

SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT
DE PAUL INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL GENERAL

GLOBAL TRAINING

HISTORY ORIGINS





Only one thing could hinder us and lead us astray: a change in our first intention; forgetful [...] of the humble simplicity that first presided over our meetings, made us love our obscurity without seeking to hide and perhaps earned us our later growth and development.

BLESSED FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM, 1ST MAY 1841



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2 CONTEXT OF THE FOUNDATION

3 WHY FORM A CONFERENCE OF CHARITY?

4 WHERE ARE THE POOR?

5 TO CONCLUDE



TWO REASONS

1. To understand how the “Conference of Charity” became the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

2. Because history helps us to think about what the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul IS today



1 WHY SHOULD WE KNOW OUR HISTORY?

2 CONTEXT OF THE FOUNDATION

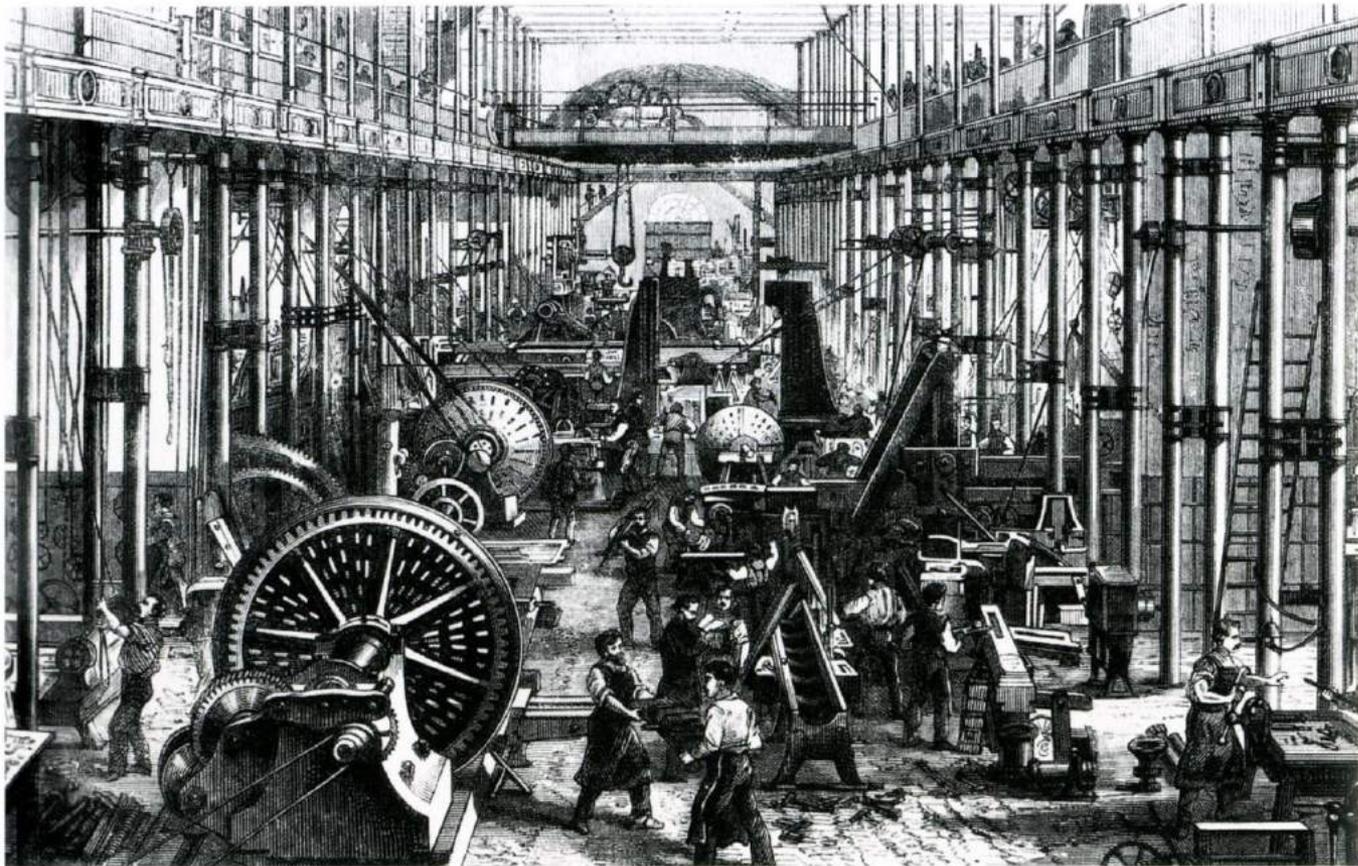
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A CHANGING AND UNPREDICTABLE WORLD



POLITICAL CONTEXT

GREAT INSTABILITY

The France of King Louis-Philippe (1830-1848)



Following the French Revolution (1789), the country remained unstable and divided. There were several changes of régime

- Republic
- Empire
- Monarchy

King Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) tried to reconcile the revolutionary ideals with his régime of monarchy

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

THE COUNTRY WAS MODERNISING AND BECOMING WEALTHY

Industrial revolution:

- new technology and the use of steam power
 - production significantly increased
 - Faster and cheaper manufacturing
 - Development of the transport network
 - first railway line in 1825
 - first steam boat in 1807
- Strong economic growth
- Over 2000 businesses were formed every year between 1835 and 1845
- Development of textile factories, foundries, steelworks, coal mines



PARIS SETTING

PARIS, AN UNHEALTHY, HAZARDOUS PLACE...

- Large influx of workers, because of the industrial revolution
The Paris population grew steadily
- Many slum areas
- An unhealthy city: cholera epidemic in 1832
- A dangerous city: revolutions and barricades
- No sewers, no running water
- A city without trees
- Traffic congestion

PARIS SETTING

PARIS ALSO HAD TO MODERNISE

- Improved street lighting
- Creation of 200km of pavements
- Creation of new roads
- Numerous dwellings demolished
- Fine buildings erected

THOSE WHOM INDUSTRIALISATION FORGOT

Demolition and construction of buildings led to increased rents in the centre of the capital, and at the same time caused serious levels of poverty, especially among

- ✓ the elderly,
 who lived alone in the slums in the centre of Paris
- ✓ young working people with families
 living in the outer districts
- ✓ Children
 living alone in groups or in families

THE SOCIAL QUESTION

- Movement of workers to large town, scraping a living in the urban landscape, where they are poorly housed and clothed, neglected
- Inhuman working conditions
 - over twelve hours a day at work
 - little rest
 - low wages
- Coal-mining
 - Coal was vital for machinery to operate. Mining: a dangerous job:
 - mines could collapse at any time
 - Coal dust causes serious illnesses
 - Children were working in these mines

THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

WHAT WAS THE CHURCH DOING?

- In the face of this poverty, there was little or no response from the State, it was a period of liberalism
- The clergy was a divided and weakened group after the Revolution
- Parishes were disorganised

THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

NEW RELIGIOUS ENERGY AND GROWTH IN GOOD WORKS

- Strengthened role of lay people
- Renewal through charitable works
- Upper classes in France returned to the faith
- Talented preachers such as Father Lacordaire and spectacular conversions



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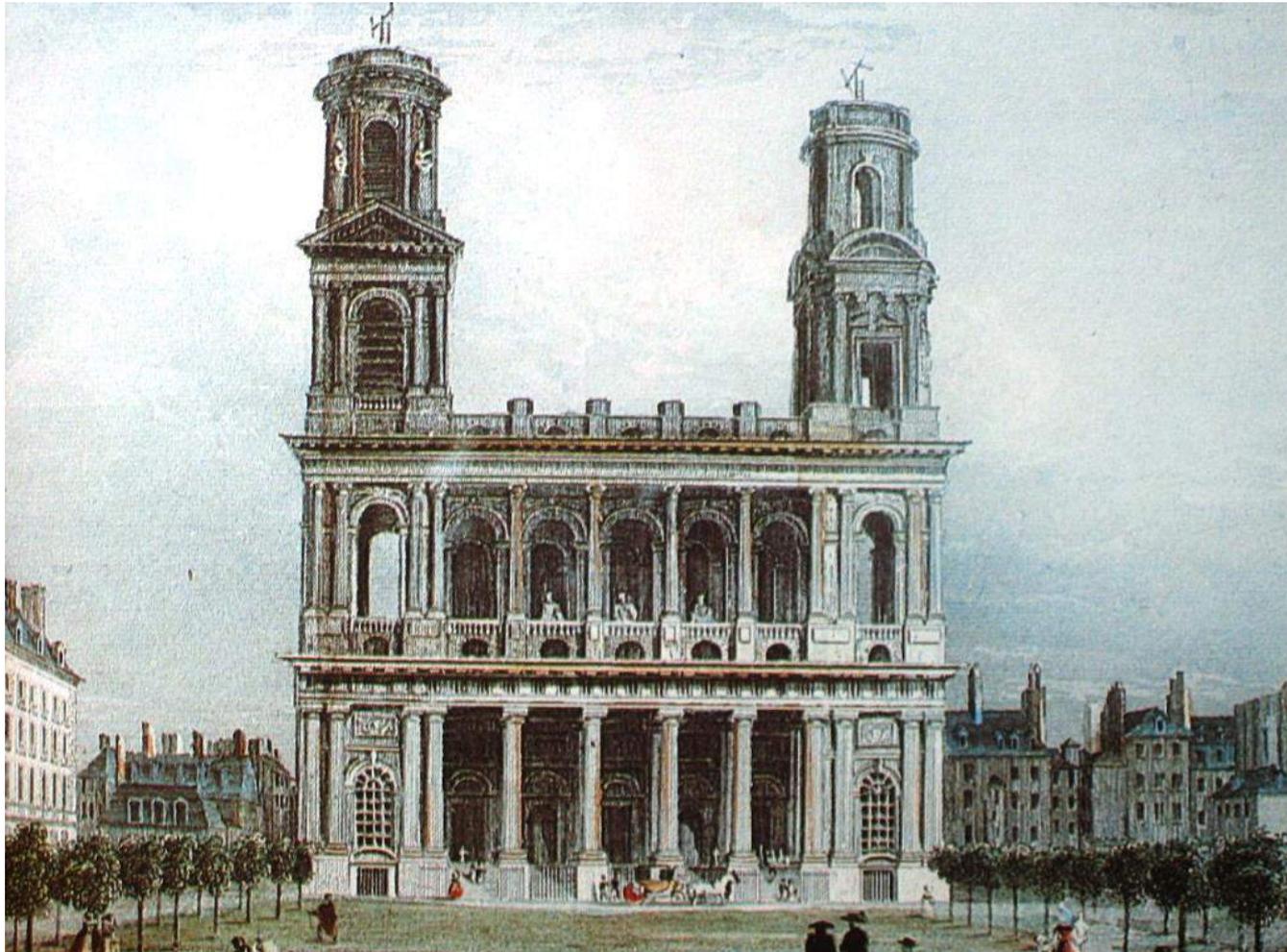
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“THE WORLD TURNS, THE CROSS REMAINS”



4 FACTS ABOUT THE FOUNDERS

- Founded by young people
6 of the 7 founders were between 19 and 23 years old
- Founded by students
- Founded by provincials
- Founded by the middle class



TO SHOW THAT THE FAITH IS STILL ALIVE...

The story of the foundation by Ozanam

"Christianity used at one time to do miracles; but now, Christianity is dead. So you who boast of being Catholics, what are you doing? where are the works that show your faith, and that could make us respect and accept it? They were right, the reproach was well deserved. It was then that we said: well, to work! and may our deeds match our faith."

Speech in Florence, 1853



TO BE STIMULATED IN THE FAITH

“The purpose of the Conference is therefore:

- 1) to support its members [...] in the practice of their Christian life
- 2) to visit the poor at home, to bring them help in kind, and to give them the consolations of religion [...]

Extract from the Rule of 1835



THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE...

The conference is a community of faith, in which the members seek holiness through service and the evangelisation of the poor.

Friendship unites them, enthusiasm leads them.

4 FEATURES OF A CONFERENCE

- The meeting follows a well-defined routine
- Prayer is the heart of the conference
- Charity practised in common
- Visiting the poor at home is the main work

KNOW OUR FOUNDERS



Emmanuel
BAILLY



Jules
DEVAUX



Auguste
LE TAILLANDIER



François
LALLIER



Paul
LAMACHE



Frédéric
OZANAM



Félix
CLAVE

1 WHY SHOULD WE KNOW OUR HISTORY?

2 CONTEXT OF THE FOUNDATION

3 THE FIRST MEETING

4 WHERE ARE THE POOR?

5 TO CONCLUDE



GO TO THE OUTSKIRTS



TWO WORLDS THAT DO NOT KNOW EACH OTHER

- The founders were middle-class young men.
- They lived in the university district of Paris, a step away from the poorest part of the capital: “the Mouffetard district”, but **THEY DID NOT KNOW IT**

TWO WORLDS THAT DO NOT KNOW EACH OTHER



PARIS, THE MOUFFETARD DISTRICT

The poorest district of Paris, an area of slums and extreme poverty

Cat thieves, rue Mouffetard Paris, around 1830-1840.
Lithograph by François Bouchot



PARIS, THE UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

The university district of Paris,
known as “quartier des Ecoles”

Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève 1859

MOUFFETARD DISTRICT, 1830s: FAILURES OF MODERNITY...

1 in 5 residents was poor

1 in 2 residents received handouts of bread

1 in 3 residents died in hospital

8 in 10 residents were buried in common graves

THE ROLE OF SISTER ROSALIE RENDU, “THE APOSTLE OF THE MOUFFETARD DISTRICT”

- Emmanuel Bailly's wife knew her personally
- She provided the first lists of people in need to be visited
- She took initiatives to help the poor
- She trained the first members to be kind and friendly not just to give hand-outs



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3 IDEAS TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE FOUNDATION...

- The foundation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is communal by nature. The Holy Spirit inspired the group, not just one individual. It rests on friendship and the Faith
- The principles of the Society's action were defined during a founding period, from 23 April 1833 to 08 December 1835, the date on which the first Rule was promulgated.
- Small changes have since been made to express the Society's charism more clearly.
- In the 2003 Rule the understanding of the charism was deepened



TWO QUESTIONS

- What has particularly affected me, in the story of the origins of the SSVP?
- How can that help me to be a Vincentian today?