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The Most Important Question

Reverend Craig B. Mousin

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Saint Vincent de Paul has inspired individuals and educational institutions to seek pragmatic means to ease the pain of poverty over the last four hundred years. Vincent constantly educated new leaders throughout his lifetime, and the Vincentians have gone on to establish universities, colleges, and seminaries around the world to increase access to education as one means of addressing poverty. But do universities established in the name of Vincent have other means and responsibilities to address poverty besides education? How are faculty, staff, and students achieving those ends in the twenty-first century? Could we invite other faculty, staff, and students to offer new courses on poverty, inspire new research, and develop effective service projects? To address these questions, a call for papers was sent out to all Vincentian institutions of higher education requesting staff and faculty to participate in a symposium in the spring of 2007, responding to the question of “What would Saint Vincent de Paul do about today’s global poverty.” This journal includes the work of those who chose to answer through teaching, research, and publication or through the administration of an institution that names poverty reduction as an integral part of its mission. These articles address the particularity of a mission-driven educational endeavor that seeks both to increase access to education and to employ its pedagogy in the service of the poor. The invitation can be made given the way in which Vincentians have described their call since Saint Vincent founded the Congregation of the Mission. Indeed, Gregory Gay, C.M., reminds us that our invitation was not a new one, for it was in keeping with: “Saint Vincent’s way: approaching all those who can contribute and inviting them to this precious task of helping the poor.”

Critics charge, however, that persons of faith or faith-based institutions cannot reduce poverty. Seeking to trump Christians on their own terms, they recall that even Jesus promised that “the poor will always be with you.” Religious leaders have often sided with those in power, disclaiming

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2 Matthew 26:11 (RSV).
responsibility for the poor and citing Jesus in defense of inaction. Founders of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society responded to that secular challenge in 1831, refusing to let the critique stem the growth of their student-led organization. Subsequently, Christian realists commended attempts to alleviate poverty while asserting that no human endeavor would ever achieve that goal. Others have suggested that institutions of higher learning follow a misguided mission of simply bestowing privileges upon graduates and advancing their social status to the detriment of those left behind. Gregorio Bañaga, C.M., asserts, for example, that Catholic education in the Philippines “has been criticized for creating a new kind of elite.” Dennis McCann suggests DePaul’s initial outreach to immigrant families actually aimed to pacify “Chicago’s immigrant communities,” and that its conservative Catholic curriculum supported Chicago’s elite by educating in a way that was “officially anti-Marxist, anti-socialist, and keenly sensitive to the potential excesses of popular democracy.” More recently, Peter Sacks argues, “colleges, once seen as beacons of egalitarian hope, are becoming bastions of wealth and privilege that perpetuate inequality.”

The problem is greater than that of simply providing higher education. Inequality between the rich and the poor, staggering in Vincent’s time and in Paris in the early nineteenth century, continues to challenge all who share a vision of the common good. The divide between rich and poor in the United States expands while social mobility — the great safety valve of American society that permitted generations to escape poverty — has not kept pace with

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3 Edward R. Udovic, C.M., “‘What about the Poor?’ Nineteenth-Century Paris and the Revival of Vincentian Charity,” Vincentian Heritage 14:1 (1993): 76, quoting the pastoral letter of the archbishop of Bourges, Cardinal Jacques Marie Celestin Du Pont, “...There will always be inequalities of rank and fortune in society, or society itself would cease to exist.... Consequently there will always be those with great needs and sufferings.”

4 Frederick Ozanam wrote, “the same authority which tells us that we shall always have the poor amongst us is the same that commands to do all we can that there may cease to be any....” in Kathleen O’Meara, Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne. His Life and Works (New York: Christian Press Assoc. Publishing Co.), 177, citing De l’Auîonne, vid. Mélanges, i., 398.


the growing chasm between rich and poor. Moreover, although traditionally higher education has been one catalyst for escaping poverty, recent changes have shown that "increasingly, more educated workers are riding the economic roller coaster once reserved for the working poor."  

Robert Franklin argues that society today sustains itself through a myth of "normative inequality." According to Franklin, this myth encourages loyalty to a government and society that sustains these "dramatic disparities in wealth and power." Do institutions of higher education live by the same myth? Or can they make a difference while scrambling to raise funds to support and increase student services? Does the myth of normative inequality shackle universities or can they simultaneously cultivate leaders for social justice and offer innovative programs that impact lives burdened by poverty? Specifically, does this myth undermine Vincentian efforts to inculcate students, faculty, and staff with the aspirations to truly reduce poverty?

Based on their founding principles and mission statements, Vincentian institutions rebuff the critics, claiming that within the larger mission of education, they have a primary goal of seeking the reduction of poverty. All the universities represented by authors in this journal find within their mission the goal of reducing poverty and educating those whom society would otherwise neglect. Adamson University seeks socially disadvantaged students and educates them "to become agents of change." All Hallows College inculcates "much self-sacrifice, a pastoral concern for people, and a firm faith in a God of love." DePaul University describes its mission as including "a special concern for the deprived members of society," and "service to others." Universidad Santa Isabel produces "socially oriented research," and empowers learners to engage

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12 Ibid.


in community service.\textsuperscript{16} Niagara University sets forth to “teach students about the challenges and causes of poverty” while supporting “service learning activities where our students reach out with compassion to serve people’s basic needs.”\textsuperscript{17} In Vincent’s name, St. John’s University strives “to provide excellent education for all people, especially those lacking economic, physical, or social advantages,” while it searches for “the causes of poverty and social injustice and [encourages] solutions which are adaptable, effective, and concrete.”\textsuperscript{18} The Vincentian legacy suggests no less.

Those who claim the Vincentian mantle, moreover, feed off challenges to live up to the words that define the Vincentian tradition. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., names the moment in January 1617 when Saint Vincent responded to Madame de Gondi with the “Vincentian question” of “What must be done?” as being the genesis of all things Vincentian that since have dedicated lives and institutional resources to serving the poor.\textsuperscript{19} Educating men and women to address the issues of poverty through the Congregation of the Mission or the Daughters of Charity became one institutional response to Madame de Gondi’s question. John E. Rybolt, C.M., chronicles the development of the Vincentian educational mission, from the initial efforts to prepare clergy to contemporary efforts to increase access to education for those who face the many barriers caused by poverty.\textsuperscript{20} As Vincentian education expanded to the United States, Vincentian universities reshaped their mission in response to contemporary challenges.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition to providing access to higher education, including the development of programs by students and faculty, the Vincentian legacy has revealed imaginative responses to poverty. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the lay ministry program dedicated to expanding charitable resources, has grown from seven members in 1833 to over 700,000 members in 141 countries.\textsuperscript{22} Frederick Ozanam, a principal founder of the Society, responded

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\item Mission of St. John’s University, available at: http://www.stjohns.edu/about/general mission (accessed on 1 October 2008).
\item Yvon Laroche, “1833-2008, The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is 175 Years Old! A Little Bit
to critics who claimed the Roman Catholic Church had not lived up to its principles. When only eighteen, he penned a widely-read response to Saint-Simon’s challenges that the Church only promised peace in heaven, but failed to address the needs of the poor. Saint-Simon argued that the state would best assist the poor through seizing inheritances of the rich, thus reducing the responsibility of the Church. Parker Thomas Moon posits that Ozanam’s entire life “might be regarded as a reply to Saint-Simon’s challenge, and a not wholly unconscious reply.”

Ozanam’s academic career dovetailed with a great debate among French Catholics about the Church’s response to the poor, its relationship to government, and liberty. He taught at a time when many in the academy openly scorned the Catholic Church and faith in general to the point that Pope of History... Founding the Society,” Confeder@tioNews, 5 June 2008, available at: http://www.ozanet.org/datospdf/doc_0328_en.pdf?edicion=389 (accessed on 1 October 2008).


25 Moon, Labor Problem, 26.
Gregory XVI contended that "'Academies and schools resound' with open war on the Catholic faith." Ozanam saw his role as that of a defender of the faith and welcomed the full academic debate at the university. Called the "most consistent apostle of Social Catholicism" during the mid-nineteenth century, Ozanam's university lectures and writings not only educated his students, but later found approval in the Social Encyclical Rerum Novarum.

Significantly, Ozanam's role as the principal founder of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society also arose from the question of a skeptic he encountered as a student. During a meeting of a student debating society, Ozanam was stung by the criticism of Jean Broet, a follower of Saint-Simon, who asked, "You boast of being Catholic, what do you do? Where are the works that prove your faith?" After defending the Church in the meeting, Ozanam later echoed Madame de Gondi's "Vincentian question" when he inquired of friends, "What must we do to live our Catholicism? ... Let us no longer talk so much about charity. Let us put into practice and go out to assist those who are poor." Shortly thereafter, on 23 April 1833, he and six other members gathered at the home of Emmanuel Bailly, a former professor of Philosophy, not just to debate history, literature, or the poverty in Paris, but to found what has since become the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Only one of the students was older than twenty.

Broet's question had challenged Ozanam to ponder whether a group of students could focus on providing charity to the poor. As Baunard suggests, "their zeal was altogether directed toward the visitation of the poor."

References:
26 Mirari vos, as quoted in John Noonan, Jr., A Church That Can and Cannot Change, The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 148; See also, Schimberg, Great Friend, 92.
29 Ibid., 203.
30 Ibid., 200.
31 The Right Rev. Monsignor Louis Baunard, Ozanam In His Correspondence (Wexford, Ireland: John English & Co., 1925), 69. Baunard suggests there is some controversy over whether seven or eight founders met that night. Ibid., Sullivan suggests six plus Bailly, and Baunard appends a page explaining why some consider seven and others eight. Baunard, Correspondence, 426. For other narratives describing the founding of the Society, see generally: Sullivan, Rendu, 199-221; Thomas E. Auge, Frederic Ozanam and His World (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1966), 20-42; Madeleine Des-Rivières, Ozanam, James Parry, trans. (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1989); O'Meara, Professor at the Sorbonne, 59-68; Schimberg, Great Friend, 62-83; Gregory, "Good Society," 27-9.
32 Baunard, Ibid., 68.
Throughout his life, Ozanam also raised the question, not just as a personal one, but as a social one:

The problem that divides men in our day is no longer a problem of political structure; it is a social problem; it has to do with what is preferred, the spirit of self-interest or the spirit of sacrifice, whether society will be only a great exploitation to the profit of the strongest or a consecration of each individual for the good of all and especially for the protection of the weak.33

Ozanam's academic work and his initiative in building the Society revealed how he responded to this question, which is no less pertinent to students and faculty today.34 Where else but in the university may the tools of research and debate address the most fundamental questions of the day? The question is not just a religious one, but one for all who are privileged to be a part of any university dedicated to increasing knowledge and furthering human capacity. For example, University of California, Berkeley, Professor David Romer asserted: "Surely the most important societal question economics can help answer is why so many people are crushingly poor and what can be done about it."35

The university mission statements noted above suggest that Vincentian institutions claim a particularly specific responsibility to answer this question.36 It also remains critical to recognize that the changes in the world


34 Robin Lovin suggests that resolving these poverty issues in a just and sustainable society may be the most significant moral problem of the twenty-first century. Robin W. Lovin, Christian Ethics, An Essential Guide (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.


36 I am not suggesting that other universities, both public and private, do not also seek to reduce poverty, tackle critical social issues, or encourage student community service. See, e.g., Holtschneider and Udovic, Higher Education, 1-3 (a shift in the United States economy makes “a college education all the more important as a systemic method of escaping poverty,” 2). Without relying on religious language, both public and secular private universities often seek similar goals. See, e.g., the Mission of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which states: “We at Illinois serve the state, the nation, and the world by creating knowledge, preparing students for lives of impact, and addressing critical societal needs through the transfer and application of knowledge,” available at: http://illinois.edu/about/about.html (accessed on 5 August 2008). The Johns Hopkins University states: “The mission of The Johns Hopkins University is
since the days of Vincent and Ozanam necessitate that a mission based on a Catholic priest from the 1600s, and the founder of a Catholic lay volunteer organization in the 1800s, now be inclusive enough to serve many who may not be Catholic or Christian. What can be culled from Vincent and those who followed that provide particular substance for this mission without reducing it to generalities lacking in power and vision?

Of critical importance is how Vincent understood his faith in relation to the individuals he assisted. Two of his traits provide guidance: human dignity and human response. For Vincent, every individual was blessed with God-given dignity. Thomas McKenna, C.M., named as Vincent’s core elements his belief in God and the dignity of each person merged with the recognition of God’s presence within. To place such an emphasis on human dignity eliminates human barriers and helps explain Vincent’s amazing ability to treat each individual he encountered as an equal, regardless of his or her status within society.

Emphasizing human dignity leads to additional consequences. McKenna notes that education nourishes the fullness of human life, and therefore, “if we believe in the God-given dignity of people, of course we would look to educate its students and cultivate their capacity for life-long learning, to foster independent and original research, and to bring the benefits of discovery to the world,” available at: http://webapps.jhu.edu/jhuniverse/information_about_hopkins/about_jhu/mission_statement/index.cfm (accessed on 5 August 2008). Other religious universities may also call upon their tradition to address these problems. See, e.g., William Quigley, “Seven Principles For Catholic Law Schools Serious About a Preferential Option for the Poor,” 1 Saint Thomas Law Journal 128 (2003). Vincentian institutions, however, clearly focus on issues of poverty based on their legacy as part of their teaching, research, and service. The symposium sought to investigate and report on particular Vincentian historical and spiritual resources.


Vincent’s inherent belief in the dignity of all people also finds support in the biblical source that human beings were created in God’s image. André LaCocque asserts that the Hebrew text in the Genesis story reveals the biblical belief that we “are all humans without distinction or discrimination — thus making all human differences such as ones based on nationality meaningless (note omitted). Under this understanding of the Genesis story, being created in the image of God establishes a “fundamental human equality.” André LaCocque, The Trial of Innocence, Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2006), 33. See also, Craig B. Mousin, “Vincentian Leadership — Advocating for Justice,” Vincentian Heritage 23-25:2, 26:1 (2005): 243, 266-69 (Vincent’s reliance on the biblical concept of the Jubilee year stresses the dignity of all humans and provides a universal way for non-Christians to share in the Vincentian mission). Vincent’s emphasis on human dignity also finds support in contemporary secular understandings: See, e.g., The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly resolution 217A(III) of 10 December 1948), available at: http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html (accessed on 29 September 2008). “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”
kindly on the chance to nourish that dignity by educating it.”

Education thus serves a second purpose in its collaboration with the poor by “sensitizing everybody else to their dignity and worth.” This Vincentian endeavor leads to DePaul’s mission, noting therefore that “the DePaul community is above all characterized by ennobling the God-given dignity of each person.”

Ozanam urged his companions to observe “mutual charity to all,” when they met with the indigent to carry out the work of the Society.

But mission statements can fossilize on bookshelves without daily implementation; Vincent clearly stated that words without action fail. He wrote to Saint Louise, “Nevertheless, in order to become soundly virtuous, it is advisable to make good practical resolutions concerning particular acts of the virtues and to be faithful in carrying them out afterwards. Without doing that, one is often virtuous only in one’s imagination.”

Corroborating Vincent’s emphasis on action, Warren Dicharry, C.M., stressed that Vincent cites the

Ozanam’s crypt. The mural above depicts Ozanam as the Good Samaritan helping Jesus.

Photo courtesy of the author

40 Ibid., 211.
41 Mission of DePaul University.
42 O’Meara, Professor at the Sorbonne, 115.
same biblical reference in opening the first and last chapters of the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission: “teach” and “do.” For Ozanam, the parable of the Good Samaritan inspired students to “dare... to approach this great sick one,” thus actively progressing beyond mere dialogue.

Inheritors of that tradition, Vincentian universities include social engagement as part of their mission. Questions still challenge the implementation of that vision. Richard Meister notes that DePaul frequently must question how a Vincentian university can seek new ways to serve the poor. Dennis McCann concurs that DePaul’s Vincentian mission challenges the university to confront how best to engage in public service for the common good. Indeed, if the question is not addressed, followers within this tradition who name human dignity as being essential to their call may fall prey to mere imagined virtuosity. The issue of dignity challenges all today. Whether efforts to work with the poor of Payatas, Quezon City, Philippines, the homeless and refugees in Chicago, New York City, or Niagara Falls, or the indigenous people in Chiapas to name just a few, these articles seek to shed light on some of the ways in which faculty, students, and staff address those concerns.

But the first question could also be posed: why universities? Should not their first mission be that of educating students? Vincent understood that success in developing programs to alleviate the suffering of the poor would only be fruitful if he educated the clergy to enable the reforms he sought. Necessarily this led him to build schools and seminaries. For him, educating the clergy was the place for proper formation and understanding. For Ozanam and his friends, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society provided the opportunity to enhance the dignity of the poor while humanizing the dignity of students.

Indeed, the Society offers a powerful exemplar of how higher education provides fertile soil for community work toward poverty reduction. Given the Society’s history, Ozanam’s words provide a particularly helpful description of university faculty, staff, and students dedicating their talents to serving the poor. The many programs described in this journal owe a debt

46 Richard Meister, “DePaul University, Catholic, Vincentian and Urban,” in Centennial Essays; See also, Udovic, Vincentian Question.
47 McCann, “Foundling University,” 65; see also, Udovic, “What about the Poor?” (the question must be asked anew each day).
48 Louise Sullivan, D.C., The Core Values of Vincentian Education (Niagara University, N.Y: Niagara University, 1994), 25. See also, Rybolt, “Vincentian Education.”
to Ozanam and his colleagues for pioneering how the resources of youth, imagination, and academic discourse can unite under the umbrella of academic freedom, and reveal how universities can respond to the Vincentian question. As a scholar, teacher, and servant of the poor, Frederick Ozanam has prefigured our response, whether in teaching, scholarship, or service. For example, Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., in his foreword, highlights the university resources of imagination and service that work together to seek reduction in poverty at home and throughout the world. Similarly, in describing the history of Adamson University’s commitment to the Vincentian legacy, Gregorio L. Bañaga, C.M., emphasizes Adamson’s three-fold emphasis of education of the poor, education with the poor, and education for the poor, ensuring that all involved become advocates of an “education for social transformation.”

Maria Asuncion G. Evidente, D.C., Nenette Abrigo, and Virginia Reyes describe how the only Vincentian university administrated by the Daughters of Charity, the Universidad de Santa Isabel, has cultivated many new approaches to education in its goal to build a university of the poor — a “leaven for social transformation.” They highlight the diverse programs that must be established to reach that goal, including thrift savings and loan programs that go beyond simply providing financial aid to extending loans for business development and housing. These different models confirm what Gregory Gay reminds us: that “the Vincentian Family subscribes to the idea that education is always towards justice and solidarity, towards the liberation of the poor.” Indeed, these articles highlight how prescient Ozanam was in understanding how those involved in higher education can collaborate in seeking to reduce poverty and its consequences.

I. Teaching and Learning

First, Ozanam was above all an educator. He earned doctorates in law and literature, eventually obtaining a chair as Professor of Foreign Literature at the University of the Sorbonne in 1844, in addition to teaching law at the University of Lyons and evening school at Stanislas College in Paris.

Second, for Ozanam, the university prepared students to address the

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51 Bañaga, “Heart.”


critical social question of poverty with confidence and an inquiring mind. To his cousin, Ernest Falconnet, Ozanam wrote, “Let us begin with strong study, in depth, on the matter most agreeable to our inclinations....” He believed education provided the locus both for the investigation of poverty’s causes and for its remedy: “through education rather than through legislation.” His teaching cultivated more effective advocates for justice. Ozanam saw his scholarship as a means of addressing the fundamental questions of his day. He thrived amidst the discourse of academic life, and saw it as a way to teach young students to not abdicate the field, but to use academic debate to understand the truths he knew his faith had taught him. In another letter to Falconnet he wrote, “Even more useful than this is to show the student youth that it is possible to be Catholic and have common sense, to love religion and liberty, and finally to draw it out of indifference to religion and get it used to grave and serious discussions.”

Third, Ozanam knew from personal experience that naïve university students would need outstanding teachers to ensure that their interaction with the poor did not do more harm than good; best intentions frequently fail if inspired students simply leave the campus to work with the poor with no understanding of, or sensitivity to, the humanity of each person they engage. His elite urban university students knew little of how the inhabitants of Sister Rosalie Rendu’s district lived or even survived. The Society’s initial efforts succeeded only through the patience and teaching of Sister Rosalie. She, who lived her life with the ones she served, was trusted by the Mouffetard district’s inhabitants, and her skillful instructions to Ozanam and his friends converted their good intentions to successful mutual encounters.

Several symposium articles relate to how the education of students provides the primary means of addressing poverty. Annalisa Saccà reminds us of the many ways in which a professor can integrate concern and commitment with working with the poor in the classroom. Dorrie Balfe, O.P., and John Joe Spring, Dip.Th., relate how the changing demographics of the students at All Hallows College, and the changing context of those the university has served encouraged exploration of new ways of addressing poverty and service, resulting in a new Masters Program in Social Justice and Public Policy.

56 Baunard, Correspondence, 277, citing a 24 September 1849 letter to M. Foisett describing Ozanam’s article in The New Era.
58 Sullivan, Rendu, 206.
59 Annalisa Saccà, “In the Footsteps of Monsieur Vincent: Diary of an Ordinary Professor,” in this volume of Vincentian Heritage (2008).
60 Dorrie Balfe, O.P., and John Joe Spring, Dip.Th., “Poverty Reduction — A Vincentian Initiative
Rather than just institutions of higher education for the elite, Ozanam argued the need for a variety of schools including adult night schools, schools for apprentices, academies of arts and trades, and public libraries.\(^6^1\) DePaul’s School for New Learning (SNL) has offered new opportunities for adult students seeking a college degree. Former Dean Susanne Dumbleton explores how the SNL model for adult students addressed issues of poverty in Kenya.\(^6^2\) She celebrates how the adult education model engages “superb individuals committed to lives of powerful service” and permits them to continue their work in the community while enhancing their skills through their course work.\(^6^3\) Yvonne Pratt-Johnson writes of teaching immigrant mothers whose visible poverty of the spirit challenges traditional understandings of education and necessitates research into how best to teach with compassion and implement new ideas in the classroom.\(^6^4\)

\(^6^1\) Baunard, Correspondence, 277, citing a letter of 24 September 1849 to M. Foisett regarding Ozaman’s article in The New Era.

\(^6^2\) Susanne Dumbleton, “Undergraduate Program in Eastern Africa for Adults Serving the Poor,” in this volume of Vincentian Heritage (2008).

\(^6^3\) Ibid.

Ozanam also recognized the benefits of sending well-educated alumni out to change the world and address these preeminent social questions of poverty in their work. In a letter to Mademoiselle Soulacroix, an educator in Paris, he asks:

How can there not be given some hope to such a strength of association, exerted mainly in the large cities, in every law school, in every enlightened home, upon a generation called to fill a variety of offices and influential posts? And if formerly immorality befell the upper classes, the academies, the judiciary, the military chiefs, the politicians, among the middle class and the people, can we not believe with too much madness that divine Providence calls us to the moral rehabilitation of our country....

Under Sioban Albiol’s leadership, the DePaul College of Law’s Asylum and Immigration Clinic prepares law students through their representation of refugees seeking asylum before United States courts, where they learn not only to be zealous advocates, but also engaged citizens working with clients and communities to understand the causes of poverty and the consequences of injustice. Similarly, Leonard L. Cavise has developed DePaul’s Chiapas Human Rights Practicum as a summer-long program where law students observe the work of human rights workers in Chiapas, Mexico. Cavise’s students learn from exposure to a society where war and poverty have all too often led to impunity for human rights violators; with the goal that this experience will “transform their world view sufficiently to persuade them to continue working in human rights or public service.” Similarly, Marco Tavanti and Heather Evans offer DePaul’s School of Public Service students a “life-changing” experience working and studying with citizens of Chiapas, after which they return committed to “socially responsible personal and professional lives” without forgetting what studying abroad has taught them about influencing domestic political and social decisions that also impact people in Chiapas.

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Another key to Ozanam’s success was that the college students did not initially treat the poor simply as recipients of donations from the privileged. Sister Rosalie had taught them how to meet the poor. Recognizing Vincent’s and Ozanam’s admonitions not to just provide charity, but to ennoble each person’s dignity, Troy Harden seeks first to teach his students how to engage a community with dignity and respect. Otherwise, no amount of communication or good will can avoid the pitfalls paved by privilege and power.69

II. Scholarship, Research, and/or Other Creative Activities

After the excesses and responses to the French Revolution, nineteenth-century Parisian academic life was the scene of a debate over the Catholic Church’s relationship to the government and the beginnings of the many challenges that modernity would place on university and church.70 Ozanam flourished in the debate and positioned himself as one of the Catholic social liberals who sought freedom of religion from the state, but dedication to the faith through personal response. His friends and admirers encouraged his leadership role in both public debate and written jousting. As an academic, however, he knew the necessity of preparation and saw his study of history and literature as one way to document the persuasiveness of his position. He urged friends and students to engage in study and research so as to be better prepared for the debates within the university. “Happy are those whose life can be consecrated to the research of truth, good, and beauty,” he wrote to his friend Louis Janmot.71 Yet Ozanam was no idealist. This same proclamation followed his warning to Janmot that the great social question dividing those with “too much” from the “great many others who do not have enough, who have nothing” would lead to a terrible “menacing confrontation” that would necessitate persons like them to mediate to “deaden the shock,” if not prevent violence.72 Ozanam praised students who “consecrate their reflections and researches to this high mission.”73

The research of Edward R. Udovic, C.M., demonstrates how important it is for those claiming the mantle of Vincentian service to understand Vincent’s concern for mutuality when seeking to serve the poor.74 Udovic’s article of-

72 Ibid., 96-7.
73 “Letter to Ernest Falconnet,” 10 February 1832, Ibid., 17-8.
74 Edward R. Udovic, C.M., “Our good will and honest efforts.’ Vincentian Perspectives on
fers Vincentian templates to ensure that our actions seek justice instead of self-delusion. In addressing the diverse ways in which the Congregation of the Mission has provided education to the poor and those serving the poor over the last four centuries, John E. Rybolt, C.M., highlights the foundation of all contemporary educational endeavors to reduce poverty while yoking all those with the name Vincentian in this concerted effort.75 Likewise, Margaret John Kelly, D.C., relies on research at St. John’s University to posit five themes for inculcating a culture of Vincentian service in a university environment.76

Our authors similarly reveal how academic research can further the cause of poverty reduction. Following Hurricane Katrina’s tragedy, Gloria Simo explains how research expands our understanding of poverty as something beyond mere lack of income. By investigating and reporting on the contributing correlatives of poverty such as health, housing, education, race, and gender, Simo elicits pragmatic and successful responses to Katrina.77 Patricia Werhane, Laura Hartman, and Scott Kelley reveal how the innovative research of DePaul’s Institute for Business and Professional Ethics changes the questions asked about effective means to reduce poverty. Recognizing that poverty’s global reach can overwhelm even the best intentioned non-governmental organizations, Werhane, Hartman, and Kelley direct the Institute’s research to find new resources by “inspiring companies to alleviate poverty through for-profit initiatives.”78 Recognizing the power of capital, Charles Strain calls upon Catholic social teaching to focus on the university’s relatively vast resources when compared to the poor of the world. By raising the institutional question, Strain explores how institutions could allocate their resources “as responsible investor” and “as responsible citizen” to become more engaged in addressing poverty issues.79 Similarly, Scott Kelley calls upon Catholic social teaching on subsidiarity to suggest new approaches for escaping poverty.80 Research furthers the Vincentian mission and provides, in part, the foundation for meaningful service.

Poverty Reduction Efforts,” in this volume of Vincentian Heritage (2008).
75 John Rybolt, “Vincentian Education.”
III. Service

Ozanam simultaneously emphasized the benefits of doing more than research, being what David Gregory calls “that rarest of intellectuals: one who served — directly and personally, and throughout his entire adult life — the immediate needs of the poor. The poor were not an abstraction; they were, and are, his brothers in Christ.”81 Jean Guitton also concludes that Ozanam consistently served two fronts, the academic and “that of social aid,” emphasizing that work for charity “surrounds all justice, and it is daily, effective and concrete.”82

Ozanam understood how efforts on the second front to ameliorate the burdens of poverty contributed to a university education. He argued:

> The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learned, not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor man’s garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind. When the conditions of the poor have been examined, in school, at work, in hospital, in the city, in the country, everywhere that God has placed them, it is then and then only, that we know the elements of that formidable problem, that we begin to grasp it and may hope to solve it.83

With service complementing classroom studies, Ozanam expected education to interpret what was causing the poor to grow by the thousands in Paris or wherever a Saint Vincent de Paul Society took root. Combining both types of education also developed leadership skills that students would employ as they entered their careers after graduation. Schimberg relates that Ozanam considered the Society “the best possible training place for young Catholics.”84

Even today, Vincentian universities continue to promote the educational benefit of service. In his keynote speech at the symposium, Norberto Carcellar, C.M., explained how the students and faculty of Adamson University work with those who live in the garbage dumps of Payatas, Quezon City, Philippines, encouraging the development of resources within the community and building strong organizations.85 Howard Rosing addresses the theme

81 Gregory, “Good Society,” 47.
82 Jean Guitton, “The Saintliness of Ozanam,” in Hess, Frédéric Ozanam, 78.
83 Frederick Ozanam, New Era, as quoted in Baunard, Correspondence, 279.
84 Schimberg, Great Friend, 150.
85 Father Carcellar has since been awarded the 2007 Opus Prize for his work. For a review of that work, see: http://www.opusprize.org/winners/07_Carcellar.cfm (accessed on 25 September 2008).
of community service incorporated in the academic enterprise by describing the development of DePaul’s Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning, and the educational and management theories that make its work distinctive. The Steans Center exemplifies how working with community-based organizations can educate students about poverty while providing the assistance of individuals like Sister Rosalie, who work and live in the community and understand the mutuality necessary for such service. Similarly, Marilynn Fleckenstein reports how Niagara University developed its service-learning programs, inculcating Vincentian principles through faculty and students as the economic distress in the city of Niagara Falls, and in the rust belt in general, forced the university to ask the question of who was its neighbor. Marco Tavanti, Merlinda Palencia, and Margaret Guzzaldo report on the power of new synergies that occur when the global reach of the Vincentian community collaborates in the service of the poor. Linking a partnership between Adamson and DePaul with organizations such as the Homeless People Federation of the Philippines, the Payatas Popular Organizations, and the Vincentian Center for Social Responsibility in the Philippines, these authors honor Vincent’s legacy by showing how the community can share resources and imagination to engage students in concrete and effective responses.

The forces that cause poverty also weaken those who are dedicated to reducing its tragic consequences. Vincent knew that; Ozanam understood that. Compounding the unintended consequences of trying to “do good,” the overwhelming poverty in our world can quickly deaden the enthusiasm and optimism of students often living on their own far from family and locally known sources of support. Although youthful idealism may easily turn into jaded skepticism, Ozanam preached that negative outcomes could be mitigated through faith and support within a community. With perhaps a hierarchical view that represented his humble perspective, he believed that students, too inexperienced to engage the powers of society, could start their education through charity. When only twenty-one, he wrote to Falconnet:

But, we others, we are too young to intervene in the social struggle. Should we remain inactive therefore in the midst of a suffering and groaning world? No, there is a preparatory path open to us: before taking action for the public good.

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86 Howard Rosing, “Untangling the Ivy: Discovering Vincentian Service Learning at DePaul University,” in this volume of *Vincentian Heritage* (2008).


we can take action for the good of individuals; before regenerating France, we can solace poor persons. I would further wish that all young people might unite in head and heart in some charitable work and that there be formed through the whole country a vast generous association for the relief of the common people.\(^{89}\)

Working through the Society, Ozanam envisioned that a community of support could safely enrich the urban university experience and diminish student frustration and fear. Noting the vulnerability of the young student arrivals, he wrote: “It is important then to form an association of mutual encouragement for young Catholic people where one finds friendship, support, and example... where the elders receive the new pilgrims from the province and give them a bit of moral hospitality.”\(^{90}\) Thus, their weekly meetings provided the opportunity to share ideas, modify approaches to their ministry, and seek ways to orient new students.

Students today face similar challenges. Karl Nass and Siobhan O’Donoghue recount how student leaders committed to working with the poor at DePaul University have developed communities of reflection through the Vincentians in Action program. Stressing weekly community reflection, they, like Ozanam, have seen the benefit of gathering in community to discuss their faith and work together.\(^{91}\) Ozanam has been described as having been totally centered in prayer, a key component in his ability to manage so many different parts of his work and life.\(^{92}\) Likewise, Pauline Villapando recognizes the power of prayer and community at the Vincent and Louise House at DePaul as being components necessary for “putting love into action.”\(^{93}\) The hospitality of the Vincent and Louise House enables students to learn the skills needed for a life of social engagement for justice and peace.

Contemporary myths of normative inequality deaden the sense of concern that poverty undermines the common good, or that a common good may not even exist. The papers and work of the students and faculty who have shared their work in this journal serve as an antidote to such estrangement.

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89 “Letter to Ernest Falconnet,” 21 July 1834, Dirvin, Life in Letters, 47.
Moreover, they reveal truths that Vincent, Louise, Frederick, Rosalie, and all those in this tradition have understood about addressing poverty. These pioneers never expected their work to end poverty. Yet their belief in the dignity of each person calls all Vincentian universities to serve the poor despite a culture whose myths perpetuate an acceptance of poverty and drive ever-widening chasms between those who have and those struggling to earn their daily bread. The testimony of the articles that follow celebrates the hope of students' transformation when sharing the blessing of service and the possibilities of partnerships with others. They are a response to Vincent's call to "teach and do," and also to the most important question for all: what must be done? What must be done to address the poverty that shackles the God-given dignity of each person? Should this symposium prove successful, Vincentian faculty, students, and administrators will accept the invitation to seek new responses to this most important question.