

## Apostolate from the Point of View of the II Vatican Council\*

### Introduction

The Second Vatican Council understands apostleship as all the activities of the Mystical Body aimed at making, through the spread of the kingdom of Christ throughout the world, “all people partakers of salvific redemption and, through them, directing the whole world truly towards Christ” (AA 2). The rationale and purpose of the apostolate are clear in this respect: it is about the authentic inclusion of all people in the salvific work of Christ, about the renewal of the whole reality created in the Saviour, about the actual realization of the kingdom of God on earth. The Council also leaves no doubt about the carriers of apostolic responsibility: The Church works the apostolate “through all its members,” for the Christian vocation is “by its very nature also a vocation to the apostolate” (AA 2). The unity of the mission of the Church, however, does not, according to the Council, cancel out the natural diversity of services in the mystical organism: “not all in the Church follow the same path.” (LG 32). The apostolate of the representatives of the hierarchy and of the lay faithful is necessarily shaped differently in terms of means and form, even though its essential contents are the same in both cases. Let us take a closer look at the doctrine of Second Vatican Council on the apostleship, showing it, for greater clarity, against the background of earlier views.

### *The Understanding of the Apostolate in the Pre-conciliar Times*

The concept of the apostolate depends very much on looking at two closely connected realities: the Church and salvation. The concrete vision of the Church and the understanding of salvation have had a decisive influence on the theological concept of the apostolate throughout the centuries.

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### Understanding of the Apostolate in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the 19th century, there was a medieval, hierarchical organisational model in the Church, which survived until the time of the Second Vatican Council. At that time, the Church was understood as a perfect community, shaped like a temporal state, but superior in some respects to the latter, because of its specifically divine origin. The Church therefore consisted of superiors and subordinates, hierarchies and lay people, and the compartment between the two groups of Christians was clear, which was motivated by the concept of salvation which was particular at that time. According to the neoplatonic vision of the world and the pseudo-dionysified concept of salvation that descended hierarchically from above, all benefits flowed from God to the little ones of this world via the power that originated – as it was claimed – from God Himself. The ecclesiastical hierarchy established by Christ was in this concept the only transmitter of salvation originating in Christ. It also excursively had an active part in the salvific work of God, while the laity could only be passive recipients of the benefits coming from God and passed on to them through this ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Hierarchy, and it alone, was the teaching Church, while the laity, together with the clergy of the lower order (not excluding deacons and priests), were only the hearing Church: if they transmitted the word of God to others, they did so by authority, mandate, or canonical mission received from the bishop<sup>1</sup>. The hierarchy, but only the higher one, included not only the government, but also the sanctification of the faithful; it only had infallibility in teaching; the other members of the Church only enjoyed, as crystallised over time, infallibility in faith (believing). No wonder that the apostolate was connected with the higher ecclesiastical hierarchy itself: the true apostolic man (*vir apostolicus*) was in the Church the only visible deputy of Christ on earth, as he was called, the Pope<sup>2</sup>. It is also understandable that in this perspective any thought about the responsibility of lay people for the Church and their apostolate must have raised a reflex objection.

<sup>1</sup> This range was particularly marked in the liturgy: 1° the priest who was to preach the word of God in the presence of the bishop had to approach him and ask him for permission (blessing), which the bishop gave by placing a stole on the priest's shoulders; 2° in the Missal and Breviary there were separate forms for holy bishops (and since the reign of Pope Pius XII also for popes), and separate forms for believers, among whom were also priests. At present, priests (together with bishops and pope) are commonly referred to as "shepherds" of the Church.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Y. Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat*, Paris 1964, 19ff; E. Weron, *Laikat i apostołstwo*, Paris 1973, 9ff.

### The Pioneering Character of the Apostolic Idea of Pallotti

Against this background of ecclesiology, in Rome in the first half of the nineteenth century, Vincenzo Pallotti<sup>3</sup> presented himself with the idea of the universal apostolate<sup>4</sup>. He wanted to ignite, encourage and mobilise all to the apostolate. Not being a theoretician in the strict sense of the word, he crystallised his thinking, creating a great work of the Union of the Catholic Apostolate<sup>5</sup>. One can also say, without exaggeration, that Pallotti's true greatness, but also his peculiar tragedy, consisted in the fact that by interpreting the "signs of the times" extremely accurately, he overtook his epoch by more than a century: he pointed out the apostolic responsibility of all Christians, which surprised his contemporaries, including representatives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. We should not be surprised, therefore, that it was not properly and fully understood or accepted at that time. If, because of his personal connections with Pope Pius IX (Pallotti was for some time the Pope's confessor), he did not meet with a complete rejection of the preached idea, it must be clearly stated that he did not enjoy much popularity in church circles, and the fate of his work after his death did not turn out to be the best. Four years after Pallotti's death (so in 1854), the church authorities changed the name of the work he founded into the Pious Missionary Association, a name that survived until 1947.

The first victim of Pallotti's spiritual inspirations or initiatives was – so to speak – a well-known English proselyte, J.J. Newman, who, as a Catholic bishop, had already written an article about consulting the faithful on doctrine issues<sup>6</sup>. This great and extremely reliable thinker, who throughout his whole life sought the truth and only the truth<sup>7</sup>, stated, among other things that he was a great and extremely reliable thinker who in his life was looking for the truth and only the truth. In this article, based on the authority of the ecclesiastical tradition and some of its contemporary theologians, that "the faithful in their masses constitute one of the testimonies to the existence of the tradition of revealed doctrine" and that "their consensus in the Christian community

<sup>3</sup> From the newer biographies of the Saint in Polish, see: F. Bogdan, *Na drogach nieskończoności. Życie i spuścizna duchowa św. Wincentego Pallottiego*, Poznań 1981; J. Stabińska, *Wincenty Pallotti*, Poznań 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Bogdan, *Apostolska idea Wincentego Pallottiego*, in: *Association of the Catholic Apostolate. Jubileusz Wspólnoty Ołtarzewskiej 1927-1977*, Poznań 1977, 127-136.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H. Schulte, *Das Werk des Katholischen Apostolats*, Limburg 1966-1967.

<sup>6</sup> *On Consulting the Faithful in matters of doctrine*, in: "The Ram Bler," vol. 2, p. II, July 1858, 198-230.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. Balter, *Człowiek, który przeżył zjednoczenie*, "Biuletyn Ekumeniczny" 6(1977)2, 41-47.

is the voice of the infallible Church,” for “no one else but the pious man has this unfailling instinct which is manifested in the discernment of the mysteries through which the Holy Spirit permeates the Church with his grace, and this instinct undoubtedly rejects that which is alien to the Church’s doctrine. The universal consensus of the faithful is of great evidential importance even for the most learned theologians.”<sup>8</sup>

Newman did not directly touch upon the problem of the apostolate of the lay faithful in the quoted article but raised a much more important issue, which underlies all apostleship, namely the responsibility of Christians for the Church and their role in the life of the Church. Nor did he once invoke the authority of the promoter of the idea of the universal apostolate in the Church, Vincenzo Pallotti, even though he met him personally in Rome<sup>9</sup>. He preferred to quote extensive fragments from the work of the famous Roman theologian, J. Perrone,<sup>10</sup> with whom he kept in touch. Nevertheless, Newman’s article was severely criticised by Church dignitaries, who accused him of thinking that “a fallible part of the Church can lead the infallible, which is absolutely unacceptable”<sup>11</sup>. Also Newman was recognised as the “most dangerous man in England,” who can turn secular people against church hierarchies. It was thought that unless the lay people’s delusions were cut off in time, they would “take over the Catholic Church and wish to rule it instead of the Holy See and the Episcopate”<sup>12</sup>. This made Newman’s situation much worse, until Pope Leo XIII, at the request of the laity, appointed him Cardinal.

<sup>8</sup> Quote for: J. Guillon, *Kościół współczesny*, Warsaw 1965, 53.59.

<sup>9</sup> In the years 1846-47 J.H. Newman studied Catholic theology in Rome, preparing himself as a former Anglican pastor for re-establishment of priestly ordination. Pallotti was at that time a spiritual father and confessor at the Roman Seminary. In letters written to Fr. Melia (to London) Pallotti mentions that he is a confessor of English proselytes, and in his later letters, written after 1848, he recommends to Melia such people as W. Faber, Dr. J. Newman and others. Cf. V. Pallotti, *Epistulae latinae*, Rome 1907; V. Pallotti, *Lettere e brani di lettere*, Rome 1930. These small references and the voice of Cardinal Newman himself in the information process of the Servant of God V. Pallotti (the files are in the Archives of the Generalate of the SAC in Rome) can have their deep meaning.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Perrone, *De immaculato B. Mariae Virginis conceptu*, Romae 1847.

<sup>11</sup> J. Guillon, op. cit., 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13. This is the sentence of Counsellor of Pius IX, Monsignor Talbot, written in a letter addressed to Archbishop Manning.

### Theological Elaboration of Pallotti's Ideas by Perrone

Who knows if J. Perrone's work, entirely devoted to the Catholic apostolate and published at a time when Newman was in the greatest trouble<sup>13</sup>, was not intended to help him theologically? Perrone, of course, wrote in the spirit of contemporary ecclesiology; however, he also expressed many new thoughts that can be found in almost identical terms in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. "The Catholic apostolate, he said, is the continuance on earth and the continuation of the presence of the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, who in the person of his messengers lives on and helps man in his transition from time to eternity."<sup>14</sup> In order to understand the apostleship from the standpoint of its nature and purpose, he explained, it is necessary to take into account of the fact of original sin and its repairing by Christ: the rehabilitation of the fallen man by sin, and the bringing of him to the knowledge and love of God through the divine Saviour, constitutes the general idea of the Catholic apostolate. The apostolate, therefore, is by nature the work of God Himself who, in His immeasurable goodness, desires to save the sinful man, and every man. For the Catholic apostolate is no other than "the blessed and animating action of God's love: universal, for it spreads over all, eternal, because it spreads throughout all ages, effective, because it gives birth to flowers and fruits of eternal life and gives life to the world, enlightens it and enriches it in every way possible."

God, however, does not carry out great works of mercy alone, but with the help and cooperation of man. He selects for himself the appropriate instruments and collaborators: he sends them, fills them with his Spirit, equips them with his power and authority and with the appropriate charisms, and makes available to them all the means he has found in his eternal wisdom necessary and appropriate for the attainment of the desired purpose<sup>15</sup>, so that they may implement in time the eternal plan of his infinite love. Jesus' co-workers, the apostles, were aware that they were God's helpers, ministers of God's mysteries, servants of Christ. By defining themselves in this way, they made it clear that it is God who speaks and acts through them, they fill them with strength, they give them patience and humility – essential for apostolic work, they identify with them in a way: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (Mt 10:40). The entire apostolic

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Perrone, *L'Apostolato cattolica e il proselitismo protestante ossia l'opera di Dio e Vopera dell'uomo*, Genova 1862.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

activity would become simply be absurd if it were to be reduced to purely human activities, and if it were the work of man himself.<sup>16</sup> Such an apostolate derives its power and effectiveness from God and is simply the realisation by the people called to it of the eternal plan of human salvation. And since the Catholic apostolate is ultimately “an extension of the apostolate of the divine Saviour himself, sent by the Father to sanctify the world,” one could say that the Church of Jesus Christ, endowed by himself with various gifts of the Spirit, and especially “love, humility, gentleness, patience and sacrifice,” is “strictly speaking an eternal and universal apostolate”<sup>17</sup>: it is he who continues the saving work in the world, maintains the unblemished truth revealed and proclaims it to the world, he who leads people to salvation... The characteristics of the Church – unity, holiness, universality, fertility – become the attributes of the Catholic apostolate.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, Perrone emphasises the unique role of the Pope and the Holy See in the Church and in the apostolate, and the particular importance of the hierarchy: The Holy See is the head and heart of the Church, the “centre of the Catholic apostolate,”<sup>18</sup> while the visible deputy of Christ on earth, the Pope, in the name of Christ, directs the entire apostolate, sending apostolic husbands to the whole world, giving them the necessary power and authority, governing them and sustaining them in action, in hardships and dangers<sup>19</sup>; more directly watches over the apostolate and is guided by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which receives all its authority and its mission from the Pope<sup>20</sup>. Despite this apparent tightening of the apostolate to the hierarchy itself, Perrone seeks to suggest on various occasions, citing the words of the apostles (1P 3:1; 1Cor 7:14, etc.), the irreplaceable role of the lay faithful in the apostolate of the Church, imbuing the world with the spirit of the Gospel, as it were, from within<sup>21</sup>. Does he not do this under the clear influence of Pallotti’s thoughts?

### Conclusions

Newman already noted in the above mentioned article that Perrone had undergone a clear spiritual evolution towards a strong emphasis in 1847 (when Newman himself attended his lectures) on the role of the laity in the Church,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 11ff.37.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 544ff.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 88ff.569.

whereas a little earlier, in lectures published, for example, in 1842, he had not raised the issue at all. It is well known that Perrone knew Pallotti personally and valued him highly<sup>22</sup>. It would be reasonable to suppose, therefore that it was precisely through his conversations and contacts with Pallotti that he saw the great role to be played by the lay faithful in the Church and in its apostolate. The Apostolate too as “a work of God’s mercy which embraces all times, all places, all people on earth,”<sup>23</sup> seems to indicate a great relationship, if not a direct relationship, to dependence on Pallotti. It could therefore be said that Perrone, a well-known Roman theologian, contributed in his own way to the popularisation of Pallotti’s idea and indirectly to its recognition, acceptance and approval by the Second Vatican Council.

### The Conciliar Concept of the Apostolate

Nowadays, after the Second Vatican Council, the issue of the responsibility of all Christians for the Church does not raise any doubts. No one is able to question – the Council’s statements are all too clear on this point – the obvious fact that the faithful as such are the Church, form the Church of Christ, and that this Church is by its very nature an apostolic community. The Council’s merit, however, is much greater. When Pope Pius XI implemented the Catholic Action fifty years ago, he noticed the pioneering character of Pallotti’s thought and officially called it the “predecessor” of the Action. Pallotti’s thought was revived after many years of being forgotten and in slumber, but it was revived within the framework of the existing church structures. The faithful laity, who at that time were officially mobilised to act, supposed to be like an extension of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and their work was to become only a help for the hierarchical apostolate. This was undoubtedly a great step forward compared to the situation of the Church in Pallotti’s time but it was not the real “breakthrough” that occurred only in connection with the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>22</sup> Fr C.M. Orlandi states in his memoirs that in the work created by Pallotti he entered on the explicit advice of his spiritual director, Fr J. Perrone, who encouraged him to trust in the words and holiness of the Servant of God. Cf. J. Weidner, *Autobiographicae Caroli M. Orlandi notitiae*, in: Acta SAC 2 (1951-1954), 590.

<sup>23</sup> J. Perrone, op. cit., 11. Cf. H. Nys, *Le sdluz sans l’Evangile*, Paris 1966, 103ff; Y. Congar, *Un peuple messianique*, Paris 1975, 145ff.

### The Council's Vision of the Church as the "Universal" Sacrament of Salvation

The Council not only valued the lay faithful in the Church and not only affirmed that it is they who, together with the hierarchy, form one great people of God, but, by emphasizing the servile character of the hierarchy, showed a completely different model of the Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48): "The Church, both in helping and in receiving much from the world, is moving towards this one, so that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may become a reality. All the good that God's people can do to the human family during their earthly pilgrimage flows from the fact that the Church is the 'universal sacrament of salvation,' which shows and at the same time realizes the mystery of God's love for man" (GS 45). Does it not sound like Perrone's concrete thinking about the Church as "universal and eternal apostolate" echoes in these words?

By calling the Church "the sacrament, or sign and instrument of interior union with God and unity of the whole human race" (CCC 1) and by referring to it as the "universal sacrament of salvation," the Second Vatican Council sought to revive and express much more profoundly the truth of the former axiom: "extra Ecclesiam nulla salus." It did so by modifying the existing concept of salvation in two dimensions:

1° While before the Council salvation was conceived in an objective way as the achievement of an intended end and the achievement of an end (e.g. a happy vision)<sup>24</sup> the Council itself treated it more existentially, claiming that it is man's adhesion to God, the development of God's life in man, his union with Christ, his salvific death and resurrection. Salvation therefore begins, according to the concept of the Council, here on earth, and reaches its end in eternity. Since man's earthly adherence to God is always uncertain and in danger of sin, salvation will be fully realized in the future life when bodily death is overcome and "the all-powerful and merciful Saviour restores to man the salvation lost through his guilt": then man will adhere to God "with all his nature in the eternal sharing of God's immaculate life" (GS 18).

2° In pre-subjective theology, the idea of salvation, implemented hierarchically from above, was firmly rooted: The salvation "given" to mankind by God reached the lay faithful through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, whose representatives – each according to their place in the Church – were the "transmitters"

<sup>24</sup> Cf. X. Ochoa, *Index verborum cum documentis Concilii Vaticani secundi*, Rome 1967, 444f.



of salvation, while the laity were only its “recipients.”<sup>25</sup> The Council has overcome this ecclesiastic, or rather clerical, concept of salvation by emphasising the role of baptism, which is a sacrament given not only by the representatives of the hierarchy: by linking mankind most closely to the death of Christ, baptism deals a mortal blow of death to sin, while uniting man with his resurrection restoring the fullness of the dead in man through the sin of God’s life. The Christian, who is like Christ in being, “like the image of the Son, who is the first-born among many brothers and sisters” (GS 22), is capable, through the “first-beginnings of the Spirit” received in the same sacrament, of becoming truly like Christ. The salvation which he has experienced can and must bear fruit in him: the baptised man, incorporated into the paschal mystery by baptism and confirmed by the power of that sacrament, “to the death of Christ, he will go forth strengthened by hope for the resurrection” (GS 22). But not only the personal salvation of the baptised is at stake. Baptism involves man in the triple dimension of Christ’s ministry and life: in his priestly, royal and teaching function, so that every Christian may be a living part of the sacrament of salvation, which is the Church of Christ. The baptised are “consecrated by the rebirth and anointing of the Holy Spirit as [...] a holy priesthood, in order to offer spiritual sacrifices through all works proper to the Christian and to proclaim the power of the One who called them out of darkness to his bizarre light. Therefore [...] by praying and praising God together, they must offer themselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, and everywhere they must bear witness to Christ, and to those who demand it, give witness to the hope of eternal life which is in them” (LG 10). Every Christian can, therefore, by virtue of the priesthood received at baptism of the King’s Priesthood, and must, as a real living part of the Church’s sacrament, become a sacrifice for others; he can and must also bear witness to Christ with his whole life<sup>26</sup>. For, as the Council emphasises, the apostleship, which is “participation in the very saving mission of the Church,” “the Lord himself predestines all by baptism and confirmation” (LG 33).

The Holy Spirit, who is the soul and driving force behind all the apostolic activities of the Church, not only constantly accompanies and directs apostolic work, but also “sometimes, even visibly, anticipates the apostolic activity” of Christians” (AG 4). He also offers to all, even the non-baptised, “the opportunity to come, in a way known to God, to share in this paschal mystery” of Christ (GS 22). This setting of the problem of the universality of salvation by the Council

<sup>25</sup> Cf. A. Manaranche, *Quel salut?*, Paris 1969, 189ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. L. Balter, *Kapłaństwo ludu Bożego*, Warsaw 1982, 27ff.157ff.181ff.

does not mean at all that for people “of good will, in whose hearts grace invisibly acts” (GS 22), the Church has ceased to be the actual “sacrament of salvation.” The Council itself stresses, “based on Sacred Scripture and Tradition, that this pilgrim Church is indispensable for salvation. For Christ is the one Mediator and the only way of salvation, the One who becomes present to us in his Body, which is the Church (Mk 16:18; J 3:5) confirming at the same time the necessity of the Church, into which men enter through baptism as a gateway” (LG 14).

This fundamental and presuppositional statement, supplemented by a strong addition that there could be no salvation for those “who, knowing that the Church was founded by God through Christ as necessary, but who nevertheless do not want to either join or persevere in it,” in turn becomes for the Council the starting point for a detailed discussion of the various categories of persons in their relationship to the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation. The Council discusses in turn: belonging, communion and “ordering” to God’s people’ of Catholic Christians, catechumens, non-Catholics, Jews, Muslims and members of other non-Christian religions (cf. LG 14.16). The spiritual character of the relationship with the Church is strongly emphasised. The Council does not hesitate to affirm that even a Catholic, that is, a person “incorporated into the Church” and a living part of the “universal sacrament of salvation,” cannot achieve salvation himself unless he remains in love, that is to say, unless he “remains in the Church’s womb ‘flesh’ but not ‘heart’” (LG 14). On the other hand, the Council strongly emphasizes that Divine Providence does not refuse “the necessary help for salvation to those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet come to a clear knowledge of God at all, and who are trying, not without God’s grace, to lead an honest life. For whatever is in them of goodness and truth, the Church treats it as preparation for the Gospel and as given to them by the One who enlightens every man, so that he may ultimately possess life” (LG 16).

### *The Church as the Sacrament of Salvation of the World*

The fundamental change in the attitude of the Church towards the world deserves special attention in this case. While in the past the Church, faithful to some formulations of Christ (J 15:20; 16:33; 17:9ff) and the apostles (1J 2:15; J 4:4), has moved away from the affairs of this world in her general attitude, the Second Vatican Council, taking into account a number of other statements of Christ (J 3:16f; Mk 16:15, etc.), stressed the great role and positive presence of the Church in the world, under the influence of the rapidly developing theology of earthly realities. After all, the Church exists in the world and for the world.

As a visible association and spiritual community, the Church “walks with all humanity and experiences the same earthly fate as the world, living in it as the leaven and soul of human society, which is to be renewed and transformed into the family of God in Christ” (GS 40). In turn being a tool of “salvation of all,” he was sent to “the entire world, as – the light of the world and the salt of the Earth” (LG 9). This salvific mission of the Church imposes concrete obligations on the whole people of God and on its individual members. If the Church is to be truly the “universal sacrament of salvation,” all her sons “must be conscious of their responsibility for the world, must cultivate a truly Catholic spirit within themselves and devote their energies to the work of evangelisation” (AG 36).

The Council does not recommend too much detachment from the affairs of this world, nor does it approve of a complete immersion in earthly interests. It considers both attitudes to be inappropriate. Therefore, it admonishes Christians to “strive to carry out their earthly duties faithfully, guided by this spirit of the Gospel.” The Council considers the gap between faith and everyday life, expressed in the conviction that earthly affairs are alien to religious life, which would allegedly be reduced to mere acts of worship and “the fulfilment of certain moral duties,” as one of the “the more important mistakes of our time.” (GS 43). In the Council’s view, there is a mutual exchange of goods between the Church and the world: The Church, above all, but not exclusively, communicates supernatural values to the world and, at the same time, benefits from the values of this world. This mutual dependence, however, must not in any way undermine the fundamental mission of the Church, which “by helping the world and by receiving much from it, moves towards this one, so that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the whole human race may become a reality” (GS 45).

### *The Internal Structure of the Church – the Sacrament of Salvation*

Looking at the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation” also determines to some extent the view of its internal structure. The Church is, according to the doctrine of Vatican Council II, the people of God and the Body of Christ (CCC 7,1), composed of many different members united by one Spirit. The image of this Body, sketched out by the last Council, however, far surpasses the vision of the Church, discussed at the First Vatican Council. In fact, when the previous Council intended to define the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, there was no thought, in the spirit of the times, of the mutual responsibility of the members for one another and their fundamental equality with one another; rather, the first plan was to subordinate and differentiate one another. The Second Vatican Council did not cross out the hierarchy of the Church. However, speaking of the

Mystical Body, it emphasised the fundamental equality for all, maintaining that what is common is the dignity of members resulting from their rebirth in Christ, the common grace of the sons, the common vocation to perfection, the one salvation, the one hope and indivisible love. There is therefore no inequality in Christ and in the Church “because of race or national affiliation, social condition or gender...” (LG 32). All without exception “from bishops to the last of the lay faithful” have this supernatural sense of faith, of which J.H. Newman once wrote, which makes “God’s people, under the guidance of the sacred office of teacher [...] persist in their faith once handed down to the saints, penetrate it deeper with just judgement and apply it more fully in their lives. In addition, the very same Holy Spirit by (...) ‘giving to everyone, as he wishes’ (1 Cor 12:11) distributes among the faithful of all states his gifts and special graces by which he makes them fit and ready to undertake various works or functions for the renewal and further useful development of the Church (1 Cor 12:11)” (LG 12).

If, therefore, there is a certain diversity in the Church, because not everyone “follows the same path” and some “are appointed by Christ’s will as teachers, ministers of mysteries and pastors of others, yet as regards dignity and the common work of all the faithful in building up the Body of Christ, true equality prevails among all. For the distinction which the Lord has made between the ministers, saints and the rest of God’s people brings with it communion, because the shepherds and the other faithful are bound to one another by the necessary mutual references; the shepherds of the Church, following the example of the Lord, give one another and the other faithful clothing services, and the faithful willingly help together the shepherds and teachers. Thus in their diversity they bear witness to a bizarre unity in the Body of Christ” (LG 32).

This fundamental equality and responsibility of all for the Church becomes the basis of the universal apostolate, which is participation in the “saving mission of the Church” and to which “the Lord himself predestines all by baptism and confirmation” (LG 33). The soul of the Church’s apostolate is the love given and sustained by God through the sacraments (cf. LG 33). Lived by the love of God and men, all the faithful are to make Christ present (to be “*aiter Chriistus*”), to become witnesses and living instruments of the mission of the whole Church, and to “make the Church present and active in places and circumstances where it can only become the salt of the earth through their help” (LG 33). Moreover, the lay faithful “can also be called to a more direct collaboration with the apostolate of the hierarchy in various ways,” because by virtue of their implantation in the royal priesthood of Christ they are capable of “the hierarchy taking on the help of the laity in the performance of certain ecclesiastical tasks serving a spiritual purpose” (LG 33). All members of the

Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, therefore, have the honourable duty to care for the development of the kingdom of God on earth.

### Conclusions

When one compares the statements of the Second Vatican Council on the basis, sources, universal duty, conditions and means of the apostolate with the inspirational thinking of Vincenzo Pallotti in this field, one can see not only an internal convergence, if not an overlap: the interdependence of these approaches, which would allow us to speak of Pallotti's real influence on the Council, but also the full conciliar approval of the pioneering ideas that were laid down, with such great difficulty, that allowed to take root for good in the consciousness and life of the Church.

### *An Authentic Dimension of the Universal Apostolate*

Since the universal apostolate, for which V. Pallotti had struggled to obtain such an effort and to which J. Perrone devoted so much attention, has now become, after the Second Vatican Council, an indisputable fact, it is appropriate to take a closer look at this reality.

The Second Vatican Council strongly emphasizes that the apostolate as such stems from the Christian vocation itself and therefore it can never be lacking in the Church (cf. AA 1-2). If, in fact, the Church has been established to live in order to "spread the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of the Father, to make all delusions partakers of salvific redemption and to direct the whole world truly to Christ through them," and any "activity of the Mystical Body towards this end is called the apostolate" (AA 2); it is beyond doubt that the Church herself is by nature an apostolic community which carries out her apostolate in many different ways and at various levels.

### *The Bearers of Apostolic Responsibility*

The Second Vatican Council, thus showing the basis and purpose of the apostleship, emphasises in many places the vocation of all members of the Church: the hierarchy and lay faithful, active and contemplative religious communities (including hermits), Christian families, elderly and young people, and the lonely – to the apostleship. The bearers of apostolic duty and tasks are therefore all Christians on an equal footing, albeit in different ways. In fact, the Council

draws particular attention to the need to preserve its own specificity, which stems from its personal vocation, from the gifts received from God, from its charisms, and thus from its place in God's people and from the role that each person has in it. Since the Holy Spirit "who performs the work of sanctifying the people of God" grants to the faithful various gifts for the fulfilment of their apostolate, so that "by serving one another with every grace he has received, they may also contribute 'as good ministers of the various graces of God' (1P 4:10) to build up the whole body in love," they thus have the unquestionable right and duty to use these gifts "for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit (...) and at the same time in union with the brothers in Christ, especially with their shepherds, who are to judge the true nature of these gifts and their proper use" (AA 3).

The fruitfulness of the apostolate, its effectiveness depends on the degree of human union with Christ, the Apostle of the Father. Eternal (DA 4): the closer an individual's union with Jesus, the deeper his inner life, the greater his contribution to the building up of the Church's body<sup>27</sup> Therefore, although "all apostolic activity must be born of love and draw its strength from it," there is a clear gradation of works of art, apostolic practices: first place are those which, flowing from the deepest, boundless love of God and neighbour, are by their very nature "capable of becoming a living expression of love itself" (AA 8). The priority among the apostolic works, therefore, is the strength of the fact that there is a variety of "works of charity and mutual assistance aimed at helping people in their various needs" (AA 8). The Church has always held these works in high esteem and appreciation.

One could also say that since the measure of a person's personal holiness is the degree to which he or she updates the royal priesthood, i.e. offers himself or herself to God as a sacrifice for others, while personal holiness has a decisive influence on all apostolic actions of a Christian, the apostolate, whose soul is personal holiness, in its essence boils down to updating the priestly dignity of Christians, i.e. to becoming a sacrificial feeding ground acceptable to God for others. The whole Christian life, the various daily activities: prayer, work, apostolic undertakings and sufferings, and even moments of rest and relaxation, if they are held in the Spirit, can become "spiritual sacrifices, pleasing to God through Jesus Christ" (LG 34). These sacrifices, combined with the Most Holy Sacrifice of Christ, are offered to God the Father in the eucharistic rite "through

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. Forycki, *Apostolskie powołanie ludu Bożego*, in: *Powołanie do apostołstwa*, L. Balter (ed.), Poznań 1975, 144-156.

the hands of the priest” (LG 48). Therefore, the Eucharist is not only the summit and the source of the Church’s life and salvific activity (CL 10), but also presents itself “as the source and the summit of all evangelisation” (OT 5) and the whole apostolate, “for the apostolic work is intended to make all, having become children of God by faith and baptism, come together, worship God in the midst of the Church, share in the sacrifice and nourish the Lord’s Supper” (LG 10). “For the Eucharist contains all the spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Passover, and the living bread which, through his Body, animated and animating by the Holy Spirit, gives life to men, inviting them and thus leading them to offer with him himself, his work and all things created” (GS 5). The Eucharist thus presents itself as the most effective means and the most essential content of the entire apostolate of the Church. In the course of its exercise, the Church is herself: a visible association and spiritual community, a community equipped with “hierarchical organs” and at the same time “the mystical Body of Christ” (LG 8), that is, a compact, uniform organism, albeit differentiated in the functions of its members, and in short, the sacrament of salvation.

#### *Parish as a Privileged Area for Apostolic Work*

Thinking about the Eucharist, which is “the centre of the congregation of the faithful presided over by the presbyter” (OT 5), automatically leads to a parish that is the smallest part of the local Church (CL 42; LG 23) and at the same time the privileged area of apostolic work. As the Second Vatican Council notes, the parish “provides an eye-catching example of the community apostolate, bringing together all the different human characteristics within its boundaries and implanting them into the universality of the Church” (DA 10). One could also say that it is in the parish that differences between the hierarchical apostolate, the centre of gravity which is in the various liturgical services, and the apostolate of the lay faithful, whose proper task is to pass the world from within with the leaven of the Gospel, can be best seen.

The representatives of the ecclesiastic hierarchy in the parish (pastor, vicar and other pastors) are “teachers, ministers of mysteries and pastors of others by the will of Christ himself” (CCC 32). Their basic functions concentrate on shaping – by the holy power they have – the priestly people, teaching them, forming and directing them, and celebrating “in place of Christ (in persona Christi) the Eucharistic Sacrifice and its offering to God in the name of all people (LG10). All their activities must therefore, by their very nature, lead to the sacred liturgy and be manifested in it above all; only in the course of the liturgy do they make Christ’s faithful present in his triple function: The Teacher, the Priest and the

Shepherd, and in it only make him personally present in the midst of the congregation of the faithful (cf. LG 28), for “the same one who once offered himself on the cross is now offered up through the ministry of priests” (SC 7). Their apostolate is also inseparable from the sacred liturgy: it is expressed above all in the proper preparation of the faithful for its full, authentic experience – priests “teach the faithful to sacrifice divine prayer to God the Father in the Mass and to sacrifice their lives with it” (OT 5), – and in such celebration of sacred activities – with the highest reverence, concentration and depth of experience – that they are a true edification for the whole people. “Each liturgical celebration, as the work of Christ the Priest and his Body, or Church, is a most sacred activity, and no other activity of the Church can match its effectiveness in the same title and to the same degree” (SC 7). Therefore, the Eucharistic Sacrifice is presented “as the source and summit of all evangelisation” (OT 5) and is the very centre of all the apostolic activities of the ecclesiastic hierarchy.

The lay faithful, on the other hand, “by virtue of their royal priesthood, cooperate in the offering of the Eucharist; they also fulfil this priesthood by receiving the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the testimony of the holy life, self-denial and active love” (LG 10). As participants in the triple function of Christ, they exercise their “apostolate through work to spread the Gospel... and to imbue with the evangelical spirit and to perfect the order of temporal affairs, so that their efforts in this field openly bear witness to Christ and serve the salvation of men” (AG 2).

Within the parish community, the main burden of apostolic work rests on Christian families, which are “the first school of the social virtues needed by all communities” and in which “a healthy human society and the Church” are first experienced (GE 3). The Council therefore obliges spouses to be “co-workers of grace and witnesses of faith for one another, for their children and for others in the household.” Their primary task and at the same time the quintessence of their apostolate is to show and confirm with their own lives the truth about the inseparability and holiness of the matrimonial bond, to strongly emphasise the right and duty of parents and guardians to educate children and young people in Christianity, to defend the dignity and the due autonomy of the family (AA 11).

The Council also assigns important apostolic tasks to young people, who become increasingly more involved in social and political life. He believes that “young people should become the first and direct apostles of youth through personal apostolic activity among their peers,” adding that even children “have their own apostolic activity. For they are true witnesses of Christ among their peers to the extent of their strength” (AA 12).



### *Specificity of the Apostolate of the Lay Faithful*

The apostolate of lay people differs in nature from the apostolate of monks who are also burdened with care for the construction of God's kingdom on earth, adapted to the type of religious family and its way of life. While in many religious families "the entire religious life of the members must be imbued with an apostolic spirit and all apostolic activity must be characterised by a religious spirit," it is also true that "the entire religious life of the members must be imbued with an apostolic spirit" (PC 8), the specificity of the apostolate of the lay faithful is that, living in the world and among the affairs of this world, they are "in the form of a leaven, from within" contributing to the sanctification of mortality and the example of their lives, radiating faith, hope and charity, and showing "others Christ" (LG 31). The apostolate of the laity is therefore expressed not only in the conformity of their lives with faith, but also in the reliability of their work, in fraternal charity, in which "by participating in the life, work, sufferings and aspirations of their brothers, they slowly and unnoticeably prepare the hearts of all for the work of salvific grace," in the conscious involvement in the construction of human society, in which they "with Christian generosity seek to carry out their domestic, social and professional activities" (AG 13).

The apostolate of lay people can of course be individual and communal. The individual apostolate is "the beginning and the condition of every lay apostolate, including the associated apostolate, and cannot be replaced by anything" (AA 16). The community apostolate is based on and results from the individual, that is, the authenticity of life, a personal example, attitude and teaching. It also fully responds to "the human and Christian demands of the faithful, while at the same time showing the sign of communion and unity of the Church in Christ" (AA 18). This explains why it is so important in the Church. If it is organised in the form of legally approved associations, the Church respects them and provides full support for the activity they develop, while at the same time taking care to maintain a proper hierarchy of forms of work and needs. And since the proper accomplishment of the apostolic tasks requires proper Christian preparation and development, the Council has recognized this as an urgent need of our time, and at the same time as an apostolic task for all, especially for those whom the Lord Himself has made ministers of the mysteries of God.

## Conclusion

The panorama of the Council's thinking about the universal apostolate, sketched out in brief, is increasingly becoming the property of the people of God: it permeates the minds and hearts, is reflected in the practice of daily life, in the initiatives and apostolic undertakings taken, in the way of thinking and acting. It would be difficult to say, of course, what the actual state of current apostolic activity in the Church is, if we had separate sociological studies. Nevertheless, it should be stated and strongly emphasised that the pioneering suggestions of Vincenzo Palottis, enriched by the experience and reflections of future generations, the contributions of Newman, Perrone and others, deepened and adapted according to the demands of the times by the Second Vatican Council, have already become a lasting heritage and property of the whole people of God, who are becoming increasingly more aware that they are by their very nature, and therefore must be in practice, a people who are eminently apostolic.