



Poverty Alleviation in the Digital Age under the Guidance of St. Vincent and Thomas Erikson

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Abstract:

This study examines the persistence of poverty patterns across eras by integrating the theological perspective of St. Vincent de Paul and the psychological approach of Thomas Erikson. Using a qualitative-descriptive method through literature analysis of their major works, it explores the roots of poverty in Indonesia from spiritual and behavioral dimensions. The findings reveal that poverty arises not only from economic inequality but also from the poverty of love, low self-awareness, and destructive social habits. St. Vincent's mysticism of charity emphasizes human dignity restoration through active love and solidarity, while Erikson's personality theory highlights self-awareness and constructive character formation in overcoming psychological poverty. The synthesis of both approaches indicates that genuine poverty alleviation must be holistic, involving transformation of the heart, mind, and behavior. This research also recommends further studies on applying spirituality of love and excellent behavior in modern social contexts, particularly in education and leadership both personal and communal.

Keywords: Poverty, Holistic Development, Excellent Character, Vincentian Charism, Indonesia

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menelaah kesinambungan pola kemiskinan dari masa ke masa dengan mengintegrasikan perspektif teologis St. Vinsensius a Paulo dan pendekatan psikologis Thomas Erikson. Menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif melalui studi pustaka terhadap karya-karya utama keduanya, penelitian ini berupaya menjelaskan akar kemiskinan dari dimensi spiritual dan perilaku manusia di Indonesia. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa kemiskinan tidak hanya bersumber dari ketimpangan ekonomi, tetapi juga dari kemiskinan kasih, lemahnya kesadaran diri, dan perilaku sosial yang destruktif. Teologi mistik kasih St. Vinsensius menekankan pemulihan martabat manusia melalui kasih yang aktif dan solidaritas, sedangkan teori kepribadian Erikson menyoroti pentingnya kesadaran diri dan pembentukan karakter konstruktif dalam mengatasi kemiskinan psikologis. Sintesis kedua pendekatan ini mengarah pada pemahaman bahwa pengentasan kemiskinan sejati harus bersifat holistik, mencakup transformasi hati, pikiran, dan tindakan. Kajian ini juga merekomendasikan penelitian lanjutan mengenai penerapan spiritualitas kasih dan perilaku unggul dalam konteks sosial modern, tekhusus pendalaman pada bidang pendidikan dan kepemimpinan baik personal maupun komunitas.

Kata Kunci: Kemiskinan, Pembangunan Holistik, Karakter Unggul, Karisma Vinsensian, Indonesia

Introduction

Poverty has always been one of the oldest and most complex problems in human history. In Indonesia, this problem persists even though the nation has undergone various phases of social, economic, and technological progress. In the last two decades, the digital era has promised efficiency, connectivity, and new economic opportunities that should



narrow social gaps. However, reality shows that poverty has not been completely eradicated. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that in March 2025, the national poverty rate did decrease to 8.47 percent, the lowest since the 1970s. However, this data also reveals a paradox: the majority of poor workers remain trapped in informal jobs with low productivity and social protection. The statistical decline in poverty rates does not fully represent structural improvements in the quality of life and economic resilience of the lower classes.

This phenomenon indicates that poverty is not merely an economic issue, but also a cultural and psychological one. Ridho Ilahi emphasizes that poverty is often misinterpreted as a result of individual laziness, when in fact empirical data shows that the majority of poor families work hard every day but remain trapped in an unfair social structure. This view shows that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, influenced by education, access to health care, and employment opportunities, and passed down from generation to generation. In the context of Indonesia, which is undergoing economic digitalization, a new paradox has emerged: technology presents new opportunities as well as new inequalities between those who are able to access the digital world and those who are left behind because of it¹. So, the fundamental question that needs to be answered is: why, in the midst of the digital revolution, does poverty still persist in forms and patterns similar to those of the past?

In the history of the church and humanity, St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) is known as a figure who dedicated his life to the poor and oppressed. He lived in France during a time of social and spiritual crisis similar to the conditions of the modern world today: a wide social gap, systemic poverty, and a loss of social concern due to the materialistic orientation of society. As Antonello wrote, St. Vincent's spirit of service was born not solely from a humanitarian social project, but from a spiritual awareness that all works of mercy are a response to God's grace at work in human history. Through his service to the poor in the villages of France, St. Vincent discovered the true meaning of his priestly vocation, namely, to bring God's love into concrete action, especially to those whom society considered "useless."²

In this context, poverty alleviation is not merely an economic policy, but a form of service and spiritual transformation. St. Vincent shows that poverty has moral and spiritual roots: people can fall into a "culture of poverty" not only because of a lack of material goods, but also because of a loss of meaning in work, solidarity, and responsibility towards others. This view is highly relevant in the digital age, when dehumanization, narcissism, and disinformation give rise to new forms of moral and psychological poverty.

Technological advances have changed the way humans work, communicate, and interact, but they have also caused a disorientation of values. Thomas Erikson (2019–2024), through his series of books *Surrounded by Idiots*³, *Surrounded by Psychopaths*⁴,

¹Ridho Ilahi, "Kemiskinan Yang Diwariskan," *Kompas.Id*, May 25, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-yang-diwariskan-2>.

² Erminio Antonello, "The Beginning of the Congregation of the Mission : Historical Sketch and Attempt of Actualization," *Studia Vincentiana* 3, no. 2 (2025): 108–32, <https://doi.org/the Congregation of the Mission, Identity, Mission Contract, Vincent de Paul>.

³ T Erikson, *Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour (or, How to Understand Those Who Cannot Be Understood)* (books.google.com, 2019), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en%5C&lr=%5C&id=BZl1DwAAQBAJ%5C&oi=fnd%5C&pg=PT8%5C&dq=%22thomas+erikson%22+surrounded%5C&ots=e-cXMA_k6A%5C&sig=13euSdxYxtU-AYcmnsSqEkvFIhU.

⁴ T Erikson, *Surrounded by Psychopaths: How to Protect Yourself from Being Manipulated and Exploited in Business (and in Life)* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020),

Surrounded by Liars⁵, and Surrounded by Narcissists⁶, shows that modern human behavior tends to be controlled by emotional impulses, selfishness, and manipulative tendencies. This phenomenon weakens social empathy and expands "psychological poverty", that is, the inability to understand oneself and others deeply. From Erikson's perspective, this type of poverty is no less dangerous than economic poverty because it has the potential to destroy the social order from within. Therefore, studying poverty in the digital age requires an approach that is not only economic, but also humanistic and psychological.

The urgency of this article stems from a deep concern that the patterns of poverty faced by St. Vincent in the 17th century still persist in Indonesia today. Vincent lived in a time marked by the suffering of peasants, extreme social inequality, and the indifference of the elite towards the plight of the poor. In the early biography researched by Rybolt, it is described that St. Vincent rejected the comforts of social status and chose to devote his life to poor farmers and prisoners, because for him compassion was not a passive attitude but an active action that healed social and spiritual wounds⁷.

A similar situation is now emerging in a different form. Amidst the growth of the digital economy, most Indonesians are connected to online information and transaction networks, but not all of them are able to utilize technology to improve their welfare. Digital transformation, which should ideally be inclusive, has instead widened the gap between those who are digitally literate and those who are not. The government has reported that extreme poverty fell to 0.85 percent in March 2025⁸. However, the Kompas.id report also notes that the majority of poor workers remain in the informal sector without adequate social protection. Meanwhile, Ridho Ilahi highlights structural and inherited poverty, where young people from poor families find it difficult to obtain quality education due to inequality of opportunity.

This situation shows that even though government policies have succeeded in reducing poverty rates statistically, the root causes of the problem have not been fundamentally addressed. Poverty alleviation programs often focus only on economic aspects without considering moral and cultural dimensions. In fact, as St. Vincent taught, the success of a social movement depends on the transformation of the human heart, both on the part of the giver and the receiver. The urgency of this research is to return the paradigm of poverty alleviation to its spiritual and human roots: that freeing the poor also means freeing humans from moral blindness and insensitivity to others.

Studies on poverty in Indonesia show dynamic developments over the past five years. Most research focuses on economic dimensions and public policy. For example, research by Hidayat, Kurniasih, and Tobirin highlights the effectiveness of multi-level collaborative governance in alleviating extreme poverty in seven priority provinces. This study confirms that the success of cross-actor collaboration, between the government,

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en%5C&lr=%5C&id=CjLQDwAAQBAJ%5C&oi=fnd%5C&pg=PT150%5C&dq=%22thomas+erikson%22+surrounded%5C&ots=H1pCG3S9HF%5C&sig=g2Ui0WhZxLgh6rzdQs7GvO6-bmM>.

⁵ T Erikson, *Surrounded by Liars: How to Stop Half-Truths, Deception, and Gaslighting from Ruining Your Life* (London: Penguin Random House, 2024).

⁶ T Erikson, *Surrounded by Narcissists: Or, How to Stop Other People's Egos Ruining Your Life* (London: Penguin Random House, 2022), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en%5C&lr=%5C&id=C2REEAAQBAJ%5C&oi=fnd%5C&pg=PT12%5C&dq=%22thomas+erikson%22+surrounded%5C&ots=g8AluKbS3m%5C&sig=HxB0X-Y1pozToC12Plrp2GovaiA>.

⁷ John E. Rybolt, "The Earliest Biographies of Saint Vincent De Paul [1]," *Studia Vincentiana* 3, no. 2 (2025): 212–45, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35312/9ea98m94>.

⁸ Op.cit. Budiawan Sidik A, "Kemiskinan Semakin Menyusut, Apa Maknanya?," *Kompas.Id*, July 26, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-semakin-menyusut-apa-maknanya>.

private sector, and community, in Central Java is highly dependent on leadership that is capable of building trust and shared responsibility⁹. However, this approach is still predominantly structural in nature and does not yet address the cultural and psychological dimensions of poor communities.

Anindita's study examined the impact of various social assistance programs such as the Family Hope Program (PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance (BPNT), Pre-Employment Card, and People's Business Credit (KUR) on poverty levels in 25 priority provinces. The results of the study show that only KUR has a significant effect on poverty reduction, while the other programs have no real effect.¹⁰ These findings indicate that there is still a gap in the effectiveness of social assistance programs due to low targeting accuracy and minimal community empowerment.

From a macro policy perspective, Suardini, Purnamasari, and Aryani reviewed President Joko Widodo's poverty alleviation policies (2014–2024). These policies include direct assistance-based welfare programs such as the Basic Food Card, Pre-Employment Card, and Indonesia Smart Program.¹¹ Nevertheless, this study concludes that technocratic policies have not yet touched on aspects of social transformation and independence among the poor, and remain oriented toward meeting short-term basic needs.

From a macroeconomic perspective, Putri and Mardianto analyzed the determinants of poverty rates in the five poorest provinces in Indonesia. The results showed that an increase in the Human Development Index (HDI) had a significant negative effect on poverty, while unemployment and inflation had no significant effect.¹² This confirms that improving access to education, health, and social welfare plays an important role in reducing poverty rates.

In addition, Saputri, Millah, Falah, and Dewi (2025, pp. 524–526) review poverty alleviation strategies in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹³ They highlighted structural challenges such as inequality in access to education, health services, and infrastructure, but also emphasized new opportunities in the use of digital technology and social empowerment to accelerate poverty alleviation.

Although these studies have contributed significantly to the structural and economic understanding of poverty, there is still a gap in studies that highlight the humanistic and spiritual dimensions. There is almost no research linking the psychosocial aspects of poverty, such as empathy crisis, individualism, and narcissism in the digital society, with the vision of compassionate service as taught by St. Vincent. In fact, in the

⁹ Mohamad Taufiq Hidayat, Denok Kurniasih, and Tobirin, “KOLABORASI MULTI LEVEL DALAM PENANGGULANGAN KEMISKINAN EKSTREM DI 7 PROVINSI DAN 35 KABUPATEN PRIORITAS DI INDONESIA (STUDI KASUS DI PROVINSI JAWA TENGAH),” *DINAMIKA GOVERNANCE JURNAL ILMU ADMINISTRASI NEGARA* 13, no. 04 (2024): 410–11, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33005/jdg.v13i4.4172>.

¹⁰ Gabriella Natalie Krista Anindita and Nurhayati, “PENGARUH PROGRAM PENGENTASAN KEMISKINAN DI 25 PROVINSI WILAYAH PRIORITAS PENGENTASAN KEMISKINAN EKSTREM,” *Media Ekonomi* 32, no. 1 (2024): 61–65, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.25105/me.v32i1.21137> ISSN.

¹¹ Dila Andini Suardini, Hanny Purnamasari, and Lina Aryani, “ANALISIS KEBIJAKAN PUBLIK PENGENTASAN KEMISKINAN ERA PRESIDEN JOKO WIDODO TAHUN 2014-2024,” *Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Dan Studi Kebijakan (JIASK)* 7, no. 2 (2025): 150–53.

¹² Afriliya Tri Putri and Dedi Mardianto, “Determinan Tingkat Kemiskinan Di Indonesia,” *Digital Bisnis: Jurnal Publikasi Ilmu Manajemen Dan E-Commerce* 4, no. 1 (2025): 224–26, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30640/digital.v4i1.3894>.

¹³ Marta Ayu Saputri et al., “Strategi Pengentasan Kemiskinan: Tantangan Dan Peluang Dalam Mewujudkan SDGs Di Indonesia,” *ENTITA: Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 1 (2025): 524–26, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19105/ejpis.v1i.19213>.

context of contemporary Indonesian society, poverty does not only mean economic limitations, but also a decline in solidarity and social spirituality. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap, connecting Vincentian spirituality of service with Erikson's social behavior theory to reinterpret the meaning of poverty in the digital age and formulate an approach to poverty alleviation that emphasizes the moral, psychological, and social transformation of contemporary Indonesian society.

This paper focuses on finding similarities in the causes of poverty between the time of St. Vincent in 17th-century France and Indonesia in the digital age of the 21st century. In both periods, poverty arose from unequal social relations and the failure of the moral structure of society to embody solidarity. While in Vincent's time poverty arose from the feudal system and agrarian injustice, in the present day poverty arises from digital capitalism, which concentrates wealth in the hands of a small technological elite. Although the contexts are different, both have the same roots: dehumanization and a loss of empathy for the weak.

In addition, this article also explores how St. Vincent implemented the principle of "caritas concreta."¹⁴, namely love manifested in concrete actions, and how this principle can be applied to reform poverty alleviation strategies in Indonesia. Vinsensius' approach is not merely charitable giving, but empowerment that restores human dignity. This principle needs to be translated into social policies and ethics in the digital age, where solidarity can be realized through technological innovations that favor humanity.

Another focus is an examination of the psychological aspects that contribute to perpetuating the "culture of poverty." Using Thomas Erikson's social personality theory, this paper examines how the narcissistic, manipulative, and egocentric behavior of digital society weakens social cohesion and prolongs the cycle of poverty. For example, the dominance of social media has fostered a culture of social comparison and self-image that deepens the psychological gap between the "digital rich" and the "virtual poor."¹⁵ This phenomenon gives rise to a new alienation rooted in a loss of contentment and empathy, a spiritual poverty that requires moral guidance as taught by St. Vincent.

Thus, this study aims to establish a dialogue between the spiritual legacy of St. Vincent and Erikson's modern psychological analysis to formulate a new, more holistic approach to poverty alleviation. Efforts to alleviate poverty cannot stop at social or economic policies, but must touch on the inner dimensions of human beings: self-awareness, social responsibility, and sensitivity to the suffering of others.

The historical background of St. Vincent shows that poverty is a reflection of humanity's failure to build a community of love. Meanwhile, conditions in Indonesia in the digital age show that modernity does not automatically bring moral progress. Amidst the onslaught of technology, humans remain at risk of losing their sense of humanity and solidarity, which are the foundations of true prosperity. Therefore, reviving the spirit of Vincent, which combines love, concrete work, and inner renewal, is an important step in reinterpreting poverty alleviation strategies in the digital age.

Through a cross-generational dialogue between St. Vincent and Thomas Erikson, this paper invites readers to revisit the psychological and spiritual roots of poverty. That true poverty alleviation is not merely about freeing people from material deprivation, but also from poverty of meaning, empathy, and social relations. With this foundation, this research is expected to offer a new perspective that integrates the spirituality of love and

¹⁴ Giuseppe Turati, "Does the Mission Ad Gentes Still Make Sense?," *Studia Vincentiana* 2, no. 3 (2024): 201–16, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35312/7b424420>.

¹⁵ Sampean, "Kemiskinan Digital," *Kompas.Id*, June 30, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-digital>.

an understanding of human behavior as the basis for equitable social policies and practices in Indonesia today.

Methodology

The methodology in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with historical comparative studies and psychosocial analysis, utilizing historical literature related to St. Vincent and Thomas Erikson's personality theory to compare with secondary data on digital poverty in Indonesia from scientific journals that are accountable and relevant to the theme of the paper in order to identify patterns of causes of poverty and psychological aspects that play a role, thereby enabling the development of an adaptive and holistic integrative model for poverty alleviation. This approach aims to combine social, economic, technological, and psychological aspects in understanding and solving the phenomenon of contemporary poverty.

Discussion and Result

Portrait of Poverty in the Digital Age, Indonesia

Poverty in Indonesia in the current digital era shows complex dynamics, although official data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows a downward trend in the national poverty rate to 8.47 percent in March 2025, which is the best achievement in the last two decades¹⁶. This decline was also accompanied by a decrease in extreme poverty to 0.85 percent, although the disparity between urban and rural areas remains high, with poverty more prominent in rural areas and a clear gap in access to technology¹⁷. In urban areas, poverty rates have tended to stagnate or increase after the pandemic, due to difficulties in finding decent work and high living costs¹⁸, while the informal sector remains the largest source of employment for the poor¹⁹.

Digital poverty is a major challenge, particularly the inequality of access to and literacy in information technology, especially in remote areas such as Papua and its surroundings, which lag far behind in terms of digital infrastructure²⁰. Low levels of education and digital skills exacerbate the entrapment of poor communities in the cycle of poverty, which is difficult to break with economic growth alone²¹. Persistently high income inequality reinforces the position of the poor, with a distribution between the rich and the poor that is still far from the principle of social justice²².

The low quality of education, health, and employment opportunities is the root cause of poverty that continues to be passed down from generation to generation. This is reflected in limited access to education and poor nutrition among children from poor families. Coupled with corruption and poor management of social assistance recipient data, the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs is hampered, making it difficult to significantly reduce inequality and poverty²³.

¹⁶ Budiawan Sidik A, "Kemiskinan Semakin Menyusut, Apa Maksudnya?"

¹⁷ Lili Retnosari, "Kemiskinan Perdesaan," *Kompas.Id*, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-perdesaan>.

¹⁸ LILI RETNOSARI, "Kemiskinan Di Perkotaan," *Kompas.Id*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-di-perkotaan>.

¹⁹ Agne Theodora and Agustinus Yoga Primantoro, "Kemiskinan Menurun, Tetapi Ketimpangan Meningkat," *Kompas.Id*, July 17, 2023, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-menurun-tapi-ketimpangan-meningkat>.

²⁰ Sampean, "Kemiskinan Digital."

²¹ Ilahi, "Kemiskinan Yang Diwariskan."

²² Setyo Budiantoro, "Kemiskinan Turun, Ketimpangan Melebar," *Kompas.Id*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-turun-ketimpangan-melebar>.

²³ Hardius Usman, "Kemiskinan, Korupsi, Dan Bantuan Sosial," *Kompas.Id*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/kemiskinan-korupsi-dan-bantuan-sosial>.

Equally important, poverty also correlates with social and cultural aspects such as high crime rates, negative social impacts, and psychological dynamics that exacerbate the conditions of poor communities²⁴. The government has launched various strategic programs to increase the income of poor families, reduce expenditure burdens, and expand access to technology, but multidimensional challenges require a holistic approach that integrates social, economic, technological, and human resource aspects²⁵.

With this panoramic view of poverty in Indonesia's digital era, rich in challenges and opportunities, it is important to reflect on the historical roots and foundations of social poverty in the past. An examination of the conditions of poverty during the time of St. Vincent de Paul in 17th-century France will provide valuable insights into the values of love, solidarity, and social approaches that can serve as a foundation for developing comprehensive and sustainable solutions to poverty in this digital age.

Portrait of Poverty in the St. Vincent's Age, France

St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) was born in Pouy, Gascony, southern France, into a poor peasant family. From childhood, he lived close to the suffering of the peasantry and witnessed the stark social inequality between the nobility, clergy, and commoners²⁶. His brilliant early education led him to the priesthood at a young age, but his career was marked by personal ambition before he finally experienced a profound inner conversion that led him to dedicate his life to the poor. Spiritual encounters with figures such as Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle and St. Francis de Sales deepened his awareness that works of charity were not merely philanthropy, but participation in God's work of salvation in the world²⁷.

At that time, 17th-century France was in a complex social crisis. Prolonged wars, famine, and epidemics worsened the conditions of the common people. The oppressive feudal system caused most of the population to live in structural poverty: peasants were trapped in debt, high taxes, and dependence on the nobility. On the other hand, the Catholic Church itself was struggling to emerge from a post-Reformation moral crisis and needed comprehensive spiritual renewal²⁸. In such a cultural panorama, poverty was not only an economic problem, but also a reflection of social inequality and declining spirituality among the people and the Church.

Vincent saw the suffering of the people not as a disgrace, but as a place where Christ was hidden. His pastoral spirit was born from his concrete experience of encountering farmers living below the poverty line and prisoners starving on royal ships²⁹. Through prayerful reflection and pastoral experience, he concluded that true repentance must be manifested in concrete actions to defend the weak. In this context, Vincent founded the Confraternities of Charity in Châtillon (1617) as a form of socio-spiritual ministry that involved the laity, especially women, in organizing aid for the poor.

²⁴ Sri Rejeki et al., "Kemiskinan Memicu Tingginya Pembunuhan," *Kompas.Id*, July 24, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/duet-maut-kemiskinan-dan-pembunuhan>.

²⁵ Iqbal Basyari, "Kemiskinan Bisa Naik Lagi, Wapres Minta Rencana Penyesuaian Standar Garis Kemiskinan Diantisipasi," *Kompas.Id*, September 18, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/wapres-minta-rencana-penyesuaian-standar-garis-kemiskinan-diantisipasi>.

²⁶ John E. Rybolt, "The Earliest Biographies of Saint Vincent De Paul [1]," 213.

²⁷ Antonello, "The Beginning of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Sketch and Attempt of Actualization," 114–15.

²⁸ A Riyanto, "Methods in Vincentian Studies: Historical, Theological, Pastoral Perspectives on Revitalizing the Vincentian Charism," *Studia Vincentiana*, 2025, 9, <https://vincentiana.org/sv/article/view/40>.

²⁹ Antonello, "The Beginning of the Congregation of the Mission: Historical Sketch and Attempt of Actualization," 118.

This work developed into a rural mission movement and eventually gave birth to the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, with the support of the noble de Gondi family³⁰. The main mission of this congregation was to preach the Gospel and serve the poor free of charge. It was in this spirit that Vincent also founded the Daughters of Charity with St. Louise de Marillac, marking a new chapter in the Church's social service focused on structural and humanitarian transformation. He strongly rejected paternalistic forms of charity, instead encouraging systemic change through education, spiritual guidance, and solidarity across social classes³¹.

The socio-political context of Vincent's time revealed a close connection between poverty, patronage culture, and power inequality. The poor were often victims of a system that exploited them for economic and political gain. Vincent responded to this situation not with ideological rebellion, but with a revolution of compassion, a "revolution from within," which fostered collective moral awareness through concrete practices of organized love³². He viewed poverty as a field of spiritual education that challenges humans to restore the divine dignity of their neighbors.

Vincent's efforts to alleviate poverty were inseparable from his theological vision that every poor person is a living sacrament of Christ. Therefore, charitable actions must be accompanied by structural change and spiritual formation of society. This approach became known as the "mystique of charity," in which faith and social action became an inseparable unity³³. This model of service became the forerunner of the pastoral spirituality of the modern Church, which combines theology, social justice, and Christian humanism.

Thus, the panorama of poverty during St. Vincent's time revealed the reality of France, wounded by social inequality, but also gave birth to a transformative spiritual-social movement. Vincent's spirit shows that poverty alleviation is not only an economic issue, but also a renewal of the heart and culture. In this context, it is relevant to examine how, in modern society, individual personality factors also play a role in the cultural dynamics of poverty.

The impact of an individual's personality model in a culture of poverty

Thomas Erikson is a Swedish author and behavioral consultant widely known for his work on interpersonal communication and human personality dynamics. As a leadership coach and behavioral analyst, he strives to bridge the gap in understanding between people through simple yet profound explanations. His main inspiration came from a personal experience when he met a businessman who complained that he was "surrounded by idiots." From that encounter, Erikson began to realize that often the problem between people is not stupidity, but differences in the way they think and communicate³⁴.

In his works, Erikson adapted the DISC theory introduced by William Moulton Marston in 1928 in his book *Emotions of Normal People*. He translates the model into four personality types with color codes: Red for individuals who are dominant and results-oriented, Yellow for those who are expressive and full of ideas, Green for individuals

³⁰ ibid 117–18.

³¹ Op,cit Riyanto, "Methods in Vincentian Studies: Historical, Theological, Pastoral Perspectives on Revitalizing the Vincentian Charism," 20.

³² ibid 17–18.

³³ Nicola Albanesi and Collegio Alberoni, "La Dimensione Contemplativa Della Nostra Spiritualità" 1, no. 1 (2023): 43.

³⁴ Erikson, *Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour (or, How to Understand Those Who Cannot Be Understood)*, 7–10.

who are stable and harmonious, and Blue for those who are meticulous and analytical³⁵. Through this approach, he emphasizes that understanding personality is not about labeling others, but rather about building bridges of communication and mutual understanding amid the diversity of human behavior.

Erikson describes that each personality type has strengths and weaknesses that determine how a person interacts with their environment. The Red type, for example, has great energy and assertiveness, but is often insensitive to the emotions of others, which can easily lead to conflict³⁶. The Yellow type is known for being enthusiastic and communicative, but tends to be impulsive and easily loses focus when faced with routine or economic pressure³⁷. The Green type is patient and loyal, but their fear of change makes them prone to getting stuck in a stagnant comfort zone³⁸. Meanwhile, the Blue type, who is very cautious and perfectionist, is often hampered by a fear of making mistakes, making it difficult to take bold steps towards change³⁹.

In a broader social context, Erikson argues that these personality differences not only affect interpersonal dynamics, but also play a role in creating patterns of collective behavior in society. When individuals fail to understand how others think, miscommunication becomes a source of social stagnation, mistrust, and even structural poverty. Thus, understanding oneself and others becomes an important social capital in building productive collaboration.

In his follow-up work, *Surrounded by Psychopaths* (2020), Erikson warns that personality weaknesses can be exploited by manipulative individuals who understand the psychology of others more deeply than their victims. He explains that Yellow types are easily influenced by praise, Green types are controlled through guilt or the desire to maintain harmony, Red types are trapped by ego and competition, while Blue types can be manipulated through fear and the need for control⁴⁰. This explanation underscores the fact that psychological poverty does not always stem from material deprivation, but often arises from a failure to manage emotions, ambitions, and fears.

In *Surrounded by Narcissists* (2021), Erikson highlights the growing phenomenon of narcissistic culture in modern society. According to him, the excessive drive to appear perfect and be recognized has created a generation that craves recognition but lacks meaning⁴¹. He describes how individuals who continue to build false images for social acceptance are actually accumulating another form of poverty, moral and emotional poverty, because they lose the ability to empathize and live authentically⁴². This phenomenon is evident in societies that are willing to go into debt to maintain prestige, or tell small lies to maintain social status.

This view is further reinforced in *Surrounded by Liars* (2024), when Erikson discusses the human habit of covering up reality in order to maintain a sense of security. He reminds us that small lies repeated over and over again will form a fragile social system, built on illusions and fear⁴³. In the context of a culture of poverty, this behavior manifests itself in the form of denial of economic reality, a reluctance to admit mistakes,

³⁵ *ibid* 22–24.

³⁶ *ibid* 45–46.

³⁷ *ibid* 55–58.

³⁸ *ibid* 63–65.

³⁹ *ibid* 70–72.

⁴⁰ Erikson, *Surrounded by Psychopaths: How to Protect Yourself from Being Manipulated and Exploited in Business (and in Life)*, 14–17.

⁴¹ Erikson, *Surrounded by Narcissists: Or, How to Stop Other People's Egos Ruining Your Life*, 32–35.

⁴² *ibid* 50–54.

⁴³ Erikson, *Surrounded by Liars: How to Stop Half-Truths, Deception, and Gaslighting from Ruining Your Life*, 8–11.

and a tendency to blame external parties for one's own failures. As a result, society loses its reflective ability to honestly improve the situation.

For Erikson, these four personality types actually have the potential to change if each individual develops a deeper sense of self-awareness. Red types need to learn to balance ambition with social empathy; Yellow types must practice discipline and consistency; Green types need to cultivate the courage to take risks; while Blue types should dare to step out of their fear of imperfection⁴⁴. Through such character management, a person can break out of a deficit mindset and build psychological resilience to life's pressures.

Thus, Thomas Erikson's personality theory not only discusses communication styles, but also provides a deeper understanding of the psychological roots of poverty. When a certain personality dominates without balance, individuals and communities can fall into a closed, manipulative, and non-reflective mentality, which are the main characteristics of a culture of poverty that is difficult to penetrate. Erikson emphasizes that human liberation from inner and social poverty begins with a willingness to recognize oneself, understand others, and consciously rearrange the way one relates to others. At this point, Erikson's thinking provides an important bridge to the spiritual reflection of St. Vincent's ministry: that true change always begins with the renewal of the human heart and character.

Guidance in the Spirituality of Love and Excellent Behavior to Alleviate Poverty

The recurring pattern of poverty from time to time, despite the progress that humanity has made, reveals the fact that poverty is not merely an economic issue, but a humanitarian problem that encompasses moral, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. History shows that technological progress and improved material living standards are not always accompanied by spiritual progress and social awareness. Unfair social structures, collective egoism, and insensitivity to the suffering of others perpetuate old forms of poverty. Both in the time of St. Vincent de Paul in 17th-century France and in today's digital age, the root of the problem of poverty lies in the disconnect between outward progress and inner growth. It is in this context that the spirituality of love and the formation of excellent behavior as conceived by St. Vincent and Thomas Erikson offer two complementary approaches to building a new awareness in the struggle to eradicate poverty comprehensively.

St. Vincent de Paul presented a profound spiritual paradigm through what is known as the mystique of charity. He rejected the view that poverty could only be overcome through material giving. For Vincent, poverty was a reflection of the breakdown of loving relationships between people. Therefore, the true solution must be rooted in a change of heart and the restoration of social solidarity. For Vincent, charity is not merely a sentimental emotion, but a concrete action that flows from faith and awareness of God's presence in every poor person. He emphasized that humans need to "see Christ in the poor, and the poor in Christ," because only with such a loving perspective can humans treat their neighbors with divine dignity⁴⁵.

Through his pastoral ministry, Vincent showed that true compassion requires total involvement in the suffering of others. He formed the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity not only as charitable institutions, but as spiritual communities that made love a way of life. The mysticism of love leads people to love with rationality and sacrifice, not just momentary compassion. This principle has transformative power,

⁴⁴ Op.cit. Erikson, *Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour (or, How to Understand Those Who Cannot Be Understood)*, 120–25.

⁴⁵ Op.cit. John E. Rybolt, "The Earliest Biographies of Saint Vincent De Paul [1]," 217.

because love lived with humility gives birth to a more just social order, while neglected spiritual poverty perpetuates inequality. Thus, the spirituality of love taught by Vincent not only builds personal faith, but also restructures society to be civilized and compassionate.

Meanwhile, Thomas Erikson offers a complementary perspective through his approach to modern human psychology and behavior. In his theory of four personality types—Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue—Erikson explains that poverty can persist because people fail to recognize the mindsets and behavioral tendencies that undermine them. Individuals who are impulsive, passive, or extreme perfectionists tend to repeat decisions that distance them from social and economic progress. On the other hand, societies dominated by ego, fear, and indiscipline will continue to produce dysfunctional social structures. Erikson asserts that true change begins with self-awareness, namely self-consciousness and the ability to adapt constructively to differences⁴⁶.

Erikson's psychological approach reveals the micro side of poverty that is often overlooked, namely mental and emotional poverty. He states that many people are not poor because they lack hard work, but because they are unable to manage their inner drives, communication, and social relationships. Erikson shows how the modern world encourages people to be reactive and narcissistic, loving themselves without moral reflection and empathy for others⁴⁷. This phenomenon has given rise to a new form of poverty: spiritual and psychological poverty amid material abundance. Therefore, modern human development requires a paradigm shift from merely pursuing efficiency to strengthening character and social responsibility.

Both St. Vincent and Erikson, despite coming from different contexts and disciplines, both emphasize that human liberation from poverty must begin with inner transformation. Vincent teaches active and transformative love, while Erikson emphasizes self-awareness that fosters constructive and empathetic behavior. Both see that poverty persists because humans have lost the moral and psychological awareness to live in balance between heart and mind, between love and logic. The spirituality of love, lived out with behavioral discipline, becomes the bridge that unites faith and knowledge in building a whole humanity.

Thus, spiritual guidance based on love and exemplary behavior is the main foundation in efforts to alleviate poverty in this digital age. Technology without moral maturity and emotional intelligence will only widen the social divide. Conversely, digital progress accompanied by the formation of a character that is loving, empathetic, and reflective will make technology a means of social justice. St. Vincent guides people to see the face of God in the poor, while Erikson guides people to understand themselves so that they are able to relate to others in a healthy way. When these two approaches are combined, a holistic path is born towards the liberation of humanity from poverty in all its dimensions, whether material, moral, or mental.

In this light, the fight against poverty is not merely a social project, but a spiritual and moral calling. It requires humans to be humble, reflective, and courageous in renewing themselves. Only in this way can the progress of civilization go hand in hand with the progress of the heart, so that the same poverty is not repeated from generation to generation.

⁴⁶ Op.cit. Erikson, *Surrounded by Idiots: The Four Types of Human Behaviour (or, How to Understand Those Who Cannot Be Understood)*, 120–25.

⁴⁷ Op.cit Erikson, *Surrounded by Narcissists: Or, How to Stop Other People's Egos Ruining Your Life*, 32–35; Op.cit Erikson, *Surrounded by Psychopaths: How to Protect Yourself from Being Manipulated and Exploited in Business (and in Life)*, 15–17.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that the pattern of poverty that persists from generation to generation is not only caused by economic factors, but more profoundly by human spiritual and psychological poverty. The loss of awareness of love, weak social responsibility, and the inability to recognize and manage oneself are the roots that perpetuate social suffering throughout the ages. Through his mystical theology of love, St. Vincent shows that true poverty arises from the severance of loving relationships between humans and their neighbors, so that its restoration requires repentance of the heart and concrete actions in empathetic service. On the other hand, Thomas Erikson asserts that destructive behavior patterns, poor communication, and low self-awareness are forms of inner poverty that hinder social change. The integration of the spirituality of love and psychological awareness explains that true poverty alleviation can only be realized when humans renew their hearts, minds, and actions as a whole.

This study opens up new space for further research linking spirituality, psychology, and social development in the context of poverty. Future researchers can deepen the practical dimensions of St. Vincent's theology of love and relate it to character formation based on Erikson's personality model in various social contexts, such as education, community leadership, and pastoral ministry. In addition, research can be directed towards formulating a poverty alleviation model based on the values of love and excellent behavior that is appropriate to the challenges of the digital age. Thus, this work is expected to become a stepping stone for the birth of increasingly contextual reflection and action, so that the fight against poverty does not stop at the level of ideas, but bears fruit in real transformation for human life.

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