When Vincent de Paul was born (1581-1660), he was one of the many peasants of his time. He didn’t have blue blood in his veins! His was a culture that did not allow him to write great works, every career was barred to him. Yet, while many were asking the why of things, he overturned the existing values, wondering: "why not?" Why can’t things change, innovate, improve? This was the question of courage, of the Mission, of the charism of charity.

With his action and his sensitivity he changed the way things are understand, so much so that after him the Church and the world were no longer the same. He invented a new role for the woman, placing her at the centre of the life of humanity with its needs and hopes. He did not invent charity, but discovered it within the Church and placed it at the top of the interests of the world.

In him there isn't only the "saint". There is also a century, a people, a landscape. There is a lifetime. There is a church. There is God.

We are in 17th century France, characterized by wars and political struggles, famine and epidemics, appalling poverty of populations, especially in the countryside. The French State was not only unconcerned, but its politics were aimed at "elevating the name of the King over foreign Nations". And this led the socio-economic situation to tragic levels: many beggars, tramps, abandoned children;

begging in the 17th century is a worrying and disturbing problem.

Infant mortality grows: 50% of children die before one year of life. The situation in hospitals is terrible, where the poor and the tramps are locked up, considered to be vehicles of diseases, disorders and immorality.

The treatment reserved for prisoners is inhuman.

The French peasant
Saint Vincent de Paul - the apostolic life

suffers hunger, is oppressed by all kinds of burdens and tithes, conditions that provoke furious riots in the country. Productivity is low due to backward agricultural techniques, to bad weather (years of freezes, floods, droughts), to raids of bandits, the lodging and presence of troops during the thirty years' war, which resulted in famines that also produced epidemics and plagues.

Vincent summarized this distressing reality in the famous phrase: "The poor starve to death and damn themselves". Moreover, at that time, the poor person was not considered as the Christ to be clothed (St. Martin) or to be helped to ford the river of life (St. Christopher): the poor man represented according to scholars – the "great fear" of the century.

At the same time, the French Church was shaken by heresy, rejected due to the opulence and the worldliness of bishops and prelates, for the decadence of fervour and the scandals in the cloistered monasteries and for the ignorance and the immorality of priests. Some enlightened Bishop had tried to create groups of consecrated virgins dedicated to the poor, the sick, orphans, illiterates. But he hopelessly collided with the mentality of the time: it was unthinkable for a nun to be outside the security of the enclosure, deemed necessary to protect the female fragility.
Saint Vincent de Paul - the apostolic life

NOVATOR OF FEMALE RELIGIOUS LIFE

In their homes and assist those who would have died without aid, not daring to ask for it. In military camps, the wounded on the battlefield, they perform a “service” that was not done by any other religious community.

While having great respect for the traditional cloistered convents, neither obliged to wear a special habit nor to live in places separated from ordinary people. It was a necessity for them, essential to safeguard women who had no husband’s protection. Therefore Solemn Profession was not required of the Daughters of Charity (as this would have been impossible for them).

The Daughter of Charity provides very high dowries for their daughters to enter a convent. For the first time, St Vincent had reacted to the custom of the time where families had to consider the woman as weak and inconsistent, incapable of direct intervention in social life and therefore incapable of forming communities.

Among other dioceses, the Vincentian lay movement was a natural continuation of the retreats. For ongoing formation, there were the lectures on Tuesdays. The Seminaries, in many dioceses of France under the direction of some priests of the Mission, represented the main ministry.

The Missions gave birth to Spiritual Retreats and prayer groups such as the Associations of Perpetual Adoration, so that at some point the missionary left the place to the parish priest and the mission became a simple Pastoral Ministry. Trent: “educate, convert, be understood.” The ideal aim was to bring all Christians “to live in holiness”: the Missions, for Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It underlined the personal encounter with God through general confession and communion, giving importance to catechetical instruction, for which Vincent had given birth to the Congregation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (Volunteering, Conferences of St. Vincent) and to the Vincentian lay movement, creating a new style of woman’s presence in the Church and in society: the Daughters of Charity provided a genuine re-foundation of female community life.

A little at a time, and amidst a thousand difficulties, St Vincent started an organized Institute. With Vincent a charity that is structured, organized, consistent and attentive is born. The Church practiced only almsgiving and charity: until that time, the Company of the Daughters of Charity was a true passion. The ideal aim was to bring all Christians “to live in holiness”: the Missions, for Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. It underlined the personal encounter with God through general confession and communion, giving importance to catechetical instruction, for which Vincent had given birth to the Congregation of the Company of the Daughters of Charity (Volunteering, Conferences of St. Vincent) and to the Vincentian lay movement, creating a new style of woman’s presence in the Church and in society: the Daughters of Charity provided a genuine re-foundation of female community life.

St Vincent realized that the Lord called him as compared to other female communities of his Institute. He assumed the responsibility for the tragic key moment experience of his Institute. As he moved to Rome: Masonry, the chapel of the General House: NOVATOR OF FEMALE RELIGIOUS LIFE

...
Saint Vincent de Paul - the apostolic life

La Roche/Foron (France): stained glass in the community chapel

In a famous paragraph of the disability, soldiers on the battlefield were all places of action of the Daughters of St. Vincent were built main purpose for which God has called and united you is to honour our Lord Jesus Christ as the “Vincentian” tradition.

absolutely new form that responded to the needs of the times. Search for the face of God, life in For this, the

In the fire of a charity that was active and industrious, Vincent de Paul was able to achieve the

: the sisters did not wear any special habit, they lived in buildings called “houses” and not complaints as a good mother should do, because the Daughters of Charity are intended to

fear of God as their grate,

experienced the fear of the poor and indifference toward them, if not also rejection of childhood:

the virtues, because this would be the most dangerous ambition” (5 Jan 1643).

whom one owes respect and devotion. His was a as if they had professed their life in a Religious Order”

and holy modesty for their veil,

to serve with great sweetness and cordiality, understanding their pain, listening to their

the streets of the city and the hospital wards as their cloister;

The spiritual perspective, steeped in history, founded on solid virtue “adherence to Christ” through “the adherence to the poor”. The service for the poor was

famous these same words are recalled, when one traces the identity of the Sisters of Charity of

evangelical experience, therefore, is accomplished in the solitude of the cloister as well as in the

common, obedience, chastity, poverty, are not complete in themselves, but constitute the

than others, both physically and morally, because of one’s family or because of riches, nor for

the parish church as their chapel,

became also the heritage of the community founded by Jeanne-Antide. In her

spiritual practices laid down by the rules to assist the destitute.

around the identification of Jesus Christ in the person of the poor

indigent patients at home and in hospitals, basic education in rural areas, assistance to

commitment

Their

homes of the poor, the hospices and the prisons (common life, chastity, obedience, poverty, prayer and silence, distance from worldliness) in an

considered so much a priority that in many cases the Daughters of Charity were to leave the

service to one’s neighbour.

> «all that you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, is considered done to me

The

rented houses as their cells;

Rule of 1802

for the sisters working in parishes and in villages, for the sisters teaching in the schools and for

model-guide for many other types of religious communities which, in turn, were inspired to the

case of the Daughters of Charity they were not nuns, but

. One of the main fruits of this new apostolic vision, the

elements of a proactive presence of evangelization and charity among men and women:

since the origins of the Company.

no ambition or conceit: if you do not think of yourselves as being more than you are or better

special Rules

they should, by virtue of this, lead a religious life

surrounded by a sacred aura, which demands respect and veneration: for Vincent, this meant

represent God's goodness toward the poor. They represent the person of our Lord, who said:

foundlings, orphans, galley slaves, beggars, abandoned old people, people with mental

those working in the hospitals and in the prisons

obedience as their enclosure;

Besançon: in the community chapel , 131 grande rue

Besançon: in the community chapel

SPIRITUAL PHYSIOGNOMY of the DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

religious ideal

Conferences