

## **From Pity to Solidarity**

We have heard it said that resources have been wasted on pampering the poor with assistance. In fact, a vast, worldwide industry has grown out of responding to poverty.

Billions of dollars have been spent all over the world on solutions to poverty. Regardless, the number of poor continues to increase, and poverty continues to worsen globally.

Philosophies on how to help the poor are necessarily complex. But we can at least emphasize that poverty has to be faced on two levels: a focus on the actual conditions of the poor, and a corresponding focus on the systems that make and keep them poor.

It is important to respond to the lack of security in housing and livelihood; basic services such as health, water, legal assistance; safety from calamity, disease, hazardous surroundings, abuse, and other issues that oppress the poor. We must also understand that poverty affects men and women, adults and children, differently.

There is also a need to rethink policies and laws such as the automatic servicing of foreign debt, the oil deregulation law, privatization of services, liberalization of agriculture, contractualization, and other related policies that threaten security of labor. There is a need to act upon the inequitable distribution of space and resources. There is something wrong with a status quo that allows for vast well-watered golf courses, and yet leaves poor communities vying for tiny plots of land and precious little water.

Considering urban poverty together with rural poverty will reveal the relevance of discussions on agrarian reform, environmental restoration, the resolution of armed conflict, and sustained livelihood. We need to restructure the reality whereby urban and global centers consume the resources of the provinces without just or commensurate return.

Instead of treating the poor as dispensable and barriers to development, there is a need to recognize their significance in our economy. Where would we be without our vendors, laundresses and drivers? A rebuke needs to be issued against those who exploit the poor; this includes, for instance, media outfits that draw millions of pesos in revenue from the poor through programs that actually diminish their dignity. Churches, meanwhile, need to find new ways to respond to the fact that poverty and injustice are at the center of God's concern.

The bottom line of all of this is that injustices must be rectified to bring about an equitable sharing of opportunities. More than alms or pity, the poor need us to be in solidarity with them, that they may gain the dignity, confidence and capacity to participate in charting their own development.

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