



Vinfam India



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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHARITY

Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII is the first in the series of the great encyclical letters on social teachings of the Catholic Church. Till 1891 the Church, which was not spirited in addressing the different social questions, took a paradigm shift thereafter. In this Encyclical, the Church acknowledges her paramount duty of not aligning itself with oppressive and anachronistic powers that were perpetuating the sufferings of the people. Thus the Church's clear position to be close to the poorest of the poor and to become the voice of the voiceless began to be expressed in her teachings. Charity (diaconia) is one of the purposes for which the church began to exist (Acts 6: 3). And the Church continues to do this mission. Charity blended with justice is the clearest and most compelling sign of Christ's presence in the life of the Church. Therefore the Church with much enthusiasm began to project her social stance which highlighted the inseparability of charity and justice.

In the recently concluded World Youth Day at Rio de Janeiro, the jovial and humble Pope Francis urged people who are more economically privileged to "never tired" of working for solidarity and social justice. The Church firmly believes that solidarity and social justice is the continuation of the Mission of Christ

who inaugurated it at his public ministry by affirming that He is sent "to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..." (Luke 4: 18).

At this juncture we may be provoked to make a query as why the Church was tacit till 1891, regarding its duty to speak about social justice? Or from where did Church receive this prolific influence on the body of literature known as social justice or in other words who were the precursors of modern catholic movement? One of the most influential personalities for this praise worthy inspiration for the Catholic social thought is Blessed Antoine Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), the principal founder of Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The central concerns of Rerum Novarum are a focus of his thoughts on social justice. According to Frédéric Ozanam all Christians personally but not through proxy are called to be at the service of the poor. Love for others, and in the first place love for poor, in whom the church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment. Only such awareness can

give the courage needed to face the risk and the change involved in every authentic attempt to come to the aid of another. It is not merely a matter of 'giving from one's surplus', but of helping entire people which are presently excluded or marginalised to enter into the sphere of economic and human development.

Although Frédéric Ozanam referred to his work as 'charity' but his vision transcended mere charitable giving. He had understood that there was no charity worthy of the name that did not do something to bring about greater equity. Therefore he insisted on putting a human face to the otherwise distant and anonymous practice of charity. His humanisation of the poor demanded the members of the Society to go out and meet poor families and, in so many ways, adopt them and make their struggles the struggles of the Society members. He exhorted the members that their approach to the poor is not only alienated from one another by sinful social, political, and economic structures, and giving them the opportunity of experiencing their genuine and deep filial bonds under their common divine parent.

St. Vincent de Paul once stated: "There is no charity which is not alongside justice". Thinking along the same lines Frédéric Ozanam, who

wished “Charity is to do what justice cannot do on its own”. Further he stated, “Order in the Society (SSVP) is founded on two virtues, justice and charity. But justice already presupposes a lot of love, for one must love a person a lot if one is to respect his rights, which border one’s own rights, and his freedom which limits one’s own freedom! Justice, however, has limits; charity knows none.”

On the mural of the Crypt where Frédéric Ozanam’s mortal remains, there is a beautiful painting of the Good Samaritan. The reason of placing such painting is because he loved that passage and had given a special interpretation. While praising the heroic act of Good Samaritan, he added that road was treacherously winding and was a favourite hideout of robbers and thieves. So our role is not only to take care of the victims, but also to make sure that similar attacks on strangers may not take place. In other words, according to Frédéric Ozanam, “Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice’s role to prevent the attack.”

This year while celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Frédéric Ozanam, let us uphold the legacy left behind by this noble personality. Charity and justice will have to go hand in hand. As we are confronted with the phenomenon of growing poverty and injustice in our society, let us commit ourselves in following the footsteps of Frédéric Ozanam by promoting social justice and charity.

*Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil, CM
National Coordinator, VFI*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE SYSTEMIC CHANGE WORKSHOP IN INDIA

The goal of this workshop is to assist the Vincentian Family in India to help the members of the various branches to develop a systemic change mentality, to initiate new systemic change projects, and to transform already-existing projects into systemic change projects.

The Commission for Promoting Systemic Change hopes that the participants at the workshop in Ranchi will become “multiplying agents” of systemic change; that is, that they will use the tools they have acquired during the workshop to teach others about systemic change.

The international leaders of the Vincentian Family are eager to have feedback in regard to how the participants at the various workshops around the world have followed up afterwards. In order to supply them with this information, and also to tell other members of the worldwide Vincentian Family what is happening in India, the Commission asks your help in assessing the follow-up.

FOLLOW-UP PROCESS

1. A year from now, Fr. Francis Puthenthayil will conduct a survey. In it he will ask each branch of the Vincentian Family that has participated in the workshop in Ranchi the following questions:
 - a. Since the meeting in Ranchi, what further systemic change workshops have been given within your branch or by members of your branch? Who participated in such workshops?
 - b. What new systemic change projects have been initiated by members of your branch? Please

give a brief description of such projects.

- c. What already-existing projects have been transformed into systemic change projects by members of your branch? Please give a brief description of the steps taken to bring about this transformation.
2. Fr. Francis will then collate the results into a report, which he will send to the chairperson of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change.
3. The chairperson of the Commission will share the report with all the members of the Commission and with the international leaders of the Vincentian Family.
4. Some of the information contained in the report may be shared with the worldwide Vincentian Family through the www.famvin.org website.

EXECUTIVE BODY MEETING

The 10th Executive Body Meeting was held at the Diocesan Social Service Centre at Vijyawada on September 29, 2013. In spite of the fact of ‘indefinite bandh’ in Andhra Pradesh, most of the members could arrive in right time to attend the meeting. The meeting began at 9.30 a.m. Bro. V. M. J. Balaswamy, the National President of SSVP, who hosted the meeting welcomed the members. The members while appreciating the growth of the VFI took up the agenda of the meeting. There was a serious discussion on the ‘Follow up to the Systemic Change Workshop in India’. “Systemic Change” was chosen as the VFI’s focus at least for the coming two years

(2014-2015). In view of this, a commission consisting of five members will be nominated. The commission will disseminate the concept of systemic change to all the members.

There was also serious discussion on the report of the

commission for women empowerment. There was a strong proposal to name more members for the commission so as to execute the suggestion proposed by the said commission. The need of a secretariat at Bangalore, more formation programmes, strengthening the

regions and zone, updating the website etc. were other topics for the discussion. The meeting was concluded at 4 p.m. The Executive Body expressed profound gratitude to SSVP for hosting the meeting at Vijayawada.

NEWS - REGIONAL

1. EASTERN REGION

Seminar on Systemic change

This year the heads of VFI together with selected members who are actively involved in social action, gathered in Ranchi, invited the members of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change to make a presentation. Afterwards, "Systemic Change" was chosen as the VFI's focus for at least the coming few years. In view of this, each branch as well as the social wing was requested to disseminate the concept of the systemic change in their respective areas. Accordingly, the Organization for Development Integration and Social Action (ODISA) arranged a seminar for its members. ODISA is a social work wing of the Vincentian confreres working in the Northern Indian Province. It was established on 11th April 1990 with the sole aim of enhancing the capabilities of the rural poor on their March towards liberation and development at all stages. True to its model and patron, ODISA has a special predilection for the socially, economically, politically and ideologically powerless and marginalized section in the society. It aims at building self-reliant communities based on human values. At present ODISA works in 600 rural villages. Our focus groups are those who are socially, economically and politically marginalized and exploited such as tribals, Dalits, backward classes, physically handicapped, women, child laborers, street children and leprosy patients. ODISA follows

the maxim "Develop people and development will follow" we organize these unorganized groups and empower them to become self-reliant self-dependant.

Having realized the importance and usefulness of this model in the field of social work, a three-day training programme was organized for the staff of ODISA on systemic change. Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil C.M. the National Coordinator of Vincentian family was the resource person. There were about 45 participants attended the training. The training was conducted in lecturing, Power Point presentation, Group discussion and presentation of the report. The training programme was very much participatory. On the last day during the evaluation the trainees expressed their satisfaction on the training. They said it has widened their horizon of understanding and gave them new and relevant tools to work effectively. ODISA is very much thankful to Rev. Fr. Francis Puthenthayil for giving his valuable time and giving training to its workers.

*Fr. Vijoy Kumar Nayak CM
Director of ODISA*

2. BIHAR-JHARKHAND REGION

Vincentian Family meeting of Bihar - Jharkhand Region

The meeting was held on July 10, 2013 at Nirmala College, Ranchi. Sr. Lilly SCJM, the new Regional Coordinator presided over the meeting. There was representation from all the branches present in the region. The participants while appreciating the input session on Systemic

Change by the International Commission for Systemic Change took some concrete steps for implementing one of the resolutions taken during the Annual Meeting at Ranchi. One-day seminar on "Restoring the Dignity of Women" was organised and will be conducted on a convenient date in the month of October, 2013. The venue will be Nirmala College. More participants including the leaders of village communities will be invited to attend the input session.

*M.C. Mathew SSVP
Secretary, Bihar-Jharkhand Region.*

3. KARNATAKA REGION

Seminar on "Dignity of Women and Atrocities against them"

As per the proposal at the Annual Meeting of the Major superiors/heads at Ranchi, the Karnataka region organised a seminar on "Dignity of Women and Atrocities against them". It was held on September 22, 2013 at St. Vincent's House, Priest Home, & Retreat House, Mysore. There were twenty-one participants from different branches of Vincentian family such as DC, CM, SSVP, SCN, and SCV. Sr. Saleena D.C., the resource person explained the theme through a power point presentation and showed a couple of video clippings. At the end of the seminar, the participants came to an agreement of working together on the following areas, such as:

- a) Girl Child Education
- b) Join hands with likeminded

- NGO's
- c) Zonal level gathering and finalizing the action plan
 - d) Stop child labour and start Non Formal Education for them
 - e) With possible and our own resources plan at zonal level all the possibilities.
 - f) Inform all the activities to the

Region.

2. *Formation of Zones in Karnataka Region*

During the meeting held on September 22, 2013, the members formed five zones for Karnataka region. The following are the regions and their coordinators:

1. Bangalore North: Sr. Ann Muttathil DC

2. Bangalore South : and Sr. Tincy SCV
3. Mysore: Sr. Rose Chirayil DC
4. Mangalore and Udipi : Sr. Magadalene DC
5. Belgaum: Sr. Clare Fernandez SSVP

*Fr. Devasia Pudussery CM
Regional Coordinator*

BLESSED FREDERIC OZANAM, THE PRINCIPAL FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL



A n t o i n e Frederic Ozanam, born in Milan on 23rd April 1813 and died in Marseilles on 8th September 1853, and according to Lacordaire, the man whose life and

career brought most honour to the Church in France during the nineteenth century. While he was in college in Lyons he decided, after a serious religious crisis, to devote his life to the defence of the Faith. While a student in Paris, he became, in 1833, the principal founder of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, in whose service he spent himself heedlessly until his death.

A professor in Lyons, and later at the Sorbonne, he devoted himself, in his first post, to the study of social problems, and he brought Christian conceptions unknown before his day. In Paris, he first studied Christian civilisation in the Dark Ages and later Dante and medieval religious literature. In 1848 he took up journalism and published a number of articles in support of the working class in the 'New Age' publication.

Incomparable husband, father and friend, he brought a ray of light and comfort to all. When his health at last put an end to teaching, he passed his last years in the service of his students and above all, of his beloved Society of St. Vincent de Paul. After a long and cruel illness, during which he accepted his suffer-

ings in a spirit of Christian resignation to the Divine Will, and which raised him to the highest levels of virtue, he died a holy death at the age of forty years.

His written work and, even more, his apostolate, survived him and earned many admirers in France, throughout the world, and above all in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. It is surely unnecessary to emphasise the deciding role he played in the foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. In 1913 when the Society were about to celebrate the centenary of Ozanam's birth, deeper researches were undertaken. Armed with the results of these researches, Vice-President-General de Lanzac de Laborie, a historian, published in his Book of the Centenary, a long article in which he cast light both on Ozanam's ideas in apologetics and the hopes that he had conceived by the realisation of his ideas, from the time of his joining the Society.

But it was Ozanam alone who saw all the opportunities offered by such an association for the spiritual welfare of youth as the witness and advocate that it had become urgently necessary to bring forward in support of the Church and of Christ in a Society that denied Christianity. This was the work to which Ozanam devoted himself with an undying ardour. Always ready for a flight of the spirit, he formulated and suggested to Bailly the first President General, everything that has gone to make up the structure and spirit of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and everything that

has ensured its growth and development.

The centenary of the Society, in 1933 and of Ozanam's death, in 1953, gave an opportunity for assessing the results of the first action of Charity. Today, throughout the world Christian after sincere witness for the Faith by their disinterested help for the unfortunate not less than by their faithful and entire submission to the laws of the Church. The highest authorities in the Church have recognised this in opening the cause of Frederic Ozanam's canonization, which opened in 1925 and entered into its decisive phase in 1956. Frederic was proclaimed 'Venerable' on July 6th 1993 by John Paul II and 'Beatified' him on August 22nd 1997.

Pope John Paul II said at the beatification of Ozanam: "Ozanam understands that charity should lead us to work for the elimination of injustice. Charity and Justice go together."

Let us continue to pray earnestly and fervently for the miracle, which is urgently needed for the canonization of our principle founder.

The "spirit" is the spirit of Christ. Faithful sons of the Catholic Church, the members seek no reward here below. It is enough for them to feel that they are working for the kingdom of God and to raise up the spiritual level of the world which has an ever more pressing need for Faith and love.

*Bro. Dominic Pinto
National Treasurer, SSVP.*

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