

Evangelization and Systemic Change

Some Reflections

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On two occasions recently, I gave presentations describing the notion of systemic change and offering examples of successful projects in various countries. I then threw the floor open for questions. The first question on both occasions went like this: “The systemic change projects you described are admirable, but what do they have to do with the main goal of the Congregation: to preach the good news to the poor?”.

Actually, in each instance I was not sure if the questioner was posing an objection that lay deep in his heart or if he was simply offering me the opportunity to say more about a theme that is extremely important in the Vincentian Family: the relationship between evangelization and works of justice and charity (or, given the focus of the Vincentian Family today, the relationship between evangelization and systemic change projects).

This article addresses that basic theme. I will proceed in four steps: 1) the teaching of St. Vincent about the relationship of evangelization and works of charity and justice; 2) the teaching of recent popes about the same relationship; 3) the importance of systemic change today; and 4) the challenge to design creative evangelization projects inside and outside the Congregation of the Mission.

This topic is of considerable importance today – so much so that at the closing of the 2010 General Assembly, the Superior General, Fr. Gregory Gay, tackled it directly: “Fears have been expressed, saying that, with such a focus on systemic change, we might become like another NGO. Such is not the case when we have clear what it is and Who it is that motivates us to do what we do”¹. Following Fr. Greg’s lead, the Assembly itself, in its concluding documents, repeatedly encouraged Vincentians throughout the world to engage in both creative evangelization and systemic change².

¹ *Vincentiana* LIV (July-September 2010), 207.

² *Ibid.*, 404ff.

I. ST. VINCENT'S TEACHING: the unbreakable bond between doing and preaching

The teaching of St. Vincent in regard to this question is unambiguous: evangelization and works of charity and justice are inextricably linked; one must not dichotomize them. He states his view as a sharp rebuttal addressed to those who, apparently, were voicing contrary opinions. On December 6, 1658, speaking forcefully about the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, he minced no words³:

If there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the gospel to the poor but not to comfort them, to supply their spiritual but not their temporal wants, I reply that we ought to assist them and have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others.... To do this is to preach the gospel by words and by works.

Within that context, let me highlight four critical distinctions that play a significant role in describing evangelization in the Vincentian tradition:

a) we evangelize "by words and works"

As is evident in the citation above, St. Vincent was deeply convinced of the link between what we say and what we do. Again and again he spoke of evangelization by "words and works".

Consistent with his emphasis on simplicity as the first virtue of a missionary, he insisted that what the evangelizer does and says must reinforce one another. First, do. Then, teach. That is St. Vincent's rule for "effective" evangelization. In other words, he sees preaching, teaching, personal witness and human promotion as complementary to one another, and as integral to the evangelization process. Today, the unity between evangelization and human promotion, so much a part of St. Vincent's spirit, is one of the main emphases in the Church's social teaching⁴.

³SV XII, 87-88.

⁴Cf. Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*, in AAS LXIII (1971) 924: "...action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are integral elements in the preaching of the gospel". Cf. also, *Centesimus Annus*, 5.

b) *we serve “spiritually and corporally”*

The second phrase is that we minister to the poor “*spiritually and corporally*”⁵. St. Vincent uses this phrase in speaking to all the groups he founded: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. He says to the Daughters of Charity that they should tend not only to bodily needs, but also share their faith by their witness and their words⁶. Conversely, he warns the members of the Congregation of the Mission that they should not think of their mission in exclusively spiritual terms⁷. Rather, they too should care for the sick, the foundlings, the insane, and the most abandoned⁸.

c) *our love is to be both “affective and effective”*⁹

St. Vincent repeated this theme over and over again. He says, for example, “*The love of a Daughter of Charity is not only tender; it is effective, because they serve the poor concretely*”¹⁰.

The theme of effective love is central to Vincentian spirituality. “*Let us love God*”, he tells the members of the Congregation of the Mission, “*let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and with the sweat of our brows. So very often many acts of love of God, of complacency, of benevolence, and such interior affection and practices, although very good and very desirable, are nevertheless to be suspected if they do not reach the practice of effective love*”¹¹. To this day, worldwide, St. Vincent is known for a love that is practical, concrete, well-organized and effective.

d) *our evangelization can be direct/indirect*

The life and works of St. Vincent and the history of the Congregation make it clear that evangelization of the poor can take multiple forms. St. Vincent clearly recognized that not all could serve the poor directly, but that the service of some would necessarily be indirect. He handled

⁵SV IX, 59, 593; XI, 364.

⁶SV IX, 59; IX, 593; XI, 364; XI, 592.

⁷SV XII, 87.

⁸SV XI, 393.

⁹SV IX, 475, 592, 599; XI, 40.

¹⁰SV IX, 593.

¹¹SV XI, 40.

a dispute over the question in his own lifetime¹². As examples of indirect service of the poor, he cites seminary teachers and directors of the Daughters of Charity. He saw their role as necessary if the poor were to be served well. History demonstrates that there will always be cases like that.

There is a need for caution in using the direct/indirect distinction. It must be evoked with great moderation. Unless many of our members are involved in direct evangelization, we will hardly merit, as a Congregation, the name “missionaries”.

Those are four key phrases in the Vincentian tradition. Today they are moving us more and more, in our various branches, not only to assist the poor in their immediate needs by providing food, clothing and shelter, but also to assist them to change the social system within which they live, so that they might emerge from poverty. In light of these phrases, so fundamental in our family’s spirituality, the Congregation is attempting to respond concretely to the appeal that Pope John Paul II addressed to the General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission in 1986: ***“Search out more than ever, with boldness, humility and skill, the causes of poverty and encourage short and long-term solutions – adaptable and effective concrete solutions. By doing so you will work for the credibility of the gospel and of the Church”***¹³.

The question of the relationship between evangelization and works of charity and justice seems to be a perennial one. It has emerged once again in the Congregation of the Mission for a variety of reasons. For example, since 2006 the Congregation, with the help of the Franz Foundation, has been giving, in alternate years, a Systemic Change Award (to those beginning well-designed systemic change projects) and a Mission Award (to those launching creative evangelization projects). In applying for those awards, some confreres requested greater precision about what the distinction between them was. In response, the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change was asked to help clarify the two awards so that the Congregation might give sharper attention to both evangelization and systemic change.

Some of the ideas that the Commission suggested were these:

a) It felt that the first distinction employed by St. Vincent, described above, is very useful in differentiating the two awards: i.e., we preach the good news “by words and works”¹⁴:

¹²SV XII, 87-96.

¹³Cf. Address of John Paul II to the delegates of the General Assembly of 1986, which can be found in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, August 2, 1986, p. 12; cf. *Vincentiana* (1986) 417.

¹⁴SV XII, 88.

- Words = proclaiming the gospel explicitly
- Works = performing works of charity, justice, peace, systemic change

b) It recognized that, in integral evangelization programs, these two forms of proclaiming the good news should go hand in hand. Programs like that of Fr. Pedro Opeka at Akamasoa in Madagascar, for instance, strikingly combine explicit evangelization and comprehensive works among those living in dire poverty.

c) Still, at times it is useful to distinguish these two aspects of evangelization, so that we can focus on creative ways of preaching and teaching the good news, as well as on creative systemic change projects among the poor.

d) There are many well-designed systemic change projects in the Vincentian Family. The book *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change* describes some of them. Others have been presented at systemic change workshops on the various continents.

e) As we look for creative ways to preach and teach the gospel explicitly in today's context, it is important to use traditional *fora* well (e.g., by preaching and teaching relevantly from the pulpit, in the classroom and in other usual contexts) and to create new *fora*. Examples of new *fora* might be: the use of media like television in evangelizing; the use of internet in communicating the good news; the use of new places for preaching or teaching, such as “theology on tap”, which has now become popular in some places (the Archbishop of New York, for instance, spoke recently at a pub in Manhattan). The final section of this article will treat such *fora*.

f) Programs created for explicit evangelization should be programs of *integral* evangelization, avoiding the individualistic-type of evangelization programs that are sometimes popular among fundamentalist groups.

g) Since the concept of “systemic change” is a contemporary one, it was unknown in St. Vincent's time. But St. Vincent himself expressed many related ideas. For example, he emphasized organized works. Right from the start, when he gathered the first group of women to form a “Confraternity of Charity” at Chatillon-les-Dombes in November 1617, he stated, in the Rule he composed for them¹⁵, that the poor sometimes suffer more from lack of “order” than from lack of charitable persons. As noted above, he also continually urged the members of his Family to love the poor “spiritually and corporally” and “affectively and effectively”. He encouraged his followers to examine various elements in the lives of the poor to see what their most important needs

¹⁵ SV XIII, 423.

were: nourishment, health care, education, work, spiritual care, etc. We might call these ideas and practices “Seeds of Systemic Change in the Life and Works of St. Vincent”.

h) Today we are conscious that the poor live within a social system where some or many of these elements are lacking, a system that, if changed, can help a person emerge from poverty.

II. THE TEACHING OF RECENT POPES: Integral evangelization is the heart of the Church’s mission

Beginning in 1891 with Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*¹⁶, a remarkable series of papal documents, over the past 120 years, has outlined and explicitly developed Catholic social teaching¹⁷. On various anniversaries of *Rerum Novarum*, this teaching took significant steps forward; e.g., **Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno*** (1931), **John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra*** (1961), and **John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus*** (1991). Other conciliar and papal writings deepened the numerous themes found in these landmark documents. One of those themes is the relationship between evangelization and action on behalf of justice.

The writings of Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI emphasize that evangelization has multiple facets, all of which play a crucial role in the Church’s mission.

¹⁶ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891.

¹⁷ Many have pointed out that Frederic Ozanam’s social thought foreshadowed *Rerum Novarum*, which was published 40 years later. In a letter of November 5, 1836, for example, he wrote: “The question which divides the people of today is no longer one about political structures, but a social question. It is to find out which will win, the spirit of egoism or the spirit of sacrifice. Is society to be just a huge exploitation for the profit of the strongest, or a dedication of each person to the benefit of all, and especially to the protection of the weak? There are many people who have too much, and who want still more. There are very many more who do not have sufficient, who have nothing and who want to take if people will not give. A struggle is starting between these two types of people. This struggle threatens to be a terrible one. On one side is the power of gold, on the other the power of despair. We must jump in between these opposing armies, if not to prevent at least to soften the encounter. And the fact that we are young middle-class people makes it easier for us to fulfill the role of mediator, to which our title of Christian obliges us. That is why our Society of St. Vincent de Paul is useful”. Engaged as he was in practical charity, Ozanam realized that this was not enough. He wrote on April 30, 1848: “Charity is not sufficient. It treats wounds, but it does not stop the blows that cause them... There is an immense poor class which does not want alms, but institutions”. Similarly, he wrote on November 13, 1836: “Societal order rests on two virtues: justice and charity. But justice already presupposes much love, because one must deeply love the human person in order to respect his rights, which limit our rights and his liberty, which impinges on our liberty”.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI offered a description of evangelization¹⁸ which has had a profound influence on the worldwide Church and on the Congregation of the Mission:

Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others.

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission refer explicitly to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on several occasions¹⁹, as, even more frequently, does the *Ratio Missionum* of the Congregation²⁰.

Even earlier in the pontificate of Paul VI, the post-synodal document of 1971, *Justice in the World*, stated: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation"²¹.

Pope John Paul II gave a new turn to this theme. He made the expression "new evangelization" part of the contemporary Catholic vocabulary. Few topics received more attention in the Church during the years of his pontificate. He speaks of an evangelization that is new in its ardor, in its methods and in its expression²².

A fundamental question about the new evangelization is, obviously: "What is new?"

Pope John Paul speaks²³ of an evangelization that is new in its:

¹⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24. This document describes the content of evangelization very clearly in paragraphs 25-39. Interestingly, especially for members of the Vincentian Family, paragraphs 41 and 42 mirror St. Vincent's rule for effective evangelization: first, do; then, teach.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 11, 16.

²⁰ *Ratio Missionum Congregationis Missionis*, cf. especially chapter 2, where *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is cited repeatedly.

²¹ *Justice in the World* (1971), 6.

²² Discourse at the 19th Ordinary Assembly of CELAM, Haiti, March 9, 1983; also, in the Dominican Republic, October 12, 1984.

²³ Discourse given in Santo Domingo, October 12, 1984.

a) *ardor*

Here the emphasis is on the conversion of the evangelizer. Only someone who knows the Lord and loves him deeply can proclaim the word of God with joy, enthusiasm, conviction.

There are many ways of conversion. The focus in new evangelization is not on any particular path, like the charismatic movement, the neo-catechumenate, or one of the new forms of community springing up in the Church. Even though many, in fact, are converted in and through such new communities, the new evangelization is much broader. Within any of many possible vocational paths, each of us – woman or man, clergy or lay, younger or older, richer or poorer – must be continually converted. Finding the proper path is the challenge.

In this light, the new evangelization raises a series of questions for us. Have I really found a way of ongoing conversion myself? Has the Congregation as a whole been genuinely converted? Has live contact with the poor been for us, as it was for St. Vincent, the path to conversion? Have the poor revealed to us how God sees the world's priorities?

b) *methods*

There are many new means at hand. They too pose enormously challenging questions to us.

Do many in the Church, or the Congregation, really use the mass media (TV, radio, the press, movies, online resources) as means for evangelizing? Are there many provinces that have trained even one person in the use of the media and have organized one good media project? Do many in the Congregation use computer and cell phone contacts to full advantage in pastoral activities, especially among the young? I will take up these questions again in the final part of this article.

In our pastoral methodology, do we work not only *for* the poor, but *with* them? Do we regard base communities as a peculiarly Third World thing, or do we work at forming Christian communities wherever we evangelize?

c) *expression*

Every era and every place has its own language and its own culture, or its own languages and cultures. Today, differences in culture pose an increasing challenge, since we live in an information society, where rapid communication brings us into contact with the global commu-

nity. Large cities on all continents teem with people of diverse languages and cultures. Sunday Mass, for example, is celebrated in more than 30 languages in the Archdiocese of New York. Something similar is surely true in many large metropolitan cities.

On the different continents, there is a strong emphasis on the need for the inculturation of theology. In the Church everywhere, we live in an ecumenical era, which makes demands on the language we use in preaching and teaching.

Contemporary papal documents, often recalling the preaching of the Fathers of the Church, remind us continually of the importance of the social teaching of the Church. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: "To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message"²⁴. He adds: "The 'new evangelization'... must include among its elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine"²⁵.

Pope Benedict XVI carries this theme forward in *Caritas in Veritate*, speaking of the "new demands of evangelization"²⁶, frequently citing the writings of Paul VI and John Paul II and repeating that the social teaching of the Church is an essential element in evangelization²⁷.

In fact, in contemporary Church documents, there are many expressions that are quite new. I do not mean that the underlying concepts are completely new. Actually, we can find almost all of them, at least in some form, in the Fathers of the Church. But as the Church interfaces with contemporary societies and contemporary cultures, there is a new emphasis, often expressed in new language, on:

- the preferential option for the poor
- the effects of sin on social structures
- the systemic aspects of justice and injustice
- life issues (war, peace-making, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment)
- the erosion of family structures and sexual morality
- integral liberation
- ecology²⁸.

²⁴*Centesimus Annus* 5.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Caritas in Veritate*, 12.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸Pope Benedict XVI focused on ecology during the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2010, entitling his message: "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation".

Beyond these new emphases in Church documents and contemporary theology, one can also discern in our 1984 Constitutions and in the official documents of the Congregation of the Mission in recent years a number of significantly new accents:

- on Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor
- on the link between evangelization and action for justice
- on searching out the causes of poverty and concrete solutions
- on specializing in the Church's social teaching
- on investigating the new forms of poverty
- on being evangelized by the poor
- on the poor as not merely the object of evangelization, but its subject
- on forming basic Christian communities
- on a global world-view.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE

In an address given in 1979, Pope John Paul II stated: "Social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity towards those who are most in distress, those who are extremely poor, those suffering... from hunger, neglect, unemployment and despair. You will also want to seek out the structural reasons which foster or cause the different forms of poverty in the world and in your own country, so that you can apply the appropriate remedies".

Structural thinking does not come easily to us, but the worldwide Vincentian Family is attempting to respond energetically to the challenge above. The structural way of thinking that Pope John Paul II describes requires an informed understanding of the real circumstances of the poor, patient analysis, and a disciplined search for solutions. Beyond that, the implementation of structural change demands dialogue, collaborative action, and perseverance. But without structural thinking and structural change, the root causes of poverty remain embedded in society, even if programs that we set up are successful in dealing with some symptoms.

Conscious of this, in recent years the Vincentian Family has been focusing on systemic change. Of course, in a Family like ours, providing immediate service and working for systemic change are not an "either/or" option. They are a "both/and" imperative. It is important for us, on the one hand, to work to meet the immediate needs of the poor. On the other hand, it is crucial that we also help in promoting long-term change. Since 2006, some important steps forward have been made in that regard.

1. BACKGROUND

In 2006, with the encouragement and support of the Franz Foundation, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Gregory Gay, named a Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and gave it the following mandate: *To help bring about systemic change through the apostolates of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially those ministering to the oppressed poor.*

The following year, at their annual meeting, the international leaders of the Family, gathered in Rome, invited the members of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change to make a presentation. At the end of the meeting, “Systemic Change” was chosen as the Family’s focus for at least two years (2007-2009). The theme is still an ongoing priority for the Family today.

2. THE GOALS OF THE COMMISSION AND THE WORK DONE SO FAR

a) *Goals*

When Fr. Greg named the members of the Commission, he asked them to:

- study available material concerning Systemic Change,
- discuss the members’ own involvement in Systemic Change,
- formulate a series of effective strategies for promoting systemic change (called “best practices” in some cultures) which would subsequently be shared with the members of the Vincentian Family,
- propose how the effective strategies might best be disseminated among the members of the Family throughout the world.

b) *What has been done so far?*

To respond to its mandate, the Commission started to reflect about Systemic Change and about how eventually to share the results of its work. At the beginning of the process, each of the members of the Commission wrote a story based on his or her own experience, describing a project in which Systemic Change had been implemented. In the stories presented, the Commission identified strategies that were effective in working toward Systemic Change. The importance of self-help and self-sustaining programs soon became evident. The Commission recognized that it was crucial that the poor themselves be active par-

ticipants in the planning and realization of the projects envisioned. As its work proceeded, the Commission underlined the spirituality that lies behind a systemic-change approach in the Vincentian Family.

The Commission gradually developed a series of means for communicating to the various branches of the Family what it was doing:

- A book, entitled *Seeds of Hope: Stories of Systemic Change*, has been published in many languages and distributed throughout the world
- A tool kit (a 2 gigabyte flash drive) was developed, containing brochures, short documents, DVDs, films, PowerPoint presentations, suggestions for workshops, etc.
- Continental workshops have been given on systemic change (these have now been held in Mexico, Brazil, Cameroon, Thailand, and the USA; upcoming workshops will take place in Haiti and at three locations in Europe)
- Numerous courses, seminars and workshops for leaders and multiplying agents have been given by individual members of the Commission
- FAMVIN has offered its services generously as a resource library and a hub for sharing ideas about systemic change
- Programs for promoting wise money management for the sake of the mission are being sponsored within the Family.

c) Some clarifications about the notion of Systemic Change

Systemic Change aims not only to serve the immediate needs of the poor (by providing food, clothing, etc.), but also to assist the poor to develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty. The notion of “systemic change” should not be confused with “systematic change” (that is, planned, step-by-step change); “systematic change” can produce very positive results within a particular situation, but “systemic change” goes further. It aims at changing a whole series of structures that form the social system within which we live.

Today, we are more and more conscious that sin affects not just individuals; it deeply affects social structures too. It becomes embodied in unjust laws, power-based economic relationships, inequitable treaties, artificial boundaries, oppressive governments, and numerous other subtle obstacles to harmonious societal relationships. Some of these unjust societal structures keep the poor poor. Systemic-change projects aim at addressing such structures.

Many good projects address urgent, immediate needs, but do not go beyond that. Different from these, a systemic-change project has, among others, the following characteristics:

1) Long-range social impact

This is the most basic characteristic of systemic change; that is, the project helps change the overall life-situation of those who benefit from it.

2) Sustainability

The project helps create the social structures that are needed for a permanent change in the lives of the poor, like employment, education, housing, the availability of clean water and sufficient food, ongoing local leadership, etc.

3) Replicability

The project can be adapted to solve similar problems in other places. The philosophy or spirituality that grounds the project, the strategies it employs and the techniques that it uses can be applied in a variety of circumstances.

4) Scope

Concretely, this means that the project actually has spread beyond its initial context and has been used successfully in other settings in the country where it began, or internationally, either by those who initiated it, or by others who have adapted elements of it.

5) Innovation

The project has brought about significant social change by transforming traditional practice. Transformation has been achieved through the development of a pattern-changing idea and its successful implementation.

A system functions as a whole through the interaction of its various parts. Its elements affect each other constantly as they interact, either for better or for worse. Unemployment or low wages, poor housing, an unhealthy diet, deficient healthcare, and low-quality education are usually not separate problems; rather, they are ordinarily intimately linked with one another. “Systemic change” aims at transforming an entire series of interacting elements, rather than just one or two of them. This frequently requires a change in attitudes. A systemic-change approach offers tools to interpret our experience and focuses on how the system’s elements interact. It devises means for promoting structural change within a whole system. Basically, systemic-change thinking helps us, in the words attributed to Albert Einstein, “**to learn to see the world anew**”.

d) *Are we just another NGO?*

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, from time to time members of the Family ask questions like these: in focusing so sharply on systemic change, is the Vincentian Family becoming just another NGO? are there differences between our systemic change projects and those of highly motivated NGOs which currently emphasize systemic change?²⁹.

Much could be said in response to those questions. Here, in addition to what is stated above about St. Vincent's teaching on this matter and about contemporary papal teaching, I offer only a few brief concrete considerations for the reader's reflection.

1. As Fr. Greg pointed out during his remarks at the 2010 General Assembly, there are often significant differences in the motivation that moves an NGO to act and the motivation that drives members of the Family. Fr. Greg stated that we do what we do because we are following Christ the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, who "went about doing good"³⁰ by word and work. Hopefully, this colors all our actions. Creative fidelity³¹ to the following of Christ demands that our mission manifest the compassionate love of God, that it flow from prayerful union with the Creator and Redeemer, that it unite us with others in a community of service, and that it be renewed continually in every age, adapting itself to new challenges (like new forms of poverty) and new means (like systemic change methodology).

²⁹This type of question is perennial in the history of the Catholic Church, arising in diverse forms in different eras and in different countries: why should we run hospitals when the State runs some extraordinary ones? why should we run private Catholic schools, when the State offers public education free of charge? As noted above, St. Vincent faced such questions in his own time. In some ways these questions, while often asked, are in themselves problematic, since they often remain in the abstract and seek to identify, abstractly, the specific difference between two realities which are very different in the concrete. Ironically, for example, many who are not Catholic are eager to send their children to Catholic schools because they regard them as better, for concrete reasons. In the history of Catholic moral theology, the same question arises under another guise: is there a specifically Catholic moral code? While many may spontaneously answer that question in the affirmative and may even state that an affirmative response is obvious (e.g., in regard to birth control, abortion, etc.), others point out that Catholic moral teaching is consistently supported in the writings of theologians and in papal documents by natural law reasoning, which, by definition, is available to all persons, whether Catholic or not.

³⁰Acts 10:38.

³¹This was the theme of the 41st General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, held in Paris in 2010.

2. Concretely, we bring to our systemic change projects a distinctive spirituality. In the footsteps of St. Vincent, St. Louise, Frederic Ozanam and countless others, we emphasize virtues like simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal. Of course, these virtues too must be renewed in every era with creative fidelity. Today, one hopes that Vincentian Family systemic change projects will be characterized by transparency (simplicity), listening to the poor and being evangelized by them (humility), warmth and respect (gentleness), perseverance in the face of obstacles (mortification) and life-long dedication (zeal).

3. One would also hope that, in our projects, effective works will be accompanied, as St. Vincent often recommended, by a life that witnesses to Christ and by words of faith and encouragement³².

4. Of course, if a particular NGO provides services that promote integral human development better than we, their example should stimulate us to ongoing conversion and renewal, and we should rejoice humbly in the good being done by others, acknowledging that “all that matters is that in any and every way... Christ is being proclaimed”³³, even if he is being proclaimed anonymously.

IV. CREATIVE PREACHING: A challenge for contemporary evangelizers

Preaching the good news lies at the heart of the Congregation's charism. Our motto, taken from Luke 4:18, states our identity clearly: “To preach the good news to the poor He has sent me”. The challenge for Vincentians in every era, then, is to preach well. That involves preparation, a deep understanding of the scriptures meditated upon in prayer, an informed awareness of the contemporary world in which we apply the word of God, the development of good communication skills, and the use of media that facilitate communication.

As in other eras within the Congregation's history, today there are many good examples of creative evangelization programs; often, these are linked with creative “works” for the poor.

Here, because of space limitations, I will offer a brief description of only some of these, to whet the reader's appetite. Much more could be said about each of the examples that I will present below, and many more examples could be given.

³²SV IX, 59; IX, 593; XI, 364; XI, 592.

³³Philippians 1:18.

1. Akamasoa

Fr. Pedro Opeka is best known for the extraordinary systemic change project that he initiated at Akamasoa in Madagascar. It provides jobs, housing, health care and education for more than 17,000 people. But visitors to Akamasoa are also immediately struck by the vibrant faith community they find there. On Sundays, 6,000 people gather to celebrate the Eucharist, praying and singing God's praises. On feasts like Easter, Pentecost and Christmas 10,000 may join in the celebration, giving thanks to God for his gifts. In the evenings, many gather for quiet prayer. Akamasoa's schools provide religious education for 9,000 young people.

What is the key to the building up of this faith community? Fr. Pedro puts it this way:

Material progress never completely satisfies the longing in people's hearts. Our spirits are restless as we seek a sense of purpose in life. The spark of God resides in all and moves the human heart to go beyond our limited daily horizons. In Akamasoa, we recognize that we must help people to experience life's surprises. When we explore the mystery of the covenant between God and humanity, when we develop the gifts of compassion, mercy, and sharing, we move beyond the limits of human justice and begin to spread a charity that has no bounds. In this way, we live in joy and peace because we love deeply. To that end, we attempt to return continually to the source of the Good News and open our hearts to it. If we do that faithfully, then, in the footsteps of Christ, we ourselves will be Good News.

The most recent annual report of Akamasoa puts it this way: "**Spiritual animation** has likewise played a very important role in helping the residents face the future courageously and in raising their consciousness in regard to their responsibilities toward their families and toward society. The Sunday Eucharist has taken on a hugely important dimension, with massive participation of the children, young people and adults. It has also become international, since many foreigners come in order to experience a powerful, unforgettable moment in the life of the community and to pray with it".

2. The truck drivers apostolate in Brazil

Brazil is huge, extending over more than 8,000,000 square kilometers. A vast network of roads and highways crosses the country in all directions. Ninety percent of all transportation is provided by trucks on the highways. There are over one million registered truckers, who

often travel day and night without stopping – tired and hot, working inhumane hours with low pay, on dangerous roads, under the threat of being robbed, separated from their families for weeks and sometimes even months at a time. About 50,000 people die each year on the road. Within this framework, a Highway Pastoral Apostolate has now been functioning for thirty-five years.

The priests accompany the truckers on their travels over the highways of Brazil. They bring the solace of the Word of God, the sacraments, the opportunity for peaceful prayer, the presence of the Church, and friendship. The main focus of the work at the end of each day is the Highway Mass. This Mass is usually celebrated at service stations, although sometimes the celebration takes place in restaurants or garages. Basically, the apostolate provides Roman Catholic religious services for the Highway Community (truckers, bus drivers, cab drivers, their passengers, also the personnel at service stations, automotive repair shops, restaurants, etc...).

The Highway Pastoral Apostolate began in 1976 in the state of Parana, with the authorization of Msgr. Geraldo M. Pellanda, Archbishop of Ponta Grossa. Father Marian Litewka, C.M. shouldered the work at the start. Until 1981, it was limited to the state of Parana. Then in October 1981, it was extended to Santa Catarina and Rio Grande, two states in the south. In 1982, a team began serving the states of Mato Grosso, Goias, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espirito Santo, and Bahia. Since 1985, sisters from the community of Our Lady of Sorrows have assisted in the Highway Pastoral Apostolate.

In 1988, Father José Carlos Chacorowski, C.M. (named a bishop in 2010) joined the project and expanded it further. He began religious services along the highways of Northeastern states and the states of Tocantins, Maranhao, and Para. In 1993, Father Miguel Staron, C.M., launched the mission in the state of Rondonia. In 1996, Father Germano Nalepa became a team member, replacing Fr. José Carlos.

The missionaries travel on all the highways in Brazil except for those in the states of Amapa, Roraima, Amazonas, and Acre. Along the way, they stop each year in about 7,000 service stations and other roadside establishments. They are on the road 220-250 days a year, and celebrate Mass at over 1,400 service stations across the country.

They have selected the Virgin Mary, with the title of Our Lady of the Road, as the patron of their pastoral work. The original portrait for Our Lady of the Road, painted by an unknown artist around 800 years ago, is in the Gesù Church in Rome, Italy. Since 1976 the team has distributed, after every mass, images of Our Lady of the Road on posters and flyers, placing more than 300,000 copies of the image in the hands of the people.

The team's vision is broad: "For our part, we would like to see the Highway Pastoral in Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. In Brazil, we help many truck drivers from neighboring countries; we also know that thousands of Brazilian truck drivers travel on the highways of neighboring countries. It is important that the truck drivers in all Latin America, at least those in South America, feel the friendly and comforting presence of the Church in their lives, work, and on their journeys".

In the opinion of the missionaries themselves, the Highway Apostolate would be viable in other countries if adapted to the individual characteristics of each country. One of them mused: "When I visit Paris and travel on the metro, seeing the crowd of dehumanized people, I think: what a great missionary assignment it would be to walk among travelers as a friend or a brother, distributing flyers with the gospel message, giving my undivided attention to whoever needs it. It would require an enormous amount of humility, patience, and hope, but it would be worth it".

3. A publication ministry in Brazil

Fr. Mizael Poggioli has had an enormous influence on the Vincentian Family in Brazil not only by his preaching, but also by his publications, which hundreds of thousands of people have read. He has written many of these books himself; he has had others translated. All of them have served as important tools in the formation of the large Vincentian Family in Brazil. Fr. Mizael serves as spiritual advisor to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, whose membership in Brazil has reached 300,000.

The books treat current ecclesial and Vincentian topics clearly, simply and briefly. Here is a list of the titles presently available at: <http://mizaelpoggioli.blogspot.com/search/label/Livros>

TITLE / AUTHOR	# OF PP.
The Spiritual Experience of St. Vincent de Paul and our Own <i>Various</i>	78
St. Vincent de Paul – A Saint for Today <i>Alfonso M. Tamayo and Alvaro Panqueva</i>	122
The Humanism of Vincent de Paul <i>André Dodin</i>	322
St. Vincent de Paul and Charity <i>André Dodin</i>	206

TITLE / AUTHOR	# OF PP.
Week of Vincentian Studies <i>Various</i>	334
Frederic Antoine Ozanam <i>Benedito Rosa Miranda and Messias G. Teixeira</i>	71
Saint Catherine Labouré <i>Guilherme Vaessen</i>	197
St. Vincent de Paul <i>Guilherme Vaessen</i>	156
Instruction on Vows in the CM <i>Document</i>	122
My Hero, Vincent de Paul <i>Aloísio D. Goch</i>	318
The Way of Vincent de Paul <i>Robert Maloney</i>	240
Frederic Ozanam – The Mobilization of the Laity <i>Various</i>	148
Manual of Vincentian Spirituality <i>Various</i>	176
Francis Regis Clet <i>Lourenço Biernaski</i>	120
Pilgrims in Prayer – Pilgrims in Charity <i>Robert Maloney</i>	157
The Vincentian Family – Brazil <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	176
Vincent de Paul and the Charism of Charity <i>Luigi Mezzadri</i>	134
The Service of Advisor – The Vincentian Family <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	68
Vincentian Ethics <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	59
Vincent de Paul – Father of the Poor <i>Nélio Pita</i>	181
Jesus Christ is in the Poor <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	62
The Dignity of the Poor <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	118
Overcome with the Poor I <i>Various</i>	75

TITLE / AUTHOR	# OF PP.
Overcome with the Poor II <i>Various</i>	94
Promoting Systemic Change <i>Various</i>	60
The Vincentian Conferences <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	100
Charity as a Force in Evangelization <i>Various</i>	144
The Cry of the Poor <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	76
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Church <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	125
Foundations of the Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	86
Foundations of the Spirituality of Frederic Ozanam <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	80
Seeds of Hope <i>Various</i>	301
The Vincentian Conferences – Texts for Reflection <i>Roque Gelatti</i>	144
Charity – Mission <i>Various</i>	136
Other Vincentian Chronicles <i>Renato Lima</i>	140
Basic Foundations of AIC – Brasil <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	176
In Charity- Face to Face with the Poor <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	78
Mary in Vincentian Spirituality <i>Mizaél Donizetti Poggioli</i>	103
Praying with Frederic Ozanam <i>Ronald Ramson, C.M.</i>	152
Turn Everything to Love <i>Robert Maloney</i>	102
Lives that Endure... <i>J. Assis Pacheco</i>	142
Fifteen Days of Prayer with Louise de Marillac <i>Elizabeth Charpy</i>	135

TITLE / AUTHOR	# OF PP.
DVD – St. Vincent de Paul – Chaplain of the Gallery Slaves – Dubbed in Portuguese	
DVD – Society of St. Vincent de Paul – Institutional	
DVD – The Dignity of the Poor	

4. Ministry among the nomadic population in Mexico

Fr. Benjamin Romo has spent the last two and a half years in the mountain region of Tarahumara in the parish of Chinatu. “My experience with the people”, says Benjamin, “has been a fascinating one, filled with difficulties, challenges, and a good bit of ‘the cross’”.

Three Vincentian missionaries cover this enormous parish, which consists of 105 communities. The distances are huge and travel is difficult, especially during the winter snows and in the rainy season. To travel from one end of the parish to the other takes eight hours by land rover. Municipal and State authorities have done little to improve the paths and roads, so the missionaries themselves fix them from time to time, with the help of the people and with some donations.

The social problems are daunting, since the planting and trafficking of drugs are rampant in these communities. Kidnappings are frequent. People confront death and threats of death daily.

The missionaries aim at creating an environment in which the communities can gather to listen to the Word of God and celebrate traditional festivals, something that will be lost if leaders and teachers do not help them conserve the values of their culture. The priests’ work involves a lot of accompaniment and empowerment. After just two and a half years, change in the communities is visible, and the members, little by little, are discovering the riches they possess as they unite to work together. In one community, a large chapel was built in a year, thanks to the labor of the community itself, along with financial support and meals that the missionaries provided. The people are often hungry and weak; therefore, it is necessary to provide them both spiritual and material nourishment.

Many are coming to realize that they can change their life conditions, if they are united. This realization has transformed their mentality, so that now they are capable of thinking about small projects for community development. Much remains to be done in the areas of health care, education, and culture.

For the missionaries, the center of their evangelization work is Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor. Their resources are very limited in

every sense. They lack the personnel to cover the great expanse of the parish. They rely on seven members of the JMV who collaborate with them, but this is insufficient. They also need financial resources to move projects forward, to sustain the members of the JMV who are assisting them. But in the end, Fr. Romo states confidently, “We are walking where God is showing us the way day to day, and every day brings its own joys and its own surprises”.

5. Online ministries

In recent years, a number of confreres have developed creative online ministries. Frs. John Freund, Julio Suescun and Claude Lautissier have labored energetically to make www.famvin.org a valuable formation and communication resource for the entire Vincentian Family. Other branches of the Vincentian Family, as well as a number of individuals within those branches, have created important websites.

One of the most valuable sources for Vincentian research is *Via Sapientiae*, a website sponsored by DePaul University. Frs. Ed Udovic and John Rybolt have contributed very significantly to its birth and development.

Among personal evangelization efforts aimed at communicating the gospel message effectively (while also developing a number of specifically Vincentian themes), let me mention Fr. Dandy Labitag’s work especially. He has produced numerous films and PowerPoint presentations, some of which are listed below:

N.	NAME	HYPERLINK
1.	Video Campaign Against Child Labor (Long Version)	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnV5EH9ER30
2.	Video Campaign Against Child Labor (Short Version)	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j5Yg5UFhuY&feature=related
3.	2010 Convocation – Western Province: A Glimpse	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnykdTV1Owg&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL
4.	Anyway	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsVSfn7PH-8&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=12
5.	Prayer of the Vincentian Family	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sNZjInnI9E&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=13
6.	Mother’s Prayer	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ee_t83QjIo&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=14
7.	FACE	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDMpe8iSSf0&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=15

N.	NAME	HYPERLINK
8.	Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvNNXJ_T6vE&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=16
9.	Vincentian Saints, Blesseds and Venerables	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuz98oBPqLM&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=17
10.	Needful Hands	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uo664Xx12k&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=18
11.	350 Images of Poverty	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWAeh5tor2Q&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=20
12.	350 Images of SVP	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_ByXVOH6yw&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=21
13.	St. Louise de Marillac: A Woman in Love	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1S9lx0oC6w&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=22
14.	CIF: Rooting, Renewing and Risking	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6882DMWc6xw&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=1
15.	Superior Generals of the Congregation of the Mission	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn9TV0piT4s&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=2
16.	I am Your Angel – Celine Dion	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8W44Ndo0mm4&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=3
17.	Ave Maria – Celine Dion	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePDMzIVGR4w&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=4
18.	Help Me Lord – Johnny Cash	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yL1LrFtx2w&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=5
19.	Smile! – Josh Grobin	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHlvNJUc7I&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=6
20.	Tears of An Angel	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYid6MTgIO0&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=7
21.	The Voice	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu6go8NhqeQ&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=8
22.	Away in the Manger: A Modern Christmas	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yI8yMTHBPQ&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=9
23.	The Blessing	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ajUwV83IEU&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=10
24.	Miracle	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOx2tumeqZo&feature=BF&list=ULcEgzRxvmATY&index=11
25.	REMEMBER – A Tribute to St. Vincent de Paul	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=J1F9BCNU
26.	PANIS ANGELICUS - Music Videos	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=JM01JMNU
27.	DO NOT GIVE UP! You are Loved	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=JEFJBMNU

N.	NAME	HYPERLINK
28.	What Matters Most	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=DY67KPNX
29.	Over the Rainbow	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=DYK7YGXN
30.	God's Voice	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=D76PWWNX
31.	I am the Voice – Celtic Woman	http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=D7DLZWXX

These days creative online ministries abound. A few months ago, Deacon Steve Politte's website, www.openmyeyeslord.net, recorded the millionth hit on its homepage. One of the site's videos, "Ultimate Freedom", has had more than 12 million hits. The creators of the site state that it is "probably the video that got our website going".

Steve Politte, a deacon in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, is disabled from a back injury and no longer able to preach or minister at Mass. Instead, he has created a ministry to spread the good news via the Internet, forming a community of prayer around the world.

"Whispers in the Loggia", a very popular news website created by Rocco Palmo of Philadelphia, has already recorded 18,521,673 hits as I write this article!

6. An interesting example of the use of a new forum is "Theology on Tap"

Theology on Tap is a program of lectures given, usually, by well-known spiritual leaders and teachers, who address current topics in religion and theology. The issues treated are often controversial. The venue is normally a bar or a restaurant. The use of this forum has become common among Catholics and other Christian denominations, particularly Episcopalians, Lutherans, and some Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

Theology on Tap was cofounded in June 1981 in Arlington Heights, Illinois, by Father John Cusick, director of the archdiocese's Young Adult Minister and Father Jack Wall. It came into being as the result of comments made by a recent college graduate who was "concerned about his personal identity and finding meaning in life".

Lecture topics have included the **sacrament of reconciliation**, faith and work, relationship issues, **Christian** values, small faith communities, decision making or discernment, embryonic stem-cell research, **religious fundamentalism**, the relevance of the church in the modern world and to public policy, and women's role in the church.

Since its inception, the program has spread to many parishes in the USA and to at least six other countries, including **Canada, Italy, Tai-**

wan, the **Philippines, Ireland, Australia and Hong Kong**. More than 29 USA dioceses have local Theology on Tap groups.

Cardinals **Justin Rigali, Francis George, Sean Patrick O'Malley**, Donald Wuerl and Archbishops Timothy Dolan and **George Niederauer** have addressed program gatherings.

7. Other challenging arenas

Of course, beyond the examples of creative evangelization projects described above, there are still some striking challenges that are crying out for a response.

a) *Youth ministry*

One of the great evangelization challenges is the communication of God's word to young people, or what we commonly call youth ministry. Can the young people in our Vincentian parishes and schools be reached by creative websites or through email or the cell phone or Twitter?

Recently, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, of Dublin, stated:

Young Irish people are among the most catechised in Europe but apparently among the least evangelized. Our schools are great schools; our young people are idealistic and generous, but the bond between young people and Church life ends up being very weak....

Probably my greatest discouragement as Archbishop of Dublin comes from the failure of interaction between the Church and young people. I visit parishes where I encounter no young people. I enquire what is being done to attract young people to parish life and the answers are vague. Many experiments flourish for a while and then die out. Everyone knows that there is a missing generation and perhaps more than one, yet there are not enough pastoral initiatives to reach out to young people.

Parishes offer very little outreach to young people and I feel that an increasing number of young people find parishes a little like alien territory. A form of religious education which is separated from the parish will inevitably collapse for most the day that school ends. We need a more demanding catechesis, within a parish framework, and more opportunities for young people to deepen their faith and to develop a Christian sense of their generosity and social commitment.

I suspect that the same could be said in many countries. How might pastors work *with* the young for *the* young?

b) *Radio and Television*

How about the means of communication that billions of people use day in and day out? In the USA, 85% of the population listens to the radio daily. Millions tune in morning and evening as they drive back and forth to work. 238,000,000 people settle down in front of the TV at some time each day; the average person watches for more than 4 hours daily. I suspect that, with adjustments for varying economic and social circumstances, the reality is similar in many other countries. Are we using these media to communicate the good news effectively?

From 1951 to 1957, Bishop Fulton Sheen's "Life is Worth Living" was one of the most watched TV shows on the air. It competed successfully with other prime-time shows and drew as many as 30 million viewers every week. In 1952 Bishop Sheen won an Emmy Award as the Most Outstanding Television Personality. He accepted the honor by saying, "I feel it is time to pay tribute to my four writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John". The Archdiocese of New York could not meet the demand for tickets to his show. *Time* magazine called him "the first 'televangelist'".

Today Catholic preachers have faded from the list of outstanding radio and television evangelists. Who will revitalize these ministries in what – to use John Paul II's terminology – are much frequented "areopagi"?

c) *Films*

Holiness attracts – yes, even today, in what many regard as very secularized times. Last year "Of Gods and Men", the true story of Trappist monks murdered in Algeria won numerous awards, though it was denied an Oscar nomination on technical grounds. It received 11 nominations for the César Awards in France and won second place for the Grand Prix at Cannes.

Over the years, numerous explicitly "Catholic" films have won Oscars. "Going My Way" and "A Man for All Seasons" (the life of St. Thomas More) received the best picture of the year award. In 1948, "Monsieur Vincent" won the best foreign film award. "The Bells of St. Mary's" was nominated for 6 Oscars in 1946 and took home one. Ingrid Bergman won the best actress nomination for "The Bells of St. Mary's" and "Joan of Arc" (for which José Ferrer was nominated too). In 1964, "Becket" won an Academy Award for the best screenplay. Both Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton were nominated for Best Actor, and John Gielgud was nominated as Best Supporting Actor. Numerous other award-winning films had less explicit, but very Catholic themes, like "Dead Man Walking" for which Susan Sarandon won an award as Best

Actress (and Sean Penn, Tim Robbins and Bruce Springsteen received nominations).

Could more be done in film? There are some wonderfully attractive lives of saints and other themes that might fascinate viewers.

d) Games

The brother of a friend of mine is the founder of Zynga, the largest online game producer in the world. At the end of 2010, Zynga's most popular game "Cityville" had 69 million users, only a few weeks after its birth. Zynga's second most popular game "Farmville" had 57 million users. By January 14, 2011, "Cityville" had surged past 100 million users and was heading toward new records. While I must confess that I have little interest in online games, I have to acknowledge that a huge number of people do, especially (though by no means exclusively) the young.

Zynga was recently evaluated at 7.5 billion dollars. One must applaud the company for its inventiveness and also for its social conscience. It has helped Haiti in post-earthquake reconstruction and has assisted in projects to aid those living in poverty in other countries as well.

I sometimes ask myself: could not someone invent a good game that would alert users to the plight of those living in poverty? Could "Cityville" have added in slums as part of the city's overall design? Could its design have included poverty-reduction programs for improving the city? Could someone invent a good game for catechetical or evangelical purposes? Or even just a good game of any sort, whose proceeds would go toward alleviating poverty?

For a good number of us, the world of games is a foreign world. But it is a world inhabited by many residents, younger and older. What can we do to enter that world, and, by entering, influence it?

Let me conclude these reflections on evangelization and systemic change by asking some fundamental questions. Will we, the members of the Congregation of the Mission, followers of Christ *as the Evangelizer of the Poor*, evangelize effectively by "words and works" as St. Vincent says? Will our provinces be communities of priests and brothers evangelizing the poor creatively and leading others to evangelize them, as our Constitutions envision? Can the Church, as it commits itself to a new evangelization, really become a church of the poor, as Pope John XXIII called it to be in his opening address at Vatican II, reaching out to them in a new evangelization, as John Paul II hoped?

I trust that the answer to all these questions can be *yes*. But it is quite a challenge.