

e) Saint Sulpice had given him a Christ-centred, self-forgetful spirituality strengthening his desire to live and work with Christ for the glory of God and the salvation of man.

f) For natural and supernatural reasons, he had developed a deep concern for people afflicted by the « ills of modern society ».

g) Then he was to discover devotion to the Sacred Heart which was to be the spark giving fire to his life, transforming it and giving it unity and purpose.

#### CHARISM.

By means of these different influences a founder was being formed. But perhaps of more practical interest than the formative process is the founder's charism. Especially since Vatican II this has been the subject of discussion and research in view of renewal and adaptation of religious institutes<sup>10</sup>. Without going too deeply into the origins and meanings of the word « charism », we can say that, for our purposes a charism may be described as:

« A gift of the Spirit to an individual for the good of others... it brings him (the founder) to focus on some particular aspect of Jesus' life, leading him to follow Jesus and to serve others for his love in a particular way »<sup>11</sup>.

Fr. Chevalier's charism was a grace that he received giving him a particular dynamic vision calling for a definite response. In trying to describe his charism as accurately as possible, we meet with a double difficulty. Firstly, — from his living for more than fifty years as a priest, and from all that he wrote — how pick out the dynamic element which constitutes his charism? Secondly, how distinguish what is essential to it from the time-bound elements and the cultural conditioning which would have affected his expression of it?

Obviously historical research and analysis is called for. This itself has an intrinsic difficulty. For « a researcher is also an historically and culturally conditioned person. He looks

with time-bound and limited eyes at the time-bound and limited work of the founder. No one today can know the exact way that the founder himself thought and felt about the vocation and the dynamics and life of his religious community »<sup>12</sup>.

Fortunately he can check the result of his research against the experience of living communities. For « the charism of the founder of any religious community is this charism as it is lived now. It does not exist in the air... it is *these* individual, unique persons, and not others, who at this moment share and live the charism »<sup>13</sup>.

A charism is a grace given for others.

This does not mean that we can read history backwards, or make the founder say things which in fact he never thought of. But in the present expression of the charism of an institute, we have a control against which to examine the conclusions of our historical research. This also suggests a way to avoid getting our readers lost in a maze of textual analysis while wondering where it is all leading. We can therefore first of all look at some of the most recent official expressions of this charism as lived in existing religious institutes. We shall then try to analyse Chevalier's own experience.

There are three religious congregations which owe to Fr. Chevalier their foundation - or at least their inspiration: The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Hiltrup<sup>14</sup>. If we study the latest expression of the « spirit » of these Congregations, we would expect to find certain common characteristic notes all pointing towards the charism of their Founder. Let us have a look.

In the Documents of the General Chapter of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 1969, we find these texts:

1. « It (our spirit) is shaped by a love for justice and a concern for all, especially the very poor »<sup>15</sup>.

« To bring... a message of hope, particularly to those who search for life's meaning; to those who live in subhuman conditions: to those whose rights are disregarded »<sup>16</sup>.

« In every man who hopes, in every man who seeks to find himself and longs for unity in a world of justice and peace, in every man who is oppressed, we discover Christ »<sup>17</sup>.

2. « When he laid down his life for his friends, when his side was pierced, Christ gave us his Spirit. This Spirit puts love into our hearts and gives us the will to serve. Looking on him who was pierced on the Cross we see the new heart that God has given us, and we wish to point this out to all men. We discover the love of God made man for others, and we believe in this love. We want to proclaim it and the new life it makes possible for all »<sup>18</sup>.

3. « Ours is a family spirit, and a spirit of brotherhood. It is shaped by charity, kindness, humility, simplicity, hospitality and good humour »<sup>19</sup>.

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart wrote:

1. « Their concern opens out to every man of every race and creed and condition »<sup>20</sup>.

2. « They see in his pierced and glorious heart, the symbol of God's love incarnate »<sup>21</sup>. « The Congregation... makes known the surpassing riches of God's love revealed in Christ »<sup>22</sup>.

« ... consecrated to a particular participation in his saving mission... As he was sent by the Father, so they are sent by the Church to make known that he is the revelation of God's infinite charity to men; that he loves them with a human heart; that he is the answer to their hopes, their questionings, their every need »<sup>23</sup>.

3. « They seek to enter into (his) disposition of humility... They strive to manifest in their own life the charity, gentleness and kindness of the Lord who was himself meek and humble of heart »<sup>24</sup>.

In these two different accounts there is a very clear coincidence on three points:

1. A deep concern for all men;
2. A belief in the love of God revealed in Christ, together with the conviction that men can find there the answer to their deepest needs. Consequent on this realization is the mission to bring this love to men.
3. This love must be revealed through the charity, the gentleness and the kindness of those who are called to share in Christ's mission of 'revealing the kindness of God'<sup>25</sup>.

The same emphases occur in the documents of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart:

They are called « to love the poor with the tenderness of the Heart of Christ »<sup>26</sup>, recognizing that « in today's world we meet poverty in many and various forms such as insecurity, suffering, loneliness, discord among nations aimlessness, injustice, oppression, frustrated hopes, despair, homelessness, hunger and other forms of want »<sup>27</sup>. They have learned to look to the Person of Christ in whom « man's longings and God's graciousness meet in redemptive incarnation »<sup>28</sup>. Theirs is a mission to declare « that God in his merciful love is ever present to the world in Christ »<sup>29</sup> theirs is a service which « serves and instructs, encourages and consoles, helps and heals »<sup>30</sup>.

They are called to live a charity which always shows itself in kindness<sup>31</sup>, which gives a genuine human affection to others, which shows at all times a respect for their dignity as persons<sup>32</sup>. Their tradition has insisted on the virtue of meekness, and a humility which is a poverty of spirit: « All that we have and are is a gift from Him, and so we stand before God, aware of our nothingness, totally open to Him and dependent on his graciousness »<sup>33</sup>.

We see the converging lines of thought in these three versions. Allowing for natural differences of emphasis<sup>34</sup>, we note the three constants: concern for men; belief in the loving-kindness of God revealed in Christ; and the call to make this known through our work and through our living charity, our kindness, our 'humanity'. Now, if a Founder's charism is alive in the Congregations he has founded, we

Charity - Kindness

useful examples

would expect that Fr. Chevalier's charism somehow includes these three particular emphases.

In fact, historical research indicates that these were the constituents of his own vision of his vocation. We shall consider them individually, remembering that it is through the living experience of a man that his inspiration comes and his charism takes shape. It need not follow the best logical or theological order.

### 1. Chevalier's concern for mankind.

The early documents of the MSC Society reflect Fr. Chevalier's preoccupation with « the evils of our time » (Le Mal moderne). It was because he saw in devotion to the Sacred Heart « a remedy for the ills of our time », that he decided to form an association of priests to combat these ills<sup>35</sup>. In his Formula Instituti, and the first Constitutions, explaining the opportuneness and the end of his new Society, he states that: « Devotion to the Sacred Heart was revealed as an efficacious remedy to cure the ills of a world growing cold and afflicted by serious ailments »<sup>36</sup>.

A document printed in 1866 to publicize the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart is quite instructive. The first two and a half pages are devoted to: I. LE MAL MODERNE. This is then followed by II. LE REMEDE AU MAL. The ills of Society are here listed as Protestantism, Jansenism and Rationalism. However, it would be a mistake to suppose that Chevalier thought of these « isms » as mere impersonal systems. He saw them as affecting human persons, giving them wrong values resulting in forgetfulness of Christ and his love, leading to rigorism and unhappiness. Behind the systems he saw « souls who are so dear to Christ »<sup>37</sup>.

It would also be a mistake to think that Chevalier was primarily preoccupied with the systems as such. In our ecumenical days, we would find it hard to classify Protestantism as one of the « ills of the modern world ». We would be more preoccupied with materialism than with rationalism;

and while Jansenism may linger on, it is not one of the major worries of those who want to work for the kingdom of Christ. Chevalier saw deeper than any specific system to the « egoism and indifference » which he set out to combat<sup>38</sup>. This egoism and this indifference to God and the rights of man today have other external manifestations. Anyone who is « concerned for mankind » will know where to look.

The young Chevalier was concerned for people who suffered from the ills of his time. He was preoccupied by the social evils of his day<sup>39</sup>. He was specially concerned for the poor, in their « double need... temporal and spiritual »<sup>40</sup>, for these are « the privileged friends of the Heart of Christ »<sup>41</sup>. 'Privileged friends' are not the only friends and Fr. Chevalier never thought of limiting the apostolate of his congregations to those in real 'temporal or spiritual' poverty. For he felt that the lives of all could be enriched by a spirituality of the heart of Christ.

### 2. His discovery (in devotion to the Sacred Heart) of the 'compassionate Christ' concerned for mankind.

Jules Chevalier had profited by his seminary studies; he had been helped very much spiritually by the French School of spirituality. But neither the studies nor the spirituality had been able to ignite in his soul that spark which transforms an ordinary generous response to God's grace into a charismatic one. It was his living contact with devotion to the Sacred Heart which did that. Prior to this time he had conceived of religious practice as a duty of the virtue of religion. It was a sublime duty, and one which was also a privilege, calling for our gratitude and generous response. Nevertheless, the transformation of his own life and his spiritual and apostolic inspiration, came to him as he « discovered » devotion to the Sacred Heart<sup>42</sup>. When his professor of theology developed a thesis on the Sacred Heart « with much knowledge and piety... this doctrine went straight to my heart. The more I went into it, the more attractive I found it »<sup>43</sup>.

inspired from  
charity by  
devotion

This was much more than an emotional reaction to a 'private devotion' as some might be inclined to think, as they look back from a viewpoint of a greater theological and biblical development. For Chevalier it was a deeply spiritual experience. A few considerations can help us understand why this was so. Firstly, in those days, in many a seminary,

— catechetics was concerned with 'knowledge' of truths of the faith and teaching about religious observance;

— religious practice was shown as a duty following on the virtue of religion;

— scriptural studies were concerned more with textual exegesis than with the great biblical themes;

— dogmatic theology spoke of many truths to be believed; but ONLY devotion to the Sacred Heart gave a vision of the whole of religion as being God's love revealed that man might respond in love.

Jules Chevalier had learned to look constantly to « Jesus who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection »<sup>44</sup>. He had learned to admire this Christ as « the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature »<sup>45</sup>. But it was only now that he learned that God's nature was love<sup>46</sup>. It was only now that he learned that « this only Son, begotten from all eternity from the Heart of God the Father, is the radiance of his charity among men »<sup>47</sup>. It was now that « the kindness and love of God our saviour for mankind were revealed »<sup>48</sup> to Jules Chevalier. He had learned to know Christ the Adorer of the Father; now he met the Christ who « had compassion on the crowds »<sup>49</sup>; the Christ who is « capable of feeling our weaknesses with us »<sup>50</sup>.

His new insights did not negate his previously acquired knowledge. They complemented it. Jesus is still the one who gives perfect adoration to God<sup>51</sup>.

« The heart is the central point of his divine humanity. It is there, on this sacred altar that Jesus offers to God his Father an adoration which is permanent and worthy of his greatness. And so it is this divine Heart which is the glorifier par

excellence of the divine majesty »<sup>52</sup>. Religion remains man's duty and « Jesus is Religion par excellence »<sup>53</sup>. However, « if Religion is a bond, is it not a bond of love which alone can bring about a spiritual union?... and if we take the word 'religion' in the sense of a bond broken and restored, I shall ask: Is it not love which has brought this bond to be, which has bound together the two extremities which were separated.....? »

This revelation to him of Christ in his love as being the 'last word in all things' came at a time when he was weighed down by his concern for men in their indifference, their coldness, their fear of God. And now he discovered a Christ who, far more than he, had been concerned for mankind: « During his mortal life, he was happy to pour out all the tenderness of his heart on the little ones, the humble, the poor, on those who suffer, on sinners - and on all the miseries of mankind. The sight of a misfortune, an unhappiness or any pain, touched his heart with compassion »<sup>55</sup>.

And so for him the heart of Christ is full « of love and mercy »<sup>56</sup>. « The heart of Jesus is essentially merciful »<sup>57</sup>. The mercy of this divine Heart appears on every page of the Gospel »<sup>58</sup>. Chevalier is particularly taken by the idea of Christ as the Good Shepherd. He devotes a number of Meditations to different aspects of this theme<sup>59</sup> and proposes to his missionaries the mind and example of the Good Shepherd<sup>60</sup>.

Fr. Chevalier would have found meaningless the distinction made later between - going directly to the Person of Christ, or going to Christ through his heart. As already mentioned, he lived at a time when the Sacred Heart, and it alone, pointed up this loving compassionate Christ of the gospels. He lived, too, at a time when people were probably more sensitive to symbolism - the symbol leading immediately to the symbolised, but not in itself constituting an object which arrested the attention.

« The Heart of Jesus is the epitomized and living expression

of his divine Person... O My God! your Heart is you... So, His Heart and himself, it's all the same »<sup>61</sup>.

« This divine charity, taken in its full extension, i.e. in itself and in its different manifestations is the formal object... *the spiritual and primary object* of the cult of the Sacred Heart »<sup>62</sup>.

For him there was no problem - he thought of the Christ whose heart felt compassion for the crowds; the Christ who, because he « was gentle and lowly of heart » could ease the burdens of those who came to him to find rest for their souls. But a gentle Christ is not a weak Christ; the Heart of Jesus possesses in perfect degree the virtues of « *courage, strength, constancy and generosity* »<sup>63</sup>.

Jules Chevalier had discovered his charism:

« 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 »<sup>64</sup>. We have just considered his particular way of looking at the Christ of the Gospels. We have seen how this fitted in with his concern for men. The third aspect of Chevalier's charism could be expressed as:

### 3. A mission of love; manifesting the kindness of God.

This mission is carried out in the work of service, and by the way of serving; in love and kindness

a) *The service* - is to be missionaries of the love of Christ, to work to deliver men from the evils of their time.

In giving the reason for the existence of his Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Chevalier proposed a double motive: « On the one hand the excellence (of devotion to the Sacred Heart) and on the other the extent and depth of the evil of which it is the remedy »<sup>65</sup>. This double motive, he believed, demanded « the foundation of a special society, whose members, by taste and attraction and particular vocation consecrate themselves especially to the service of the Sacred Heart,

becoming its apostles in order to apply the remedy and propagate its benefits »<sup>66</sup>.

This can be regarded as a double aim; or more truly it can be seen as seeking to incarnate the total christian message of saving love in the whole life of man, personal and social. In his book on the Sacred Heart, Chevalier gives some indications as to *how* devotion to the Sacred Heart is the remedy for the ills of his time. He quotes Mgr. Baudry: « To the egoism of our epoch and to its sensual tendencies, to its religious indifference, it opposes the cult which is the most dedicated, the purest, the most disinterested, the most tender and compassionate »<sup>67</sup>.

Making more specific applications, Fr. Chevalier indicates how its presentation of the humble Christ helps overcome pride; the obedience of Christ, totally submitted to his Father's will challenges man's spirit of total independence; Christ's immense charity and his desire for unity overcome the spirit of division; and finally « the noble and generous strength » of Christ delivers us from a servile spirit towards the State in its unjust demands. While they must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, Christians must have the courage to stand up for the demands of truth and justice<sup>68</sup>.

### b) *The way of serving - in love and kindness.*

The first response to our vision of Christ in his love will naturally be a love given to him in return and a sharing in his love for others. We will serve him, practising *his* virtues: « his zeal for the glory of God, his patience, his charity towards others, his kindness, his humility, his spirit of poverty... »<sup>69</sup>.

« God, who is goodness itself (Deus caritas est) whose heart is full of love for all who weep, groan and suffer, loves to see in his children a likeness to himself. And when he meets a truly compassionate soul, he gives it abundant grace... »<sup>70</sup>.

Since the image of Christ the Good Shepherd was one which Chevalier loved, it was natural that he would use it to indicate the way his missionaries should serve: « with the operative charity of Christ for men, and especially with that immense mercy towards the lost sheep »<sup>71</sup>. « Goodness, charity, mercy, these are the virtues which the Holy Spirit recommends to us unceasingly »<sup>72</sup>.

→ An « immense mercy », but one which expresses itself in the simplest and most human way: « a word coming from the heart, said with interest, with love, with a compassionate kindness... »<sup>73</sup>.

Especially « must we practise meekness which is taught us, prescribed by Jesus Christ as being the privileged virtue of his Heart... This virtue is indispensable.... with it we have all the others. We can not, in fact, be meek without being humble, charitable, patient, mortified, master of ourselves and our passions »<sup>74</sup>.

The one word « meekness » (especially in English) does not readily suggest the total virtue which Chevalier had in mind. It was the strength which enabled us to conquer pride, impatience, fatigue; to be possessed by the faith that every man is « my brother, in the full strength of the word »<sup>75</sup>, and then to act towards him with unfailing kindness and total acceptance of his person. This was probably nowhere more fully expressed than in a text of his MSC Constitutions: « In order that they might truly be disciples of Him who declared himself meek and humble of heart, they will combine the greatest meekness towards their neighbour with a deep humility and complete self-forgetfulness. Their dearest desire will be to persuade christians that the yoke of their loving Saviour is sweet and his burden light. Intent on following in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd, they will attract his sheep by kindness, drawing them with the bonds of love. If necessary they will carry them on their shoulders. With every possible effort they will totally exclude the opposite spirit of fear and rigorism by which Jansenism did so much harm to the Church »<sup>76</sup>.

Although all of these things were written later, they are no more than the expression of what he saw in essence when, as a seminarian, he experienced his charism in his own life. It is very illuminating to consider how Chevalier's character was suddenly possessed by this charism, his way of acting totally transformed by it. The doctrine of the Sacred Heart, he had said, went straight to his heart. But it did not immediately flow from his heart to penetrate his outward personality. In his effort to live the spiritual life he had become severe, « serious... stiff as a poker in his relations with others, taciturn »<sup>77</sup>. Then he did his retreat for ordination to Subdiaconate and a minor miracle was wrought before the eyes of his fellow seminarians. « On the day of his ordination », wrote a still wondering Piperon, « he appeared completely different... a man entirely renewed, a subdeacon kind, affable and always smiling. We wondered at this sudden change, brought about by a few days of retreat and the grace of Holy Orders. The Abbé Chevalier had realized that in order to do good he had to act in the most attractive way, the way of kindness accompanied by a holy joy and pleasant conversation. Once he had taken this resolution, he carried it out with his natural strength, without one single failure. From that moment his influence grew. Those who had avoided him were drawn to him by his joyful and amiable conversations which he could always finally direct to God, for the good of his listeners »<sup>78</sup>.

Even after fifty years, the wonder of this transformation and its unfailing continuance, had not passed from Piperon's mind: « And still today », he wrote, « after fifty years, we find him always good, compassionate, amiable towards all who approach him. He has become all things to all men in order to gain all to Jesus Christ. This is the great secret which draws souls to him from every country; nobody takes leave of him without taking away a kind and consoling word and an encouragement to do good »<sup>79</sup>.

[ For nearly sixty years, Fr. Chevalier lived his « Charism of Kindness »<sup>80</sup>. ]