



When I try to explain what I am doing here in Portugal, somebody says:

“Well, then you are doing a charity job?”

For some reason the word “charity” grates my ears. Maybe I associate the word with the rich ladies you read about in magazines, who try to silence their consciences and stand out in a more favourable light by doing “charity”. It gives you the idea that they stretch down from an elevated position to the “needy”. **I prefer to call it “human kindness”.**

A person wants to be strong rather than weak. We want to be the one who helps rather than the one who is helped. We try to be efficient, good and strong. But that has nothing to do with the Christian gospel! Jesus’ message is the opposite: confess your sins and weaknesses, that you fall short, that you are small, weak and exposed. We are all needy children, in desperate need of our Saviour.

Jesus is radically and politically wrong and means that we are all evil and that only God is good (Luke 11:13, 18:19). The Christian gospel is implacable and uncomfortable: **We have all sinned** and are far away from God’s saving presence. (Rom.3:23) These are no humanistic trains of thought leading up to the idea about man’s inherent goodness. The Christian gospel is extremely humanitarian! We are all fellow beings (unless we are anti-fellows?). God became our fellow being in Jesus Christ! He was both God and fellow being. **This is the basis of our “human kindness” in the Foundation.**

When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick and in prison, and visit you? The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!’ (Matt. 25:37-40)



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A Hope in the Dark

A Newsletter From

Maj-Lis Humanitarian Foundation in Portugal

June - August 2005



On the run from poverty

Today the refugees from the former Portuguese colonies are not the most affected. People keep coming from Eastern Europe, and **migrants without documentation circulate within the Union, ending up permanently in Portugal**, where the bar is lower. According to the definition of the United Nations they are not refugees. They are not persecuted because of their political or religious beliefs, but most of them are fugitives from poverty. **They risk their lives because they hope that Europe will give them a more tolerable life** and see no future in their native countries, nothing to desire. The poor people watch the soap operas on TV and get a false idea about life in Europe: a rich world as far as the material aspect is concerned. This is one of the many reasons why people want to emigrate. But the root of the evil is the poverty. Nobody wants to tell the truth about their poor jobs and the fact that they are disregarded as black immigrants.

The drought here in Portugal is everybody's concern. Usually we have a rainy period from October to May. But this winter we have had no rain at all. And now the dry season starts, when you cannot see a cloud until the autumn. Is the desert closing in on Europe?

The desert, well, sometimes we people are also as dried out as a desert. And in that case we could say that **the spiritual desert in Europe is spreading**. The Bible compares people to *dried-up wells, like springs without water*. (2 Pet 2:17)

"Those who ... search and can not find water... Their tongues are dry because they are thirsty. I, the Lord God of Israel, will come to their rescue. I will not desert them. I will make rivers flow on the bare hilltops." (Is 41:17-18)

Why do we struggle in the Foundation to help people who failed and have a difficult life, thirsting for something different? The answer is: because with God's help, it is possible to feel better. Many get a solid faith in God. It helps them in the stress that characterizes their life. They achieve an interior strength. Even though the situation seems hopeless, many of them gain faith in the future and they are strongly determined to reach their goals.

Jesus said: I am the water of life. And it is written about Jesus: "The LORD formed me from the beginning, before he created anything else. I was appointed in ages past, at the very first, before the earth began...I was born - before he had made the earth and fields and the first handfuls of soil. I was there when he established the heavens, when he drew the horizon on the oceans.

I was there when he set the clouds above, when he established the deep fountains of the earth...I was the architect at his side. I was his constant delight, rejoicing always in his presence. And how happy I was with what he created - his wide world and all the human family!" (Proverbs 8:22-31)

Would not he be able to quench our thirst!



Poverty increases in Portugal

The poverty is spreading and does not only affect ethnic minorities. Today there are **at least two million poor people** in Portugal, according to the economist Rogerio Amaro in the magazines DESTAK and Economia. He names the aged, the long-term unemployed, the children of work-addicts, interns and homeless, families with only one parent and small-scale farmers, who suffer.



The worst drought in almost 100 years

Ration the water; Avoid bathing in tubs, Close the tap while you are soaping yourself, Use the water from cooking vegetables for a soup, Do not unnecessarily flush the toilet. This is the recommendation in Portugal today.

The Swedish Television reported in its programme Actualities on March 21 that they had visited Alentejo in south eastern Portugal, **one of the very poorest regions of the EU**. At that time of the year, there are usually light green sprouts in the vineyards. But the country is suffering **from the worst drought in almost 100 years**. It has not rained since last October.

The farmer Manuel has no wheat for his sheep and goats.

- They are already starving, he sighs. But there is nothing for them to eat. All the vegetation is drying up. It does not rain. There is no hope. It is a catastrophe.

Sweden is of the opinion, in the long-term budget of the Union, that the support to countries as Portugal should rather go to the new members in Eastern Europe. But the Portuguese Vitor believes that a country like his own, where **the manpower is still unqualified** compared to the rest of the Union, deserves to be supported.

The good years with the European Union seems to be over. Now Portugal has to create its own future, according to the conclusion of Actualities.