

ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA AND HIS CHARISM

A Canonical Interpretation

Varghese Koluthara CMI

Abstract: The author makes a canonical interpretation of the charism of the CMI congregation that St Chavara founded. In the light of the Codes of Canon Law the author makes an analysis of the life and activities of Chavara in order to have a deeper understanding of the charism of Chavara and his mission and its impact on the posterity. He begins his study with the canonical understanding of charism with a survey of the use of the term in the Codes of Canon Law and its canonical implications. Relating the term to 'patrimony', he observes that 'the mind and designs' of the founder is part of the charism, which has to do with the 'nature', 'purpose', 'spirit', 'character' and 'sound traditions' of the congregation. First, he presents the canonical dimensions of patrimony in the above mentioned aspects and then he combines them with the instances from the life of St. Chavara and his collaborators in the establishment of CMI religious congregation. The author concludes the study by enumerating the sound traditions that are found today in the CMI community established by St. Chavara and challenges the members to live up to the CMI vision 2020.

Keywords: Charism, Canon Law, Holy Spirit, Consecrated Life, Mission, Constitution, Vatican II, Founder, Patrimony, hierarchy, communion, canons, traditions, oriental, community, testament, monastery, beth-rauma, renunciation, lay brothers, clerics

1. Introduction

St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the founding fathers of the two major religious congregations of the Syro-Malabar Church, namely, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) for men and the Congregation of the Mount Carmel (CMC) for women, wrote in *The Chronicles* (1855-1870):

And as any close observer can perceive, the holy way of life and exemplary conduct has not yet taken root in our Malabar. For this Malabar which had received the faith from St Thomas, the Apostle, remains barren, not having produced even one saint, while other countries and islands which received faith much later have brought forth several saints. From those lands have come many missionaries prompted by good intentions and absolute charity leaving their relatives and homelands, with the sole motive of teaching the true religion and the way of Salvation.¹

These were the thoughts of Chavara about his own Church. He made it a point that through his life he would redress it. His life takes a direction with the sole intention of becoming a saint. Thus on his death-bed, on 1 January 1871, two days before his death, pointing to the picture of the Holy Family placed on a table nearby, he said to his confreres: "My pious parents in many ways impressed on me a great regard for the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I always kept in heart and mind and honoured Holy Family in this way; thus, their help was always available to me. By God's grace, I daresay that with their help I never had an occasion to be deprived of the grace I received in baptism."² This personal claim that he made about his conscience was canonically endorsed by the Catholic Church when on 23 November 2014, he was declared a saint by Pope Francis in Rome along with St Euphrasia CMC and several others.

Our interest in this study is to search and find out the canonical understanding of charism in the life of Chavara. In this discussion we analyse what is the canonical meaning of the word charism? How is it different from the theological concept of charism? And how are they dealt with in the Codes of Canon Law? In the light of the Codes of Canon Law we analyse the life and activities of Chavara in order to have a deeper understanding of the charism of Chavara and his mission to the posterity.

¹*Complete Works of Bl. Chavara, I: The Chronicles (Nalagamangal)*, (ed.) K. C. Chacko and Others, Mannanam 1990, 146.

²*Positio super Introductione Cause et super Virtutibus ex-Officio Concinnata*, Vatican 1977, 548, cited in A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore 2008, 390-391; T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Mumbai 2014, 359-360.

2. Canonical Understanding of Charism³

Every Institute of Consecrated life, religious or secular, is founded on a gift of the Lord,⁴ a gift of the Holy Spirit which allows it to follow Christ in his prayer and in his action more closely,⁵ and by its life, it vivifies the Church and the world.⁶ This gift of the Holy Spirit is a charism to the Church.

Charism is one of the terms very generically used today, depending on its context. It is a term derived from the Greek root 'char', which means welfare,⁷ favour, gift, etc. It is used in theological circles today to signify the works of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In religious circles, it denotes the gifts received from the Holy Spirit by the Institutes of Consecrated life. This charism is collective. A religious is a Benedictine in St Benedict, a Dominican in St Dominic, a Franciscan in St Francis, and a Carmelite in Carmelite spirituality and charism. Each Institute of Consecrated life has its founder, whether known or not, whether an individual person or a group. As a collective charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, is lived out in a group and as such takes on the dimensions of the mystery of the Church.⁸ It is because of its charism that each Institute has its own identity, its own life and its own mission.⁹

Charism is a gift made to the Church by the Lord.¹⁰ It is a gift that the Church must recognise and receive, and it devolves upon the hierarchy of the Church to discern it and to approve it, by giving consent to a particular kind of life, with its rule or Constitutions, and by inserting it into the ecclesial life; taking care at the same time not to distort the gift received, but rather to guarantee its authenticity and fulfilment¹¹.

Vatican II in its conciliar documents¹² and post-conciliar documents such as *Ecclesiae Sanctae*,¹³ *Evangelica Testificatio*,¹⁴ *Mutuae Relationes*,¹⁵

³V. Koluthara, *Rightful Autonomy of Religious Institutes: A Comparative Study on the Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches and the Code of Canon Law*, Bangalore 2014(3rd revised edition), 24-28, 59-64.

⁴LG., 43a.

⁵LG., 44c.

⁶LG., 46a.

⁷A. Romano, "Carisma di Fondatori e Magistero della Chiesa," *Vita Consacrata* 23 (1987) 831.

⁸J. Beyer, "Religious and the Local Church," *The Way Supplement* 50 (1984) 82.

⁹MR., 11b.

¹⁰LG., 43a.

¹¹LG., 45a; MR., 14b.

¹²LG., 45 a-b; CD., 35.

¹³AAS 58 (1966) 757-787.

¹⁴AAS 63 (1971) 497-535.

Redemptionis Donum,¹⁶ etc., underline the whole theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and assess such spiritual gifts as valuable to the whole Church. In general, it can be said that charisms as gifts of the Spirit, are given to particular individuals, namely, to founders of religious institutes, who became creators and transmitters of new means of reflecting in the Church, on one of the aspects of the mystery of Christ, and not to institutions, although, acting as benefactors, may pass on their charism to their followers.¹⁷ In a way, the members of the institute also partake in the charism of their founders, since they exist, due to the divine call that binds them in filial devotion to “the experience of the Spirit” proper to their founders.¹⁸ Therefore, each founder or foundress, each patrimony, each vision and tradition is to be respected in its uniqueness. The whole life of an institute in its internal as well as external dimensions must allow for the full expansion of its charism.¹⁹

3. The Use of the Word *Charism* in the Codes of Canon Law

In the first Code of Canon Law (CIC 1917), the term charism was not present. In the *Schema Codicis Iuris Canonici* (1980) the word charism appears eight times, namely, cc. 506; 516 §3; 557 §1; 634; 642 §1; 643 §3; 648 §1, §2. In spite of the discussions and changes, *Codex Iuris Canonici: schema novissimum* (1982) also retained the term *charism* in the following canons: 580; 590 §3; 631 §1; 708; 716 §1; 717 §3; 722 §1, §2. However, before the promulgation of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* in 1983, the term *charism* that appeared in the *schemas* (1980 & 1982) was either substituted by other words or omitted entirely. In the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church (CIC 1983) it came to be substituted in c. 578 and in c. 631 §1 by *patrimonium*, in c. 588 §3 by the terms *naturae, indolis et finis*, in c. 708 by *indole proprio que spiritu*, in c. 717 §3 by *spiritus* and in c. 722 §2 by *fini, spiritui et indoli*.

Commentators say that the main reason for leaving out the term *charism* was that it was not a precise juridical term, able to be used in

¹⁵AAS 70 (1978) 473-566.

¹⁶AAS 76 (1984) 513-546.

¹⁷J. Kallumkal, *The Patrimony of an Institute according to the Code of Canon Law*, Roma 1989, 47-52.

¹⁸M. R. Jurado, “Consecrated Life and the Charism of the Founders,” in R. Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, vol. III, (New York/ Mahwah 1989) 14-20.

¹⁹J. Beyer, “Religious in the New Code and Their Place in the Local Church,” *Studia Canonica* 17 (1983) 176.

juridical language.²⁰ J. Beyer expresses regret that the word *charism* was struck out from the new law of religious life, having been considered by the commission as an insufficiently juridical word. According to him, the removal of the word *charism* is a minimising of the most important truth of consecrated life.²¹ In CIC 1983, the concept of charism is substituted by a word called 'patrimony'. The legislator finally decided that it is more comprehensive and precise. Thus CIC c. 578 expresses the charism of an institute with the word patrimony.

In Oriental Canon Law, either in the *Motu Proprio, Postquam Apostolicis Litteris*²² or in the present Code *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*,²³ the term *charism* was never used to describe religious life. In the CCEO the term *charism* appears once in c. 381, §3, where it is mentioned that it is the duty of clerics to esteem the multiform charisms of the laity. However, it is to be noted that the working group of the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of Oriental Canon Law had observed that the very nature of Eastern Monasticism highlighted the charismatic aspect of the call of the Holy Spirit, on account of which the religious life was rightly seen as belonging to the "mystical aspect" of the Church and necessarily had a relationship to the hierarchy. Therefore, the working group proceeded to explain that, while the Church's hierarchy had the right of discerning and regulating the charisms of the religious life, it was yet bound at the same time to respect the proper nature of that charism and its various manifestations, allowing each institute to express its own "personality" within the wider communion of the Church, and in effect, the working group argued for the leaving of "ample space" to the operation of the principle of subsidiarity,²⁴ in the canons on religious life. In short, even though the term charism does not appear in the canons on religious life in CCEO, it does not deny the reality.

²⁰V. De Paolis, *La Vita Consecrata nella Chiesa*, Bologna 1991, 36; R. Laurentin, "Charisms: Terminological Precision," *Concilium* 13 (1977) 5.

²¹J. Beyer, "La vie religieuse et l'Eglise Universelle," in F.G. Morrissey (ed.), *The New Code of Canon Law*, vol. I, Fifth International Congress of Canon Law, 19-25 August 1984 (Ottawa 1986) 569-70; J. Beyer, *Il Diritto della Vita Consacrata*, Milano 1989, 65-66.

²²AAS 44 (1952) 65-150.

²³AAS 82 (1990) 1033-1363.

²⁴A. T. Minisci, "I canoni De Monachis," *Nuntia* 4 (1977) 3.

4. The Preservation of Patrimony

The Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church (CIC 1983) describes the concept of charism with legal precision with the term 'patrimony'. The concept of patrimony of an institute (CIC c. 578) has no parallel in CIC 1917. The sources of the canon are the following: *LG 45, PC 2b, ES II: 16 §3*.²⁵ This canon on patrimony found a place already in the first schema of the Pontifical Commission for the Codification of Latin Canon of 1983. Later, it underwent some small changes, but the sum and substance of the canon remained the same all through the redactions. The history and the evolution of the canon are outlined in *communications*.²⁶ Here it is acknowledged that the patrimonies of the religious institutes are treasures of the Church and therefore, she has a duty to preserve them. The evolution of the canon was complete with the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law on June 25, 1983 in which the text reads as follows:

The whole patrimony of an institute must be faithfully preserved by all. This patrimony is comprised of the intentions of the founders, of all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions.²⁷

Patrimonium is a Latin word deriving from *pater* and etymologically it denotes that which belongs to the father, who was the only subject of law

²⁵C. 578: *LG 45; PC 2b; ES II: 16 §3. cf., PCCICAI, Fontium Annotatione, 163. LG 45* gives a general idea on the patrimony of a religious institute: "*Ipsa etiam, Spiritus Sancti impulsus dociliter sequens, regulas a praeclaris viris et mulieribus propositas recipit et ulterius ordinatas authentice adprobat, necnon Institutis ad aedificationem corporis Christi passim erectis, ut secundum spiritum fundatorum crescant atque floreat, auctoritate sua invigilante et protegente adest*". Cf., AAS 57 (1965) 51; and *PC 2b* clarifies the elements of the patrimony of a religious institute such as the spirit, aims of each founder and its sound traditions: "*In ipsum Ecclesiae bonum cedit ut instituta peculiarem suam indolem ac munus habeant. Ideo fideliter agnoscantur et serventur Fundatorum spiritus propriaque proposita, necnon sanae traditiones, quae omnia cuiusque instituti patrimonium constituunt*". Cf., AAS 58 (1966) 703. Finally, *ES II: 16 § 3* reminds the religious institutes that one of the criteria for renewal and adaptation is to seek after a genuine understanding of their original spirit: "*Ad ipsum bonum Ecclesiae procurandum, germanam cognitionem sui primigenii spiritus Instituta prosequantur, ita ut, eodem fideliter servato in aptationibus decernendis, vita religiosa abelementis alienis purificetur et abobsoletis liberetur*". cf., AAS 58 (1966) 778.

²⁶*Communicationes* 11 (1979) 39-40.

²⁷*CIC (1983) c. 578 – Fundatorum mens atque proposita a competent auctoritate ecclesiastica sancita circa naturam, finem, spiritum et indolem instituti, necnon eius sanae traditiones, quae omnia patrimonium eiusdem Instituti constituunt, ab omnibus fideliter servanda sunt.*

in the ancient Roman law. *Patrimonium* is everything that pertains to the father or derives from the father.²⁸ Leaving the general understanding of *patrimonium* as 'the property inherited from one's father or ancestors'²⁹ and passing to the source of c. 578,³⁰ the term *patrimonium* acquires a new significance denoting the spirit of the founders, their determination and their wholesome traditions that is passed to the generations.

CICc. 578 underlines that there are three constitutive elements in patrimony such as the founder, who receives and realizes the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the competent authority, who gives the seal of the Church as a guarantee of its 'genuinity', and the members who live the inspiration, by which they constitute the sound traditions. Therefore, the patrimony of an institute consists of the actualised charism of the founder, with his intention and projects, its approval and erection into an institute by ecclesiastical authority, its rule to safeguard them, its nature and character, purpose, spirit and sound traditions. Regamey, in his article "Carismi", notes that founders provide a kind of 'form' for their followers, and that religious charism includes institutional elements that cannot be separated from the whole body of the institute, just as the soul cannot be separated from the body.³¹ In an emphasis on working to discover the original charism of the founder, some institutes have found that there was no particular original charism, but rather a response to the particular need of a local community at the time of founding.

The reality of the problem in trying to determine the founder's intention may be one of the reasons why the Codes of Canon Law, following the documents of Vatican II, does not use the word *charism* with reference to the founding of an institute. Further, the Latin text speaks of "wholesome or authentic traditions" in the plural. In the Catholic Church, the concept of "tradition" has a time-honoured place and involves the handing on not only of the context of faith, but also time-proven ways for living out that faith. The distinction into "wholesome traditions" rather than simply using the generic term

²⁸B. Biondi, "Patrimonio," in AA. VV., *Novissimo Digesto Italiano* 12 (Torino 1957) 615.

²⁹Several Dictionaries give the same meaning to patrimony; For example: R. E. Allen (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford 1990, 873; R. Bird, *Osborn's Concise Law Dictionary*, 7th ed., London 1983, 248; A. M. Webster (ed.), *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, Chicago 1976, 1656; F. Palazzi (ed.), *Novissimo Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, Milano 1979, 970; S. Battaglia (ed.), *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, Torino, 1984, 841 etc.

³⁰C. 578: *LG* 45; *PC* 2b; *ES* II:16 §3. cf., PCCICAI, *Fontium Annotatione*, 163.

³¹R. Regamey, "Carismi", 301-302.

“traditions” should be both a caution and a reminder to institutes in their continued living out of the responsibility of consecrated life within the particular institute.³² The institutes are dedicated to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God’s kingdom as mentioned in CIC c. 573, i.e., the honouring of God, the upholding of the Church, and the salvation of the world. With this admonition against unauthorized modifications in search of finding out their patrimony, in different institutes, the legislator declares that religious institutes presently have the essential means to fulfil their patrimony and so of their real identity.

In the Church there are many institutes of consecrated life, with gifts that differ according to the graces given to them: they follow more closely Christ praying or Christ proclaiming the kingdom of God, or Christ doing good to people or Christ in dialogue with the people of this world, but always Christ doing the will of the Father.³³

Each charism approved, is first and foremost a way of following Christ. The members have to live it in its genuine tradition according to their patrimony, and contribute to it to bring it into its fullness. The various charisms of the institutes, therefore, become the recognition of the right to their practical application, and signify also an obligation to guard and promote them.³⁴

CIC c. 578 tends to speak about the origins of an institute. X. Ochoa claims that each institute has at least two founders: the founder who presents it and the Church which approves it.³⁵ The intentions and projects of the founder as well as the approbation of the competent authority refer back to the original charism of an institute. Sound traditions can also originate at the beginning of an institute. Thus, J.M. Lozano says that an essential element of the founder’s charism is his spiritual experience to give life to a religious family, and his personal experience is handed on to others so as to fulfil the purpose of the institute and maintain the essential traits of its rule of life and

³²J. Hite and Others (eds.), *A Handbook on Canons: 573-746*, Minnesota 1985, 37.

³³CIC (1983) c. 577 -*Permulta in Ecclesia sunt instituta vitae consecratae, quae donationes habent differentes secundum gratiam quae data est eis: Christum enim, pressius sequuntur sive orantem, sive Regnum Dei annuntiantem, sive hominibus beneficientem, sive cum eis in saeculo conversantem, semper autem voluntatem Patris facientem.*

³⁴*cf.*, G. Ghirlanda, “De Obligationibus et Iuribus Christifidelium,” *Periodica* 73 (1984) 347.

³⁵X. OCHOA, “Modus determinandi patrimonium constitutionale cuiusvis Instituti Perfectionis proprium,” *Commentarium pro Religiosis et Missionariis* 49 (1968) 98.

constitutions.³⁶ The members of an institute by their life and activity contribute to the original charism and it forms an integral part of their patrimony. Therefore, the preservation of the patrimony is the primary duty of the members and the best service they can render to the Church as well as a sure mode of being faithful to their commitment to God.³⁷

In the following discussion, we analyse the word patrimony in the life of Chavara to understand the meaning of his charism. CIC c. 578 reads as follows:

The whole patrimony of an institute must be faithfully preserved by all. This patrimony is comprised of the intentions of the founders, of all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions.³⁸

Each concept involved in the complex reality of 'patrimony' as found in the life of Chavara is analysed so that his charism is better understood.

5. 'Mind and Designs' of the Founder (CCEO c. 426)

When CIC c. 578 uses the phrase 'intention and projects of the founders', CCEO prefers the phrase 'mind and designs of the founder.' In the constitutions approved by the hierarchical authority (CCEO c. 414) the members will find the expressed intentions (*mens*) and determinations of the founder with structures appropriate to their mission and informed by their founding spirit (CCEO c. 426).³⁹ It is actually summarized in 'mind (*mens*) and designs of the founder,' in the CCEO c. 426. The intention of the founder can be found in its charism, life, writings, fundamental concerns, and the mentality which he encountered, social fundamental situations, the values that he wanted to communicate and the virtues he practiced. They are active forces in generating his intentions.⁴⁰

In the course of founding a religious community, it seems that Chavara shared a collective thinking along with Fr Thomas Porukara

³⁶J. M. Lozano, "Founder and Community: Inspiration and Charism," *Review For Religious* 37 (1978) 226-228.

³⁷J. Beyer, "Religious in the New Code and their Place in the Local Church," 179.

³⁸CIC (1983) c. 578 – *Fundatorum mens atque proposita a competet auctoritate ecclesiastica sancita circa naturam, finem, spiritum et indolem instituti, necnon eius sanae traditiones, quae omnia patrimonium eiusdem instituti constituunt, ab omnibus fideliter servanda sunt.*

³⁹Holland, "A Spirit to Animate the Letter," *Jurist* 56 (1996), 302-303.

⁴⁰J. Kallumkal, *The Patrimony of An Institute according to the Code of Canon Law*, 273-274.

and his Malpan Fr Thomas Palackal. This shared vision is expressed in Chavara's own words:

He (Fr Palackal) and his most intimate friend Fr Thomas (Porukara) had yearned to establish a religious house (*darsanaveedu*) since, in the absence of a house of penance (*tapasu bhavanam*) in Malabar even for priests, much good was left undone. They were sad at heart as there was no one to give them support but went on praying.⁴¹

The fundamental concern of Chavara to found a religious community originated in the mind of Fr Porukara. He felt that by leading an ordinary life one may not attain eternal life. During his time in Varapuzha as a seminarian, Porukara had been in touch in Fr Palackal. Immediately after his priestly ordination on 29 November 1829, Chavara was attracted to the shared inspiration of these two fathers. We reasonably conclude that Chavara too shared the plans of Palackal and Porukara to start a religious house and gradually got more and more involved in the efforts to materialise the dream.⁴² His first Qurbana at Arthungal was offered for this intention.

Palackal and Porukara approached the then vicar apostolic, Bishop Maurilius Stabilini for advice and approval. The bishop was pleased with the idea. However, he said to them: "If you, the only knowledgeable ones, go and live in silence and solitude, who else will be left to teach the people? If you like, you may establish a monastery so that all the people can benefit from it."⁴³ It was whole-heartedly accepted by Palackal and Porukara. Their collective decision to start a house for leading a religious life was embraced by Chavara. He fully collaborated and worked together with to achieve the end. The permission to establish a monastery and to raise funds from the people was granted by the bishop. They spotted a place in 1830 on Mannanam mount, which they named *beth-rauma*, a Syriac word meaning "house on hill-top." On 11 May 1831, the foundation stone for the monastery was laid in the name of St. Joseph by Porukara in the presence of Bishop Stabilini.

⁴¹*Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. I, Mannanam 1981, 1; *Chavaraacchante Sampoorana Kruthikal*, vol. I, Mannanam 1981, 1.

⁴²T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 77.

⁴³*The Chronicles* by St Chavara included in *Complete Works of Blessed Chavara*, vol. I (The first 14 pages entitled "History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery" are thought to be written by Br Jacob Kaniyanthara. The not yet published Malayalam manuscript is kept in the Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery Mannanam), 6-7 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 70.

Even before the pioneers passed away – Palackal in 1841 and Porukara in 1846 – Chavara took several initiatives in the process on his own in consultation with the seniors. However, it was after the death of Porukara that the full responsibility to lead the newly founded religious community fell on his shoulders. He inherited not only the more contemplative spirit of Palackal but also the active dimension of Porukara's spirituality. Assimilating the spirit of the two elders, he evolved a vision of his own. Further combining this vision, with the insights he received from the tradition of the Carmelite Order, he tried to give to both contemplative and active aspects a texture in a very dynamic manner.⁴⁴

From the above analysis, we get a glimpse of the 'mind and designs' (CCEO c. 426) of the founding fathers Palackal, Porukara and Chavara in the foundation of the CMI religious community. With this introductory note on the 'intention and projects of the founders' (CIC c. 578), we shall take up the other elements that the concept of patrimony contains (CIC c. 578), i.e., 'all that the competent ecclesiastical authority has approved concerning the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute, and of its sound traditions.' Let us analyse the life of Chavara and see how each of these concepts is found in his life and vision.

6. The 'Nature'

The term 'nature' denotes the specific juridical quality that the founder had intended to give to his community and the foundation on which the Church has given her approval. These institutes are to be either clerical or lay. Although the Code of Canon Law underlines the fact that by nature, consecrated life or religious life is neither clerical nor lay, it also recognizes that the nature of a particular institute can be further qualified by distinguishing it between those which are clerical and those that are lay.⁴⁵ Therefore, the nature of the institute means the form of the institute in general, whether it is religious or secular. This is properly understood as the nature of a religious institute, which serves as an enduring quality of the institute and it has its definitive bearing on the life and apostolate of the members.⁴⁶

⁴⁴CMI Central Committee, *CMI 175 years: 1831-2006*, Kakkanad, 2007, 7.

⁴⁵*cf.*, CIC c. 588.

⁴⁶A. L. Kaitharath, *The Autonomy and Hierarchical Dependence of Religious Institutes according to the Code of Canon Law*, Rome 2002, 115.

In the foundation of the CMI religious community, Palackal, Porukara and Chavara dreamt of something new in the history of St Thomas Christians in India. They did not envisage a religious life totally cut off from the people and apostolic work. They wanted to lead a life of evangelical renunciation, but not without apostolic activities. They yearned to establish a religious house to do many good things that in its absence were left undone.⁴⁷ Br Jacob Kaniyanthara shared the inspiration of the founding fathers and assisted them in the foundation.⁴⁸ The presence of Kaniyanthara who was never ordained a priest, points to the fact that the founding fathers had in mind a way of clerical religious life supported by the lay brothers. From the tradition of the CMI congregation we also understand that brotherhood in went hand in hand with the clerical members of the CMI fraternity. Even though there is a decrease in the number of members joining the congregation as lay brothers today, never have we had a history where lay brothers deviated from the supporting style of 'Aha Jacob Kaniyanthara' tradition. According to the Constitutions of the CMI, the lay brothers in the congregation enjoy equal status and privileges with any cleric except for administering sacraments and for holding the roles of superior and major superior.

As far as the 'nature' of the CMI congregation goes, it serves today as a religious community of clerics along with the lay brothers. This has become its enduring quality. The congregation has all kinds of apostolates as visualized by the founding fathers. They sought 'to do many good things' that were left undone. This kind of entering into all kinds of apostolates has become a definitive style of its members today and it has thus become the part and parcel of CMI charism.

7. The 'Purpose'

The purpose of a charism means a way of thinking, feeling, living and acting, as the members of an institute putting into effect the mission, which the Holy Spirit inspired the founder. It is a particular way of living the Gospel. It is something that permeates and informs the style of the members. It is manifested in one's relationship with others, members of the community or outsiders. It determines whether an institute was conceived for engaging in contemplation or action.

⁴⁷T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 71.

⁴⁸*Constitutions and Directory of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate*, Kakkanad, 2014, 11.

The CMI constitutions explain the 'purpose' dimension of the charism. It reads as follows:

They (the founding fathers) had a profound experience of the love of God which called them away from the corrupt and corrupting world to a life of solitude, but at the same time made them realize the need to work for the salvation of their fellow-men. In the religious life organized under the guidance of the Church, they found a happy blending of these two goals. It was a life of communion with the triune God: experiencing the freedom of the spirit, and making the word our sole food and drink (Chavara, *Atmanuthapam*), they became powerful heralds of the same Word and formed themselves in the likeness of the Son. It was also a life of total availability urging them to undertake with zeal for the sake of the Church and according to the needs of the times, the preaching of the gospel to the faithful, catechizing the new Christians, evangelizing the non-Christians, working for the well-being of St. Thomas Christians and for the reunion of the dissident groups among them and labouring for the all-round building of Christ's body the Church. Both these goals they saw as one, since for them, religious life was a call to discipleship.⁴⁹

Thus, sanctification of self and salvation of all has become an inseparable dimension of CMI charism today.

8. The 'Spirit'

Spirit of the founders is a Christian spirit drawn from the Christ of the Gospels and flows from their particular imitation of Christ.⁵⁰ The spirit of an institute is a particular way of living the Gospel.⁵¹ It is the way of life foreseen by the founder as a result of the charism he received from the Holy Spirit. Here the 'spirit' dimension should be seen as the ambience which permeates and informs the lifestyle of the members. Sometimes it can be also said as the spirituality of the institute according to the disposition of the original charism. Often it is manifested in one's relationship with others, be they members of the same community or outsiders.⁵² The spirit of the institute can be compared to its soul that vivifies and informs the whole institute and

⁴⁹*Constitutions and Directory of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate*, n.3, p.12.

⁵⁰E. Gambari, *Renewal in Religious life*, Bombay 1963, 189.

⁵¹John Paul II, Post Synodal Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 25 March 1996, AAS 88 (1996) 25.

⁵²A. L. Kaitharath, *The Autonomy and Hierarchical Dependence*, 117.

each of its members, imprinting their own, as a very distinct character, a special style of life, which is translated into a particular way of looking at things, of judging and evaluating, a particular way of becoming part of the mystery of the Church and making it present to the world.⁵³ The spiritualities of such institutes have become the patrimony of the Church and it has inspired others. In this way, the particular mystery of Christian faith that gives unity and inspiration to an institute becomes its spiritual patrimony.⁵⁴

Fr Paul Achandy, the Prior General of the CMI congregation, explains in his own way the spirit dimension of the charism of Chavara, while promulgating the Acts of the XXXVII General Synaxis of the congregation:

CMI identity has been acknowledged as a spiritual, prophetic and missionary movement and every CMI has a great responsibility to live the charisma and the spirit of the founding fathers. The spirit of communion and togetherness was so important to the founding fathers and Kuriakose Elias Chavara advises us to live like the children of one mother. In the changing world of individualism and we have resolved to strengthen our spirit of community after the model of our founding fathers. Our community life shall be true witnessing of the quality of our religious life celebrating the communion of divine table, dialogue table and dining table... Our founding fathers always stood for the cause of the poor and the dalits and had special passion and compassion for them. Following their example we have to live their legacy by being closer to the poor in order to empower them and we shall spare our quality personnel for such challenging ministries... Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a champion of families and his last testament to his parish community is a great treatise for effective family life. Chavara had special devotion to the Holy Family and his insights on good family life are relevant even today. Our members engaged in parish, education, media, and social apostolates shall rediscover our commitment to the families and equip our young members to render relevant service to the concerns of family life.⁵⁵

⁵³E. Gambari, *Renewal in Religious life*, 189.

⁵⁴A. L. Kaitharath, *The Autonomy and Hierarchical Dependence*, 118.

⁵⁵Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, *CMI Charism and the Prophetic Call for Global Mission: Acts of XXXVII General Synaxis*, Kakkanad 2015, 10.

9. The 'Character'

It refers to the mark, distinctive quality, feature, or attribute that make up an individual: the detectable expression of the action of a gene or group of genes.⁵⁶ Identifying the nature of an institute's charism with its character, *mutuae relationes* holds that the very charism of the founder (EN 11) appears as "an experience of the spirit," transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. "It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church" (LG 44; CD 33; 35, 1-2 etc). This distinctive character also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements.⁵⁷

The character of a religious institute represents the distinctive identity it has within itself. It is the distinguishing factor that differentiates one institute from other irrespective of whether they have similar type of life style and apostolate. The main function of the character of an institute is to provide for its external and internal ordering and for the protection of its autonomy as well as its basic rights that are canonically ordained. They are to safeguard their identity so as to avoid ambiguities arising from ill-conceived involvements in the life of the Church, without taking into consideration their time bound apostolate and their distinctive character.⁵⁸

The character of a religious institute also means its structure. Aims are broader, recalling the vision, the founder had of his institute in the original inspiration, through which he perceived, its activity, its particular ways, its motivation. The constitutions have to indicate the aims of a religious family, the activities that are devoted in carrying out that purpose of the institute, the works proper to it and the means it uses.⁵⁹ Thus through these fundamental norms, the members order their lives in striving for the perfection of charity according to the patrimony of the institute.⁶⁰

⁵⁶"Character," in *Webster's Dictionary*, 187.

⁵⁷MR 11.

⁵⁸A. L. Kaitharath, *The Autonomy and Hierarchical Dependence*, 119-120.

⁵⁹E. Gambari, *Renewal in Religious Life*, 190.

⁶⁰J. P. Beal, J. A. Coriden and T. J. Green (eds.), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, New York/Mahwah 2000, 746.

Chavara in his parting message to his confreres showed that he was a man led by the Holy Spirit and he transmitted it to the CMI congregation. Similarly, through his three circular letters written from 1869 to 1870 he gave a series of corrections to the members of his community in those days for the shortcomings observed among them. They were meant for awakening and renewal of the members' zeal. A little before he became bedridden in October 1870, he wrote the testament in August 1870 describing it variously as 'my heartfelt sermon,' 'parting message' (*odukkathe gunadosham*) and 'a dying father's words of message' (*chavarul*) and he addressed the members of the congregation as 'my dear little children'.⁶¹ Having written in his own hand, he sealed it in an envelope and entrusted it to a novice who had been attending on him during his old age saying: "after my death please entrust this to Fr Leopold."⁶² The novice faithfully did so. On reading it, Leopold was much impressed and immediately sent the copies of the letter to the monasteries at Mannanam, Vazhakulam, Pulinkunnu and Elthuruthu along with small portions of the Prior's personal belongings like clothes a mementoes. The members of the community were greatly inspired by the counsels in the testament. They tried their best to live them. After this, Parappuram gives briefly the contents of the document and concludes his description: "The monasteries received with great respect the copies of the testament and mementos as very important treasures and preserved them with extreme care, as precious keepsakes to perpetuate the memory of the deceased Prior among them."⁶³

The opening words of the testament are very personal and touching:

I, your servant brother Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family, swear my fidelity to the Lord, with all of you, my dear Rev. Brothers, the religious priests, my dear children the novices and brothers co-operators. I address you with this as my powered sermon, last instruction and *chavarul* [farewell message as if from my death bed].⁶⁴

In his first circular, Chavara unambiguously states that the congregation was started by God and not by humans: "this humble

⁶¹T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 271.

⁶²Leopold Beccaro of St. Joseph OCD, an Italian Carmelite was the confessor and spiritual director of St. Chavara.

⁶³*Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. IV, 1982, 99 as cited in A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Chavara*, Bangalore 2008, 167-168.

⁶⁴*Complete Works of Chavara*, vol. IV, 99 as cited in A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Chavara*, 168.

community of ours is not man-made but by a number of miracle-like ways, God established it, nurtured it and made it grow."⁶⁵ That it is included in the Carmelite family too is sheer providence of God: "it is by God's special grace that we are called to be members of the (Carmelite) congregation which is most pleasing to the mother of God. This was because God willed it and not because of man planned it thus. I am as sure of this as I am sure that the material on which I am now writing is paper."⁶⁶ The founding members through whom God established it had planned it on the Dominican model. "Hence we started the unprecedented practice of wearing the white cassock and took other steps but our Holy Mother, realizing our weakness, took us into her love (through membership in the Carmelite order)."⁶⁷

In establishing this congregation, God's purpose was to secure the salvation of Christian brethren (T 71, 100). He wanted it to be a mirror of virtuous life, and its monasteries to be resorts of virtuous persons. It should not be reduced to an association of self-willed stewards and business administrators (Circular 1 61-62). He writes: "If we forget our holy vocation neglect the sacred duties of our state of life; fail in practice of virtues like humility, obedience, charity, religious modesty and genuine piety and are satisfied with valuing them only in spirit and words and not in deeds; within a short time all these monasteries will fall to ruin" (Circular 1 61-90). He continues: "the strength of monasteries does not consist in the thickness of our walls but in the religious zeal and virtue of their inmates" (Circular 1 65, 94-95). "Members must value virtues like humility, obedience, charity and genuine piety (Circular 1 61-62, 90)... They must not be presumptuous and arrogant but humble and docile, ready to cooperate with the elderly people (Circular 1 64, 93)."⁶⁸

For Chavara obedience was an identity mark. He notes that "one mark of a religious is a total surrender of one's will, and obedience as if one does not have one's own eyes and ears (Testament 70, 100)... "Whom should they obey? Chavara's unequivocal answer is that his confreres should obey their ecclesiastical and religious superiors as well as one another... He who practices obedience on all these three levels will enjoy heavenly peace even while in the monastery, which is

⁶⁵Circular 1 61, 90 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 272.

⁶⁶Testament 70, 99 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 272.

⁶⁷Testament 70, 99 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 272.

⁶⁸T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 274.

a miniature heaven. This is certain!" (Testament 70-71,100). "The members should see Jesus Christ in their superior and accept the latter's words as His own. While obeying, one should resist the temptation to weigh the superior's intelligence, wisdom and virtues, as well as to evaluate his deeds and behaviour... The superiors should take care to give orders only in accordance with the will of God and not according to the liking of the members" (Circular 1 63, 91-92). In a letter Chavara wrote to Kuriakose Porukara, the Vicar of Mannanam Monastery, he says: "the superior of the community is called to be a partner with God in tending His sheep and that, as such, he should love the sheep and be concerned about their wellbeing. He also gives a list of qualities expected of an ideal CMI superior.⁶⁹

A thing very close to Chavara's heart was the mutual love and concern that must prevail among the members of his religious community. "They must be like children born of the same parents... Numerous the Monasteries may be, all must be like members of the same family; children born to, nursed and brought up by the same mother" (Testament 71, 100). This love should never weaken but grow stronger day by day. Chavara always held community life dear, and loved having things in common rather than possessing them privately. Already as a seminarian, much before the congregation was founded, he had renounced his family property in favour of his sister and brother in law. Still later, right at the beginning of his priestly life much before his religious profession, he had begun to consider himself as an ascetic.⁷⁰

The first Circular gives tips for an ideal community: All must esteem and encourage among themselves spiritual conversation, religious modesty and piety. Quarrels and conflicts should be avoided... All must take care to maintain silence at the allotted times and places avoiding curiosity to know and speak of unnecessary things. One should be regular and punctual in attending spiritual exercises and choir. No one should ever give up daily meditation and prayers or disregard the usual customs and self-discipline. In conclusion, the Circular says: "lastly my beloved brethren, loving sons, none of us was drawn to life in the monastery by being driven by hunger or desperate conditions of the world... If we forsake the Lord

⁶⁹V. Plathottam, *Malankara sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santanam Athava Vandya Divya Sri Chavara Kuriakose Elias Achan CMI*, Mannanam, 1939, 373-374 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 275.

⁷⁰T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 276.

by negligence and indolence, what a great mistake it would be, what madness" (Circular 1 62, 90-95).⁷¹

Chavara was a man with far sighted planning. In order to realize the congregation's purpose of securing the salvation of souls, there should be more monasteries, convents, and members. He visualized the growth of the congregation with many houses and many members and even dreamt of its growth into regions and provinces. Another reminder given to the community is that they should be ever grateful to those who had helped St Thomas Christians to keep the faith intact or contributed in one way or another to the founding and nurturing of the congregation. The Prior concludes the testament in a moving manner by asking pardon of all concerned for his failures, like, non-enforcement of rules in full among the members, not being an example to others and for giving scandal to others! (Testament 74,103).⁷²

The founding fathers "yearned to build a *darsanaveedu* (religious house) at least for the priests"⁷³ originally. To their request the ecclesiastical authority, vicar apostolic Stabilini granted the permission and gave them the ecclesiastical approval. While granting the permission the vicar apostolic directed them to put up a monastery that would be "useful to all" not merely to the inmates.⁷⁴ Thus, the very charism of the founders especially of Chavara, appears as "an experience of the spirit," transmitted to their confreres to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Church, Body of Christ, which is ever vibrant and the "vitality of the whole Church never appears to be aging."⁷⁵

10. Sound Traditions

The "sound traditions" mentioned in c. 578, has its basis in the documents *Perfectae Caritatis*⁷⁶ and *Ecclesiae Sanctae II*.⁷⁷ The word "traditions," which appears in the phrase "sound traditions" in canon

⁷¹T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 277-78.

⁷²T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 278-281

⁷³Complete Works of Blessed Chavara I: 1; Chavaraachante Sampoorana Kruthikal I:1 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 286.

⁷⁴Kaniyanthara, "History of the Foundation of Mannanam Monastery," 6 as cited in T. Kochumuttom, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 286.

⁷⁵Leo XIII, ap. Letter *Orientalium dignitas*, 30 Nov. 1894, preamble as cited in John Paul II, ap. Constitution *Sacri Canones*, xxiii, in promulgating CCEO on 18th October 1990

⁷⁶PC 2b.

⁷⁷ES 12.

578, refers to belief, information, and customs handed down through word or by example from one generation to the next. Traditions are not necessarily written for they are inherited modes of thought or action, as is the case with religious practices and social customs.⁷⁸ In the Church, the concept of tradition has a very prominent place as it involves not only the handing on of the content of the faith but also time-proven ways of living out that faith.⁷⁹ The “sound tradition” mentioned in this canon would form part of the patrimony as those practices or customs are traditionally carried out in the congregation and which are acceptable to the Church.

The tradition plays an important role in the life of a religious community and it can explain the values, which the community abides by. In the light of *Perfectae Caritatis* 2b, a tradition is to be considered sound, only if it is real, universal or general and should be related to the nature, specific end, proper spirit, proper apostolate, particular mode of exercise of ministry, of an institute.⁸⁰ Sound traditions are those which are in agreement with the example and words of the founder.⁸¹ Those traditions are not sound which are contrary to the proper charism of the institute. It is the patrimony of the institute, springing from the life of the institute itself and amassed down through the years and centuries as a family heritage.⁸²

The sound traditions that we find today in the CMI and CMC communities established by Chavara are numerous. Some of the striking sound traditions that we find in the CMI community are the following: (1) The sense of community life and the sense of governing by the local synaxes. (2) The farsightedness in the involvement of apostolates especially in the field of education. (3) Identifying with the poor and standing for their cause. (4) The Carmelite, Indian and Oriental traditions of the community. (5) Feeling with the Church and standing for the cause of the Church. (6) Hospitality and welcoming nature has become part and parcel of the community. (7) Believing in the providence and opening up new avenues of evangelical existence

⁷⁸D. P. Simpson, “traditions,” in *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, New York 1968, 609.

⁷⁹E. O’Hara, “Norms Common to All Institutes of Consecrated Life,” in J. Hite and Others (eds.), *A Handbook on Canons: 573-746*, Minnesota 1985, 37.

⁸⁰J. Kallumkal, *The Patrimony of An Institute*, 262-303.

⁸¹T. Pazhayampallil, *Pastoral Guide: A Handbook on the Latin and Oriental Code of Canon Law*, Bangalore 2004, 822.

⁸²S. Kurumbath, “Canonical Basis of Statutes and Constitutions of Religious Institutes according to CCEO and CIC,” *Eastern Legal Thought* (2010-2011), 132.

elsewhere in India apart from Kerala and going to other countries like Africa, South America, Australia, etc.

To conclude, the realization of the charism visualized by Chavara and his collaborators is articulated today in the CMI vision 2020, which consists of the following ten specific ideals adopted by every CMI member: (i) A CMI member is a man of prayer and CMI community is primarily a praying community. (ii) CMIs have a genuine commitment to excellence in all what they do; they keep on learning to be ahead of times. (iii) CMIs have a genuine family feeling, spirit of togetherness and art of teamwork. (iv) CMIs have an emotional attachment to the Church and cooperate with the Church hierarchy. (v) CMIs and their institutions are closer to the poor and have a high sense of social commitment. (vi) CMIs render a unique pastoral service. (vii) Wherever the CMIs are and whatever they do, have a sense of family and make an impact on the families they are in contact with. (viii) CMIs play a creative role in evangelization through media and public sphere and cultural space. (ix) CMIs are competent to provide leadership to the Church and other religious congregations; and (x) CMIs have an international outlook and universal openness to reach out to the ends of earth especially in the developing countries.⁸³

CMI vision 2020 is a dream to be realized and an ideal set before the members of the community. They are invited to imbibe the charism of St. Chavara and to become his torch bearers today in order to bring salvation to themselves and to the humanity with whom they are, wherever they may be.

⁸³Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, *CMI Charism and the Prophetic Call for Global Mission: Acts of XXXVII General Synaxis*, 51.