so as to cooperate effectively with the works of his greater glory and the greater sanctification of souls”\(^3\). And Pallotti added: “...all Christians, each one in his or her own circumstances and according to his or her vocation is obliged to do this.”\(^4\).

A specific area of spiritual formation is that of formation for cooperation in the catholic, or "universal" apostolate. According to Fr. Vincent all persons, be they priests, brothers, lay persons, women or men, all are called to cooperate in the universal apostolate of the Church.

It is good to recall that the word "universal" had three meanings for Vincent Pallotti. It meant "everywhere", "with every necessary and opportune means", and also "open to all persons". Pallotti was

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\(^1\) The following articles come to mind: "Called by name. The formation manual of the UAC”(1986); “General orientations for formation in the Union of Catholic Apostolate” (2004); “The Spiritual Profile of the Union of Catholic Apostolate” (2008); “Together and for one another, the characteristics and the way of the Union” (2009).

\(^2\) Cf. OCCC III, pp. 177-178.

\(^3\) OCCC VII, pp. 63-64.

\(^4\) OCCC VII, pp. 90-91.
an apostle with high and open ideas. He considered all expressions of sectarianism to be alien, every expression of a closed circle of contact and activity, every exclusion and closed mentality were alien to him. He wished to mobilize every person to cooperation for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity. His openness to diverse languages, ecclesial rites, peoples and cultures came from this mentality. Fr. Vincent formed his followers, whether they were lay or clerics, men or women, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, to this kind of openness, this cooperation with all, when he said to them that this Pious Union was of Catholic Apostolate [...] in order that it be permanently in the Church of Jesus Christ as an Evangelical Trumpet which calls all, invites all, reawakens the zeal and charity of all5.

Pallottine formation in all times is therefore called to form its members in a "mentality of (being) the evangelical trumpet" in the heart of the universal and local Church. It is perhaps necessary to clarify that this universal nature is not a flight from the local or particular because the "particular or the local" is not a rejection of the universal just as the "universal" is not a flight from the particular. According to Fr. Vincent the "universal" includes the "particular", because the universal apostolate concerns every person in particular. The Pallottine charism, having a particular responsibility in a concrete and limited place in the vineyard of the Lord, urges us to not close ourselves in this particular place and neither to isolate ourselves from the universal body of the Catholic Apostolate. It is only with this spirit that we will be able to reinforce all forms of cooperation in the heart of our spiritual Family. The reinforcement of cooperation should be, therefore, the expression of our union of spirits and should not emanate from the inevitable and pragmatic need to work together because we are obliged or forced to do so by a shortage of vocations or qualified personnel. On the other hand in order that an apostolic project be fruitful it does not require a great number of men but rather men of human and spiritual quality. Formation in this universal spirit should therefore be ensured with a view to our particular ministerial works in the Church and according to the charismatic character of each one, that is, according to his talents and capabilities.

Here is an example. In his writings St. Vincent Pallotti speaks of models of "holy cooperation". There are two models "par excellence"; the Most Holy Trinity and the Holy Family. Speaking of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Pallotti proposes it as a model of charitable and harmonious cooperation. However in order to foster this cooperation it is necessary, Fr. Vincent noted, that the superior of the community, assign tasks to each one according to "his ability and his capacity". We read in the Great Rule that “The Rector must occupy each one according to his proper talent and ability in those other works of which he is aware of a true need and for which he recognizes that they are capable”6.

It is very interesting to read a text like this in Pallotti because on the one hand he insists a great deal on obedience which is to be “exact, complete, ready and also blind”7 and, on the other hand, he cedes to the tastes and the preferences of each one. Why? Because it is a question of “cooperating in the tasks of the pious Society out of charity, without selfish interest and without ambition”8. Furthermore, I think that Pallotti simply wanted to say that in order to encourage the creativity, initiative, apostolic zeal and commitment of each one, it is necessary to recognize the qualities, talents and abilities of the others; otherwise cooperation would not be possible in the community. Rather than being facilitated, cooperation would be blocked and “laziness, idleness and hostility”9 would emerge.

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5 Cf. OOCC I, pp. 4-5.
6 OOCC II,149.
7 OOCC III,71-72.
8 OOCC I,106.
9 Cf. OOCC II, 149.
Formation for holy cooperation

Certainly the universal apostolate is not reserved to the Pallottine family, but that which gives originality to our apostolate is the "how" we want to realize it. This "how" is "holy cooperation"; the most sublime, the noblest, the most divine among all the divine perfections which the Most High communicates to his creatures. We must, therefore, form ourselves and form the followers of Pallotti for this "holy cooperation". How?

I want to state firstly that Pallotti did not use the word "collaboration" in his writings, but used the word "cooperation". However, both expressions share the same Latin root: "collaborate" comes from "cum+laborare", which means to "work together" and "cooperate" comes from "cum+operari", which means "to operate, or work, together". Notwithstanding this, it is necessary to state that the words "to cooperate" and "cooperation" denote in the Italian of the nineteenth century, a profound theological and spiritual sense. This is the reason why Pallotti preferred them to "collaboration" and "to collaborate". I now invite you to deepen this concept of cooperation. We will start with some words on the model par excellence of "holy cooperation", the Most Holy Trinity.

The Most Holy Trinity

Cooperation will never be successful if it is based only on purely human efforts even if they are carried out with the intention of the most apostolic effectiveness. According to Pallotti cooperation is first of all the imitation of the cooperation of the Most Holy Trinity. I will explain.

We know that the Trinitarian ecclesiology finds its most radical basis in the self-same “divine relationships”. No one person exists without the relationship with the other two. “The Father is Father only because he has a Son, and the Son is Son only because he has a Father […]. The Father does not relate to himself, nor does the Son to himself, rather they both relate to one another reciprocally” – observed St. Augustine. This means that the relationships are constituted by the personal divine identities. As Fr. Michel Rondet rightly says: “God is not this solitary being, exiled in his grandeur who we can only adore from a distance. He is a communion of three persons, united in love, who open themselves to receive us.”

If God is relationship this means that He lives in an eternal exchange; that God is cooperation. This was Vincent Pallotti’s intimate and firm conviction. He was convinced that in the very intimate being of God, One and Triune, there was a mystery of cooperation that God himself desires to communicate to his creatures. Speaking of the cooperation with God and with the other members of the Church, Pallotti wrote these sublime words:

Consider, o my soul, that the gift of cooperating in the well-being of souls, is the most divine among all gifts, it is the most divine because he (the person) who meritoriously profits from it, perfects in himself the image of the Most Holy Trinity, that is he becomes more like God.

10 Cf. OOC II, p.16; OOC IV, p.124/125; OOC V, p.55; OOC III, p.403; OOC XI, p.234; OOC XI, p.256.
15 OOC XI,257.
It can be said that the Trinitarian theology constitutes not only the basis of ecclesiology but also that of a spirituality of cooperation. This means that the Church is not primarily formed by structures but by persons who are united in faith and in fraternal love. Vincent Pallotti does not seek to gather together "all persons" merely on the basis of their affinity with one another, nor with a view to greater apostolic effectiveness. The need for cooperation emerges from the mystery of God, One and Three, which is a mystery of relationship, of communion and of cooperation. This is why Pallotti not only defends a close and intense cooperation, but deduces from it profound theological significance. For him cooperation is not merely a solution or a "pastoral strategy" – effective as it may be16 –, but it is first of all a spirituality, an art of the imitation of the Most Holy Trinity and consequently “a way of being Church”. Thus the mystery of God, One and Three, is patently the foundation of all Pallottine initiatives, it also forms the basis for formation to Pallottine cooperation.

Cooperation is not just an affair of persons and their work or efforts. It certainly involves the work or efforts of persons, but in God. I believe that it is precisely at this level that we find the radical originality of cooperation in the heart of the Church as proposed by Fr. Vincent Pallotti. Cooperation is simultaneously theological and fraternal, because God, who by his very nature is cooperation, is at the same time, the principle of cooperation among brothers. In other words, cooperation according to Pallotti, does not originate in man nor does it end in him: the origin of cooperation is the eternal and reciprocal exchange of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit; its end, or its culmination point, is full participation in His glory for all of eternity17. Pallotti declared that he wished to cooperate “for ever, also after his death”18. In fact he yearned to cooperate not only “fully” and “effectively”, but also “eternally in all of the works of the greater glory of God and the well-being (salvation) of souls”19.

Reception of new members

There are numerous occasions in Pallotti’s writings when he develops the notion of cooperation in the area of formation20. But, amongst them one deserves special attention. It is in reference to the reception of new members of the Pious Society21.

As soon as a person, a lay person, a cleric, or a priest, who has a sincere disposition of heart to practise a life of perfect sacrifice right up to death, has formally entered the Congregation of the pious Society, the words of the Angel could be taken, the words which announced to the Shepherds the Birth of the Saviour, and they can be addressed to the Faithful People (of God), and they could also echo in the ears of the infidels, and the following could be said to them: Behold I announce to you a subject of great joy (!), which will be shared by the entire Populace of the Militant (here on earth), Suffering (in Purgatory) and Triumphant (in Heaven) Church, because today the one who, for you, will cooperate in your salvation, has

16 It is true that, inviting all the baptized (lay persons, priests and consecrated persons) to work together, Pallotti insisted on the effectiveness of the apostolic initiatives: “in this way, not alone will you be the most zealous co-operators of God, but together you will be the most effective in expediting the event that was infallibly predicted by our Lord Jesus Christ fiet unum Ovile, et unus Pastor” (OOCC IV,304). But Pallotti did not do this only with the objective of apostolic effectiveness. He gave deep theological significance to cooperation .
17 Cf. OOCC XI,259.
18 OOCC V,211.
19 OOCC X,280.
20 Pallotti speaks of cooperation at all levels of formation beginning from vocation promotion (OOCC VII, p.259), up to final profession during which the priests and brothers of the Catholic Apostolate as well as the Teachers of the Pia Casa, explicitly express their desire to “cooperate in the salvation of Souls” (OOCC VI, p.281 ; III, p.83 ; IX, p.26).
21 Cf. OOCC II, p.15/16
been born, he who in some manner could be called your Saviour, he is a faithful imitator of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he is born in the City of David, called Bethlehem, which means House of Bread, a further symbol of our little Congregation, abundant in spiritual food, in the necessary means for the acquisition of the most sublime perfection in order to further cooperate for the greater glory of God, and for the salvation of Souls.

But nobody can arrive at a point of meriting having the name of Saviour of the People in the sense that it is expressed here, if he does not constantly practice the use of all the necessary means to come to a stage where he really and truly promotes in all his life the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Nobody really commits to using the means if he is lacking the most lively, generous and perfect desire to cooperate in all, and always, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls: and in order that such a desire not be lacking in anybody, as a Rule of our Congregation one must make use of the appropriate means, in order that always, and in all, lay persons, clerics and priests, the desire for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls be lively, generous and perfect; therefore all the prayers that are said and that will be said in the Congregation and by the entire Body of the pious Society, are addressed also to the goal of obtaining for all, and always, such a desire, as a divine gift (as a gift from God).

This page is so very important that the Founder himself classifies it as criteria for “Pallottine discernment”. You will have noticed that three times in this relatively short text, Pallotti uses the word "to cooperate":

- as soon as a person, be it a lay person, a cleric, or a priest, has formally entered into one of the Holy Retreats (the Community Houses) of the pious Society, rejoicing is fitting, because in that person somebody who will cooperate in our salvation has been born for us;

- our Houses and our formation Centres should carry the name “Bethlehem”, which means House of Bread, because they should abound in spiritual food, in the necessary means for the acquisition of the most sublime perfection and increasingly cooperate for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls;

- and Pallotti adds finally: nobody really commits to using the means if he is lacking the most lively, generous and perfect desire to cooperate in all, and always, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

It is clear in this text that the ability to cooperate is not optional for Pallotti. It is this which gives specific colour and warmth to the Pallottine vocation.

**Methodological suggestions**

As a conclusion to this talk I would like to indicate some pedagogical lines. This would appear to be the problem of formation today. Doctrinal orientations and good intentions are not lacking. But everything remains inoperative when clear pedagogical choices and appropriate programmes are lacking. Everything should be thought of and matured in the light of a clear pedagogical choice, by this I mean the best formation possible: place, ambience, formators, content, methods and means, etc. Here are some suggestions.
The formators

In “Memory and Prophecy” of the Union of Catholic Apostolate we read: “The formation of the members of the Union of Catholic Apostolate is an essential task for the future.”. In this area all the communities and the groups which make up the Union as well as the individual members, must be actively engaged”. This invitation was addressed 16 years ago to all those who participate, in diverse ways, in the life of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, persons of every age, state and condition. The same document continues with:

The privileged place of formation is a community formed of priests, brothers, sisters and lay persons, as a visible expression of this particular experience of ecclesial life which is based on communion and on a strong impulse of the Holy Spirit to revive faith, to re-enkindle charity and to spread the Gospel of Jesus in the world. The participation of all the members of the Union and their collaboration in the process of formation in a community where they experience the demand to form themselves together is very important.

We should ask ourselves, where are we today, 16 after this prophetic document "Memory and Prophecy"? It is a matter of urgency that the participation of all the members of the Union in the process of formation be more sought after and structured.

A pedagogy of symphony

I think that the first logical consequence that emerges from such a vision of formation should be a pedagogy which I would call "symphonic" or "pedagogy of symphony". In fact Fr. Vincent Pallotti in placing such value on cooperation was very sensitive to variety and to harmony. In other words, Pallotti avoided a “club spirit” and exclusiveness in the formation process. He wanted to promote a comprehensive “spiritual, scientific (academic) and ministerial culture”. Study was always preceded by a desire for holiness and guided by an apostolic commitment.

In his writings Fr. Vincent continually insisted on this “trio”: spiritual growth – study – apostolic commitment. This "trio" was to form the basis and the one foundation of Pallottine formation. It is important, therefore, that from the very first stage of our formation, an intimate link is forged between the spiritual culture, the ecclesiastical sciences and apostolic experiences.

This Pallottine pedagogy of "symphony" is shown also in a very beautiful and original manner, in one of Fr. Vincent’s expressions, one he used often when he spoke of formation, it is: Neither too much, nor too little. It is as if Pallotti wanted us to understand that neither a situation in which there is deficiency, or great want, nor a situation of great satisfaction, favour the development of the person. The best formation is one in which both are experienced: moments of deficiency and dissatisfaction as well as moments, or times, of fullness and happiness. I think that Pallottine formation should be attentive to

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22 "Memory and Prophecy" of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, Roma 1993, n.36
23 "Memory and Prophecy," n.36
24 It is said: As the Foundation is, so should formation be. It is interesting to note that Pallotti is aware of the varied nature of his foundation. In the inspiration of January 9th 1835 he confesses: “But I confess now and always in your presence oh my God, […] that if such a multiple Institution has not been promoted up until now it is been my fault” (OOCC X, p.199).
26 Cf. OOCC I, pp. 152-189.
27 Cf. “Neither too much nor too little” (OOCC III, p.36); “Neither too strong, nor more often than is necessary” (OOCC II, p.159); “Do not engage in too much solitude nor too much in conversation” (OOCC X, p.536).
this pedagogy in which the variety, the diversity, openness, measure, and harmony are key words. It is not bound in an exclusive manner to any school of spirituality, to any one method, to a formula. It is an open pedagogy, inclusive and universal\textsuperscript{28}, because its particularity consists in bringing into cooperation all the methods, all the schools, all the necessary and opportune means, suitable to forming a passionate apostle of God and of humanity.

**Collaboration between the National Coordination Councils.**

Moments of meeting between the members of the UAC of diverse Coordination Councils to share a good programme, one which is rich in theology, spirituality and life experience, could be the right solution for an adequate formation in the heart of the UAC. I think that collaboration between the National Coordination Councils must be sought and structured.

**Form in order to become weavers of God.**

Two years ago, on May 7\textsuperscript{th} 2007, Pope Benedict XVI, received in audience the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General. He said to them: “The theme of the Plenary Assembly … is particularly interesting: "Called to weave a new spirituality that generates hope and life for all of humanity." The topic you have chosen is the fruit of an ample reflection on the following question: "In contemplating our world, listening to its cries, its needs, its thirst and its aspirations, what thread are we Religious, responsible for our Congregations, called to weave in this moment in order to become prophetic and mystic "weavers of God"?.

We know that the symbol of "weaving" is an image that is used in all cultures. We also must learn how to individualize the threads that can be used "to weave", in our times, a living tapestry of a beneficial service to the universal Church and in the local Churches. In his time Pallotti spoke of the so-called “monthly consultation (meeting, or gathering)”\textsuperscript{29}. Then it was an original means and a fairly rare one. Today it could be called “a meeting of communitarian apostolic discernment”. It was a monthly meeting of those who were responsible for the Procurae with all their co-operators “to present (and discuss) the needs of the Church and of the People”\textsuperscript{30}.

Fr. Vincent was very sensitive to the signs of the times and their demands. Often he would speak of the importance of considering “attentively the present state of the World”\textsuperscript{31}, of “perceiving the present times and their challenges”\textsuperscript{32}, or, yet again, to “study the needs of the Church and of the world”\textsuperscript{33}. Thus Pallotti wanted to form apostles capable of under standing the men of their time, of uniting together to seek the will of God and to cooperate among themselves for the salvation of humanity. I believe that the "spirituality of weaving" as proposed by Pope Benedict, is in perfect correspondence with our role in the heart of the Church. In Pallottine terms we can speak of formation to become "a bridge, or meeting point”\textsuperscript{34}.

\textsuperscript{28} Speaking for example of methods of prayer Pallotti advised one of his disciples, Fr. Francesco Virili, the following: “The method of mental prayer to choose is that which your spirit finds to be the easiest, the most fruitful” - OCL III, p.78.

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. OOCC I, p. 183.

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. OOCC I, p. 183.

\textsuperscript{31} Cf. OOCC IV, pp. 387-388 and p. 254.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. ibid., pp. 139-140.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. OOCC VII, p. 3 ; OOCC X, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. OOCC VII, p.3/4.
A dynamic formation for the maturity of persons.

Finally I think that in the new demands and the possibilities that present themselves today for the members of the UAC today, it is necessary to avoid two obstacles. That of a formation which is only theoretical, or one that is only practical. The person should always be at the centre. If the person is always at the centre of formation, with vigilant attention to the indissoluble relationship between formation and the apostolic mission, then each member of the Union will feel him or herself to be fully realized in his or her own vocation.

Conclusion

Allow me to end with an image, perhaps one that is "too biological", but one that I think is very evocative for the reality of our Foundation and apt for the topic of my talk. It is that of the "conception" of our life. The sperm of itself is nothing! The ovum of itself is sterile! It is from the UNION of both that life is born. Without the ovum the sperm is destined to die. Also the ovum without the sperm dies.

You understand immediately that to avoid the other in that precise moment means to die. Life is born when the sperm and the ovum meet. To meet the other, therefore, is to live and at the same time, to die to oneself. The embryo begins to live when the sperm and the ovum cease to exist. If we could, using our imagination, ask the sperm and the ovum what is it that they feel at the moment of their encounter, they would say “we are, I die!”

This is the conception of our life: to meet with one another; to be able to cooperate, "coadiuvare" – help one another, and "concorrere" – to converge, these are the three words used by Pallotti in his writings to speak of the same experience, that of “operating or working, together with others in order to achieve a common objective, or goal” – it is necessary to accept that one will lose something, just like the paternal and maternal cell. This is the internal law from the first moment of our lives. This is the reason why our Founder insisted:

All three must be so connected that one keeps the other vigilant and in continuous motion, in order that in none of them will be a strength of will (an imposition of ones’ own will), a lessening of zeal or the cessation of works. 35

Two questions to consider:

1. What does it mean for me in concrete terms to form myself and to form for the universal Apostolate?
2. What are some pedagogical lines in accordance with the axiom:

“As the apostolate is, so shall formation be”.