

IDEAS ABOUT STRUCTURAL CONVERSION

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We have been talking about “structural sin” for quite some time (basically since the Second Vatican Council, but especially in CELAM-Medellín). Various documents of the Church explain that the world has created true "structures of sin," in which we participate as Christians (personal level), as communities, and as Institutions (Congregation or Church).

This topic interests us because theology has always dealt with sin, and our salvation hinges on sinning or not sinning. As missionaries and as Vincentians, the virtue that most say relates more directly to the Mission is "zeal for the salvation of souls." Needless to say, that although Vincent used the term "souls," he never reduced the salvation he preached to the poor to a purely internal expression of salvation. His concept of salvation moves him to understand that without a healthy "body" that enjoys life, the issue of the salvation of the soul cannot be presented. From the point of view of zeal, we understand that in our world even the poor themselves play the games that multiply these structures every day.

The influence of the world on people and communities is very strong. Without addressing the structures of sin, how can we help the poor and ourselves avoid being in solidarity and being complicit with structural sin? This solidarity and complicity are not always conscious- it occurs “out of ignorance,” by a “lack of conscience”, or even an awareness of it, because the structural sin touches aspects of current personal or social life that is difficult to connect to or link with sin, and therefore with the salvation we offer.

For many it is difficult to realize that if "we stand in solidarity with structural sin" we must also be in solidarity with "its conversion." Personal conversion cannot fail to include “the communal”, and therefore “the structural”. In other words, true Christian conversion cannot be reduced to only “loving God” individually and emotionally. Vincent said that it is also the missionary's task "to make others (people, communities, society and their structures) love Him. Those who convert personally to God, moved by fraternal charity, must contribute to the transformation of the" structures of sin," and the building of a new society that is more just and more humane according to God's plan.

New men, communities and structures for a "New Humanity"

First, it must be taken into account that man is not saved in isolation or apart from others. Each person is part of a broader human conglomerate: and is influenced by the actions of others. Mutual influence among human beings, or what we call the "butterfly effect," is a fact today that cannot be denied, much less ignored. Authentic interior conversion necessarily refers to society and structures alike, and is evaluated on the basis of effective transformation in the way the Gospel is lived out. Jesus continually preached a change of "heart" and left to his disciples the care of building the world demanded by that change.

However: "It is necessary at this point, to clearly warn against the danger of certain tendencies prone to the privatization of conversion, as well as other conversions that do not sufficiently value interior conversion and unilaterally focus their attention on the transformation of structural realities." It is necessary to remember the words of Paul VI: "But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel" (converted men). The same must be said of the communities and ecclesial institutions.

The Church certainly considers it important and urgent to build structures that are more humane, more just, more respectful of human rights; less overwhelming, less oppressive, less discriminatory as well as less "exclusive" structures. The Church is also well aware that even the best structures, the most idealized systems, soon become inhumane if inhuman inclinations are not healed, if there is no conversion of heart and mind on the part of those who live within those structures, or who govern them.

This conversion is obtained and deepened, when one sees and discerns the way that the structures of the world in which we live damage the life created and cared for by God and his divine providence. At the level of the structure of the Congregation, it is important to evaluate ourselves from the reality of the world of the poor, from the new missionary vision of the Church, from her preference to be poor, to be with the poor and to be for the poor. To what extent are our spirituality, our lifestyle and our ministries in solidarity and complicit with the structures of sin that are attacking the lives of the poor today (and even of those who are not so poor)?

So as to not go on for too long, this means concretely that the conversion of sins, even in its individual form, must bear in mind the great horizon in which the destinies of the

whole of humanity are decided (remembering everything that the pastoral exhortation *Laudato Si* teaches), and even the entire universe. The Pope has insisted much on moving from a casuistic conception to a transparency of evangelical life; from a morality of stipulated acts of sin, to a morality of following, and "reconfiguring" life "with Christ, through Christ, and in Him."

On the other hand, an aspect so clear in the text of the final judgment (St. Matthew Ch 25) is the surprise of both those who are judged as good and those who are judged as bad: "Indeed, many who have come from the East and the West will have a pleasant surprise, and others an unpleasant surprise, since they learned many lessons, but not the decisive one: the fact that damnation or salvation will be decided in history, and in a very concrete and everyday way."

It is evident that the structural conversion of the CM must be clear about this and more focused on the conversion that God asks of us today.

I have presented a very brief vision, but it can be used to guide the documents and instruments for GA 2022.