

BOOK REVIEW

Jossy Veliyan CMC, *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD in Kerala*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2015, pages xxiv + 439, ISBN: 978-93-8496401- 6. Price: Rs 250.

Founders of religious congregations are saintly persons in the Church who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to undertake such a task for the good of the Church and the greater glory of God. In the history of the Church we can find a variety of such persons - men, women, bishops, priests and even lay persons chosen by God for the purpose. In the present volume, Jossy Veliyan discusses at length the foundation of a congregation - the Congregation of Women TOCD in Kerala, founded by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, with the help and close collaboration of Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Archbishop Baccinelli.

This volume is an honest and committed attempt to trace the role of St. Chavara in founding the first indigenous religious congregation for women in the Church of Kerala. The author has first examined the norms, if any, set by the Church documents to identify the founders of religious institutes; then she, applying these norms to the person of St. Chavara, has convincingly proved that he had received the inspiration to found the new religious institute, which is the most important character of a founder, according to the Church documents, Papal teachings and theological opinions that she has painfully unearthed and studied.

The author distinguishes between charismatic and non-charismatic founders: The charismatic founders are those, who, in response to God's inspiration to found a religious institute, conceive it, make its blue print in mind at least and work towards its realization, whereas non-charismatic founders may be assisting this process of foundation in various ways, and so may be called co-founders. Another category of non-charismatic founders may be those who are involved in its legal/canonical matters and in the formal establishment of the institute. They may be called juridical founders. All of them may share the original inspiration of the founders, received from God; however the term 'founder' without qualification would refer only to the charismatic founders (p. xxv). Jossy thus identifies St. Chavara, Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli respectively as the Founder, Co-Founder and the Juridical Founder of the TOCD, and

then describes their contributions to its genesis and all-round development. This is the central theme of the work.

The whole book is divided into four chapters: The first chapter gives a historical narrative of the fascinating story of founding the said institute: With the help of the writings of the same three men – Chavara, Beccaro and Baccinelli – and their contemporaries, the author shows how the Catholic faithful of Kerala had been waiting long for a religious institute for women; how, when Chavara with Frs. Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara (co-founders of the CMI Congregation) founded the institute for men at Mannanam, in 1831, had received inspiration to found one for women as well; and how Chavara even after the death of the other two, continued to cherish the longing for establishing a religious congregation for women. At the appointed time God sends a young Italian missionary, Fr. Leopold Beccaro, who soon becomes closely associated with Chavara, shares his view on the matter at hand, and eventually they jointly plan, work hard and put up in 1866 its first house at Koonammavu and name it St. Teresa's Convent. Appreciating Fr. Leopold's "hard work and assistance", in establishing the convent Chavara says that "God sent him here to put up and conduct these monasteries and convents" (p. 3).

The same chapter continues with a discussion of the events that led to the bifurcation of the institute into CMC and CTC, which happened in the wake of the creation of the Vicariates for Syrians, within the existing Latin Vicariate of Varapuzha. This gave rise to a dispute between the two Syrian Apostolic Vicars (Trichur and Kottayam) on one side and the Latin Vicar Apostolic on the other, each side claiming jurisdiction over the Koonammavu content. It was finally settled in favour of the Syrians and the convent was declared to belong to the Syrian Vicariate of Thrissur. Eventually the Latin Rite members of the convent were taken to a newly built convent in Varapuzha and developed into the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites, (CTC), while the Syrian members in the course of time adopted the name Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC). At least partly related to this dispute, gradually came up different opinions regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD, which had branched into CMC and CTC.

Five opinions regarding the foundation of a religious community have been identified and discussed, which are the subject matter of chapter two. Here the approach is rather theological and the author has succeeded in creating a reliable list of criteria, as we shall see below, to identify the founders of religious institutes, useful for all the

religious men and women which are struggling to decide on who their founders are. In that sense this is an original contribution of this research.

The third and fourth chapters apply the above-mentioned norms to determine who exactly deserves to be called the founder in one sense or another. Having examined all the relevant documents and writings, the author has arrived at the conclusion that, while Chavara and Beccaro respectively are the charismatic founder and co-founder, Baccinelli is the juridical founder. The third chapter dismisses the opinions that hold, either Beccaro alone, or Beccaro and Chavara together, or Baccinelli, or Eliswa as the founder or founders as without basis.

The fourth chapter makes a thorough investigation of whether Chavara has the decisive characteristics of a founder. Reliable testimonies of his contemporaries, like Beccaro, Kuriakose Elias Porukara and the members of the first community of women are considered. This study establishes that Chavara had originally received the inspiration to found a congregation for women, as he attests in the Chronicle. For years he had been 'knocking at the door of the Lord' for its realization. At last came the required help in the person of Fr. Leopold with whom he founded it at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. Further, he played a vital role in determining its nature and purpose as well as in the formation of its members.

The canon law provides only a vague and general qualification of the 'founder' as the one "who initiated or left behind an institute or such a way of life" (CIC 1983, c.578), but it does not enunciate any more specific and clear cut norms and criteria to identify the founder (p. 89). Hence the author decides to have recourse to other Church documents, Popes and theologians to arrive at a reasonable set of norms for the purpose.

Jossy has examined three pre-conciliar Popes and *Lumen Gentium* VI. Besides, *Perfectae Caritatis*, giving guidelines for renewal of religious life, instructs the institute 'to return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of the founding persons...' (p. 98). Of the several documents issued by the Congregation for Religious Life, following *Perfectae Caritatis*, the author has noted particularly the letter dated 4 December 1967, requesting religious institutes to preserve the purpose, nature and character of the institutes. More particularly, the letter states, "The spirit of the foundress, that special charism given to an institute through its

foundress, should permeate the Constitutions, which embody the spiritual heritage of her daughters" (pp. 100f).

Jossy has considered, in particular, *Evangelica Testificatio*, the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, commonly known as the *Magna Carta* on Religious Life, in which the Pope refers to the founders as "men and women of spiritual generosity." Jossy notes that, starting from *Evangelica Testificatio*, there has been a constant and progressive development of this thematic theology, and presents several expressions and phrases that shed light on the discussion of the person and charism of the founder, for example, 'an institute's own proper character and function', 'patrimony of the institute', 'evangelical intention of the founder', and so on. She concludes that *Evangelica Testificatio* positively encourages one to identify the uniqueness of one's institute and its founder as distinct from others (pp. 102f).

Another important Church document, Jossy has consulted for the purpose is *Mutuae Relationes* (Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church), which, in its attempt to define the charism of the founder, makes an allusion to *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* and calls the founders "outstanding men and women", and speaks clearly of how 'the charism of the institute is inherited from the founder' (p. 104). *Evangelica Testificatio* also specifies, according to Jossy, the following five aspects in reference to the charism of the founders: 1) charism is an experience of the Spirit, 2) it is transmitted to the disciples, 3) it is to be lived, guarded, deepened and developed by the disciples, 4) it possesses a distinctive style for sanctification and apostolate, 5) it is a particular style of life for sanctification and a particular tradition (see p. 104). In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II, affirming the statements of the previous documents says that the 'founders are persons open to the Holy Spirit and they have responded wisely to the needs of their times' (p. 108).

Jossy has also studied a few theologians' views on the matter. Although there is no unanimity among them with regard to all the points, when we consider these views severally along with the Church teachings, ten such features that can be attributed to a founder emerge. Jossy has singled out four of them as primary and the rest secondary. The primary norms are: 1) The founder receives a vocation/divine inspiration for it, 2) he has the awareness of being chosen for it, 3) he conceives the nature and purpose of the institute, and 4) he defines the spirit and gives formation to the pioneering members. These four are absolutely necessary to determine the profile of the founder. As

secondary and complementary identity marks, he/she may possess some personal qualities like 1) experience of a particular aspect of Christ's mystery, 2) constructive love for the Church, 3) giving Rules of life and government to a group, 4) sharing in the sufferings of Christ, 5) gathering a group to form a religious institute, and 6) a sense of paternity/maternity towards the members (pp. 115-140).

Jossy dwells at some length also on the nature and form of a founder's inspiration to start an institute, like direct inspiration through visions and dreams, voices and locutions (example Bl. Mother Teresa's 'call within the call'), and indirect inspiration, for example, the sad situation of the Church in France giving inspiration to St. Vincent de Paul to start the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, as well as collective inspiration. In this last case, the author cautions, it may be hard to determine who took the initiative to found an institute due to particular historical situation and unsettled problems of the individual Church (pp. 141-162).

This chapter closes with some reflections on the role and identity of a 'co-founder'. She observes that there exists some confusion of roles of founder and co-founder in the case of women religious institutes that originated between the 17th and 19th centuries. From her extensive research on the founding process of various religious institutes, she has left behind this valuable insight: The concept of co-founder/co-foundress whose assistance enables the founder, in some way, in the execution of the inspiration received from God is yet to be developed in the teaching of the Church; it is an area that requires further study to settle the issue, especially in the case of some religious institutes of women (pp. 172-181).

In the third chapter, the author, armed with the checklist of norms and criteria culled out of Church documents and supported by scholarly theological opinions given in chapter two, applies them to some candidate's eligibility as founder of women TOCD. She successfully eliminates the candidacy of Fr. Leopold Beccaro as founder; next she considers the opinion of some people who hold both Chavara and Beccaro as founders and is dismissed on the basis of the check-list. Then she takes the case of Archbishop Baccinelli as founder proposed by some and he is also dismissed against the touchstone of the check-list.

Finally, she takes the case of Sr. Eliswa Vakayil's candidacy as foundress, staunchly defended by Dr. Sucey Kinattungal and supported by Archbishop Mellano. Jossy proceeds systematically applying the essential norms of the check-list to see if Sr. Eliswa could be

considered the founder/foundress, and refutes the assertions of Sucey (pp. 233-248, 253-279). In that process, Sr. Jossy has also unearthed the fallacy of Archbishop Mellano's opinion, by showing that he had made it in the particular context of arguing for jurisdiction over the Koonammavu convent, after the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the Vicariate of Varapuzha in 1887.

After a systematic process of eliminating all other claimants as founders - Fr. Beccaro, Archbishop Baccinelli and Sr. Eliswa, as we have seen above - the author singles out St. Chavara in the fourth and final chapter of the book. She draws an excellent profile of him as the founder, by showing forth all the important identity marks of a founder shining out in him in a unique way (pp. 301ff). As additional proof, she presents the contemporary testimonies on the question - testimony of Fr. Leopold Beccaro himself, of Fr. Kuriakose Porukara who was successor of St. Chavara as Prior, and of the sisters of the TOCD community who were his spiritual daughters (p. 388ff).

Jossy concludes this study, presenting in a summary the five factors that decisively point to Chavara's position as the founder of the women TOCD (pp. 398-402).

Having made a review of the book, I am very happy to underscore the opinion of Prof. Stipe on the work of Jossy. He notes that Jossy has invested immense labour in her dissertation and has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of many problems concerning the origin of the Third Order of Carmelites Discalced for women in Kerala and has produced a most competent study methodologically (p. ix). As I was attentively perusing the pages of this volume, I was convinced of the compliments bestowed on her by Fr. Paul Kalluveetil, another great researcher. Presenting the book, he notes that Jossy is gifted with a research mind (xvii).

However, I may be permitted to make one further remark, so to say, for the value addition of this already immensely valuable book, namely, to cut it to size in its next revision, for the sake of any ordinary reader and devotee of saint Chavara, by removing materials repeated for 'proof-presentation' at different levels of argumentation, though this procedure might have been necessary for the kind of research done.

In conclusion, may I note that Sr. Jossy Veliyan, the author, surely deserves our admirations and sincere gratitude for this excellent contribution to the combined field of Church History, Theology and Spirituality.

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