

A Point of View of the Poor from Experience

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We know all of the miserable and inhuman conditions in which millions of people currently live throughout the whole world in the different countries of our planet. In this third millennium, we are obliged again to ask ourselves: Who are the poor of today?

Why are there more poor in this era of computers and the Internet where the phenomenon of internationalization imposes itself? What can be the reasons for this growing poverty that rages in the different parts of our planet, notably in all of the countries of the Continent of Africa? What precisely do the poor want as they face their situation of distress? And would we, so many priests of the Congregation of the Mission, be able to propose concretely to fight against the poverty of the majority of the inhabitants of the world?

It is not as a theoretician, nor as one giving a lesson that I speak in this article, but simply as a son of Saint Vincent de Paul, as a man of the land, living currently for some fifteen years with homeless people excluded/marginalized by society, abandoned in the streets of the capital of Madagascar or driven back in 1985-1986 by the municipal authorities from this city in a veritable return to death!

1. WHO ARE THE POOR?

By definition, someone is poor when he does not have the necessary minimum to live. He is poor because he does not have what is needed to live with dignity according to his human condition. But the criteria that govern this definition vary according to times and circumstances. In the present context of internationalization, the European Union gives us a very suitable definition and without ambiguity as to what one calls "poor." Indeed for the European Union, one understands that "poor people are individuals, families or groups of people whose material, cultural, and social resources are so weak, that they lack the minimally acceptable means as a member of the place in which they live!"

In this third millennium, we can note with bitterness that more than one billion human beings live in these conditions. They are without any security, protection or social amenities, and they are without any help! They are the elderly, single women, children without a future, without education, without school, without work and without lodging, but also without leisure. One does not need to be an expert to foresee the tragic consequences that are going to ensue from such a situation, particularly, when we know that this underprivileged layer is the majority in Africa and Madagascar and even on a world-wide level. In short, the poor are the people and the families who do not even have access to the basic services of society. And the most forgotten among the poor are the aged people, single women and children.

Our own experience among the poor reveals to us that the poor do not have a future! The poor person is the one who lives from day to day. To be able to look to the future, it is necessary to enjoy a certain clarity that there will be a following day. For the poor, the future is the very day. For the poor person the only objective is to survive in the present. All problems that appear in the future are disregarded. In this extreme misery, the poor forget the whole spiritual dimension. It is necessary to survive!

And in despair, the poor lower their arms in the face of difficulties. They receive so many strokes that they are too tired to fight. They undergo the sense of injustice as their destiny. What is astonishing is that often the poor try to survive without hate against the one that lives better and those who govern life. They do not hope anymore for much from life. And one understands that for the poor, alcohol is the most accessible drug, capable of being considered a means to recover a little dream, a little happiness; in the end the final illusion!

In the ambiance of poverty, indeed, people look most often to passive leisure, sometimes to make money, as in playing card games or dominoes, while not excluding and affected by the consumption of alcoholic drinks.

2. THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

But can one speak of the poor and their point of view without speaking first of the causes of poverty?

One notices that the more poor a country is, the more its controlling class is absent from the life of the society. It remains passive to the conditions of the inhumane life of its population, especially of the children of the street who do not stop increasing in number. Without education, without the minimum to live, without moral and spiritual

reference guides, these children and youth are lost as in a jungle, where the law of the strongest reigns without mercy.

Yes! We are there today! Why?

2.1. INDIFFERENCE AND THE SELFISHNESS OF THOSE HAVING THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL POWER

In any case, in the political and diplomatic world, one truly feels a certain fear to speak the truth, to denounce this evil and these injustices. Goodness and truth are not the first worries of the politicians, but rather they are concerned to preserve their power and privileges. One is aware of a flagrant gap between what political decision-makers say and what they do, between the propositions of the economists and what they make effective.

Everywhere administrative blockage, indifference and the passivity of the countries to solve the social problems, push individuals or groups to take the path of violence to make themselves heard. It is the case of Haiti today. Finally the drama can only grow. How much longer can leaders who do not want to see, rule in the face of the sad reality in which the people live!

The facts are there: the failure of political will, the insufficiency of conviction and resolution and the lack of perseverance in the realities of the social policies. In every age, in every change of régime, the same policies, the same selfish gestures repeat themselves. To be sure there are other forms, but the bottom line remains the same. Every régime knows how to justify its politics, even when there was not any change from the previous regime. Every régime exaggerates and uses the terms “reason of State” or “national sovereignty” dishonestly. Here or there when there is a coup with the new possessors of the power there may be some who have their own ideology, a country must always start from scratch again. In some countries, the new leaders very often make a claim of what one might call “continuity of State” as a principle on which a State rests its rights for respect of itself. Struggles for power are often accompanied by civil wars or ethnic wars. We are all witnesses of these holocausts and genocides as in the Second World War, in Africa, in the Balkans, in Asia. Yes! In this third millennium, one is again aware of what went on in Rwanda, in Kosovo, in Sierra Leone, in Liberia, in Burundi, or in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, etc.!

Are the countries of the African Continent, in particular, obligated to make their “Hundred Years War,” to find their place in the concert of Nations?

The experience of a country or a continent is not able to act as a lesson to others.

Is it human logic that all change must pass by human sacrifices before finding an outcome and a solution in the dialogue around the same table?

Behind ideological slogans and emptiness of meaning, hide the selfishness of a minority who try to protect, in excessive ways, the privileges bound to actually capturing power. And in the same way, the poverty of the majority does not stop increasing. In reality there are plays on words. The gap between the rich and the most underprivileged layers becomes wider and wider! Who does not know it? Who does not see it? The media does not very often speak of it.

In the face of these miseries and this poverty that cry to the heavens, one cannot be quiet, especially for us priests of Saint Vincent de Paul. Encouraged by so many of the saints that gave their lives for the poor, one has the right to wonder the reason for this resignation of persons from countries who are responsible for these conditions. One only need to have common sense, as Saint Vincent had, to see and to react, in order to relieve the situations that lead us in the circle of misery, violence and hate!

The last straw is that the rich countries and the international institutions had helped some state-parties, whereas, their help for the development of the local population was in reality diverted for political propaganda or to protect a régime.

In addition, the reports of the international organizations are based on numbers and percentages, often inflated and arranged well; the heads of state use with trickery the statistical data, as compared to actual growth rates, to say that the country is doing well. But can one see the human beings who suffer behind these abstract numbers? Can one see their pain, their suffering? It is not about empty numbers, is it? Cannot one measure the degrees of success of the policies with other means than statistics?

We are all accomplices of the systems that generate poverty and insecurity, even with the phenomenon in vogue, known by the name internationalization.

2.2. THE PHENOMENON OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

The present internationalization is bound to the era of the computer and the internet, and expertise belongs to a minority having an elevated place in society. Internationalization makes claim that a big group of the inhabitants of the earth do not have enough to eat to take care of hunger and do not have access to education, to health care, to lodging, to potable drinking water. Therefore, there is inequality of access to the universal goods of humanity. It only makes the social fracture enlarge the gap between the poor majority

and a rich minority. More than the economy of the market, the motor of internationalization is a system without mercy or compassion for those who remain on the periphery and changes itself literally to exclude many in relation to the universal requirements of humanity.

Some make believe that all are equal. But knowledge and other human riches are distributed badly. Between rich and poor, the gulf continues to widen itself. Pope John Paul II, time and time again, did not stop repeating it. Equality is the Christian tradition and the social doctrine in which the church always defended the universal destination of goods and wealth!

The poor are those who are always behind in their progress in relation to the degree of progress in the world. The criteria for poverty change according to the times and the places. But the poor are always set aside. Some fool them, some distract them in a sort of mirage, while insisting that they know their rights and how to accomplish their duties, while finally promising them an unattainable happiness in a multi-dimensional world.

Nothing on our African Continent — malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and civil and ethnic wars that cause the devastations — come before the total indifference of the international community. Some big powers only intervene for the moment when their interests are threatened, as in Iraq.

Internationalization is also the relocation of enterprises to countries where the workers are underpaid and without social guarantees. In these poor countries, there are the clear areas that give some jobs to a lot of young people. But in what difficult conditions and at what price?

2.3. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF POVERTY

Increasingly in a short time, the number of poor have become throughout the world the majority of the whole and become more impoverished on the cultural, moral and spiritual levels. And they are caught up in hate and violence teaching them to dissociate instead of uniting. Increasing internationalization is made up of a selfishness that not only blinds the rich and the leaders of a lot of countries, it also affects the poor.

Is not internationalization, in this sense, a factor of spiritual and moral poverty? And while giving special stature to only one way of life as compared to others, does it not also contribute to the destruction of the tradition, culture and spiritual strength which harmonized the lives of millions of people over the centuries from different nations?

The dream of a just, fraternal world seems to go away. Where does the humanity go? Do we have a direction? Do we have a sense of purpose for the younger generations? Commencing with the eldest, have we not arrived before a Great Wall that we cannot surmount anymore and before which we all were pedestrians?

If we do not react as human beings, as a church and a Community of the Mission, we are all going to collapse before this immense defensive wall that does not have a door for an exit.

Yet this defensive wall: it is beautiful, attractive, and irresistible. But it has a logic that produces poverty, war and insecurity. Indeed, everywhere in the world insecurity prevails in the capitals and the big cities from the North and the South, of the developed countries and of those so-called in development. We only have to see what goes on in New York, in Buenos Aires, in Algiers, in Johannesburg, etc.

In short, it points out the indifferent selfishness of the leaders of a certain number of countries, from their political decisions, their economic choices and their technical progress which are also at the origin of the unceasing increase of the number of the poor! The economic thinking of the present world finally generates the poor.

Once one was born poor. But today, in a context of internationalization and excessive liberalization of the economy, one becomes poor because of the bad management of the universal goods and the lack of human solidarity. The maximum of gain and profit constitutes the logic of the market economy. As in sports competitions, the logic that excels in the present context is to win.

How do we recapture our original self and recover in this modern world what makes us dream so?

For some, it is the economy and money that lead the world. For others, it is concrete action and spiritual strength that change the world; again for others it is ideas! Between these three conceptions, these three visions, one can have a complementary balance. They are all necessary to advance toward a just and universal progress that is for all in a world where all citizens of the earth can enjoy the "necessarium vitae," the necessary minimum to live humanly: access to employment, to energy sources, to potable drinking water, to the possibility of taking care of family members, to access of children to schooling and to healthful lodgings, and also access to leisure worthy of this name.

Do we want a society indeed with less social injustice, fewer poor, fewer marginalized or excluded people?

Often, one wants to diminish misery and poverty. But is this an attitude that contributes to serve justice? Do we want true peace in our world?

3. THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE POOR TO LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF AKAMASOA

To speak honestly, one does not fight for the poor from his office. It is quite necessary to be among the poor, to be situated in the middle of the poor and to start from there for a realistic and concrete action as in the time of Saint Vincent, who took courageous initiatives in France to bring help to those ravaged by the wars, without anyone officially investing in this humanitarian action!

Courage, realism, and charity lived in our founder, Saint Vincent, who was involved in the social problems that first were seen as insurmountable! However, his love and his goodwill for the poor moved mountains!

We have ourselves lived in this kind of experience with the actions of the humanitarian association AKAMASOA that we founded fifteen years ago, that has advanced by Divine Providence, and that continues to work in favor of the marginalized and the most underprivileged of the Big Island of Madagascar, according to the means at its disposition.

The name given to our Association expresses well our humanitarian actions in favor of the poor because the Malagasy word Akamasoa means good friend

3.1. A STRUGGLE LED WITH FAITH AND CONVICTION

Effectively, the history of Akamasoa is a history of a handful of young Malagasy laymen, who concluded with faith and conviction that poverty is not the fruit of luck, but a sad reality that has causes that can be defeated because it is not a destiny.

And we always have, in that conclusion, profound reason to believe that the excluded/marginalized people can stand up well and can recover their dignity.

With faith and the impetus of the heart, and also with a certain firmness and indispensable discipline, this small number of volunteers wove relationships of respect and friendship with this population of the excluded/marginalized who were abandoned everywhere in the streets of the capital of Madagascar, or driven back to its garbage dumps outside of the capital on an isolated hill, that turned in reality to death and dying.

Then, with an unshakable will and certain courage, it was necessary for us to look into the deepest part of ourselves, where the force of the Spirit of God manifests itself, so we could go forward. In the beginning no one believed in our work.

We have cleared some obstacles permanently. We had real life difficult moments. But today, we are all together in our work.

Certainly, we know without illusion that all that we constructed remains fragile because of the economic environment of the country that is slow to improve in spite of the good will of the new government that came from the crisis of 2002!

But we have faith that nothing will stop us from continuing to fight, to strengthen and to consolidate again what we had acquired a few years ago for the wellbeing of these thousands of children and families without shelter.

In spite of the adversities, daily effort and perseverance allowed us to see the first fruits. We are delighted for the work accomplished by these young, honest and devoted Malagasy laymen. And we are anxious to underline that Akamasoa especially speaks of the courage of the poor who want to come out of poverty and to break the vicious cycle of misery. It is not ever a question of those who are destitute.

However, next to our joy, we cannot forget the thousands of children and families who wander again in the streets and the markets of some big Malagasy cities and who live there in inhuman conditions, without any dignity and unfortunately without any future, before the indifference of nearly all of the authorities of the communities!

In spite of the menacing dangers and disappointments that threaten us, we are going to continue to constantly awaken the consciences of the responsible people and of the poor to what it means for them that poverty can and must be eradicated. We will have this thought before us at all times and especially as a attitude for the direction of our work and our actions, supported by faith and prayer, that constitute the most efficient expression to convince those who do not believe in the strength and the capacity of the poor to lift themselves up in dignity. The actions achieved until now by Akamasoa with its needy members are already an irrefutable proof of this.

And we can sincerely say that the pains, as well as the lies and deceptions met during these fifteen years of humanitarian actions, are not anything in relation to the joy that the handful of 270 educators could feel before the dignity recovered by the thousands of children and families formerly marginalized and homeless people. "God is to be praised for this miracle!"

3.2. SOME OF THE CONCRETE ACTIONS ACHIEVED FOR AND WITH THE POOR

Everything that Akamasoa could achieve for the profit of the poor would not have come to good term without the power of prayer or the consent and the active involvement of the poor themselves. For Akamasoa, the struggle against poverty consists in encouraging and sustaining the poor to take into their own hands their own progress to recover their human dignity.

Everything that we had projected to do for the poor was done concretely by themselves beyond all forms of assistance which instead paralyzes the initiatives of one or the other. The best way to help the poor is to support them to take their destiny progressively in their own hands. It does not get done without a big dose of perseverance and being put to the test, but it is there, the way *par excellence* that permits them to regain slowly but surely their human dignity that had been ridiculed.

And the outcome of such a march to concrete and palpable realizations was a certain world recognition which the humanitarian association Akamasoa enjoys today. Our actions, as discreet as they were, did not escape the world media.

In truth, we worked in a difficult environment that one could speak of as hell. This is a place forgotten by all that leaves nothing to be seen on the horizon except survival at any price. It was truly a place where violence, prostitution, epidemics, hunger, and falsity reigned as master. It was a social environment where the urgency was to live for that day.

And in such a milieu, with the progression of the concrete results of our humanitarian actions, we were invaded by the media, by the researchers or by the makers of films, who came to analyze us and to study us.

What we are doing interests them from their point of view and not from the point of view of the poor, not from our point of view, those of us who have tried to save human lives and to return to thousands of poor their human dignity.

During their filming and their investigations in the course their work, the journalists and the researchers were nearly all taken to the bowels of the earth. The extreme misery of so many thousands of children, the courage of so many single women, who attempt to live with their children in such a horrible state and who make inestimable sacrifices, could not leave them insensitive to what they experienced. Before such a drama, they could not remain indifferent. And finally, we won a lot of friends in these surroundings. They understood the deep sense of human solidarity that we lived in.

After 15 years of life as a Lazarist missionary in the region of the southeast of Madagascar, in September 1988 I had to return to the Malagasy capital to be responsible for the Scholasticate of the young Lazarists, candidates to the priesthood, a position which has nothing to do with the direct service of the underprivileged homeless persons.

But I could not remain indifferent on seeing the revolting situation that I had personally seen in Antananarivo and in its immediate vicinity; of the destitution of entire families who spend the night under the stars, under the arcades of the Avenue of Independence, in the center of the City or in the tunnels; of people living in some cardboard houses or in material of plastic or fabric or jute, all along the railroad, behind the reserved luxurious administrative district of several governmental ministries. Nor could I remain indifferent to the hundreds of families that the municipal authorities of the Malagasy capital had driven back, 25 years after the independence of Madagascar in 1985, into the periphery of the city, notably close to the garbage dump of the capital, to about ten kilometers to the east of Antananarivo, on the side of the National Road n° 2 in the direction of the big port of Tamatave.

In short, there were excluded/marginalized and homeless persons everywhere throughout and around the Malagasy capital. And in most cases, it is while searching in the trash cans of the capital or in the famous discharge of Andralanitra that they found directly what to put into their mouth to survive. This kind of searching also allowed them to earn for themselves a little money and to buy themselves a little food, by recovering particular resellable objects or some things suitable for recycling. Otherwise, a lot of full grown young people fell automatically into the trap of multiform delinquency to survive while the girls and some single women or single mothers were caught up in the system of prostitution. And we will not speak of the proliferation of drugs and alcohol, whose aftermaths continue again to weigh on some of our old excluded/marginalized.

In any case, the centers where these marginalized were returned to by the transformed municipal authorities were, in fact, real places to die, notably where we currently have our main welcome Center, on the high Hill of Ambohimahitsy. I had gone up to it, for the first time, on May 14, 1989. And I remember well, during that first meeting with these numerous poor families, abandoned by society, that I had to crawl on the ground to be able to go into their homes. I conversed, in fact, in the small houses of the fortunate which were hardly one meter in height and constructed of cardboard, plastic or jute.

By God's strength, in an atmosphere of reciprocal confidence, I had to start fighting together with the marginalized against this

extremely tragic poverty. It is there that I called on the young Malagasy laymen who answered and became present. And today, one does not crawl on the ground, but one walks with head held high to enter the dwellings/shelters of these marginalized, who enjoy domestic lodgings worthy of human beings!

Yes! The persistent struggle against poverty, led by the Akamasoa association, but with the active involvement of the poor themselves, allowed thousands of families to recover their human dignity. Indeed, the community Akamasoa counts today 17,000 people, of which 8,000 are children. This population is distributed in four different sites, which are in rural environments, 70 Km to the northwest of the capital, where more than 300 formerly homeless people today enjoy fully and proudly the status of peasant agriculturists, accepting the challenge to rebuild the earth in order to remake their lives.

Other jobs have been created for the social rehabilitation of those poor who chose to remain in the sites where we met them and that we arranged one after the other with them thereafter to work in: embroidery, sewing and vestment making; weaving; sales of the traditional craft objects; manufacture and sale of compost instead of the municipal dumping of garbage; business career; sale and transportation of stone blocks, of quarry stones, etc.; works of construction and framing; carpentry; studio for metallic works; mechanical shop for autos and motors of electrical machines; shoe stores and shoe repairs; preparation of the daily school canteens; education and teaching (helpers of schoolmistresses and teachers); maintenance of the squares and public places in the Akamasoa cities; and other works of communal interest (restocking, welcome, cooks for the hosts of tourists, etc.). In all we created jobs for 4,000 people.

In the area of education, some school establishments have been constructed progressively during the fifteen years of the humanitarian actions of our association. At our different sites, we have in all today: three nurseries, six nursery schools, four primary schools, three colleges of general teaching and one high school — all near the rubbish dumps in Andralanitra. And the school population has risen to more than 7,000 children and young, trained by 170 educator-teachers.

With regard to “lodging,” the association has 1,544 solid houses currently and 426 made of wood and clay. Most of the solid houses are lodgings for single families.

For the newly welcomed families and the single people requiring particular care, there are common dormitories serving them that are very healthful group living shelters.

If the financial backers are willing to sustain us, in the next two years, we could conduct the construction of new sturdy houses, 326 made of wood and clay/brick. This project would allow all families in temporary residences to have their respective permanent lodgings, insofar as they have the firm will seriously to remake/reform their lives. And in this way one would have the opportunity to avoid the proliferation of the ghettos and the rising new violence in our cities.

Note that our policies for construction of lodgings in different places always takes place with deliberate town planning: creation of districts; installation of infrastructures for athletics; planning of paved streets with sidewalks and channels for water drainage; as well as public gardens and parklands. In short, we moved toward the creation of new cities which includes disciplinary regulations created by the inhabitants themselves to assure their own security.

During these 15 years, on the level of health care, respectively for each of our four cities, five Centers of Basic Health or clinics have been constructed, two maternity facilities and a dental office were set up in Manantenasoa, the main site of our activities.

Indeed, the thousands of poor which we take care of were for the most part in a very fragile health state. It was, therefore, impossible for us to send them all into a hospital in the capital. With the few means at the disposal of our association, the costs of hospitalization of its members would have been too expensive. Much more of a need that our patients had was emotional attention. The collaboration for some years with Physicians Without Borders was for us indeed a big help. And since 1994 notably, Malagasy physicians not employed have been hired. Currently our staff for Health Care is made up of eight general practitioner physicians, a dental physician, three midwives, a laboratory technician, and about twenty nursing aides.

Today these clinics not only constitute the centers for community basic care, but they are also centers for permanent education in matters of preventive health, hygiene and family planning. They also educate concerning nutritional food, because food deficiencies and the illnesses undergone by the poor always have a dramatic impact, not only on the intra-uterine formation of children, but also on the physical and psycho-intellectual development of those whom we manage to see every day.

With all that we have achieved in favor of the very poor, in the domain of employment, education, lodging and health, of the thousands of excluded/marginalized adults, young people and children, they were able to recover their human dignity with a new impetus of solidarity and the ability to take on even greater responsibility.

At the end of these fifteen years of struggle for and with the poor, I understood my mission as a priest of Saint Vincent de Paul more deeply. Since rereading the life of Saint Vincent, I now understand better his engagement with and his love for the poor, the little method and the five virtues that he asked of the priests of the Mission.

Also Jesus' words in the Gospel have made sense and given more weight on my heart for my priestly life as a missionary.

In 1994, the Visitor and his council saw in this work Saint Vincent's charism applied to the abandoned poor, and they gave us their blessing and their spiritual and brotherly support. The Province allocated a confrere for the ministry of Akamasoa.

In the same way the Daughters of the Charity responded with a lot of love in this work of rehabilitation of the very poor! Without a doubt the poor bring us closer to God and they are the shortest path to reach God.

I clearly understood that the poor when they feel they are listened to, welcomed and shown love, in spite of the duress of their life, have an extraordinary joy for living!

But this work of social rehabilitation of the excluded/marginalized would not be possible without an appropriate ministry in this place of poverty!

Cardinal Armand Razafindratandra, Archbishop of the Diocese of Antananarivo, granted us, according to Canonical Privilege, a Private Parish allowing us to provide for all the spiritual needs of the people of the street and the dumps. A ministry for sacramental care has been in place since 1994. A very important event of the week is the Sunday Mass with the presence of four to six thousand people, a majority of whom are children and young people. The Mass is often attended by tourists who come to Madagascar!

To see formerly excluded/marginalized people singing and participating in the liturgy by chants, dances and devotion, makes converts of the tourist visitors. The excluded/marginalized people have become apostles of God's love! Truly, God knows how to turn the biggest miseries and sufferings in this place to joy and hope!

What would we be able to propose, as a concluding example, for reducing poverty on our planet, as our holy founder St. Vincent began it!

4. SOME PROPOSITIONS

1. With humility but with determination we should create and cultivate, at every level of each country throughout the world, an authentic spirit of solidarity. It would be necessary to have the willing attitude to create a human society where there is a just social protection and minimum social guarantees for all!

In the global solidarity perspective, is the North not able to use the service of all humanity in the very important social services with which it is endowed? But would those who have power like them indeed share social service for the entire human family?

2. One thing is certain: human selfishness is a reality. Does not one see for oneself, among other matters, the different level of salary the experts of the countries of the North have as compared to the poor in the countries of the South? In one of our projects, for example, we worked with another European organization. This one sent us an expert to work in a very poor environment in which he did not know the language, the culture or the tradition. Every time that he wants to go to the beneficiary population of the project, he must make the visit with the help of a local interpreter. And yet according to the level of his monthly salary, under the terms of the contract stipulated in the project financed by a European institution, he is paid 85 times more than our Malagasy agent, responsible for the project in question. What a waste of money! And all this is done in the name of human development and solidarity with the poor.

Are the reduction of poverty and the development of the poor truly the goal of these projects and these reports of evaluation skillfully elaborated by the experts working in countries of the South? Do not the poor become the springboards for the promotion of the experts of the countries of the North? And would not the reduction of such a gap between the salary of a European expatriate expert and a local responsible person constitute already in itself a concrete form of solidarity between the North and the South?

3. The countries one calls developed also are not without problems. In spite of their very elevated standard of living, the rich are confronted by spiritual indifference, and the lack of good life choices by their children. Thus, some come to be inspired by the courage the poor took to help their own children in dealing with a consumer society. When the First Lady of France toured in Madagascar, she had the opportunity to see in one of our cities the manner in which our people fight daily against poverty. She had taken some photos of our people fully working in their career,

confessing that these photos could really help their children to act more reasonably/responsibly in dealing with the material wealth which they enjoy.

Do not the materially poor also have, in a sense, great wealth? In other words, the excessive competition and the immediate profitability of all wealth is not always a criteria or value for the poor. For the rich countries and business men, time is money. This is not the case for the poor. Even the problems of time and immediate efficiency do not constitute for them important criteria. Their criteria is that their physical fragility, due to considerable food deficiencies, often forces them to work slowly. The affluent have something, therefore, to learn from the poor.

4. Authentic human solidarity may be possible in a context of monitoring and mutual respect, quite beyond the complexities of superiority or inferiority. Material assistance does not solve all human problems in spite of its important necessity. It is solidarity, mutual respect and spiritual wealth that would permit the inhabitants of the earth to share true happiness.

5. Children of wealthy countries who live in great wealth are also not very safe from the loss of values due to drugs, delinquency and crime, because they are not appropriately educated in the spirit of sharing and solidarity.

6. Workers of the North and the South would do best to be more united in a bond. Indeed, while the worker of the South earns in one week what the worker of the North earns in one or two hours, with greater solidarity, the too flagrant inequalities could well disappear or at least decrease.

7. There is no recipe ready made related to the struggle against poverty. Theories are well proposed that often prove to be inapplicable in concrete situations, because such a struggle is above all an engagement of all of life's issues among and close to the poor.

Through the concrete actions dictated by this kind of solidarity, one must constantly review the approach to the existing forms of poverty in view of the decisions and more realistic and adequate actions beyond simple formality. In the service of the poor, indeed, it is necessary often to have the courage to make courageous and legitimate decisions, without too many legalistic processes for the service to so many underprivileged. It is always the common sense of the Gospel and the good sense that Saint Vincent had in his time that must excel. And this is how we succeeded for the most part in the enterprise of our association AKAMASOA.

In the struggle against poverty, the on-going actions engaged in and committed to ought to be the preservation of justice, dignity and love. When hundreds of millions of people live in an extreme poverty, certainly, there are violations of human rights.

The struggle against poverty also implies a struggle against corruption under all its forms. Otherwise, to allow thousands of families to enjoy true autonomy, freedom of access to the ownership of property is indispensable. All local involvement for every project of development should have a greater view for autonomy, beyond any form of dependence and assistance.

And it is in such a context that we all should constantly multiply aid given to decrease the nuisances that the market economy produced and caused people to move back to the distresses which are produced by bad governance and the money/materialistic logic that lead to war.

8. True internationalization in this third millennium is the internationalization of love and sharing goods. It is also the erasing of the debts of poor countries by rich countries and other financial backers in order for them to invest in the development of the most underprivileged social layers of poor countries. But all should be under the rigorous control of the financial backers to avoid new diversions by those holding power.

9. Finally, in this construction of a more just and fraternal world, the media must have an important role. With their power, the media are well able to provoke and cultivate in people of all horizons, not only generosity, but also the spirit of solidarity in multiple ways, beyond the indifference and the selfishness that prevail.

At the end of this article, I would like to encourage all colleagues who are committed to the service of the poor and to say to them that we have a great opportunity to serve the poor by imitating our Lord and our founder Saint Vincent who have given us an example to follow!

Let us as the Congregation of the Mission rise to the height of this challenge!