

**Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara
the Founder of the
Women TOCD in Kerala**

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Jossy Veliyan CMC



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©Author

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Preface

This study is the book form of the doctoral dissertation defended in the University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome under the title: *Identifying the Founder of the Third Order of Carmelite Discalced (TOCD): A Historico-Theological Study on the Identity of the Founder of the First Indigenous Religious Institute for Women in Kerala*. The moderator of the dissertation was Dr. Prof. Michael Monshau, O.P. Dr. Prof. Stipe Jurič, O.P. served as the second Reader of the dissertation. I wholeheartedly and sincerely thank my guides

whose critical remarks and observations have helped me to improve the content of this study. Let me cite some of their impressions. Monshau says, "...this dissertation provides very good reasoning for the choice of the founder toward which Sr. Veliyan's work points." Rev. Prof. Stipe Jurič, O.P. also has kind words of appreciation: "After I had read the dissertation, in my estimation, Veliyan has produced a most competent study, methodologically. This is a very important and very original dissertation. It is a study in history and it is also theology. Veliyan has invested immense labor in her dissertation and has demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the many problems concerning the origin of women Third Order Carmelite Discalced in Kerala." Once again, I bow my head in gratitude before these two scholars for their expert guidance and creative suggestions.

I gratefully remember the message written and the blessing given by Baselios Cardinal Cleemis to this book. I thank Fr. Paul Kalluveetil CMI for the words of presentation of this book. Let me put in record my indebtedness to the authorities who had magnanimously opened for me the archives where I could go and consult the original documents concerning the theme of this dissertation. I am giving below under the title 'Acknowledgement' the details of the archives. I also place on record my deep sense of indebtedness to my religious Superiors, especially, Sister Sancta CMC, the Superior General, for kindly providing me with an opportunity to do this study and supporting me all along such an arduous and taxing task. The same is true to Sr. Sophy CMC, my Provincial Superior, all the Sisters of the CMC, especially in Rome. I am as well grateful to my friends and

well-wishers for their bighearted help in many ways and their words of encouragement. I also owe a big debt of gratitude to my benefactors, especially to the diocese of Augsburg for generously sponsoring this work.

Jossy Veliyan CMC



The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

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Message

The Catholic Church in India, especially that of Kerala, is honored and glorified in the elevation of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and St. Euphrasia Eluvathingal for veneration at the altar in the Universal Church on 23 November 2014. Pope Francis in his meeting of the Superiors General on 29 November 2013 remarked: “You must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing and being. You must embody the values of the Kingdom”. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is a religious who embodied the values of the Kingdom of God in his life.

The book *Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the Women TOCD (The Third Order of the Carmelite discalced in Kerala)* of Sr. Jossy CMC is very relevant especially in the context of the recent canonization of St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias. The work enables everyone to have a new interpretation of, and a renewed commitment to the spirit and charism of CMC Sisters as it has been

envisioned by its founder. Sr. Jossy has made use of all the available sources, especially archival manuscripts from Italy and Kerala regarding the origins and charism of the first indigenous religious institute in Kerala.

St. Chavara Kuriakose was a visionary who saw the miserable situation of women in Kerala and dreamt of a Church where women can work for the spiritual nourishment of the people of God. This visionary founder realized that the empowerment of women could be attained mainly through their own renewed commitment to the Christian calling. It is in such a background, Sr. Jossy looks at the foundation of the first indigenous religious institute for women. St. Chavara Kuriakose saw in his mind's eye that the Sisters, too, could work for the spiritual empowerment of the people of the two existing vicariates of Kollam and Varapuzha without any distinction of Latin or Syrian. He not only envisioned the convent as a spiritual resort for girls to learn matters of their religion and the sacred Scripture, but also work for the spiritual renewal and growth of the Church. St. John Paul II writes in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* that women ought to be recognized as co-workers in the mission of the Church. St. Chavara Kuriakose predicted it about 120 years ago. I am sure that Sr.Jossy's work will not only

enlighten many but also empower the readers to bring out the much needed changes in society especially in the religious circle, so that the mind of Christ will be reflected in his Church.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Rev. Sr. Jossy CMC for bringing out this study in a book form. I am sure that this book is the result of so much prayer, reflection and research which she has done during her Doctoral studies in Rome. All the Sisters who are the fruits of the spiritual efforts of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara will rejoice by seeing his vision for religious life is coming out in this way. His insights for women empowerment, especially his prophetic vision, that the Sisters might work hand in hand with men religious for the growth of the Kingdom of God. I wish God's blessings to the author, the CMC sisters and pray that everyone should read the book eagerly and imbibe the missionary spirit of St. Chavara Kuriakose in their own missionary field.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Baselios Cleemis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

+ Baselios Cardinal Cleemis
Major Archbishop-Catholicos of Trivandrum
President, Catholic Bishop's Conference of India.



Mount Carmel Generalate
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Foreword

This study is an honest attempt to trace the role of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara in founding the first indigenous religious Congregation for women in the Church of Kerala. Sr. Jossy has presented the historical origin of various opinions regarding the identity of the founder of this institute. By applying the norms set by the Church documents to identify the founders of religious institutes to the person of St. Chavara she convincingly proved that he received the inspiration to found a new religious institute, which is the most important characteristic of the founder. It can be seen that all other qualities expected of the founders are fulfilled in him. Whereas, the deciding factors of the founders of religious institutes are not present in other persons such as Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Msgr. Bernardin Baccinelli and Sr. Eliswa Vakayil whom some writers regard as founders of the women TOCD.

According to the author, the establishment of religious life for women is God's response to the cries of women of the nineteenth century Kerala. As the dignity and vocation of women were demeaned in the society, Chavara felt an urgency to institute convents for women in view of the empowerment of women through the dedicated services of the religious Sisters. In the Chronicles of Koonammavu

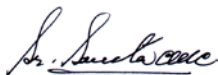
Convent and Mannanam Monastery St. Chavara depicted the miserable situation of the women of Kerala that in the ancient Church of St. Thomas Christians they had no opportunity to live a life totally dedicated to God. He tells that even though there were many women desirous of leading a chaste life they had no option but to accept marriage and live a worldly life. Hearing the cries of these women, God inspired St. Chavara to found communities of consecrated women in the Church. He motivated the Sisters to learn the art of loving Jesus and to live constantly in the divine presence and help the Church and the world to become more humane and holy. He seemed to believe that the promotion of dignity and vocation of women is integral to the evangelizing mission of the Church. He suggested practical steps and specific actions to promote the Reign of God. What he suggested was not meant for increasing their knowledge, but to change their lives by forming right attitudes.

It was an eye-opening to me that St. Chavara envisioned in his Testament that the ‘monasteries, convent and boarding house for girls’ be opened in places in view of catering to the needs of the two existing vicariates of Kollam and Verapuzha which were under the Italian Carmelite missionaries. He dreamt of a Church where men and women religious work hand in hand without any discrimination of Latin or Syrian. The encouragement given by St. Chavara to the Sisters to develop their feminine charism supports a spirituality of complementarity, which is based on the fact that man and woman are not conflicting elements but complimentary agents working together for the progress and development of the people of God. This book is a strong invitation to uphold women’s dignity and vocation through a

recommitment to the cause of women as St. Chavara envisioned. I pray that the women TOCD from which emerged the present CMC and CTC imbibe his noble vision on women.

I congratulate Sr. Jossy for her efforts to learn new languages such as Italian and Latin in order to hunt the treasures in the archives of Rome, Genova, Loano and Kerala. This book is a fitting tribute to the founder, St. Chavara, as it is published in the days of the celebrations of his canonization. It is a service to the Congregation and the society as they look forward to know the contributions of St. Chavara in founding the first religious Congregation for women in Kerala. I wish and pray that the Lord bless the author and the readers through the intercession of St. Chavara.

It is my prayer that these studies and reflections on the founder fathers and the first members will produce good results in the lives of the women religious: that they will look upon St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the founder and Father of the first religious institute for women and imbibe the charism of the founder.



Sr. Sancta CMC
Superior General

Presentation

It is a great honor granted to me to present the book “St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Founder of the women TOCD,” by Dr. Sr. Jossy Veliyan CMC. This is a revised version of the dissertation submitted at the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome defended on 24 February 2014. Sr. Jossy is a pioneer who spent about twenty-seven years of her life in researching and publishing scientific works on the CMC Congregation, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Fr. Leopold Beccaro, and the revised editions of Koonammavu Chronicle, and of the Letters of St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara.

Sr. Jossy is gifted with a research mind. During her days in Rome she spent days after days in the Archives of Vatican library, of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, and of the OCD Generalate , Rome, the monastery of St. Anna, Genova, where Leopold Beccaro spent his last days, and of the monastery of Mount Carmel, Loano. This book invites us to enter into the world of the historical documents concerning the origin of the women TOCD. This is indeed, a most precious and inexhaustive reservoir of knowledge. Every impartial and unbiased reader who delves deeply into this stream of knowledge will be impressed and convinced of the arguments brought out by the author.

This book is divided into four chapters, with general introduction and general conclusion. Chapter one deals with the foundation of the Women TOCD and different opinions on the founder. In Chapter two Sr. Jossy studies the norms to identify the founder according to the documents of the

Church. In Chapter three she tries to apply these norms to the foundations of women TOCD and makes an evaluation of the different opinions. The author convincingly unveils the weaknesses of the theories of the authors who hold Leopold Beccaro as the sole founder, and of the St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Leopold Beccaro as co-founders, as well as Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli as founder and Eliswa Vakayil as foundress. Chapter four, entitled “Chavara- the charismatic founder of the women TOCD is devoted to a detailed study of the historical documents, and persuasively defends that title.

The author adduces ten arguments for holding Chavara as the charismatic founder of the Women TOCD: 1) It was Chavara who was the inspiration behind it. The nature of inspiration is explained; his longing for a Religious Institute for Women is proved from the documents, as well as his sense of fulfillment at the establishment of the convent. 2) Chavara conceived the Institute with its purpose. 3) Chavara’s awareness of being called to be its founder, which is proved from his role in the preparation for and during the ceremonies of Vestition and Profession as well as the words he wrote in his ‘Testament’ regarding the future expansion and growth of the convent. 4) The part played by Chavara in the evolution of the life-style of the community, in giving form to the first members, in making the community a ‘spiritual resort,’ in helping the Sisters to grow in union with God, in encouraging feminine charism, in providing books to learn matters of religion, in assisting them to lead a liturgical life and to foster the love for the Mother of God, in starting the apostolate of the community such as training in handicrafts, training of girls in the boarding house, in giving education to the girls and in taking care of the temporalities of the convent. 5) Chavara provided them the inspiration to delve deep into a particular mystery of Christ, such as

adhering to the divine will. 6) He taught them to love the Church. 7) The saint, by deeds and words injected in the Sisters the docility to the ecclesiastical authorities. 8) He had to undergo sufferings as founder. 9) He speaks about the Women TOCD in his 'Testament' to his confreres. 10) The Women TOCD is presented as the Sister Congregation of the Men TOCD by Archbishop Baccinelli, by Chavara himself; there existed collaboration between the Monastery and the Convent during his life time and after his death, till the prohibition of the ecclesiastical authorities. The testimonies of Beccaaro, of Kuriakose Porukara and the contemporary Sisters prove that Chavara was the founder.

In the precise and concise general conclusion Jossy states, "This research thus comes to the conclusion that Chavara deserves the title of being the founder of the women TOCD at Koonammavu. The founding of this institute was an epoch making event in the history of the Church in India. Both CMC and CTC Sisters are obliged to him for their religious existence. Sr. Jossy owes our heartfelt appreciation and sincere gratitude. She has done a wonderful contribution, which will make futile the attempts of the present antagonists to project Mother Eliswa as foundress of the women TOCD. Let us expect more scholarly contributions in the fields of Church history, theology and spirituality.

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With profound gratitude and love, I raise my heart in praise and thanks to God Almighty who has graciously guided me with strength and endurance to the completion of this work. God has been the constant inspiration of my whole life and my studies. However, this project has progressed with the help of so many generous persons. I place on record, my deep indebtedness to all those who have helped me, in one way or the other in this attempt. I most sincerely thank Dr. Prof. Michael Monshau, OP., the moderator of this dissertation, for his scholarly guidance with keen observations, accurate suggestions, allowing necessary freedom and above all with fraternal concern and never-failing friendly approach. I wholeheartedly thank Prof. Stipe Jurič, OP., the second Reader of this thesis for his insightful questions and practical suggestions. My heartfelt thanks are due to all the professors of the faculty of Theology of the University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome.

This research enabled me to study the manuscript sources from the archives in Rome, Genova and Kerala. The archivists of the Congregation of Oriental Churches, the Propaganda Fide, the Generalate of OCD, Rome, the Monastery of St. Anna, Genova, the Monastery of Monte Carmelo, Loano, the Prior General's House of the CMI, Kakkanad, St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam, CMC Provincial House, Ernakulam, CMC Generalate, Alwaye, St. Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, India who allowed me to use their manuscript sources.

I express my sincere thanks to the following individuals who in a special way have made the completion of this dissertation possible: Isaac Arikappilly CMI, Sebastian Athappilly CMI, Thomas Kochumuttam CMI, who offered valuable comments, which helped me clarify my writing. They generously assisted in refining my text and furthered my interest in academic endeavors. Sr. Mary Virginia OSU and Mary Ann OSU who took pains to read, correct and improve the linguistic quality of this work.

For my stay and study in Rome, I am indebted to several persons. I take this opportunity to express my indebtedness and gratitude to the Sisters of the Generalate community of the Ursulines of Roman Union, especially Mother Cecilia Wang, the Superior General, and her team who sustained, supported and encouraged me during these years. I place on record my deep sentiments of love and gratitude to every one who accompanied me in this study.

Rome

24 – 02 – 2014.

Jossy Veliyan CMC

Abbreviations

<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Commentarium Officiale</i>
<i>ACMCG</i>	<i>Archives of CMC Generalate, Alwaye, Kerala, India</i>
<i>ACO</i>	<i>Archives of the Congregation for Oriental Churches</i>
<i>AGOCD</i>	<i>Archives of the Generalate of the Order of the Carmelites Discalced</i>
<i>AMC</i>	<i>Archives of Mutholy Convent</i>
<i>AMCL</i>	<i>Archives of Monte Carmelo Loano</i>
<i>APC</i>	<i>Archives of Puthenpally Convent, India</i>
<i>APF</i>	<i>Archives of the Congregation for Propaganda Fide</i>
<i>APGK</i>	<i>Archives of Prior General's House Kakkanad,</i>
<i>ASA</i>	<i>Archives of the Monastery of St. Anna,</i>
<i>ASJM</i>	<i>Archives of St. Joseph's Monastery, Mannanam</i>
<i>AST</i>	<i>Archives of St. Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu</i>
<i>AVP</i>	<i>Archives of Vimala Province, Ernakulam, India</i>
<i>c, cc</i>	<i>Canon, Canons</i>
<i>CCC</i>	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
<i>CCEO</i>	<i>The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches</i>
<i>Cf</i>	<i>Consult (Cônfer)</i>

<i>CIC</i>	<i>The Code of Canon Law</i>
<i>CK</i>	<i>Chavarayachante Kathukal [Letters of Father Chavara]</i>
<i>CKC</i>	<i>Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent</i>
<i>CMC</i>	<i>Congregation of the Mother of Carmel</i>
<i>CMI</i>	<i>Carmelites of Mary Immaculate</i>
<i>CMM</i>	<i>Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery</i>
<i>col, cols</i>	<i>Column, Columns</i>
<i>CTC</i>	<i>Congregation of Teresian Carmelites</i>
<i>CWC</i>	<i>Complete Works of Blessed Chavara</i>
<i>DIP</i>	<i>Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione</i>
<i>ed/eds</i>	<i>Editor/Editors</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Essential Elements of Religious Life</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>Ecclesiae Sanctae</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Evangelica Testificatio</i>
<i>et al</i>	<i>Other authors (et alli)</i>
<i>etc</i>	<i>and so on (et cetera)</i>
<i>f, ff</i>	<i>folio, folios, or following after page numbers</i>
<i>FMM</i>	<i>Franciscan Missionaries of Mary</i>
<i>fn</i>	<i>Footnote</i>
<i>Ibid</i>	<i>In that very same place (Ibidem)</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
<i>Mal</i>	<i>Malayalam</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Missionaries of Charity</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i>
<i>Msgr</i>	<i>Monsignor</i>
<i>MSS</i>	<i>Manuscript Sources</i>
<i>NBCLC</i>	<i>National, Biblical, Catechetical, Liturgical,</i>

	<i>Center</i>
<i>OCD</i>	<i>Order of Carmelite Discalced</i>
<i>p, pp</i>	<i>Page, pages</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
<i>Plut</i>	<i>Plutonium</i>
<i>Prot. No</i>	<i>Protocol Number</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sacred Congregation</i>
<i>Scri. Rif. nei. Cong.</i>	<i>Scritture Riferiti nei Congressi</i>
<i>SCRIS</i>	<i>Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes</i>
<i>TOCD</i>	<i>Third Order of Carmelite Discalced</i>
<i>trans</i>	<i>Translated by</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vita Consacrata</i>
<i>Vol, Vols</i>	<i>Volume, Volumes</i>

INTRODUCTION

This book is a study of the story of the foundation of the first religious congregation for women in Kerala. Founded in 1866 in a small village named Koonammavu, it was originally called the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced (TOCD). Later it was bifurcated into the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) in Syrian Rite and the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) in Latin Rite. The focus of the study is on the persons involved in founding the Women TOCD and the respective roles they played in that process as well as in evolving the charism of the Congregation.

The book distinguishes between charismatic founders and juridical ones. The former in response to God's inspiration to found a congregation conceive it and work for its materialization. There can be others who assist the charismatic founders by cooperating with them in different ways in the task of founding and bringing up the new congregation. They are called co-founders. They may share the inspiration that the founders originally received from God and contribute to its realization by lending ideas, human as well as material sources, moral support and spiritual help. The juridical founders are those who give ecclesiastical approval for the new congregation. The term 'founder' without qualification would refer to the charismatic founder. Identifying Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara,¹ Fr Leopold

¹ Kuriakose was the name given to him at baptism. On 8 December 1855 when he made his religious profession at Mannanam, he took the name as Kuriakose Elias of the Holy Family. Chavara is his family name or the surname. He was born on 10 February 1805 of devout parents at Kainakary in Alappuzha district, Kerala. He was ordained as a priest on

Beccaro² and Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli³ respectively as the founder, co-founder and the juridical founder of the TOCD, the present work describes in some detail their noble contributions to its coming into being and all-round growth and wellbeing. This is the central theme of this work.

The first chapter gives a historical narrative of the fascinating story of the foundation of the women TOCD. With the help of the original writings of the same three illustrious men—Chavara, Beccaro and Baccinelli—and their

29 November 1829 at the church of Arthunkal by Msgr. Maurelius Stabilini. He died on 3 January 1871. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 8 February 1986 at Kottayam and was canonized by Pope Francis on 23 November 2014 at Vatican. Hereafter he will be referred to in this work as Chavara.

² He was born on 27 August 1838 in Beccaro family, Grogardo, Italy. He was christened as Jacob. As an Italian Carmelite missionary he reached Kerala in 1859. He was ordained as priest by Msgr. Bernardin Baccinelli at Verapuzha on 8 September 1860. The place of his activities was Koonammavu until he left for Italy on 1 January 1876 and died on 22 April 1914 at Genova. Hereafter he will be referred to in this work as Beccaro.

³ Joseph Baccinelli was born on 15 March 1807 of the Baccinelli family in Rome. He joined the Discalced Carmelite Order in the Roman province and on 8 December 1824, he pronounced the religious vows with the name Bernardine of St. Teresa. He reached Malabar on 18 October 1833. He was nominated as Pro-Apostolic Vicar of Quilon (1845-1853), Co-adjutor to the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha (1853) and finally Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha (1855-1868) with the title of Archbishop of Parsala in Thessalonica. After thirty-one years of dedicated service to the people of Malabar Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli passed away on 5 September 1868 and was buried in Verapuzha. Cf., Ambrosii a S. Theresia, *Hierarchia Carmelitana seu Series Illustrium Praesulum Ecclesiasticorum ex Ordine Carmelitarum Discalceatorum* (Romae: apud Curiam Generalitiam, 1939), 340.

contemporaries it says how the Catholic faithful of Kerala had been long desiring to have a religious institute for women, how Chavara and other founders of the men's congregation [Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara] that they started at Mannanam in 1831, had also received inspiration to found one for women as well, and how Chavara, even after the death of others, continued to cherish the longing for establishing a women's congregation. In the course of time there were also two failed attempts (between 1858 and 1861) to begin it. From the documentary and circumstantial evidence, one can reasonably infer that Chavara was personally involved in those attempts. Then providentially there appeared the young Italian Carmelite missionary Fr Leopold Beccaro who soon became closely associated with Chavara and even shared his idea of a new religious institute for women. Eventually they jointly planned, worked hard and in 1866 put up in Koonammavu its first house by name St Teresa's Convent. Appreciating Beccaro'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."

The same chapter continues with a discussion of the events that led to the bifurcation of the institute into CMC and CTC. It happened in the wake of the formation of two vicariates for the Syrians, namely, Thrissur and Kottayam, as different from but within the existing Latin vicariate of Verapuzha. There arose a dispute between the two Syrian Apostolic Vicars on the one side and the Latin Vicar Apostolic of Verapuzha on the other, each side claiming jurisdiction over the Koonammavu convent. It was finally settled in favor 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 Verapuzha and developed into the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites while the Syrian members in the course of time adopted the name the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.

Partly related to the disputes and conflicts between members of the two Rites gradually, different opinions were expressed regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD, which branched into CTC and CMC. We have come across five such opinions: (i) Beccaro is the founder; (ii) both Beccaro and Chavara together are the founders; (iii) Vicar Apostolic Bernardine Baccinelli is the founder; (iv) Sister Eliswa Vakayil, the first member of the community, is the founder; and (v) Chavara is the founder. These different opinions along with their proponents are presented in the second half of the first chapter.

Confronted with the different opinions regarding the founders we were led to enquire into the norms deciding the identity of a founder. So far, there does not exist any single Church document giving a list of such norms. Therefore, we had to analyze systematically the various documents that speak of the identity of founders in small ways and construct such a list. In support of it, we have also incorporated into the findings the considered views of some theologians of repute. This is the subject matter of the second chapter. Here the approach is rather theological. We hope that we have succeeded in creating a reliable list of criteria to identify the founders of religious institutes, which could be of use for all the religious men and women struggling to decide on who their founders are. This, therefore, may be considered an original contribution of this work.

The third and fourth chapters apply the above mentioned norms to the persons related to the founding of the women TOCD with a view to determining who exactly deserve to be called its founder in one or another sense: charismatic, co-founding, or juridical. Basing ourselves on all the relevant documents and writings, we have 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 as without basis each of those opinions that holds either Beccaro, or Beccaro and Chavara together, or Baccinelli, or Eliswa as the founder or founders. It includes a detailed investigation into the personality of Eliswa and her role in establishing and bringing up the religious community at Koonammavu, but finds nothing that would qualify her as its founder. Beccaro, however, as a ‘Godsend associate’ of the founder Chavara and by his hard “work and assistance,” clearly comes out as the co-founder.

The fourth chapter is an investigation whether Chavara has the deciding characteristics of a founder, and comes to an affirmative conclusion. Reliable testimonies of his contemporaries like Beccaro, Kuriakose Elias Porukara and the members of the convent also amply vindicate this fact. This study establishes that Chavara originally received the inspiration for founding a congregation for women. As he himself attests in the Chronicle, he had an intense yearning for having a religious Congregation for women. He was knocking at the door of the Lord for the realization of his long-cherished dream. Finally, with the help of his associate Beccaro he founded it at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. He played vital role in deciding its nature and purpose and in the formation of its members. The gracious Lord had

bestowed on this beloved son the virtues, which are commonly held as the traits of a founder. For example, he excelled in the love of the Church and docility to ecclesiastical authorities, participated in the various aspects of the mystery of Christ, and underwent sufferings and hardships for the cause of founding the religious institute.

An additional finding that strengthens and confirms the thesis that Chavara is the founder of the new congregation is that the convent at Koonammavu is understood and brought into existence as the completion of the project of religious life conceived by the founders of the men's congregation that they started already in 1831 at Mannanam. Indeed, Chavara as well as Baccinelli always treated the convent community at Koonammavu as a sister congregation of the Mannanam community. Even the Provincial Delegate was common to the two foundations, and in the mutual dealings of the two communities there ever existed a sense of being Brothers and Sisters. It is significant that Chavara in his 'Testament,' betraying the deep-seated awareness of owning the Sisters' institute, entrusts it to the care of the Mannanam community in the manner of a father instructing his sons to take care of his daughters. He even marked the specific places where convents are to be opened. These points are elaborated towards the fourth chapter. The general conclusion is a résumé of the entire work and its findings.

Having delved comparatively deep into the personality traits and spiritual attainments of Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara I have come to admire him and feel inspired by his unparalleled sense of commitment to the Lord and His people. This study has surely convinced me of his role in the establishment of the first religious congregation for women as

its founder. Still more, I am inclined to designate him as the Father of women religious in Kerala, although many may think that it is an exaggerated statement. He is the dynamic initiator and leader under whose inspiration the indigenous religious life in Kerala was initiated. My observation is that the religious community that he founded at Koonammavu was not only the first of its kind in Kerala, but even the model for most of the women's Congregations that subsequently came into existence in the same State. In fact, in the earlier times they had as a rule the TOCD men and women as their formators and spiritual directors so that Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara can be rightly called their Father as well.

Chapter One

The Foundation of the Third Order of Carmelites Disalced (TOCD) for Women and Different Opinions on the Founder

Saint Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, founded as the Third Order of the Carmelites Disalced (TOCD) on 13 February 1866 is the first institute of consecrated women in the Church of Kerala, India. From this evolved later the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC) in the Syrian Rite and the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) in the Latin Rite. In the course of its history, a controversy concerning the identity of the founder has emerged. Various opinions have been making their rounds and the title of the founder has accordingly been attributed to different persons depending upon the author's viewpoint and understanding of history. The content of this chapter is the presentation of these varied opinions or shades of views.

In order to understand the context in which the different opinions have emerged, it is indispensable to reflect on the founding of the convent, which sheds light on the persons involved in it from its beginning. At the outset, an attempt is made to trace the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians of India with regard to the institutes of monks and nuns in Kerala even before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century.

1.1 Religious Life in the Church of Kerala

Paulinus of St. Bartholomew, a Carmelite missionary in Malabar in the eighteenth century, reports in his book *Viaggio alle Indie Orientali* that before the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries there were vestiges of monastic life

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at Angamaly, Edappally, and Kuravilangadu, three important Christian centers of Malabar.¹ Many Church historians mention a monastery near the grave of St. Thomas at Mylapore where the inhabitants spent time in prayer, meditation and silence. They are of the view that religious communities existed in Kerala from very early times. However, the exact nature of the religious life they followed is shrouded in obscurity due to a lack of valid historical documents. Some travelers and writers of the sixth and following centuries refer to this monastery. While making a detailed and scientific study on the origin of Indian Christians and their relationship with the Apostle Thomas, Mathias Mundadan, a Church historian of India, states, “Gregory of Tours (A.D. 594) gives an account of the monastery of St. Thomas in India based on the report he heard from a monk called Theodore who had visited that monastery.”² Placid Podipara, another Church historian, speaks of the testimony of Theodore: “Theodore, a sixth century pilgrim from Gaul, who visited Edessa and India, said that he saw a monastery in the region of India where St. Thomas’ body first rested.”³ The Christians of Kerala who desired a spiritual life used to make pilgrimages to this monastery and spend the rest of their lives there as religious.⁴ A St. Thomas Christian priest, known as Joseph the Indian, who visited Lisbon, Rome, and Venice in 1501 is reported to have said: “They have

¹ Cf. Paulinus A S. Bertholomeo, *Viaggio alle Indie Orientali* (Romae, 1796), 80.

² A. M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol.1 (Bangalore: Church History Association in India, 1984), 56.
Cf., Placid Podipara, *The Thomas Christians* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1970), 25.

⁴ Cf., Bernard Thoma, *Mar Thoma Khristianikal* Vol.1 [The St. Thomas Christians] (Palai: Mar Thoma Sreeha Press, 1916), 41-42.

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monasteries where black monks live a chaste life; they have also many nuns.”⁵ Damianõ de Gomes, an early sixteenth century Portuguese historian, confirms this: “They have monasteries of monks, who dress in black. There are nuns, too, of the same Order. Both monks and nuns live in strict observance, honesty, chastity and poverty.”⁶ It seems that this kind of religious life became extinct during the sixteenth century. Hence, the Christian Community was poised for the re-establishment of religious life in Kerala.

The *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery (CMM)*⁷ narrates an incident that shows how in the sixteenth century the St. Thomas Christians wanted to re-establish religious life for women. After the blessing of the newly built convent at Koonammavu, on 27 March 1867, Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro returned to their monastery. Back in his room, Beccaro read a book on St. Teresa; and what he found there surprised him. It was something that he had never previously come across, namely, that the St. Thomas Christians had communicated their desire to St. Teresa (1515-1582) to have a convent started in Kerala. “Mother Teresa had received a letter from the ancestors of the Christians in India, which read: ‘We request you to come

⁵ Antony Vallavanthara, *India in 1500 AD, the Narratives of Joseph the Indian* (Mannanam: RISHI, 1984), 176.

⁶ Quoted in Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 187.

⁷ In this study all the references to the *Chronicle of the Mannanam Monastery* are from the *Chavarayachante Sampoorana Kruthikal* (Complete Works of Fr. Chavara), Vol. 1: *Nalagamangal* (Chronicles) (Mannanam: CMI Prasadhaka Committee, 1981). Hereafter abbreviated as *CMM*.

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over here to our country to found convents.”⁸ It is further written in the Chronicle:

Reading it and considering our misfortune, she was moved to tears, and decided to go to India. However, when she prayed to Jesus, as she was accustomed to do, he appeared to her and said, “Daughter, you need not pray for it now; this is to be realized not by you but by your children; at the right time your children in religion will go there and establish communities of monks and nuns!” This [establishment of a convent] reassured us that it was she herself, who from heaven guided our steps, and that she would continue to do so.⁹

Parappuram adds some more details regarding the information St. Teresa received from the missionaries who had come to India from her country that India lacks monasteries and convents. The people have no proper teachers or preachers of the Word of God.¹⁰ Thus, the

⁸ *CMM.*, 139. Cf., also *Koonammavu Madham Nalagamam* (The Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent), Vol. 1 (1866-1870), Vol. 2 (1871-1910), written in Malayalam language, edited by Jossy Veliyan (Alwaye: Mount Carmel Generalate, 2009). *CKC.*, 1, 27, 45. Hereafter this Chronicle is abbreviated as *CKC.*, with specific volume and page number.

⁹ *CMM.*, 139.

¹⁰ Cf., *ASJM.*, Varkey Parappuram, *Diary*, 1126. Varkey Parappuram joined the TOCD in 1855 as a seminarian, and was ordained in 1858. When the monastery at Koonammavu was entrusted to the men TOCD in 1857, Msgr. Baccinelli appointed Parappuram as one of the members of Koonammavu monastery. He died in 1908 at the age of seventy-four and was buried in Koonammavu. His *Diary* gives the story of the nineteenth century Kerala Church. Hereafter cited as *Diary* with page numbers.

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Christian Community had been cherishing its hope of re-establishing religious life among them and making efforts for it even at the time of St. Teresa of Avila. Baccinelli had also the information that St. Teresa wished to dedicate a convent for women in India to her beloved Spouse.¹¹ Marceline Berardi, a Carmelite missionary in Kerala while writing the biography of St. Teresa of Avila also mentions the above fact of St. Teresa's prayers with tears for establishing religious houses in India.¹²

1.1.1 The Longing for a Religious Institute for Women in the Modern Period

The idea of religious life was not new to the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. The precise origin of the desire to have a religious institute for women in Kerala is difficult to determine. It emerged out of the expectant waiting of the Christians of Kerala for centuries. A few expressions of the desire and attempt to found convents¹³ in the nineteenth

¹¹ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, Circular Letter of Baccinelli written to Molto Reverende Madri Priore a Religiose Caemelitane Scalze, Figlie della Nostra Signora Madre Teresa di Gesù on 29 June 1860, addressing "Molto Reverende Madri." Hereafter abbreviated as *Reverende Madri*.

¹² Marceline Berardi, *Serapha Amma Ieshoyude Theresa* [Biography of St. Teresa of Jesus] (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Press, 1868). He dedicated this book to Chavara and in the page of dedication, he states that when God's time arrived to answer her [St. Teresa's] prayers, Chavara was the one who worked for the realization of it in Kerala: "You [Chavara] are the one who made it possible with relentless prayers." He wrote these lines on 22 September 1866.

¹³ Although in many documents the word 'convent' is used to denote the religious houses of men and of women, in this study, 'convent' is used to denote the residence of religious women and 'monastery' for that of religious men.

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century can be noted. From the historical records available, it is known that there were many religious institutes for women in other parts of South India such as Mangalore, Madurai, Pondicherry, Coimbatore, Mysore, Madras, Hyderabad, and Vishakhapatanam.¹⁴

In the report of Msgr. Clemens Bonnard,¹⁵ Apostolic Visitor for all the vicariates of India, who visited the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1860, he speaks of Indians' unusual inclination towards religious life. He observes, "It appears in the reports that Indians in general have great inclination for

¹⁴ Cf. APF., *Acta*, S. Congr. Propaganda Fide, Anno 1868, P.2. Relazione sulla visita Apostolica dei Vicariati delle Indie Oriente. Vol. 234. Report of Msgr. Clemens Bonnard, f. 70. The chart showing the number of Religious Houses for women ('case di Religiose') in all the vicariates: the vicariate of Pondicherry - 13, Mangalore - 4, Madura - 7, Coimbatore - 1, Mysore - 2, Madras - 1, Verapuzha - 1, Hyderabad - 1, Vishakhapatanam - 3. (Quadro Sinottico dello stato delle Missioni Indiane nel principio dell'Anno 1867). These institutes were not founded among the St. Thomas Christians. The above report, known as Bonnard Report is referred to as APF., *Acta*, *Bonnard Report*.

¹⁵ Clemens Bonnard was born in 1796. He joined the Paris Foreign Missions Society (Missions Étrangères de Paris: MEP). He was nominated the Apostolic Vicar of the Coast of the Coromandel, India in 1859. On 13 August 1858, Pope Pius IX conferred on him the title and office 'Visitor of all the vicariates of India.' With Claudio Depommier and Francis Laöuenan as assessors, Bonnard started the visit on 29 November 1859 and visited the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1860. While traveling to Patna, he died at Varanasi on 21 March 1861. Msgr. Charbonneax continued the visit and the report was prepared by him in November 1862 and submitted to the Propaganda Fide. Some authors call it 'Report of Bonnard' and some others, 'Report of Charbonneax.' In this study, it is referred to as the 'Bonnard Report.'

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religious life.”¹⁶ Looking at the phenomenon of religious life in other vicariates of India, where there were many religious institutes for women, Bonnard poses the question, “Why up until now have the institutions of women prospered far more than institutions of men?”¹⁷ This was not true about the vicariate of Verapuzha, where institutes for men prospered, but not those for women.¹⁸

Some Church historians of modern times state that during the nineteenth century in certain parts of South India there was a greater emphasis and participation of women in the ministry of the Church. This period was marked by the growth of religious communities of women and their increasing involvement in the activities of the Church.¹⁹ It is the female sector of society that benefitted the various apostolic activities of the women religious, namely, education, social services, health care and other charitable activities. The Sisters also began to play a larger and more significant role in mission fields. In the present State of Tamil Nadu, for example, approximately nine religious institutes for women were opened in the first half of the nineteenth

¹⁶ APF, *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 411: “Parimenti apparisce dalle relazioni che in generale gl’Indiani hanno grande inclinazione per la vita religiosa.” Since there are more than three page numbers on each page, to avoid confusion, we follow the paragraph number of the Report.

¹⁷ APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 412: “Perchè finora abbiano prosperato più gli Istituti di donne che quelli di uomini.”

¹⁸ Cf. APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, f. 70. (Quadro Sinottico dello stato delle Missioni Indiane nel principio dell’Anno 1867). According to the chart, there are altogether nineteen ‘Case di Religiosi’: Mangalore, 4, Verapuzha, 5, Pondichery, 1, Coimbatore, 1, Mysore, 1, Madras, 1, Hyderabad, 1.

¹⁹ Cf. Firth C.B., *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Mysore: Wesley Press, 1961), 209-214.

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century.²⁰ The main apostolate of all of these religious institutes was education of girls and care of the sick and the disabled.

While in other vicariates of India religious institutes for women were flourishing, in the vicariate of Verapuzha first originated religious institute for men. Two leading priests of the time Fr. Thomas Palackal and Fr. Thomas Porukara took the initiative for the same. Under the title 'Establishment of a Religious House,' Chavara articulated their yearnings to start religious life in the Kerala Church:

Fr. Palackal and his intimate friend Fr. Thomas Porukara were anxious to establish a monastery (*darsanaveedu*, 'house of vision') at least for priests because they were well aware of the fact that many a good thing was not done owing to the want of a

²⁰ The following details are taken from Alex Paul Urumpackal's study, *Vocations in India : The Religious Women*, Vol.1. In 1870, Fr. Michael Ansaldo from Pondichery founded a religious community for women at Poonamallee. It is known as Franciscan Sisters of Notredame de Boun Secours. The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was instituted at Pondichery in 1844. Fr. Joseph Louis from the Coimbatore diocese founded the Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the year 1853 at Coimbatore. In 1854, five young women of Tiruchirappally formed a religious community at Tiruchirappally. It was called the Congregation of the Servants of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows (OSM). Cf. Alex Paul Urumpackal, *Vocations in India: The Religious Women*, Vol. 1 (Vadavathur: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1986), 96-288. *Bonnand Report* and Urumbackal's study regarding the number of institutes for religious women do not tally with each other.

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religious house. They were sad at heart, as there was no one to give them support for this cause ...²¹

Drawing attention to the phrase ‘at least for priests,’ Mundadan states, “The words of Chavara, ‘a *darsanaveedu* [monastery] at least for priests’ seem to indicate that the founding fathers of the TOCD desired to open a path to religious life in general (both for men and for women). However, given their limitations they wanted to begin at least with one for priests.”²²

In this connection, a reference may be made to the letter Msgr. Maurilius Stabilini²³ gave to the above two priests exhorting churches and their faithful congregations to give generous donations for the establishment and support of a religious institute. According to the writings of Chavara, these two priests, desiring to found religious life for men in the region, approached the then Apostolic Vicar, Msgr.

²¹ *CMM.*, 1. “*ጊገላኝ ገገላኝ ገገላኝ ገገላኝ*”

²² Cf. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 281.

²³ Maurilius Stabilini, born in 1777 in Ferrara, Italy, made his religious profession in 1794 in the Order of Carmelites of Primitive Observance (O. Carm.). In 1824, he was ordained titular bishop of Dolica and made co-adjutor of the Vicariate Apostolic of Great Mughal. On 8 December 1827 he took charge as interim Apostolic Vicar of Malabar and Cochin. In the same month on 27 he made his profession in the Discalced Carmelite Order (OCD). After retiring from Kerala in 1831 he worked as a missionary in Karwar (1831-1837). He returned to Italy in 1837 and died there in 1857. Cf. Ambrosii A. S. Theresia, *Hierarchia Carmelitana seu Series Illustrium Praesulum Ecclesiasticorum ex Ordine Carmelitarum Discalceatorum (Romae: Apud Curiam Generalitiam, 1939)*, 304-311.

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Stabilini, for permission.²⁴ Porukara was secretary to the Apostolic Vicar, Palackal was the rector of Pallipuram seminary, and both were friends. They were the leading priests of the time known as *Malpan*.²⁵ One can see that the letter speaks of the existence of religious communities in other parts of the Church. It also stresses the need for opening ‘a door to religious life’ in general, for both men and for women. It reads:

In other countries, which were evangelized much later than Malabar [Kerala], and even in those, which are not as extensive as Malabar, there are many monasteries for both men and for women. You who are ancient Christians, requested the Holy Church to establish for you also similar religious institutes. Yet, so far, no steps have been taken for the establishment of a monastery. No men and women here have benefited by the example and labor of religious. The teaching about the choice of the religious life is not known among laymen and women; and even among the priests. ...In order to open a door for religious life, the two priests who are entrusted with this letter desire to establish a church and a monastery for those who are willing to embrace the religious life.²⁶

²⁴ *CMM.*, 1. Cf., also Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, translated from Malayalam and reprinted by Lucas Vithuvattical (Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 2003), 7. Hereafter referred to as *A Short Biography*.

²⁵ *Malpan* is a Syriac term, a title given for a learned man, professor, or doctor of theology.

²⁶ ASJM., File no. 4/B/2. The letter written by Msgr. Maurelius Stabilini on 1 November 1829. The original is in the Malayalam language and signed by Stabilini.

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Mathias Mundadan observes in the above letter of the Bishop the phrase ‘to open a door for religious life’ and in his opinion, the idea for religious life for women was there in the minds of these native priests and they approached their Apostolic Vicar with the request. He states:

It is quite likely that the letter of Bishop Stabilini, if not dictated by the two priests, was based on ideas suggested by them. From this, we might infer that the two had included in their vision religious life for both men and women. The beginning they were attempting – the foundation of a monastery for priests - would eventually lead to religious life for all categories of persons.²⁷

Chavara shared their vision, made it his own and worked along with Palackal and Porukara and he admits that from his young age he was determined to be of one mind with the *Malpan*, and was guided to priesthood by the wisdom of these two priests.”²⁸ Accordingly, the work to found a monastery started in 1831 at Mannanam and the institute received canonical approval in 1855. Then Chavara, the only surviving of the trio, concentrated his attention on establishing a convent for women. Based on his understanding, he narrated the longing of women of Kerala for a consecrated life when he wrote the Chronicle of the convent at Koonammavu (*CKC*). The opening words of the Chronicle under the heading, ‘The Beginning of Religious Life for Women’ present equal importance to both men’s and women’s religious institutes:

²⁷ A. M. Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008), 281.

²⁸ *CMM.*, 26.

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In the land of Malayalam [Kerala] even though the true Christian religion was in practice from very early times, there existed no monasteries or convents. The people had heard of men and women who practised religious virtues but they did not have living examples of religious virginity... As for women even those who desired to live a virginal life, had no way of embracing such a life-style. They had no option. They had to accept marriage and live as worldly women and they were living in this sad plight for a very long time..²⁹

1.1.2 First Attempts and Failures

The story of the attempts to found a religious institute sheds light on the people involved in the founding of the convent at Koonammavu in 1866. The foundation at Koonammavu followed events, which gradually led to the establishment of a convent for women. The first among them is mentioned in the diary of Varkey Parappuram, who was one of the first members of the TOCD monastery at Koonammavu, started in 1857, records about a search for a plot of land for a convent near Alangadu Kunnel church. They went and inspected the land under the leadership of Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar. The people as well as the parish priests were happy with the idea of beginning a convent there. This first attempt was in 1858. The same *Diary* records why this plan could not be accomplished at Alangadu. Parappuram's description may be paraphrased as follows:

²⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

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For this [to found a convent for women], several places were considered including a place near Alangadu Kunnel church. It was at this time that Msgr. Canoz, Apostolic Vicar of Thiruchirappally happened to visit Verapuzha. When the matter of the proposed convent was discussed with him, he suggested that it should not be located far away, but at a nearby place [near the monastery at Koonammavu].³⁰

The correspondence of Msgr. Alessio Canoz with Propaganda Fide shows that he visited Verapuzha in the first week of December 1858, which may mean that they had the discussion with him on the site of the convent in one of those days in December.³¹ Eventually this plan was abandoned because the place was rather far away from Koonammavu.

While searching for another plot for the convent, the parishioners of Puthenpally readily offered their land for establishing a convent on their church property. Manampady Puthenpally is a place located between Koonammavu and the Bishop's house at Verapuzha. This was also a stronghold of the Syrian Christians,³² and was finally chosen to be the site

³⁰ Parappuram, *Diary*, 656-657.

³¹ Cf., APF., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Indie Orientali* (1857-1858), Vol. 16, ff. 1174-1177. Letter written by Msgr. Alessio Canoz, Apostolic Vicar of Trichirappilly, to the Propaganda Fide from Cochin on 3 December 1858. His letter shows that he visited Msgr. Baccinelli and some of the places of the vicariate of Verapuzha.

³² To be sure that Puthenpally was a Syrian parish, Cf., APF., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Indie Orientali* (1865-18670), Vol. 19, ff.1130-1152. *Relazione del Vicariato di Verapuzha Redatta li 20 Febbraio 1867*; ACO., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaressi* (1862-1877), ff. 150-172. The report has separate folio numbers which are used in this

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for the convent. A Lease Deed³³ was signed on 4 February 1859, which shows that as soon as they abandoned the plan at Alengadu in December 1858 they were able to find an ideal site at Puthenpally. There, the efforts evolved into a more concrete form. A letter of Baccinelli addressed to Msgr. Carlo of Saint Elia, Apostolic Vicar of Quilon who was staying in Rome in 1859, gives the information that the church at Puthenpally has offered two palm-groves large enough to build a convent for native women. The letter also speaks of the circular letter Baccinelli sent to the vicariate of Verapuzha motivating the people to donate for the construction of the same. He requested prayers for himself and for the convent for native women, the construction of which was in

study; f. 30: Alleg. Lett. A. Elenco delle parrocchie, e rispettive Cappelle, Sacerdoti, Anime, Scuole della Dottrina Cristiana riguardante la Cristianità Siro-Malabarica del Vicariato Apostolico di Verapoli. Puthenpally comes first in the list. Cf. also ACO., *Scritture Originali* (1876), Vol. 7 (390C) *Catalogus Ecclesiarum ritus Siro-Malabarici quae sub jurisdictione Vicarii Apostolici Verapolitani Illrmi ac Remi D. Fr. Leonardi A. S. Alosio*. The 'Catalogus' prepared and sent to Propaganda Fide by Msgr. Mellano in 1876 include Puthenpally in the list of Syro-Malabar parishes. Hereafter the report of Baccinelli (1867) is referred to as ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*.

³³ APC., *Puthenpally Seminary Parampinte Charithram* MSS Malayalam [The History of the Plot of the Seminary at Puthenpally], 3. This history was written by Fr. Kuriakose Vadakkumchery, in 1944, the then Parish priest of Puthenpally. He says that he referred to all the documents related to its history. The Lease Deed, originally written on palm leaves, is copied on page 3 of the book. The four trustees of the parish put their signature in the Deed.

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progress.³⁴ Parappuram refers to the above-mentioned circular letter in his *Diary*:

His Grace Archbishop Bernardine announced in a circular letter to the churches about the charitable funds collected from the churches he had visited in the current year [1859] and in the previous year. He also mentioned in the same circular letter about the need of establishing a convent for women and about the help required for the same. The people as well as the priests were, in general, happy about the idea.³⁵

The two circular letters of Baccinelli to Europe, one to the OCD nuns³⁶ and the other to the Carmelite Provincials, Priors and Religious written on 29 June 1860 shed much light on the foundation of the convent. The purpose as well as the content of the two letters is almost the same.³⁷ He states, “Here four monasteries for men of the Third Order of the Carmelites have already been established. As for women a

³⁴ AGOCD., *Plut.* 442, i, *Litterae 1858-1860, Bernerdinos A. S. Teresia*, Letter written by Baccinelli from Verapuzha to Rome on 2 July 1859: “... e ci raccomandandi alle orazioni di quelle servo di Iddeo e il monastero di native, che cui si va architettando, per cui ho chiesto elemosina in tutto il Vicariato. La chiesa di Puthenpally vicina a Verapoli mi ha ceduti a in tal oggetti due palmeti che formono un sufficientissimo spazio in luogo opportunissimo.” This letter clearly tells that the proposed convent is meant for the native women.

³⁵ Parappuam, *Diary*, 656.

³⁶ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, *Reverende Madri*.

³⁷ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e. Letter of Msgr. Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order on 29 June 1860; APF., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi, Indie Orientali 1859-1861*, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421.

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convent is being just started.”³⁸ Addressing the letter to Reverend Mothers, he tells them,

...She [St. Teresa of Avila] wished to dedicate a convent for women to her beloved Spouse. In fact, the foundation has already been laid for a convent of the Third Order Carmelite Nuns, to be engaged in the training of Indian girls.... You may well understand, Rev. Mothers, how deep is my sorrow to see so many young girls longing to stay in this convent to dedicate themselves to their Spouse, Jesus, who has called them to himself. The building is still incomplete and I do not know when we would be able to accomplish this task.³⁹

Baccinelli further tells that he is sad to see the eagerness of more virgins who approached him for admission in the convent, that he cannot take more than thirty-three of them: “Oh! My God! I do not know how to expand my fatherly care! I could only accept thirty-three of them, and that with great risk, lacking all the means to console and accept even just one more.”⁴⁰ In the same letter he explains the reason why he restricted the number as thirty-three, that

³⁸ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, *Reverende Madri*: “... mentre i 4 Conventi per i Terziari sono già alquanto avanzati, e questo delle Terziarie è appena cominciato ...”

³⁹ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e. *Reverende Madri*.

⁴⁰ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e. Letter of Msgr. Baccinelli to the Provincials, Priors and Religious of the Carmelite Order, dated 29 June 1860; Cf., also APF., *Indie Orientali: Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaressi*, 1859-1861, Vol.17, ff. 1420-1421.

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is, in honor of thirty-three years of Jesus Our Redeemer who lived among us.⁴¹

A number of documents, including Western and Indian, are available on the proposed convent at Puthenpally.⁴² The construction work of the convent at Puthenpally began in 1859 and within one year or so a two-storey building with accommodation for thirty-three members, and surrounded by a tall protective wall,⁴³ was completed. However, this building, when fully constructed,

⁴¹ AGOCD., *Plut.*35 e, *Reverende Madri*: “Difatti già si son gettate le fondamenta di questo Monastero per Terziarie Carmelitane addette alla educazione di queste povere bambine indiane quasi del tutto abbandonate dai loro parenti... e qui sol loro resta per consolarsi la speranza che la pietà di quelli a cui ricorro faccia crescere quest’ unico piantato Monastero fondato per contenerne 33 in onore dei 33 anni che visse fra noi il nostro Redentore Gesù.”

⁴² Some Western authors like Clemens Bonnand, Leo Meurin, Eliseus Meckenna, Ambrosii A. S. Theresia, and Sanmiguel have written about this initiative. Bonnand and Leo Meurin were Visitors Apostolic of Kerala in 1860 and 1876 respectively. Meckenna and Sanmiguel were European Carmelite missionaries and seminary professors. They showed their interest in it because of their relationship with the Puthenpally seminary. Meckenna was professor at Puthenpally seminary (1878-1884), and Victor Sanmiguel at Always seminary (1933-1966). Both of them have written extensively about the Church of Kerala and the events that led to the opening of the seminary at Puthenpally. In that connection they mentioned about the convent since the land was leased for the convent and the original plan was to open a convent at Puthenpally. Indian writers include, Chavara in *CKC* and *CMM*, the *Chronicle of Mannanam (1864-1872)*, Vol. 3; *Alochana (1864-1871)*, *Diary of Parappuram Varkey*, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the St. Joseph Apostolic Seminary, Always (1933-1958)*, Sebastian Kuzhumpil and the *Puthenpally Seminary Parampinte Charithram*, and the Lease Deed of 4 February 1859.

⁴³ A small portion of the huge compound wall built in 1859 at Puthenpally is preserved to this day.

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was not initially used as a convent but as a seminary. The *CKC* points to the arrival of Mar Thomas Roccas⁴⁴ in Kerala as the reason for changing the plan:

It was at this time that a Syrian Bishop defying the Holy See arrived from Babel. Then most of the churches went over to his side. Because of the turmoil created, the construction work on the convent was stopped. By God's grace, when the strife ceased, seeing that many souls were being lost for want of good priests, a decision was taken to change the convent into a seminary. Accordingly it was made the study house (scholasticate). With that, we lost all the hopes we had [about opening a convent], and again were plunged into the same former sad state of helplessness.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The Chaldean Patriarch Joseph Audo (1848-1879) received many letters from the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar for a Bishop of their own Rite in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though the *Propaganda Fide* told Patriarch Audo not to interfere in the affairs of Malabar, he ordained Thomas Roccas as Bishop and sent to Kerala. Accompanied by some of the St. Thomas Christians, he reached Kochi on 9 May 1861. The Christian community accorded a warm welcome to him and many of the churches went after him in spite of repeated warnings from the part of the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha, which created much confusion and unrest in the Christian community. Msgr. Baccinelli excommunicated Roccas and at last, Roccas left Kochi in 1862. Although he was ordained and sent by the Patriarch, he was called an intruder Bishop by Rome because the St. Thomas Christians were under *Propaganda Fide* for about two centuries. This was true about Mar Mellus who reached Kerala in 1874.

⁴⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 2.

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The chronicler of Mannanam monastery explains the situation in similar words:

A huge wall was being built for the convent for nuns. It was then that the above-mentioned events [Roccas schism] broke out. Therefore, the construction work of the convent was stopped. Then the authorities, feeling that priests were more needed than nuns, converted the convent building into a seminary, and it seemed that there was no more chance of realizing the plan for a convent!⁴⁶

Alochana refers to their longing to have a religious institute for women and the change of plan of the built convent in the following words:

During these days itself, since there was no convent for nuns in this Malayalam [Kerala], Very Reverend Archbishop and other Fathers desired to found one. However, while its construction was going on, thinking that the need for good priests was more important than a convent, [they] decided to make it a seminary. Therefore, this prayer [for founding a convent] was prolonged...⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *CMM.*, 126.

⁴⁷ *ASJM.*, *Alochana*, Mannanam [Book of Consultation of Mannanam Monastery], (1864-1871), 95. Hereafter referred to as *Alochana*. In this text even though there is no explicit mention of the name of the place, from the context it is clear that the author speaks about Puthenpally.

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Eliseus Mckenna's⁴⁸ *The Church of the Thomas Christians on the Malabar Coast of India* has a description of the convent building for native nuns at Puthenpally. Further, under the title 'the Intended Nunnery in Puthenpally,' he provides a historical setting to the seminary at Puthenpally. He records:

The seminary building of Puthenpally was originally intended as a convent for native nuns, for the instruction of whom Msgr. Bernardine thought to bring out to Malabar some European nuns; but because of the schism caused by Roccas he was hindered in carrying out this design. As the seminary building in Verapuzha was too small, on 15 August 1866 he transferred the seminary to Puthenpally,

⁴⁸ Eliseus A. S. Corde Jesu Mckenna was born in 1863 in Holland, made his religious profession as a Carmelite in the province of Bavaria in 1880 and took the name Eliseus of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After his ordination in 1886 he reached Verapuzha in 1890 as a missionary. He was rector in the Apostolic Seminary, Puthenpally, and taught philosophy for many years. He was a resident in the monastery of Koonammavu and taught Latin to the Tertiaries. After fourteen years of missionary life he returned to Holland in 1914. While he was in Kerala he wrote four books on the history of the Church of Kerala: 1. *The True Church of Jesus Christ and the Syro-Chaldean Church*, 2. *The Reduction of the Thomas Christians by the Carmelites*, 3. *History of the Latin Christians at the Malabar-Coast (British-East India that is in the Kingdoms Travancore and Cochin (1904)* 4. *The Church of the Thomas Christians (Syrians) on the Malabar Coast of India*, written between 1903/04. Cf., P. Ambrosii A. S. Theresia, OCD., *Nomenclator Missionariorum Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum* (Romae: Apud Curiam Generalitiam, 1944), 129-130. Cf., also P. Ambrosii A. S. Theresia, OCD., *Bio-Bibliographia Missionariorum Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*, 319.

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where the convent buildings had been modified and enlarged for this purpose.⁴⁹

The same author speaks about ‘the Clerical Seminary of Puthenpally’ under the title ‘The Puthenpally Nunnery Turned into a Seminary.’ There, he repeats, “the buildings, which in the hamlet of Puthenpally near Verapoly had been constructed for the purpose of a nunnery, were adapted for the requirements of a seminary.”⁵⁰ The Puthenpally parish records affirm the fact that the St. Joseph Apostolic Seminary was established in 1866 which was built in the name of the Convent of Immaculate Mother of Carmel. Therefore, the local people called the institute the ‘Convent Seminary’ and its inhabitants, priests and seminarians of the convent.⁵¹ When Msgr. Leo Meurin, Apostolic Visitor, during his visitation in Kerala, wrote from Ollur to the Propaganda Fide on 4 September 1876, testified that the present building of the seminary at Puthenpally was constructed originally as a convent for women.⁵² Ambrosius of St. Theresa, OCD, also has testified about the origin of a convent for women at Puthenpally that later turned into a seminary because of the Roccas schism. He states, “...Moreover, the establishment of this convent was being impeded by serious obstacles,

⁴⁹ AGOCD., *Plut.* 296 h. Eliseus Mckenna, *The Church of the Thomas Christians (Syrians) on the Malabar Coast of India*, (MSS), 325. Hereafter referred to as *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, with specific page numbers.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵¹ APC., *Puthenpally Seminary Parampinte Charithram*, 8.

⁵² ACO., *Ponente July 1877 Originali Extra Summarium*, Letter written by Msgr. Meurin to Propaganda Fide from Ollur on 4 September 1876, Para. II, 2.

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especially on account of the schism having risen in the Christian community due to the arrival of Bishop Roccas.”⁵³

Both Indian and European writers have recorded that the focused attempt to found a convent for women had proved unsuccessful because of the Roccas schism. For as long as Bishop Roccas remained in Kerala, neither Chavara, nor Msgr. Baccinelli nor any other leader of the Christian Community could give attention to the foundation of a convent. Even after Roccas departed from Kerala in 1862, they had to concentrate on healing the wounds inflicted by him in the Community. An immediate step suggested was to give proper theological training to the priestly candidates of Syro-Malabar Christians who were affected by the Roccas schism.

1.1.3 The Foundation at Koonammavu

The preceding historical survey of the expression of the desire and failed attempts for establishing a convent for women in Kerala, establishes the background for discussing the actual foundation at Koonammavu in 1866. The latter has to be seen not in isolation but as the continuation and culmination of these various attempts at different sites to found the convent. Different persons were involved in varying degrees of participation. In Chavara’s description of ‘the Beginning of Religious Life for Women,’ he expresses in touching words his disappointment at losing the opportunity to found the convent at Puthenpally.⁵⁴ Chavara was indeed,

⁵³ Ambrosii A. S. Theresia, OCD., *Hierarchia Carmelitana seu Series Illustrium Praesulum Ecclesiasticorum ex Ordine Carmelitarum Discalceatorum* (Romae: apud Curiam Generalitiam, 1939), 340.

⁵⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 2.

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Delegate.⁵⁷ in 1863. While Beccaro was serving as the parish priest of Koonammavu church, he came in contact with a widow named Eliswa Vakayil, aged 34 and her only daughter Anna, aged 14, who disclosed to him their determination to lead a chaste life and entrusted themselves into the hands of their spiritual director. He tested the genuineness of such a desire. He saw that some natural bent toward and taste for religious experience was undoubtedly at work in them. Convinced, he sought the advice of other missionaries on how to protect and nurture the desire for chaste life of his spiritual daughters. He approached his bosom friend Chavara and sought his advice about his plan to engage the widow Eliswa and her daughter in the works proper to nuns, such as teaching the girls the practice of virtues and training them in some handicrafts..⁵⁸ Chavara and Beccaro together started planning for the beginning of a convent for women. Both of them selected suitable candidates conscientiously.

1.1.3.1 Collaboration of Beccaro and Chavara

In both *CKC* and *CMM* Chavara himself has recorded that in all the matters regarding the convent they discussed, planned and worked together..⁵⁹ When they discussed this new form of life, they agreed upon the following points. First of all, these women should be kept in a safe place. With this objective, they planned a separate house to be built on the property of Anna, Eliswa's daughter. It was understood that their life should be one of total dedication to God and a close

⁵⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 200 provides the designation of Beccaro as 'Provincial Delegate.' Beccaro was Superior of both the TOCD for men and for women by appointment.

⁵⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 5.

⁵⁹ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 2ff. Cf., also *CMM.*, 126-135, 138-143.

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following of Jesus. At the same time, this life was a life for others, especially for the integral development of women, which was an important dimension of their life.

Chavara noted down in the Chronicle, "...besides striving for their [the Sisters'] own spiritual growth they have to teach other girls to pray and train them in various handicrafts."⁶⁰ When Msgr. Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar was approached for permission to open a convent he was prompt and unconditional in approving the idea. Chavara recorded in the Chronicle: "When the Archbishop was informed of it [the plan for a convent], he, too, approved of it saying that it was a fine idea. He, who had formerly wanted to make them [the Sisters] live within the compound wall thirteen feet high, now allowed them to live in a house made with bamboo-mats, without any hesitation."⁶¹ The Archbishop was keen on instituting the convent as 'Third Order of Carmelites' and provided them the Rules⁶² of the same Order to be translated into Malayalam.

1.1.3.2 A Humble Beginning

Keeping the above-mentioned ideals in mind, Beccaro selected a property belonging to Anna as the site for the first religious institute for women. He then contacted Anna's uncles and agreed to pay all the debts relating to the property

⁶⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 5.

⁶¹ *CKC.*, 1, 2-3.

⁶² *CKC.*, 1, 5-6; *CMM.*, 127. Cf., also *ACO.*, *Report*, 20 February 1867, Response to the Q. 71: "Le regole son quelle già approvate per tale Istituto [Maestre Pie del nostro Ordine cioè Terziarie], vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho detto pei Terziari."

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from the Koonammavu monastery.⁶³ He then requested them to construct a small house there for the convent. There, a small hut with bamboo-mat walls, known later as ‘bamboo-mat convent’ was erected. It had three bedrooms, a prayer room, and a dining room. Surrounding the house a fence was put up to mark off the enclosure. Beyond that, there was an outer fence all around the compound. The new pathway to the church was cut out and cleared.⁶⁴ Chavara calls it ‘a true abode of poverty.’⁶⁵ *Alochana* compares it to ‘a small mustard seed’⁶⁶ an expression that speaks of its smallness and littleness as well as the enormous possibility of its future growth and development, as Jesus used the parable of the mustard seed in the gospel (Mt 13:31-32). Chavara in his humility states in a very modest way that God came down to hearken to his prayer and to fulfill his earnest desire to have a convent for women: “It seems that God has willed to accomplish now the matter of a convent for nuns for which I was praying for long.”⁶⁷

1.1.3.3 The First Community

In the meantime, there was one more candidate ready to join the new life: Eliswa’s sister Theresa, aged 18. Beccaro met her in her home-parish when he went to inspect the school at Karuthedathu and she reached Koonammavu on 10

⁶³ *CMM.*, 127: “*‘B* *issfmsjbpw Chns\p\pw Xoa p smAm sapw...*” Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 4.

⁶⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 6.

⁶⁵ *CMM.*, 128.

⁶⁶ *Alochana*, 96. The author uses the term ‘small seed of mustard’ (*‘sNdplspmsd hn ptmse.’*).

⁶⁷ *CMM.*, 126.

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February 1866.⁶⁸ On 12 February, Leopold called together all three candidates, and gave the necessary instructions to begin the new way of life on the next day. On Tuesday 13 February 1866, the Community was started and they were given a small brown scapular in a very simple ceremony, thus inaugurating the first convent for women in Kerala.⁶⁹ Eliswa, aged 26, an unmarried woman who was a neighbor and a relative of Anna's father was contacted and she was appointed as a helper to the Community. All the Superiors of the monasteries were instructed by Chavara to be present for the inaugural ceremony of the convent at Koonammavu. Kuriakose Porukara, Superior of Mannanam and Mathai Mariam, Superior of Elthuruth were present. Other Superiors, the chronicler informs, could not be present because they were preaching a retreat at Ankamaly at that time.⁷⁰

The fourth member was a Syrian Catholic woman called Eliswa Puthanangady, a widow aged 37, belonging to the parish of Vaikom. Chavara knew that she was waiting for admission to religious life. She was received to the Community on the following day, 14 February 1866.⁷¹ Thus, the convent had four candidates and a helper to begin with.⁷² In the report of 1867, Msgr. Baccinelli, recorded that though there were members from both Syrian and Latin Christian Communities, they lived in harmony.⁷³ The story of the first Community at Koonammavu is not that of upper class people, but of two widows and two young women. The educational,

⁶⁸ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 7.

⁶⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 9-12.; *CMM.*, 128.

⁷⁰ Cf., *Alochana*, 96.

⁷¹ *CKC.*, 1, 15; Cf. also *CMM.*, 129.

⁷² *CMM.*, 129.

⁷³ *ACO.*, *Report, 20 February 1867*, f.18: "Vi sono Soriane, e Latine, che ciò nulla imbarazza in esse."

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occupational, socio-economic and religious background of these four women was that of the lower middle class. They could not even read or write properly; they could not manage to construct a small house as a convent by themselves. They had no money, no power, no initiative, just good will and large hearts. They were little people, from an agricultural background. The Chronicle describes their condition in these words:

These women had some land and paddy fields as their own. A loan had been taken out using this property as security. ... The interest on the loan was mounting up and reaching a point when they would not only lose the land but also run into debt.⁷⁴

In one of the letters, Chavara wrote about the life of Eliswa and her daughter Anna before starting their Community life in bamboo-mat convent, which gives the impression that they were very poor people.⁷⁵

1.1.3.4 A New Building for the Convent

Since the first members lived in an impoverished dwelling, they needed a more solid house. Baccinelli himself reports that the condition of the convent was very poor.⁷⁶ The words in *CMM*, “The present shed was made of fresh bamboo which was being eaten up by moths and the tender coconut

⁷⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 4; Cf., also *CMM.*, 127.

⁷⁵ *Chavarayachante Kathukal* [Letters of Fr. Chavara], Ed. Thomas Panthaplackal and Jossy Veliyan (Kakkanad: Chavara Central Secretariat, 2011), V/3. Here after abbreviated as *CK*.

⁷⁶ *ACO.*, *Report*, 20 February 1867, f. 18: “... nel frattanto abitano in una si può dir capanna miseramente in tutto.”

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logs were being eaten away by termites and bamboo-mats which were not yet dry.”⁷⁷ The main concern was how to find funds to construct a proper building for the convent as well as the land for the building. With firm determination, Beccaro and Chavara journeyed together to different places in search of money.⁷⁸ Sr. Anna, the chronicler recorded in the Chronicle of the Koonammavu Convent: “When they [Chavara and Beccaro] came back they brought with them some donations to construct a new convent building and they bought a new plot of land on which construction work started.”⁷⁹ It seems that the Fathers, together or separately, made many trips to raise funds for the convent. Fr. Kuriakose Porukara, the biographer and successor of Chavara, has clearly mentioned one such journey of Chavara to Malayattoor and nearby places:

In his zeal to construct the convent, he [Chavara] in the beginning of the season of monsoon [September - October, 1866] went to the parishes at Malayattoor side. While at Cheranelloor he was laid up with rheumatic fever, and was unconscious for two days. All exhausted he came back to the monastery in Koonammavu. The swelling in his leg became aggravated and burst and gradually he recovered.⁸⁰

Lay individuals, parish communities and the clergy, especially Chavara’s disciples whom he contacted by letters

⁷⁷ *CMM.*, 130. [2000]

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 20. This entry is of May 1866 (exact date is not given).

⁸⁰ *Alochana*, 131.

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and personal visits, were a source of financial assistance.⁸¹ Baccinelli admits that the convent was constructed by the donations from the faithful, some churches and priests.⁸² A circular letter sent by Beccaro on 13 February 1867 to the Syrian churches of Kaduthuruthy and Muttuchira to raise funds for the construction of the convent also must have persuaded the people to contribute generously: “Now the building of a convent for religious Sisters, who diffuse perfume like sweet smelling lilies,... has reached up to the roof thanks to the alms of churches, priests and faithful of the Syrian Rite.”⁸³

The *CMM* and *CKC* and other contemporary writers provide details about the source of money for the construction of the convent. Sufficient funds were raised for the construction to be completed by the following February and the Sisters entered the newly built convent on 27 March 1867.

⁸¹ Louis Pazheparampil, “Preface” to *Thressia Punnyavalathiyude Carmelita Munnam Sabhayile Sahodarikkayulla Nyayapramanam* [Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of Carmelites of St. Teresa] (Elthuruth : St. Joseph’s Industrial School Press, 1917), 3.

⁸² ACO., *Report, 20 Febbraio 1867*, Q. 72: “La lor casa si fabbrica con le elemosine date *ad hoc* dai fedeli, da alcune chiese, e sacerdoti.”

⁸³ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, ff. 42-43. The circular letter sent by Beccaro to the parishes of Muttuchira and Kaduthuruthy on 13 February 1867. The letter originally written in Malayalam language is published in 2010. Jossy Veliyan, ed., *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal* [Letters of Fr. Leopold], (Alwaye: Mount Carmel Publication, 2010), III/1. Hereafter referred to as *Leopold Missionariyude Kathukal*. *CKC.*, 1, 48 has this entry regarding the letter of Beccaro: “Seeing that money was over he [Beccaro] said, ‘Let us send a letter and see whether we get some money or not.’ We sent a letter to Kaduthuruthy, Muttuchira parishes. It was a real wonder. They collected 600 Rupees in cash and sent it, through the Superior of Mannanam monastery.”

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On the same day after the blessing of the convent, the first four members were vested with the religious habit of the Third Order of the Carmelites Discalced.⁸⁴ The first four members made their religious profession of vows on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 16 July 1868.⁸⁵

1.1.4 Bifurcation of the Convent on the Basis of Rites

The vicariate of Verapuzha was divided on the basis of Rites.⁸⁶ By Breve of Pope Leo XIII *Quod jampridem praedecessoribus nostris*, on 20 May 1887 the St. Thomas Christians following the Syrian Rite, who hitherto had been governed by the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha together with the Latins, were separated from the jurisdiction of the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha and subjected to two Bishops, not of the Carmelite Order. Two vicariates were constituted for the Syrians, namely, Kottayam and Thrissur.⁸⁷

St. Thomas Christians saw in this event a partial fulfillment of their long cherished desire to have Bishops of their own. Pope Leo XIII appointed Msgr. Charles Lavinge, a French Jesuit, as Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam and Msgr.

⁸⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 57; Cf., also *CMM.*, 139.

⁸⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 90, 201; *CMM.*, 143.

⁸⁶ *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (CCEO), c. 28 § 1 reads: "A Rite is a liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage, which is made distinct by the culture and circumstances of the history of peoples and which is manifested by each Church *sui iuris*" in its own manner of living the faith." (George Nedungatt, ed., *A Guide to the Eastern Code: A Commentary on the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2002), 111.

⁸⁷ *ACO.*, *Brevi e Bolle e Lettere Ap.* 1869 – 1917 Reg. 153, f. 253; Cf., also *Acta Leonis XIII*, Vol. VII, Roma, 1888, 106-108.

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Adolf Medlycott, an Anglo-Indian as the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur. The two vicariates were territorially divided by the river Alwaye, which divided Malabar from Malayattoor into almost equal parts.⁸⁸ The establishment of separate vicariates for the Syro-Malabar Church⁸⁹ and the Latins marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Church of Kerala. It marked a new beginning for the TOCD as well. The Koonammavu convent also experienced bifurcation on the basis of Rites.

1.1.4.1 The Background of the Division of the Vicariate of Verapuzha

A note on the situation that led to the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the Vicariate of Verapuzha seems appropriate here. The Christians of Kerala trace their origin to the mission of the Apostle St. Thomas who founded some Christian communities and thus originated the first nucleus of the Catholic Church in India. They are, therefore called ‘the

⁸⁸ When the Archbishops and Bishops of Southern India, namely, Archbishops of Verapuzha, Pondichery and Madras, and the Bishops of Thiruchirappally, Vishakhapatanam, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore, Coadjutor Bishops of Mysore and Verapuzha as well as the Administrator of the diocese of Kollam met together at Bangalore on 25 January 1887 they suggested making the division of the vicariates according to the natural limit of Alwaye river which divides the region from Malayattoor to Kochi. Cf., ACO., *Acta*, 1887, Vol. 18 ff. 263-264, copy of the letter of the Bishops who met together at Bangalore to *Propaganda Fide*.

⁸⁹ When the Vicariates Apostolic of Thrissur and Kottayam were erected by the Bull *Quod jampridem* the then Catholic St. Thomas Christians were named “The Syro-Malabar Church” in order to distinguish them from the Latin Christians.

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St. Thomas Christians.’⁹⁰ Until the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in India, all the followers of Christ were called St. Thomas Christians. They enjoyed a hierarchical relationship with the Chaldean Church with their Indo-Oriental identity. Their Bishop was the Metropolitan of All India, who was a spiritual head of the Church and who ensured the canonical and liturgical matters. The Archdeacon of All India, an indigenous priest, carried out the administration. They followed the East-Syrian⁹¹ liturgical Rite. After the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries, the situation started changing adversely.

The embarrassing complicity between the Church and the colonial powers was bound to affect the Church in the European colonies. It certainly affected its progress in Kerala. The Europeans’ superiority complex did not allow them to foster the richness of indigenous Christians. Some European missionaries were often arrogant towards indigenous Christians, including priests. This arrogance and low opinion

⁹⁰ The St. Thomas Christians form the second largest community among the Oriental Churches with a membership of about three million Christians. This Church is the most flourishing Oriental Church of our times. Several names are used in the documents to denote the Catholic St. Thomas Christians of India: Mar Thoma Christians, Syrians, Syrians of Malabar, Suriani Christians, Malabar Suriani, Malabar Chaldeans, Chaldeans of Malabar, Syro-Chaldeans, Nazranis, Syro-Malabar Christians. Owing to the relations these Christians had with the East Syrians, in course of time it was classified under the Chaldean tradition although it is not a daughter Church of the Chaldean one (Cf., Andrews Thazhath, *The Quest for Identity: The Syro-Malabar Church and Its Rite* (Thrissur: Institute of Theology, 1992), 1.

⁹¹ Since the liturgical language of the St. Thomas Christians was Syriac, they are often called *Syrians or Suriani Christians*. The Christians who followed the Latin Rite are called Latins.

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of the colonized people also explain the reluctance of the Church, especially of the Roman Catholic Church, to appoint Indian Bishops, to admit local candidates to their religious orders, and, more importantly, to establish an Indian Catholic Church. In his study *A History of Christian Missions*, Stephen Neil often emphasizes how ‘extraordinarily slow’ Western missionaries were ‘to recognize and trust the gift of indigenous Christians. Even when ordained to the ministry, they were regarded as no more than assistants to the missionary.’⁹²

The Portuguese missionaries did not understand the cultural traditions of the local Christians. With the ecclesiastical power known as *Padroado*.⁹³ and with the political power they had, they began to interfere in all the matters of the St. Thomas Christians. Judging them schismatics, they began to impose the Latin Rite upon them and the St. Thomas Christian Community opposed them strongly under the leadership of their Archdeacon. The Synod of Diamper (1599) convoked by the Portuguese missionaries was an official expression of the Portuguese *Padroado*

⁹² Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions*, Second Edition, (London: Penguin, 1990), 384.

⁹³ It was the privilege of the King of Portugal obtained from the Holy See through the Bull “*Dum Fidei Constantiam*” of Leo X dated 7 June 1514 to present Episcopal Sees and Episcopal candidates to the Holy Father. The King, for his part, worked for the interest of the Church in the propagation of the faith and the financial upkeep of the Churches. The King of Portugal and his successors were granted full authority to invade, conquer, subdue and subject all the kingdoms and lands of the infidels and to reduce those peoples to perpetual subjection as a sign of the triumph of the Catholic faith. Cf. L.M. Jordão, “*Bullarium Padronatus Portugalliae Regum*” in *Ecclesiis Africae Asiae atque Oceaniae*, 1(1868) 98-99.

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jurisdiction⁹⁴ over the St. Thomas Christians. The Chaldean relationship to St. Thomas Christians was formally cut off when the Malabar Church was put under the royal patronage of Portugal on 4 August 1600 and a period of latinization followed. According to a cunningly thought out plan of the Jesuit Bishops who ruled the St. Thomas Christians under Portuguese *Padroado*, the office of the Archdeacon was suppressed.⁹⁵ This office had been an immemorial tradition and the true office of leadership of the St. Thomas Christian Community. Naturally, such an attitude provoked conflicts and resentment. They disliked their Portuguese masters from Europe with their domineering attitude and innovative ways. Their opposition reached its culmination in 1653 when they openly revolted, swearing they would never obey the Jesuits or Archbishop Garcia⁹⁶ and the Christian Community was divided into two groups, one in communion with Rome and

⁹⁴ In this study the term *Jurisdiction* is used in the sense of *power of governance*.

⁹⁵ Cf., J. Thekkedath, *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S J: Archbishop of Cranganore (1641-1659)*, (Roma: Pontifical University Gregorianum, 1972), 21-40.

⁹⁶ The St. Thomas Christians, ever eager to get a Bishop of their own Rite and finding their efforts unsuccessful rebelled against Msgr. Francis Garcia S.J., the third Latin Archbishop in 1653. The disappointed Christians swore before the “Coonan Cross” [bent Cross] at Mattanchery on 3 January 1653 that they would not thereafter obey the Jesuits then represented by Archbishop Garcia. Cf. J. Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India: From the Middle of the Sixteenth Century to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542-1700)*, Vol. II (Bangalore: Church History Association in India, 1982), 91-109.

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the other becoming affiliated with the Jacobite Church of Antioch,⁹⁷ an entirely new alliance.

The news about this serious situation reached Rome. In order to heal the wounds opened in the heart of the Malabar Church, Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667) sent Discalced Carmelites under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda with full powers to deal with the situation. Thus began the apostolic works of the Discalced Carmelites in Kerala. Fr. Joseph Mary Sebastiani was consecrated a Bishop and was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Malabar.⁹⁸ Verapuzha was chosen as their administrative center. The Catholic St. Thomas Christians were now divided into two groups: one ruled over by the Carmelite Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha under the Propaganda Fide, and the other by the Archbishop of Cranganore under the *Padroado*. Often the two jurisdictions overlapped.

The discontent created by the autocratic behavior of the Latin Church over the St. Thomas Christian Community continued to increase. The relationship of the Latin Bishops with the faithful and the clergy was not at all cordial. The St. Thomas Christians approached the Chaldean Patriarch in person or through letters with a request for a Bishop of their own Rite from Chaldea. Thus, the Patriarch Mar Joseph Audo sent Mar Thomas Roccas in 1861 and Mar Elia Mellus in 1874 to Kerala without the permission of the Pope. In spite of the strict warnings of the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha,

⁹⁷ A. M. Mundadan, *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy*, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1984), 50.

⁹⁸ Cf., Xavier Koodappuzha, *Bharatha Sabha Charitram* [History of the Indian Church], (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1980), 329-331.

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people welcomed these Bishops with eagerness, which caused much confusion among the St. Thomas Catholic Community. It became clear to the St. Thomas Christians that a permanent solution to this problem was possible only through a complete liberation of the Syrians from their foreign Latin Superiors. They also realized that the right of the Syrians to have Bishops belonging to their own Rite and nationality had to be affirmed and they sent many petitions to Rome asking for a separate Bishop for the St. Thomas Christians. Msgr. Mellano was against the petition movement and he expelled seven TOCD priests from their religious Congregation who took the initiative to send letters to Rome.

There were also missionaries who wanted separation of the Syrian Christians from the Latins, with a Carmelite Apostolic Vicar for each. Leopold Beccaro wrote to the Propaganda Fide in 1873. The confused situation, Beccaro asserted, reduced the vicariate to a morally paralyzed state. He enlisted the reasons for and the advantages of the change of administration of the Syrians from the Latins.⁹⁹ Msgr. Hyacinth, another Carmelite missionary in Kerala, maintained that "... for these [Christians], called Christians of St. Thomas who constantly adhered to the Syrian Rite, a separate Bishop is very necessary."¹⁰⁰ Msgr. Depommier, the Bishop

⁹⁹ ACO., *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi 1862-1877*, ff. 238-242. Letter of Fr. Leopold of St. Joseph to Cardinal Barnabo, the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 23 November 1873. Beccaro was severely punished by Msgr. Mellano for supporting the division of the vicariate.

¹⁰⁰ ACO., *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi 1862-1877*, f.563, Letter of Leo Meurin to Cardinal Franchi on 5 October 1876, quoting Fr. Hyacinth CD: "His itaque Christians, Sancti Thomae dictis, qui tenaciter ritibus Syrorum haerent, Episcopus singularis valde necessarius est..."

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of Coimbatore, also wrote to Propaganda Fide that Syrian Catholics should be granted a separate Bishop. In the following words, Depommier insisted upon the necessity for a separate administration, for priestly formation and other establishments for the Syrian Catholics:

... It is evident that the combining of Latin and Syrian Rites under one and the same jurisdiction has many inconveniences: it demands a double administration, double priestly formation, double setting up, etc. These are in a word, like two dioceses combined in a single one.¹⁰¹

Some of the missionaries and a few Syrian clergy sent petitions to Rome opposing the division of the vicariate of Verapuzha and appointing a separate Bishop for the Syrians. Because of this confusing information from Kerala, the Propaganda Fide could not make a properly informed decision toward improving the situation of the St. Thomas Christians and therefore appointed two Apostolic Visitors (Msgr. Leo Meurin, Apostolic Vicar of Bombay reached Kochi on 5 May 1876 and Msgr. Ignatius Persico, Bishop of Bolina, in March 1877) to study the situation and report to Rome. After an in-depth study, Msgr. Ignatius Persico, reached the following conclusion:

The earnest craving of Malabarians to have a Bishop of their own Rite was age-old and exhibited many times. The longing became intense due to the

¹⁰¹ ACO., *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi 1862-1877*, f. 563. Letter of Leo Meurin to Cardinal Franchi on 5 October 1876, quoting Depommier. Original in French.

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abandoned state in which the Syrian Christians of India found themselves now estranged from the missionaries, who for the lack of or little knowledge of the language, not only disregarded the Syrian Catholics but also treated them with haughtiness and rudeness. Added to this was the antipathy of the Syrian Catholics towards the Apostolic Vicar Mellano, who never showed any concern on their behalf, but on the contrary, was known to prefer the Latins to the Syrian Catholics.... they were left in ignorance and almost abandoned to themselves.¹⁰²

Persico proposed a division according to Rites, forming two different vicariates, one for the Latins and the other for the Syrian Catholics. Msgr. Meurin also concluded that the desire of the Syrians for the division of the vicariate was legitimate and he expressed this judgment in the many letters he wrote to the Propaganda Fide during his visitation in Kerala.¹⁰³ He made it clear that the only solution to the schism and the conversion of the Jacobites was to erect a new diocese for the Syrians.¹⁰⁴ and he recommended that a European Missionary be appointed as their Bishop and under him another indigenous Bishop as assistant.¹⁰⁵

The Propaganda Fide, in its general meeting on 9 July 1877, appointed Fr. Marceline Berardi, an Italian Carmelite Missionary as co-adjutor to Mellano with the right of

¹⁰² ACO., *Acta* 1877-1878, Vol. 10 f. 272, Persico's report to the Propaganda Fide.

¹⁰³ Cf. ACO., *Ponente, Agosto 1876, Relazione*, ff. 4-5.

¹⁰⁴ ACO., *Scritture Originali 1876*, Vol.7, Unpaginated.

¹⁰⁵ ACO., *Ponente, Agosto 1876, Relazione*, ff. 4-5.

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succession and for the exclusive care of the Syrians.¹⁰⁶ It was a temporary arrangement and it did not give the expected result. Cardinal Tisserant comments about the appointment of Marceline:

The choice was not a happy one. The new Bishop-elect was intimately connected with the Apostolic Vicar, and since he knew that someday he would rule the Latins of the vicariate, he made little effort to win over the affection of the Syrian faithful who had been committed to his special care. What is more, he omitted to carry out one of the conditions laid down by the *Propaganda* at the time of his appointment. He never nominated the Vicar General and the four councillors who were to assist him. Thus, the intentions of the Holy See were once more to a great extent frustrated.¹⁰⁷

Being aware of the critical situation in India, especially of the St. Thomas Christians, the Holy See decided to appoint an Apostolic Delegate, hoping that he would be a more reliable source of information for the Holy See. On 23 September 1884, Antony Agliardi¹⁰⁸ was appointed as the first Apostolic Delegate of East Indies and thus the history of

¹⁰⁶ ACO., *Lettere e Decreti 1877*, Vol.10, ff. 370-371. Special instructions of the Propaganda Fide to Msgr. Marcelline Beradi dated 23 August 1877.

¹⁰⁷ E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, translated and adapted by Hamby, (Bombay: Orient Longmans 1957), 125.

¹⁰⁸ Antony Agliardi was born on 4 September 1832 in Cologno al Serio in the diocese of Bergamo, Italy. He was appointed as Apostolic Delegate on 23 September 1884 and later he was promoted to the dignity of the titular Archbishop of Caesaria in Palestina. Cf., *Hierarchia Cattolica*, Vol. VIII, 166.

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the apostolic delegation was inaugurated in India. Andrea Aiuti was nominated on 31 March 1887 as the new Apostolic Delegate of East Indies.¹⁰⁹ When the Propaganda Fide decided the division of the vicariate of Verapuzha according to Rites Aiuti was asked to carry out the division.

1.1.4.2 Change in Administration of the Syrians

Most of the problems endured by the Church of Kerala in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were due to the negative attitude of Msgr. Leonard Mellano and the Carmelite missionaries towards the division of the Vicariate or granting self-government to the St. Thomas Christians. Church history has proved it so. Victor Sanmiguel openly comments, “Msgr. Leonardo was not right in the problem regarding the separation of the Syrians,...”¹¹⁰ He also states, “Any movement of transition even when it is due to natural development of the institution is not an easy step to take without disturbance and sacrifice.” Mckenna writes, “Msgr. Mellano never would give self-government to the Syrians because he thought that they were not ripe for it.”¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Rome decided the other way.

The vicariate of Verapuzha was elevated to the rank of an Archbishopric comprising forty-four churches and some chapels and a Catholic population of about 60,000 souls, who continued to be governed by Mellano, and his co-adjutor Bishop Berardi as well as the Carmelite missionaries.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Cf., ACO., *Breve e Bolle e Lettere Apostolicae. 1869-1917*, Reg. 153 ff. 272-273. Andrea Aiuti was born in Rome on 17 June 1849.

¹¹⁰ Victor Sanmiguel, *Three Century Kerala Carmelite Mission*, 91.

¹¹¹ Mckenna, *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, 368.

¹¹² Mckenna, *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, 354.

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According to the ‘Statistics of the St. Thomas Christians’ at the time of separation presented by Mckenna, “The Thomas Christians or Syro-Chaldeans, who at this time were exempted from the government of the Vicars Apostolic of Verapuzha and the Carmelite missionaries numbered 208 557 souls, divided into 254 churches: they had 452 priests, secular and regular, and nine convent churches. ...”¹¹³ Mellano had to witness the event, namely, the division of the vicariate, which he could never tolerate in his life. He died one year after the St. Thomas Christians got their self-government.¹¹⁴ About the death of Mellano Mckenna notes, “On 19 August 1897 Msgr. Leonard died at his residence in Manjumel...In his old age he was much troubled by scruples; it was a pity to watch his sufferings.”¹¹⁵

1.1.4.3 Problems Related to the Division of the Vicariate of Verapuzha

The establishment of these Syrian Vicariates had naturally infuriated the Latin Church in Kerala and the emergence of new vicariates and division of churches and other institutions based on Rites created unexpected troubles and difficult situations for the convent and the monastery at Koonammavu. The main problem was to decide under whose authority should both the communities and the institutions attached to them, be placed. Mellano sent an application to the Propaganda Fide claiming that the monastery at Koonammavu should come under his jurisdiction, that is,

¹¹³ Mckenna, *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, 354-355.

¹¹⁴ In 1896 the existing vicariates of Kottayam and Thrissur were divided into three - Kottayam, Thrissur and Ernakulam - and three natives were appointed as the Vicars Apostolic.

¹¹⁵ Mckenna, *The Church of the Thomas Christians*, 368.

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under the Vicariate of Verapuzha. With this, many arguments regarding ownership arose because Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli had given the monastery to the Syrians in 1857. Finally, according to the order from Rome, the members of the TOCD monastery left Koonammavu and went to the monastery at Ambazhakad on 9 March 1889.¹¹⁶

1.1.5 Disputes over Rights

The disputes regarding authority over the convent started in 1888. Until then, there was no division within the Community based on Rites or any other reason. Both Baccinelli and Mellano in their reports presented to the Propaganda Fide in 1867 and in 1888 respectively had stated that in the Koonammavu convent, both the Latin and the Syrian Sisters lived happily as members of one family. After the division of the vicariate of Verapuzha based on Rites, this Community had to undergo several crucial tests. Msgr. Lavigne, Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam took the initiative to start convents in his Vicariate. He took the Sisters from the convent at Koonammavu, who were from the Vicariate of Kottayam and opened a new convent at Mutholy on 13 July 1888. This was the first branch of St. Teresa's Convent in the Vicariate of Kottayam.¹¹⁷ Mellano expressed his displeasure at this procedure of Lavigne in taking the Sisters to Mutholy without informing him. He believed that the convent remained under his jurisdiction even after the division of the vicariate and he wrote to the Propaganda Fide on 28 November 1888:

¹¹⁶ Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya Suriyani Reethil Chernna*, 336-342.

¹¹⁷ Cf., *CKC.*, II, 139.

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I do not see any reason by which the new Apostolic Vicars can take the authority over the Third Order, and call them to other places as they wish. After the coming of Msgr. Lavigne, the Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam, he has sent a letter to the Superior of this Monastery, by which he ordered that some of these nuns must depart to other places, etc., without letting me know anything in advance and when I brought it to the attention of the Apostolic Delegate, he responded me saying only that ‘Msgr. Lavigne, the Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam will do nothing without consulting me.’¹¹⁸

He was afraid that the other Apostolic Vicar also might do things like this. Expressing his impatience and apprehension regarding the matter, he wrote,

Along with all these I believe that in one or the other moment each one will do what comes to their mind, persuading themselves that it will be suffered in silence. That is alright, but your Eminence, know that the patience, humility and meekness of man have a limit, and it is good that nobody abuses that. I request

¹¹⁸ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890*. Letter written by Msgr. Mellano to the Propaganda Fide, on 28 November 1888 (Allegato A), f.53: Essendo così, non vedo ragione alcuna, per cui i nuovi Vicari Apostolici abbiano a pretendere autorità sopra tali Terziarie, e chiamarle in altri luoghi come se fossero loro suddite. “Poco dopo la venuta di Bishop Lavigne, Vicario Apostolico di Cottayam, aveva mandato una lettera alla superiora di questo Monastero, in cui ordinava che alcune di queste Monache dovessero partire per altro luogo, etc. Senza che nulla avesse fatto sapere a me previamente, di ciò mi lamentati col Delegato apostolico, I quale nel rispondermi si limitò a dirmi, che Monsig. Lavigne non fara nulla senza intendersi prima con me.

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to your Eminence that to tell me how I should regulate this; one thing is clear more or less that there is no need of putting in a new *ius Canonicum* (new canon). In this convent of the Third Order, they do not know either Latin or the Syriac language. They recite their prayers in Malayalam; and thus form a body under my jurisdiction.¹¹⁹

Mellano sent a petition to the Propaganda Fide demonstrating the fact that four local women of the Latin Rite founded the convent at Koonammavu and that it should come under his jurisdiction.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the Propaganda Fide appointed Msgr. Andrea Aiuti, the Apostolic Delegate of India, to study the arguments in detail and to suggest a just solution. The Delegate sent Mellano's letter to the Apostolic Vicars of Thrissur and Kottayam asking them to give their responses to it. Mellano, too, submitted a petition to the Apostolic Delegate. Msgr. Aiuti understood that it was difficult to find a solution satisfactory to both the groups. So he wrote to the Propaganda Fide. Along with his letter he included all the proofs he had obtained as well as his own opinions and conclusions. He mentioned in his report that from 1867 when the convent at Koonammavu was

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, "Da tutto l'insieme credo che da un momento all'altro ciascuno farà quel che gli viene in mente, essendo persuasi che si soffrirà tutto in silenzio, ciò va bene, ma V. E. Sa pure che la pazienza, umiltà o mitezza dell' uomo hanno un limite, e che è bene niuno se ne abusi. Prego per tanto V. E. a dirmi come mi abbia in questo a regolare, trattandosi ci cosa abbastanza chiara da non ammettere un nuovo *ius Canonicum*. In questo Monastero le Terziarie non sanno nè la lingua latina nè la Soriana, recitano le loro orazioni in lingua Malabarica, formano quindi un corpo sotto la mia giurisdizione.

¹²⁰ ACO., *Scritture Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi (1878-1889)*. Letter of Mellano to Propaganda Fide, on 24 November 1888.

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canonically established, there were Latin and Syrian Sisters and that until the division of the Vicariate in 1887, there were no decrees from the Church authorities indicating under which Rite this institution was to be included. At the time of division of the vicariate, there were twenty Syrian and seven Latin Sisters in the convent at Koonammavu. After considering the factors involved, he counseled that this institution should be given to the Syrians.¹²¹

Cardinals of the Propaganda Fide on 24 March 1890 discussed the issue on jurisdiction of the convent at Koonammavu. In that meeting, it was decided that the convent and the institutions attached to it should be under the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur.¹²² Propaganda Fide further decided that nothing should be altered regarding the reception of candidates, whether they were of Latin or Syrian Rites, nor as regarding the administration of the Community, school and orphanage, as well as regarding the language used in prayers and readings.¹²³ Thus, it was made clear that the convent was assigned to both Rites and the jurisdiction was given to the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur. The Cardinal Prefect of the

¹²¹ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*. ff. 20-36. Letter of Msgr. Andrea Aiuti to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 30 August 1889.

¹²² ACO., *Acta (1890-1891)*, Vol. 21, f. 4.

¹²³ ACO., *Lettere e Decreti* Vol. 23 (1890), f. 144: "Inoltre hanno pur stabilito che nuova innovazione si faccia in esso sia in ordine all'ammissione delle postulanti di ambedue riti, sia in ordine alla lingua finora usata nell'ufficio, orazioni, letture, ecc. Sia in ordini ai regolamenti spettanti l'organizzazione della comunità Religiosa, scuole annesse ed orfanatrofio. Che se alcune delle suore del detto monastero con licenza del Vicario Apostolico di Trissur lasciasse il monastero o passare a formare altra casa sotto altere Vicario o diocese."

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Propaganda Fide communicated this decision to the three Apostolic Vicars of Verapuzha, Thrissur and Kottayam. Medlycott informed the Sisters of the final decision of the Propaganda Fide and he sent a copy of the decree to the convent at Koonammavu.¹²⁴

1.1.6 The Separation of the Sisters Belonging to the Latin Rite (1890)

Although the decrees of the Propaganda Fide declared the convent at Koonammavu would come under the Vicariate of Thrissur, especially noted that the Sisters should live in harmony and unity as they had before without any distinction of Rites. Nevertheless, Archbishop Mellano submitted applications to Rome to separate the Sisters belonging to the Latin Rite from Koonammavu and to take them to Verapuzha quickly. He wrote: “I humbly request your Eminence, above all, to give the necessary permission and order by which the Latin nuns can come out from that prison and to found (a convent) at Verapuzha, as now it is already five years.¹²⁵ that

¹²⁴ Cf. *CKC.*, II, 142. After spending considerable time in serious study of the documents received from both the parties – Latin and Syrian prelates - Msgr. Aiuti, the Propaganda Fide and all those who were responsible for the decision-making understood that the claims of Msgr. Mellano were not true. At last, they settled the question of jurisdiction that the convent would be under the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur and it was specifically noted that no changes should be introduced in the life style of the convent, in the admission of candidates, prayers, etc.

¹²⁵ The fact that Mellano began the construction of the convent at Verapuzha five years before (may be in 1883) shows his concern for the Latins. At that time, there were only two professed Sisters from the Latin community in the Koonammavu convent. Sr. Anastasia, the third member from the Latin Rite community made her profession in 1886, twenty years after the foundation of the convent. Whereas,

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I began constructing that building for the above mentioned cause and also for the orphans.”¹²⁶ This letter makes clear that Mellano had asked for the separation of the Latin Sisters from the Koonammavu convent. Soon he made arrangements to complete the construction of the convent at Verapuzha. The Latin Sisters also submitted a petition requesting permission to leave the Koonammavu convent and to go to the convent built for them at Verapuzha. They wrote: “Reverend Archbishop at Verapuzha has built the monastery for us. Therefore, we request you to give us the permission to go from here.”¹²⁷ About the letter of the Latin Sisters, Aiuti states,

Msgr. Mellano had sent me a copy of the letter, which he addressed to your Eminence in response to N. 1514/85. I also received a copy of the letter that the Latin Sisters who are present in the Koonammavu

there were twenty professed Sisters from the Syrian community and there were twenty-seven Syrian girls who studied in the boarding house and were seeking admission to be religious in the Koonammavu convent. When he started the construction of a convent and an orphanage, the question about the division of the convent was not even thought of. This letter can be seen as an expression of Mellano’s lack of concern for the Syrians.

¹²⁶ ACO., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi, (1890-1892)*. Letter of Mellano to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni on 14 June 1890: “Prego per tanto Vostra Eminenza a dare il necessario permesso e l’ordine, in modo che passano le monache latine uscire da quell’ergastolo e venire a fondare a Verapuzha, come già erano destinate da 5 anni, quando cominciarono quelle costruzioni che faccio completare per il minimo indispensabile, come sopra ho detto, anche per le orfane.”

¹²⁷ ACO., *Scri. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi, (1890-1892)*, f. 1802. The Collective Letter of the Latin Sisters from Koonammavu to the Propaganda Fide on 7 June 1890.

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convent sent to your Eminence, asking your permission to transfer to the convent, which the Archbishop had prepared for them at Verapuzha.¹²⁸

In the same letter, Aiuti describes the convent built at Verapuzha as a rather large edifice. He offers a suggestion to the Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni to authorize Mellano to call the Latin Sisters from Koonammavu to the newly built convent at Verapuzha:

I will say that, at part the superior judgment of your Eminence will feel very very opportune to concede to the Latin religious who are now at Koonammavu, the permission that they implore, authorizing the Archbishop to call them to the convent which is prepared for them at Verapuzha; that is a big edifice half of which has been already completed. Let me add that neither considerably more nor much expensive, but can give accommodation not only to those seven religious, but also to a number more than that. In that way, you will guarantee the complete execution of the solutions of the Sacred Congregation and you will

¹²⁸ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, Letter of Aiuti to the Propaganda Fide on 30 June 1890 from Ootacamund: “Monsignor Mellano mi ha mandato copia della lettera che poco fa ha indirizzato a Vostra Eminenza in risposta al N.1514/85, con cui Vostra Eminenza gli faceva conoscere le stesse soluzioni, e mi ha pure fatto tenere una copia della lettera che le religiose latine presenti nel Monastero di Cunemao hanno pure inviato a Vostra Eminenza, chiedendo il permesso di trasferirsi nel Monastero che per loro ha preparato a Verapuzha Arcivescovo.

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reinstate the necessary peace and tranquility in the spirit of the religious of both the Rites.¹²⁹

The separation based on Rites was established in the convent at Koonammavu through the initiative of Mellano. On 15 September 1890, Mellano and Medlycott held a meeting at Manjummel, drew up the conditions of division and submitted them to Aiuti. After considering all aspects of the matter, Aiuti decreed on 20 September 1890, that the Latin Sisters living in the Koonammavu convent would go on their own to the convent at Verapuzha. In accordance with the conditions laid down in the agreement and signed by both Bishops at Manjummel, Medlycott made special arrangements to prepare for the farewell of the Latin Sisters. Regarding the departure of the Latin Sisters on 17 September 1890, the chronicle records as follows:

Rev. Fr. Louis, the brother of Sr. Eliswa came with another secular priest and took the seven of them, Sr. Eliswa Vaipissery, Sr. Theresa Vaipissery, Sr. Anastasia Poopana, Novices Angela Pathiala and

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, Aiuti wrote to the Propaganda Fide: “Dopo questa digressione, dirò che, a parte il giudizio superiore di Vostra Eminenza, sembrerebbe assai opportuno accordare alle Religiose latine, che si trovano ora a Cunemao, il permesso che implorano, autorizzando Mons. Arcivescovo a chiamarle nel monastero che tiene per loro preparato a Verapuzha; esso è grande edificio già completato per metà e che, grazie ad aggiunte non troppo considerevoli nè troppo dispendiose, può dare comodamente alloggio non solo a quelle 7 Religiose, ma ad un numero di esse molto maggiore. In tal modo si garantirebbe l’esecuzione completa delle soluzioni della S. Congregazione, e si ristabilirebbe la pace e la tranquillità necessaria negli spiriti delle Religiose di entrambi i riti.”

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Beatrice Pazhampally, lay Sister Eliswa and Mariam Vaipissery, a girl who was in the boarding house of the convent.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ *CKC.*, II, 144. Contrary to these facts, Kinattungal in her book *Servant of God Mother Eliswa the Foundress of TOCD (CTC & CMC) for Women* when referring to the event often uses the terms such as ‘exclusion’ (p.178). Kinattungal repeats, “The exclusion of the Latin members and the related matters were kept secret ...” (p.303). “After the exclusion of the founding members of the Latin Rite, the Koonammavu convent went through a period of crisis” (p.393). She also uses the word ‘removal’: “The news of the removal of the Sisters of the Latin Rite from St. Teresa’s convent caused great agitation among the people” (p.302). Francis Pereparambil, Professor of Church History, went to the extent of saying that the Latin Sisters were chased away from their convent. According to him the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, Msgr. Andrea Aiuti and many others were the culprits for the same. He says: “Humanly thinking, the convent, which was built in the property of those poor Latin Sisters was seized from them in a cruel way. In this process, the Vicar Apostolic of Thrissur and the Apostolic Delegate Andrea Aiuti who had taken the further steps to chase them away from there were not the only culprits. How can we qualify the act of those who misguided these people who knew nothing about this country, its Regulations and the differences of Rites and thus misled Rome and thus stood against the spirit of religious life?” [“B lms e o³ klymknvlpfss kz nA lwnlgnv eTw vapjnlambn nbnmA GApw lqeambn AhenAvlpw ndns spiplbpw Ahse AhnsAvlpw BvntbndnplXvlpw ep³sslsbpplbpw sNbvX XyiqA hnImA AtkvXmenjbpw AtkvXmenjv hnknAa Ai b Abq nbpw mtXaA sXApImA. Cu vmdnslpdpw vmp\ds\pdpdpw do p hyXymk sspdpdpw AUembnepl Ahse sXAn²evdpw AXphgv tdmans\ hgnsvAvdpw klymk ssNXy vlvv AlhmZs fmbheps lhr nlsf fss\ hntjvd jvlpw?”]. Francis Pereparambil, “kXytahPbtXI” in Suci Kinattungal, *Pradhama Thaddheshiya Sanyasinisamooham Sthapaka* [The Foundress of the First Indigenous Religious Institute for Women], (Cochin: Kerala Latin Catholic History Association), 104.

1.1.7 The Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC)

As had been decided previously, the Latin Sisters first went to St. Teresa's Convent, Ernakulam. They stayed there for about two months. When the construction of the new convent at Verapuzha was completed, on 10 November 1890, they moved to that convent. Sr. Theresa, one of the first members who had joined the convent at Koonammavu in 1866, was appointed as the Superior and Fr. Philip OCD was appointed as chaplain.¹³¹ Thus, the TOCD for women of the Latin Rite, known as the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites (CTC) came to be formed in the diocese of Verapuzha with three professed Sisters, two Novices, one lay Sister and one girl who was a candidate for religious life.

This survey of the history of the foundation of the convent identifies the persons involved directly (or indirectly) in the various attempts to found the convent in different places, culminating in the foundation at Koonammavu. There were two persons, Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro who were deeply involved in the foundation of the convent and the evolution of the life style of the first Community of the Sisters at Koonammavu. Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, being the Apostolic Vicar of the time, as hierarchical authority, gave canonical approval for the religious institute and gave the Rules of the Third Order Carmelites. He had maintained a very personal interest in the project and he was very particular that the convent should be instituted as the 'Third Order of Carmelites.' The Sisters, as

¹³¹ Cf., *Varapuzha Kanyakamadhom: Charithra Samkshepam*, Jubilee Souvenir, 1890-1940 (Verapuzha: CTC, 1940), 21.

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guided by both Chavara and Beccaro, have kept a detailed Chronicle about the foundation and the background that led to its foundation. In addition, the Chronicle has recorded the details of the kind of formation imparted to the Sisters. Nevertheless, after the death of Chavara in 1871 and the departure of Beccaro from Kerala in 1876, the Community was left without proper leadership.

In 1896, the existing Vicariates - Thrissur and Kottayam - were restructured into the vicariates of Kottayam, Thrissur, and Ernakulam for the St. Thomas Christians and Mar Mathew Makeel, Mar John Menachery, and Mar Louis Pazheparambil were appointed as Apostolic Vicars respectively. The Sisters belonging to these vicariates were sent out to open new convents in their respective vicariates under their Apostolic Vicars. Gradually, the communities in each vicariate grew independently of one another under the leadership and control of the respective Apostolic Vicars, without having any relationship with the Sisters of other vicariates, including that of the 'motherhouse' at Koonammavu. After about a century of independent growth and development, in 1963 they were all amalgamated under one Superior General, with 3366 members. It was raised to pontifical status in 1967 and assumed a new name, 'the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel' (CMC). The Congregation of Teresian Carmelites, the Latin wing of the TOCD was elevated to the status of pontifical right with a decree issued by the Propaganda Fide on 28 June 1971.

As mentioned earlier, differing opinions on the identity of the founder of the women TOCD have emerged. The next section presents those opinions about the founder.

1.2 Opinions on the Founder of the Women TOCD

A few researches in the areas of history and canon law have appeared that directly or indirectly deal with the founder of this first religious institute for women in Kerala. Several biographies on Chavara discuss the question of the founder of the women TOCD. Some authors speak of Leopold Beccaro OCD as the founder and Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the co-founder. Others argue that Chavara is the founder and Leopold Beccaro is the co-founder. Another group considers both these priests as founders without making the distinction of founder or co-founder. There is still another group regards Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar of the time, as founder. A small minority of writers holds the view that Eliswa Vakayil, the first member, is the foundress. The method used here is to have recourse to a historical survey in order to introduce and pursue the whole question of the founder. It is an attempt to spell out some of the different views existing on the matter. The question of the identity of the founder of the women TOCD is examined by dividing the writers into five groups.

1.2.1 Leopold Beccaro as Founder

A few writers - James Thalachelloor,¹³² Mary Chittilappally (Mary C. J.),¹³³ and Sunny Maniakkunnel¹³⁴ -

¹³² James Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women in the Syro-Malabar Church with Special Reference to the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (A Historico- Juridical Study)*, Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Facultas Iuris Canonici Orientalis, Rome, 1990, (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis).

¹³³ Mary Chittilappilly (Mary. C. J.), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (With*

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regard Leopold Beccaro as founder or they tend to give a greater role to him in the foundation and formation of the first institute of women religious at Koonammavu. At the same time, they acknowledge the important role played by Chavara. The topic of their study was not directly related to the origins of the women TOCD at Koonammavu. A detailed, comprehensive and critical study of the arguments of these writers will be undertaken in chapter three and hence they are not discussed here.

1.2.2 Both Chavara and Beccaro as Founders

Some other authors look at the foundation of the first religious institute for women as the fruit of the joint achievement of Chavara and Beccaro and tend to hold both of them as founders. In an official report sent by Baccinelli in 1867 to Rome, there is an indirect reference to Chavara and Beccaro and he seems to give equal importance to both of them.¹³⁵ Mar Louis Pazheparambil,¹³⁶ Bernard of St. Thomas,¹³⁷ Mathias Mundadan,¹³⁸ Alex Paul Urumpackal,¹³⁹

Special Reference to Women) 1866- 1991, University of Calicut, Kerala, 2002 (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), 92-93.

¹³⁴ Sunny Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary: A Historical Study of the Life and Activities of Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD in Malabar/Kerala 1860-1877*, (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 266-279.

¹³⁵ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, f. 18.

¹³⁶ Louis Pazheparampil, "Preface" to *Thressia punnyavalathiyude karmaleetha munnam sabhayile sahodarikalkkayulla nyayapramanam* [Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of Carmelites of St. Teresa] (Elthuruth : St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1917), 3. His position will be evaluated in the third chapter 3.3.2 of this study.

¹³⁷ Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya suriyani reethil chernna malayalathile karmaleetha munnam sabhayude charithram*, [History of the Syrians

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and Joseph Kanjiramattathil, are the other writers who hold both priests as founders.¹⁴⁰ Some of the volumes of the *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* also present an inclusive approach with regard to the question of the founder of the women TOCD.

1.2.2.1 Bernard of St. Thomas

Bernard Thoma,¹⁴¹ a known historian of the Kerala Church in his monumental history of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala, presents the foundation of the convent in the general background of the origin and growth of the men TOCD established at Mannanam.¹⁴²

of Third Order Carmelites], (Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 1987), 241-242. Marthoma Kristianikal [St. Thomas Christians], (Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 1921), 717.

¹³⁸ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 311-317.

¹³⁹ Alex Paul Urumpackal, *Vocations in India, The Religious Women*, Vol. 1, (Vadavathoor: Oriental Institute, 1986), 284-285, 197.

¹⁴⁰ Alex Paul Urumpackal, and Joseph Kanjiramattathil, have not studied the issue scientifically and elaborately. Hence, they will not form part of the study.

¹⁴¹ Historians call Fr. Bernard of St. Thomas as Bernard Thoma. He was born in 1858, ordained in 1883 at Koonammavu. He made his religious profession in the TOCD in 1886. The first volume of '*Marthoma khristianikal*' [The History of St. Thomas Christians] was published in 1916 and the second volume in 1921. Its second edition was published as a one-volume book in 1992. He died in 1940 and was buried in the monastery of Chethipuzha. *A Brief Sketch of St. Thomas Christians and Kaldaya suriyani reethil chernna malayalathile karmaleetha munnam sabhayude charithram*, [History of the Syrians of Third Order Carmelites] are the two other important books on history written by him.

¹⁴² Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya suriyani reethil chernna*, 241-242.

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Bernard Thoma who wrote the first history of the men TOCD connects the establishment of the convent at Koonammavu with the history of the monastery of Koonammavu, which was established in 1857. He looks at the founding of the convent as “the fruit of the joint efforts” of Chavara and Beccaro, always mentioning the name of Chavara first. In his scholarly written book, *Mar Thoma Khristianikal* [the St. Thomas Christians], he presents the story of foundation of the convent at Koonammavu in these words:

In 1866, Fr. Prior and Fr. Leopold Missionary who was the “delegate” founded a convent for women of both Latins and Syrians [in common], near the monastery at Koonammavu with a view that womenfolk also enjoy the privileges of religious life...¹⁴³

In his book on the history of the Syrians of Third Order of Carmelites, he gave a rather long description of the founding of the convent at Koonammavu. He places it in the context of the appointment of Chavara as the Vicar General in 1861 and the change of his residence from Mannanam to Koonammavu in 1864. He depicts the background of foundation in almost same words in both books:

While growing in this way, in order that women also may enjoy the benefits of the ascetic life by leading a consecrated life of service to God and they could give education to young girls and train them in devout life and in handicrafts, Fr. Prior and Fr. Leopold, who was the Apostolic Delegate to the monasteries, had the

¹⁴³ Bernard Thoma, *Marthoma Khristianikal*, 717.

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desire to establish a convent. With this in mind, in February 1866, they built a temporary house. ... There, a widow who was leading a pious life for long time, her daughter Anna, her sister, and a widow Eliswa, 37 year old, (Her name was Achamma, and in the convent she was called Clara), from the parish of Vaikom, daughter of a *Vaidyan* [physician] from the family of Puthanangady as Fr. Prior had informed, these four were the first members of this convent. Archbishop Bernardine gave them the Rules, the missionary Delegate translated it from Latin, and called them 'Sisters of Third Order Carmelites.' It is from our monastery, the things they [the Sisters] needed were taken first.¹⁴⁴

He further speaks about how Fr. Prior collected money from his disciples and other priests to meet the expenses of the construction of the new building of the convent.

1.2.2.2 Alex Paul Urumpackal

Alex Paul Urumpackal, while presenting the 'Vocations in India,' speaks about the situation in which the first indigenous religious institute for women came into being. He states that the initiative for it came not from above but from below:

The saintly Prior of the Carmelite Tertiaries Fr. Chavara had a close friend, an Italian Carmelite missionary, Fr. Leopold OCD. ... During this period, a widow and her daughter entrusted their spiritual care

¹⁴⁴ Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya Suriyani Reethil Chernna*, 241-242.

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to Fr. Leopold. This inspired Fr. Leopold to found a religious institute for women for the first time in Malabar. Fr. Cyriac Chavara joined Fr. Leopold in this attempt. This took place in 1866. These religious women followed the rules of the Carmelite Third Order. St. Thomas Christians co-operated with Fr. Leopold and Fr. Chavara giving money and land property for the new religious institute, because they found that this new religious institute was under the protection of a St. Thomas Christian priest and a missionary who in spirit was a St. Thomas Christian.¹⁴⁵

1.2.2.3 Joseph Kanjiramattathil

In his doctoral dissertation, Kanjiramattathil attempts to bring out the charismatic personality and pastoral vision of Chavara who was a great leader of the Syro-Malabar Church. He presents the foundation of the religious institute for women as Chavara's pastoral achievement. He says, "In the providence of God he became the chief instrument in founding a Congregation for women also."¹⁴⁶ He observes,

When we examine the role played by Chavara and Leopold in founding the Congregation we see that the former had played a greater role than the latter. ...Chavara's own words show that he was cherishing the project in his heart for a long time. In addition,

¹⁴⁵ Alex Paul Urumpackal, *Vocations in India: The Religious Women*, Vol.1, 284-285.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara: The Co-Founder of CMI Congregation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, 1986), 57.

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considering the amount of effort made to accomplish this project, it is seen that Chavara had the greater part in the sharing. Hence when we consider the foundation of the Congregation for women we have to take all these elements together. ... We can rightly say that these two are the co-founders of the Congregation.¹⁴⁷

In an article, “The Indigenous Carmelite Religious Congregation for Women in Kerala,” Sr. Lucina CTC regards both Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro as founders, without any distinction between founder and co-founder.¹⁴⁸ In the same article, she uses the term ‘founder fathers’ (in plural) eleven times. She follows the description of the *CKC* and uses the terms *Moopachan*¹⁴⁹ and *Priorachan*¹⁵⁰ as the chronicler has used, the former indicating Beccaro and the latter Chavara. When she describes the grief experienced by the first Community at the death of Chavara, Lucina says, “The death of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, one of the founders of this religious institute for women and the intimate friend of *Moopachan*, was an unbearable loss to this Community.”¹⁵¹ She concludes her

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60, 61.

¹⁴⁸ Sr. Lucina CTC, “Keralathile Ethaddesiya Karmelita Sanyasinisabha” [Indigenous Carmelite Congregation for Women in Kerala], in *The Souvenir of the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. Philomina’s Parish, Koonammavu*, 1987), 21-33.

¹⁴⁹ *Moopachan*, literally means an elderly priest. Later this term was attributed to foreign missionaries.

¹⁵⁰ *Priorachan*, literally means Father Prior. Fr. Chavara, being the Prior of the TOCD monasteries of men, he was called *Priorachan* or ‘the Prior’ and some times, *Valiya Priorachan* which means ‘the Great Prior.’

¹⁵¹ Sr. Lucina, “Keralathile Ethaddesiya Karmelita Sanyasinisabha,” 25.

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presentation visualizing the joy and satisfaction of the founder fathers from heaven in seeing the growth and fruitfulness of the mustard seed sown by ‘Chavara and Beccaro’:

Thus the Good Sower, using the founder fathers as instruments, sowed the mustard seed in the property (*Kashandian Parambu*) of the Vakayil family, Koonammavu that sprouted and grew much. It will surely make them happy and contented.¹⁵²

In the same Souvenir, Sister Rose Metty from the CTC Congregation gives the position of the founder to Chavara and Beccaro and presents Eliswa as the first Superior of the community: “Fr. Leopold and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara together founded the first religious institute for women on 13 February 1866 and appointed Eliswa as the first Superior.”¹⁵³

Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione presents Leopold Beccaro and Kuriakose Elias Chavara as co-founders of the convent at Koonammavu. Elisabeth Vakayil, her daughter Anna, Sister Theresa, and Elisabeth from Vaikom who joined on 14. 2. 1866 are the first members of the first religious institute.¹⁵⁴ When the second volume of the same

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵³ Sr. Rose Metty, CTC, “Mother Eliswa: A Remembrance,” in *The Souvenir of the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. Philomina’s Parish, Koonammavu*, 1987), 106.

¹⁵⁴ V. Macca, “Madre del Carmelo, Suore della, Sisters of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel” *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, Vol. 5 (Roma: Edizioni paoline, 1978), cols. 815- 817). *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* will be referred to as *DIP* with its Volume number.

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book speaks about Chavara Kuriakose Elias, calls him as the “*confondatore*” of both the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.¹⁵⁵ In some other place, it gives the name of Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the founder,¹⁵⁶ of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu, in 1866. The same author gives the title “*confondatore*” of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel to Beccaro. He says, “Together with Kuriakose Elias Chavara on 13. 2. 1866, in a place called Koonammavu he [Fr. Leopold Beccaro] founded a convent of Third Order Carmelite.¹⁵⁷ When it speaks about Teresian Carmelites of Verapuzha (India), the same author considers the Servant of God, [Chavara] and Leopold Beccaro as the founders.¹⁵⁸ Luigi Borriello, in *Dizionario Carmelitano* calls Chavara a collaborator of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.¹⁵⁹

1.2.2.4 Mathias Mundadan

A well-known modern Church historian of the Indian Church, Mathias Mundadan, has prepared a biography of Chavara. He studied the various opinions of the different authors regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD and commented: “Here what we get is the impression

¹⁵⁵ V. Macca, “Chavara, Kuriakose Elias”, *DIP*, II (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1975), col. 874.

¹⁵⁶ V. Macca, “Carmelitani di Ernakulam (India)”, *DIP*, II, col. 400.

¹⁵⁷ V. Macca, “Beccaro, Giacomo - Carmelitano Scalzo”, *DIP*, I (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1974), col. 1161- 1162.

¹⁵⁸ V. Macca, “Carmelitane Teresiane di Verapuzha (India)”, *DIP*, II, cols.457-458.

¹⁵⁹ Emanuele Boaga O.Carm & Luigi Borriello, OCD, “Chavara, Ciriaco Elia, Beato, Confondatore (1805-1871),” *Dizionario Carmelitano*, (Città Nuova: Curie Generalizio O.Carm e OCD, 2008), col. 132.

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that it [the foundation of the convent] was a work undertaken by the two together, in perfect harmony.”¹⁶⁰

1.2.3 Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar as Founder

The report of Msgr. Clemens Bonnand, the Apostolic Visitor makes some passing references to Msgr. Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha as the founder of the women TOCD, which will be discussed in chapter three.

1.2.4 The First Members as Founders

1.2.4.1 Msgr. Leonard Mellano

Archbishop Mellano, the successor of Msgr. Baccinelli holds that the first four members of the convent at Koonammavu are the foundresses. It was Archbishop Mellano who mentioned for the first time that the first members are the foundresses of the convent at Koonammavu. In 1888, it was in a particular situation that he wrote letters to the Propaganda Fide and Msgr. Aiuti, arguing for jurisdiction over the convent at Koonammavu. Mellano submitted a statement on 28 November 1888 in which he claimed that Koonammavu convent belonged to the vicariate of Verapuzha and the first members who belong to the Latin Rite are the foundresses of the convent..¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 311.

¹⁶¹ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, ff. 36-37. Letter of Msgr. Mellano to the Propaganda Fide dated 28 November 1888.

1.2.4.3 Sucy Kinattungal

Taking the official communications of Mellano to Rome as valid proof for the identity of the founder, Sucy Kinattungal¹⁶² submitted her doctoral research to the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome holding Eliswa as the foundress of the women TOCD. In the conclusion of ‘The Critical Study of the Foundation of the TOCD,’ she observes:

In the history of this religious congregation, there have been many personalities involved, such as Archbishop Bernardine, Fr. Leopold, Fr. Guyomar Panambil, Archbishop Leonard Mellano, Fr. Chavara, Msgr. Marceline, Fr. Philip, Fr. Louis, etc. However, none of them can be regarded as the founder or co-founder. Mother Eliswa has the unique position of the foundress and she received the gift of charism through her deep interior life of prayer and solitude. Theresa and Anna were co-foundresses who were attracted to the life style and charism of Mother Eliswa, and thus formed the first religious Community.¹⁶³

The women TOCD has a concrete origin in the history of the Church of Kerala. The story of its foundation was interpreted later by different writers, especially after the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the Vicariate of

¹⁶² Sucy Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa the Foundress of TOCD (CTC & CMC) for Women: The Critical Study of the History of Foundation (1866-1913)*, (Cochin: Kerala Latin History Association, 2010), 166- 250. Hereafter this book is referred to as Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa* with specific page numbers.

¹⁶³ Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 249-250.

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Verapuzha and the subsequent division of the women TOCD into two independent religious institutes in 1890; one in the Syro-Malabar Church and the other in the Latin Church. The context of these interpretations is a decisive factor in understanding and evaluating the opinion of each writer regarding the identity of the founder. Presenting the first members of the women TOCD as the foundresses of the institute is a by-product and a typical example of the above-mentioned particular context. Those who hold the first members as foundresses do not see any connection with the previous attempts to found the convent in different places. Kinattungal asserts that there is no connection between the proposed convent at Puthenpally and the first convent of the women TOCD.¹⁶⁴ She repeats the same idea that the first convent of TOCD is a new beginning and is not related to any of the previous projects or ventures.¹⁶⁵ For the correct interpretation of the complex text, and especially one as intricate as Msgr. Leonard Mellano's letters in the *Ponente Marzo 1890*, one cannot forgo a study of the context, which will be done in the third chapter.

1.2.5 Kuriakose Elias Chavara as the Founder

One group of writers regards Chavara as the founder. This group includes mainly his early biographers such as Leopold Beccaro and Kuriakkose Eliseus Porukara who lived with Chavara for many years. Religious brothers who knew Chavara personally have written some of the earliest documents in the form of memoirs or simple notes about him in their personal diary and detailed descriptions in the

¹⁶⁴ Kinattungal, *Pradhama thaddheshiya sanyasinisamooham stapaka*, 62.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

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chronicles of the monasteries such as Mannanam, Koonammavu, Vazhakulam, and Ambazhakadu. The impact of his sanctity on those who surrounded him was strong. Some of them prepared his biography soon after his death in 1871. Later biographers and writers depended on these early biographies and Chronicles of the monasteries and of the Koonammavu convent.

1.2.5.1 Early Biographers

1.2.5.1.1 Leopold Beccaro OCD

Leopold Beccaro, an Italian Carmelite Missionary was a person intimately associated with Chavara and with the developments of the Kerala Church in the 1860s. On two occasions, he clearly recorded that it was Chavara who founded the first religious institute for women in Kerala: the first was in his personal diary, and the second appears in his *Short Biography of Chavara*.¹⁶⁶ His words on Chavara will be reflected upon in the third chapter.

1.2.5.1.2 Kuriakose Eliseus Porukara

Porukara was an early companion of and successor to Chavara as Prior. He was one of the ten priests who made their religious profession on 8 December 1855 at Mannanam.

¹⁶⁶ Leopold Beccaro, *A Short Biography of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Lucas Vithuvattical, ed., (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Monastery, 2003). Immediately after the death of Chavara in 1871, Fr. Leopold collected all relevant materials from persons related to Chavara, especially from the members of the Congregation and prepared a brief biography in Malayalam, as an introduction to the autobiographical poetical work of Chavara's *Atmanuthapam*, and published it in 1871, together with a few excerpts from the book.

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They had lived together for years in the monastery at Mannanam. He was in touch with the longings of this leader of the Church and had witnessed with admiration all the labors and pains of Chavara for the unity and growth of the Church.¹⁶⁷ which will be evaluated in the third chapter.

1.2.5.2 Later Biographers

1.2.5.2.1 Valerian Plathottam

The biography of Chavara written by Valerian Plathottam can be seen as one of the earliest ones and an elaborate one.¹⁶⁸ In the chapter on ‘the religious institute for women,’ he emphatically says, “If you forget the historical fact that the first religious institute for women in Kerala is the fruit of the efforts of Fr. Prior, the social reformer, it will be the height of ingratitude.”¹⁶⁹ To substantiate his claim he quotes from the biographies of Chavara by Leopold Beccaro and Kuriakose Porukara. In addition, he quotes detailed descriptions from the Chronicles of Mannanam and Koonammavu. Thus with solid documents he establishes that Chavara is the founder of the convent at Koonammavu. He concludes that chapter with the statement of Rao Sahib O.M.Cherian, a great scholar and a leader of the Jacobite

¹⁶⁷ Kuriakose Porukara, *Sthapakapithakkanmar* [Founder Fathers] Third Edition, (Mannanam: St. Joseph Monastery, 1995), 29-40.

¹⁶⁸ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 413.

¹⁶⁹ Valerian Plathotam, Malankara Sabhamathavinte Oru Veera Santhanam [‘A Heroic Son of Mother Malankara Church’] or *Vazhthappetta divyashree Chavara Kuriakose Eliyasachan: eevacharithram* [‘Very Rev. Father Kuriakose Chavara’] (A Biography in Malayalam) (Mannanam: St. Joseph’s Press, 1939), 208.

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Church: “It is Fr. Kuriakose who built and brought up the famous convent of Koonammavu....”¹⁷⁰

1.2.5.2.2 Chacko Kadankavil (K.C. Chacko)

Chacko Kadankavil, in his biography of Chavara, provides a detailed description of the founder and the foundation of the first convent at Koonammavu. He presents it in the background of close friendship between Chavara and Beccaro:

In 1864, Father Kuriakose had moved to Koonammavu, as desired by the Archbishop. There he was working in close harmony with the missionary priest Fr. Leopold, and the Archbishop himself. At the suggestion of the former, Fr. Kuriakose took up the idea of forming a convent for pious women. It is quite interesting and edifying to follow the history of these foundations mostly in his own words as recorded in his diary with all details. Such personal description reveals the insight, sagacity and prudence of the servant of God. Here is an account condensed from his narrative: “It seems that God has been pleased to fulfill something which seems difficult and for which I have been praying for long. In 1865, Very Reverend Leopold took me out for an evening walk... and told me. ‘Here, there is a widow and her fourteen-year old daughter. ...Why not separate them from their home and accommodate them in a new house to be built on their own property, a little removed from the family house? Here other girls in like situation may be

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

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trained in handicrafts and virtuous ascetic life to become nuns"... In 1866, with a small sum of Rupees 18 only, the first convent was started. Soon Father Kuriakose struggled to erect a convent suitable for the safe habitation of women. ... A ritual vestition ceremony was solemnly arranged for the women's congregation also.¹⁷¹

Following closely the Chronicle of Mannanam, he highlighted the leading role of Chavara in founding the first religious institute for women in Kerala.

1.2.5.3 Studies on Chavara

A few studies have come up about the life and contributions of Chavara.

1.2.5.3.1 Jose Chirayil

Chirayil wrote in the souvenir commemorating the centenary of Chavara's death that it is in the Chronicle of the monastery of Mannanam, that the first historical evidence regarding the foundation of the religious institute for women at Koonammavu is seen.¹⁷² Quoting from the Chronicle he said that Chavara thought of it, and prayed for it much before the actual foundation took place at Koonammavu in 1866. He bought a piece of land and built a compound wall around the property at Puthenpally in 1859; Beccaro was a seminarian in

¹⁷¹ K.C. Chacko, *Father Kuriakos Elias Chavara: Servant of God* Second edition (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Monastery, 1968), 52-54.

¹⁷² Jose Chirayil, "Chavarayachan: CMC Sabhasthapanam," [Fr. Chavara: the Founder of the CMC], *Chavara Souvenir* (Thalore, 1972), 15-20; at 15.

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Italy at that time and had not yet arrived in Kerala.¹⁷³ What Chirayil tries to emphasize is that it was the long-cherished dream of Chavara that was fulfilled at Koonammavu in 1866 by the efforts and support of Beccaro. He quotes from the Chronicle of Mannanam, which records the long-awaited desire of Chavara for instituting a convent for women: “For years, I have been praying for the establishment of a convent, but so far, it has not been possible. It appears that God has willed to bring about the starting of a convent, for which I have been praying but which till now has not been achieved.”¹⁷⁴

He also quotes from the short biography of Chavara by Beccaro and the inscription in the personal Diary of Leopold, on the day of Fr. Chavara’s death, which clearly states that the convent was founded by Chavara. When he speaks of the identity of the founder, Chirayil distinguishes the movement of women religious from the actual foundation. He presents Chavara as the founder of the movement of women religious¹⁷⁵ in which Leopold has no part. Whereas, in starting the convent at Koonammavu, Beccaro put in his effort and supported Chavara to realize Chavara’s long-cherished dream.

Chirayil was aware of the position of some authors, especially Bernard Thoma, the Church historian of St. Thomas Christians, who regarded Leopold Beccaro also as a founder of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. He

¹⁷³ Jose Chirayil, “Chavarayachan: CMC Sabhasthapanam,” 16.

¹⁷⁴ *CMM.*, 126.

¹⁷⁵ He uses the term *Kanyakamadha prasthanam* [നവീനമാതൃകവ്യവസ്ഥ] to denote the movement of women religious. Cf. Jose Chirayil, “Chavarayachan: CMC Sabhasthapanam,” 18.

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gives two reasons for Bernard Thoma's inclusion of Leopold's name in the founder's list. First, St. Thomas Christians had high respect for Leopold Beccaro even after he left for Europe in 1876, mainly because of his involvement in the struggle for autonomy of the St. Thomas Christians. Second, since Beccaro was the Delegate Provincial, it was he who directed the two Congregations of men and of women. It was common then to attribute to the Superior the credit for a work accomplished, as is still the practice today. Bernard Thoma also followed this trend. Moreover, Bernard Thoma had great admiration for Beccaro simply because Beccaro was a supporter of the cause of the St. Thomas Christians.¹⁷⁶ Chirayil concludes, "It is because of these same reasons that I.C. Chacko regards Beccaro as the founder of the CMC."¹⁷⁷

1.2.5.3.2 The Souvenir of the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. Philomina's Church, Koonammavu

Prof. P.M. Giuse, while presenting the significance of Koonammavu in the Church of Kerala, speaks about how the foundation of religious institutes for men and for women at Koonammavu became the source of the importance of that place. He appreciates the broadminded vision and far-sighted approach of the great prophetic personality of Chavara in bringing together diverging ecclesial and ethnic communities into one:

... Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the first Prior of the monastery started in Koonammavu (sic) in 1859 (sic). The first religious institute of the women TOCD

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

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at Koonammavu is the fruit of his efforts. The founding members¹⁷⁸ were of the parish of Koonammavu belonging to Latin Rite, Elisabeth Vakayil and Theresa. Later, Clara from the Syrian Rite joined them. Without any distinction of Rites, the members joined this convent, because the intention of Fr. Chavara was to unite them in Christ and sustain fellowship between the Christians of Syrian and Latin Rite that were engaged in an unhealthy competitive spirit. Thus, Koonammavu grew as a powerful centre of the Kerala Church. The most important factor for this growth is the enlightened members of the monastery. It was none other than Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara who gave leadership to face the challenges of the church of which the most important was the Roccas schism. Msgr. Bernardine entrusted Fr. Chavara and his religious family to fight against the schism.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Sucus Kinattungal took the above words of Giuse referring to Elisabeth Vakayil and Theresa to present Prof. Giuse as one who considers Sr. Eliswa and Sr. Theresa foundresses of the Congregation. The term he used is *Sthapakaangal*, (കുടുംബസ്ഥാപകന്മാർ) which, in the ordinary sense, means 'founding members, or the first members; not founders/foundresses. It is interesting to note that he did not mention the name of Anna. In addition, Kinattungal claims, "He also explained their properties; the offering of the three plots by Fr. Guyomar and the contribution of 8000 Rupees by the Vicar Apostolic." However, in the article of Prof. Giuse there is no mention of their property nor does he mention the name of Fr. Guyomar and the contribution of 8000 Rupees by the Apostolic Vicar. See, Sucus Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 196.

¹⁷⁹ Prof. P. M. Giuse, "Koonammavum Kerala Khraisthava Sabhayam" [Koonammavu and the Christian Church of Kerala], in the "*The*

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Thus, according to Giuse, the first religious institute of the women TOCD at Koonammavu is the fruit of Chavara's efforts.

1.2.5.3.3 *Oriente Cattolico: Cenni Storici e Statistiche*

The Short Accounts and Statistics of Religious Life in the Oriental Catholic Churches prepared by Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches presents the founder of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel in these words: "The Congregation of the Mother of Carmel was founded in 1866 by the Servant of God Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the first Prior of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate."¹⁸⁰

1.2.5.4 Official Declarations

There are four official declarations from Rome that speak of the identity of the founder of the first religious

Souvenir of the Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. Philomina's Church, Koonammavu (1987), 1-10, at 9.

¹⁸⁰ Sacra Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali: "Congregazioni di Diritto Pontificio: Congregazione della Madre del Carmelo, Cenni Storici" *Oriente Cattolico : Cenni storici e statistiche*, Quarta edizione, (Città del Vaticano, 1974), 688- 689: "La Congregazione fu fondata nell'anno 1866 dal Servo di Dio P. Ciriaco Elia Chavara, primo priore dei Carmelitani di Maria Immacolata, il quale già l'anno precedente aveva riunito 4 ragazze (sic.) di rito latino ed una di rito malabarese, permettendo loro di vestire l'abito delle Carmelitane e di vivere insieme nella casa di una delle postulanti. Costruito il convento a Koonamavu (ora nell'arcid. di Ernakulam) nel 1866, le postulanti cominciarono dal 19 marzo 1867 a vivere secondo la regola del terz'Ordine carmelitane regolare. In seguito continuarono ad essere ammesse candidate tanto di rito latino, quanto di rito malabarese. Dopo l'erezione della gerarchia malabarese, anche la Congregazione nel 1887 venne divisa: una di rito latino, l'altra di rito malabarese".

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institute for women in Kerala. The first was in 1967 on declaring the women TOCD of the Syrian Rite as a pontifical institute in the Church. The second and the third were on the person of Chavara declaring him Venerable in 1984 and Blessed in 1986. The fourth one was from Pope Francis on the occasion of the canonization of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara on 23 November 2014 at Vatican.

The *Decretum* of Sacra Congregatio Pro Ecclesia Orientali Prot. N. 504/57, raising the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel to the status of pontifical right in 1967, declares Chavara as the founder of this religious institute. It reads as follows: “For the first time a humble movement of Sisters of Carmelites of Malabar was established by the Servant of God Kuriakose Elias Chavara in the year 1860 (sic). It was by a certain divine inspiration and under the auspices of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Carmel.”¹⁸¹

Pope John Paul II declared Chavara as Venerable in 1984 and the Pontiff affirmed that Chavara was the initiator of the convent at Koonammavu. The document reads,

Meanwhile, in the year 1866, in cooperation with Father Leopold Beccaro, OCD, Kuriakose Elias Chavara established an institute of religious life for women at Koonammavu, for the Christian education

¹⁸¹ ACO., *Decretum* Prot. N. 504/57. “Feliciter iam revoluto saeculo, ex quo humile primum Sororum Carmelitarum malabarensium agmen sub auspiciis Beatae Virginis Matris Carmeli anno millesimo octingentesimo sexton a Servo Dei Kuriakose Elia Chavara divino quodam instinctu constitutum est, agmen illud, parvum sane, Deo protegente, in dies magnifice crescens et per varias eparchias diffusum hodierno die ingens multitudo effecta est.”

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of girls and to bring them up in the knowledge of Christian religion.¹⁸²

The Decree declaring Chavara as Blessed affirmed the above position about the identity of the founder: “Finally, with the co-operation of Leopold Beccaro, a Carmelite missionary and most pious man, [Chavara Kuriakose Elias] founded the Congregation of women religious, to educate girls, in the year 1866.”¹⁸³ On the day of Beatification of Chavara Pope John Paul II, after speaking about the foundation of the CMI Congregation in 1831 added: “Finally, with the help of an Italian missionary, Father Leopold Beccaro, he [Kuriakose Elias Chavara] founded a religious institute for women, the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.”¹⁸⁴

On the occasion of the canonization ceremony at St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome, on 23 November 2014 Pope Francis declared Chavara a saint. Pope Francis states, “Fr. Kuriakose

¹⁸² John Paul II, *Commentarium Officiale*, 7 April 1984. In AAS Vol. 76 (1984): 810-815; at 812.

¹⁸³ John Paul II, *Commentarium Officiale*, 8 February 1986. In AAS Vol. 78 (1986) 1076-1078; at 1077: “Denique, cooperante etiam Leopoldo Beccaro, piissimo viro eodemque missionario Carmelitano, Congregationem mulierum religiosarum, puellarum educandarum gratia, condidit anno MDCCCLXVI.” (*Litterae Apostolicae*).

¹⁸⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Two New Blessed Bear Witness to the Value of Religious Life,” Homily of the Holy Father at the Eucharistic Celebration on 8 February 1986 at Nehru Stadium in Kottayam, on the occasion of the beatification of Chavara and Sr. Alphonsa of the Syro-Malabar Church. Cf., *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 17 February (1986), 6.

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Elias Chavara and Sister Euphrasia Eluvathigal, who was a member of the religious institute founded by him...¹⁸⁵

In the official document, the Pontiff designated him as the founder of the first religious institute for women in Kerala. In the first paragraph itself, it is stated:

In order to support better education of girls and the spiritual progress of the Catholic Church in Kerala, he [St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara] instituted the first convent of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters of the Third Order on 13 February 1866 in the village popularly called Koonammavu with the help of Reverend Father Leopold Beccaro..¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

The facts of history regarding the foundation of the women TOCD in Kerala and the evaluation of those facts by various authors were presented in this chapter. Looking at the unfolding of religious life in the ancient Church of Kerala, one is inclined to say that it was the fulfillment of a long cherished dream. The second half of the nineteenth century

¹⁸⁵ “Udienza ai fedeli giunti per la canonizzazione dei due religiosi indiani” *L'osservatore Romano*, Anno CLIV n. 269 (46.811), novembre 2014, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Canonization of the Blessed Cyriac Elias Chavara of the Holy Family, Priest and the Founder of the Congregation of the Carmelite Brothers of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, 2: “Quo institutionem puellarum et ascensum spiritualem Ecclesiae catholicae in Kerala amplius foveret, reverendo patre Leooldo Beccaro comitante, primum Conventum Sororum Tertii Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatarum die 13 mensis Februarii anno 1866 in civitate vulgo Koonammavu dicta instituit.”

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saw serious efforts being made to bring religious life to the Church of Kerala in different places and at last, they succeeded in founding a religious institute for women at Koonammavu in 1866. In the process of its foundation, different persons were involved in different capacities and there exists differing opinions regarding the identity of the founder.

A survey of different opinions of various writers on the identity of the founder of the women TOCD in Kerala has been presented here. From this historical survey, one can understand that at the final stage of its founding, it was a joint venture of both Chavara and Beccaro. Prior to the foundation at Koonammavu, there were persons: 'those priests and Bishop who envisioned 'an opening of the door for religious life' (1829), who took the initiative to look for a site at Alengadu Kunnel church (1858), the parishioners of Puthenpally who offered their land 'for building and conducting a convent in the name of the Immaculate Holy Mother of Carmel,' all those who co-operated to build the huge compound wall and the two-storey building, those thirty-three women who eagerly waited to dedicate themselves in the solitude of the convent. Thus there were many who longed to see a religious institute for women in Kerala. Above all Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli and Chavara were the pioneers in this project at Puthenpally and Beccaro joined at the foundation at Koonammavu. Then we have the first members - Eliswa Vakayil, Anna Vakayil, Theresa Vaipissery and Clara Puthenangady - who received the call to lead a consecrated life and started their actual religious life in 1866 at Koonammavu. Among all these, who can be designated the founder of the women TOCD? In whom can one find the qualities expected of a founder of a religious

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institute according to the accepted norms prevailing in the Church?

Several factors become evident from this survey: early biographers of Chavara (Beccaro and Porukara) used almost the same terms to describe Chavara's desire and efforts to establish the first convent and saw his "leading role" in the foundation and hence, presented him as the founder of the institute. Some authors pictured Chavara as a collaborator of Leopold. One may observe that in the early period of its history, there was no controversy on the identity of the founder. This question arose after the division of the vicariate of Verapuzha according to Rites in 1887. As discussed earlier, it was Msgr. Leonard Mellano in 1888 who called the first members 'foundresses', that too, in the context of the dispute over jurisdiction of the convent at Koonammavu. Those who presented Baccinelli as the founder speak in terms of 'hierarchical founder' as he was the ecclesiastical authority who canonically approved the religious institute at Koonammavu.

Another observation is that some documents like the *CMM* and *CKC* and some of the Church historians [Bernard Thoma, Mundadan, and Valerian Plathotam] situate the foundation of the convent in the ecclesial context of Kerala, as a historical evolution, and present the establishment of religious life as a movement in the Kerala Church. First, the attention of the leaders was to found a religious institute for men [priests] and then for women. It is in this manner, the writers picture the story of the foundation of the first religious institute for women. Thus, it is hardly surprising that they see it in continuity with the foundation of the monastery at Mannanam in 1831. The Christians had already started enjoying the fruits of religious life of the priests through their

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preaching of the Word of God in the parishes and the apostolate of printing and publication they introduced, the schools they opened in the parishes, etc. Msgr. Bonnard, the Apostolic Visitor of the time, noticed the unusual inclination or desire for embracing religious life among the faithful. There were many women desiring to lead a consecrated life and the convent was founded so that women also could enjoy the benefit of entering religious life. However, those who consider Eliswa the foundress look at the foundation at Koonammavu as an independent event. They do not link it with previous attempts at Puthenpally or Alengadu. Moreover, they ignore many historical facts, too. They follow the line of argument initiated by Msgr. Leonard Mellano, the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha, on the question of jurisdiction over the Koonammavu convent. They made a serious omission of the foundational texts, too. From the reports of some of the Apostolic Visitors and ecclesiastical dignitaries, Msgr. Alessio Canoz (1858), Msgr. Clemense Bonnard (1861) and above all, Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, the local Ordinary who canonically approved the institute, some important historical evidence to the previous attempts to found the religious institute is available, before it was realized at Koonammavu in 1866.

From the above survey, it is clear that different interpretations are possible on the event of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu depending on the particular affiliation of the interpreter, unless he/she is very cautious to be impartial to the finding of truth. An awareness that flows from the above survey is that different persons understood the term 'founder' differently and the study of the foundation of various religious institutes shows that there are many different ways of being a founder. Hence, the next chapter focuses more specifically on the term 'founder' and its usages

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in the ecclesiastical context and in the theology of consecrated life. This leads to the documents of the Church on the founders of religious institutes as well as those reflections of theologians on the subject, which will provide the norms to identify the founder.

Chapter Two

The Norms for the Identity of the Founder According to the Documents of the Church

In this chapter, a search is made to find out the essential marks of a founder based on various Church documents, practice of the Church and the reflections of theologians. It is an attempt to determine the essential elements that the founder contributes in the process of a religious institute being founded. They can be used as criteria to identify the founder of a religious institute. This is carried out in order to make available a list of the qualities or deciding factors of what constitute the founder. Most of the institutes are clear about their founder's identity. However, some congregations have not yet established a position on the respective roles played by different persons involved in the process of the foundation.

2.1 A Clarification of Terms

A clarification of the term 'founder' is a fundamental starting point, for the term is not univocal. When a common understanding of meaning is absent, ambiguity reigns and there seems to exist a fluid situation as to the criteria to decide upon the founder.

2.1.1 The Term 'Founder'

The term founder belongs neither to the ecclesiastical nor to the civil sphere exclusively but is used in both indiscriminately. Any person can found a religious institute. Besides this general permission the Canon Law also clearly distinguishes between the competent ecclesiastical authority who canonically establishes or erects institutes of consecrated

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life¹ and the founder who initiated or left behind an institute or such a way of life.² Apart from this vague and general qualification of the founder as the one “who initiated or left behind an institute or such a way of life” the law of the Church does not enunciate any more specific and clear cut norms as qualifications to identify the founder. This lacuna has led to much confusion among many religious institutes when it came to the question of identifying the real charismatic founder.

Church law is more interested in the former and so it speaks more about canonical approval and erection than on the description of the decisive marks of the charismatic founder. In the strict sense, charismatic founder is the real founder as the one who has to do with the internal nature of the institute and its charism, while hierarchical founder is the external, although necessary link to the universal Church. The role of the hierarchical “founder” is his intervention by way of ecclesiastical authority by giving canonical approval to the institute. The focus of our study is not on the hierarchical founder but on the charismatic founder of religious institutes, because the dispute and difference of opinion is precisely regarding the identity of the charismatic founder in the context of the women TOCD in Kerala.

All through the years, the Church has used different criteria for specifying the charismatic founder. Very often, the official documents of the beatification or canonization of persons who were considered foundresses or founders do not give a unified notion about the identity of the founder. Doubts have been raised whether the title of foundress or founder was

¹ *CIC*, 1983, c.573§ 2.

² *CIC*, 1983, c.578.

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rightly attributed to certain persons. When the question arose about the identity of the founder of ‘the Saint Gabriel Brothers of Christian Education’ in the first half of the twentieth century, the Roman Congregation of Rites concerned with the canonization of saints conducted three successive enquiries. Its sole purpose was to clarify whether or not St. Louis Grignon de Montfort was the founder of the above mentioned institute.³ These enquiries showed that there was no single, clearly defined concept of foundation at that time, and that people meant different things by the term founder or foundation and different methods were used to determine the founder of the institute. Against this background, we find it necessary to sort out clear norms and qualifications to determine the identity of the charismatic founder based on the documents, practice of the Church and on the writings of the theologians. This is the task of this present chapter.

In order to focus on the individuality of the founders, various studies have come up. Antonio Romano in his study emphasizes five aspects or dimensions.⁴ They are: a) the historico-juridical aspect, b) the historico-theological aspect, c) the historico-sociological aspect, d) the theologico-charismatic aspect, and e) the charismatico-analogical aspect. Later he developed this idea in his book, *The Charism of the*

³ Cf. Sacred Congregation for Rites, *Sectio Historica*, 66, *Nova inquisitio... super dubio un B. Ludovicus Maria Grignon de Montfort historice haberi potest uti fundator...*, Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot, 1947, VI and 961-983. Cf. also Antonio Romano, *The Charism of the Founders: The Person and Charism of Founders in Contemporary Theological Reflection*, (United Kingdom: St. Pauls, 1994), 30-35.

⁴ Antonio Romano, “Dimesione sociologica, carismatica, ed analogica della figura dei fondatori”, *Vita Consacrata* 23 (1987), 722-741.

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Founders.⁵ Fabio Ciardi's doctoral research presenting *The Founders: Men of the Spirit* on the persons of the founders of various religious institutes is considered an important guide in this regard.⁶ George Nedungatt provides a description of seven types of founders.⁷ In his attempt to identify the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family, in Kerala, India, he distinguishes between the ideas of foundation and erection of a religious institute.⁸ *Enciclopedia Cattolica* provides the following definition of a founder:

Any believer can be called to establish new religious orders and congregations, be it man or woman, layman or priest, the only prerequisite is that he is to be baptized when proposing the new institute to the ecclesiastical authority. Ordinarily it requires a special vocation from God, so that the new form of life, according to which the proposal is evangelical perfection, does not remain in a vacuum but gives salutary fruits. The manifestation of this vocation can occur in different forms. ...⁹

In a general sense, a 'founder' is one who finds or establishes which directs our thought to the beginnings and suggests a causal link with the thing founded. In ecclesial circles, the term 'founder' is used to denote someone who

⁵ Cf. Romano, *The Charism of the Founders*, 29-65.

⁶ Fabio Ciardi, *I Fondatori uomini dello Spirito* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1982).

⁷ George Nedungatt, "Typology of Founders" *Commentarium pro religiosus et missionaris*, 79 (1998), 95-119.

⁸ George Nedungatt, "Who Founded the Congregation of the Holy Family?" *Charity Blossoms* 18 (1997), 15-33.

⁹ Guiseppe Damizia, "Fondatore," *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Vol. 5 (Città del Vaticano: Casa Editrice, 1950), cols. 1474-1475; at 1474: "È colui che costituisce il fine specifico dell'Ordine."

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makes a foundation or establishes an ecclesiastical institution. This institution can be a church, a hospital, a beneficial fund, or a pious organization.¹⁰

2.1.2 The Term ‘Co-founder’

The concept of ‘co-founder’ is of later origin¹¹ and in its usage there is some confusion. According to Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, the prefix ‘co’ means together or with. ‘Co’ is often joined to purely English words. With nouns, it implies ‘joint,’ ‘mutual,’ ‘common,’ or ‘fellow, as co-partner or co-author. Whereas according to *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, “co-founder is one who has had a considerable share in the execution of what the founder had conceived.”¹² Accordingly, the founder is the one who conceived the idea of the institute and the co-founder assisted him in executing the idea or in shaping the institute’s mission and spirit. Theologians of religious life, in line with the *Enciclopedia*

¹⁰ Elio Gambari, John M. Lozano, and G. Rocca, “Fondatore,” *DIP*, 4 (1977), cols. 96-115; at 97: “Per un istituto religioso è fondatore colui o colei che gli ha dato esistenza non soltanto come fatto storico, ma più ancora ne ha concepito e delineato la fisionomia nei suoi tratti caratteristici, ne ha ordinate la vita e l’azione.”

¹¹ Gian Carlo Rocca observes that even the term ‘cofounder/cofoundress does not appear as a title in the *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*. Cf. Rocca, “Il charisma del fondatore,” *Claretianum* 34 (1994), 86, fn. 180. The contribution of co-founder/co-foundress might be of some importance to understand the true depth of the charism of the institute, but these thoughts do not seem to have yet reached a satisfactory stage. Studies made so far seem more concerned to emphasize the practical role of these persons.

¹² Guiseppe, Damizia, “Fondatore,” *Enciclopedia cattolica*, Vol. 5, (Città del Vaticano: Casa Editrice, 1950), col. 1474: “Confondatore si dice colui che ha avuto una parte rilevante nell’esecuzione di quanto il fondatore ha concepito.”

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Cattolica often use the term co-founder to mean one of the less important two or more partners in founding the congregation. They attribute the role of founder to someone who is the major one who conceived the idea or one who received the divine inspiration to create a new institute.¹³ Anastasio Gutierrez also notices that the term co-founder/co-foundress in normal use, and in the case of the processes of the canonization of the saints, means a title subordinate, inferior or subsidiary, to that of the founder/foundress.¹⁴ He also states that co-founder does not mean “founder-with” another, at one and the same creative level, but a collaborator, co-adjutor, without whom the original idea would not go forward.¹⁵

Very often, the role of co-founder, understood in the sense explained above, is applied in the case of religious institutes of women founded by some male members. For example, in the case of the institute of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the founder is Don Bosco; and Maria Domenica Mazzarello is regarded as the co-foundress.¹⁶ The

¹³ It is in this sense the term co-founder is used in this study, namely, the founder is the one who conceived the idea of the institute and the co-founder assisted him in the execution of the idea.

¹⁴ Anastasio Gutierrez, “Madre Nazarena Majone confondatrice delle Figlie del Divino Zelo,” in *Studi Rogazionisti*, 13 (1992), 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: “Confondatore non significa “fondatore-con” un altro, allo stesso e identico livello creativo, ma collaboratore, coadiutore, senza il quale l’idea originaria del primo (che rimane esclusivamente sua), non sarebbe andata avanti.” He explains in the case of Mother Nazarene Majone as co-foundress of the Daughters of Divine Zeal that one cannot put her on the same level as the “Foundress-with Blessed Annibale M. di Francia, or equal in merit and originality, with absolute parity, but she worked depending on him and in subordination to him.

¹⁶ The institute was founded at Mornese, Italy, in the province of Alessandria and the diocese of Acqui, on 5 August 1872. The

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former received the charism to found an institute for women and the latter assisted him to put into effect the idea of the foundation for women.¹⁷ In many of the institutes of women religious there is much confusion regarding the identity of the founder. One classical example is that of the ‘Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.’¹⁸

Another case can be the question of the identity of the founder and co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family in Kerala, India. There existed some confusion of roles of the founder and co-founder. Nedungatt¹⁹ made a study through serious historical investigation, to see how the idea for the institute emerged and he proved that Mariam Thresia received the inspiration, conceived the institute with its purpose and she formed the first members. Even before the canonical erection of the institute, she initiated the ‘family

founder, Don Bosco, is well known; the co-foundress, Maria Domenica Mazzarello, is little known outside Salesian circles. The sphere of her activities was far more limited than that of the founder; but, though her life was short (1837-1881), her specific mission within the Church was constantly mentioned in the process for her beatification and canonization. Cf., A. Deleidi, “Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello: Their Historical and Spiritual Relationship” in Patrick Egan and Mario Midali, ed., *Don Bosco's Place in History* (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1993), 213-224.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Ceria, *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello, confondatrice dell'istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, (Torino: SEI, 1952), 7-22; Cf., also Mario Midali, *Madre Mazzarello, Il significato del titolo di confondatrice* (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1982), 122-123.

¹⁸ Cf. Mario Midali, *Madre Mazzarello, il significato del titolo di confondatrice* (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1982), 122-126.

¹⁹ George Nedungatt was the Postulator of the cause of the beatification of the Servant of God Mother Mariam Thresia and it was he who prepared the *Positio super virtutibus* (Key documentation on her virtues).

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apostolate' along with her three companions.²⁰ Nedungatt's second attempt was an analysis of the extent to which each of the parties involved in the foundation influenced the shaping of the institute's mission and spirit. Thus, he clarified the role of the local Ordinary, Mar John Menachery, as hierarchical founder and Fr. Thomas Vithayathil as co-founder.²¹ Nedungatt, for his part, has valuable insights into the personal and indispensable contribution made by Vithayathil toward the founding of the institute. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints studied her case and Pope John Paul II conferred on Mariam Thresia the title of foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family and Vithayathil has been presented as the one who gave spiritual guidance and support to her.²²

The intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of founders and co-founders assumes varied modes from one person to another. This is true with regard to the nature and extent of co-founder's dependence on and subordination to the founder in executing the idea of the founder. In the Church circles either the term or the role of co-founder is not defined nor clarified properly and since the term co-founder is not univocal, the possibility of misunderstanding of roles of founder and co-founder is more. Some examples of religious

²⁰ "History," The "diary" about Mariam Thresia by Fr. Joseph Vithayathil given in the *Positio super virtutibus, (Mariam Thresia Mankidiyan), Summarium.*, 337.

²¹ Cf., George Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for All: A Biography of Bl. Mariam Thresia*, Mannuthy: Holy Family Publications, 2002), 128-136.

²² Cf., Pope John Paul II, *Decretum super virtutibus*, AAS 92 (2000), 71-73.

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institutes where such confusion persists are studied at the end of this chapter.²³

2.1.3 The Term ‘Foundation’

Founding an institute of consecrated life is a complex act of providing all fundamental elements with which a community can be founded and sustained. Normally it is a process that matures only gradually. Nedungatt observes that often no single moment can be isolated as the act of foundation and it is not possible for many congregations to single out a particular date for the foundation of their institute.²⁴ Therefore, it cannot be understood as founding of an ordinary institution or laying of the foundation stone of a building, although the term ‘to found’ means, to set up or establish on a firm basis. Foundation is understood to be a *charismatic* event by a charismatic leader and erection is a *juridical* act of institution by a competent ecclesiastical authority. Although founded by a charismatic leader the community becomes a religious institute only after receiving the canonical approval from the proper ecclesiastical authority. Foundation and erection are distinct and complementary. The charismatic founder and the hierarchical founder have hence different roles.

2.2. Popes on Founders of Religious Institutes

According to Pope Pius IX, founders are the recipients of divine inspiration. While speaking ‘On Discipline for Religious’ in his first Encyclical Letter, *Ubi Primum*, the Pontiff states: “Your Orders were founded by extremely holy

²³ Cf., 2.8 of this chapter.

²⁴ Cf. Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders,” 99.

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men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the greater glory of Almighty God and for the salvation of souls. In this, the founders were encouraged by this Holy See.”²⁵ Pope Pius XI considered the founder of religious institute as Father and lawgiver of the congregation. In the Apostolic Letter, *Unigenitus Dei Filius* the Pope invites the religious to “follow the example of their founder and father and lawgiver.”²⁶ For Pope Pius XII the founder is the one who discovers some special needs of the Church of the time and locality and establishes an institute to meet those needs:

For it has generally happened that founding fathers of religious institutes conceived their new undertakings as a means of meeting some needs or tasks of the Church that were then emerging and brooked no delay; consequently they adapted their undertakings to their own time. If you wish to follow the footsteps of your founders, then act in the same manner as they did.²⁷

2.3 Founders in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council

When *Lumen Gentium* speaks on ‘religious,’ and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on ‘renewal and adaptation of religious life,’ it constitutes an admirable synthesis of Catholic teaching concerning consecrated life.

²⁵ <http://www.piustheninth.com/apps/app38.htm> Pope Pius IX, *Ubi Primum*, Encyclical Letter, 17 June 1847.

²⁶ Pius XI, Apostolic Letter *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 19 March 1924, AAS, XVI (1924), 135.

²⁷ Pius XII, *Letter to the Superiors General of Orders and Religious Institutes*, in Gaston Courtois, *The States of Perfection: Papal Documents from Leo XIII to Pius XII* (Dublin: 1961), 182, n. 415.

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2.3.1 *Lumen Gentium*

The definitive text of Chapter VI, ‘the Religious’ of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, is the Church’s official teaching on consecrated life. It is the basic document for all other studies concerning religious life. It recognizes the Spirit-inspired role of the founders in building up the body of Christ. The founders determine the rules²⁸ and the apostolates “of all these religious families.”²⁹ *Lumen Gentium* does not speak directly about the qualifications that serve to identify the founder, but it has a reference to the founding persons in LG 45 when it speaks on the relation between the authority of the Church and the religious state. It reflects on their sanctity, calls them “outstanding men and women”, and believes that religious institutes should develop and flourish in accordance with the ‘spirit of their founders.’ Here the document speaks rather on the qualities of a founder.

2.3.2 *Perfectae Caritatis*

Perfectae Caritatis prescribed two guidelines for religious. One that religious institutes return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of the founding persons and it instructs religious to live out creatively the history of the original founding, which speaks directly of the person of the founder. It calls for looking to the past, whereas the second guideline, responding to the signs of the times, invites forward-looking attitude. The beginning of religious community centers around a founding person and his or her vision about which *Perfectae Caritatis* affirms: “It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own

²⁸ LG. 43, 45.

²⁹ LG. 46.

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proper characters and functions. Therefore, the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully accepted and retained, as indeed should each institute's sound traditions, for all of these constitute the patrimony of an institute."³⁰

The Council entrusted the hierarchy with the task of promoting the growth and flourishing of the institutes "in accordance with the spirit of the founders."³¹ The Council also urged the institutes themselves to accept and retain "the spirit of the founders," which is the uniqueness of the Spirit that animated the founder and reject what was less suited to the "spirit of their institutes."³² Thus, the Second Vatican Council gives great importance to the founding person and openness to the actual world as it states, "from the very beginning of the Church there were men and women who set out to follow Christ ... more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels... many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit founded religious families."³³ Those outstanding men and women presented "Rules of religious life" to the Church leaders for approval.³⁴

2.4 After the Second Vatican Council

Following the Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* the Congregation for Religious Life³⁵ has issued from time to

³⁰ *PC.* 2b.

³¹ *LG.* 45.

³² *PC.* 2, 20.

³³ *P.C.* 1.

³⁴ *LG.* 45.

³⁵ In the Roman Curia, it is above all the responsibility of this Congregation of the Church to publish documents on the Consecrated Life, even though other Congregations can also do the same. Its name has been changed many times. It was founded by Pope Sixtus V

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time a number of documents focused on the theme of origins and the original spirit of the institutes. While presenting the criteria for renewal and adaptation in *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, Pope Paul VI tells the religious to be faithful to the original spirit: “For the good of the Church, institutes must seek after a genuine understanding of their original spirit, so that they will preserve it faithfully when deciding on adaptations, will purify their religious life from alien elements, and will free it from what is obsolete.”³⁶ In a letter dated 4 December 1967, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRSI) requested religious institutes to preserve the purpose, nature and character of the institutes.³⁷ Again it

on 27 May 1586 with the title *Sacra Congregatio super consultationibus regularium*; in 1601, it was united to the *Congregatio pro consultationibus episcoporum et aliorum prelatorum*. On 29 June 1908, Pius X again separated the two bodies, one referring to Religious and the other, to Bishops. On 15 August 1967, Paul VI, with the Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universale*, renamed it as the *Sacred Congregation for the Religious and the Secular Institutes* (SCRSI). The new *CIC* (1983) removed the variable “Congregation” and the adjective “Sacred.” Finally, John Paul II, with the Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, on 28 June 1988, changed the title to the *Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Society of Apostolic Life* (CICLSAL). Cf. J. Rovira, “Principal Doctrinal Contents on Consecrated Life in the Church Documents (Starting from the End of Vatican II), Cf. *Sanyasa : Journal of Consecrated Life*, Vol.1, No. 1 January-June (2006), 33-62, at 56-57 (endnote, 3).

³⁶ *ES*. 16:3. Paul VI, *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, II, 6 August 1966, Norms for Implementing the Decree: On the Up-to- Date Renewal of Religious Life. Translated by Gilbert Volery, and Austin Flannery. Austin Flannery, General Editor, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1977), 624-633.

³⁷ SCRSI., *Par une Lettre*, 10 July 1972. “Acts of Special General Chapters” Translated by Vatican Press Office. Austin Flannery, Ed. *Vatican Collection Vol. 2. Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar*

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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.*”³⁸

2.4.1 *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971)

In the initial years after the Council there existed much disorientation among religious. There was tension between an institution and its charism. Knowing well the chaotic situation, Pope Paul VI published in 1971, *Evangelica Testificatio (ET)*.³⁹ which was known as *Carta Magna* on Religious Life in which he calls the founders as men and women of spiritual generosity.⁴⁰ One of the major themes in the 70s was ‘charism of religious life.’ It slowly developed into ‘the charism of the founder’ and ‘the charism of the religious institute’. Although this document does not directly define the characteristic traits of the founder of the religious institute, it calls the founders persons ‘who are raised up by God within his Church.’⁴¹ About religious life it says, “It is far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church.”⁴² It was for the first time in *ET* that a Church document speaks of charism applying to religious life

Documents, (New York: Costello Publishing Company North Post, 1982), 195-199.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio, (ET)*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life according to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council, 29 June, 1971, AAS 63 (1971), 497- 526.

⁴⁰ *ET*. 1.

⁴¹ *ET*. 11.

⁴² *ET*. 11.

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in general and also of ‘charisms of the founders,’⁴³ and the ‘charisms of different institutes.’⁴⁴ Among the other particular elements, which characterize the traits of the founders or foundresses, the document enumerates the following: The individuality or identity of the institute depends upon the spirit and identity of the founder or foundress; the founders and foundresses are the source of a tradition and on which an institute is founded; they present the Rules to the hierarchy for approval, defining the aims of the community they founded;⁴⁵ and the original inspiration of the founder is the source of the charism of the institute which is written into the Institute’s own law and to which the institute should refer; and the grace granted to the founders implies a particular fecundity in the Church. Starting from the document *ET*, there was a constant and progressive development of this thematic theology.

A cursory reading of *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Evangelica Testificatio* brings to mind a number of words and phrases that shed light on the discussion of the figure and charism of the founder. These are: ‘an institute’s own proper character and function,’ ‘spirit and aims of the founder,’ ‘sound traditions,’ ‘patrimony of the institute,’ ‘charisms of the founders,’ ‘evangelical intention of the founder,’ ‘example of the founder’s sanctity,’ ‘charism of the religious life as a fruit of the Holy Spirit,’ ‘dynamism proper to each institute,’ and ‘authentic and integral vocation of each institute.’ All these phrases form part of an invitation to rediscover the identity of the institute as well as that of the founder. The attention was on the uniqueness, identity, self-

⁴³ *ET*. 11.

⁴⁴ *ET*. 32.

⁴⁵ *ET*. 11.

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image, individuality or the specific gift of a given congregation. It also tells us that the characteristic of a healthy self-image of one's institute is the understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of the specific gifts received by the founder and transmitted to the institute. Thus, the document gives encouragement to identifying the uniqueness of one's institute and its founder as distinct from others.

2.4.2 *Mutuae Relationes* (1978)

The instruction, *Mutuae Relationes* (MR)⁴⁶ written jointly by two of the Congregations, that for Religious and Secular Institutes and that for Bishops, in 1978 with the approval of Paul VI, gives one of the most significant statements on the theme since Vatican Council II. It explains the qualities of the founder, who possesses gifts “which without doubt usually come from the Spirit.”⁴⁷ While explaining the ecclesial nature of a religious institute, it speaks of the distinctive character of every institute.⁴⁸ In the paragraph number 11, the expression ‘the distinctive character’ has been repeated three times; once it speaks about the ‘necessity of preserving the identity of each institute so securely’ as well as ‘the special mission of the institute.’⁴⁹ Moreover, the variety that emerges from the distinctive character of each institute comprises a gift made to the Church through religious founders; and the hierarchy of the Church authenticates this gift.⁵⁰ In its attempt to define ‘the charism of the founder’, the document, alluding to *Lumen*

⁴⁶ Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church, SCRSI., 23 April 1978. AAS 70 (1978), 473-506.

⁴⁷ MR. 11.

⁴⁸ MR. 11.

⁴⁹ MR. 13.

⁵⁰ MR. 11.

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Gentium and *Perfectae Caritatis* calls the founders “outstanding men and women.”⁵¹ It speaks clearly of how the charism of the institute is inherited from the founder. *Mutuae Relationes* does not apply the term ‘charism’ to the institute. Instead, the terms used are ‘the identity,’ ‘the specific charismatic note,’⁵² ‘the peculiar feature,’⁵³ ‘the special purpose,’⁵⁴ ‘the particular spirit and special mission,’⁵⁵ and everything concerning ‘the loyalty to the charism of the founder.’⁵⁶

This document declared that “the very charism of the founders” appears as an “experience of the Spirit”. It specified five aspects in reference to the charism of the founders: i) it is an experience of the Spirit, ii) it is transmitted to the disciples, iii) it is to be lived, guarded, deepened and developed constantly by the disciples, iv) it possesses a distinctive style for sanctification and apostolate, and v) a particular style of life for sanctification and a particular tradition.⁵⁷ When the document affirms that ‘every authentic charism brings an element of real originality in the spiritual life of the Church along with fresh initiatives for action’,⁵⁸ it definitely points to the gift the founder received from God.

Mutuae Relationes marks a genuine trait of the founder as one who works with originality. The document

⁵¹ MR. 11.

⁵² MR. 12.

⁵³ MR. 13, 14.

⁵⁴ MR. 13.

⁵⁵ MR. 14.

⁵⁶ MR. 12.

⁵⁷ MR. 11.

⁵⁸ MR. 12.

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goes on to describe the true marks of an authentic charism in any institute.⁵⁹ This document attributes to the founder the ability to bear sufferings. It says, “In a genuine charism there is always a mixture of new creativity and interior suffering. The historical fact of the connection between charism and cross, apart from other factors that may give rise to misunderstanding, is an extremely helpful sign in discerning the authenticity of a call of the Spirit.⁶⁰ All these qualities of the founder and of the members are intended for the enrichment, development and rejuvenation of the life of the institute. Towards the end of the document,⁶¹ there is a summary of the characteristics required for the authenticity of a charism. Accordingly, founders are the privileged recipients of a specific charism; in the person of the founder there will be evidence of the special origin of the charism from the Holy Spirit; the founder expresses a profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ in order to witness to some aspect of His mystery; the founder will exhibit a constructive love of the Church, which shrinks from causing any discord in her. An ability to be docile to the hierarchy is regarded as an indispensable quality of the founder. Although it speaks of these characteristics in the context of the birth of new institutes it can be applied to the authenticity of the founder as well, because, a religious institute starts first with the person of the founder. Thus, in this document the figure of the founder has become brighter and the expectations of the Church regarding the identity of the founder clearer.

Pope John Paul II, in the same month in which he assumed his office as Supreme Pontiff, shared with the

⁵⁹ Cf., *MR.* 12.

⁶⁰ *MR.* 12.

⁶¹ *MR.* 51.

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Superiors General of Men how the Church looks at the identity of the founder of each congregation. He told them:

Each of your founders, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ to the Church, was a man who possessed a particular charism. Christ had in him an exceptional “instrument” for his work of salvation, which, especially in this way, is perpetuated in the history of the human family. The Church has gradually assumed these charisms, evaluated them, and, when she found them authentic, thanked the Lord for them, and tried to “put them in a safe place” in the life of the community so that they could always yield fruit.⁶²

2.4.3 *Essential Elements of Religious Life* (1983)

The Church regards certain elements essential to religious life. Nine characteristics proper to each institute are listed in a document called *Essential Elements in the Teachings on Religious Life (EE)*.⁶³ which refers particularly to institutes of active life.⁶⁴ The ideas such as, ‘the founding gift’, the founding person, the identity of the institute, etc., are stressed in this document as well. Referring to Canon 578, it reminded the religious of becoming aware of the identity of each religious institute: “The nature, purpose, spirit, and character of the institute, as established by the founder or foundress and approved by the Church, should be preserved

⁶² Pope John Paul II to Superiors General of Men, Rome, November 24, 1978. *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 7 (1978), 3.

⁶³ SCRSI., *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate, (EE)*, Vatican, 31 May 1983.

⁶⁴ *EE*. 13-52.

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by all, together with the institute's sound traditions."⁶⁵ Quoting the document *Mutuae Relationes* it states, "The identity derives from that action of the Holy Spirit which is the institute's founding gift and which creates a particular type of spirituality, of life, of apostolate, and of tradition."⁶⁶ As per this document, every aspect of life, in every group, is to be specified and re-read in the light of one's own charism. It catches our attention that the foundation of unity among the members of the community, which is communion in Christ, rooted in one's religious consecration itself, that this document says, is established by the one founding gift.⁶⁷

2.4.4 *Vita Consacrata* (1996)

The year 1994 saw the celebration of the Ninth Ordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops. This Session was devoted entirely to consecrated life in the Church and in the world. It showed a renewed interest in the founding charism of religious institutes and the person and holiness of the founders. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* is the most important document on Consecrated Life; together with *Evangelica Testificatio*, they represent the testament that two great Popes of our time have left to consecrated persons. Although it presents a rich theology of consecrated life in the Church, it attempts neither to define the figure of the founder nor deal directly with the characteristic traits of the founder. While speaking of apostolic religious life the document states,

⁶⁵ *EE*. Some Fundamental Norms, (No number for this), Identity, § 14.

⁶⁶ *EE*. 11.

⁶⁷ *EE*. 18.

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This is a splendid and varied testimony, reflecting the multiplicity of gifts bestowed by God on founders and foundresses who, in openness to the working of the Holy Spirit, successfully interpreted the signs of the times and responded wisely to new needs.⁶⁸

Thus, Pope John Paul II was affirming the statements of the previous documents that founders and foundresses are persons open to the Holy Spirit and they have responded wisely to the needs of their times.

Another characteristic mark *Vita Consecrata* acknowledges in the founders is, ‘their love for the Church or their sense of the Church.’ The Pope observes, “In founders and foundresses, we see a constant and lively sense of the Church, which they manifest by their full participation in all aspects of the Church’s life, and in their ready obedience to the bishops and especially to the Roman Pontiff.”⁶⁹ Referring to the heroic love for the Church of saints like St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Pope acknowledges that these saints, founders and foundresses, have lived their full ecclesial communion in diverse and often difficult times and circumstances.⁷⁰ The document often uses terms like ‘the founding charism,’⁷¹ ‘the charisms proper to the various institutes,’⁷² ‘original inspiration of the Institute,’⁷³ ‘inspiration of the founders,’⁷⁴

⁶⁸ VC. 9b.

⁶⁹ VC. 46.

⁷⁰ VC. 46; MR.51 speaks of “A constructive love of the Church, which absolutely shrinks from causing any discord in her.”

⁷¹ Cf. VC. 12b, 36

⁷² Cf. VC. 19d, 25.

⁷³ Cf. VC. 37

⁷⁴ Cf. VC. 36.

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‘new charisms given to men and women of our times by the Holy Spirit to found institutions that can meet the challenges of today.’⁷⁵ It is evident that all these terms point to the figure of the founder of the institute. When *Vita Consecrata* invites the Institutes of Consecrated Life to courageously propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity, and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world,⁷⁶ it admits that the founders and foundresses are persons of creativity, originality and holiness.

2.4.5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992)*

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*⁷⁷ does not speak directly of the founder of a religious institute. However, one can see a growth and clarity regarding the identity of consecrated life. It presents consecrated life as a closer following of Christ and a clearer manifestation of his self-emptying. It is seen as a special sign of the mystery of redemption.⁷⁸ Referring to *Perfectae Caritatis*, it affirms that those who founded institutes of consecrated life were under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ VC. 62.

⁷⁶ Cf. VC. 37.

⁷⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992 (CCC).

⁷⁸ CCC. 932.

⁷⁹ CCC. 918.

2.5 Canon Law on the Identity of the Founder

2.5.1 *The Code of Canon Law (1983)*

The Code of Canon Law whether of the Latin Church (1917, *CIC* 1983⁸⁰) or of the Eastern Churches (1952, 1990) does not contain any definition of a founder. Nor have these documents determined the requisites for a person to be called a founder. The law codes do not even use the term ‘charism’ in relation to either the founder or the religious life as such.

Both the Codes do not explicitly describe norms regarding the identity of the founder of a religious institute, instead canon 578 of *CIC* speaks of the ‘patrimony of a religious institute’. In the religious circles, patrimony is often considered a charism that the founder has transmitted to the community. This particular canon considers the founder as the one who determines the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute founded by him. In the words of Aidan McGrath, it is easy to identify “charism” with the “patrimony” of an institute,⁸¹ namely, it “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

⁸⁰ *The Code of Canon Law (CIC)* (Collins: The Canon Law Society Trust, 1983) (In English Translation). Hereafter its abbreviation *CIC* will be used in this work and the number of canons referred to in this study is usually indicated by prefixing “c.” which refers to canons of the *CIC*. The canons of other Code, namely *CCEO* are specified before or after each reference to them.

⁸¹ Aidan McGrath, “Between Charism and Institution: The Approval of the Rule of Saint Clare in 1253,” *Studia Canonica* 31 (1997), 424.

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tradition.”⁸² In some other canons also these terms, ‘nature,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘character and purpose’ are repeated.⁸³ Thus, the *CIC* made it clear that the founders determined the specific nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute.

Canon 578 of *CIC* deals with the identity of consecrated life,⁸⁴ in terms of the institute’s patrimony with its important elements. The source of canon 578 is *PC* 2b where almost all these terms have been used. Canon 578 proposes an enriched concept of patrimony by adding new elements to the Conciliar idea of patrimony. Moreover, the Code highlights the role of the founder of the religious institute as well as the competent ecclesiastical authority in forming an institute’s patrimony. In order to identify the founder of a religious institute we look to the person who defined or determined the above four factors of a particular institute of consecrated life.

2.5.2 *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (1990)*

The term charism never appears in *the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO)*⁸⁵ to describe religious life. However, it has been observed by the commission of experts for the codification of Oriental Canon

⁸² C. 578. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, Donald E. Heintschel, ed. *The Code of Canon Law: Text and Commentary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 456.

⁸³ Cf., cc. 586, 578, 588 §3, 598 §1, 607 §3, 610 §1, 611, 652 §2, 659 §2, 708, 722 §2.

⁸⁴ The term “consecrated life” in the canons applies to religious, secular institutes, hermits, and those consecrated by the rite of virgins. Cf. O’Hara, “Norms Common to All Institutes of Consecrated Life: Canons 573-606,” 32.

⁸⁵ Hereafter the abbreviation *CCEO* will be used to denote the Oriental Code.

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Law, that the very nature of eastern monasticism highlights the charismatic aspect of the call of the Holy Spirit, on account of which religious life was seen as belonging to the mystical aspect of the Church and necessarily with a relationship to the hierarchy. In effect, the commission expresses its opinion that canons on religious life in the *CCEO*, do not deny the reality of the charisms of every institute operating in the Church, since religious institutes have been considered as bearers or depositories of specific gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church.⁸⁶

Canon 426 of *CCEO* speaks of the obligation of the members to be faithful to the intention and determinations of the founder. “Each religious, whether superior or subject, is obliged not only to observe faithfully and integrally the vows which they have professed, but also to arrange his or her life according to the *typikon*.⁸⁷ or statutes, thus having faithfully observed the intention and determinations of the founder, and so tend to the perfection of his or her state.”⁸⁸ According to this canon, the beginning of the congregation signifies the time when the founder or foundress conceived the general idea of the institute and defined at least, in general terms the aims, the spirit and the life style of the institute, that is, the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the institute. The founder’s intention and determinations are to be seen as a

⁸⁶ There are no canons in the *CCEO* corresponding to c. 578 of *CIC*. In the general sense, we can say that *CCEO* 426 correspond to *CIC*., cc. 578; 598 § 2.

⁸⁷ The term *Typikon* means the particular law or the Constitutions of the religious institute.

⁸⁸ Jobe Abbas, “Institutes of Consecrated Life (cc. 410-572),” in George Nedungatt, ed., *A Guide to the Eastern Code: A Commentary on the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2002), 352.

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plan, a project that is to be expressed in the community of its first members.⁸⁹

The section on the identity of the founder was dedicated to explaining the concept, nature, and content of the patrimony of an institute as presented by the *CIC*. The theology of consecrated life perceives patrimony as charism. Basically, charism is a gift of God given to a Christian for the benefit of the Church. The intention and determination of the founder is the basic subjective element of the patrimony, for they are determining factors about the nature, purpose and character of an institute. The spirit of the founder is the subjective element that helps to form the spirit of an institute. The patrimony of the institute is approved by the juridical acts of the competent ecclesiastical authority, namely, the canonical approbation and erection. The canon on the patrimony of an institute presents the founder as a designer because the intentions and projects of the founder determine the nature, purpose, spirit and character of an institute. The competent ecclesiastical authority ratifies the intentions and projects of the founder. Therefore, the role of the founder appears to be like that of a designer. The main source of c.578 is *PC* 2b, which speaks about the renewal of religious life by returning to the original inspiration. *C. 578* tends to speak about the origins of an institute. The intentions and projects of the founders as well as the approbation of the competent authority, too, refer to the origin of an institute. Sound traditions can as well originate at the beginning of an institute

⁸⁹ Cf., David-Maria A. Jaeger, "Observations on Religious in the Oriental Code" in *The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches: A Study and Interpretation Essays in Honor of Joseph Cardinal Parecattil*, Jose Chiramel and Kuriakose Bharanikulangara, ed., (Alwaye: St. Thomas Academy for Research, 1992), 152-180.

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and hence, the canon is consonant with the mind of the Council to return to the original inspiration of the institute.

The different documents of the Church studied above describe the qualities and qualifications essential for defining the founder of a religious institute. A good deal of material could be found in the documents of the Church, especially the *Evangelica Testificatio* and *Mutuae Relationes*, regarding the founder and it is possible to abstract and collect certain common elements that characterize a founder. We discern the following characteristic traits of the founders: 1) the divine origin of the call of the founders to found new religious institutes in the Church, 2) the founders exhibit a profound love for the Church and in response to a specific need of the Church of their time they found the new institutes, 3) they experience a particular aspect of the mystery of Christ, or they are attracted to a particular approach or attitude of Jesus, and 4) the founders show a sincere docility to the hierarchy and the Church and a ready response to the gift they have received from the Spirit.

2.6 Theologians on Founders

The study of various theologians on the consecrated life shows that a precise notion of founders has not guided all authors in the past. The list of elements that make up the essential qualities or qualifications of the founder varies according to writers. The very fact that there are varied explanations regarding the identifying marks of the founder suggests that this is a concept that can be interpreted in different ways. From the studies of J. M. Lozano,⁹⁰ Gian

⁹⁰ Juan Manuel Lozano, "Fondatore," *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata* (Milan: Editrice Ancora Milano, 1994), 756-767.

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Carlo Rocca,⁹¹ Antonio Romano,⁹² and Fabio Ciardi⁹³ ten such qualities which are usually mentioned are taken and explained here. We do not strictly follow here the list or priority of any one of the theologians.

2.6.1 Profile of a Founder

The ten qualities given by theologians are given below among which we may regard the first four as essential or primary norms and the last six as secondary elements that refer rather to the personal qualities, virtues or character of the founder or of the institute. The primary norms qualify them as founders and without which nobody can be called as founders.

2.6.1.1 Primary Norms or Qualifications of the Founder

2.6.1.1.1 The Vocation of the Founder or Divine Inspiration

As a profile of the founder, the special vocation received by the founder is studied first. Theologians of religious life consider the ‘divine vocation’ as the basis for his or her identity as founder. This enables him or her to live one particular aspect of the mystery of Christ, from which evolves the mission of the founder, which in turn becomes the

⁹¹ Gian Carlo Rocca, “Il charisma del fondatore,” *Claretianum* 34 (1994), 73-106. Cf. Also Gian Carlo Rocca, “Charisma dei Fondatori e Magistero della Chiesa,” *Vita Consacrata* 23 (1987), 830-846; Gian Carlo Rocca, “Elementi per la fisionomia di un Fondatore: Don Alberione e I suoi istituti,” *Claretianum: Commentaria theologica* 29 (1989), 125-198; Elio Gambari, Juan Manuel Lozano, Gian Carlo Rocca, “Fondatore,” in *DIP.*, Vol. IV, Cols. 96-101.

⁹² Romano, *The Charism of the Founders*, 129-150.

⁹³ Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 47-140.

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mission of the institute. All these aspects – vocation of the founder, mission and the original inspiration - are interrelated, or one flows from the other. For the sake of clarity, those points are explained under separate titles.

According to Rocca, among the ten distinguishing marks of the founder the divine vocation of the founder forms the first. He says, “The experience of a divine call received by the founder/foundress is perhaps the first element in order of time and it manifests itself in different concrete ways (by a particular light, a dream, an inner voice, or whatever).”⁹⁴ The life of one as founder begins with the special vocation that he/she receives, advances through the inspiration of God and culminates in the institutionalization of the founding charism. Hence, the origin is entirely personal; a call addressed to a person to found and the end is a new community or an institute. When the theologians speak of vocation of the founder they mean to emphasize the divine initiative or the Primary Cause that moved the founders in establishing the institute. In the case of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the vocation she received to found a new religious institute and the grace brought to her on the day of her inspiration was very vivid in her mind. She says, “It was on this day of 10 September 1946 in the train to Darjeeling that God gave me

⁹⁴ Rocca, “Il Carisma del fondatore,” 79: “esperienza divina o chiamata/vocazione particolare: è forse il primo elemento in ordine di tempo e le modalità concrete con cui essa si manifesta sono varie (tramite una illuminazione particolare, un sogno, una voce interiore, o altro ancora): e sono tale illustrate soprattutto dal P. Ciardi, che su di esse ha fondato la sua teologia del carisma dei fondatori.”

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the “call within a call” to satiate the thirst of Jesus by serving Him in the poorest of the poor.”⁹⁵

The idea of considering the founder as the bearer of the original inspiration is clear from papal as well as Conciliar documents. According to *Lumen Gentium* founders were acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or were moved by the Holy Spirit. Among the gifts of the Spirit that makes a Christian the founder of a religious institute, inspiration is the first according to the *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*.⁹⁶ It continues to say that Pope Pius VI in his Encyclical Letter *Quod aliquantulum*, 1791 and Pope Pius IX, through his Encyclical Letter *Ubi Primum*, 1847 stressed the idea that the founders acted under the divine inspiration,⁹⁷ and Pius XI in *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 1924 had stressed the importance of the inspiration received by the founders.⁹⁸

The Second Vatican Council, while explaining the origin of religious life stated: “Many of them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit became hermits or founded religious families” and has described the figure of the founder with a distinctively prophetic role.”⁹⁹ Pope Paul VI, views the founders as people “who were raised up by God in his

⁹⁵ Mother Teresa to Malcom Muggeridge, quoted in Muggeridge’s *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 85-86.

⁹⁶ Elio Gambari, John M. Lozano, and G. Rocca, “Fondatore,” *DIP*, IV, col. 98: “Tra I doni dello Spirito che fanno di un cristiano il fondatore di una famiglia religiosa, bisogna sottolineare in primo luogo l’ispirazione.”

⁹⁷ Pope Pius IX, Encyclical Letter, *Ubi Primum*, 17 June 1847.

⁹⁸ Pius XI, Apostolic Letter *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 19 March 1924, AAS, XVI (1924), 135.

⁹⁹ *LG*. 45, *PC*. 1.

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Church.”¹⁰⁰ This expression means that God designated people or caused them to rise or appear as founders in the Church. The inspiration may be sudden or through experiences of different events over a long period through which God prepares the person to experience some particular aspect of the mystery of Christ and also to be sensitive to the specific need of the Church. He allows them to receive mystical graces and supernatural experiences that enrich the spirit of the founder. The details about the nature of inspiration received by founders will be explained in a separate section of this study.¹⁰¹

2.6.1.1.2 Awareness of Being Called by God to Found a New Religious Institute

The consciousness of being called by God to found a new religious institute in the Church has been considered as essential to qualify one as founder. When *Perfectae Caritatis* speaks about the call of the founding persons of religious institutes, it notes, “the Holy Spirit has raised up in the Church men and women who founded religious families.”¹⁰² Antonio Romano puts it more clearly, “The feeling which the founder has that he or she, and no other, has been called by God to give life to a new religious family, or – more broadly – to a new form of evangelical life.”¹⁰³ An institute of consecrated life is born in the Church through the action of the Holy Spirit and from the charism of a Christian for the well-being of the Church. The gift received by the founder becomes the charism of the community. J. C. Futrell expresses the idea in this way: “A person gradually comes to

¹⁰⁰ *ET*. 11.

¹⁰¹ Cf. the section 2.7.

¹⁰² *PC*. 2.

¹⁰³ Romano, *The Charism of the Founders*, 42.

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realize that he has been given the charism to be a founder when he recognizes that the way of following Jesus and the service of humans to which he is called does not exist in this specific form in the Church. He is called to a new beginning.¹⁰⁴ The activities of the founder in relation to the institute necessarily flow from this particular awareness of being called.

Through the experience of the divine call, the founders not only feel called by God but also they are convinced of their mission as founder. This conviction is something personal in the same way as the vocation of an individual. As in the case of vocation, the conviction may also grow and mature through the various experiences of one's life. This is really in consonance with the biblical idea of vocation: "It is a property of God, an initiative of his freedom that he nevertheless extends to all and every single man, 'forming him in His being.'" ¹⁰⁵ Hence, the calling of God is for a specific purpose and in the case of the founder, it is to constitute him as a founder. This divine vocation creates in the founding person the conviction of his mission. In the words of Lozano, "The founder is the one who discovers that it is God's Will that he or she should found this new religious family in the Church." ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ J. C. Futrell, "Discovering the Founder's Charism," *The Way Supplement* 14 (1971) 64.

¹⁰⁵ M. Germinario, *I nuovi termini della vita religiosa: Vocazione, carisma, fine, missione, indole e natura, sane tradizioni spiritualità* (Roma: Editrice Rogate, 1983), 24-25. "Una proprietà di Dio, una iniziativa della sua libertà che egli tuttavia estende a tutti e ad ogni singolo uomo, 'costituendolo nel suo essere.'"

¹⁰⁶ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 7.

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When the lives of these men and women are observed, they are seen as a special category of Christians with a grace of spiritual fecundity. Father Jerome Nadal, S.J., has suggested this approach. Reflecting on the origin of the various orders, he writes, “First, God calls a person.”¹⁰⁷ Everything the religious orders have been, everything they have done, was ordinarily initiated with the calling of an individual. Looking at the founders and foundresses of religious institutes (almost all are canonized or beatified among them; others are in the process of canonization), Lozano observes two facts: first, these personalities form a glorious dynasty in the history of Christian sanctity. They have extraordinarily enriched the Church with their spirituality, with their activities and many times with their doctrines. This simple fact suggests that the vitality of a given religious family depends on the spiritual fullness of the woman or man to whom it owes its existence in the Church. Secondly, almost every religious community first begins as a group of disciples or companions gathered around an outstanding personality. The very fact of inspiration of the founders speaks of the presence of divine intervention in the lives of the founders. There are several ways by which they become aware of the divine will and the tasks assigned to them.¹⁰⁸

Founders share the fact that the idea of giving life to a religious institute in the Church did not come from their rational thinking or their autonomous will. They become aware that it stems from an explicit divine intervention. It is

¹⁰⁷ Cf. H. Nadal, S.J., “Exhortationes Colonienses,” 1-3, in *Commentarii de instituto societatis Iesu*, Roma, 1962), 779, Quoted in Lozano, “Founder and Community: Inspiration and Charism,” *Review for Religious* 37 (1978), 219.

¹⁰⁸ Lozano, “Founder and Community: Inspiration and Charism,” 219.

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the Spirit that invades the founders and the work that they start shows that through them God wants to do certain things in the Church. The Holy Spirit becomes the guide and teacher in implementing the plan that gradually unfolds. Here Lozano mentions two exceptions: first, the example of the seven founders of the Servites in which a whole group shared the founding grace. Another example he shows is that of the Carmelites, whose origin cannot be defined with precision and there we do not see one outstanding person as the founder who directly founded the Order of the Carmelites.

The followers were attracted to the special grace given to the person of the founder or foundress and they share the particular way of life of the founders or foundresses. In the *Living Flame of Love* St. John of the Cross speaks about the grace granted to the founders: the highest mystical graces are ordinarily reserved for founders in proportion to the number of offspring they are called to have.¹⁰⁹ Jerome Nadal repeats this idea: when God wants to help his Church, he first raises up a person and gives him or her a special grace and impulse under which he or she may serve him in a particular manner. This is what he did in the case of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta: he offered her a particular grace for her personal growth as well as for her companions. It continues in the Church even today. Speaking about the vocation of the founders it is a fact affirmed by theologians that some particular grace was first granted to the founders and, *through them*, to their communities. Not only the first generations of

¹⁰⁹ John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, 2: 12-13. quoted in Elio Gambari, J. M. Lozano, G. Rocca, "Fondatore," in *DIP*, IV (Edizioni Paoline, 1977), col. 98.

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companions, but also many of the founders themselves were well aware of this vitality springing from them.¹¹⁰

2.6.1.1.3 Conceiving the Institute with Its Purpose

When Rocca enlists the essential requirements of the founder he puts first the role of the founder to conceive the idea of the institute with its purpose about which he says, “This item may not be the first in order of time, but it is certainly the first for the allocation of the founder.”¹¹¹ In order to identify the founder of a religious institute one has to analyze how the idea for the Institute first emerged. Some other theologians have modified or corrected this notion. Since this aspect of conceiving the idea and determining the purpose of the institute have been explained under the section of ‘the Canon Law on the identity of the founders’¹¹² it is not treated in detail here. According to *Perfectae Caritatis* and most of the theologians, one can be called founder if he or she has conceived the idea of the institute clearly with its specific purposes.

2.6.1.1.4 Defining the Spirit and Forming a Group in Its Religious Way of Life

The *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione* attributes to the founders the role of defining the spirit and life-style of the institutes they found. It says that the founder gives the institute not only its historical existence, but also even more,

¹¹⁰ Lozano, “Founder and Community: Inspiration and Charism,” 221.

¹¹¹ Rocca, “ Il Carisma del fondatore” *Claretianum*, 79: “l’aver concepito l’idea dell’istituto con le sue finalità: questo elemento non è forse il primo in ordine di tempo, ma è certamente il primo per l’attribuzione del titolo di fondatore.”

¹¹² Cf. 2.5.1.1 and 2.5.1.2.

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he conceives and outlines its characteristic features and describes as accurately as possible the founder's personal conception of the life and action of the institute he founded.¹¹³ Regamey also declares that founders provide a kind of "form" for their followers, and the 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.¹¹⁴ They take special care to form the community in the idea when he received the divine call to found a new religious institute in the Church.

Whether the founders are canonized or not they are carriers of a charism that enables them to raise a new religious family that has been destined to perpetuate the spiritual wealth of their own holiness. It is the diversity of religious institutes, the distinctive characters of their spirituality, the originality of their activities, including the variety of the dress, which gives an outward witnessing.¹¹⁵ Damizia attributes the following role to the founder: "A founder is the person who sets the specific scope of an institute."¹¹⁶ Lozano also admits that defining the purpose of the institute and forming the group are included among the important roles of the founder."¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Elio Gambari, John M. Lozano, and G. Rocca, "Fondatore," col. 97.

¹¹⁴ R. Regamey, "Carismi", in *DIP*, II, col. 301-302.

¹¹⁵ M. Olphe-Galliard, "Aspetto ascetico" in *DIP*, IV, Col. 102-108; at, 102.

¹¹⁶ Guisepp Damizia, "Fondatore," *Enciclopedia cattolica*, Vol.5, cols. 1474-1475.

¹¹⁷ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 9.

2.6.1.2 Secondary Traits or Qualities of the Founder

2.6.1.2.1 Experiencing a Particular Aspect of the Mystery of Christ

Vita Consacrata reaffirms the vision of *Mutuae Relationes* that in every founder “a profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ to give witness to some aspect of his mystery”¹¹⁸ can be seen. It means that each founder stresses some particular dimension of the mystery of redemption and some unique insight that the Church seems to need for the fullness of its life. Yet at a deeper level, there is the quality of willing conformity with Christ in love.¹¹⁹ When Romano enlists the fundamental aspects of the founder, he states:

To be a founder is to be the artisan of a project that is intrinsically complete even if always imperfect in its realization, that this project is one of following Christ and the Gospel in the service of God and people. Such a “following” must spring from a particular experience of the mystery of God which the founder has had; that this experience must become the unifying centre of a more global and all-inclusive experience, involving the whole life of the founder and his disciples in a way which challenges Church and society at this particular historical period.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *MR.* 51 quoted in *VC.* 36.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Gerald Arbuckles, *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life* (New York: St. Paul Publications, 1986), 53.

¹²⁰ Romano, *The Charism of the Founders*, 42.

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Rocca puts this aspect as the last one in his list and calls it ‘a new form or a special form of following Christ.’¹²¹ When some founders were captured by the person of Christ and started loving him passionately by living radically the mystery of Christ in such a way that they had a strong impact on their contemporaries which attracted followers to share in the same experience of these saintly persons, by offering the same type of services to the people around. Some other founders lived in simplicity, committed to the humble ministries of charity, which attracted followers. However, the presence of the divine in the person and life of the founder or foundress had an attractive force at the beginning of each institute.¹²² The Spirit being present in the lives of the founders, conforms their lives to Christ’s life, causing them to penetrate its mystery and the mystery of his Word. This is an experience of communion with Christ grasped in its totality and they are led to a global experience of Christ and the gospel; they also wanted their followers to have the same total union with Christ in his totality.¹²³ The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod of Bishops on consecrated life held in 1994 speaks about the particular aspect of Christ’s mystery imitated by various religious families:

The gospel of Christ and Christ himself, the living *Good News of the Father, is always the foundation of every life consecrated to God and the inexhaustible treasure from which, under the action of the Spirit, the founders and foundresses draw their inspiration and life. All their experiences are rooted in the words and example of the Master. ... In its very form the*

¹²¹ Rocca, “Il Carisma del fondatore,” 81: “nuova forma di sequela di Cristo”

¹²² Cf., Lozano, “Founder and Community,” 229.

¹²³ Ciardi, *I Fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 144.

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consecrated life seeks to live a message, an example, and a mystery of the incarnate or glorious life as the whole in a fragment. However, every charism is rooted in the following of Christ and every gift of self to him, just as every aspect of his life is inseparable from his person.¹²⁴

The understanding of a particular approach or attitude to the person of Christ and a special attraction towards his word serve as the main object of the original inspiration received by the founders. According to Ciardi, founders, guided by the Spirit, find a particular historical way of reflecting the mystery of Christ. An intense spiritual experience invites them to penetrate deeply into certain words of Jesus, some aspects of his ministry, and at the same time enables them to attract followers who in a way, extend their life and mission as a kind of “small mystical body,” behaving like them and responding to their presence among them.¹²⁵

The inexhaustible richness of Christ’s personality and the human limitation to imitate Him fully prompted the founders to place a particular stress on a special aspect of the life of Christ in their following of Him. From this particular experience of the mystery of Christ the founder can grasp the person of Christ in its totality, the whole Gospel and the mystery of salvation. This synthesis becomes a guide and criterion for the performance of a particular service in the Church. Ciardi also says that since the mystery of Christ is unfathomable the various religious families manifest different aspects of the message of the Gospel, which makes the face

¹²⁴ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 43. The Consecrated Life and Its role in the Church and in the World *Instrumentum Laboris* of Bishops IX Ordinary General Assembly Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1994.

¹²⁵ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 391.

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of the Church brighter every day.¹²⁶ The founders articulate the common elements of religious life around this particular theme.

An intense divine experience of Mother Teresa will explain this aspect clearly. The original inspiration Mother Teresa of Calcutta received on 10 September 1946 on her train journey to Darjeeling and the “Voice” she heard during the days following her experience clearly speak of her understanding of a particular aspect of the mystery of Christ and his Word. She articulated the common elements of her call to found a new religious institute and the lifestyle of the new institute around this theme: “to satiate the thirst of Jesus *on the Cross*.” Jesus’ cry while dying on the Cross, “I thirst” (Jn 19: 28), stood for her as a summary and a reminder of her call. For Mother Teresa the nature as well as the purpose of her call was very clear. She explained it later while instructing her Sisters:

“I thirst,” Jesus said on the Cross when Jesus was deprived of every consolation, dying in absolute poverty, left alone, despised and broken in body and soul. He spoke of his thirst - not for water - but for love, for sacrifice. ... Just like the adoring angels in Heaven ceaselessly sing the praises of God, so the Sisters, using the four vows of Absolute Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Charity towards the poor ceaselessly quench the thirsting God by their love and of the love of the souls they bring to Him.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 142-143.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, the Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”* (New York: Image Doubleday, 2007), 41.

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By her words and living example, her followers would grasp the meaning of the grace Mother Teresa received on that day of her inspiration. History shows that she lived the particular aspect of Jesus' love for the poor and the marginalized in society. She was strongly attracted by Jesus' love for the poor.

2.6.1.2.2 Having a Constructive Love for the Church

The founders of religious institutes are known for their special love for the Church.¹²⁸ The raising up of a founder as the divine answer to certain problems affecting the Church is a recurring theme in papal documents. The inspiration received by the founders is intimately related both to their historical situation and to the radical following of the Gospel. In other words, the motivation or insight to the founding of a new religious family comes from a gaze fixed on the Church and society that surrounds the founder or foundress, notices Ciardi. Founders were able to see the particular need of the Church and to respond to it creatively. They were persons with a high degree of originality. It explains the reason for the existence of various forms of religious institutes in the Church.¹²⁹ Looking at the phenomenon of the increasing number of religious families in the sixteenth century, Pope Gregory XIII mentioned this fact in his Constitution of Confirmation of the Society of Jesus. He held that "Divine Providence" has produced in the Church various institutes in accordance with the necessities of the time. He alluded to the diverse religious families as "new remedies for new diseases," "new auxiliaries for fresh assaults of the Church's enemy." He states, "The variety of religious institutions has

¹²⁸ *MR.* 51.

¹²⁹ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 226.

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been introduced by divine providence, and is both fitting and of service to the Church.”¹³⁰ Sensitivity to the particular situation or need of the Church can be seen in the life of the founders.

The founders notice a definite need and move to relieve it. Their original inspiration involved both a reference to certain ministries as well as a calling to a specific life-style based on the particular mystery of Christ, which was experienced by the founders in a precise situation of the Church. It is often noticed that the founders are deeply sensitive to the needs of the society of their times. “Every religious founder, by virtue of his commitment to the Gospel, is a man involved in the social problems of his time. Every religious foundation is inspired by the Spirit to answer a disturbing question of the society that surrounds him.”¹³¹ Even others might have perceived the social needs, but the founder is the one who responded concretely to a pressing need. The perception of a specific ministry occurs as a response to the needs of the Church. Lozano considers the beginning of an institute incomprehensible without reference to the urgent needs of the Church. He says, “In fact,... the birth of various forms of religious life and of the various institutes are absolutely incomprehensible if we do not bear in mind the Church, especially those needs that are most

¹³⁰ Cf., Pope Gregory XIII, Constitution *Ascendente Domino*, May 25, 1584, n. 18, *Bullarium Romanum* (Augustae Taurinorum, 1863), 8, 461.

¹³¹ J. A. Gomes, “Il charisma della vita religiosa dona dello Spirito alla Chiesa per il mondo,” *Vita Consacrata* 17 (1981), 491: “Ogni Fondatore religioso, in virtù del suo impegno con il Vangelo, è un uomo coinvolto nella problematica sociale del suo tempo. Ogni Fondazione religiosa è la risposta suscitata dallo Spirito ad una inquietante domanda della società che la circonda.”

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sensibly felt during the period in which these institutes appear.”¹³² He understands the founder as one who is sensitive to the specific need of the Church:

Common charisms are indivisible parts of the one vocational charism, which includes more varied and richer aspects. In the case of institutes professing a “specialized” form of religious life centered on a specific ministry (intercession, apostolate, works of mercy), the specific gift is often the first one of which the founders became aware and around this, the common charisms attain their real significance.¹³³

The founders are animated by a ‘sense of the Church,’ which brings an awareness of being devoted completely to the needs of the Church, of having the duty of working for the Church and of being at her disposal for any task she wishes to entrust to the religious. The expression ‘sense of the Church’ means a communion in the life of the Church which consists in making one’s own the mind of the Church, her will, her activity, in order to reflect all of this in oneself and thus be a faithful echo of the Church, or rather, to be in oneself an expression of the Church. To have a sense of the Church means to enter into the mystery of the Church;¹³⁴ it also means to live the mystery of the whole Christ, in his openness

¹³² Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 61.

¹³³ John M. Lozano, *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life*, (Chicago: Claretian Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1983), 133.

¹³⁴ An ecclesial sense, which demands entering into the mystery of the Church and letting oneself be penetrated, transformed and vivified by it, is closely connected with the maternity of the Church and constitutes a practical acknowledgement of it. Cf., Elio Gambari, *For Me to Live is the Church*, 281.

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to the world. It calls for thinking, willing and acting in the Church, with the Church, through the Church and for the Church. Moreover, this expression means that the new institution does not want to remain as a sect, but fit fully into the life of the Church. The Church's problems are his/hers and his/her problems are those of the Church. To feel with the Church means to fuse one's life with that of the Church, with that mystical and juridical reality of which the Holy Spirit is the soul.¹³⁵ According to *Vita Consacrata* in founders and foundresses one can notice a constant and lively sense of the Church, which they manifest by their full participation in all aspects of the Church's life, and in their ready obedience to the Bishops and especially to the Roman Pontiff.¹³⁶

2.6.1.2.3 Giving Rules of Life and Government to a Group

According to Rocca, giving the group the Rules of life and government is an accessory, in the sense that the founder can personally prepare Constitutions, but also can instruct others to do so, maintaining the general supervision.¹³⁷ In the middle of the twentieth century when Servo Goyenèche gave the reply to the *Nova Inquisitio* instituted by the Congregation for the Rites, he included 'founder as Law-giver' among the primary characteristics of the founder. Giving the laws that regulate the life of a religious institute has become a new element in determining the founder.¹³⁸ This concept has been changed considerably in the course of time and now it is understood that giving Rules need not be the personal work of the founder.

¹³⁵ Elio Gambari, *For Me to Live is the Church*, 281.

¹³⁶ VC. 46.

¹³⁷ Rocca, "Il Carisma del fondatore," 80.

¹³⁸ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 8.

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When the *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata* starts speaking about different roles of the founder, which are not considered essential, it states, “The founder is not the one who writes the Rules, Constitutions or Statutes, because many founders, especially foundresses, have not done so.”¹³⁹ Many founders and foundresses have taken over the Rules of St. Basil, St. Augustine or St. Benedict, or of some other saints or founders. Lozano observes that borrowing the Rule or Constitutions for a new foundation does not make the latter a branch of the original religious institute, nor does the original founder necessarily become thereby the founder of the new institute.¹⁴⁰ The Constitutions may be adopted and or adapted; or it may be given to the founder or to the institute by concerned hierarchical authority. Lozano observes that all the Congregations approved during the opening decades of the twentieth century received identical Constitutions from the Holy See, except for the paragraph that defined their specific end, mentioned their title, and listed their co-patrons.¹⁴¹ Nedungatt comments, “The framing of the Constitutions is not a necessary part of the charism of the founder: more than a written document the life and example of a charismatic founder can set the scope of an institute.”¹⁴² Writers are of the opinion that it is not necessary that the founder alone defines all the elements of the Rule of life. Nor is it necessary that the founder writes the Constitutions. Nevertheless, it does seem necessary that he or she, either in written or oral form, should outline the fundamental traits of

¹³⁹ Lozano, “Fondatore,” *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata*, col. 757. “Fondatore non è chi scrive la regola, le costituzioni o gli statute, perchè molti fondatori, soprattutto fondatrici, non lo hanno fatto.

¹⁴⁰ Cf., Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 4.

¹⁴¹ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 3.

¹⁴² Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders,” 101.

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the kind of life to be led, traits that someone else may later copy into the Constitutions.¹⁴³ It is to be emphasized that charism and life-project need to be embodied in a way of life laid down by broad rules and sound traditions that form an integral part of Constitutions and traditions. Without these, the charism and life-project will remain on the level of ‘ideal’ and not of ‘fact.’ Some structures must be put in place to make the charism and life-project a reality. However, theologians do not hold that one can be designated founder only if the founder himself articulates explicitly the foundational charism in the Constitutions or find an apt name for his institute; what is important is that the founder inspires and influences the members by his charismatic life style.¹⁴⁴ With regard to the government of newly founded institutes, the history of religious institutes shows that many founders directly governed their communities. Some founders decided to hand over the ordinary government to others for one reason or another.¹⁴⁵

2.6.1.2.4 Gathering a Group to Form a Religious Institute

Nova Inquisitio to which reference has been made earlier, stated: “for a person to be called the founder or foundress of a religious family, what is needed above all is the *fact* of having gathered some nucleus, however small, of followers and of having fixed for them a specific scope.”¹⁴⁶ This was a notion prevalent in the 1940s, which was modified

¹⁴³ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders,” 101.

¹⁴⁵ Cf., Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Nova inquisitio*, XVII: “Per poter chiamare una persona Fondatore o Fondatrice di una famiglia religiosa, si richiede anzitutto il fatto di aver adunato un qualche nucleo, sia pur piccolo, di seguaci e di aver fissato loro uno scopo specifico.”

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by subsequent studies. For a person to be designated founder or foundress it is not necessary to gather a group of followers, or to give the group a name, or frame its Rule or Constitutions: these are all accidental to foundation, says Nedungatt.¹⁴⁷ Lozano considers the question, ‘must the founder actually start the institute?’ a delicate one.¹⁴⁸ He observes that the most important requisite to determine the identity of the founder is the divine call received by him; having created the institute is normal and standard, but historically it has not been always regarded as indispensable. After studying the story of the foundation of several religious institutes Lozano says, “What is really important is that the founder defines the ends and shapes the life and spirituality of the institute, even though this institute may in some cases not be able to be brought into existence at that time.”¹⁴⁹ For Rocca the element of ‘having created the institute’ allows for it to distinguish itself among the many who may have the desire or inclination to establish new institutions, and those who actually come to the foundation.¹⁵⁰

Both Lozano and Rocca take the example of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) in this regard. Based on the ideal of Charles de Foucauld two communities, one for men founded by Father Renè Voillaume in 1933 known as the Little Brothers of Jesus and another for women founded by Sister Magdalen of Jesus in 1939 known as the Little Sisters of Jesus, were started after Foucauld’s death. Charles de Foucauld had the idea of founding a religious institute and he had prepared the Rules for it, but the actual foundation took place many years after his death. Foucauld had no disciples

¹⁴⁷ Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders,” 101.

¹⁴⁸ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Rocca, “Il Carisma del fondatore,” 79.

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during his lifetime, but the publication of his personal papers inspired the founding of the above-mentioned religious institutes.¹⁵¹ Both institutes maintain that Little Brother Charles of Jesus inspired them to found the institutes.¹⁵²

2.6.1.2.5 Sharing in the Suffering of Christ

Theologians on consecrated life are of opinion that the founders of religious institutes are subject to frequent and severe trials as part of their call as founders. Many are the difficulties that a foundress or founder must overcome to get to the founding of their religious institutes. They may have difficulties arising from their Ordinary, or any of their disciples, or even from the Holy See itself to recognize the contributions or benefits of the new foundation. They may experience uncertainties to discern the Will of God. As an important cause of suffering, Rocca says that the hierarchy may disregard the charism, or consider it a fraud or self-aggrandizement by the founder, which goes hand in hand with his subsequent exaltation.¹⁵³

The founders will experience personally, what the “rigors of the narrow way” mean; personal suffering, often of an intense kind, will test them. *Mutuae Relationes* expects this kind of suffering to occur: “an unvarying history of the connection between charism and cross ... is supremely helpful in discerning the authenticity of a vocation to

¹⁵¹ A. J. Wouters, “Foucauld, Charles Eugène de,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, Second Edition (Washington D.C.: Thomson Gale, 2003), 826-827.

¹⁵² Angelika Daiker, *Beyond Borders: Life and Spirituality of Little Sister Magdeleine*, (Philippines: St. Pauls, 2010), 89.

¹⁵³ Rocca, “Il Carisma del fondatore,” 80.

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found.”¹⁵⁴ Not infrequently, suffering comes from severe opposition directed personally at founding persons. The opposition often comes from those who in fact, should be their supporting brothers and sisters. St. Teresa of Avila has much to teach us about the virtues of those who wish to exercise the charism of founding and how the Lord will require a deep purification as a sign of one’s authenticity.¹⁵⁵

Lozano notices that in some cases founders had to face the rise of certain tendencies among their disciples, which were in contradiction with their own spirit. In others, a certain opposition rose directly against the founder in which some members of the community were involved. For one reason or another, some founders were deposed from the position of Superior, and at least a few were separated from the community. While reflecting on the causes of these phenomena theologians agree that these trials often appear in the lives of saints and servants of God as a part of a deep purification, a particular form of the night of the soul, in which God purifies their legitimate love for their communities from any kind of excessive attachment. These sufferings were a source of merit for them and enhanced their intercession before God in favor of their work.¹⁵⁶

Suffering can lead to a deep feeling of loneliness and abandonment which lead them to what Jesus said, “A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and his own house” (Mk 6: 4). Here it is worth mentioning the sufferings of some foundresses due to the rigorous rules of Cloister imposed by certain Popes of the Pre-Vatican

¹⁵⁴ *MR.* 12.

¹⁵⁵ Cf., Arbuckle, *Strategies of Growth*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Lozano, “Founder and Community,” 231.

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Church. Mary Ward and Angela Merici are the most commonly cited in this line.

2.6.1.2.6 *Paternity or Maternity*

Rocca states that a special sense of paternity or maternity towards the members of the community they founded is common to all the founders and foundresses.¹⁵⁷ They feel that their followers are born in their hearts and they consider them children in the spirit they begot in Christ. To their disciples the founders can apply what St. Paul told the Corinthians: “Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the Gospel” (1 Cor 4:15). To his disciples in Galatia he said: “My dear children! Once again, just like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ’s nature is formed in you” (Gal 4: 19). As the founders considered their followers their children, the disciples looked at the founders as their Father or Mother. It was because of the extraordinary vitality manifested at the origin of the institutes through their experience of a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ and the profound spiritual influence the founders exert on their followers, the founders were ordinarily referred to as Father or Mother. According to Lozano, the references to the paternity of founders began to be more frequent in the twelfth century because it was in that period religious life began to be diversified and it was then that the various groups began to insist on their proper origins.¹⁵⁸ The paternity and maternity of the founders reveal a kind of close relationship with the members of an institute. This aspect draws our attention to the fact that founders do not become founders by themselves. Just as one does not

¹⁵⁷ Rocca, “Il Carisma del fondatore,” 79.

¹⁵⁸ Cf., Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 21.

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become a parent by oneself but in relation to one's child and the mutual relationship between them creates paternal/maternal and filial relation, so too, founders of religious institutes become so only in relation to the context in which they find themselves.

It is not necessary that all these above traits may be present in all the founders. It has already been mentioned that theologians do not agree among themselves on the factors necessary or basic to be a founder and not even on their order of priority. In the above mentioned study, Rocca says that the first two, namely, having conceived the idea of the institute with its purpose, and having created the institute, constitute the basis for any discussion and the characteristic of the personality of the founder, which thus shows its gifts, non-transferable. These special abilities allow the founder to face situations that are totally new and unpredictable, to walk alone at critical moments, to be leader and guide, facilitator, as well as to discern with great clarity what the needs of the times are. Without these elements, you do not get to the foundation of an institute and cannot therefore speak of the founder or foundress. These first two elements form the core of the characteristics of the founder.¹⁵⁹ He also admits that the other elements are found in many founders, all or in part and to greater or lesser extent depending upon the nature of the institute, but are not essential to the task of founding.

The *Dizionario teologico della vita consacrata* presents the most essential element to be the founder of a religious institute in these words: Having become convinced of the vocation and mission to be a founder, he expresses the scope of the institute orally or in written form, thus creating

¹⁵⁹ Rocca, "Il Carisma del fondatore," 81.

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the nucleus of the Rule. It concludes by saying that generally, the founder feels specifically called to found an institution, and often writes its basic Rule of life.¹⁶⁰ According to *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, “There is a minimum requirement if a person is to be regarded as a founder in a formal sense: such a person should be the bearer of an original inspiration and, at least in a certain measure, operative in its realization by giving a code of life or by forming the first members.”¹⁶¹

Among other theologians who clarified the concept of the founder, Lozano, after studying the founding history of several religious institutes, provides two essential requisites. He speaks, “Among the various traits that distinguish founders, their essential role seems to consist of: a) Having felt called by God to create a new religious family, and b) Having defined their ends and lifestyle, and shaped their spirit. These are the only traits present in all founders.”¹⁶² After studying the pertinent documents, the canonist George Nedungatt thus draws the sketch of a founder: “one who sets up or inspires an initial group to live radically a life patterned on the evangelical counsels either by the actuation of an original inspiration or by helping to form that group spiritually or physically with or without a code of life.”¹⁶³ There is no necessity that the founder of an institute for

¹⁶⁰ Cf., Lozano, “Fondatore,” 756-767.

¹⁶¹ E. Gambari, J. Lozano, G. Rocca, “Fondatore,” *DIP.*, IV, cols. 96-101; at 97-98: “Vi è un minimo richiesto perchè una persona possa essere ritenuta in senso formale fondatore: essa deve essere apportatrice di una ispirazione originale e, almeno in certa misura, artefice della sua realizzazione dando un codice di vita, o formando i primi membri.”

¹⁶² Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 5.

¹⁶³ Nedungatt, “Who Founded the Holy Family Congregation?” 33.

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women should be a female. In conclusion, one may add that in the long process of receiving the call to be a founder and actualizing that call, God prepares and educates the founders by gradually imprinting in their hearts the idea of the future Congregation, helping them to discover in their own lives what they will propose later to others.

2.7 Inspiration of the Founder

Inspiration is understood as the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative. St. Francis de Sales defines the term inspiration in the following words: “By inspirations, I mean all drawings, feelings, interior reproaches, lights and intuitions, with which God moves us, preventing our hearts by his Fatherly love and care, and awakening, exciting, urging, and attracting them to goodness, to Heavenly love, to good resolutions, in short, to whatever tends to our eternal welfare.”¹⁶⁴ He further explains the meaning of inspiration in these words:

When God intends to perform some act of love in us, by us, and with us, he first suggests it by his inspiration; secondly, we receive that inspiration; and thirdly, we consent to it... The delight we take in God’s inspirations is an important step gained towards his glory, and we begin at once to please him thereby.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, II. 18 (Verona: Publisher’s name not given, 1782), 281.
<http://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/devoutlife.pdf> [Accessed on 20 - 11 - 2013].

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

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The definition of inspiration and its explanation given by Francis de Sales can be applied to the founders' inspiration to found new religious institutes in the Church. Inspiration of the Holy Spirit is a phenomenon recognized by the Church from apostolic times. The same is affirmed in the religious founders. Pope Benedict XVI, while speaking about the power of the Word of God in the consecrated life, emphatically states that it is the same Holy Spirit who inspires the founders and foundresses to live the radicalism of the Gospel: "The Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines the word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every Rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel."¹⁶⁶ According to Fabio Ciardi the term founder may be applied in its fullest sense to the one who receives the inspiration either directly or indirectly, to found a religious institute in the Church.¹⁶⁷ He further adds that founders guided by the Spirit find a particular historical way of reflecting the mystery of Christ. An intense spiritual experience invites them to do so, and enables them to attract followers.¹⁶⁸ It is understood as the charism or special impulse of the Holy Spirit given to a particular person to found a new religious institute. In each founder, the inspiration given by God, the experience of being called by God, the way he gives his consent to it, and its expression vary.

¹⁶⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 83. AAS 102 (2010), *Commentarium officiale*, 754.

¹⁶⁷ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 332.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 391.

2.7.1 The Nature of the Inspiration

Some Popes have affirmed that the decision to found a new religious institute is always due to an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In fact, by stating this, the popes have simply given official support to an idea that has been shared by many religious institutes since the very beginning of religious life. The origin and the deepest motivation of every religious family must be sought in a particular intervention of God in the life of the founder. Original inspiration surely implies the communication of the plan of God to the founders. The origin of the institute is to be found in the mind of God, communicated to the founders and ratified by the Church. The founders become aware of the divine will and the tasks assigned to them, in several ways. The Lord has so many ways of making himself and his plans known. Very often, this awareness stems from an explicit divine intervention of which the founder becomes conscious gradually. The founder or foundress undergoes a radically transforming experience, which can usually be pinpointed to an event or series of events, and which is perceived as an abrupt shift in the founding person's identity and a timeless moment in which a vision or dream is received. Contained in the transforming experience is a new appreciation of the message of Jesus, which leads to innovative insight, concerning how the condition of the Church or society could be improved or how a very new kind of future could be launched.¹⁶⁹ Elio Gambari, a theologian on religious life, distinguishes the expressions, 'original inspiration of the founder' and the 'primitive spirit' of the institute. He states,

¹⁶⁹ Cada et al., *Shaping the Coming Age*, 53.

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The expression “*primigenia*” leads us back to the moment in which the founder received the call and inspiration from God to enrich the Church with a new religious family. The term “*primitive spirit*,” on the other hand, means the atmosphere, fervor and generosity, which were present in the religious family in its first years. It refers to the period in which the institute’s original inspiration was translated into action. ... It is important to retrace our steps to that initial moment in which the plan of God was actualized.¹⁷⁰

However, comparing to both the expressions one can say that founders are chosen by God, God worked in them and employed them for the task of founding. Nevertheless, the intervention of God in the life of the founders assumes different modalities from person to person. Therefore, a comparison between the founders may be out of place. Moreover, Ciardi notes that every experience, and especially that which originates from the Spirit, is in itself unique and we would have to investigate the nature of the inspiration she or he received from the Holy Spirit in the life of every single founder.¹⁷¹ There are extreme variety of ways by which God manifests himself and his plans to his children.

There have been cases in which the inspiration to found new religious institutes seems to have occurred under the form of some extraordinary phenomena such as vision, locution, dreams, enlightenment of intellect, and can also

¹⁷⁰ Elio Gambari, *Journey Toward Renewal: Meditations on the Renewal of the Religious Life*, Trans., by The Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1968), 51, 52.

¹⁷¹ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 49: “ogni esperienza, e soprattutto quella che ha origine dallo spirito, è di per se irripetibile.”

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happen under the ordinary circumstances of life. Depending on the direct and indirect nature of the communication involved, Ciardi studies inspiration under two heads, namely, direct and indirect inspiration.¹⁷² He calls direct inspiration that which is immediate, direct and tangible in form. Indirect inspiration can be mediated through events, circumstances and sometimes through a third party.¹⁷³

2.7.1.1 Direct Inspiration

Looking at the experiences of various founders and the kind of inspiration received by them one could call those inspirations as direct or immediate. Theologians on mysticism consider it a mystical order of grace in which God manifests, in a clear and incomprehensible manner simultaneously, the plan he wants to achieve by the founder. This kind of inspiration can take many different forms, such as a sensory or intellectual vision, an interior illumination, a dream, or spiritual movements. Some of the founders had dreams that contributed greatly regarding the origin of the idea and actualization of the institute. As examples of direct inspiration through visions and dreams, the experience of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997), the foundress of the Missionaries of Charity and that of Saint Don Bosco (1815-1888), the founder of the Salesians of Don Bosco are explained. Mother Teresa does speak about the voices and visions, not the dreams.

¹⁷² Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 47-77.

¹⁷³ Cf., Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 47-48.

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2.7.1.1.1 Voices or Locutions

Locutions (or supernatural words) are “manifestations of God’s thought” which may come through words heard externally (exterior or auricular locutions) or in the imagination (interior imaginative locutions) or immediately without any words (interior intellectual locutions).¹⁷⁴ Brian Kolodiejchuk, the Postulator for the canonization process of Mother Teresa, made a detailed study on the numerous letters she wrote to her spiritual directors that reveal the nature and content of the voice she heard from God motivating her to found the new religious institute. It also reveals the hidden treasure of her spiritual life.¹⁷⁵ He testified that Mother Teresa received interior imaginative locutions. From 10 September 1946 onwards,¹⁷⁶ she began to receive a series of interior locutions that continued until the middle of the following year. Mother Teresa was actually hearing Jesus’ voice and intimately conversing with Him. Jesus spoke to her directly, asking her to undertake a special mission among his people. From the beginning of this extraordinary experience it was clear to her that it was Jesus who was speaking to her. Yet she would mostly refer to these communications as the “Voice.”¹⁷⁷ A moving exchange of great beauty went on

¹⁷⁴ Cf., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Spiritual Life: Prelude of Eternal Life*, Vol. 2 (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 589-90; and Augustin Poulain, *Revelations and Visions: Discerning the True and Certain from the False or the Doubtful*, trans. L. L. Yorke Smith (New York: Alba House, 1998), 1-18.

¹⁷⁵ Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ Mother Teresa first heard Jesus speaking to her while she was traveling to Darjeeling. She explains it in a letter written to Father Van Exem, on 13 January 1947. Cf. Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 44.

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between Christ and Mother Teresa. He addressed her as “*My own spouse*” or “*My own little one.*”¹⁷⁸

2.7.1.1.2 Visions

Brian Kolodiejchuk narrates three visions Mother Teresa received. In the first vision, she saw a big crowd with very poor people including children. They all had their hands lifted up towards her. She was standing in their midst. She heard them calling out, “Come, come, save us and bring us to Jesus.” In her second vision she saw that big crowd of people with great sorrow and suffering on their faces. She saw herself kneeling near Our Lady facing the people. Mother Teresa heard Our Lady saying, “Take care of them, they are mine. Bring them to Jesus and carry Jesus to them. Fear not. Teach them to pray the Rosary in their families and all will be well. Fear not Jesus and I will be with you and your children. For a third time she saw the same great crowd and the people were covered in darkness. She saw the Lord Jesus on the cross and Our Lady at a little distance from the cross. She saw herself as a little child in front of her. Both Mother Teresa and Our Lady were facing the Cross. She heard Jesus saying these words: “*I have asked you and She, My Mother had asked you. Will you refuse to do this for Me - to take care of them, to bring them to Me?*”¹⁷⁹

While giving explanation to her visions Brian Kolodiejchuk said that the three visions are related to one another, each building on the previous one. Also these visions

¹⁷⁸ The Spiritual Notes of 1947 quoted in Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 98.

¹⁷⁹ Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 95. She had this vision on 3 December 1947.

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are connected to the ‘Voice’ she heard in the train, calling her, “Come-come- carry me into the holes of the poor. Come be my light.” In the second vision Mary was encouraging her to respond to both pleas, giving her a means for all to “be well” by teaching the poor to pray the Rosary as a family. In the third vision, the great crowd’s suffering intensified: they were “covered in darkness.” Mother Teresa could see them. She could see also Jesus on the Cross. Mary’s role was intensified as well: she was a mother behind her “little child,” supporting her as they both faced Jesus on the Cross. The voice was that of Jesus, reminding Mother Teresa of his previous invitations.¹⁸⁰ These invitations from Jesus and the crowd, “Come,” would keep echoing in her heart to the end of her life. Mary’s assurance always strengthened her.

2.7.1.1.3 Dreams

In the Judeo-Christian traditions dreams hold an honored place. Yahweh told Moses: “Should there be a prophet among you, in visions will I reveal myself to him, and in dreams will I speak to him” (Num. 12:6). The dreams of the patriarch Joseph in the Old Testament and of Joseph the husband of Mary in the New Testament are immediately remembered. Some of the founders had dreams that contributed greatly to the origin of their institutes. John Bosco known as the apostle of the youth was a man of dreams. His autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory* records many of his dreams.¹⁸¹ John was about nine when he experienced his first extraordinary dream. This first dream, the most important one, set the course for his whole life. He tells us of it in his

¹⁸⁰ Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 101.

¹⁸¹ Cf., Eugene M. Brown, ed. “Dreams, Visions and Prophecies of Don Bosco,” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 12 (2004), 321-348.

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autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory*.¹⁸² John saw himself playing with a crowd of neighborhood boys; many of them were fighting and swearing. He told them to stop, then leapt in with both fists when they did not. Suddenly a stranger, a noble and radiant gentleman, appeared. He told John that he needed to use kindness, not blows, to win over these children. John did not understand. The man said he would give him a teacher, and a majestic Lady showed up. She instructed John to watch, and the boys turned into wild animals—bears, goats, dogs, cats, etc. “This,” she told him, “is your field of work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic, so that you’ll be able to do for my children what you will see now.” And the beasts turned into gentle lambs. In his confusion, John began to cry. The Lady assured him that in due time he would understand and he woke up.¹⁸³ John understood that this was no ordinary dream, even if he did not understand the meaning of it. He could not forget it. He received many times similar dreams with some variations that rendered its share to point out his calling from God or the future of his work. Slowly with the help of his confessors he was convinced of the special significance of those dreams that are for God’s greater glory and the good of the souls.

2.7.1.1.4 Mother Teresa of Calcutta: A Recipient of Direct Inspiration

Mother Teresa of Calcutta explains the way in which God communicated to her the divine plan of founding the new congregation, “the Missionaries of Charity.” She had a decisive mystical encounter with Christ on 10 September

¹⁸² *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Frances de Sales from 1815 to 1855* trans. Daniel Lyons (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 18-19.

¹⁸³ *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 19-20.

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1946. She calls it “Inspiration Day,” to be the real beginning of the Missionaries of Charity.¹⁸⁴ Pope John Paul II once referred to her inspiration as a “call within her call.”¹⁸⁵ As we said above, through the voice she heard at different times and the three visions she received, she was led to the awareness of being called to be the founder of the Missionaries of Charity. She testified that during the time of daily prayer and Holy Communion she received more clarity and conviction of her call as well as of the nature, purpose, spirit and character of the new institute to be founded. From the time she received the call, she was convinced that her mission was to bring the light of Christ to those living in darkness. Eventually she realized the depth of her mystical experience and the cost of living out the new call and mission. Finally she left the Loretto Order and began her work in the slums of Calcutta. Both in answering the “call within a call” and in the slow process of discernment that followed, she faced bravely the many sufferings that came her way and held firmly to her new mission. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Missionaries of Charity Pope John Paul II said to the public, “From the very first, Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity were driven by the desire “to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for love of souls... by laboring for the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor.”¹⁸⁶ Mother Teresa obviously believed

¹⁸⁴ Cf., Kolodiejchuk, *Mother Teresa*, 40.

¹⁸⁵ Letter of Pope John Paul II on the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Missionaries of Charity on 17 October, 2000, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20001017_missionaries-charity_en.html.

¹⁸⁶ Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation of the Missionaries of Charity on 17 October 2000. The Letter is addressed to Sister M. Nirmala Joshi, M.C. Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity;

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that the real value of her work was symbolic. Alpion is of the opinion that Mother Teresa's carefully crafted public image came to epitomize both the spirituality of the Roman Catholic Church and its charitable disposition. The Vatican has continuously emphasized the symbolism of Mother Teresa's work since her death in 1997. Alpion observes,

In his first Encyclical Letter on 25 December 2005, Pope Benedict XVI presented charity as being the most representative feature of Christianity, and Catholicism in particular. The Pontiff referred three times to Mother Teresa in this document, ranking her alongside Francis of Assisi and Ignatius of Loyola as one of the lasting models of social charity for all people of good will.¹⁸⁷

In order to understand the way God transforms the persons whom he calls to be the founder of a new religious institute, Mary Ward, the foundress of the Institute of Blessed Virgin Mary provides an example. In 1609 while she was staying with her family in England she had the first of the three pivotal experiences which were to point the way for the foundation of an active religious institute for women. In her autobiography Mary Ward describes what she then understood intellectually:

It was shown to me with clearness and inexpressible certainty that I was not to be of the Order of St. Teresa, but that some other thing was determined for me, without all comparison more to the glory of

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2000/documents/hf_hp-ii_let_20001017_missionaries-charity_en.html

¹⁸⁷ Gëzim Alpion, *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?*, 229.

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God.... I did not see what the assured good thing would be, but the glory of God which was to come through it, showed itself inexplicably and so abundantly as to fill my soul in such a way that I remained for a good space without feeling or hearing anything, but the sound, Glory, Glory, Glory. ... Returning to myself, I found my heart full of love for this thing, accompanied by such glory that not yet can I comprehend what it was.¹⁸⁸

2.7.1.2 Indirect Inspiration

Many founders and foundresses like Saint Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Angela Merici, Mary Ward, Mother Teresa and others claim that they received extraordinary intervention from God through visions, dreams, voices, and other kinds of revelations and intuitions to motivate them for their new foundations. Other founders, indicating the initial experience from which their work would be born do not refer to any kind of direct intervention of God or extraordinary intuition; instead the inspiration to found new institutes has been caused by their reflection on some particular realities of the Church or society. Other than the direct and immediate kind of inspiration, Ciardi explains some indirect or mediated ways of communicating God's plan to the founders. They never experienced one particular occasion in which they first heard their call. Rather, they gradually came to know their call, especially through several events which society may rank as failures. In such cases the action of the Holy Spirit seems, apparently, less obvious and

¹⁸⁸ Jennifer Cameron, Quoted in Jennifer Cameron, *A Dangerous Innovator Mary Ward (1585-1645)* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2000), 58-59.

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hence they are not categorized under mystical experiences. At the same time, the founders experience the real action of the Holy Spirit in their lives and are deeply convinced of their call to establish new religious institutes. However, the experience is definitive in the mission of the foundresses and founders. The enlightenment comes to them through prayer, in reflection, in dialogue with others, and in taking counsel with others. The divine light draws their attention to determined needs in the Church, while an inner impulse moves their wills to offer themselves as instruments in the hands of God. The indirect nature of inspiration does not take away anything from it rather it always remains as genuine inspiration. Often this takes place in a determinate circumstance, and is always in connection with the historical situation and socio-religious condition of the founder. The life experience of the founder also plays a vital role in receiving the call. Two elements involved in this are the perception of one's vocation and the conviction about it. An examination of the different ways of receiving indirect inspiration may also help to deepen our understanding of the call of the founders.

2.7.1.2.1 The Vision of the 'Illnesses of the Church'

Ciardi includes 'the vision of the illnesses or evils of the Church' as an indirect inspiration to the founder to start a new religious institute in the Church.¹⁸⁹ According to him, the sad situation of the Church in France gave inspiration to St. Vincent de Paul to start the Congregation of the Mission in 1625. In 1633, with the assistance of Louise de Marillac he founded the Daughters of Charity. In the same manner,

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 70-73.

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Blessed Eugene de Mazenod¹⁹⁰ was inspired to found a new congregation known as the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). In the writings of Mazenod one often sees a correlation between the vision of the desolation of Christians and the feelings of emotion it aroused in the person of Mazenod. In the preface of the Constitutions and Rules of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a fundamental text which summarizes the origin, nature and purpose of its foundation, he described the sad situation of the Church of France of his time, as it was perceived by him. He felt within, that the Church was calling out to him personally to restore the faith that was dying in the heart of a great number of Christians. It was a call personally addressed to himself and through him to his first companions. The sight of the disorders of the Church also touched the hearts of some other priests. The founding of the Congregation of the Mission by St. Vincent de Paul¹⁹¹ attests to the fact of the spiritual poverty of the people and that of the priests of his place. Here one does not find any direct inspiration, but a divine intervention is evident. From a clear and realistic perception of the situation, Vincent de Paul felt called to give a positive response by creating a group of missionaries.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Mazenod (1782-1861) was born in Provence, southern France. He founded the 'Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)

¹⁹¹ St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). He was born in France in 1581 and ordained in 1600. From 1612 he began to serve the Gondi, an illustrious family and he was confessor and spiritual director to Madame de Gondi. In 1625 he founded the Congregation of the Mission, a society of missionary priests commonly known as the Vincentians. In 1633, with the assistance of Louise de Marillac he founded the Daughters of Charity. He died in Paris in 1660 at the age of seventy-nine.

¹⁹² Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 72.

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2.7.1.2.2 *Saint Camillus de Lellis (1550-1614)*

The manner in which the inspiration came to Saint Camillus de Lellis can be explained in the following way. It can be said that the situation that prevailed in the Saint James hospital in Rome became an instrument of inspiration to him to found the Order, Ministers of the Sick, popularly known as the Camillians. De Lellis had a serious wound in his leg that he received while in the army. It was declared incurable by the physicians and he was admitted to Saint James Hospital which cared for incurable cases. During his long stay at the hospital he observed the poor attention the sick received from the staff of the hospital. The particular situation was an appeal to him to do something to change the condition of the hospital. He was inspired to invite a group of pious men to express their faith through the care of the patients at the hospital. Eventually he felt called to establish a religious institute for this purpose and this paved the way for the foundation of the Order, Ministers of the Sick.¹⁹³ His concern for the proper treatment of the sick extended to the end of their lives. The Congregation of the Servants of the Sick of Saint Camillus, the Daughters of Saint Camillus, the Secular Institutes of Missionaries of the Sick Christ Our Hope, and of the Lay Camillian Family, were born later of the charisma and spirituality of Saint Camillus.

2.7.1.2.3 *Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660)*

While tracing the origin of the Congregation of the Mission, it can be seen that St. Vincent de Paul was moved by the situation that prevailed in the rural areas of seventeenth century France. He felt a call within himself to help the rural

¹⁹³ Cf. Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 64-67.

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people and to evangelize them. For this purpose he obtained funds from Madame de Gondi.¹⁹⁴ and then he looked unsuccessfully for people to assist him in this work. At this juncture of his failure Madame de Gondi was active and she succeeded in appointing him as rector of a school, through the Archbishop of Paris. As rector of the school, Vincent could gather and train missionary priests. In this way, the Congregation of the Mission slowly came into being.¹⁹⁵ It seems to suggest that Vincent would not have founded the Congregation of the Mission, without the help and encouragement of Madame de Gondi. Coupled with it, his own personal impulse to help the rural people served as the medium of his inspiration.

2.7.1.2.4 Mother Mary of the Passion (1839-1904)

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), a religious institute founded in Ootacamund¹⁹⁶, South India in 1877 by Hélène de Chappotin de Neuville (Mother Mary of the Passion) is taken here as an example of indirect inspiration.¹⁹⁷ She received the inspiration to found this congregation in a strange manner. Indeed, she admitted the strangeness of her vocation to found a new missionary institute. In the evening of her life she wrote:

¹⁹⁴ Madame de Gondi's was an illustrious French family. Vincent became her confessor and spiritual director.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. P. Coste, *The Life and Works of St. Vincent de Paul* (London, 1934), 144-146.

¹⁹⁶ A village in the present State of Tamil Nadu, South India, now known as Ooty.

¹⁹⁷ M. Motte, "Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, Vol.5 (Washington, DC: Thomson Gale, 2003), 878.

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It is certain that I am not like one of the true Foundresses, ... I had never ever thought of founding: I desired sometimes to imitate Blessed Benedict Labre, the solitary person of the rocks, but I had never thought of founding an institute. Sent back into the world with my companions, former Missionaries like me, I went to meet Pius IX to request him to preserve the religious vocation of all of us. We were twenty in number, we had lived many years in the missions, we loved the missions, we knew them, and we desired to continue consecrating our lives to them. That was the truth ...¹⁹⁸

In a particular situation, Mother Mary of the Passion and twenty other Sisters were sent out of their religious community and she was inspired to found the new religious institute in the Church. She obtained from Pope Pius IX and from Cardinal Franchi, the prefect of the Propaganda Fide the authorization for her and her Sisters to form a new community whose headquarters would be in Ootacamund. Mother Mary of the Passion officially informed the Sisters who had remained in India of the birth of this new institute. On 6 January 1877, it was founded as a diocesan congregation dependent on the Apostolic Vicariate.¹⁹⁹ The initiatives at the origin of the Missionaries of Mary were the personal responsibility of Mother Mary of the passion. Her companions of Ootacamund testified to it in 1877.²⁰⁰ Nine

¹⁹⁸ Extract from “Ouverture d’âme,” of 1901, quoted in *Positio super virtutibus en vue de la beatification et de la canonization de Marie de la Passion*, t. II, 1991, 1229.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Marcel Launay, *Hélène de Chappotin and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary*, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 123-124.

²⁰⁰ Letter of the Sisters of Ootacamund to Msgr. David, Bishop of Saint-Brieuc, dated 27 August 1877, quoted in *Positio* t. II, 1991, 276.

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years after the foundation of the new missionary institute they had to undergo a great trial. Rome came hard on the fledgling Congregation. The foundress was deposed from the office of Superior General of the new congregation. In February 1883 Pope Leo XIII appointed a personal Delegate to examine the question in depth. After a thorough examination of the case, on the eve of Passion Sunday, 28 March 1884 the Pope decided to rehabilitate Mary of the Passion. In 1885 the new Congregation received the Laudatory Decree and the new name, 'Franciscan Missionaries of Mary,' was officially adopted. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints studied her case and she was declared the foundress²⁰¹ of the institute.²⁰²

2.7.1.3 The Suggestion of a Third Party

In the history of religious life, there are cases in which the idea of founding an institute was proposed to the founder by someone else. This seems to be the case for many of the diocesan congregations founded earlier. The diocesan bishops themselves suggested the idea of the foundation to others who founded the institute. However, the bishops were not considered as founders. In these cases, the inspiration reached through the medium of the bishops who suggested it to the founder. Here, let us take an example of the Institute of Charity to which the idea to found the institute reach the founder through someone else.

²⁰¹ Fundatricis Congregationis Sororum Franciscanum Missionariarum a Maria. Cf., AAS 92 (2000), 280-284.

²⁰² Pope John Paul II, Decretum super virtutibus, AAS 92 (2000), 280-284.

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Antonio Rosmini Serbati at the instigation of St. Maddalena di Canossa founded the Institute of Charity in 1828 at Calvario in Piedmont, Italy.²⁰³ While explaining the charism of Antonio Rosmini as founder Alfeo Valle describes the story: Antonio Rosmini's calling to found a religious order was shown him through Maddalena di Canossa, a noble lady from Verona, who had already founded a flourishing religious family, the Daughters of Charity. She had been conscious of the urgent need for a male congregation devoted to the religious and secular education of youth. She had drafted directives for such a congregation and sent the *Plan of the Sons of Charity* to Rosmini in 1821, begging him to undertake the work. It marked the beginning of his religious vocation as the founder of a new institute in the Church.²⁰⁴ After receiving the plan of the *Sons of Charity*, Rosmini immersed himself fervently in it. He fully accepted Maddalena's spirit and her *plan for the Sons of Charity*, but introduced a new element, the pastoral ministry, which had matured in him during the years of study and waiting. Maddalena, however, was decisively against the introduction of the pastoral ministry into the Congregation of the Sons of Charity. After receiving a divine light through more intense preparation and prayerful waiting Rosmini prepared the constitutions for the Institute of Charity, which he started in 1827. Valle says, "This is the moment of decision for the two founders. Rosmini's project is no longer Canossa's."²⁰⁵ Since she failed to convince Rosmini of her idea, she founded another Institute of Charity for men which is known as *Sons*

²⁰³ C.R. Leatham, "Rosminians," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, Vol.12 (Washington, DC: Thomson Gale, 2003), 385. Cf. also John M. Lozano, "Fondatore," 757.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Alfeo Valle, *Antonio Rosmini: His Charism as Founder*, (place and year of publication not given), 6.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Valle, *Antonio Rosmini, His Charism as Founder*, 10.

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*of Charity, the Canossiani.*²⁰⁶ They consider Maddalena their foundress, whereas Rosminians do not. He received the inspiration independently, about which he wrote in his personal Diary, “10 December 1825: On this day I conceived in a flash the plan of the Institute of Charity.”²⁰⁷ Rosmini discovered that it was God’s will that he should found this new religious institute and Maddalena di Canossa serves as an instrument of God in order to manifest his will to Antonio Rosmini.

2.7.1.4 Collective Inspiration

There are cases in which religious institutes were founded as a response to a long-awaited desire of the community of believers and are seen as a culmination of repeated attempts in different places. Many persons would be there who became actively involved in various degrees. In such cases it may be difficult to identify the person who conceived the idea of the congregation or who received the special inspiration to found it. Due to the length of time between the attempts and also owing to the number of persons involved in different places, very often it was difficult to see who took the initiative at each place to found the institute. The particular historical situation and unsettled problems of the individual church may also add to this sort of lack of clarity regarding the identity of the founder.

It is not like forming a community in order to engage in some particular ministry. It may be called a collective inspiration, which is proved to be true with regard to some institutes. Even in such cases, one discovers Spirit-filled

²⁰⁶ Valle, *Antonio Rosmini, His Charism as Founder*, 10.

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Valle, *Antonio Rosmini, His Charism as Founder*, 8.

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persons who became creators and transmitters of new means of reflecting in the Church one of the aspects of the mystery of Christ. In those institutes having more than one founder, and in those whose inspiration was not very original, it is possible to detect one or more persons at their origins who, as a result of the influence of the Holy Spirit have induced others to live and act in ways approved by the Church as capable of leading to sanctity.²⁰⁸

2.7.1.5 Gradual Development

When the nature of the inspiration received by various founders and foundresses is analyzed it can be stated that the founding of a new religious institute in the Church was never a sudden act. There is a gradual development in the process of the perception of an inspiration. The founders receive the initial enlightenment and God communicates his plan to the person, slowly he shows him the design that he has on him. Yet this experience cannot be isolated from the rest of the life of the founder. It is related to all the events that precede and follow it.²⁰⁹ After receiving the enlightenment the person is led to a maturation of the vocation of the founder, that is, a common preparation for any type of ministry he is going to start. The founder is prepared gradually by the work of grace to his specific task in the Church. Generally, the call to this vocation comes after a “second conversion,” when the soul has become docile to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the founder has already been made sensitive to the needs of the Church, to which urgencies, with the founding of

²⁰⁸ Manuel Ruiz Jurado, “Consecrated Life and Charisms of the Founders,” in Latourelle, rene, Vatican II, Assessment and perspectives: 25 Years after (1962-1987), 19.

²⁰⁹ Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 79.

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a particular institute will be called to account.²¹⁰ There is a gradual development in the process of the perception of an inspiration.

Generally, the founders were called to respond to a pressing need of the Church or they were faced with a situation in which the Church was subject to strong pressures. Hence the forms of life resulting were either a return to the Gospel or were dedicated to specific ministries in the Church evangelization, education, care of the sick, etc. Here, the object of the original inspiration is twofold, namely, a return to the Gospel as a way of life and a commitment to a ministry.²¹¹ Therefore, the object of the inspiration is not only a return to the Gospel as a way of life but also “a defined vision of community-relationships and of the presence of the community in the world different from other groups.”²¹²

From the experiences of the founders studied so far it can be concluded that there can be many different ways in which a founder discovers it to be God’s will that they give their lives to the foundation of a new religious institute. It may be through a direct intuition that God inspires the founder through the power of the Holy Spirit. It may be through indirect intuition that God does the same in the founder through indirect ways. In any case, the extraordinary character of the experience through which the founders discover their vocation is not essential. Though certain founders had extraordinary charisms, divine inspiration is not to be conceived as an extraordinary phenomenon. On the contrary, usually the founding persons become gradually

²¹⁰ Ciardi, *I fondatori uomini dello Spirito*, 91.

²¹¹ Cf. Lozano, “Founder and Community,” 228.

²¹² Cf. Lozano, “Founder and Community,” 228.

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aware of their being called to found a new community through ordinary means like prayer, reflection and advice. The essential factor is that in one way or another, these men and women became aware at a certain moment that God called them to establish a new religious family and they have already received a particular grace.

Obviously, in the process of reaching their decision, they were helped, at least, by ordinary graces of the Spirit: a certain light in their intellects focused on a specific need of the Church with a corresponding impulse in their wills moving them to offer themselves as instruments of God. In fact, history shows that founders often passed through a long process before deciding to found their community, and a still longer process before ultimately defining all the elements, which would characterize it. This happened in the persons who discovered their vocation under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the theologians give importance to the theological aspect of the founder, namely, the vocation, inspiration and charism of a Christian, which designate him as founder.

2.8 Religious Institutes for Women and Their Founding Persons

In the previous section the attempt was to determine those essential elements of the founding process, which were contributed by the “founder”. While analyzing the characteristic traits commonly seen in the founders ten such qualities are recognized or identified as applicable to the founders of religious institutes of both men and women. It has been grouped as primary norms and secondary traits. At the same time, the studies conducted on the evolution of religious life for women in the Church present a different story of

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foundation. The history of the foundation of women's institutes reflects the evolution of the social position of women throughout the course of history. The religious life of women has a long and complex history.²¹³ Recent studies on the contribution of women religious are based on the awareness expressed by the document *Mutuae Relationes* which states,

In the vast pastoral field of the Church, a new and most important place is given to women. In the early Church they were the devoted helpers of the Apostles (Acts 18: 26; Rom 16: 1ff.); today they are called upon to exercise their apostolic activity in the ecclesial community, faithfully unfolding the mystery of their identity, both created and revealed (Gen 2; Eph 5; 1Tim 3, etc.), and aware of their growing influence in civil society.²¹⁴

2.8.1 Female Monastic Communities

The earliest forms of religious life for women were the consecrated virgins and widows who lived in the early Christian communities. St. Paul referred to these special groups of women in his letter to the Corinthian community (1 Cor 7: 8-9) and in his letter to Timothy, he included a relatively detailed list of criteria for enrolment as a widow (1

²¹³ Lynn Marie Jarrell, *The Development of Legal Structures for Women Religious between 1500 and 1900: A Study of Selected Institutes of Religious Life for Women*, (Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1985); Cf., also J. Leclercq, "Femminile, Monachesimo," *DIP*, 3, cols. 1445-1451; Cf., Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press), 2001.

²¹⁴ *MR.*, 49.

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Tim 5: 3-16). These holy women, who devoted themselves to prayer, fasting and good works, were even an example and source of encouragement for the whole Church.

The presence of women's monasteries was very significant in the early stage of Christianity. In the beginning, feminine monasticism was like a certain group of widows and virgins who lived together in their own houses and practiced the ascetical life.²¹⁵ The 'order of widows' was the predecessor of female monastic orders.²¹⁶ At the end of the first and the beginning of the second century the state of consecrated women or a profession of virginity was recognized in the Church, as well as the order of widows. The first form was a kind of 'domestic monasticism,' and there were 'dual monasteries,' which housed both sexes.²¹⁷

While studying on the 'Desert Mothers' Laura Swan observes that the solitary ascetical life, which the pious men led at the beginning of the Church, was also followed at the same period by pious women as well. Their convents not only offered women protection for themselves and their property, but also often nourished their intellectual growth and political power. In the fourth century, when monasteries for men began to be established, others for women made their appearance at the same time and there were feminine

²¹⁵ "In the early Church widows, after the death of their spouses, renounced the possibility of a second marriage and sublimated their circumstantial solitude into a life of service to the Church by prayer and the care of needy members of the community." Sandra M. Schneiders, *New Wine-Skins: Remaking Religious Life Today*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 24.

²¹⁶ Bonnie B. Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 114.

²¹⁷ J. Leclercq, "Femmine, Monachismo," *DIP*, 3, col. 1445-1451; at 1445.

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counterparts to the earliest monks.²¹⁸ Mary, sister of Pachomius, established a convent for women in Tabennisi in 318, Upper Egypt, on the right bank of the Nile, separated by a small stream from that of the monks. The nuns followed basically the same Rule as that of the monks.²¹⁹ At his death, Pachomius (+346) had nine monasteries of men and two of women.²²⁰

The first picture of life in a female domestic monastery, in the Eastern Church, is that of St. Macrina (+379),²²¹ the sister of St. Basil the Great (330-379), which is described by her brother, Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa.²²² She administered one of the earliest communities of women ascetics. The Canons of St. Basil formed the basis for the *typika* or regulations of convents. By compiling precise rules, St. Basil and St. Macrina regulated every aspect of the life of the nuns in the monastery and tried to improve structurally the institution on monasticism. Saint Scholastica, St. Benedict's sister, lived in a monastery at a short distance from Monte Cassino. The name of Caesaria, sister of Caesarius of Arles (+542) is associated with monastic life in

²¹⁸ Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 7.

²¹⁹ Cf. Dunn Marilyn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 25-34.

²²⁰ James R. Cain, "Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women," *Review for Religious* 27(1968), 243-280; at 252. By the end of the century his Order would comprise no less than seven thousand monks. Cf. Daniel Rops, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963), 526.

²²¹ Cf. Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 128-131.

²²² Gregory affirms that St. Macrina decided to lead a life of virginity when she was twelve years age and that she did so without leaving her mother. Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Macrinae Virginis*, 4, in *Patrologia Graeca*, 46, 959-1000.

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the early centuries also. In these cases the natural sisters of the monks were companions of the monastic life of women.

The first indication of common life in the West is in the home of Marcella who was a widow in Rome, where a group of women met under St. Jerome's direction. She learned the ascetic practices and founded a monastic community for women in her place on the Aventine Hill in Rome in the fourth century.²²³ The Rule for Sisters (*Regula sororum*) of St. Augustine written as a part of a letter to a convent of nuns at Hippo tells about the life-style of the Sisters at that time.

Some founders had intended to share with women the charism they received from God. For example, the Order of Preachers, commonly known as Dominicans, founded by Dominic Guzman in 1215, was primarily a clerical order. They combined a contemplative foundation with overflow of contemplation into apostolic expression. Elizabeth McDonough observes that the participation of women in this charism was restricted to its contemplative aspect in a cloistered context that goes with solemn profession.²²⁴ Historians say that monasteries for women had to have a man as their founder. Canon law insisted that the monasteries of women must be close to that of monks. The idea was that women had to be protected by men. Institutes of simple vows arose within the course of several centuries, beginning in about the fourteenth century. They were not intended to replace the traditional religious lifestyle for women as lived

²²³ Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 135.

²²⁴ Elizabeth McDonough, "Cloister for Nuns: From the Early Centuries to the 1917 Code," in *The Church and Consecrated Life*, ed. David Fleming and Elizabeth McDonough (Missouri: Review for Religious, 1996), 81.

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in the monasteries. Rather, they were the logical extension of the monastic life, which had been moved from the isolated countryside to within the city walls for its own protection.²²⁵

2.8.2 Independent Foundresses

The history of religious life for women shows that many a time the establishment of a new institute for women was associated with a man and a woman.²²⁶ Examples are many for the same as explained above. Lozano asks, “Was it always needed that women depended on men to found religious institutes for women?” He responds negatively and states, “Macrina began her ascetical life before Basil and he was attracted to her kind of life. Teresa welcomed John of the Cross to expand the reform to the Carmelite Order of the male line. The historical causes vary, but the fact of the complementarities of the sexes remains.”²²⁷ According to the Second Vatican Council, religious life for women has “become a permanent feature of the Church by a legitimate and necessary development.”²²⁸ Nevertheless, history shows

²²⁵ In the twelfth century, church authorities had directed the bishops to see that all monasteries were moved inside the city walls. Surely the event of this relocation and the uprooting of groups from their original buildings to the closeness of the city life put the monasteries in a totally new relationship with the society surrounding them. Cf. Lynn Marie Jarrell, *The Development of Legal Structures for Women Religious between 1500 and 1900: A Study of Selected Institutes of Religious Life for Women*, (Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1985), 30.

²²⁶ J. Leclercq, “Femminile, Monachesimo,” *DIP*, III (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1977), cols. 1445-1451; at 1446.

²²⁷ Lozano, “Fondatore,” 758.

²²⁸ *LG*. 43.

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that there were many obstacles for women to come out of the structure the Church and society had imposed on them.²²⁹

Lynn Marie Jarrell presents the illuminating stories of four courageous and charismatic women of the Pre-Vatican period who struggled to live their religious consecration in a non-cloistered structure and with an active apostolate.²³⁰ These four women are: Angela Merici (1474-1540), Foundress of the Company of Saint Ursula, Mary Ward (1585-1645), Foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), Foundress of the Daughters of Charity Under the Direction of Saint Vincent de Paul, and Catherine McAuley (1781-1841), Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. All these four women had to struggle hard to follow a style of religious life different from the established practices for what women could do in the Church in their time. Since the closing of the Council of Trent (1563) and the bull *Circa Pastoralis* (1566), solemn vows and papal enclosure were the norm for all women religious. Those four heroic women used their life energy to attempt to work through the various obstacles that opposed their perception that a religious institute for women could be non-cloistered and have an active apostolate.

²²⁹ Many of the early Church Fathers had maintained that the woman was to be protected and was not to take charge of her affairs. This approach had been part of the Roman Law which had ruled initially that a woman needed to be protected by some type of guardian, whether her parents, her husband or some legal guardian. In this way she was ranked with children and the insane who also always needed to have guardian.

²³⁰ Cf., Lynn Marie, Jarrell. *The Development of Legal Structures for Women Religious between 1500 and 1900: A Study of Selected Institutes of Religious Life for Women*, (Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1985), 56-275.

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Each religious institute of women and its Rule has developed within a given legal and historic setting. The manner in which a culture perceives the role of women, the demanding needs of a certain society, and the long pattern of custom and legal tradition are factors that had its impact on the foundation. For women, their inferior social position prohibited them socially from carrying out certain types of charitable works.²³¹ Only with centuries was there expansion in social and ecclesiastical perceptions of what women seeking to serve the Church could do beyond the traditional monastic model of religious life for women. It had to wait until the historic setting of the late Renaissance, the period when the first non-cloistered groups of women religious were initiated.²³² All these four women have many things in common. First of all, rather than taking the road well traveled, they decided to blaze their own trail. Angela, Mary, and Louise in particular had to find ways to get out of this limiting medieval perception on how women could safely live a religiously consecrated life outside the cloister.

Things have changed slowly; in the twentieth century, for example, Mother Teresa of Calcutta founded two religious institutes for women and three for men or rather, she founded one religious family, the Missionaries of Charity (MC), which

²³¹ James R. Cain demonstrates how women were given an inferior social position in the writings of the Church Fathers and of the Scholastics. The only significant change in these 1000 years or more of history in the various ecclesiastical writers was that their perspective on women was gradually more tempered. *The Influence of the Cloister in the Apostolate of Congregations of Religious Women* (Rome: .publication not given, 1965); Cf., also James R. Cain, "Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women," *Review for Religious* 27 (1968) 243-280; 427-448; 652-671; 916-937.

²³² Jarrell, *The Development of Legal Structures for Women Religious between 1500 and 1900*, 5.

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has five independent branches, namely, MC Sisters – Active, MC Sisters –Contemplative, MC Brothers –Active, MC Brothers – Contemplative, and MC Priests. The two branches of the MC Sisters share the same Constitutions and government, but the three male branches have their own separate Constitutions and Generalates respectively. All these religious institutes regard Mother Teresa as their foundress. There are other women who became foundresses on their own, without being yoked to a co-founder and founded institutes independently.²³³

2.8.3 Feminine Auxiliaries

In the history of religious life for women one notices another phenomenon of ‘Feminine auxiliaries,’ namely, one founder establishes institutes for both men and women with the same charism. In some cases, the same founder founds both the institutes, and in some other cases the male branches take initiative to found their female branches. While explaining the origin and growth of the Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) and the heroic personality of its foundress Mother Mary of the Passion, Marcel Launay speaks of such a phenomenon. He observes

²³³ In the Syro-Malabar Church, India there are seven religious institutes for women founded by women. Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC), Congregation of the Holy Family (CHF), *Deena Sevana Sabha* (DSS), Little Sisters of Christ (LSC), Little Servants of Divine Providence (LSDP), Fervent Daughters of Sacred Heart of Jesus (FDSH), and Disciple Sisters of Christ (DSC). Cf., Joseph Maleparampil, “Religious Congregations of Syro-Malabar Church and Mar Thoma Margam,” in *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, ed., Andrews Mekkattukunnel (Kottayam: OIRSI, 2012), 504-514; at 507.

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that for the spread of the Kingdom of God and in view of better collaboration of men and women in the mission areas, some missionary congregations emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century (1861-1882) which were explicitly dedicated to the *ad gentes*, and which were inspired by some members of masculine institutes in search of feminine auxiliaries. They are: Our Lady of the Missions, founded at the instigation of the Society of Mary, Our Lady of the Apostles inspired by Father Planque, to be a congregation collaborating with the African Missions Society of Lyon, the White Sisters (Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa) and the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Issoudun. The last two congregations constitute the feminine branch of the same religious family.²³⁴ The religious institute called ‘the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, as explained earlier, is the best example for having one foundress and different institutions with the same charism.’²³⁵

Another example of the same is that of the Society of the Divine Word’ (SVD), and their Sister-congregation, (SSpS). St. Arnold Janssen (1837-1909) founded two religious institutes with same charism, one for men known as ‘the Society of the Divine Word’ (SVD), another for women with the name ‘the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit’ (SSpS). The Constitutions of the latter acknowledges the fact that the founder intended the charism, spirituality and mission as the same for both the institutes. It reads: “The charism and spirituality of our common founder unite us to the Society of the Divine Word and the Congregation of the

²³⁴ Cf. Launay, *Hélène de Chappotin: And the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary*, 122.

²³⁵ Here the term cannot be used as ‘Feminine Auxiliaries’, but the purpose is the same.

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Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration. We seek to work closely with them and support them with our prayers.”²³⁶ It calls the present members to co-operate with each other in their apostolate: “Where possible, we work with the members of the Society of the Divine Word, as our Founder intended both the Congregations to share in the same missionary mandate.”²³⁷

2.8.4 ‘Co-founder’ and ‘Founding Couple’

When Lozano speaks about the origin of the institutes for women religious observes that most of the congregations of women that appeared between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries have a ‘founding couple’ at their origins.²³⁸ In many such institutes there exists a confusion of roles of founder and co-founder. In some cases the initiative came from a woman (foundress), at other times from a Bishop or priest (founder). Lozano observes:

In numerous cases it was a woman who felt called to create this new family, but, given the social position of women, she would not have realized her ideal without availing herself of the support of some men, usually the Bishop of the diocese or her spiritual director. In such cases only one party is properly speaking, the founder, whereas the other is really a co-founder.²³⁹

²³⁶ Constitutions and Directory of the Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit, 1984, art. 313.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, art. 107.2.

²³⁸ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 12.

²³⁹ Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 12.

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Lozano explains some other cases in which the idea for the foundation emerged out of the relationships between a woman and her confessor or spiritual director, so that it is often hard to say who had the idea first. Both of them might have conceived the institute and its purpose or spirit simultaneously. In such cases both persons, the woman and the man, are the founders. Many religious institutes have not established a position on the respective role played by each of their “founders.” Since the main criterion to designate one as the founder is to see how the idea for the institute first emerged, they need a serious historical investigation to identify their charismatic founder. They also must analyze to what extent each of the parties involved influence the shaping of the institute’s mission and spirit.

The explanation given by Anastasio Gutierrez that a co-founder acts depending on and in subordination to the founder²⁴⁰ is not true for all religious institutes and an analysis of the nature and level of ‘dependency and subordination’ alone will not solve the problem, especially when one party is a Bishop or a priest and the other is a woman.

When there is lack of clarity about the issues like who received the original inspiration to found the institute, who executed the idea and which are the parties involved in shaping the mission and spirit, and life style of the institute, Nedungatt suggested that in case of foundation by several people, if one person played the leading or principle role, that person is called founder and the other(s) cofounder(s). Co-founders are regarded as sharing the foundational charism in

²⁴⁰ Cf., P. Anastasio Gutierrez, “Madre Nazarena Majone Confondatrice delle Figlie del Divino Zelo,” *Studi Rogazionisti* 13 (1992), 59.

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a special way distinct from that of the other members of the institute.²⁴¹ This suggestion may not solve the problem of many of the institutes where there is no documentary evidence for the principal role.

Dom Gerardo Oesterle brings anew a case of the seventeenth century regarding the uncertainty of roles of founder and co-founder. He was one of the three writers appointed by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1946 with the intention of defining which essential points must be present if someone is to be called the founder of a religious institute. After a profound study he distinguished three cases in which someone could be spoken as a founder. As the third case he stated: “Finally, there are those cases where the name of founder is given to one who took the idea from another but was, to all intents and purposes, the person who put the idea into execution.”²⁴² He gave the example of St. Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal who brought the Order of the Visitation into being. With regard to considering St. Jane Chantal as foundress of the Order of the Visitation, the Sacred Congregation pointed out that “if the Cause of St. Jane Chantal were being dealt with today, she would be called not the “Institutrix” but the co-foundress of the Order of the Visitation. This is a later term, not in use when her Cause was being dealt with. The real founder of the Visitation Order was St. Francis de Sales. He has always been considered such since it was he who had the idea and who wrote the Constitutions.”²⁴³ The execution of his idea, however, and the

²⁴¹ Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders,” 105-106.

²⁴² Oesterle G., Lettera di risposta alla S. Congregazione dei Riti (4 December 1946), in SCH.SH. 66, *Nuova Inquisitio*, XVI-XVII. Quoted in Antonio Romano, *The Charism of the Founder*, 33.

²⁴³ Here, Oesterle applies the most important norm, namely, conceiving the institute with its purpose, to designate Francis de Sales as founder.

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spread of the institute were largely the work of St. Jane Chantal.”²⁴⁴

In the example of the ‘Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,’ giving attention to the recurrent problem of the so-called “pair of founders” or “founding couple” and the related “feminine issue” in the case of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello the issue was settled by Midali through a scientific research. He affirmed that the idea of the institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was conceived by Don Bosco and it was he who prepared their Constitutions. Blessed Mazarello was the main figure who gave life to, and propagated, the institute for women.²⁴⁵ Therefore, Don Bosco is considered the founder and Blessed Mazarello the co-founder of the above said institute. He believes that this understanding is dynamically faithful to the legacy of the past. After studying the texts of the Process of both the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello he concluded in these words:

In fact, the founder [St. Don Bosco] wanted Mother Mazzarello to establish the feminine dimension (experience) of Salesian charism at Mornese, which he and his sons lived at Valdocco in a masculine way. Consistent with this view, we should say, from a strictly theological point of view, that Mother Mazzarello, rather than co-founder, is the founder and creator of the feminine Salesian experience, which is

He calls the co-founder as one who executes the idea conceived by the founder thereby he restricts the role of co-founder to the practical levels.

²⁴⁴ Antonio Romano, *The Charism of the Founder*, 33.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Mario Midali, *Madre Mazzarello il significato del titolo di confondatrice*, (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1982), 122-126.

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innate in her and shaped by her, keeping the point of reference to Don Bosco and his sons as central and indispensable. This can be expressed by the equivalent term as “Mother.”²⁴⁶

In the same manner, George Nedungatt made a detailed study on the history of foundation of the Congregation of the Holy Family and affirmed that Blessed Mariam Thressia is the foundress. Mariam Thressia was assisted by her spiritual director, Father Joseph Vithayathil. He was the parish priest of Puthenchira, Mariam Thresia’s home parish. She accepted him as her spiritual director. During the early years of the religious institute, he rendered it carefully and tenderly, so as to deserve to be called co-founder.²⁴⁷ After analyzing the findings of the Historical Commission, which was set up to collect the documents for the beatification of Mariam Thressia, he clarified the use of terms such as “erect” and “found” and thus he made clear the role of Mar John Menachery, the local Ordinary who erected the institute, as the hierarchical founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family. He concludes: “When the facts of history are examined and the concepts of foundation and erection are properly distinguished, it will be seen that the title of foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family belongs

²⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁴⁷ George Nedungatt, *Crucified with Christ for All: A Biography of Bl. Mariam Thresia*, Mannuthy: Holy Family Publications, 2002), 128; Cf. George Nedungatt, “Who founded the Congregation of the Holy Family?,” 41-48; Cf., also A. M. Mundadan, ed., *Writings of Mother Mariam Thresia* (Mannuthy: Holy Family Generalate, 1991), 23; Cf., also J. Puthenkalam, and A. Mampra, ed., “Blessed Mariam Thressia Mankidiyan (1876-1926),” *Sanctity in India*, Yercaud: The Retreat, 2000, 157-173.

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properly to Mother Mariam Thressia.”²⁴⁸ Vithayathil’s role as the protector and co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family is quite significant and both Mariam Thresia and Vithayathil worked together.²⁴⁹

The recognition of Mother Mariam Thresia as foundress is a strong tradition so ingrained in the Congregation and outside of it, in official and non-official documentation, which seems to leave no room for doubt. There is an authoritative testimony of Mar James Pazhayattil, the Bishop of Irinjalakuda who knew Vithayathil as well as the religious institute founded by Mariam Thresia very well, is very relevant to remove the confusion of roles of founder and co-founder of this institute:

Rev. Fr. Joseph Vithayathil is a priest of the diocese of Thrissur, and co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family. The Servant of God, Mother Mariam Thresia, the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family Sisters, from 1902 till her death in 1926, got the spiritual direction and timely guidance from Fr. Vithayathil who knew her through and through and was indeed a father, and guide in her visions, trails, spiritual life and family apostolate. He was the main support for her to start the new congregation and to open new convents and schools.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ George Nedungatt, “Who founded the Congregation of the Holy Family,?” 48.

²⁴⁹ “*History*,” The “diary” about Mariam Thresia by Fr. Joseph Vithayathil given in the *Positio super virtutibus*, (*Mariam Thresia Mankidiyan*), *Summarium*., 337.

²⁵⁰ This testimony of the Bishop is given in the *Positio super virtutibus*, (*Mariam Thresia Mankidiyan*), Part 1, “*Informatio*,” 105-106.

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The role of Vithayathil is not restricted to the practical realm alone. After the death of the founder in 1926, Vithayathil lead the institute for long years in all the spheres of life. In order to see clearly the role and identity of co-founder a general norm cannot be applied to all religious institutes. Special study is to be conducted with regard to each institute to remove the uncertainty.

Conclusion

A close look at the ecclesiastical documents reveals that there is not an exact and rigid definition of a founder in them. However, we can gather from the practice of the Church in accepting and officially declaring certain persons as founders the mind of the Church regarding the determining factors of the founders. Reflecting on this and studying the founding process of various religious institutes some of the theologians on consecrated life have extracted the norms according to the teaching of the Church to qualify someone as a founder.

With regard to the concept of co-founder/co-foundress whose assistance enabled the founder in a certain manner to execute the inspiration received by him/her is yet to be developed in the teaching of the Church. Since the co-founder acts in view of supporting the founder and in executing the original inspiration received by the founder, it depends very much on the nature and context of the relationship that exists between them. It is an area where study has to be made on individual cases in order to describe and determine the role of co-founder/co-foundress, especially in the cases of certain religious institutes for women.

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Great progress has been made since 1948 as the authors of the *Nova Inquisitio* presented their findings on what constitutes the founder. In the light of the study of the documents of the Church the fundamental norms of the founder can be listed. It does not exist as a list *per se* with all the ingredients listed in one document, but it can be formulated by assessing all the pertinent Church documents containing elements that would go toward the construction of such a list; to identify and make available a comprehensive list with all the necessary attributes of the founder. From the survey of the ecclesiastical documents, the following qualities of the founder are highlighted:

- The founders are instruments under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (*LG. 45*);
- The original inspiration of the founder is the source of the dynamism proper to each religious institute (*ET. 12*);
- They define the aims of the community they founded (*ET. 11*); they are the source of a tradition on which an institute is founded (*PC. 2; ET.12*);
- They determine the Rules of life and present it to the hierarchy of the Church for approval (*LG. 45; ET. 11, 12*) and the apostolates of the religious families (*LG. 46*);
- The grace granted to the founders implies a particular fecundity in the Church. (*ET. 14; MR. 12*);
- Pope John Paul II sees in a founder an exceptional instrument of Christ for the work of salvation and the founder receives the inspiration to found the institute with its aim and forms the material and spiritual lifestyle of the members;

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- *Mutuae Relationes* calls a founder, a man of divine experience who possesses a special charism, a distinctive style for sanctification and apostolate and transmits the same to the followers (*MR. 11*). Usually founders are endowed with creativity required for leadership (*MR. 12*).

- *Mutuae Relationes* marks a genuine trait of the founder as one who works with originality, and as one who possesses boldness in initiatives, perseverance in the gift of self, humility in the face of adversity and ability to bear sufferings (*MR. 12*);

- The founder expresses a profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ in order to witness to some aspect of His mystery (*MR. 51*).

- The founder will exhibit a constructive love for the Church, which shrinks from causing any discord in her (*MR.51*).

- An ability to be docile to the hierarchy of the Church is considered as a sure sign of the founder (*MR. 51*).

- The founders define the nature, purpose, spirit, tradition and character of the institute (*CIC.C. 578*). But the *CIC* never applied the term founder to the hierarchical Superior who canonically erects the institute.

Theologians who have presented their observations on the identifying marks of the founders modified some of the elements that were considered essential earlier. Thus, based on the study of the ecclesiastical documents and the insights of the theologians, a list of qualities has been prepared in which the first four are considered primary norms or what qualify someone as charismatic founder and other elements

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are of secondary importance, which can be considered personal qualities of the founder of the religious institute. Those qualities can only be corroborative, and not possibly proving the identity of the founder by themselves. Surely, they add to the personal sanctity of the founder. Thus, the primary norms are: a) divine vocation or original inspiration received by the founder, b) the awareness of being called by God to found a new religious institute in the Church, c) conceiving the institute with its purpose and d) defining the spirit and forming a group in its religious way of life.

Besides the above qualifications, the founder should possess, however, certain personal qualities as well, such as experiencing a particular aspect of the mystery of Christ, constructive love for the Church, giving Rules of life and government to the institute, sharing in the suffering of Christ, and a sense of paternity/maternity towards the community he founded. The real founders are the ones who are employed by the Holy Spirit to inspire the followers to live out the newly inspired vocation and take initiative to form the religious life style in them. On their part, the founders co-operate with the working of the Holy Spirit who prepares them for a specific mission in the Church by responding to some specific needs of the Church. In other words, one who charismatically pursues an ideal that moulds the members and knits them together into a religious institute in the Church, is the authentic founder.

Chapter Three

Application of the Norms and Evaluation of the Opinions

The main thrust of the foregoing chapter was on collecting and sorting out the various norms for identifying the charismatic founder of a religious institute. These norms have now to be applied separately to each of the four candidates, namely, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Leopold Beccaro, Bernardine Baccinelli and Eliswa Vakayil. The application will lead either to elimination from the list in case one does not meet the norms, or to confirmation if one fulfills them. This will, consequently, also show the merits and demerits of the different opinions regarding the founder.

The most important qualifications or norms that must be present in the founder of a religious institute are based on various Church documents, the practice of the Church and the reflections of theologians. The norms are: i) Receiving a divine call or original inspiration, ii) Being aware of a call from God to found a new religious institute in the Church, iii) Conceiving the institute with its purpose and iv) Defining the spirit and forming the Community's religious way of life. The present chapter is thus devoted to analyzing and evaluating the nature of the involvement and the specific roles played by the three candidates other than Chavara, namely, Beccaro, Baccinelli and Eliswa in the foundation of the women TOCD.

3.1. Leopold Beccaro as Founder

A few writers speak of Beccaro as the founder and Chavara as the co-founder, whereas others give equal importance to both of them and thus hold both of them as founders. The protagonists of these two opinions agree that

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the founding of the convent was the joint effort of Beccaro and Chavara. The relevant question here is about who received the *original inspiration* to be the charismatic founder and who assisted him to execute the idea of the foundation of the institute and thus became the co-founder. There are many examples in the *CKC* and *CMM* to show the significant role of Beccaro in the founding of the convent at Koonammavu.¹ In almost all the instances of the visit of the two priests - Chavara and Beccaro together - it was Beccaro, the Canonical Superior, who gave the instructions and advices to the Sisters. Therefore, he is there in almost all the pages of the *CKC*. Besides those numerous instructions, he had given them his 'Testament' on the day of their entrance into the new convent.² It is a thoughtfully written document on the nature of religious life, which is meant to cultivate and experience love for Jesus, their Spouse. In his Testament, Beccaro makes it clear that the Sisters are called for the single purpose of loving God and seeking his glory. A further forty-nine letters which Beccaro wrote to the Sisters stand as a vivid expression of his concern for them.³ As their formator, Beccaro repeatedly instructed the Sisters to love Jesus with their whole heart and mind.⁴

Beccaro has definitely played an important role at the initial stage of the first community. It was he who discerned the vocation of the first members and decided on the site for

¹ Cf., 1.1.3 of this study to get the picture of the combined efforts of Chavara and Beccaro in founding the convent and in the evolution of the life style of the first Community.

² Cf. *CKC.*, 1, 59. Its full text is given in the *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1.

³ Cf., *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1-5; pp. 83-158.

⁴ *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1.

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the first convent.⁵ When the Apostolic Vicar was approached and permission was sought to open a convent, the Bishop entrusted Beccaro to translate the Rules for the convent.⁶ He committed himself tirelessly to the project and successfully collected funds together with Chavara and the members of the men TOCD. His words became final in admitting and dismissing the candidates. He officiated at the religious ceremonies in the convent. He visited the convent very often (most often in the company of Chavara), gave exhortations, made concrete decisions concerning the issues, and acted as the person of authority. Even while he was away from Koonammavu, he communicated eagerly with the Sisters through letters. He remained in touch with the convent during his journeys; he wrote to them from the ship while he was travelling to Europe and also from such places as Acqui, Loano, Porta Maurizio, Bombay, Madras, etc. Taking all these facts together, some writers, such as James Thalachelloor, Mary Chittilappilly, and Sunny Maniakkunnel, are inclined to attribute Beccaro the title of the founder of the women TOCD.

3.1.1 James Thalachelloor's Opinion

Thalachelloor's research was on the formation of religious women in the Syro-Malabar Church with special reference to the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. This doctoral thesis was submitted in the Faculty of Canon Law of the Oriental Institute, Rome. In its second chapter, as he presents the origin and growth of the first religious institute for women in the Syro-Malabar Church, he states, "Its early history shows the influence of the Carmelite Discalced

⁵ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 3.

⁶ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 3; *CMM.*, 127.

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Missionaries and the role played by Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in its foundation and in the progress of the Congregation.”⁷ Under the title ‘Founder or Founders?’ he made an analysis of the manuscripts of the original sources as well as published books and studies on the topic by different authors. He concluded saying: “From all the documents at our disposal we say that Fr. Leopold Beccaro is the founder and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the co-founder.”⁸

As a student of Canon Law, Thalachelloor examined the duties and functions of the Canonical Superior and concluded that Beccaro is the founder of the institute.⁹ His main point of argument in favor of Beccaro is that it was Beccaro who defined the purpose of the first indigenous congregation for women in the Kerala Church.¹⁰ From a detailed study of the writings of Chavara, one cannot accept the above argument. When Chavara envisioned religious life for both men and women, its purpose was already defined in 1831 itself.¹¹

3.1.2 Sunny Maniakkunnel’s Opinion

Maniakkunnel’s research examines the life and activities of Fr. Leopold Beccaro during his stay of sixteen years in Kerala as a missionary.¹² He expertly contextualizes

⁷ James Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 2, 38.

⁸ Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 70-71.

⁹ Cf., Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 71, 196.

¹⁰ Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 71.

¹¹ Cf., *CMM.*, 1. The next chapter explains Chavara’s role in defining the purpose of the women TOCD.

¹² Sunny Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary: A Historical Study of the Life and Activities of Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD in Malabar/Kerala 1860-1877*, (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005).

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the work in the detailed history of Carmelite mission in Kerala, and the history of the first indigenous religious men and women TOCD. The fourth chapter of his study is on the “Role of Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the Foundation and Development of the First Indigenous Congregation for Women” in which Maniakkunnel presents Beccaro as the founder and formator of the institute.

Under the title, ‘Opinion of Writers about the Founders’ Maniakkunnel made a detailed study on the ‘Founder Controversy’ of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.¹³ After studying the original documents, he expresses his opinion in these words:

We accept the fact that the original idea as such of starting religious life in Malabar did not come from Leopold Beccaro. The desire to start a convent and many women willing to lead the religious life were present at that time. ... Fr. Kuriakose Elias and Msgr. Baccinelli always desired that but they could not realize it. Fr. Leopold Beccaro knew well their idea. However, the inspiration of the new foundation came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro. Fr. Leopold Beccaro also determined the charism and goal. In other words, the foundation of the actual congregation came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro. The entire original sources which we came to know point the finger to Fr. Leopold Beccaro as founder and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara as co-founder.¹⁴

Thus, according to Maniakkunnel, the women TOCD is indebted to Beccaro for the charism of the institute.

¹³ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 266-279.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

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Another argument used by Maniakkunnel to substantiate his claim on Beccaro as founder is this: “Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara clearly reported in the *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent* that Fr. Leopold Beccaro was founder of the convent.”¹⁵ He quotes Chavara’s words from the *CKC* to provide evidence for the same: “Then came the missionary priest Fr. Leopold Mary of Jesus (sic) as our Delegate. By his efforts and assistance, our dream of a convent was realized. It may be that God sent him here with the deliberate purpose of starting monasteries and convents.”¹⁶ One must admit that Maniakkunnel reached this conclusion from a misunderstanding of some of the words Chavara used.¹⁷ From the first part of the sentence Maniakkunnel was admitting that by Beccaro’s *efforts* and *assistance*, Chavara’s dream for a convent was realized, which means that Beccaro was assisting Chavara to execute the idea of foundation. But Maniakkunnel seems to be confused with the second part of the quotation, which results from the wrong understanding of the phrase “\š p̄h̄m̄\mb̄n̄<p̄X̄s̄fl̄,” which does not mean ‘to establish,’ instead, it means ‘to conduct,’ ‘to run,’ ‘to guide,’ ‘to govern’ etc. Chavara expressed in clear terms the actual role of Beccaro in the foundation of the convent, namely, Beccaro *worked* and *helped* to *conduct* the monasteries and the convent.¹⁸ Further, Chavara’s idea becomes clear when one pays proper attention to another phrase. He uses the phrase ‘monasteries and convents’ together, and since ‘monasteries’ were founded (in 1831 at Mannanam and in 1857 at Koonammavu) much before the arrival of Beccaro in

¹⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

¹⁶ A Quotation from *CKC.*, 1, 2 in Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

¹⁷ “C̄X̄n̄s̄\ h̄m̄N̄m̄ēn̄p̄t̄l̄m̄ā̄ k̄ā̄th̄iz̄ē C̄ū k̄l̄ȳm̄k̄n̄ā̄Īš̄f̄p̄w̄ N̄ȳm̄k̄v̄ĪX̄n̄ā̄Īš̄f̄p̄w̄
\š̄ p̄h̄m̄\mb̄n̄<p̄X̄s̄fl̄ C̄ū t̄Z̄l̄s̄ b̄m̄f̄X̄ b̄m̄j̄n̄ F̄l̄p̄h̄m̄N̄m̄ēn̄m̄ C̄S̄b̄p̄-v̄.”

¹⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 2: “ā̄q̄.̄³ s̄N̄b̄v̄X̄ th̄ēb̄m̄ēp̄w̄ k̄l̄m̄b̄ m̄ēp̄w̄ C̄X̄n̄ā̄S̄ b̄m̄b̄n̄.”

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Malabar,¹⁹ surely Chavara did not mean to say that God sent Beccaro to establish the monasteries. Thus, according to Chavara, Beccaro's role was the same with regard to 'monasteries and convents,' namely, to guide them. The above statement of Chavara speaks of his conviction that Beccaro was a real supporter of the TOCD monasteries and convents in Kerala. As discussed earlier, Chavara connects both events related to the founding of the institute, first at Puthenpally and then at Koonammavu.²⁰ Meditating on the way the event of the foundation of the convent took place, Chavara sees Divine Providence as making the seemingly impossible thing possible through the support and efforts of Beccaro.

In addition, Maniakkunnel makes a distinction between the earlier attempts (original idea) to found the convent and the actual foundation at Koonammavu. He writes,

We know that Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a desire to establish a convent but it was not realized. By the fact that he had a plan to found a convent and he tried it does not make him a founder of the congregation that was realized later.²¹

Maniakkunnel again states, "Without any doubt we accept that Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had already tried to

¹⁹ Chavara uses the phrase 'monasteries and convents' together in relation to Beccaro's duties toward the TOCD. After Beccaro's arrival in 1859 in Verapuzha his duty was to guide and not to establish monasteries, which had already been founded in 1831, even before the birth of Beccaro in Grogardo, Italy on 28 August 1837.

²⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 2.

²¹ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

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start a convent earlier but could not realize it.”²² Referring to the Puthenpally event and the desire of the candidates to enter the convent, Maniakkunnel openly admits,

According to the report of Baccinelli, some years even before Elizabeth [Eliswa] and Anna came in contact with Fr. Leopold Beccaro, many women wanted to lead a religious life in Malabar. As there was no possibility for that, they were led to marital life.²³

An objective reader of the historical documents on the foundation of the convent would say that before Beccaro’s arrival in Kerala, concrete steps had been taken for the foundation of the convent. Thus, Beccaro cannot be called the ‘initiator’ of the convent or the bearer of inspiration; the idea to found the convent did not come from him.

After Beccaro’s arrival, it was in an atmosphere of close friendship and collaboration between Chavara and Beccaro that every step was taken toward the foundation. Beccaro testifies to the kind of intimate love that existed between them: “...that I loved him [Chavara] even as I love myself.” (“...che io amavo quanto me stesso”).²⁴ Chavara was fully involved in all the process of the foundation at Koonammavu. In other words, one could say that Chavara was the only link between the two events – Puthenpally and Koonammavu. Hence, the two events cannot be seen as isolated or independent, and the inspiration to found the convent was one and the same. Thus, one could say with a sense of objectivity that the actual foundation at

²² Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 274.

²³ Maniakkunnel, 278. Reference to AGOCD., *plut.* 35 e. Letter of Baccinelli to Rome in June 1860.

²⁴ ASA., Beccaro, *Manuale*.

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Koonammavu was the fruition of the attempts made at Alengadu and Puthenpally. Beccaro had no role in those two attempts because he arrived later. Above all, Chavara acknowledges Beccaro as the one who helped him in executing his idea of founding a convent, and hence he is understood as the co-founder of the women TOCD.

Maniakkunnel brings another argument in favor of Beccaro that he played the greater role in the event of foundation. He writes,

Thus from the analysis of original sources we can conclude that even though Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara worked together for the foundation of the convent, a greater role was played by Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the actual foundation of the convent at Koonammavu.²⁵

Maniakkunnel's observation is valid that Beccaro played an important role, and his was a very powerful presence in the affairs of the Sisters. As discussed earlier, he carried out his responsibilities in his capacity as Provincial Delegate. The performance of those activities did not necessarily qualify him as the founder of the TOCD. As Maniakkunnel rightly admits the fact that the original idea as such, of starting religious life in Malabar, did not come from Leopold Beccaro.²⁶

Maniakkunnel states that the charism and spirituality of the congregation is due to Beccaro. He gives the reason for this assertion in these words:

²⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 278.

²⁶ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 279.

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We also know that the charism and spirituality of the Third Order Carmelites for women came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro, because it was he who determined the goal; namely, contemplation and teaching the girls prayers and handicrafts.²⁷

The study of the documents proves that Chavara defined the purpose of the institute much before the actual foundation took place at Koonammavu. Maniakunnel also states, in support of his claim, that Fr. Leopold Beccaro gave most of the instructions, and he did a greater part of the work of formation. The most important point one needs to take note of in this context is the position of Beccaro who was the Provincial Delegate, the immediate and Canonical Superior of the TOCD congregation of men and women, as well as the parish priest of the Koonammavu church. Thus, his position was more canonical, and he was exercising his authority.²⁸ It was also as the Canonical Superior that Beccaro visited the Sisters, gave them many exhortations, made decisions regarding the members of the convent, presided over election of the Superior, and officiated at the religious ceremonies in the convent. Nobody can deny the vital role played by this Provincial Delegate and parish priest at the initial period. A few pages of the *CMM*²⁹ as well as the *CKC*³⁰ speak about his support given in matters of the convent and the Sisters. After the death of Chavara (1871), Beccaro alone looked after the affairs of the convent for five more years until he left for Europe on 1 January 1876. The major part of the second

²⁷ Maniakunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 277. The next chapter explains how Chavara defined the purpose of the institute.

²⁸ Cf., Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications*, 218-220.

²⁹ *CMM*, 126-130, 131-135.

³⁰ *CKC*, 1, 2ff.

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volume of the *CKC* records his instructions at length, which he gave in view of instilling the real spirit of religious vows, apostolate and community life in the Sisters.

On the other hand, Beccaro himself testified that Chavara did succeed in all his holy endeavors, not merely by the power of his words, nor by his logic, but by his extraordinary character and sanctity.³¹ Though the number of instructions Chavara gave to the Sisters were few, the letters he wrote to them are quite considerable. The contents of these letters reveal the deep spirituality of the person writing and the spiritual caliber he expected from those to whom he wrote them.

Therefore, the Sisters imbibed the permanent values of religious life from the spirit of obedience, humble gestures, and committed and saintly life of their *Priorachan* (Fr. Prior, Chavara). The *CKC* testifies that the first community learned from the saintly life of Chavara and they admired him as a true model of Christian perfection.

3.1.3 Mary Chitilappally's [Mary C.J] Opinion

Mary Chitilappally's research was on the impact of the religious institute of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel on society and culture. In her doctoral dissertation submitted in the university of Calicut, Kerala, she analyzes the role of Beccaro in founding the institute.³² She observes

³¹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

³² Mary Chitilappilly (Mary. C. J.), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (With Special Reference to Women) 1866- 1991*, University of Calicut, Kerala, 2002 (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), 92-93.

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Beccaro's initiative in many matters related to the foundation and hence holds that Leopold Beccaro is the founder of the first religious institute for women in Kerala. She argues,

The primacy of Fr. Leopold above all others is well brought out by various documents. In addition, it reveals that Fr. Leopold historically institutes the CMC. His primacy is established in the selection of the candidates, in making the decision in establishing the convent, in translating the Constitution from Italian to Malayalam, in instructing them in these rules, in deciding the place of the convent, in collection of donation and giving them spiritual direction at all levels. ... In all these, the place of Fr. Leopold is unique. ... However, the prominence of Fr. Leopold as the representative of the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha was an indispensable factor. Perhaps it may not be very wrong on our part to be convinced of the primacy of Fr. Leopold in the light of the available information. This may be attributed to the fact of his closer contact with the Roman West and training in Europe. At the same time, it is worth recording that both these great men attributed the establishment of the convent to divine inspiration. Moreover, in a truly Christian spirit of humility they described themselves as the instruments of God.³³

Referring to the document recorded by Chavara on the designation of Beccaro as Delegate Provincial, Mary Chitilappally states, "Fr. Chavara has admitted that Fr. Leopold was given authority to establish convents and

³³ *Ibid.*

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monasteries.”³⁴ As discussed earlier, here also the problem is with the phrase, “\S phm\mbn<p,” which she wrongly took as meaning ‘to establish.’ In the text quoted by Chitilappally, Chavara was speaking of the authority of Beccaro as a person delegated by the Vicar Provincial to guide the monasteries and their convents.³⁵ According to this text, the Superior General of his Order gave this authority to Beccaro. However, what authorizes a person to be the charismatic founder of an institute is the call of God to found a new religious institute in the Church, which is not evident in Beccaro. She continues,

Fr. Chavara has written elaborately about the initiative taken by Fr. Leopold. When all hopes were given up, Fr. Leopold arrived here in Kerala as a ray of hope for reviving the project of establishing a convent. It was generally taken for granted that the Almighty had destined him to be the founder of the Carmelite family in Kerala.³⁶

From a real understanding of the text, one cannot conclude that the Almighty had destined Beccaro to be the founder, and above all, Chavara did not seem to mean it.

³⁴ Chitilappally (Mary C. J), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (with Special Reference to Women)*, 89. Reference from *CKC.*, 1, 200: “... \S k'bps\ NymkviXnIsfbpw tN'A p \S phm³ Xih^w NymkviXnIsf'f'ipw ZeKm F'l apjvieu slmsp p \S dhcp'l...” (Given power to him [Beccaro] as Delegate to admit Sisters to the same Order [TOCD] and to guide or conduct the convent...).

³⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 200.

³⁶ Chitilappally, *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel*, 89. Before the arrival of Beccaro in December 1859, Carmelite family had been established in the Church of Kerala.

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Chitilappally admits that it is very difficult to make a choice purely on the basis of objective circumstances, and she leaves the responsibility to historians to find out who is the real founder.³⁷ As all those who consider both Chavara and Beccaro as founders, she also admits the primary role of Chavara in the idea of founding the convent. She states,

At the same time, the idea of the Congregation was nursed by Fr. Chavara for a long time and it only needed the encouragement and promptings of the kindred soul to push him into action. But for the complete dedication and continuous labor of Fr. Chavara, the idea of a Congregation would not have materialized.³⁸

Thus, she also attributes the original inspiration to the founding of the convent to Chavara. When she introduces ‘the foundation of Koonammavu convent’ she says, “This was founded by Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara CMI and the Italian Missionary Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, the Apostolic Delegate (sic) at the time.”³⁹ According to her, what Chavara got from Beccaro was ‘the encouragement and promptings of the kindred soul to push him into action.’ One could thus say that it is because of such encouragement and support, which Beccaro offered to Chavara, that Beccaro could be regarded as the co-founder of the women TOCD.

3.1.4 Application of the Norms to Beccaro

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 93. The title of her study was *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (with Special Reference to Women)*, and her concentration was not directly on the identity of the founder of the institute.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81. She gives the first place to Chavara.

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It is a fact that those who hold Beccaro as founder do admit that he is not the bearer of the original idea to found the institute. Thus, the most important of the primary norms is not present in him. With regard to Beccaro's awareness of being called by God to be the founder of the women TOCD, the *CKC* and other foundational texts do not provide any clear evidence. When other norms for identifying the founder are applied to Beccaro, one should say that as the Canonical Superior and co-founder of the institute, he had played a decisive role in gathering up the group and in the evolution of the life-style of the community - its particular spirituality, apostolate, and traditions. Based on these facts, he cannot be regarded as the charismatic founder of the institute.

When one recognizes that every religious institute came into being as a positive response to some particular needs of the Church and society, Beccaro does not seem to be as sensitively aware of the problems of the women of the nineteenth century Kerala Church as Chavara was. He does not seem to carry the desire for long to have a convent for women in Kerala.

3.1.5 Evaluation of the Opinions of Maniakkunnel and Chittilappally

Although Maniakkunnel and Chittilappally designate Beccaro as the founder of the women TOCD, both are not consistent in their opinion. Maniakkunnel explicitly states that the original idea of the convent did not come from Beccaro. Chittilappally also admits that concrete steps had already been taken to found religious institute for women in the vicariate of Verapuzha before the arrival of Beccaro in Kerala. This clearly shows that Beccaro is *not* the one who received the divine vocation or the original inspiration to

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found the religious institute at Koonammavu. However, this is the first and most important norm that qualifies someone as founder of a religious institute. Therefore, Beccaro can hardly be acknowledged as the real charismatic founder of the TOCD. Maniakkunnel seems to be aware of this most important norm set by the ecclesiastical teaching, as is acknowledged in his statement: “Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara were the founders of the convent. We accept the fact that the original idea as such of starting religious life in Malabar did not come from Leopold Beccaro.”⁴⁰ Another discrepancy is that although Maniakkunnel calls both of them the founders, in the general conclusion of his study he holds that Beccaro is the founder and Chavara is only the co-founder. Maniakkunnel writes, “Our study, after the analysis of all the documents available to us and the opinions of various authors, concludes that Fr. Leopold Beccaro is the founder of the convent at Koonammavu and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the co-founder.”⁴¹ He tries to prove that Beccaro is the founder while on the other hand, he uses frequently the terms ‘founding fathers,’⁴² ‘founders,’⁴³ ‘founder fathers,’⁴⁴ in plural form and thus, seems to give equal importance to both as founders. Consequently, one could say that he is not very sure of the identity of the founder of the institute and he changes his position. This confusion reaches its climax in the concluding words of the chapter on ‘First Indigenous Congregation for Women.’ He states, “The seed that was sown by Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias

⁴⁰ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 279.

⁴¹ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 452.

⁴² Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 261, 309.

⁴³ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 240, 252, 258 (fn. 54), 265, 279, 451 (three times), 452, 453.

⁴⁴ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 262, 265.

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Chavara at Koonammavu in 1866 began to grow up rapidly.”⁴⁵ Since he holds that both priests together planted the seed for the religious institute for women and at the same time calls Beccaro the founder, one cannot give much value to his opinion regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD.

From the study of Maniakkunnel on Beccaro as the founder one could find the following arguments against his claim:

i) Maniakkunnel accepts the words of Chavara in the *CKC* as strong evidence to designate Beccaro as founder. “Then came the missionary priest Fr. Leopold Mary of Jesus (sic) as our Delegate. By his efforts and assistance our dream of a convent was realized. It may be that God sent him here with the deliberate purpose of starting monasteries and convents.”⁴⁶ However, Chavara does not entitle Beccaro as the founder in the above quoted text by Maniakkunnel. One can easily prove that he mistook the words of Chavara, and on that misunderstanding, he based his opinion.

ii) In order to support his claim that Beccaro is the founder, Maniakkunnel says that Beccaro played the greater role in the foundation of the institute and the formation of the first community. It is true that as the Canonical Superior of the Community, Beccaro was responsible for the formation of the Sisters and he looked into all the details of the community. However, Maniakkunnel’s explanation about the number of sermons given by Beccaro and the activities of

⁴⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 310.

⁴⁶ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272 a quotation from *CKC.*, 1, 2.

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Beccaro as formator do not qualify him as the founder of the institute.

iii) Maniakkunnel's assertion that the community received the charism from Beccaro cannot be accepted. As the Provincial Delegate and Canonical Superior Beccaro played an important role in the matters concerning the members of the convent. But the Community did not receive the charism from this Delegated Superior. Instead, it was from the charismatic founder who received the original inspiration, and the vitality of the women TOCD depends on the spiritual fullness of Chavara to whom it owes its existence in the Church.

iv) Another important limitation of Maniakkunnel's position is that he changes his opinion and does not seem to be consistent with his position, and thus he holds an unscientific opinion. Very often he presents both Beccaro and Chavara as founders which proves that he is not sure of the identity of the founder of the institute.

Taking the words from the *CKC* that designate Beccaro as Delegate Provincial, Mary Chittilappily stated that Chavara considered Beccaro as founder. However, one cannot become a charismatic founder with a power delegated by somebody else. Even after clearly stating that the idea for the institute was already there before the arrival of Beccaro, she calls Beccaro the founder. Looking at certain activities of Beccaro such as the selection of the candidates, choosing the site for the convent, seeking the permission of the Bishop, etc., Chittilappally concluded that Beccaro historically instituted the CMC. It is true that Beccaro worked earnestly in the foundation of the convent, in furnishing it and providing material, moral and spiritual helps. However, these

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activities do not qualify him as founder. All these three authors are pretty fair in presenting the role played by the “founder.” They differ only by their expression ‘founder,’ ‘co-founder’ as applied by them

3.2 The Role of Beccaro as Co-founder of the Women TOCD

Some writers regard Beccaro as the co-founder of women TOCD. It is a fact that both Beccaro and Chavara had their own personal traits and specific roles to play in founding the institute. The focus of this part of the study is on the role of Leopold Beccaro in the founding of the institute. As has already been pointed out earlier, “Co-founder/Co-foundress is the one who has had a significant role in the execution of what the founder had conceived.”⁴⁷ The founder is the one who conceived the idea of the institute and the co-founder assists him or her in executing the idea, in shaping the mission and spirit of the institute.

With this clarification of the term ‘co-founder’ we turn to see how Chavara understood the role of Beccaro in the founding of the convent. Chavara readily acknowledged the role of Beccaro as the one who extended his help and put his hard work in founding the convent. He believed that the Almighty has entrusted Beccaro with a role to guide the religious institutes of both men and of women. Raising his heart to God in gratefulness Chavara states, “... we are led to think that God had sent him [Beccaro] here to guide the monasteries and convents...” It has also to be noted that Chavara records this text after mentioning the feeling of disappointment and loss of hope at the unsuccessful attempt

⁴⁷ Damizia, “Fondatore,” *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Vol.5, col. 1474.

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at materializing the dream for a convent at Puthenpally. Chavara attributes a decisive role to Beccaro in the execution of the plan for the convent at Koonammavu, and he admits the personal and indispensable contribution made by Beccaro.

It is important to see how Beccaro looks at his role with regard to the TOCD. While speaking about the system of governance of the TOCD, Beccaro describes the role of the Provincial Delegate in these words: “The Apostolic Vicar, in his stead, appoints a Missionary who governs and directs them immediately. He also has the task of instructing and directing the young students and the novices, but in relevant matters always depends on the Apostolic Vicar.”⁴⁸ From these words it is clear that Beccaro had a delegated authority to instruct and direct (“*li governa a dirige*”). Baccinelli, who was the Vicar Provincial of the Carmelite Order, delegated Beccaro to govern and direct the men TOCD and thus he became their Canonical Superior. The *CKC* testifies that Beccaro had the same role with regard to the women TOCD, and in all important matters, he depended on the Apostolic Vicar. In the *CKC* Chavara documented the nature of Beccaro’s authority in almost the same words.⁴⁹ He was

⁴⁸ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, Beccaro, *Brevi cenni sui principi, progressi e stato attuale dei conventi carmelitani scalzi nuovamente stabiliti nel Malabar*, para. 4: “Il Vicario Apostolico determinò a far le sue veci un Missionario il quale immediatamente li governa a dirige; ed ha inoltre l’incarico di istruire e dirigere i giovani allievi e i novizi; ma nelle cose rilevanti dipendono sempre dal Vicario Apostolico.” *CKC.*, 1, 200 says that Beccaro had the same role with regard to the women TOCD. It does not attribute the role of the founder of the institute to Beccaro.

⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 200: “In accordance with the command of the Superior General of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, Very Reverend Dominic of St. Joseph, Archbishop Bernardine of St. Teresa, Reverend Vicar Apostolic of Malayalam rules us as the Vicar

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appointed as the master of novices at Koonammavu monastery as well.⁵⁰ Beccaro knew his position pretty well, namely, to govern and direct the institutes. He performed this appointed duty effectively and in a praiseworthy manner. Therefore, he never thought of himself as the founder of the institutes.

When Chavara believed that Beccaro was sent by God to guide the ‘monasteries and convents,’ he meant that Beccaro’s presence, influence, efficiency, affectionate nature, wholehearted support, and his commitment for the cause of the TOCD had enhanced the movement of religious life that had already been started in Kerala. He saw that Beccaro was guiding both the congregations of men and of women to his satisfaction and expectation. With a sense of gratitude and indebtedness, he pictured Beccaro as one who would continue to assist in furthering the growth and development of these institutes of men and of women as he had expressed in his Testament. The experience of being assisted by Beccaro to realize his dream for a convent made deep imprints in the mind of Chavara about the eternal truth of Divine Providence; that God sends his agents to him at the right moment and in

Provincial; he had established in this land of Malayalam the monasteries and the Sisters of that Order and they were run by giving authority as the Delegate also of the nuns to the missionary of the first Order Very Reverend Leopold Maria of St. Joseph...”

⁵⁰ APF., *Indie Orientali Scrit. rif. nei Congressi*, Vol. 18, f. 448. Stato delle Missioni Estere del Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863 Indie Orientali, Costa Malabarica Vicariato Apostolico di Verapoli. Baccinelli introduces Beccaro in these words: “P. Leopoldo di Girolamo, Maestre de nostri novizi terziari Siriacci nel convento di Cunemao.” When Beccaro first joined the monastery at Loano his name was Leopoldo di Girolamo, which was changed later. Cf. AMCL, *Libro delle professione dei novizi dal 8 July 1763- 31 August 1891*.

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his own way; that failures and feelings of helplessness and disappointments come on the way of achieving one's goal; that the Divine Master often makes use of various situations and persons to realize his goal rather than directly getting involved in the matter.

Some other factors also have led to the confusion of the actual role of Beccaro in the foundation and the events that followed. An important one in this regard is the portrayal of Beccaro as the principal actor in the *CKC*. While admiring the spirit of collaboration of both Chavara and Beccaro, the Sisters believed that it is difficult to differentiate who took the initiative, and who worked more in all their undertakings. In such situations or when more than one person is involved in the foundation, Nedungatt's words seem to be helpful. He opined that the founder and the co-founder can be identified depending on the leading or principal role one played.⁵¹ In this regard, too, there is a difficulty in identifying the main actor in the events related to the foundation. A cursory reading of the *CKC* gives the impression that Beccaro played the leading role in matters concerning the convent. Therefore, it calls for an interpretation of the *CKC*.

3.2.1 Interpreting the Chronicle in its Context

The *CKC* that was written about 150 years ago has to be interpreted in its ecclesial, social and cultural framework and the train of thought of the writer to get the intended meaning which is veiled in historically and culturally conditioned expressions. Context, one may say, is the unwritten part of the text. It relates to the text in a way and not completely dissimilar to the way tradition relates to

⁵¹ Nedungatt, "Typology of the Founder," 105-106.

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Scripture. It is understood that the task of critical interpretation of texts in its context is complex and demanding.⁵² In order to understand the real perspectives, one has to study the following historical realities, which caused Chavara to put Beccaro in the forefront and also that which prompted the chronicler of the *CKC* to project Beccaro as the main actor. When Chavara described the story of the foundation of the convent in the *CMM* and in the first pages of the *CKC*, he presented Beccaro as the one who did almost every thing. The Sisters continued the same rendering in the pages of the *CKC*.

An interpretation of the history of relationship between Chavara and Beccaro within the TOCD perspective will bring to light several reasons for the mindset and approach of Chavara toward Beccaro. The most important one in this regard is Chavara's unassuming character. As discussed earlier, Chavara experienced the providential hand of God in the arrival of Beccaro and allowed himself to be guided by him since he chose him as his confessor and spiritual director. Priests played a significant role in his life. In his boyhood itself, Thomas Palackal came into his life and continued until the latter's death in 1841. The following words of Chavara manifest his attitude of indebtedness towards Palackal, his *guru*:

From my childhood onwards, *Malpan* Palackal himself looked after me in all the spiritual and bodily needs, and taught and brought me up. Until death, he cared for me more than for any of his relatives and other disciples who were his spiritual children.

⁵² Cf., Edward Farrugia, "Vatican I and the Ecclesiological Context in East and West," *Gregorianum*, Roma 92/3 (2011), 451-469.

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Considering me his heir, before death he entrusted me with the works of the monastery that was his most treasured possession..⁵³

Chavara continues, “Thereafter in all matters I followed his directions and views.”⁵⁴ Already from his young age, he was determined to be of one mind with the *Malpan*, and he admits that Chavara was led to the priesthood by being guided by his and Fr. Thomas Porukara’s wisdom..⁵⁵ He resolved to conform his will to that of his *guru* and spiritual director. Kuriakose Porukara in his biography of Chavara admits that even after his ordination to the priesthood, Chavara was guided by the instructions of the *Malpan* of Pallipuram..⁵⁶ Beccaro replaced the *Malpan* when Chavara chose him as his spiritual director. The nature of his relationship and all his dealings with him, as well as the recording of the events, must be interpreted in this frame of mind. Chavara accepted Beccaro, a European Carmelite missionary, the Provincial Delegate, the Canonical Superior of his Congregation and that of the Congregation for women, and above all, his spiritual director and confessor. An interpretation of the nature of Chavara’s relationship with Beccaro will reveal that Chavara always kept a low profile of himself in front of Beccaro. This is quite characteristic of the humility and self-effacing nature of Chavara. He was particular to project others for various achievements to which he had equally contributed. It may be this projection of others [Beccaro and Baccinelli] that led some writers to consider Beccaro as the founder of the institute. This spirit is

⁵³ *CMM.*, 59-60.

⁵⁴ *CMM.*, 26.

⁵⁵ *CMM.*, 26.

⁵⁶ Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 25.

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particularly evident when Chavara describes the foundation and growth of the Koonammavu convent.⁵⁷

Beccaro's words shed much light on Chavara's attitude toward exercising his role as Superior of the indigenous religious institute founded at Mannanam. While giving a brief report of the system of governance of the TOCD, Beccaro affirms that the first Superior is the Superior General of the OCD, then the Apostolic Vicar who governs through a Missionary who is appointed as his delegate. Next he tells, "There is yet another Superior over all the monasteries with the title of Prior, but this title was given by Msgr. Bernerdine to one [Chavara] especially because of his high merit as one of the three surviving founders; however, he did not exercise his authority owing to some special circumstances."⁵⁸ By affiliating the Congregation to the Carmelite Order, the Prior, Chavara, lost his authority and the Superior General of the first Order became the legitimate authority who governed the Congregation through his delegate. Beccaro admitted that Chavara did not exercise his authority.⁵⁹ When the Congregation juridically came under the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, even the founders of the Congregation lost their separate identity, privileges, and autonomy. Some of the members of his

⁵⁷ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 326.

⁵⁸ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, Beccaro, *Brevi Cenni sui Principi, Progressi e Stato Attuale dei Conventi Carmelitani Scalzi Nuovamente Stabiliti nel Malabar*, para.4: "C'è ancora un altro Superiore sopra tutti i conventi col titolo di Priore, ma questo titolo fu da Monsignore Bernerdino dato per uno speciale riguardo all'alto merito d'uno dei 3 primi fondatori sopravvivenenti, il quale però non esercitá che in qualche speciale circostanza." This report was prepared in 1870.

⁵⁹ Beccaro did not explain the special circumstance that prevented Chavara in exercising his authority over all the monasteries founded by him.

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religious family were quite unhappy about this change of authority, which came upon them owing to the affiliation of the Congregation to the Carmelite Order as their Third Order. However, because of the sanctity and humility of Chavara, he accepted it as coming from the hand of God. In the first paragraph of his Last Will, he shares his conviction that the Congregation became Carmelite owing to a special grace of God. He writes,

Dear children, by the special grace of God, we have been called to be in the Carmelite Order so pleasing to our Blessed Mother. This has been so, because God willed it so and not because man planned it thus. I am sure of this as I am sure that this material, on which I am writing, is paper. For the founders of this Congregation, Reverend *Malpans* Palackal and Porukara, had sought and made arrangements for a Dominican Order.⁶⁰ That is why we started the unprecedented custom of wearing the white cassock and took other steps. However, our Holy Mother, realizing our weakness, took us into the Carmelite Order.⁶¹

Chavara was a person vowed to be humble and he accepted the authority of the Carmelites over the institute without questioning and in a light of faith. About his 'fourth vow of humility,' Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Fide on 15 June 1861. He said that if Rome decided to consecrate Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Bishop he should be commanded by virtue of obedience to accept such a position. Baccinelli disclosed that even to accept the office of the Vicar General

⁶⁰ He says, the original plan about the monastery was in the line of Dominican style. St. Dominic's vocation was to preach, at a time when the ordinary people of Europe scarcely ever heard a good sermon.

⁶¹ *CK.*, VI/5.

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he had to command him [Chavara] by virtue of obedience.⁶² Marceline Berardi also testified to Chavara's fourth vow of humility.⁶³

3.2.2 Submissive Nature of Chavara

The respect and spirit of submission Chavara showed to the Church authorities was unique. Beccaro writes, "Among his [Chavara's] virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith in, and devotion to, the holy Catholic Church and the Holy Father."⁶⁴ In his Testament Chavara encouraged the members of his Congregation to obey the Apostolic Vicar, the Delegate Provincial, and all the missionaries. Beccaro's words explain why Chavara asked his religious brothers to obey all the missionaries: "It was because of his extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love, and obedience toward the Papal Legate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and toward the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church."⁶⁵ Chavara always looked up to Beccaro as a person "who is invested with the power and authority of the Provincial Delegate to look after and

⁶² ACO., *Acta*, Vol. 2. 1864-1865. f.206. Letter of Msgr. Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 15 June 1861: "Soltanto devo avvertire, che il detto soggetto, il quale si chiama il P. Ciriaco Chavara Priore dei Terziari della Immacolata Concezione di Maria SS. Del Monte Carmelo, ha il voto semplice di umilita, e quantunque non l'avesse, non accetterebbe tal carattere e dignita senza un precetto, come ho dovuto darglielo io per farlo accettare d'esser Vicario Generale."

⁶³ Marceline Berardi, *Keralathile Satyavedacharithram*, 302.

⁶⁴ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12-13.

⁶⁵ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 13.

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govern the monasteries and the convent established in Kerala.”⁶⁶

In the *CKC* Chavara wanted to give a prominent place to Beccaro because he was the Provincial Delegate and Chavara had great concern for him. The following incident explains it clearly. Once when both of them were on a journey to Thiruvananthapuram in search of a woman to train the Sisters in handicrafts, Chavara sent a letter to the convent through someone to tell the Sisters to pray for Beccaro. It reads, “Mother Superior and other Sisters, myself, *Moopachan* [Beccaro] and others are going today, on 12 Friday, from Kollam to Thiruvananthapuram. We have no illness until now. You must pray well to God for us, especially for *Moopachan*, that he may be protected by God without any illness for the sake of your spiritual life.”⁶⁷ On another occasion, also he told the Sisters to pray for Beccaro.⁶⁸ *CMM* provides another example of Chavara’s projection of Beccaro in their journey together for soliciting alms. In those descriptions one may notice how Chavara presented Beccaro as the one giving sermons by way of introducing the purpose of their visit as well as motivating the people to be generous in giving donations to the construction of the convent.⁶⁹ In the description of laying the foundation stone for the convent Chavara presented Beccaro as the main actor.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 200, the duties of Beccaro as the Provincial Delegate, recorded by Chavara.

⁶⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 63.

⁶⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 158.

⁶⁹ *CMM.*, 132-134. During this journey, Chavara records that *Moopachan* gave sermon in three places -Kalloorkadu, Mannanam, and Arthumkal.

⁷⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 20, 24, 46-49; *CMM.*, 134.

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When the chronicles are read in its proper context of the Italian Carmelite rule over the St. Thomas Christians during the nineteenth century one becomes aware of the superiority complex of the missionaries toward the indigenous religious institutes, local Christians and the priests. Chavara's submissive nature and obedience to his Superiors only added to the delicacy of the situation.

It is true that Beccaro loved Chavara 'as his own soul' and had great esteem for him. Yet there were occasions when Chavara could feel rather uneasy with the way Beccaro did things.⁷¹ The reluctance, shown by Beccaro in admitting Clara Puthenangady from Vaikom on the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent, can be seen as one such occasion.⁷² Beccaro exercised his authority as the Canonical Superior in taking the decision regarding the new candidate brought by Chavara about which Chavara expresses his embarrassment when he notes, "This caused some sorrow and disturbance,⁷³ not only to Clara and the parish priest of Vaikom and her relatives who came along with her to Koonammavu on 11 February but presumably also to himself. For him it was even a public insult and humiliation. Nevertheless, he and all those who were under his guidance kept "holding firmly on to obedience." Beccaro could have respected and trusted the wisdom of the mature and saintly

⁷¹ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 321-322.

⁷² *CKC.*, 1, 7, *CMM.*, From the description of the person of Clara given by Chavara it is clear that he knew her well for years and considered her fit for entering the convent. She reached Koonammavu on 10 February. The reason given by Beccaro for the postponement of her entrance was that he did not test her vocation and accepted her on the next day of the inauguration of the convent.

⁷³ *CKC.*, 1, " ... CXp_mã Iptd k'shpw Cfhpw tXw_msbhpw sNmãhnbmã Dd'p lmsã p."

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person that Chavara was. In the words of Mundadan, for Chavara it was a matter of practical wisdom, for he wanted to have the greater goals such as the founding of the convent, achieved even at the cost of his own name and fame. The self-emptying obedience of Jesus Christ was indeed the supreme model for him.⁷⁴

In one of the letters of Chavara written to the Sisters one can find some expressions of this kind of uneasiness. During his last illness before the return of Beccaro from Italy, Chavara wrote to the Sisters, “When Father Delegate comes and looks through his glasses to see how I have formed you in my ignorance, I do not know what all accusations he would hail at me. I have fear for the reprimands of the Great Delegate.”⁷⁵ For Chavara, God is the supreme Judge and he needs to fear his judgment alone. During those fourteen months, while Beccaro was in Italy Chavara worked for the welfare of the convent with an innovative spirit. Even then, from the above letter one gets the impression that in spite of his affection and regard for the latter, Chavara appears sometimes afraid of Beccaro’s judgment.

In those days, the European missionaries would not eat together with local priests. They considered themselves superior to the local Indian population. The indigenous priests could not even sit with the missionary priests and had to speak to them standing.⁷⁶ Several letters written by leading priests in Malabar to the Holy See during and after the Mellus schism bitterly complain that the missionaries treated them

⁷⁴ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 325.

⁷⁵ *CKC.*, II, 8. Cf. also *CK.*, VII/19.

⁷⁶ Cf. I. C. Chacko, *Mar Louis Pazheparampil, Jeevithavum Kalavum* [Mar Louis Pazheparambil, His Life and Period], (Trivandrum, 1937), 132.

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not as their collaborators but as their servants.⁷⁷ Chavara also has noticed that a kind of master-slave relationship existed in the Kerala Church between the Bishop and the priests, the missionaries and the people.⁷⁸

The Latin Rite had long been held in the West as superior to all other Rites warranted even by the Holy See in the past, influenced to some extent the superiority complex of the Latin missionaries in Malabar.⁷⁹ In the past, the Church failed to understand the individuality and identity of the Apostolic Church of the St. Thomas Christians, which was an individual Church with its own particular theology, liturgy, spirituality, and administrative system. When the Portuguese missionaries arrived in Kerala they imposed their own systems upon the Malabar Church and governed them as if it were their birthright to rule over other churches. Latinization had long been regarded by the Latins as a service done to the Church in India. The Carmelite missionaries applied the same policy over the TOCD Congregation, which was an indigenous religious institute with its own identity and charism. The Apostolic Vicar and the General Council of the OCD (Rome) affiliated this institute to the OCD in 1860 and called the institute TOCD. There is no evidence that Chavara and his community were consulted before or after the event. Yet Chavara regarded this arrangement as Divine Providence. He tried to persuade his fellow religious to accept the event in that spirit.⁸⁰ The missionaries looked down upon the local priests and the Christians. When the missionaries were asked

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁸ CK., VI/4.

⁷⁹ Cf. Varkey Vithayathil, *The Origin and Progress of Syro-Malabar Hierarchy* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1980), 37.

⁸⁰ CK., VI/5. Chavara's Testament, para. 1.

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to express their opinion about consecrating Chavara a Bishop for the St. Thomas Christians, Baccinelli and the leading missionaries did not appreciate the plan and wrote negatively about Chavara.⁸¹ Once the Carmelites got hold of the episcopacy in the Kerala Church, they never let it go and return it to the Indians. They kept it as their monopoly.

Even though the Sisters respected and loved both priests as their Fathers, the *CKC* gave prominence to Beccaro. The recording of the prophetic utterance made by Chavara on the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent can be considered an example of the respect of the chronicler towards Beccaro. According to *CMM*, Chavara made this statement: “If God wills before it is time to re-thatch and renew the leaves of the roof and the bamboo mats, you will be able to live in a convent built with stones.”⁸² He referred to this saying in his letter to the parishioners of Kainakary as his personal testimony of God’s providence.⁸³ However, Anna attributes it to both Fathers.⁸⁴ It may be true that

⁸¹ Cf. ACO., *Scri. rif. nei Congressi Chaldei*, 1862-1866, Vol. 1, f. 738 ff. Letter of Marceline Berardi on 13 September 1865. Berardi asks: “Where could be found a worthy candidate? It is a loss of time. ... In the monasteries there are good priests. But prudence and courage and other qualities are lacking in them.” Beccaro also expressed the same line of thought. Regarding the appointment of Chavara as the permanent Vicar General of the Malabarians Beccaro wrote: “He [Chavara] is certainly a very good man, still has only the slightest knowledge of Moral. ...He has no experience in government.” Cf., *Ibid.*, ff. 742-743. Joining with Berardi and Beccaro Baccinelli opposed the idea of any further steps to appoint a Bishop of their own Rite to the Malabarians. Cf., ACO., *Scri. rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* 1862-1877, f. 4. Letter of Baccinelli to the Propaganda Fide on 24 September 1865.

⁸² *CMM.*, 146.

⁸³ *CK.*, IX/11:13.

⁸⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 46.

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Chavara allowed the chronicler to project Beccaro as more important. Although the Sisters were writing under the supervision of Chavara, they had their high esteem or preference for the foreign missionaries, which, too, might be at least partially responsible for the low profile Chavara got in the *CKC*.

It is likely that since he was a European, Beccaro expected more respect from the Sisters. In the presence of Beccaro, when the Sisters wrote about Beccaro and Chavara coming together to the convent and giving instructions, they gave first place to Beccaro saying, “Our Father *Moopachan* and *Priorachan*.” When Beccaro was away in Italy, the same Sisters, on several occasions call Chavara “Our Father *Priorachan*.”⁸⁵ When they wrote about his last sickness and death, an outpouring of their love, respect, and sense of indebtedness towards their saintly founder Father Chavara can be seen. Once Beccaro himself observed the Sisters’ unreasonable and naïve approval and admiration of the foreign missionaries. In an instruction on obedience, he told the Sisters, “If you were given a European Sister as your Superior, how promptly you would have obeyed her words. Why? Because she is a European. She is educated; she is spiritual, etc.”⁸⁶ Although he was making a comparison of their attitude toward the Europeans and natives, this can be seen as the reason for highlighting Beccaro’s role and picturing him as ‘Our Father *Moopachan*’ in their descriptions. In other words, the interplay of superiority complex of the missionaries and inferiority complex of the Keralites has played a part in their recording

⁸⁵ *CKC.*, 152, 174, 175, 176, 177, 181, 182 (twice), 183 (twice), 185 (thrice), 186, 192.

⁸⁶ *CKC.*, II, 80.

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of the daily happenings of the convent. The role of a “Canonical Superior” whose office gives him official responsibilities, prerogatives, and privileges, has inflated the description of his actual role.

3.2.3 A Paternal Love for the Sisters

The pages of the *CKC* and the forty-nine letters written by Beccaro to the Sisters are telling examples of the warmth of his sincere love for them. Those letters written to the Sisters, especially those during his journey and stay in Italy, tell the kind of relationship that existed between him and the Sisters. His personal attention and thoughtfulness for each one of them has been expressed in the letters, as well as in his conversations, by mentioning each one by name and caring for them tenderly. While he was away from Koonammavu his ears were burning about hearing all the sad situations of the Sisters. These letters give concrete expression to his affection toward them. He appears in the letters as a fatherly and motherly figure.

After the death of Chavara, Beccaro took upon himself all the responsibilities of the convent to widen their apostolate, to deepen their spirituality and he visited the Sisters regularly to give them instructions. The *CKC* acknowledged that Beccaro looked after the Sisters and nurtured them like a mother in all matters of body and soul.⁸⁷ Even when he was in the crucible of suffering due to the displeasure of Mellano, he was attentive to the affairs of the convent. When he was kept away from Koonammavu and was put in a prison-like situation at Verapuzha, he tried to

⁸⁷ *CKC.*, II, 111.

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communicate through letters with a view of strengthening the Sisters..⁸⁸

3.3 Both Beccaro and Chavara as Founders

As a main thrust of this chapter is to eliminate those candidates who are not qualified as founders by applying the norms to them and to evaluate different opinions, the opinion of those who hold Chavara and Beccaro as founders is analyzed here.

3.3.1 Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli

The report sent to the Propaganda Fide on 20 February 1867 by Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli⁸⁹ has an indirect reference to the persons responsible for the religious institute for women founded at Koonammavu. It is the official report the prelate prepared in answer to the questionnaire sent by the Propaganda Fide for full information on the state of the Churches of Oriental Rite. The question⁹⁰ number 71 and the answer pertaining to the religious Community for women as in the report are given below:

Q. 71 How many Congregations for women which belong to the Oriental Rites are there? Which are they? With whose authority were they established? Who is looking after them?

⁸⁸ Cf., *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/129-157. On those days while he was staying at Verapuzha he wrote fifteen letters to the Sisters at Koonammavu.

⁸⁹ Cf., ACO., *20 February Report 1867*, f. 18.

⁹⁰ Questions are in Latin and answers in Italian.

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Ans.: A convent for women similar to our Third Order (*Maestre Pie*) is being constructed not very far from the monastery at Koonammavu. Their rules are of the recognized orders of that type. I have made certain changes in it to adapt it to this country. They are entrusted to the Missionary along with the Prior of the Tertiaries. Like our Third Orders, they are subject to our Superior General and me.... Their aim is the education and Christian formation of the girls.⁹¹

Even though Baccinelli answered to the question, “Who is looking after them?” without mentioning the name of the priests, from the context one gets the identity of the missionary and the Prior as Beccaro and Chavara respectively.

Even though he did not make a distinction of the role of the Bishop who sanctioned the convent and the other two whom he referred to in the report, what he meant must be that, being the local Ordinary, he is the hierarchical founder. As mentioned earlier, for Baccinelli monasteries and the convent were “nostri Terziarii,” and Beccaro was appointed as his delegate to look after the affairs of both the monasteries and the convent, as it is seen in the document showing the

⁹¹ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, Q. 71: An et quot habeantur monialium ritus orientalis coenobia, cuius institute, qua auctoritate fundata, et cuius curae et ministerio commissa?

Ans.: “È prossima a terminarsi la fabbrica di una casa di Maestre Pie del nostro Ordine cioè Terziarie, alquanto distante dal convento di Cunemao. Le Regole son quelle già approvate per tale Istituto, vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho detto pei Terziari. Sono affidate al Missionario col Priore dei Terziari. Dipendono come I Terziari dal N. P. Generale, e da me. Vi sono Soriane e Latine, che ciò nulla imbarazza in esse;... Il loro scopo è l’istruzione ed educazione Cristiana delle ragazze.”

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designation of Beccaro.⁹² Being the Provincial Delegate, Beccaro collaborated with Chavara, who was for a long time making attempts to found a convent and was praying for the same. No document is available defining the role of Chavara but seems to have been presumed, recognized, and mentioned in his official report of Baccinelli.

3.3.2 Mar Louis Pazheparampil, the First Apostolic Vicar of Ernakulam

Loius Pazheparampil was a novice of Fr. Leopold and he was a member of the monastery at Koonammavu at the time of founding of the convent in 1866.⁹³ He described the foundation of the convent as the crowning event of the joint efforts of the two priests, Chavara and Beccaro. He wrote the following statement as an introduction to the Constitution that he gave to the Carmelite Sisters of the diocese of Ernakulam in 1917.

In the year 1864 Very Rev. Fr. Leopold Beccaro was director of the Third Order of the Carmelites of Malabar and Very Rev. Fr. Cyriac Elias Chavara was the Prior General of the Order. While both of them were staying in the monastery at Koonammavu, they planned to institute a convent for women, and as the

⁹² *CKC.*, 1, 200.

⁹³ Cf. ASA., Leopold Beccaro, *Manuale di Memorie, Dal 1 Dicembre 1870* unpaginated. Leopold wrote in his *Diary* the details of the members of the TOCD for men. Accordingly, Louis Pazheparambil joined the Koonammavu Monastery on 23 October 1861 and made his religious profession on 19 March 1872. He was a resident at Koonammavu monastery during the period of 1861-1872. He was one of the seven priests who were expelled by Msgr. Mellano from the TOCD in 1874 for writing letters to Rome to obtain a separate Bishop for the St. Thomas Christians. He became the first Bishop of Ernakulam in 1896.

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days passed by this idea became more important to them. With this in mind, in 1866 these two priests built a small house for some widows and young girls. After that, money was collected from the people and parishes to build a convent for them. Fr. Chavara got a good amount of money from his old students and priests. With this money, a two-storey building was put up.⁹⁴

Mar Louis Pazheparampil wrote these words in order to make the Sisters aware of their origins. He was thus not making a categorical statement that both Beccaro and Chavara were the founders. Rather, he was stressing the point that both of them worked together with a single purpose for beginning the first convent. Hence, it is wrong to hold that he was asserting the co-foundership of Beccaro.

3.3.3 Bernard of St. Thomas

While evaluating the historian Bernard Thoma we have taken into account that he merely mentions the fact that under the guidance of the Bishop, Chavara and Beccaro worked hand in hand to establish the first convent at Koonammavu. Thus, he does not delve deeply into the canonical issues concerning the founder.

3.3.4 Mathias Mundadan

⁹⁴ Louis Pazheparampil, "Preface" to *Thressia punnyavalathiyude carmelita munnam sabhayile sahodarikalkkayulla nyayapramanam* [Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of Carmelites of St. Teresa] (Elthuruth : St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1917), 3.

Application of the Norms

In his biography of Chavara, Mundadan studied in detail all the existing positions concerning the question of the founder of the women TOCD. He evaluated the documents available and emphasized the role of Chavara in founding and forming the Community. Giving attention to the documents from the Holy See, he said: “Here it may also be pointed out that the decree of the Holy See approving the miracle of Chavara before beatification clearly stated that Chavara founded the CMC Congregation assisted by Fr. Leopold.”⁹⁵ He concludes this question by saying:

Considering all this, it is best to say that both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara are the founders of the religious Community of women founded at Koonammavu in 1866. Otherwise, there will be no end of problems. There is not much to be gained in distinguishing between founder and co-founder.⁹⁶

Clarifying his position he states, “The conclusion arrived at is that the wisest solution to the problems involved is to acknowledge both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara as founders.”⁹⁷ Then he gives the ‘Personal Profiles of Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara’ to figure out the specific role that each of them played in establishing, in running and in the all-round development of this Community of women. Although he calls Chavara one of the two founders, he holds the view that in the spiritual formation of the Sisters, Chavara had contributed more than Beccaro.

⁹⁵ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 316.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 317.

Application of the Norms

From his words, it is clear that he was proposing a practical solution to the contentious issue of the founder. He wants to bring peace between two rival groups, thinking that it is useless to waste time on it. Thus, Mundadan uses the words, “it is the wisest solution,” without asserting that his position has absolute certainty.

The position of those writers who hold an inclusive approach, designating both as founders – Bernard Thoma, Mar Louis Pazheparambil, Alex Paul Urumpackal, and Mathias Mundadan, and Joseph Kanjiramattathil– can be refuted on a number of grounds. In the actual foundation at Koonammavu, Beccaro’s role can be seen from three angles. Firstly, as a parish priest of Koonammavu church, he met Eliswa and Anna and discerned their vocation; secondly, as a friend of Chavara, and a lover of St. Thomas Christians, Beccaro extended his wholehearted cooperation and support to realize the long-cherished dream of Chavara to institute a convent. Thirdly, as the Canonical Superior of the TOCD, Beccaro officiated at the ceremonies of the religious clothing and profession of the Sisters.⁹⁸ Being the Provincial Delegate, he took upon himself the responsibility of the formation of the Sisters and other matters related to them. In his capacity as the Provincial Delegate, Beccaro exercised his authority in all the matters concerning the Sisters in the presence and with the support of Chavara in order to enable Chavara to found the religious community for women.

When these writers hold an inclusive approach, they do not seem to ascribe equal roles to Chavara and Beccaro. Mundadan clearly stated that in the formation of the Sisters

⁹⁸ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 200. In one case, at least, Chavara alone officiated at the ceremony of religious clothing of the Sisters and put his signature in Syriac while recording the event himself.

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Chavara played a greater role; and Chavara had the principal role and Beccaro the secondary role. The reason for assigning to Chavara the principal role is that he is the recipient of the divine vocation to found a new religious institute for women in the Kerala Church or initiator of the movement of religious life for women.

As noticed earlier, the opinions of the writers differ regarding the exact nature of the role of Beccaro and Chavara in the foundation of the convent. It was difficult for them to spell out the functions strictly pertaining to the role of the founder and that of the co-founder. About such a difficulty Mary Chittilappally believed, “It is very difficult to make a choice purely under (sic) the basis of objective circumstances,”⁹⁹ and she left it to the historians to decide. Alex Paul Urumpackal concluded: “To whom goes the honor of this new attempt? I would say to both: to Fr. Leopold and to Fr. Chavara.”¹⁰⁰ In the same line of thinking, Mundadan said, “Taking all this into consideration, it is best to say that both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara are the founders of the religious community of women founded at Koonammavu in 1866. Otherwise, there will be no end of problems. There is not much to be gained in distinguishing between founder and co-founder.”¹⁰¹ This difficulty becomes more evident when one takes the concept of co-founder/co-foundress, explained by Anastasio Gutierrez. He presents co-founder as one who works, depending on and in subordination to the founder. Since Gutierrez was speaking in the context of the foundation of a particular religious institute for women, namely, the Daughters of Divine Zeal, his idea of co-founder cannot be

⁹⁹ Chittilappilly (Mary C. J), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Urumpackal, *Vocations in India*, 285.

¹⁰¹ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 316.

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applied fully to the founder/co-founder question of the women TOCD at Koonammavu. On many occasions the *CKC* and *CMM* give the impression that Chavara was dependent on and subordinate to Beccaro. As explained earlier, it was mainly because of the particular ecclesiastical situation of the Kerala Church of the nineteenth century, and partly due to the personality traits of Chavara and Beccaro, that Chavara worked in subordination to Beccaro, the Canonical Superior.

The role of Beccaro as co-founder is evident in the *CKC* in its description of the events related to the founding of the institute and the evolution of the life style of the first community at Koonammavu. This is the legacy of the institute for the past one hundred and fifty years. The official declarations of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis confirmed this fact.¹⁰²

When Beccaro is recognised as the co-founder of the women TOCD, one does not limit him to his practical role alone. His contribution is of great importance to understand the true depth of the charism of the institute. As discussed earlier, he has played a significant role in the formation of the Sisters. Both Chavara and Beccaro were together in taking all the steps for the foundation of the convent and the formation of the Sisters. They worked together. However, their roles were different and hence, both together cannot be called founders.

¹⁰² Cf., the section 1.2.5.4 of this study.

3.4 Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar as Founder

There are some passing references made by Msgr. Bonnard, the Apostolic Visitor, and Chandy Kattakayam¹⁰³ to Baccinelli as the founder of the convent.

Msgr. Bonnard's report has two references to the convent for 'nuns of the Syro-Chaldean Rite' and both references speak of Msgr. Bernardine, the Apostolic Vicar, as the founder. In the second chapter of his report to the Propaganda Fide, the Visitor speaks about Msgr. Baccinelli's proposed convent for nuns of Syro-Chaldean Rite in the vicariate of Verapuzha.¹⁰⁴ In the same report, Bonnard speaks about the convent at Koonammavu. Paragraph 182 says, "The present Apostolic Vicar has now founded a monastery of Syro-Chaldean nuns using contributions from all the churches, and these Sisters are devoted to the education of girls."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ ASJM., *Diary of Fr. Chandy Kattakayam*, (MSS), 49: "The founders of this great endeavor [the founding of the convent] are our Archbishop Bernardine and 'his two hands' – our most Reverend Fr. Kuriakose Elias of fond memory and Apostolic Missionary Leopold Beccaro."

¹⁰⁴ APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 661: "... alcune monache Siro-Caldee." Parappuram, *Diary*, 351-353 and Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya Suriyani Reethil Chernna*, 82-83 says that Bonnard paid his apostolic visit to Verapuzha in April 1860. Therefore, Bonnard's mention of nuns of Syro-Chaldean Rite may be about the proposed convent at Puthenpally.

¹⁰⁵ APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 182: "Il presente Vicario Apostolico ha ancora fondato un Monastero di Religiose Siro-Caldaiche a contribuzione commune di tutte le Chiese, e le dette Suore si dedicano alla educazione delle fanciulle".

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Since Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli was the ecclesiastical authority of the time, the Apostolic Visitor mentions the Bishop's name in his report. Thus, his statement could not be taken as a scientific assertion concerning the issue of the founder, since it was not his purpose. These casual references of Bonnard and Kattakayam need not be understood as their view about the identity of the founder of the women TOCD.

When one analyzes Baccinelli's relationship with the convent at Koonammavu, it is clear that his involvement in the affairs of the convent was very limited. The *CKC* does not refer to the presence of the prelate at any of the important events of the convent, such as the religious clothing and the profession of the members, the laying of the foundation of the new convent and for its blessing. It is never mentioned in the *CKC* that he ever visited the convent. Of course, his permissions were sought at the pertinent occasions, which was the necessary canonical prescription.¹⁰⁶ He did not make any direct contact with the institute in the form of giving instructions to the Sisters or visiting them.

The *CKC* records that once he visited the site of the construction while the work was in progress and expressed his appreciation at God's providence in bringing the work to a completion within a short time.¹⁰⁷ He knew that within four

¹⁰⁶ At the time of foundation of the bamboo-mat convent (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 5); the profession of vows of the first members (*CKC.*, 1, 90); the expulsion of one candidate (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 44, 78); starting of the new apostolate (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 83), etc.

¹⁰⁷ The *CKC* has this entry: "The Archbishop also visited the site of the construction, went around, and being satisfied, blessed the structure. Don't you wonder how this building has come up so quickly? Last year we had no money to build even this bamboo shed. Now within four or five months so much has been built. It is only God's miracle

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or five months Chavara and Beccaro could purchase a big compound near to the monastery church and complete the whole work of construction.

We do not deny that Baccinelli used to give eight Rupees per month for the sustenance of the Sisters.¹⁰⁸ Reminding the Sisters of their responsibility of praying gratefully for the generosity and timely help of Baccinelli in providing this much money for the convent, Beccaro said, “The eight Rupees we receive now is more useful than double the amount we receive after some time.”¹⁰⁹ All these examples show that he was not directly relating with the community or with the Sisters. Those who have recognized Baccinelli as the founder meant that since he was the local Bishop and the Vicar Provincial of the Carmelite Order he was responsible for all the important happenings of the vicariate.

In the two long circular letters Baccinelli wrote in 1860 to the Carmelites of Europe and the official report he sent to the Propaganda Fide in 1867, there is no evidence to regard himself as the one who initiated the convent for women either at Puthenpally or later at Koonammavu. He states, “Here four monasteries for men of the Third Order of the Carmelites have already been established. As for women a convent is just being started.”¹¹⁰ His attitude and approach toward the TOCD manifested in these letters explain how he

that we were able to get such a big compound near the church and we were able to put up this building... (CKC., 1, 44).

¹⁰⁸ CKC., 1, 32.

¹⁰⁹ CKC., 1, 32.

¹¹⁰ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, *Reverende Madri*: “mentre i 4 Conventi per i Terziari sono già alquanto avanzati, e questo delle Terziarie è appena cominciato ...”

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looked at the movement of religious life in Kerala, which had already been started before his arrival in Malabar.¹¹¹ Since he included both monasteries and convent belonging to ‘*Rito Syro-Malabarico*,’ they form one unit of local initiative, even though he calls them “Our Tertiaries.” He wrote the circular letters (1860) at the time when the construction of the convent at Puthenpally was in progress, and he sent the report of 1867 at the time when the construction of the new building for the convent at Koonammavu was about to be completed.

Baccinelli approves the local initiative and the Syro-Malabar origin of both institutes. He never mentions that he instituted the convent. On the contrary, he distances himself from the claim that he is the founder of the institute. He openly admitted in 1867, while the construction of the Koonammavu convent was in progress, that the money for the construction was the donation from the faithful, some churches, and from priests.¹¹²

In his report to Propaganda Fide in 1867, Baccinelli does not answer the question, “With whose authority were they [the convents] established?” He was silent about the

¹¹¹ He reached Kerala in 1832. Cf. APF., *Scritture Rif. nei Congressi, Indie Orientali*, Vol.18, f. 448: Stato delle Missioni Estere del Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863, Indie Orientali, Costa Malabarica, Vicariato Apostolico di Verapoli.

¹¹² ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, in response to Q. no. 72: “La lor casa si fabbrica con le elemosine date *ad hoc* dai fedeli, da alcune chiese, e Sacerdoti: nel frattanto abitano in una si può dir capanna miseramente in tutto. Si sostentano con la lor dote che devon portare: per tre povere io do il vitto a ragione di circa 14 paoli al mese per ciascuna.”

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question on the founder of the convent.¹¹³ Does this silence mean that he considers himself the founder? The answer is in the negative. Since he says, “Like our Third Order, they [the Sisters at Koonammavu] are subject to our Superior General and me,”¹¹⁴ one can believe that the nature of his relationship with the institute is canonical. Baccinelli, being the local Ordinary, granted the canonical approval to the institute. From the very fact of admitting his relationship with the convent at Koonammavu as canonical, one can exclude him from the title of charismatic founder.

On one instance, Chavara refers to Baccinelli as the one who instituted the convent.¹¹⁵ In the *Decretum* of declaring ‘the Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel’ as the TOCD in 1860, Baccinelli calls himself the founder of the institute.¹¹⁶ While describing the nature of the religious institute of Mannanam, Marcelin Berardi, a Carmelite missionary, projects its founder in these words: “Archbishop

¹¹³ Since the *Documentum Erectionem* is not available today one cannot prove for certain what was in his mind about the founder of the women TOCD.

¹¹⁴ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, f. 18: “Dipendono come i Terziari dal N. P. Generale, e da me.” The nature of relationship of the Superior General, Vicar Provincial and the Delegate of the Vicar Provincial is proved to be canonical.

¹¹⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

¹¹⁶ *CMM.*, 169-170. It is noted that there is no mention about the convent for women in the *Decretum*. Whereas, in the letter of Stabilini in 1829, (prepared by the two priests, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara) the dream for a convent for women can be traced. It shows that the idea of founding a convent for women does not seem to have originated from the Carmelites but from the native priests.

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Bernardine founded this religious institute which was very effective for the salvation of the Christians of Kerala...”¹¹⁷

There is a distinction between the concept of ‘foundation’, and ‘erection’ of the institute, and the different roles of the ‘charismatic founder’ and the Bishop who canonically approves the institute. There is also a misunderstanding that the day of erection of an institute is regarded as its day of foundation as well. Though this convention allows the foundation to be dated on the day of the erection, surely it does not annul the distinction between the two. However, it has given rise to confusion of thought, mistaking Baccinelli for the founder.

Hypothetically, Baccinelli, Chavara, or other later writers may have inadvertently followed this convention.¹¹⁸ Before the canonical approval of the monastery at Mannanam, Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Fide on 28 September 1855, “one Convent of priests [‘i Cassanari’].¹¹⁹ exists already for many years in this Vicariate and they have asked me for a Rule and form them to a religious Congregation. ...”¹²⁰ Since he admits the presence of a monastery of priests many years before his arrival in Verapuzha it is clear that the title of founder given to

¹¹⁷ Marceline Berardi, *Kerala Rajyathile Satyavedacharithram* [History of the Church in Kerala] (Koonammavu: Immaculate Conception Press, 1872), 303.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders” 114-115.

¹¹⁹ Italian form of *Cathanar*, a term stands for St. Thomas Christian priest, which means ‘Father.’

¹²⁰ ACO., *Ponenza* 24, 1844 m ff.321-322: “I cassanari di un Convento o ritiro esistente già da molti anni in questo vicariato avendomi domandato di dargli una regola e forma religiosa ...”. Letter written by Msgr. Baccinelli to the Propaganda Fide on 28 September 1855. This letter has no mention of TOCD.

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Baccinelli rests on a confusion of the terms foundation and hierarchical approval. It is a historical fact that Baccinelli gave the canonical approval to the men TOCD and he is their hierarchical founder.¹²¹ This is true about the women TOCD, too.

3.5 Eliswa Vakayil as Foundress

In the history of the ‘founder controversy’ of the women TOCD, the latest candidate to be added to the list is Eliswa Vakayil. An analysis is done here to see her role in the founding of the convent. The immediate history of the Koonammavu convent starts with Eliswa’s expressed desire to lead a chaste life. The *CKC* records,

The widow Eliswa (our first Superior) and her only daughter Anna were members of this parish, as they lived in Koonammavu in Vakayil house ... They used to make their confession to Leopold *Moopachan*. Eliswa told him that they had decided to live a life of chastity until their death – Eliswa, the chastity according to that of a widow, and Anna the perfect chastity of virginity. Eliswa informed *Moopachan* that she had entrusted both herself and her daughter to him.¹²²

The *CMM* records the same in these words:

¹²¹ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

¹²² *CKC.*, 1, 3; Cf., also *CMM.*, 126. When Eliswa’s words are reported the chronicler does not record the exact date of her meeting with Beccaro.

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Here is a widow with a fourteen-year-old daughter whose father had left her half of his properties. The girl does not want to be married. So why not get these two out of their joint family house, settle them down in a house constructed in one of their own properties and engage them in the work nuns do, namely, teaching other girls the practice of virtues and training them in some handicrafts.¹²³

Eliswa had a role in expressing her desire for a ‘chaste life’ and her determination to remain in that state for life. It can be seen as an expression that indicates an amorphous desire for religious life. In order to fulfill this desire she entrusted both of them – Eliswa and Anna - to Beccaro, their confessor and parish priest. This is the only text that speaks of her aptitude for religious life. The *CKC* or *CMM* or any other documents of that period do not provide further details regarding her intentions or plans for her life.

3.5.1 Application of the Norms to Identify the Founder to Eliswa

3.5.1.1 The Divine Vocation of Eliswa

The Divine vocation and original inspiration received by the founder is the basic factor to be analyzed and critically evaluated since this is the primary norm set by the ecclesiastical documents to identify the founder. In order to recognize the nature of Eliswa’s vocation to be the foundress of the women TOCD in Kerala, naturally one may have to study the words written by her, and analyze her involvement in the process of foundation of the institute and the important

¹²³ *CMM.*, 126.

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and different steps taken by her alone or in collaboration with others to achieve the goal. Another significant source can be the record of the events by the chroniclers or biographers, or various exhortations given by her on different occasions in view of forming the first community according to the inspiration received by her. Testimonies given by her contemporaries regarding her role in the foundation also can be of use. However, one may be at a loss with regard to all the above factors. Therefore, one cannot grasp the nature of her inspiration and the way she conceived the institute and its purpose. Now let us analyze whether she conceived the institute and what role she played in the event of foundation of the Koonammavu convent based on which the opinion of those who hold her as foundress would be critically evaluated.

3.5.1.2 Conceiving the Institute with its Purpose

Conceiving the institute with its purpose is an important factor that qualifies someone as founder. There are some writers who try to read in the words Eliswa expressed to Beccaro the origin of the idea for religious life. For example, Augustine Mulloor states, “In fact, the idea¹²⁴ came from Eliswa Vakayil and the confession and spiritual direction helped the discernment, and Fr. Leopold helped her in the process of foundation with technical things of getting permission etc.”¹²⁵ He again affirms, “After all, the very idea

¹²⁴ Mulloor did not specify here what her idea was. However, in the following page, he specified it as ‘the idea for leading religious life.’

¹²⁵ Augustine Mulloor, “Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the Historical Discovery of Sunny Maniakkunel Luke: Some Serious Questions and a Note of Disagreement,” in Gracious CTC, ed., *Mother Eliswa: Foundress and Mystic*, (Edappally: Teresian Carmel Publications, 2005), 156-161, at 158. Hereafter referred to as “Questions and Disagreement.”

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of *leading religious life* came from Mother Eliswa in the context of the spiritual conversation with Fr. Leopold.”¹²⁶ Here, Mulloor puts the words rightly that Eliswa’s idea was for ‘leading a religious life.’ Accordingly, she joined the religious institute when it was founded at Koonammavu in 1866. One must distinguish the idea of leading a religious life from that of founding a new religious institute; for the call to be a founder is different from the call to be a religious. If her ‘idea’ or desire was to be a religious, no body can designate her as foundress. Therefore, one cannot find in her the idea of the institute or its purpose. Moreover, as discussed earlier, from the analysis of the foundational texts (1866-1887), no one could say that the idea of founding a religious institute for women came from Eliswa.

Sucy Kinattungal in her doctoral dissertation has made some unsubstantiated general statements regarding Eliswa’s charism:

- “In the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. ...Fr. Leopold, after testing and evaluating her special charism,¹²⁷ confirmed it as the gift of God for her to live a consecrated life in Carmel and he discussed it with the Apostolic Vicar” (171).¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160. He does not provide any documental evidence to his assertions.

¹²⁷ Although Kinattungal used the term ‘special charism,’ she never explained what exactly was that special charism of Eliswa.

¹²⁸ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 171. She has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol.1. ff. 1-4. In those pages there is no mention of her special charism and Fr. Leopold’s discussion

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- “Eliswa Vakayil was a widow, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and was thus inspired to live a consecrated life” (103). Kinattungal affirms the fact of Eliswa’s call to lead a consecrated life in her concluding remarks as well:

- “Mother Eliswa led a life of prayer for 14 years and it is she who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel, and she who took the early initiative to live a community life” (405). Both Mulloor and Kinattungal affirm one fact, namely, ‘Eliswa’s call was to lead a religious life.’ Thus, she became the first member of the religious community founded at Koonammavu. If she has received the call to lead a religious life that does not necessarily qualify her as the founder of the institute. By receiving a special vocation to found a new religious institute in the Church, the founders not only feel called by God but also they are convinced of their mission as founders. The written documents of the foundation period do not provide any historical evidence in favor of Eliswa’s call to found a new religious institute in the Church. Moreover, Mulloor and Kinattungal do not make available any historical evidence to show how Eliswa received the divine vocation to be the foundress. Therefore, in vain is the search for some expressions of how she conceived the nature, purpose, or character of the institute.

From the story of foundation explained in the two main foundational texts, namely, *CMM* and *CKC*, one gets a different picture of the persons involved in the foundation and the person who conceived the institute according to which,

with the Apostolic Vicar. The number in brackets stand for the page numbers in her book *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*.

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even before the birth of Eliswa¹²⁹ a religious institute for men was founded at Mannanam in 1831 whose founders had already conceived religious institutes for women. The letters of Baccinelli to Rome (1859-1860) and his circular letter to all the churches of the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1859 informing the people of the plan of founding a convent and inviting people to donate generously for the construction of the convent at Puthenpally and some other testimonies, which are referred to earlier, very well speak of the previous attempts to found a convent for women before the actual foundation took place at Koonmmavu in 1866. No documents speak of Eliswa's involvement in those previous attempts.

3.5.1.3 The Role of Eliswa in the Foundation of the Convent

The study on the role of Eliswa in the foundation of the convent and the evolution of the life style of the first community is based on the foundational texts such as *CKC*, *CMM*, and the letters of Chavara and Beccaro. The above chronicles testify that Eliswa and Anna chose Beccaro as their confessor and they disclosed to him the desire of their hearts and entrusted themselves into his hands. The documents do not mention that Eliswa had any thought about founding a religious institute with definite orientations and precise plans. In the life of Eliswa one does not find any initiatives towards the foundation in the beginning or in the later stages. A close look at the process of foundation and the steps taken before the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent makes one convinced that Eliswa simply followed the instructions of Beccaro and Chavara.

¹²⁹ As per *CKC.*, 1, 204 Eliswa was born on 3 October 1831. The foundation was laid for the monastery at Mannanam in the presence of Msgr. Maurelius Stabilini on 11 May 1831 (*CMM.*, 25).

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The *CKC* records, “Deciding that the convent should be inaugurated at the beginning of Lent itself, even without our knowing anything, cloth was bought and brought from Kochi in order to make new dresses for us, and we were asked to stitch for ourselves these dresses that would be extraordinarily modest.”¹³⁰ The phrase, ‘even without our knowing anything’ can be taken as their acknowledgement of the fact that they were being guided by the priests who took all the decisions for the first members and the convent to be opened. This is true about the fixing of the site for the bamboo-mat convent,¹³¹ paying the debt,¹³² which was on the land in the name of Anna, entrusting and encouraging Thomman, one of the paternal uncles of Anna, to prepare the bamboo-mat convent,¹³³ and all the arrangements made in it. When the house was ready, on 12 February, Beccaro called the candidates together and gave the following instructions:

Today itself you must keep your dress, and such other things as rice that you need to eat, mat, pillows, etc., in that house. Early in the morning you must go to the church, attend the Holy Mass, receive Holy Communion, and ask God’s help to remain in this state of life till death. Stay in the church itself praying and meditating fervently until someone comes and informs you.¹³⁴

On 13 February 1866, Tuesday, at 5 o’clock in the morning both priests together came to the bamboo-mat house

¹³⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 7.

¹³¹ *CKC.*, 1, 6.

¹³² *CMM.*, 127: *Moopachan* said: “All the debts will be cleared from the monastery.”

¹³³ *CMM.*, 127; *CKC.*, 1, 6.

¹³⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 7-8.

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and arranged all the things required for a convent. The *CKC* specifically records, “They had not only brought all these things but also arranged them with their own hands before we arrived.”¹³⁵ The *CMM* notes that these things were taken from the Novitiate house of men TOCD, Koonammavu,¹³⁶ and gives the detailed list¹³⁷ that includes things needed for starting a new life in a new house. Those texts give the impression that Eliswa or any other member of her community had no share in the preparation for starting of their life in the convent, except that they expressed their desire and they followed the instructions of Chavara and Beccaro. The chronicler of the Koonammavu convent or any other contemporaries has recorded nothing regarding her active participation in the event of foundation or in the preparations for the same. The chronicles prove that Providence prepared a suitable instrument for Chavara and Beccaro to realize the dream for a convent. *Alochana* aptly calls them ‘stones fit for foundation.’¹³⁸ They found in her the docility and attentive solicitude that rendered her so humbly obedient, just what they needed for their project; her attitude was that of a faithful disciple. The first pages of the *CKC* and the description of the beginning of the convent in the *CMM* testify to this fact.

3.5.1.4 The Role of Eliswa in the Evolution of the Lifestyle of the Community

Eliswa and the other three Sisters had their own contributions in making the community life modeled on the early Christian community. As the first member of the

¹³⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 12.

¹³⁶ *CMM.*, 128.

¹³⁷ *CMM.*, 128; *CKC.*, 1, 10-12.

¹³⁸ Cf., *Alochana*, 95.

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religious community and as its first appointed Superior for about five years, Eliswa's personality and her God-given gifts would have influenced much in the evolution of the lifestyle of the first community.¹³⁹ Although according to the document *Mutuae Relationes* it is from the founding grace a particular type of spirituality, life style, apostolate, and tradition of the institute are derived,¹⁴⁰ there is no documentary evidence, even from Anna who was both her daughter and chronicler of the community, to suggest that Eliswa had a vision for its evolution.

3.5.1.5 The Role of Eliswa in Starting the Apostolate

In order to evaluate Eliswa's role in initiating the apostolate of the convent at Koonammavu, one must look at the definition of the purpose of founding the convent. In both the definitions presented by Chavara and Beccaro the orientation toward teaching the girls to pray and giving training in handicrafts to women is evident.¹⁴¹ A look at the process of the construction of the new building for the convent will show that the plan was to build the boarding house and school for girls along with the convent – all three together as one single unit. The text from *CKC* given below tells how Providence arranged all three together:

¹³⁹ Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications*, 279-285. Kinattungal's statement, "Mother Eliswa instructed this small Community in the true spirit and charism, which she received as a gift of the Holy Spirit" (133) cannot be proven from any of the documents. The *CKC* or any other document has not recorded any of the instructions of Eliswa.

¹⁴⁰ Cf., *MR*, 11.

¹⁴¹ Cf., *CKC*, 1, 5; Cf., also Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

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... With this amount¹⁴² on Saturday 13 June, the foundation was laid for a single storey building which was narrow, as they [Chavara and Beccaro] thought it was enough. Again, after some days...delayed. Thus after 8 September, the feast of the Nativity of our Holy Mother, seeing that God was directing and blessing them abundantly through all the ways and means that the Fathers adopted and through all whom they approached, they decided to make the convent a two storey building... Again since our Delegate was not quite satisfied and felt that the foundation laid for the school and Boarding house was not strong enough, he made them erect some pillars...for all three buildings together as one single unit.¹⁴³

This text clearly shows that the idea of having a school and a Boarding house attached to the convent was there from the beginning when the two priests designed the convent and accordingly Chavara and Beccaro planned and constructed the three together. The text also states the reason for changing their plan to build a two-storey building for the convent was that they received donations beyond their expectations from “all whom they approached.” *Alochana*

¹⁴² *CMM.*, 132-134. During their journey to places such as Mannanam, Arthunkal, Kalloorkadu, and Muttam they collected 1,200 Rupees from the places they visited. He has specified the names of the parishes and persons who donated the money (Kallorkkadu – 100 Rupees, Arthunkal - 500 Rupees, Muttam - 340 Rupees, Pulinkunnu – 160 Rupees, Pathil Kunjanna – 100 Rupees, thus total 1200 Rupees). Chavara writes in *CMM.*, 134: “Thus with a total of Rupees 1,200 we started the work.”

¹⁴³ *CKC.*, 1, 46-47. Whereas, Kinattungal, connects the event with Baccinelli: “On September 8 Archbishop Bernardine asked that the foundations be strengthened in order that a two storey building could be erected.” Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 138.

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also speaks of the generous donations from the local churches and the faithful for the construction of the convent.¹⁴⁴ As the new building was away from the bamboo-mat convent, Eliswa and the Sisters might not have even seen the site, the plan of the building, or the process of construction. Thus, they had no specific responsibility in the vision of the apostolate and in the steps taken for its execution.

Training in Handicrafts: Among the various apostolates of the community, the training in handicrafts started first. As seen in the *CKC* and *CMM*, the Sisters were given training first in view of training the girls in the boarding house and later to the women of the locality. Even before the Fathers took concrete steps for the construction of the bamboo-mat convent, they collected materials needed for handicrafts. Listed in the *CKC* are many bundles of needles and a variety of threads, which the Fathers had collected for the convent from different places and maybe after repeated search, since Koonammavu was a remote and interior small village. They not only collected those materials but also searched for experts to give training to the Sisters in handicrafts.¹⁴⁵

From the description in the chronicles that both priests arranged all those things needed for doing handicrafts in each one's room and in the common room with their own hands, one can conclude that they were in agreement with all the details of the apostolate of the Sisters and worked for the actualization of the plan. On another occasion, both of them together went in search of some women who could give training to the Sisters, and they brought a woman to the

¹⁴⁴ *Alochana*, 139.

¹⁴⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 53, 60, 64, 155, 177-178; *CMM.*, 139.

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convent.¹⁴⁶ The chronicles do not record any particular involvement of Eliswa or any other member of the community in the discernment process for the development of the embryonic apostolate.

Boarding House for Girls: Another apostolate started in the initial stage of the convent was a Boarding house for girls. Kinattungal claims that Eliswa is the initiator of the first convent school, the Boarding house, and orphanage. She states, “The present Kerala Church is rich with religious sisters and their services. So, it is important to know the personality of the first religious sister in Kerala who has such a privileged position as the initiator of the first convent school, the Boarding house, and the orphanage for girls in Kerala.”¹⁴⁷ However, the analysis of the texts shows little or no involvement of Eliswa in all of this. The fact that she was there at the beginning of the community life at bamboo-mat convent does not necessarily make her the initiator or visionary of the apostolate. The first mention of starting the Boarding house for girls in the *CKC* reads:

It was said that *Educumdath* (Boarding house) was to be opened soon after the Nativity of Christ, as it was the command of the Archbishop to do so and also that the children would be arriving the next day. Therefore, the three rooms that were separated with wooden rafters were to be covered on all three sides with yellow cloth, and we were entrusted with it. Thus, we made six rooms, the mistress’ room, the

¹⁴⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 60, 64; *CMM.*, 139-140; *CK.*, V/12. Chavara’s letter dated 30 March 1870 to Fr. Chandy Kattakayam has reference to the arrival of two Sisters from Cochin to give training to the Sisters in handicrafts.

¹⁴⁷ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 404.

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multipurpose room and the room for the chapel. All these were stitched and made with the yellow cloth. For the altar we, also made a canopy with the yellow cloth, arranged everything, and kept the candlesticks that were made for the purpose.”¹⁴⁸

Another passage from the *CKC* gives more details about the girls who came to join the convent and the Sister who was appointed in charge of their formation:

The Boarding house should be opened on the second day of the new year [1868]. He [Beccaro] asked our opinion about who would be suitable to be the boarding mistress and at the end, *Moopachan* himself appointed Sr. Clara. He also wrote out a few Rules for the Boarding house. However, on 1 January 1868 itself, a girl named Theresa Ozhuvil was brought from Muttam. Desiring to join the convent, she had come earlier and had met Father and told him about it. So she was immediately sent to us. ... and inaugurated the Boarding house on 2 January itself.¹⁴⁹

The next day of the opening, two more girls were added to the Boarding house. One could clearly see that Eliswa had no particular responsibility in the process of

¹⁴⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 83. In this text the word used is ‘*Idapp*’ which does not mean commanded. It may mean suggested. From the context it is clear that it was not the Archbishop’s initiative to open the Boarding house. When the idea of opening the Boarding house was communicated to the Bishop and permission was sought he might have suggested the date.

¹⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 84. In this description, almost all the sentences are without a proper subject. The sentence on appointing Clara as Boarding mistress there is a subject, namely, *Moopachan*.

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opening the Boarding house. The Fathers brought the yellow cloth for the curtain, and when the Fathers told the Sisters to stitch the curtain for the rooms, which were divided earlier, they did it. Beccaro decided that Sr. Clara should be the mistress of the girls, and he himself prepared the Rules for the Boarding house. Accordingly, the girls were given training in catechism, meditation, handicrafts, different languages, mathematics, science, music, and cooking. It was also looked on as a means for fostering good vocations to religious life. This purpose was achieved when many of them later joined the convent and became religious. However, from the names of those girls who were admitted in the Boarding house,¹⁵⁰ it seems that the institute was not meant only for the aspirants for religious life.¹⁵¹ Girls from far away places reached the Boarding house, and as the report of Marceline Berardi shows in 1883, the number reached thirty.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ *CKC.*, II, 26 provides the picture that some of the girls (Bipiana from Kunnel, Rosa Thuruthiyil from Pulincunnu, Eliswa Maliekal from Alapuzha and Jacintha Charankattu from Arthunkal) after going for vacation remained in their homes, and some others returned to the Boarding house.

¹⁵¹ The idea of the Boarding house seems to be the same as that which Chavara had expressed in the circular letter written on 25 March 1850, which was meant to open a study centre for boys. *CK.*, IX/2. He speaks of two stages of study: “In the first stage, languages like Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac, and Latin will be taught by special teachers appointed for the purpose. If any of the boys who study there, when they come to maturity, desire for priesthood and if the Superiors find that they have a real vocation, they will be selected and taught theology and other matters connected with priestly life. ...”

¹⁵² *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi (1878-1889)* ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, (f.1170): “In questo hanno un educando di circa 30 educande, ed una scuola giornaliera di circa 100 ragazze: attendono pure all’orfanotrofio, ospidale di femmine unito allo stesso monastero.”

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The *CKC* has recorded many details regarding the girls' entry to the Boarding house, the date of their going home for holidays, their coming back, their entrance into religious formation, etc. It shows that the reception of the girls from the Boarding house to the convent was an important event in the life of the convent. Both priests took great interest in their formation. The references to the girls of the Boarding house can be seen in almost all the letters of Chavara. His design for the future growth of the convent, as he expressed in his Testament, speaks of Boarding house along with the convent and both were planned as one unit.¹⁵³ Thus, it can be concluded that though Kinattungal says, "Without any discrimination of Rites, Mother Eliswa received the aspirants who came to her with proper dedication and fostered them with sincere kindness and tender love,"¹⁵⁴ the *CKC* does not mention anything special of Eliswa's role in finding the girls or in their character formation. Kinattungal's statement may simply mean that when the Fathers brought the girls to the Boarding house Eliswa, without making any objections, accepted them as she was the Superior of the Community.

A School for Girls: As discussed earlier, giving education to girls was a clear motive of establishing the religious institute for women at Koonammavu; the building has been planned and constructed accordingly, namely, the Boarding house, school for girls, and convent as one single unit. As the *CKC* testifies, the Boarding house opened on 2 January 1868 met the purpose of the school until the girls from outside were added in 1872, although the school building was ready in 1867. In the context of the small village

¹⁵³ *CK.*, VI/5. Testament of Chavara, para. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 133.

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of Koonammavu, which was a thinly populated area and people were not ready to send their daughters to attend the school, it was not easy to get the girls as day-scholars. One could notice that the girls who joined the Boarding house in the initial stage were from far away places like, Muttom-Cherthala,¹⁵⁵ Palluruthy, Pulincunnu (three girls),¹⁵⁶ Arthunkal,¹⁵⁷ Chakarakadavu,¹⁵⁸ Ollur (three girls),¹⁵⁹ Palluruthy,¹⁶⁰ etc. One can see that the girls from the locality started attending the school slowly. The *CKC* clearly notes the date of opening the school for the girls from outside as 16 October 1872: “The Sisters started the teaching work in the school situated outside the convent premise, for the day-students.”¹⁶¹ Here, too, the Sisters do not seem to play any definite role except that they taught the girls following the instructions of Beccaro. Moreover, in 1872 Eliswa was just an ordinary member of the community; for her term of office as the Superior was over when the new Superior was elected on 16 July 1871.¹⁶²

An Orphanage for Girls: Berardi in his report of 1883 speaks of the working of an orphanage attached to the convent.¹⁶³ Its foundation stone was laid on 6 September 1880. The idea of starting an orphanage and its financial help came from a generous Italian lady who was a benefactor of Gerard Beccaro. After returning from Kerala in 1876, Gerard

¹⁵⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 84.

¹⁵⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 86.

¹⁵⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 86.

¹⁵⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 88.

¹⁵⁹ *CKC.*, II, 46.

¹⁶⁰ *CKC.*, II, 46.

¹⁶¹ *CKC.*, II, 60.

¹⁶² *CKC.*, II, 32-33.

¹⁶³ *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* (1878-1889) ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, at 1170.

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Beccaro kept contact with Archbishop Mellano and introduced Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti, who offered money for the Verapuzha mission to open projects for the conversion of souls. Mellano decided to spend the money for the construction and the maintenance of an orphanage for girls at Koonammavu. The letter, written by the Sisters of the convent thanking Signora Viscouti, gives the picture of the orphanage.¹⁶⁴

As observed in the cases of other fields of apostolate, Eliswa's special role as claimed by Kinattungal in the planning or the running of the orphanage cannot be proven from any of the documents of the time. According to *Vita Consacrata*, founders and foundresses are persons of creativity, originality, and holiness.¹⁶⁵ However, in the case of Eliswa, one cannot find any enterprising initiative or creativity in starting the apostolates of the Koonammavu convent. When her term of office as Superior was over in 1871, there was no special mention about her in the pages of the chronicles. One could say that Eliswa's main contribution was through the apostolate of her suffering. From the chronicles, one gets the impression that she was sick most of the time.¹⁶⁶ Because of her illness, there was an occasion when the community had to discontinue their annual retreat, which sheds light on the intensity of her suffering.¹⁶⁷ *CKC*

¹⁶⁴ AVP., Letter written by Sr. Kathreena Manjooran of Jesus from the convent at Koonammavu to Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti, dated 8 April 1882.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *VC.*, 37.

¹⁶⁶ For some references to her illness, Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 69, 79, 81, 118, 122, 158, 174, 176-177; *CK.*, VII/3; *CMM.*, 135.

¹⁶⁷ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 21-24.

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often refers to the bodily illnesses and ailments of Eliswa,¹⁶⁸ and she was not able to fulfill her responsibilities as the Superior of the community for a longer period. The sanctity of the first member and the first appointed Superior has contributed toward the religious life style of the community, which might have enabled Berardi to report to the Propaganda Fide later that the Tertiary Sisters of the Koonammavu convent are excellent souls, humble, virtuous, and saintly.¹⁶⁹

From the above analysis of Eliswa's role in the foundation and in the evolution of the life style of the first community, including that of various apostolates, one could say that she had not played any significant role in those events. As the *CKC* and the *CMM* testify, her desire was to lead a chaste life, and she does not seem to conceive the idea of establishing a religious institute with its definite nature or purpose. That all the documents of the foundation period describe her as the first member and the first appointed Superior of the first community goes without question.

Lozano understands the founder by analyzing the interaction between an institute and its founder. For Lozano founders are persons called by God to establish a new community. They are the mediators of the Spirit to their

¹⁶⁸ *CKC.*, I, 21-22; 23; 24; 69; 79; 81; 118; 122; 158; 174; 176-177; *CK.*, VII/3. *CKC* does not provide any instance of her mental or spiritual sufferings.

¹⁶⁹ *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* (1878-1889) ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, at f. 1170: "Le Terziarie vanno meglio dei religiosi, perche umile e quindi in tutto più virtuose. Il monastero di Cunemao, può dirsi un composto d'anime eccellente e santé."

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disciples.¹⁷⁰ In the case of Eliswa, the foundational texts designate her as Superior (“*ḥiḥiḥi p*”) never as ‘Mother Eliswa’ with her personal name. Throughout the *CKC* and other documents of that period, she is referred to as Sr. Eliswa and never as ‘mother’ or ‘foundress’. For example, there is a list of the members of the Koonammavu convent in the *CKC*.¹⁷¹ and in the personal Diary, *Manuale di Memorie*, of Beccaro with the title ‘Note of the nuns at the Monastery of St. Teresa.’¹⁷² ‘Sr. Eliswa Mariam’ is the first in both lists where she was not designated as Mother or Prioress or Foundress. Another example of how she was viewed at the time is seen in the fact that soon after the election of the new Superior on 16 July 1871 when Eliswa was elected as ‘keeper of keys,’ her name was written as Sr. Eliswa.¹⁷³ not ‘Mother Eliswa.’ Even in the letter of Beccaro to Marceline Berardi in 1890, which Kinattungal quotes as proof.¹⁷⁴ for her claim of Eliswa as foundress, she is referred to as ‘Sister Eliswa.’ She was one of the two surviving members from the Latin community when Beccaro left for Italy.¹⁷⁵ Twice she is referred to as Sr. Eliswa in that letter. Therefore, one of the

¹⁷⁰ Garcia Paredes, J. C. R., *Theology of Religious Life: Vocation and Charism* (Manila: ICLA Publications, 2006), 8-9.

¹⁷¹ *CKC.*, I, 204-205.

¹⁷² ASA., *Manuale di Memorie*: ‘Nota delle Monache nel Monastero di S. Teresa.’ Both seem to be in the same hand.

¹⁷³ *CKC.*, II, 34. If the members of the first Community had considered her as foundress, surely they could have used the term ‘Mother Eliswa’ or ‘our foundress,’ instead of Sr. Eliswa to denote her office.

¹⁷⁴ Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 305-306. Beccaro’s letter is given in the appendix of the book (426-27).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *CKC.*, II, 130. Sr. Anastasia, the third member from the Latin Community made her profession on 23 May 1886, namely, ten years after Beccaro left for Europe and twenty years after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu.

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qualities attributed to the founders or foundresses regarding their paternity or maternity cannot be applied to Eliswa.

Now it is pertinent here to analyze and evaluate the opinion of those who hold Eliswa as foundress.

3.5.2 Archbishop Leonard Mellano's Opinion

The reference to the first members as foundresses first occurred in 'the Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome,' which he made during and after the division of the Koonammavu convent, in a particular context of arguing for the jurisdiction over the convent. This communication started after the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1887, which means that the idea of regarding the first members as foundresses started more than twenty-two years after the foundation of the institute. In his letters to Propaganda Fide and to Msgr. Aiuti, Apostolic Delegate to India, Mellano argued that the first members, who were from the Latin Christian Community, were the foundresses of the convent at Koonammavu and therefore, the convent must come under his jurisdiction. Whereas, according to the geographical boundary set for the new vicariates the convent belonged to the vicariate of Thrissur. At the time of the division of the vicariate, in the convent there were members from all the three vicariates, namely, Verapuzha, Kottayam and Thrissur and from both Rites – Latin and Syrian. Refuting the claims of Mellano, Medlycott wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide and argued in favor of his vicariate of Thrissur. When the Propaganda Fide received different claims on the convent, the Prefect appointed Fr. Gabriele de Guarcino, the consultant of

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the Holy See, to study those documents.¹⁷⁶ The arguments of Mellano and the counter-arguments of Medlycott, the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, the report and evaluation of Gabriele de Guarcino, the letter of Aiuti to his Eminence Prefect of Propaganda Fide,¹⁷⁷ and other documents on this issue can be seen in the *Ponente, Marzo 1890*.

The archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches has rightly titled the above-mentioned documents in the following words: “*Sacra Congregazione De Propaganda Fide per gli Affari del Rito Orientale, Ponente L’Eminentissimo e Reverentissimo Singnor Cardinale Gaetano Aloisi-Masella, Relazione con Sommario: Circa la giurisdizione sul Monastero delle Suore Terziarie Carmelitane sito in cunemao Marzo 1890.*” Those communications were arguments on the jurisdiction over the convent of the Sisters of the Carmelite Tertiaries situated at Koonammavu; they were not meant to discuss or decide the identity of the founder of the institute. Mellano himself approves that he wrote those letters to get justice to him.¹⁷⁸

A simple glance at those letters of Mellano will demonstrate his lack of clarity and wavering position regarding the identity of the founder of the convent. In his letter on 24 November 1888 to the Prefect of the Propaganda, Mellano wrote:

¹⁷⁶ ACO., *Ponente della Sacra Congregazione ‘De Propaganda Fide’ per gli affari del Rito Orientale, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Num. 1), 1-20. Hereafter referred to as *Ponente, Marzo 1890*.

¹⁷⁷ *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Num. II), 20-36.

¹⁷⁸ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Allegato A*: “Mi credo obbligato a ricorrere a V.E per essere illuminato sopra una questione a riguardo del monastero delle nostre Terziarie native e per ottenere giustizia.”

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I am happy to present to you a description of the convent at Koonammavu founded by my *predecessor Msgr. Bernard of St. Teresa*, in 1866. 2) The first founders of this convent were *Sr. Eliswa, Sr. Teresa, and Sr. Anna who belonged to the Latin Rite*.3) The first convent was started in the house of Sr. Eliswa and her daughter Sr. Anna, to which were added their immovable furnishings and money worth 1000 Rupees. 4) My honorable predecessor desired that such an institution should be beneficial to the Syrians also, and thinking that such a gesture would not give anyone a chance to think that it is not a Latin convent, he received a few Syrians also into the convent just as I am doing now.¹⁷⁹

At the conclusion of that letter, Mellano wrote,

This is the truth: one of the missionaries under me performed its spiritual and material management. Whatever may be said about the collection of the donation, it will be a clear injustice to say that this convent does not belong to me.¹⁸⁰

He was resolute that the convent should be under his jurisdiction, regardless of the facts, the explanations or claims of other parties. Other than the letter mentioned above, written on 24 November 1888, on the question of the right over the convent, *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, includes three more letters written by Mellano: on 28 November 1888, 15 March 1889, and 2 April 1889 respectively. In each of these letters,

¹⁷⁹ ACO., *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi Malabaresi*, (1878-1889).
Letter of Msgr. Mellano to Propaganda Fide, on 24 November 1888.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

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he identifies different people as the founder of the convent at Koonammavu. In the letter quoted above, (24 November) he states, “My predecessor Msgr. Bernardine of St. Teresa founded the convent at Koonammavu in 1866.” Four days later, on 28 November 1888, he wrote the following about the founder:

Four natives of the Latin Rite, of whom the two were the first Superiors, founded this monastery [convent for women] near Koonammavu and one called Sr. Theresa of Jesus, due to her capacity re-elected and by them founded the proper house in the land on which it is situated. Afterwards they rebuilt the convent in a more convenient place near the first one. To accommodate young women also of the Syrian Rite, who might have a vocation to be consecrated to God in such a state, my predecessor and I received some of the Syrians. Thus, they formed one body and one monastery.¹⁸¹

Although this letter claims that four natives of the Latin Rite founded the convent at Koonammavu, it does not ascribe any special role to Eliswa in the founding of the convent. Mellano does not even mention her name in the above-quoted letter. Moreover, he had ignored or omitted

¹⁸¹ *Ponente, Marzo 1890 (Allegato A)*. Letter of Mellano to Msgr. Aiuti on 28 November 1888: “Questo Monastero vicino a Cunemao fu fondato da quattro native di rito latino, due delle quali furono le prime Superiore, ed una chiamata Suor Teresa di Gesù, per la sua capacità rieleta più volte, e da esse fondato nella propria casa cedendo anche il terreno contiguo, ma dopo fu riedificato nelle vicinanze di questo primo, come luogo più conveniente.”

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some and changed more of the historical facts.¹⁸² On 15 March 1889, when Mellano wrote to Aiuti, on this issue, he argues:

Father Leopold, Missionary Apostolic, by order of my predecessor, Msgr. Bernardine of fond memory, in the year 1866 had a house built for four Latin postulants, viz., 1) Sister Elizabeth, 2) Sister Anna, 3) Sister Teresa, 4) a laywoman, also Latin, in the property of Sister Elizabeth.¹⁸³ and this is the way the Monastery [convent] of Koonammavu was founded.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Cf. *Ponente, Marzo 1890*. In his letter to the Propaganda Fide on 28 November 1888, Mellano had altered some of the historical facts: 1) He says that the convent was founded for the Latins. There is no evidence to prove his position. 2) He speaks of four candidates from the Latin Community whereas, in fact, there were only three candidates. 3) His assertion that the newly built convent was near to the first one is not correct. It was far from the bamboo-mat convent. 4) His claim that the new convent was built by the first members ‘themselves’ is also inaccurate, as it was built by Beccaro and Chavara. 5) He says the proper house was built on their property (e da esse fondato nella propria casa cedendo anche il terreno contiguo). This statement is not true. The proper convent was built on a new plot that belonged to the TOCD men, to which two more plots were added and the cost was paid for later from the patrimony of the Syrian Sisters. 6) With regard to the letter of Msgr. Lavigne to the Superior of the Koonammavu Convent, *CKC.*, II, 138-139 testifies that Msgr. Lavigne wrote the letter with the permission of Msgr. Andrea Aiuti, the Apostolic Delegate to India. All the above points of Mellano were refuted by Msgr. Medlycott in his letter to Msgr. Andrea Aiuti on 27 January 1889, Cf., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, 38-39.

¹⁸³ Cf. *CKC.*, I, 15, 40. Mellano keeps silence about Clara Puthenangady from the Syrian parish of Vaikom who joined the convent on the following day, namely, 14 February 1866.

¹⁸⁴ *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, ff. 61- 63. (Allegato D): “Il P. Leopoldo, Missionario Apostolico, per ordine del mio predecessore Msgr. Bernardino di s. m. nell’anno 1866 avendo Quattro postulanti Latine,

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In this letter, Mellano calls Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Anna, and Sr. Theresa postulants, not foundresses.¹⁸⁵ In the letter written to Aiuti on 2 April 1889, Mellano argues, “Whatever I have said earlier about the founder of the convent is pure truth...”¹⁸⁶ While concluding the letter he said again, “the convent must remain as the property of the foundresses, under my jurisdiction.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, the reference here is not to one foundress, but to foundresses. Later, on 14 June 1890 Mellano mentions, “there are *three foundresses*... the Latin nuns among whom the first *two foundresses* (the third one died) have started the convent at Koonammavu ...”¹⁸⁸ This

cioè 1. Suor Elisabeth, 2. Suor Anna, 3. Suor Teresa, 4. una Conversa pure Latina fece fabbricare una casa nel palmaro della Suora Elisabetta, e così fondò, il Monastero di Cunemao”.

¹⁸⁵ The letter tells of four Latin postulants and named three of them, the fourth one was not named, simply because there were only three postulants; not four. The fourth one lived with them for some time as a helper, not as a postulant. She left after a short period. Cf. *CKC.*, 1, 8, 55-56.

¹⁸⁶ *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Allegato D’), Letter written by Msgr. Mellano, Archbishop of Verapuzha to Msgr. Andrea Aiuti, Delegate Apostolic dated on 2 April 1889, f. 64: “Come, e da chi è stato fondato il Monastero di Cunemao, già l’ho con precisione e purissima verità narrato nella mia precedente, ed a quella mi riferisco, ed è quella una prova evidente, che non ammette risposta.” One may ask, which opinion about the founder is to be taken as the pure truth? Baccinelli? Leopold? or first members?

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, f.65: “Insomma, se da ciò può dedursi qualche diritto, è chiaro che sarebbe per le monache che vi hanno professato, di potervi abitare, ed io non ho mai avuto il pensiero di scaricarle, se vogliono restarvi, possono andarsene, ma il Monastero deve rimanere alle Fondatrici, che sono sotto la mia giurisdizione senza che alcuno possa molestarle.”

¹⁸⁸ Letter of Msgr. Mellano to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 14 June 1890: “... e devo notare a Vostra Eminenza che le Monache

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text is repeated in almost the same words in his letter on 27 September 1890: "...there are two foundresses of the Koonammavu convent. The third one, daughter of one of the two, is dead..."¹⁸⁹

Whereas, Aiuti, after studying all the documents received from Medlycott, Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, and Lavigne, Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam and from others expressed his view with regard to the foundation:

In fact, the same [convent] was built under the auspices of Fr. Leopold, Delegate Superior for the convents of the Tertiaries. Helped by Fr. Kuriakose Elias, Superior also of the Tertiaries, and by many members of his congregation, some clerics who collected money mainly from the Syrian Churches and people; and they did this accompanied by the letter of the same Fr. Leopold, and of Fr. Kuriakose Elias..¹⁹⁰

Latine, tra le quali le prime due fondatrici (la 3° è morta) cominciarono il monastero di Cunemao nella propria casa e nel proprio palmetto, e furono le uniche Superiore per molti anni...).

¹⁸⁹ Letter of Msgr. Mellano to Msgr. Aiuti on 27 September 1890 : "Ricordo solo a Vostra Eccellenza che fra le suore uscite ci sono due fondatrici del monastero di Cunemao, la 3° figlia di una delle due, è morta."

¹⁹⁰ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, Letter of Msgr. Andrea Aiuti to Cardinal Prefect of Proppaganda Fide dated 30 August 1889, (n.2) f. 49 : "In fatti il medesimo fu fabbricato sotto gli auspice del P.Leopoldo, Superiore Delegato pei Conventi dei Terziarii, aiutato dal P. Curyacos Elias, Superiore anch'esso dei Terziarii, da vari membri della sua Congregazione, della quale alcuni ecclesiastici raccolsero denaro principalmente tra le Chiese e congregazioni Soriane; e ciò fecero in seguito a lettera sia del P. Leopoldo medesimo, sia dello stesso Padre Curyacos Elias." He is speaking about the persons responsible for the construction of the convent and

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Here, Aiuti was speaking about the persons responsible for the construction of the convent and the source of money for the construction.

From a cursory reading of those letters of Mellano, one can very well conclude that his intention was not to state the identity of the founder; his interest was in the jurisdiction over the convent for which he argues repeatedly. Moreover, Mellano was unclear about the founder of the institute. Since his special intention of writing those letters was to present his claims over the convent, one cannot take Mellano's statements as an expression of his opinion about the founder of the institute.¹⁹¹ Moreover, Mellano was not a person involved in the early stages of the foundation.

When Mellano's letters presented the first members as the foundresses, his addressees immediately understood the motivation of his arguments. They realized another reason for Mellano's claim for the convent, namely, his special love for the Latin Christians and lack of concern for the Syrians. Msgr. Ignatius Persico, the Visitor Apostolic, reported to the Propaganda Fide in 1876 his observation regarding Mellano's attitude toward the St. Thomas Christians:

The Syrian Catholics have antipathy towards Mellano, the Apostolic Vicar, who never showed any concern

the source of money for the construction and not about the charismatic founder of the institute.

¹⁹¹ After spending considerable time in serious study of the documents received from both the parties – Latin and Syrian prelates - Msgr. Aiuti and all those who were responsible for making the decision, did not give much credibility to the claims of Msgr. Mellano. At last, they took the decision in favor of the Vicariate of Thrissur, a vicariate for the Syrians.

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on their behalf, but on the contrary, was known to prefer the Latins to the Syrian Catholics. For the Latins, in fact, stabilized schools and charitable institutions, which had been established, while for the Syrian Catholics little or nothing was being done, but they were left in ignorance and almost abandoned to themselves.¹⁹²

Aiuti and those who studied the case saw the open rejection of the historical truth in Mellano's approach. It is noteworthy that all the reports, which Mellano sent to Rome, were studied with the help of a commission; and later, Rome had taken a decision contrary to his arguments by giving the jurisdiction of the Koonammavu convent to the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, thus disproving Mellano's position.

3.5.3 Sucy Kinattingal's Opinion

Sucy Kinattingal is the main proponent of the opinion that Eliswa Vakayil is the foundress of the women TOCD. Before analyzing the conclusions or findings of her study on Eliswa, in the published version of her thesis, it is essential to give attention to the scope of her theme, the sources, and the methodology she used to arrive at those conclusions.

- She explains the scope in these words: "The scope of this work is to prove the true position of Servant of God Mother Eliswa, the foundress of the TOCD Congregation for women, by making use of primary sources and proving the falsity of misleading presentations" (28). Again, she states, "It is an attempt to present historical proofs in defense of the

¹⁹² ACO., *Acta* 1877-1878, Vol. 10 f. 272, Persico's report to the Propaganda Fide.

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position of the foundress, against the widespread false publications” (31).

- About the sources she writes, “The main sources for the book are the official communications of the Vicars Apostolic, Archbishops, Apostolic Visitors, Apostolic Delegates, Superior Generals of the Carmelite Order, and the missionary priests and local priests of the time” (29).

- About her methodology she states, “The original manuscripts written by the ecclesiastical authorities of the nineteenth century are used to explain the history of the Verapuzha Vicariate and the Carmelite Mission... The study progressed on the basis of information received from the official communications of the Apostolic Delegates, Vicars Apostolic, Apostolic Visitors, etc” (29-30).¹⁹³ She concludes her general introduction with these words: “The contributions of all the Carmelite Missionaries are once again esteemed in this historical study” (32).

One may observe that she had two purposes in this study: to *defend* ‘the foundress’ and to extol the European missionaries for which she made use of the communications of the western authors.

No wonder that she put Chavara’s writings among ‘the Secondary Works’ in her bibliography (469) even when

¹⁹³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 29-30. All these ecclesiastical authorities were Europeans. On one occasion, Kinattungal laments over the negative effect of the authorities who were foreigners: “The persons involved in this process were the then ecclesiastical authorities, who were all foreigners” (253). She was not concerned about what the local people had narrated about their experiences under the European missionaries.

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she agreed that Chavara was one of the persons who showed great interest in the affairs of the convent (240), and left behind much of the historical evidence and important chronicles of the time of the foundation of the convent. Her limited attention to Chavara's writings is clear from her own statement on the methodology she used to present the history.

Her admission that she studied the history of the Kerala Church using the communications of the ecclesiastical authorities of the nineteenth century who were all Europeans demonstrates the limitations of her research and the conclusions she arrived at. She made it clear that she looked at the Church in Kerala through the eyes of the Western missionaries. She has repeated the colonial version regarding the local people and the Church. She seems to over-emphasize the negative opinions of the European missionaries regarding the priests of the St. Thomas Christians.¹⁹⁴ However, in her 'General Conclusion' she asserts, "The thesis has portrayed the history of the nineteenth century Kerala Church from a correct point of view. It has not been an attempt to pay homage to particular persons and communities ..." (403).

One may observe that in the 'General Introduction' itself, the author asserts eight times¹⁹⁵ that Mother Eliswa is the foundress, a fact which she had to prove by citing documents. Before proving the facts, the author makes her

¹⁹⁴ Cf., Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 326-344. See the number of negative comments made by Europeans on Syrian priests in her footnotes in the form of long citations in Italian language and in English in the body of the text.

¹⁹⁵ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 25, 26, (twice), 27, 28, 30, 31 (twice). Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *An Unscientific Scientific Work!*, 50.

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own assertions emphatically to convince the readers. One can see her position in her introduction: “It is a proven fact that the TOCD Congregation for women was founded by Mother Eliswa and it is to affirm that one branch of TOCD Congregation cannot claim a different founder” (26).

It is an obvious fact that she openly took an ecclesiastically motivated opinion or a preconceived decision in considering Eliswa the foundress, and that too, without properly substantiating her statements. However, academically one cannot accept that her position is true to the documental evidence of the foundation period.

In order to prove the ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress’ Kinattungal has used five primary sources.¹⁹⁶ They are: 1) The Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome, 2) Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, 3) Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu, 4) Proofs from the Writings of Fr. Chavara, and 5) Proofs from the chronicles of the Congregation. An evaluation of each of her primary sources is appropriate here. It is important to note that her first three sources belong to the period after the bifurcation of the vicariate of Verapuzha (1887). They were written during and after the process of division of the convent at Koonammavu and in the context of the dispute between the Vicars Apostolic of Verapuzha and Thrissur. Accordingly, except for the last two, she seems to depend on some sources, which were connected with the disputes on the jurisdiction over the convent, which resulted in the division of the institute and therefore are polemic in nature. Above all, they were written by those who were not involved in the foundation of the convent, and therefore, are

¹⁹⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 176-190.

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documents of secondary importance. The manuscripts, which were used by Kinattungal, were not written by contemporary historians. She seems to have omitted other primary sources¹⁹⁷ of the period of foundation, which were relevant to evaluate her thesis. For example, she has not given due importance to the *CKC* written before 1870 and *CMM* written by Chavara before his death in 1871. Even though her scope was “to prove the true position of Eliswa the foundress of the women TOCD, by making use of primary sources,” she devoted only fourteen pages (173-190) for this most important subject and that too, with sources of later origin. In the same chapter, she allotted thirty-eight pages (199-237) to refute others’ opinions on the identity of the founder. She spent 117 pages (251-368) describing ‘the Division of the Congregation of Women,’ the lengthiest chapter of the dissertation. Thus, Kinattungal gives the impression that her main concentration was on the event that took place twenty-four years after the foundation of the convent. The event of the division of the convent, one should say, is not directly related with the claim that Eliswa is the foundress.¹⁹⁸ One can see the reasons for her selection of these documents of later origin as her primary source, namely, it is those documents of dispute (at least indirectly) that speak of Eliswa as foundress. Leaning on Mellano, she investigated the disputes about the division of the convent that took place in 1890. This can be seen as the main limitation of her study: in order to prove the identity of the founder of the institute she

¹⁹⁷ In her bibliography, she included Chavara’s writings under the heading ‘Secondary Works.’ Cf., Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 469. The writings of Chavara who directly involved in the foundation are secondary works!

¹⁹⁸ The fact that Rome decided to give the jurisdiction of the convent to the Apostolic Vicar of the Syrians can be seen as a proof against the claim that the first members are the foundresses.

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omitted some of the important sources of the foundation period (1866-1887) and used those sources, which were of later origin, written by those who were not involved in the foundation.

The three introductory paragraphs, under the title, ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress’, deserve special attention (173-176). As Kinattungal stated in her introduction that hers is an attempt to present historical proofs in *defense* of the position of the foundress, she started defending the position of Eliswa in the first paragraph of the third section. Kinattungal used a play on words with ‘foundation stones,’ ‘foundations,’ ‘beginners,’ and ‘initiators’ (174). According to her, Beccaro, Baccinelli, and some others called the first members ‘foundation stones.’ First of all, Beccaro addressed those words not to the first three Latin members alone, but to the first community as a whole, in a later period.¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, by taking such terms as ‘stones of foundation’ to mean founders seems to be an effort to advance her arguments without sufficient proof.²⁰⁰ It is worth noticing that the *Alochana* also calls the first members as

¹⁹⁹ *CKC.*, I, 97: “Dear children, you must remember this. God has made you the foundation stones of this....” This address was given on 31 August 1868 and, at that time, there were four professed Sisters and four postulants in the convent. Another address is recorded in *CKC.*, II, 40: “You are the foundations of the convent. If you are not right, just imagine what will be the condition of the rest.” This was addressed to the whole Community of seven professed members. This entry is of 14 September 1871.

²⁰⁰ Cf., *CKC.*, I, 97; *CKC.*, II, 40, 76. Beccaro, on three occasions called them foundation stones during his regular instructions.

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‘stones fit for foundation.’²⁰¹ What they meant was that they were like stones, which the builder used for the construction of the edifice. Eliswa and Anna offered themselves to be built upon or to be formed. They did not consider themselves or were not called as builders, but simply as stones. They were foundation stones, not founders. After referring to the words ‘foundation stones’ used by Beccaro and Baccinelli,²⁰² she made a jump to the Decree of the Propaganda Fide given at Rome on 21 January 1988. She writes, “The document entitled, *Decretum, Congregatio Pro Genitum Evanelizatione seu de Propaganda Fide*, Prot. N. 193/88 and many such documents, clearly state that the Third Order Carmelite Congregation for women was founded by Rev. Mother Elizabeth Vakayil, and canonically erected by the Apostolic Vicar, Bernardine Baccinelli OCD.”²⁰³ She has made some other generic statements in the second paragraph without quoting any text pertinent to her claim and mentioned some other documents of later origin, such as *Diamond Jubilee Souvenir of the CMC*, Bro. Leopold TOCD, *Satyanadakahalam*, etc., to prove her position on Eliswa.²⁰⁴

The second paragraph opens with these words: “The contemporary people and ecclesiastical authorities testified to

²⁰¹ *Alochana*, 95: ‘[Aṣṅkṛṣṇāṅ nṅp tṅmKyāmb [ṣṭ]mṣe.’ [Stone fit for foundation].

²⁰² *CKC* or any other documents never records any visit or instruction of Baccinelli to the community at Koonammavu.

²⁰³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174, fn. 28, given the reference to APF, *Decretum*, Prot. N. 193/88, which is decreed at the time of raising the CTC as an institute of pontifical status. The *Decretum* is given as Appendix on page 449 of her book.

²⁰⁴ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174. See another such general statement: “The documents in the General Archives of the Discalced Carmelite Order also testify to the position of the foundress, Mother Eliswa.” She has not quoted any of the documents.

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the authenticity of the position of Mother Eliswa as foundress of the Congregation of the TOCD for women.”²⁰⁵ She has not presented any valid contemporary documents in support of her argument. She speaks about a special ceremony of receiving the first members: “He (Baccinelli) in virtue of his office, officially accepted Eliswa, Anna and Theresa into the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites Sisters (TOCD) on Monday, February 12, 1866, by issuing the *Documentum Erectionem*.”²⁰⁶ She has shown two sources for it: the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD and *Nalagamam of TOCD*. However, the *Nalagamam of TOCD* does not speak about such a ceremony on 12 February. Except for the two references to the *Nalagamam of the TOCD*, all other references in these paragraphs are taken from the writings after the division of the convent in 1890, and since those documents are of later origin cannot be taken as valid historical evidence. Thus, one should say that Kinattungal either ignored or consciously omitted some of the pertinent documents of the foundation period.

A discussion is made here regarding the primary sources used by Kinattungal.

1) The Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome: Although in her ‘General Introduction’ Kinattungal states that “The main sources for the book are the official communications of the Vicars Apostolic...,” (29) she does not refer to the official report sent to the Propaganda Fide by Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar in 1867, in which he reported

²⁰⁵ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174-175. She has quoted from the ‘Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu,’ which was written in 1890 after the convent had been declared as belonging to the Vicariate of Thrissur.

²⁰⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 128, see also 174.

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that ‘the Sisters were entrusted to a missionary and the Prior of the Tertiaries,’ referring to Beccaro and Chavara.²⁰⁷ She does not seem to be interested in delving deeply into the nature of their collaboration with regard to their duty entrusted by the local Ordinary to care for the Sisters. She took only the communications of Mellano to Rome, written in the context of the dispute over the ownership of the property of the convent at Koonammavu.

Another observation is that when Kinattungal takes ‘the official communications of Mellano Rome’ as the first of the primary sources to prove the authenticity of the position of Eliswa, she does not seem to depend on any of the letters written by him before 1887. It may mean that during or after the time of foundation of the convent until the bifurcation of the vicariate, nothing concerning the convent was in his communications! Even when Mellano submitted the report to the Propaganda Fide in 1876, the convent at Koonammavu had no place in the *Catalogus Ecclesiarum Ritus Siro-Malabarici*.²⁰⁸ The comments and observations regarding the reliability of the opinion of Mellano on the question of the identity of the founder of the Koonammavu convent are not repeated here.

Even though Kinattungal finds in the letters of Mellano answers to her search that Eliswa is the foundress, her analysis from the letters of Mellano is totally

²⁰⁷ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, f. 18.

²⁰⁸ Cf. ACO., *Scritture Originali 1876*, Vol. 7. *Catalogus Ecclesiarum Ritus Siro-Malabarici*, ff.390b-390m. In the ‘Catalogue of the Parishes’ given by Msgr. Mellano in 1876 he puts the monastery at Koonammavu in the list of Latin parishes along with the monastery of Manjummel. The convent at Koonammavu is not included in that *catalogus*!

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unconvincing due to the lack of correct information on the historical basis and lack of clarity in the presentation of this part of the argument. In sum, the letters of Mellano, given in *Ponente, Marzzo 1890*, were written in the context of a dispute between him and Medlycott over the jurisdiction of the Koonammavu convent. Therefore, his letters cannot be taken as proof for the authentic position on Eliswa, as Kinattingal claims.²⁰⁹ Thus, her acceptance of Mellano's claim as to the identity of the founder cannot be said to be historically accurate, as Mellano himself has confused utterances regarding the identity of the real founder; he was inconsistent, uncertain and vacillating. Moreover, in his letters Mellano did not seem to ascribe any specific role to Eliswa in the foundation. In those letters, Mellano never mentioned the name of Chavara and proposed some other persons as responsible for the foundation.

In spite of the fact that Rome rejected the claims of Mellano by considering them as unauthentic, Kinattingal and those who hold Eliswa as the foundress keep on repeating the words of Mellano, their ecclesiastical head, as contrary to the written documents of the foundation period. Thus, Mellano's statements on the Latin origin of the Koonammavu convent, the ritual status of the institute before 1890, the financial source for the construction of the convent, the omission of the name of Chavara, the denial of the role of the men TOCD in the affairs of the convent, and his lack of clarity about the identity of the founder of the institute, etc., result from an alteration of the historical facts.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ This is true about her claims about the site of the convent, the patrimony of the first members, etc.

²¹⁰ Cf., Paul Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications* (Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013), 427-609.

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Kinattungal's presentation of another point needs our attention, namely, the economic status of Eliswa, which contradicts the description given in the documents of the foundation period.²¹¹ Kinattungal presents Eliswa as a person of wealth:

- "Though she was rich, she had abandoned all the comforts of her luxurious house and she had chosen the small granary for her more disciplined and simple lifestyle" (121).

- "The first step in the option for the poor was her own option to be poor. Mother Eliswa decided to be poor even though she had the possibility to be otherwise" (123).

- She says that Baccinelli also knew "that they possessed enough economical resources to build a convent, [and] he was all the more delighted" (125).

- About living in a bamboo-mat convent Kinattungal says, "According to the standards of Vypissery and Vakayil families, living in such a house made of bamboo was a great humiliation" (126).

- "It would appear that, the Archbishop wished to check the ability of the sisters to live the vow of poverty, since they belonged to such a rich family. ...Mother Eliswa was not proud of her material riches and was very happy to renounce them in order to find the real treasure in God" (127).

Chavara's letter to Porukara, the Superior of the Mannanam monastery, on 13 March 1866, provides an

²¹¹ *CKC.*, 1, 6-7; *CMM.*, 127; *CK.*, V/3.

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altogether different picture of the life situation of Eliswa and Anna before they started their community life in the bamboo-mat convent. It is a letter expressing Chavara's apprehension about receiving a woman of a rich family to the community at bamboo-mat convent, which has embraced a life style of simplicity and poverty. This letter tells that even the first members Eliswa and Anna were formerly leading a life of utter poverty and hard labor. He notes that both the mother and her daughter were finding their sustenance by hard work, such as rope making, mat weaving, and grinding rice. Even then, they had to eat rice bran and to drink *kanji* water. They did not seem to have had many clothes; hence, they had to wash, dry, and put on the existing ones. They had no proper bed to sleep in; they slept on planks (*vattipuram*).²¹² Indeed they were very poor, it seems.

As an attempt to show that Eliswa and the first members had enough material resources and they were not in need of others' help to construct the new convent, Kinattungal writes, "...original sources are available which prove the list of properties of the foundress and her daughter Anna."²¹³ It is true that they had some plots of land and fields, as Beccaro's diary notes and '*the Accounts of the dowry of Sr. Anna*' depict. However, the *CKC* and the *CMM* state that their land was in debt. If the interest and the debt had not been paid on

²¹² *CK.*, V/3. Letter written by Chavara to Porukara on 13 March 1866.

²¹³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 204 fn. 143. She gives reference to AVP, CMC, *Pathrameni Sambhanthicha Kanakkukal* (1867-1875), (*The Accounts of the Dowry of Sr. Anna*), p. 20. The same thing can be seen in fn. 151 of her chapter two. She gives the list of properties under the same footnote and same page number of the original and added "List of properties which were bought after the foundation of the Congregation," which gives the impression that all these properties were of Anna's patrimony. The second part is on page 21 of the original, which Kinattungal has not given.

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time, the land would be lost but the debt would remain.²¹⁴ Both the chronicles testify that Thomman, Anna's uncle, agreed to build a temporary house as convent. Nevertheless, his problem was that he had no money even to start with.²¹⁵ This being the economic condition of the first members at the time of foundation, Mellano wrote to Rome that they had had property worth of Franc 14000. So too, Kinattungal claims that Eliswa had a cash deposit of Rupees 2000.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, she fails to cite any documents to prove her claim.

In the conclusion of 'The Critical Study of the Foundation of the TOCD,' Kinattungal observes:

In the history of this religious congregation, there have been many personalities involved, such as Archbishop Bernardine, Fr. Leopold, Fr. Guyomar Panambil, Archbishop Leonard Mellano, Fr. Chavara, Msgr. Marceline, Fr. Philip, Fr. Louis, etc. However, none of them can be regarded as the founder or co-founder. Mother Eliswa has the unique position of the foundress and she received the gift of charism through her deep interior life of prayer and solitude. Theresa and Anna were co-foundresses who were attracted to

²¹⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 4; *CMM.*, 127.

²¹⁵ *CMM.*, 127 provides the source of money to begin the work of the bamboo-mat convent: "In the beginning of the year 1866, a person given Rs. 10 as donation. ...With that and Rs. 8 got from some other source, work on the house was begun. Chavara has noted further contributions as well. Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 6-7. Cf., Paul Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications* (Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013), 63-67.

²¹⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 135: "According to the current money value, it would be millions of Rupees."

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the life style and charism of Mother Eliswa, and thus formed the first religious Community.²¹⁷

An observation on the contribution of Fr. Guyomar is relevant here: No original documents mention the name of Thomas Guyomar Panambil whom Kinattingal presents as the maternal uncle of Eliswa and as the one who offered three pieces of land for the convent. Kinattingal has made three references to Guyomar's offer of three pieces of land in her book.²¹⁸ It is strange that the first volume (1866-1870) of *CKC* written by Anna, "the grand niece" of Guyomar omitted the name of this "benefactor." She has faithfully recorded the names of all those who extended any kind of help to the convent, as well as those who had paid visits to the convent in the early years of its foundation. Neither Chavara nor Beccaro had any reference to this person in relation to the founding of the convent, the donation of land or any other transaction. Moreover, Msgr. Mellano, in his letter of 15 March 1889, tells the name of the persons in whose land the convent was constructed.²¹⁹ He also does not mention the name of

²¹⁷ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 249-250.

²¹⁸ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 191. About Fr. Guyomar's offer of three pieces of land, see Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 137, 181, 184; Her basis for these assertions are from secondary sources of much later origin.

²¹⁹ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, f.62: "Il luogo, dove questo Monastero fu fabbricato consisteva in tre piccolo palmari di Latini, cioè Vattaparampil Cacchi, Vattaparampil Cunhu Varido nipote di Cacchi, ed un certo Cioladempil Cunhu Varido nipote di Cacchi, I quali a modicissimo prezzo li cedettero colla casa, che vi aveano, per tale oggetto." This letter of Mellano does not mention the name of Fr. Guyomar Panambil as one who contributed land for the convent. Therefore, it can be concluded that until 1889 Fr. Guyomar was not in the picture. In spite of many contemporary testimonies regarding the land of the convent and the money collected for the construction of the new building of the convent, Sucy Kinattingal, depending upon

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Guyomar Panambil as the contributor of the land for the convent.

2) Another important source for Kinattungal is ‘the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD.’²²⁰ Brother Leopold was born in the year 1882 and started writing more than fifty years after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu and even after the establishment of the convent at Verapuzha in 1890. Kinattungal acknowledges the later origin of his writings: “Some manuscripts were written in 1934... We can

Bro. Leopold’s unauthentic and unscientific manuscripts states, “the first convent was built on the property of the members of the Latin Rite Fr. Thomas Guyomar Panambil offered three plots of land to his nieces to build the convent and the compound was comprised of these three plots and the plot bought with the patrimony of the founding members.” Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 181. The writings of Bro. Leopold TOCD (1882-1967) belonged to the period after the division of the convent based on Rites and he seemed to follow the line of arguments of Msgr. Mellano regarding the property of Eliswa and Anna, except that of the offer of Guyomar. Kinattungal asserted later that Chavara also admitted the fact of Guyomar’s contribution of three plots. Cf., Kinattungal, *Pradhama Thaddheshiya Sanyasinisamooham Stapaka*, 54. What Chavara recorded in *CMM.*, 134 reads like this: “He [Beccaro] prevailed upon the owners of two compounds adjacent to the land owned by our Koonammavu monastery to part with them in exchange for two other properties and at a concessional price... and joined the three plots together.” Kinattungal mistook Chavara’s phrase “three plots” and considered those ‘three plots’ as donated by Guyomar. At the same time, she did not give attention to his words in the same sentence as ‘the land owned by our Koonammvu monastery.’ In *CMM.*, 134 Chavara has mentioned the names of persons who extended helps to the Sisters, for example, he names Nicholas who went to the convent with medicine and Vareed who gave a torch for Chavara to light on their way to the convent at night when the Superior was ill. If Guyomar had contributed the land, surely Chavara could have mentioned his name.

²²⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 179-182.

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guess that the manuscripts were written between 1910 and 1935.”²²¹ Even then, his writings are included among the primary sources by Kinattingal. According to her, Bro. Leopold is one of the famous local historians (109). She attributes the authorship of many books to him (179) and refers to his manuscripts (102) throughout her study. She observes,

Bro. Leopold reported about the life of the founding members, the foundation of the congregation, their patrimony, division of the TOCD Congregation, etc. Bro. Leopold TOCD was one who witnessed the life of the founding members of the TOCD Congregation for women (180).

According to the details given by Kinattingal, Bro. Leopold was born sixteen years after the foundation of the Koonammavu convent and the founding members left for Verapuzha when he was seven or eight years old. One can imagine the trustworthiness of the *witness* of an eight-year-old boy. A cursory look at his presentation of Eliswa as foundress shows that very often he adds that ‘the first convent was built on her property.’ According to Kinattingal, his Books I, III, and IV speak of the above matter.²²² One may wonder why he connects the question of the founder with the property of the convent. Kinattingal says, “Bro. Leopold recorded that the first convent was built on the property of the Latin Rite members, and he also gave details about the patrimony of Sr. Anna. ... Bro. Leopold mentioned the different sources of money for the construction, a major portion of which was contributed by the Apostolic Vicar. ...”

²²¹ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 180, fn.50.

²²² Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 175, fn.36.

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(181). These and other information taken from Bro. Leopold echo Mellano's letters, and their main preoccupation was the monetary aspect of the convent. Bro. Leopold wrote these manuscripts after the event of the division of the convent. This naturally reflects the mindset of the Latin community at Koonammavu after the division of the Convent. Therefore, the manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD cannot be taken as a reliable source with regard to the position of Eliswa as foundress.

Some confusion also exists about the source of those manuscripts. Kinattungal uses both archives - ASJVB²²³ and AICM²²⁴ - in the same footnote.²²⁵ The use of their folio numbers creates further confusion. In some references all four Books have folio numbers, while in others the same Books have no folio numbers. In addition, these manuscripts are classified by their trustees as a "Reserved Source"²²⁶ and not available even for academic research.

3) Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu: The third primary source of Kinattungal is the letter written by the parishioners of Koonammavu on 10 June 1890.²²⁷ This letter,

²²³ Archives of St. Joseph's Vidya Bhavan, Edappally.

²²⁴ Archives of Immaculate Heart Monastery, Manjimmel.

²²⁵ In the same fn. 51 (p. 180), Kinattungal gives reference to Book I, II, III, IV from ASJVB with footnote numbers. Again, she gives AICM, Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, fn. 11f. (Book No. is not mentioned).

²²⁶ ACMCG, [In response to the request of Sr. Sancta, the Superior General of the CMC to have the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, the Superior General of the CTC wrote that the 'Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD' is a 'Reserved Source' and it cannot be made available to you.]

²²⁷ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 182-183. Although Kinattungal refers to it as the 'Letter of the parishioners of

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as the date of its writing shows, is written after the decision taken by Propaganda Fide made the final decision regarding the authority of the convent on 24 March 1890 that the convent should be under the governance of the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur. Naturally, the parishioners of Koonammavu found it difficult to accept the decision. Kinattungal says that the priests and people sent *many letters* to the Propaganda Fide with many additional pages of signatures (182-183). They seemed to repeat the same version of Mellano, their ecclesiastical head, regarding the property and the founder of the convent. Although the news about Propaganda's decision reached them, since it was not executed, they might have thought that by sending many letters the authorities might change the decision in favor of the Latins. To substantiate their arguments Kinattungal had referred to Mellano's letters.²²⁸ As discussed above, in view of the fact that their concern was the monetary aspect of the convent and not directly the identity of the founder, the period and situation of its writing, this letter does not serve as proof of the authenticity of the position of Eliswa as foundress.

4) 'Proofs' from the Writings of Chavara: Kinattungal has allotted just one and a half pages to present 'Proofs from the Writings of Chavara.' There she quotes his words from the *CMM* in a distorted manner and she concludes, "The above testimony is important in proving the invalidity of the statements of those who claimed Fr. Chavara as the founder of the congregation" (184). Even though her

Koonammavu' the letter given in the appendix of her book, 434-440 is signed by the 'clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Verapuzha' (*Clerus et populus Archidicesis Verapolitana*), not the parishioners of Koonammavu.

²²⁸ Cf. Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 183, fn. 64.

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purpose was to prove the ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress,’ she ended up concluding that Chavara was not the founder. It is obvious that she did not get any ‘proofs’ from the writings of Chavara in favor of Eliswa as foundress.

5) ‘Proofs’ from the Chronicles of the Congregation: According to Kinattungal, “the authentic sources for explaining the true history of the TOCD Congregation are the chronicles ...” (26-27) which were written during the period of foundation. At the same time, she allots only the *fifth* place to these chronicles. Curiously enough she misses in the first pages of the Chronicle any idea regarding the identity of the founder/foundress since the chronicler does not clearly state in these pages who received the inspiration for the founding of the convent.²²⁹ She remarks, “In the first pages of the Chronicle one would naturally expect a detailed description of the foundress and the other founding members or the presentation of the charismatic spirit implied, etc. Instead these pages speak out of Fr. Leopold’s relationship to TOCD priests of Syrian Rite.”²³⁰ Kinattungal thus obviously admits

²²⁹ It is true that Chavara did not start the ‘Beginning of the Religious Life for Women’ directly with the description of the first members as Kinattungal expected. On the contrary, he starts with the sadness of the people due to the absence of religious life in Kerala, their age-long waiting for, and the gradual evolution of the religious movement that started at Mannanam and followed by the attempt at Puthenpally, the disappointment caused by that failed attempt and the actual foundation of the convent for women at Koonammavu.

²³⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 185. But on page 188 Kinattungal states, “The first 17 pages of the Chronicles testify to the ardent desire of Eliswa and Anna to embrace religious life. Both of them had led a pious life for long years and had selected Fr. Leopold as their confessor and spiritual director.” Though she has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol. 1, ff.1-4, it is from page 3 that speaks about Eliswa and Anna.

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that she could not see the “foundress” or the “charismatic spirit of the foundress” in the first pages of the *CKC*. She then attributes this absence to the “male domination in the Church!”²³¹

Kinattungal’s argument that Eliswa’s name was not mentioned as the foundress had been due to bias or vested interests is not maintainable, since even Anna, Eliswa’s own daughter does not show her as the foundress in the rest of the pages of the chronicle. It seems that Kinattungal first presupposes that Eliswa was the foundress and then seeks to find references to it in the chronicles. Since these ‘wished for’ references are not there, she blames the Church for male domination. In fact, Kinattungal frankly admits that there is no such clear evidence to her thesis. There is only scant reference to Eliswa’s leading role in the first Community in the rest of the pages as well. In other words, Kinattungal admits that the Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent do not present Eliswa as the foundress of the institute.

In this connection, it is also worthwhile to answer a critical remark of Kinattungal who notices certain tampering in the first pages of the *CKC*. She calls it an ‘attempt to hide the facts’ (185). Accepting the fact of tampering, it may be pointed out that this tampering is related to facts and figures with regard to patrimony, and not about the question of the founder.²³² The argument that there were manipulations in certain pages related to some other topic is not a valid argument when the real issue of the founder is at stake. Those who base their arguments on the Chronicles of Koonammavu

²³¹ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 185.

²³² Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *An Unscientific Scientific Work*, 132-139.

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Convent bring out only those statements in the document that are not tampered or manipulated.

As a demonstration of Eliswa as foundress, Kinattungal makes some comments on ‘the reception of the fourth member.’ She argues:

Fr. Leopold asked Achamma to seek permission from Mother Eliswa by kneeling in front of her. With due permission of the foundress, Fr. Leopold received Achamma as a member of the new religious congregation ... It is clear that Mother Eliswa exercised all the rights of the foundress and that Fr. Leopold respected her rights and asked her permission to admit the fourth member (189).²³³

However, to interpret the act of the candidate, kneeling down before the Superior, as a proof for the status of Eliswa as the foundress, seems to be a step too far in logic. One has to admit that the new candidate was asked to kneel down before the Superior of the Community as an expression of her spirit of obedience and humility.²³⁴ In the narration of this particular event, the term Superior (‘*ṭṭivī n̄*’) or Mother Superior (‘*ṭṭivī n̄ 1/2*’) has been repeated seven times,²³⁵ never as ‘Mother Eliswa,’ (‘*Ḡeozim̄ 1/2*’) in her personal name. It is noted that in the *CKC* she was never designated as Mother Eliswa or Mother Foundress. However, Kinattungal argues, “It is clear that Mother Eliswa exercised all the rights of the foundress and that Fr. Leopold respected her rights and asked her permission to admit the fourth member” (189). She

²³³ Although *CKC* names the fourth member Eliswa, which was changed to Clara, Kinattungal calls her Achamma which is not in *CKC*.

²³⁴ Kalluveetil, et.al., *An Unscientific Scientific Work*, 93.

²³⁵ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 14-15.

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takes it as a proof for Beccaro's acceptance of Eliswa as the foundress, and to show that Chavara had no role in it.²³⁶ Whereas *CKC*²³⁷ and *CMM*²³⁸ clearly testify the fact that it was Chavara who took the initiative to invite the fourth member to the convent. The very fact that Chavara exercised his freedom to invite a Syrian member to the convent shows that he had the authority to do it. The *CKC* gives the reason for not admitting her on the first day: "Because he [Beccaro] had never seen or known her before, he could not take a decision immediately, without having interviewed her once or twice in the confessional. So he asked her to wait, staying in a house outside."²³⁹ Being the Provincial Delegate and the Canonical Superior, Beccaro took upon himself the responsibility to discern the genuineness of the vocation of the candidate, and he admitted her on 14 February, the following day of the inauguration of the convent, after having tested her and been personally convinced of her vocation.

The fourth member Eliswa Puthenangady reached Koonammavu by the invitation of Chavara and the Provincial Delegate tested her vocation. By the fact that Beccaro informed or asked permission from the Superior of the community to admit the new member does not mean that he was acknowledging the authority of Eliswa as the foundress as Kinattungal claims.

²³⁶ These words of Kinattungal echo Mulloor who expressed this idea in 2005: "In fact when the first Syro-Malabar rite member arrives, Fr. Leopold asks permission from Mother Eliswa before she is presented to the Community and it is Mother Eliswa who admits her." Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 160.

²³⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 8-9: "Sr. Clara arrived on 11th February itself, as *Priorachan* had informed them through the parish priest of Vaikom."

²³⁸ *CMM.*, 129: The details about Eliswa Puthenangady's life given in the *Chronicles* prove that Chavara knew her well.

²³⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 9.

3.5.3.1 Eliswa and Her Founding Charism

In her third chapter, while making ‘the critical study of the foundation of the TOCD Congregation,’ Kinattungal has two subtitles: ‘the founding charism’ of Eliswa and ‘the characteristics of the charism.’²⁴⁰ Instead of describing the nature of inspiration Eliswa received from the Holy Spirit or its content and her awareness of being called to be the founder, the author makes some generic statements. She does not quote any words of the foundress. Kinattungal seems to agree that the call of Eliswa was to lead a consecrated life. She states, “In the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. ...Fr. Leopold, after testing and evaluating her special charism,²⁴¹ confirmed it as the gift of God for her to live a consecrated life in Carmel and he discussed it with the Apostolic Vicar” (171).²⁴² “Eliswa Vakayil was a widow, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and was thus inspired to live a consecrated life” (103). Kinattungal affirms the fact of Eliswa’s call to lead a consecrated life in her concluding remarks as well, “Mother Eliswa led a life of prayer for 14 years and it is she who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel and she who took the early initiative to live a community life” (405).

Kinattungal’s repeated use of the phrase ‘to lead a consecrated life’ is noteworthy, by which she confirms that

²⁴⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 170-173.

²⁴¹ Although Kinattungal mentions the ‘special charism,’ she never explained what exactly was that special charism of Eliswa.

²⁴² Kinattungal, 171. She has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol.1. ff. 1-4. In those pages there is no mention of her special charism and discussion with the Apostolic Vicar.

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Eliswa's call was to lead a consecrated life, hers was a call to follow; not to be a leader or initiator. Kinattungal does not speak about Eliswa's call to be the founder of a new religious institute in the Church. Thus, Kinattungal is fully in agreement with Beccaro, Chavara, Anna, the chronicler of *CKC*, and other contemporaries who held Eliswa as the first member of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu. It cannot be proven for certain that when Eliswa told Beccaro that "we entrust both of us to you," the idea of consecrated life was clearly present in her. While guiding Eliswa and Anna in the beginning, Beccaro's concern was "how to nurture and protect their chastity,"²⁴³ not exactly to found a new institute of consecrated life, nor to help the founder to establish a new religious institute.

Kinattungal claims that 'it was Eliswa who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel,' which is not supported by any evidence in *CKC* and *CMM*. According to *CMM*, it was Baccinelli who decided that the convent was to be Carmelite.²⁴⁴ Thus, the Carmelite charism was discerned and decided neither by Beccaro nor by Eliswa. Therefore, Kinattungal's assertion that Eliswa received the charism to 'Carmel' is baseless.

Kinattungal's statement that it was Eliswa who took the early initiative to live a community life, is not supported by the *CKC* which states that community life started only after the inauguration of the Bamboo-mat convent on 13 February. It is surely spurious to claim that a mother and her fourteen-year-old daughter formed a community on their own and in their 'joint family.' In order to show that Eliswa

²⁴³ *CKC.*, 1, 4.

²⁴⁴ *CMM.*, 127; Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 5-6.

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already started community life earlier, Kinattungal presents the mother and child as they were staying in *Kalapura*.²⁴⁵ and brings some other imaginary stories. The *CKC* provides a different picture from what Kinattungal presented under the sub-titles ‘Shifting of Residence to *Kalapura*’ (116), ‘Contemplation in Cells’ (116), ‘A Small Community’ (117), and ‘Theresa Joins Mother Eliswa and Anna’ (117). As discussed earlier, on the day following the opening of the bamboo-mat convent when Beccaro and Chavara together visited the convent and enquired about their new life in the community, Eliswa told them, “Sister Theresa had eaten almost nothing the previous day and that she had some difficulty in leaving her mother. She had never before been away from her mother, not even for a day.”²⁴⁶ Theresa herself confirmed this when Beccaro asked her to speak of her experience. The *CKC*’s description about the arrival of Theresa at Koonammavu agrees with Eliswa’s expression, ‘not even for a day’ was she away from her mother. Theresa reached Koonammavu along with her parents and some of her relatives on (Saturday), 10 February 1866, and they stayed with Eliswa and Anna until the opening of the convent on (Tuesday), 13 February.²⁴⁷ As a result, ‘the previous night,’ namely 13 February 1866 was her first night away from her mother that made her ‘homesick,’ as noticed and reported by her elder sister, Eliswa, which proves the inaccuracy of Kinattungal’s claim that the three together formed a community even before the opening of the bamboo-mat convent. She says, “There emerged a minuscule pious

²⁴⁵ According to Kinattungal *Kalapura* was the granary, in the share of Anna (116).

²⁴⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 4.

²⁴⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 7-8.

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community without fixed rules and regulations” (117).²⁴⁸ “The three founding members were under the guidance of Fr. Leopold for four years” (189). At another instance Kinattungal states, “Sr. Theresa was preparing herself in her own house” (125). If Theresa was preparing in her own house at Ochanthuruth, ‘A Small Community’ at Koonammavu was consisted of a widow and her teenage daughter.²⁴⁹ One may say that Kinattungal is contradicting herself by saying that Theresa was preparing herself in her own house, and at the same time holding that Theresa joined Eliswa and Anna to form a ‘minuscule’ community. Furthermore, when the *CKC* and *CMM* speak about the beginning of religious life for women, they refer only to Eliswa and Anna and do not mention Theresa’s name before the preparation of the bamboo-mat convent.²⁵⁰ and she was not on the scene earlier.²⁵¹

A word about Eliswa’s stay in *Kalapura* is appropriate here. Kinattungal’s source for *Kalapura* is Prescilla, who seems to have invented this story more than a century after the foundation and to which no references were provided by

²⁴⁸ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 117. She has given reference to it from a book written in 1940.

²⁴⁹ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 116: “Eliswa remained constant in prayer and solitude and led a simple life for 14 years...”

²⁵⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 3: Eliswa entrusted both herself and Anna. *CMM.*, 126 mentions only about two: “Here is a widow and her fourteen-year-old daughter....So why not get these two out of their joint family house and settle them...”

²⁵¹ *CKC.*, 1, 7. In the list of members, Theresa is the third, although she is senior to Anna by age. Clara is the fourth, though she is older than all other members of the first Community are. It may be because of the concept of the reception of their call to be religious.

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What Kinattungal states, under the above-mentioned titles, do not have a basis in any of the contemporary documents.²⁵⁵ Instead of a detailed research of important original sources of the foundation period, she depended upon those writings of more recent origin.²⁵⁶ In addition, her book repeats a long-standing debate about the identity of the founder of the women TOCD by depending on and repeating the ideas of Mellano, and some popular and pious biographies. Even then, Kinattungal claims that her work clears away all doubts and confusion regarding the position of the foundress of the TOCD Congregation for women (404). On the contrary, by going through Kinattungal's presentation of Eliswa, it can be said that she has not done an exhaustive study on Eliswa as foundress. She has not given attention to any special charism or the nature of the virtuous life of Eliswa in the convent at Koonammavu. She never looked into Eliswa's inner dynamism, which was the fruit of her long-suffering life, as the *CKC* testifies that for most of the time in the convent Eliswa was afflicted by some kind of physical

Life of Mother Eliswa' (pages 105-106) as her footnotes show, she depended on the writings from the third quarter of the twentieth century and even of the third millennium. Those books were not written in a scientific manner, but written in a popular style.

²⁵⁵ ACMCG., Letter of Prof. Norman Tanner, SJ, on 30 January 2010 to Sr. Sancta, Superior General of the CMC. While sending the published extract of her work to the Superior General of CMC Prof. Tanner, the moderator of Kinattungal's dissertation, wrote: "Only chapter two, which is relatively uncontroversial, is included." One can imagine that if "chapter two, which is relatively uncontroversial" has this many controversial and distorted elements, what will be the condition of other chapters!

²⁵⁶ Kinattungal's source books referring to the early life of Eliswa, Anna and Theresa, show that they are not scientific works but written in a popular style.

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illnesses. Kinattungal's study cannot be called scientific and her conclusions are questionable.

3.5.3.2 Co-foundresses

In the concluding part of her study, Kinattungal has accorded great importance to the other two members of the first community. She states, "In the history of the TOCD Congregation for women, the Servant of God, Mother Eliswa has a unique position as the foundress of the congregation. Sr. Theresa and Sr. Anna have the positions of the co-foundresses." As a rationale to give them the title of co-foundresses, she notes, "They were attracted to the lifestyle and charism of Mother Eliswa and they formed a religious community in a small house built on the property of the Vakayil family" (405). According to theologians, co-founder/co-foundress is one who has had a significant part in the execution of what the founder had conceived.²⁵⁷ Co-founders are regarded as sharing the foundational charism in a special way distinct from that of the other members of the institute.²⁵⁸ Kinattungal has not described what significant role that Anna and Theresa played in order to entitle them as co-foundresses. Their simple attraction to the lifestyle of Eliswa does not qualify them to that position. On the contrary, Eliswa herself testified that Theresa never spent a night without the company of her mother before joining the bamboo-mat convent.²⁵⁹ Such a person does not seem to play any significant role in the execution of the idea of Eliswa in the founding of the institute before and after the event of foundation.

²⁵⁷ Damizia, "Fondatore," *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Vol. 5, col. 1474.

²⁵⁸ Nedungatt, "Typology of Founders," 101.

²⁵⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 13.

3.5.4 Evaluation of the Opinion on Eliswa as Foundress

The foundation of the convent at Koonammavu was not an isolated single event that took place in 1866. It was the result of a long process with a long history. For Kinattungal the origin of the TOCD for women starts all of a sudden with the person of Eliswa Vakayil. Kinattungal does not seem to link the foundation with the long waiting of many persons and their previous attempts to restore religious life in the Church in Kerala. She thus ignores and overlooks the fact that the foundation of the convent at Koonammvu, an ecclesial event of great significance, was the culmination of some repeated attempts and failures, longings and disappointments. Herein lies the major weakness of her work that she fails to see and present the foundation of the convent in the broader ecclesial context of the Church in Kerala. Another major setback of her work is with regard to her sources and methodology. Relying uncritically on the writings of the ecclesiastical authorities who were European missionaries, Kinattungal does not take into consideration the aspirations and activities of the local Christians. She looks at the events through the eyes of those Westerners, sometimes excluding and other times distorting or misinterpreting the original authentic sources.

Moreover, in presenting Eliswa as the foundress, Kinattungal openly admits that the charism of Eliswa was ‘to lead a consecrated life’ and that Fr. Leopold, Eliswa’s confessor, confirmed it as the gift of God for her. Glaringly missing is any mention in the sources as well as in the argumentation of Kinattungal that Eliswa received ‘the charism to be the founder’ of the institute. To be called by

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God to lead a religious life or consecrated life, even as the first member of a congregation, is not necessarily the same as to be called to found such an institute. Kinattingal has not brought forth any documentary evidence that either shows Eliswa as the foundress or that describes her as having the qualities to be seen in the foundress. The very title of her book, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa the Foundress of TOCD (CTC& CMC) for Women* is, therefore, not merely an assertion without any documental support, but also against all evidence in the original documents of the foundation period. More importantly, in presenting Eliswa as the foundress, Kinattingal does not give much attention to show whether and how far the ecclesiastical norms for being a foundress have been realized in Eliswa, although she mentions certain true and valid norms along with certain other fake and invalid ones.

Under the title ‘Who is a Founder or Foundress of a Congregation?’ Kinattingal presents ‘certain aspects to clarify the position of the founder of a religious congregation.’ She states, “The founder is the one in whose life the action of God is visible. The ‘founder’ or ‘foundress’ is the one who receives a special vocation from God to a specific type of evangelical life, consecrating himself/herself to a specific service in the Church” (168). All those who receive a special vocation to a specific type of evangelical life cannot become the founder. The founder is the one who received the specific call to be the founder. In the same way, all the persons in whom the action of God is visible cannot be called founders of religious institutes.

Referring to *Vita Consacrata per il Nuovo Millennio* Kinattingal rightly states, “It is the Holy Spirit who inspires a person and gives him/her, the specific charism to found a

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religious congregation for the good of the Church” (168). However, while applying this principle to Eliswa, Kinattungal failed to see a divine call in Eliswa to be the founder; instead she saw in her a call to lead a consecrated life. She affirms, “In the history of the first indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala, Mother Eliswa received the call from God *to lead a consecrated life* and thereby, she became the pioneer of consecrated women in Kerala” (168). Although she stated a valid norm as the first one she could not apply it to the person of Eliswa. Next, she explains, “After long preparation in silent prayer and meditation, she obtained a clear vision of the life style which the Holy Spirit inspired in her” (168-169). However, Kinattungal never described the nature of the clear vision Eliswa obtained, nor the foundational texts show the role of Eliswa in the evolution of the religious life style of the institute.

Kinattungal has put the second and third norms in the negative. The third one has no reference and it seems to be self-made, invalid and fake norm. She writes:

Thirdly, the founder of a religious congregation is not the person who physically constructs a convent or a monastery. It is not relevant to say that the founder of a congregation is not the one who helps to construct a convent building. In the history of the first religious congregation for women in Kerala, Fr. Leopold and Fr. Chavara came to these positions respectively. It was only Mother Eliswa who undoubtedly received the special charism of the TOCD congregation for women (169).

With regard to the norms used by Kinattungal to show the position of Eliswa as foundress of the TOCD she mentioned both acceptable or valid norms as well as

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unacceptable or fake norms. The first one is a valid norm but she failed to apply it in the person of Eliswa. She could not apply it simply because objectively speaking the call to be the founder cannot be present in Eliswa. Instead, Kinattungal repeatedly and plainly admitted that Eliswa's call was to lead a consecrated life; also admitted that she became the pioneer of consecrated women in Kerala. In order to affirm her position she insists, "Here in the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. During these years, she led a life perfectly open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit" (171). All praying or saintly persons need not become founders of religious institutes.

In this connection, it may be observed that Mulloor speaks about 'an established, held, lived, and transmitted fact and tradition of more than hundred years that Mother Eliswa is the foundress.'²⁶⁰ CTC Sisters have, of course, 'an existing tradition based on the history of a hundred years!' namely after the opening of the convent at Verapuzha in 1890 and this tradition of considering Eliswa as foundress is of a later origin.²⁶¹ Basing on Msgr. Mellano's letters Mulloor asks, "But how can this be disproved when it is clearly supported by the documents in which ecclesiastical authorities have addressed Mother Eliswa as foundress."²⁶² For Mulloor, too, the letters of Mellano, (their ecclesiastical authority), are the basis for the history of accepting Eliswa as the foundress.

²⁶⁰ Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 159.

²⁶¹ When he made these claims in 2005, the institute had 139 years of its history. Then his acceptance of 'more than hundred years' take them back to the period after the division of the convent in 1890 after which the tradition originated.

²⁶² Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 160.

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However, as discussed earlier, considering the origin of Mellano's letters, which date back more than twenty years after the foundation, that too, written in the context of dispute and division of the convent according to Rites, those letters have only a relative value to be considered impartial sources for proving anything. Interestingly enough the only thing that Mellano stated in his letters regarding the foundation was that the first members whom he called 'foundresses' belong to the Latin Christian Community and that the first convent was built on their property. This betrays his concern and interest. It is also noteworthy that Mellano did not assign yet any explicit role to Eliswa in founding the convent.²⁶³ In other words, the letters of Mellano do not show Eliswa as the foundress. They rather disprove this, by mentioning nothing about her definite role!

To sum up, the opinion that Eliswa is the foundress of the Women TOCD remains merely as an assertion without any documentary evidence because:

i) The original sources do not provide adequate answers to the pertinent questions regarding Eliswa's founding charism. It has not demonstrated what the nature or content of her inspiration was to be the founder. Her special charism was shown in her desire to live a chaste life. All what

²⁶³ It is already noticed that in his different letters Mellano presented different persons as founders. Even then, with regard to the 'founder controversy' Mulloor asks: "Does such a controversy really exist?" It seems that Mulloor is unaware of the wavering position of Mellano regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD. Moreover, Mellano took many deviations from the documents of the foundation period, including that of Baccinelli who is the hierarchical founder of the institute of the Women TOCD. Cf., Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 159.

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one could say based on documents is that she received a call to lead a chaste life or even religious life. Neither is it shown what aspects of the Gospel were especially attractive to her and what specific need of the Church ignited a flame in her heart to found the institute. There is also no evidence to show her participation in a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ as the founders of the religious institutes are expected to have as per the document *Mutuae Relationes*.

ii) Eliswa had not conceived the religious institute, which is necessary for any founder. The desire she expressed to Beccaro was simply for helping her and her daughter Anna to realize their desire for a chaste life for according to Eliswa, Anna does not want to get married. In order to achieve this they depended upon Beccaro, their confessor, spiritual guide and parish priest. Thus they entrusted themselves into his hands, hoping that God would inspire him to find a way to realize their desire for a chaste life. This does not mean in itself that she intended to found a new religious institute. There is no documentary evidence to hold that she had a “positive input” in the decision to found a new institute or in defining the nature, character, ministry and its life style, which are considered to be the role of the founder. She merely followed the instructions and suggestions given by Chavara and Beccaro. No valid and original document presents her as foundress either before or after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu. Not even a single mention regarding her call to be the *foundress* of the institute can be seen in the documents of the foundation period.

iii) While describing in detail the programme of the first day of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu, the *Alochana* adds, “Since there was nobody among them, [the members], to teach the Rules to the community, Very

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Reverend Leopold *Moopachan*, who was appointed as their Father along with *Priorachan*, taught them by instructing them by word and showing them everything they needed for a religious way of life”²⁶⁴. The above chronicler does not find anyone among the first members who had conceived the idea of religious life nor one who had received the charism to found an institute. He looks at them as ‘stones fit for foundation,’ which the builders took and used to establish the convent.

iv) Leopold Beccaro and Chavara who knew Eliswa well, with her spiritual attitudes and aptitudes, as well as the story of foundation of the convent, never referred to her as foundress. According to Beccaro, Chavara is the founder, while Eliswa was the first member and the first appointed Superior of the community. When Mellano wrote to Propaganda Fide on 28 November 1888, Sr. Teresa’s leadership capacity is mentioned, not Eliswa’s. When the time came for the community to elect the Superior, Eliswa was *not* elected. This could have been probably because the members of the community did not see any dynamic or visionary leadership qualities in her while she was at Koonammavu convent.

v) As Lozano observes, with regard to the government of newly founded institutes, it is usually the founders who directly govern their religious families. Some founders may decide to hand over the ordinary government to others for one reason or another.²⁶⁵ In the case of Eliswa, she did not govern the institute from the start and others did not elect her at the time of election. Eliswa simply followed the instructions of

²⁶⁴ *Alochana*, 96.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 4.

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the two priests, Chavara and Beccaro, without having any innovative spirit. On the day of the election of the new Superior to the community, the Chronicle records that *Sr. Eliswa* (not “Mother Eliswa”) was elected as the ‘keeper of the keys.’ Even while she was the appointed Superior of the community, the *CKC* designates her as ‘Superior’ or ‘Mother Superior,’ but *never* as ‘Mother Eliswa’ even while she was the Superior and, of course, after the election of the new Superior. This is a strong suggestion that the community members had not considered her as foundress or Mother. The community did not seem to accept her maternity and she, in turn, does not take them as her children, a quality seen in the foundresses and founders of religious institutes.

Now, the first two Constitutions of this institute are studied to see the role of the founders in formulating the Rules of life for the institute, as well as to see what place the Constitutions have ascribed to the founders.

3.6 The Founder of the Women TOCD in Their Constitutions

As discussed earlier, theologians do not agree among themselves about the giving or writing the Rules as the responsibility of the founder. Even so, it is worth discussing the origin and nature of the first Rules (*regola*) of the women TOCD. It was deemed necessary to give ecclesiastical status to groups and associations within the Church by giving them their rule of life. In 1867, Baccinelli reported to the Propaganda Fide that the Rules he gave to the women TOCD had already been approved for such an institute and he had

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done some adaptations on it.²⁶⁶ Neither Chavara nor Beccaro composed the Rules of the women TOCD. Beccaro translated the text given by Baccinelli. They were the Rules of the Carmelites of Europe with slight modifications made for the Sisters of Kerala. Baccinelli gave the first Rules of the Congregation for women, but Beccaro kept on improving the text to make them more and more conformable to the rule of St. Teresa, namely, of the Discalced Carmelite nuns.²⁶⁷ Mundadan says that Beccaro did a similar service for the TOCD for men from early 1860 onwards, correcting and improving the original Rules with a view to making them as conformable as possible to the Rules of the Discalced Carmelites.²⁶⁸ This he did not in his capacity as the founder, but as the Canonical Superior of the TOCD. Thus, nobody could assign any superior role to Beccaro or any inferior position to Chavara regarding the writing of the Rules, because that Rule had already existed for some other institutes in some other country. There is no mention of the name of the founder in the first Rules.

One more word should be added with regard to the first Rules given to the women TOCD. Very often, the hierarchy of the Church accepts the Rules presented to it by remarkable men and women (the founders), and after adjusting them approves them with its authority.²⁶⁹ However, what happened in the case of the women TOCD in Kerala was that when the idea of founding the institute was

²⁶⁶ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*. Response to Q. 71: “Le Regole son quelle già approvate per tale Istituto, vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho detto pei Terziarii.” Cf., *Positio Super Virtutibus*, Chavara, 131, 132, 133, 318.

²⁶⁷ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 307.

²⁶⁸ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 307.

²⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 45.

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communicated to Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar of the time, he offered the Rules for the institute. In fact, the above mentioned Rules was formally given by Beccaro to the community on 16 July 1876 and all the Sisters took the profession of their vows once again according to the newly given Rule. They documented the event in the Chronicle in a formal way, giving the name of the one who professed her vows, the one who received her vows, and the two witnesses.²⁷⁰ The reason for this profession of vows for the second time, according to the *CKC*, is that the Rules observed until now was the abridged Rules for the Third Order, which was used by the secular TOCD.²⁷¹

The Second Constitutions were approved by Mar Louis Pazheparambil, the first Apostolic Vicar of Ernakulam in 1917, which in consultation with Beccaro, he brought from Genova, Italy and made adaptations according to the situations of the Kerala Church, and were in use until the unification of the institute in 1963. Although in its introduction Pazheparambil presents the convent at Koonammavu as the fruit of the joint effort of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD,²⁷² in its text the name of the founder does not appear. The reason for searching for another Rule, according to Pazheparampil was that the previous one was neither approved by Rome nor

²⁷⁰ *CKC.*, II, 97-107.

²⁷¹ *CKC.*, II, 98. Here some may raise a question as to what happened to the *regola* given by Baccinelli for the second time when he was informed that the first one was for the secular TOCD. Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 5-6: "The Bishop was consulted again and our 'Rules' was obtained and another copy of it was made."

²⁷² Cf. Louis Pazheparampil, "Preface" to *Thressia Punnyavalathiyude Carmelita Munnam Sabhayile Sahodarikkayulla Nyayapramanam*, 3. This Constitution was not meant for the CTC Sisters.

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complete. Thus, in the formulation of the Rules both priests - Chavara and Beccaro - have not played any significant role, since it was a Rule that pre-existed in Europe.

Conclusion

This study of analyzing in detail and evaluating critically the different opinions regarding the identity of the founder by applying the norms set by the Church documents to each 'candidate' – Beccaro, Baccinelli and Eliswa - can be concluded by presenting the comments on them succinctly. In the process of evaluating the opinions and applying the norms to the candidates, they are eliminated according to the check-list.

1) One opinion is that Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Delegate of the Vicar Provincial Superior of OCD, is the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. He cannot be regarded as the founder. When the primary norms or qualifications of the founders are applied to Beccaro, the most important criterion, namely, the divine vocation or original inspiration to be the founder, cannot be seen in him. The indigenous initiative of starting religious life in the Syro-Malabar Church was promoted by the Carmelite missionaries who were the ecclesiastical Superiors in Kerala at that time. They thought that the best way to promote that initiative was to make the Communities for men and women as Third Orders of their Order (OCD). They executed it for the men's institute in 1855/1860 and that for women when it was taking shape in 1866. This was effected by appointing a Provincial Delegate, Leopold Beccaro, for both institutes. Beccaro himself admitted that his role was that of a Canonical Superior and a novice master. He expressed it clearly in the report presented to his Superior General in 1870, that his role

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is to govern and direct the Congregation and instruct the novices and young religious. Thus, Beccaro acted as the Delegate of the Provincial when the religious community for women was being founded, and he was instrumental in initiating the first members in religious life style. This he did in his capacity as the Delegate. The inspiration for the movement for religious life was not a compartmentalized inspiration. It was an integral one that took shape at Mannanam in 1831. The founding charism, received by the founders of the religious movement started at Mannanam, was not for founding a Third Order of the OCD but it had its origin in the Syro-Malabar Church. Baccinelli, the local Ordinary of the time recognized it as an initiative of the *Rito Syro-Malabarico*. Its origin was from a son of the Syro-Malabar Rite and not from an Italian missionary of the Latin Rite. Hence, the original inspiration to found the institute was not received by Beccaro, and therefore, he is eliminated from the position of the founder of the women TOCD.

Even when Maniakkunnel claims that Beccaro is the founder, he was not attributing the original inspiration to Beccaro, and in fact, he was not the recipient of the founding grace, which is the most important mark of the founder. At the same time, it is difficult to say that Beccaro was merely a Canonical Superior or his activities cannot be attributed to a mere Canonical Superior. This study proves that Beccaro offered his whole-hearted support and helped to realize the long cherished desire of Chavara to institute a convent for the women of Kerala; and he is considered co-founder of the women TOCD.

The most important factor in favor of Beccaro as co-founder is that in both *CKC* and *CMM* as well as in Chavara's Testament, Chavara designated Beccaro as the one who

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assisted in founding the convent and worked for the smooth running of the monasteries and convent, and therefore, as the one who was the supporter for the expansion of the same. Moreover, Chavara never leaves the impression that Beccaro or any other person founded the convent. On the contrary, Beccaro clearly testified without doubt that Chavara founded the convent. While acting as the Canonical Superior of both religious institutes of men and women TOCD, he gave due respect to Chavara as their founder although at times, Beccaro was not totally free from the innate superiority consciousness of the Europeans of that period.

2) Another group accepts both Chavara and Beccaro as founders. Although both of them cooperated in the foundation of the convent, their roles were different. Chavara acted as the charismatic founder and as the recipient of the founding charism; Beccaro, as the co-founder. Beccaro cannot be given equal status as founder with Chavara. Therefore, this opinion of considering both Chavara and Beccaro as founders is rejected.

3) Some other group holds Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli of Verapoli as the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. He cannot be called its founder because he does not seem to be the recipient of the inspiration to found a religious institute for women, nor did he maintain any direct contact with the convent. According to the *Code of Canon Law*, the intentions and projects of the founder, no matter how good they are, cannot constitute an institute in the Church except through the action of the competent ecclesiastical authority. In fact, Baccinelli was instrumental in the canonical approbation and erection of the institute for men as well as one for women, as he was the local Ordinary of the time. He did not play the role

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and functions of a founder. Hence, the opinion of considering Baccinelli as the founder of the women TOCD in Kerala is rejected.

4) According to some, Eliswa Vakayil is the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. An important reason why she cannot be called the foundress is that there is no documentary evidence to show that she received the inspiration to found the religious institute. It is true that she had a desire to remain chaste, which she shared with her confessor. This desire was not to found a religious institute but to live a chaste life or a life of renunciation and prayer or at the most, to lead a consecrated life. One also does not find any expression of her awareness of being called to be the founder. She had not conceived the institute with its purpose nor formed the community according to that purpose. During her twenty four years of stay in the St. Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, her community members do not seem to consider her as the foundress of the institute. Those who hold her as the foundress of the women TOCD were not able to present any valid contemporary documents on her behalf. Eliswa has not left anything in writing with regard to her awareness of being called to be the foundress of the institute. The chronicles have not recorded anything pertaining to her role as foundress. Instead, the chronicles present her as the first member of the institute.

This chapter aims at applying the norms set by the Church documents regarding the founder to those persons like Baccinelli, Beccaro, and Eliswa who were considered founders by some writers. The study based on the original documents of the foundation period shows that those accepted norms are not fulfilled in the above candidates. Therefore,

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they cannot be designated as the founders of the women TOCD in Kerala and they are eliminated from the position of founders. The next chapter will provide the evidence of the unique position of Chavara as the founder of the institute.

Chapter Three

Application of the Norms and Evaluation of the Opinions

The main thrust of the foregoing chapter was on collecting and sorting out the various norms for identifying the charismatic founder of a religious institute. These norms have now to be applied separately to each of the four candidates, namely, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Leopold Beccaro, Bernardine Baccinelli and Eliswa Vakayil. The application will lead either to elimination from the list in case one does not meet the norms, or to confirmation if one fulfills them. This will, consequently, also show the merits and demerits of the different opinions regarding the founder.

The most important qualifications or norms that must be present in the founder of a religious institute are based on various Church documents, the practice of the Church and the reflections of theologians. The norms are: i) Receiving a divine call or original inspiration, ii) Being aware of a call from God to found a new religious institute in the Church, iii) Conceiving the institute with its purpose and iv) Defining the spirit and forming the Community's religious way of life. The present chapter is thus devoted to analyzing and evaluating the nature of the involvement and the specific roles played by the three candidates other than Chavara, namely, Beccaro, Baccinelli and Eliswa in the foundation of the women TOCD.

3.1. Leopold Beccaro as Founder

A few writers speak of Beccaro as the founder and Chavara as the co-founder, whereas others give equal importance to both of them and thus hold both of them as founders. The protagonists of these two opinions agree that

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the founding of the convent was the joint effort of Beccaro and Chavara. The relevant question here is about who received the *original inspiration* to be the charismatic founder and who assisted him to execute the idea of the foundation of the institute and thus became the co-founder. There are many examples in the *CKC* and *CMM* to show the significant role of Beccaro in the founding of the convent at Koonammavu.¹ In almost all the instances of the visit of the two priests - Chavara and Beccaro together - it was Beccaro, the Canonical Superior, who gave the instructions and advices to the Sisters. Therefore, he is there in almost all the pages of the *CKC*. Besides those numerous instructions, he had given them his 'Testament' on the day of their entrance into the new convent.² It is a thoughtfully written document on the nature of religious life, which is meant to cultivate and experience love for Jesus, their Spouse. In his Testament, Beccaro makes it clear that the Sisters are called for the single purpose of loving God and seeking his glory. A further forty-nine letters which Beccaro wrote to the Sisters stand as a vivid expression of his concern for them.³ As their formator, Beccaro repeatedly instructed the Sisters to love Jesus with their whole heart and mind.⁴

Beccaro has definitely played an important role at the initial stage of the first community. It was he who discerned the vocation of the first members and decided on the site for

¹ Cf., 1.1.3 of this study to get the picture of the combined efforts of Chavara and Beccaro in founding the convent and in the evolution of the life style of the first Community.

² Cf. *CKC.*, 1, 59. Its full text is given in the *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1.

³ Cf., *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1-5; pp. 83-158.

⁴ *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/1.

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the first convent.⁵ When the Apostolic Vicar was approached and permission was sought to open a convent, the Bishop entrusted Beccaro to translate the Rules for the convent.⁶ He committed himself tirelessly to the project and successfully collected funds together with Chavara and the members of the men TOCD. His words became final in admitting and dismissing the candidates. He officiated at the religious ceremonies in the convent. He visited the convent very often (most often in the company of Chavara), gave exhortations, made concrete decisions concerning the issues, and acted as the person of authority. Even while he was away from Koonammavu, he communicated eagerly with the Sisters through letters. He remained in touch with the convent during his journeys; he wrote to them from the ship while he was travelling to Europe and also from such places as Acqui, Loano, Porta Maurizio, Bombay, Madras, etc. Taking all these facts together, some writers, such as James Thalachelloor, Mary Chittilappilly, and Sunny Maniakkunnel, are inclined to attribute Beccaro the title of the founder of the women TOCD.

3.1.1 James Thalachelloor's Opinion

Thalachelloor's research was on the formation of religious women in the Syro-Malabar Church with special reference to the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel. This doctoral thesis was submitted in the Faculty of Canon Law of the Oriental Institute, Rome. In its second chapter, as he presents the origin and growth of the first religious institute for women in the Syro-Malabar Church, he states, "Its early history shows the influence of the Carmelite Discalced

⁵ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 3.

⁶ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 3; *CMM.*, 127.

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Missionaries and the role played by Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara in its foundation and in the progress of the Congregation.”⁷ Under the title ‘Founder or Founders?’ he made an analysis of the manuscripts of the original sources as well as published books and studies on the topic by different authors. He concluded saying: “From all the documents at our disposal we say that Fr. Leopold Beccaro is the founder and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the co-founder.”⁸

As a student of Canon Law, Thalachelloor examined the duties and functions of the Canonical Superior and concluded that Beccaro is the founder of the institute.⁹ His main point of argument in favor of Beccaro is that it was Beccaro who defined the purpose of the first indigenous congregation for women in the Kerala Church.¹⁰ From a detailed study of the writings of Chavara, one cannot accept the above argument. When Chavara envisioned religious life for both men and women, its purpose was already defined in 1831 itself.¹¹

3.1.2 Sunny Maniakkunnel’s Opinion

Maniakkunnel’s research examines the life and activities of Fr. Leopold Beccaro during his stay of sixteen years in Kerala as a missionary.¹² He expertly contextualizes

⁷ James Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 2, 38.

⁸ Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 70-71.

⁹ Cf., Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 71, 196.

¹⁰ Thalachelloor, *Formation of Religious Women*, 71.

¹¹ Cf., *CMM.*, 1. The next chapter explains Chavara’s role in defining the purpose of the women TOCD.

¹² Sunny Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary: A Historical Study of the Life and Activities of Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD in Malabar/Kerala 1860-1877*, (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005).

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the work in the detailed history of Carmelite mission in Kerala, and the history of the first indigenous religious men and women TOCD. The fourth chapter of his study is on the “Role of Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the Foundation and Development of the First Indigenous Congregation for Women” in which Maniakkunnel presents Beccaro as the founder and formator of the institute.

Under the title, ‘Opinion of Writers about the Founders’ Maniakkunnel made a detailed study on the ‘Founder Controversy’ of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.¹³ After studying the original documents, he expresses his opinion in these words:

We accept the fact that the original idea as such of starting religious life in Malabar did not come from Leopold Beccaro. The desire to start a convent and many women willing to lead the religious life were present at that time. ... Fr. Kuriakose Elias and Msgr. Baccinelli always desired that but they could not realize it. Fr. Leopold Beccaro knew well their idea. However, the inspiration of the new foundation came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro. Fr. Leopold Beccaro also determined the charism and goal. In other words, the foundation of the actual congregation came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro. The entire original sources which we came to know point the finger to Fr. Leopold Beccaro as founder and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara as co-founder.¹⁴

Thus, according to Maniakkunnel, the women TOCD is indebted to Beccaro for the charism of the institute.

¹³ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 266-279.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 279.

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Another argument used by Maniakkunnel to substantiate his claim on Beccaro as founder is this: “Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara clearly reported in the *Chronicles of Koonammavu Convent* that Fr. Leopold Beccaro was founder of the convent.”¹⁵ He quotes Chavara’s words from the *CKC* to provide evidence for the same: “Then came the missionary priest Fr. Leopold Mary of Jesus (sic) as our Delegate. By his efforts and assistance, our dream of a convent was realized. It may be that God sent him here with the deliberate purpose of starting monasteries and convents.”¹⁶ One must admit that Maniakkunnel reached this conclusion from a misunderstanding of some of the words Chavara used.¹⁷ From the first part of the sentence Maniakkunnel was admitting that by Beccaro’s *efforts* and *assistance*, Chavara’s dream for a convent was realized, which means that Beccaro was assisting Chavara to execute the idea of foundation. But Maniakkunnel seems to be confused with the second part of the quotation, which results from the wrong understanding of the phrase “\š phm\mbn<pXsfl,” which does not mean ‘to establish,’ instead, it means ‘to conduct,’ ‘to run,’ ‘to guide,’ ‘to govern’ etc. Chavara expressed in clear terms the actual role of Beccaro in the foundation of the convent, namely, Beccaro *worked* and *helped* to *conduct* the monasteries and the convent.¹⁸ Further, Chavara’s idea becomes clear when one pays proper attention to another phrase. He uses the phrase ‘monasteries and convents’ together, and since ‘monasteries’ were founded (in 1831 at Mannanam and in 1857 at Koonammavu) much before the arrival of Beccaro in

¹⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

¹⁶ A Quotation from *CKC.*, 1, 2 in Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

¹⁷ “CXns\ hpnmcnptlzmā kAthize? Cu klymknaIšfpw NymkvIXnaIšfpw \š phm\mbn<pXsfl Cu tZls bmfX bmn F\phmNmcn,m? Cšbp-v.”

¹⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 2: “aq.”³ sNbvX thebmepw kmb mepw CXnaš bmbn.”

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Malabar,¹⁹ surely Chavara did not mean to say that God sent Beccaro to establish the monasteries. Thus, according to Chavara, Beccaro's role was the same with regard to 'monasteries and convents,' namely, to guide them. The above statement of Chavara speaks of his conviction that Beccaro was a real supporter of the TOCD monasteries and convents in Kerala. As discussed earlier, Chavara connects both events related to the founding of the institute, first at Puthenpally and then at Koonammavu.²⁰ Meditating on the way the event of the foundation of the convent took place, Chavara sees Divine Providence as making the seemingly impossible thing possible through the support and efforts of Beccaro.

In addition, Maniakkunnel makes a distinction between the earlier attempts (original idea) to found the convent and the actual foundation at Koonammavu. He writes,

We know that Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had a desire to establish a convent but it was not realized. By the fact that he had a plan to found a convent and he tried it does not make him a founder of the congregation that was realized later.²¹

Maniakkunnel again states, "Without any doubt we accept that Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara had already tried to

¹⁹ Chavara uses the phrase 'monasteries and convents' together in relation to Beccaro's duties toward the TOCD. After Beccaro's arrival in 1859 in Verapuzha his duty was to guide and not to establish monasteries, which had already been founded in 1831, even before the birth of Beccaro in Grogardo, Italy on 28 August 1837.

²⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 2.

²¹ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272.

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start a convent earlier but could not realize it.”²² Referring to the Puthenpally event and the desire of the candidates to enter the convent, Maniakkunnel openly admits,

According to the report of Baccinelli, some years even before Elizabeth [Eliswa] and Anna came in contact with Fr. Leopold Beccaro, many women wanted to lead a religious life in Malabar. As there was no possibility for that, they were led to marital life.²³

An objective reader of the historical documents on the foundation of the convent would say that before Beccaro’s arrival in Kerala, concrete steps had been taken for the foundation of the convent. Thus, Beccaro cannot be called the ‘initiator’ of the convent or the bearer of inspiration; the idea to found the convent did not come from him.

After Beccaro’s arrival, it was in an atmosphere of close friendship and collaboration between Chavara and Beccaro that every step was taken toward the foundation. Beccaro testifies to the kind of intimate love that existed between them: “...that I loved him [Chavara] even as I love myself.” (“...che io amavo quanto me stesso”).²⁴ Chavara was fully involved in all the process of the foundation at Koonammavu. In other words, one could say that Chavara was the only link between the two events – Puthenpally and Koonammavu. Hence, the two events cannot be seen as isolated or independent, and the inspiration to found the convent was one and the same. Thus, one could say with a sense of objectivity that the actual foundation at

²² Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 274.

²³ Maniakkunnel, 278. Reference to AGOCD., *plut.* 35 e. Letter of Baccinelli to Rome in June 1860.

²⁴ ASA., Beccaro, *Manuale*.

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Koonammavu was the fruition of the attempts made at Alengadu and Puthenpally. Beccaro had no role in those two attempts because he arrived later. Above all, Chavara acknowledges Beccaro as the one who helped him in executing his idea of founding a convent, and hence he is understood as the co-founder of the women TOCD.

Maniakkunnel brings another argument in favor of Beccaro that he played the greater role in the event of foundation. He writes,

Thus from the analysis of original sources we can conclude that even though Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara worked together for the foundation of the convent, a greater role was played by Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the actual foundation of the convent at Koonammavu.²⁵

Maniakkunnel's observation is valid that Beccaro played an important role, and his was a very powerful presence in the affairs of the Sisters. As discussed earlier, he carried out his responsibilities in his capacity as Provincial Delegate. The performance of those activities did not necessarily qualify him as the founder of the TOCD. As Maniakkunnel rightly admits the fact that the original idea as such, of starting religious life in Malabar, did not come from Leopold Beccaro.²⁶

Maniakkunnel states that the charism and spirituality of the congregation is due to Beccaro. He gives the reason for this assertion in these words:

²⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 278.

²⁶ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 279.

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We also know that the charism and spirituality of the Third Order Carmelites for women came from Fr. Leopold Beccaro, because it was he who determined the goal; namely, contemplation and teaching the girls prayers and handicrafts.²⁷

The study of the documents proves that Chavara defined the purpose of the institute much before the actual foundation took place at Koonammavu. Maniakunnel also states, in support of his claim, that Fr. Leopold Beccaro gave most of the instructions, and he did a greater part of the work of formation. The most important point one needs to take note of in this context is the position of Beccaro who was the Provincial Delegate, the immediate and Canonical Superior of the TOCD congregation of men and women, as well as the parish priest of the Koonammavu church. Thus, his position was more canonical, and he was exercising his authority.²⁸ It was also as the Canonical Superior that Beccaro visited the Sisters, gave them many exhortations, made decisions regarding the members of the convent, presided over election of the Superior, and officiated at the religious ceremonies in the convent. Nobody can deny the vital role played by this Provincial Delegate and parish priest at the initial period. A few pages of the *CMM*²⁹ as well as the *CKC*³⁰ speak about his support given in matters of the convent and the Sisters. After the death of Chavara (1871), Beccaro alone looked after the affairs of the convent for five more years until he left for Europe on 1 January 1876. The major part of the second

²⁷ Maniakunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 277. The next chapter explains how Chavara defined the purpose of the institute.

²⁸ Cf., Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications*, 218-220.

²⁹ *CMM*, 126-130, 131-135.

³⁰ *CKC*, 1, 2ff.

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volume of the *CKC* records his instructions at length, which he gave in view of instilling the real spirit of religious vows, apostolate and community life in the Sisters.

On the other hand, Beccaro himself testified that Chavara did succeed in all his holy endeavors, not merely by the power of his words, nor by his logic, but by his extraordinary character and sanctity.³¹ Though the number of instructions Chavara gave to the Sisters were few, the letters he wrote to them are quite considerable. The contents of these letters reveal the deep spirituality of the person writing and the spiritual caliber he expected from those to whom he wrote them.

Therefore, the Sisters imbibed the permanent values of religious life from the spirit of obedience, humble gestures, and committed and saintly life of their *Priorachan* (Fr. Prior, Chavara). The *CKC* testifies that the first community learned from the saintly life of Chavara and they admired him as a true model of Christian perfection.

3.1.3 Mary Chitilappally's [Mary C.J] Opinion

Mary Chitilappally's research was on the impact of the religious institute of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel on society and culture. In her doctoral dissertation submitted in the university of Calicut, Kerala, she analyzes the role of Beccaro in founding the institute.³² She observes

³¹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

³² Mary Chitilappilly (Mary. C. J.), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (With Special Reference to Women) 1866- 1991*, University of Calicut, Kerala, 2002 (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis), 92-93.

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Beccaro's initiative in many matters related to the foundation and hence holds that Leopold Beccaro is the founder of the first religious institute for women in Kerala. She argues,

The primacy of Fr. Leopold above all others is well brought out by various documents. In addition, it reveals that Fr. Leopold historically institutes the CMC. His primacy is established in the selection of the candidates, in making the decision in establishing the convent, in translating the Constitution from Italian to Malayalam, in instructing them in these rules, in deciding the place of the convent, in collection of donation and giving them spiritual direction at all levels. ... In all these, the place of Fr. Leopold is unique. ... However, the prominence of Fr. Leopold as the representative of the Apostolic Vicar of Verapuzha was an indispensable factor. Perhaps it may not be very wrong on our part to be convinced of the primacy of Fr. Leopold in the light of the available information. This may be attributed to the fact of his closer contact with the Roman West and training in Europe. At the same time, it is worth recording that both these great men attributed the establishment of the convent to divine inspiration. Moreover, in a truly Christian spirit of humility they described themselves as the instruments of God.³³

Referring to the document recorded by Chavara on the designation of Beccaro as Delegate Provincial, Mary Chitilappally states, "Fr. Chavara has admitted that Fr. Leopold was given authority to establish convents and

³³ *Ibid.*

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monasteries.”³⁴ As discussed earlier, here also the problem is with the phrase, “\S phm\mbn<ph,” which she wrongly took as meaning ‘to establish.’ In the text quoted by Chitilappally, Chavara was speaking of the authority of Beccaro as a person delegated by the Vicar Provincial to guide the monasteries and their convents.³⁵ According to this text, the Superior General of his Order gave this authority to Beccaro. However, what authorizes a person to be the charismatic founder of an institute is the call of God to found a new religious institute in the Church, which is not evident in Beccaro. She continues,

Fr. Chavara has written elaborately about the initiative taken by Fr. Leopold. When all hopes were given up, Fr. Leopold arrived here in Kerala as a ray of hope for reviving the project of establishing a convent. It was generally taken for granted that the Almighty had destined him to be the founder of the Carmelite family in Kerala.³⁶

From a real understanding of the text, one cannot conclude that the Almighty had destined Beccaro to be the founder, and above all, Chavara did not seem to mean it.

³⁴ Chitilappally (Mary C. J), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (with Special Reference to Women)*, 89. Reference from *CKC.*, 1, 200: “... \B k<bps\ NymkviXnIsfbpw tNfA p \S phm< Xih<w NymkviXnIsf<fipw ZeKm F!l apjvieu slmsp p \S dhcp!...” (Given power to him [Beccaro] as Delegate to admit Sisters to the same Order [TOCD] and to guide or conduct the convent...).

³⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 200.

³⁶ Chitilappally, *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel*, 89. Before the arrival of Beccaro in December 1859, Carmelite family had been established in the Church of Kerala.

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Chitilappally admits that it is very difficult to make a choice purely on the basis of objective circumstances, and she leaves the responsibility to historians to find out who is the real founder.³⁷ As all those who consider both Chavara and Beccaro as founders, she also admits the primary role of Chavara in the idea of founding the convent. She states,

At the same time, the idea of the Congregation was nursed by Fr. Chavara for a long time and it only needed the encouragement and promptings of the kindred soul to push him into action. But for the complete dedication and continuous labor of Fr. Chavara, the idea of a Congregation would not have materialized.³⁸

Thus, she also attributes the original inspiration to the founding of the convent to Chavara. When she introduces ‘the foundation of Koonammavu convent’ she says, “This was founded by Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara CMI and the Italian Missionary Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD, the Apostolic Delegate (sic) at the time.”³⁹ According to her, what Chavara got from Beccaro was ‘the encouragement and promptings of the kindred soul to push him into action.’ One could thus say that it is because of such encouragement and support, which Beccaro offered to Chavara, that Beccaro could be regarded as the co-founder of the women TOCD.

3.1.4 Application of the Norms to Beccaro

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 93. The title of her study was *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel and Its Impact on Society and Culture (with Special Reference to Women)*, and her concentration was not directly on the identity of the founder of the institute.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81. She gives the first place to Chavara.

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It is a fact that those who hold Beccaro as founder do admit that he is not the bearer of the original idea to found the institute. Thus, the most important of the primary norms is not present in him. With regard to Beccaro's awareness of being called by God to be the founder of the women TOCD, the *CKC* and other foundational texts do not provide any clear evidence. When other norms for identifying the founder are applied to Beccaro, one should say that as the Canonical Superior and co-founder of the institute, he had played a decisive role in gathering up the group and in the evolution of the life-style of the community - its particular spirituality, apostolate, and traditions. Based on these facts, he cannot be regarded as the charismatic founder of the institute.

When one recognizes that every religious institute came into being as a positive response to some particular needs of the Church and society, Beccaro does not seem to be as sensitively aware of the problems of the women of the nineteenth century Kerala Church as Chavara was. He does not seem to carry the desire for long to have a convent for women in Kerala.

3.1.5 Evaluation of the Opinions of Maniakkunnel and Chittilappally

Although Maniakkunnel and Chittilappally designate Beccaro as the founder of the women TOCD, both are not consistent in their opinion. Maniakkunnel explicitly states that the original idea of the convent did not come from Beccaro. Chittilappally also admits that concrete steps had already been taken to found religious institute for women in the vicariate of Verapuzha before the arrival of Beccaro in Kerala. This clearly shows that Beccaro is *not* the one who received the divine vocation or the original inspiration to

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found the religious institute at Koonammavu. However, this is the first and most important norm that qualifies someone as founder of a religious institute. Therefore, Beccaro can hardly be acknowledged as the real charismatic founder of the TOCD. Maniakkunnel seems to be aware of this most important norm set by the ecclesiastical teaching, as is acknowledged in his statement: “Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara were the founders of the convent. We accept the fact that the original idea as such of starting religious life in Malabar did not come from Leopold Beccaro.”⁴⁰ Another discrepancy is that although Maniakkunnel calls both of them the founders, in the general conclusion of his study he holds that Beccaro is the founder and Chavara is only the co-founder. Maniakkunnel writes, “Our study, after the analysis of all the documents available to us and the opinions of various authors, concludes that Fr. Leopold Beccaro is the founder of the convent at Koonammavu and Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the co-founder.”⁴¹ He tries to prove that Beccaro is the founder while on the other hand, he uses frequently the terms ‘founding fathers,’⁴² ‘founders,’⁴³ ‘founder fathers,’⁴⁴ in plural form and thus, seems to give equal importance to both as founders. Consequently, one could say that he is not very sure of the identity of the founder of the institute and he changes his position. This confusion reaches its climax in the concluding words of the chapter on ‘First Indigenous Congregation for Women.’ He states, “The seed that was sown by Fr. Leopold Beccaro and Fr. Kuriakose Elias

⁴⁰ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 279.

⁴¹ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 452.

⁴² Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 261, 309.

⁴³ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 240, 252, 258 (fn. 54), 265, 279, 451 (three times), 452, 453.

⁴⁴ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 262, 265.

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Chavara at Koonammavu in 1866 began to grow up rapidly.”⁴⁵ Since he holds that both priests together planted the seed for the religious institute for women and at the same time calls Beccaro the founder, one cannot give much value to his opinion regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD.

From the study of Maniakkunnel on Beccaro as the founder one could find the following arguments against his claim:

i) Maniakkunnel accepts the words of Chavara in the *CKC* as strong evidence to designate Beccaro as founder. “Then came the missionary priest Fr. Leopold Mary of Jesus (sic) as our Delegate. By his efforts and assistance our dream of a convent was realized. It may be that God sent him here with the deliberate purpose of starting monasteries and convents.”⁴⁶ However, Chavara does not entitle Beccaro as the founder in the above quoted text by Maniakkunnel. One can easily prove that he mistook the words of Chavara, and on that misunderstanding, he based his opinion.

ii) In order to support his claim that Beccaro is the founder, Maniakkunnel says that Beccaro played the greater role in the foundation of the institute and the formation of the first community. It is true that as the Canonical Superior of the Community, Beccaro was responsible for the formation of the Sisters and he looked into all the details of the community. However, Maniakkunnel’s explanation about the number of sermons given by Beccaro and the activities of

⁴⁵ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 310.

⁴⁶ Maniakkunnel, *An Ideal Missionary*, 272 a quotation from *CKC.*, 1, 2.

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Beccaro as formator do not qualify him as the founder of the institute.

iii) Maniakkunnel's assertion that the community received the charism from Beccaro cannot be accepted. As the Provincial Delegate and Canonical Superior Beccaro played an important role in the matters concerning the members of the convent. But the Community did not receive the charism from this Delegated Superior. Instead, it was from the charismatic founder who received the original inspiration, and the vitality of the women TOCD depends on the spiritual fullness of Chavara to whom it owes its existence in the Church.

iv) Another important limitation of Maniakkunnel's position is that he changes his opinion and does not seem to be consistent with his position, and thus he holds an unscientific opinion. Very often he presents both Beccaro and Chavara as founders which proves that he is not sure of the identity of the founder of the institute.

Taking the words from the *CKC* that designate Beccaro as Delegate Provincial, Mary Chittilappily stated that Chavara considered Beccaro as founder. However, one cannot become a charismatic founder with a power delegated by somebody else. Even after clearly stating that the idea for the institute was already there before the arrival of Beccaro, she calls Beccaro the founder. Looking at certain activities of Beccaro such as the selection of the candidates, choosing the site for the convent, seeking the permission of the Bishop, etc., Chittilappally concluded that Beccaro historically instituted the CMC. It is true that Beccaro worked earnestly in the foundation of the convent, in furnishing it and providing material, moral and spiritual helps. However, these

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activities do not qualify him as founder. All these three authors are pretty fair in presenting the role played by the “founder.” They differ only by their expression ‘founder,’ ‘co-founder’ as applied by them

3.2 The Role of Beccaro as Co-founder of the Women TOCD

Some writers regard Beccaro as the co-founder of women TOCD. It is a fact that both Beccaro and Chavara had their own personal traits and specific roles to play in founding the institute. The focus of this part of the study is on the role of Leopold Beccaro in the founding of the institute. As has already been pointed out earlier, “Co-founder/Co-foundress is the one who has had a significant role in the execution of what the founder had conceived.”⁴⁷ The founder is the one who conceived the idea of the institute and the co-founder assists him or her in executing the idea, in shaping the mission and spirit of the institute.

With this clarification of the term ‘co-founder’ we turn to see how Chavara understood the role of Beccaro in the founding of the convent. Chavara readily acknowledged the role of Beccaro as the one who extended his help and put his hard work in founding the convent. He believed that the Almighty has entrusted Beccaro with a role to guide the religious institutes of both men and of women. Raising his heart to God in gratefulness Chavara states, “... we are led to think that God had sent him [Beccaro] here to guide the monasteries and convents...” It has also to be noted that Chavara records this text after mentioning the feeling of disappointment and loss of hope at the unsuccessful attempt

⁴⁷ Damizia, “Fondatore,” *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Vol.5, col. 1474.

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at materializing the dream for a convent at Puthenpally. Chavara attributes a decisive role to Beccaro in the execution of the plan for the convent at Koonammavu, and he admits the personal and indispensable contribution made by Beccaro.

It is important to see how Beccaro looks at his role with regard to the TOCD. While speaking about the system of governance of the TOCD, Beccaro describes the role of the Provincial Delegate in these words: “The Apostolic Vicar, in his stead, appoints a Missionary who governs and directs them immediately. He also has the task of instructing and directing the young students and the novices, but in relevant matters always depends on the Apostolic Vicar.”⁴⁸ From these words it is clear that Beccaro had a delegated authority to instruct and direct (“*li governa a dirige*”). Baccinelli, who was the Vicar Provincial of the Carmelite Order, delegated Beccaro to govern and direct the men TOCD and thus he became their Canonical Superior. The *CKC* testifies that Beccaro had the same role with regard to the women TOCD, and in all important matters, he depended on the Apostolic Vicar. In the *CKC* Chavara documented the nature of Beccaro’s authority in almost the same words.⁴⁹ He was

⁴⁸ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, Beccaro, *Brevi cenni sui principi, progressi e stato attuale dei conventi carmelitani scalzi nuovamente stabiliti nel Malabar*, para. 4: “Il Vicario Apostolico determinò a far le sue veci un Missionario il quale immediatamente li governa a dirige; ed ha inoltre l’incarico di istruire e dirigere i giovani allievi e i novizi; ma nelle cose rilevanti dipendono sempre dal Vicario Apostolico.” *CKC.*, 1, 200 says that Beccaro had the same role with regard to the women TOCD. It does not attribute the role of the founder of the institute to Beccaro.

⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 200: “In accordance with the command of the Superior General of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites, Very Reverend Dominic of St. Joseph, Archbishop Bernardine of St. Teresa, Reverend Vicar Apostolic of Malayalam rules us as the Vicar

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appointed as the master of novices at Koonammavu monastery as well.⁵⁰ Beccaro knew his position pretty well, namely, to govern and direct the institutes. He performed this appointed duty effectively and in a praiseworthy manner. Therefore, he never thought of himself as the founder of the institutes.

When Chavara believed that Beccaro was sent by God to guide the ‘monasteries and convents,’ he meant that Beccaro’s presence, influence, efficiency, affectionate nature, wholehearted support, and his commitment for the cause of the TOCD had enhanced the movement of religious life that had already been started in Kerala. He saw that Beccaro was guiding both the congregations of men and of women to his satisfaction and expectation. With a sense of gratitude and indebtedness, he pictured Beccaro as one who would continue to assist in furthering the growth and development of these institutes of men and of women as he had expressed in his Testament. The experience of being assisted by Beccaro to realize his dream for a convent made deep imprints in the mind of Chavara about the eternal truth of Divine Providence; that God sends his agents to him at the right moment and in

Provincial; he had established in this land of Malayalam the monasteries and the Sisters of that Order and they were run by giving authority as the Delegate also of the nuns to the missionary of the first Order Very Reverend Leopold Maria of St. Joseph...”

⁵⁰ APF., *Indie Orientali Scrit. rif. nei Congressi*, Vol. 18, f. 448. Stato delle Missioni Estere del Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863 Indie Orientali, Costa Malabarica Vicariato Apostolico di Verapoli. Baccinelli introduces Beccaro in these words: “P. Leopoldo di Girolamo, Maestre de nostri novizi terziari Siriacci nel convento di Cunemao.” When Beccaro first joined the monastery at Loano his name was Leopoldo di Girolamo, which was changed later. Cf. AMCL, *Libro delle professione dei novizi dal 8 July 1763- 31 August 1891*.

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his own way; that failures and feelings of helplessness and disappointments come on the way of achieving one's goal; that the Divine Master often makes use of various situations and persons to realize his goal rather than directly getting involved in the matter.

Some other factors also have led to the confusion of the actual role of Beccaro in the foundation and the events that followed. An important one in this regard is the portrayal of Beccaro as the principal actor in the *CKC*. While admiring the spirit of collaboration of both Chavara and Beccaro, the Sisters believed that it is difficult to differentiate who took the initiative, and who worked more in all their undertakings. In such situations or when more than one person is involved in the foundation, Nedungatt's words seem to be helpful. He opined that the founder and the co-founder can be identified depending on the leading or principal role one played.⁵¹ In this regard, too, there is a difficulty in identifying the main actor in the events related to the foundation. A cursory reading of the *CKC* gives the impression that Beccaro played the leading role in matters concerning the convent. Therefore, it calls for an interpretation of the *CKC*.

3.2.1 Interpreting the Chronicle in its Context

The *CKC* that was written about 150 years ago has to be interpreted in its ecclesial, social and cultural framework and the train of thought of the writer to get the intended meaning which is veiled in historically and culturally conditioned expressions. Context, one may say, is the unwritten part of the text. It relates to the text in a way and not completely dissimilar to the way tradition relates to

⁵¹ Nedungatt, "Typology of the Founder," 105-106.

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Scripture. It is understood that the task of critical interpretation of texts in its context is complex and demanding.⁵² In order to understand the real perspectives, one has to study the following historical realities, which caused Chavara to put Beccaro in the forefront and also that which prompted the chronicler of the *CKC* to project Beccaro as the main actor. When Chavara described the story of the foundation of the convent in the *CMM* and in the first pages of the *CKC*, he presented Beccaro as the one who did almost every thing. The Sisters continued the same rendering in the pages of the *CKC*.

An interpretation of the history of relationship between Chavara and Beccaro within the TOCD perspective will bring to light several reasons for the mindset and approach of Chavara toward Beccaro. The most important one in this regard is Chavara's unassuming character. As discussed earlier, Chavara experienced the providential hand of God in the arrival of Beccaro and allowed himself to be guided by him since he chose him as his confessor and spiritual director. Priests played a significant role in his life. In his boyhood itself, Thomas Palackal came into his life and continued until the latter's death in 1841. The following words of Chavara manifest his attitude of indebtedness towards Palackal, his *guru*:

From my childhood onwards, *Malpan* Palackal himself looked after me in all the spiritual and bodily needs, and taught and brought me up. Until death, he cared for me more than for any of his relatives and other disciples who were his spiritual children.

⁵² Cf., Edward Farrugia, "Vatican I and the Ecclesiological Context in East and West," *Gregorianum*, Roma 92/3 (2011), 451-469.

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Considering me his heir, before death he entrusted me with the works of the monastery that was his most treasured possession..⁵³

Chavara continues, “Thereafter in all matters I followed his directions and views.”⁵⁴ Already from his young age, he was determined to be of one mind with the *Malpan*, and he admits that Chavara was led to the priesthood by being guided by his and Fr. Thomas Porukara’s wisdom..⁵⁵ He resolved to conform his will to that of his *guru* and spiritual director. Kuriakose Porukara in his biography of Chavara admits that even after his ordination to the priesthood, Chavara was guided by the instructions of the *Malpan* of Pallipuram..⁵⁶ Beccaro replaced the *Malpan* when Chavara chose him as his spiritual director. The nature of his relationship and all his dealings with him, as well as the recording of the events, must be interpreted in this frame of mind. Chavara accepted Beccaro, a European Carmelite missionary, the Provincial Delegate, the Canonical Superior of his Congregation and that of the Congregation for women, and above all, his spiritual director and confessor. An interpretation of the nature of Chavara’s relationship with Beccaro will reveal that Chavara always kept a low profile of himself in front of Beccaro. This is quite characteristic of the humility and self-effacing nature of Chavara. He was particular to project others for various achievements to which he had equally contributed. It may be this projection of others [Beccaro and Baccinelli] that led some writers to consider Beccaro as the founder of the institute. This spirit is

⁵³ *CMM.*, 59-60.

⁵⁴ *CMM.*, 26.

⁵⁵ *CMM.*, 26.

⁵⁶ Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 25.

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particularly evident when Chavara describes the foundation and growth of the Koonammavu convent.⁵⁷

Beccaro's words shed much light on Chavara's attitude toward exercising his role as Superior of the indigenous religious institute founded at Mannanam. While giving a brief report of the system of governance of the TOCD, Beccaro affirms that the first Superior is the Superior General of the OCD, then the Apostolic Vicar who governs through a Missionary who is appointed as his delegate. Next he tells, "There is yet another Superior over all the monasteries with the title of Prior, but this title was given by Msgr. Bernerdine to one [Chavara] especially because of his high merit as one of the three surviving founders; however, he did not exercise his authority owing to some special circumstances."⁵⁸ By affiliating the Congregation to the Carmelite Order, the Prior, Chavara, lost his authority and the Superior General of the first Order became the legitimate authority who governed the Congregation through his delegate. Beccaro admitted that Chavara did not exercise his authority.⁵⁹ When the Congregation juridically came under the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, even the founders of the Congregation lost their separate identity, privileges, and autonomy. Some of the members of his

⁵⁷ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 326.

⁵⁸ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, Beccaro, *Brevi Cenni sui Principi, Progressi e Stato Attuale dei Conventi Carmelitani Scalzi Nuovamente Stabiliti nel Malabar*, para.4: "C'è ancora un altro Superiore sopra tutti i conventi col titolo di Priore, ma questo titolo fu da Monsignore Bernerdino dato per uno speciale riguardo all'alto merito d'uno dei 3 primi fondatori sopravvivenuti, il quale però non esercitá che in qualche speciale circostanza." This report was prepared in 1870.

⁵⁹ Beccaro did not explain the special circumstance that prevented Chavara in exercising his authority over all the monasteries founded by him.

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religious family were quite unhappy about this change of authority, which came upon them owing to the affiliation of the Congregation to the Carmelite Order as their Third Order. However, because of the sanctity and humility of Chavara, he accepted it as coming from the hand of God. In the first paragraph of his Last Will, he shares his conviction that the Congregation became Carmelite owing to a special grace of God. He writes,

Dear children, by the special grace of God, we have been called to be in the Carmelite Order so pleasing to our Blessed Mother. This has been so, because God willed it so and not because man planned it thus. I am sure of this as I am sure that this material, on which I am writing, is paper. For the founders of this Congregation, Reverend *Malpans* Palackal and Porukara, had sought and made arrangements for a Dominican Order.⁶⁰ That is why we started the unprecedented custom of wearing the white cassock and took other steps. However, our Holy Mother, realizing our weakness, took us into the Carmelite Order.⁶¹

Chavara was a person vowed to be humble and he accepted the authority of the Carmelites over the institute without questioning and in a light of faith. About his 'fourth vow of humility,' Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Fide on 15 June 1861. He said that if Rome decided to consecrate Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara a Bishop he should be commanded by virtue of obedience to accept such a position. Baccinelli disclosed that even to accept the office of the Vicar General

⁶⁰ He says, the original plan about the monastery was in the line of Dominican style. St. Dominic's vocation was to preach, at a time when the ordinary people of Europe scarcely ever heard a good sermon.

⁶¹ *CK.*, VI/5.

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he had to command him [Chavara] by virtue of obedience.⁶² Marceline Berardi also testified to Chavara's fourth vow of humility.⁶³

3.2.2 Submissive Nature of Chavara

The respect and spirit of submission Chavara showed to the Church authorities was unique. Beccaro writes, "Among his [Chavara's] virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith in, and devotion to, the holy Catholic Church and the Holy Father."⁶⁴ In his Testament Chavara encouraged the members of his Congregation to obey the Apostolic Vicar, the Delegate Provincial, and all the missionaries. Beccaro's words explain why Chavara asked his religious brothers to obey all the missionaries: "It was because of his extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love, and obedience toward the Papal Legate who was the representative of the Holy Father, and toward the missionaries who were the messengers of the Holy Church."⁶⁵ Chavara always looked up to Beccaro as a person "who is invested with the power and authority of the Provincial Delegate to look after and

⁶² ACO., *Acta*, Vol. 2. 1864-1865. f.206. Letter of Msgr. Baccinelli to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 15 June 1861: "Soltanto devo avvertire, che il detto soggetto, il quale si chiama il P. Ciriaco Chavara Priore dei Terziari della Immacolata Concezione di Maria SS. Del Monte Carmelo, ha il voto semplice di umilita, e quantunque non l'avesse, non accetterebbe tal carattere e dignita senza un precetto, come ho dovuto darglielo io per farlo accettare d'esser Vicario Generale."

⁶³ Marceline Berardi, *Keralathile Satyavedacharithram*, 302.

⁶⁴ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12-13.

⁶⁵ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 13.

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govern the monasteries and the convent established in Kerala.”⁶⁶

In the *CKC* Chavara wanted to give a prominent place to Beccaro because he was the Provincial Delegate and Chavara had great concern for him. The following incident explains it clearly. Once when both of them were on a journey to Thiruvananthapuram in search of a woman to train the Sisters in handicrafts, Chavara sent a letter to the convent through someone to tell the Sisters to pray for Beccaro. It reads, “Mother Superior and other Sisters, myself, *Moopachan* [Beccaro] and others are going today, on 12 Friday, from Kollam to Thiruvananthapuram. We have no illness until now. You must pray well to God for us, especially for *Moopachan*, that he may be protected by God without any illness for the sake of your spiritual life.”⁶⁷ On another occasion, also he told the Sisters to pray for Beccaro.⁶⁸ *CMM* provides another example of Chavara’s projection of Beccaro in their journey together for soliciting alms. In those descriptions one may notice how Chavara presented Beccaro as the one giving sermons by way of introducing the purpose of their visit as well as motivating the people to be generous in giving donations to the construction of the convent.⁶⁹ In the description of laying the foundation stone for the convent Chavara presented Beccaro as the main actor.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 200, the duties of Beccaro as the Provincial Delegate, recorded by Chavara.

⁶⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 63.

⁶⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 158.

⁶⁹ *CMM.*, 132-134. During this journey, Chavara records that *Moopachan* gave sermon in three places -Kalloorkadu, Mannanam, and Arthumkal.

⁷⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 20, 24, 46-49; *CMM.*, 134.

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When the chronicles are read in its proper context of the Italian Carmelite rule over the St. Thomas Christians during the nineteenth century one becomes aware of the superiority complex of the missionaries toward the indigenous religious institutes, local Christians and the priests. Chavara's submissive nature and obedience to his Superiors only added to the delicacy of the situation.

It is true that Beccaro loved Chavara 'as his own soul' and had great esteem for him. Yet there were occasions when Chavara could feel rather uneasy with the way Beccaro did things.⁷¹ The reluctance, shown by Beccaro in admitting Clara Puthenangady from Vaikom on the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent, can be seen as one such occasion.⁷² Beccaro exercised his authority as the Canonical Superior in taking the decision regarding the new candidate brought by Chavara about which Chavara expresses his embarrassment when he notes, "This caused some sorrow and disturbance,⁷³ not only to Clara and the parish priest of Vaikom and her relatives who came along with her to Koonammavu on 11 February but presumably also to himself. For him it was even a public insult and humiliation. Nevertheless, he and all those who were under his guidance kept "holding firmly on to obedience." Beccaro could have respected and trusted the wisdom of the mature and saintly

⁷¹ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 321-322.

⁷² *CKC.*, 1, 7, *CMM.*, From the description of the person of Clara given by Chavara it is clear that he knew her well for years and considered her fit for entering the convent. She reached Koonammavu on 10 February. The reason given by Beccaro for the postponement of her entrance was that he did not test her vocation and accepted her on the next day of the inauguration of the convent.

⁷³ *CKC.*, 1, " ... CXp_mã Iptd k'shpw Cfhpw tXw_msbhpw sNmãhnbmã Dd'p lmsã p."

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person that Chavara was. In the words of Mundadan, for Chavara it was a matter of practical wisdom, for he wanted to have the greater goals such as the founding of the convent, achieved even at the cost of his own name and fame. The self-emptying obedience of Jesus Christ was indeed the supreme model for him.⁷⁴

In one of the letters of Chavara written to the Sisters one can find some expressions of this kind of uneasiness. During his last illness before the return of Beccaro from Italy, Chavara wrote to the Sisters, “When Father Delegate comes and looks through his glasses to see how I have formed you in my ignorance, I do not know what all accusations he would hail at me. I have fear for the reprimands of the Great Delegate.”⁷⁵ For Chavara, God is the supreme Judge and he needs to fear his judgment alone. During those fourteen months, while Beccaro was in Italy Chavara worked for the welfare of the convent with an innovative spirit. Even then, from the above letter one gets the impression that in spite of his affection and regard for the latter, Chavara appears sometimes afraid of Beccaro’s judgment.

In those days, the European missionaries would not eat together with local priests. They considered themselves superior to the local Indian population. The indigenous priests could not even sit with the missionary priests and had to speak to them standing.⁷⁶ Several letters written by leading priests in Malabar to the Holy See during and after the Mellus schism bitterly complain that the missionaries treated them

⁷⁴ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 325.

⁷⁵ *CKC.*, II, 8. Cf. also *CK.*, VII/19.

⁷⁶ Cf. I. C. Chacko, *Mar Louis Pazheparampil, Jeevithavum Kalavum* [Mar Louis Pazheparambil, His Life and Period], (Trivandrum, 1937), 132.

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not as their collaborators but as their servants.⁷⁷ Chavara also has noticed that a kind of master-slave relationship existed in the Kerala Church between the Bishop and the priests, the missionaries and the people.⁷⁸

The Latin Rite had long been held in the West as superior to all other Rites warranted even by the Holy See in the past, influenced to some extent the superiority complex of the Latin missionaries in Malabar.⁷⁹ In the past, the Church failed to understand the individuality and identity of the Apostolic Church of the St. Thomas Christians, which was an individual Church with its own particular theology, liturgy, spirituality, and administrative system. When the Portuguese missionaries arrived in Kerala they imposed their own systems upon the Malabar Church and governed them as if it were their birthright to rule over other churches. Latinization had long been regarded by the Latins as a service done to the Church in India. The Carmelite missionaries applied the same policy over the TOCD Congregation, which was an indigenous religious institute with its own identity and charism. The Apostolic Vicar and the General Council of the OCD (Rome) affiliated this institute to the OCD in 1860 and called the institute TOCD. There is no evidence that Chavara and his community were consulted before or after the event. Yet Chavara regarded this arrangement as Divine Providence. He tried to persuade his fellow religious to accept the event in that spirit.⁸⁰ The missionaries looked down upon the local priests and the Christians. When the missionaries were asked

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁸ CK., VI/4.

⁷⁹ Cf. Varkey Vithayathil, *The Origin and Progress of Syro-Malabar Hierarchy* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1980), 37.

⁸⁰ CK., VI/5. Chavara's Testament, para. 1.

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to express their opinion about consecrating Chavara a Bishop for the St. Thomas Christians, Baccinelli and the leading missionaries did not appreciate the plan and wrote negatively about Chavara.⁸¹ Once the Carmelites got hold of the episcopacy in the Kerala Church, they never let it go and return it to the Indians. They kept it as their monopoly.

Even though the Sisters respected and loved both priests as their Fathers, the *CKC* gave prominence to Beccaro. The recording of the prophetic utterance made by Chavara on the day of the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent can be considered an example of the respect of the chronicler towards Beccaro. According to *CMM*, Chavara made this statement: “If God wills before it is time to re-thatch and renew the leaves of the roof and the bamboo mats, you will be able to live in a convent built with stones.”⁸² He referred to this saying in his letter to the parishioners of Kainakary as his personal testimony of God’s providence.⁸³ However, Anna attributes it to both Fathers.⁸⁴ It may be true that

⁸¹ Cf. ACO., *Scri. rif. nei Congressi Chaldei*, 1862-1866, Vol. 1, f. 738 ff. Letter of Marceline Berardi on 13 September 1865. Berardi asks: “Where could be found a worthy candidate? It is a loss of time. ... In the monasteries there are good priests. But prudence and courage and other qualities are lacking in them.” Beccaro also expressed the same line of thought. Regarding the appointment of Chavara as the permanent Vicar General of the Malabarians Beccaro wrote: “He [Chavara] is certainly a very good man, still has only the slightest knowledge of Moral. ...He has no experience in government.” Cf., *Ibid.*, ff. 742-743. Joining with Berardi and Beccaro Baccinelli opposed the idea of any further steps to appoint a Bishop of their own Rite to the Malabarians. Cf., ACO., *Scri. rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* 1862-1877, f. 4. Letter of Baccinelli to the Propaganda Fide on 24 September 1865.

⁸² *CMM.*, 146.

⁸³ *CK.*, IX/11:13.

⁸⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 46.

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Chavara allowed the chronicler to project Beccaro as more important. Although the Sisters were writing under the supervision of Chavara, they had their high esteem or preference for the foreign missionaries, which, too, might be at least partially responsible for the low profile Chavara got in the *CKC*.

It is likely that since he was a European, Beccaro expected more respect from the Sisters. In the presence of Beccaro, when the Sisters wrote about Beccaro and Chavara coming together to the convent and giving instructions, they gave first place to Beccaro saying, “Our Father *Moopachan* and *Priorachan*.” When Beccaro was away in Italy, the same Sisters, on several occasions call Chavara “Our Father *Priorachan*.”⁸⁵ When they wrote about his last sickness and death, an outpouring of their love, respect, and sense of indebtedness towards their saintly founder Father Chavara can be seen. Once Beccaro himself observed the Sisters’ unreasonable and naïve approval and admiration of the foreign missionaries. In an instruction on obedience, he told the Sisters, “If you were given a European Sister as your Superior, how promptly you would have obeyed her words. Why? Because she is a European. She is educated; she is spiritual, etc.”⁸⁶ Although he was making a comparison of their attitude toward the Europeans and natives, this can be seen as the reason for highlighting Beccaro’s role and picturing him as ‘Our Father *Moopachan*’ in their descriptions. In other words, the interplay of superiority complex of the missionaries and inferiority complex of the Keralites has played a part in their recording

⁸⁵ *CKC.*, 152, 174, 175, 176, 177, 181, 182 (twice), 183 (twice), 185 (thrice), 186, 192.

⁸⁶ *CKC.*, II, 80.

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of the daily happenings of the convent. The role of a “Canonical Superior” whose office gives him official responsibilities, prerogatives, and privileges, has inflated the description of his actual role.

3.2.3 A Paternal Love for the Sisters

The pages of the *CKC* and the forty-nine letters written by Beccaro to the Sisters are telling examples of the warmth of his sincere love for them. Those letters written to the Sisters, especially those during his journey and stay in Italy, tell the kind of relationship that existed between him and the Sisters. His personal attention and thoughtfulness for each one of them has been expressed in the letters, as well as in his conversations, by mentioning each one by name and caring for them tenderly. While he was away from Koonammavu his ears were burning about hearing all the sad situations of the Sisters. These letters give concrete expression to his affection toward them. He appears in the letters as a fatherly and motherly figure.

After the death of Chavara, Beccaro took upon himself all the responsibilities of the convent to widen their apostolate, to deepen their spirituality and he visited the Sisters regularly to give them instructions. The *CKC* acknowledged that Beccaro looked after the Sisters and nurtured them like a mother in all matters of body and soul.⁸⁷ Even when he was in the crucible of suffering due to the displeasure of Mellano, he was attentive to the affairs of the convent. When he was kept away from Koonammavu and was put in a prison-like situation at Verapuzha, he tried to

⁸⁷ *CKC.*, II, 111.

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communicate through letters with a view of strengthening the Sisters..⁸⁸

3.3 Both Beccaro and Chavara as Founders

As a main thrust of this chapter is to eliminate those candidates who are not qualified as founders by applying the norms to them and to evaluate different opinions, the opinion of those who hold Chavara and Beccaro as founders is analyzed here.

3.3.1 Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli

The report sent to the Propaganda Fide on 20 February 1867 by Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli⁸⁹ has an indirect reference to the persons responsible for the religious institute for women founded at Koonammavu. It is the official report the prelate prepared in answer to the questionnaire sent by the Propaganda Fide for full information on the state of the Churches of Oriental Rite. The question⁹⁰ number 71 and the answer pertaining to the religious Community for women as in the report are given below:

Q. 71 How many Congregations for women which belong to the Oriental Rites are there? Which are they? With whose authority were they established? Who is looking after them?

⁸⁸ Cf., *Leopold Missionariyude Katthukal*, V/129-157. On those days while he was staying at Verapuzha he wrote fifteen letters to the Sisters at Koonammavu.

⁸⁹ Cf., ACO., *20 February Report 1867*, f. 18.

⁹⁰ Questions are in Latin and answers in Italian.

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Ans.: A convent for women similar to our Third Order (*Maestre Pie*) is being constructed not very far from the monastery at Koonammavu. Their rules are of the recognized orders of that type. I have made certain changes in it to adapt it to this country. They are entrusted to the Missionary along with the Prior of the Tertiaries. Like our Third Orders, they are subject to our Superior General and me.... Their aim is the education and Christian formation of the girls.⁹¹

Even though Baccinelli answered to the question, “Who is looking after them?” without mentioning the name of the priests, from the context one gets the identity of the missionary and the Prior as Beccaro and Chavara respectively.

Even though he did not make a distinction of the role of the Bishop who sanctioned the convent and the other two whom he referred to in the report, what he meant must be that, being the local Ordinary, he is the hierarchical founder. As mentioned earlier, for Baccinelli monasteries and the convent were “nostri Terziarii,” and Beccaro was appointed as his delegate to look after the affairs of both the monasteries and the convent, as it is seen in the document showing the

⁹¹ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, Q. 71: An et quot habeantur monialium ritus orientalis coenobia, cuis institute, qua auctoritate fundata, et cuius curae et ministerio commissa?

Ans.: “È prossima a terminarsi la fabbrica di una casa di Maestre Pie del nostro Ordine cioè Terziarie, alquanto distante dal convento di Cunemao. Le Regole son quelle già approvate per tale Istituto, vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho detto pei Terziari. Sono affidate al Missionario col Priore dei Terziari. Dipendono come I Terziari dal N. P. Generale, e da me. Vi sono Soriane e Latine, che ciò nulla imbarazza in esse;... Il loro scopo è l’istruzione ed educazione Cristiana delle ragazze.”

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designation of Beccaro.⁹² Being the Provincial Delegate, Beccaro collaborated with Chavara, who was for a long time making attempts to found a convent and was praying for the same. No document is available defining the role of Chavara but seems to have been presumed, recognized, and mentioned in his official report of Baccinelli.

3.3.2 Mar Louis Pazheparampil, the First Apostolic Vicar of Ernakulam

Loius Pazheparampil was a novice of Fr. Leopold and he was a member of the monastery at Koonammavu at the time of founding of the convent in 1866.⁹³ He described the foundation of the convent as the crowning event of the joint efforts of the two priests, Chavara and Beccaro. He wrote the following statement as an introduction to the Constitution that he gave to the Carmelite Sisters of the diocese of Ernakulam in 1917.

In the year 1864 Very Rev. Fr. Leopold Beccaro was director of the Third Order of the Carmelites of Malabar and Very Rev. Fr. Cyriac Elias Chavara was the Prior General of the Order. While both of them were staying in the monastery at Koonammavu, they planned to institute a convent for women, and as the

⁹² *CKC.*, 1, 200.

⁹³ Cf. ASA., Leopold Beccaro, *Manuale di Memorie, Dal 1 Dicembre 1870* unpaginated. Leopold wrote in his *Diary* the details of the members of the TOCD for men. Accordingly, Louis Pazheparambil joined the Koonammavu Monastery on 23 October 1861 and made his religious profession on 19 March 1872. He was a resident at Koonammavu monastery during the period of 1861-1872. He was one of the seven priests who were expelled by Msgr. Mellano from the TOCD in 1874 for writing letters to Rome to obtain a separate Bishop for the St. Thomas Christians. He became the first Bishop of Ernakulam in 1896.

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days passed by this idea became more important to them. With this in mind, in 1866 these two priests built a small house for some widows and young girls. After that, money was collected from the people and parishes to build a convent for them. Fr. Chavara got a good amount of money from his old students and priests. With this money, a two-storey building was put up.⁹⁴

Mar Louis Pazheparampil wrote these words in order to make the Sisters aware of their origins. He was thus not making a categorical statement that both Beccaro and Chavara were the founders. Rather, he was stressing the point that both of them worked together with a single purpose for beginning the first convent. Hence, it is wrong to hold that he was asserting the co-foundership of Beccaro.

3.3.3 Bernard of St. Thomas

While evaluating the historian Bernard Thoma we have taken into account that he merely mentions the fact that under the guidance of the Bishop, Chavara and Beccaro worked hand in hand to establish the first convent at Koonammavu. Thus, he does not delve deeply into the canonical issues concerning the founder.

3.3.4 Mathias Mundadan

⁹⁴ Louis Pazheparampil, "Preface" to *Thressia punnyavalathiyude carmelita munnam sabhayile sahodarikalkkayulla nyayapramanam* [Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of Carmelites of St. Teresa] (Elthuruth : St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1917), 3.

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In his biography of Chavara, Mundadan studied in detail all the existing positions concerning the question of the founder of the women TOCD. He evaluated the documents available and emphasized the role of Chavara in founding and forming the Community. Giving attention to the documents from the Holy See, he said: “Here it may also be pointed out that the decree of the Holy See approving the miracle of Chavara before beatification clearly stated that Chavara founded the CMC Congregation assisted by Fr. Leopold.”⁹⁵ He concludes this question by saying:

Considering all this, it is best to say that both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara are the founders of the religious Community of women founded at Koonammavu in 1866. Otherwise, there will be no end of problems. There is not much to be gained in distinguishing between founder and co-founder.⁹⁶

Clarifying his position he states, “The conclusion arrived at is that the wisest solution to the problems involved is to acknowledge both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara as founders.”⁹⁷ Then he gives the ‘Personal Profiles of Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara’ to figure out the specific role that each of them played in establishing, in running and in the all-round development of this Community of women. Although he calls Chavara one of the two founders, he holds the view that in the spiritual formation of the Sisters, Chavara had contributed more than Beccaro.

⁹⁵ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 316.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 317.

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From his words, it is clear that he was proposing a practical solution to the contentious issue of the founder. He wants to bring peace between two rival groups, thinking that it is useless to waste time on it. Thus, Mundadan uses the words, “it is the wisest solution,” without asserting that his position has absolute certainty.

The position of those writers who hold an inclusive approach, designating both as founders – Bernard Thoma, Mar Louis Pazheparambil, Alex Paul Urumpackal, and Mathias Mundadan, and Joseph Kanjiramattathil– can be refuted on a number of grounds. In the actual foundation at Koonammavu, Beccaro’s role can be seen from three angles. Firstly, as a parish priest of Koonammavu church, he met Eliswa and Anna and discerned their vocation; secondly, as a friend of Chavara, and a lover of St. Thomas Christians, Beccaro extended his wholehearted cooperation and support to realize the long-cherished dream of Chavara to institute a convent. Thirdly, as the Canonical Superior of the TOCD, Beccaro officiated at the ceremonies of the religious clothing and profession of the Sisters.⁹⁸ Being the Provincial Delegate, he took upon himself the responsibility of the formation of the Sisters and other matters related to them. In his capacity as the Provincial Delegate, Beccaro exercised his authority in all the matters concerning the Sisters in the presence and with the support of Chavara in order to enable Chavara to found the religious community for women.

When these writers hold an inclusive approach, they do not seem to ascribe equal roles to Chavara and Beccaro. Mundadan clearly stated that in the formation of the Sisters

⁹⁸ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 200. In one case, at least, Chavara alone officiated at the ceremony of religious clothing of the Sisters and put his signature in Syriac while recording the event himself.

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Chavara played a greater role; and Chavara had the principal role and Beccaro the secondary role. The reason for assigning to Chavara the principal role is that he is the recipient of the divine vocation to found a new religious institute for women in the Kerala Church or initiator of the movement of religious life for women.

As noticed earlier, the opinions of the writers differ regarding the exact nature of the role of Beccaro and Chavara in the foundation of the convent. It was difficult for them to spell out the functions strictly pertaining to the role of the founder and that of the co-founder. About such a difficulty Mary Chittilappally believed, “It is very difficult to make a choice purely under (sic) the basis of objective circumstances,”⁹⁹ and she left it to the historians to decide. Alex Paul Urumpackal concluded: “To whom goes the honor of this new attempt? I would say to both: to Fr. Leopold and to Fr. Chavara.”¹⁰⁰ In the same line of thinking, Mundadan said, “Taking all this into consideration, it is best to say that both Fr. Leopold and Blessed Chavara are the founders of the religious community of women founded at Koonammavu in 1866. Otherwise, there will be no end of problems. There is not much to be gained in distinguishing between founder and co-founder.”¹⁰¹ This difficulty becomes more evident when one takes the concept of co-founder/co-foundress, explained by Anastasio Gutierrez. He presents co-founder as one who works, depending on and in subordination to the founder. Since Gutierrez was speaking in the context of the foundation of a particular religious institute for women, namely, the Daughters of Divine Zeal, his idea of co-founder cannot be

⁹⁹ Chittilappilly (Mary C. J), *The Evolution of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Urumpackal, *Vocations in India*, 285.

¹⁰¹ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 316.

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applied fully to the founder/co-founder question of the women TOCD at Koonammavu. On many occasions the *CKC* and *CMM* give the impression that Chavara was dependent on and subordinate to Beccaro. As explained earlier, it was mainly because of the particular ecclesiastical situation of the Kerala Church of the nineteenth century, and partly due to the personality traits of Chavara and Beccaro, that Chavara worked in subordination to Beccaro, the Canonical Superior.

The role of Beccaro as co-founder is evident in the *CKC* in its description of the events related to the founding of the institute and the evolution of the life style of the first community at Koonammavu. This is the legacy of the institute for the past one hundred and fifty years. The official declarations of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis confirmed this fact.¹⁰²

When Beccaro is recognised as the co-founder of the women TOCD, one does not limit him to his practical role alone. His contribution is of great importance to understand the true depth of the charism of the institute. As discussed earlier, he has played a significant role in the formation of the Sisters. Both Chavara and Beccaro were together in taking all the steps for the foundation of the convent and the formation of the Sisters. They worked together. However, their roles were different and hence, both together cannot be called founders.

¹⁰² Cf., the section 1.2.5.4 of this study.

3.4 Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar as Founder

There are some passing references made by Msgr. Bonnard, the Apostolic Visitor, and Chandy Kattakayam¹⁰³ to Baccinelli as the founder of the convent.

Msgr. Bonnard's report has two references to the convent for 'nuns of the Syro-Chaldean Rite' and both references speak of Msgr. Bernardine, the Apostolic Vicar, as the founder. In the second chapter of his report to the Propaganda Fide, the Visitor speaks about Msgr. Baccinelli's proposed convent for nuns of Syro-Chaldean Rite in the vicariate of Verapuzha.¹⁰⁴ In the same report, Bonnard speaks about the convent at Koonammavu. Paragraph 182 says, "The present Apostolic Vicar has now founded a monastery of Syro-Chaldean nuns using contributions from all the churches, and these Sisters are devoted to the education of girls."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ ASJM., *Diary of Fr. Chandy Kattakayam*, (MSS), 49: "The founders of this great endeavor [the founding of the convent] are our Archbishop Bernardine and 'his two hands' – our most Reverend Fr. Kuriakose Elias of fond memory and Apostolic Missionary Leopold Beccaro."

¹⁰⁴ APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 661: "... alcune monache Siro-Caldee." Parappuram, *Diary*, 351-353 and Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya Suriyani Reethil Chernna*, 82-83 says that Bonnard paid his apostolic visit to Verapuzha in April 1860. Therefore, Bonnard's mention of nuns of Syro-Chaldean Rite may be about the proposed convent at Puthenpally.

¹⁰⁵ APF., *Acta, Bonnard Report*, Para. 182: "Il presente Vicario Apostolico ha ancora fondato un Monastero di Religiose Siro-Caldaiche a contribuzione commune di tutte le Chiese, e le dette Suore si dedicano alla educazione delle fanciulle".

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Since Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli was the ecclesiastical authority of the time, the Apostolic Visitor mentions the Bishop's name in his report. Thus, his statement could not be taken as a scientific assertion concerning the issue of the founder, since it was not his purpose. These casual references of Bonnard and Kattakayam need not be understood as their view about the identity of the founder of the women TOCD.

When one analyzes Baccinelli's relationship with the convent at Koonammavu, it is clear that his involvement in the affairs of the convent was very limited. The *CKC* does not refer to the presence of the prelate at any of the important events of the convent, such as the religious clothing and the profession of the members, the laying of the foundation of the new convent and for its blessing. It is never mentioned in the *CKC* that he ever visited the convent. Of course, his permissions were sought at the pertinent occasions, which was the necessary canonical prescription.¹⁰⁶ He did not make any direct contact with the institute in the form of giving instructions to the Sisters or visiting them.

The *CKC* records that once he visited the site of the construction while the work was in progress and expressed his appreciation at God's providence in bringing the work to a completion within a short time.¹⁰⁷ He knew that within four

¹⁰⁶ At the time of foundation of the bamboo-mat convent (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 5); the profession of vows of the first members (*CKC.*, 1, 90); the expulsion of one candidate (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 44, 78); starting of the new apostolate (Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 83), etc.

¹⁰⁷ The *CKC* has this entry: "The Archbishop also visited the site of the construction, went around, and being satisfied, blessed the structure. Don't you wonder how this building has come up so quickly? Last year we had no money to build even this bamboo shed. Now within four or five months so much has been built. It is only God's miracle

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or five months Chavara and Beccaro could purchase a big compound near to the monastery church and complete the whole work of construction.

We do not deny that Baccinelli used to give eight Rupees per month for the sustenance of the Sisters.¹⁰⁸ Reminding the Sisters of their responsibility of praying gratefully for the generosity and timely help of Baccinelli in providing this much money for the convent, Beccaro said, “The eight Rupees we receive now is more useful than double the amount we receive after some time.”¹⁰⁹ All these examples show that he was not directly relating with the community or with the Sisters. Those who have recognized Baccinelli as the founder meant that since he was the local Bishop and the Vicar Provincial of the Carmelite Order he was responsible for all the important happenings of the vicariate.

In the two long circular letters Baccinelli wrote in 1860 to the Carmelites of Europe and the official report he sent to the Propaganda Fide in 1867, there is no evidence to regard himself as the one who initiated the convent for women either at Puthenpally or later at Koonammavu. He states, “Here four monasteries for men of the Third Order of the Carmelites have already been established. As for women a convent is just being started.”¹¹⁰ His attitude and approach toward the TOCD manifested in these letters explain how he

that we were able to get such a big compound near the church and we were able to put up this building... (CKC., 1, 44).

¹⁰⁸ CKC., 1, 32.

¹⁰⁹ CKC., 1, 32.

¹¹⁰ AGOCD., *Plut.* 35 e, *Reverende Madri*: “mentre i 4 Conventi per i Terziari sono già alquanto avanzati, e questo delle Terziarie è appena cominciato ...”

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looked at the movement of religious life in Kerala, which had already been started before his arrival in Malabar.¹¹¹ Since he included both monasteries and convent belonging to ‘*Rito Syro-Malabarico*,’ they form one unit of local initiative, even though he calls them “Our Tertiaries.” He wrote the circular letters (1860) at the time when the construction of the convent at Puthenpally was in progress, and he sent the report of 1867 at the time when the construction of the new building for the convent at Koonammavu was about to be completed.

Baccinelli approves the local initiative and the Syro-Malabar origin of both institutes. He never mentions that he instituted the convent. On the contrary, he distances himself from the claim that he is the founder of the institute. He openly admitted in 1867, while the construction of the Koonammavu convent was in progress, that the money for the construction was the donation from the faithful, some churches, and from priests.¹¹²

In his report to Propaganda Fide in 1867, Baccinelli does not answer the question, “With whose authority were they [the convents] established?” He was silent about the

¹¹¹ He reached Kerala in 1832. Cf. APF., *Scritture Rif. nei Congressi, Indie Orientali*, Vol.18, f. 448: Stato delle Missioni Estere del Ordine de Carmelitani Scalzi nel 1863, Indie Orientali, Costa Malabarica, Vicariato Apostolico di Verapoli.

¹¹² ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, in response to Q. no. 72: “La lor casa si fabbrica con le elemosine date *ad hoc* dai fedeli, da alcune chiese, e Sacerdoti: nel frattanto abitano in una si può dir capanna miseramente in tutto. Si sostentano con la lor dote che devon portare: per tre povere io do il vitto a ragione di circa 14 paoli al mese per ciascuna.”

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question on the founder of the convent.¹¹³ Does this silence mean that he considers himself the founder? The answer is in the negative. Since he says, “Like our Third Order, they [the Sisters at Koonammavu] are subject to our Superior General and me,”¹¹⁴ one can believe that the nature of his relationship with the institute is canonical. Baccinelli, being the local Ordinary, granted the canonical approval to the institute. From the very fact of admitting his relationship with the convent at Koonammavu as canonical, one can exclude him from the title of charismatic founder.

On one instance, Chavara refers to Baccinelli as the one who instituted the convent.¹¹⁵ In the *Decretum* of declaring ‘the Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel’ as the TOCD in 1860, Baccinelli calls himself the founder of the institute.¹¹⁶ While describing the nature of the religious institute of Mannanam, Marcelin Berardi, a Carmelite missionary, projects its founder in these words: “Archbishop

¹¹³ Since the *Documentum Erectionem* is not available today one cannot prove for certain what was in his mind about the founder of the women TOCD.

¹¹⁴ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, f. 18: “Dipendono come i Terziari dal N. P. Generale, e da me.” The nature of relationship of the Superior General, Vicar Provincial and the Delegate of the Vicar Provincial is proved to be canonical.

¹¹⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

¹¹⁶ *CMM.*, 169-170. It is noted that there is no mention about the convent for women in the *Decretum*. Whereas, in the letter of Stabilini in 1829, (prepared by the two priests, Thomas Palackal and Thomas Porukara) the dream for a convent for women can be traced. It shows that the idea of founding a convent for women does not seem to have originated from the Carmelites but from the native priests.

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Bernardine founded this religious institute which was very effective for the salvation of the Christians of Kerala...”¹¹⁷

There is a distinction between the concept of ‘foundation’, and ‘erection’ of the institute, and the different roles of the ‘charismatic founder’ and the Bishop who canonically approves the institute. There is also a misunderstanding that the day of erection of an institute is regarded as its day of foundation as well. Though this convention allows the foundation to be dated on the day of the erection, surely it does not annul the distinction between the two. However, it has given rise to confusion of thought, mistaking Baccinelli for the founder.

Hypothetically, Baccinelli, Chavara, or other later writers may have inadvertently followed this convention.¹¹⁸ Before the canonical approval of the monastery at Mannanam, Baccinelli wrote to the Propaganda Fide on 28 September 1855, “one Convent of priests [‘i Cassanari’].¹¹⁹ exists already for many years in this Vicariate and they have asked me for a Rule and form them to a religious Congregation. ...”¹²⁰ Since he admits the presence of a monastery of priests many years before his arrival in Verapuzha it is clear that the title of founder given to

¹¹⁷ Marceline Berardi, *Kerala Rajyathile Satyavedacharithram* [History of the Church in Kerala] (Koonammavu: Immaculate Conception Press, 1872), 303.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Nedungatt, “Typology of Founders” 114-115.

¹¹⁹ Italian form of *Cathanar*, a term stands for St. Thomas Christian priest, which means ‘Father.’

¹²⁰ ACO., *Ponenza* 24, 1844 m ff.321-322: “I cassanari di un Convento o ritiro esistente già da molti anni in questo vicariato avendomi domandato di dargli una regola e forma religiosa ...”. Letter written by Msgr. Baccinelli to the Propaganda Fide on 28 September 1855. This letter has no mention of TOCD.

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Baccinelli rests on a confusion of the terms foundation and hierarchical approval. It is a historical fact that Baccinelli gave the canonical approval to the men TOCD and he is their hierarchical founder.¹²¹ This is true about the women TOCD, too.

3.5 Eliswa Vakayil as Foundress

In the history of the ‘founder controversy’ of the women TOCD, the latest candidate to be added to the list is Eliswa Vakayil. An analysis is done here to see her role in the founding of the convent. The immediate history of the Koonammavu convent starts with Eliswa’s expressed desire to lead a chaste life. The *CKC* records,

The widow Eliswa (our first Superior) and her only daughter Anna were members of this parish, as they lived in Koonammavu in Vakayil house ... They used to make their confession to Leopold *Moopachan*. Eliswa told him that they had decided to live a life of chastity until their death – Eliswa, the chastity according to that of a widow, and Anna the perfect chastity of virginity. Eliswa informed *Moopachan* that she had entrusted both herself and her daughter to him.¹²²

The *CMM* records the same in these words:

¹²¹ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

¹²² *CKC.*, 1, 3; Cf., also *CMM.*, 126. When Eliswa’s words are reported the chronicler does not record the exact date of her meeting with Beccaro.

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Here is a widow with a fourteen-year-old daughter whose father had left her half of his properties. The girl does not want to be married. So why not get these two out of their joint family house, settle them down in a house constructed in one of their own properties and engage them in the work nuns do, namely, teaching other girls the practice of virtues and training them in some handicrafts.¹²³

Eliswa had a role in expressing her desire for a ‘chaste life’ and her determination to remain in that state for life. It can be seen as an expression that indicates an amorphous desire for religious life. In order to fulfill this desire she entrusted both of them – Eliswa and Anna - to Beccaro, their confessor and parish priest. This is the only text that speaks of her aptitude for religious life. The *CKC* or *CMM* or any other documents of that period do not provide further details regarding her intentions or plans for her life.

3.5.1 Application of the Norms to Identify the Founder to Eliswa

3.5.1.1 The Divine Vocation of Eliswa

The Divine vocation and original inspiration received by the founder is the basic factor to be analyzed and critically evaluated since this is the primary norm set by the ecclesiastical documents to identify the founder. In order to recognize the nature of Eliswa’s vocation to be the foundress of the women TOCD in Kerala, naturally one may have to study the words written by her, and analyze her involvement in the process of foundation of the institute and the important

¹²³ *CMM.*, 126.

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and different steps taken by her alone or in collaboration with others to achieve the goal. Another significant source can be the record of the events by the chroniclers or biographers, or various exhortations given by her on different occasions in view of forming the first community according to the inspiration received by her. Testimonies given by her contemporaries regarding her role in the foundation also can be of use. However, one may be at a loss with regard to all the above factors. Therefore, one cannot grasp the nature of her inspiration and the way she conceived the institute and its purpose. Now let us analyze whether she conceived the institute and what role she played in the event of foundation of the Koonammavu convent based on which the opinion of those who hold her as foundress would be critically evaluated.

3.5.1.2 Conceiving the Institute with its Purpose

Conceiving the institute with its purpose is an important factor that qualifies someone as founder. There are some writers who try to read in the words Eliswa expressed to Beccaro the origin of the idea for religious life. For example, Augustine Mulloor states, “In fact, the idea¹²⁴ came from Eliswa Vakayil and the confession and spiritual direction helped the discernment, and Fr. Leopold helped her in the process of foundation with technical things of getting permission etc.”¹²⁵ He again affirms, “After all, the very idea

¹²⁴ Mulloor did not specify here what her idea was. However, in the following page, he specified it as ‘the idea for leading religious life.’

¹²⁵ Augustine Mulloor, “Fr. Leopold Beccaro in the Historical Discovery of Sunny Maniakkunel Luke: Some Serious Questions and a Note of Disagreement,” in Gracious CTC, ed., *Mother Eliswa: Foundress and Mystic*, (Edappally: Teresian Carmel Publications, 2005), 156-161, at 158. Hereafter referred to as “Questions and Disagreement.”

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of *leading religious life* came from Mother Eliswa in the context of the spiritual conversation with Fr. Leopold.”¹²⁶ Here, Mulloor puts the words rightly that Eliswa’s idea was for ‘leading a religious life.’ Accordingly, she joined the religious institute when it was founded at Koonammavu in 1866. One must distinguish the idea of leading a religious life from that of founding a new religious institute; for the call to be a founder is different from the call to be a religious. If her ‘idea’ or desire was to be a religious, no body can designate her as foundress. Therefore, one cannot find in her the idea of the institute or its purpose. Moreover, as discussed earlier, from the analysis of the foundational texts (1866-1887), no one could say that the idea of founding a religious institute for women came from Eliswa.

Sucy Kinattungal in her doctoral dissertation has made some unsubstantiated general statements regarding Eliswa’s charism:

- “In the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. ...Fr. Leopold, after testing and evaluating her special charism,¹²⁷ confirmed it as the gift of God for her to live a consecrated life in Carmel and he discussed it with the Apostolic Vicar” (171).¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160. He does not provide any documental evidence to his assertions.

¹²⁷ Although Kinattungal used the term ‘special charism,’ she never explained what exactly was that special charism of Eliswa.

¹²⁸ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 171. She has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol.1. ff. 1-4. In those pages there is no mention of her special charism and Fr. Leopold’s discussion

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- “Eliswa Vakayil was a widow, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and was thus inspired to live a consecrated life” (103). Kinattungal affirms the fact of Eliswa’s call to lead a consecrated life in her concluding remarks as well:

- “Mother Eliswa led a life of prayer for 14 years and it is she who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel, and she who took the early initiative to live a community life” (405). Both Mulloor and Kinattungal affirm one fact, namely, ‘Eliswa’s call was to lead a religious life.’ Thus, she became the first member of the religious community founded at Koonammavu. If she has received the call to lead a religious life that does not necessarily qualify her as the founder of the institute. By receiving a special vocation to found a new religious institute in the Church, the founders not only feel called by God but also they are convinced of their mission as founders. The written documents of the foundation period do not provide any historical evidence in favor of Eliswa’s call to found a new religious institute in the Church. Moreover, Mulloor and Kinattungal do not make available any historical evidence to show how Eliswa received the divine vocation to be the foundress. Therefore, in vain is the search for some expressions of how she conceived the nature, purpose, or character of the institute.

From the story of foundation explained in the two main foundational texts, namely, *CMM* and *CKC*, one gets a different picture of the persons involved in the foundation and the person who conceived the institute according to which,

with the Apostolic Vicar. The number in brackets stand for the page numbers in her book *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*.

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even before the birth of Eliswa¹²⁹ a religious institute for men was founded at Mannanam in 1831 whose founders had already conceived religious institutes for women. The letters of Baccinelli to Rome (1859-1860) and his circular letter to all the churches of the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1859 informing the people of the plan of founding a convent and inviting people to donate generously for the construction of the convent at Puthenpally and some other testimonies, which are referred to earlier, very well speak of the previous attempts to found a convent for women before the actual foundation took place at Koonmmavu in 1866. No documents speak of Eliswa's involvement in those previous attempts.

3.5.1.3 The Role of Eliswa in the Foundation of the Convent

The study on the role of Eliswa in the foundation of the convent and the evolution of the life style of the first community is based on the foundational texts such as *CKC*, *CMM*, and the letters of Chavara and Beccaro. The above chronicles testify that Eliswa and Anna chose Beccaro as their confessor and they disclosed to him the desire of their hearts and entrusted themselves into his hands. The documents do not mention that Eliswa had any thought about founding a religious institute with definite orientations and precise plans. In the life of Eliswa one does not find any initiatives towards the foundation in the beginning or in the later stages. A close look at the process of foundation and the steps taken before the inauguration of the bamboo-mat convent makes one convinced that Eliswa simply followed the instructions of Beccaro and Chavara.

¹²⁹ As per *CKC.*, 1, 204 Eliswa was born on 3 October 1831. The foundation was laid for the monastery at Mannanam in the presence of Msgr. Maurelius Stabilini on 11 May 1831 (*CMM.*, 25).

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The *CKC* records, “Deciding that the convent should be inaugurated at the beginning of Lent itself, even without our knowing anything, cloth was bought and brought from Kochi in order to make new dresses for us, and we were asked to stitch for ourselves these dresses that would be extraordinarily modest.”¹³⁰ The phrase, ‘even without our knowing anything’ can be taken as their acknowledgement of the fact that they were being guided by the priests who took all the decisions for the first members and the convent to be opened. This is true about the fixing of the site for the bamboo-mat convent,¹³¹ paying the debt,¹³² which was on the land in the name of Anna, entrusting and encouraging Thomman, one of the paternal uncles of Anna, to prepare the bamboo-mat convent,¹³³ and all the arrangements made in it. When the house was ready, on 12 February, Beccaro called the candidates together and gave the following instructions:

Today itself you must keep your dress, and such other things as rice that you need to eat, mat, pillows, etc., in that house. Early in the morning you must go to the church, attend the Holy Mass, receive Holy Communion, and ask God’s help to remain in this state of life till death. Stay in the church itself praying and meditating fervently until someone comes and informs you.¹³⁴

On 13 February 1866, Tuesday, at 5 o’clock in the morning both priests together came to the bamboo-mat house

¹³⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 7.

¹³¹ *CKC.*, 1, 6.

¹³² *CMM.*, 127: *Moopachan* said: “All the debts will be cleared from the monastery.”

¹³³ *CMM.*, 127; *CKC.*, 1, 6.

¹³⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 7-8.

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and arranged all the things required for a convent. The *CKC* specifically records, “They had not only brought all these things but also arranged them with their own hands before we arrived.”¹³⁵ The *CMM* notes that these things were taken from the Novitiate house of men TOCD, Koonammavu,¹³⁶ and gives the detailed list¹³⁷ that includes things needed for starting a new life in a new house. Those texts give the impression that Eliswa or any other member of her community had no share in the preparation for starting of their life in the convent, except that they expressed their desire and they followed the instructions of Chavara and Beccaro. The chronicler of the Koonammavu convent or any other contemporaries has recorded nothing regarding her active participation in the event of foundation or in the preparations for the same. The chronicles prove that Providence prepared a suitable instrument for Chavara and Beccaro to realize the dream for a convent. *Alochana* aptly calls them ‘stones fit for foundation.’¹³⁸ They found in her the docility and attentive solicitude that rendered her so humbly obedient, just what they needed for their project; her attitude was that of a faithful disciple. The first pages of the *CKC* and the description of the beginning of the convent in the *CMM* testify to this fact.

3.5.1.4 The Role of Eliswa in the Evolution of the Lifestyle of the Community

Eliswa and the other three Sisters had their own contributions in making the community life modeled on the early Christian community. As the first member of the

¹³⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 12.

¹³⁶ *CMM.*, 128.

¹³⁷ *CMM.*, 128; *CKC.*, 1, 10-12.

¹³⁸ Cf., *Alochana*, 95.

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religious community and as its first appointed Superior for about five years, Eliswa's personality and her God-given gifts would have influenced much in the evolution of the lifestyle of the first community.¹³⁹ Although according to the document *Mutuae Relationes* it is from the founding grace a particular type of spirituality, life style, apostolate, and tradition of the institute are derived,¹⁴⁰ there is no documentary evidence, even from Anna who was both her daughter and chronicler of the community, to suggest that Eliswa had a vision for its evolution.

3.5.1.5 The Role of Eliswa in Starting the Apostolate

In order to evaluate Eliswa's role in initiating the apostolate of the convent at Koonammavu, one must look at the definition of the purpose of founding the convent. In both the definitions presented by Chavara and Beccaro the orientation toward teaching the girls to pray and giving training in handicrafts to women is evident.¹⁴¹ A look at the process of the construction of the new building for the convent will show that the plan was to build the boarding house and school for girls along with the convent – all three together as one single unit. The text from *CKC* given below tells how Providence arranged all three together:

¹³⁹ Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications*, 279-285. Kinattungal's statement, "Mother Eliswa instructed this small Community in the true spirit and charism, which she received as a gift of the Holy Spirit" (133) cannot be proven from any of the documents. The *CKC* or any other document has not recorded any of the instructions of Eliswa.

¹⁴⁰ Cf., *MR*, 11.

¹⁴¹ Cf., *CKC*, 1, 5; Cf., also Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

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... With this amount¹⁴² on Saturday 13 June, the foundation was laid for a single storey building which was narrow, as they [Chavara and Beccaro] thought it was enough. Again, after some days...delayed. Thus after 8 September, the feast of the Nativity of our Holy Mother, seeing that God was directing and blessing them abundantly through all the ways and means that the Fathers adopted and through all whom they approached, they decided to make the convent a two storey building... Again since our Delegate was not quite satisfied and felt that the foundation laid for the school and Boarding house was not strong enough, he made them erect some pillars...for all three buildings together as one single unit.¹⁴³

This text clearly shows that the idea of having a school and a Boarding house attached to the convent was there from the beginning when the two priests designed the convent and accordingly Chavara and Beccaro planned and constructed the three together. The text also states the reason for changing their plan to build a two-storey building for the convent was that they received donations beyond their expectations from “all whom they approached.” *Alochana*

¹⁴² *CMM.*, 132-134. During their journey to places such as Mannanam, Arthunkal, Kallorkadu, and Muttam they collected 1,200 Rupees from the places they visited. He has specified the names of the parishes and persons who donated the money (Kallorkkadu – 100 Rupees, Arthunkal - 500 Rupees, Muttam - 340 Rupees, Pulinkunnu – 160 Rupees, Pathil Kunjanna – 100 Rupees, thus total 1200 Rupees). Chavara writes in *CMM.*, 134: “Thus with a total of Rupees 1,200 we started the work.”

¹⁴³ *CKC.*, 1, 46-47. Whereas, Kinattungal, connects the event with Baccinelli: “On September 8 Archbishop Bernardine asked that the foundations be strengthened in order that a two storey building could be erected.” Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 138.

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also speaks of the generous donations from the local churches and the faithful for the construction of the convent.¹⁴⁴ As the new building was away from the bamboo-mat convent, Eliswa and the Sisters might not have even seen the site, the plan of the building, or the process of construction. Thus, they had no specific responsibility in the vision of the apostolate and in the steps taken for its execution.

Training in Handicrafts: Among the various apostolates of the community, the training in handicrafts started first. As seen in the *CKC* and *CMM*, the Sisters were given training first in view of training the girls in the boarding house and later to the women of the locality. Even before the Fathers took concrete steps for the construction of the bamboo-mat convent, they collected materials needed for handicrafts. Listed in the *CKC* are many bundles of needles and a variety of threads, which the Fathers had collected for the convent from different places and maybe after repeated search, since Koonammavu was a remote and interior small village. They not only collected those materials but also searched for experts to give training to the Sisters in handicrafts.¹⁴⁵

From the description in the chronicles that both priests arranged all those things needed for doing handicrafts in each one's room and in the common room with their own hands, one can conclude that they were in agreement with all the details of the apostolate of the Sisters and worked for the actualization of the plan. On another occasion, both of them together went in search of some women who could give training to the Sisters, and they brought a woman to the

¹⁴⁴ *Alochana*, 139.

¹⁴⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 53, 60, 64, 155, 177-178; *CMM.*, 139.

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convent.¹⁴⁶ The chronicles do not record any particular involvement of Eliswa or any other member of the community in the discernment process for the development of the embryonic apostolate.

Boarding House for Girls: Another apostolate started in the initial stage of the convent was a Boarding house for girls. Kinattungal claims that Eliswa is the initiator of the first convent school, the Boarding house, and orphanage. She states, “The present Kerala Church is rich with religious sisters and their services. So, it is important to know the personality of the first religious sister in Kerala who has such a privileged position as the initiator of the first convent school, the Boarding house, and the orphanage for girls in Kerala.”¹⁴⁷ However, the analysis of the texts shows little or no involvement of Eliswa in all of this. The fact that she was there at the beginning of the community life at bamboo-mat convent does not necessarily make her the initiator or visionary of the apostolate. The first mention of starting the Boarding house for girls in the *CKC* reads:

It was said that *Educumdath* (Boarding house) was to be opened soon after the Nativity of Christ, as it was the command of the Archbishop to do so and also that the children would be arriving the next day. Therefore, the three rooms that were separated with wooden rafters were to be covered on all three sides with yellow cloth, and we were entrusted with it. Thus, we made six rooms, the mistress’ room, the

¹⁴⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 60, 64; *CMM.*, 139-140; *CK.*, V/12. Chavara’s letter dated 30 March 1870 to Fr. Chandy Kattakayam has reference to the arrival of two Sisters from Cochin to give training to the Sisters in handicrafts.

¹⁴⁷ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 404.

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multipurpose room and the room for the chapel. All these were stitched and made with the yellow cloth. For the altar we, also made a canopy with the yellow cloth, arranged everything, and kept the candlesticks that were made for the purpose.”¹⁴⁸

Another passage from the *CKC* gives more details about the girls who came to join the convent and the Sister who was appointed in charge of their formation:

The Boarding house should be opened on the second day of the new year [1868]. He [Beccaro] asked our opinion about who would be suitable to be the boarding mistress and at the end, *Moopachan* himself appointed Sr. Clara. He also wrote out a few Rules for the Boarding house. However, on 1 January 1868 itself, a girl named Theresa Ozhuvil was brought from Muttam. Desiring to join the convent, she had come earlier and had met Father and told him about it. So she was immediately sent to us. ... and inaugurated the Boarding house on 2 January itself.¹⁴⁹

The next day of the opening, two more girls were added to the Boarding house. One could clearly see that Eliswa had no particular responsibility in the process of

¹⁴⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 83. In this text the word used is ‘*Idapp*’ which does not mean commanded. It may mean suggested. From the context it is clear that it was not the Archbishop’s initiative to open the Boarding house. When the idea of opening the Boarding house was communicated to the Bishop and permission was sought he might have suggested the date.

¹⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 84. In this description, almost all the sentences are without a proper subject. The sentence on appointing Clara as Boarding mistress there is a subject, namely, *Moopachan*.

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opening the Boarding house. The Fathers brought the yellow cloth for the curtain, and when the Fathers told the Sisters to stitch the curtain for the rooms, which were divided earlier, they did it. Beccaro decided that Sr. Clara should be the mistress of the girls, and he himself prepared the Rules for the Boarding house. Accordingly, the girls were given training in catechism, meditation, handicrafts, different languages, mathematics, science, music, and cooking. It was also looked on as a means for fostering good vocations to religious life. This purpose was achieved when many of them later joined the convent and became religious. However, from the names of those girls who were admitted in the Boarding house,¹⁵⁰ it seems that the institute was not meant only for the aspirants for religious life.¹⁵¹ Girls from far away places reached the Boarding house, and as the report of Marceline Berardi shows in 1883, the number reached thirty.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ *CKC.*, II, 26 provides the picture that some of the girls (Bipiana from Kunnel, Rosa Thuruthiyil from Pulincunnu, Eliswa Maliekal from Alapuzha and Jacintha Charankattu from Arthunkal) after going for vacation remained in their homes, and some others returned to the Boarding house.

¹⁵¹ The idea of the Boarding house seems to be the same as that which Chavara had expressed in the circular letter written on 25 March 1850, which was meant to open a study centre for boys. *CK.*, IX/2. He speaks of two stages of study: “In the first stage, languages like Malayalam, Tamil, Syriac, and Latin will be taught by special teachers appointed for the purpose. If any of the boys who study there, when they come to maturity, desire for priesthood and if the Superiors find that they have a real vocation, they will be selected and taught theology and other matters connected with priestly life. ...”

¹⁵² *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi (1878-1889)* ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, (f.1170): “In questo hanno un educando di circa 30 educande, ed una scuola giornaliera di circa 100 ragazze: attendono pure all’orfanotrofio, ospidale di femmine unito allo stesso monastero.”

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The *CKC* has recorded many details regarding the girls' entry to the Boarding house, the date of their going home for holidays, their coming back, their entrance into religious formation, etc. It shows that the reception of the girls from the Boarding house to the convent was an important event in the life of the convent. Both priests took great interest in their formation. The references to the girls of the Boarding house can be seen in almost all the letters of Chavara. His design for the future growth of the convent, as he expressed in his Testament, speaks of Boarding house along with the convent and both were planned as one unit.¹⁵³ Thus, it can be concluded that though Kinattungal says, "Without any discrimination of Rites, Mother Eliswa received the aspirants who came to her with proper dedication and fostered them with sincere kindness and tender love,"¹⁵⁴ the *CKC* does not mention anything special of Eliswa's role in finding the girls or in their character formation. Kinattungal's statement may simply mean that when the Fathers brought the girls to the Boarding house Eliswa, without making any objections, accepted them as she was the Superior of the Community.

A School for Girls: As discussed earlier, giving education to girls was a clear motive of establishing the religious institute for women at Koonammavu; the building has been planned and constructed accordingly, namely, the Boarding house, school for girls, and convent as one single unit. As the *CKC* testifies, the Boarding house opened on 2 January 1868 met the purpose of the school until the girls from outside were added in 1872, although the school building was ready in 1867. In the context of the small village

¹⁵³ *CK.*, VI/5. Testament of Chavara, para. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 133.

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of Koonammavu, which was a thinly populated area and people were not ready to send their daughters to attend the school, it was not easy to get the girls as day-scholars. One could notice that the girls who joined the Boarding house in the initial stage were from far away places like, Muttom-Cherthala,¹⁵⁵ Palluruthy, Pulincunnu (three girls),¹⁵⁶ Arthunkal,¹⁵⁷ Chakarakadavu,¹⁵⁸ Ollur (three girls),¹⁵⁹ Palluruthy,¹⁶⁰ etc. One can see that the girls from the locality started attending the school slowly. The *CKC* clearly notes the date of opening the school for the girls from outside as 16 October 1872: “The Sisters started the teaching work in the school situated outside the convent premise, for the day-students.”¹⁶¹ Here, too, the Sisters do not seem to play any definite role except that they taught the girls following the instructions of Beccaro. Moreover, in 1872 Eliswa was just an ordinary member of the community; for her term of office as the Superior was over when the new Superior was elected on 16 July 1871.¹⁶²

An Orphanage for Girls: Berardi in his report of 1883 speaks of the working of an orphanage attached to the convent.¹⁶³ Its foundation stone was laid on 6 September 1880. The idea of starting an orphanage and its financial help came from a generous Italian lady who was a benefactor of Gerard Beccaro. After returning from Kerala in 1876, Gerard

¹⁵⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 84.

¹⁵⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 86.

¹⁵⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 86.

¹⁵⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 88.

¹⁵⁹ *CKC.*, II, 46.

¹⁶⁰ *CKC.*, II, 46.

¹⁶¹ *CKC.*, II, 60.

¹⁶² *CKC.*, II, 32-33.

¹⁶³ *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* (1878-1889) ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, at 1170.

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Beccaro kept contact with Archbishop Mellano and introduced Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti, who offered money for the Verapuzha mission to open projects for the conversion of souls. Mellano decided to spend the money for the construction and the maintenance of an orphanage for girls at Koonammavu. The letter, written by the Sisters of the convent thanking Signora Viscouti, gives the picture of the orphanage.¹⁶⁴

As observed in the cases of other fields of apostolate, Eliswa's special role as claimed by Kinattungal in the planning or the running of the orphanage cannot be proven from any of the documents of the time. According to *Vita Consacrata*, founders and foundresses are persons of creativity, originality, and holiness.¹⁶⁵ However, in the case of Eliswa, one cannot find any enterprising initiative or creativity in starting the apostolates of the Koonammavu convent. When her term of office as Superior was over in 1871, there was no special mention about her in the pages of the chronicles. One could say that Eliswa's main contribution was through the apostolate of her suffering. From the chronicles, one gets the impression that she was sick most of the time.¹⁶⁶ Because of her illness, there was an occasion when the community had to discontinue their annual retreat, which sheds light on the intensity of her suffering.¹⁶⁷ *CKC*

¹⁶⁴ AVP., Letter written by Sr. Kathreena Manjooran of Jesus from the convent at Koonammavu to Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti, dated 8 April 1882.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *VC.*, 37.

¹⁶⁶ For some references to her illness, Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 69, 79, 81, 118, 122, 158, 174, 176-177; *CK.*, VII/3; *CMM.*, 135.

¹⁶⁷ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 21-24.

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often refers to the bodily illnesses and ailments of Eliswa,¹⁶⁸ and she was not able to fulfill her responsibilities as the Superior of the community for a longer period. The sanctity of the first member and the first appointed Superior has contributed toward the religious life style of the community, which might have enabled Berardi to report to the Propaganda Fide later that the Tertiary Sisters of the Koonammavu convent are excellent souls, humble, virtuous, and saintly.¹⁶⁹

From the above analysis of Eliswa's role in the foundation and in the evolution of the life style of the first community, including that of various apostolates, one could say that she had not played any significant role in those events. As the *CKC* and the *CMM* testify, her desire was to lead a chaste life, and she does not seem to conceive the idea of establishing a religious institute with its definite nature or purpose. That all the documents of the foundation period describe her as the first member and the first appointed Superior of the first community goes without question.

Lozano understands the founder by analyzing the interaction between an institute and its founder. For Lozano founders are persons called by God to establish a new community. They are the mediators of the Spirit to their

¹⁶⁸ *CKC.*, I, 21-22; 23; 24; 69; 79; 81; 118; 122; 158; 174; 176-177; *CK.*, VII/3. *CKC* does not provide any instance of her mental or spiritual sufferings.

¹⁶⁹ *ACO.*, *Scrit. Rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi* (1878-1889) ff. 1158-1178. Report of Msgr. Marcelline Berardi in 1883, at f. 1170: "Le Terziarie vanno meglio dei religiosi, perche umile e quindi in tutto più virtuose. Il monastero di Cunemao, può dirsi un composto d'anime eccellente e santé."

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disciples.¹⁷⁰ In the case of Eliswa, the foundational texts designate her as Superior (“*ḥiḥḥi p*”) never as ‘Mother Eliswa’ with her personal name. Throughout the *CKC* and other documents of that period, she is referred to as Sr. Eliswa and never as ‘mother’ or ‘foundress’. For example, there is a list of the members of the Koonammavu convent in the *CKC*.¹⁷¹ and in the personal Diary, *Manuale di Memorie*, of Beccaro with the title ‘Note of the nuns at the Monastery of St. Teresa.’¹⁷² ‘Sr. Eliswa Mariam’ is the first in both lists where she was not designated as Mother or Prioress or Foundress. Another example of how she was viewed at the time is seen in the fact that soon after the election of the new Superior on 16 July 1871 when Eliswa was elected as ‘keeper of keys,’ her name was written as Sr. Eliswa.¹⁷³ not ‘Mother Eliswa.’ Even in the letter of Beccaro to Marceline Berardi in 1890, which Kinattungal quotes as proof.¹⁷⁴ for her claim of Eliswa as foundress, she is referred to as ‘Sister Eliswa.’ She was one of the two surviving members from the Latin community when Beccaro left for Italy.¹⁷⁵ Twice she is referred to as Sr. Eliswa in that letter. Therefore, one of the

¹⁷⁰ Garcia Paredes, J. C. R., *Theology of Religious Life: Vocation and Charism* (Manila: ICLA Publications, 2006), 8-9.

¹⁷¹ *CKC.*, I, 204-205.

¹⁷² ASA., *Manuale di Memorie*: ‘Nota delle Monache nel Monastero di S. Teresa.’ Both seem to be in the same hand.

¹⁷³ *CKC.*, II, 34. If the members of the first Community had considered her as foundress, surely they could have used the term ‘Mother Eliswa’ or ‘our foundress,’ instead of Sr. Eliswa to denote her office.

¹⁷⁴ Kinattungal, *The Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 305-306. Beccaro’s letter is given in the appendix of the book (426-27).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *CKC.*, II, 130. Sr. Anastasia, the third member from the Latin Community made her profession on 23 May 1886, namely, ten years after Beccaro left for Europe and twenty years after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu.

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qualities attributed to the founders or foundresses regarding their paternity or maternity cannot be applied to Eliswa.

Now it is pertinent here to analyze and evaluate the opinion of those who hold Eliswa as foundress.

3.5.2 Archbishop Leonard Mellano's Opinion

The reference to the first members as foundresses first occurred in 'the Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome,' which he made during and after the division of the Koonammavu convent, in a particular context of arguing for the jurisdiction over the convent. This communication started after the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1887, which means that the idea of regarding the first members as foundresses started more than twenty-two years after the foundation of the institute. In his letters to Propaganda Fide and to Msgr. Aiuti, Apostolic Delegate to India, Mellano argued that the first members, who were from the Latin Christian Community, were the foundresses of the convent at Koonammavu and therefore, the convent must come under his jurisdiction. Whereas, according to the geographical boundary set for the new vicariates the convent belonged to the vicariate of Thrissur. At the time of the division of the vicariate, in the convent there were members from all the three vicariates, namely, Verapuzha, Kottayam and Thrissur and from both Rites – Latin and Syrian. Refuting the claims of Mellano, Medlycott wrote to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide and argued in favor of his vicariate of Thrissur. When the Propaganda Fide received different claims on the convent, the Prefect appointed Fr. Gabriele de Guarcino, the consultant of

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the Holy See, to study those documents.¹⁷⁶ The arguments of Mellano and the counter-arguments of Medlycott, the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, the report and evaluation of Gabriele de Guarcino, the letter of Aiuti to his Eminence Prefect of Propaganda Fide,¹⁷⁷ and other documents on this issue can be seen in the *Ponente, Marzo 1890*.

The archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches has rightly titled the above-mentioned documents in the following words: “*Sacra Congregazione De Propaganda Fide per gli Affari del Rito Orientale, Ponente L’Eminentissimo e Reverentissimo Singnor Cardinale Gaetano Aloisi-Masella, Relazione con Sommario: Circa la giurisdizione sul Monastero delle Suore Terziarie Carmelitane sito in cunemao Marzo 1890.*” Those communications were arguments on the jurisdiction over the convent of the Sisters of the Carmelite Tertiaries situated at Koonammavu; they were not meant to discuss or decide the identity of the founder of the institute. Mellano himself approves that he wrote those letters to get justice to him.¹⁷⁸

A simple glance at those letters of Mellano will demonstrate his lack of clarity and wavering position regarding the identity of the founder of the convent. In his letter on 24 November 1888 to the Prefect of the Propaganda, Mellano wrote:

¹⁷⁶ ACO., *Ponente della Sacra Congregazione ‘De Propaganda Fide’ per gli affari del Rito Orientale, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Num. 1), 1-20. Hereafter referred to as *Ponente, Marzo 1890*.

¹⁷⁷ *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Num. II), 20-36.

¹⁷⁸ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Allegato A*: “Mi credo obbligato a ricorrere a V.E per essere illuminato sopra una questione a riguardo del monastero delle nostre Terziarie native e per ottenere giustizia.”

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I am happy to present to you a description of the convent at Koonammavu founded by my *predecessor Msgr. Bernard of St. Teresa*, in 1866. 2) The first founders of this convent were *Sr. Eliswa, Sr. Teresa, and Sr. Anna who belonged to the Latin Rite*.3) The first convent was started in the house of Sr. Eliswa and her daughter Sr. Anna, to which were added their immovable furnishings and money worth 1000 Rupees. 4) My honorable predecessor desired that such an institution should be beneficial to the Syrians also, and thinking that such a gesture would not give anyone a chance to think that it is not a Latin convent, he received a few Syrians also into the convent just as I am doing now.¹⁷⁹

At the conclusion of that letter, Mellano wrote,

This is the truth: one of the missionaries under me performed its spiritual and material management. Whatever may be said about the collection of the donation, it will be a clear injustice to say that this convent does not belong to me.¹⁸⁰

He was resolute that the convent should be under his jurisdiction, regardless of the facts, the explanations or claims of other parties. Other than the letter mentioned above, written on 24 November 1888, on the question of the right over the convent, *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, includes three more letters written by Mellano: on 28 November 1888, 15 March 1889, and 2 April 1889 respectively. In each of these letters,

¹⁷⁹ ACO., *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi Malabaresi*, (1878-1889). Letter of Msgr. Mellano to Propaganda Fide, on 24 November 1888.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

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he identifies different people as the founder of the convent at Koonammavu. In the letter quoted above, (24 November) he states, “My predecessor Msgr. Bernardine of St. Teresa founded the convent at Koonammavu in 1866.” Four days later, on 28 November 1888, he wrote the following about the founder:

Four natives of the Latin Rite, of whom the two were the first Superiors, founded this monastery [convent for women] near Koonammavu and one called Sr. Theresa of Jesus, due to her capacity re-elected and by them founded the proper house in the land on which it is situated. Afterwards they rebuilt the convent in a more convenient place near the first one. To accommodate young women also of the Syrian Rite, who might have a vocation to be consecrated to God in such a state, my predecessor and I received some of the Syrians. Thus, they formed one body and one monastery.¹⁸¹

Although this letter claims that four natives of the Latin Rite founded the convent at Koonammavu, it does not ascribe any special role to Eliswa in the founding of the convent. Mellano does not even mention her name in the above-quoted letter. Moreover, he had ignored or omitted

¹⁸¹ *Ponente, Marzo 1890* (Allegato A). Letter of Mellano to Msgr. Aiuti on 28 November 1888: “Questo Monastero vicino a Cunemao fu fondato da quattro native di rito latino, due delle quali furono le prime Superiore, ed una chiamata Suor Teresa di Gesù, per la sua capacità rieleta più volte, e da esse fondato nella propria casa cedendo anche il terreno contiguo, ma dopo fu riedificato nelle vicinanze di questo primo, come luogo più conveniente.”

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some and changed more of the historical facts.¹⁸² On 15 March 1889, when Mellano wrote to Aiuti, on this issue, he argues:

Father Leopold, Missionary Apostolic, by order of my predecessor, Msgr. Bernardine of fond memory, in the year 1866 had a house built for four Latin postulants, viz., 1) Sister Elizabeth, 2) Sister Anna, 3) Sister Teresa, 4) a laywoman, also Latin, in the property of Sister Elizabeth.¹⁸³ and this is the way the Monastery [convent] of Koonammavu was founded.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Cf. *Ponente, Marzo 1890*. In his letter to the Propaganda Fide on 28 November 1888, Mellano had altered some of the historical facts: 1) He says that the convent was founded for the Latins. There is no evidence to prove his position. 2) He speaks of four candidates from the Latin Community whereas, in fact, there were only three candidates. 3) His assertion that the newly built convent was near to the first one is not correct. It was far from the bamboo-mat convent. 4) His claim that the new convent was built by the first members ‘themselves’ is also inaccurate, as it was built by Beccaro and Chavara. 5) He says the proper house was built on their property (e da esse fondato nella propria casa cedendo anche il terreno contiguo). This statement is not true. The proper convent was built on a new plot that belonged to the TOCD men, to which two more plots were added and the cost was paid for later from the patrimony of the Syrian Sisters. 6) With regard to the letter of Msgr. Lavigne to the Superior of the Koonammavu Convent, *CKC.*, II, 138-139 testifies that Msgr. Lavigne wrote the letter with the permission of Msgr. Andrea Aiuti, the Apostolic Delegate to India. All the above points of Mellano were refuted by Msgr. Medlycott in his letter to Msgr. Andrea Aiuti on 27 January 1889, Cf., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, 38-39.

¹⁸³ Cf. *CKC.*, I, 15, 40. Mellano keeps silence about Clara Puthenangady from the Syrian parish of Vaikom who joined the convent on the following day, namely, 14 February 1866.

¹⁸⁴ *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, ff. 61- 63. (Allegato D): “Il P. Leopoldo, Missionario Apostolico, per ordine del mio predecessore Msgr. Bernardino di s. m. nell’anno 1866 avendo Quattro postulanti Latine,

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In this letter, Mellano calls Sr. Elizabeth, Sr. Anna, and Sr. Theresa postulants, not foundresses.¹⁸⁵ In the letter written to Aiuti on 2 April 1889, Mellano argues, “Whatever I have said earlier about the founder of the convent is pure truth...”¹⁸⁶ While concluding the letter he said again, “the convent must remain as the property of the foundresses, under my jurisdiction.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, the reference here is not to one foundress, but to foundresses. Later, on 14 June 1890 Mellano mentions, “there are *three foundresses*... the Latin nuns among whom the first *two foundresses* (the third one died) have started the convent at Koonammavu ...”¹⁸⁸ This

cioè 1. Suor Elisabeth, 2. Suor Anna, 3. Suor Teresa, 4. una Conversa pure Latina fece fabbricare una casa nel palmaro della Suora Elisabetta, e così fondò, il Monastero di Cunemao”.

¹⁸⁵ The letter tells of four Latin postulants and named three of them, the fourth one was not named, simply because there were only three postulants; not four. The fourth one lived with them for some time as a helper, not as a postulant. She left after a short period. Cf. *CKC.*, 1, 8, 55-56.

¹⁸⁶ *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario* (Allegato D’), Letter written by Msgr. Mellano, Archbishop of Verapuzha to Msgr. Andrea Aiuti, Delegate Apostolic dated on 2 April 1889, f. 64: “Come, e da chi è stato fondato il Monastero di Cunemao, già l’ho con precisione e purissima verità narrato nella mia precedente, ed a quella mi riferisco, ed è quella una prova evidente, che non ammette risposta.” One may ask, which opinion about the founder is to be taken as the pure truth? Baccinelli? Leopold? or first members?

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, f.65: “Insomma, se da ciò può dedursi qualche diritto, è chiaro che sarebbe per le monache che vi hanno professato, di potervi abitare, ed io non ho mai avuto il pensiero di scaricarle, se vogliono restarvi, possono andarsene, ma il Monastero deve rimanere alle Fondatrici, che sono sotto la mia giurisdizione senza che alcuno possa molestarle.”

¹⁸⁸ Letter of Msgr. Mellano to the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide on 14 June 1890: “... e devo notare a Vostra Eminenza che le Monache

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text is repeated in almost the same words in his letter on 27 September 1890: "...there are two foundresses of the Koonammavu convent. The third one, daughter of one of the two, is dead..."¹⁸⁹

Whereas, Aiuti, after studying all the documents received from Medlycott, Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, and Lavigne, Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam and from others expressed his view with regard to the foundation:

In fact, the same [convent] was built under the auspices of Fr. Leopold, Delegate Superior for the convents of the Tertiaries. Helped by Fr. Kuriakose Elias, Superior also of the Tertiaries, and by many members of his congregation, some clerics who collected money mainly from the Syrian Churches and people; and they did this accompanied by the letter of the same Fr. Leopold, and of Fr. Kuriakose Elias..¹⁹⁰

Latine, tra le quali le prime due fondatrici (la 3° è morta) cominciarono il monastero di Cunemao nella propria casa e nel proprio palmetto, e furono le uniche Superiore per molti anni...).

¹⁸⁹ Letter of Msgr. Mellano to Msgr. Aiuti on 27 September 1890 : "Ricordo solo a Vostra Eccellenza che fra le suore uscite ci sono due fondatrici del monastero di Cunemao, la 3° figlia di una delle due, è morta."

¹⁹⁰ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890, Sommario*, Letter of Msgr. Andrea Aiuti to Cardinal Prefect of Proppaganda Fide dated 30 August 1889, (n.2) f. 49 : "In fatti il medesimo fu fabbricato sotto gli auspice del P.Leopoldo, Superiore Delegato pei Conventi dei Terziarii, aiutato dal P. Curyacos Elias, Superiore anch'esso dei Terziarii, da vari membri della sua Congregazione, della quale alcuni ecclesiastici raccolsero denaro principalmente tra le Chiese e congregazioni Soriane; e ciò fecero in seguito a lettera sia del P. Leopoldo medesimo, sia dello stesso Padre Curyacos Elias." He is speaking about the persons responsible for the construction of the convent and

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Here, Aiuti was speaking about the persons responsible for the construction of the convent and the source of money for the construction.

From a cursory reading of those letters of Mellano, one can very well conclude that his intention was not to state the identity of the founder; his interest was in the jurisdiction over the convent for which he argues repeatedly. Moreover, Mellano was unclear about the founder of the institute. Since his special intention of writing those letters was to present his claims over the convent, one cannot take Mellano's statements as an expression of his opinion about the founder of the institute.¹⁹¹ Moreover, Mellano was not a person involved in the early stages of the foundation.

When Mellano's letters presented the first members as the foundresses, his addressees immediately understood the motivation of his arguments. They realized another reason for Mellano's claim for the convent, namely, his special love for the Latin Christians and lack of concern for the Syrians. Msgr. Ignatius Persico, the Visitor Apostolic, reported to the Propaganda Fide in 1876 his observation regarding Mellano's attitude toward the St. Thomas Christians:

The Syrian Catholics have antipathy towards Mellano, the Apostolic Vicar, who never showed any concern

the source of money for the construction and not about the charismatic founder of the institute.

¹⁹¹ After spending considerable time in serious study of the documents received from both the parties – Latin and Syrian prelates - Msgr. Aiuti and all those who were responsible for making the decision, did not give much credibility to the claims of Msgr. Mellano. At last, they took the decision in favor of the Vicariate of Thrissur, a vicariate for the Syrians.

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on their behalf, but on the contrary, was known to prefer the Latins to the Syrian Catholics. For the Latins, in fact, stabilized schools and charitable institutions, which had been established, while for the Syrian Catholics little or nothing was being done, but they were left in ignorance and almost abandoned to themselves.¹⁹²

Aiuti and those who studied the case saw the open rejection of the historical truth in Mellano's approach. It is noteworthy that all the reports, which Mellano sent to Rome, were studied with the help of a commission; and later, Rome had taken a decision contrary to his arguments by giving the jurisdiction of the Koonammavu convent to the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, thus disproving Mellano's position.

3.5.3 Sucy Kinattingal's Opinion

Sucy Kinattingal is the main proponent of the opinion that Eliswa Vakayil is the foundress of the women TOCD. Before analyzing the conclusions or findings of her study on Eliswa, in the published version of her thesis, it is essential to give attention to the scope of her theme, the sources, and the methodology she used to arrive at those conclusions.

- She explains the scope in these words: "The scope of this work is to prove the true position of Servant of God Mother Eliswa, the foundress of the TOCD Congregation for women, by making use of primary sources and proving the falsity of misleading presentations" (28). Again, she states, "It is an attempt to present historical proofs in defense of the

¹⁹² ACO., *Acta* 1877-1878, Vol. 10 f. 272, Persico's report to the Propaganda Fide.

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position of the foundress, against the widespread false publications” (31).

- About the sources she writes, “The main sources for the book are the official communications of the Vicars Apostolic, Archbishops, Apostolic Visitors, Apostolic Delegates, Superior Generals of the Carmelite Order, and the missionary priests and local priests of the time” (29).

- About her methodology she states, “The original manuscripts written by the ecclesiastical authorities of the nineteenth century are used to explain the history of the Verapuzha Vicariate and the Carmelite Mission... The study progressed on the basis of information received from the official communications of the Apostolic Delegates, Vicars Apostolic, Apostolic Visitors, etc” (29-30).¹⁹³ She concludes her general introduction with these words: “The contributions of all the Carmelite Missionaries are once again esteemed in this historical study” (32).

One may observe that she had two purposes in this study: to *defend* ‘the foundress’ and to extol the European missionaries for which she made use of the communications of the western authors.

No wonder that she put Chavara’s writings among ‘the Secondary Works’ in her bibliography (469) even when

¹⁹³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 29-30. All these ecclesiastical authorities were Europeans. On one occasion, Kinattungal laments over the negative effect of the authorities who were foreigners: “The persons involved in this process were the then ecclesiastical authorities, who were all foreigners” (253). She was not concerned about what the local people had narrated about their experiences under the European missionaries.

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she agreed that Chavara was one of the persons who showed great interest in the affairs of the convent (240), and left behind much of the historical evidence and important chronicles of the time of the foundation of the convent. Her limited attention to Chavara's writings is clear from her own statement on the methodology she used to present the history.

Her admission that she studied the history of the Kerala Church using the communications of the ecclesiastical authorities of the nineteenth century who were all Europeans demonstrates the limitations of her research and the conclusions she arrived at. She made it clear that she looked at the Church in Kerala through the eyes of the Western missionaries. She has repeated the colonial version regarding the local people and the Church. She seems to over-emphasize the negative opinions of the European missionaries regarding the priests of the St. Thomas Christians.¹⁹⁴ However, in her 'General Conclusion' she asserts, "The thesis has portrayed the history of the nineteenth century Kerala Church from a correct point of view. It has not been an attempt to pay homage to particular persons and communities ..." (403).

One may observe that in the 'General Introduction' itself, the author asserts eight times¹⁹⁵ that Mother Eliswa is the foundress, a fact which she had to prove by citing documents. Before proving the facts, the author makes her

¹⁹⁴ Cf., Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 326-344. See the number of negative comments made by Europeans on Syrian priests in her footnotes in the form of long citations in Italian language and in English in the body of the text.

¹⁹⁵ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 25, 26, (twice), 27, 28, 30, 31 (twice). Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *An Unscientific Scientific Work!*, 50.

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own assertions emphatically to convince the readers. One can see her position in her introduction: “It is a proven fact that the TOCD Congregation for women was founded by Mother Eliswa and it is to affirm that one branch of TOCD Congregation cannot claim a different founder” (26).

It is an obvious fact that she openly took an ecclesiastically motivated opinion or a preconceived decision in considering Eliswa the foundress, and that too, without properly substantiating her statements. However, academically one cannot accept that her position is true to the documental evidence of the foundation period.

In order to prove the ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress’ Kinattungal has used five primary sources.¹⁹⁶ They are: 1) The Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome, 2) Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, 3) Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu, 4) Proofs from the Writings of Fr. Chavara, and 5) Proofs from the chronicles of the Congregation. An evaluation of each of her primary sources is appropriate here. It is important to note that her first three sources belong to the period after the bifurcation of the vicariate of Verapuzha (1887). They were written during and after the process of division of the convent at Koonammavu and in the context of the dispute between the Vicars Apostolic of Verapuzha and Thrissur. Accordingly, except for the last two, she seems to depend on some sources, which were connected with the disputes on the jurisdiction over the convent, which resulted in the division of the institute and therefore are polemic in nature. Above all, they were written by those who were not involved in the foundation of the convent, and therefore, are

¹⁹⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 176-190.

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documents of secondary importance. The manuscripts, which were used by Kinattungal, were not written by contemporary historians. She seems to have omitted other primary sources¹⁹⁷ of the period of foundation, which were relevant to evaluate her thesis. For example, she has not given due importance to the *CKC* written before 1870 and *CMM* written by Chavara before his death in 1871. Even though her scope was “to prove the true position of Eliswa the foundress of the women TOCD, by making use of primary sources,” she devoted only fourteen pages (173-190) for this most important subject and that too, with sources of later origin. In the same chapter, she allotted thirty-eight pages (199-237) to refute others’ opinions on the identity of the founder. She spent 117 pages (251-368) describing ‘the Division of the Congregation of Women,’ the lengthiest chapter of the dissertation. Thus, Kinattungal gives the impression that her main concentration was on the event that took place twenty-four years after the foundation of the convent. The event of the division of the convent, one should say, is not directly related with the claim that Eliswa is the foundress.¹⁹⁸ One can see the reasons for her selection of these documents of later origin as her primary source, namely, it is those documents of dispute (at least indirectly) that speak of Eliswa as foundress. Leaning on Mellano, she investigated the disputes about the division of the convent that took place in 1890. This can be seen as the main limitation of her study: in order to prove the identity of the founder of the institute she

¹⁹⁷ In her bibliography, she included Chavara’s writings under the heading ‘Secondary Works.’ Cf., Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 469. The writings of Chavara who directly involved in the foundation are secondary works!

¹⁹⁸ The fact that Rome decided to give the jurisdiction of the convent to the Apostolic Vicar of the Syrians can be seen as a proof against the claim that the first members are the foundresses.

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omitted some of the important sources of the foundation period (1866-1887) and used those sources, which were of later origin, written by those who were not involved in the foundation.

The three introductory paragraphs, under the title, ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress’, deserve special attention (173-176). As Kinattungal stated in her introduction that hers is an attempt to present historical proofs in *defense* of the position of the foundress, she started defending the position of Eliswa in the first paragraph of the third section. Kinattungal used a play on words with ‘foundation stones,’ ‘foundations,’ ‘beginners,’ and ‘initiators’ (174). According to her, Beccaro, Baccinelli, and some others called the first members ‘foundation stones.’ First of all, Beccaro addressed those words not to the first three Latin members alone, but to the first community as a whole, in a later period.¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, by taking such terms as ‘stones of foundation’ to mean founders seems to be an effort to advance her arguments without sufficient proof.²⁰⁰ It is worth noticing that the *Alochana* also calls the first members as

¹⁹⁹ *CKC.*, I, 97: “Dear children, you must remember this. God has made you the foundation stones of this....” This address was given on 31 August 1868 and, at that time, there were four professed Sisters and four postulants in the convent. Another address is recorded in *CKC.*, II, 40: “You are the foundations of the convent. If you are not right, just imagine what will be the condition of the rest.” This was addressed to the whole Community of seven professed members. This entry is of 14 September 1871.

²⁰⁰ Cf., *CKC.*, I, 97; *CKC.*, II, 40, 76. Beccaro, on three occasions called them foundation stones during his regular instructions.

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‘stones fit for foundation.’²⁰¹ What they meant was that they were like stones, which the builder used for the construction of the edifice. Eliswa and Anna offered themselves to be built upon or to be formed. They did not consider themselves or were not called as builders, but simply as stones. They were foundation stones, not founders. After referring to the words ‘foundation stones’ used by Beccaro and Baccinelli,²⁰² she made a jump to the Decree of the Propaganda Fide given at Rome on 21 January 1988. She writes, “The document entitled, *Decretum, Congregatio Pro Genitum Evanelizatione seu de Propaganda Fide*, Prot. N. 193/88 and many such documents, clearly state that the Third Order Carmelite Congregation for women was founded by Rev. Mother Elizabeth Vakayil, and canonically erected by the Apostolic Vicar, Bernardine Baccinelli OCD.”²⁰³ She has made some other generic statements in the second paragraph without quoting any text pertinent to her claim and mentioned some other documents of later origin, such as *Diamond Jubilee Souvenir of the CMC*, Bro. Leopold TOCD, *Satyanadakahalam*, etc., to prove her position on Eliswa.²⁰⁴

The second paragraph opens with these words: “The contemporary people and ecclesiastical authorities testified to

²⁰¹ *Alochana*, 95: ‘[Aṣṁkṛṣṇāṁ nṅp tṁkṛyāmb [ṣṭ]mṣe.’ [Stone fit for foundation].

²⁰² *CKC* or any other documents never records any visit or instruction of Baccinelli to the community at Koonammavu.

²⁰³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174, fn. 28, given the reference to APF, *Decretum*, Prot. N. 193/88, which is decreed at the time of raising the CTC as an institute of pontifical status. The *Decretum* is given as Appendix on page 449 of her book.

²⁰⁴ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174. See another such general statement: “The documents in the General Archives of the Discalced Carmelite Order also testify to the position of the foundress, Mother Eliswa.” She has not quoted any of the documents.

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the authenticity of the position of Mother Eliswa as foundress of the Congregation of the TOCD for women.”²⁰⁵ She has not presented any valid contemporary documents in support of her argument. She speaks about a special ceremony of receiving the first members: “He (Baccinelli) in virtue of his office, officially accepted Eliswa, Anna and Theresa into the Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites Sisters (TOCD) on Monday, February 12, 1866, by issuing the *Documentum Erectionem*.”²⁰⁶ She has shown two sources for it: the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD and *Nalagamam of TOCD*. However, the *Nalagamam of TOCD* does not speak about such a ceremony on 12 February. Except for the two references to the *Nalagamam of the TOCD*, all other references in these paragraphs are taken from the writings after the division of the convent in 1890, and since those documents are of later origin cannot be taken as valid historical evidence. Thus, one should say that Kinattungal either ignored or consciously omitted some of the pertinent documents of the foundation period.

A discussion is made here regarding the primary sources used by Kinattungal.

1) The Communications of Archbishop Mellano to Rome: Although in her ‘General Introduction’ Kinattungal states that “The main sources for the book are the official communications of the Vicars Apostolic...,” (29) she does not refer to the official report sent to the Propaganda Fide by Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar in 1867, in which he reported

²⁰⁵ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 174-175. She has quoted from the ‘Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu,’ which was written in 1890 after the convent had been declared as belonging to the Vicariate of Thrissur.

²⁰⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 128, see also 174.

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that ‘the Sisters were entrusted to a missionary and the Prior of the Tertiaries,’ referring to Beccaro and Chavara.²⁰⁷ She does not seem to be interested in delving deeply into the nature of their collaboration with regard to their duty entrusted by the local Ordinary to care for the Sisters. She took only the communications of Mellano to Rome, written in the context of the dispute over the ownership of the property of the convent at Koonammavu.

Another observation is that when Kinattungal takes ‘the official communications of Mellano Rome’ as the first of the primary sources to prove the authenticity of the position of Eliswa, she does not seem to depend on any of the letters written by him before 1887. It may mean that during or after the time of foundation of the convent until the bifurcation of the vicariate, nothing concerning the convent was in his communications! Even when Mellano submitted the report to the Propaganda Fide in 1876, the convent at Koonammavu had no place in the *Catalogus Ecclesiarum Ritus Siro-Malabarici*.²⁰⁸ The comments and observations regarding the reliability of the opinion of Mellano on the question of the identity of the founder of the Koonammavu convent are not repeated here.

Even though Kinattungal finds in the letters of Mellano answers to her search that Eliswa is the foundress, her analysis from the letters of Mellano is totally

²⁰⁷ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*, f. 18.

²⁰⁸ Cf. ACO., *Scritture Originali 1876*, Vol. 7. *Catalogus Ecclesiarum Ritus Siro-Malabarici*, ff.390b-390m. In the ‘Catalogue of the Parishes’ given by Msgr. Mellano in 1876 he puts the monastery at Koonammavu in the list of Latin parishes along with the monastery of Manjummel. The convent at Koonammavu is not included in that *catalogus*!

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unconvincing due to the lack of correct information on the historical basis and lack of clarity in the presentation of this part of the argument. In sum, the letters of Mellano, given in *Ponente, Marzzo 1890*, were written in the context of a dispute between him and Medlycott over the jurisdiction of the Koonammavu convent. Therefore, his letters cannot be taken as proof for the authentic position on Eliswa, as Kinattungal claims.²⁰⁹ Thus, her acceptance of Mellano's claim as to the identity of the founder cannot be said to be historically accurate, as Mellano himself has confused utterances regarding the identity of the real founder; he was inconsistent, uncertain and vacillating. Moreover, in his letters Mellano did not seem to ascribe any specific role to Eliswa in the foundation. In those letters, Mellano never mentioned the name of Chavara and proposed some other persons as responsible for the foundation.

In spite of the fact that Rome rejected the claims of Mellano by considering them as unauthentic, Kinattungal and those who hold Eliswa as the foundress keep on repeating the words of Mellano, their ecclesiastical head, as contrary to the written documents of the foundation period. Thus, Mellano's statements on the Latin origin of the Koonammavu convent, the ritual status of the institute before 1890, the financial source for the construction of the convent, the omission of the name of Chavara, the denial of the role of the men TOCD in the affairs of the convent, and his lack of clarity about the identity of the founder of the institute, etc., result from an alteration of the historical facts.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ This is true about her claims about the site of the convent, the patrimony of the first members, etc.

²¹⁰ Cf., Paul Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications* (Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013), 427-609.

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Kinattungal's presentation of another point needs our attention, namely, the economic status of Eliswa, which contradicts the description given in the documents of the foundation period.²¹¹ Kinattungal presents Eliswa as a person of wealth:

- "Though she was rich, she had abandoned all the comforts of her luxurious house and she had chosen the small granary for her more disciplined and simple lifestyle" (121).

- "The first step in the option for the poor was her own option to be poor. Mother Eliswa decided to be poor even though she had the possibility to be otherwise" (123).

- She says that Baccinelli also knew "that they possessed enough economical resources to build a convent, [and] he was all the more delighted" (125).

- About living in a bamboo-mat convent Kinattungal says, "According to the standards of Vypissery and Vakayil families, living in such a house made of bamboo was a great humiliation" (126).

- "It would appear that, the Archbishop wished to check the ability of the sisters to live the vow of poverty, since they belonged to such a rich family. ...Mother Eliswa was not proud of her material riches and was very happy to renounce them in order to find the real treasure in God" (127).

Chavara's letter to Porukara, the Superior of the Mannanam monastery, on 13 March 1866, provides an

²¹¹ *CKC.*, 1, 6-7; *CMM.*, 127; *CK.*, V/3.

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altogether different picture of the life situation of Eliswa and Anna before they started their community life in the bamboo-mat convent. It is a letter expressing Chavara's apprehension about receiving a woman of a rich family to the community at bamboo-mat convent, which has embraced a life style of simplicity and poverty. This letter tells that even the first members Eliswa and Anna were formerly leading a life of utter poverty and hard labor. He notes that both the mother and her daughter were finding their sustenance by hard work, such as rope making, mat weaving, and grinding rice. Even then, they had to eat rice bran and to drink *kanji* water. They did not seem to have had many clothes; hence, they had to wash, dry, and put on the existing ones. They had no proper bed to sleep in; they slept on planks (*vattipuram*).²¹² Indeed they were very poor, it seems.

As an attempt to show that Eliswa and the first members had enough material resources and they were not in need of others' help to construct the new convent, Kinattungal writes, "...original sources are available which prove the list of properties of the foundress and her daughter Anna."²¹³ It is true that they had some plots of land and fields, as Beccaro's diary notes and '*the Accounts of the dowry of Sr. Anna*' depict. However, the *CKC* and the *CMM* state that their land was in debt. If the interest and the debt had not been paid on

²¹² *CK.*, V/3. Letter written by Chavara to Porukara on 13 March 1866.

²¹³ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 204 fn. 143. She gives reference to AVP, CMC, *Pathrameni Sambhanthicha Kanakkukal* (1867-1875), (*The Accounts of the Dowry of Sr. Anna*), p. 20. The same thing can be seen in fn. 151 of her chapter two. She gives the list of properties under the same footnote and same page number of the original and added "List of properties which were bought after the foundation of the Congregation," which gives the impression that all these properties were of Anna's patrimony. The second part is on page 21 of the original, which Kinattungal has not given.

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time, the land would be lost but the debt would remain.²¹⁴ Both the chronicles testify that Thomman, Anna's uncle, agreed to build a temporary house as convent. Nevertheless, his problem was that he had no money even to start with.²¹⁵ This being the economic condition of the first members at the time of foundation, Mellano wrote to Rome that they had had property worth of Franc 14000. So too, Kinattungal claims that Eliswa had a cash deposit of Rupees 2000.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, she fails to cite any documents to prove her claim.

In the conclusion of 'The Critical Study of the Foundation of the TOCD,' Kinattungal observes:

In the history of this religious congregation, there have been many personalities involved, such as Archbishop Bernardine, Fr. Leopold, Fr. Guyomar Panambil, Archbishop Leonard Mellano, Fr. Chavara, Msgr. Marceline, Fr. Philip, Fr. Louis, etc. However, none of them can be regarded as the founder or co-founder. Mother Eliswa has the unique position of the foundress and she received the gift of charism through her deep interior life of prayer and solitude. Theresa and Anna were co-foundresses who were attracted to

²¹⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 4; *CMM.*, 127.

²¹⁵ *CMM.*, 127 provides the source of money to begin the work of the bamboo-mat convent: "In the beginning of the year 1866, a person given Rs. 10 as donation. ...With that and Rs. 8 got from some other source, work on the house was begun. Chavara has noted further contributions as well. Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 6-7. Cf., Paul Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications* (Aluva: CMC Publications, 2013), 63-67.

²¹⁶ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 135: "According to the current money value, it would be millions of Rupees."

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the life style and charism of Mother Eliswa, and thus formed the first religious Community.²¹⁷

An observation on the contribution of Fr. Guyomar is relevant here: No original documents mention the name of Thomas Guyomar Panambil whom Kinattingal presents as the maternal uncle of Eliswa and as the one who offered three pieces of land for the convent. Kinattingal has made three references to Guyomar's offer of three pieces of land in her book.²¹⁸ It is strange that the first volume (1866-1870) of *CKC* written by Anna, "the grand niece" of Guyomar omitted the name of this "benefactor." She has faithfully recorded the names of all those who extended any kind of help to the convent, as well as those who had paid visits to the convent in the early years of its foundation. Neither Chavara nor Beccaro had any reference to this person in relation to the founding of the convent, the donation of land or any other transaction. Moreover, Msgr. Mellano, in his letter of 15 March 1889, tells the name of the persons in whose land the convent was constructed.²¹⁹ He also does not mention the name of

²¹⁷ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 249-250.

²¹⁸ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 191. About Fr. Guyomar's offer of three pieces of land, see Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 137, 181, 184; Her basis for these assertions are from secondary sources of much later origin.

²¹⁹ ACO., *Ponente, Marzo 1890*, f.62: "Il luogo, dove questo Monastero fu fabbricato consisteva in tre piccolo palmari di Latini, cioè Vattaparampil Cacchi, Vattaparampil Cunhu Varido nipote di Cacchi, ed un certo Cioladempil Cunhu Varido nipote di Cacchi, I quali a modicissimo prezzo li cedettero colla casa, che vi aveano, per tale oggetto." This letter of Mellano does not mention the name of Fr. Guyomar Panambil as one who contributed land for the convent. Therefore, it can be concluded that until 1889 Fr. Guyomar was not in the picture. In spite of many contemporary testimonies regarding the land of the convent and the money collected for the construction of the new building of the convent, Sucy Kinattingal, depending upon

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Guyomar Panambil as the contributor of the land for the convent.

2) Another important source for Kinattungal is ‘the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD.’²²⁰ Brother Leopold was born in the year 1882 and started writing more than fifty years after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu and even after the establishment of the convent at Verapuzha in 1890. Kinattungal acknowledges the later origin of his writings: “Some manuscripts were written in 1934... We can

Bro. Leopold’s unauthentic and unscientific manuscripts states, “the first convent was built on the property of the members of the Latin Rite Fr. Thomas Guyomar Panambil offered three plots of land to his nieces to build the convent and the compound was comprised of these three plots and the plot bought with the patrimony of the founding members.” Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 181. The writings of Bro. Leopold TOCD (1882-1967) belonged to the period after the division of the convent based on Rites and he seemed to follow the line of arguments of Msgr. Mellano regarding the property of Eliswa and Anna, except that of the offer of Guyomar. Kinattungal asserted later that Chavara also admitted the fact of Guyomar’s contribution of three plots. Cf., Kinattungal, *Pradhama Thaddheshiya Sanyasinisamooham Stapaka*, 54. What Chavara recorded in *CMM.*, 134 reads like this: “He [Beccaro] prevailed upon the owners of two compounds adjacent to the land owned by our Koonammavu monastery to part with them in exchange for two other properties and at a concessional price... and joined the three plots together.” Kinattungal mistook Chavara’s phrase “three plots” and considered those ‘three plots’ as donated by Guyomar. At the same time, she did not give attention to his words in the same sentence as ‘the land owned by our Koonammvu monastery.’ In *CMM.*, 134 Chavara has mentioned the names of persons who extended helps to the Sisters, for example, he names Nicholas who went to the convent with medicine and Vareed who gave a torch for Chavara to light on their way to the convent at night when the Superior was ill. If Guyomar had contributed the land, surely Chavara could have mentioned his name.

²²⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 179-182.

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guess that the manuscripts were written between 1910 and 1935.”²²¹ Even then, his writings are included among the primary sources by Kinattingal. According to her, Bro. Leopold is one of the famous local historians (109). She attributes the authorship of many books to him (179) and refers to his manuscripts (102) throughout her study. She observes,

Bro. Leopold reported about the life of the founding members, the foundation of the congregation, their patrimony, division of the TOCD Congregation, etc. Bro. Leopold TOCD was one who witnessed the life of the founding members of the TOCD Congregation for women (180).

According to the details given by Kinattingal, Bro. Leopold was born sixteen years after the foundation of the Koonammavu convent and the founding members left for Verapuzha when he was seven or eight years old. One can imagine the trustworthiness of the *witness* of an eight-year-old boy. A cursory look at his presentation of Eliswa as foundress shows that very often he adds that ‘the first convent was built on her property.’ According to Kinattingal, his Books I, III, and IV speak of the above matter.²²² One may wonder why he connects the question of the founder with the property of the convent. Kinattingal says, “Bro. Leopold recorded that the first convent was built on the property of the Latin Rite members, and he also gave details about the patrimony of Sr. Anna. ... Bro. Leopold mentioned the different sources of money for the construction, a major portion of which was contributed by the Apostolic Vicar. ...”

²²¹ Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 180, fn.50.

²²² Kinattingal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 175, fn.36.

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(181). These and other information taken from Bro. Leopold echo Mellano's letters, and their main preoccupation was the monetary aspect of the convent. Bro. Leopold wrote these manuscripts after the event of the division of the convent. This naturally reflects the mindset of the Latin community at Koonammavu after the division of the Convent. Therefore, the manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD cannot be taken as a reliable source with regard to the position of Eliswa as foundress.

Some confusion also exists about the source of those manuscripts. Kinattungal uses both archives - ASJVB²²³ and AICM²²⁴ - in the same footnote.²²⁵ The use of their folio numbers creates further confusion. In some references all four Books have folio numbers, while in others the same Books have no folio numbers. In addition, these manuscripts are classified by their trustees as a "Reserved Source"²²⁶ and not available even for academic research.

3) Letter of the Parishioners of Koonammavu: The third primary source of Kinattungal is the letter written by the parishioners of Koonammavu on 10 June 1890.²²⁷ This letter,

²²³ Archives of St. Joseph's Vidya Bhavan, Edappally.

²²⁴ Archives of Immaculate Heart Monastery, Manjimmel.

²²⁵ In the same fn. 51 (p. 180), Kinattungal gives reference to Book I, II, III, IV from ASJVB with footnote numbers. Again, she gives AICM, Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, fn. 11f. (Book No. is not mentioned).

²²⁶ ACMCG, [In response to the request of Sr. Sancta, the Superior General of the CMC to have the Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD, the Superior General of the CTC wrote that the 'Manuscripts of Bro. Leopold TOCD' is a 'Reserved Source' and it cannot be made available to you.]

²²⁷ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 182-183. Although Kinattungal refers to it as the 'Letter of the parishioners of

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as the date of its writing shows, is written after the decision taken by Propaganda Fide made the final decision regarding the authority of the convent on 24 March 1890 that the convent should be under the governance of the Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur. Naturally, the parishioners of Koonammavu found it difficult to accept the decision. Kinattungal says that the priests and people sent *many letters* to the Propaganda Fide with many additional pages of signatures (182-183). They seemed to repeat the same version of Mellano, their ecclesiastical head, regarding the property and the founder of the convent. Although the news about Propaganda's decision reached them, since it was not executed, they might have thought that by sending many letters the authorities might change the decision in favor of the Latins. To substantiate their arguments Kinattungal had referred to Mellano's letters.²²⁸ As discussed above, in view of the fact that their concern was the monetary aspect of the convent and not directly the identity of the founder, the period and situation of its writing, this letter does not serve as proof of the authenticity of the position of Eliswa as foundress.

4) 'Proofs' from the Writings of Chavara: Kinattungal has allotted just one and a half pages to present 'Proofs from the Writings of Chavara.' There she quotes his words from the *CMM* in a distorted manner and she concludes, "The above testimony is important in proving the invalidity of the statements of those who claimed Fr. Chavara as the founder of the congregation" (184). Even though her

Koonammavu' the letter given in the appendix of her book, 434-440 is signed by the 'clergy and people of the Archdiocese of Verapuzha' (*Clerus et populus Archidicesis Verapolitana*), not the parishioners of Koonammavu.

²²⁸ Cf. Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 183, fn. 64.

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purpose was to prove the ‘Authenticity of the Position of Mother Eliswa as Foundress,’ she ended up concluding that Chavara was not the founder. It is obvious that she did not get any ‘proofs’ from the writings of Chavara in favor of Eliswa as foundress.

5) ‘Proofs’ from the Chronicles of the Congregation: According to Kinattungal, “the authentic sources for explaining the true history of the TOCD Congregation are the chronicles ...” (26-27) which were written during the period of foundation. At the same time, she allots only the *fifth* place to these chronicles. Curiously enough she misses in the first pages of the Chronicle any idea regarding the identity of the founder/foundress since the chronicler does not clearly state in these pages who received the inspiration for the founding of the convent.²²⁹ She remarks, “In the first pages of the Chronicle one would naturally expect a detailed description of the foundress and the other founding members or the presentation of the charismatic spirit implied, etc. Instead these pages speak out of Fr. Leopold’s relationship to TOCD priests of Syrian Rite.”²³⁰ Kinattungal thus obviously admits

²²⁹ It is true that Chavara did not start the ‘Beginning of the Religious Life for Women’ directly with the description of the first members as Kinattungal expected. On the contrary, he starts with the sadness of the people due to the absence of religious life in Kerala, their age-long waiting for, and the gradual evolution of the religious movement that started at Mannanam and followed by the attempt at Puthenpally, the disappointment caused by that failed attempt and the actual foundation of the convent for women at Koonammavu.

²³⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 185. But on page 188 Kinattungal states, “The first 17 pages of the Chronicles testify to the ardent desire of Eliswa and Anna to embrace religious life. Both of them had led a pious life for long years and had selected Fr. Leopold as their confessor and spiritual director.” Though she has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol. 1, ff.1-4, it is from page 3 that speaks about Eliswa and Anna.

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that she could not see the “foundress” or the “charismatic spirit of the foundress” in the first pages of the *CKC*. She then attributes this absence to the “male domination in the Church!”²³¹

Kinattungal’s argument that Eliswa’s name was not mentioned as the foundress had been due to bias or vested interests is not maintainable, since even Anna, Eliswa’s own daughter does not show her as the foundress in the rest of the pages of the chronicle. It seems that Kinattungal first presupposes that Eliswa was the foundress and then seeks to find references to it in the chronicles. Since these ‘wished for’ references are not there, she blames the Church for male domination. In fact, Kinattungal frankly admits that there is no such clear evidence to her thesis. There is only scant reference to Eliswa’s leading role in the first Community in the rest of the pages as well. In other words, Kinattungal admits that the Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent do not present Eliswa as the foundress of the institute.

In this connection, it is also worthwhile to answer a critical remark of Kinattungal who notices certain tampering in the first pages of the *CKC*. She calls it an ‘attempt to hide the facts’ (185). Accepting the fact of tampering, it may be pointed out that this tampering is related to facts and figures with regard to patrimony, and not about the question of the founder.²³² The argument that there were manipulations in certain pages related to some other topic is not a valid argument when the real issue of the founder is at stake. Those who base their arguments on the Chronicles of Koonammavu

²³¹ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 185.

²³² Cf., Kalluveetil, et al, *An Unscientific Scientific Work*, 132-139.

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Convent bring out only those statements in the document that are not tampered or manipulated.

As a demonstration of Eliswa as foundress, Kinattungal makes some comments on ‘the reception of the fourth member.’ She argues:

Fr. Leopold asked Achamma to seek permission from Mother Eliswa by kneeling in front of her. With due permission of the foundress, Fr. Leopold received Achamma as a member of the new religious congregation ... It is clear that Mother Eliswa exercised all the rights of the foundress and that Fr. Leopold respected her rights and asked her permission to admit the fourth member (189).²³³

However, to interpret the act of the candidate, kneeling down before the Superior, as a proof for the status of Eliswa as the foundress, seems to be a step too far in logic. One has to admit that the new candidate was asked to kneel down before the Superior of the Community as an expression of her spirit of obedience and humility.²³⁴ In the narration of this particular event, the term Superior (‘*ṭṭivī n̄*’) or Mother Superior (‘*ṭṭivī n̄b½*’) has been repeated seven times,²³⁵ never as ‘Mother Eliswa,’ (‘*Ḡeozm½*’) in her personal name. It is noted that in the *CKC* she was never designated as Mother Eliswa or Mother Foundress. However, Kinattungal argues, “It is clear that Mother Eliswa exercised all the rights of the foundress and that Fr. Leopold respected her rights and asked her permission to admit the fourth member” (189). She

²³³ Although *CKC* names the fourth member Eliswa, which was changed to Clara, Kinattungal calls her Achamma which is not in *CKC*.

²³⁴ Kalluveetil, et.al., *An Unscientific Scientific Work*, 93.

²³⁵ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 14-15.

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takes it as a proof for Beccaro's acceptance of Eliswa as the foundress, and to show that Chavara had no role in it.²³⁶ Whereas *CKC*²³⁷ and *CMM*²³⁸ clearly testify the fact that it was Chavara who took the initiative to invite the fourth member to the convent. The very fact that Chavara exercised his freedom to invite a Syrian member to the convent shows that he had the authority to do it. The *CKC* gives the reason for not admitting her on the first day: "Because he [Beccaro] had never seen or known her before, he could not take a decision immediately, without having interviewed her once or twice in the confessional. So he asked her to wait, staying in a house outside."²³⁹ Being the Provincial Delegate and the Canonical Superior, Beccaro took upon himself the responsibility to discern the genuineness of the vocation of the candidate, and he admitted her on 14 February, the following day of the inauguration of the convent, after having tested her and been personally convinced of her vocation.

The fourth member Eliswa Puthenangady reached Koonammavu by the invitation of Chavara and the Provincial Delegate tested her vocation. By the fact that Beccaro informed or asked permission from the Superior of the community to admit the new member does not mean that he was acknowledging the authority of Eliswa as the foundress as Kinattungal claims.

²³⁶ These words of Kinattungal echo Mulloor who expressed this idea in 2005: "In fact when the first Syro-Malabar rite member arrives, Fr. Leopold asks permission from Mother Eliswa before she is presented to the Community and it is Mother Eliswa who admits her." Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 160.

²³⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 8-9: "Sr. Clara arrived on 11th February itself, as *Priorachan* had informed them through the parish priest of Vaikom."

²³⁸ *CMM.*, 129: The details about Eliswa Puthenangady's life given in the Chronicles prove that Chavara knew her well.

²³⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 9.

3.5.3.1 Eliswa and Her Founding Charism

In her third chapter, while making ‘the critical study of the foundation of the TOCD Congregation,’ Kinattungal has two subtitles: ‘the founding charism’ of Eliswa and ‘the characteristics of the charism.’²⁴⁰ Instead of describing the nature of inspiration Eliswa received from the Holy Spirit or its content and her awareness of being called to be the founder, the author makes some generic statements. She does not quote any words of the foundress. Kinattungal seems to agree that the call of Eliswa was to lead a consecrated life. She states, “In the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. ...Fr. Leopold, after testing and evaluating her special charism,²⁴¹ confirmed it as the gift of God for her to live a consecrated life in Carmel and he discussed it with the Apostolic Vicar” (171).²⁴² “Eliswa Vakayil was a widow, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and was thus inspired to live a consecrated life” (103). Kinattungal affirms the fact of Eliswa’s call to lead a consecrated life in her concluding remarks as well, “Mother Eliswa led a life of prayer for 14 years and it is she who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel and she who took the early initiative to live a community life” (405).

Kinattungal’s repeated use of the phrase ‘to lead a consecrated life’ is noteworthy, by which she confirms that

²⁴⁰ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 170-173.

²⁴¹ Although Kinattungal mentions the ‘special charism,’ she never explained what exactly was that special charism of Eliswa.

²⁴² Kinattungal, 171. She has given reference to *Nalagamam of TOCD*, Vol.1. ff. 1-4. In those pages there is no mention of her special charism and discussion with the Apostolic Vicar.

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Eliswa's call was to lead a consecrated life, hers was a call to follow; not to be a leader or initiator. Kinattungal does not speak about Eliswa's call to be the founder of a new religious institute in the Church. Thus, Kinattungal is fully in agreement with Beccaro, Chavara, Anna, the chronicler of *CKC*, and other contemporaries who held Eliswa as the first member of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu. It cannot be proven for certain that when Eliswa told Beccaro that "we entrust both of us to you," the idea of consecrated life was clearly present in her. While guiding Eliswa and Anna in the beginning, Beccaro's concern was "how to nurture and protect their chastity,"²⁴³ not exactly to found a new institute of consecrated life, nor to help the founder to establish a new religious institute.

Kinattungal claims that 'it was Eliswa who received the charism to live the consecrated life in Carmel,' which is not supported by any evidence in *CKC* and *CMM*. According to *CMM*, it was Baccinelli who decided that the convent was to be Carmelite.²⁴⁴ Thus, the Carmelite charism was discerned and decided neither by Beccaro nor by Eliswa. Therefore, Kinattungal's assertion that Eliswa received the charism to 'Carmel' is baseless.

Kinattungal's statement that it was Eliswa who took the early initiative to live a community life, is not supported by the *CKC* which states that community life started only after the inauguration of the Bamboo-mat convent on 13 February. It is surely spurious to claim that a mother and her fourteen-year-old daughter formed a community on their own and in their 'joint family.' In order to show that Eliswa

²⁴³ *CKC.*, 1, 4.

²⁴⁴ *CMM.*, 127; Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 5-6.

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already started community life earlier, Kinattungal presents the mother and child as they were staying in *Kalapura*.²⁴⁵ and brings some other imaginary stories. The *CKC* provides a different picture from what Kinattungal presented under the sub-titles ‘Shifting of Residence to *Kalapura*’ (116), ‘Contemplation in Cells’ (116), ‘A Small Community’ (117), and ‘Theresa Joins Mother Eliswa and Anna’ (117). As discussed earlier, on the day following the opening of the bamboo-mat convent when Beccaro and Chavara together visited the convent and enquired about their new life in the community, Eliswa told them, “Sister Theresa had eaten almost nothing the previous day and that she had some difficulty in leaving her mother. She had never before been away from her mother, not even for a day.”²⁴⁶ Theresa herself confirmed this when Beccaro asked her to speak of her experience. The *CKC*’s description about the arrival of Theresa at Koonammavu agrees with Eliswa’s expression, ‘not even for a day’ was she away from her mother. Theresa reached Koonammavu along with her parents and some of her relatives on (Saturday), 10 February 1866, and they stayed with Eliswa and Anna until the opening of the convent on (Tuesday), 13 February.²⁴⁷ As a result, ‘the previous night,’ namely 13 February 1866 was her first night away from her mother that made her ‘homesick,’ as noticed and reported by her elder sister, Eliswa, which proves the inaccuracy of Kinattungal’s claim that the three together formed a community even before the opening of the bamboo-mat convent. She says, “There emerged a minuscule pious

²⁴⁵ According to Kinattungal *Kalapura* was the granary, in the share of Anna (116).

²⁴⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 4.

²⁴⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 7-8.

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community without fixed rules and regulations” (117).²⁴⁸ “The three founding members were under the guidance of Fr. Leopold for four years” (189). At another instance Kinattungal states, “Sr. Theresa was preparing herself in her own house” (125). If Theresa was preparing in her own house at Ochanthuruth, ‘A Small Community’ at Koonammavu was consisted of a widow and her teenage daughter.²⁴⁹ One may say that Kinattungal is contradicting herself by saying that Theresa was preparing herself in her own house, and at the same time holding that Theresa joined Eliswa and Anna to form a ‘minuscule’ community. Furthermore, when the *CKC* and *CMM* speak about the beginning of religious life for women, they refer only to Eliswa and Anna and do not mention Theresa’s name before the preparation of the bamboo-mat convent.²⁵⁰ and she was not on the scene earlier.²⁵¹

A word about Eliswa’s stay in *Kalapura* is appropriate here. Kinattungal’s source for *Kalapura* is Prescilla, who seems to have invented this story more than a century after the foundation and to which no references were provided by

²⁴⁸ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 117. She has given reference to it from a book written in 1940.

²⁴⁹ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 116: “Eliswa remained constant in prayer and solitude and led a simple life for 14 years...”

²⁵⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 3: Eliswa entrusted both herself and Anna. *CMM.*, 126 mentions only about two: “Here is a widow and her fourteen-year-old daughter....So why not get these two out of their joint family house and settle them...”

²⁵¹ *CKC.*, 1, 7. In the list of members, Theresa is the third, although she is senior to Anna by age. Clara is the fourth, though she is older than all other members of the first Community are. It may be because of the concept of the reception of their call to be religious.

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What Kinattungal states, under the above-mentioned titles, do not have a basis in any of the contemporary documents.²⁵⁵ Instead of a detailed research of important original sources of the foundation period, she depended upon those writings of more recent origin.²⁵⁶ In addition, her book repeats a long-standing debate about the identity of the founder of the women TOCD by depending on and repeating the ideas of Mellano, and some popular and pious biographies. Even then, Kinattungal claims that her work clears away all doubts and confusion regarding the position of the foundress of the TOCD Congregation for women (404). On the contrary, by going through Kinattungal's presentation of Eliswa, it can be said that she has not done an exhaustive study on Eliswa as foundress. She has not given attention to any special charism or the nature of the virtuous life of Eliswa in the convent at Koonammavu. She never looked into Eliswa's inner dynamism, which was the fruit of her long-suffering life, as the *CKC* testifies that for most of the time in the convent Eliswa was afflicted by some kind of physical

Life of Mother Eliswa' (pages 105-106) as her footnotes show, she depended on the writings from the third quarter of the twentieth century and even of the third millennium. Those books were not written in a scientific manner, but written in a popular style.

²⁵⁵ ACMCG., Letter of Prof. Norman Tanner, SJ, on 30 January 2010 to Sr. Sancta, Superior General of the CMC. While sending the published extract of her work to the Superior General of CMC Prof. Tanner, the moderator of Kinattungal's dissertation, wrote: "Only chapter two, which is relatively uncontroversial, is included." One can imagine that if "chapter two, which is relatively uncontroversial" has this many controversial and distorted elements, what will be the condition of other chapters!

²⁵⁶ Kinattungal's source books referring to the early life of Eliswa, Anna and Theresa, show that they are not scientific works but written in a popular style.

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illnesses. Kinattungal's study cannot be called scientific and her conclusions are questionable.

3.5.3.2 Co-foundresses

In the concluding part of her study, Kinattungal has accorded great importance to the other two members of the first community. She states, "In the history of the TOCD Congregation for women, the Servant of God, Mother Eliswa has a unique position as the foundress of the congregation. Sr. Theresa and Sr. Anna have the positions of the co-foundresses." As a rationale to give them the title of co-foundresses, she notes, "They were attracted to the lifestyle and charism of Mother Eliswa and they formed a religious community in a small house built on the property of the Vakayil family" (405). According to theologians, co-founder/co-foundress is one who has had a significant part in the execution of what the founder had conceived.²⁵⁷ Co-founders are regarded as sharing the foundational charism in a special way distinct from that of the other members of the institute.²⁵⁸ Kinattungal has not described what significant role that Anna and Theresa played in order to entitle them as co-foundresses. Their simple attraction to the lifestyle of Eliswa does not qualify them to that position. On the contrary, Eliswa herself testified that Theresa never spent a night without the company of her mother before joining the bamboo-mat convent.²⁵⁹ Such a person does not seem to play any significant role in the execution of the idea of Eliswa in the founding of the institute before and after the event of foundation.

²⁵⁷ Damizia, "Fondatore," *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Vol. 5, col. 1474.

²⁵⁸ Nedungatt, "Typology of Founders," 101.

²⁵⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 13.

3.5.4 Evaluation of the Opinion on Eliswa as Foundress

The foundation of the convent at Koonammavu was not an isolated single event that took place in 1866. It was the result of a long process with a long history. For Kinattungal the origin of the TOCD for women starts all of a sudden with the person of Eliswa Vakayil. Kinattungal does not seem to link the foundation with the long waiting of many persons and their previous attempts to restore religious life in the Church in Kerala. She thus ignores and overlooks the fact that the foundation of the convent at Koonammvu, an ecclesial event of great significance, was the culmination of some repeated attempts and failures, longings and disappointments. Herein lies the major weakness of her work that she fails to see and present the foundation of the convent in the broader ecclesial context of the Church in Kerala. Another major setback of her work is with regard to her sources and methodology. Relying uncritically on the writings of the ecclesiastical authorities who were European missionaries, Kinattungal does not take into consideration the aspirations and activities of the local Christians. She looks at the events through the eyes of those Westerners, sometimes excluding and other times distorting or misinterpreting the original authentic sources.

Moreover, in presenting Eliswa as the foundress, Kinattungal openly admits that the charism of Eliswa was ‘to lead a consecrated life’ and that Fr. Leopold, Eliswa’s confessor, confirmed it as the gift of God for her. Glaringly missing is any mention in the sources as well as in the argumentation of Kinattungal that Eliswa received ‘the charism to be the founder’ of the institute. To be called by

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God to lead a religious life or consecrated life, even as the first member of a congregation, is not necessarily the same as to be called to found such an institute. Kinattingal has not brought forth any documentary evidence that either shows Eliswa as the foundress or that describes her as having the qualities to be seen in the foundress. The very title of her book, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa the Foundress of TOCD (CTC& CMC) for Women* is, therefore, not merely an assertion without any documental support, but also against all evidence in the original documents of the foundation period. More importantly, in presenting Eliswa as the foundress, Kinattingal does not give much attention to show whether and how far the ecclesiastical norms for being a foundress have been realized in Eliswa, although she mentions certain true and valid norms along with certain other fake and invalid ones.

Under the title ‘Who is a Founder or Foundress of a Congregation?’ Kinattingal presents ‘certain aspects to clarify the position of the founder of a religious congregation.’ She states, “The founder is the one in whose life the action of God is visible. The ‘founder’ or ‘foundress’ is the one who receives a special vocation from God to a specific type of evangelical life, consecrating himself/herself to a specific service in the Church” (168). All those who receive a special vocation to a specific type of evangelical life cannot become the founder. The founder is the one who received the specific call to be the founder. In the same way, all the persons in whom the action of God is visible cannot be called founders of religious institutes.

Referring to *Vita Consacrata per il Nuovo Millennio* Kinattingal rightly states, “It is the Holy Spirit who inspires a person and gives him/her, the specific charism to found a

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religious congregation for the good of the Church” (168). However, while applying this principle to Eliswa, Kinattungal failed to see a divine call in Eliswa to be the founder; instead she saw in her a call to lead a consecrated life. She affirms, “In the history of the first indigenous religious congregation for women in Kerala, Mother Eliswa received the call from God *to lead a consecrated life* and thereby, she became the pioneer of consecrated women in Kerala” (168). Although she stated a valid norm as the first one she could not apply it to the person of Eliswa. Next, she explains, “After long preparation in silent prayer and meditation, she obtained a clear vision of the life style which the Holy Spirit inspired in her” (168-169). However, Kinattungal never described the nature of the clear vision Eliswa obtained, nor the foundational texts show the role of Eliswa in the evolution of the religious life style of the institute.

Kinattungal has put the second and third norms in the negative. The third one has no reference and it seems to be self-made, invalid and fake norm. She writes:

Thirdly, the founder of a religious congregation is not the person who physically constructs a convent or a monastery. It is not relevant to say that the founder of a congregation is not the one who helps to construct a convent building. In the history of the first religious congregation for women in Kerala, Fr. Leopold and Fr. Chavara came to these positions respectively. It was only Mother Eliswa who undoubtedly received the special charism of the TOCD congregation for women (169).

With regard to the norms used by Kinattungal to show the position of Eliswa as foundress of the TOCD she mentioned both acceptable or valid norms as well as

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unacceptable or fake norms. The first one is a valid norm but she failed to apply it in the person of Eliswa. She could not apply it simply because objectively speaking the call to be the founder cannot be present in Eliswa. Instead, Kinattungal repeatedly and plainly admitted that Eliswa's call was to lead a consecrated life; also admitted that she became the pioneer of consecrated women in Kerala. In order to affirm her position she insists, "Here in the life of Mother Eliswa, the thirst to attain perfection was visible to all. Mother Eliswa received the charism of consecrated life in Carmel during the long years of her prayer life. During these years, she led a life perfectly open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit" (171). All praying or saintly persons need not become founders of religious institutes.

In this connection, it may be observed that Mulloor speaks about 'an established, held, lived, and transmitted fact and tradition of more than hundred years that Mother Eliswa is the foundress.'²⁶⁰ CTC Sisters have, of course, 'an existing tradition based on the history of a hundred years!' namely after the opening of the convent at Verapuzha in 1890 and this tradition of considering Eliswa as foundress is of a later origin.²⁶¹ Basing on Msgr. Mellano's letters Mulloor asks, "But how can this be disproved when it is clearly supported by the documents in which ecclesiastical authorities have addressed Mother Eliswa as foundress."²⁶² For Mulloor, too, the letters of Mellano, (their ecclesiastical authority), are the basis for the history of accepting Eliswa as the foundress.

²⁶⁰ Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 159.

²⁶¹ When he made these claims in 2005, the institute had 139 years of its history. Then his acceptance of 'more than hundred years' take them back to the period after the division of the convent in 1890 after which the tradition originated.

²⁶² Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 160.

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However, as discussed earlier, considering the origin of Mellano's letters, which date back more than twenty years after the foundation, that too, written in the context of dispute and division of the convent according to Rites, those letters have only a relative value to be considered impartial sources for proving anything. Interestingly enough the only thing that Mellano stated in his letters regarding the foundation was that the first members whom he called 'foundresses' belong to the Latin Christian Community and that the first convent was built on their property. This betrays his concern and interest. It is also noteworthy that Mellano did not assign yet any explicit role to Eliswa in founding the convent.²⁶³ In other words, the letters of Mellano do not show Eliswa as the foundress. They rather disprove this, by mentioning nothing about her definite role!

To sum up, the opinion that Eliswa is the foundress of the Women TOCD remains merely as an assertion without any documentary evidence because:

i) The original sources do not provide adequate answers to the pertinent questions regarding Eliswa's founding charism. It has not demonstrated what the nature or content of her inspiration was to be the founder. Her special charism was shown in her desire to live a chaste life. All what

²⁶³ It is already noticed that in his different letters Mellano presented different persons as founders. Even then, with regard to the 'founder controversy' Mulloor asks: "Does such a controversy really exist?" It seems that Mulloor is unaware of the wavering position of Mellano regarding the identity of the founder of the women TOCD. Moreover, Mellano took many deviations from the documents of the foundation period, including that of Baccinelli who is the hierarchical founder of the institute of the Women TOCD. Cf., Mulloor, "Questions and Disagreement," 159.

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one could say based on documents is that she received a call to lead a chaste life or even religious life. Neither is it shown what aspects of the Gospel were especially attractive to her and what specific need of the Church ignited a flame in her heart to found the institute. There is also no evidence to show her participation in a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ as the founders of the religious institutes are expected to have as per the document *Mutuae Relationes*.

ii) Eliswa had not conceived the religious institute, which is necessary for any founder. The desire she expressed to Beccaro was simply for helping her and her daughter Anna to realize their desire for a chaste life for according to Eliswa, Anna does not want to get married. In order to achieve this they depended upon Beccaro, their confessor, spiritual guide and parish priest. Thus they entrusted themselves into his hands, hoping that God would inspire him to find a way to realize their desire for a chaste life. This does not mean in itself that she intended to found a new religious institute. There is no documentary evidence to hold that she had a “positive input” in the decision to found a new institute or in defining the nature, character, ministry and its life style, which are considered to be the role of the founder. She merely followed the instructions and suggestions given by Chavara and Beccaro. No valid and original document presents her as foundress either before or after the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu. Not even a single mention regarding her call to be the *foundress* of the institute can be seen in the documents of the foundation period.

iii) While describing in detail the programme of the first day of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu, the *Alochana* adds, “Since there was nobody among them, [the members], to teach the Rules to the community, Very

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Reverend Leopold *Moopachan*, who was appointed as their Father along with *Priorachan*, taught them by instructing them by word and showing them everything they needed for a religious way of life”²⁶⁴. The above chronicler does not find anyone among the first members who had conceived the idea of religious life nor one who had received the charism to found an institute. He looks at them as ‘stones fit for foundation,’ which the builders took and used to establish the convent.

iv) Leopold Beccaro and Chavara who knew Eliswa well, with her spiritual attitudes and aptitudes, as well as the story of foundation of the convent, never referred to her as foundress. According to Beccaro, Chavara is the founder, while Eliswa was the first member and the first appointed Superior of the community. When Mellano wrote to Propaganda Fide on 28 November 1888, Sr. Teresa’s leadership capacity is mentioned, not Eliswa’s. When the time came for the community to elect the Superior, Eliswa was *not* elected. This could have been probably because the members of the community did not see any dynamic or visionary leadership qualities in her while she was at Koonammavu convent.

v) As Lozano observes, with regard to the government of newly founded institutes, it is usually the founders who directly govern their religious families. Some founders may decide to hand over the ordinary government to others for one reason or another.²⁶⁵ In the case of Eliswa, she did not govern the institute from the start and others did not elect her at the time of election. Eliswa simply followed the instructions of

²⁶⁴ *Alochana*, 96.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders*, 4.

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the two priests, Chavara and Beccaro, without having any innovative spirit. On the day of the election of the new Superior to the community, the Chronicle records that *Sr. Eliswa* (not “Mother Eliswa”) was elected as the ‘keeper of the keys.’ Even while she was the appointed Superior of the community, the *CKC* designates her as ‘Superior’ or ‘Mother Superior,’ but *never* as ‘Mother Eliswa’ even while she was the Superior and, of course, after the election of the new Superior. This is a strong suggestion that the community members had not considered her as foundress or Mother. The community did not seem to accept her maternity and she, in turn, does not take them as her children, a quality seen in the foundresses and founders of religious institutes.

Now, the first two Constitutions of this institute are studied to see the role of the founders in formulating the Rules of life for the institute, as well as to see what place the Constitutions have ascribed to the founders.

3.6 The Founder of the Women TOCD in Their Constitutions

As discussed earlier, theologians do not agree among themselves about the giving or writing the Rules as the responsibility of the founder. Even so, it is worth discussing the origin and nature of the first Rules (*regola*) of the women TOCD. It was deemed necessary to give ecclesiastical status to groups and associations within the Church by giving them their rule of life. In 1867, Baccinelli reported to the Propaganda Fide that the Rules he gave to the women TOCD had already been approved for such an institute and he had

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done some adaptations on it.²⁶⁶ Neither Chavara nor Beccaro composed the Rules of the women TOCD. Beccaro translated the text given by Baccinelli. They were the Rules of the Carmelites of Europe with slight modifications made for the Sisters of Kerala. Baccinelli gave the first Rules of the Congregation for women, but Beccaro kept on improving the text to make them more and more conformable to the rule of St. Teresa, namely, of the Discalced Carmelite nuns.²⁶⁷ Mundadan says that Beccaro did a similar service for the TOCD for men from early 1860 onwards, correcting and improving the original Rules with a view to making them as conformable as possible to the Rules of the Discalced Carmelites.²⁶⁸ This he did not in his capacity as the founder, but as the Canonical Superior of the TOCD. Thus, nobody could assign any superior role to Beccaro or any inferior position to Chavara regarding the writing of the Rules, because that Rule had already existed for some other institutes in some other country. There is no mention of the name of the founder in the first Rules.

One more word should be added with regard to the first Rules given to the women TOCD. Very often, the hierarchy of the Church accepts the Rules presented to it by remarkable men and women (the founders), and after adjusting them approves them with its authority.²⁶⁹ However, what happened in the case of the women TOCD in Kerala was that when the idea of founding the institute was

²⁶⁶ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*. Response to Q. 71: “Le Regole son quelle già approvate per tale Istituto, vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho detto pei Terziarii.” Cf., *Positio Super Virtutibus*, Chavara, 131, 132, 133, 318.

²⁶⁷ Cf., Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 307.

²⁶⁸ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 307.

²⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 45.

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communicated to Baccinelli, the Apostolic Vicar of the time, he offered the Rules for the institute. In fact, the above mentioned Rules was formally given by Beccaro to the community on 16 July 1876 and all the Sisters took the profession of their vows once again according to the newly given Rule. They documented the event in the Chronicle in a formal way, giving the name of the one who professed her vows, the one who received her vows, and the two witnesses.²⁷⁰ The reason for this profession of vows for the second time, according to the *CKC*, is that the Rules observed until now was the abridged Rules for the Third Order, which was used by the secular TOCD.²⁷¹

The Second Constitutions were approved by Mar Louis Pazheparambil, the first Apostolic Vicar of Ernakulam in 1917, which in consultation with Beccaro, he brought from Genova, Italy and made adaptations according to the situations of the Kerala Church, and were in use until the unification of the institute in 1963. Although in its introduction Pazheparambil presents the convent at Koonammavu as the fruit of the joint effort of Fr. Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Fr. Leopold Beccaro OCD,²⁷² in its text the name of the founder does not appear. The reason for searching for another Rule, according to Pazheparampil was that the previous one was neither approved by Rome nor

²⁷⁰ *CKC.*, II, 97-107.

²⁷¹ *CKC.*, II, 98. Here some may raise a question as to what happened to the *regola* given by Baccinelli for the second time when he was informed that the first one was for the secular TOCD. Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 5-6: "The Bishop was consulted again and our 'Rules' was obtained and another copy of it was made."

²⁷² Cf. Louis Pazheparampil, "Preface" to *Thressia Punnyavalathiyude Carmelita Munnam Sabhayile Sahodarikkayulla Nyayapramanam*, 3. This Constitution was not meant for the CTC Sisters.

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complete. Thus, in the formulation of the Rules both priests - Chavara and Beccaro - have not played any significant role, since it was a Rule that pre-existed in Europe.

Conclusion

This study of analyzing in detail and evaluating critically the different opinions regarding the identity of the founder by applying the norms set by the Church documents to each 'candidate' – Beccaro, Baccinelli and Eliswa - can be concluded by presenting the comments on them succinctly. In the process of evaluating the opinions and applying the norms to the candidates, they are eliminated according to the check-list.

1) One opinion is that Fr. Leopold Beccaro, Delegate of the Vicar Provincial Superior of OCD, is the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. He cannot be regarded as the founder. When the primary norms or qualifications of the founders are applied to Beccaro, the most important criterion, namely, the divine vocation or original inspiration to be the founder, cannot be seen in him. The indigenous initiative of starting religious life in the Syro-Malabar Church was promoted by the Carmelite missionaries who were the ecclesiastical Superiors in Kerala at that time. They thought that the best way to promote that initiative was to make the Communities for men and women as Third Orders of their Order (OCD). They executed it for the men's institute in 1855/1860 and that for women when it was taking shape in 1866. This was effected by appointing a Provincial Delegate, Leopold Beccaro, for both institutes. Beccaro himself admitted that his role was that of a Canonical Superior and a novice master. He expressed it clearly in the report presented to his Superior General in 1870, that his role

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is to govern and direct the Congregation and instruct the novices and young religious. Thus, Beccaro acted as the Delegate of the Provincial when the religious community for women was being founded, and he was instrumental in initiating the first members in religious life style. This he did in his capacity as the Delegate. The inspiration for the movement for religious life was not a compartmentalized inspiration. It was an integral one that took shape at Mannanam in 1831. The founding charism, received by the founders of the religious movement started at Mannanam, was not for founding a Third Order of the OCD but it had its origin in the Syro-Malabar Church. Baccinelli, the local Ordinary of the time recognized it as an initiative of the *Rito Syro-Malabarico*. Its origin was from a son of the Syro-Malabar Rite and not from an Italian missionary of the Latin Rite. Hence, the original inspiration to found the institute was not received by Beccaro, and therefore, he is eliminated from the position of the founder of the women TOCD.

Even when Maniakkunnel claims that Beccaro is the founder, he was not attributing the original inspiration to Beccaro, and in fact, he was not the recipient of the founding grace, which is the most important mark of the founder. At the same time, it is difficult to say that Beccaro was merely a Canonical Superior or his activities cannot be attributed to a mere Canonical Superior. This study proves that Beccaro offered his whole-hearted support and helped to realize the long cherished desire of Chavara to institute a convent for the women of Kerala; and he is considered co-founder of the women TOCD.

The most important factor in favor of Beccaro as co-founder is that in both *CKC* and *CMM* as well as in Chavara's Testament, Chavara designated Beccaro as the one who

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assisted in founding the convent and worked for the smooth running of the monasteries and convent, and therefore, as the one who was the supporter for the expansion of the same. Moreover, Chavara never leaves the impression that Beccaro or any other person founded the convent. On the contrary, Beccaro clearly testified without doubt that Chavara founded the convent. While acting as the Canonical Superior of both religious institutes of men and women TOCD, he gave due respect to Chavara as their founder although at times, Beccaro was not totally free from the innate superiority consciousness of the Europeans of that period.

2) Another group accepts both Chavara and Beccaro as founders. Although both of them cooperated in the foundation of the convent, their roles were different. Chavara acted as the charismatic founder and as the recipient of the founding charism; Beccaro, as the co-founder. Beccaro cannot be given equal status as founder with Chavara. Therefore, this opinion of considering both Chavara and Beccaro as founders is rejected.

3) Some other group holds Archbishop Bernardine Baccinelli of Verapoli as the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. He cannot be called its founder because he does not seem to be the recipient of the inspiration to found a religious institute for women, nor did he maintain any direct contact with the convent. According to the *Code of Canon Law*, the intentions and projects of the founder, no matter how good they are, cannot constitute an institute in the Church except through the action of the competent ecclesiastical authority. In fact, Baccinelli was instrumental in the canonical approbation and erection of the institute for men as well as one for women, as he was the local Ordinary of the time. He did not play the role

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and functions of a founder. Hence, the opinion of considering Baccinelli as the founder of the women TOCD in Kerala is rejected.

4) According to some, Eliswa Vakayil is the founder of the religious institute founded at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. An important reason why she cannot be called the foundress is that there is no documentary evidence to show that she received the inspiration to found the religious institute. It is true that she had a desire to remain chaste, which she shared with her confessor. This desire was not to found a religious institute but to live a chaste life or a life of renunciation and prayer or at the most, to lead a consecrated life. One also does not find any expression of her awareness of being called to be the founder. She had not conceived the institute with its purpose nor formed the community according to that purpose. During her twenty four years of stay in the St. Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, her community members do not seem to consider her as the foundress of the institute. Those who hold her as the foundress of the women TOCD were not able to present any valid contemporary documents on her behalf. Eliswa has not left anything in writing with regard to her awareness of being called to be the foundress of the institute. The chronicles have not recorded anything pertaining to her role as foundress. Instead, the chronicles present her as the first member of the institute.

This chapter aims at applying the norms set by the Church documents regarding the founder to those persons like Baccinelli, Beccaro, and Eliswa who were considered founders by some writers. The study based on the original documents of the foundation period shows that those accepted norms are not fulfilled in the above candidates. Therefore,

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they cannot be designated as the founders of the women TOCD in Kerala and they are eliminated from the position of founders. The next chapter will provide the evidence of the unique position of Chavara as the founder of the institute.

Chapter Four

Chavara: The Charismatic Founder of the Women TOCD

In the previous chapter, it was shown that Beccaro, Baccinelli, and Eliswa do not fulfill the primary requirements laid down by the Church to designate a person as the charismatic founder. The objective of the present chapter is to apply the norms to Chavara to see whether the imprints of the founder are established in him; and if so, to what degree are they fulfilled in him as far as the founding of the women TOCD is concerned.

4.1 Chavara: The Bearer of Inspiration

An important norm to identify the founder is that he or she received the inspiration to be the founder. As explained earlier the desire to found religious institute for women was included in the original vision of religious life in Kerala, which was recorded in the following words of *CMM*:

“He [Fr. Palackal] and his most intimate friend Fr. Thomas [Porukara] had yearned to establish a religious house (*darsanaveedu*, ‘house of vision’) since, in the absence of a house of penance [*tapasubhavanam*] in Malabar even for priests, much good was left undone. They were sad at heart as there was no one to give them support for this cause, but went on praying...”¹

¹ *CMM*, 1. “Z\A\hosp\ Wvnh\ h\A\ am\w.”

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Acknowledging the main role of Porukara and Palackal Chavara writes, “All these had been achieved mainly by the efforts and the interest of the two priests – Fr. Porukara and our Malpan, Fr. Thomas Palackal.”² From the lines followed we get the impression that Chavara owned or shared the vision of the two priests when he notes down his prayer at the time of his ordination for the success of the work started at Mannanam, which confirms that he cherished the idea of instituting a monastery even before his ordination to priesthood at the age of twenty-four:

The writer of this, Fr. Kuriakose Chavara from his youth had been of one mind with the *Malpan*. He had, at the time of his ordination to which he had been led by the wisdom of these two priests, asked God at the first Mass with the Bishop at Arthunkal to bless this place and effort.³ Again, when I sang the high Mass in my parish Chennankari on the first Sunday of Advent [in the year 1829] I prayed for the same intention.⁴

After his ordination also Chavara says, “Thereafter in all matters I followed his directions and views wholeheartedly. Renouncing my relatives and family I stayed with him.”⁵ He even believed that before the death of his

² *CMM.*, 26.

³ The words used are: “*Cu kvYehpw thebpw \S1p \ndthdp hm\pA ssZhm\plqew D-mIWw FlpA \ncqIWbmA s1 B H1ma s lqPbWwXr\mA...*” (God’s blessing on the site and for the fulfillment of the efforts [the monastery at Mannanam] I offered the first Mass...).

⁴ *CMM.*, 26. Cf., also Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 25; Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 6. Chavara joined the group in search of a site for the monastery. Cf., *CMM.*, 8-9.

⁵ *CMM.*, 26.

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guru Fr. Palackal entrusted him the treasured property of his heart, namely, his vision for religious life:

From my youth *Malpan* Palackal looked after both my body and soul, met the expenses of my priestly studies, and adopted me as his protégé. Until his death he took more interest in me and loved me than in any of his blood relatives or his other students who were considered his spiritual sons. He took me as his heir, and left me in charge of the work that was his heart's love, the further growth and development of the monastery to which he had dedicated his life.⁶

As Chavara noted in the first pages of the *CMM*, the pioneers' intention was to found a religious institute "at least for priests." Both Palackal and Porukara died before seeing the realization of their dream. The monastery founded in 1831 was canonically erected in 1855. Then the attention of Chavara, the surviving of the trio, was turned to found a convent for women. Thus, as he begins the story of foundation of the convent in the *CKC*, Chavara laments over the want of 'monasteries and convents' in the Kerala Church and presents the origin of the convent at Koonammavu as a continuation of the monastery at Mannanam.

4.1.1 The Nature of Chavara's Inspiration

The expression 'original inspiration' leads us back to the moment in which the founder received the call and inspiration from God to enrich the Church with a new

⁶ *CMM.*, 59.

religious family.⁷ In the life of Chavara, instead of speaking of a particular moment of receiving the inspiration, one should say that he gradually came to know that he was called to found a convent for women. 'The vision of the illnesses of the Church,' an expression of Ciardi,⁸ had become an inspiration to Chavara to found the first religious institute for women through which the members could render great service for the Church, especially for the empowerment of women. He received the inspiration as a response to the cries of women of the nineteenth century Kerala Church who spent many years in sadness and hopelessness in the absence of religious institute for women in Kerala.

Chavara's inspiration to found a religious institute came from his gaze fixed on the Church and the society that surrounded him, namely, the particular historical situation of the St. Thomas Christians of the nineteenth century and the socio-religious condition of Kerala women.⁹ Chavara painfully felt the lack of institutes of religious life in the ancient apostolic Church of Kerala. This was hence a matter of his ardent prayer. As a person deeply involved in the affairs of the Church, he knew through his personal contacts with the parishes, priests, and families of the vicariate of Verapuzha, and through his official capacity as the Vicar General of the St. Thomas Christian community, that there were many women in Kerala longing to lead a consecrated life.¹⁰ The divine light drew his attention to this particular

⁷ Cf., Elio Gambari, *Journey toward Renewal: Meditations on the Renewal of the Religious Life*, Translated by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul editions, 1968), 51.

⁸ Cf., Ciardi, *I Fondatori*, 70-73.

⁹ The special situation of the Kerala Church has already been explained in the first chapter as well as in the third chapter of this study.

¹⁰ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 1.

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need in the Church, namely, to found a convent for women, while an inner impulse moved his will to offer himself as an instrument in the hands of God. This leads to the experience of his vocation and his conviction about it.

Some texts from his writings manifest the inner longings and struggles of Chavara as a person who approached God in prayer to open the doors of religious life for women. Some other texts bring forth the cries of women of nineteenth century Kerala who were ready to offer themselves fully and totally to God, but there was yet no organized system for that purpose. A study of those texts will lead one to understand the nature of Chavara's inspiration to be the founder of the women TOCD, in Kerala.

4.1.2 Chavara's Longing for a Religious Institute for Women

There are two specific texts in the *CMM*, the first of which speaks of Chavara's yearning and prayer for the establishment of a convent for women, and the second, which expresses his joy coupled with a sense of fulfillment when the convent was established. Both texts amply testify to the intensity of Chavara's desire to have religious institutes for women. He wrote the first while the preparation for the bamboo-mat convent was in progress at Koonammavu: "For years¹¹ I have been praying for the establishment of a convent, but for so long it was not possible. Behold! Now it seems that 'God has willed' to bring about the establishment of a convent."¹² These words also echo his earlier

¹¹ The expression 'long years' (*adubimew*) is noted in both *CMM* and *CKC* while explaining the origin of the institute.

¹² *CMM.*, 126.

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unsuccessful attempts. When some immediate and concrete steps were taken in founding the convent, such as obtaining the permission of the Bishop, discerning the vocation of the candidates, and fixing up the site of the convent, he noted down in the Chronicle of Mannanam that God had willed to accomplish a convent for nuns for which he had been praying for a long time.

The *CMM* introduced the story of the foundation of the convent in the above quoted words of Chavara. Then in the following five pages, Chavara gave the detailed description of how the event took place, connecting it with the attempt at Puthenpally. In a very modest way, he stated how God came down to answer his prayers and to fulfill his earnest desire: It appears that God has willed to accomplish now, the matter of a convent for nuns, which was prayed for a long time. As a humble instrument in the hands of God, Chavara acknowledged that the foundation of the convent is the work of God. The Lord made the seemingly impossible and difficult endeavor possible at Koonammavu. He did not only desire but also persistently pleaded before God for the cause. In the *CKC* he also spoke about the long years of waiting for the establishment of the convent for women and the description starts with the phrase, “from a long time.” He states, “In this land of Malayalam, where the true Christian religion was in practice for many years, there had not existed monasteries and convents. The people had heard of men and women who practiced religious virtues but there were no living examples of religious virginity.”¹³ His craving for a convent is also evident in phrases like, “there were no existing monasteries or convents,” “even though there were many [women] who desired to lead a chaste life,” and

¹³ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 1: “*Ġdib\m\A p\h\mse.*”

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“remained in this plight for a long time.” These words speak of his aching heart.

Alochana also refers to the long waiting for the convent.¹⁴ Chavara would have been seeking the ways for the fulfillment of his dream and he attempted to found the convent along with Baccinelli in different places, such as Alengadu (1858) and Puthenpally (1859-61). Thus, two factors are stressed in his statement: Chavara’s intense desire and his fervent prayer for its realization. These two elements should serve as the basis of every spiritual movement. Beccaro in his *Short Biography of Chavara* written in 1871 also refers to the earnest desire of Chavara to found a convent for women: “He longed to establish for the girls of Malayalam [Kerala] a spiritual resort and a convent for learning the matters of religion and sacred Scripture and growing up as good Christian children...”¹⁵

As St. Paul states, “It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). The founders of religious Congregations were gifted with the two fundamental gifts, namely, earnest desire and ardent prayer for fulfilling the desire. One could say that these two elements are the authentic traits, which should be consuming the heart of a genuine founder. In this sense, Chavara received the inspiration to found the convent and fulfilled the primary norm to be the founder of the first religious institute for women in Kerala.

¹⁴ *Alochana*, 95. This entry on page 95 was made on 3 February 1866, evidently in the context of the opening of the bamboo-mat convent, which is seen as an answer to their “prolonged prayer.” In *Alochana* this text forms an introduction to the establishment of the bamboo-mat convent at Koonammavu.

¹⁵ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

4.1.3 A Sense of Fulfillment at the Establishment of the Convent

The second text is in the form of a prayer: “God, Almighty! I believe that it is to make me more indebted to You that You gave me a longer life so that I can see this event, too; let Your name be glorified forever and ever. Amen.”¹⁶ Chavara recorded this prayer at the end of his description of the concluding ceremony of the blessing of the new building for the convent on 27 March 1867. These words echo the ecstatic outpouring of the holy man named Simeon in the Jerusalem temple as he took the Baby Jesus into his hands and gave thanks to God: “Now, Master, You can let Your servant go in peace, just as You have promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of Your people Israel” (Lk 2:29-32). Chavara firmly believed that God has increased his span of life in order to see the blessed event of the foundation of the convent. It means that the foundation of the convent was his great dream in life. He wrote to Fr. Joseph Chavara, his grand nephew: “The Almighty God granted to me a longer period than my predecessors. It is only now that I realize fully that a longer life was granted to me by the mercy of God not so much for me, as for the benefit of others.”¹⁷ He looks at the well-furnished convent as a saving gift from the Lord of salvation for the benefit of many people. Reflecting on the providential hand in the fulfillment of his cherished dream, Chavara raised his heart to God in loving gratitude and praise. He felt that it was a call personally addressed to himself and this was the

¹⁶ *CMM.*, 139.

¹⁷ *CK.*, V/ 16. Letter of Chavara to his grand nephew, Fr. Joseph Chavara on 21 July 1868.

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mission that Providence gave him. Chavara looked at the foundation of the convent as the realization of his cherished dream, which accomplished the purpose of his life. Lozano observes that generally when the founders describe the work of God in them, they bring to light the act of foundation as a gift that God has put into their work.¹⁸ Chavara's profound joy emerged from his deep conviction that God in his great mercy took him as an instrument in divine hands to found a convent for which he was yearning for long. This can be seen as another way of acknowledging his charism of being the founder of the convent. A few years after the foundation, reflecting on the divine providence in his life, Chavara acknowledged in his *Dhyanasallapangal* that he undertook all the works as prompted by the divine Will:

Are all those things that God had me do
within my power?
Who called you from home?
Why were you ordained a priest?
How did you join the monastery?
Where did the religious Congregation come from?
Who appointed you as Prior?
How have you reached here?
Are you worthy of any of these?
No, certainly not! So, what?
God's Will is done. It will always be done!¹⁹

Chavara was a man who looked at everything from God's perspective and gracefully accepted all the events of

¹⁸ Lozano, "Fondatore" *Dizionario Teologico della Vita Consacrata*, 763.

¹⁹ Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 1.

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his life as from the hands of God. That indeed was the key to explaining his ministry, mission, and spirituality. He understood everything that happened in his life as God's Will and nothing else. This realization on the one hand kept him humble and realistic, and on the other, grateful to and confident in God. Chavara's inspiration to found the convent for women was based on his deeply rooted experience of being led by God. Thus, he seems to fulfill one of the characteristics of the founders noted in *Lumen Gentium* that the founders were outstanding men and women who under the impulse of the Holy Spirit founded religious families.²⁰ Chavara was a man who was guided by the impulse of the Spirit. After making the decision to found the convent, he was prepared gradually by the work of grace to his specific task in the Church, and he became more docile to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, he became more obedient to Beccaro, his immediate Superior.

Chavara calls the year 1867 the year of a miracle of Providence! He believed that the blessing of the convent was a great event and a great gift – personally to himself, to the Church of Kerala, and to the whole sub-continent of India. While looking at the growth of monasteries and the convent Chavara praised God saying, “The Lord Almighty continues to shower his abundant blessings upon India.”²¹ He described it as grace bestowed upon the people of India, not merely to a small State of South India. Recalling gratefully the miracles of Providence he received in the year 1867, Chavara stated, “It is said that 1867 is a remarkable year of joyous victory for

²⁰ *LG.*, 45-46.

²¹ *Alochana*, 170-171. Chavara has not recorded this saying in his writings. His disciples might have heard him say and they noted down in their record.

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the Church.”²² He calls the year 1867 as *annus mirabilis*, an auspicious year mainly because God worked wonders in favor of starting a convent for women.²³ He states,

In the year 1867, the Almighty God showered a blessing on us: the nuns, who started staying between bamboo-mat walls in March (sic) 1866, were transferred on 27 April (sic) 1867 to the newly finished building with all rooms fully furnished. ... All this was made possible for us, poor destitutes without a single penny, thanks to God who brought to us Rupees 8,000 in donations.²⁴

While looking at the growth of monasteries and the convent Chavara praised God saying, “The Lord Almighty continues to shower his abundant blessings upon India.”²⁵ He described it as grace bestowed upon the people of India, not merely to a small State of South India, Kerala.

4.2 Chavara Conceived the Institute with Its Purpose

In this section, an attempt is made to analyze how far the second primary norm, namely, conceiving the institute with its purpose, is fulfilled in Chavara. In order to acknowledge Chavara as the founder one has to see in detail his individual contribution in defining the purpose of the institute, and the methods he used to instill this vision in the

²² *CMM.*, 136.

²³ *CMM.*, 138.

²⁴ *CMM.*, 138.

²⁵ *Alochana*, 170-171. Chavara has not recorded this saying in his writings. His disciples might have heard him say and they noted down in their record.

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life of the first members of the Koonammavu convent. From Chavara's words in *CKC*, *CMM*, the collection of his Letters, particularly the twenty-two letters written to the Sisters, as well as his other writings such as *Dhyanasallapangal* and *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, one gets his conception of the convent. Special mention has to be made to his Last Will, which articulates how the monasteries, convents, and boarding houses together as one unit should care for the growth of the vicariates of Kollam and Verapuzha.²⁶

Three biographers of Chavara articulated the concept of the convent that was in his mind in almost the same words.²⁷ Beccaro inscribed it in these words:

It was his [Chavara's] great desire to found a religious house for women with the main intention of making it a spiritual resort for the girls of Malabar [Kerala] and a convent of Sisters to live their religion as good Christians and to learn doctrines and traditions of their religion and the Sacred Scripture, as well as to make them grow as good Christian children.²⁸

The word used by Beccaro to denote the convent is *Punyasanketham* [pWytXw], which literally means a spiritual resort. According to the Sanskrit dictionary, 'Sanketham' is a place/person that provides help in difficult situation, or a place where one goes in need or difficulty.²⁹

²⁶ *CK.*, VI/5 para. 3.

²⁷ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12; Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 29; Koyipallil, *A Short Biography*, 57; Cf., *Positio Super Virtutibus*, Chavara, 558.

²⁸ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

²⁹ Vaman Shivram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit- English Dictionary*, Delhi Reprint Edition, (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications), 1989.

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Thus *punyasanketham* envisioned by Chavara provides spiritual help to those who seek for it.

He also intended the growth of the girls as good Christian children. The use of the term *Punyasanketham* seems to be uniquely Chavara's contribution, and all three biographers used the same term, which has very profound and highly mystical overtones. In his poem *Anastasyayude Rakthasakshyam* (The Martyrdom of Anastasia)³⁰ Chavara uses this term with a slight variation to denote a convent for women: *punyaketham* (line,6), *punyasarshaketham* (line, 19), and monastery (lines 36, 40). In addition, one notices the terms *Educumdath* (line, 7) to denote boarding house for girls and *Guruthiyamma* (line, 7) for Mistress of the girls. These terms were often seen in the Chronicles of the Koonammavu Convent and that of the Mannanam monastery, and have been added to the vocabulary of the religious of that period. In Chavara's Testament, the term *Educumdath* occurs thrice.³¹ When Chavara wrote down the above poem in 1862 these terms spontaneously flowed from him because the concept of the convent as *punyasanketham* was embedded in him. In the biography of Chavara, Beccaro articulated Chavara's idea of the convent for women in his friend's own words and termed it as *punyasanketham*. It may be because Chavara had shared with Beccaro his idea and vision of a convent much earlier and Beccaro became familiar with the terms used by Chavara. According to Chavara, the purpose of establishing religious life for women was to create a *Punyasanketham* in the Kerala Church.

³⁰ It is a short poem of 182 lines, which tells the story of heroic suffering and martyrdom of Anastasia, in Rome. Cf., *Anastasyayude Rakthasakshyam*, lines 5-166.

³¹ Cf., *CK.*, VI/5, para. 3-4.

Another dimension of the convent expressed by him is that it is for learning the Scriptures and matters of religion for which the term used is *vedakaryangal*.³² To indicate the purpose of consecrated life for women he used some other terms such as, ‘living witness or examples’³³ (*punya kandu paditham*), ‘spousal relationship with Jesus Christ’³⁴ and ‘remain virgins.’ Chavara saw in the very longing for consecrated life of women a yearning for life of virginity, namely, an undivided devotion to the Lord. He says, “As for women, even those who desired to live a virginal life had no way of embracing such a life-style. They had no option. They had to accept marriage and live as worldly women. They were living in this sad plight for a very long time.”³⁵ According to him, many women were desirous of embracing the life of virginity. He also states, “The people had heard of men and women who practiced religious virtues but they did not have living examples of religious virginity, except that the men who had the privilege of priesthood lived a life of chastity.”³⁶ Thus, he understood religious life as a life consecrated to God. Chavara thus puts the purpose of the religious life as providing for the Kerala Church a living model of practicing Christian discipleship. It would remain as a sign for others, reminding them of the nature of real Christian life. The *CKC* put it in these words: “In order that the spiritual affairs of the members are properly conducted, they may teach other girls to pray and train them in certain

³² *Chiriyasā* [*Vedakaryangal*] means matters regarding the *Veda*. *Veda* can mean both the religion and the Sacred Scripture, as is used as *Satyavedam* for Catholic Church or *Vedopadesham* for Catechesis and *Vedapusthakam* for the Holy Bible.

³³ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

³⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 7.

³⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

³⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

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handicrafts, such as needle work.”³⁷ One can understand clearly his vision of religious life from the means he used to inculcate it, namely, the instructions he gave and the letters he wrote to the Sisters, regarding the greatness of their vocation and their responsibility to remain in the presence of God, to learn the art of loving God and humans and above all, his very saintly life.

There were two purposes for founding the women TOCD. Chavara, being a man who acknowledged and promoted the high dignity of women and who knew their longings to offer themselves totally and completely to God, was inspired to found a convent so that they could live their total commitment to God as consecrated women. Therefore, firstly, it originated from the basic human need for being totally dedicated to God and his people. It was born out of an ecclesial need felt by Chavara that the St. Thomas Christians lacked religious Congregations for women. He seemed to believe that the Kerala Church remained barren due to the want of religious life.³⁸ In his letter to the Sisters, Chavara put before them the purpose of their religious life: “To climb the summit of perfection and not to stumble down from the heights...”³⁹

Secondly, the convent would serve a social purpose, namely, the empowerment of women; the educational, occupational, and economic conditions of women in the society were very low in those times. Chavara’s earnest attempts to train the Sisters in handicrafts and to make them

³⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 5; *CMM.*, 126.

³⁸ Cf., *CMM.*, 173.

³⁹ *CK.*, VII/8. A letter written by Chavara to the Superior of the Koonammavu convent. No date given.

grow as enlightened and holy persons were in view of empowering the women of the society. In his Testament, he emphasized the responsibility of the members to work for the salvation of other people: “God has willed to found this Congregation for the salvation of our Christian brethren ...”⁴⁰ The *CKC* and *CMM* point out that Chavara expressed definite ideas concerning the aim of the institute and the form of material and spiritual lifestyle of the Sisters. He took diligent care to form them accordingly. This he did through his frequent visits to the Sisters, the instructions given by him, the twenty-two letters written to them, caring for their needs, and above all, as the Sisters believed, through his prayers and his saintly life.⁴¹

4.2.1 Chavara’s Sense of Commitment toward the Institute He Founded

Chavara’s understanding of his role and charism as founder of the institute was clear in his relationship with the Sisters, which brought forth commitment, and responsibility; with responsibility came accountability and obligation. He believed that he was accountable before God for his duties toward the Sisters and the girls in the boarding house: “...To the innocent souls of the children [girls in the boarding house], to many others, and more so, to you the spouses of my Lord, whom God had entrusted to my shoulder.”⁴² Therefore, in the collection of his ‘daily prayers,’ one can see that he prayed daily “for those entrusted to my care,” and “for

⁴⁰ *CK.*, VI/5.

⁴¹ *CKC.*, II, 23: “Moreover, now that our Father dwells in heaven, he will be able to help and do much more good for us that he was capable of doing when he was alive.”

⁴² *CKC.*, I, 165.

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the religious monks and nuns.”⁴³ In one of his letters to the convent, he expressed his conviction that he was appointed by God and was in charge of the Sisters.⁴⁴ There he compares himself to the one who sits at the throne of Moses by the intention of God. Thus, the most important element, as understood by Chavara, must have been God’s choice of him as a humble instrument to found the convent and to guide the Sisters toward God.

To the question, ‘Did Chavara know that he was chosen by God, or was he conscious of having been prepared to undertake the work of foundation,’ one can answer in the affirmative. He was conscious of his divine vocation as founder and was led by that awareness. Even when he was ill, he felt responsible toward the formation of the Sisters, and in a way of apology, one day Chavara wrote to them, “I regret I was not able to come to give instructions to you and to the children of the boarding house. The condition of my health impedes me.”⁴⁵ When he was seriously ill, he wrote many small notes to the Sisters, informing them about his condition and requesting their prayers. Those notes and the three visits he made during his final illness also show his fatherly love for them, as well as his commitment and attentiveness toward their spiritual and material well-being. Even at the last moments of his life on earth, he thought of the Sisters and sent his final blessing to them.⁴⁶ Once when he came to know that his Superiors were planning to take him to Mannanam for better treatment, he came to the convent with much difficulty to meet his ‘most loving children’ and to say a ‘last good bye’ to them, thinking that he would not meet them again before

⁴³ Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 40.

⁴⁴ Cf., *CKC.*, II, 8, *CK.*, VII/19.

⁴⁵ *CK.*, VII/8.

⁴⁶ *CKC.*, II, 14.

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his death.⁴⁷ When Beccaro was away in Italy, Chavara felt an added responsibility for giving instructions and guidance to the Sisters. His weakness due to illness, old age, and additional duties in the absence of Beccaro, the immediate Superior of the institutes, did not allow Chavara to make frequent visits to them. On 25 May 1870, he sent the following note to them:

Yesterday I wrote down the rubrics for saying the Divine Office, as you had requested of me. I wanted to go over to the convent and meet you. However, on reaching here I felt very tired and had a splitting headache. I fell asleep without myself realizing it. Hence, I write to you this note.⁴⁸

He exercised his responsibility as the founder not only in caring for their spiritual well-being, but also in all other matters concerning the convent. As the chronicle entries of this period and the letters sent by him to the convent testify, he took great interest in teaching the members of the community Latin,⁴⁹ and in training them in handicrafts.⁵⁰ In order to perfect their canonical prayer, he gave them practice in the recital of it and made copies of the prayer book available for each one in the community.⁵¹ There developed a lovely relationship between the founder and the community. Looking at the splendor of the love-relationship that existed between Chavara and the community of Sisters, and acknowledging its depth and beauty, Chavara once exclaimed, “Now why do you love me more than your own

⁴⁷ *CKC.*, II, 14.

⁴⁸ *CK.*, VII/ 5.

⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 152, 162-163; *CK.*, VII/6.

⁵⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 155, 177-178.

⁵¹ *CKC.*, 1, 162.

blood relatives and why do I do the same toward you? Oh! Lord, do not depart from us until we are one with You.”⁵² On those days he expressed more tenderly the warmth of his paternal love toward the members of the convent. The above examples show the spontaneous and deep spiritual relationship, which implied a close bond between the Sisters and their founder. There is a clear inference that Chavara very well considered himself as their loving Father and the founder of the institute.

4.2.2 Chavara’s Concern for the Numerical Increase of the Members

As the establishment of the convent was a much-awaited event in the Kerala Church, Chavara and Beccaro noticed that there was an attraction among the women toward consecrated life in the convent. One could see Chavara’s concern for receiving new members to the convent, while thinking about the possibility of constructing the new building for the convent. He writes, “To consider how to find means for expanding the convent to accommodate all those who aspired to enter it. ...”⁵³ These words show that the thought about the new building for the convent, its future members, its apostolate, etc was always in him. Even when the Sisters were in the bamboo-mat convent, the Fathers told the Sisters that many have expressed their desire to embrace religious life. The Sisters were asked to keep those girls in their prayer. On 17 December 1866, the Fathers told them: “Now the construction of the new convent is almost completed. Many people have requested to join the convent. We have to pray for this from now on. Therefore, for fifteen

⁵² CK.,VII/6.

⁵³ CMM., 131: “TymkviXnðThpw AXnÁ ðÊmbhsc tNÁ p \S p fXn\pw...”

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days, after the evening meditation, pray the ‘Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary.’ In honor of Saint Joseph, pray the ‘Our Father,’ ‘Hail Mary’ and ‘Glory be’ five times.”⁵⁴ They started receiving new members soon after the blessing of the new convent (27 March 1867). They welcomed one new girl on 1 April⁵⁵ and two girls on 30 June.⁵⁶ The *CKC* tells of the arrival of another new member on 9 September 1867.⁵⁷ Likewise, there was a steady increase in the number of new candidates to the community. The first four members were vested with the religious habit on 27 March 1867, and the fifth member on 8 September of the same year.⁵⁸

Except in the case of Clara Puthenangady from Vaikom, whom Chavara invited to the convent, the chronicler does not record Chavara’s direct contribution in promoting the vocation of girls to the boarding house. However, in his ‘Testament of a Loving Father’⁵⁹ Chavara strongly argued for the freedom of girls to choose their own vocation. He states:

When children are old enough to determine their vocation, they should be given full freedom to follow their bent of mind; it is God who determines the nature of their vocation and it is their personal business to make the choice. It is not the parents’ duty. Negligence in this point would cause a soul to

⁵⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 32-33.

⁵⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 59.

⁵⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 64.

⁵⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 68.

⁵⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 65.

⁵⁹ Cf., *CK.*, IX/10. On the second anniversary of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu, Chavara wrote a long letter on 13 February 1868 to his own parish of Kainakary which is known as the *Testament of a Loving Father*.

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be lost. Therefore, when a boy is sixteen or eighteen and a girl fourteen or sixteen, he or she must choose his or her vocation.⁶⁰

Chavara admonishes the parents that it is the children's duty to choose their own vocation that God has designed for them, not the parents.' Parents must allow girls and boys to follow their vocation. It was unheard of during that period of the Kerala Church that girls were assured of their freedom to choose their vocation. On those days, women had many restrictions in religious matters. One can assume that these words of their Vicar General had encouraged and supported many girls to discern their vocation to religious life. When Chavara wrote these words of encouragement, there was only one convent for women and naturally, the girls knocked at the doors of the Koonammavu convent to realize their vocation. Moreover, his influence in the parishes, and the people's appreciation for the renewal programs conducted by the TOCD priests throughout the Kerala Church might have contributed much to the fulfillment of the desire of girls to embrace religious life. In view of admitting girls to religious life, a boarding house attached to the Koonammavu convent was opened on 2 January 1868. Many girls entered there, desiring to lead a life deeply rooted in Christian values and virtues.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *CK.*, IX/10. This is an instruction for 'The Upbringing of the Children.'

⁶¹ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 83, 84.

4.3 Chavara's Awareness of Being Called to be the Founder

The third primary norm to identify the founder is Chavara's conviction of himself as the founder of the religious institute he founded. It is evident from the survey of the historical records of the time and the Chronicles of the monastery and convent that Chavara had firm conviction of his call as the founder. His own experience of receiving the divine inspiration to found the institute, the objectives and goals he defined, his great dedication for the moral, spiritual and social formation of the community, his personal involvement, his total care for the material needs of the community and future development, his motherly concerns and fatherly protection for each member of the institute, all speak of his firm conviction that he was the founder of the women TOCD. Two prominent examples are taken here to show his awareness of being called to be the founder and his sense of responsibility towards the consecrated life of the Sisters, namely, their religious clothing and their religious profession of vows. It is pertinent here to analyze Chavara's role in preparing the first members for their religious clothing and their profession of vows.

4.3.1 Religious Clothing of the First Members

The first four members were vested with the religious habit of the Carmelite Order on 27 March 1867, the day they entered the newly built convent. Chavara himself recorded the significance of this great event of religious clothing in the last pages of the *CKC*.⁶² as well as in the *CMM*.⁶³ In the *CKC*

⁶² In the outer cover of the first volume of *CKC*., there is a note which reads, "1866-1870 (205 pages). The handwriting of Fr. Prior pages 1-

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he puts the title “Written testimony of the decision taken and other particulars regarding the reception into the convent as children of Mother St. Teresa, religious clothing as novices and permission to make the religious profession of vows.”⁶⁴ Then he has written the designation of Leopold Beccaro “as the Delegate Provincial who officiated at the ceremony of religious clothing and vested the four Novices Eliswa, Anna, Theresa and Clara with the religious habit on 27 March 1867 in accordance with the rules and regulations.” Leopold puts his signature in the Italian language with his name as Fr. Leopoldo Maria di San Giuseppe, C.S.M.A.⁶⁵ Novice Mariam, the fifth member, was vested with the religious habit of this Order on 8 September of the same year, for which Chavara alone was the celebrant, and he recorded the event with his name as “Prior, *Aha*”⁶⁶ Kuriakose Elia of the Holy Family” with his signature in Syriac.⁶⁷

With regard to Chavara’s special role in the events of religious investiture and profession of the vows of the first members, it is observed that Chavara took personal interest and great concern in preparing the full text of the ‘rite of vestition’ and the *CKC* recorded it in detail.⁶⁸ On the actual day of the vestition of novice Mariam, 8 September 1867, he

17. After the first line of page 17, Sr. Anna wrote. Again Prior’s handwriting in pages 200-201.”

⁶³ *CMM.*, 139.

⁶⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 201.

⁶⁵ Beccaro often concludes his official communications with these four letters CSMA, which stand for ‘*Carmelitana Scalza Missionario Apostolico.*’

⁶⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 200. *Aha* is a Syriac word that means ‘Religious Brother.’ The members of men TOCD called themselves *Aha*, a word which catches both their early simplicity and strong family spirit.

⁶⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 200.

⁶⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 66-68.

spent time with the community for the celebration, to give them practice, and make them aware of the importance and greatness of the event. “Then he gave an exhortation on the greatness of the status of the spouse of Christ and on the responsibilities of the vows they were going to take.”⁶⁹ He officiated at the ceremony and expressed a special joy in the event of her vestition, which can be seen as a result of his sense of responsibility as founder and Father. He was cooperating with his immediate Superior in humble docility and submissiveness to him. Once in his letters, Chavara told the Sisters that each one must take responsibility for the duty entrusted to her.⁷⁰ Similarly, Chavara was aware of his distinct responsibility as founder, and he was ready to respect the position of Beccaro as their Canonical Superior.

4.3.2 Religious Profession of the First Members

Both Chavara and Beccaro took great interest in preparing the Sisters for their religious profession. After seeking the permission from the Apostolic Vicar and deciding upon the date of profession as 16 July, the feast day of the Mother of Carmel, both priests came together to the convent in June and they made the Sisters aware of the greatness, uniqueness and importance of the event.⁷¹ The *CKC* records, “In the month of June, once again our Father *Moopachan* and *Priorachan* came together to the visitors’ room and gave us an instruction on the obligations that were to be fulfilled after taking the vows.”⁷² In view of the fact that it is the first of its kind in Kerala Chavara, exulting in joy, recorded with

⁶⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 66-68.

⁷⁰ *CK.*, VII/ 5.

⁷¹ *CKC.*, 1, 90-94.

⁷² *CKC.*, 1, 92

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gratitude to God in his chronicle: “Behold, all the four members who first joined ‘our convent’ took their religious profession on 16 July 1868.”⁷³ In the *CKC* Chavara himself documented the event of the profession of vows by the first four Sisters before the Canonical Superior Leopold Beccaro. He wrote:

Ten days before the feast of our Mother of Carmel, our Archbishop very Reverend Vicar Provincial, was consulted about the first profession of the first members and according to his order they made ten days’ retreat, as was the custom, and on 16 July 1868, they received Holy Communion. On the same day at nine in the morning Sr. Eliswa, Sr. Anna, Sr. Theresa, and Sr. Clara made their vows.⁷⁴

Beccaro admitted that the enthusiasm and interest of Chavara to give quality formation to the Sisters is a well-known fact. He says, “A full account of all the great things he had done for the realization of this desire, when God willed it so, is beyond the scope of this short biography. It is known to all how interested and zealous he was in the orderly progress of the convent in virtue and perfection, once it was founded.”⁷⁵ Porukara’s words are significant in this regard: “On seeing the disciplined and virtuous life of the Sisters, he [Chavara] had them make their religious profession.”⁷⁶ The Sisters have testified to the fact that Chavara was especially interested in the numerical increase of the members, the quality of their life in the convent, and in their growth and

⁷³ *CMM.*, 143.

⁷⁴ *CKC.*, I, 201.

⁷⁵ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

⁷⁶ Porukara, *Sthapakapitakkanmar*, 29.

perfection in virtues.⁷⁷ They recorded these words from their relationship with Chavara and their experience of being directed by him. It was their conviction and experience that Chavara was led by the awareness of his call as founder of the institute and Chavara, from his part, worked earnestly to form the Sisters according to the vision he had in mind.

4.4 Chavara: In the Evolution of the Life Style of the Community

According to *Mutuae Relationes*, it is from the founding grace a particular type of spirituality, life-style, apostolate, and tradition of the institute are derived.⁷⁸ This means that by looking at the lifestyle that was lived by the ‘founder’s generation,’ and the mission undertaken by them under the founder’s direct guidance, one can grasp the traditions of the community. What gives identity to religious institutes are not the activity or the ministry but the theological vision and the corresponding spiritual experiences of the founders. These two are the essential elements from which the life-style of the community evolves and without which those elements of the community cannot be understood. From the strenuous efforts of Chavara to form the first community’s religious life-style, one can assume that he did this from the awareness of his responsibility as its founder. The words in the *CKC* attest to this fact: “He [Chavara] from the beginning has undertaken so much work and has undergone very many difficulties for the sake of attending to our spiritual and temporal needs, aiding our

⁷⁷ *CKC.*, II, 23.

⁷⁸ Cf., *MR.*, 11; *EE.*, 11.

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growth.”⁷⁹ The chronicler recorded Chavara’s special interest in introducing some spiritual traditions in relation to the Christmas celebration in the community. In order that the Sisters enjoy the real meaning of the mystery of Incarnation, Chavara prepared some short plays, called ‘*Eclogue*.’ As part of their first Christmas celebration in the newly built convent in 1867, the Sisters acted it out during their time of recreation and it made them happy:

We were very happy not just because we made all these things. Priorachan had written on a piece of paper all the regulations we were to follow on the [Christmas] night and also all about our recreation and sent it to us. We were happy that we had done everything as he had said.⁸⁰

4.4.1 Role of Chavara in the Formation of the Sisters

As explained in the work of the foundation of the convent, both Chavara and Beccaro toiled together in giving formation to the Sisters. To show the unique contribution of Chavara in this regard some important texts are analyzed below. While studying the role of Chavara in the evolution of the religious life-style at Koonammavu and the kind of formation the Sisters received from him, one will be impressed by the acknowledgement of Beccaro. On the influence of Chavara’s sanctity in the formation of the seminarians, he testifies:

⁷⁹ *CKC.*, II, 6.

⁸⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 84. Chavara introduced the tradition of having some Christmas play, which was written by him for the eve of Christmas.

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Father Prior [Chavara] succeeded in all these holy endeavors, not merely by the power of his words nor by his logic, but by his extraordinary character and sanctity. Those who came to know him were convinced of his unusual humility, extraordinary charity, unqualified obedience and submissiveness to the Ordinary. As a result, all loved and respected him; and they put their trust in his words.⁸¹

Beccaro seems to say that Chavara's life itself was the message, and that Chavara influenced others more by his saintly life than by using the language of human wisdom. Appreciating the effect of priestly formation given by Chavara at Mannanam, Marceline Berardi commented that Chavara formed the seminarians through his teaching and life-witness.⁸² About Chavara's method of imparting formation to the religious men and women Berardi testified that it was by Chavara's witnessing life, living faith, the spirit of contemplation, and his virtuous life he influenced them.⁸³ Chavara as a formator tried to inspire, interact, and instruct the Sisters.

The Sisters considered Chavara an outstanding personality and they were convinced of his saintliness and the power of his intercession in heaven. They believed, "Now that our Father dwells in heaven, he will be a very alert and powerful mediator of our cause; he will be able to help and to do much more good for us than he was capable of doing when

⁸¹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

⁸² Marceline Berardi, *Kerala Rajyathile Satyavedacharithram* [History of the Church in Kerala] (Koonammavu: Immaculate Conception Press, 1872), 302: "നീനം മരണവും ഏകീകൃതം മരണവും."

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 302.

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he was alive.”⁸⁴ Seeing the commitment of their saintly founder in providing all the facilities for the Sisters, their minds and hearts were raised in praise and thanks to God, the Provider of everything. They recorded their words of praise to God: “Ah! My Sisters, you must remember who is the one that is protecting and providing us all these. Ah! Yes, it is our beloved Father and sweet Spouse Jesus who is making them do all this for us. So we must remember that we are bound to serve him with great faith and love.”⁸⁵ Chavara took keen interest in giving religious formation to the Sisters.⁸⁶ He kept constant contact with them. He wrote letters or sent some notes even when he was on journey to different places. The *CKC* records one such letter:

A few days after they had gone, reverend *Priorachan* sent us a letter through someone. It was as follows. Mother Superior and other Sisters of the Third Order of St. Teresa, myself, Moopachan and others are going today, the 12th Friday, from Kollam to Thiruvananthapuram. We have no sickness till now. You must pray well to God for us, especially for Moopachan, that he may be protected by God without any sickness for the sake of your spiritual life. All that you need will be done for you by the procurator and by very Reverend Father Vicar of Koonammavu.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *CKC.*, II, 23-24.

⁸⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 175. The chronicler recorded these words as she saw the hard works of Chavara to provide better facilities for the Sisters.

⁸⁶ Cf., Kalluveetil, Sophy Rose, Marianto, Marina, *Women TOCD Facts Versus Fabrications*, 221-278.

⁸⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 63-64.

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Chavara's care for the Sisters was more expressive during the last period of his life on earth. The date of Chavara's letters to the Sisters shows that most of them were written in that period, namely, in 1870. Owing to Chavara's added responsibility toward the monasteries and convent in the absence of the Provincial Delegate and the local Ordinary, he could not visit the Sisters to give instructions to them or communicate with them personally. In order to fill this gap he wrote those letters. When the Sisters were not sure of certain traditions to be kept in the community, they often freely approached their Priorachan for clarifications. One such example is this:

We had a doubt whether we should observe abstinence if any solemn feast fell on the days of abstinence given in our rules and regulations. We asked our Father *Priorachan*. His reply was, "If the feasts of our Mother Saint Teresa, Mary Mother of Carmel and Christmas fall on the days of abstinence, you are exempted from it; but on all other feasts you are bound to abstain."⁸⁸

The fact that the Sisters wrote letters to him and approached him in their needs or doubts tells that they accepted Chavara as their Father and founder.

4.4.1.1 Chavara's Role in Making the Convent a 'Spiritual Resort'

The term used to denote convent *Punyasanketham*, (Spiritual resort) in the original text of the poem, *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, stands for the spiritual

⁸⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 35.

atmosphere of the young religious women, including Anastasia, under the loving care, guidance, and spiritual leadership of Sophia, the Mother Superior of the community. When Mother Sophia, who was well known for her spiritual caliber, came to know that a time of temptation and persecution had come for young Anastasia, Sophia encouraged and strengthened her to be strong in faith and commitment to Christ her Divine Spouse.⁸⁹ Being a real disciple of Christ, Anastasia sacrificed her precious life for the love of Jesus. The poet presents the figure of Anastasia as a symbol of a closer following of Christ. Mother Sophia is presented as the symbol of a spiritual mother, wisdom and guide to Anastasia and other members of the convent. The poet describes her role in these words, “She brought her up with tender heart, care and concern, love and joy, trained and taught her well.”⁹⁰ She directs Anastasia, “Daughter dear, your blessed Groom calls you with a longing love; go, and be quick.... He is the Lord, your holy Groom.”⁹¹ In the Indian context, a person with knowledge is a *jnani* (wise) or guru. One who is full of wisdom is a person with the knowledge of God, who is thus able to guide others to God. Chavara imparts the true meaning of religious life for women in and through this poem and the kind of ‘spiritual resort’ (*Punyasanketham* and *Punyakandupaditham*) of which he dreamt for the women of Kerala in the nineteenth century. In the communion between Mother Sophia and Anastasia, he portrayed the kind of relationship to be nurtured in the community.

⁸⁹ *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, lines, 45-49.

⁹⁰ *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, lines, 11-13.

⁹¹ *Anastasiayude Rakthasakshyam*, lines, 51-55.

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From the beginning of their community life at Koonammavu, Chavara's attempt was to make the Sisters aware of the dignity and greatness of their vocation, and he instilled in their minds the conviction that they are the spouses of Christ. Celibacy, according to Chavara was a walk with God and with other people with love. It is an inner response to a call of the Heavenly Father and is based on being gripped with the person of Jesus. In his written reflections on the status of the consecrated ones, Chavara eulogizes the spousal dignity of Sisters. His reflections begin with a citation from St. Augustine:

Oh! Consecrated Sister, Oh! Blessed Sister, you have a Bridegroom who is the most sublime above the glories of heaven and earth. He has chosen you from other girls, in order to make you his own and to elevate you as his bride. Don't you know that you are granted the pledge of love? It is then proper that you should have the greatest love for him.⁹²

The spiritual resort, which was in Chavara's mind, was meant for the girls and women to grow in Christian discipleship and to be a blessed presence to others. From the life of Chavara, one can assume that the pitiable situation of the women of Kerala prompted him to found a convent for women. He witnessed the sad situation of women and made it his personal mission to improve their lives. Women had no opportunities to hear the preaching of the Word of God⁹³ or pursue studies of the Bible as the men could during their priestly formation. Chavara was eager to have them

⁹² CK., VII/12.

⁹³ Cf. Bernard Thoma, *Mar Thoma Khristianikal*, Vol. 1, 254; Vol. II, 53:

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experience the taste and the power of the Word of God. There was no Bible printed in Malayalam at that time. Chavara was a man who loved the Word of God. Since he knew many languages such as Syriac, Latin, Italian, English and Portuguese, as well as a few South Indian languages, he could read the Bible in those languages. He put his effort to teach the Sisters and girls in the boarding house many languages, such as Latin and Tamil, with the intention of introducing them to a wider reading of books, especially of the Bible.⁹⁴

Chavara had a special interest in the formation of the young girls who were attracted towards religious life. His sense of responsibility was not only toward the Sisters but also for the girls of the boarding house. In almost all the letters, he spoke about his concern for the well-being of those girls.⁹⁵ He often sent books for their study of different languages, such as Latin and Tamil, and books for their spiritual reading.⁹⁶ He told the Mother Superior to make the girls understand the spiritual experience shared in his letters.⁹⁷ Chavara was insisting that they must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing and being.

4.4.1.2 Helping the Sisters Grow in Communion with God

In meditating on the gift of consecrated life, Chavara invited the Sisters to contemplate their own vocation of belonging totally to the Lord, their Divine Spouse. He exhorts, “Consider how sweet is the voice of your loving Spouse. He is vigilantly watching in your hearts, jealously,

⁹⁴ There are many references to his efforts to teach the Sisters Latin and other languages. Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 152, 163, *CK.*, VII/1,2, 6, 11, 13.

⁹⁵ *CK.*, VII/ 1, 6, 8, 11.

⁹⁶ *CK.*, VII/ 8, 11.

⁹⁷ *CK.*, VII/ 8, 5.

lest you love anyone more than Him, lovingly looking to all your needs.”⁹⁸ It provides the portrait of the founder concerned with the spiritual welfare of the Sisters. Chavara emphasized that Jesus Christ should be their only treasure. He kept constant contact with the Sisters and cared for their union with the Lord. Following the mystical doctors of the Church, he viewed the call of a religious woman as entering into a spousal relationship with Jesus. A man-woman relationship being the prototype of human relationships, and religious life as a life of ‘undivided devotion to the Lord’ (1 Cor. 7: 35), Chavara regarded the religious woman as a consecrated and blessed person. In many of his letters, he repeated that the Sisters were the spouses of Jesus Christ, their Divine Bridegroom.⁹⁹ He reminded the community of the sublime dimensions of spirituality. According to this mystic, the cell of a religious is the bridal chamber of Christ. His blessings for the Sisters are seen in one of his letters: “May Jesus Christ bless you. Remain with Him with joy in your cell which is His royal chamber.”¹⁰⁰ This is indeed a very sublime and celestial vision. A consecrated woman is called to live a delightful, charming, and loving life. Chavara calls higher stages of meditation as entering into the wine-cellar with the Lord. He explained it in this way:

When a soul delights in solitude, Jesus Christ will come to converse with it in solitude and begin communing with it. ... Then it is that the Lord will lead you to the wine-cellar and pour out some wine for you. ...Then the bride will love more and the

⁹⁸ *CK.*, VII/ 7.

⁹⁹ *CK.*, VII/2, VII/6, VII/7, VII/12.

¹⁰⁰ *CK.*, VII/ 2. Chavara’s letter to the Sisters dated 1 March 1870 and copied in their chronicle, *CKC.*, 1, 165.

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Bridegroom will rejoice over it and adorn her with ornaments. Thus commences the divine union.¹⁰¹

For Chavara “the straight way to the summit of perfection and the means not to tumble down from the heights”¹⁰² is meditation.

Chavara told the Sisters of the kind of undivided love that Jesus expects from the religious women: “Our God is a jealous God. He cannot tolerate us when we love something more than Him.”¹⁰³ He even told them that when they loved anything other than Jesus they were betraying Jesus as Judas had betrayed him for thirty silver coins.¹⁰⁴ According to him the Sisters are great queens, and they are greater than the secular empresses who may have jealousy toward them. The religious are not only spouses of Jesus Christ but also spouses of ‘my God and Lord.’¹⁰⁵ He invited the Sisters to live continuously and constantly in the presence of the Lord in loving conversation with him and in exchange of love. The same line of thought is seen also in another letter where he tells them that the divine Bridegroom is ever with them and would not suffer any other love in the hearts of his beloved spouses. The saintly Father wanted to train the early members of the community to live in the ever abiding and loving presence of the divine Bridegroom and to keep communion with him.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, his concern was not merely the material building up of the community of the Sisters but much more the building up of the inner shrine of their hearts.

¹⁰¹ CK., VII/8.

¹⁰² CK., VII/8.

¹⁰³ CKC., 1,166. This was the entry on 2 March 1870 (Ash Wednesday).

¹⁰⁴ *Atmaanuthapam*, IX, lines 178-180.

¹⁰⁵ CK., VII/2.

¹⁰⁶ CK., VII/6.

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They were to lock themselves up in this interior castle and attain a closer union with God. He tells, “I lock up your hearts in the tabernacle of Jesus. For you, I have locked up my heart there.”¹⁰⁷

These few examples shed light on the mystical personality of Chavara and the spousal spirituality, which he inculcated in the hearts of the early members of the Koonammavu convent. This experiential and mystical milieu would greatly influence the growth and evolution of their life style. It was a joy for Chavara to meet the Sisters and to have constant communications with them. Along with Beccaro, as well as in his absence, he regularly visited them. When he could not do this due to his illness, or some other reasons, he sent them letters or sometimes, small notes to instruct them.

4.4.1.3 Encouraging Feminine Charism

Saint Chavara encouraged the Sisters to develop a feminine charism in their community which is an essential aspect of the spirituality of women. He expected the Sisters to experience their relationship with God in their own feminine way, namely, God as mother. In a letter written to the Sisters Chavara states, “God is like a mother who awakens her sleeping child and feeds it even though the child is incapable of telling her that it is hungry.”¹⁰⁸ St. Chavara pictures God as such a loving and caring mother to them. It brings to their mind Jesus as representative of God presenting himself as mother hen gathering her chicks under her wing (Mt. 23:37). In his *Dhyanasallapangal* Chavara calls God, “father,” “my father,” “my merciful father,” etc., but one could say that in

¹⁰⁷ CK., VII/9.

¹⁰⁸ CK., VII/10.

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his core experience, he saw God as mother. In his spiritual life one could see the influence of many women saints, among them were Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt, Margret of Cortona, etc. He looked upon them as constant helpers in his faith journey.¹⁰⁹

He encouraged the Sisters to read the biographies of those women saints such as St. Rosa, St. Teresa,¹¹⁰ to venerate their relics¹¹¹ and presented these saints to them as models in observing the Constitutions¹¹² and regulations in the community. He taught them the Teresian method of contemplative prayer and said that your meditation has to be like that of Mother Teresa who reached the seventh mansions of contemplation.¹¹³ When he conceived this community as a *punyasanketham* for women where their feminine qualities were protected and promoted, he suggested that for their commitment to the cause of women the Sisters must develop their feminine charism. When one notices the change of names of the candidates as they enter religious life, in the early period, they were not given masculine names, instead, the name of any woman saint was added to their baptismal name such as Marianna, Mariam Thressia, etc. The chronicler records, “Because the two new comers had the names Thresia and Anna, *Moopachan* gave the second Thresia, the name Mariam Thresia and to the second Anna, the name Marianna.”¹¹⁴ His idea was that the Sisters have to get acquainted with the feminine way of thinking, meditating and experiencing God in their own day-to-day religious life,

¹⁰⁹ Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 16, CK., VII/3.

¹¹⁰ CK., VII/8.

¹¹¹ CKC., 1, 63.

¹¹² CKC., 1, 70.

¹¹³ CK., VII/8, Cf., also CKC., 1, 68.

¹¹⁴ CKC., 1, 65.

which will enable them to meet the challenges of life with feminine grace and courage.

4.4.1.4 Providing Books to Learn ‘Vedakaryangal’

Chavara knew very well the level of the knowledge of the Sisters in Sacred Scripture and catechism. *The Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery* provides some details of the catechumenate, which was officially inaugurated on 9 October 1864 at Mannanam:

On Sundays and feast days many boys came to study catechism and remained here until five O’ clock in the evening. Some of them came from distant places. Some of them were poor. In order to promote more efficiently this so wholesome and fruitful work, they thought that it was necessary to feed the boys at noon with *Kanji* [rice gruel]. They were also given clothes and pious articles like rosaries, scapulars, etc....¹¹⁵

The above words make clear that as in the case of the retreats preached in the parishes, girls could not attend the catechism classes. It was in that situation of women that Chavara envisaged convent as a place for girls to learn the Sacred Scripture [*vedakaryangal*] and matters of their religion. Therefore, he gave great importance to teach them different languages and he was keen on improving their knowledge in matters on religion and the Bible. In view of developing in the Sisters the habit of reading, he instructed them what to read and how to read. He observes that readers are of two kinds; the first group cares more for knowledge and entertainment, the second group for knowledge and devotion. According to him, the latter is the sure way to acquire virtue

¹¹⁵ ASJM., *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, (1864-1872) Vol. 3, 30.

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and to persevere in the same.¹¹⁶ Since there is a shortage of books for spiritual reading in Malayalam, the Sisters are advised to learn Tamil. Chavara wanted them to learn Latin as well, which would open their minds to the wide horizons of philosophical, theological and other literary treasures of the West. As Latin was regarded as the official language of the Church, the Sisters would get an entry into the Church teachings only by learning that language. Though the attempt was not fully successful, the Sisters have recorded his interest and indicated that he had tried very hard to teach them Latin:

Our *Priorachan* gave us four books, printed both in Latin and in Malayalam. Their transliterations were also printed, to enable us to study Latin without the help of a teacher. One copy of the book was for the children of the boarding house and the other three were for us. *Priorachan* often came and taught us how to read and write Latin and we began to pick it up slowly.¹¹⁷

While Beccaro was in Europe Chavara took great interest in teaching the Sisters Latin and other languages. In

¹¹⁶ *CK.*, VII/8.

¹¹⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 152. This is the entry on 1 October 1869. One could grasp the greatness and importance of his efforts to teach the Sisters the Latin language, only when we know the hardships Chavara had to face to study Latin during his seminary days. Although Fr. Thomas Palackal, his rector of Pallipuram seminary made arrangements for Chavara to study Latin by staying in Verapuzha seminary and attending class along with other students he could not succeed due to some reasons. Then he approached the parish priest of Thanki church and stayed with him about six months, but could not study much. It was not an easy thing to study Latin on those days since only very few know the language. Still he wanted the Sisters to learn the language. Cf., *CMM.*, 74-75.

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his letters of this period as well as in the *CKC* one often sees frequent references to this effect.¹¹⁸ When he managed to get more copies of prayer book in Latin and while giving six copies of the same to the Sisters Chavara told them: “God is planning to make use of you to do certain things for him. ...”¹¹⁹ Once Chavara wrote to the Sisters that there is no possibility of teaching them Latin, as he had planned earlier. Therefore, he told them to learn Tamil well. The reason for his insistence to learn that language was that there are many spiritual books in Tamil and they can expect many more in the future.¹²⁰ Seeing the extraordinary interest of Chavara to teach them Latin and the pain he took for the same in the form of making some books available and his frequent visits to the Sisters, the Sisters felt deeply indebted to him and recorded it for posterity. They felt that they could not give anything in return for his efforts except that they pray earnestly for him. Sister Anna, the chronicler records, “My dear Sisters, what love and gratitude can we return for this? We cannot do anything. So then let us remember that it is our obligation to pray always for this Father of ours in our poor prayers.”¹²¹

In some of the letters written by Chavara to the Sisters, there are references to sending books to them. It was a joy for him to send books for the Sisters. Once Chavara found a Tamil book, translated it into Malayalam and sent it to them with a note, which says,

¹¹⁸ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 162, 163; *CK.*, VII/1, 6, 11, 13.

¹¹⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 163.

¹²⁰ *CK.*, VII/6.

¹²¹ *CKC.*, 1, 152.

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O joy of joys ... By chance, I saw a book in a room. Taking it, I saw that it was on the discipleship among virgins. I am sure that God has sent it for you. I translated it into Malayalam and completed it yesterday. All must read this carefully as spiritual reading at least once..¹²²

In another letter he wrote: “In case you need any book either to study Tamil or to read, and if you specify it, I will send it to you.”¹²³ A collection of such books can be seen in the convent at Koonammavu.¹²⁴ Most of them are manuscripts among which one can see eight copies of *Atmaanutapam*, the autobiographical poem of Chavara.¹²⁵ It surely conveys the intention of the founder to share his own God experience with the members of the institute he founded. The number of copies of books on catechism, meditation, biographies of saints, etc. makes one clear his commitment to give training to the Sisters in matters of religion.¹²⁶ The same list, besides spiritual books, provides books on geography, introduction to Mathematics, Malayalam grammar, etc.

4.4.1.5 Living the Liturgical Life

Chavara’s contributions to improve the liturgy of the St. Thomas Christians are remarkable. He composed about

¹²² CK., VII/10.

¹²³ CK., VII/1.

¹²⁴ CKC., 1, 195-197.

¹²⁵ CKC., 1, 196. Since these pages are in the hand of Anna who died in 1871 and it was before the publication of *Atmaanuthapam*, one could rightly think that Chavara took interest to make copies available to the Sisters.

¹²⁶ Cf., CKC., 1, 195-197.

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ten books for the liturgical use in this Church.¹²⁷ He was known as an apostle of Eucharistic devotion. Even when he could not celebrate the Holy Mass due to some sickness or any other reason, his love for the Eucharistic Lord enabled him to remain united with the Masses offered in the whole world daily. His testimony from his death-bed reveals this fact:

Even though I was not able to celebrate Holy Mass after my illness increased, I remain one in spirit with the priests, who offer to God the Father the divine lamb every hour continuously during day and night in the four parts of the world, in Asia and America, etc..¹²⁸

It was he who translated the ceremonies of forty hour adoration from Latin into Malayalam and introduced it in the churches with due permission.¹²⁹ It was first conducted at Koonammavu on 15 February 1866.¹³⁰ Other monasteries also imitated the same devotional practice in the following year.

From the start of the community life in the bamboo-mat convent, the *CKC* specifically mentions that Chavara took the initiative to introduce the Sisters to the liturgical practices: “Very Reverend *Priorachan* had translated the canonical prayers from both Latin and Syrian languages and had written its explanation which he gave to us.”¹³¹ Chavara

¹²⁷ Mundadan, *Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, 267-279.

¹²⁸ *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 3 (1864-1872), 133.

¹²⁹ *Dhyanasallapangal*, He explains the story of the origin of this devotion in France in the year-----

¹³⁰ *CKC.*, 1,

¹³¹ *CKC.*, 1, 31.

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told them about the importance and greatness of canonical prayers and instructed them in how they were to be used:

Any prayer that you say as your canonical prayer is more fruitful than all other prayers. When you get ready to say your canonical prayers, first you must imagine that all the angels and saints of heaven, all the holy souls on earth, and the guardian angels of all our Sisters present are praising God, and that you are joining them in their praises saying your prayer. ...¹³²

The above words of Chavara clearly brought to their mind the real meaning of their canonical prayers, that when they pray they join with the praises of the heavenly choir, the militant Church, “all the souls on earth,” the pilgrim Church, and more specially with all the guardian angels of all those who are in the chapel praying together. He meant to say that their prayer can bring unity of mind and communion within the praying community as well as with the whole Church. In the same instruction, he told them about the need to purify their mind before beginning their prayer.”¹³³

4.4.1.6 Fostering the Love for the Mother of God

A true feminine spirituality can be formed through a careful study and contemplation on Mary. For this reason, Chavara encouraged the Sisters to contemplate on Mary in the Scriptures in their day-to-day lives and imitate her life. Being a great Marian devotee, Chavara intended to inculcate in them a true love toward the Heavenly Mother. At the beginning of their life in the community, he sent them books

¹³² *CKC.*, 1,71.

¹³³ *CKC.*, 1, 71.

on Mary as per their request. Since he could not find copies of the Dolores of the Mother and May Devotions as requested by the Sisters, their saintly Father sent a copy of the book *Jnanapiusham* (nectar) (in which the May Devotions were included) which he himself was using. Here one finds not only his affection for his dear children, but also his holy concern for their love and imitation of the Blessed Mother. He writes, “that you may not feel sorry for not having these books for loving and serving our Mother as you would wish to...”¹³⁴ Once when he sent to the Sisters some gifts, he told them that he was sending them in honor of the Mother of God.¹³⁵ While Beccaro was away in Italy, Chavara brought to the Sisters a small book of the *Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* written in Latin. The *CKC* testifies, “He gave us the book he brought, read a part of it to us, and then told us to read and start saying those prayers.”¹³⁶ In the collection of his letters to the Sisters there is a ‘Litany of Mary’ in Latin, transliterated in Malayalam in Chavara’s hand.¹³⁷ After writing one page he instructed them to learn the rest of the litany by reading from it. He also gave them practice for singing the hymn ‘Hail, Holy Queen’ in Syriac.¹³⁸

Chavara had childlike trust in the Heavenly Mother that enabled him to run to her in all the events of his life. He testifies to it from his own experience: “Till now, I have never cast a net in the name of Our Blessed Mother which has

¹³⁴ *CK.*, VII/1. Chavara’s letter to the Superior of the convent written on 29 April 1867.

¹³⁵ *CK.*, VII/8.

¹³⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 162. This was the entry on 12 February 1870.

¹³⁷ *CK.*, VII/13.

¹³⁸ *CKC.*, II, 11.

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been in vain.”¹³⁹ Through the powerful intercession of the Heavenly Mother, Chavara received a special blessing on 1 March 1867. Chavara described it in his *Dhyanasallapangal*:

God gave me great blessings today [1 March 1867]. As we - my spiritual director, very Reverend Fr. Delegate and I - had a great trouble our Reverend Sisters were asked to pray three ‘Hail Holy Queen’ and three ‘*Memorare*’ to the effect that what seemed to assume mountainous proportions was made as light as a flower by the Blessed Mother.¹⁴⁰

In the collection of Chavara’s prayers, one prayer to Mother Mary captures our special attention. It speaks of his filial relationship with the Mother of Jesus.¹⁴¹ He believes that when Mother Mary offers Chavara’s requests to Jesus, they will not be rejected. Chavara had a special interest in connecting the events of the convent with the life of the Heavenly Mother. When he describes the beginning of the religious life for women in Kerala he connects, “... in the month of January of 1866, when the feast of the wedding of our Mother of Carmel and our Father St. Joseph was approaching, the work of this humble bamboo-mat convent was begun.”¹⁴² The Sisters made their religious profession on 16 July 1868, and the election of the Superior was conducted on the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. When a new candidate came to the convent, the Sisters are told: “Behold

¹³⁹ CK., V/17. Chavara’s letter to his grand nephew, Fr. Joseph Thressia Chavara on 9 December 1869. This he wrote regarding the payment of Rupees 120 as tax of the convent at Koonammavu.

¹⁴⁰ Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 47.

¹⁴¹ Chavara, *Dhyanasallapangal*, 68: Prayer to the Holy Mother of God.

¹⁴² CKC., 1, 6.

our Blessed Mother has brought us a new Sister.”¹⁴³ When Chavara sent the Sisters some gifts he tells them that he is sending the gifts in honor of our Heavenly Mother.¹⁴⁴

The testimony of the first community given below speaks of his sincere concern that the Sisters love and praise their Heavenly Mother deeply. The event took place on the evening of 15 October 1870 during one of his final visits to them. They marked the words of appreciation for him:

Then he had us sing *Slamlekh* (Hail Holy Queen). Since we did not know exactly where the pauses were, he showed us the places where we were to stop and marked them for us. We are unable to tell you how interested our good Father was to teach us and to have us sing this hymn. His efforts were not in vain. However, he was not fortunate enough to hear us sing this according to the regulations.¹⁴⁵

4.4.2 Starting the Apostolate of the Community

According to the descriptions given in the Chronicles regarding the starting of the apostolate of the first community, both Chavara and Beccaro were actively involved in its every step. However, being an accepted leader of the Kerala Church of his time, and as one who had been nourishing the idea of founding a religious institute for women for a long time, one could say that Chavara can be rightly considered the ‘initiator’ of the apostolate. He envisioned and arranged for

¹⁴³ *CKC.*, 1, 68.

¹⁴⁴ *CK.*, VII/8.

¹⁴⁵ *CKC.*, II, 11.

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various apostolates for the first community. They are related to the following aspects: the situation of women in the Kerala Church and in society, his perception of their need, his response to the need, a particular life-style, and the image of Jesus who responded to a similar need in his time, namely, Jesus' attitude and approach toward women. The conferences and exhortations he gave, the devotions he practised, the spirituality he fostered, the paternal and maternal love he expressed toward the Sisters, the saintly life lived by Chavara, and the activities undertaken under his guidance have provided us with some insights into the vision and nature of the apostolates of the institute.

4.4.2.1 Training in Handicrafts

When Chavara and Beccaro envisioned the activities of the convent, they included the training in handicrafts for girls. The nineteenth century women of Kerala were economically dependent. Syrian women had no right to property, no right to inherit, and they could not earn money. Economic freedom remained a dream for women. They were not able to support the family with the income of their spouses alone. Thus, women also had to work for their livelihood. Owing to the seasonal nature of agriculture, women remained idle at home most of the days. Mainly the agricultural wage laborers faced this problem. This situation of poor income and the fewer number of working days of women inspired Chavara to initiate the women to some handicrafts, so that the women of the locality could earn something for their families.¹⁴⁶ Chavara and Beccaro

¹⁴⁶ Cf., AST., Letter written on 8 April 1882 by some women of Koonammavu, thanking Signora Marchioness Fanny Anguissola Viscouti for providing materials for their handicrafts. This letter speaks of the development of this apostolate and the attitude of the

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thoughtfully collected and arranged those things needed for this purpose. Both were of the same mind in this regard. They journeyed together in search of some experienced persons to bring to the convent to give the Sisters training in handicrafts.¹⁴⁷ Chavara records that on their way back from Thiruvananthapuram they met an elderly woman who could teach crape-net, thread-work, etc. and got her to agree to come to Koonammavu convent. Later on she came and has been teaching different kinds of needlework to the Sisters.¹⁴⁸ Even when the Sisters were in the bamboo-mat convent, the Fathers brought a woman named Francisca who knew some needlework.¹⁴⁹ The Sisters had many inconveniences in the bamboo-mat convent, owing to a lack of enough rooms, leaking of the roof, and many other such things. Above all, Francisca, who was brought for this purpose, was not a person who could easily be accommodated or adjusted to the facilities of the convent. Since her life situation was different from that of the Sisters of the convent, some special food was brought for her daily from the Koonammavu monastery. In spite of all these practical difficulties, the priests decided to initiate the Sisters to this apostolate soon after the opening of the bamboo-mat convent.

While describing the events of the first days of the convent, Chavara noted down his attempt to search for some women to give training in handicrafts to the Sisters:

When we were looking for some persons to teach embroidery and sewing, we came to know that the

beneficiaries toward it. A copy of the letter is kept in the archives of the Koonammavu convent.

¹⁴⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 60, 64; *CMM.*, 139-140; *CK.*, V/12.

¹⁴⁸ *CMM.*, 139-140.

¹⁴⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 35-41.

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sisters of Padre Jaseentha of Thankassery were good at needlework and making vestments. On writing to the Vicar, Fr. Geevarghese, we received the reply that they were not willing to come. We trusted that God would now complete what we started.¹⁵⁰

On the same page of the chronicle, Chavara recorded his satisfaction in seeing that Anna and Theresa were fast in learning things shown to them: “The two young Sisters Anna and Theresa took to writing on paper, playing on instruments, and needle work.”

The *CKC* records some expressions of Chavara’s particular concern for giving training to the Sisters in handicrafts. When Beccaro was away in Europe in 1870 Chavara took special interest in bringing two European Sisters from Fortkochi to the convent at Koonammavu to give training to the Sisters in needlework, Stitching, flower making, etc. He gave his personal attention to arranging for special cooked food to be brought from the Koonammavu monastery for these Sisters each time while they stayed in the convent for nine days.¹⁵¹ On those days, in a letter to Fr.Chandy Kattakayam, Chavara instructed him to bring to Koonammavu some materials needed for handicrafts: “Sisters have arrived from Cochin to teach in the convent. Good printed pictures for scapulars are not available here. Therefore, send all the big and small blocks of the scapular available there. Its printing can be done here in the hand press.”¹⁵² In the same letter, Chavara speaks of the ten rosaries made by the Superior of the Koonammavu convent

¹⁵⁰ *CMM.*, 1, 129.

¹⁵¹ *CKC.*, 1, 178.

¹⁵² *CK.*, V/12. Chavara’s letter to Fr. Chandy Kattakayam dated 30 March 1870.

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and he blessed them in order to distribute to certain individuals.¹⁵³ This letter shows the collaboration of the TOCD men in developing this apostolate of the Sisters. On some other occasions, in view of encouraging the Sisters in this apostolate, when some dignitaries of the Church visit the convent, Chavara informs the Sisters beforehand to gift them some articles such as scapulars, rosaries, flowers, alb, etc.¹⁵⁴ The *CKC* records: On 25 October *Priorachan* wrote and informed us. “Today Elias *Moopachan* will come there to see your convent. Then it will be good to gift him some rosaries and scapulars. ...When they were about to go we gave Elias *Moopachan* some rosaries and scapulars.”¹⁵⁵

An incident recorded in the *CKC* throws much light on Chavara’s personal interest in the Sisters’ training in handicrafts. In the month of October 1870 Chavara was seriously ill and could not walk by himself. Even in such a condition as this, he visited the convent twice on 15 October. In the afternoon when he came to the convent, he carried with him some kind of threads, dye, and instructed the Sisters how to dye the threads. The Sisters were deeply touched by the gesture of their beloved Father and recorded it in their chronicle: “He taught us what thread to use for sewing, how to dye the thread, the process to be followed, and the colors to be used.”¹⁵⁶ Chavara always thought of introducing new

¹⁵³ Chavara named ten persons to whom the rosaries are to be distributed; it may be that he is offering these rosaries to them as a token of his gratitude for the donations he received from them or encouraging them in Marian devotion by praying the rosary.

¹⁵⁴ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 84.

¹⁵⁵ *CKC.*, 1, 155.

¹⁵⁶ *CKC.*, II, 12. This he did while visiting them the second time in the evening hours on 15 October 1870. These expressions of special interest of Chavara contradict what Kinattungal says about Chavara: “Fr. Chavara was simply a friend of Fr. Leopold and Prior of the

ways and means for the Sisters to grow in relationship with God and humans.

4.4.2.2 Training of Girls in the Boarding House

As discussed earlier, the boarding house along with the convent was thought of as an arrangement for the promotion of vocations of girls for religious life. The idea of a boarding house for girls seems to be the same as that which Chavara expressed in the circular letter written on 25 March 1850, which was meant to open a study center for boys. He speaks of two stages of study: In the first stage the boys learn different languages, such as Syriac, Latin, Tamil, etc., and in the second stage those who have the bent of mind for the priesthood to learn theology and other matters connected with priestly life.¹⁵⁷ This seems to be the system of formation envisioned for and practiced in the boarding house at Koonammavu. Chavara's special interest and efforts to teach the girls Latin and Tamil will confirm the above fact. Chavara was a person engaged in the priestly formation for many years and many have testified to his ability and efficiency in that field. Seeing the good works done by Chavara in the field of priestly formation in the Kerala Church, Msgr. Francis Xavier Pescetto conferred on him the title *Malpan* and examiner of seminarians.¹⁵⁸ Msgr. Ludovicos, Baccinelli, Marceline, and Beccaro testified amply to Chavara's

Syrian Tertiary priests at Koonammavu..." Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 176.

¹⁵⁷ CK., IX/2.

¹⁵⁸ Cf., ASJM., Msgr. Pescetto's Letter of Appointment of Chavara as *Malpan* on 16 November 1844. *Malpan* is a Syriac word which means Professor, or Teacher. It is an honorific title conferred to learned priests, known for their learning and sanctity of life, by the Bishop in the Syro-Malabar Church.

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efficiency in giving formation to the seminarians. In the case of the Koonammavu convent, the term used to denote the system of formation of the girls is *educumdath*. Although it is an Italian term, when we think of Chavara's usage of the term *educumdath* in his poem *Anastasyayude Rakthasakshyam*, which he wrote in 1862, in the context of Roccas schism, one could admit that this term was very familiar to Chavara, even before Chavara changed his residence to Koonammavu. It suggests that the original idea of the boarding house for girls came from Chavara. He took great interest in the formation of the girls. When he designed the future growth of the convent in his Testament, he included the boarding house along with the convent. When Chavara suggested new places to open convents, he used the phrase 'convent with boarding house.'¹⁵⁹

Chavara's correspondence with the convent expresses his unique love for the girls of the boarding house and his vision about it. There is mention about the girls of the boarding house in almost all his letters to the Sisters. In his letter dated 1 March 1870, he persuades the girls to go for the Forty Hours adoration in the Monastery chapel at Koonammavu.¹⁶⁰ In the same letter he encourages them to buy the book on 'May Devotion.' When he shared his God-experience with the Sisters through a letter, he tells the Subprioress to read and explain it to the girls.¹⁶¹ He wanted them to imbibe the spirit of offering every movement of the body and make it as prayer joining with the Passion of Christ. On another occasion, he expressed his apology that he could not give conferences to the girls of the boarding house due to his

¹⁵⁹ CK., VI/5. Testament of Chavara, para. 3.

¹⁶⁰ CK., VII/2.

¹⁶¹ CK., VII/3 and 6.

ill-health.¹⁶² The words of apology came from his consciousness that he was responsible for the formation of the girls in the boarding house. In another letter, after explaining the different stages of meditation, he tells the Superior to make the girls understand according to their age and as they could. He was much interested to teach them many languages, such as Latin and Tamil. Once when he made books available to learn Latin, he separately brought books for the girls also.¹⁶³ His concern for the girls' study of languages can be seen in these words: "Since the girls have learnt Tamil, now they can read the Tamil book as well and learn easily if the translation is read side by side with it."¹⁶⁴ This he wrote while sending them a book translated by him from Tamil into Malayalam.

4.4.2.3 Education for Girls

The importance of education for girls was not given due attention in the nineteenth century. However, in each village of Kerala there was a *kalari* where the preliminaries of education, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, were taught. Girls also could attend such schools. Nevertheless, they had no opportunities for further education. When a school was planned along with the convent, its purpose was to give an opportunity for the girls to learn spiritual and secular matters so that there would be empowerment of women. Naturally, what is contained in empowerment is nothing but power. In the case of women, it means regaining or re-establishing their God-given power and utilizing it in the same way as in the case of men for guiding the entire human society. Chavara envisioned the empowering of the

¹⁶² CK., VII/8.

¹⁶³ CKC., 1, 152.

¹⁶⁴ CK., VII/11.

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human society in its march toward the realization of the Reign of God through the convent-educated girls. In the boarding house the girls were formed to be spiritually enlightened and socially empowered. The syllabus and other system of formation were arranged accordingly. As explained earlier before the girls from outside were added to the school at Koonammavu convent, the apostolate of education for girls was through the boarding house.

When Chavara conceived the religious institute with its purpose, it included education of girls as well. According to Chavara, the Convent was a place where girls of Malabar could learn *vedakaryangal*, namely, matters of their religion and Sacred Scripture. Chavara's understanding of the value and importance of education could be seen from the circular letter he sent to all the parishes of Kerala.¹⁶⁵ In his '*Testament of a Loving Father*' written on the second anniversary of the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu and given to his parishioners at Kainakary, Chavara reminded the parents of their responsibility of giving proper education to their children.¹⁶⁶ He gave clear instructions to the parents: "As soon as the children come to the age of reason, they must be sent to school. Besides, parents should inquire whether and how the children study and behave, and who their

¹⁶⁵ Cf., *CK.*, IX/2. Referring to St. Ephrem's theme of 'the Luminous Eye' Chavara instructed the people that the second source of enlightenment is learning or knowledge. As those who have no eyes are called 'blind,' so too those who have no learning should be called "spiritually blind." He states, "Consequently, although we, the *Nazranis* [St. Thomas Christians] claim to be Christians of ancient origin, we do not have the vitality or the wisdom of the sages because of this spiritual blindness.

¹⁶⁶ Cf., *CK.*, IX/10.

companions are. Their studies should be tested every Sunday.”¹⁶⁷

4.4.2.4 Caring for the Temporalities of the Convent

The “experience of the Spirit,” which is distinctive of the founders necessarily includes their vision of temporal realities as well. Chavara’s attentiveness to the welfare of the convent was not limited to the spiritual life of the Sisters. He was keenly interested in the temporal affairs of the Sisters. Examples are many which show the paternal and maternal care of “Our Father *Priorachan*” toward the well-being of the Sisters. With a feeling of indebtedness, the chronicler has reported many of the works of renovation done by Chavara. The examples given below are the initiatives of Chavara while Beccaro was away in Europe for fourteen months. The paternal love of Chavara enabled him to care for all the needs of the convent, such as digging a well in the compound, preparing a barn outside the cloister, and many such other things. The Sisters substantiate the concern of their founder father:

... During this April [1870], our *Priorachan* decided to make a well at any cost. Therefore, he arranged for the materials required, such as stone, lime, etc., and sent many laborers in order to finish it within a short time. The work was completed within a few days. Though Father was sick and tired during those days, he often came and supervised the work.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ CK., 1X/10.

¹⁶⁸ CKC., I, 174-175.

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As another example of Chavara's tender love and concern for the convent the Sisters noted down in the chronicle: "All the yielding coconut trees, as well as the young ones in the compound, inside and outside the enclosure fence, were all dug and manured, bringing soil from the nearby paddy fields."¹⁶⁹ Here is another letter, which shows how Chavara was interested and involved in the minute details of the life of the Sisters. It also presents the comprehensive vision of Chavara integrating spiritual and temporal matters of religious life:

As I am suffering from severe headache and fatigue, I could not come there. That is why I am writing these instructions. Ask the procurator to give the instruction to the masons: the granaries, the large one and the smaller one, have to be set on a solid granite foundation so that white ants may not attack the wood and the grains. The floor must be paved with bricks before the wooden granaries are fixed on the floor. There should be a varandha. It must be strongly and neatly paved so that paddy can be put on the floor and measured on it.... The tops of the coconut palms must be cleared of the dry leaves, etc. Thus, when the base and the top of the coconut palms are cleared, the tree will bear more fruit and we will get plenty of materials for firewood. Ask the procurator to do all these..¹⁷⁰

Knowing that a balanced formation includes not only theoretical, but also practical experiences, Chavara taught them how to keep proper accounts of their daily expenses and

¹⁶⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 175; Cf. also *CK.*, VII/ 5.

¹⁷⁰ *CK.*, VII/5.

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income. In one of his letters to the convent, he instructed, “You must be very accurate in writing the accounts.”¹⁷¹ This letter provides the impression that Chavara, keeping the account book of the convent open before him and pointing to the inaccuracies in the accounts, he taught them the correct method of keeping accounts. Even for their financial matters, the Sisters depended on Chavara. The letters of Chavara to the members of his Congregation, written on 15 November 1869, to his successor Fr. Kuriakose Elisa Porukara and another letter on 9 December 1869, to his grand nephew, Fr. Joseph Theresa, speak of Chavara paying the tax of the convent. He wrote to Porukara: “On reaching here, I found that the Mother Superior was being harassed by the mill-owner. She was waiting for me to get the money for paying the tax, which amounts to Rupees 120.”¹⁷² In his letter to Fr. Joseph Theresa he tells that Chavara paid that amount as the tax of the convent.¹⁷³ He also cared about the relevant cultural and spiritual development of each individual.

A careful reading of the Chronicles presents the close relationship and communion that existed between Chavara and the community of Sisters. The Sisters approached him for learning from him the lessons of consecrated life. They asked him freely for clarification about their religious practices, such as the observance of abstinence on certain feast days,¹⁷⁴ and going for the Forty Hours adoration in the Koonammavu

¹⁷¹ *CK.*, VII/7. This letter gives the impression that Chavara was caring for all their needs.

¹⁷² *CK.*, V/5.

¹⁷³ *CK.*, V/17.

¹⁷⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 35.

monastery.¹⁷⁵ Sometimes they wrote to him to inquire about his health.¹⁷⁶ Whatever he said or wrote flowed from his heart; he lived the sublime and celestial ideas and ideals, which he communicated to the Sisters. Here one can find the true portrait of a founder. Some contemporary documents testified to the effect that he put his heart and soul into the realization of his long cherished dream for a convent.¹⁷⁷ Beccaro finds it impossible to give a proper articulation to the arduous and untiring efforts of the ‘aged and saintly founder.’¹⁷⁸ While the members of the first community at Koonammavu and the contemporaries appreciated and acknowledged the loving Father Prior’s care and concern for the Sisters in the small and big, spiritual and temporal matters that Chavara did for them, Kinattungal looks at those activities of Chavara as that of an overseer.¹⁷⁹

4.4.3 Transmitting the Tradition

One way of capturing the vision of the founders is by listening to their personal sharing and another way is to capture it by watching them closely. Chavara’s insistence to record all the events related to the convent is one way of transmitting his vision of the community to posterity. Understanding the value of the experience of the foundation

¹⁷⁵ *CK.*, VII/2; Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 164. In his reply Chavara encouraged them by telling them that the Lord is highly pleased with the adoration they offer from their residence.

¹⁷⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 164.

¹⁷⁷ *CKC.*, 1, 48-49; *CMM.*, 126-135, 138-140; *Alochana*, 95-96, 106-107, 130-131, 139-140; Parappuram, *Diary*, 1124-1125, 1186-1187.

¹⁷⁸ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 240: “In fact, Fr. Chavara was not appointed as the Chaplain. But he was overseeing the external works such as the digging of the well in the compound and manuring the cultivated land.”

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period or the ‘founder’s generation,’ Chavara instructed the Superior: “Persuade Sr. Anna to write down all the matters. If you write without stopping, due to idleness, even the silly facts, after some time you yourself will feel so happy.”¹⁸⁰ Initiated and guided by both Chavara and Beccaro, Anna wrote the Chronicles. There she recorded the details of the Fathers’ efforts to form the Sisters in a true religious spirit and in the administration of the temporalities of the convent. It is impressive to read the writings of the first members of the institute. As testified in the cover page and in the margin of page three of the first book of the *CKC*, the first sixteen pages, page 200, and half of page 201 are written by Chavara himself.¹⁸¹ The former is about the beginning of the convent, and the latter is the record of the official matters of the institute, such as the religious investiture and profession of vows of the first members. It says that Anna wrote the rest of the pages. This fact is further evidenced from Chavara’s letter to the Superior of the convent.¹⁸²

Chavara’s influence in the *CKC* cannot be limited to those pages in his hand. In the following pages, Anna has copied Chavara’s letters and instructions as well; in the first book, nine letters are copied, and in the second five letters.¹⁸³ The small notes sent by him during the days of his terminal illness which were copied in their chronicle show that the Sisters held them in reserve with reverence and love for him.

¹⁸⁰ *CK.*, VII/1. Letter of Chavara to the Superior of the convent on 29 April 1867.

¹⁸¹ In page 201, Chavara’s writing concludes with the recording of the event of the profession of the first four members.

¹⁸² *CK.*, VII/1. Letter written by Chavara on 29 April 1867 to the Superior of St. Teresa’s Convent, Koonammavu.

¹⁸³ There are references to his letters, which are not copied in the chronicle. For example, *CKC.*, 1, 79, 109, 111.

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Anna concluded her writing of the first book of the chronicle of the Koonammavu convent by copying a letter of Chavara sent to the convent, informing them of the death of the Superior General of the OCD on 8 July 1870.¹⁸⁴ Thus, from the beginning to the end of the first book of the *CKC*, Chavara's influence is evident. Besides those letters copied in the chronicle, there are some references to Chavara's letters written to the Sisters in the *CKC*.¹⁸⁵

It is worth noting some parallel descriptions of events in both of the Chronicles, which surely confirm the influence of Chavara in the *CKC*. Certain events written by Chavara in the *CMM* in detail, can sometimes be seen in Anna's hand in the *CKC*. What is special in such descriptions is that in those events, neither Anna nor any other member of the convent was directly present; Chavara was present. However, Anna has written like an eyewitness to those events.¹⁸⁶ The best example can be the description of the preparation for and the

¹⁸⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 192. Pages 195-197 present a long list of books and in between some pages are empty.

¹⁸⁵ Cf., *CKC.*, 1, 22, 48, 79, 84, 109.

¹⁸⁶ Examples are many to this effect. See the similarity in narrating the events related to the Episcopal ordination of Mellano as well as the reception given to the newly consecrated Bishop at Koonammavu. Another example can be the recording of the illness, death and burial of Msgr. Baccineli in *CKC.*, 1, 101-103 = *CMM.*, 143-144. From where did Anna get the details of the number of parishioners who participated in the funeral service, the order of the procession, etc.? An extraordinary similarity can be seen in the detailed reporting of the conversion of a Konkani woman. *CKC.*, 1, 112-115 = *CMM.*, 148-151. It is true with the descriptions of the arrival of Madam Clerk, (*CKC.*, 1, 115-117 = *CMM.*, 148) and that of Fr. Gerard Beccaro (*CKC.*, 1, 117 = *CMM.*, 152), as well as the journey of Msgr. Mellano and Beccaro to Europe (*CKC.*, 1, 141-146, 148 = *CMM.*, 153-155).

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Episcopal ordination of Mellano.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps, Chavara might have dictated it to her or he might have given her a copy of those portions, which he himself had written in his record of Mannanam. What is noteworthy here is that Chavara's direct intervention or influence is evident from the beginning to the end of the first book of the chronicle. Another interesting feature one observes is the same sequence of events in the same style in both the records. Since Chavara is the author of both journals, the content, style, approach, and presentation of the event of foundation are similar in both. After Beccaro's consultation about the starting of the convent that took place in September 1865, the foundation and the events followed in the convent are the important topics recorded in *CKC* and *CMM*. The next important topic entered is the description of journeys made by both priests together for collecting donations for the convent.¹⁸⁸ The difference one notices is that in the *CKC* the description is short. The event of the laying of the foundation stone for the convent is very similar in both texts with all its particulars.¹⁸⁹ Many other events in succession can be seen in both the records. Chavara in the *CMM* gives the detailed report of events related to the convent in its chronological order, and it shows his remarkable interest and his personal contribution in matters concerning the convent, as well as his sense of responsibility towards the formation of the Sisters.

The Church expects certain qualities to be seen in the founders of religious institutes as enumerated in the *Mutuae*

¹⁸⁷ In both the Chronicles the words of introduction of the day of consecration, the speech given by Fr. Marcelline OCD on the day, and many other details are amazingly similar (*CKC.*, 1, 105-110 = *CWC.*, 1, 144-148).

¹⁸⁸ *CKC.*, 1, 63-64 = *CMM.*, 139-140.

¹⁸⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 24-25 = *CMM.*, 134.

Relationes. When those qualities are applied in the person of Chavara his profile as founder becomes clear. Before concluding this section, a glimpse at the life of Chavara to see whether these qualities were present in him will be pertinent.

4.5 Participation in a Particular Mystery of Christ

One of the marks of the religious founders and foundresses is their profound ardor of love to be conformed to Christ in order to witness to some aspect of His mystery. All the founders intend to live Christ in its fullness, yet at the same time, affirm the existence of a path in the original common following, capturing the mystery of Christ in a particular angle.¹⁹⁰ In his daily ‘Morning Prayer’ Chavara prays, “Let me always conform my will to Your holy Will. Let me always say: May the Holy Supreme and true Will of God be praised now and forever.”¹⁹¹ Throughout his life, he made earnest efforts to forget his own self and to conform his will to the divine Will revealed to him in and through different life situations and persons. The spirit of humble submission of Chavara to Superiors was an edifying example to his fellow religious. Beccaro bears witness to the fact that in Chavara’s life ‘resignation to the divine Will’ was evident to a high degree. Keen evangelical insight on Jesus’ submission to the Father’s Will became a force and a power that moved Chavara beyond his imagination to live in an evangelical way.

As Chavara approached the end of his life, he attained that serenity of mind, which led him to declare openly that he did not wish to do anything according to his own will. He told

¹⁹⁰ Cf., Ciardi, *I Fondatori*, 155.

¹⁹¹ CWC., III, 36-37.

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the Sisters: “Do I have a will of my own? I do not desire either to go and stay there, or to stay here.¹⁹² I am ready to do as I am told. I do not wish to do anything according to my will. I am ready to do only what I am commanded to do.”¹⁹³ The chronicler continues with admiration for Chavara’s spirit of obedience:

... He went on speaking to us for a long time about giving up our own will and about the greatness of obedience. ... This very reverend Father used to obey everyone like a little child. The good example, which he has shown us until his death, is something at which everyone marvels. Isn’t it then right and just that all of us learn from him and live accordingly? As he was the Prior and the head of all the monasteries, and also because our very reverend Father Delegate was not here to give him a command beyond it, all were bound to do according to his command. Even then, he did not like this because he lived, giving up his will completely, and thus setting a good example for all.¹⁹⁴

As Chavara prayed daily for the grace of conforming his will to the divine Will, he practised it heroically even at the last moment of his life. Although he had the desire to go to Mannanam with the hope of dying at the feet of St. Joseph, when Gerard Beccaro, the acting Delegate Provincial in the absence of Leopold Beccaro, asked Chavara, his reply was characteristic of him: “Father, do I have a will different from yours? I am prepared to do whatever you Fathers wish that I should do. I do not will that I should go there or that I should

¹⁹² He said this in the context of the decision of the Fathers to take him to Mannanam for better treatment for his illness.

¹⁹³ *CKC.*, II, 13.

¹⁹⁴ *CKC.*, II, 13.

not go there.”¹⁹⁵ Thus, he was participating in the mystery of Jesus Christ who made his Father’s will his food.

When Chavara was not preoccupied with doing his own will, he saw the divine hands working in his life more powerfully. The construction of the building for the new convent provided a new experience of God taking possession of his plans and doing wonderful things in and through him. At the beginning of the bamboo-mat convent he had no money for its construction. The prophet in Chavara could see into the flourishing future for the women TOCD, and he even expressed it with a prophetic courage, “God will prepare for you a strongly built convent before it is time to re-thatch and renew the leaves of the roof and bamboo mats.”¹⁹⁶ When Chavara saw it came about as exactly as he said, his trust in the wonderful ways of God became stronger and deeper. By seeing how God opened the hearts of the people towards the cause of the construction of the convent, he praised the Almighty. Within a short span of time, they could build the convent. Chavara recorded it in the *CMM* as a great act of God’s merciful grace.¹⁹⁷ In order to instill in the minds of the people deep trust in God, he also shared his experience of divine providence that he saw in the construction of the convent with the parishioners of Kainakary.¹⁹⁸

4.6 Chavara: A True Lover of the Church

Chavara had a constant and lively love for the Church, which he manifested by his full participation in all aspects of

¹⁹⁵ *CKC.*, II, 13.

¹⁹⁶ *CMM.*, 129-130, 132; Cf. also *CK.*, IX/11; *CKC.*, 1, 46.

¹⁹⁷ *CMM.*, 132-134.

¹⁹⁸ *CK.*, IX/11:13.

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the Church's life, and in his ready obedience to the Bishops, especially to the Roman Pontiff. He looked at the Church as his mother. His devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and also to her visible head, the Holy Father, was unparalleled, to which Beccaro testifies as follows:

Among his virtues the most outstanding was his ardent faith and devotion to the Holy Catholic Church and to the Holy Father. He had an ardent desire to spread the light of the Holy Catholic Church in all directions; he was grieved to the point of shedding tears when he heard of the trials and persecution of the Church and eagerly longed to see the days of her triumph. Whenever he happened to hear the news of the Pope, he was always moved to tears, either of sorrow or of joy. It was because of this extraordinary faith that he showed great veneration, love and obedience toward the Papal Delegate who was the representative of the Holy Father and toward missionaries who were messengers of the Holy Church.¹⁹⁹

In the history of the Malabar Church, when there were no canonized saints, no religious houses of men or of women, no quality formation of the priests, no excellent theological books or good treatises,²⁰⁰ no books for spiritual reading for the people, no systematic educational system, etc., he thought that the Church was barren.²⁰¹ Steeped in the divine Will for himself and for the Church Chavara worked for the faith formation of all levels of society and undertook various projects and programs. Pope John Paul II openly proclaimed

¹⁹⁹ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12f.

²⁰⁰ *CK.*, VI/4.

²⁰¹ *CMM.*, 173.

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it in these words: “All his priestly and religious life was dedicated to the spiritual welfare of the local Church, leading it to maturity in Christ. He provided for the formation of priests, preached retreats for the faithful in the parishes, brought in priests, and thus introduced a renewal of spiritual life in the entire vicariate.”²⁰² The Pontiff again records:

Going through his active life, we easily understand with what ardent love he loved the Church, how fervently he desired to unite himself with God through meditation and prayer, how intimately he was united with God in every apostolic initiative, how all through life he was guided by the eyes of faith, under the eyes of God and His marvelous Providence, and with what trust he was drawn toward the permanent union with God in heaven.²⁰³

The first community witnessed Chavara’s faith-journey and watched from a close distance his dispositions toward God, attitudes toward life, the priorities that he set, his zeal for the unity and growth of the Church, and the values he upheld. The Sisters of the convent at Koonammavu were convinced that Chavara was a true lover of the Church. They had a clear grasp of his greatness and his contributions to the Church. The *CKC* refers to the person of Chavara as a leading light and righteous pillar of the Church:

This Father of ours was like a brilliant light and a mirror to all the Christians of Kerala. Moreover, he

²⁰² John Paul II, *Litterae Apostolicae Venerabili Servo Dei Cyriaco Eliae Chavara Beatorum honores decernuntur*. AAS 78 (1986): 1076-1078.

²⁰³ John Paul II, *Litterae Apostolicae Venerabili Servo Dei Cyriaco Eliae Chavara Beatorum honores decernuntur*. AAS 78 (1986): 1076-1078.

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was like a pillar that supported the Catholic Church because of the zeal he evinced in its expansion and in the protection of the faith.²⁰⁴

These words indicate that Chavara had a unique place in the Church of Kerala as a guiding light and a supporting pillar for all and was a distinct instrument through which Christ worked for the sanctity, unity, and growth of the people of God.

4.7 Docility to the Ecclesiastical Authorities

The document *Mutuae Relationes* holds docility to the ecclesiastical authorities as an essential quality to be seen in the religious founders.²⁰⁵ Chavara's biographers praise him, saying that in all his undertakings he was guided by the principle of obedience to the Bishops: "Never did he hold himself back from any work, nor fight shy of any difficulty, as he was always prompted by two motives: obedience to the Bishop and the salvation of souls."²⁰⁶

4.8 The Sufferings of Chavara as the Founder

In a genuine charism there is always a mixture of new creativity and interior suffering. When *Mutuae Relationes* speaks of the sufferings of the founding person it means mainly those sufferings related to the process of founding the new religious institute. The call received to found, or attempts to realize the divine call, may invite various kinds of sufferings. When St. Paul presents the list of his sufferings as

²⁰⁴ *CKC.*, II, 23.

²⁰⁵ *MR.* 51.

²⁰⁶ Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

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an apostle, he includes his anxiety about the growth of the churches in different places: “Everyday I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor 11: 28). St. Paul continues, “When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress.”

In the same way, Chavara has given vent to his experience of disappointments and helplessness in the first pages of the *CKC* and many more pages of the *CMM*. In the process of founding the convent as Chavara describes it, he tells about his sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, and disappointments due to long waiting for the foundation, and some unexpected troubles that caused delays in opening the convent. For example, at Puthenpally, even after the building for the convent and the candidates to enter the convent were ready, due to Roccas Schism (1861), the plan for the convent was changed and it was decided to use that building for the training of priests.

Once the construction of the first convent was begun, the finance was a major problem and one may not forget the great sacrifices, which Chavara underwent in the process of collecting the donations. At Cheranalloor he was severely afflicted by rheumatic fever which made him unconscious for two days. He came back to Koonammavu as a sick and exhausted person with swollen legs.²⁰⁷ However, this did not deter him from his firm determination to continue to travel to seek donations for the construction of the new convent. He wrote to Eliswa, the first Superior that both of them were having the same kind of sickness and they needed the same treatment.²⁰⁸ He wrote from pain and in pain, from his

²⁰⁷ *Alochana*, 130-131.

²⁰⁸ *CK.*, VII/5.

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physical pain of incurable disease. As he was the Vicar General, he had to make travels to different churches in order to settle problems or to start new projects. As mentioned above, his repeated and unsuccessful attempts in different places to found the convent for women itself caused him constant suffering. As noted earlier the problem of the Kerala Church, owing to the lack of a Bishop of their own Rite and nationality, was a cause of constant pain to Chavara. Since he loved the Church as his own mother, every pain of the Church pained him as well. The lack of cordial love-relationship between the Bishop and the priests caused him much pain. One can rightly apply to Chavara the words of Pope John Paul II, that “founders are persons who were exceptional instruments in Christ’s hands for his work of salvation.”²⁰⁹

4.9 The Women TOCD in the ‘Testament’ of Chavara

Chavara believed that his responsibilities toward the women TOCD would not end with his death. Intending to continue the historical mediation created by the founder in establishing the institute, he clearly designed the growth and development of the institute and articulated it in his Testament.²¹⁰ In this final farewell message, which is addressed to his religious community of men, Chavara gives some guidelines for the future expansion and the nature of ministry of the Congregation of men and of women and the relationship between them.

While looking at the needs of the Church and reflecting on the future growth of the convent, Chavara

²⁰⁹ Cf. Pope John Paul II to Superiors General of Men, Rome, 24 November 1978. *L’Osservatore Romano*, 7 December 1978), 3.

²¹⁰ *CK.*, VI/5.

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thoughtfully marked in his Testament the specific places where the convents were to be opened: “It is necessary and very useful to have convents, one at Mutholy and another at Mannanam with boarding houses attached.”²¹¹ By the very fact of including such details in the Testament and entrusting the convent to the men TOCD, he has revealed that he is the real founder of both institutes. He encouraged his sons to put more effort and diligence into accomplishing these things. He conceived the monastery, convent, and boarding house together as one unit with one single goal to achieve. In his Testament, the phrase “monasteries, convents and boarding houses” has been repeated twice and “monasteries and convents” twice, as well as there is mention of ‘boarding houses’ three times.²¹² He states:

It is necessary that more monasteries and convents be opened in the south, that is, one monastery each to east and west of Mannanam and some convents with boarding houses. ... This will help very much to render necessary and useful spiritual ministry to the faithful of the two vicariates of Verapuzha and Kollam.²¹³

The presentation of the ‘monasteries and convents with boarding houses for girls’ as one single unit with a purpose of

²¹¹ *CK.*, VI/5, para. 3.

²¹² Cf. *CK.*, VI/5.

²¹³ *CK.*, VI/5. In spite of this clear evidence that the convent was entrusted to the sons of Chavara, Kinattungal states, “The ‘sons of Chavara’ had no involvement in the convent until the division of the Vicariate.” Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 219. She again states, “Archbishop Mellano, Fr. Leopold OCD, Bro. Leopold TOCD, the people and clergy of Verapuzha testified that no Syrian priests were allowed to interfere in the affairs of St. Teresa’s Convent until 1889.” Kinattungal, *Servant of God Mother Eliswa*, 211.

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catering to the needs of the two existing vicariates of Kollam and Verapuzha, points to an important vision of Chavara. One could say that St. Chavara dreamt of a Church where religious men and women work hand in hand without any discrimination of Latins or Syrians. He also dreamt of women TOCD giving spiritual leadership in the Church. It was a time when women were not allowed to attend the retreat preached in their own parishes. However, according to his Testament they were meant not only learning the matters concerning their religion but also work for the spiritual empowerment of the people of God.

Pope Francis encourages the feminine presence in all spheres of the Church and women share the pastoral responsibilities. He states,

I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. However, we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because “the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace”²¹⁴ and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.²¹⁵

The beauty of the Testament of Chavara is that he supports a spirituality of complementarity, which is based on

²¹⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 295.

²¹⁵ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium The Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, 103.

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the fact that both institutes of men and women TOCD are complimentary agents working together for the progress and development of the people and their mission is to promote the Reign of God. He envisioned it 150 years before Pope Francis.

In the Last Will one hands over one's own treasured property to others. If Chavara had thought of the convent as founded by Beccaro or by someone else, there was no relevance for him to provide plans in his Testament for its future expansion nor would he have entrusted the institute of women to his sons in religion. He was convinced that he was the founder of both the institutes and was led by a sense of commitment for their growth. That he had entrusted the convent and its affairs to his own Congregation is a proof that both are his children, and he felt responsible for their well-being even after his death.

It is to be remembered that Chavara prepared his Testament when Beccaro was the Delegate Provincial and he had great expectations of Beccaro. Chavara told his religious brothers about Beccaro: "You are yet to see numerous other benefits accomplished by them [Beccaro Brothers: Leopold and Gerard]." ²¹⁶ Even though Chavara was preparing for his impending death and while writing his Last Will in which he expressed his expectation of the great contribution that Beccaro can offer to the TOCD, he did not entrust the future growth and expansion of the convent either to Beccaro or to the Carmelite missionaries of Beccaro's religious Order. Chavara clearly assigned the role of formator to Beccaro and that of the ecclesiastical Superior to Baccinelli. According to Chavara, it was the responsibility of his religious Brothers to

²¹⁶ CK., VI/5, para. 3.

work for the growth of the convent because both institutes had the same purpose of foundation, the same charism and the same founder.

4.10 The Women TOCD: the Sister-Congregation of the Men TOCD

The fact that the women TOCD was from the very start considered as the Sister-congregation of the men TOCD is a strong historical confirmation of the founder role of Chavara regarding the convent. The understanding of the convent at Koonammavu as the Sister-Congregation of the monastery started at Mannanam is dynamically faithful to a legacy of the past. The focus of the considerations below is on the kind of relationship that existed between these two institutes from the beginning and the evolution and growth of this consciousness in the later period. While the ‘Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel’²¹⁷ was growing and flourishing, the need was felt intensely for an identical system of consecrated life for women. When the desire to open a *darshanaveedu* [House of Vision or Monastery] for men was expressed and permission was sought for the same from Msgr. Stabilini, the plan for a convent for women also was included. Church historians who traced the origin of the movement of religious life in Kerala have presented the starting of the convent for women as the continuation of the inspiration that was realized at Mannanam in 1831.²¹⁸ As discussed earlier, the Koonammavu convent was entered in official documents as the TOCD and the *CKC*, *CMM*, and

²¹⁷ The religious institute at Mannanam was known in this name and some official documents of the foundation period bear the same name.

²¹⁸ Bernard Thoma, *Kaldaya Suriani Reethil Chernna*, 241.

Chavara's letters to the Sisters and to the members of his own religious institute clearly speak of the relationship of the TOCD men with the convent. Here are some observations to how the documents of the local Ordinary of the time and other writings looked at the Koonammavu convent and the monasteries of the TOCD.

4.10.1 In the Words of Msgr. Baccinelli

4.10.1.1 Baccinelli's "nostri Terziarii"

Baccinelli understood both institutes of men and of women as one unit. The name given to both institutes by Baccinelli and the way they were treated in official reports to the Propaganda Fide and in his letters sent to Rome serve as sufficient evidence of his acknowledgement that both institutes originated from the same root. When the Carmelite missionaries call the monasteries and the convent started in Kerala as "nostri Terziarii," the TOCD call themselves as the 'Servants of the Immaculate Mother of Carmel,' and the same name they proposed for the convent at Puthenpally.²¹⁹

In Baccinelli's response to the Question number 71 of the report that he sent to the Propaganda Fide in 1867, he connects the TOCD men and TOCD women in three aspects: i) He openly refers to both the institutes in their relationship

²¹⁹ Cf., APC., *Puthenpally Seminary Parampinte Charithram*, 3. The Lease Deed prepared by the four trustees of Puthenpally church shows that it was leased for the clearly stated purpose "of building and conducting a convent with the name of the Immaculate Holy Mother of Carmel." ["*AtemZv h hntp² lAae tZhamXmohns^d NymkfvXn #Iv h'p \S pIXn²...v...*"] These introductory words of the deed speak clearly about the purpose of giving the land. The deed concludes by repeating the same purpose: "to establish the above-named convent."

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to the Prelate and to the Superior General of the Carmelites.²²⁰ ii) He specifically mentions the physical proximity of the two institutes.²²¹ iii) His attitude and approach toward their Rules are the same.²²² Another important observation is that in the same report, Baccinelli places the convent at Koonammavu under the title “*Conventi di Terziarii Carmelitani Scalzi, di Rito Malabarico.*” Presenting the five monasteries in their chronological order of foundation - Mannanam, Koonammavu, Vazhakulam, Elthuruth and Pulincunnu, Baccinelli says, “At Koonammavu there is a convent of *Maestre Pie*, namely, the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites, ...”²²³

²²⁰ ACO., *20 February Report, 1867*, p.18: “Dipendono come i Terziarii dal N.P Generale, e da me.”

²²¹ “È prossima a terminarsi la fabbrica di una casa di Maestre Pie del nostro Ordine cioè Terziarie, alquanto distante dal convento di Cunemao.” Cf., also *CKC.*, 1, 44. Baccinelli offers thanks to God for getting the land for the convent very near to the monastery church. Earlier the site for the convent at Alengadu was rejected because it was not close to the monastery at Koonammavu. Cf. Parappuram, *Diary*, 656-657.

²²² “Le Regole sono quelle già approvate per tale Istituto; vi ho fatto qualche variazione per adattarle a questi luoghi, come ho fatto per i Terziarii.”

²²³ ACO., *20 February Report, 1867*, p.38-39: “In Cunemao evvi una casa di Maestre Pie Carmelitane scalze Latine e Soriane, e fino ad ora sono 7.” This he puts when he presented the list of parishes along with its details in ALLEG. LETT. A, between 84 and 85, that is, “continuing the parishes West of Verapuzha and Sea Beach.” As noted earlier in this report Baccinelli gives the details about matters concerning the Syrians of his vicariate. Whereas, in the ‘Catalogue of the parishes’ given by Mellano in 1876 he puts the monastery at Koonammavu in the list of Latin parishes along with the monastery at Manjummel. The convent does not have a place in that catalogue. Cf. ACO., *Scritture Originali 1876*, Vol. 7, *Catalogus Ecclesiarum Ritus Siro-Malabarici*, ff.390b-390m.

4.10.1.2 The System of Governance: A Common Provincial Delegate

The document showing the designation of Leopold Beccaro as ‘Delegate Provincial’ is an important evidence that both institutes had the same system of governance and were directed by the same authorities. The *CKC* records the designation of Beccaro in these words:

This Bishop [Msgr. Bernardine Baccinelli, Vicar Provincial per order of the Superior General of the Order of Carmelites Discalced] has appointed a delegate giving him the power to see to the smooth running of the monasteries, also to establish and run convents of the same Order, and to admit Sisters to the same Order. This Delegate is the Missionary Apostolic of Malayalam [Kerala] – Very Reverend Fr. Leopold Maria of St. Joseph of the Order of Carmelites Discalced.²²⁴

The phrase “convents of the same Order” is noteworthy. Thus from the early years of Beccaro’s arrival in Kerala he administered the monasteries and the convent in his capacity as the Provincial Delegate of the Carmelite Order. Mannanam chronicle also affirms that both the convent and monastery had Leopold Beccaro as their Superior.²²⁵ The diary notes of Leopold leave the impression that he administered both institutes and loved them dearly as his sons

²²⁴ *CKC.*, 1, 200. This is written by Chavara on the occasion of registering the religious vestition and profession of the first members of the Koonammavu convent in 1867 and 1868 respectively. Cf. also *CKC.*, II, 99, on the occasion of taking the vows again on 16 July 1875.

²²⁵ *ASJM.*, *Chronicles of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 3, 96.

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and daughters. The matters concerning both of them received equal mention in the pages of his diary.²²⁶ Baccinelli clearly documented in his report of 1867, “Like the TOCD for men they [the Sisters] depend on Our Superior General and on me.”²²⁷ Baccinelli’s authority as Vicar Provincial was delegated to Beccaro and thus the Delegate Provincial had authority over the Sisters as their Canonical Superior. The first Constitution given by the Prelate lists the following order of authority in the convent: 1. Apostolic Vicar, 2. OCD General, 3. Delegate Provincial, 4. Mother Superior.²²⁸ Baccinelli had admitted in the report to the Propaganda Fide that the Sisters were entrusted to the care of the Missionary (Beccaro) and the Prior of the Tertiaries. Because of his position as the Delegate Provincial, Beccaro had canonical authority over the convent. The authority Chavara and his religious Brothers exercised over the Sisters was not juridical.

4.10.2 In the Words of Chavara

In the first pages of the *CKC* Chavara explains the origins of religious life for women in Kerala. Even though he put the title ‘the Beginning of Religious Life for Women’ he did not immediately start with the inauguration of St. Teresa’s

²²⁶ ASA., Beccaro, *Manuale di Memorie*. Some detailed lists of the members of the monasteries and the convent, their land-property, and many other matters are seen in his diary notes.

²²⁷ ACO., *Report, 20 February 1867*. In response to Q. 71: “Dipendono come i Terziari dal N.P Generale, e da me.”

²²⁸ AST., *Constitutions of the Sisters of the Third Order, 1875*, Chapter one (MSS, unpaginated). From the chronicle of the convent one cannot prove what kind of relationship existed between the OCD Superior General and the women TOCD at Koonammavu, except that at the death of Fr. Dominic of St. Joseph, the Superior General of the Order, on 8 July 1870 the Sisters were asked to offer special prayers for him (Cf. *CKC.*, 1, 192).

Convent at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866. Instead, he presents it as the continuation of the movement of religious life begun at Mannanam.²²⁹ and his Testament gives ample proof for considering the convent and monasteries as one unit established by the same founder with the same charism.²³⁰ Further research done on the role the TOCD men played in forming the women TOCD at Koonammavu presents two periods, the first before the death of Chavara and the second, after his death.

4.10.3 Collaboration between the Monastery and the Convent before the Death of Chavara

Saint Teresa's Convent, Koonammavu, was Chavara's beloved project; he took great interest in guiding it and in recording many matters concerning the life in the convent in both the *CMM* and *CKC*. Many examples in the Chronicles show the active involvement, co-operation, and help of the members of the Koonammavu monastery in the foundation and day-to-day life of the convent.²³¹ They were even ready

²²⁹ *CKC.*, 1, 1.

²³⁰ Cf., the section 4.9: 'The Women TOCD in the Testament of Chavara' of this chapter.

²³¹ Here are some of the examples: Mr. Thomman who was the procurator of the monastery was appointed as the procurator of the convent (*CKC.*, 1, 4; *CMM.*, 139); to start the work of the bamboo-mat convent money was taken from the monastery (*CMM.*, 128); while the construction was in progress, "once or twice loans were taken from the monastery" (*CKC.*, 1, 47); one plot of land that belonged to the monastery was given for the construction of the new building for the convent (*CMM.*, 128); at the start of the convent many utensils were taken from the monastery (*CMM.*, 135; *CKC.*, 1, 21); programs were planned and conducted simultaneously both in the monastery and the convent such as retreat starting on the same date and visit of important guests, etc. (*CKC.*, 1, 21; *CMM.*, 135);

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to pay the debt on the property of Anna and were involved in the construction of the convent from the beginning.²³² The life of Sisters in the bamboo-mat convent was not safe. There was an urgent need to build a proper house for them. The words of Chavara reveal his concern for the Sisters: “Since our Sisters who live in the bamboo-mat [house] are suffering from various kinds of illness, Rev. *Moopachan* ardently desires to build a strong [house] for them. Therefore, it is good if [we] add two plots, adjacent to the land owned by and close to our Koonammavu Monastery.”²³³ He used the terms ‘Our Sisters’ and ‘Our Koonammavu Monastery’ as equally “our” own. Chavara mentions the name of some TOCD priests who went to parishes to solicit alms.²³⁴ The

when important guests visited the convent necessary supplies were brought from the monastery to welcome them (*CKC.*, 1, 190); when two European Sisters came and stayed in the Koonammavu convent to train the Sisters in handicrafts food were prepared and brought for them to the convent each time from the monastery (*CKC.*, 1, 178); when the Sisters fell ill, Brother Nicholas TOCD who practised allopathic treatment was sent to the convent with medicines on several occasions (*CKC.*, 1,23; *CMM.*, 135), and the same brother stitched the religious dress of the Sisters (*CMM.*, 134-135); on different occasions when Chavara and Beccaro went out for ministry the Sisters were entrusted to the Superior of the monastery (*CKC.*, 1, 71-72); when the Sisters find it difficult to pay an amount of Rupees 120 as tax Chavara paid the tax for them (Cf. *CK.*, V/7, Chavara’s letter to his nephew Fr. Joseph Chavara on 9 December 1869; Cf., also *CK.*, V/1, Chavara’s letter to Elisha Porukara).

²³² *CMM.*, I27.

²³³ *CMM.*, 134. This money was paid back to the monastery later by the patrimony of the Sisters. Cf., also *Kanakkupusthakam* (The Record of Accounts), Vol. 2, (1867-1875), 12, Another Manuscript kept in the archives of the Vimala Province, Ernakulam, also speak of the plot given by the Koonammavu monastery to build the convent.

²³⁴ Among the priests who went were Fr. Chandy, Fr. Scaria Ephrem (*CMM.*, 132), Fr. Jacob Mariam (*CMM.*, 133), Fr. Kalathil (*CMM.*, 134), and Fr. Thatassery (*CMM.*, 131). Beccaro also sent Fr. Joseph

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whole community, so to speak, was somewhat involved in the matters concerning the convent. In Chavara's letters to the members of his community, there are many references to the convent and the Mother Superior, and there existed mutual give and take between the Sisters and their *Priorachan*.²³⁵ When Elisha Porukara, the successor of Chavara, was appointed, Beccaro himself informed the Sisters and instructed them to give a warm welcome to him in the convent.²³⁶

The third volume of the Chronicle of Mannanam contains many details regarding the foundation and the evolution of the life style of the convent.²³⁷ It states that the Superiors of all TOCD monasteries were asked to participate in the opening ceremony of the convent at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866.²³⁸ It gives the name of those Superiors who attended and the reasons for the absence of others. The

Thressia, one of the TOCD priests, with a letter addressing the priests and parishioners of Muttuchira and Kaduthuruthy to collect alms from them and collected Rupees 600/- in cash. Cf., *Letters of Leopold Missionary*, III/1; *CKC.*, 1, 48.

²³⁵ *CK.*, V/5. In a letter to Fr. Kuriakose Porukara on 15 November 1869, Chavara tells him to give to the persons the ten rosaries made by the Mother Superior. *CK.*, V/12. In another letter to Fr. Chandy Kattakayam on 30 March 1870, Chavara requests him to bring the materials needed to make scapulars since such good quality things are not available at Koonammavu. He tells this in the context of the arrival of two Sisters from Cochin to give training in handicrafts to the Sisters at Koonammavu.

²³⁶ *CKC.*, II, 26.

²³⁷ *ASJM.*, *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 3, (1864-1872). When Chavara changed his residence to Koonammavu in 1864, another member of the Community started writing the Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery.

²³⁸ Cf. *Alochana*, 95-96.

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same document gives a detailed description of the day's program. Very often, the chronicle of Mannanam indicates that they give preference to the needs of the convent. Even sacrificing their own needs, they spent everything for the convent because they considered the construction of the convent as their own matter:

In these days, our Fr. Delegate and Priorachan had a special desire to build for the Sisters a convent like those of Europe. At the beginning of last Lent, the bamboo-mat convent was established in 'tears.' Although all these monasteries were pulling together somehow, all were tired, and there was no hope at all; still they hoped against hope. Without anything from the Very Reverend Archbishop and from the program like that of 'a handful of rice,' in a miraculous way, so to speak, from the local churches, from the faithful, and in a manner unheard of (as fascinating news) from the parish priests, they obtained about Rupees 8000, most of which was collected through letters. Thus within a short span of time the convent was built in a fine way, everything necessary had been arranged. By the next Lent (they were) established in the new convent.²³⁹

Very often, the monastery and the convent were mentioned in the chronicle as they form one family. The relationship between the first convent of the TOCD for women at Koonammavu and the TOCD for men served as a paradigm for the institute's subsequent history. The expressions of cooperation and association of both the

²³⁹ ASJM., *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 3, (1864- 1871), 139.

monasteries and the convent, and the family atmosphere that existed between the institutes, can be clearly seen from the familial terms used in the chronicle. Describing the starting of the convent and the construction works of the new convent, the Chronicle records: “In favor of these Sisters (*Sahodarikal*), the Fathers (*Pithakanmar*) and Brothers (*koodappirappukal*) approached many people begging....”²⁴⁰ The use of familial terms here would clearly inspire the readers with an ever-greater understanding of familial relationship.

4.10.4 Developments after the Death of Chavara

After the death of Chavara, his successors took great care of the Sisters in their spiritual as well as their material needs. According to the expressed desire of Chavara to have a convent at Mutholy, Kuriakose Porukara, the successor of Chavara, and the members of the monastery at Mutholy took special interest in establishing a convent there as the first branch house of Koonammavu. It was Fr. Varkey Parappuram from the Koonammavu monastery who took the Sisters to Mutholy. On their way they stayed at Mannanam monastery for four days.²⁴¹ When the second batch of Sisters went to Mutholy they were accompanied by Fr. Louis Pazheparampil on 21 July 1891. They also stayed at Mannanam monastery for three days.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Cf., *Alochana*, 95-96.

²⁴¹ Cf., CKC., II, 139; Cf., also *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 4 (1872-1905), 356.

²⁴² Cf., CKC., II, 150; Cf., also *Chronicle of Mannanam Monastery*, Vol. 4 (1872-1905), 362.

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This kind of care and concern was extended widely when the number of convents kept on increasing in other vicariates. During the troubled days of the Koonammavu convent, the Sisters experienced the brotherly protection and care of the TOCD men at its best. As discussed earlier, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a troubled period for the monastery and the convent at Koonammavu. The departure of the TOCD community of men from Koonammavu and the division of the convent caused much trouble for the institute of men and the institute of women. In spite of many restrictions and struggles, the TOCD priests extended their generous help and support to the Sisters when the local community of Latin Christians turned against the convent. When the TOCD monastery at Koonammavu was given to the Latins and all the members of the community were shifted to Ambazhakad, two priests stayed in the bungalow on the campus of the convent in view of attending to the needs of the convent.²⁴³ A letter written by Fr. John Menachery, the secretary of Msgr. Medlycot from Thrissur, testifies to the dangerous situation of the Sisters and the need to be cautious about attacks from the people of the locality.²⁴⁴

Another important evidence of the participation of the TOCD men in the affairs of the convent was their presence in the election sessions of the Superior of the community. The Superior of the monastery was always present for the election sessions of the convent. During Chavara's lifetime, the election took place only once, on 17 June 1869, to elect the assistant Superior.²⁴⁵ Anna has recorded its procedure in the

²⁴³ *CKC.*, II, 143.

²⁴⁴ AVP., Letter written by John Menachery, secretary to the Bishop, to the Superior of the convent at Koonammavu on 30 August 1890.

²⁴⁵ *CKC.*, I, 129. This was the election of the Sub-prioress. Sr. Theresa was elected as Sub-prioress.

chronicle: "...The box was kept in the rotor and turned outward. The Father Delegate took the ballot papers and read them aloud. *Priorachan* noted it on paper. ...At the end, Father Delegate pronounced, "I, too appoint her by virtue of my power."²⁴⁶ The first election of the Mother Superior was on 16 July 1871 after the death of Chavara. The *CKC* recorded that "The Prior of the monastery was present for the session."²⁴⁷ After the departure of Beccaro, the election was conducted on 16 July 1878 and the *CKC* recorded, "Fr. Ouseph Augustinos, Father Prior of the monastery at Koonammavu, also was present with him [Rev. Philippose *Moopachan*] as his companion."²⁴⁸ July 1887 was the last election session conducted before the Latin Sisters left for Verapuzha and Msgr. Marceline confirmed the elections. The chronicle observes that Very Reverend Philippose *Moopachan*, the Director of the convent, and Reverend Father Albert, from the monastery of Koonammavu, were with him as his companion."²⁴⁹ The institute remained spiritually linked to the TOCD for men through the person of the Superior of the monastery of Koonammavu and so remained in touch with its spiritual roots.

4.10.5 History of the Separation of the TOCD

The days after Beccaro left for Europe were turbulent times for the convent of Koonammavu. Fr. Philip, a Carmelite missionary, was appointed the Director of the convent. Many new changes were introduced in the convent that the Sisters

²⁴⁶ *CKC.*, 1, 129.

²⁴⁷ *CKC.*, II, 33.

²⁴⁸ *CKC.*, II, 113.

²⁴⁹ *CKC.*, II, 136.

were required to accept under obedience.²⁵⁰ Many unpleasant and sad things occurred during the years of the bifurcation of the vicariate of Verapuzha and the separation of the Latin Sisters from the convent at Koonammavu. The Director of the convent and almost all the missionaries were unhappy with the TOCD priests because of their leading role in the struggle for autonomy of the St. Thomas Christians. Those priests were hence not allowed to have any free access to the convent. Later, when the Sisters were put under the Vicars Apostolic of Kottayam and Thrissur, more restrictions were laid upon them. Msgr. Charles Lavigne, the Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam, repeatedly stated that he was the sole authority over the convents in his jurisdiction. When the Sisters requested the Apostolic Vicar and the Delegate Apostolic that they desired to have the TOCD priests for confession, Msgr. Lavigne answered as follows: “You are under our authority. The Holy Catholic Church does not allow you to be under the TOCD priests of your Order.”²⁵¹ Approving the opinion of the Apostolic Vicar, the Delegate Apostolic wrote as follows, “Since your Order is one instituted by the Bishop and since its rules have never been submitted for scrutiny to the Holy See, you have to be under the Right Reverend Apostolic Vicar of Kottayam. As per the rules and regulations laid down by the Canon Law, you have to be submissive to him.”²⁵² Msgr. Medlycott, Apostolic Vicar of Thrissur, also forbade the Sisters at Koonammavu to write letters to the TOCD priests or to visit them: “He had informed them (Sisters of Koonammavu convent) not to write letters to the

²⁵⁰ CKC., II, 115-116: “Since we were commanded to cover our faces when we went to the church, our very reverend Father Director bought for us some black net. We wore it on the head over our shawl while going out to the church.”

²⁵¹ AMC., *The Chronicles of the Convent of Mutholy*, Vol. 1, 32-33.

²⁵² AMC., *The Chronicles of the Convent of Mutholy*, Vol. 1, 32-33.

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Carmelite priests; and if they did, it would be considered a reserved sin.”²⁵³

After the separation of the St. Thomas Christians from the Vicariate of Verapuzha in 1887, Propaganda Fide subjected the TOCD men to the Apostolic Delegate of East India, Msgr. Aiuti, with the office of the Prior General of the Tertiaries and not to any of the Vicars Apostolic of Malabar so that they may remain united.²⁵⁴ The Tertiaries were very satisfied with having Msgr. Aiuti as their Prior General.²⁵⁵ In this context, the Sisters of the convent at Koonammavu sent an application to Msgr. Aiuti, requesting him to bring all the Sisters of Koonammavu and Mutholy under his authority:

Your Eminence,

We Sisters humbly request you and we long very much to live in obedience under your authority just like our brother-priests, because it is ideal for our growth in holiness and in the religious spirit, to live

²⁵³ APGK, *The Chronicle of the Monastery at Ambazhakad*, Vol. 1, 123.

²⁵⁴ ACO., *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi Malabaresi 1878-1889*, f. 1304. Letter of Aiuti on 16 January 1888. Although another monastery of TOCD was founded by Baccinelli at Manjummal in 1866 for promoting religious life among the Latin Christian Community, Beccaro was not appointed as the Provincial Delegate of that institute. Later, the above-mentioned religious institute came directly under the authority of the Superior General of the OCD and was formed as one of the provinces of the OCD, whereas, the religious institute founded at Mannanam were administered separately, not under the Superior General of the Carmelite Order.

²⁵⁵ ACO., *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi Malabaresi 1878-1889*, f. 1315-1316. Letter of Aiuti to Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide dated 19 May 1888.

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under a common authority and to live in unison, obeying the rules and regulations..²⁵⁶

This letter indicates that the Sisters desired very much to have one Superior common to both the TOCD priests and the Sisters. Their request was nevertheless rejected; they were made to understand that they were canonically separated. It is noteworthy that throughout history the same longing of the Sisters to be under one Superior General continued. When the St. Thomas Christians had Bishops of their own Rite and nationality, things became easier, and the TOCD priests were entrusted with the duty of caring for the needs of the Sisters. In the vicariate of Ernakulam, Mar Louis Pazheparampil appointed Fr. Mathai Chakumkulathu, a TOCD priest, as 'Visitor' to visit all the Sisters and their convents to see their actual situation in view of encouraging them in their religious commitment..²⁵⁷

From 1953 onwards, the process of beatification and canonization of Chavara helped to make it clear to the Church, to the TOCD men, and to the TOCD women that Chavara was indeed the true Father and founder of this institute for women. Chavara's specific mission within the Church was constantly mentioned in the process for his beatification. The observation made by Mother Prima, the then Superior General, on the publication of the chronicle, is worth mentioning. Observing the difference between the spirituality and the charism of the institute, she stated, "As far as we are concerned, the Carmelite spirituality continues to

²⁵⁶ AMC., *The Letters from Ecclesiastical Authorities*, Letter written to Msgr. Aiuti, the Delegate Apostolic. No date is seen in the letter.

²⁵⁷ AVP., *Letters of Mar Louis Pazheparampil*, Letter written by Mar Louis Pazheparampil on 24 July 1917 to all the Superiors of the TOCD convents in his Vicariate.

inspire us. However, beyond that there is our charism. This charism or the special spirit has been imparted to us by Fr. Chavara and his followers, the CMI priests.”²⁵⁸ This acknowledgement is an expression of her sense of history that women TOCD is related to the men TOCD.

4.11 Contemporary Testimonies on Chavara as Founder

As the history of the foundation of the TOCD for women and the evolution of its life style show, in the initial period there was no controversy regarding the identity of the founder. Controversy started with the claim for jurisdiction over the convent after the bifurcation of the vicariate of Verapuzha in 1887. Therefore it is important to study the testimonies of the contemporaries of Chavara and those who were closely related to the event of the foundation to see how they understood the role of Chavara in the foundation.

4.11.1 The Testimony of Beccaro

The first testimony is from Beccaro, Chavara’s intimate friend, spiritual director, and Canonical Superior of both institutes of men and of women TOCD. On two occasions, Beccaro affirmed plainly that Chavara was the founder of the convent at Koonammavu. On 3 January 1871, the day of the death of Chavara, Beccaro wrote, “He [Chavara] was the founder and the first Prior of the Third Order of Carmelites of Malabar. He founded also the convent

²⁵⁸ Sr. Prima, “Introduction” in *CMC Nalagamam* [The CMC Chronicle] (Alwaye: CMC Publications, 1988), 19.

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of the nuns after undergoing many hardships.”²⁵⁹ These words of Leopold provide sure evidence that in his estimation Chavara was the founder of the convent at Koonammavu. It came from the spiritual director of Chavara, about whom Beccaro noted down, “Whom I loved even as myself.”²⁶⁰ He was well aware of Chavara’s holiness and he concluded the note on that day with an intercessory prayer to Chavara in these words: “O! Holy and beautiful soul, pray for me.”²⁶¹ Further, in his short biography of Chavara, Beccaro wrote:

Among these, specially, he [Chavara] desired ardently to found a convent for Sisters as a spiritual resort [*punyasanketham*] for the girls of Malabar and for learning doctrines and traditions of the Catholic religion and Sacred Scripture, as well as to have them grow as good Christians. When God Almighty willed to accomplish that, the efforts taken by him are beyond the description of this narration. Even after the foundation of the convent, he took great interest in leading the Sisters in the path of a virtuous life. However, it is true to say that not all these works are done by mere words but by his unusually good character and virtuous life.²⁶²

On another occasion, Beccaro articulated his conviction that the convent at Koonammavu was the fruit of Chavara’s labor. He told this to the diocesan priests of Kerala

²⁵⁹ ASA., Beccaro, *Memoria Rerum*: “Fondatore e primo Priore di Terz. Carmelitani Scalzi nel Malabar ha fondato con somme fatiche il monastero delle monache.” Entry on 3 January 1871.

²⁶⁰ ASA., Leopold Beccaro, *Memoria Rerum*, MSS, unpaginated: “...che io amavo quanto me stesso...”

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, “O anima santa e bella, prega per me!”

²⁶² Beccaro, *A Short Biography*, 12.

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when they came to meet Beccaro after Chavara's funeral. Parappuram recorded in his diary, "Fr. Leopold also shared their [the priests'] feelings and extolled the good things the deceased had done. He specially recollected that it was because of him [Chavara] that the convent was established there at Koonammavu."²⁶³ Even when Chavara was alive, he expressed his appreciation for the saintly founder Chavara, and he wrote to his younger brother, Gerard Beccaro OCD, while Gerard was getting ready to travel to Kerala as a Carmelite missionary: "This aged holy founder of the Third Order in Malabar expects to see you in Malabar before he dies. Therefore, I request you to start as early as possible. Please bring some good pictures and relics of St. Cyriac, because he has this name."²⁶⁴ In the same letter, at the end he calls Chavara as "*Questo Santo vecchio Priore e fondatore.*"

Here Beccaro attributes the title founder to his friend. He acknowledges that Chavara had to undergo many hardships in the process of foundation. Again, in the Short Biography, Beccaro expressed clearly the ardent desire of Chavara to have a convent for women in Kerala. Beccaro admits that Chavara took active steps for the realization of his dream of establishing a religious institute. He acknowledges that a detailed description of his strenuous efforts escape his short account of the life of Chavara. In addition, he relates that after establishing the convent, Chavara showed great fervor and care to conduct everything in order. According to Beccaro, this fact is well known to all. Both these statements were inscribed in 1871 and by a person who knew him well and loved him intimately.

²⁶³ Parappuram, *Diary*, 1424 f.

²⁶⁴ ACO., *Scri. rif. nei Congressi Malabaresi (1862-1877)*, Letter written by Leopold Beccaro to his brother Gerard to Rome on 8 August 1868.

4.11.2 The Testimony of Porukara

Kuriakose Porukara, the successor of Chavara, also considers him as the initiator of the idea of a religious institute for women. He displays great appreciation for the distinct authority of Chavara as founder. He states:

From Mannanam, he [Chavara] went to the monastery at Koonammavu and stayed there. While there, he wished to establish a convent for the girls of Malayalam as a spiritual resort to learn about religious matters and to grow as good Christian children. Trusting the Lord Almighty, he accepted the persons who were ready for that and began a temporary bamboo-mat convent for them to live in. In a miraculous way, within eight months, collecting around 8000 Rupees as alms by different ways, the convent was built, all the necessary things were arranged, and he had the Sisters live there. Seeing their modest and virtuous life, he allowed them to make their vows and he finally kept the Blessed Sacrament in their Chapel.²⁶⁵

As a person closely associated with Chavara for many years, the statement of Porukara has great value. He calls the completion of the construction of the convent within a short period of eight months a miracle. He has seen Chavara's strong faith and trust in divine providence and the enthusiasm of the people to contribute for the cause of the convent. According to him, it was indeed the hand of the Almighty Lord that had brought the first indigenous religious community into existence. He testifies that Chavara accepted

²⁶⁵ Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 29.

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the first members, “those persons who were prepared as its foundation,” and settled them in the bamboo-mat convent. In Porukara’s view, the convent is the younger child of Chavara:

Just as Jacob the patriarch greatly loved most his youngest son Benjamin, he [Chavara] loved the Sisters most dearly and deeply, looked after them, and nurtured them as a mother takes care of her own children..²⁶⁶

4.11.3 The Testimony of the Sisters

The Sisters of the community loved and respected Chavara as their Father and founder. They recognized his unique role as founder as can be seen in their testimonies on different occasions:

He [Chavara] was especially interested in the numerical increase of the members of the convent and also in their spiritual growth. Therefore, he did much to establish this convent of ours and he helped us grow in the path of virtue..²⁶⁷

While recording about his last days, the *CKC* articulates the unique responsibility of Chavara in the evolution of the religious life style and growth of the community. It states,

... who from the very beginning has undertaken so much work and has undergone very many difficulties

²⁶⁶ Porukara, *Stapakapithakanmar*, 29.

²⁶⁷ *CKC.*, II, 23.

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for the sake of attending to our spiritual and temporal needs and aiding our growth.... who used to instruct and teach us all that we wanted and all that we needed to know for our spiritual and temporal life..²⁶⁸

The community of Sisters at Koonammavu convent unambiguously acknowledged the services of Chavara in these words: “Thus in all things, small or big, spiritual or temporal, our *Priorachan* by the grace of God does whatever is necessary in spite of his old age and ill health.”²⁶⁹ Here is another expression of their indebtedness towards Chavara: “Our very reverend *Priorachan* has suffered much in his old age on our account. So all of us have an obligation to remember him and to pray for him at all times.”²⁷⁰ They recognized the gift given by their loving *Priorachan* as a memento..²⁷¹ The chronicler acknowledged that their loving Father Chavara was helping the Sisters in every aspect of their day-to-day life:

Ah! How much pain and how much interest our Father [Chavara] takes to teach us and to help us do certain things! My dear Sisters, what love and gratitude can we return for this? Nothing. We cannot do anything. So then, let us remember that it is our obligation to pray always for this Father of ours in our poor prayers..²⁷²

²⁶⁸ *CKC.*, II, 7.

²⁶⁹ *CKC.*, I, 175.

²⁷⁰ *CKC.*, 1, 86.

²⁷¹ Chavara had offered the Community a monstrance. *CKC.*, 1, 86. On another occasion they stated that he gifted them with a big ciborium.

²⁷² *CKC.*, 1, 152.

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They recorded these words of indebtedness toward Chavara after seeing his strenuous efforts to teach them Latin. The chronicler reminded the present community and the coming generations to remember him gratefully in their prayers. They believed that even after his death, Chavara, as their Father and founder, will continue to guide and lead them in their way of life by his powerful intercession before God Almighty.²⁷³

Conclusion

In the process of applying the norms to Chavara, a review is made of the attempt at Puthenpally, in order to see Chavara's position as the initiator of the religious institute for women. The realization of the desire to have a convent for women was close at hand at Puthenpally in 1860. However, it was at Koonammavu that the idea of a convent was realized. The records of Chavara speak clearly about his long-awaited and ardent desire, earnest prayers to have a convent, and his sense of fulfillment when finally the religious institute for women was established. He was the bearer of an original inspiration; he set the specific scope of the institute founded by him. He was actively involved to form the members of the first community.

When Chavara states, "with the assistance and work of Leopold Beccaro the convent [at Koonammavu] came into existence," he meant that the idea of the convent which was in his mind for a long time, and for which he was praying, became a reality in 1866 with the help of Beccaro, the Provincial Delegate of the Carmelite Order. With one mind

²⁷³ *CKC.*, II, 7.

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and heart, Chavara and Beccaro worked for the growth of the Sisters. Beccaro continued to offer his help and support in all matters concerning the Sisters during the lifetime of Chavara and until Beccaro left for Europe on 1 January 1876. Leopold Beccaro, being appointed as the Delegate Provincial of both institutes of TOCD for men and for women, had the canonical authority over both monasteries and convent; and while exercising his power, he made decisions regarding the institutes of men and women. With his conviction of being a ‘servant leader,’ Chavara saw things from the perspective of God and projected Beccaro to the forefront. Chavara exercised his authority over the Sisters as their charismatic founder and Father and had free access to the convent. His commitment toward the institute was acknowledged and reported by Baccinelli, the Bishop who canonically erected the institute. There is no indication that the contemporaries questioned his distinct authority as founder.

It is also clear that the Sisters accepted, loved, and respected Chavara as their founder and Father. When the Sisters speak about the last three days of the life of Chavara, they express both joy and sorrow – joy at his touching the life of the convent with grace, and sadness at the impending loss of their Father, and that an era had passed, never to be repeated in the history of the convent. The Sisters considered themselves blessed to have had a saintly founder in the person of Chavara. They confirmed that Chavara did much “to found this convent of ours and to help us progress along the path of holiness. Thus in all things, small or big, spiritual or temporal, our *Priorachan* by the grace of God did whatever was necessary, in spite of his old age and ill health.” The Sisters of St. Teresa’s Convent, Koonammavu, were moved by Chavara’s extraordinary docility towards the ecclesiastical authorities and all the missionaries. The chronicler has

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recorded many words of admiration for his humility and saintliness. Chavara wrote twenty-two letters to the Sisters, which were preserved, and some of those letters were copied in their Chronicles. His influence in the writing of their chronicle can be traced in the parallel descriptions, and the recording of the same sequence of events in both the Chronicles – the *CMM* and the *CKC*. Above all, the recording of the minute details regarding the events of the convent, and of the Sisters in Chavara's chronicle and many references to the same in his letters and other writings surely point to his deep concern, sense of responsibility, direct involvement, and interest in their spiritual, administrative, and material affairs.

Above all, the Testament of Chavara is the best acknowledgment of Chavara's real paternity of the convent. The Testament can be viewed as the written embodiment of Chavara's consciousness of being called to be the founder of these institutes. He regarded both the institutes as his own and made it clear to them that their mission is to promote the Reign of God. The way Chavara in his Testament hands over the duty of looking after the convent to the members of his Congregation also shows that he considered the convent as the Sister-institute of the latter.

The early biographies of Chavara, testimonies of his contemporaries, such as Baccinelli, Beccaro, Porukara, Parappuram, the author of *Alochana*, and above all, the Sisters of the Koonammavu convent themselves vividly portray Chavara's position as the founder of the women TOCD at Koonammavu.

In the light of the documents of the Church, when the facts of the history of the foundation are examined from the foundational texts, and the concepts and roles of founder and

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co-founder are properly distinguished, it can be seen that the title of founder of the women TOCD belongs primarily and properly to Chavara. With his original inspiration and leadership in founding the convent and forming the first community, Chavara is rightly to be regarded as founder and Father of the women TOCD. From the beginning, Chavara was imbued with the foundational charism and all the norms set by the Church documents can be applied to him.

From the beginning of his priestly ministry until his last breath, the religious movement in the Kerala Church was his most important concern. As his own words testify, during the Holy Mass of his ordination and his first Mass, he earnestly prayed for the fruition of the religious movement in Kerala. In his Testament, he gave concrete outlines for the growth of the movement and at the time of his death he advised ways and means for the further growth of the same. Therefore, on the occasion of the bicentenary celebration of the birth of Chavara, Mar Kuriakose Kunnassery, the Bishop of Kottayam rightly called him 'the Indian Benedict' and Mannanam 'the Indian Monte Casino.' Beccaro, in the biography of Chavara, has left us an invaluable testimony that admirably acknowledges Chavara's position as founder of the TOCD for men and for women. Again, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II has definitively resolved the question of the identity of the founder in his decree on the beatification of the Venerable Chavara Kuriakose Elias on 8 February 1986 which was confirmed by Pope Francis on 23 November 2014 at Vatican while declaring Chavara a saint. As per the norms set by the documents of the Church to designate someone as founder enumerated above, Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the founder of the women TOCD, instituted at Koonammavu on 13 February 1866.

Conclusion

This study is undertaken in view of identifying the charismatic founder of the women TOCD in Kerala. After having dealt with different opinions on the identity of the founder the study focused on the ecclesiastical norms for identifying the founder. Based on the documents and practice of the Church as well as the reflections of the theologians on consecrated life, some specific norms have been thus collected and sorted out. By applying these norms to the various candidates it was made clear that only Chavara fulfills the norms satisfactorily. We have tried to critically evaluate the five main positions being held by authors concerning the founder of the women TOCD.

The result of our study can be thus presented in a summary form. The opinion holding Beccaro as founder:

Although Leopold Beccaro played an important role in founding the first religious community for women and forming the religious life style at Koonammavu, it is too much to elevate him to the status of founder of the women TOCD. Before the arrival of Leopold Beccaro in Kerala serious attempts had been made at Puthenpally to found a religious institute for women. Thus, the source of the original idea of the convent did not come from him which is an important deciding factor of charismatic founders of religious institutes.

We have pointed out the difficulties for holding both Chavara and Beccaro as co-founders.

Conclusion

The opinion that Msgr. Baccinelli is the founder does not have a solid basis. Being the local Ordinary, he canonically instituted the women TOCD.

We have brought out the underlying motive of Msgr. Leonard Mellano for denying the title of founder to Chavara. He remained silent about the role played by Chavara, even in mentioning his name. He created stories regarding the founder without doing justice to the facts presented in the written documents of the foundation period. Thus Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara from the Catholic Church of St. Thomas Christians, the actual charismatic founder of the institute, was simply and arbitrarily sidetracked and deliberately eclipsed. Beccaro, a collaborator of Chavara, Baccinelli, the then local Ordinary and finally the first members who were from the Latin Christian Community, have all been projected as the founders of the women TOCD. We have tried to bring into light the scientific fallacies of his arguments.

Sucy Kinattungal made an attempt to present Mother Eliswa as the foundress. However, her arguments are unscientific and fabricated without having any solid basis on the contemporary historical documents.

This research, thus, comes to the conclusion that Saint Chavara deserves the title of the founder of the women TOCD at Koonammavu. Both CMC and CTC Sisters are obliged to him for their religious existence. This study presents five factors that decisively point to Chavara's position as the founder of the women TOCD:

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i) Chavara's ardent desire: Saint Chavara ardently desired to have a convent for women in the Kerala Church and he was earnestly praying to God for its realization. He toiled hard for the foundation of the convent at Koonammavu and recorded his sense of fulfillment in a form of prayer when it was accomplished. He looked at the event of the foundation of the convent as a realization of his life-goal and thanked the Almighty for answering his prayers. The extraordinary cooperation and generosity of the people point to their expectant waiting and the whole Church of Kerala was involved in the construction of the building of the convent.

ii) Autobiographical notes: There are clear references to the convent in the writings of Chavara such as *Letters*, *dhyanasallapangal*, and *Anastasyayude Rakthasakshyam*. In the *Chronicles* of Mannanam he provided the detailed description of the convent, its preparation, the construction of the new building for the convent, the day-to-day life of the Sisters, etc. In those writings, he was not simply recording some incidents related to the convent; rather he wrote those details with his full interest and involvement. They are his autobiographical notes in which he considered the convent as his extended existence. His Testament speaks of his sense of owning the Sisters' institute and is a sign of his awareness of his vocation to be the founder and Father of the women TOCD. As a responsible and caring father, Chavara designed the future growth of the convent, planned it along with that of the TOCD monasteries, and directed his spiritual sons to carry out those plans.

iii) Chavara's sense of commitment towards the members of the convent: He had spontaneous and unquestioned involvement and paternal interest in the affairs

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of the convent. He felt accountable before God to form the Sisters of the convent and the girls of the boarding house. When one observes the nature of his relationship with the Sisters and his concern for their needs, one can conclude that he was acting as their founder and Father. The goal to be achieved by the convent was clear in his mind and accordingly he took practical steps in collaboration with Beccaro to realize the same.

iv) Chavara defined the purpose of the institute: Saint Chavara defined the convent as spiritual resort [*punyasanketham*] to learn matters of religion [*vedakaryangal*] and in his Testament he expressed his dream that the Sisters render necessary and useful spiritual ministry to the faithful of the then existing two vicariates of Verapuzha and Kollam. He opened up a space for the women TOCD in the Church, namely, they work for the spiritual empowerment of the people and their mission is to promote the Reign of God. Recently Pope Francis made it again clear in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* that female presence in the Church must get more visibility.

Since Chavara speaks of ‘monasteries, convent and boarding houses’ together as one unit he might have envisioned women religious collaborating with men religious in catering to the needs of the people of God. It implies that women and men join hands in ministry, in leadership as well as in service, and share their resources for the common good of all. One could say that Saint Chavara had a dream of a Church as a partnership of equals. Thus, by establishing religious institute for women, Chavara not only aimed at the spiritual empowerment of women but also dreamt of a Church being spiritually nurtured by women. Saint Chavara

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being the founder intended the charism, spirituality and mission as the same for both the institutes of women and of men.

v) The testimonies of others: Those who lived with Chavara such as Beccaro, Kuriakose Porukara, and above all, his beloved children, the Sisters who were the first beneficiaries of the founding of the convent, testified to the fact of Chavara being the founder. The official declaration of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of Chavara's beatification also confirmed Chavara as the founder of the institute. Finally, in the document declaring Chavara as saint, Pope Francis reaffirmed the fact, which his predecessor announced in 1986.

Let us thank the Almighty Lord for his wonderful providence and rejoice at the elevation of Kuriakose Elias Chavara to the sainthood on 23 November 2014. The founding of this institute was an epoch making event in the history of the Church in India.

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