Antoine Frederic Ozanam (one of the co-founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), for his restless and excellent reflection on work, capital and professional relations, is considered one of the most brilliant precursors in the 19th century of the Doctrine Social of the Church, consolidated by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical “Rerum Novarum.”[1]

His articles, published in the newspapers of the time, were – sometimes – the only voice that was raised in defense of the less favored. Ozanam was so worried about the subject that he founded, in 1848, a newspaper, in union with Fr. Lacordaire and other colleagues, called “The New Era,” in which he presented his social positions.
The Social Doctrine of the Church means the set of Catholic teachings contained in numerous encyclicals and papal documents that define principles, criteria and guidelines on the social and political organization of nations, with the aim of building a just and fraternal society through the experience of the Gospel[2]. In other words: the struggle for social justice in a society full of inequalities, lack of values and obsessed with money.

Many Vincentians can study and know the foundations of the Social Doctrine of the Church when they participate in formation meetings. From there, they take a liking for the subject and begin to be interested in Church documents, specialized articles, Internet research and reflections on the subject. Many of those Vincentians did not even know that Ozanam had been one of the precursors of this Doctrine.

The Social Doctrine of the Church is very much in tune with the wishes of all the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, because they do not accept poverty and want every human being to be happy, fulfilled, economically independent and with a solid Faith in Christ. The Vincentians seek a world in which the excluded are the first, not the last, and choose to be next to those more humble brothers, in unity with them. The Vincentians are eternal indignant with the situation of oppression and misery, not merely alleviating poverty with basic baskets or clothing.

The International Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in its chapter 7, is very clear in defending that “Vincentians dream of a more just society, where the rights, responsibilities and development of all people are promoted” [3]. «Vincentians are committed to identifying the root causes of poverty and contributing to its elimination. In all its charitable actions, there must be a search for justice» [4]. We see, then, that the Vincentian Regulation fits perfectly with the Social Doctrine of the Church.

The Vincentian Family, of which the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a part, has been developing for years the Project called “Systemic Change,” which aims to remove the miserable from the situation they are in, generating employment and work, so that, With their own economic resources, the poor can feed themselves, live healthily, study and, in this way, find work that frees them from the humiliating situation of beggars. This project is completely inserted in the foundations of the Social Doctrine of the Church, because it stimulates, through work, the social realization of men and women, children of God, especially of the poor, the Lord’s favorites.

[1] Published in 1891.


Renato Lima de Oliveira
16th General President of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul