

## CHARITY, JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

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As we celebrate the Feast of St Vincent de Paul on September 27, we remember that it is nearly four hundred years since Vincent formed in August 1617, with the charitable people of Châtillon les Dombes in the Lyons region of France, a group which came to be called the Confraternity of Charity. Confraternities of Charity were then soon set up wherever Vincent and his Missioners gave parish missions, and he was able to obtain the assistance of Louise de Marillac in organising and supporting these groups. When a number of such groups were set up in rural areas, they spread to the urban area of Paris. The Company of the Daughters of Charity, as a result of the efforts of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, came into being in 1633 as a group of young women who would do the heavy and sometimes unpleasant work some of the ladies of the Confraternities of Charity in Paris did not have time to do, could not do, or were unwilling to do. Sometime early in 1634, a Confraternity of Charity was established at the Hôtel Dieu (Hospital) in Paris by Madame Goussault<sup>1</sup> and Vincent de Paul. This group, with the involvement of Louise de Marillac and the Daughters of Charity, became known as the Ladies of Charity. Similar groups spread to many different places in France and eventually throughout the world. The Ladies of Charity can still be found working for the poor today, but are now under the name of the [International Association of Charities](#) or AIC. All of this was part of the organised charity that is recognised as being begun by Vincent and Louise.

### **Benedict XVI: Charity, Justice and Solidarity**

My attention was drawn recently to an article titled *The Complex Necessary Union of Charity and Justice* by Meghan Clark.<sup>2</sup> In this article, Meghan Clark extends the Vincentian approach of organised charity with which we are familiar in the Vincentian Family. Firstly, she draws from two encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI in order to make a connection with charity and justice:

*Pope Benedict XVI chose 'caritas' (charity) as the central theme both of his first encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est", and his first social encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate". In so doing, he brought renewed attention to the relationship of charity to justice, especially as it relates to the mission of the church in contemporary society. The*

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<sup>1</sup> Madame Goussault (Geneviève Fayet) was an influential lady who had been involved in several Confraternities of Charity and also worked with Louise de Marillac.

<sup>2</sup> Clark Meghan J. "The Complex Necessary Union of Charity and Justice: Insights from the Vincentian Tradition for Contemporary Catholic Social Teaching", *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, De Paul University, Chicago USA, 2012, Vol.31, Issue 2, pp 24-39. (Note: Dr Meghan Clark is Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at St John's University, New York USA. Her areas of specialisation are Catholic social teaching, social ethics, medical ethics, human rights, and solidarity.)

*two are inextricably linked, as Caritas in Veritate recognizes, "If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them," and "to desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity."<sup>3</sup>*

Clark continues to use Pope Benedict's words to make the connection with justice and solidarity. Again, in the words of *Caritas in Veritate*:

*.....solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely relegated to the State. While in the past it was possible to argue that justice had to come first and gratuitousness could follow afterwards, as a complement, today it is clear that without gratuitousness, there can be no justice in the first place.<sup>4</sup>*

So it is argued that charity, justice and solidarity go together, though sometimes with a delicate balance:

*One reason justice needs charity is charity's influence in "widening the focus of justice to include ..... groups of people previously passed over." These three central virtues (justice, charity and solidarity) are inextricably connected for Christian discipleship and community .....<sup>5</sup>*

If justice and solidarity are intrinsically connected with charity, then they are part of the mission of the Church (or should we say the "Mission of God"?). In view of this, we could say that they ought also to be part of any form of evangelisation and perhaps should be included in the mix when talking about the "New Evangelisation".

(Note: In the next Reflection, we will look at how Meghan Clark sees justice and solidarity as being part of organised charity in the Vincentian Tradition.)

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### FOR REFLECTION

1. Do we accept that justice and solidarity are part of organised charity ?
2. Should justice and solidarity be part of individual and personal acts of charity ?
3. Should justice and solidarity be part of all our evangelisation ?

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<sup>3</sup> Clark, p 25

<sup>4</sup> Clark, p 29

<sup>5</sup> Clark, p 29