

2. CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY

With regard to the charism and spirituality of one's own institute, there are two questions not infrequently asked which can lead into barren side-tracks. Firstly: « Rather than concentrating on our own particular charism, should we not rather try to live the whole Gospel? » This question has its adequate answer in a descriptive definition of what a religious charism is. I quote Fr. John Futrell, S.J.: It is « A particular angle of looking at Jesus in the Gospels, a special stress or emphasis upon a certain way of following him and a certain way of serving him in other people » (THE WAY, Supplement, n.14, 1971, p. 63). Since this is so, there can be no sense in the question « our charism OR the Gospels », since a charism is a way of looking to and following the Christ of the Gospels.

The second question which one hears in relation to this topic is: What is specific to us which distinguishes us from other religious? Especially, what makes us different from, for example, the Priests of the Sacred Heart. The question may be valid, and there may be a time for it. However, I must confess my own inability to answer it in any useful way. Further, I believe that discussion of such a question

is fruitless as far as living our vocation is concerned. The only fruitful question is: What inspires our lives as M.S.C.? What is it which gives meaning and value to my life and which could do the same for the life of any young man who wished to join us?

Moreover both in answering the previous questions and in thinking out the meaning of any particular vocation, we must remember that a spirituality is never worked out at a desk, even by the most brilliant and intuitive of founders. It results from the lived experience of a great man or woman — an experience which others can live after them: the experience of an Augustine, an Ignatius, a Francis of Assisi.

In a very true sense, long before anyone thought of applying the Pauline term in its present sense, St. Augustine got to the heart of what a religious charism was all about. He suggested that it defied logical analysis but was a reality which could be recognised by anyone who had experienced it. He was commenting on Chapter VI of St. John's Gospel, specifically on that phrase of Christ: « No one comes to me unless he be drawn by the Father ».

He quotes the phrase from the classics: « *Trahit sua quemque voluptas* »; each man is drawn by his own desire or pleasure. « He is drawn to Christ who delights in truth, happiness, justice ». Then St. Augustine goes on to say: « Give me someone who loves and he will understand what I say. Give me someone who desires, who hungers; give me someone who is a pilgrim and thirsting, longing for the source of eternal life; give me such a one and he will know what I am saying ». Augustine wrote as one who

had thrilled to the reality of God revealed in Christ Jesus. « In that pure eloquence (of St. Paul) », he wrote, « I saw one face and learned to rejoice with trembling » (Conf. 7, 21). He did not write: « Give me a brilliant mind, give me a speculative intellect, and he will understand » Simply and beautifully he wrote: « *Da amantem et sentit quod dico* ».

When we look for Fr. Chevalier's charism, we have to ask in what light he saw the face of Christ, through what experience he learned to 'rejoice with trembling' as he thrilled to the reality of God revealed in Christ Jesus. I have written about this elsewhere (*Jules Chevalier*, Ch. V), but it seems useful to recapitulate the salient points. As a seminarian Jules Chevalier lived a deep concern for people. He was preoccupied with the 'modern evils' which prevented men from living a fervent faith and letting it inform their lives. This preoccupation he lived first of all in the context of the French School of Spirituality. As he interpreted and applied the teachings of that school, he saw things in a serious and severe light.

God was the God of Majesty, Creator and Lord of the universe. Towards God, man's first duty was the duty of religion (usually seen as part of the virtue of justice). Man was obliged to worship, to serve, to adore and to obey his sovereign Lord. Christ, in the writings of this school, was « the perfect Religious », the one who most perfectly adored, obeyed and served. SACRIFICE is the supreme act of religion and on Calvary Christ offered the sacrifice supreme. According to a number of theologians of that era, annihilation was an essential note of sacrifice. We are called to follow Christ — in service,

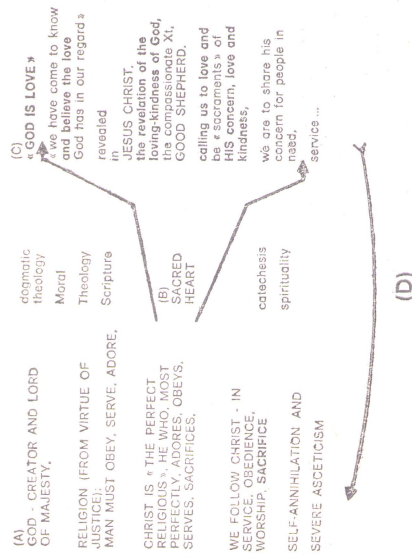
obedience, worship and sacrifice. Christ annihilated himself in his sacrifice on Calvary, and continues to do so in the eucharistic sacrifice. From this theological view, Jules Chevalier (in line with many others) drew conclusions for himself which resulted in a severe asceticism. He was fervent and generous; yet he was far from manifesting any real christian and human joy.

Represented schematically (see page 10) this first stage of formation (A) in the life of Jules Chevalier could be depicted in dark colours and heavy characters. If he were to look to the different seminaristic studies for relief, he would find no change of tone or colour. In those days dogmatic theology had little, if anything, about the love of God. Moral theology was concerned with man's duties and the commandments which had to be observed scrupulously. Scripture was more a matter of verbal exegesis than an exposition of the wonderful biblical themes developed today. Catechetics echoed the prevalent theological teaching. I once examined a number of older catechisms to see whether any of them spoke at length about the love of God. In the books which I read I found one reference to the love of God, and that in the unlikely context of eternal damnation. The catechism said « Those who die in mortal sin will be forever excluded from the love of God ». Any teaching on the spiritual life would, obviously, be strongly influenced by what was taught in theology.

Against this background we can easily understand that when Jules Chevalier discovered the heart of Christ, he did far more than find a new devotion or a set of pious practices. It was then that he could say, as St. Augustine had said long before: « I saw

one face and learned to rejoice with trembling ». Revealed in the face of Christ he saw, at last, « the infinite tenderness for us of this God incarnate for our salvation ». He had a whole new vision now of a God who is love, of Christ who reveals the loving kindness of God and of our vocation being the call to witness to the loving concern of Christ for all men. Our mission was, in a sense to be, « sacraments of the loving-kindness of God. (see *Jules Chevalier*, pp. 116 ff). His new vision of the whole of religion and revelation (C) is suffused with the light and radiant colours which came into his life when he discovered the Heart of Christ (B). He had his vision and inspiration for life — and for his life's work in which we are called to share. We will share it fully only to the extent that we too share in his vision and inspiration; or in other words, to the extent that his charism is alive in us.

MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART
FR. CHEVALIER'S EXPERIENCE



The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of today, reflecting on their vocation, have consistently professed to live three essential elements of our founding charism:

1. A concern for all men, especially those in need;
2. « *Et nos credidimus caritati* » — we have learned to believe in the love of God manifested in Christ (I. Jo. 4,16);
3. « a spirit shaped by charity, kindness, simplicity ».

However, there is a further element in Fr. Chevalier's spirituality which deserves careful attention. It will be treated more fully later, but it needs to be noted clearly now. Fr. Chevalier's « new insights did not negate his previously acquired knowledge. They complemented it. Jesus is still the one who gives perfect adoration to the Father ». He laid down his life for his friends, for mankind whom he loved. It was not only for men that he acted, but « that the world might know that he loved the Father ». All Chevalier's need to adore and praise God is transformed now by the light of the love he has discovered in the heart of Christ. But worship and adoration, praise and thanksgiving remain part of his life. The (D) of the schema indicates this.

It was natural that Fr. Chevalier should have taken practices of « devotion to the Sacred Heart » to express this adoration and worship in terms of his new vision. Such practices date with time. It is understandable that not all of them appeal to later generations. A number of them have been dropped.

However, it is a superficial view to consider them merely as outdated forms of piety. They were, in their time, an expression of loving worship and adoration which will always need to be expressed in some form or other. A void has been created in some quarters. It is vital that it be filled. There is a contemplative thrust in all spirituality; it must be present in our own.

It can be easily seen that for Fr. Chevalier, the particular vision and inspiration which came to him through discovering the Heart of Christ was a wonderful experience in his life. It was new, it was fresh, it was different. However, here a doubt naturally expresses itself to some. This, they say, is now a common vision of Christianity, one taught in theology, scripture and catechetics. Is there still a place for a religious Congregation which professes to live from this now common vision? I would reply with another question. The whole church today professes a concern for the poor. Is there then no place for people like Mother Teresa of Calcutta? The answer to both questions lies in the difference between doctrine and life. To look at our world, even our Catholic world, it is not obvious that all christians « believe in God's love » utterly, in all their lives and action. The Church will only be a community of those who believe in God's love, of those concerned for the poor if within her there are groups who dedicate their whole lives to this vision in one form or another. Here again we might say: « *Da amantem et sentit quod dico* ».

At times a certain confusion is caused because a clear distinction is not made between charism and spirituality. With the aid of another diagram, I should like

to offer my own explanation of the difference between the two. They are closely connected. Nevertheless it is useful to distinguish a number of connected elements.

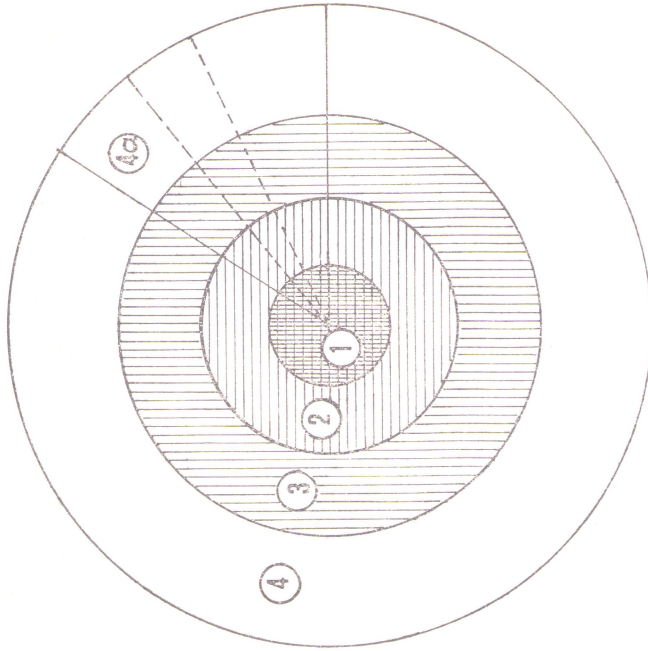
1. The charism is the central focus, the intuition, the inspiration — that vision of Christ which takes hold of a man. This central intuition is like the spark which sets a flame going through all one's life. It must become incarnate in the wider circles of knowledge and practice. In this way it gives rise to a whole way of spirituality to which it gives its own particular tone or colour.

2. Some elements of the wider spirituality are so closely connected with the « charism » that, in practice, it is sometimes difficult to discern whether they are actually a part of it or a necessary consequence. This immediate and necessary expression of the charism can be called « basic MSC Spirituality ».

3. A third area is common to all religious: evangelical counsels, community. In any religious Institution, however, these, too, will have a particular colouring since they are ways of living out a total human response to the initial vision and inspiration.

4. Even in community each person is an individual. Each has his own gifts of nature and grace. These can not be submerged without harm to the person. It has been well said that there are as many spiritualities as there are men. The charism which we all share will inform, but not take away, the individual response to God. There is room for personal liberty.

MSC CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY



CHARISM - the central vision and inspiration. « A particular way of looking at Jesus in the Gospels, a special emphasis on a way of following him, and serving him in others. »

BASIC MSC Spirituality, flowing from the charism and closely connected with it; so strongly coloured by it, that it is not always easy to see if it is part of the charism or not - v. g.: the Eucharist, Devotion to Our Lady of the S. Heart, etc.

NECESSARY components of our total spirituality, but common to many religious: evangelical counsels, community, etc. The field of **PERSONAL** liberty in spirituality firstly as regards « private devotion », v. g. to St. Rita, St. Francis Xavier, etc. Secondly, in the **MANNER** in which we live basics, v. g. Sacred Heart devotion and as regards the **MEASURE** that each person gives to one of the essential elements of our spirituality.

4a. This truth has a particular and important application regarding the emphasis given to essential elements in our spirituality. One man will have a more 'eucharistic' piety than another; one will find a greater place for devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and so on. Each finds his own way. No one can say that, because of the differences, he is more loyal to the spirit of the Founder than others are.