

A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART
in accordance with FR. JULES CHEVALIER'S CHARISM
An on-line program for members of the Chevalier Family
and for everyone interested in a Spirituality of the Heart

AMETUR!

Welcome to a program of on-line sessions around the theme of a Spirituality of the Heart. The “International Committee of the Laity of the Chevalier Family” presents these sessions to all members of the world-wide Chevalier Family; more specifically to its lay members and other people, interested in a Spirituality of the Heart.

The Spirituality of the Heart, presented in these sessions, is rooted in the Charism of Fr. Jules Chevalier MSC. Fr. Chevalier lived in France from 1824 to 1907. He is the Founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, as well as the Spiritual Founder of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of the International Branch of the Lay members of the Chevalier Family. His process of beatification has already been introduced.

Each month, we will publish one section of these sessions on-line. The sections can be utilized for personal reflection, while coordinators or facilitators of groups might use the sections during their groups’ gatherings, dependent on the program of the group and the needs of the members. Feel free also to publish the materials in bulletins or other publications, issued for the benefit of members of the Chevalier Family.

Contents of the Program

This program is divided into short sections, each followed by a reflective moment.

The program consists of:

1. Some brief annotations concerning a need for Spirituality, the existence of different kinds of Catholic Christian Spiritualities and a variety of Spiritualities of the Heart.
2. A brief presentation of the charism of Fr. Chevalier: the special Gift of the Spirit that shaped his vision and mission as the Founder of “the Chevalier Family”.
3. Inspired by his charism, Fr. Chevalier developed his own vision of a Devotion to the Sacred Heart in such a way that today it is appropriately called a Spirituality of the Heart, clearly rooted in Jesus’ own spirituality. We present this biblical Spirituality of the Heart as a mainstay to family life and social involvement.
4. A variety of materials relevant to practicing a Spirituality of the Heart in family life and broader society.

After reading each section, you are invited to spend some time of private reflection.

We wish you fruitful moments of reflection and sharing.

International Committee of the Laity of the Chevalier Family
Coordination Internationale des Laïcs de la Famille Chevalier
Coordinación Internacional de los Laicos de la Familia Chevalier
Internationaal Lekencomité van de Chevalier Familie.

Section 1

CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS IN SEARCH OF A SPIRITUALITY.

In 2003 the Pontifical Council for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue issued a discussion paper entitled *Jesus Christ the bearer of the Water of Life*. Cardinal Poupard, president of this Council, wrote in the foreword to this document *“that the success of New Age growth is a response for people’s longing for peace, harmony and reconciliation within themselves, with others and with nature.”* The paper remarked that success of New Age thinking and practice offers the Church a challenge:

“The search which often leads people to New Age is a genuine yearning for a deeper spirituality, for something that will touch their hearts and for a way of making sense of a confusing and often alienating world” (“Water of Life” no. 1.5 see also no 3.3 Quoted by Jim Quillinan, Shapin an Australian Spirituality in Compass, vol. 46, no. 4, 2012).

In November 2011, the American weekly newspaper ‘National Catholic Reporter’ (NCR) published a survey that offered a portrait of US Catholics in the Second Decade of the 21st Century. One of the conclusions of the survey was that US Catholics *“continue to maintain a strong foothold in the Church and to participate regularly in the sacraments”*, while the same Catholics easily embrace new spiritual resources. In the same issue of the NCR, in an article entitled “Old and New Spiritual Resources”, Michelle Dillon concludes that *“large numbers of Catholics say that they believe in various aspects of New Age Spirituality. Forty two percent believe that there is spiritual energy located in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals; over one third (37 percent) believes in reincarnation...”*

Linda Woodhead, a professor in the sociology of religion in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University in England, notes that in the UK, belief in a « personal God » roughly halved between 1961 and 2000 – from 57 per cent of the British population to 26 percent, while over the same period, belief in a “spirit of life force” doubled – from 22 percent in 1961 to 44 per cent in 2000.

In many parts of the world, Catholics try to feed their spiritual hunger by searching for resources, different from Sunday worship. It seems that their spiritual appetite is not appeased only by regularly attending Mass and listening to sermons. They are in search of something more. Without being aware of it, they are in need of food for their hearts.

Many go shopping in a market which supplies all kinds of ‘spiritualities’. However, because of the great variety of spiritualities on offer, - the World Wide Web under “Christian Spirituality” yields millions of sites - they most probably find it difficult to make the right choice. So, not surprisingly, some of them might be tempted to embrace certain spiritual views and convictions that in our Christian view do not lead toward spiritual fulfillment, and finally will not be able to appease spiritual hunger.

Even committed Catholics are often not aware of the existence of life-giving spiritual resources in our own Christian tradition. Some people assume that these resources are only accessible to men and women in religious life, who spend many hours in prayer and meditation. They are not aware of the fact that most Christian spiritualities, including those in the Catholic tradition, are at the service of everyone, even of people with a busy daily schedule. People longing for a deeper

spiritual life will be enriched by these spiritualities. A condition is that they should feel touched and attracted by the path shown by great men and women in the history of Christianity, more specifically also in the Catholic Church.

A reflective moment

*“Human Development must include not just physical growth
but also spiritual growth,
since the human person is a unity of body and soul,
born of God’s creative love and destined for eternal life.*

*We human beings develop when we grow in the spirit,
when we begin to know ourselves
and the truths that God has implanted deep within,
when we enter into dialogue with ourselves and our Creator.”*

(Liberal translation of Pope Benedict XVI,
Caritas in Veritate, no. 76)

Section 2

IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITIES ARE RELATED TO A PERSON GIFTED BY THE SPIRIT.

Besides all having their origin in Jesus, one of the characteristics of Christian Spiritualities is a special 'Gift of the Spirit' bestowed on a certain man or woman. This 'Gift of the Spirit' is called a 'Charism'. People speak of a Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian, Carmelite Spirituality, because these Spiritualities find their origin in a special 'Gift of the Spirit', a special 'Charism', lived and practiced by great men and women such as St. Benedict (480-547), St. Dominic (1170-1221), St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and St. Clare (1194-1253), St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), St. John of the Cross (1542-1581), or Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897).

Some of us may be familiar with the spirituality of spiritual writers, who have lived in modern times, such as Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Russian American, Founder of Friendship House and Madonna House Apostolate (1896–1985); Thomas Merton (1915-1968), the Trappist monk; Chiara Lubich (1920-2008), the founder of the Focolare Movement; Anthony de Mello (1931 – 1987), the Indian Jesuit; Henri Nouwen, (1932 – 1996), the Dutch-born Catholic priest and writer, who authored 40 books about spirituality; or the well-known Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997). Each of these men and women has been directed by the Spirit to live in close relationship with God and Jesus Christ. They practiced the Gospel and served both Church and society in a special way, while showing other people a direction in following a path of life, guided by the Spirit.

Some of us might also feel inspired by contemporary writers, such as Jean Vanier (*1928), the Founder of the l'Arche communities, Willigis Jäger (*1925) and Anselm Grün (*1945), both German Benedictines; Richard Rohr OFM (*1943), founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in the USA, or Ronald Rolheiser OMI, a spiritual lecturer and writer, who each in their own way, offer us a certain kind of Spirituality of the Heart, by teaching “a way of entering into our hearts”.

Spiritualities of the Heart can be found in many forms, depending on the special gift of the man or woman living and promoting this kind of Spirituality. Some Spiritualities of the Heart find their origin in the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For example, we can find a Spirituality of the Heart according to the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641), the founders of the Visitation Sisters; St. Jean Eudes (1601-1680), the founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary; or St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), whose way of practicing the Devotion to the Sacred Heart has been popularized by the Jesuits, based on her writings. All these men and women lived and practiced the Devotion to the Sacred Heart in their own way. They offered to others a model of living a spirituality, more precisely a Spirituality of the Heart.

A reflective moment

*“Being Christian is not a result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea,
but the encounter with ... a person,
who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”*

Of course, the central person in every Christian Spirituality is Jesus Christ, in whom God has become human.

However, God “*encounters us ever anew,
in the men and women who reflect His presence....*”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est no. 1 and 17).

To read more

If you want to know more about the above mentioned men and women, and the spiritual path they followed, please look for their names on-line, for example in WIKIPEDIA or THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA on-line.

Section 3

COMMON FEATURES OF THE CHARISM OF THESE SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

What have these men and women in common? As we have said before, they all have received a special Gift of the Spirit, and by responding to this Gift, they followed the guidance of the Spirit in their daily life, and in all their undertakings. The Spirit is always at work in each of us to deepen and strengthen our relationship with God and Jesus Christ as well as with our neighbors. Therefore, in the lives of all these great men and women, you will discover a profound, personal relationship with Jesus, even a passion for Jesus and his Gospel message, as well as a total commitment to the coming of God's Reign on earth, in personal relationships, in daily life and work, and in secular society.

These men and women also show us that by being faithful to the Gift of the Spirit in our hearts, we will be empowered in loving our neighbors, wholeheartedly. Indeed, *"God's Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled."* (Galatians 5:22 –23)

They all take seriously St. Paul's word: *"God has given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts"* (2 Cor 1:21-22; see also 1 Cor 2:10-12), and are *aware* of the mystery of the presence of God's Spirit within their hearts. By doing so, they are able to show us a new way of life: not just following the current fads and fancies of public opinion, but living "from inside out". They call this 'inside' with different names. Jesus himself had already spoken about "the inner room" (Matt 6:6). Many centuries later, Teresa of Avila calls it the "Interior Castle". In modern times, Thomas Merton spoke about the "True Self". Other teachers simply refer to "the soul" or "the heart", meaning the inner core of the human person.

Now, as St. Paul often repeats, we are all gifted by the Spirit: “*God’s Spirit lives in you*” (e.g. Rom 8:11). The moments of our Baptism and Confirmation have made us aware of this mystery of the Spirit dwelling within us. The difference between these spiritual teachers and us is that *they* have explored this inner dwelling place of the Spirit, through contemplation and prayer. Moreover, they have shown others how to enter into this ‘inner room’, the heart. By becoming aware of the presence and the guidance of the Spirit within, we will feel urged to follow a new way of life, a way of relating to God and Jesus Christ, of associating with others and performing our daily tasks, according to this divine guidance.

A reflective moment

*“I used to keep my spiritual life in a tight space
and felt that my work, my social life, my relational joys and struggles
actually kept me away from God
rather than teaching me
and being sources of personal transformation for me.
Now I see all these differently.
I have come to believe that every part of my life affects
or influences my life with God.
The world I live in, with its beauty and tragedy,
with its creatures of all forms and shapes,
is constantly offering me messages about who I am and who God is. Everything
and everyone teaches me about God, life and myself.
I try now to approach each person, event, creature with two questions:
How are you my teacher?
What am I meant to learn?”*

(Joyce Rupp OSM, *The Cup of Our Life*, Ave Maria Press 2012)

Section 4

THE CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY OF FR. JULES CHEVALIER (1824-1907)

It is helpful to make a distinction between Chevalier's charism and his spirituality. A charism is a special Gift of the Holy Spirit, which enriches a Founder with a vision that attracts people to join him or her in carrying out a lifelong mission. A charism could be compared with a flame that sets the heart of a Founder on fire, and that keeps burning during his or her whole life, kindling a similar fire in the heart of his or her spiritual sons and daughters. *"What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality"*, states Ronald Rolheiser in his book *"The Holy Longing"* (p.6 and 7). A charism is always embodied in a spirituality, like a flame is burning in a fire. A spirituality disconnected from a charism, will run dry; a charism not incorporated in a spirituality, becomes powerless.

When reading about Fr. Chevalier's charism and spirituality, we have to keep in mind that he lived in France of the 19th century. His way of channeling the fire that burned in his heart, that means, his way of expressing his charism into a spirituality was shaped by the European mentality of his day. Now we live in the 21st century and in different cultures. Fr. Cuskelly, a former General Superior of the MSC, took into consideration the way Fr. Chevalier lived the Devotion to the Sacred Heart in 19th century France. He pointed out that today it would be more appropriate to speak of 'a Spirituality of the Heart', instead of a Devotion to the Sacred Heart. Because, he said, now the term 'Devotion to the Sacred Heart' does not have the same meaning as it had for Fr. Chevalier.

However, when we allow ourselves to be carried away by his enthusiasm, Fr. Chevalier's charism, the great passion of his heart, is still relevant to face the challenges in modern society and family life. Just as Chevalier never got tired of spreading a Devotion to the Sacred Heart in the society of his time, the same spirit should lead us in living and spreading a Spirituality of the Heart in today's society.

Or, as it has been said by Fr. Dennis Murphy MSC: *“To share in Father Chevalier’s own ‘experience of the Spirit’ is to be given the gift of rediscovering today his enthusiasm, an enthusiasm capable of carrying him through extraordinary difficulties and disappointment.”*

A reflective moment

*“Research into the past would be fruitless,
unless it prepared us for the same ‘experience of the Spirit’
that moved our Founder.*

*This does not mean
that we are asked to imitate every detail about Father Chevalier;
our task is to discover his essential concerns.*

*The creative power of the Spirit
can bring this to life again in us today in new ways
and help us contribute to the Church’s Mission.”*

(Dennis Murphy MSC)

Section 5:

FR. CHEVALIER'S WAY OF LIVING A DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

In the next two sections we will briefly introduce Fr. Chevalier and his way of living a “Devotion to the Sacred Heart”. Fr. Jules Chevalier’s Spirituality has been shaped by this Devotion, and has certainly been enriched by the way the Saints, who lived before him, practiced this Devotion. Also his contact with some Jesuits has clearly inspired Chevalier. Even so, he lived the Devotion to the Sacred Heart in his own way. From the beginning, Fr. Chevalier understood the Devotion to the Sacred Heart in a broad sense. He lived it not as a devotional practice, but as a spirituality that comprised all aspects of faith, religion and daily life - social life as well as personal life. For him the Devotion to the Sacred Heart was not only *a Devotion*, in the narrow sense of the word. He did not practice this Devotion only by performing some specific, spiritual exercises such as the Holy Hour, Adoration or the Prayer of Reparation on First Fridays of the month. Even if he did not neglect these devotional practices, his way of practicing a Devotion to the Sacred Heart included his whole life and work.

Fr. Hériault MSC, for many years his confrere and assistant priest in St. Cyr parish of Issoudun, notes that Fr. Chevalier did not have “*a demonstrative piety*” and that his piety above all consisted in “*carrying out his obligations*” (Daily Readings October 11). Fr. Piperon MSC, another companion, describes Fr. Chevalier as ‘*a worker*’ who never lost time, but who in the midst of all his occupations, always found time to attend to the gatherings of the MSC community, several times a day: during the prayer services, the meals and the time of recreation.

A reflective moment

*“We can try new ways to find peace of heart and a little tranquility
by doing simple, practical things:*

*cooking, cleaning the house, visiting a friend, writing a letter,
taking a walk, listening to gentle music,
visiting a church, praying in silence or playing with children.*

*In the midst of all our weakness and pain,
we can experience moments of peace and joy.”*

(Jean Vanier)

Section 6
FR. CHEVALIER'S WAY OF LIVING
A DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART
(continued)

Being in charge of the St.Cyr parish in Issoudun, with more than 13000 inhabitants, Fr. Chevalier engaged himself in a great variety of pastoral activities. He looked after the parish-schools, gave catechesis to groups of adults and children, visited the sick, and attended to the needs of the many visitors at his presbytery, more specifically the poor. At the same time, being the General Superior, he administered the MSC Congregation, and after the Congregation was spread abroad, visited the communities in foreign countries. He founded the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and brought together diocesan priests and lay people in a Third Order of the Sacred Heart, while accompanying them as a spiritual director. Later on, he became the spiritual founder of the MSC Sisters in Germany.

He spent his free time (late at night?) in reading and meditating on the Devotion of the Sacred Heart. Continuously, he tried to deepen his understanding of the meaning of the Devotion, resulting in two substantial volumes about the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Besides that, he wrote many other books and pamphlets, and it has been said, that when in Issoudun, he wrote an average of 10 letters a day!

So, Fr. Chevalier practiced the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by *wholeheartedly* engaging himself in the occupations of his daily life, and by his way of associating with his confreres, parishioners and the other people he met. We may say, his spirituality was practical and down to earth.

However, we should not put him on a pedestal. He was an ordinary man with ordinary talents. He had flaws in his character, and he certainly made mistakes in

carrying out his leadership functions. However, what made him special was his total commitment to the cause of Jesus, whom he called “the Sacred Heart”. He devoted himself without reserve to the spreading of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, so that Jesus, the Sacred Heart, would be known and loved, everywhere.

A reflective moment

*For Fr. Chevalier,
practicing the ‘Devotion to the Sacred Heart’ meant
“devoting his whole life and all his works to the Sacred Heart of Jesus”.
He did this by carrying out his daily obligations
with love and dedication to the people around him
and to those entrusted to his care,
both in the Congregations and in the Parish*

To read more

In this on-line course, it is not our intention to present a complete biography on Fr. Chevalier. For further reading about Fr. Chevalier and his works, we refer to:

E.J.Cuskelly MSC, “Jules Chevalier, Man with a Mission” (1975): a biography, describing the life, personality and works of Fr. Chevalier, his mission and his struggles.

Jean Tostain MSC, “Jules Chevalier. Who is he?” (1996): A short introduction to the life of Fr. Chevalier, covering the earlier part of his life and works.

Hans Kwakman MSC, “Jules Chevalier’s Charism and the Identity of the Chevalier Family” (2011) explores the special Gift of the Spirit of Fr. Chevalier that he passed down to his spiritual sons and daughters of the Chevalier Family.

Section 7

THE CHARISM OF FR. CHEVALIER

The following sections deal with Fr. Chevalier's charism, that means, with the special Gift of the Spirit that inspired him to realize his dream of spreading the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, everywhere, as a remedy of the ills of society. His ideal was to bring together in one Society, religious, diocesan priests and lay people, who each in their own way would practice the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, today called a Spirituality of the Heart, by giving witness to it by their way of life, of service and teaching.

We may distinguish the following aspects of Chevalier's charism which kept him going during his whole life, notwithstanding setbacks and opposition:

1. A passion for Jesus Christ.
2. A developing vision of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart.
3. A Mission of the Heart.
4. A Social Mission.
5. A Shared Mission.
6. A Mission Everywhere.
7. A Mission together with Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

In the following sections, we will present the different aspects of Chevalier's multi-faceted charism, one by one. As gifts of the same Spirit, these seven aspects are closely interconnected with one another. Together, these seven aspects will

give a deeper insight into Chevalier's charism as the Founder of the Chevalier Family, and consequently, into the charism and identity of the Chevalier Family.

A reflective moment

*"The charism of Chevalier
should become the charism of the Chevalier Family,
and the source of its identity.
It is the unifying force
that creates coherence and integration
in the variety of ministries and services,
performed by members of the Chevalier Family.
Our spirituality is what we do with Chevalier's charism;
the way we channel and express it
through our life and ministries."*

To read more

To read in more detail about Fr. Chevalier's Charism, please go to ["Jules Chevalier's Charism and the Identity of the Chevalier Family"](#) by Fr. Hans Kwakman, (2011). There, you will also find more quotations of Fr. Chevalier's writings, related to the different aspects of his Charism. The reflective moment of this section is a quotation taken from this book.

Section 8

A PASSION FOR JESUS CHRIST

What was it that inspired Fr. Chevalier to devote his whole life and work to the Sacred Heart? What empowered him to perform his mission till the end of his life, with unflagging energy, day by day, notwithstanding many setbacks? During his entire life, he remained inspired and empowered by a special Gift of the Spirit, poured out in his heart. He humbly received this gift with an open heart, and remained faithful to it during his whole life. This Gift of the Holy Spirit or Charism became a permanent source of inspiration for him personally, and a light that gave direction to all his undertakings. It was as a fire that set his heart aflame and ignited him to do ordinary things in an extra-ordinary way.

What did this special Gift of the Spirit to Chevalier include? Above all, a great passion for Jesus Christ. For Chevalier, Jesus Christ was the Son of God who became human and lived among us in Palestine, as well as the living Lord, still present in today's world, especially in the Eucharist.

The Devotion to the Sacred Heart inspired him to read the Gospels with new eyes. By doing so, he encountered Jesus in a different way: he met Jesus who loves all of us with a human heart full of compassion. Both in his personal prayer and in the Eucharist he met Jesus as the living Lord, who loves us unconditionally. For Chevalier, the Eucharist was the greatest gift of the Sacred Heart, because in the Eucharist Jesus remains with us, till the end of time.

Driven by this passion for Jesus Christ, Chevalier urged people to read and re-read the Gospel in order to get to know Jesus better. When Jesus is better known, he said, he will also be more deeply loved. He himself had discovered - and he wanted others to discover the same - that the heart of the Christian religion is not found in theological doctrine and moral laws, but in a personal relationship with a living person, Jesus Christ, God's Word Incarnate. For Fr. Chevalier, "the Sacred

Heart” was just another name for Jesus Christ, indicating the whole person of Jesus, the Son of God becoming human and loving with a human Heart.

A Reflective Moment

*Fr. Chevalier believed in Jesus Christ,
God's Word Incarnate and the Risen Lord,
as being present in every human being
and in the midst of society.
He felt himself intensely strengthened in his belief
by Jesus' words to Margaret Mary Alacoque:
"Behold the Heart that has loved humankind so much
that it has spared nothing."
These words he kept quoting in his writings.*

Section 9

A DEVELOPING VISION OF THE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

One of the remarkable features of Chevalier's Charism is his unflagging energy spent on meditating and studying the deeper meaning of a Devotion to the Sacred Heart. Fr. Chevalier did not take for granted the Devotion to the Sacred Heart as already commonly lived and practiced in his time. Therefore, his vision of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart was in constant development. Although, he was not a writer by nature, he spent much time in publishing the results of his investigations, and he wanted to share them with anyone interested. Fr. Piperon MSC notes that it took Chevalier not less than 20 years to write his large volumes about the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

Through his on-going studies, he came to realize that we meet in the Heart of Jesus the revelation of God's own Heart and of God's powerful love. Wherever God's love is at work, Chevalier sees a manifestation of Jesus' Heart. So, Chevalier shows us that Jesus' Heart plays a central role in the creation of the universe and humanity. The creation of the universe, culminating in the creation of the human race, is a work of God's love.

Chevalier also underlines St. Paul's words that *"God created the whole universe through him and for him"* (Col 1:16), that is, through and for Jesus Christ, God's Son. While all human beings are created in the image of God, who is Love itself, they are all created in the image of Jesus, the Son of God. The Son of God reveals God's love by becoming human, while loving us with a human heart.

Chevalier points out how God's powerful, divine love is already at work in shoals of fish in the ocean and flocks of animals on the land, as a first realization of God's plan that will be completed when the time is right *"to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as Head"* (Eph 1:10).

He also indicates how each human heart is created by God according to the model of the human Heart of His Son. That means that the deepest desires of our hearts live also in the Heart of Jesus, and are actually God's own desires. It means also that, deep inside, our hearts have a similar capacity for love as that of the Heart of Jesus.

He saw Jesus Christ not only as our Redeemer and Savior, but also as the Great Adorer and Thanks giver. In the midst of creation and in the Eucharist, Jesus Christ adores the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, giving thanks for the Father's works of love, on behalf of each of us. Chevalier states that, while we are gifted with a heart and a voice, it is our task to participate in these acts of adoration and thanksgiving to the Creator, on behalf of all creatures.

A reflective moment

*"Already in matter, there is a sort of knowledge,
a beginning of love.
In the atmosphere and in the water,
these thousands of varieties of animals
know one another, love one another:
a first draft, a first outline, perfect in itself, wonderful, entrancing,
but only a distant sketch,
a long way unfortunately from its model¹," Jesus Christ, the Sacred Heart."*

*"Jesus is Man-God.
He reunites the whole of creation:
'I am the life', he tells us,
all created life and uncreated life,
plant, animal or material life, spiritual and rational life..."*

Jules Chevalier, 1900

Section 10

A DEVELOPING VISION OF THE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART (continued)

The Church, the Eucharist and the other sacraments, but also people taking care of the poor and the sick, people striving for peace and unity, and forgiving one another – Chevalier sees all these events as gifts of Jesus, the Sacred Heart, to us.

Remarkable also is Chevalier's vision of a new world emerging from the Heart of Jesus, pierced on Calvary. This broken and wounded Heart of Christ, seen by St. John as a source of blood and water, the birth of new life, is for Chevalier a great sign of hope that God is at work in our broken world. It is this heart that transforms our wounded society into a new society, and changes this old world into a new world. He sees this new world foreshadowed by the Church, not only in its liturgical celebrations but also in people caring for the poor, the sick and the handicapped, as well as in people who continue to love others, even if they themselves are wounded by a broken relationship or a broken heart.

Through his continuous meditation on the meaning of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, Chevalier renewed his image of God. Till the end of his life he sought how to reconcile the belief in a God who loves humankind unconditionally, with God's justice; how to square God's love revealed in the Heart of Jesus with the biblical accounts of God's anger towards sinners. He never totally resolved this tension, but he was finally able to write: *"God is love, God is love itself. God looks with immense love on the smallest, the least of the beings created by Him."*

A reflective moment

*"God is love itself.
This infinite love... has enclosed itself in a human heart,
the Heart of Jesus... his living sacrament."*

*"The Heart of Jesus is the Heart of God,
the center of divine love;
the image of the Heart of God."*

*"It is through the Heart of Christ
that the love of God, God himself,
pours himself out on the world
and on the human race"
(Jules Chevalier, 1900)*

Section 11

A MISSION OF THE HEART

At the origin of Chevalier's emerging charism was a conversion of heart. Actually, three events brought him to such a conversion. First, a clear instruction about the deeper meaning of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, presented by a Seminary professor in Bourges. Secondly, the reading of a book about Margaret Mary Alacoque, who in moments of mystical prayer saw how Jesus showed her his Heart, and spoke words of love for humanity. Thirdly, also in Bourges, a retreat that touched him deeply. His companion, Fr. Piperon, who witnessed the fruits of the conversion, notes that the young Chevalier underwent a transformation of heart. His relationships with his companions at the Seminary changed from strict and severe to kind and warmhearted, from aloof and distant to warm and understanding.

Apparently, during his first years in Bourges, Jules had forced himself to practice a spiritual life that did not correspond to his natural disposition. His behaviour was in contrast with his open and cheerful character. By nature, Jules was "lively" and "hot-headed", with a keen sense of humor. Most likely during his first years in Bourges, Jules felt himself totally ill at ease with himself, but must have felt obliged to behave in that way, assuming that it was the way a perfect seminarian should behave.

The encounter, through the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, with the merciful Heart of Jesus, must have occurred to him as a liberation. He began to realise that what the Lord expected from him was just the opposite of what he had been practising until then. For him, the conversion of heart culminated in a new relationship with Jesus, and a new way of looking at himself. Jesus became for him "the Sacred Heart", the Word of God becoming a human person, loving with a human heart. At the same time, he began to look at himself as a missionary, sent by Jesus, the Sacred Heart. That was the birth of his mission.

A reflective moment

*“The Christian's program —
the program of the Good Samaritan,
the program of Jesus—
is “a heart which sees”.
This heart sees where love is needed
and acts accordingly.”*

(Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, God is Love, no. 31)

Section 12

A MISSION OF THE HEART

(continued)

Because of his own experience in Bourges, Chevalier believed in the human heart's potentialities for loving and serving. He even spoke about "*the almighty power of love*", referring not only to the love emerging from the Heart of Jesus, but also from our own hearts. He was certainly aware of the fact that the human heart can become a source of evil. However, he was also convinced that the human heart is able to perform miracles of charity and courage.

He calls the human heart "*the most powerful means for doing good.*" To practice charity to the poor, he said, there is no need to be rich, "*it is enough to have a heart that is able to love ... and to be compassionate... God has given you a good, kind and sensitive heart.*" And he made an appeal to his audience to use the great power of their hearts in serving the poor, by going to visit the poor personally and to sit at the bedside of the sick.

For Chevalier, the formation of the human heart in accordance with the Heart of Jesus as a Model was of utmost importance. He stipulated it as one of the aims of the Society that he founded, not only for the religious and priests, but also for the lay members. When we neglect the formation of our hearts in conformity with Jesus' Heart, we run the risk of living our relationships in community life and family life in an improper way. And our missionary activities in pastoral care and social services, in education and medical work might become contaminated by selfishness as well. Later on in the course, we will come back to this central element of living a Spirituality of the Heart.

A reflective moment

*In order to practice charity to the poor,
there is no need to be rich,
"it is enough to have a heart that is able to love, to sympathize,
and to be compassionate....*

*God has given you a good, kind and sensitive heart...
The human heart is the most powerful means for doing good."*

(Jules Chevalier, circa 1860)

Section 13

A SOCIAL MISSION

There is a clear distinction between Margaret Mary Alacoque, (who as a Visitation sister, living from 1647 until 1690, in Paray-le-Monial, France, received apparitions of the Sacred Heart), and Fr Chevalier regarding their relationship with Jesus. Margaret Mary was a contemplative nun and a mystic, while Fr. Chevalier was a parish priest and a missionary. Accordingly, Margaret Mary lived in a continuous *mystical* relationship with Jesus, while Fr. Chevalier lived in a *missionary* relationship with Jesus. Consequently, there is also a difference between a Devotion to the Sacred Heart as promulgated by Margaret Mary and the Devotion to the Sacred Heart as promoted by Fr. Chevalier.

Certainly, Fr. Chevalier incorporated the devotional practices inherited from the tradition of Paray le Monial into his missionary spirituality. However, for him, the Devotion to the Sacred Heart included not only prayers of adoration and reparation, but also ways of obtaining a deeper knowledge of Jesus, and participation in Jesus' social mission. By reading the Gospels, Fr. Chevalier discovered Jesus, who through the practice of compassionate love, wanted to change society, including family life. Chevalier invited every person to participate in the same mission. He wanted as many people as possible to follow the way of Jesus, namely, the way of compassion, while leaving behind a way of life characterized by social egoism and religious indifference.

When Chevalier refers to the Devotion to the Sacred Heart as a remedy for the ills of society, he does not see the Devotion *as such* as a remedy. For him, this Devotion is a way of entering into a personal relationship with Jesus. Chevalier is convinced that Jesus himself is even more concerned about the deplorable situation in which our society finds itself. Therefore, by participating in Jesus' mission of the heart, we ourselves will be able to practice compassion, and to become healers of a wounded society, beginning in our own environment.

Chevalier found the root-causes of all ills of society in the human heart afflicted by social egoism, religious indifferentism, ignorance of the revealed truth, and disobedience to the teachings of the Catholic Church. All these vices and evils arise from a heart not yet formed in conformity with the Heart of Jesus. For Chevalier, the healing of the ills of society starts by a conversion of the heart. The main purpose of spreading the Devotion of the Heart is exactly this: to bring about a change of heart, which will result in a transformation of life of as many people as possible: This transformation of life of many people, will in turn, bring about a transformation and restoration of society.

A reflective moment

*“The experience of the past and of our own time
demonstrates that justice alone is not enough,
that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself,
if that deeper power, which is love,
is not allowed to shape human life
in its various dimensions.”*

(Pope John Paul II “Dives in Misericordia”, Rich in Mercy n. 12)

Section 14

A SHARED MISSION

The participation of lay people in the Chevalier Family is the logical consequence of the social dimension of Chevalier's charism. Without the involvement of lay people, it would be impossible to practice a Devotion to the Sacred Heart as a remedy for the ills of the time and the evils of society. By practicing a Spirituality of the Heart as a way of compassion both in family life and at the work place, lay people give their contribution to the renewal of society.

It was Chevalier's intention that the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ be carried out in close collaboration of religious, diocesan priests and lay members of the Chevalier Family combined. That is why, in his Constitutions for the MSC, Fr. Chevalier put much emphasis on the formation of lay people. They should be introduced into the deeper meaning of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, not only as a devotional practice but as a way of life, that is, a Spirituality of the Heart.

It is clear that in Chevalier's mind a Devotion to the Sacred Heart or a Spirituality of the Heart is not only carried out through social projects and works of charity. The way he himself practiced this Devotion in daily life, makes it clear that for him praying and working were equally important. It was his conviction that any social activity, whether in family, in the community or in society, could only bear fruit when accomplished in unity with Jesus and in conformity with the desires of Jesus' Heart. A Devotion to the Sacred Heart, when lived as a spirituality, that is, as

a way of life, as promoted by Chevalier, surpasses any opposition between working and praying.

Nevertheless, Chevalier emphasized that the lay-members of the (at that time so called) “Third Order” should avoid anything that would give the appearance of being a religious. For him, it was very important that the laity would live their Christian vocation, within their families, and by carrying out their daily duties in society. Only in that way would they be able to participate effectively in Christ’s healing mission in the world.

A reflective moment

*“New experiences of communion and cooperation
between consecrated persons and the laity
can give rise to the spread of a fruitful spirituality...
and facilitate more intense cooperation in view of the Institute's mission.*

*The participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights
into certain aspects of the charism,
leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it
and helping to draw from it
directions for new activities in the apostolate.*

*Consecrated persons should cultivate "the most precious gift: the spirit".
For their part, the laity should offer Religious families
the invaluable contribution of their "being in the world".*

(Pope John Paul II, Vita Consecrata, Consecrated Life n.55).

SECTION 15

A MISSION EVERYWHERE

“Mission anywhere in the world” is another integral element of Chevalier’s charism. *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere”!* The reason that, in the Chevalier Family, we speak about *“a mission everywhere,”* does not in the first place refer to the fact that the Chevalier family is spread over the five continents, but rather to the reality of taking part in the mission of Jesus Christ in all its aspects. Jesus Christ has been sent by the Father to carry out his mission all over the world, on every level of society, in all dimensions of social life, and in every corner of the human heart. In that sense, we speak about a mission without limits.

This broad understanding of mission explains Chevalier’s emphasis on the readiness of members of his spiritual Family to undertake ministries and services of any kind whatsoever, and to carry out any sort of mission anywhere in the world. His dream of a mission without boundaries is also one of the reasons, why Chevalier wanted to involve as many lay people as possible in this missionary project. As has been said before, through their way of living in their families, and by carrying out their secular professions, the lay people will be able to make Christ’s healing love present, everywhere, including in those places and situations where priests and religious are not present.

Chevalier desired that the presence of his spiritual sons and daughters in Church and society would really make a difference. Even if they lived in the same conditions as other people, or would perform the same services as other religious and lay persons, or, in the case of priests, would take on the same ministries as secular priests, the *quality of their presence and works*, should give witness to their calling as being missionaries of the Heart of Jesus. Jesus’ concern and compassion for humankind should be embodied in their way of life and work. While being aware of the fact that this special mission to make a difference was very challenging, Chevalier wanted to see his entire religious family, including the laity, well formed in living and spreading a Spirituality of the Heart or a Devotion to the Sacred Heart, in the broad sense as he understood it.

A reflective moment

“Lay people must exercise a very special form of evangelization.

*Their own field of evangelizing activity is
the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics,
but also the world of culture, sciences and arts,
of international life and the mass media.*

*It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization,
such as human love, the family,
the education of children and adolescents,
professional work and suffering.*

*One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family
in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity.”*

(Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Proclaiming the Gospel n. 70-71)

Section 16

A MISSION TOGETHER WITH OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART

What was the main intention of Fr. Chevalier in promoting the Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart? Fr. Chevalier saw the Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart first of all as a powerful means to bring people to the Devotion of the Sacred Heart. Spreading the Devotion to the Sacred Heart had been the main purpose of Chevalier's whole life and all his works. He wanted to promote the Devotion to the Sacred Heart everywhere, and by all means, as the remedy for the evils of our time. With that purpose in mind, he founded the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Association of the Secular Priests of the Sacred Heart, the Third Order of lay people, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and later on, together with Fr. Hubert Linckens, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. With the same intention in mind, he started to promote the Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

Only *one* devotion was central in the mind of Fr. Chevalier, and that was the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. However, for him the Virgin Mary was inseparably related to the Sacred Heart of her Son. He used to say, "*All blessings are received from the Sacred Heart through Our Lady.*" In Chevalier's vision, also now in heaven the Risen Lord Jesus Christ acts on the intercession of Mary, while Mary is there to lead us to the Heart of her son.

For Chevalier, Our Lady was the first Missionary of the love of the Sacred Heart. She associates herself completely with the Mission of her Son to realize a regeneration or renewal of humankind. In that way, the Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart became an integral part of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart. This is a strong element of Fr. Chevalier's charism.

The three statues which represent Our Lady of the Sacred Heart clearly express Chevalier's intention to involve Mary in this project of spreading the Devotion to the Sacred Heart: Jesus, at the age of twelve, standing in front of Mary,

his mother; the child Jesus on Mary's arm; and Jesus on the cross accompanied by his mother – in each of the three statues, Mary draws our attention to her son Jesus, by pointing to his heart.

A reflective moment

Please, look for a while
at the three different Images which
follow and which today represent
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.
Each image, in its own way, shows
the intimate relationship between
Our Lady and her son Jesus.
Our Lady regards Jesus
and draws our attention to Jesus,
who shows us his Heart.

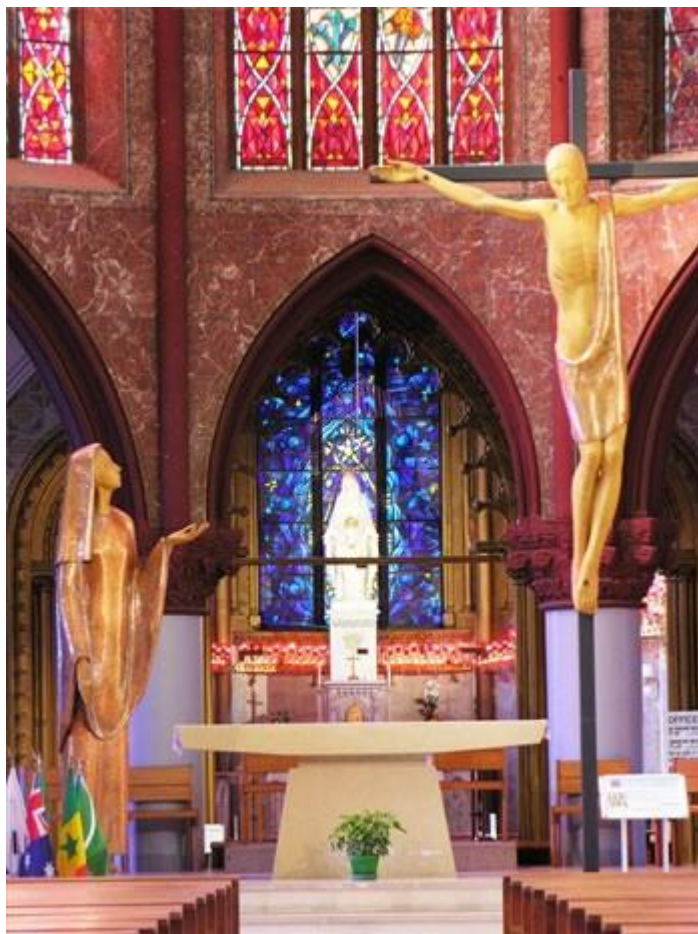


This first image above,
designed by Fr. Chevalier,
shows us Mary looking at Jesus,
who as a twelve year old boy
stands in front of her,
pointing to his heart and to his mother.

(In certain places, some images represented Fr. Chevalier's first design in a distorted manner, showing Jesus not as a twelve year old – according to Fr. Chevalier's point of view Luke 2:51 was very important - but as a little boy, sitting at the feet of his mother. Therefore, the Vatican ordered Fr. Chevalier to design a second image. However, the original Statue of Issoudun, shown above, crowned on behalf of the Pope in 1869, was permitted to remain as it was.)



The second image above,
also designed by Fr. Chevalier,
expresses the intimate relationship
between mother Mary and her child Jesus,
who again points to his heart
and to his mother.



The third image
is called “the Calvary of Issoudun”,
and was designed after the Second Vatican Council.
It shows us Jesus, hanging on the cross,
his Heart pierced,
while Our Lady stands near the cross,
inviting us to “look upon him whom they have pierced.”

Part three
SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART
IN THE CHEVALIER FAMILY

Section 17
Introduction to Part Three

In the foregoing sections (8 to 16) we followed the pattern, which characterized Fr. Chevalier's charism. As has been pointed out before (see section 7), this pattern includes the following aspects: a Passion for Jesus Christ; a Developing Vision of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart; a Mission of the Heart; a Social Mission; a Shared Mission; a Mission Everywhere; and a Mission together with Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

By remaining faithful to Fr. Chevalier's charism, today a Spirituality of the Heart as lived by the Chevalier Family should basically show the same pattern, but enriched by the potentials of the culture in which we live, and in response to the challenges of the 21st century. We may be grateful to Pope Francis, who through his words, writings and actions clearly promotes a Spirituality of the Heart for the Church in today's world.

In the following sections we will read some of Pope Francis' writings to show how a Spirituality of the Heart shapes the Pope's understanding of the mission of the Church. In particular, we will pay attention to the Apostolic Exhortation 'Evangelii Gaudium' ('the Joy of the Gospel') on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world; and the Encyclical "Laudato si, mi' Signore" ("Praise be to you, my Lord") on care for our common home, that is, the earth and the universe. Some authors from inside and outside the Chevalier Family, who in their writings foster a Spirituality of the Heart, will also contribute to our reflections. In that way, it will become clear that, thanks to the Spirituality of the Heart as inherited from Fr. Chevalier, we as members of the Chevalier Family, participate in a Spirituality, significant to the entire Church and its mission.

First of all, we will pay attention to a characteristic of evangelization, crucial to Fr. Chevalier as well as the Chevalier Family. This feature is clearly highlighted by Pope Francis, namely that the driving force of evangelization is found in a JOYFUL response to the Good News of the Gospel. The same joy that overwhelmed Fr. Chevalier at the discovery of a Devotion to the Sacred Heart shines also in Pope Francis' Exhortation titled 'Evangelii Gaudium' or the Joy of the Gospel. James Cuskelly MSC, who was one of the first, who called the Devotion to the Sacred Heart as lived by Chevalier "a Spirituality of the Heart", also underlined that the experience of joy is at the root of an authentic, missionary spirituality (Regarding James Cuskelly, see also section 4).

A reflective moment

Bishop James Cuskelly MSC underscores that
*“true spirituality begins when God enters your life -
and is accepted as your God,
and when you delight in being a son or daughter of God...
We truly ... let the Lord enter into our lives,
if, in the process, joy enters into our hearts.”*

Pope Francis opens his Exhortation with the words:
*“The Joy of the Gospel fills the heart and lives of all
who encounter Jesus.
Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free
from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.
With Christ joy is constantly born anew”*
(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 1).

To read more

In the coming sections, texts of “A Reflective moment” will be taken from Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, (November 2013) and from his Encyclical “*Laudato si*”, on care for our common home, (May 2015). (Both texts are also available on the internet).

Other publications of Pope Francis also reveal the inspiration of a Spirituality of the Heart. For example: *Misericordiae-Vultus* (“**Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy**”): Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 2015 (also available on the internet).

Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, a conversation with Andrea Tornielli, Random House USA, 2016.

The essay of E.J. Cuskelly MSC, *Walking the way of Jesus, an essay on Christian Spirituality* (St.Paul’s 1999) is clearly inspired by a Spirituality of the Heart. Cuskelly’s words quoted in “A Reflective Moment” are taken from p. 29-30.

Section 18

Dignity, Beauty, Joy

The title of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, 'Joy of the Gospel', defines the Pope's program of evangelization. It is a clear indication of what the Pope wants to highlight, namely that our Christian dignity is a source of joy, giving meaning to our lives. This joy urges us to share the beauty of this dignity enthusiastically with as many people as possible.

The Pope encourages us to make ourselves more aware of the beauty of the gift that we have received at our baptism: the belief in God, who loves us unconditionally and whose boundless love has become human in Jesus Christ. Belief in this gift gives meaning to our present life and opens up a bright perspective on our future life in eternity. Only when we are fully aware of this gift and delight in it, we will feel enthusiastic in sharing it with others. The Pope invites us therefore, to become missionaries of *the joyful news* of the Gospel.

At the Major Seminary of Bourges, Jules Chevalier discovered the beauty of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart (In section 11, we already talked about it). The Heart of Jesus became for him a profound source of love and joy. As he himself wrote, the doctrine on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as explained by his professor of Christology, "*went straight to my heart. The more I went into it, the more attractive I found it.*" While reading a biography on St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Chevalier also felt deeply touched by the words of Jesus to Margaret Mary: "*This is the Heart that has loved humankind so much that it has spared nothing.*" These words, he added, "*stirred up in me a keen desire to become the apostle*" of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart and to spread it everywhere.

His joy even deepened when later on in his life, Chevalier began to realize that the love of Jesus' Heart finds its source in the Heart of God, who loves the world and each one of us so much that he has sent his only Son to become human among

us (John 3:16). This joy strengthened his desire to spread “*this true and most salutary Devotion*” everywhere (See also section 9).

A Reflective moment

Bishop James Cuskelly writes that
at the heart of an authentic vocation to any kind of ministry,
the desire exists, to
*“share with others something of the joy
that the faith has brought into my life.”*
(E.J. Cuskelly, p. 31)

Pope Francis urges us to
*“recover and deepen our enthusiasm,
that delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing,
even when it is in tears that we must sow.”*
(Evangelii Gaudium n. 10)

SECTION 19

“The very heart of the Gospel”

By communicating the Gospel, the Pope states that we should always focus on *“the very heart of the Gospel”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 34) that means, on its core message. When trying to *“reach everyone without exception, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary”* (n. 35). What should always stand out *“is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead”* (n. 36).

For Pope Francis, this message about the incarnation forms the core of the Christian faith. We need to recognize and internalize the significance of this statement: the INCARNATION, that is, the manifestation of God’s love in the person of Jesus Christ, in his ministry, death and resurrection, forms the CORE of the Christian faith. The Pope admits that by saying so, *“the message is simplified,”* but it will lose *“none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing”* (n. 35).

Fr. Chevalier would have totally agreed with Pope Francis. In fact, in his book *“Le Sacré Coeur de Jésus”* (1900), he had already written something similar. There, with full approval, he quoted the words of his contemporary, Cardinal Pie, who had written that the history of Christian religion is found *“wholly and entirely in the sublime statement “God so loved the world”* (John 3:16). Moreover, the Cardinal added: *“the whole creed is reduced to these words of the beloved Disciple: “We believe in God’s love for us”* (1 John 4:16).

When becoming an auxiliary bishop, James Cuskelly MSC chose as his motto "*Credidimus Caritati*" (1 John 4:16), which he himself freely translated as "*we believe in a compassionate love*". For him as well, this confession formed the core message of the Gospel, and at the same time of a Spirituality of the Heart.

A Reflective Moment

What is said in the Constitutions of the MSC,
applies to the entire Chevalier Family:

*"In our communion as brothers and sisters
we live our faith in the compassionate love of the Lord."*

Pope Francis writes:

*"The first proclamation that must ring out over and over, is:
"Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you;
and now he is living at your side every day
to enlighten, strengthen and free you."*

(Evangelii Gaudium n. 164).

Section 20

The Healing of a Wounded Society

Pope Francis and Fr. Chevalier are both aware of the fact that the central message of the Gospel concerning God's unconditional love is received not only for our private consolation, but for the healing of a wounded society. In "Evangelii Gaudium", the Pope shows himself to be deeply conscious of the ills of modern society. He speaks extensively about the suffering of people and the big challenges faced by today's world: poverty, inequality, violence and war. He criticizes modern economies that disadvantage the poor. However, the Pope sees the root-causes of the appalling social inequality in today's society not only in failing economic systems, but also in maladies of the human heart. Above all, he points to two illnesses: indifference and selfishness. He goes even so far as to speak of "*a globalization of indifference*" and declares: "*Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were not our responsibility*" (Evangelii Gaudium n. 54). Regarding egoism, he urges all of us to say a firm "*no to selfishness*" (Evangelii Gaudium n. 81).

In his day, Fr. Chevalier felt himself upset by exactly the same social evils, rooted in the human heart. Two evils, he said, are "*destroying our unhappy world: indifference and egoism*" (Personal Notes, Appendix p. 107). He found "*an effective remedy*" (Daily Readings January 4), for these evils of the heart in the devotion to "*the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is all love and charity.*" Why? Because this devotion, he said, will "*kindle in all hearts the fire of God's love found in the Heart of Jesus.*"

Pope Francis does not specifically mention the devotion to the Sacred Heart, but he also considers love and charity to be the remedies of today's social evils. Here he sees a role both for politicians and every private person. Politicians, he says, should get involved in "*sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots of the evils in our world,*" while all of us should be convinced that, "*charity not only should shape our personal relationships with*

family, friends, and small groups, but also our social, economic and political relationships” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 205). Several times, the Pope refers to “the inescapable social dimension of the Gospel message” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 258), which “before all else, invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, ... and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 39).

A Reflective moment

What sort of society do we want?

*“A society that encourages us to break open
the shell of selfishness and self-centeredness
contains the seeds of a society where people are honest, truthful, and loving.
A society can function well only if those within are concerned,
not only with their own needs
or the needs of those who immediately surround them,
but by the needs of all,
that is to say, by the common good and the family of nations.”*

Jean Vanier - Daily Thought

Pope Francis writes:

*“The joy of the Gospel is such
that it cannot be taken away from us
by anyone or anything (cf. Jn 16:22).
The evils of our world – and those of the Church –
must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor.
Let us look upon them as challenges
which can help us to grow.
With the eyes of faith, we can see the light which the Holy Spirit always
radiates in the midst of darkness...*

*Our faith is challenged to discern
how wine can come from water
and how wheat can grow in the midst of weeds.”*
(Evangelii Gaudium n. 84).

Section 21

A Change of Heart

A frequent theme in Pope Francis' encyclical, « Laudato Si » (“Praise be to you, My Lord”) on care for the earth and the integrity of creation, is the statement that, *“everything is interconnected”* (Laudato Si n. 70; also for example in n. 16; 91; 240), or *“all creatures are connected”* (Laudato Si 42). The Pope declares: *“Peace, justice and the preservation of creation cannot be separated. ... Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures, and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth”* (Laudato Si n. 92).

Remarkably, not unlike Pope Francis, Fr. Chevalier also points out that all creatures are connected with one another by the love of the Creator. He writes: *“How marvelous it is, this material world! What perfect unity in this indescribable variety! Not a being in isolation. On the contrary, it is an immense network, all the links of which converge at a central point: humankind. Yes, it is in humankind that this unity is achieved; and in us the affective life has a special organ; the heart. The heart! See the central point where everything converges.”* (Le Sacré Cœur de Jésus, p. 64-65). Further down Chevalier points to *“the mysterious chain which binds the human heart to the Heart of Christ and the Heart of Christ to the very Heart of God”* (Le Sacré Cœur de Jésus, p. 182; Daily Readings July 11).

Speaking about *“Ecological Education and Spirituality”* (Chapter Six), Pope Francis makes an appeal for, what he calls, an *“Ecological Conversion”* (Laudato Si n. 216): *“We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart”* (Laudato Si n. 218), he says. For, *“the emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume.”* An empty heart generates *“obsession with a consumerist lifestyle,”* which results in the disappearance of *“a genuine sense of the common good.”* This might even lead, the Pope warns, *“to violence and mutual destruction”* (Laudato Si n. 204).

This 'ecological conversion' or 'change of heart' calls for fostering certain attitudes. The Pope declares: *"First, it entails gratitude, recognition that the world is God's loving gift. It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings."* Then, *"by developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems"* (Laudato Si n. 220). Moreover, such a conversion or change of heart will lead us to, *"an alternative understanding of the quality of life, encouraging a lifestyle, capable of deep enjoyment, free of the obsession with consumption"* (Laudato Si n. 222).

These words of Pope Francis find resonance in Fr. Chevalier's own heart and teachings. After all, he expected a change of heart through an encounter with the Heart of Jesus. He wrote: *"knowing the Heart of Jesus, we shall know our own heart. We shall be able to say with the Apostle: "Everything belongs to us, we belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to God"* (1 Cor 3:22-23; Le Sacré Coeur de Jésus, p.199).

A Reflective moment

*"A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart
and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment.*

*Christian spirituality proposes a growth
marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little.*

*It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop
and appreciate the small things,
to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us,
to be spiritually detached from what we possess,
and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack."*

(Pope Francis, Laudato Si n. 222)

*"Many people don't pay any attention
to the miracles that are all around them
all the time here and now."*

(Richard Rohr ofm)

Section 22

The motive of Evangelization

Fr. Chevalier was filled with concern about the fact that so many people did not know Jesus Christ and even did not know what they were missing. He wrote: *“the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the only source of light, truth and life, is not sufficiently known, is not sufficiently loved. Yet his love has saved the world... and his loving kindness keeps it in being”* (Règles 1857, p.1; Daily Readings December 20). Talking about the Sacred Heart, Chevalier referred to the person of Jesus as appearing in the Gospels, loving with a human heart. He argued, when people get to know Jesus of the Gospels, their hearts and their lives will change. People will start to love him, and by loving him they will *“combat egoism and indifference.”* So in order to make known the *“greatness”* of Jesus Christ and *“the treasures of mercy which his heart contains,”* Chevalier intended to bring religious men and women, diocesan priests and lay people together in a society of the Sacred Heart (Règles 1857, p.1; Daily Readings December 20).

In his sermons Chevalier loved to tell the Gospel stories revealing how Jesus cares for the sick and the poor. With excitement, he spoke about Jesus' concern for a sinful woman caught in adultery; for Jairus, a synagogue official, whose daughter had died, and for the widow of Naïm, on her way to bury her only son. He underlined how Jesus' Heart, *“from the cradle to the cross,”* showed both *“gentleness and strength”* (Le Sacré Cœur, p. 200; Daily Readings July 13).

Also Pope Francis feels deeply concerned about the fact that so many people still do not know Jesus Christ. In *“Evangelii Gaudium”* he writes: *“Evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him”* (EG n. 15). He adds: *“If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life”* (EG 49). The Pope continues: *“Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is something beautiful,*

capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties” (EG n. 167).

A Reflective Moment

Pope Francis speaks with passion about Jesus in the Gospels:

*“How good it is for us to contemplate
the closeness which he shows to everyone!*

*If he speaks to someone,
he looks into their eyes with deep love and concern:
“Jesus, looking upon him, loved him” (Mk 10:21).*

*We see how accessible he is,
as he draws near the blind man (cf. Mk 10:46-52)
and eats and drinks with sinners (cf. Mk 2:16)
without worrying about being thought a glutton
and a drunkard himself (cf. Mt 11:19).*

*We see his sensitivity
in allowing a sinful woman to anoint his feet (cf. Lk 7:36-50)
and in receiving Nicodemus by night (cf. Jn 3:1-15).”
(Evangelii Gaudium n. 269).*

A Prayer to Jesus

*Lord Jesus, “your Father’s love was so unlimited
that he wanted us to know that love
and to find in it the fulfillment of our deepest desires.
So he sent us you, with a human heart big enough
to hold all human loneliness and all human anguish.
Your heart is not a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh;
not narrowed by human sin and unfaithfulness,
but as wide and deep as divine love itself.
Your heart is open to receive anyone with total, unrestricted love.
For anyone who wants to come to you, there is room.
You want to offer all people a home
where every human desire is met,
every human longing comes to rest
and every human need is satisfied.”*

(Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Heart speaks to Heart*, Three prayers to Jesus, p. 22).

Section 23

A passion for Jesus and a passion for his people

Central to the vision of both Pope Francis and Fr. Chevalier is their understanding of 'mission' or, the word often used by recent Popes, 'evangelization'. Along with Fr. Chevalier, Pope Francis emphasizes that all Christians are called to take part in Jesus' mission in the world. For both of them, 'mission' or 'evangelization' has to play a vital role in the Church and in the life of every Christian.

The Pope describes 'mission' as *"at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people"* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 268). In section 8 of this course, we already spoke about Fr. Chevalier's great passion for Jesus Christ. In all his writings, he presented Jesus Christ as the model of our life and mission in Church and society. He invites us to look attentively at Jesus in his public life, so that we may follow him in his mission. What do we see? *"We see his Heart pour itself out on every sort of misfortune, on every sort of misery, moral and physical. All the kindness that Jesus sowed along his path, all the miracles he worked are so many outpourings of ineffable goodness of his Heart"* (Le Sacré Coeur 1900, p. 9). In the same book, Chevalier elaborates the meaning of this *"ineffable goodness"* of Jesus, by declaring: *"Goodness is gratuitous love."* Quoting Fr. Lacordaire OP, a famous preacher of his day, he states: *"He is good who loves for the sole happiness that he finds in loving"*.

Pope Francis sees this as the purest motivation for evangelization. He writes: *"Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary. This openness of the heart is a source of joy, since "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). And the Pope points to the many people who are "missionaries" just by the way they carry out their daily commitments: "All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others"* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 272-273). And, we may add that all around us we also meet parents and children with soul, priests, religious and all kind of workers with soul. These are the people, the Pope says, who live with *"a heart attentive to others"* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 282). They are the people who *"generously give"* of

themselves (Evangelii Gaudium n. 274). In Chapter 5 of Evangelii Gaudium, the Pope calls them several times “*Spirit-filled Evangelizers.*”

A reflective moment

*“Isn't it instructive
that the spiritual formation of the original disciples
happens with Jesus on the road?”*

*In effect, the disciples learn by doing.
They grow into an understanding of this God of love,
this God of compassion, this God who loves justice,
this God who makes all things new,
by participating as active observers
and agents of compassion, justice, and newness.*

*And, yes, necessarily, they pause with Jesus to reflect,
ask questions (sometimes stupid questions), and pray.*

*But the spiritual adventure described in the four Gospels
does not happen in the sanctuary;
it happens on the road,
in the company of beggars, prostitutes, and lepers.”*

Jack Jezreel, "To Love without Exception," *Oneing*, Vol. 4 No. 1, p. 51-52.

Section 24

“A spirituality which can change hearts”

(Evangelii Gaudium n. 262)

James Cuskelly MSC, we already met in earlier sections of this program. He was one of the first MSC, who introduced the Chevalier Family to a Spirituality of the Heart. When we really want to live a Spirituality of the Heart, he declared: *“We have to go down in the depths of our own soul in a realization of our profound personal needs of life, of love and of meaning”*

(Jules Chevalier, Man with a Mission, p. 128).

Why do we have to pay attention to our profound personal needs in the depths of our soul or heart, in order to live a Spirituality of the Heart? In his book published in 1900, Fr. Chevalier already gave a profound reason. He wrote: *“God reveals to us the aspirations of his Heart through the aspirations of our own heart. ... Whether one knows it or not, the truth is that our heart is made for his Heart.”* Indeed, he said, God creates *“needs in us in harmony with his desires”* (Le Sacré Coeur 1900, p. 77). St. Augustine, living in the fourth century, commended the faithful, saying: *“Return to your own heart...There you will find God, because you are formed in his likeness”* (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John 18:10, with reference to Isaias 46:8).

It is certainly God, who implants in our hearts our deeper aspirations, our desires for solidarity and justice, as well as our search for love and meaning in life. In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis considers these deeper desires of people’s hearts, as well as their search for meaning in life to be a clear sign of people’s thirst for God, even if people are not aware of it. He points to the

“innumerable signs in today’s world, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 86). We may be sure, he states that it is, *“God’s presence (which) accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find meaning in their lives”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 71). And when people foster *“solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice,”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 71), God’s Spirit is certainly at work among them.

Implicitly, the Pope’s words also convey the message that it is important to pay attention to the deeper aspirations of our own hearts, our own *“profound personal needs of life, of love and of meaning,”* as well as our own desire to foster justice, truth and solidarity. Because, also in us, *“God’s saving love ... is mysteriously at work ..., above and beyond (our) faults and failings”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 44).

A Reflective moment

In ‘The Joy of the Gospel’, Pope Francis draws attention to the fact
that our own time is marked by
“the return to the sacred and the quest for spirituality”

He continues by saying:

*“Today, our challenge is ... the need
to respond adequately to many people’s thirst for God,
lest they try to satisfy it with alienating solutions
or with a disembodied Jesus,
who demands nothing of us with regard to others.*

*These people should find in the Church a spirituality,
which can offer healing and liberation,
and fill them with life and peace,
while at the same time summoning them
to fraternal communion and missionary fruitfulness.
If not, they will end up by being taken in by solutions
which neither make life truly human
nor give glory to God”*

(Evangelii Gaudium n. 89).

Section 25

“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”

(First part)

His love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus led Fr. Chevalier to honor the Sacred Heart in a variety of manifestations and to study them as well. In his book on the Sacred Heart, he describes the Heart of Jesus as the center of God’s plan not only in redemption, but also in creation: *“Jesus Christ is the starting point, the center and the summit of the whole of creation.... Everything is summed up in Jesus. And in Jesus everything leads back to his Heart”* (Sacré Coeur de Jésus, 1900, p. 77).

Concerning the creation of human beings, Chevalier declares: *“When God made the heart of the first human being, evidently his attention was fixed on the Heart of his Son, which the Holy Spirit would have to form later from the blood of a Virgin”* (Sacré Coeur de Jésus, 1900, p. 139). Accordingly, his love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its role in creation brought Chevalier also to highly esteem the place of human beings in creation. In Chevalier’s vision, all things are made not only for Jesus Christ, but for us as well. *“All things are made for us and put at our disposal.”* Such nobility, however, brings about responsibility. On behalf of all creatures, *“it is our task to sing the hymn of thanksgiving, to lend them our voice, our heart, our faculties in order to give glory to God. Without us the universe would be mute, but with us everything in nature turns to heaven, prays, adores.”* (Retraite de huit jours selon la méthode de Saint Ignace, Issoudun 1904, p. 22; Daily Readings March 2).

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis proclaims the same message: *“When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them”* (Laudato Si n. 87). The Pope even broadens our vision by stating that, *“a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings”* (Laudato Si n. 91).

So, the motto of the Chevalier Family, *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”*, expresses an invitation to practice a love without boundaries.

We are invited to love the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the center of the universe, making the entire universe into a sacred community of creatures. The life of our fellow human beings and nature in its great variety of creatures as well, is sacred and deserves our respect and admiration. Because, as Pope Francis said: *“as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect”* (Laudato Si n. 89).

A Reflective moment

A Christian prayer in union with creation

*“Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.*

*God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.*

*Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you! Amen”
(Pope Francis, Laudato Si n. 246).*

Section 26

“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”
(Second part)

Fr. Chevalier started sending missionaries abroad in the turbulent times of 19th century France. In those days, in several areas of France, religious were especially persecuted by state-officials. Consequently, in November 1880, MSC fathers, brothers and students were expelled from France. *“I then had the profound sorrow of seeing all my confreres dispersed, our dear Basilica closed and sacrilegious seals affixed to its doors,”* writes Fr. Chevalier in his Personal Notes (p. 34; Daily Readings November 5). He himself could stay in France, because years before, the Archbishop of Bourges had appointed him as parish priest of St. Cyr in Issoudun. However, to continue to serve as parish priest, he had to behave like a diocesan priest, and was not permitted to appear in public as the Superior General of a religious Institute. Since the closing of the Basilica and the confiscation of the monastery by local authorities, he had to govern the Congregation from the presbytery.

In the middle of these very disheartening circumstances, Fr. Chevalier received a letter from the Vatican, dated March 25, 1881, requesting the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to accept the Mission of Melanesia and Micronesia in Oceania - a vast region already for many years without a Catholic Mission. Against the negative advice of his councilors, who, not without reasons, maintained that this Mission went far beyond the strength of the young Society, Fr. Chevalier put his trust in the Sacred Heart and took the decision to accept the offer. Though he was still unsure whom to send, he considered the foreign missions to be one of the principal ends of the Society, to which he had given the motto: *“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”* – a saying that up to and including today expresses the participation of the Chevalier Family in Christ’s mission.

In our days, missionaries of the Good News of the Gospel face trials not unlike those met by Fr. Chevalier and his confreres. In his Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’, Pope Francis describes the many challenges evangelization has to deal with in today’s society. These challenges, the Pope writes, *“may take*

the form of veritable attacks on religious freedom or new persecutions directed against Christians. In some countries these have reached alarming levels of hatred and violence.” However, in other places, the Pope states, *“the problem is more that of widespread indifference and relativism, linked to disillusionment...”* (Evangelii Gaudium 61).

For the Pope, these challenges are no ground for lessening our commitment to mission. On the contrary, the Pope states that today: *“Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.”* In addition, he continues by affirming that *“indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 121).

A Reflective Moment

*“May the world of our time,
which is searching, sometimes with anguish,
sometimes with hope,
be enabled to receive the Good News,
not from evangelizers who are dejected,
discouraged, impatient or anxious,
but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor,
who have first received the joy of Christ”*
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 10).

*“Every person is worthy of our giving. ...,
Every human being is the object of God’s infinite tenderness,
and he himself is present in their lives. ...
Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life,
that already justifies the offering of my life. ...
We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls
and our heart is filled with faces and names!”*
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 274)

Section 27

“May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved”

(Third part)

Fr. Chevalier's book *“Le Sacré Coeur de Jésus”* (the fourth edition appeared in 1900) opens with the words: *“God is wholly love. God is love himself, essentially love (1 John 4:16). From all eternity God formed the plan of revealing to us this love... God sends his Word on earth, that is to say, God's only Son”* (p. 3). This is a beautiful confession of faith, being foundational to Chevalier's spirituality during the last stage of his life, and to a contemporary Spirituality of the Heart as well. (See also section 10 of this course).

Yet, due to the theological climate of his time, Fr. Chevalier did not clearly recognize the other way God's love is powerfully at work among us, namely through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the universe, secular society and people's hearts. Sure, Chevalier acknowledged God's work in our hearts through, *“the Spirit of power and love”* (2 Tim 1:7; *Le Sacré Coeur de Jésus*, p. 201), but, while holding on to the teaching of the Church at the time, he saw God's Spirit only at work in the hearts of people baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. That made it difficult for him to discover any good, for example, in the hearts of a protestant reformer such as Luther, or contemporaries who campaigned for human rights.

Pope Francis expands our understanding of a Spirituality of the Heart by attributing an important role to *“the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 2). Not unlike Fr. Chevalier, he draws our attention to God, who sends the *“Spirit into our hearts”*, while making us *“God's sons and daughters, transforming us and enabling us to respond to God's love by our lives”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 112). The Pope emphasizes as well how *“the Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms.”* These charisms or “Gifts of the Spirit” (see section 2 and 4 of this course), *“are meant to renew and build up the Church”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 130).

What is more, the Pope urges us, *“to believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone.”* He declares, *“that the Holy Spirit seeks to penetrate every human*

situation and all social bonds, knowing how to loosen the knots of the most complex human affairs” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 178). He states as well that, “the same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom, which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 254). And so, “as Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries,” as they “can help us better to live our own beliefs” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 254).

Consequently, as “*missionary disciples*” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 119), who are used to praying, “*may the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved*”, we should let ourselves be taught by, “*the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ*” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 2). We remember too, that it is this same Spirit which is powerfully active in the hearts of all people and in the entire secular society. (See Evangelii Gaudium n. 265). We are sent to “*cooperate with the liberating work of the Spirit*” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 178), in order to make Jesus and the yearnings of his heart, everywhere known and loved.

A Reflective Moment

*“Keeping our missionary fervor alive
calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit,
for it is he who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26).
But this generous trust has to be nourished,
and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly.
He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavor.*

*It is true that this trust in the unseen
can cause us to feel disoriented:
it is like being plunged into the deep
and not knowing what we will find.*

*Yet there is no greater freedom than that of
allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit,
renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail,
and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us,
leading us wherever he wills.
The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place.”
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, n. 280).*

Section 28

“A Preferential Option for the Poor ”

After Fr. Chevalier's death, Fr. Claude Hériault MSC, who for many years had been his parish-assistant, paid tribute to Chevalier's special care for the poor: *“The poor knew his charity and the kindness of his heart. They used to come constantly knocking at his door. They knew they would not be refused... How many families ... have been supported by his open handed generosity and by his advice... Today the poor realize the loss they have suffered with the death of Fr. Chevalier”* (Claude Hériault MSC, Notes sur le T.R.P. Chevalier. MS. Daily Readings, September 14).

One of the first pastoral projects of the newly erected MSC Community was the celebration of Masses only for men. At the time, in general, men did not attend Mass, not even on Sundays. In 1857, Chevalier, Maugenest and Piperon started visiting all the families of Issoudun to invite the men to attend the “for men only” Sunday Mass. Then, around 1858, during Lenten sermons for about fifty men, Fr. Chevalier spoke about the two main evils of society, namely Egoism and Indifference, which he considered to be the main causes of wide-spread poverty. These evils, he said, could be healed by following Jesus, who, as revealed in the Gospels, loves with a human Heart.

No less than four of his eighteen Lenten sermons, Chevalier dedicated to the practice of charity for the poor, not just the poor in general, but the poor in Issoudun. Chevalier told the men of Issoudun that there were many more poor people in their neighborhood than they realized. There are two reasons, he said, why we should love the poor. First, they are human beings like us, created in the image of God. Even in the most pitiful condition, a poor person still shows us *“a portrait of our Father in heaven.”* Secondly, the poor are *“our brothers and sisters, since we are all together children of the same Father.”* Therefore, he said, we should treat them as brothers and sisters, by visiting them personally at home. (Combattre l'Égoïsme et l'Indifférence par la charité et l'amour du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus, 10. Sur le Pauvre, sa Dignité. Manuscrits sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus, Fontes MSC 1,4).

The renewed MSC Constitutions of 1984 declare that “*the spirit of our Society*” implies “*a preferential option for the poor*” (MSC Const. 1985, n. 48). That is totally consistent with the way our Founder practiced a Devotion to the Sacred Heart. Also the Spirituality of the Heart as practically lived and promoted by Pope Francis, clearly involves “*a preferential option for the poor.*” “*The Church has made an option for the poor, he writes, because God shows the poor his first mercy... This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have “this mind... which was in Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:5). This is the reason, the Pope continues, “why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” (Evangelii Gaudium n. 198).*

A reflective moment

*“Our commitment does not consist
exclusively in activities or programs...
What the Holy Spirit mobilizes is ...
above all an attentiveness,
which considers the other in a certain sense
as one with ourselves.
This loving attentiveness is
the beginning of a true concern for their person...
This entails appreciating the poor
in their goodness,
in their experience of life,
in their culture,
and in their ways of living the faith. ...
Only on the basis of this real and sincere closeness
can we properly accompany the poor
on their path of liberation.
Only this will ensure that
in every Christian community the poor feel at home. ...
Without the preferential option for the poor,
the proclamation of the Gospel ...
risks being misunderstood...”*

(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 199)

Section 29

"OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART"

By promoting the title "Our Lay of the Sacred Heart", Fr. Chevalier wanted to integrate the two major devotions of his time, devotion to the Sacred Heart and devotion to Mary. In section 16 of this introductory program, we already presented the three common images of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. These images demonstrate that Fr. Chevalier always wanted to honor Mary as the Mother of Jesus.

In his book "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart", Jan G. Bovenmars MSC writes: *"It is clear that in Fr. Chevalier's charism the Heart of Jesus is most central. It is the incarnation of the love and compassion of the Father who cares for all people, especially for the most needy. For Fr. Chevalier and for us everything starts from there. But from the beginning there was also a deep relationship with Mary."*

Fr. Piperon reports how in 1859, when people were building the first part of the the Sacred Heart church in Issoudun (later on elevated to become the Basilica of Our lady of the Sacred Heart), Fr. Chevalier asked an artist to design a window representing Mary *"with her arms extended and her eyes modestly lowered towards Jesus.... The Child Jesus at the age of twelve was to be standing in front of her, with one hand pointing to his Heart, and the other towards his Mother... The child Jesus is represented at the age of twelve, because the evangelist, Saint Luke, after having related that Jesus was found by Mary and Joseph in the midst of the doctors, adds: "He went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them." (Luke 2:51).*

Afterwards, the Vatican ordered Fr. Chevalier to change this image. The reason was that, contradictory to the intentions of Fr. Chevalier, the child Jesus had sometimes been represented at a very young age, as a little boy sitting at the feet of his mother. The first statutes and paintings, like the ones in Issoudun and Sittard, could remain in their places, but from 1878 on, new images had to present the Child Jesus in his Mother's arms.

In the years after the Second Vatican Council, the understanding of the meaning of the Devotion to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was deepened. Accordingly, also the representation underwent a change. From then on Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was primarily presented as Mary, looking at the pierced side of her Son on the cross. A beautiful statue was created, now on display in the Basilica of Issoudun and called “the Calvary of Issoudun.” It represents Our Lady beneath the cross, with one hand showing the wounded heart of Jesus Christ, while the other hand is drawing us toward Jesus on the cross.

In her book “In the Company of Marie Louise Hartzer,” Gerardine Doherty FDNsc writes: *“At the foot of the cross, Mary remains present to her son while he is publicly executed. She remains present also to her own pain and grief, as together with Jesus and for Jesus, she innocently suffers at the hands of violent victimization. Her desire for oneness with Jesus in his suffering expresses at the same time, her steadfast solidarity with suffering humanity!”* (p. 50).

In his Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”, Pope Francis put into words what could have been the thoughts of Fr. Chevalier: *“On the cross, ... Jesus could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and [St. John], his friend. At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: “Woman, here is your son”. Then he said to his beloved friend: “Here is your mother” (John 19:26-27). Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that “all was now finished” (John 19:28). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother.”* (Evangelii Gaudium n. 285).

A Reflective Moment

*“Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus,
with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. ...*

*She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives.
She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword*

and who understands all our pain.

*As mother of all, she is a sign of hope
for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice.
She is the missionary who draws near to us
and accompanies us throughout life,
opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love.*

*As a true mother, she walks at our side,
she shares our struggles
and she constantly surrounds us with God's love. ..."*

*Through her, many people
"find strength from God to bear the weariness
and the suffering in their lives.
Mary offers them maternal comfort and love,
and whispers in their ear:
"Let your heart not be troubled...
Am I not here, who am your Mother?"*

(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 286).

To read more

Jan G. Bovenmars MSC, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Rome: General House Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 1993.

Gerardine Doherty FDNsc , In the Company of Marie Louise Hartzler, First Congregational Leader Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. DekoVerdivas, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 2014.

Announcement

Herewith, we come to the end of the first three parts of our On-line Program, entitled "A Spirituality of the Heart in accordance with the Charism of Fr. Jules Chevalier." After an "Introduction" (section 1 to 3), the second part (section 4 – 16), presents, "the Charism of Fr. Chevalier", while the third part (section 17 to 29), describes aspects of "Spirituality of the Heart in the Chevalier Family" which are also featured in the writings of Pope Francis.

After the General Assembly of the Laity of the Chevalier Family in Sao Paulo, July-August 2017, the General Chapter of MSC in Rome, September 2017, and the General Conference of FDNSC in Rome, October 2017, we will continue this On-Line Program. Any suggestions are welcome at <jjmkwakman39@gmail.com>.

A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART
in accordance with FR. JULES CHEVALIER'S CHARISM
An on-line program for members of the Chevalier Family
and for everyone interested
to live a Spirituality of the Heart

Part Four:
Living a Spirituality of the Heart in Daily Life.

Section 30: A Spirituality of the Heart and the Joy of Love.

We have started this On-Line Program by presenting some brief annotations concerning a widespread need for Spirituality in today's world and the existence of different kinds of spiritualities, including spiritualities of the Heart. (Section 1-3). A second part of the program (Section 4-16) briefly introduced the main aspects of the Charism of Fr. Jules Chevalier. The third part (Section 17-29) referred to the writings of Pope Francis, above all to his letter "Evangelii Gaudium" (the Joy of the Gospel), while highlighting the fact that living a Spirituality of the Heart is as relevant to the mission of the Church today as it was in the days of Fr. Chevalier.

In the following sections, we will reflect on a Spirituality of the Heart as a source of inspiration for living our daily life as married or single people in family life, or as religious and priests, living in communities. First of all, we will focus on Pope Francis' letter "Amoris Laetitia" (the Joy of Love) and discover how he shows us the way of the heart in family life and personal relationships. In one way or another, we all live in families or communities, either as parents or children, as couples or singles, or as members of religious and church communities. The Pope's letter is basically a document showing us the

bumpy road towards living joyfully together in family or community, while trying to keep growing in love.

In his reflections on marriage and family life, the Pope departs from the daily challenges, faced by families in today's society. He shows himself to be a good councilor, who, before proposing a way to proceed, first listens to the joy and struggles of people's hearts. Likewise, he shows a deep respect for the small voice of someone's heart. He wants to accompany everyone, not only people leading a harmonious family life, but also those facing big challenges in their relationships, or whose marriage has ended in failure. To everyone he shows the way of the heart.

A Reflective Moment

*"No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed;
families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love.
This is a never-ending vocation
Our contemplation of the fulfilment
which we have yet to attain also allows us
to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection,
which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come.
It also keeps us from judging harshly
those who live in situations of frailty.
All of us are called to keep striving
towards something greater than ourselves and our families....
Let us keep walking together.
What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine.
May we never lose heart because of our limitations,
or ever stop seeking that fullness of love
and communion which God holds out before us."
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia n. 325).*

Section 31

“The Joy of Love,” the Way of Compassion

“The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” (Amoris Laetitia 1). This opening phrase of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation ‘the Joy of Love’ reminds us of the first sentence of “Gaudium et Spes”, ‘Joy and Hope’, a famous document of the Second Vatican Council (1965). This document opens by saying: *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”* (Gaudium et Spes 1). These words are quite after the heart of people, who want to follow the way of the heart in daily life. In his reflections on family life in today’s society, Pope Francis also totally sympathizes with people’s happiness, struggles and suffering. In fact, the Pope puts into practice a Spirituality of the Heart.

The Pope is fully aware of the fact that in real life families go through a mixture of joy, hope, grief and anxiety. All these human experiences resonate in his heart and evoke a response of mercy and compassion. According to the Pope, the way of the Church should be the way of mercy and compassion. For Pope Francis ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ are not just sentiments of feeling sorry for someone’s pain. ‘Mercy’ and ‘compassion’ show itself by being attentive to people’s sorrow and distress, as well as by practicing solidarity, accompaniment and care, as far as possible and needed.

The Pope cares about entire humankind. He sees humankind as one big family, in which God expects us to treat our *“fellow human beings as brothers and sisters”* (Amoris Laetitia 183). In this worldwide family, the Church is sent to be *“a mother who always welcomes (her children), takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel”* (Amoris Laetitia 299), *“even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”* (Amoris Laetitia 308). *“It is a matter of reaching out to everyone,”* the Pope insists, *“helping each person to find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial*

community.” By doing so, we let people experience, “being touched by an unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous mercy” (Amoris Laetitia 297).

A Reflective Moment

*“In the variety of situations affecting families
the Church is commissioned to proclaim
the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel,
which in its own way must penetrate
the mind and heart of every person.*

*She knows that Jesus himself is the shepherd of the hundred,
not just of the ninety-nine.
He loves them all.*

*We cannot forget that
mercy is not only the working of the Father;
it becomes a norm for knowing who his true children are.
In a word, we are called to show mercy
because mercy was first shown to us. ...*

*For mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life....
The Church is the house of the Father,
where there is a place for everyone,
with all their problems.”
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia 309).*

Section 32

“In the Light of the Word”

Part 1: The family, a dwelling place of the Lord

The Bible is full of stories about families, births and love affairs, as well as stories about family crises (AL 8). All these stories, the Pope states in the first chapter of his letter ‘Amoris Laetitia’ (AL), are presented rather as “*a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering*” (AL 22). However, besides the “*bitter truth ... of pain, evil and violence that break up families*” (AL 19), Scripture presents the ideal picture of the family as well. In this section 32, we will focus on the positive dimension of family life, as presented in Scripture and related by Pope Francis; the next section will go into other aspects.

The Book of Genesis tells us that God created man and woman “*in his own image.*” And God blessed them and ordered them to, “*be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1: 26-28). This is the Scripture’s way of indicating that the fruitful love of a married couple, including sexual, corporeal and self-giving love, reveals God’s inner life. Pope Francis reminds us that in the Christian vision God is contemplated as a communion of love between Father, Son and Spirit. Therefore, he states, a loving family, being an image of God, is an outstanding demonstration of God’s loving presence on earth (AL 11). The Pope insists, “*the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion*” and “*dwells deep within the marital love*” (AL 314).

It is good to keep in mind that by saying so, the Pope refers to the daily life of normal families. He states: “*The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes.*” And he adds, saying: “*The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters, which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place*” (AL 315).

Man and wife express their conjugal love through so many everyday ways. In fact, God’s love comes alive “*with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an*

embrace” (AL 321). In that way, the Pope states, “Spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family.” (AL 316).

Besides showing positive aspects of family life, Pope Francis also indicates that Scripture gives witness to the fact that marriage and family life may become a source of suffering and pain. We will follow the Pope’s reflections on that dimension of family life in the following sections

A Reflective Moment

**Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening
faith
in God’s loving presence in the family.**

*“A few minutes can be found each day
to come together before the living God,*

*to tell him our worries,
to ask for the needs of our family,
to pray for someone experiencing difficulty,
to ask for help in showing love,
to give thanks for life and for its blessings,
and to ask Our Lady to protect us
beneath her maternal mantle.*

*With a few simple words,
this moment of prayer
can do immense good for our families.*

*The various expressions of popular piety
are a treasure of spirituality for many families.”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 318)

Section 33

“In the Light of the Word”

Part 2: Jesus knows the complexity of family life from his own experience

St. Luke tells us how at twelve years of age, as a Jewish young adult, Jesus took the well-considered decision to prepare himself for his future mission, not by staying in the Temple of Jerusalem among the teachers of the law, but by sharing the life of his family in the small village of Nazareth (Luke 2:51-52; AL 18).

Pope Francis underlines the fact that *“Jesus’ own family did not appear unusual or different from other families. That is why people found it hard to acknowledge Jesus’ wisdom: “Where did this man get all this? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:2-3).... These questions make it clear that theirs was an ordinary family, close to others. Jesus readily interacted with the wider family, the relatives of his parents and their friends.”* (AL 182).

Nevertheless, the Pope urges us *“to peer into those thirty long years when Jesus earned his keep by the work of his hands, reciting the traditional prayers and expressions of his people’s faith and coming to know that ancestral faith”* (AL 65). Moreover, *“its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod’s relentless violence”* (AL 30). Jesus had made the choice to experience everyday human life for better and worse.

So, even if the Gospels do not openly speak about it, these years in Nazareth deliver an important message regarding family life. They show us the deepest meaning of the mystery that *“changed the history of the world,”* the mystery of *“the incarnation of the Word”* (AL 65): ‘God-with-us’, is not the God we meet outside, but inside this often chaotic world of ours. God meets us and we meet God first of all inside the complexity of our daily life and inside the family in which we grew up and may still live.

As the Pope wrote in his Encyclical “Laudato Si”: *“In the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Lord does not come from above, but from within, he comes, so that we might find him in this world of ours”* (Laudato Si 236).

A Reflective Moment

Pope Francis highlights the fact that at the time of his ministry Jesus often visited families afflicted by illness or grief, while several of his parables also show that Jesus was fully aware of the joys and sorrows met by ordinary families.

*“Jesus himself was born into a modest family
that soon had to flee to a foreign land.*

*He visits the home of Peter, whose mother-in-law is ill (cf. Mk 1:30-31)
and shows sympathy upon hearing of deaths
in the homes of Jairus and Lazarus (cf. Mk 5:22-24, 35-43; Jn 11:1-44).*

*He hears the desperate wailing of the widow of Nain
for her dead son (cf. Lk 7:11-15)
and heeds the plea of the father of an epileptic child
in a small country town (cf. Mk 9:17-27).*

*He goes to the homes of tax collectors
like Matthew and Zacchaeus (cf. Mt 9:9-13; Lk 19:1-10),
and speaks to sinners
like the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (cf. Lk 7:36-50).*

*Jesus knows the anxieties and tensions experienced by families
and he weaves them into his parables:
children who leave home to seek adventure (cf. Lk 15:11-32),
or who prove troublesome (Mt 21:28-31)
or fall prey to violence (Mk 12:1-9).*

*He is also sensitive to the embarrassment
caused by the lack of wine at a wedding feast (Jn 2:1-10),
the failure of guests to come to a banquet (Mt 22:1-10),
and the anxiety of a poor family over the loss of a coin (Lk 15:8-10).”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 21)

Section 34
“In the Light of the Word”
Part 3: God’s mercy and the human vocation.

“The word of God is not a series of abstract ideas” (AL 22), Pope Francis states. *“The call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history”* (AL 31). The Bible consistently uses stories and images to describe God’s mercy and the human vocation in life. Not only the story about the Holy Family of Nazareth *“teaches us the meaning of family life,”* (AL 66), but also other Bible stories, which expose different ways marriages break down, while God remains faithful and merciful.

The second chapter of the book of Genesis opens with painting a fine portrait of the first couple, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. With the Pope, we may say that Adam and Eve represent men and women of every time and place. (See AL 13). Adam feels the solitude amid the world around him and anxiously seeks *“a helper fit for him”* (Gen 2:18). Then, the Creator brings him Eve. The author of Genesis describes God’s original design concerning marriage with the words: *“The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one”* (Gen 2:24; AL 12 and 13).

However, *“through sin”* (AL 19), the relationship of love between man and woman turned into a relation of domination. The narrator of the Genesis’ story describes this reality by letting the Lord declare: *“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”* (Gen 3:16; AL 19). Afterwards, the Bible frequently offers descriptions of failing marriages and suffering couples. (See AL 20 and 21).

Jesus wants to bring people back to awareness of God’s initial purpose of marriage. He quotes the words of the Genesis’ story: *“The man shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one”* (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:5). In that way, the Pope states, Jesus enlightens the ideal marriage as *“a profound harmony”* and a *“union of hearts and lives”* (AL 13). While speaking in the context of *“a dispute about divorce”*, Jesus makes it clear that according to God’s original design, marriage is not about a man’s rights regarding his wife, but about the union of love between spouses. This communion of love cannot be dissolved by merely human procedures (Mat 19:6; AL 19).

The Pope points out that in his preaching and attitudes, Jesus, on the one hand, clearly *“set forth a demanding ideal,”* while, on the other hand, *“never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery”* (John 8:1-11; John 4:4-42; AL 38). Consequently, the Pope adds, also for us, *“there is a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations”* (AL 296). Not unlike God’s charity, our charity towards other people should also be, *“unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous”* (AL 296).

A reflective moment

*“It is a matter of reaching out to everyone,
of needing to help each person
find his or her proper way
of participating in the ecclesial community
and thus to experience being touched
by an “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” mercy.*

*No one can be condemned for ever,
because that is not the logic of the Gospel!
Here I am not speaking only
of the divorced and remarried,
but of everyone,
in whatever situation they find themselves.”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 297).

Section 35

“The Experiences and Challenges of Families”

Part 1: Some Challenges from within

In the second Chapter of ‘Amoris Laetitia’ Pope Francis looks at *“the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows”* (AL 32). The chapter opens with the sentence: *“The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church”* (AL 31). First of all the Pope welcomes the fact that *“families have come to enjoy greater freedom through a fair distribution of duties, responsibilities and tasks”,* as well as *“a greater emphasis on personal communication between the spouses”* (AL 32). In the same strain he declares that *“the equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear. Within families there is a growing reciprocity”* (AL 54). These developments, the Pope affirms, *“help to make family life more humane”* (AL 33).

However, the Pope also reminds us to beware of *“extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ... leads to intolerance and hostility in families”* (AL 33). Love is certainly the heart of the marriage bond, but the Pope warns against *“a purely emotional and romantic conception of love”* (AL 40). He advises that *“a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity”* (AL 41). It may even become a reason why people easily move *“from one affective relationship to another”* (AL 39).

As a remedy against a wide-spread *“culture of the ephemeral”* (AL 39), the Pope wants to promote the attitude of *true love* which involves the practice of *“self-giving”* (AL 39). He quotes the Second Vatican Council which *“defined marriage as a community of life and love.”* While placing love at the center of the family, the Council declared that *“true love between husband and wife involves mutual self-giving, which includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimensions, in accordance with God’s plan”* (AL 67; cf. Pastoral Constitution ‘Gaudium et Spes’, 48-49).

In this second chapter the Pope describes in more detail the challenges that spouses have to face in family life. In the next section, we will see how the Pope also comments on social structures that in many places in the world may harm family life.

A reflective moment

*“I thank God that many families,
which are far from considering themselves perfect,
live in love,
fulfil their calling
and keep moving forward,
even if they fall many times along the way.*

....

*There is no stereo- type of the ideal family,
but rather a challenging mosaic
made up of many different realities,
with all their joys, hopes and problems.”
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia n. 57).*

Section 36

“The Experiences and Challenges of Families”

Part 2: Social structures jeopardizing family life.

In the second chapter regarding the actual situation of families, the Pope intends “*to keep firmly grounded in reality*”. He underlines the fact that in today’s society family life receives “*less support from social structures than in the past*” (AL 32), and he warns “*against a cultural decline that fails to promote love or self-giving.*” (AL 39).

For instance, concerning young people and their attitude towards marriage, the Pope states: “*At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future. ... In some countries, many young persons postpone a wedding for reasons, such as the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the economic benefits associated with simply living together, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely bureaucratic*” (AL 40).

Also, the Pope continues, “*the weakening of faith and religious practice in some societies has an effect on families, leaving them more isolated amid their difficulties*” (AL 43). And “*one symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person’s life and the fragility of relationships*” (AL 43)

Regarding the many problems that families throughout the world have to cope with, the Pope states, “*each country or region can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs* (AL 3). However, no one should be “*content to*

proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people's real problems" (AL 201).

On the contrary, everyone in the Church must be concerned *"to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy"* (AL 49). Moreover, the best way the Church may act in response to the many challenges families have to cope with is by promoting the *"values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized of countries,"* (AL 201). The Church is also called to continue proclaiming the Good News of family life itself, which *"responds to the deepest expectations of the human person"* (AL 201).

A reflective Moment

*"The situations that concern us are challenges.
We should not be trapped
into wasting our energy in doleful laments,
but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity.
In every situation that presents itself,
the Church is conscious of the need
to offer a word of truth and hope.
The great values of marriage
and the Christian family
correspond to a yearning
that is part and parcel of human existence."
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, n.57).*

Section 37

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE:

A GIFT AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW IN LOVE.

At the beginning of his Exhortation on the “Joy of Love”, Pope Francis declares that, *“families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity”* (AL 7), that is, an opportunity to grow in love. *“Marriage is “a gift” from the Lord”* (AL 61), he says, and both husband and wife *“are called to respond to God’s gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort”* (AL 74).

The Pope reminds us that, *“it is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow”* (AL 135). It is *“much healthier to be realistic about our limits, defects and imperfections, and to respond to the call to grow together, to bring love to maturity and to strengthen the union, come what may.”* Don’t forget, he counsels *“that the best is yet to come, that fine wine matures with age”* (AL 135).

‘Growing in love’ is a constantly recurring theme in the Pope’s letter. *“Each marriage is a kind of “salvation history”, which from fragile beginnings – thanks to God’s gift and a creative and generous response on our part – grows over time into something precious and enduring. Fostering growth means helping a person to shape his or her own identity”* (AL 221).

Likewise, *“the indissolubility of marriage – ‘what God has joined together, let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6) – should not be viewed as a ‘yoke’ imposed on humanity, but as a ‘gift’ granted to those who are joined in marriage”* (AL 62). Why a gift? Because the promise of upholding *“the ideal of growing old together, looking after and supporting one another”* (AL 39), will also overcome the tendency “to

remain in the early stages of affective and sexual life” (AL 41). This promise, given to one another during the wedding ceremony, encourages husband and wife “to make their love grow and deepen” (AL 88). “A love that fails to grow is at risk,” the Pope states, while “growth can only occur through constant acts of love, acts of kindness that become ever more frequent, intense, generous, tender and cheerful” (AL 134).

A Reflective Moment

“Joy also grows through pain and sorrow.

In the words of Saint Augustine,

‘the greater the danger in battle

the greater is the joy of victory’.

After suffering and struggling together,

spouses are able to experience

that it was worth it,

because they achieved some good,

learned something as a couple,

or came to appreciate what they have.

Few human joys are as deep and thrilling

as those experienced by two people

who love one another

and have achieved something

as the result of a great, shared effort.”

(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, n.130).

Section 38

MARRIED LIFE:

THE SACRAMENT OF “MUTUAL SELF-GIVING” (AL 73)

In his letter ‘the Joy of Love’ (‘Amoris Laetitia’), Pope Francis shows us how to look at marriage and family life with the eyes of faith. *“The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment,”* the Pope writes (AL 72). Neither is it *“a single moment of the past”* (AL 215). Husband and wife *“need to be encouraged to see the sacrament of marriage rather as a reality that permanently influences the whole of their married life”* (AL 215).

Married life is a sacrament, because it is *“a dynamic process”* (AL 122), in which Jesus Christ himself takes part. Jesus Christ *“dwells”* with husband and wife, *“gives them the strength to take up their crosses..., to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens”* (AL 73). *“The language of the body, and the signs of love”* (AL 215), *“the common life of husband and wife, the entire network of relations that they build with their children and the world around them”* (AL 74), become all together the sacrament of *“mutual self-giving”* (AL 73).

The Pope states that *“The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living image, capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior”* (AL 11). What is more, the Pope continues, *“the family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons”* (AL 71). *“Seen this way, the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself. In the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection”* (AL 11). *“Saint John Paul II already shed light on*

this when he said, "Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family" (AL 11).

The sacrament of marriage also reveals the profound meaning of God's incarnation, *"whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us"* (AL 74). The Second Vatican Council has declared that, *"by his incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human being. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart"* (Gaudium et Spes n. 22). Husband and wife, who love one another in *"a freely chosen mutual belonging marked by fidelity, respect and care"* (AL 156), present a strong sign of Christ's constant participation in human history. *"The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace"* (AL 321).

A Reflective Moment

"The wedding ceremony is "just the beginning."

By saying "I do,"

husband and wife embark on a journey

that requires them to overcome all obstacles

standing in the way of their reaching the goal.

The nuptial blessing that they receive

is a grace and an incentive for this journey.

They can only benefit from sitting down

*and talking to one another about how, concretely,
they plan to achieve their goal” (AL 218).*

*“Neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect.
Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other
as he or she actually is:
an unfinished product, needing to grow,
a work in progress.*

*A persistently critical attitude towards one’s partner
is a sign that marriage was not entered into
as a project to be worked on together,
with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity.”
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, n.218).*

SECTION 39
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 1: Love is patient

Pope Francis continues his reflections on “the Joy of Love” (“Amoris Laetitia”) by entering more deeply into the Christian meaning of love. “*The word “love”, he says, is commonly used but often misused*” (AL 89). When getting married, man and wife are encouraged to give themselves to one another and to follow the path of fidelity. So, they need to deepen their understanding of the true meaning of love and to strengthen this love as a couple and a family ever more. The Pope does not write as a psychologist – even if his reflections on the real meaning of love may greatly contribute to the development of our psychic well-being. He draws his insights from a meditative reading of St. Paul’s “Hymn of Love” in 1 Corinthians 13, which speaks about “*the way of love*” as experienced and practiced in the daily life of couples and their children (Cf. AL 90).

With St. Paul, the Pope underlines in the first place that “*love is patient.*” “*Being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us*” (AL 92). On the contrary, being patient means actively practicing love and forgiveness, doing that which is best for the other person.

Jesus taught us to “*be merciful just as your Father in heaven is merciful*” (Luke 6:36). Since God is merciful, he is also patient towards us, sinners, always ready to forgive, while enabling us to repent and to change for the better. God’s patience is a sign of God’s real power (cf. AL 91).

In a similar way, that person is patient, “*who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense*” (AL 91), while refraining from taking revenge. *Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like*” (AL 92).

A Reflective Moment

The Way of Love

*“Even if I have faith so as to remove mountains,
but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).*

*“Love is patient, love is kind;
love is not jealous or boastful;
it is not arrogant or rude.
Love does not insist on its own way,
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong,
but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7).*
(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 89-90).

SECTION 40
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 2: Love is kind

“Love is always a gift of God,” Pope Francis writes (AL 228). Our entire life, our personal talents and the whole of creation are a gift of God, but love is the greatest gift (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is even the source of all other gifts, because we are all *“rooted and grounded in love,”* as it is written by St. Paul (Ephesians 3:17),

St. Paul’s ‘Hymn of Love’ (1 Corinthians 13) is not a ‘what-to-do-list’, as if St. Paul wants to command us to be patient or kind. It is first of all a proclamation of the Good News that we *are capable* of being patient, kind and forgiving. Why? Because it is *“the love of God”* that, *“has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5).

In the ‘Hymn of Love’ St. Paul describes the qualities of God’s love, poured out into our hearts. In that way, he also reminds us that God’s love becomes fruitful through the love of our hearts. Our hearts are really gifted and enabled to love one another as God loves us, because we are guided by the Holy Spirit.

With St. Paul and Pope Francis, we should keep in mind that *“love is more than a mere feeling”* (AL 94). Nevertheless, by being kind to one another, we *“experience the happiness of giving, the nobility and grandeur of spending ourselves generously, purely*

for the pleasure of giving and serving, without asking to be repaid"
(AL 94).

The Pope quotes Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who has said, "*Love is shown more by deeds than by words*" (AL 93). Also, in daily life, most of the time spouses and their children show their kindness to one another not just by words, but by deeds, while being "*ever ready to be of assistance*" (AL 93).

A Reflective Moment

*"The principle of spiritual realism
requires that one spouse not presume
that the other can completely satisfy his or her needs.*

*The spiritual journey of each needs to help them
to a certain "disillusionment" with regard to the other,
to stop expecting from that person something
which is proper to the love of God alone.*

*This demands an interior 'divestment' (or 'detachment')
(which) enables the spouses
to find in the love of God
the deepest source of meaning in their own lives.*

*Each day we have to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit
to make this interior freedom possible."*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 320).

SECTION 41:

THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE

IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Part 3: Love is not jealous

In his letter “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” “the Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis has laid down some principles of how to live and build up Church communities, based on Gospel-values. All Church communities, he states, should become places of “*mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel*” (EG 114).

In “*Amoris Laetitia*,” “the Joy of Love,” the Pope applies this principle to families, because Christian families, he says, are “*domestic churches*” or “*home churches*.” The Pope writes: “*The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all these domestic churches*” (AL 87). He continues: “*Through their union in love, the couple experiences the beauty of parenthood, and shares plans, trials, expectations and concerns; they learn care for one another and mutual forgiveness. In this love, they celebrate their happy moments and they support each other in the difficult passages of their life together*” (AL 88).

True love is indispensable for family life, as well as “*for the Church and for society as a whole*.” Following St. Paul, Pope Francis states that opposing true love is “*an attitude of being jealous or envious*.” “*Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another’s prosperity*,” he says. “*It shows that we are only concerned with our own well-being and not with the happiness of others. True love makes us rise above ourselves, while envy closes us in on ourselves. True love frees us from the sour taste of envy and values the other person’s achievements*” (AL 95).

And the Pope concludes: “*Everyone has different gifts and a unique path in life. So true love strives to discover its own road to happiness, while allowing others to find theirs*” (AL 95).

A REFLECTIVE MOMENT

***“Love inspires a sincere esteem for every human being
and the recognition of his or her own right to happiness.***

***I love this person,
and I see him or her with the eyes of God,
who gives us everything
“for our enjoyment” (1 Tim 6:17).
As a result, I feel a deep sense of happiness and peace.***

***This same deeply rooted love also leads me
to reject injustice
whereby some possess too much and others too little.***

***It moves me to find ways of helping society’s outcasts
to find a little bit of joy.***

That is not envy, but the desire for equality.”

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 96).

Section 42
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 4: Love is humble, not selfish.

St. Paul's 'Hymn of Love' (1 Cor. 13) describes the qualities of God's love. God our Father showed the fullness of his love by sending his Son, who "*humbled himself*" (Philippians 2: 8), becoming human, while at all times accompanying us on our life's journey as "*servant*" (Philippians 2: 7) and "*friend*" (John 15: 14-15). This "*love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 5:5). It is this Spirit, who "*gives a new heart and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ loved us*" (AL 120).

During his public life Jesus revealed the special characteristics of God's love through his mighty deeds, his profound wisdom and obedience to death. However, the thirty long years reveal the qualities of God's love as well when Jesus lived in the modest conditions of Nazareth as son of a humble family. These were the years when Jesus, in the words of Pope Francis, "*earned his keep by the work of his hands, reciting the traditional prayers and expressions of his people's faith and coming to know the faith of his ancestors*" (AL 65).

During his whole life Jesus' love was marked by humility. He did not need "*to be the center of attention*" (AL 97; see Marcus 1:43-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8: 30). His whole life was "*focused on others*" (AL 97). He served his family and the people who needed his help, "*from the heart*" (AL 98). Accordingly, Jesus warns us that in a world where

power and pride prevail, *"it shall not be so among you"* (Mat 20:26).
Rather, *"whoever would be first among you, must be your servant"*
(Mat 20: 27; AL 98).

A Reflective Moment

"The contribution of the Church in today's world is enormous.

*The pain and the shame we feel
at the sins of some members of the Church
and at our own,*

*must never make us forget
how many Christians are giving their lives in love.*

*They help so many people to be healed
or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals.*

*They are present to those enslaved by different addictions
in the poorest places on earth.*

*They devote themselves
to the education of children and young people.*

*They take care of the elderly
who have been forgotten by everyone else.*

*They look for ways to communicate values
in hostile environments.*

*They are dedicated in many other ways
to showing an immense love for humanity
inspired by the God who became human.*

*This witness comforts and sustains me
in my own effort to overcome selfishness
and to give more fully of myself."*

(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium n. 76).

SECTION 43
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 5: Love is not arrogant or rude.

One of the basic principles of Pope Francis' Spirituality of the Heart is that true love forms a reflection or image of divine love. True love among couples, family members, friends or neighbors is a human manifestation of divine love that constantly is poured out into our hearts. This applies in particular to the love of married couples. At the beginning of his letter "the Joy of Love" the Pope writes: *"The majestic early chapters of Genesis present the human couple in its deepest reality. The first chapter says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). It is striking that the "image of God" here refers to the couple, "male and female" (AL 10). And the Pope continues: "The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living image capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection" (AL 11; see also Section 32).*

While reflecting on the intimate relationship between divine love and truly human love, the Pope writes: *"The deeper love is, the more it calls for respect for the other's freedom and the ability to wait until the other opens the door to his or her heart" (AL 99).* These words apply first and foremost to God's love for us and as a result, also to true human love. God never behaves arrogantly or rudely, intrusively or insensitively towards us. God respects our human freedom and waits until we open our hearts, while allowing his love to permeate our hearts. Thus, any misfortune or sorrow that we experience, we should never attribute to God, as if God wants to punish us for doing evil or wants us to be unhappy.

Jesus teaches us to look at his Father as a compassionate God (see Luke 6:36), who respects our autonomy, our capacities and limitations, and who loves us, even when we are sinners (Romans 5:8). Being compassionate, just as our Father is compassionate, urges us, in the words of Pope Francis, to, *"approach a person with immense respect and a certain dread of causing harm or taking away someone's freedom" (AL 127).*

A Reflective Moment

“Develop the habit of giving real importance to other persons.

*This means appreciating them
and recognizing their right to exist,
to think as they do and to be happy.*

*Never downplay what they say or think,
even if you need to express your own point of view.*

*Everyone has something to contribute,
because they have their life experiences,
they look at things from a different standpoint
and they have their own concerns,
abilities and insights.*

*We ought to be able to acknowledge the other person’s truth,
the value of his or her deepest concerns,
and what it is that they are trying to communicate,
however aggressively.*

*We have to put ourselves in their shoes
and try to peer into their hearts,
to perceive their deepest concerns
and to take them as a point of departure for further dialogue.”*

(Pope Francis, “Amoris Laetitia” n. 138).

SECTION 44
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 6: Love is not Resentful

“Indignation is healthy when it makes us react to a grave injustice,” writes Pope Francis (AL 103). For example, if one of the spouses, through irresponsible behaviour, damages or endangers the love relationship, the other is right to be angry. And it is also a good thing that he or she says so, clearly, because the love relationship between spouses is a precious treasure that must be handled with care.

The Pope quotes the apostle Paul, *“Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger”* (Ephesians 4: 26). One must never end the day without making peace in the family. Then the Pope continues: *“And how am I going to make peace? Just by a small gesture, a little something, and harmony within the family will be restored. Just a little caress, no words are necessary.”* (AL 104).

But if one of the spouses really wants to call the other to account for his or her behavior, it is important that the words are chosen carefully so as not to hurt the other, especially when discussing difficult issues. *“Making a point should never involve venting anger and inflicting hurt”* (AL 139).

When we feel overwhelmed by anger, the Pope states, *“we can always cling to the anchor of prayer.”* This will lead us back to *“the source of peace,”* namely God's love in our hearts. (Gaudete et Exsultate 114). Moreover, *“to pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love”* (Evangelii Gaudium 101).

The Pope also cautions that even if many disagreements are not about important things, couples must be careful, because *“what might alter the mood is the way things are said or the attitude with which they are said.”* At such moments, it is important to *“show affection and concern for the other person. Love surmounts even the worst barriers”* (AL 139-140).

A Reflective Moment

“Take time, quality time.

*This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively
to everything the other person wants to say.*

*It requires the self-discipline of not speaking
until the time is right.*

*Instead of offering an opinion or advice,
we need to be sure that we have heard everything
the other person has to say.*

*Do not be rushed,
put aside all of your own needs and worries,
and make space.*

*Often the other spouse does not need a solution
to his or her problems,
but simply to be heard,
to feel that someone has acknowledged
her or his pain, disappointment, fear, anger,
hopes and dreams.*

How often we hear complaints like:

“He or she does not listen to me.”

(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia 137)

SECTION 45
THE WAY OF DAILY LOVE
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE
Part 7: Love and Forgiveness

In his letter "Amoris Laetitia", "The Joy of Love," Pope Francis often speaks of the connection between love and forgiveness. Every family knows how selfishness, disagreement, tension and conflict can threaten family life and cause great damage (AL 106). Even so, at times couples want to deal with marital problems too quickly, without having the patience to reflect first and to make the sacrifice to forgive each other (AL 41). The Pope is well aware that forgiveness is not easy, for it requires generous tolerance and the attempt to understand the weaknesses of the other. Forgiveness, however, drives the bitterness out of our hearts, before we begin to discuss our disagreements (AL 105).

In order to be able to forgive the other, it is good to first turn to oneself, says the Pope. For example, we may wonder to what extent our own behavior has contributed to the tense situation. Have we perhaps kept too much distance from one another, or have we been too restrained in showing affection? In order to be able to forgive someone else, we must first forgive ourselves. Self-knowledge can have a liberating effect, while blaming the other person may make us feel good, but might be the wrong way to go. (AL 107).

The Pope therefore urges us to return to our own past history, for example in prayer, in order to accept ourselves with our limitations, and to forgive ourselves. This will help us to adopt the same attitude towards the other (AL 107). Moreover, when we realize that we ourselves are constantly forgiven by God, in the belief that God's love continually strengthens us, we will also be able to forgive the other, even if we have been wronged in a terrible way. Otherwise we run the risk, writes the Pope that "*our family life is no longer a place of understanding, support and encouragement, but of constant tension and mutual criticism*" (AL 108).

A Reflective Moment

*. “The unitive end of marriage
is a constant summons
to make love grow and deepen.*

*Through their union in love,
the couple experiences
the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood,
and shares plans, trials, expectations and concerns.*

*They learn care for one another and mutual forgiveness.
In this love, they celebrate their happy moments
and support each other
in the difficult passages of their life together.*

*The beauty of a mutual, gratuitous gift,
the joy which comes from new life that is born
and the loving care of all family members
– from toddlers to seniors –
are just a few of the fruits
which make the response to the vocation of the family
unique and irreplaceable”*

(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia n. 88)

SECTION 46

Daily Love in Marriage and Family:

Part 8: Love, trust and hope.

Pope Francis ends his description of practicing love in daily life with the provocative sentence in which St. Paul, speaking about love, uses the word "everything" four times. "*It tolerates everything, it believes everything, it hopes everything, it perseveres in everything*" (1 Cor. 13: 7). For both Paul and Pope Francis, love is always accompanied by faith and hope. Which means, those who love continue to "trust in the other", and, if necessary, to hope that the other person "evolves for the better".

"*Love believes everything.*" The person, who loves, trusts the other and looks through the weaknesses of the other at his or her good heart. With St. Paul we believe that the Holy Spirit has poured out his gifts in the hearts of every person. And the greatest gift of the Spirit is love. That means that every person has the ability to be good. By continuing to trust someone, we enable him or her to keep believing in his or her own good qualities. In a family, where the members fully trust one another, everyone can be him/herself in a genuine way, writes Pope Francis. (AL 115).

"*Love hopes everything.*" If we love the other person, we are firmly convinced that he or she will continue to grow and, if necessary, change for the better, says Pope Francis. (AL 116). Someone who loves can wait until the good nature of the other person shows up. People who love someone keep hoping that good can come from the evil that the other might do. God writes straight on curved lines, the Pope affirms. (AL 116).

True love is based on faith and hope. Love gives confidence and is always open to new progress. Moreover, it is good to remember what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said during a wedding ceremony: *“It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.”*

Reflection

Pope Francis quotes Martin Luther King,
who met every kind of trial and tribulation with brotherly love,
and who was able to say the following:

“The persons who hate you most have some good in them ...
Even the race that hates you most has some good in it ...

When you look at a human face,
you’ll see deep down within it
what religion calls "the image of God."
And in spite of everything you begin to love him or her,
because there is an element of goodness in that person,
which he or she can never sluff off ...

When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy,
that is the time which you must not do it ...

At the level of love,
of its great beauty and power,

you seek only to beat evil systems.
Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system,
you love,
but you seek to defeat the system. "
(Quoted by Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia n. 118).

SECTION 47

Daily Love in Marriage and Family: Part 9: Friendship in Marriage.

Pope Francis describes conjugal love as *"a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life"* (AL 123).

Conjugal love combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion (AL 120), writes the Pope. And, he declares, this friendship continues even when passion and emotions have already diminished. After all, it is God's Spirit who gives spouses a new heart, through which love for one another grows to fullness from within (AL 120).

That is why conjugal love is a very special form of friendship: *"exclusive, faithful and open to new life"* (AL 125). It is a form of friendship that must *"grow and mature"* (AL 125). However, one must bear in mind, writes the Pope, that it is a gradual process of growth. After all, we are dealing with two people, who, with his or her limitations, normally show their love in simple, everyday things (see AL 119-120).

Joy plays an important role in friendship. *"Joy must be cultivated in marriage,"* writes the Pope (AL 126). Joy leads to *"an expansion of the heart,"* (AL 126) and can *"even be experienced amid sorrow"* (AL 126). *"It involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to care for one another, to help and serve each other"* (AL 126).

Anselm Grün OSB writes: *"Friendship is about sharing with each other what each one experiences and feels. While sharing, the experiences become more intense, deeper, livelier. And while listening and telling, friendship grows."* (The Little Book of Good Living, Lannoo / Ten Have, 2nd edition, p. 201).

A Moment of Reflection.

Friendship makes love grow.

*“The love of friendship unifies all aspects of marital life
and helps family members to grow constantly.
This love must be freely and generously expressed
in words and acts.*

In the family, three words need to be used.

Three words: ‘Please’, ‘Thank you’, ‘Sorry’.

Three essential words!

*In our families when we are not overbearing and ask: ‘May I?’;
when we are not selfish and can say: ‘Thank you!’;
and when someone realizes that he or she did something wrong
and is able to say ‘Sorry!’,
our family experiences peace and joy”.*
*Let us not be stingy about using these words,
but keep repeating them, day after day.*

*For certain silences are oppressive,
even at times within families,
between husbands and wives,
between parents and children,
among siblings.*

*The right words, spoken at the right time,
daily protect and nurture love*

(Pope Francis, “Amoris Laetitia” n. 133)

SECTION 48

Daily Love in Marriage and Family: Part 10: Intimacy in Marriage.

Under the heading "*a world of emotions*" (AL 143-146), in "*Amoris Laetitia*" ("The Joy of Love") Pope Francis devotes a great deal of attention to the experience of intimacy in the marriage relationship. He refers to the Second Vatican Council, which more than 50 years ago, taught that marital love with its physical and affective manifestations encompasses the whole person (AL 142). The Desires toward each other, feelings of tenderness and needs for intimacy play an important role in the love relationship, the Pope states (AL 143). They form a force that keeps the marriage relationship alive.

The Pope speaks of the beauty of the marriage relationship and the intense joy that intimacy, affection and embracing can bring. This is why he encourages the married couple to accept these feelings and desires as a divine gift. At the same time the spouses are urged to purify them, by freely guiding these feelings into the right direction. These emotions may sustain self-giving and commitment to one another, while enhancing mutual engagement. Desire for intimacy also helps spouses to overcome the fatigue that inevitably accompanies the care of the family (AL 148).

"*God rejoices in the joy of His children*," the Pope writes (AL 147). But on the other hand, he also points out that feeling attracted to one another does not automatically mean that one actually loves the other. Believing that something *is* good because it *feels* good is a big mistake, the Pope writes (AL 145). Desire for intimacy can also arise from selfishness. Exuberance and lack of control weaken and spoil pleasure and harm family life (AL 148). There are people who believe that they are able to give a lot of love, when in fact they are only seeking to meet their personal need for affection. These people are not able to make another person truly happy. That is why the Pope emphasizes that the formation of the emotional life is necessary (AL 148).

Reflection.

"God rejoices in the joy of His children" (AL 147)

*"We believe that God loves the enjoyment
felt by human beings.
God created us and
richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17).*

*Let us be glad when with great love God tells us:
"My child, treat yourself well...
Deprive not yourself of present good things" (Sirach 14:11-14).*

*Married couples likewise respond to God's will
when they take up the biblical injunction:
"On a good day enjoy good things" (Ecclesiastes 7:14).*

*What is important is to have the freedom to realize
that pleasure can find different expressions
at different times of life,
in accordance with the needs of mutual love.*

*In this sense, we can appreciate
the teachings of some Eastern masters who urge us
to expand our consciousness,
lest we be imprisoned by one limited experience
that can blinker us.*

*This expansion of consciousness
is not the denial or destruction of desire
so much as its broadening and perfection."*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 149).

SECTION 49

Upbringing of Children

Part 1: The formation of good behaviour.

You cannot become a good person if you are not raised as a good person. Therefore, in "Amoris Laetitia", ("About love in the family"), the Pope places great emphasis on what he calls "*the moral education*" of the child. In doing so, it is necessary to "*recall the importance of virtues*," he says (AL 206). Such a virtuous life prevents a person from becoming a slave to his own selfish tendencies, he writes (AL 267). After all, human freedom is shaped, strengthened and nourished by a life according to human values.

During childhood and adolescence, education to be a well-brought-up person plays a very important role in the family. The family is "*the first school*" where children learn to embrace human values and make proper use of their freedom, states the Pope. (AL 274).

In the family you learn how to behave towards others, listen to others, share, tolerate, respect and help each other (AL 276). "*Many people act in a certain way throughout their lives, because they have adopted this way from their childhood on and consider it to be good*" (AL 274) "*That's how I was taught*". "*That's what I learned to do*". (AL 274).

Children learn to behave well and adopt human values, when parents and other educators enter into conversation with them, writes the Pope. You teach children the importance of human values, principles, and norms not by imposing them from above as commands or instructions ("Do it because I say so"), but by talking to them about what they do or experience themselves. In doing so you must speak a language that children can understand (AL 264).

By talking about it in the family, children also learn to listen critically to the messages conveyed by the various means of communication (AL 274).

A Reflective Moment

" Parents rightly entrust
the basic education of their children
to schools.

But the moral education of their children
they can never completely pass on to others.

Someone's moral development
is ultimately based on the experience
in the family,
that parents are trustworthy.

Through the love for their children
and the good example they give
parents will instil in their children
trust and loving respect.

When children no longer feel
that, despite their mistakes,
they are important to their parents;
or no longer feel
that their parents are genuinely concerned for them,
they will bear
deep pain and a great burden
on their way to adulthood.

The feeling of being left to their own devices
causes more pain to children
than the dressing-down they sometimes will get
when they've done something wrong."

(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, n. 263, free translation).

SECTION 50

Education of the children

Part 2: A Spirituality of the Heart and the formation of conscience...

Both in his way of interacting with people, the decisions he takes, and in his writings, Pope Francis shows that he is guided by a Spirituality of the Heart. For example, the words "heart" or "heartfelt" appear more than a hundred times in "Evangelii Gaudium" ("the Joy of the Gospel") and almost sixty times in *Amoris Laetitia* ("the Joy of Love").

For Pope Francis, a Spirituality of the Heart is rooted in faith in the Trinity: "*Every child formed in the womb of the mother has a place in God's heart*" (AL 168). Jesus' Heart "*was open to all*" (AL 144). The Holy Spirit "*gives us a new heart*" (AL 120) and enables, among other things, "*that man and woman may love one another as Christ has loved us*" (AL 120).

Thanks to the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we too may be guided by a Spirituality of the Heart. Then, however, our hearts must be shaped so that we can also let them speak. For Pope Francis, the formation of the heart is therefore very important in the education of children. Parents form the hearts of their children when they themselves set an example of how to relate to one another from the heart. For example, children learn from their parents to listen to one another "*with the ear of the heart*" (AL 232) and, in certain situations, to speak to one another "*from heart to heart*" (AL 234). Parents who have "*a big heart*" show children how to pay attention not only to the limited circle of family and friends, but also to the poor, sick, disabled, and those people who got stuck in life (AL 196-198).

Responsible parenthood also includes the formation of conscience. In the midst of their limitations and in often difficult circumstances, many parents try to meet the ideals of the Gospel as well as possible (AL 37). They may also help their children learn to listen to God's voice in the depths of their hearts. Parents and other educators, says the Pope, are called "*to form conscience, not to replace it*" (AL 37).

He therefore invites everyone to make room for conscience. In that context, he quotes the Second Vatican Council, which taught, "*Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of all human beings. There everyone is alone with God, whose voice resounds in the depths of their hearts.*" (Gaudium et Spes ("Joy and Hope") n 16; AL 222).

Reflection

*"The presence of the Lord
lives in real and concrete families,
with all their daily problems and struggles,
joys and hopes...*

*The spirituality of love in the family
is made up of thousands of small but real gestures.
In that variety of gifts and encounters
that deepen togetherness,
God has his dwelling place.*

*This mutual commitment to each other
brings the human and the divine together,
for it is filled with the love of God.*

*In the end, the spirituality of marriage
is a spirituality of relationship,
in which divine love dwells."*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* n. 315)

Part 5 of the Online Program
“Spirituality of the Heart”
(Hans Kwakman msc)

The preceding parts of this Online Program

Part 1 (section 1-3) presents some notes about the widespread need for a Spirituality and indicates the availability of different kinds of Spirituality. A Spirituality of the Heart is the spirituality of the Chevalier Family, the laity of the Chevalier Family included.

Part 2 (section 4-16) offers a brief introduction of the more important aspects of the Charism of Fr. Jules Chevalier (1854-1907).

Part 3 (section 17-29) shows that a Spirituality of the Heart is as relevant to the people today as it was to the men and women at the time of Chevalier. This part is based on Pope Francis' letter "Evangelii Gaudium" ("the Joy of the Gospel").

Part 4 (section 30–50) focuses on Pope Francis' letter "Amoris Laetitia" ("the Joy of Love") and reflects on a Spirituality of the Heart as a source of inspiration for the daily life of married couples, singles and religious, who live in a community.

Part 5, the part which now follows, will reflect on a Spirituality of the Heart in Pope Francis' letter "Laudato Si" ("Praise be to you, my Lord"), on Care for our Common Home.

All these sections are still available from Mr. Roland Douchin at <cornovum@gmail.com>.

Section 51: **‘Laudato Si’ and a Spirituality of the Heart.**

On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis issued an encyclical letter entitled *"Laudato Si": ("Praise be to you, my Lord")* in which he speaks on *"Care for our Common Home."* In this letter, the Pope urges us to take responsibility for the place where we live, the world we inhabit together with so many other creatures: planet Earth.

Our common home is currently going through a deep crisis, the Pope declares. He speaks of *"the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes"* (LS 63). He refers to global warming and climate change; the throwaway culture and pollution; extreme drought and lack of access to safe drinkable water; loss of biodiversity and the decline in the quality of human life. We cannot remain indifferent to these catastrophes, he states, all the more so since these disasters mostly affect the poorest people.

For us, Chevalier Associates, there is also the question of what attitude we can adopt in the midst of these crises – we, who are trying to live a Spirituality of the Heart. This question brings us straight to the heart of Pope Francis' discourse, which he formulates as follows: *"Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things"* (LS 77). He bases this vision on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. For example, the book of 'Wisdom' declares: *"For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it"* (Wisdom 11:24; LS 77).

Therefore, the Pope invites us to see creation first and foremost *"as a gift, coming from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality enlightened by love, which calls us together to universal communion"* (LS 76).

This vision of the Pope raises many questions, especially in these times when so many people are suffering from the global COVID-19 pandemic. But

even people who suffer from devastating earthquakes or typhoons; prolonged drought or flooding; extreme poverty, permanent handicaps or a painful loss, will wonder how the Pope can speak of a God who loves all that lives (Wisdom 11:26). We will elaborate on this in the following sections.

REFLECTION

*“The various cultural and religious resources
found in art, literature, sacred writings,
liturgical action and mystical contemplation,
contribute to the ecological commitment
which is intrinsic to faith.*

*The Creation accounts in the Bible bring together
relationships to God, the neighbour and to the earth,
together with the principle of common ownership.*

*All this requires that human intelligence
respect the particular nature of things.*

*Each living being has a value in God’s eyes,
which counts more than pragmatic usefulness.*

*There is a larger world of wonder
overflowing the limited scope of mere human utility.*

*In that perspective of one divine creation,
everything is interconnected.”*

(Anthony J. Kelly CssR, "Laudato Si".
An Integral Ecology and the Catholic Vision.
Published by ATF Press Publishing Group, Australia}.

SECTION 52

SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART IN 'LAUDATO SI':

SOME CENTRAL THEMES

Hans Kwakman msc

In Pope Francis' encyclical: "Laudato Si" certain themes keep recurring. These show that the care for our common dwelling, the planet earth, is grounded in spirituality. David Cloutier, whom I also quote in the Reflection, mentions some central themes. I will briefly summarise his contribution.

Everything is interconnected. For the Pope this is the core of a healthy spirituality. Our spiritual life, our prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist should not be separated from our daily life, from caring for the world around us and for God's whole creation.

Everyone is connected. This forms the heart of our Christian faith: the human family is one, we are all brothers and sisters of each other and live in a common home. The Covid-19 pandemic makes this painfully clear once again.

The crisis in which the world is currently immersed cannot be resolved by purely technical measures. The solution to the crisis requires a conversion of the heart and a deepening of our relationship with God, with each other and with creation. Together with the Son, Jesus Christ, we are all sent to accomplish the Father's creative work. Under the inspiring guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are called to make this world a better place to live for everyone.

One of the things we thus need to do is to develop a *new way of living and interacting with one another*. The “*throwaway culture*” must make way for a culture of care and sustainability. This will also enrich us spiritually and deepen our relationship with God and with one another.

The earth is "our sister" and our "common home". These metaphors want to express that we are responsible for our planet, as for our family members and for our own home. Planet earth is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be admired in joy and gratitude.

Moreover, the Pope repeatedly stresses that there is a close relationship between *the crisis facing the world and the widening gap between rich and poor*. The care of our common home needs above all to benefit the poor and the needy.

REFLECTION

*“An actual encounter with the text of “Laudato Si”
should also be about spiritual development.*

It should change us, inside and outside.

*We not only need to read it;
we need to pray it and live it....*

*As we approach the encyclical,
we might also pray for the grace of humility.*

A genuine humility always reflects Christ.

Francis has been a prime example of it.

*When discussing social issues in our society,
things can quickly become destructive...*

*Humility makes it possible for us
to speak our differences, listen
and perhaps grow toward one another.*

*Let us listen to God, to the pope,
to one another, and to the world.*

*Let us pray about it – really pray –
and not just react.*

*And then let's act together
so that God's will might be done on earth,
and not just in heaven."*

(David Cloutier,
Reading, Praying, Living Pope Francis's "Laudato Si."
A Faith Formation Guide,
Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.)

Section 53

Spirituality of the Heart in 'Laudato Si':

Problems that are related to each other.

(Hans Kwakman msc)

Pope Francis calls on us to wake up and *"look at the facts to see that our common home is in serious disarray"* (LS 61). In the first chapter of Laudato Si, he extensively discusses *"what is happening in our home [planet earth]. He sheds light on five problems with which humankind struggles and which are closely interconnected.*

Pollution and global warming (LS 20-26): *"Climate is a common good of all and for all... All people need to become aware of the need to change their lifestyle and consumption habits"* (LS 23).

The increasing shortage of water (LS 27-31): *"Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental right of every human being, because human survival depends on it"* (LS 30).

The loss of biodiversity or diversity of plant and animal species (LS 32-42): *"All creatures are interconnected and should all be treasured with love and admiration, because all creatures need each other"* (LS 42).

The decline in the quality of human life (LS 43-47): *"Realizing that people also have the right to life and happiness and are endowed with a very special dignity, we must also take into account the influence of environmental pollution and of 'the throwaway culture' on human life"* (LS 43).

The global inequality between the richest and the poorest people (LS 48-52): We should pay attention to both *"the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"* (LS 49). Therefore, we should *"strengthen the awareness that we are one human family"* and that *"there is no room for the globalization of indifference"* (LS 52).

When faced with so many huge problems, it can make us feel hopeless. That is why the Pope urges us not to lose hope. He keeps believing in the positive attitude of so many men and women. *"In the midst of all our limitations, all kinds of generosity, solidarity, and care flourish. After all, we are made for love"* (LS 58).

Reflection

*"It is easy to see what is wrong with our system,
harder to see how to fix it."*

*"The Pope calls for an "integral ecology,"
by which he means a vision of the world
founded fundamentally on respect for Creation,
and a renewed emphasis on our mutual interconnection
with one another and with nature."*

"An integral ecology must also include..."

*a culture of care rooted in
“love for society
and commitment to the common good,”
as the centrepiece of civil society,
environmental protection, religious communion,
and finally, human dignity, happiness and love.”*

*“Crucially, this culture of care
must include not just those of us alive today,
but also future generations.”*

(Naomi Oreskes,
Introduction to Pope Francis,
Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality.
Melville House, Brooklyn, London).

Section 54:
Spirituality of the Heart
and God's Creation in Evolution.
(Hans Kwakman msc)

"The whole material universe is an expression of God's love, of His immeasurable goodness to us" (LS 84). The universe with its vast variety of creatures comes from God's loving heart. God is love and everything that is created, from the very beginning, billions of years ago, to the present moment - the furthest distant galaxy and our planet Earth; the smallest insect and every individual human being - everything is a gift of God's creative love. Every creature owes every moment of his or her existence to God and God allows every creature to develop according to natural laws, his or her own.

Pope Francis writes: *"God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature, and this gives rise to the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs. His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, continues the work of creation" (LS 80).* That is why we can meet God in all things. God fills the universe completely with His presence and the universe develops in God. *"We can discover the mystery of God's presence in every leaf, mountain path, dewdrop, or the face of a poor person,"* declares the Pope (LS 233).

All the beauty that we experience in nature and in art, but also every expression of love and forgiveness, fidelity and solidarity, peace and justice, shows us the beauty and attractiveness of God. *"The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge,"* states the Pope (LS 80)

The Pope continues: *“Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end”* (LS 80). He compares God's Spirit to a mysterious shipbuilder, who is able to give timber the strength to take the shape of a ship itself (LS 80). Where the natural sciences speak of evolution, we see with the eyes of faith the driving force of God's Spirit at work.

REFLECTION

*"The Church clearly teaches that
the scientific evolution theory,
when properly understood,
is fully compatible
with faith in God as the creator.*

The Catechism states:

*"The question on the origins of the world and of humankind
is the subject of many scientific studies.
Our knowledge of the age
and the dimensions of the cosmos,
as well as of the development of life forms
and the appearance of humankind
they have highly enriched.*

*These discoveries invite us
to even more admiration
for the greatness of the Creator."
(The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 283)*

*But the question of the meaning
of the origin of creation;
whether the universe is governed
by chance or by God.
The question why there is evil and so on...,
these are not questions that science
can answer anyway.
Science can tell us
HOW things come to exist in the universe,
but not WHY."*

*(David Cloutier,. Reading, Praying, Living
Pope Francis's Laudato Sì .
Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition).*

SECTION 55: SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART: A SPIRITUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

(Hans Kwakman MSC)

The biblical stories of creation are permeated by profound wisdom. In symbolic language they tell us that in God's creation everything is connected. *How* the cosmos came into being is investigated and studied by the physical sciences. The biblical stories proclaim that human existence is based on four closely connected relationships: our relationship with God, neighbour, ourselves and the cosmos (LS 66).

Pope Francis quotes Psalm 33: "*By the word of the Lord the heavens are made*" (Ps 33:6). In doing so, he emphasizes that the universe and humankind did not come into existence by chance, but were given to us by God as a rich and abundant gift. God's creative word expresses God's free choice, arising from God's loving heart.

Creation is thus given to us as a gift, and we are called to respect this gift and to manage it with care. By caring for the order of creation with respect, we honour God as the Creator. "*A spirituality that forgets that God is the Almighty Creator is unacceptable*" (LS 75).

However, when we dishonour the riches of the earth, we sin against God, the Creator, just as we sin against God when we deliberately dishonour our relationship with our fellow human beings or ourselves. To explain this, Pope Francis quotes the words of Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church: "*To destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; to damage the integrity of the earth by causing climate change; to strip the earth of its natural forests or abolish its wetlands; to soil water, land, air, and life on earth - these are sins. To commit a crime against the natural world is to sin against ourselves and to sin against God*" (LS 8).

Abuse of the riches of the earth is a violation of our relationship with God, with our fellow human beings, and with ourselves. In that case we are not faithful to our calling to love God and His creation.

REFLECTION

*“To follow Jesus means
being led by the Spirit
as he was Spirit-led at every stage of his journey.*

*This involves a truly personal discernment,
but it is never an individualistic one.*

*The Spirit of God is always the Spirit of communion, communion with our human sisters
and brothers
and communion with the whole of creation.*

*It is not difficult to see the Spirit at work
in great movements of our times:
the ecological movement,
the movement seeking justice and peace
above all for the poor of the Earth,
and the feminist movement*

*seeking the full equality of women.
In spite of all the human failures and sin
that play a role in these movements,
they are places where the Spirit of God
is powerfully at work,
calling us to our own part
in these movements of liberation and hope.*

*To be led by the Spirit
at the beginning of the twenty-first century
is to be involved in the transition
from “a period of human devastation of the Earth”
to a period when humans
will be present to the planet
in a mutually beneficial manner.”*

Edwards, Denis. Ecology at the Heart of Faith.

Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

Section 56

Spirituality of the Heart:

The Praise of God from the Heart of Creation.

Not only the book of Genesis, but also other books of the Bible teach us to care for nature and in particular for animals, says the Pope. Sabbath rest, he states, applies not only to human beings, but also to the animals that work for us (Exodus 23:12). Regarding nature, the Pope underlines the fact that the Bible rejects inalienable possession of the land: "*The land should not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine, and you are but aliens, who have become my tenants*" (Leviticus 25:23) (LS 67).

Several psalms invite both us humans and other creatures to praise the Lord. "*Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created*" (Ps 148:3-5). (LS 72).

From the first moment of creation, all living and non-living nature praises the Creator simply by being there. No human being is needed for this. All creatures praise God in their own way by existing, regardless of whether they are useful to humans. The hymn of praise of the three young men is a hymn of praise of the whole of creation: "*All creatures, praise the Lord*" (Daniel, Deuterocanonical).

The Pope quotes the words of the Catechism, which says:
"Each of the various creatures is willed by God in its own being and reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Human beings must therefore respect the special goodness of each creature in order to avoid any misuse of things". (LS 69).

The Pope refers to St Francis of Assisi, who reminds us to read nature as a beautiful book, in which God speaks to us and shows us his beauty and goodness (LS 12): *"When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi: "Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures"* (LS 87).

REFLECTION

"How marvellous it is, this material world!.

What perfect unity

in this indescribable variety.

Not a being in isolation!

On the contrary,

everywhere union of forces,

a combination of influences;
each element is useful for the whole,
and the whole is useful for each element.

It is an immense network
all the links of which hold together
and converge at a central point:
the human being...

A human being is not just a mineral that blooms,
a shrub that feels,
an animal that reasons.

A human being is a mineral, a tree, an animal
who prays, who worships, who gives thanks.
In us, matter becomes religious."

Jules Chevalier MSC,

Le Sacré Cœur de Jésus 1900, p.. 62.

English translation by Dennis Murphy MSC.

Section 57:

Spirituality of the Heart:

A Spirituality of Mercy and Justice.

In “Hoog Tijd voor een Andere God” (It’s about Time for Another God), Roger Burggraeve writes that today we rightly emphasize God's mercy and forgiveness, but in doing so we risk wronging the victims of injustice. They are denied justice. Biblical Spirituality of the Heart, however, invites us to be inspired by God's heart, the source of both God's mercy and justice.

God's mercy is unconditional. Pope Francis refers to the book of Genesis, where it is written, that even if *"the wickedness of people upon the earth increased still"* (Gen. 6: 5) the Lord in his mercy gave people the opportunity to begin again (see Gen. 9:11; LS 71).

However, referring to the biblical prophets and psalms, the Pope also emphasizes that *"if justice no longer dwells on earth, then the Bible tells us that all life is in danger"* (LS 70). The Pope lays blame for the fact that there is still so much injustice in the world on the arbitrariness of those in power, who control the natural wealth of the earth, among other things (LS 82).

Jesus has a clear message concerning those in power: *"You know that rulers oppress their peoples and leaders abuse their power. This is not how it should be among you. Whoever wants to be the most important among you must serve the other"* (Mat 20: 25-26; LS 82).

When we no longer strive to be of service to our neighbours, for whom we are responsible, the relationship with ourselves and others, with God and the earth will be disrupted, the Pope states (LS 70). And he adds: "*Sincere concern for our own lives and for our relationship with nature cannot be separated from solidarity, justice and fidelity toward others*" (LS 70).

REFLECTION

*"We must always strive
for balance and harmony
between justice and mercy.*

*With justice alone
we end up in a rock-hard world.*

*With mercy alone
the victim is left out in the cold.*

*Yahweh is not an indifferent God.
He is the just one,
who takes action against those who do evil;
but he is also the merciful one,
who shows compassion to those who acknowledge their error
and repent.*

*In the biblical tradition
the unconditional nature of
Yahweh's mercy
and his abundance of love
exceeds the sometimes too measured
demand for justice...."*

*"Rebelling against injustice
has the same source as compassion.
. You are touched ,
right down to your guts."*

Roger Burggraeve,
"Hoog tijd voor een andere God"
Uitgeverij Davidsfonds 2015, p. .125 en 138

Section 58

Spirituality of the Heart:

A Spirituality of personal depth.

In chapter three of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis elaborates on the human causes of the climate crisis. One of the causes he identifies, is a growing technological mentality (see LS 101). We rightly rejoice at the many technical developments, which offer us so many new possibilities, for example in the fields of medicine and communication. *"Science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity"* (LS 102), he writes. So, we can only be grateful for the efforts of scientists and technicians, who constantly show us new ways to achieve a sustainable living environment (cf. LS 102).

However, these technical developments have also a downside. A mentality is growing, claiming that everything that people are technically able to develop, is also valuable and therefore must be developed, without asking whether this new development will benefit humankind (See LS 104). But we must bear in mind that, *"our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.... We cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint"* (LS 105). To make technology serve human wellbeing requires *"a distinctive way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality"* (LS 111).

"Above all, we human beings need to change" (LS 202), declares the Pope in chapter 6, in which he underlines the necessity of an *"ecological education and spirituality"*. By this he means to say that we need education and spirituality that generate environmental responsibility. What he has in mind is an education in simple actions, which will lead to a personal spirituality that will give meaning and

depth to our lives. In the following text for reflection the Pope describes it as follows:

REFLECTION

“There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle.

*Education in environmental responsibility
can encourage ways of acting
which significantly affect the world around us,
such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper,
reducing water consumption, separating refuse,
cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other
living beings,
using public transport or car-pooling,
planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights,
or any number of other practices.
All of these reflect a generous
and worthy creativity,
which brings out the best in human beings.*

*Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it,
can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.” (LS 211).*

*“Such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem;
they enable us to live more fully
and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile” (LS 212).*

*“Ecological education can take place
in a variety of settings: at school, in families,
in the media, in catechesis and elsewhere.*

*In the family we first learn
how to show love and respect for life;
we are taught the proper use of things,
order and cleanliness, ...
and care for all creatures.*

*These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy
help to create a culture of shared life
and respect for our surroundings.” (LS 213).*

(Pope Francis 'Laudato Si', Rome, Pentecost May 2015)

Section 59

Spirituality of the Heart:

An environmentally conscious spirituality

Pope Francis sees another deeper cause of the climate crisis in which we find ourselves, as a wrong perception of humanity's role in creation (LS 116). In working the earth, we humans are not independent agents who can go our own way, but collaborators with the Creator.

The Pope supports the view that God respects human autonomy, independence and freedom. God does not intervene, even when we make wrong decisions (LS 80). However, this autonomy and freedom must be exercised in collaboration with God and one's fellow human beings. Together we are responsible for the prudent cultivation of the earth (LS 119).

According to the Christian vision, God entrusts us humans with the task of cultivating and developing the earth, together with, and for one another. The abundance of the earth is a gift from God to all humankind, including future generations. But, when we see ourselves as the rulers of creation, we tend to give priority to our own interests and to regard *"everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests"* (LS 122).

The Pope states: *"Christian spirituality proposes a return to that simplicity which allows us to appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack"* (LS 222).

And he continues: *“It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong”* (LS 224).

REFLECTION

An environmentally conscious spirituality

What does that mean?

*Joyfully experiencing being included
in the overwhelming beauty of creation.*

*Experiencing being part of
the 14-billion-year history of the universe
and the 3.8-billion-year evolution of life on earth.*

*Experiencing this evolution as directed
toward God's ultimate self-gift to us all in love
through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.*

*Experiencing being called to solidarity
with all creatures and guided by God's Spirit,
to accept other creatures as related to us.*

Experiencing with concern the enormity

*of the environmental problem:
how rainforests continue to be destroyed,
animal and plant species become extinct,
more and more carbon being pumped
into the atmosphere.*

*Feeling desperate, yet remaining hopeful
by seeing this as a participation in the way of the cross
and as an invitation to remain committed
to the wholeness of creation,
as we entrust this damaged earth to God's care.*

*Experiencing a conversion from consumerism
to the simplicity of the basic necessities of life:
food, clothing, shelter, medical care,
appropriate education, loving relationships,
meaningful work, an enriching spiritual life,
time with friends and with the nature around us.*

(Free from: Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*.

Orbis Books. Kindle Edition, chapter 7).

Section 60:
Spirituality of the Heart:
A Spirituality that sustains
our care for the environment.

In chapter 4 of 'Laudato Si' Pope Francis speaks about, *"some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions"* (LS 137). *'Integral ecology'* refers to the fact that *"everything is connected"* (LS 16; 70; 91; 117; 240). For example, care for the environment is linked to our way of life, that is, our way of consuming natural resources and products, our cultural customs as well as our habits of clothing and eating. In everything we do or not do, we have to take into consideration the common good of all people, including the milieu in which they live (Cf. LS 156).

The Pope adds that: *"A commitment this noble cannot be sustained... without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity"* (LS 216). Consequently, he states: *"An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence must not be created but found, uncovered"* (LS 225).

In chapter 6, entitled *"Ecological Education and Spirituality,"* the Pope points out that, *"An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness"* (See also the Reflection of Section 58). He often refers to Saint Francis of Assisi as *"the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology, lived out joyfully and authentically. ... He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast... He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for*

nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS 10). Saint Francis helps us “to see that an integral ecology takes us to the heart of what it is to be human.... He conversed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them “to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason” 19 (LS 11).

REFLECTION

Franciscan sister and scientist Ilia Delio writes

*(Saint Francis) did not consider himself
superior to the non-human creation.*

Rather, Francis saw himself as part of creation.

*His spirituality
(was) a spirituality of descending solidarity
between humanity and all of creation . . .*

*He found God in all creatures
and identified with them as brother and sister . . . ,
because he knew they shared with him the same beginning.*

*By surrendering himself
and daring everything for love’s sake,*

*the earth became his home
and all creatures his brothers and sisters.
That led him to love and respect the world around him
and made him truly a man of peace.*

*Only prayer {inspired by}
the Spirit of God breathing in us,
dwelling in our hearts and joining us to Christ,
can lead us, like Francis,
to the contemplative vision of God's goodness
in every creature and in every living thing. . . .*

*The God within us is the God who permeates
every aspect of our world —
the One who is the source and goal of creation."*

Quoted by Richard Rohr OFM

Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Cultivation Not Domination

Tuesday, May 19, 2020

Section 61:

Spirituality of the Heart:

A Spirituality of Dialogue

In his Apostolic Letter "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel") Pope Francis shares his vision of the Church's vocation in the third millennium. In that document of 24 May 2015, he foresees a major role for dialogue in evangelization. The Church is no longer the authority that from above prescribes how others should think and act, but more like a parent, who searches for solutions to outstanding issues, while listening to, and discussing with, his adult children.

The Pope writes: *"Evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers, who are not part of the Catholic Church"* (EG 238).

In chapter 5 of his encyclical "Laudato Si", titled *"Lines of Approach and Action,"* Pope Francis elaborates on the program, outlined in "Evangelii Gaudium." He describes paths of dialogue *"which can help us to escape from the spiral of self-destruction that is currently engulfing us"* (LS 163). Through dialogue the world must arrive at a *"common plan"* for the whole of society (LS 164-175); dialogue is also needed in local and national politics to arrive at long-term planning (LS 176-181); the whole process of decision-making needs transparent dialogue in order to eradicate corruption (LS 182-188); dialogue between politics and economics is demanded to promote the common good (LS 189-198); while religions should enter into dialogue with science *"to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things"* (LS 199-201).

For Pope Francis, dialogue does not just mean an exchange of ideas or an attempt to convince others of our own truth. The milieu crisis in which we find ourselves, *“requires that we all look to the common good, while embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity”* (LS 201).

REFLECTION

Pope Francis writes:

*“I urgently appeal for a new dialogue
about how we are shaping the future of our planet.
We need a conversation which includes everyone,
since the environmental challenge we are undergoing,
and its human roots, concern and affect us all”* (LS 14).

*“Our openness to others,
each of whom is a “thou,”
capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue,
remains the source of our nobility as human persons.*

*A correct relationship with the created world
demands that we not weaken
this social dimension of openness to others,
much less the transcendent dimension*

of our openness to the “Thou” of God.

*Our relationship with the environment
can never be isolated from our relationship
with others and with God” (LS 119).*

*“The majority of people on this planet
profess to be believers.*

*This should spur religions to dialogue among
themselves for the sake of protecting nature,
defending the poor, and building networks
of respect and fraternity” (LS 201).*

(Pope Francis in his Encyclical “Laudato Si”.
Rome, the Solemnity of Pentecost, 24 May 2015).

SECTION 62: A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART: A WAY TOWARDS A NEW LIFESTYLE

In the last chapter of 'Laudato Si', entitled "*Ecological Education and Spirituality*," Pope Francis underlines the need for a new lifestyle. The source of this new lifestyle he finds in "*a Spirituality which can change hearts*," (Evangelii Gaudium 262). He states: "*The emptier a person's heart, the more he or she needs things to buy, possess and consume*" (LS 204). Pope Benedict already declared: "*Buying is always a moral act and not only an economic one*" (LS 206). For Pope Francis, being possessed by the inner drive to consume is one of the great evils of the modern age. He states: "*To be obsessed with a consumerist lifestyle, especially when only a few can afford it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction*" (LS 204). And not unlike Father Chevalier, he emphasizes that: "*We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart*" (LS 218).

To underline the necessity of embracing a new way of life, the Pope quotes the "*Earth Charter*", published on 29 June 2000 at 'the Peace Palace' in The Hague on the initiative of the United Nations' Commission on Environment and Development: "*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life*" (LS 207).

The Pope believes that this new beginning is possible, because he trusts the positive capacities that all people bear in their hearts: "*Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours*" (LS 205).

REFLECTION

*“The divine oneness of life is within
and all around us.*

*Sometimes walking alone in nature
we can feel its heartbeat
and its wonder,
and our steps become
steps of remembrance.*

*The simple practice of
“walking in a sacred manner,”
in which with every step we take,
we feel the connection with the sacred Earth,
is one way to reconnect
with the living Spirit of the Earth.*

*It is through the heart
that a real connection is made,
even if we first make it in our feet or hands.*

*Do we really feel our self
as a part of this beautiful
and suffering planet?
Do we sense its need?*

*Then this connection comes alive,
a living stream that flows from our heart
as it embraces all of life.*

*Then every step, every touch,
will be a prayer for the Earth,
a remembrance of what is sacred.”*

Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn. Spiritual Ecology:

The Cry of the Earth.

Golden Sufi Centre. Kindle Edition.

SECTION 63: SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART: A SPIRITUALITY THAT CALLS FOR ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

One of Pope Francis' characteristic contributions to the debate regarding the climate crisis is his emphasis on the fact that we can only change the climate, if we change ourselves. In fact, the entire final chapter of *Laudato Si* speaks of the need of a spirituality, able to create a new awareness in our hearts. The Pope writes: *"It is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life"* (LS 202).

It is not only companies that pollute the air that should change. It is not only politicians that should take measures to curb pollution from agriculture or from polluting traffic on land, at sea and in the air. The Pope expects much from families and family education. *"It is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle,"* he writes. *"Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us"* (LS 212). He continues: *"Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these seeds go on to bear fruit throughout life"* (LS 213). Such education, the Pope expects above all from families *"because the family is the heart of the culture of life"* (LS 213), and also from Christian communities (LS 214).

The first thing that families and communities should teach their children or members is to appreciate the beauty of God's creation: *"By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised, if he or she treats everything as an object to be used or abused without scruple"* (LS 215). Earlier, the Pope had already written: *"If we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of*

masters, consumers, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.” (LS 11).

REFLECTION

BEAUTY

*“This feeling of being grasped by beauty
should lead to certain spiritual responses:
humility, gratitude, and thanksgiving.
For this is all a gift. ...*

*Beauty is like a gift in its sheer excessiveness.
It is so much more than we might expect,
and we respond best by appreciating it.*

*Beauty is grace,
and grace asks only to be received.
For Christians,
God’s grace is made manifest in many ways.
But we should not forget
that a primary experience of it is in creation.”*

(St. Augustine praises the Lord for:)

*“the manifold diversity of beauty
in sky and earth and sea;
the abundance of light,
and its miraculous loveliness,
in sun and moon and stars;
the dark shades of woods,
the colour and fragrance of flowers;
the multitudinous varieties of birds,
with their songs and their bright plumage;
the countless living creatures
of all shapes and sizes.”*
(The City of God).

(Cloutier, David. Walking God's Earth

Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition)..

**SECTION 64: SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART:
CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT REQUIRES CONVERSION**

Hans Kwakman MSC

In his Apostolic Letter "Evangelii Gaudium," Pope Francis encourages us to embrace "*a spirituality that changes hearts*" (EG 262). In "Laudato Si," the Pope would like "*to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living*" (LS 216). This spirituality, he states, can motivate us to come to "*a more intense concern for the protection of our world*" (LS 216). But this supposes "*a sincere desire to change*" (LS 218); even "*a profound inner conversion*" (LS 217).

The word "conversion" is a translation of the Greek word 'metanoia'. That word indicates "*a change of heart*" (LS 218) that is, a change of the direction, which the desires of our heart usually follow. Such a radical change is possible only when we are guided by God's Spirit, who calls us to cultivate in our hearts "*ecological virtues*" that are virtues that focus on caring for the environment (LS 88).

As ecological virtues, the Pope lists: "*a spirit of generous care,*" "*gratitude,*" "*recognition of the world as God's loving gift,*" "*self-sacrifice and good works*" (LS 220). While nurturing these virtues, we are "*called to quietly imitate God's generosity,*" realizing, "*that we do not live in isolation from the rest of the creatures, but are bound together in a wonderful universal communion*" (LS 220).

"*By developing these personal, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can lead us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in solving the problems of the world*" (LS 220). However, the Pope also reminds us that "*social problems must be tackled not only by some individual good deeds, but also by common networks*" (LS 219).

REFLECTION

*“Various convictions of our faith can help us
to enrich the meaning of this conversion.*

*These include the awareness
that each creature reflects something of God
and has a message to convey to us.*

*As well as the security
that Christ has taken unto himself
this material world.*

*Now, risen, He is intimately present to each being,
surrounding it with his affection
and penetrating it with his light.*

*We read in the Gospel
that Jesus says of the birds of the air
that “not one of them is forgotten before God” (Lk 12:6).*

*How then can we possibly mistreat them
or cause them harm?*

*I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully
this dimension of their conversion.*

May the power and the light of the grace

*we have received also be evident
in our relationship to other creatures
and to the world around us.
In this way, we will help nurture
that sublime fraternity with all creation
which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.”*

(Pope Francis in his Encyclical “Laudato Si.”

Rome, Pentecost, 24 May 2015, n. 221.)

SECTION 65: SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART:

A SPIRITUALITY OF HOPE AND JOY

Hans Kwakman msc

Pope Francis often reminds us that the message of the Gospel is a message of joy for all people. Three of his Apostolic Letters refer to "joy" in their titles: *"The Joy of the Gospel: on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world"* (November 2013); *"The Joy of Love, on love in the family"* (March 2016); and *"Rejoice and Be Glad: on the call to holiness in today's world"* (March 2018). And his reflections in "Laudato Si" he calls *"troubling"* on the one hand, but *"joyful"* on the other (LS 246).

"Troubling," because the Pope is fully aware of the alarming state of the earth today: *"We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair"* (LS 61). But also *"joyful,"* because there is still hope and, *"hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems"* (LS 61).

The Pope sees the deepest cause of the lack of joy in the fact that *"God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too"* (Evangelii Gaudium 2).

On the other hand, he states that there is reason to keep hoping that humanity at the beginning of the twenty-first century will generously assume its heavy responsibilities (cf. LS 165). After all, *"worldwide, the ecological movement has made significant advances, thanks also to the efforts of many organizations of civil society"* (LS 166).

However, ultimately our hope and joy are founded on the conviction that the Lord of life is always present *“in the heart of this world.” “God does not abandon us, for he has united himself definitively to our earth and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!”* (LS 245).

REFLECTION

HOPE

“Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvellous expression:

“Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis”

“God cannot suffer, but he can suffer with.”

Human beings are worth so much to God

that He himself became human

in order to suffer with humanity in an utterly real way

—in flesh and blood—

as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion.

Hence in all human suffering we are joined by One

who experiences and carries that suffering with us.

Hence con-solatio is present in all suffering,

the consolation of God's compassionate love—

and so the star of hope rises.

Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials

we always need the lesser and greater hopes too:

a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds,

a favourable resolution of a crisis, and so on.

In our lesser trials these kinds of hope

may even be sufficient.

But in truly great trials,

where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth

before my own welfare, career and possessions,

I need the certitude of that true, great hope.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical SPE SALVI, (“In hope we were saved”) November 2007,
n. 39.)

Section 66:

Spirituality of the Heart:

A Spirituality of Societal and Inner Peace.

(By Hans Kwakman msc)

The Church proclaims the Gospel of peace, for she proclaims Jesus Christ, *"who is himself peace"* (Ephesians 2:14), writes Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter "The Joy of the Gospel" (*Evangeliu Gaudium* 239). However, peace is only possible, the Pope insists in *Laudato Si*, if we always connect peace with justice and the conservation of creation. Otherwise we fall *"into gross simplifications"* (LS 92).

Dialogue between religions *"in truth and love"* is also *"a necessary condition for peace in the world"* (EG 250). This dialogue consists first of all in *"sharing each other's joys and sorrows. In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace"* (EG 250).

Pope Francis pays special attention to the peaceful relationship with the Muslims. This relationship is particularly important, he says, because today followers of Islam may, *"freely practise their religion"* in countries with a Christian tradition (EG 252).

In this regard, it is important to remember that, *"the sacred writings of Islam have retained some Christian teachings."* They testify for instance that in Islam, *"Jesus Christ and Mary receive profound veneration."* Moreover, the followers of Islam join us in *"worshipping the one merciful God"* (EG 252). Also admirable is it to see that, *"young and old, men and women in Islam make time for daily prayer"* and

practice *“mercy towards those most in need”* (EG 252). Indeed, *“authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence”* (EG 253).

Accordingly, the Pope declares that all believers *“must always feel challenged to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace,”* because, *“by continuously returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today’s needs”* (LS 200).

REFLECTION

INNER PEACE

*“Christian spirituality proposes
an alternative understanding of the quality of life,
and encourages a prophetic
and contemplative lifestyle,
one capable of deep enjoyment
free of the obsession with consumption.*

*We need to take up an ancient lesson,
found in different religious traditions
and also in the Bible.
It is the conviction that “less is more”.
A constant flood of new consumer goods
can baffle the heart*

*and prevent us from cherishing each thing
and each moment.*

*To be serenely present to each reality,
however small it may be,
opens us to much greater horizons
of understanding and personal fulfilment.
Christian spirituality proposes a growth
marked by moderation
and the capacity to be happy with little.*

*It is a return to that simplicity
which allows us to appreciate the small things,
to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us,
to be spiritually detached from what we possess,
and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.
This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion
and the mere accumulation of pleasures.”*

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, n.222).

Section 67:
**Spirituality of the Heart and the powerful presence of the
Spirit in the heart of creation.**

(By Hans Kwakman msc)

During the Sunday Eucharist, we confess in the Credo that we believe *"in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life."* In Pope Francis' writings, too, the Holy Spirit plays an important role as Giver of Life and Sacred Power, who brings about in God's creation that, *"everything is connected to each other"* (LS 16; 70; 91; 117; 240; see Section 60).

In "Evangelii Gaudium", "the Joy of the Gospel," the Pope points out, conforming to St. Paul (Galatians 5:22-23) that the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts, as God *"sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his children, transforming us and enabling us to respond to his love by our lives"* (EG 112). Moreover, the Holy Spirit is also the driving force in the heart of the Church, by enriching her *"with various gifts to renew and build her up"* (EG 130), while empowering her to fulfil her mission in the world.

In "Laudato Si" the Pope declares that the Holy Spirit is *"the infinite bond of love,"* present *"at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways"* (LS 238). Just as the Holy Spirit enriches our hearts with all kinds of gifts, inspiring us to be sincere and generous, so the Holy Spirit also fills *"the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge"* (LS 80).

Pope Francis also testifies that the Holy Spirit possesses *"an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable"* (LS 80). He quotes the bishops of Brazil, who pointed out that *"the Spirit of life dwells in every living creature,"* and that, *"discovering this presence leads us to cultivate the 'ecological virtues' "* (LS 88). About "ecological virtues" we already talked in section 64 of this program.

REFLECTION

Trust in the Holy Spirit

*“Keeping our missionary fervor alive
calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit,
for it is he who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26).*

*But this generous trust has to be nourished,
and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly.*

*He can heal whatever causes us
to flag in the missionary endeavor.*

*It is true that this trust in the unseen
can cause us to feel disoriented:
it is like being plunged into the deep
and not knowing what we will find.
I myself have frequently experienced this.*

*Yet there is no greater freedom
than that of allowing oneself
to be guided by the Holy Spirit,
renouncing the attempt
to plan and control everything to the last detail,
and instead letting him
enlighten, guide and direct us,
leading us wherever he wills.*

*The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed
in every time and place.”*

(Pope Francis in “Evangelii Gaudium” n. 280)

Section 68:
Spirituality of the Heart
and the significant presence of the Risen Christ
in the heart of creation.

(By Hans Kwakman msc)

“In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning,” Pope Francis states, while referring to St. Paul, who proclaimed: *“All things have been created through him and for him”* (Col 1:16), as well as to St. John, who in the opening of his Gospel writes: *“In the beginning was the Word... All things came to be through him”* (John 1:1-3).

Consequently, the Pope affirms that, *“from the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole* (LS 99). Christ, he states, *“has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light”* (LS 221). But, in Laudato Si nr 99 the Pope adds, *“without thereby impinging on its autonomy”* (LS 99).

In “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, “the Joy of the Gospel,” the Pope had already declared that believing in and following the Risen Christ, is, *“something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties”* (EG 167). For those, who believe in the presence of the Risen Lord, the beauty of the world around us takes on a special meaning. *“Every expression of true beauty”* in human relationships or in art, in landscapes or in technical development, *“can be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus”* (EG 167). After all, “a

renewed appreciation for beauty” is “touching the human heart, while enabling the truth and the goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it” (EG 167).

However, being the revelation of God, the Creator, the Risen Lord discloses his presence not only in beauty, but just as much in the messiness of this world and the confusion of our lives. So, the Pope exclaims: *“How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance! The Creator says to each one of us: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you” (Jer. 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary” (LS 65).*

REFLECTION

RESURRECTION

“Christ’s resurrection

is not an event of the past.

It contains a vital power which has permeated this world.

Where all seems to be dead,

signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up.

It is an irresistible force.

Often it seems that God does not exist:

all around us we see persistent injustice, evil,

indifference and cruelty.

But it is also true that in the midst of darkness

something new always springs to life

and sooner or later produces fruit.

On razed land life breaks through,

stubbornly yet invincibly.

However dark things are,

goodness always re-emerges and spreads.

Each day in our world beauty is born anew,

it rises transformed through the storms of history.

Values always tend to reappear under new guises,

and human beings have arisen time after time

from situations that seemed doomed.

Such is the power of the resurrection,

and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.”

(Pope Francis in “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” n. 276).

Section 69: Spirituality of the Heart,
A spirituality of relationships,
rooted in the presence of the Triune God

Pope Francis confesses that, *“from the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up ... It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it”* (Misericordiae Vultus 25). The Pope marvels about the presence of this merciful communion of Father, Son and Spirit in the heart of the Church, but also in the heart of families, and in the heart of the universe as a whole.

Considering the presence of the Holy Trinity in the heart of the Church, he describes the Church as *“a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, rooted in the Trinity”* (Evangelii Gaudium 111). In the Church, *“the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts.... brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity, but a multifaceted and inviting harmony”* (EG 117).

The triune God is *“a communion of persons”* (Amoris Laetitia 71), not like we are persons, separate from one another, but as the triune, creative source of our being as persons. Hence, in the family, *“the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection”* (Amoris Laetitia 11).

Concerning the presence of the Trinity in the universe, the Pope affirms: *“The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways”* (Laudato Si 238).

So, “when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity” (LS 238).

REFLECTION

TOWARDS UNIVERSAL SOLIDARITY

*“The world, created according to the divine model,
is a web of relationships.*

*Creatures tend towards God,
and in turn it is proper to every living being
to tend towards other things,
so that throughout the universe we can find
any number of constant
and secretly interwoven relationships.*

*This leads us not only
to marvel at the manifold connections
existing among creatures,
but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment.*

*The human person grows more,
matures more and is sanctified more
to the extent that he or she enters into relationships,*

*going out from themselves
to live in communion with God,
with others and with all creatures.*

*In this way, they make their own
that trinitarian dynamism
which God imprinted in them,
when they were created.*

*Everything is interconnected,
and this invites us to develop a spirituality
of that global solidarity
which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”*

(Pope Francis, *Laudato SI* n. 240).

Section 70: Spirituality of the Heart,

A missionary spirituality of intercessory prayer.

In his Apostolic Letter 'Evangelii Gaudium' ('The Joy of the Gospel') Pope Francis writes: *"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus"* (EG 120). That doesn't mean that every baptized person should get involved in missionary projects. One more way of being a missionary is by doing good to other people or to the earth through prayers of intercession.

The Pope speaks about *"the missionary power of intercessory prayer"* (EG 281). *"Intercession is a way of penetrating the Father's heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them. We may say that God's heart is touched by our intercession"* (EG 283).

In fact, before we start praying for someone, God is already present with that person in a caring way, states the Pope. Prayer of intercession is *"a spiritual gaze born of deep faith which acknowledges what God is doing in the lives of others"* (EG 282). *"What our intercession achieves is that God's power, his love and his faithfulness are shown ever more clearly in the midst of the people"* (EG 283) .

However, we are also called to combine our prayer with some form of real care, as far as possible. We shouldn't forget, says the Pope, *"that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love. Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God's gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters"* (Gaudete et Exultate 104).

As a conclusion of his extensive reflections in "Laudato Si" on the care of creation as our common home, the Pope invites us to support our practical concern for the earth by praying for the protection of its life and beauty. He proposes two prayers: one can be shared with every believer in God the Creator; the other one is a Christian prayer,

inspired by the Gospel. Here, I present the first prayer for your time of reflection. A part of the Christian prayer you may find in section 25 of this Online Course.

REFLECTION

“A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH”

*“All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.*

*Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.*

*Fill us with peace,
that we may live as brothers and sisters,
harming no one.*

*O God of the poor, help us to rescue
the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.*

*Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain*

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

*Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly
united with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.*

*We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.”*

(Pope Francis, Laudato Si n. 246)

Dear brothers and sisters, participants in this online course.

In agreement with the International Council of the Laity of the Chevalier Family, I've decided to finish the Online Course on a Spirituality of the Heart. This course was intended to be an introduction to a Spirituality of the Heart, especially for the lay members of the Chevalier Family and for all those who wish to deepen their knowledge and experience of a Spirituality of the Heart. Each section contains a brief presentation of a theme, followed by a text for personal reflection.

The first Part (sections 1-3) offered some remarks about the widespread need for Spirituality in today's world.

The second Part (sections 4-16) presented a brief introduction to the more important aspects of "THE CHARISM OF FR. JULES CHEVALIER" (1824-1907), the Founder of the Chevalier Family.

The subsequent sections were designed to indicate that a Spirituality of the Heart is as relevant to the people today as it was to the men and women at the time of Fr. Chevalier. Particularly, the writings of Pope Francis keep inspiring us to live and practise a Spirituality of the Heart in a contemporary way.

The third part (sections 17-29) focused on living "A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART IN THE CHEVALIER FAMILY" in line with Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter "Evangelii Gaudium" ("the Joy of the Gospel").

The fourth part (section 30 – 50) centred on "LIVING A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART IN DAILY LIFE," following Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter

“Amoris Laetitia” (“The Joy of Love”) as a source of inspiration for both married couples and singles, as well as religious, who live a community life.

The fifth part (section 51-70) reflected on a Spirituality of the Heart in Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter "Laudato SI" (“Praise be to you, my Lord”) on “CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME.”

The original English edition of the Online Course has been translated in French, Spanish, German and Dutch. All these editions are still available from Mr. Roland Douchin at <cornovum@gmail.com>. In addition, translations have been prepared in Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Portuguese language. In due time, you will also find information about this online course on the website of the laity of the Chevalier Family <www.chevalierfamilylaity.com>.

Also on behalf of the International Council of the Laity of the Chevalier Family, I thank all those who have contributed to making this course available through translation, distribution and support. Hopefully, the course will continue to introduce new members of the Chevalier Family to a broader understanding of the meaning and experience of a Spirituality of the Heart.

Hans Kwakman MSC, Tilburg, Netherlands, April 2022.

