**Armour of God**

**Discussion Summary, Notes and Presentation**

**For April 24, 2019**

**See notes at the end for this meeting/ discussion**

**Presentation:**

**Poverty Calls for Your Mercy**

Speaker’s Notes - by Jean Serge Quesnel

Saint Patrick’s Basilica – April 24, 2019

1 The presenter was International Chairman of the Conference on Inter-American Student Programmes, Programme (CIASP), Director at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Alternate Executive Director of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Director of the Evaluation Office of the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and currently Chair of the Finance Council of Saint Patrick Basilica Parish.

Four questions are asked:

1. • Should we give money to a beggar?
2. • What is poverty?
3. • What are the causes and effects of poverty?
4. • What needs to be done to overcome poverty?

**To the first question, the answer is YES.**

In Mark 14:7 it is written: *‘’The poor you will always have with you and you can help them whenever you want to.’’* In Deuteronomy 15:11, it is written: *‘’ For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’’*

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church2 paragraph 2052 refers to Matthew 19:16-22” It is written: *“Teacher, what good deed have must I do, to eternal life?”* To the young man who asked this question, Jesus answers first by invoking the necessity to recognize God as the *“One who is good,”* as the supreme Good and the source of all good. Then Jesus tells him: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” And he cites for his questioner the precepts that concern love of neighbour: *“You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.”* Finally, Jesus sums up these commandments positively: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Mt 19:16-19)

2 Latin text copyright © 1994 Liberia Editrice Vaticana – English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church copyright © Liberia Editrice Vaticana

To this first reply Jesus adds a second: *“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* (Matthew 19:21)

The apostle Paul wrote: *Let faith, hope and charity, these three remain among you, but the greatest of these is charity.* (Corinthian 13:13). Saint Paul also wrote: *Let all your things be done with charity.* (Corinthian 16:14)

Jesus also said *“When you give … do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.”* (Matthew 6:3). This saying epitomizes the mystery of Jesus’ sayings. What does Jesus really mean by this saying? Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount with a caution. *‘’ Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in Heaven.’’* (Matthew 6:1).

For Jesus, it is all about intent. Intent is the guiding principle for giving. We must ask: Why are we giving? When we expose our giving to others why do we do so? When we tell stories of the impoverished being empowered, why do we do so? Are we ensuring that each step is done with dignity, honesty and for the right reason? Are we seeking God’s glory or our own?

When giving to a beggar. Who are we to judge if she or he really needs it and will use our donation for the right purpose? The real intent is to help and share love. As we serve the poor, we serve Jesus. We gain much more than we can give.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 2448 states:

*’’The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. (Isa 58:6-7; Heb 13:3) Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. (Mt 25:31-46) Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.’’* (Tob 4:5-11; Sir 17:22; Mt 6:2-4)

**The second question is: what is poverty?**

Governments and the United Nations unsurprisingly take a secular and economic view of poverty. They focus on consequences, not causes. Our Catholic faith makes us understand that a cause of poverty is the lack of encountering Christ's love and mercy.

The Irish Government’s definition of poverty is one of the best that I have found: *"People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and other resources, people may be excluded and marginalized from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society."*3

3 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (Government of Ireland, 2007) - available at <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf>

For the United Nations *« poverty is the inability of having choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation»*4

4 United Nations, UN Statement, June 1998 – signed by the heads of all UN agencies found in Indicators of Poverty and Hunger (2005) in <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ydiDavidGordon_poverty.pdf>

In Canada, the federal government has endorsed no official measurement of poverty. Defining poverty, poverty lines, poverty level, sufficient incomes or minimum standards of living is a matter of ongoing debate among policy-makers inside and outside government. In general poverty is defined either in absolute terms (inability to obtain the necessities of life) or in relative terms (being worse off than average). Multiple measures of poverty have been developed on the basis of these definitions.

Many factors converge to make poverty a complex, multidimensional social phenomenon. Poverty never results from the lack one thing but from many interlocking factors that cluster in poor people’s lives. As expected, poverty is routinely defined as the lack of what is necessary for material well-being — especially food but also housing, land, and other assets. Poverty is the lack of multiple resources leading to physical deprivation.

There are important psychological aspects of poverty. Poor people are acutely aware of their lack of voice, power, and independence, which subject them to exploitation. Their poverty also leaves them vulnerable to rudeness, humiliation, and inhumane treatment by both private and public agents of the state from whom they seek help. Poor people also speak about the pain brought about by their unavoidable violation of social norms and their inability to maintain cultural identity through participating in traditions, festivals, and rituals. Their inability to fully participate in community life leads to a breakdown of social relations.

The absence of basic infrastructure — particularly roads, transport, water, and health facilities — emerged as critical. Poor people focus on assets rather than income and link their lack of physical, human, social, and environmental assets to their vulnerability and exposure to risk.

In my view, ultimately, poverty is a damaged spirit, not an economic absence. People lose the resilience to encounter God's intention for them. St. Theresa of Calcutta calls us to look for Jesus and find him in the distressing disguise of the poor.

**The third question: What are the causes and effects of poverty?**

There are also other factors that make people more likely to be poor. One single factor might not be significant on its own, but when these factors are combined they increase the risk of poverty. Factors contributing to poverty include:

***Separation***: loss of self-esteem and loss of knowing we are loved and forgiven by God – unconditionally

***Work***: being unemployed or in a low-paid job makes people more likely to be poor.

***Age***: many older people and children whose parents are poor are at greater risk of poverty than the general population.

***Health***: malnutrition, people with long-term illnesses or who are disabled are at greater risk of poverty.

***Education***: people who left school early or without qualifications are more likely to experience poverty.

***Family***: one-parent families are more likely to be poor than two-parent families or single people.

***Location***: living in a disadvantaged community or in an area with few employment opportunities increases the risk.

***Extreme weather condition* and *mismanagement of natural resources*.**

***Alienating contexts***: such as debt, inflation, corruption, exploitation, slavery, war, aggression, violence, destruction.

In the Canadian context, poor children live in chaotic, unstable households. Young children are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of change, disruption, and uncertainty. Common issues in low-income families include hectic work schedules, depression and chemical dependence, —all factors that interfere with the healthy attachments that foster children's self-esteem, sense of mastery of their environment, and optimistic attitudes. Instead, poor children often feel isolated and unloved, feelings that kick off a downward spiral of unhappy life events, including poor academic performance, behavioral problems, dropping out of school, and drug abuse. These events tend to rule out higher education as an option and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Adverse childhood experiences lead to social, emotional and cognitive impairments which in turn fosters the adoption of health risks behaviours leading to diseases, disability and social problems.

More fundamentally the real and ultimate root cause of poverty is selfishness. The powerful always wants more at the detriment of those who have less.

**The fourth question: What needs to be done to overcome poverty?**

First there is a need to change our culture from pity to empathy. We seek Jesus and opportunities to serve Him within families, our parish and in the whole world.

At the global level, Popes have expressed the need to manage responsively the resources of the earth, as a common good for the benefit of all. During a visit in the Andes, Pope Francis points out the evils of leaders who take too much at the expense of people living in impoverished conditions. Pope Francis said that *the poor were being sacrificed on the Altar of money, as the rich worship a golden calf. This sacrifice costs lives and drives people into slums*.

For the last fifty years the world development challenge has been a rich world of one billion people facing a poor world of five billion5. The good news is that most of the five billion, about 80%, live in countries that are developing, often at amazing speed. The real challenge of development is that there is a group of countries at the bottom that are falling behind, and unfortunately often falling apart. The countries at the bottom coexist with the twenty-first century, but their reality is the fourteenth century: conflicts, bad governance, plague, ignorance.

5 Paul Collier, The Bottom Billion, Oxford University Press

No doubt, the role played by the United Nations organisations created only sixty years ago has made a significant difference in making the world better. At the national level there is one group of poor6 whose poverty is the result of an unexpected setback, such as the death of a breadwinner or the loss of a job. For these people, the welfare system can function as originally intended, providing temporary support until recipients can find their footing again.

6 Robert L. Woodson, The 4 Types of Poverty, and How to Cure Them, in the Daily Signal

A second group comprises those who have remained dependent on the system because the disincentives to marry and work, embedded in regulations make it a rational choice to avoid those stepping stones to self-sufficiency. They have “done the math” and calculated that it is not worth the loss of benefits to take the first steps toward upward mobility.

The third group is made up of the disabled, many of whom will always be in need of some support.

The fourth group consists of those in poverty because of the choices they make and the chances they take—for example, those suffering from alcoholism and other addictions, who live with the consequences rather than pursue recovery. Among this group, a fundamental revitalization in vision, character, and values is a prerequisite for them to reclaim their lives and escape from dependence on government aid. This internal transformation can be—and has been—uniquely engendered by community-based (often faith-inspired) outreach by neighborhood leaders. Dramatic transformations have resulted from the work of selfless grassroots leaders. Once an internal transformation has been accomplished, these men and women, who had virtually lost their lives to drugs and alcohol, emerge as responsible employees, spouses, and parents.

At the parochial level, Saint Patrick’s Basilica Parish policy on Helping those living in poverty points to ways that we can help the poor.

❖ We can pray for those living in poverty. We may organize a special day of prayers at our Basilica for those living in poverty.

❖ We may donate money to the Saint Patrick Basilica Fund for the Poor.

❖ We are welcome to join fellow parishioners in our Parish Conference of St. Vincent de Paul

❖ We can donate generously to special collections aiming at assisting those living in poverty.

❖ We can contribute to organizations effective in serving those living in poverty locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

❖ We can volunteer at a soup kitchen. If the kitchen badly needs funding, We can bring the situation at the attention of our Rector or a member of the Parish Pastoral Council.

❖ We can help a person living in poverty by facilitating access to funding and services. For example, a low-income, disoriented, elderly parishioner is in need, living in unsanitary and unsafe conditions with no family or friends present. Taking proper security measures, we can make occasional visits. We can organise cleaning and repair services to restore the apartment to dignified and safe conditions. We can assist the parishioner to attend Mass.

❖ Most of all, we need to take action big or small to help those living in poverty.

We seek Jesus and opportunities to serve Him within families, our parish and throughout the world.

**What does the Bible tell us** (Sirach Ch. 4)

* • «My child, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. V1
* • Do not grieve the one who is hungry, nor anger a poor in want. V2
* • Do not add to the troubles of an angry mind nor delay your gift to a beggar. V3
* • Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face from the poor. V4
* • Do not avert your eyes from the needy, nor give no one occasion to curse you. V5
* • Incline your ear to the poor and answer him peaceably and gently. » V8
* • Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor. (Lk 18:22)
* • Most importantly, it is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones. (Mt 25:31-36

**Armour of God Discussion Notes – Jean-Serge Quesnel – Poverty Calls for Your Mercy – April 24, 2019**

 Poverty is complex.

 Should we give money to people on the street? Yes! Mark 14:7. We need to open wide our

hands to our poor and needy brothers.

 “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” Recognize God as the Supreme Good and

Source of all good. Love your neighbours – not kill, steal, commit adultery, honour your

parents…and if you would be perfect, go and sell what you posess, give it ot the poor, and

come follow me.

 “The greatest of these” is love or charity.

 Give in secret – don’t let your left hand know what your right hand does.

 Do not practice your righteousness before other people.

 Intent is Jesus’ guiding principle for giving – why do we give to others? Why do we tell

stories about the impoverished? Are we seeking God’s glory or our own? We are meant to

help and to love – not judge how our donation will be used.

 Catechism – the works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our

neighbour in his spiritual and bodily needs. Givig alms is one of the chief works – it is also

a work of justice pleasing to God.

 What is poverty? The cause of it is the lack of encounter with (Christ’s) love – people are

living in poverty are living in poverty if their resources (income and social ones) do not

allow them to have a standard of living accepted as the norm. (Irish leader)

 The UN says it is a violation of human dignity – not having enough to feed, clothe, work,

educate, or be social. It leads to exclusion, violence, and includes living in fragile

environments without access to basic necessities.

 Multiple measures of poverty have been developed – it is a complex problem – it is never

the lack of one thing, but comes from many factors. Food and housing are as important as

income.

 Psychological aspects of power – people know their lack of independence and the risk of

humiliation they face from people meant to help them. They cannot maintain social norms

or participate in social rituals, leading to a breakdown in social relations. Exposure to risk is

related to their vulnerability.

 St. Teresa of Calcutta – find Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor.

 **Causes and effects of poverty**

– separation from others, loss of knowing we are loved by

God, being unemployed or underemployed, age (kids or the elderly), health (illness and

disability), people who lack educational qualifications, single parents, living in

disadvantaged communities (e.g. with few employers), living in areas with extreme

weather, debt, war, slavery, violence, aggression.

 Poor kids are vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty – tight work schedules, poor

attachment, substance dependence, isolation, feeling of being unloved. This leads to

substance abuse, poor educational performance, and behavioural issues – all of this

perpetuates the cycle. The real root cause is selfishness on the part of the powerful.

 We need to change our culture from pity to empathy. We need to seek Jesus in our parish

and families. We need to manage the resources of our common home – the earth. The pope

called out leaders who sacrifice the poor to their golden calf – the sacrifice costs lives!

 For the last 50 years, one billion rich people have squared off against five billion poor

people. Countries are developing…but some are falling behind and falling apart. It’s as if

they live in the 14 th century, with all their conflicts etc. The UN has made a significant

difference in improving the stage of the world.

 One group of poor people face an unexpected setback – e.g. the death of a breadwinner.

Others remain dependent on “the system” – the loss of benefits is too great to encourage

upward mobility. Other are disabled and cannot work. Others have addictions and cannot

break free.

 Grassroots leaders like the Ottawa Mission help with support and internal transformation.

Our parish helps the poor through prayer, donations (our fund for the poor), our St. Vincent

de Paul group, special financial collections, donations to local/regional/national groups, and

connecting people to the services they need.

 We seek Jesus in the poor, in our families, and throughout the world. What we have done

for the poor will help Jesus to recognize His chosen ones.

 What about the men who gather around the parish? Is giving them money enabling their

addictions? Is there a difference between giving to individuals and organizations? – Do

both, respectfully. Giving to organizations enables practical support and behavioural

change. Giving to the individual enables immediate needs to be met.

 **How do we help internationally?**

Countries exist where the government does not take care

of the people – but churches and charities do. A lot of money has gone to waste because of

complications and corruptions.

 Federation of Guatemalan coffee producers – based on agriculture – the program was

working well after three years – but all the leaders of the federation were killed one night

because they displaced private sector interests. Overnight, the mission, values, and

accomplishment died with them.

 In Honduras, a forestry program had been established for three years – the government was

taken over. International aid means we can’t go according to our scripts. Rebel groups are

well-funded by multiple nations – when they come to power, they get a discount on national

resources.

 Bottom-up assistance is needed, but so is government support for infrastructure –

electricity, roads, health care…democratic governments genuinely concerned about their

people are most successful. Costa Rica has no army – that money goes to education.

Communist models like Cuba also work better than we may think. Some people are poor,

but many do quite well.

 Civil war, abuse, and genocide are difficult to deal with – in the short term, not much can be

done – militaries need to unseat corrupt governments. The UN and our Charter are causes

for optimism. We don’t realize that we are the first generation with the capacity for

governments around the world to exchange. Parameters of what’s acceptable are set in the

Charter and other documents.

 Poverty is relative – what is poor here in Canada may not be so elsewhere. In Mexico,

people shared and formed genuine community, despite being poor by Canadian standards.

The lower end of the economic scale may not allow for 21 st century living, but these people

are richer in other ways.

 Native people in Canada are the poorest and most isolated. What can we do? Jean has never

been involved, despite growing up near a reserve. Their sense of community was deep. Our

Canadian government and Crown have an agreement with Native populations – the extreme

runs from government to the communities themselves taking control of education, funding,

and healthcare. The breakdown happens when communities do not identify government-

provided services as their own – e.g. neighbours using their house as firewood. Poverty is

solved with respect, community, and cooperation. In Guatemala, people given construction

materials rebuilt their village, which still stands today.

 Melinda Gates wrote a book about women’s empowerment. Warren Buffett and Bill Gates

formed an organization for the wealthy to allocate half their money to help the world – are

they doing the good they think they are? They deserve praise – they collaborate with each

other and with the UN – policymaking is done with the World Bank. They are at the mercy

of the governments of the countries they wish to help – the money may disappear to

corruption, or go to serve government goals rather than the people. Governments are falling

back and allowing billionaires to do all their work.

o International development needs a reboot! Development goals made by the UN and

member countries about a decade ago – most objectives were not reached, but just

measuring them is progress. After a second decade, we may see more improvement.

We may need three strategies – one for financial support, one for creating a plan for

improving the country, and one for dealing with countries in a continuous state of

emergency.

 Is the Gates foundation connected with unsavoury reproductive endeavours? YES. These

billionaires create organizations following North American and secular norms – there’s a

mismatch between NGOs and the countries they assist. Other countries also have different

views of justice, human rights, etc. Changing their mindset takes time.

 Poverty as a broken spirit – is that a good universal understanding of poverty for a

pluralistic society? Do North Americans and Catholics have a responsibility to mend

others’ spirits in addition to financial help? How can we help people to reignite their love of

life? We need to offer respect of the person, their context, their values, and build on it.

There are no quick fixes – not even government programs. The main area to improve on is

education – it needs to be culturally sensitive, truly tolerant, and respectful. It is a project

taking multiple generations. Money is needed for infrastructure, though.

 Cardinal Sarah’s book “God or Nothing” – zero-tolerance to poverty is not the way to go, but

zero tolerance to destitution is. Gospel poverty vs. destitution – they are different. Also, the

book Happy Are You Poor by Fr. Thomas Dubay.

 A social worker said giving money to the poor is OK – we can’t judge what they do with it.

By giving, we may be preventing the greater tragedy of crime (robbery, attacks, the sex

trade).