

Theme: *"The Living Out of Our Charism Today"*

As women and men, religious and laity, where are we going together? How do we understand our spirituality and mission? We will then focus on a few of the Mal Modern such as: those who are powerless and voiceless; environment and integrity of creation; immigration and human rights.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Chevalier Family,

Greetings of the Lord's Peace to you all!

I have with me the Constitutions and Statutes of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Rome: General House, 2000) and the Directory of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart-Philippine Province containing our Vision-Mission-Goal Statements (2005) as my simple guides in trying to live out our Charism today. My knowledge of our Charism, Mission and Spirituality started with the inputs of Fr. Cuskelly, especially in the turbulent years of the '70s. I made copious notes from the lectures and retreats of Fr. Kees Braun and from the talks of Fr. Rozier in the Justice and Peace workshop at Issoudun.

"We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us.." (1John 4,16): My first conscious realization of God's love for me came while I was detained as a political prisoner under the Marcos dictatorship in 1973. I was tortured, put into a dungeon for two weeks, where food, like the food for the pigs, was served by splashing them into the cemented floor. For two months, I was held incommunicado: I was not allowed to talk to anyone, and no one was allowed to talk to me. I stopped believing in God for the first two months in the prison cell until I read, after much refusal, in the stillness of the night this text from St. John's gospel: "Greater love no one has than he who lays down his life for his friends...If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you...If they persecuted me, they will persecute you." (John 15,11-ff). I was ashamed of myself, for my pains and sufferings were nothing compared to Jesus' experience of torture and death for the cause of the little ones, the victims of injustice and oppression, the poor. It was then that I believed in Him again and promised that, should I get out of prison, whether I'd become a priest or not, I would continue to serve and glorify Him among the poor, the little ones, among the victims of injustice and oppression, for "since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another" (1John 4,11-ff).

Immigration and Human Rights: within the scope of our charism today?!

Our MSC Constitutions talk of "We will be attentive, as our Founder was, to those who suffer and are in need. We will seek to identify the causes of their suffering.." Fr. Jules also always insisted that his MSC Society must remain open to all kinds of ministries and missions in the Church. "To obtain that end – May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved! – the Society accepts every kind of ministry which the Church may offer, none excepted"... and the Directory of the MSC-Philippine Province explicitly

mentions "...mission without frontiers especially with the poor and the little ones, ..work with and for the migrants and itinerant people and their families".

The Heart of Immigration Issue and Human Rights: Globalization, the Image of Mal Modern

On the surface, the issue of immigration and immigration reforms in the laws of the United States of America seems to gravitate around the question of what to do with the illegal undocumented immigrants, on the one hand, and the secured border for US territory (especially in its southern parts), job security and economic well-being for its citizens and its legal immigrants, on the other. Juxtaposed with this issue is the concern for human rights, claimed and appropriated by both sides: both the pro and the con in the immigration debate have human rights; the country itself has its own sovereign and national rights!

Socio-historical investigation and faith-life reflection, however, would reveal, in a radical way, the artificiality of both considerations. The rise of nation-states and, the consequent definition of their sovereign status and state-rights, now used as an ethical standard in world diplomacy, were the products of wars among feuding feudal lords and families, as in the nation-states of Europe, Asia and Africa, or of occupation by colonizers and consequent annexation, using advanced war technology and developed human power in the service of power, as in the North Americas, England in relation to Australia, Northern Ireland and the Malvinas Islands and the Netherlands in relation to South Africa, or a combination of both, with an added color later on, the wars of national liberation, by the new nation-states of the 19th and the 20th centuries in Central and Latin America, Asia and Africa. The succeeding definition of human rights, now raised to the level of international ethical standards, as penned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the various protocols that followed, are largely compromised definitions between the two conflicting ideological divides of East-West geopolitics. Succeeding protocols we now know are the progressive contributions arising from the South-North geopolitical-socio-economic relations.

The dimensions of the immigration issues and concern for human rights are complex. On the personal dimension, there is the possibility of generosity threatened by insecurity, openness and altruism coexisting with racism, discrimination and legalism; on the social dimension, we find mobility as freedom of choice threatened by mobility provoked by joblessness on the one hand, and by the influx of new migrant or colored population, on the other; social security is confronting a decreasing share in the economic pie; and structurally, we have a national identity and legal tradition being confronted by new languages and new ways of life, and borders that are crossed by people in need to eke out a living, to assert life rather than death. (Although a Mexican saying would say: we did not cross the border; the border crossed us!).

But the immigration issue today and the stakes of human rights that go with it have become more pressing in the light of the havoc of victimization, poverty and

powerlessness brought about by “globalization” among the poor nations and the poor citizens of both rich industrialized nations on the one hand, and developing, underdeveloped and poor nations on the other. The logic of Globalization that was given birth by the Uruguay Round of negotiations (1993) on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and World Trade Organization (GATT-WTO), is “the integration of all national economies into one single economy within the framework of neo-liberalism, under one single superpower”. In the era of globalization, the idolatrous god is capital and the sole arbiter of life is the so-called global market; it has caused the demise of such values as justice and peace and human rights and integrity of creation and has supplanted them, instead, with the value of profit and the ideals of by “quality of life” determined by health, wealth and the pursuit of happiness!

To give a particular example: the phenomenon of “outsourcing”: US/multi-national companies relocate their operations to other poor countries, in cahoots with big business that control the political economy of that country. US citizens and legal immigrants lose their jobs; but the workers in the relocated companies receive low wages, work in subhuman working conditions, with their rights disregarded in favor of capital and foreign investments. So the poor exploited but technically sound workers go to the mother countries of these outsourced companies. Meanwhile, the mother countries of these outsourced companies now experience dramatic rise in joblessness, homelessness, an economy that is chronically ill (boom-and-bust phenomenon), but the mother companies and their owners continue to rake in the profits.

Did we ever wonder why capital recognizes no boundary at all but human labor, the worker, the human person who produces and socially reproduces capital, has borders to contend with?

Capital without boundaries, human labor limited by borders and our mission without frontiers.

From our faith-perspective, we know that the whole of creation is a gift of God for all of human life. Redeemed creation and redeemed human life participate, by their vocation, in the life and values of God’s Reign: at the heart of human rights, no matter how historically compromised in their definitions and determinations, is the solid radical conviction that all of humanity, all of us, are all created in the image of God, that by the incarnation of the Son of God, God chose to participate in our human condition except sin, and by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all of humanity, all of us, are now inheritors of this redeemed creation, called to live out the values of God’s Kingdom, as, by the Spirit in our hearts, citizens of heaven!

Our charism and mission today impel us “.to discern what our response will be by following the light of the Gospel and by listening to the world and to the Church”. “Would that we fully understood the sublimity of the ministry given us! May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved. Our Lord Jesus Christ has opened his Heart to the

world in order to bring an effective remedy to modern societies that are rushing into an abyss”.

The Challenge of Our mission: what is to be done?

The impact of immigration upon families – separation, discrimination, poverty – that wounds the soul and destroys the person is one area that calls for our loving and compassionate intervention. Can we have houses and centers of healing for these victims of broken immigration laws and for their empowerment so they can assert and stand by their human rights?

Today, in the absence of a reformed immigration legislation, raids have been conducted on lairs of suspected undocumented illegal immigrants with consequent summary arrest and summary deportation. The US Catholic Bishops have taken the position calling for a freeze in these raids, arrests and deportation and the establishment of sanctuaries in our churches where charitable, legal and just aid can be available. Can we engage in immigration reform advocacy and offer our places as “sanctuaries” in defense and promotion of human rights and justice for all, especially the disadvantaged and poor immigrants?

We know that some of us go to Mexico and other places bringing or sending help to those in need. Can we continue raising these acts of charity, and, in an institutional and structural manner advocate for a change in international relations, that would challenge the Mal Modern that is globalization through networking with other groups, intervention on the level of national and international policies on the level of the United Nations and through international solidarity?

The globalization of today has used the modern tools of the cyberworld to wreak havoc on our inhabited earth and to destroy the minds and hearts and souls of the people. Can we also use the revolution in information technology and the cyberworld in order to promote catholicity, internationalism and a global village (MacLuhan) that defend and promote the rights of peoples to migrate, for the sake of justice, peace, human rights and integrity of creation?

For in contemplating the pierced Heart of Christ, Fr. Jules Chevalier saw a new world emerging. A new heart for a new world!

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Questions for Reflection:

1. On the personal level, what are your convictions, questions and confusions with regard to immigration and human rights? Where do these convictions, questions and confusions come from?
2. As a member of the Chevalier Family, imbued with the Charism of our Founder, Fr. Jules, do you think you have a role and mission to play on the issue of immigration and human rights? How far can you go? Or what are your pyramids of sacrifice and your art of the possible? Will you be happy and excited to respond to the immigration and human rights issues as a way of living out a dimension of our Charism today?