

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

PUTHUSSERY, PAUL V.C.

**THE CHARISM OF 'VINCENTIAN CONGREGATION'
IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS' ALTRUISTIC MINISTRY
(LUKE 4:16-30)**

Moderator

Rev. Dr. Antonio Magnante I.M.C.

**A Long Essay submitted for the partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies**

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DEDICATION

To all my confreres – Bishops, Priests, Brothers and Seminarians – in the
Vincentian Congregation, as we celebrate the Centenary
of the Foundation of the Congregation in 2004.

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“...woe to me if I don’t proclaim the gospel” (I Cor 9:16). St. Paul realizes that the first and most important duty of an apostle is to proclaim the good news of the Lord. The one who appoints us to preach is nobody else than Jesus, just as he himself was sent by God to preach the Kingdom of God. In the same way, all are called to be the Apostles of Christ, and their prime duty is to proclaim the good news of the Lord, especially to the poor. This, I believe, is the purpose of my vocation and slowly by slowly, God is making me understand and realize that this is the reason for which I am called. I would like to express my gratitude to God the Loving Father, for inspiring me to meditate and discuss the importance of preaching good news to the poor, as a prophet to the modern world and the church, being a member of the Vincentian Congregation, whose charism is the ‘evangelization of the poor’.

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ecclesiastical Degree of Baccalaureate in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: Paul Puthussery V.C.

Name of the Student: **Paul Puthussery V.C.**

Date: 30.11.2004

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed: Antonio Magnante I.M.C.

Name of Supervisor: **Rev. Dr. Antonio Magnante I.M.C**

Date: 30.11.2004

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the 17th century, France witnessed to the great saint of the poor, who is said to 'have done the works of six saints in his life', just as the 20th century found itself with the preferential option for the poor in the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The seed he planted in caring for the poor centuries ago still grows in the 3rd millennium through the works of Vincentians and other Vincentian Institutions that came up in the course of the time. Vincent de Paul's vision of Christ was that he is a Missionary Christ, who empties himself of his condition as a Son of God in order to free his people from bondage, both corporeal and spiritual. This Christ draws others together, male and female, rich and poor and makes them share his mission. He saw this fullness of Christ's mission in the Lucan narrative 4:16-30, which is also entitled as the 'gospel in miniature' because it foreshadows both the ministry and the fate of Jesus through out the Gospel. Finally he took the words of Jesus as the motto of his life and of the Congregation of the mission he founded.

A host of questions may come to one's mind while reflecting on the opening words of Jesus in Galilee and its relation to the charism and mission of St. Vincent. On

the one hand, what does Jesus mean while quoting the Isaiah text? Was Jesus aware of what he read in the synagogue? How far the Scripture passage from Isaiah was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus? What was the primary mission of Jesus in proclaiming the Kingdom of God? On the other hand, why did St. Vincent choose the words of Jesus as his motto? What prompted him to do so? How far this charism is fulfilled through the lives and ministries of the Vincentians all around the world, especially the members of the Vincentian Congregation after its 100 years of existence?

After spending 11 years in the Congregation, first as an aspirant, then as a temporarily professed member, as a perpetually professed member and now as a deacon, I thought it is good and proper to know the charism in its deeper reality. Each congregation has its own charism and the prime duty of its members is to make the charism theirs, not vice versa. Therefore, I felt the urgent need of going back to the original sources and reflect on the Scripture passage that motivated St. Vincent, and to keep it updated to all the Vincentians, especially to the Vincentian Congregation. This work is my gift to the Congregation as it celebrates its Centenary this year.

Our task here is to depict the original Lucan meaning of the text and apply it to the charism of the Vincentian Congregation i.e., *evangelizare pauperibus misit me* – he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. The study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter analyzes the introductory questions with regard to the episode (4:16-30). In it, I will discuss the many aspects that brought Jesus to proclaim the statement from Isaiah, and also analyze the pertinent texts parallel to this periscope

and compares them with the Lucan passage. The first chapter ends with a brief discussion on the form and structure of this Lucan narrative.

The second chapter is dedicated to the detailed exegetical analysis of the our periscope and most significantly the Isaiah verses (4:18-19). Such an analysis gives us in depth the understanding of the Isaiah verse quoted by Jesus, and its theological implication. This helps us to understand that in the Lucan theology of preaching the Kingdom of God, Jesus was particularly interested in proclaiming it to the poor, but that is not all. The means that Jesus used to bring this good news were release from debts, release from sins and release from satanic powers. But the primary mission is the preaching of the good news to the poor.

The third chapter is the climax of our study, where all these first two chapters were heading to. It analyses the charism of the Vincentian Congregation in the light of this Lucan passage. It is a study about the great saint of the 16th century in France, St. Vincent de Paul and his works among the poor that inspired few Indian priests to begin their own work among the South Indians, motivated by the charism of St. Vincent. The core of the study lies in the findings and proposals about how can this charism, found in Luke 4:18-19, be implemented in the different ministries of the Congregation in the 21st century.

Chapter I

Introductory Questions on Luke 4:16-30

1. Introduction

With the episode at the synagogue in Nazareth (4:16-30), Luke initiates Jesus' ministry. In this chapter, I will study the introductory questions concerning 4:16-30. First, I shall discuss the passage in its immediate context. Then I will talk about how Luke prepares Jesus to begin his ministry. I shall also analyze the parallel texts which could illuminate our periscope, and finally I will present a brief structural analysis of it.

2. The Delimitation of the Text

Luke presents Jesus in chapters 3 and 4 of his gospel as arriving at a clear understanding of his mission and accepting it as a task which he must fulfill. This first scene in Jesus public ministry is indeed foundational for one's understanding of the

mission of Jesus in the gospel because it is placed just after the Spirit's descent upon Jesus, and the temptations that picture the proposed missionary methods and task that Jesus refuses to use and accomplish.¹

The periscope (4:16-30) is different from all the previous ones because it is inserted in between two editorial summaries (vv. 14-15 and vv. 31-32), which are really a mission manifesto of what he does in vv. 16-30. The passage reveals the priorities of Jesus and shows how he understands his role within His Father's plan.²

Jesus opens his public ministry in Nazareth and after this first missionary endeavor (17-29), when he became the centre of attention, Jesus leaves (4:30) Nazareth. This change of place marks the difference of our passage from the rest of the gospel. 4:16a forms an *inclusio* with 4:30 with result that our attention is centered and remains through out the passage in between.³

In the larger section (4:16-41), the preceding 4:14-15 and the following verses 4:42-44 are also inclusions. Both of them summarize Jesus' mission activity: the proclamation of the good news of Kingdom of God, the place of the synagogues, the agency of the Spirit, and his reputation among the people.

¹ J. MATTHEY, "Luke 4:16-30 – The Spirit's Mission Manifesto – Jesus' Hermeneutics and Luke's Editorial", IRM 89 (2000) 3.

² J. MATTHEY, "Luke 4:16-30 – The Spirit's Mission Manifesto – Jesus' Hermeneutics and Luke's Editorial", IRM 89 (2000) 3.

³ J.B. GREEN, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*, 208.

3. Context of the Periscope

In the first four chapters, Luke prepares the event for Jesus' public ministry (4:16-30). First, we see what gives color to the text in its preparatory context.

3.1 *Remote Context*

The remote context influences the text from far. The question here is: "What are the preparations that Luke is making by having Jesus residing in the village of Nazareth"?

3.1.1 *The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52)*

The story of the boy Jesus in the temple, for R.C. Tannehill, foreshadows both Jesus' future greatness and shows Jesus' developing awareness of his special relation to God and to the obligations that relationship entails. The scene presents him in the temple busy discussing with the leaders of Israel. He is very sharp in answering his parents who are searching for him: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house" (2:49). This also translates as 'in my Father's affairs', which anticipates his entire mission. He already senses a divine purpose and obligation for his life, which is not understandable to his parents. Luke relates this divine destiny to his recognition of God as 'my father'. He recognizes and affirms himself that as the Son of God, who has entrusted him with a mission.⁴

⁴ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 53-55.

3.1.2 Anointing by the Spirit at Baptism (Luke 3:21-22)

The Holy Spirit is always connected with Jesus' mission because He is that divine power active through out his mission. His descent on the occasion of baptism connects 4:1 with 4:14 and 4:18, where Jesus is recognized as the one on whom God's favor rests (2:40,52). This is clearly demonstrated in the words of the Spirit that he will utter in the Nazareth synagogue (4: 18-19). The coming of the Spirit is accompanied by a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3:22). God by personally addressing Jesus as his own son, God reveals a special and unique relationship with him. In this way, the empowerment for the mission as the Son of God must be fulfilled in his life.⁵

Luke also shows that the descent of Spirit and the beginning of Jesus' mission parallel the events at the conclusion of Luke's gospel and beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke makes a parallel connection between the Spirit and the beginning of the apostles' mission (Luke 24:46-49): the Pentecost scene, the first preaching and the expansion of the community. Thus, the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism is a crucial point in the narrative, and the consequences unfold as Jesus' mission develops.⁶

⁵ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 57-58.

⁶ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 57.

3.2 Immediate Context

The descent of the Spirit at his baptism inaugurates the sequence of events. It begins with the temptations where Jesus was 'full of the Spirit' (4:1) and is 'led by the Spirit to wilderness' (4:1). Then, Jesus returns to Galilee 'with power of the Spirit' (4:14), where he publicly announces his mission by proclaiming that the 'Spirit of the Lord is upon him' (4:18). Thus, the Holy Spirit is connected to each of these narrative segments between 3:22 and 4:18. Out of this we may rightly conclude that the Holy Spirit constitutes the framework of his mission⁷.

3.2.1 The Temptation

The mission that was proclaimed by Jesus in 4:18-19 is fulfilled only when the devil's challenges are silenced. The devil wants to instill in Jesus a false understanding of who the Son of God is (4:3, 9). However, a clearer understanding of his mission was achieved through his struggles with the devil because he realizes that his mission is for the poor and the enslaved. The devil, however, tempts him to use his spiritual power as Son of God to serve his own needs and becomes self-centered, but the price would be false worship. In this scene, Jesus proves his dedication to God's purpose rather than the devil's desires. Moreover, through this process of rejecting the devil's understanding of what it means to be the Son of God, Jesus clarifies that he is God's

⁷ J. SCHUBERT, "Jesus as Prophet", *BT* 35 (1997) 346-347.

Son and that he has been anointed by the Spirit for others. Now, Jesus is prepared to begin his altruistic ministry.⁸

3.2.2 *The Summary Statement in Luke 4:14-15*

Different scholars have different opinions about the source of this summary statement. For some, this is most likely inspired by Mark 1:14-15. M. Schurman, as quoted by Fitzmyer, argues, that Luke is independent from a non-Markan source.⁹ Similarly, B.H. Streetes has the opinion that the text is from Q, not from Mark, whereas J. Delobel rightly rather for a Lucan redaction.¹⁰

According to Fitzmyer, this is an editorial statement composed by Luke, like that of what Luke uses in Acts, which describes the life of the early Christians, the growth of the church, etc. Thus, this summary statement gives an overview of Jesus' Galilean ministry,¹¹ and provides the transition to Jesus' inaugural preaching whereby the time of Jesus is inaugurated.¹² Here, the primary activity of Jesus is described as teaching, which is the characteristic function of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:31; 5:3,17; 6:6; 13:10,22; 19:47; 20:1, 21; 21:37; 23:5; Acts 1:1). It interprets the ministry as a whole. The audience's response to Jesus' teaching is very favorable according to the summary and it also appears Lucan universalism. It is quite clear that the audience in the summary statement welcome Jesus' teaching. While Luke presents the acceptance of

⁸ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. I. *The Gospel According to Luke*, 59-60.

⁹ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 521.

¹⁰ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 521.

¹¹ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 522.

¹² L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 78.

Jesus' teaching is welcomed by "all" in the summary statement, he is quick in underlining the rejection on the part of Jesus' townspeople in our periscope.¹³

4. Parallel Texts

4.1 *The Text from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6*

The periscope has to be studied with utmost seriousness for its inter-textual relationship to the Isaiah material. What Luke quotes in the gospel is a conflation of 61:1a,b,d; 58:6d; 61:2a, and he purposely omits the two phrases in 61:1c and 61:2b. Luke reinterprets these Isaianic citations in his gospel in its new setting, and he does not follow a word-by-word quotation.¹⁴

In the synagogue, a sequence of readings from the prophets followed the readings from the Torah. Luke inserts in the mouth of Jesus a mixed citation from Septuagint of Isa. 61:1; 58:6; 61:2. However, he omits an important phrase – the day of vengeance of our God (Isa. 61:2b) but added from Isa. 58:6 a further descriptive phrase 'to send forth the oppressed'. Hence, the suppression of a potential theme of judgment/retribution defines the character of Jesus' ministry. This radical character of his mission is specified by its being offered to those who were the outcasts of society.¹⁵

According to Fitzmyer, in quoting Deutero-Isaiah, Jesus is presented as consciously aware of the fullness of the Spirit in him. What Isaiah had announced to his

¹³ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 61.

¹⁴ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 77.

¹⁵ L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 81.

people on those days, is now being announced to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the downtrodden of Jesus' day. His prophetic announcement is, therefore, turned to hope, and its fulfillment will be found in his person, words and deeds (4:21).¹⁶

4.2 Jesus Status as a Prophet in Comparison to Elijah (I Kgs 17:1-24) and Elisha (II Kgs 5:1-19)

Jesus' own words introduce us into the fate of a prophet when he compares himself with Elijah and Elisha. With his speech (4:16-21), we get a further elaboration of his self-identity, his claim to status as the agent of God's favor and his role as a prophetic figure. What he says about himself as a prophet is now compared to the experience of the two great prophets in Israel, and it foreshadows Jesus as another Elijah and as another Elisha.¹⁷

Tannehill is of the opinion that this comparison provides the example of prophets who do not want to please those in their own homeland. These prophets healed the gentiles, instead of the Israelites. Elijah may be an example of a prophet not acceptable in his home because of his conflict with king and queen of Israel. Both prophets witness to the inevitable conflict between on the one hand God's purpose and on the other hand human's desire to make spiritual claims on God's salvation and place limits on its scope.¹⁸

¹⁶ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke, I. (I-LX)*, AB 28, 529.

¹⁷ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke, I. (I-LX)*, AB 28, 537.

¹⁸ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 70-71.

The passage also stresses Elijah and Elisha's ministry among the Gentiles outside the boundaries of people of Israel, rather than Jews. The same gentile mission continues in Acts. Because God refuses to show partiality to certain groups, Jesus must resist the people in his own homeland who were jealous of Jesus' attention to outsiders.¹⁹ It is already anticipated in 2:32 and 3:6 that salvation brought by Jesus would extend to "all". Therefore, the equations L.T. Johnson suggests are Jesus = a Prophet, Nazareth = Israel, and Capernaum = the Gentiles.²⁰

Jesus' focus on the Isaian text, without referring to any group/ethnicity/nationality is reinforced by reference to Elijah and Elisha. Therefore, this time on God's chosen ones are the poor, the blind, the lame, the Samaritan, the gentile, the tax collector, the sinner and the outcast. This is a complete and clear understanding of altruism. This revolutionary message of Jesus is good news for outsiders, but a matter of great pain for those inside, who use to rely on their own law.²¹

5. Form and Structure of the Text

Luke's presentation of this passage (4:16-30) takes our attention to some of its literary qualities. D.L. Tiede examines the passage and in order to give each verse its importance and does a careful literary study of the passage and finally discovers a chiasmic structure.²²

¹⁹ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. I. *The Gospel According to Luke*, 71-72.

²⁰ L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 81-82.

²¹ M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 147-148.

²² M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 152-153 in D.L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts*, 35.

- A And he came to Nazareth...and he went *to the synagogue*...
- B He *stood up* to read;
- C There *was given to him* the book of the prophet Isaiah
- D He *opened the book* and found the place ...
- E The *Spirit of the Lord* is upon me, because he has anointed me
- F To *proclaim* good news to the poor
- G He has sent me to proclaim *release to the captives*
- H and recovering of sight to the blind
- G' to *set at liberty* those who are oppressed,
- F' to *proclaim*
- E' the acceptable year of *the Lord*."
- D' He *closed the book*
- C' and *gave it back* to the attendant
- B' and *sat down*
- A' and the eyes of all *in the synagogue* were fixed on him.

I accept the above structure however, there are some awkward elements. There is a striking concentricity between element A-G and G '-A' hinges around H. Hence, the phrase 'recovery of blind' occupies the central place in this section, because the focus in the Isaian passage. It is *aphesis* which means liberation/release.²³

For the sake of completeness, I also add the outline proposed by J.B. Green.

Spirit of the Lord is upon *me*
 For he has anointed *me*
 To preach good news to the poor he has sent *me*:
 To proclaim for the captives release,

²³ M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 153.

And to the blind sight;
To send forth the oppressed in release;
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.²⁴

This literal translation draws particular attention on the importance of the repeated terms “me” and “release” and, therefore, to the importance of the theme of “release” in Jesus’ message.

6. Conclusion

Jesus’ mission program is established by Luke in 4:16-30. Right from the beginning of the Gospel, Luke prepares the way for Jesus’ ministry. From childhood onwards, Jesus was drawn to his Father’s affairs, he received the Divine declaration of his Sonship. The Spirit prompted him to fight against all kinds of temptations, and at the end he proclaimed his prophetic mission manifesto by the special anointing of the Spirit. At the beginning he experiences success, but in the later stage, rejection. Of course, Jesus begins well and fully prepares to meet any kinds of difficulties. He also realizes that his mission is primarily for the poor, the marginalized, and those excluded from human fellowship. Therefore, his mission is ultimately directed “to release” through his preaching of the good news.

²⁴ J.B. GREEN, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*, 210.

Chapter 2

“Preaching Good News To The Poor” as the

Foundation Of Jesus’ Mission:

An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Luke 4:16-30

1. Introduction

Jesus’ mission, in simple terms, is to proclaim the good news especially to the poor. He realized this mission was the only job his Father had entrusted to him and for which he was anointed. Throughout his life, from the first day of his public ministry, “proclaiming the good news of God” (Mk. 1:14) was his only mission. In this second chapter, I shall make a short study on the exegesis of the periscope (Luke 4:16-30) and then do some theological reflection on the important theme under consideration, and I

finally will try to establish the primary mission of Jesus as 'preaching good news to the poor'.

2. Exegetical Analysis

The episode can be divided into five sections:

2.1 *The Form of Jesus' Ministry (Luke 4: 16-21)*

The first part begins with a quotation from Isaiah (vv. 18-19) and the teaching, in which Jesus defines the form of ministry as he begins. Only Luke's gospel pictures Jesus visiting the synagogue (v. 16) and conforming to the general Jewish customs.¹ The reading of the text, for Luke, defines the function of this Old Testament figure which is fulfilled in Jesus, who has been anointed by the Spirit for this purpose. He preaches the good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) to the poor as Deutero-Isaiah announced consolation to various groups in the post-exilic Jerusalem community.²

It is a message of healing to the broken hearted, the announcement of release to the prisoners, the recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed and announcement of the acceptable year, the 'Year of the Lord', i.e., the 'year of liberation' (Lev. 25).³ This announcement of deliverance by Isaiah to the chosen people of Israel inaugurates the opening of the glorious era of blessing of the New Israel through Jesus.

¹ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (1-LX), AB 28, 530.

² J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (1-LX), AB 28, 532.

³ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 183-184.

It also refers to the self-consciousness of the prophet that he is called to make known the goodness of God's intervention to help his people.⁴

The sentence 'eyes were fixed on him' expresses a steadfast gaze of esteem and trust which prompts the assembly's reaction of admiration or pleasant surprise.⁵ The verb ἤρξατο is a simple Semitic redundant usage that refers to the transition from preaching to teaching. The adverb 'today' (Σήμερον) is addressed to all the readers of the gospel and assures them that the era of salvation is present and the fulfillment of the message takes place as the audience 'listens' to the message.⁶

2.2 People's Response (4: 22)

V. 22 produces an awkward mixture of the people's praise of Jesus and the indignant surprise that follows and later on to the mounting hostility. Some scholars contend to hostility meaning of Luke, while others hold that it is the initial positive response followed by the knowledge that Jesus was merely Joseph's son and hence the reaction against him.⁷

2.3 The Scope of Jesus' Ministry (4: 23-27)

This section inaugurates the universalistic scope of God's salvation in Jesus. The proverb 'physician, heal yourself' essentially means that a doctor should care first for his own family and neighbors. Two accusations are made: 1) Jesus should bring the

⁴ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 183.

⁵ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 533.

⁶ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 185.

⁷ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 185-186.

same blessings to his own people as he brought to Capernaum. Luke displaces this passage from its sequence in Mark, and this does not make sense, since he does not come to Capernaum until 4:31.⁸ 2) Jesus has to provide signs to attest his verbal claims. Since his words are not met with faith, he cannot go on performing signs.⁹ The expression “truly I say to you” is a common usage for Luke to talk about prophetic self-fulfillment. ‘No prophet is accepted in his own country’ is the same proverb as in Mark 6:4 and in Matthew 13:57, though the wording differs. The audience rejects Jesus just before he predicts that it would happen. In other words, Jesus’ words seem to cause the rejection. Using this proverb, Jesus identifies himself as prophet. However, as a prophet, Jesus is not welcome in his hometown because he does not work the desired miracles there. As a result, the inclusion of the figures of Elijah and Elisha speak of the universal call to conversion to both Jews and Gentiles alike.¹⁰

2.4 Second Response: Rejection because of Jesus’ Concern for a Wider Mission (4:28-29)

The phrase ‘... filled with rage’, is caused by the fact that Jesus does not share their limited vision of God and the work of salvation. This is the reaction to Jesus’ implication that his activity would have better results elsewhere than among his own townspeople. It is the culmination of their resentment against a prophet because they were persecutors of the prophets of old. The result was that Jews forced Jesus outside

⁸ L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 80.

⁹ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 187.

¹⁰ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 536-537.

the town to the hill on which the town was built. Luke perhaps means this to symbolize the hill of Calvary because the Jews of Nazareth foreshadow the attempt upon the life of Jesus.¹¹

2.5 The Escape of Jesus (4:30)

Jesus 'passes through them' to avoid mortal danger. This may not be a miraculous passing through because the time for the opposition to succeed has not yet come.¹² The escape of Jesus foreshadows the story in Acts where the gospel triumphantly survived similar acts of hostility and rejection and also various commentators see it as an anticipation of the passion and resurrection. Jesus proceeds on his way – went away - a way that will eventually lead him to Jerusalem, the city of his passion and death.¹³

3. The Message and Theological Analysis of the Text

3.1 Jesus: Anointed by the Holy Spirit

As in most of the Lucan writings, the Spirit is present at the beginning of various stages of Jesus' journey. The Spirit occurs at least 7 times in the infancy narrative, six times in the chapters that inaugurate Jesus' public ministry (chs. 3-4), four times in chs.

¹¹ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 190.

¹² J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (1-IX), AB 28, 538-539.

¹³ I.H. MARSHALL, *Commentary on Luke*, 190.

10-12.¹⁴ Jesus' is 'drawn' by the Spirit to the desert for temptation (4:1), Jesus is 'filled' with the Spirit (4:14), and in our periscope Jesus is 'anointed' by the Spirit.¹⁵

Throughout his writings, Luke always stresses the centrality of the Spirit mentioning him 17 times, whereas Mark speaks only six times about the Spirit and Matthew 12 times.¹⁶ For Fitzmyer, the Spirit in Luke denotes God's active, creative, or prophetic presence to the world or to the people.¹⁷

Being anointed by the Spirit at his baptism and now again reiterating his anointing in 4:18, Luke describes what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. He stresses the anointing of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit as the two prophetic signs from the ancient times.¹⁸ He is the 'prophetic Messiah'. What was said by the prophet Isaiah about the servant of the Lord, Jesus declares 'to be fulfilled that day' in him (4:21). He also applies to himself the title of 'prophet' (4: 24) and identifies himself with the prophets Elijah and Elisha.¹⁹ Luke here adopts a typically Jewish idea that the Spirit is that of prophecy because his preaching is always regarded as a divine miracle.²⁰

¹⁴ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 227.

¹⁵ M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 3-4.

¹⁶ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 227..

¹⁷ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 228.

¹⁸ SANDERS, J.A., "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4", in *Luke and Scripture*, ed. C.A. Evans – J.A. Sanders, 345 as quoted in L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 81.

¹⁹ L.T. JOHNSON, *Luke*, 81.

²⁰ W.C. ROBINSON, "On Preaching the Word of God (Luke 8:4-21)", in *Studies in Luke Acts*, ed. L.E. Keck – J.L. Martyn, 407-409.

3.2 'Preaching the Good News to the Poor' is Jesus' Primary Mission

The noun form εὐαγγαλιον originally meant the reward offered to a messenger who brought the news of victory in a battle or an escape from danger. By a natural transference, it came to mean the content of the message he brought, i.e., not simply news, but good news.²¹ Luke does not use this noun, but uses εὐαγγελίσασθαι.²² It is translated in variety of ways in English. It is translated both absolutely ('gospel' 1Cor. 1:17) and with other terms such as Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43), Jesus as the Christ (Acts. 5:42), Jesus (8:35), etc. Uniformity of translation is difficult since no common verb such as 'gospelize' is available to translate *evangelize*.²³

Luke borrowed the picture of Jesus' preaching and teaching from Mark and other sources but he treats it in his own way. He does not distinguish between his preaching and teaching, and makes sure that both preaching or teaching are part of his proclamation. While Luke's editorial summary in vv. 14-15 marks the beginning of Jesus' 'teaching', in the following Nazareth scene composed by Luke himself, Jesus openly applies to himself Isa. 61:1-2 and boldly establishes that, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). Thereafter, Jesus travels around 'proclaiming and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God (8:1).²⁴

²¹ R.P. MARTIN, "Gospel", ISBE II, 529.

²² R.P. MARTIN, "Gospel", ISBE II, 531.

²³ STEIN, R.H., "Good news", ISBE II, 527.

²⁴ J.A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel According to Luke*, I. (I-IX), AB 28, 149-150.

According to J.B. Green's outline, as seen in Chapter 1²⁵, Jesus' citation of Isaiah material calls our attention to a further Lucan emphasis. The three infinitive clauses, for Green, "to proclaim..., to send forth..., to proclaim..." are the explanations of the first, "to preach good news to the poor he has sent me". In other words, 'preaching good news to the poor' is Jesus' own statement of his primary mission while the other clauses help to flesh out how this primary mission takes shape.²⁶

3.2.1 Old Testament Image of the Poor

In the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch, there were strict laws against the exploitation of widows and orphans (Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 27:19), helpless aliens (Lev. 19:33) and the poor in general (Ex. 23:6; Lev. 25:6; Deut. 15:17). Also the condemnation of the exploitation of the poor is the leading theme in the book of prophet Amos (2:7; 5:7-11; 8:4-6).²⁷

3.2.2 Lucan Image of the Poor

This is a distinctively Lucan theme. In Luke's perspective, a new age is dawning. Jesus announces good news of the Kingdom to all, but especially to the poor, weak, the lowly, the outcasts of the world. Luke clearly establishes his concern for the beggarly poor, because he uses the word πτωχός 10 times, while Matthew and Mark uses this noun only 5 times each. And unique to Luke is 4:18, which stands as a programmatic

²⁵ See the First Chapter of this Long Essay, 13-14.

²⁶ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 79.

²⁷ M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 175-176.

introduction to Jesus' ministry. Because of this emphasis, Luke's gospel is sometimes called the "gospel of the poor".²⁸

While the priestly and Qumranic texts list the kinds of people who are 'excluded' from the society, such as the disabled, the defected, Luke presents such lists in order to indicate the very people to be 'included'. According to the study made by Green,²⁹ seven of the ten occurrences of the word 'poor' (πτωχός) in Luke appears together with the lists of this nature:

- Poor, captive, blind, oppressed (4:18)
- Poor, hungry, mournful, persecuted (6:20)
- Poor, blind, lame, lepers, deaf (7:22)
- Poor, crippled, lame, blind (14:13)
- Poor, crippled, blind, lame (14:21)
- Poor, wounded by sores, hungry (16:20, 22).

These synonyms to the word 'poor' draw our special attention first to the nature of those who are the 'unexpected recipients' of good news (4:16-30; 7:18-23) and their blessedness (6:20-26), and the status of those excluded, who are now to be welcomed (14:12-14.15-24; 16:19-31).³⁰

The Lucan Jesus seems to be more concerned with the poor and the rich, but his concern is not prominent in the Acts of the Apostles. The reason probably is that though we do not see the word πτωχός, the alienation of wealth in favor of others is

²⁸ T.D. HANKS, "Poor, Poverty", *ABD* V, 417.

²⁹ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 80-81.

³⁰ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 82.

the important feature of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 6:1) and was exemplified by Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 4, 31).³¹

Where was the interest of Luke in the poor/rich? Schmidt, as quoted by Prior, argues that Luke was not really interested in the poor as such, but only in communicating his judgment that the dispossession of wealth was a Christian way of expressing trust in God.³² J. Karris also is of the opinion that Luke is primarily taken up with the rich members and their concerns, and the problems which they pose for the community.³³ P.F. Eske argues that on the social front Luke intensified the preference for the poor which was in the traditions available to him, and went back to Jesus himself.³⁴ Luke also warned the rich that their way to salvation depended on their generosity to the poor.

In this way, Luke characterizes the shape of mission for which Jesus was anointed, the sort of people to whom he was sent, and the nature of the divine purpose he would serve. Luke also identifies the present as the arena in which those who follow Jesus must follow him in his mission on behalf of the poor, disadvantaged, the sick, and the lost, i.e. on behalf of the redemptive aim of God.

³¹ R.C. TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. I. *The Gospel According to Luke*, 65.

³² M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 178.

³³ R.J. KARRIS, "Poor and Rich": *The Lukan Sitz im Leben*, in Talbert, 124 quoted by M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 179.

³⁴ P.F. ESLER, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts (SNTSMS, 57)* 223. quoted by M. PRIOR, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, 181.

3.3 The Mission of 'Release'

The prime emphasis on 'release' (ἀφῆσιν) together with the final appeal to the 'Year of Lord's favor' applies to Jesus' ministry in three different ways:

3.3.1 'Release' from Debts

The New Testament reveals that the hope of the poor is realized in Jesus' inauguration of the eschatological Year of Jubilee. The phrases 'sent me to proclaim release to the captives' and 'to proclaim the year of Lord's favor' are rooted in the Jubilee language of Lev. 25:10,41. According to Lev. 25, the year of jubilee is the 'year of release'.³⁵ Jubilee was a reminder that God is the Sovereign over the land and that the reign of God resulted in the freedom from bondage. Accordingly, every debt was erased since it was the 50th year following the seven times seven sabbatical years (Deut 15: 1-6) and the property would be returned to the original owners, and also those Jews who had managed their debts by selling themselves into slavery would be released.³⁶ Therefore, Jubilee year is for "reversal of rich and poor, redistribution of resources and a flattening of pyramids".³⁷ For Kraybil, Jubilee is "institutionalized grace" that implements "special provisions to defend and protect the helpless".³⁸

³⁵ P. HERTIG, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversal of Fortunes", *Miss* 26 (1998), 171.

³⁶ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 78.

³⁷ P. HERTIG, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversal of Fortunes", *Miss* 26 (1998), 171.

³⁸ D.B. KRAYBILL, *The Upside-down of the Kingdom*, 1990, 98. quoted in HERTIG, P., "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversal of Fortunes", *Miss* 26 (1998), 171.

Green suggests that this Is. 58:6 and 61:1-2 attest an eschatological reinterpretation of Lev. 25, likening the era of salvation to the eschatological Jubilee. Therefore, Luke represents Jesus' opening address at Nazareth as an announcement of the final Jubilee, the new era of salvation, the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.³⁹ Jesus inaugurates this reversal motif in his announcement of a new jubilee age. The Jubilee proclamations call for an immediate application in anticipation of a full reversal of the future of God's Kingdom: "blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (6:27-28).⁴⁰

The good news proclaimed to the poor is the gospel of the Kingdom of God (4:43), the announcement of that realm in which a great reversal of all injustice and oppression would come to a reality. Luke's emphasis is entirely on the release from actual social, economic and political oppression.⁴¹ This reversal motif is also seen in Mary's *magnificat*. She begins it at the inner 'spiritual' level, declaring God's mercy upon those who fear him and scattering of those who are proud in their hearts. She then moves to a 'political' reversal in which rulers are brought down and the humble exalted. Finally, she speaks of a 'socio-economic' reversal in which the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty.⁴² It is because of the negligence of Jubilee in Old Testament

³⁹ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 78.

⁴⁰ P. HERTIG, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversal of Fortunes", *Miss* 26 (1998), 171.

⁴¹ D.E. HOLWERDA, "Poor", *ISBE* III, 907.

⁴² P. HERTIG, "The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: Reversal of Fortunes", *Miss* 26 (1998), 174.

that Jesus began his mission on earth by announcing a new era of Jubilee mission practice. And he literally fulfilled the Jubilee he proclaimed.

3.3.2 'Release' from Sin

Jesus' proclamation of 'release' also entails forgiveness (literally, release from sins). The Old Testament Year of Jubilee was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement; therefore, its release was predicated upon God's release (forgiveness) of Israel from its sins. Similarly, Isaiah's promise and Luke's announcement of the Eschatological Jubilee is predicated on the forgiveness of sins (24:47). God's words of forgiveness create the basis for the reversal of injustice and the deliverance of the poor.⁴³

The word *aphesis*, in all the other parts of Luke-Acts, appears only in the phrase ἄφεσιν (τον) ἁμαρτιῶν (release of sins, forgiveness of sins). This particular phrase in the passage is of theological importance, like in the mission charge at the end of Luke (24:47) and in the speeches of Acts (2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). This ministry of forgiveness is very important in the ministry of Jesus just as in the ministry of John Baptist (Luke 1:77; 3:3).⁴⁴ Luke presents Jesus as a friend of sinners and wants to highlight them in the society. Therefore, he proclaims the release of sins (5:7), when the scribes and Pharisees' questions on the power of Jesus to forgive sins (5:17-26), he calls Levi and has a meal with him. This raises the question of his power and his

⁴³ D.E. HOLWERDA, "Poor", *ISBE* III, 907.

⁴⁴ R.C TANNERHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*. I. *The Gospel According to Luke*, 65-66.

attitude towards sinners (5:27-32), and his being the friend of tax collectors and sinners (7:34) etc.⁴⁵

Jesus proclaims that he has been sent and authorized by God to proclaim release (4:18) and in 5:24, he proclaims his authority to release sins. These verses are supported by the interpretation of Jesus' mission in 5:32 and 19:10, where he indicates that he has come to call and seek the sinners or the lost. In order to establish his position and power, the narrator presents an impressive portrayal of Jesus' work of releasing sin by linking scenes related to this theme of forgiveness of sins. In most of these scenes, Jesus is responding to criticism. These negative reactions are caused not only because Jesus claims the authority to forgive but also because he accepted the outcasts. Thus Jesus gave a new meaning to forgiveness that it has social implications. Those whom God forgives are to be accepted into the religious community. Through forgiveness, he redefines the religious community and challenges the social existence/classes.⁴⁶

Luke portrays both forgiveness and healing to match their more evident spiritual and physical overtones. Forgiveness is removing the barrier (sin) that had previously excluded one from his community, healing is also removal of the barrier (sickness, uncleanness) that had kept one from his own community.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ R.C TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 104-107.

⁴⁶ R.C TANNEHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 108-109.

⁴⁷ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 79.

3.3.3 'Release' from Satanic Powers

'Release' also means, for Luke, release from the binding power of Satan (Acts 8:22-23; 10:38). Almost every account of healing in Luke's gospel is portrayed as an encounter with demons.⁴⁸ Luke 4:18-19 anticipate the healing role of Jesus, a role that will be realized within the narrative almost immediately at Capernaum in the Synagogue and at home (4:31-39). For Luke almost all diseases are expressions of evil. It is not then surprising that healing is regarded as a vital sign of the new era. Jesus rebukes the fever of Simon's mother in law (4:28-29), just as he rebukes demons (4:41). In another passage of Jesus' ministry, Peter reiterates how Jesus "healed all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38), and Jesus too describes a crippled woman as one 'whom Satan bound' (Lk. 13:16).⁴⁹

In the end we see that, the image of bondage and release is central to the healing story in Lk. 13:10-17. Since the woman was held in Satan's bondage, the relevant analogy is the loosing of a tied animal, not raising one that has fallen into a well. It is probably a considerable emphasis on Jesus' triumph over demons especially when he goes to Capernaum. It is evident, then, that his healings and exorcisms are important aspects of his mission of bringing 'release'.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ J.B. GREEN, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 78-79.

⁴⁹ D.E. HOLWERDA, "Poor", *ISBE* III, 905.

⁵⁰ R.C TANNERHILL, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. I. The Gospel According to Luke*, 65.

4. Conclusion

Jesus had only one thing to give, i.e., the good news of the Kingdom of God; he always had a particular group of people under consideration, whom he encouraged and sustained with his good news, i.e., the poor. The ministry of his preaching and teaching takes priority over all the other ministries because the healings, working miracles, forgiving sins were all expanding his primary mission. Therefore, this episode in Jesus' life marks the beginning and explains the goal of his being on earth. His entire ministry gives evidence to this truth. His mission of 'release' in its different perspectives explains this reality and all of them support his primary mission of 'preaching the good news to the poor'.

Chapter 3

Revisiting The Charism Of The Vincentian Congregation

From The Point Of View Of Luke 4:16-30

1. Introduction

Our analysis of the Lucan narrative 4:16-30 reaches its culmination in this chapter. This chapter analyses the charism *evangelizare pauperibus misit me*, the prime motto and purpose of the Vincentian Congregation inspired by the *Common Rules* of St. Vincent de Paul. It deals with revisiting the charism of the Vincentian Congregation in the light of Luke 4:16-30. First of all, I introduce St. Vincent de Paul, his spirituality and his preference for the poor. Then, I shall discuss the origin of the Congregation and the various apostolate that flow from it. Finally, I shall also offer some proposals for the fruitful realization of this charism and how all the members of the Vincentian Congregation might live this charism, especially in the East African mission.

2. St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent de Paul, popularly known as the apostle of charity and patron saint of all fraternal and charitable service, was born in Pouy in South France in 1581 of peasant parents. Living in the land of poverty and working hard for lively hood, Vincent knew the poor and loved them since his childhood. He was compassionate at the sad plight of others. His father encouraged him and helped him towards priesthood, but he had in mind how Vincent could help to improve the lot of his family as a priest. Ambitions motivated Vincent's early years of priesthood, and his aspiration was to get an office in the Church from which he could get enough money and to help his family.¹

Although his quest was for a Church benefice, Divine Providence was guiding Fr. Vincent. He was led to a wise and holy spiritual director in the person of Cardinal Pierre de Berulle in Paris. Gradually, Vincent learned the deepest meaning of doing the will of God and came to be in love with God. He also met Francis de Sales, who captured his heart with his gentleness and love. This arrival in Paris and meeting such great men was a turning point in his life. His ambitions receded and attention to God and his priestly vocation began to mature.²

Cardinal Berulle assigned him to a poor parish in Clichy where he was moved by the life of the poor people and experienced his priesthood in a way he had not known. However, he was called back to Paris to be a chaplain to the de Gondi³ family

¹ H. O'DONNELL, *Praying in St. Vincent's Spirit*, 326. Though there are biographies written by his contemporaries in the 17th century like P.Coste and Abelly, I use here a short biography of St. Vincent de Paul, which is a succinct history of Vincent de Paul.

² H. O'DONNELL, *Praying in St. Vincent's Spirit*, 327.

³ From 1570 until 1679, the de Gondis were prominent in the Episcopacy of France, and most of them were Cardinals.

and tutor to their children. While ministering to the de Gondis, he preached to the parishioners of Folleville, where once again he experienced the unexpected and dramatic consequences of his preaching. Realizing that his vocation is to be with the poor, he left the de Gondis and went to a parish in Chatillon-les-Dombes, East of France. The plight of the poor became more evident to him, and his pastoral spirit grew day after day. It was at this parish that Vincent established a group of generous women called the Confraternity of Charity.⁴

Once again, he was called back to the de Gondis, but this time he was allowed to preach the missions in towns and villages. He was also made responsible for the spiritual welfare of the galley slaves⁵. Madam de Gondi encouraged Vincent and his colleagues to form a community to preach missions to the poor. Realizing this as the will of God, he accepted the call and founded the Congregation of the Mission⁶ in April, 1625. In the mean time, Louise de Marillac, a widow, came to him for spiritual direction. In time, they both realized that their mission was also to serve the poor. Therefore in 1629, Vincent invited her to visit and assist the work of the Confraternities of Charity. In 1633, some country girls also joined her and began to live a common life. This was the beginning of the company of the Daughters of Charity.⁷

⁴ It was founded in Paris at Hotel Diew, worked among the poor, sick, the Galley slaves, prisoners and foundlings. But later these women were not totally available to care for the poor, and therefore they employed servants to take care of the poor. The result was that the sick began to be treated roughly.

⁵ The ordinary criminals were employed for rowing in the galleys. They were to work in the galleys day and night without any remuneration. And Vincent was appointed as the chaplain of the Galley Slaves, where Philip Emmanuel Gondi was their captain general.

⁶ Hereafter abbreviated as C.M.

⁷ H. O'DONNELL, *Praying in St. Vincent's Spirit*, 331.

The intimate relationship that grew between Vincent and Louise bore fruit in an incredible outreach to all kinds of human needs. They launched a way of the Christian life grounded in loving and recognizing the poor as the image of Christ. While Jesus addressed the poor as 'blessed' (Luke 6:20), Vincent called them 'our masters and teachers'. Louise died on March 15, 1660 and Vincent followed her on September 27 of the same year. After his death he was honored as the father of the country and the father of poor and the light of clergy.⁸

2.1 His Spirituality and Charism

Fr. Robert Maloney offers a brief schema of this Vincentian Spirit based on articles 4-7 of the Constitution of the Congregation of the Mission:

The Vincentian Spirit is the spirit of Christ as sent to preach the good news to the poor (#5) as evidenced in the Gospel sayings explained in the Common Rules (#4) concretized particularly through love and reverence towards the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, docility to the Divine Providence (#6), simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, zeal for the souls (#7), Jesus Christ is the rule of the mission and centre of its life and activity (#5).⁹

St. Vincent writes in one of his conferences: "It is not enough to do what God wants, but I must do it for the love of God. We must do the will of God according to the will of God, i.e., to do it in the way our Lord did the will of His Father, when he was on earth". In the same way, "If St. Vincent de Paul was able to do so much for the poor

⁸ H. O'DONNELL, *Praying in St. Vincent's Spirit*, 332.

⁹ R.P. MALONEY, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, 13-14.

of his day, it was also because with his mind and heart he had come to know something of the length and breadth, the height and depth of the love of God that reposed in the heart of Christ Jesus. If we are not convinced that God loves us as we are, even with our frailties, it will be very difficult for us to show the love of God to the poor”.¹⁰

2.2 The Evangelizer of the Poor

In the 17th century Paris, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac had responded innovatively to the charitable and religious needs of the poor with the foundation of the widespread parish based Confraternities of Charity, Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of charity and the C.M. What Vincent had at the back of his mind was “to do the will of God that enabled him to lift the poor out of their wretched conditions and he himself lived with a profound consciousness of the importance of doing it at every moment, what he thought God wanted him to do”.¹¹

The purpose of founding the C.M., Vincent wrote in his *Common Rules*, was threefold: 1) to have a genuine commitment to grow in holiness, patterning ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues of which the great master graciously taught us in what he said and did; 2) to preach the good news of salvation to the poor people, especially in rural areas; 3) to help priests and seminarians to grow in the knowledge and virtue so that they can be effective in their ministry.¹² He returns to this aim of evangelizing the

¹⁰ R. Mc CULLEN, “The Vincentian Family: Responding to the Cry of the Poor”, *VH* 8 (1987), 82.

¹¹ R. mc CULLEN, “The Vincentian Family: Responding to the Cry of the Poor”, *VH* 8 (1987), 80.

¹² *Constitution and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, 1. Cf. *Common Rules*, I:1.

poor, again and again. In his most famous conference on 'The End of the Congregation' he states: "Our motive should be to make God known to the poor, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand and that is for the poor. O how great this is ... so great, so sublime is it to preach the gospel to the poor, for it is above all the office of the Son of God".¹³

St. Vincent here makes a clear and explicit choice. The vision he offers is not the one of Christ as a teacher, not as a healer, nor as a perfect adorer of the Father (Berulle), not even as 'a perfect image of the divinity' (Francis de Sales), but as the "Evangelizer of the poor". Vincent's disciples are called to enter into following Christ in the very terms which in Luke's Gospel, Jesus opens his public ministry (4:18-19). His spirituality flows from his contemplation of "this" Christ. The driving force that generates both the incredible activity and the gentle contemplation of this great saint is his vision of the evangelizing the poor.¹⁴ He encourages his followers to contemplate this Christ again and again: "Oh how happy will they be who can repeat at the hour of their death those beautiful words of our Lord: 'He sent me to preach good news to the poor'".¹⁵

John Paul II, while addressing the 40th assembly of the C.M. held in Rome in July, 2004, reminded all the Vincentians that "St. Vincent de Paul placed the

¹³ P. COSTE, *Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul*, Conference on Dec. 5, 1658, 602.

¹⁴ R.P. MALONEY, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, 23.

¹⁵ P. COSTE, *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Entretiens, Documents*, XI. 135 quoted in MALONEY, R.P., *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, 23-24.

evangelization of the poor and formation of the clergy at the centre of his vision for your congregation.... Your founder was deeply convinced of the fruitfulness of divine charity (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 75) and encouraged all his spiritual children to see, love and serve Christ in the poor.... Your congregation is called to explore new ways of conveying this liberating message of the gospel to our suffering brothers and sisters”.¹⁶

3. Brief Sketch of the Origin of the Vincentian Congregation and its Charism

The Congregation of the Mission expanded through out the world decade after decade and began to spread the fragrance of being a missionary even outside France. Many people were attracted to this spirit of evangelizing the poor and wanted to follow this spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. One of them was Mar Louis Pazheparambil, the Vicar Apostolic of Emakulam¹⁷ (1896-1919). He wished to start a Congregation of diocesan priests on the model of the Congregation of the Mission, an inspiration that he received during his foreign tour to France by witnessing to the work of C.M.¹⁸ He took initial steps to implement this desire. He sought the help of Nithirickal Mani Kathanar, who in turn told Fr. Joseph Kariyapurayidathil and Fr. Mani Paramkulangara about this desire. Meanwhile Fr. Joseph also encouraged Fr. Varkey Kattarath, the then Vicar of St. Joseph’s Church, Vaikom¹⁹, who supported the idea very much.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Assembly of Congregation of the Mission*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 28, 2004.

¹⁷ Diocese that belongs to the Syro-Malabar Church, in Kerala, South of India.

¹⁸ J. KALLARACKAL, *Vincentian Congregatione Charithram*, 1-2. Though this is the ideal and original reference to the history of the Vincentian Congregation, I have also used the ‘introduction’ of the *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation* to get a brief sketch of the origin and development of the Congregation.

¹⁹ A Parish situated in the boundaries of the diocese of Ernakulam.

When all these initiatives and hands were joined together under the strong guidance of Mar Louis Pazheparambil, the first house of the Vincentian Congregation was blessed on the 20th of November, 1904 in Thottakam²⁰. Although it was the interest of Mar Lois Pazheparambil to begin a religious community, Fr. Varkey was the chief implementer and executor of this idea of founding a congregation under the model of C.M. From then onwards, he started the community life, together with Fr. Joseph, Fr. Kattazhath Kusumos, Fr. Paramkulangara and Mani Kathanar. Fr. Varkey felt that he was called by God to start this new religious family and he defined the ends, the life style and spirit of the congregation accepting the rules of the C.M.²¹

After few years of community life, Fr. Varkey and other fathers were forced to leave Thottakam one by one due to various adverse circumstances. However in 1927, Frs. George Mannara, Antony Pauvathil and George Vattamkandathil expressed their desire to lead a religious life to Mar Augustine Kandathil, the then Archbishop of Eranakulam, who directed them to revive the religious community once founded at Thottakam. Therefore, they revived it and began the community life at Thottakam once again on 19th July, 1927. The initial hand of Fr. Varkey also joined them later even in his old age and he died there after four years of staying with them on 24th October, 1931. The general synaxis held in 1997 declared that Fr. Varkey Kattarath is the founder of the Vincentian Congregation which was founded on 20th November 1904. Since the Congregation draws its spirit and distinctive character from the life and works

²⁰ A village situated under the Jurisdiction of Vaikom parish in the diocese of Eranakulam.

²¹ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, 2.

and the 'common rules' of St. Vincent, it is called the Vincentian Congregation and St. Vincent de Paul is chosen as the Father and Patron of the Congregation.²²

The Vincentian Congregation is at present "a clerical society of the Syro-Malabar Church²³, which comes under that category of the Societies of Common Life according to the manner of religious (*ad instar religiosorum* – CCEO²⁴ 554). It is of pontifical Right (*status juris pontificii*)".²⁵ It is an active/apostolic community with a special character, i.e., leading a contemplative life at home. The members engage themselves fully in evangelical, pastoral and social works outside. Hence, the three aims of the Vincentian Congregation, imbibed from the *Common Rules* of St. Vincent and for the realization of which the members devote themselves are: "1) to strive for evangelical perfection by making every effort to practice those virtues which our Lord has deigned to teach us by word and example; 2) to preach the Gospel to the poor, especially the more abandoned and help them in their integral development; 3) to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue so that they can be effective in their ministry".²⁶

From this threefold purpose of the Congregation, there arises the Charism of the Vincentian Congregation i.e., "a whole-hearted commitment to the evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian advancement is the identifying mark of our

²² *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, 1-3.

²³ One of the Oriental Churches, believed to be founded by St. Thomas, Apostle in Kerala, South of India.

²⁴ *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*.

²⁵ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 7a.

²⁶ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 2.

Congregation. That is our Charism”.²⁷ The Spirit of the Vincentian Congregation, therefore, is the imitation of Christ or “participation in the Spirit of Christ. It is a life of intimate, personal love of the Father, docility to the Divine providence, and an ardent, and compassionate love of the poor”.²⁸ Accordingly, “the members must give expression to the Spirit of Christ resplendent in the five virtues: simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for the souls”²⁹ which St. Vincent termed as the “faculties of the soul of the congregation”.³⁰ This intimate love and union with Christ leads one to the profound esteem of human dignity and to the dedication of one’s life for the total development of man, especially the poor.

4. The Present State of Vincentian Congregation Based on its Charism

The Vincentian Congregation is celebrating its 100 years of its existence in 2004. What a vast growth has happened through out these decades. It has lived out this whole hearted commitment to the evangelization of the poor and their human and Christian advancement in and through our popular mission³¹ centers, retreat centers, schools, colleges, homes for the sick and aged, social welfare societies, missionary works, etc. But these commitments to the poor are to be rooted in the prime purpose of the Congregation, i.e., “a genuine commitment to grow in holiness, patterning ourselves on the virtues which our great master himself graciously taught us in what he said and

²⁷ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 5.

²⁸ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 10.

²⁹ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 12a.

³⁰ *Constitution and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission*, 2: 14.

³¹ A specific retreat program for the parishioners.

did”.³² Accordingly “the members of the Congregation vow chastity, poverty and obedience, to make themselves available for their total dedication to the service of the poor, freeing them from the obstacles that might draw them away from their mission”.³³ But this practice of the evangelical counsels lead us to “an intimate, personal and experiential friendship with our Lord necessary for a fruitful apostolate”³⁴ that means “our apostolic activities spring from an intimate union with Christ”.³⁵

Vincent believed that our contemplative life gives shape to and enriches the apostolic activities, and therefore, strongly recommends the importance of the union of action and contemplation that he sees in Christ. Even in the midst of his missionary activity, Jesus is united with the Father. Therefore, Vincent recommends to his missionaries: “Although we cannot perfectly imitate Christ our Lord who spent whole nights in prayer to God in addition to his daily meditations nevertheless we will do so far as we are able”.³⁶ In the episode (4:16ff), Luke shows a parallel between the descent of the Spirit and the beginning of his ministry. Before all the important occasions we see Jesus filled with the Spirit or drawn by the Spirit or the Spirit is upon him or with power and authority, all of which describe him that he is a man of God united with his Father, a prophet specially assigned for the ministry.

³² *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 2a. Cf. St. Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules*, n. 1.

³³ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 38.

³⁴ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 40.

³⁵ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 73.

³⁶ ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, *Common Rules*, X:7.

As a result, he begins his ministry with the Spirit of the Lord upon him. The members of the Vincentian Congregation are not only “carthusians at home, but also Apostles abroad”. The Constitution, therefore, visualizes three aspects of this apostolate:

4.1 Evangelization through Popular Missions, Retreat to Religious

Popular Mission is a distinctive apostolate of the Vincentian Congregation, by which the members work for the spiritual upliftment of the people in particular parishes. The preachers instruct the people in the sacramental, familial and personal aspects of their Christian life in the light of the teachings of the Gospel. Therefore, popular mission aims at helping the people to effect in their lives a total conversion and to lead an authentic Christian life. The members of the Congregation also assist the parish priests in the pastoral works of the diocese.³⁷

4.2 Social Apostolate

The Vincentians are dedicated to the integral development of the poor by conducting orphanages, Care Centers technical schools, Vocational Training Centers, educational institutions, social works, etc., but which the members “fulfill the duty of forming worthy children for the church and responsible citizens of the state”.³⁸ In educating the children, healing the sick, protecting orphans and in working for the

³⁷ M. KACHAPPILLY, “Life Style of the members of the Vincentian Congregation”, 162.

³⁸ *Statutes and Practical Norms of the Vincentian Congregation*, n. 93.

amelioration of the poor, they encounter Christ, the same Christ who is engaged himself in the vital growth of the people.

4.3 Missionary Work

The sharing of Christ experience is not limited to Catholics alone. The life of union urges all the Vincentians to go to the non-Christians who form vast majority of the Indian population. The instruction of the Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Ad Gentes* led the Vincentians to their specific mission in the field of evangelization. It is among the Hindus who form 97% of the population that the Vincentians first undertook their missionary endeavor.³⁹ As Jesus Christ shows his universal outlook in his mission, especially in our periscope where Jesus' focus on the Isaiah text without mentioning to any group/ethnicity/nationality, "even to the ends of the earth" (Luke 24: 47; Acts 1:8) is the driving force of St. Vincent and also Vincentian Congregation.⁴⁰

5. Suggestions for the Full Realization of the Charism

Accepting the fact of being a 'minor' in the Congregation, but also from the experiences I encountered in my past 11 years of life in the Congregation in the light of the Vincentian charism explicit in Luke 4:16-30, I would like to offer these remarks about the present state of the Vincentian Congregation.

1. Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit resulted in his various ministries, especially in preaching good news to the poor. There is a growing tendency of neglecting

³⁹ M. KACHAPPILLY, "The Realization of the Spirit of Vincent de Paul in the Modern Vincentian Congregation", 243-245.

⁴⁰ R.P. MALONEY, *The Way of Vincent de Paul: A Contemporary Spirituality in the Service of the Poor*, 27.

the unity of prayer and action, or 'to be with him and to be sent out (Mk. 3:14). Many are just following the charism for its own sake and just as a mouth exercise. We may fail to understand that this preaching or teaching is really a fruit of one's own intimate relation with God.

2. Jesus did not only preach, but he ministered by helping the needy, especially through his threefold mission of 'release'. A concrete example of our charism can be seen in the compound of Divine Retreat Centre⁴¹, Muringoor. The Vincentians are well-known for their preaching popular mission and other retreats. However, it should not remain at the level of oratory, but it should be implemented and put into practice and the time has come for the Vincentians to be known for their charitable activities, just as St. Vincent was known as the heavenly patron of all charitable works. Ministry of preaching may lead us to the ministry of active involvement for the integral development of the poor.
3. Vincentian Congregation interacts both with the rich and the poor, but what is the good news that they are preaching? The contemporary definition for good news is that, food for the hungry is good news. However, not only food, but healing for the sick is his good news; not only healing, but jobs for the unemployed and knowledge for the ignorant are good news. How far have we succeeded in giving good news according to the signs of time?

⁴¹ A world famous retreat center which offers retreat for six full days through out the year in 5 Indian languages and in English. The average attendance for the retreat is 5000 to 7000 people per week. It can accommodate up to 30000 people at the same time. This retreat centre does not just offer the ministry of preaching, but also it has a Bible College, Home for the Mentally retarded people, home for the HIV/AIDS patients, Home for orphan children and widows, De-addiction centre, an Old age home, a Dispensary, a Tailoring Centre and a Marriage Bureau.

4. Each member has to imbibe the charism of the Congregation, and make it his own and live it just as Jesus was anointed by the Spirit from above and lived it. From his community life and being a true Vincentian, one has to witness to the fact that he is true in his preaching and life.
5. The practice of the evangelical counsels and the five virtues of St. Vincent de Paul should enable the members to follow Christ more closely rather than finding reasons to step away from their respective duties.

6. The Realization of the Charism in East African Mission

Vincentians are 25 years old in East Africa. Growth has occurred through out these years. Vincentian Congregation in East Africa is like a seed planted years ago, but received water late in those years and started growing slowly. However, we do not find significant missionary endeavors being promoted (when one compares the years of our working here) in East Africa according to the charism of the Congregation. It may be due to the inconsistency of its members working here, or the lack of efficient and strong leadership. At present, we are working in four parishes and two prayer centers. The present strength of the members working here are 16 perpetually professed members, and 5 Seminarians. As I have stayed in the African mission for four years, I have the following contributions to make after analyzing the charism (Luke 4:16-30) in its Biblical perspective.

1. Jesus, right from the beginning of his ministry, knew that where he was heading to. However, the East African Mission has no clear direction or aim. Until now, it had no particular goal to be fulfilled. Somehow, it had lost clarity of its

vision and mission. It is the duty of the present generation in East Africa to bring it back to the direction and aim fulfilling the charism of Vincentian Congregation.

2. Jesus did not only preach or stay in his house waiting for people to come to him, but he went around healing the sick, raising the dead, working miracles, etc. The mission in East Africa should not remain in the closed houses, working only for those coming 'to' them, but they have to 'go out', looking for the people in need.
3. As St. Vincent particularly mentions in his *Common Rules* that our preaching has to be done in rural areas, Vincentians have to concentrate more in dealing with the poor, in rural and undeveloped areas, so that our charism is more fulfilled through our work.
4. To be a true Vincentian missionary in the midst of difficulties, one has to sacrifice one's own self and adhere to the will of God, i.e., revealed through the superiors/elders. Individualism must not be encouraged in the mission, and any new endeavor should be the result of the community, rather than that of an individual.
5. The Vincentians in East Africa are working mostly in parishes, but we can do much more than an ordinary diocesan priest can do to prove the identity of the Vincentians. He can organize charitable activities, small scale projects that are oriented directly to the charism and spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and for the integral development of the poor.

6. Each member should not limit himself only to what he is qualified and most interested in. However, he should explore new possibilities and areas that reflect our charism.

7. Conclusion

Jesus establishes his program of ministry in Luke 4:16-30. So also inspired by Luke, St. Vincent too makes his program of mission. This is the mission that all the Vincentians are to work for, this is what the charism of the Vincentian Congregation is asking us to fulfill in our lives. We described how St. Vincent was burning with the zeal for the poor and their integral growth. We also saw the primary intention of founding the Vincentian Congregation and its charism. The Congregation has spread its branches all around the globe, but that is not enough. The members have to live the charism of the Congregation; they have to make the charism a reality in their daily life. After analyzing the charism from the point of view of Luke 4:16-30, I also tried my part, to offer some ways and means for fully realizing this charism of 'evangelizing the poor'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Jesus' ministry is based on the altruistic nature of his life. Life, for him, was not something to do with his own self, rather for the other. Though he had all the powers of God, he never acted for his own behalf, but for the needy. He did not make food out of the stones for himself (Luke 4:4), but he does it for the hungry (....); he did not want to be in glory and authority for his own self-realization (Luke 4:7-8), but contrary to that, he becomes a servant of others (John 13:13-14). This altruistic nature of Jesus is found mostly in his ministries on the earth and the climax on the cross. This is the nature of his Kingdom. This is the reversal of fortunes that Luke is most interested in, that in God's Kingdom, "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor people are evangelized" (Luke 7:22).

In Luke 4:16-30, the evangelist explores the fact that Jesus' life was not oriented to himself, but it was for the other for the growth of the Kingdom of God in various ways: by preaching good news to the poor, by healing and exorcism, by freeing the oppressed and by proclaiming the arrival of the Year of the Lord's favor. In this way, Jesus expanded the perceived horizons of God's care by moving beyond the ethnic and religious categories. The same Spirit, that strengthened Jesus to begin his ministry, also

empowered the Church to witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The liberation was for all, in their spiritual, physical and material realms of life. But the fundamental message is the Good News that brings peace and joy.

Jesus found that his authentic duty to proclaim cannot just remain as an idea and therefore, it cannot be divorced from the social, material, spiritual and physical realities of life. He acted according to his ideals, he made his manifesto to be based on the deeper realities of life. This strategy of transforming the world into a New Reality is acquired through a number of responsibilities that we are supposed to fulfill. In Jesus' New Society, God's favor is poured out on the underclass of society.

St. Vincent de Paul finds himself in the same track of Jesus as inspired by this mission manifesto in Luke 4:16-30, and being a profound witness to the needs of the people, their sorrows and pains, adopted the motto of 'evangelizing the poor'. He was touched by the deep realities of the marginalized and found out a way of extending the Christian message of liberation to the oppressed. This prompted him to begin the Congregation of the Mission. But that spirit grew and spread out its branches throughout the world, and one them is the Vincentian Congregation began in India, having the same Spirit and charism of St. Vincent de Paul. Bu the original intention of St. Vincent was the integral development of the poor, by preaching and other developmental activities.

I have tried to analyze this issue by reflecting on the passage and found that the Vincentian Congregation has grown a lot both spiritually and personally, but there is a greater scope and ministry in front of them. The resources are to be used for the

implementation of the charism in a deeper level and not just to remain at the surface. To achieve this, the members are to be given adequate and proper education about the charism; they have to come down from the ideal level to the realities and practicalities of daily life; they have to lead a more deeper spiritual life, being in love with God and sharing the same with others; they have to focus on the whole person, both his spiritual and physical welfare.

Let the healing power of Jesus continue to be extended to the sick through us, let the evangelization of the Good News be a means of bringing them closer to God and let the needy realize that there is somebody to care for them. Only them, can the Church be at peace with its Founder, the Nazareth Preacher. It should, therefore, be underlined and re-emphasized that the Vincentian community, imbibing the spirit of St. Vincent, its patron, and the charism of its founder, Fr. Varkey Kattarath, leads a life of contemplation oriented to apostolic activities in tune with the spiritual heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church and the Indian religious traditions. A life dedicated to the experience of God in community and sharing it with others is the special charism and mission of the Vincentian Congregation.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	Anchor Bible Dictionary
<i>BT</i>	Bible Today
<i>CM</i>	Congregation of the Mission
<i>CCEO</i>	Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium
<i>EDNT</i>	Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>IRM</i>	International Review of Mission
<i>ISBE</i>	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
<i>Miss</i>	Missiology
<i>NIB</i>	The New Interpreter's Bible
<i>NIDNT</i>	The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
<i>NJBC</i>	The New Jerome Biblical Commentary
<i>TDNT</i>	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>VH</i>	Vincentian Heritage
<i>VC</i>	Vincentian Congregation

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