

4. And if we are a group that has come together because all its members « have believed in his love », a real fraternal charity will reign among us.

These truths are easily enough enunciated. They can be lived in superficial fashion; but they can be part of a strong and satisfying spirituality only if we, too, have taken the trouble to « ponder these things in our heart ». With St. Augustine we must have returned to our own heart to find God; and we must have listened to the cries of every human heart, to the deep human needs of man: the questioning, the anxiety, the desperate need for meaning, for a love that is real, enobling and uplifting. We need to have understood how doubt and darkness can often lie heavy on the human spirit.

And when we say that we have learned to believe in the love of God manifested in Christ, we express the conviction that this love is able to give meaning and purpose to all human life; that it can answer man's deep questioning and quiet the restless human heart.

This implies that we live what I would call « a spirituality of the heart ». This means that:

- a. We have to go down to the depths of our own soul in a realization of our profound personal needs of life, of love and of meaning.
- b. We must find, through faith and reflection, the answer to our own questioning in the Heart of Christ, i.e. in the depths of his personality, where man's yearning and God's graciousness meet in redemptive incarnation.
- c. Then, fashioned by these forces, our own heart will be an understanding heart, open to, feeling for, and giving to our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- d. We will not be *dis-heartened*, or discouraged in the face of difficulties. We follow Christ who « loved with a human heart » as Vatican II reminds us; he shared our humanness that we might know that over us all is the everlasting love of the Father. In God's good time the omnipotent love

of God will have its way. It is *this* love in which we have learned to believe.

Courage:

« Courage, strength, constancy », these Chevalier regarded as virtues of the Heart of Christ, for they express the very qualities of love. He himself had the courage to *undertake* difficult enterprises for the cause of Christ - a courage based on 'belief in his love'. For example, invited to accept the vast mission of Micronesia and Melanesia he wrote to Fr. Jouët, replying to objections from Fr. Guyot, on June 25th, 1881:

« Our Religious... without being either eagles or saints... are far from being inferior to others in devotion, obedience... We will accept this mission... because the good God always blesses and rewards obedience and sacrifice ».

He had the courage to be *constant* and to *persevere* through the multiple difficulties met with in the course of his life.

He had the *courage to hope*, even when others did not, even when others thought there was no future for religious life, at least in France. On April 4th, 1906, he wrote to Fr. Carrière, Provincial of France. « ... the faith is not dead... Where did Fr. Meyer get the idea that the Religious Orders have had their day, or that they can not be built up again? He forgets then that the life of perfection is an essential part of the Church... ».

« Obedience and mutual charity »

This juxtaposition of ideas is rather unorthodox. Consequently, those with a passion for tidier classification have sought to improve on Chevalier's text by considering obedience under the vows, while leaving the mutual charity as part of the spirit of the congregation, or part of community living. Doing this takes away a lot of the strength of what Chevalier was trying to say. For him obedience was closely connected with his charism and 'obedience in mutual charity' a strong point in his view of religious life.

From the Ecole Française he had learned to savour that text from the epistle to the Hebrews where Christ says that he comes into the world « to do thy will, O God »⁹⁷, and Psalm 40 to which it refers: « I delight to do thy will, O my God; Thy law is within my heart »⁹⁸.

By the very wording, as well as the content, of these texts, they would have fitted easily into his vision of the heart of Christ. Obedience, as much as humility, meekness, charity, was considered a virtue characteristic of those who aspired to be Missionaries of his Heart⁹⁹. They had to keep in mind the example of Jesus who was obedient unto death¹⁰⁰.

Fr. Chevalier wrote: « Those who enter our society can very well let others surpass them in knowledge, mortification and poverty; but when it comes to *obedience and mutual charity*, they will allow nobody to do better than they »¹⁰¹. This is a noteworthy passage. First of all, it takes a text of St. Ignatius and changes it in a way which would make a Jesuit shudder (how could a Jesuit light-heartedly settle for being second-rate in knowledge?). St. Ignatius had called for obedience and denial of one's own will and judgment, two things which are obviously of a piece. Far less so are 'obedience and mutual charity'. Yet here Chevalier was not merely sewing a new patch on to a different-coloured garment received from the Jesuits. He was wanting to make a very definite point.

To appreciate what his point was we need to realize that, at this stage, he was growing away from his dependence on the Jesuits. He had looked to them for help as to how to go about founding and shaping his new religious institute. Their help had been generously given; their assistance was invaluable. Chevalier naturally went through a stage of imitating much of what they did, copying their rules and practices. But if his institute was to grow, his own charism would have to express itself more clearly, informing its documents and constitutions. Growing then to its independent consciousness of its own identity, it substituted new emphases, replaced old expressions. Particularly clear was

the elimination of all military images. The « well-disciplined army » gave way to an apostolic community vivified and unified by love. The members saw that waving a military flag would scatter the sheep rather than draw them 'by the bonds of love'¹⁰².

It is in the light of this transition that we understand why Chevalier links obedience and mutual charity. One could interpret this as meaning, partially at least, 'obedience in mutual charity'. « We understand that Fr. Chevalier insisted on the great importance of obedience, above all in an institute in which the primary end is not service (in the specific Ignatian sense), but the love of God, *if this institute is to continue and to carry out its mission*. For if other institutes can rely not only on their spirit but on a rigid organization in the service of God, an institute like his must find its strength above all in its very spirit »¹⁰³.

'Community', for an apostolic institute, can never be merely a grouping of people being nice to one another. It needs to be strongly united in the charity of Christ. It needs to be able to count on the generous cooperation of its members in « obedience and mutual charity ». To this they can be inspired effectively only by living for Christ who came to do not his own will, but the will of the Father.

Self-sacrifice.

« The element which has proved to be the one constituting the very essence of all spirituality is the vital rhythm made up of renunciation and positive union... No spirituality can become real outside of this rhythm (manifested by these words of Christ: « If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross », which constitutes the negative side, « and follow me » in which the positive side consists) »¹⁰⁴.

We have seen the positive elements in Fr. Chevalier's charism. They can be made very attractive. They can also be utterly demanding; and this the negative side of self-renunciation

must not be forgotten. Otherwise we make of Chevalier's teaching a sort of spiritual fairy-floss, which is all sweetness and no substance.

His was to be a congregation built on charity and on an obedience modeled on that of Christ, obedient unto death. He had a keen concern for men which would be translated into a total availability in the constant daily self-giving of the apostolate.

He was fascinated by the love of Christ but it was only through considering the depth of the wound in the side of Christ that one could appreciate this love¹⁰⁵.

His was a charism of kindness. This demanded far more than being nice to nice people: « There are two sorts of kindness which we must not confuse. The one comes from grace and the efforts we make to acquire it; the other proceeds from nature and is the result of temperament. This latter, if it is not perfected by serious virtue, easily develops into indifference. It makes the character soft, indolent, apathetic. The soul is without force, without energy... this so-called good nature is a fault against which we must react; it is not a virtue. The virtue which the Lord recommends is quite different: it is the fruit of prayer and generous efforts; lively and hasty characters have to do themselves violence to acquire it... This virtue is not natural to man; he needs incessant efforts to acquire it with the help of God. We are all born violent, angry, inclined to be carried away. Opposition irritates us; resistance inflames us and contradiction makes us angry. Why? Because our nature is vitiated and our heart is filled with pride... It is impossible for the proud man to be kind, or for the irascible man to be humble.

This is why Our Lord unites kindness and humility and recommends these two virtues in a special way: *Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde* »¹⁰⁶.

There is no need to spell out the details of the self-renunciation which Chevalier's spirituality demanded. But for the

sake of completeness it had to be noted that he considered it an ever-operative principle.

« *Devotion to the Sacred Heart* »?

We have seen that Chevalier's charism consisted in (a) a particular angle of looking at Jesus in the Gospels the compassionate Christ, the Good Shepherd, the one who revealed the love of God in our regard;

and (b) a special stress on a certain way of following him, a certain way of serving him in other people: as missionaries of his love, in charity, kindness.

The total vision and response have been indicated in the preceding pages.

For Fr. Chevalier all this was living devotion to the Heart of Christ and being an apostle of the devotion. The question remains: to what extent is « devotion to the Sacred Heart » part of his charism? To what extent is it his « historically and culturally conditioned expression, in his own language, in his own time »¹⁰⁷ of the biblical and spiritual realities which can be expressed in other ways? These are questions which can be answered only by the members of the congregations who *live* his charism now. Some of their more recent documentation and research would seem to answer the questions asked. It would, however, be a pity if discussion of these points obscured the light of Chevalier's vision, or lessened the dynamism of the charism which was so clearly his.

Reparation.

Where did Reparation find its place in Fr. Chevalier's spirituality? Prior to answering that question we must answer another: what is the place of reparation in devotion to the Sacred Heart? After the time of St. Margaret Mary, a lot of emphasis was placed on reparation. Not enough attention was given to a distinction made in spiritual theology between mystical graces and charismatic grace. The latter is given for

the good of others; the former are given to help the individual respond to a particular vocation. Every mystic is a special person with a very special, and usually very singular, vocation in the Church. Much of what Margaret Mary wrote about was no more than a record of her private mystical graces - quite different from the contents of the 'revelations' which contained a message for all. Her private, special graces were not meant for public consumption. However, a generation avid for mystical grace was not discriminating enough in publicising the message of Paray-le-Monial. Some distinctions have to be made:

1. The call to 'console the Heart of Christ', couched in a language common to the mystics, was addressed to the generosity of the Saint herself. Attempts to transpose it into 'ordinary' piety have often resulted in sentimental and complicated approaches to Christ. This aspect is certainly not a necessary part of devotion to the Sacred Heart, even as taught by St. Margaret Mary¹⁰⁸.

2. Then there is the juridical aspect: « this comes more from Jansenism than from the revelations of Paray... someone else must take the place of the sinner and merit salvation for him by prayer and suffering.. Such a conception of reparation forgets the demands and the largesse of merciful love. In order better to insist on the price to be paid... it makes sin stand out far too much »¹⁰⁹.

3. « We would be wrong then to make reparation consist in the contemplation of a sorrowful Christ, followed by particular exercises of expiation »¹¹⁰.

4. « AUTHENTIC REPARATION is our devotion itself, this gift of our person to the Heart of Jesus, in faith in his mercy, in the peace of a soul which abandons itself to him; it is, above all, the Heart of Jesus himself, victim for our sins, but also satisfaction for our sins. He, and he alone, can make reparation for us. This reparation is accomplished especially by the sacrifice of the Mass. Christ there offers himself to the Father; we offer Him; and we offer ourselves with Him »¹¹¹.

This offering will entail (always as part of 'authentic reparation') that, in our daily life, we shall live the mystery of 'the whole Christ' or the mystical Body,

- uniting our sufferings and joys with those of the Lord;
- praying in solidarity 'forgive us our sins' and
- combatting the sin in our own life and in the world around us.

It is fairly clear that it is only this « authentic reparation » which enters essentially into Chevalier's spirituality. Naturally, in his time he would quote St. Margaret Mary in his books and other writings. However, in the Paray devotion: « The essential aspect is the love of the Heart of Christ, following on the contemplation and worship of its symbolic image; and it is our life consecrated in response to that love. The aspect of reparation is added on only as a filigree in the whole devotion (that, let us repeat, for us; for St. Margaret Mary it was quite different) »¹¹². This view of the devotion coincides with the vision which inspired his desire to become an apostle of the Heart of Christ. This desire, he says, came to him after reading the life of Blessed Margaret Mary, a book written by Mgr. Languet and given to him by his confessor¹¹³. The book has a very fine introductory note on Devotion to the Sacred Heart which is still rather wonderful to read. It is full of the joyous discovery of the love of God revealed in Christ and of « the infinite tenderness for us of this God incarnate for our salvation »¹¹⁴. Every man, in expressing his thoughts, will reflect the culture of his times. And Fr. Chevalier could not always have made the distinction between Margaret Mary's mystical graces and her public message. However, the accidental things of a culture can easily be left aside. For it is clear that Fr. Chevalier's was not a « mystique of consolation »; it was a mystique of mission in love and mercy. It was also — as a continuing thrust of the French School — a mystique of worship, adoration and praise.