

E. J. Cuskelly MSC

a new heart and a new spirit

Reflections on MSC Spirituality



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INTRODUCTION

Our General Conference of 1973 requested that « the General Administration make available documentation regarding MSC spirit ». This request was made because « the feeling of the Conference was that it would be good for the whole Congregation to have a clearer conviction of its own character, a clearer outlining of its own 'physiognomy' ». (nn. 29 and 25).

I believe that this interest in our own spirituality is the most encouraging sign for the future of our Congregation.

For these reasons, and in response to suggestions of a number of confreres, I publish these reflections on MSC spirituality. Many of them have been subjects of conferences given in retreats to groups throughout the Society. I hope that both the conferences and their publication may contribute something towards that « clearer conviction » which the General Conference desired. (The written text retains obvious traces of the original spoken style).

When one uses the term « MSC Spirituality » one thinks naturally of the MSC Sisters, too. In a preliminary draft of their new Constitutions they wrote,

in 1978: « He (Fr. Linckens) bequeathed to it (their Congregation) the spirit of his own Congregation given to it by its Founder Fr. Chevalier. »

Speaking of Fr. Chevalier as Founder directs one's attention to the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart whom, with Mother Marie Louise Hartzler, he founded.

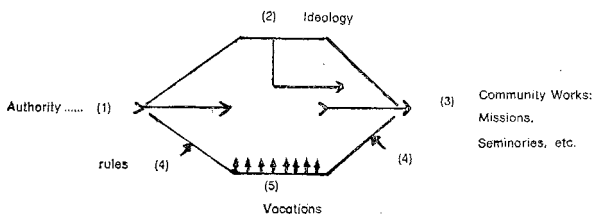
To the Sisters of both these Congregations, I offer the contents of this book in the hope that it might be of some help to them in their own efforts to live, each Congregation in its own life-style, the spirit given by Fr. Chevalier.

ROME, Easter 1978.

E. J. CUSKELLY, M.S.C.
(Superior General)

1. SOME ASPECTS OF RENEWAL IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

We have been discussing « Renewal and Adaptation » for some years now. Ideas are not lacking about what should be done; many changes have been made. However, differences of opinion frequently prevent fruitful concerted effort. Each religious group will have to seek in its own way, in line with its spirit and its history. The following considerations, I believe, can help us all to place the need for renewal in its existential context, and thereby to see the direction we should give to our work of adaptation.



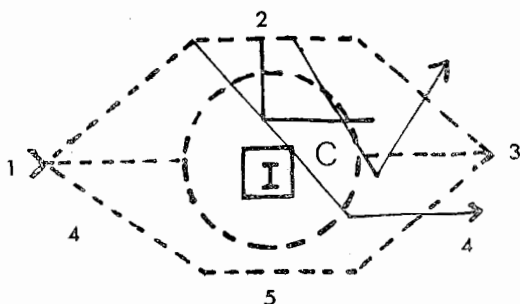
NOTE: Within this framework,

- There was no question as to « our identity »;
- there was less questioning about « community »;
- there was less preoccupation with THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON and his fulfilment — there was less need for it.

A. « Once upon a time » religious life was, to a certain extent, viewed in a way which can be expressed schematically as in Diagram A. It was then relatively easy for superiors to know the lines along which they should seek to unify and direct their religious institute.

1. A centralized *authority* could make decisions and these decisions were accepted and carried out without too much difficulty.
2. A common theology and *ideology* unified the group and helped in the common thrust towards common goals or community works.
3. *Community works*, accepted by all as goals of the Society, were a unifying (almost identifying) force.
4. *Rules*, common to all, gave a feeling of unity and made it relatively easy for Provincials to keep an eye on the « spiritual welfare » of individuals and communities. There were our community exercises.
5. More than was usually realized in the days of plenty, the constant inflow of *vocations*, assuring the members of young confreres to help with and carry on their works, was a strong moral support and confirmation of the value of their own vocation. Young men were eager and adaptable, accepting willingly appointments to the works which needed them.

B. A TIME OF CHANGE: The old lines have lost their clarity and consistency. New elements have entered into the diagram, old ones have disappeared.



1. Authority is less decisive; its decisions less easily accepted.
2. There is a plurality of ideologies, demanding different practical expressions; but IN A NUMBER THE OLD IDEOLOGY AND ITS DEMANDS REMAIN UNCHANGED. This results in bewilderment, rigidity, reaction.

NOTE: Within this WEAKENED framework,

- 1) The question of «our identity» becomes more acute.
- 2) The group appears as a collection of individuals — the I of the diagram. «Renewal ... an excuse for doing their own thing ... failure to admit in practice that the common good must be served before the individual ..». The disintegrating structures give no security, so the individual seeks his personal security in his own way.
- 3) There is much talk about community (C) — much talk, but little agreement as to what is demanded for community. After all, what is now *common* to all; in what do the individuals commune?

3. Some of the 'community works' have disappeared; the value of those that remain is called into question.
4. Rules??? Community exercises?
5. Vocations have diminished in many provinces, practically disappeared in others.

In other words, the chief factors which gave unity (apparent or real) and which gave direction to the whole Province have either disappeared or diminished notably.

Reflecting on these changes we can see that it was inevitable that there should be a deterioration in the quality of community life. Let us repeat: 'where the disintegrating structures give no security, the individual seeks his security in his own way'. Some have sought security in clinging to the old 'orthodox' view of religious life and its practices. Others have sought it in looking for « status-jobs », or at least in insisting on doing a work which *they* felt was worth while, or on doing further « special studies ». This explains a phenomenon mentioned by many religious superiors v.g. « the tendency to take on personal or individual commitments ... to attribute more importance to these private initiatives than to those of the community ».

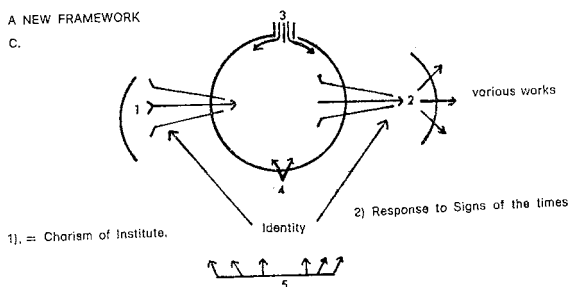
Faced with this state of affairs what must we do? Many superiors have seen the individual's need for support and understanding at this time. They have devoted their efforts to a friendly and understanding concern for the individual persons. This is good, but it is not enough. It is not enough because phase B

can never be more than a time of transition. It will be a time of transition either to new vitality or to a more or less peaceful death of a group or a Province. In the course of history, some societies have died out altogether. Others have lost some of their Provinces.

How are we to set about trying to renew? I think that we can learn valuable lessons from the history of religious life and the way that Orders have surmounted crises in the past. In general they did so 1) by a vital re-discovery of their founding charism and spirit; 2) by being alert to « the signs of the times », and 3) by a life centred on Christ in faith and prayer, conscious that they were essentially a faith-community.

These elements (especially the first 2) could be discussed at great length. I have no time for that. I want to stress, however that here we have the principles for renewal. We can not think simply in terms of patching up the fabric of the old structures. We have to think in terms of a new framework, as it were, with a different shape and a new dynamic.

A NEW FRAMEWORK
C.



Within this framework the strong emphases are different from what they were in diagram A. They are:

1. The Charism of the Institute as a dynamic and life-giving element.
2. A search for the signs of the times and a constant effort to respond to them in the light of our spirituality and mission. This can lead to a number of different works which are expressions of our mission and an answer to a call from the church in the modern world. Neither 'unity' nor 'identity' depend on the works.
3. Different ideologies can be fitted more easily into this kind of communion; they themselves constitute one of the signs of the times.
4. There is a resultant 'communion' in shared inspiration and shared 'concern'.
5. Here an ideal is given with which many modern youth can more easily « identify ».

In conclusion it may be useful to develop a few of these points more fully. It has been suggested that this present time of crisis may see the old Orders continue because they have a solid spirituality which dominates their life and existence. On the other hand, some have said, newer congregations instituted for specific works, may cease to exist when these works are no longer necessary. Before giving too much credence to this opinion (usually expressed by members of older Orders) let us see what it supposes and also what it suggests for our future. It suggests that if a religious congregation exists only or primarily to do a specific work, then the future of that congregation is uncertain. The point should be carefully considered.

However, one needs to examine carefully the supposition that more modern active Orders were founded only for certain works. The urgency of certain needs did dictate the choice of works, certainly. Nevertheless, important though the works may have been, something more basic and more important motivated the dedication to these works. This was « a particular vision of the Christ of the Gospels together with an inspiration to follow him and serve him in our brethren, and this in a special way ». Broadly speaking this is a description of the charism of the founder of an institute which inspired him and inspires those who follow him.

Certainly, apostolic works, especially when well done and appreciated by the Church and the world, assume an importance which can make them appear to be the 'raison d'être' of a particular institute. United in the pursuit of worthwhile goals, the members will have a spirit of brotherhood, an 'esprit de corps'. As long as the works remain relevant and important this state of affairs continues. However, when questions arise about the works, when different members seek their own apostolates, it is time for reassessment and for rediscovery of the more profound reasons for our being together in the same institute.

I believe that all Orders in recent years have had their eager young men — eager to respond « to the signs of the times », to try new ways, to do new things. Many of them — too many — have left religious life and the priesthood. We have made our own contribution to some of the failures. We are slow to see the way to respond to new challenges, we are hesitant about taking risks even when risks are called for.

However, a number have left because they have failed to combine all necessary elements in a search for new ways. Only when it springs from a deep spiritual discovery of the value and relevance of my own vocation will my response to the signs of the times be also a response to the call of Christ. Much so-called 'response to the signs of the times' has sprung from an impatience with the existing order of things, from a too human need of achievement. And thus it has been doomed to failure.

Nevertheless we must be careful, here, not to fall into reactionary attitudes. There are those who point to the failures I have mentioned and who draw the conclusion that all « search for novelty », as they call it, is wrong. This is a mistake as tragic as any other. It could be fatal to a religious Institute.

Every man needs to feel that his life and work is relevant and worth while. To fulfil this need, he will want to aim at certain personal goals. Even within a community he still remains an individual person. Therefore it has been recognised that an important task of government in religious life is to promote the harmonious blending of personal and community goals. To achieve this within a modern religious Institute, the community must be evidently attentive to what God is asking from each individual with his personal gifts and aspirations. The individual asks how he is called to use those gifts as a member of the community whose life and spirit he has asked to share.

Time and effort must be « invested » in prayer and discussion together if we are to discover ourselves again as a religious community in which new accents

and emphases have replaced the old — at least for many members. The psychological disintegration that this has often caused will not simply disappear with the passage of the years. We will progress beyond the stage of transition only if we work at growing together into the new more dynamic type of unity. We have to accept the implications of the truth that as members of the same religious Institute we are called to live a communion, a *koinonia*, a fellowship, a brotherhood in Christ.

This communion results from something more basic than any kind of work that we do. It needs to be nourished by the realization of two important truths. Firstly we are trying to live the same « particular vision of the Christ of the Gospel » and the same inspiration which results from this. Secondly we live a concern to express this vision and inspiration in a way that is relevant to the modern world. We may have no clear, unanimous lights as to how we should do this. However, with what light we have, in mutual respect and in the patience of faith, we seek to follow the Christ who has called us along the ways which he wants us to follow.

2. CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

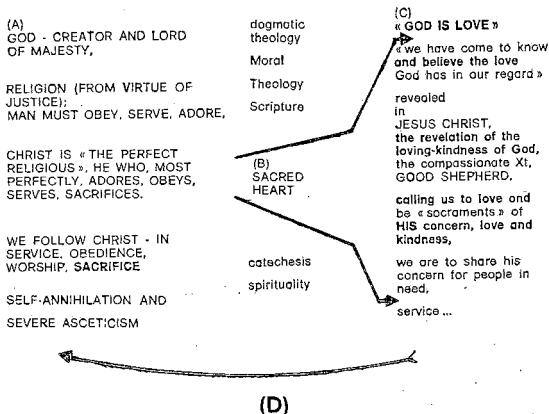
obedience, worship and sacrifice. Christ annihilated himself in his sacrifice on Calvary, and continues to do so in the eucharistic sacrifice. From this theological view, Jules Chevalier (in line with many others) drew conclusions for himself which resulted in a severe asceticism. He was fervent and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

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

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

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

MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART
FR. CHEVALIER'S EXPERIENCE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

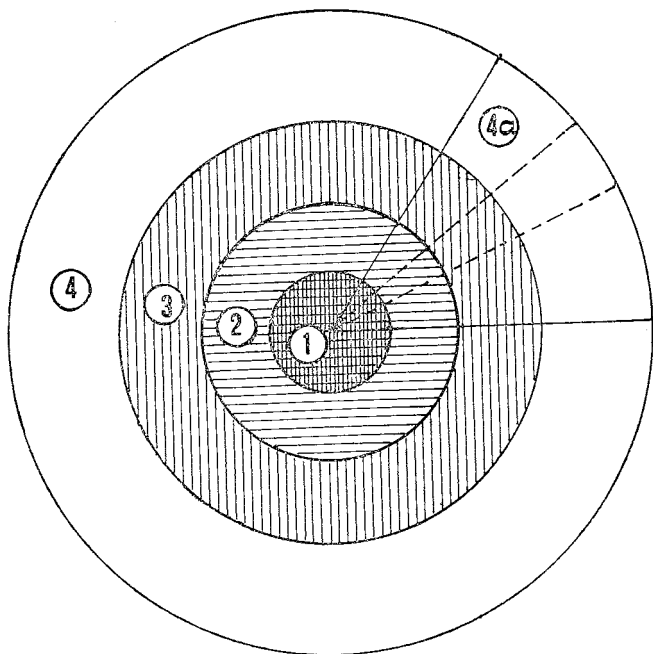
to offer my own explanation of the difference between the two. They are closely connected. Nevertheless it is useful to distinguish a number of connected elements.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

3. FROM CONTRACT TO COVENANT

I begin this chapter with some thoughts on the rather improbable topic of marriage and annulment of marriage. Specifically I want to point out an interesting recent development in the outlook of some marriage tribunals. They speak far less than formerly of the marriage CONTRACT and far more of the marriage COVENANT. By their change of terminology they wish to emphasize a special quality of the consent required to make a valid Christian marriage. They also wish to indicate that the marriage can be annulled if the parties did not make, or were incapable of making, a real personal covenant — and this because of the lack of the kind of consent required.

There is some interesting discussion among moralists about how the lack of love might bring it about that the consent to marriage is invalid, because, as they say, in its deep reality the consent needed is an act of the free will whereby two persons give themselves mutually, radically, totally.

Real love means a readiness to give; it is an altruistic, unselfish love which opens out in giving and is ready to keep on doing so. There is, on the the other hand,

a self-centred love which is incapable of giving, or does not want to give. It wants to enjoy the other person, but is capable of no more than that. When both parties to a marriage get a lot of enjoyment out of each other, what is no more than infatuation and a self-centred love can appear as sufficient for marriage. But it is not.

A covenant is more than a contract because it is informed and pervaded by a real, self-giving love. Some people who go through the form of marriage are not capable of entering a covenant. Others, though capable, are too selfish to do so. Such people may live a contract for a while; they may even live it for many years, but they never move onward into living a covenant. On the other hand, there are some who did really enter into a marriage covenant. But selfishness can intrude; one or other of the partners can recede into a 'contract-mentality'. Then, when love has died out of the marriage, the contract may be very hard to keep, and it may be impossible to restore the lost love.

At every Eucharist we recall « the blood of the new and eternal Covenant ». The Church is a covenant people, or at least is called to be.

Where is the Church today? This is a question frequently asked especially of one who has seen something of the Church in many countries. I suppose that each man will have his own reply to this question. I would suggest that the Church today stands between contract and covenant; she stands in need of learning to live anew that New Covenant foretold by the Prophets and brought about in Christ.

The People of God has always been called to be a covenant people; always called, but rarely responding with sufficient generosity. The covenant may be forever new, but humanity grows old repeatedly and needs to discover again the God who renews its youth. In the wonder at the marvels that God worked to bring them out of Egypt, in the freshness of Yahweh's call to them, the people said, enthusiastically and gladly: « Yes indeed, we will be your people, and you will be our God » All too well we know how this wonderful opening chapter was succeeded by very human stories of selfishness and sin and forgetfulness of covenant lived in love. They forgot their God and what they had promised so eagerly. But God does not forget; and again we all know the promises he made through the prophets.

« Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Juda, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. » (Jer. 31, 31ff).

« A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances... and you shall be my people and I will be your God. » (Ezech. 36, 26 ff).

The New Covenant is realized in Christ. In him the words of Psalm 39 find their perfect expression: « My God I delight in your law — in the depths of my heart. » (cf. Ep. Heb. c. 10). In the depths of his human heart, a son of man rises above all contracts to live in love a delight in God's law, a perfect covenant-love. From that same heart, pierced on the Cross symbolized by the flowing water, he gives us his Spirit that we, too, might delight in being God's people and letting him be our God.

This delight characterized the early christians who, in the wonder of their first Easter faith, sealed a new covenant with the Lord. It has been lived with the same fresh response in every time and in every land in which the Good News is perceived as light to our darkness, as hope for our apathy and as the wonder of the gift of love. But the freshness fades with time; the weight of the years brings weariness. There are many interesting things in this world of ours which occupy our minds and divide our hearts. And even for us, the new covenant can grow old; it can pass from covenant to contract. When we no longer delight in God's law, we can wonder if the contract is worth keeping. Carrying out duties, observing laws, keeping commandments, but without the Spirit and with a heart of stone — this is not living a covenant.

Where is the Church today? Behold the days have come when people are weary of rules and observances; when some do what they have to out of a sense of duty; when others appear in church for baptism, wedding and burial. There are men like Lefebvre and his followers who say: let's get back to clear contracts with rules that bind us and that we observe

carefully. But No, I can not see that this is the call of the Lord. Let us go forward to living and preaching a covenant, with a heart renewed.

As Vatican II made clear, the days have come (they came some years ago) when religious are asked to pass from contract to covenant, or to make it manifest that they were living a delight in the law of a living God. According to the Council, they were not to keep obsolete structures, they were not to observe rules which had lost all meaning except that they were written in terms of the old contracts. And what happened when we were told this? Some saw this as a time for revision of contracts and possible renewal. They rescinded theirs and are now no longer with us. (It was only when I was doing some reading about the annulment of marriages that I realized why Rome, before granting dispensations, does a lot of enquiring into the life and character of the priest in his seminary days. She is really trying to see if, at profession or ordination, he entered into a contract or really made a covenant with the Lord, in a consent which was motivated by a self-less love, open and ready to give).

It would be consoling to think that all of us who have stayed have done so because we have been always living a personal covenant with the Lord who has called us. But here, too, we have cases which are parallel to marriages that are not a total success. At profession or ordination, religious or priest echo the prayer of David: « Joyfully have I offered all these things ». In the freshness of the offering, there is joy in the giving. The joy will remain only if in our hearts the love which inspired our gift remains alive. Therefore we need to continue with a further phrase

from the prayer of David (Chronicles, 29). « Domine Deus Israel, conserva hanc voluntatem » — keep us constant in the gladness of our giving. Otherwise, although we may persevere in our profession, the covenant we once made has deteriorated into a contract. We sweat it out, and we take what consolations we can.

Fortunately for us, there is an important difference between marriages that have deteriorated and personal covenants with the Lord that have lost their freshness. Yahweh's love will last forever, his faithfulness till the end of time. If we wish, the Lord can give us a new heart and put his Spirit within us. Let us listen again to Ezechiel: « Shake off the sins you have committed against me and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why are you so anxious to die, House of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone — It is the Lord God who speaks. (Ez. 18,31, f).

The days have come when the Church has need of religious and priests who live their own personal covenant with God in Christ, and can help others to be a covenant people. This applies to your reflections on the ministry — are you going to get people to make and observe contracts, or are you going to get them to keep covenants. For our own personal lives we might ask this question: Does M.S.C. mean Men who Sign Contracts or Men who Seal Covenants?

I believe that we are fortunate in our MSC vocation or spirituality in many ways. One of these is that our spirit is admirably suited to help us (and to help us assist others) through this transition time which

all the Church is living. It is centred on the new heart and the Spirit which the prophets saw as the source of life for a new covenant.

« When he laid down his life for his friends, when his side was pierced, Christ gave us his Spirit. This Spirit puts love into our hearts and gives us the will to serve. Looking on him who was pierced on the cross, we see the new heart that God has given us... » (D.R. n. 3).

4. MATTHEW 11, 25-30

Fr. Chevalier's early companions were Fathers Maugenest and Piperon. The former was a co-founder; the latter, as Spiritual Director and Novice Master, initiated many young men into the spirit of the Congregation.

When Father Piperon died in 1915 Father Maugenest wrote — « This morning of the First Friday of the month, I came down from the Altar where I celebrated Holy Mass so that by the application of the infinite merits of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the gates of heaven might be open to our dear Father Piperon who loved this Heart so much and served him so well, and for sixty years worked so hard for his glory. He did so much for the Sacred Heart by his words, his prayer, and by his co-operation in the foundation, the support and the progress of the great work of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Issoudun. Above all, it was by his example that he contributed powerfully to the establishment and continuance of the work, and to the spirit and formation of its religious.

« The spirit of your Order was to be in effect the realisation of the great Commandment of the Sacred

Heart — Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Thanks be to God the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart practice in all things and in the highest degree the virtues of this adorable heart. Above all else, this is their strength — it is this which gives edification, it is this which gains for them the admiration, the esteem, the confidence of men. It is this which draws God's blessings on their undertakings, their works and their ministry. If the spirit of your Order has so much value, what more can we say to the glory of the humble Father Píperon than to salute in his admirable life, the perfect example of this spirit which is none other than that of the Sacred Heart ».

« Yes, (Father Maugeness goes on) — if the merit and the glory of the eminent Father Chevalier is that he founded your Order by the force of his creative genius, the merit and the glory of the humble Father Píperon is that he gave you your spirit by his practice of the virtues of the Sacred Heart. For more than sixty years he was a model of these virtues before your eyes. I loved him much and admired him more. I've never known anyone who was so humble, nor anyone who to me seemed marked to the same degree with the true seal of sanctity. »

As we read these words we are struck by the contrast between them and our previous considerations regarding the charism of our Society. We seem to be in a different world, less dynamic, less inspiring. Not many people become enthusiastic today about a call to be meek and humble of heart, or to imitate the virtues of the heart of Christ. Where is the life-giving Spirit, the new Heart, the concern for men, the revelation of the kindness of God? Yet, if we are to make

an honest search for the « founding charism » of the Society, we can not ignore this testimony of the early companions of Fr. Chevalier. So let us examine it carefully — and be humble if we must! In fact careful examination shows that the two worlds differ, not in content or inspiration, but only superficially and in the mode of expression.

We must not limit our study to isolated phrases or sentences. We need to study the whole passage of Matthew 11, 25-30, which is called « The Hymn of Jubilation ».

« At that time Jesus said: ‘ Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was done by your own choice and pleasure. My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son wants to reveal him.

Come to me all of you who are tired from carrying your heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble of heart (in spirit); and you will find rest. The yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light ».

If it is carefully examined this text is seen to contain almost all the essential elements of an MSC Spirituality. Summarily, these can be set forth in the following way.

MATTHEW 11, 25-30

THE HYMN OF JUBILATION

1. GRATITUDE (eucharist):
 - a) Calling to mind (*Unde et memores*) the WONDERS that GOD works for us. (Awe).
 - b) PRAISE joy filled.
 - c) THANKS
 - d) Confidence (So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still will lead me on.)
 - e) Petition — «Be mindful of us in our needs.»
2. Christ reveals himself as the first of the *Anawim*, the poor in spirit.
3. Christ gives us the HOLY SPIRIT,
4. to interiorize in our *hearts* the sentiments of His Heart.
5. WHY? that «others» may come to Christ and the Father.
6. WHO? those «who labour and are burdened» — those in need.

1. Christ begins his 'prayer' with the phrase: « I praise Thee, I thank Thee, Father ». Two important points can be made here: firstly, the importance of a sense of gratitude, and secondly (since prayer is part of all spirituality) the usefulness of thinking about the 'eucharistic' prayer model so common in the bible. Humility is a virtue which has often been distorted by maladroit efforts to teach it to young religious. More perceptive masters of the spiritual life have suggested that we should not try to teach humility. « Try instead », they say, « to develop a sense of gratitude in young people. A grateful man is a humble man. One who is not grateful has no humility ». If we think that we are perfectly entitled to anything we receive from God or man, we are a long way from being humble. Unfortunately we also miss the joys that come to those who have the wonder and pleasure of delighting in the reception of gifts they know they do not deserve.

The « eucharistic » or thanksgiving prayer of the bible is far more than a perfunctory giving of thanks. Its first step is a « calling to mind » of the wonders God has worked on our behalf —through salvation-history, in Christ Jesus and in our own lives. And we remember that it is God the Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, who has done these things for us, unimportant as we are. A modern writer has said that we tend to treat God as « an equal or an extra ». We have lost something of what Fr. Chevalier did not lose in his discovery of the love of God, namely, the realization of the greatness of the God omnipotent who is our Father. Without this sense of the greatness of God we can not have any thrilling sense of wonder at what this God has done for us who, in so many ways, are insignificant and unimportant. From this sense of gratitude and wonder our prayer will pass naturally to expressions of thanksgiving, praise and love. Our « calling to mind » generates trust and confidence. As Cardinal Newman wrote: « So long Thy power has blessed me, sure it still will lead me on ». In that trust and confidence we ask God to keep us in mind in our present and future needs. We confide in his continued blessings.

2. These sentiments of gratitude and humility are found in the heart of Christ. When Jesus says that he is « meek and humble of heart », he puts himself forward (by the very terms that he uses) as the first of the *Anawim*, the poor in spirit, in the rich biblical significance of that expression. The two words « meek (or gentle) and humble » indicate the total reality of a person who is 'poor in spirit', in the sense developed by the Prophets. The 'poor man' is one who, conscious of his own weakness, looks constantly to God for support and help. He is pious and

just, in no way proud, not seeking his own interests nor oppressing his brothers, but, in all things waiting on God and his will.

3. The gift of the Holy Spirit is, in the Gospel of St. John, linked with the piercing of the heart of Christ on the Cross. (cf. J.F. Lescrauwaet, MSC. *Triptych for a spirituality of the Heart*). Here in St. Matthew, too, according to exegetes, there is clear teaching of the Holy Spirit who is given to us. This is no place to give detailed exegetical reasoning. This can be studied in existing works. The main argument is the parallelism of expressions used here with texts from Wisdom literature, for example: « Come close you uninstructed. Take your place in my school... Put your necks under her yoke and let your souls receive instruction » (Ecclesiasticus 51, 23).

Here Jesus puts himself forward as the divine Wisdom Incarnate, as the one who gives the Spirit. Furthermore: « the Hymn of Jubilation is deeply and intimately related with the fourth Gospel. Now in this gospel, the Father makes man two gifts which are closely connected: the gift of his Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of St. John, to 'learn from Jesus' (cf Mt. 11, 29) is to set oneself to learn from the Holy Spirit, and this firstly because, in his teaching, Jesus already gives the Spirit (John 3,34; 6,63), and also and especially because the glorified Christ gives the Spirit to those who become his disciples (John, 7, 37-39). It is the gift of the Spirit which will make easy the yoke of Jesus by giving the light and strength to fulfil its demands. » (1).

(1) A. Feuillet: *Le Mystère de l'Amour divin dans la Théologie Johannique*. Paris, Gabalda, 1972, pp. 175-176.

4. There is an important difference between St. John's Gospel and our present text. There the Spirit is given to bring to our *minds* the truths that Christ taught. Here the role of the Spirit is to interiorize in our *hearts* the dispositions of the heart of Christ.

5. Jesus does not speak of his kindness and meekness as a display of his virtue, nor even as proposing a model for imitation. Since these qualities in him manifest the loving-kindness of God, they are reasons why, through him, men will be drawn to the Father and encouraged to accept the light yoke of his will.

6. Here, too we meet with the poor, those in need, the ones who labour and are burdened, for whom the compassionate Christ was concerned.

Obviously, considering the details of this text we find the same elements which we have seen as constituents of an MSC charism or spirituality. We saw that the Missionary of the Sacred Heart tries, through his life, his attitudes and his preaching to bear witness to the kindness and love of Christ for those who labour and are weighed down by the ills of the world.

« Our deepest desire will be to persuade christians that the yoke of our loving Saviour is sweet and his burden light ». (Const. n. 8).

If the Society is to have a « clearer conviction of its own character, a clearer outlining of its own 'physiognomy', it is good to have the assurance that the the different lines of thought converge. It is clear

that they do: from Fr. Chevalier, from the reflection of modern MSC, from Frs. Maugenest and Piperon.

However, before concluding this chapter, it may be useful to draw out some further applications of the text of St. Matthew, or at least to insist on the importance of two points already noted. Firstly, let us insist on the teaching about the Holy Spirit in this text of the heart of Christ. In re-evaluating the scriptural and patristic doctrine in current theology, Spirit and Heart are closely linked. To insist on the connexion would, of course, be valid updating of our devotion. However, it is more than that. Matthew 11, 25-30 is a text which was quoted in many versions of our Constitutions; it is a text to which Frs. Piperon and Maugenest attached our spirit. Naturally, in the way they spoke about it, they used terms adapted to the piety of the time. Its full spiritual import would hardly have escaped them. For us, its full import will mean that we value the great gift of the Spirit from the Heart of Christ.

Secondly, our Constitutions said that we are to be « disciples of him who declared himself meek and humble of heart ». In recent years, as we have tried to update the expression of what we are as MSC, there has been a disinclination to give the same prominent place to « meekness and humility ». This is explained by a number of reasons, one of them no doubt being a reaction to the way in which many were « taught humility ». However, we will profit much by a rediscovery of the full meaning of the biblical phrase. « If one is familiar with the Old-Testament », writes Fr. Feuillet, « there can be no doubt that the phrase '*mitis sum et humilis corde*' recalls the biblical tradition regarding the poor, the

word 'poor' being understood in the religious sense as in the prophets during and after the exile » (2). The next chapter will suggest some further considerations on poverty of spirit. This one could well conclude with a longer quotation from Fr. Feuillet:

« When... Our Lord says that he is meek and humble of heart, he is describing, first of all, his relationship to God. Thus he puts himself forward as the first of the 'anawim'. It is rather astonishing to hear him speak in this fashion when we know that the 'come to me' is an invitation which copies closely those of divine Wisdom in the Old Testament. It is even more astonishing to hear him use such language when we connect it with the preceding context. There Jesus claims the privilege of being united with the Father in one divine mystery... analagous to the relations of Wisdom with God. Just as Father and Son alone have a full mutual knowledge of one another, similarly in the Old Testament no one knows God except Wisdom, and no one knows Wisdom except God. Furthermore when Jesus declares: 'My Father has given me all things' he is describing himself as the transcendent Son of Man of the Book of Daniel, to whom all power is given over all the nations of the earth (Daniel, 7,14).

It is certainly remarkable that, at the very moment that Jesus declares that he is the only Son of God, putting himself forward both as divine Wisdom and as the heavenly messianic person of Daniel, he presents himself also as a man 'meek and humble of

(2) « *Le Nouveau Testament et le Coeur du Christ* », Ami du Clergé, 1964, p. 323.

heart'. This latter phrase depicts him as the model of those people free from all pride, fully obedient to God, at his disposal in all things, namely, those whom, in his sermon on the mount, he had called blessed.

Reflexion shows that such an attitude is explained quite well, because Jesus is the Son of God *incarnate*, divine Wisdom *incarnate*, and in his human breast beats a heart animated by the fully human sentiments of humility and meekness. It is clear that the Christ of the Gospels, although constantly conscious that he is 'Lord and Master', knows that he is destined to fulfil the mysterious prophecies about the Servant of Jahweh, the one who was to be especially humiliated. Without opening his mouth he endures the worst sufferings (Is. 53, 4-6). In his preaching he is clearly a teacher full of patience who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the wick which is burning dimly (Is. 42, 1-4 quoted by Mt. 12, 1-18). His perfect obedience towards Jahweh has its repercussions on his way of treating with men. Furthermore, it is difficult to be meek and kind in one's relations with men if one is not first of all humble before God.

No doubt it is because of the influence of the poems of the Suffering Servant that Deutero Zacharia tells us that the Davidic Messiah will be humble (Zach. 9,9, quoted by Mt. 21,5) at the very moment of his triumph. But in the Gospel we find a synthesis which is original and unique and much more moving. He who is the Son of God, in the proper sense of the term, puts himself within reach of the least of men. He takes his place among the humble. We can have full confidence in such a teacher. Living in perfect

intimacy with the Father, he knows him and is able to reveal him perfectly: 'No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son wants to reveal him! On the other hand, since he has a heart that is gentle and humble, since he has shared the wretchedness of humanity and its penury before God, he knows all our congenital weakness. There is no danger, then, that he will burden souls with a yoke which is too heavy.

According to Matthew 11, 28-30, the New Covenant stands in opposition not only to the yoke of the Pharisees, but also to the old alliance, because of the excellence which comes to it from the heart of the Saviour himself. This is the heart of a man who is perfectly gentle and humble, the heart of the Son of God incarnate. The invitation to men to take Jesus as the only guide of their lives results from the special qualities of his divine and human heart. In the heart of Jesus himself, they can read the fundamental disposition of humility which they themselves must have in order to be open to the promises of the new economy of salvation ». (3).

(3) *ib.* pp. 324-325.

5. POOR IN SPIRIT

In the words of Cardinal Pironio, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious,

« Authentic poverty is hunger for God and need for prayer, personal insecurity, and trust in Him for whom nothing is impossible ».

I have grown rather weary of discussion about religious poverty. Religious get together and discuss their life-style, their houses, their cars. Someone points out how much poorer other people are than we; some guilt-feelings are generated. But since it is very difficult to change many practical things, the usual conclusion is: well, at least let us try to be poor in spirit. And then everyone goes home having achieved nothing.

The crying shame of all this is that one of the most vital points for renewal in religious life is treated as an appendix and a palliative. We should begin the other way round — with serious meditation on the biblical doctrine of poverty of spirit, trying to discover where this should lead us. Many religious feel that if we do not achieve a renewal of community life, then the rest of our problems can not be solved.

I would like to state a conviction of my own. I believe that there will be no renewal of religious life, of community or within the Church of Christ, until we learn to live again this biblical poverty of spirit — which is rather well expressed by Cardinal Piro-nio in the text quoted above.

This conviction has come to me from meeting with men and women religious all over the world, of different nationalities and from different congregations. It has come to me *positively* from the people who have impressed me most. Most of them are not famous: they are men like you and me, working at their tasks day by day. I am grateful for having known them. Many of them have that quality which is so impressive in better-known people such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta with her serene determination to do « something beautiful for God » and for people. She has the extraordinary single-mindedness of the people who have found Christ and want only to live for him and others.

One finds this quality, too, in many of the people we admire for their dedicated following of Christ. One gets the impression that each of them considers everyone as important — except himself. All these people have a serene confidence that if we live for God and do what we can — generously — then God, in his ways, will redeem the world.

On the other hand, *negatively*, I have learned the same truth from people who have lost their peace, their hope and their courage in anxiety, discontent or over-concern. And what I have learned from all this is that those religious are happiest, most impressive and most effective witnesses who have learned

to live this evangelical poverty of spirit. Those who have never discovered it, or who have lost it along the way — if they stay in religious life — will never be filled with the joy that should go with faith and love.

This doctrine of the poor, the « *anawim* », we have all studied. But let us recall some of the essential attitudes contained in 'poverty of spirit'. For the Old Testament writers, it meant a whole way of standing before God in faith and hope and attentiveness to his will — a total attitude of mind and soul and heart. It was especially in and through the exile that the Prophets developed this teaching. For during the exile, the people of God were sadly reduced. All that they had looked to for security was gone — their Temple destroyed, their armies defeated despite the help of the « Lord God of Hosts ». In exile, the poor man was weighed down by misfortune; he was persecuted; he was one of the voiceless ones without rights. He had no created support. Because of this he became conscious and convinced of his own limitations, his own wretchedness. He understood and accepted his state as a sinner. Furthermore, he accepts the fact that created things are empty — incapable of satisfying the human heart. He accepts his own state of extreme need. It is then that he becomes docile before God, no longer trying to pretend that he is self-sufficient.

Jesus gave, as a sign that the Kingdom was at hand, that « the poor have the Gospel preached to them ». This text caused me a lot of thought once: Why the poor, why only the poor? What about those who are not poor? I have met lots of people with plenty of money, and I would like to think that the Gospel

is meant for them, too. In fact many of them have preached the Gospel to me by their deep faith and their sensitivity to the will of God. And yet, on reflection one sees that it is no use preaching the Gospel to anyone else. Only the poor — in the biblical sense of the word — only the poor CAN hear. Only they are open and prepared to listen.

The biblical writers had no erroneous views about the value of material things. God had created the world and seen that it was good. The world was good, as were flowers and food, gold and silver; these were all God's gifts to man. But, looking at the lives of those who had a large share of material possessions (i.e; « the rich »), the biblical writers saw that frequently, all too frequently, they got their riches out of perspective. They got their attitudes wrong and their priorities out of order. They became self-sufficient and proud, and acted as if they did not need God. They sought their security in created things; or they became so attached to material things that they were no longer free. They were not free to hear what God asked of them; they were not free to respond to the cry of their brothers. Let us repeat: there is nothing wrong with God's gifts; but there is something wrong in the heart of man which makes him tend to put his security in created things, which diminishes his freedom, which divides his heart. « You can not serve God and Mammon ».

Some modern translations of this text read: « You can not serve God and money ». There is not much challenge in that. You do not serve money, do you? Is there, then, no challenge here for us? There is indeed the challenge to face up to two questions:

Are we poor enough to hear the Gospel in whatever way it is preached to us? Are we free enough to respond? To give « money » as the translation of « mammon » is to limit the word deceptively; for it comes from the same root as the word « Amen » — that which makes firm. Mammon can signify money, but it means that created thing in which a man puts his confidence as a kind of substitute support for God. It means any created thing on which a man leans too heavily for support, whatever divides his heart, anything to which he clings fiercely. Any such thing spoils the poverty of spirit which is an openness to God so that he may lead us by whatever way he will, that He may speak to us in whatever way he wishes.

Spiritual Theology has been described as a study of the evolution of the spiritual life in its psychological conditions. Psychological conditions change from one age to another. It is no use spending time worrying about money when the modern obstacles to openness to God are more frequently other things.

We have to ask ourselves: « What are our modern mammons? » Each has to ask himself what is his personal mammon, not of iniquity, but of security. What divides his heart, or what closes part of his mind to hearing the Gospel whole? What do we cling to in inordinate fashion? I sometimes say that I have travelled the world looking for the poor to whom to preach the Gospel, but along the way that I went, I found less than one might expect. There are many more obstacles to poverty of spirit than one might think. One such obstacle is a marked chauvinism.

The word « Chauvinism » comes from the name of Nicholas Chauvin — a Frenchman who was exaggeratedly patriotic. In this sense, there are some in my own country who are chauvinist: they think that whatever is Australian is best, and that anything from outside is inferior. But we are not the only chauvinists in the world. In this country of acknowledged culture, some Italians think that all 'un-cultured' foreigners have nothing to teach them. The French invented the word, 'chauvinist'! Many Germans themselves admit that it is a pity that in their country only German theology has any value. This kind of attitude presents a block to hearing the Gospel preached with any foreign accent. In our own Society I have spoken of good things happening in the Americas — and Europeans say: Of course that may be all right for countries without history or culture, but it does not apply to us in Europe. It works the other way round, too: « What can the Dutch or the Germans, or the Italians teach us? » If I speak of something good that is happening in religious life in Australia — people ask: 'Australia? Where on earth is that?'

One might think that, at least in some of the younger countries of the world, you would find many poor ready to hear the Gospel. There be more there than in the old world. However, in Mary Ward's phrase, here too, one meets people who « worship the gods of nationalism ». Many people are out to show that they are superior to any foreigners. You can not blame them for this; for so long they heard preached the Gospel of European superiority — or American. It is not surprising that there are reactions. However, strong aggressive emotions do not make us ready to listen to the Gospel in poverty of spirit.

I think of the experience of a director of students in one of our seminaries. He used to spend much time in dialogue with the students. If, after long discussion, the students did not get what they wanted, they used to say: « Of course, you are a white man, Father. You do not understand our spirituality. You are a foreigner and you can not teach us ». Or You are German, Dutch, Spanish, American or Italian, and you can not teach us. This is so modern — but it is so ancient. It recalls the Gospel incident of the man born blind. To the Pharisees he had some very good things to say about Christ, but their retort was: « You were born in sin, and do you try to teach us? »

If, for any reason at all, we have a certain pride in our knowledge, we shall never learn from the little ones to whom God often reveals what is hidden from the wise and the prudent. One of the common obstacles to hearing the Gospel whole is the conviction that we know. It can be caused by chauvinism, or by the belief that we are more learned than others (although the really learned know enough to realize what they do not know). It can exist among those of us who are less learned but are convinced that we have the real knowledge which comes from experience, in parishes, missions, with youth, in the real world. It can exist among those who can only hear a progressive Gospel — not all that old stuff of tradition and history! It can exist among those who pride themselves on being orthodox and loyal to tradition. One can make a mammon out of traditional things, seeking security in « what we have always done », instead of in the living God who leads us where he will.

In a General Chapter which I attended not so long ago, one of the religious prayed, thanking God that « we have kept the right values » in these difficult days: — Thank God we are not like the rest of religious in these modern times, we have kept the right values. But can we know with such certainty that we have kept the right values? We hope that we can say that we have tried to, and we pray that we might have succeeded, and we pray that the Lord will enlighten us to correct whatever mistakes we have made. But our confidence can never be in our grasp of values, in our belief that we have done the right. Do we make a mammon of our own knowledge, be in God.

Do we make a mammon of our own knowledge be it knowledge of theology, spirituality, the real world, or the values of religious life so that we are not poor enough to hear any new preaching of the Gospel? Our knowledge of theology, our knowledge of God is only a limited, created thing. None of us can ever know the length and breadth of the mystery of Christ. All of us are called to continued discovery of his designs for the world. Are we poor enough to hear the Gospel, are we free enough to respond? The rich of the Old Testament were not free because they were too attached to material possessions. The modern world has other mammons than money.

An interesting exercise which I sometimes do with religious is to ask them to think out an answer to this question: What are you? Think of the answer. For many the answer is something like this: I am a professor, a director of a college, a co-ordinator (today *co-ordinator* is an important word; it makes

an impression, even if no one knows what you are coordinating!) Not everyone thinks of the answer: I am a religious. The reason that I do this exercise at times is to provoke reflection on this fact: In our world, status has become very important — the status of profession, particularly, being a Herr Doktor or a Signor Professor. A number of religious look for status jobs; they want to do specialized studies and seek for professional qualifications. Let us recall what we have seen: all created things are good, and it is good that we have well qualified religious men and women. But there is something wrong when religious get discontented because they do not have what they consider status jobs; when their own personal specialization is more important than being participating members of their own religious community. We hear a lot about 'personal fulfilment in religious life'. Up to a point this is good and necessary. But fulfilment, professional qualifications, status jobs — these can all be created things to which we look for support and satisfaction. Like material things, they can become mammons for modern religious unless we take care to live in poverty of spirit. If that should happen, we become less free to hear the Gospel and to respond.

Many of our religious in the past found a certain support in the structures and ideologies existing in religious life. In the call to change and updating some of them, afraid as we all are at times of risk, clung to the old ways and old structures. They might be shocked to hear it, but in fact they made a mammon out of religious practices and structures. I should like to quote a short passage from an article on poverty by E. Vallachi:

« The poor man adopts an attitude of clear-eyed criticism towards himself and towards the various attitudes of confidence that he bears within himself. He is a person who can be called into discussion. He can leave open for critical revision his own convictions, his own way of acting... structures, systems, even systems of values... Precisely because he leans on God, the poor man sees all other things in their relative value and resists the temptation, more or less subconscious, to absolutize norms, structures, values or persons » (Dizionario di Teologia Morale. pp. 744-745).

Not so long ago I assisted at a Chapter of nuns, some of whom seemed to have made the « absolutization » rejected in the quotation just given. I was rather saddened to hear a 'spontaneous prayer' said by one of the nuns on the opening day of the Chapter. She was one of the 'orthodox' sisters, and she and others were rather afraid of some 'progressive' tendencies among a group of the Sisters. She prayed: « O Lord, give us the courage of our convictions ». It was very clear what she meant: that we should not let these progressive sisters disturb our security. The Church never asks us to pray this way, not without first asking that we might be enlightened to have the right convictions. It is often not the courage of our convictions that is lacking but the wisdom of those convictions. Often what we call the courage of our convictions is the fear that our security might be shaken. A much more christian prayer is this one which you can find in the Missal: « O God who enlightens every man who comes into this world, make the light of your face shine upon us so that our thoughts may be always conformed to your wis-

dom and that we may love you with a sincere heart. »

Another 'mammon' of our modern society which is more universal and I feel, more dangerous, is the mammon of achievement. Chesterton wrote that in his time rationalism was the great danger to faith. He said the poet was much happier than the rationalist, because the poet just tried to get his head into the heavens; the rationalist tried to get the heavens into his head, and it is his head that cracks. Now we don't do this, but we do have the tendency to try to get everything tidy and under control, and organised. We live in *our* world. We talk about a consumer society, and a consumer society is automatically and necessarily also a *producer* society, where so much store is put on efficiency. What do you do? What do you manage to achieve? A world that has put men into space and on the moon should be able to clean up a lot of the mess around the world. We are children of this sort of society. You often hear it stated that the Church is not coping — our Society is not coping.

Very often people give as their reason for leaving the priesthood — that the Church or the official Church is not coping. We have the feeling (it comes from the whole atmosphere in which we live) that we *ought* to be able to get things under control. There are so many wrongs to be righted, so many old things to be updated, and so many untidy things to be put in order. We have to seek new methods of pastoral and missionary activity, new ways of involvement in society, new ways of being relevant in changing sociological situations. In so many ways we can and do feel that we are not coping. There is a world to

convert, and just what are we achieving? It is good that we have this concern for mankind, and for the needs of people. However, faith is the acceptance of the mystery of God, not just the mystery that transcends our human intelligence, but the mystery of God in his providence, who holds the whole world in his hands, who alone can redeem the world and who looks after even those Societies that muddle along in their human weakness.

We tend to make a mammon of efficiency and achievement. Those who have left the Society or the Priesthood claiming precisely that the Church or the Society has not achieved what it should, show that they have leant too much on these created things. Not that we sit down and don't want to achieve. All these things are good. But if they become our mammon, then there is something out of kilter. I sometimes think it's a very good exercise to ask ourselves what we would have done had we been given the task of planning the pastoral activity of Jesus Christ. Now would we, with our efficient outlook on all that was to be done, have let him sit around so long in Nazareth? I think that if any of us, even the least efficient, had charge of planning his pastoral campaign we would have arranged for a lot more and a far wider activity on his part. Our concern for others should not lessen. However we can not afford to give way to discouragement if our achievements are less than we hope for. Here too, we have to accept our human poverty, our inability to build unless the Lord builds with us.

We saw earlier that when disintegrating structures give less security in religious life, the individual seeks security for himself. Not all have realized why they

have wanted to do special studies, to achieve status by reason of their academic qualifications, their « status-jobs », their personal development, their sense of achievement. Nor have they realized why there was a greater individualism, a lessening sense of community. A community is a communion built around the one thing that is most important to all. If all of us share a common charism, a spiritual vision and inspiration; if we all believe that it is vitally important that, together, we seek constantly to discover the most fruitful expression of this charism, then we have the essential communion which will grow into community.

However, often, although we come together, the communion is more apparent than real. If each has his own mammon (the created thing to which he clings as being very important to him), the communion is more apparent than real. When one man has his personal mammon of status, another his of achievement, and a third his of personal fulfilment, then any communion is superficial only, brittle and easily broken. In that case the bond of unity is not our total availability to God, letting him lead us where he will according to the vocation which he has given us and which we openly profess to share as brothers.

Are we poor enough to hear the Gospel in whatever way it is preached to us?

Are we free enough to respond?

In conclusion let us remember that, where poverty of spirit is genuine it is accompanied by deep joy and confidence. « I will gladly glory in my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell in me », said St. Paul, and « It is when I am weak that I am

strong ». The two things go together. They alone have deep peace and true joy who have come to this double attitude of accepting their poverty and of knowing, confidently, that God is with them in their lives and activity. A supreme example of this is Our Lady who expressed both sentiments so beautifully in her Magnificat.

« CREDIMUS CARITATI »

(I. Jo. 4, 16).

For the modern MSC this has become a key-text to express our spirit and identity.

« We discover the love of God who became man for others and we believe in this love.

We want to proclaim it and the new life it makes possible for all. » (D.R. n. 3).

In the following pages we shall consider some aspects of the answer to this question: « In what kind of a love do we profess to believe? »

6. WE BELIEVE IN A COMPASSIONATE LOVE

This is an aspect of our vocation about which we need little further writing but much personal reflection. We need personal reflection in order that our human hearts and souls may be impregnated by the deep personal conviction of the wonderfully tender and compassionate love of God for us. We need little writing on the subject because it is so much a part of our spiritual tradition. That tradition suggests some of the biblical sources which we might use for personal reflection. One such source is, of course, the writings of St. John, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' and whom Chevalier quotes so often. (1).

Fr. Chevalier proposed to his missionaries the mind and example of the Good Shepherd whose heart was full of compassion. One gets the impression that this is the Christ he sees in all the Gospels: « During his mortal life, he was happy to pour out all the tenderness of his heart on the little ones, the humble, the poor, on those who suffer, on sinners — and all the miseries of mankind. The sight of a misfor-

(1) cf. J. F. Lescrauwaet M. S. C. « *Triptych for a Spirituality of the Heart* ». Prologue.

tune, an unhappiness or any pain, touched his heart with compassion » (2).

The prophet Hoseah, prophet of the unlimited tenderness of God, is proposed for our reflection in the Constitutions. (3).

Explicitly and implicitly Fr. Founder refers us to the Christ of the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle and High Priest of our faith. In this epistle, Christ is put forward as the compassionate High-Priest. (4). He is compassionate and faithful. One aspect of the meaning of « faithful » in this epistle is that Christ is faithful in his mercy and compassion. His compassion, his mercy, his kindness will never fail, and therefore we can always come with confidence before the throne of grace. High Priests of that time were not renowned for their sensitivity to human feelings. Philo had written that the High Priest should never shed a tear for the death of any relative — father, mother, brother or sister. In this way, by his insensitivity, he would show that he was totally dedicated to a transcendent God. By contrast, the author of the epistle brings out the wonderful, compassionate sensitivity of Christ who was « not unable to feel for us in our weakness ». It is this compassionate Christ to whom we are asked to look.

In 1897 one of our members wrote, regarding the special spirit of the MSC: « It is most important that we be guided by an understanding of the heart of Our Lord and not by private whims. Among all the virtues, of which one is the heart of Our Lord

(2) Chevalier, « *Meditations* », Vol. II, p. 32.

(3) n. 8.

(4) see v. g. « *Les Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur* », 1866.

most symbolic? Which one most touches the hearts of those dedicated to the true devotion to the Sacred Heart? You surely know the answer better than I.

« The more I reflect on it, the more I think that the heart of our Lord speaks to us most especially of those sentiments and dispositions which the Incarnation has, as it were, brought to the Divine character; or better still, which the incarnation especially reveals to us.

« The Sacred Heart speaks to us of Divine Charity but without any of the dryness of some metaphysic of essences; in compassion, pity for those in need, mercy, goodness and tenderness. This is « the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared » (Tit, 3,4). This is the « I have compassion on the crowd. » (Mk, 8,2). It is the « His father saw him and was moved with pity » (Lk 15,20) ». (5)

In the text of Titus referred to, there is a revelation of the goodness and kindness of God which is all the more striking because of the context in which it takes place. The context is one of evil and hatred:

« We were once foolish, disobedient and wrong. We were slaves to passions and pleasures of all kinds. We spent our lives in malice and envy. Others hated us and we hated them » (Tit 3,3). By contrast with the darkness of malice and hate, we have the splendid revelation, in Christ, of the goodness and loving-kindness of God.

Meditation on texts such as these can nourish the faith which we profess to live: we have learned to believe in his love.

(5) Jules Vandel to Fr. Meyer, May 31st, 1897.

7. A LOVE THAT IS FAITHFUL

Today, people promise when they marry that only « death will us part » and then they break up a couple of years later. People make final profession, and leave the Society. Once you were a priest « forever »; and now you are a priest for two years or ten or whatever you like. Today there is a lot of discussion and writing about the possibilities of temporary vocation to religious life; discussion of the question whether a man might be called for a time only to exercise the priestly ministry.

These are some of the facts. From them arise the theories. Some say that it is meaningless to promise fidelity in our days when we can change so much and a man changes with the changing times. It is said: « I don't know and I can't know if in ten years time I'll be the same man that I am now. So why state that I will be faithful forever when I may not be? The man I am at 24 — is this the same man that I'll be when I'm 40? Can a man really promise fidelity? »

In view of these facts of modern life we need to think a lot about fidelity. The Church has adapted. It has modified its demands. It has become less

intransigent. It grants dispensations more easily. What are we to conclude then? One sometimes hears religious pray that the Lord might be merciful to those who have been guilty of infidelity in leaving the Society. We have no right to say this. It is not for us to judge or brand with infidelity those who once were with us and have left after Final Profession or Ordination.

On the other hand, we cannot conclude that because the Church grants dispensations she approves, or that we should approve, some of the new attitudes. Acting out of compassion for weakness is not to deny that weakness is precisely that — *weakness* — and not strength. We can be forced to budget for new attitudes without judging them to be signs of progress. Some people automatically apply the word « progressive » to anything that changes. Yet not all movement is forward movement. It is not all progress. We can move backwards as well as forwards.

If we reflect a little on what the revelation of Christ signifies, we must proclaim that there is a place for fidelity — for lifelong fidelity — in Christian marriage, in the priesthood and in religious life. This I believe we should proclaim loud and clear. As we all know the Church is the Sacrament of salvation. It is a sign of God's love forever, irrevocably given. Within the Church, the marriage of Christians, as the epistle to the Ephesians said, is a sign of Christ's love. Religious in general and the M.S.C. by specific vocation and their own declaration, testify that they believe in God's love and want to witness to it in their lives. So the question returns — in what kind of love do we profess to believe? To what kind of love do we profess to bear witness? Of what kind

of love do people have need if they are to be encouraged and strengthened in their Christian living? The answer to all these questions is: a love that is forever faithful. There is a very consoling aspect to the love in which we have learned to believe. But there is a very challenging aspect as well. Let us think of the people to whom the letter to the Hebrews was written. Let us recall the Apostles after Calvary — after their failure and betrayal. They had need to be able to believe in a love that was forever faithful: faithful in the mercy that was given and would never be taken away. The High Priest is faithful and compassionate — faithful to God certainly in his duty, but faithful and constant in his mercy and kindness so that all our faults and sins make no difference.

To witness to *this* love, a love for a term of ten years is not enough. It cannot be a Sacrament of that truth: « I have loved thee with an everlasting love ». In our Constitutions Father Chevalier has quoted a text which remains: that as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, working with people, we have to draw others with the bonds of kindness. This is a quotation from the prophet Hoseah who is the prophet of God's tenderness but who is above all a prophet of God's fidelity. He is a prophet of a love that is constant, enduring, ready to pardon and receive again to friendship no matter how much this love has been scorned and rejected. This is to be noted well. It is easy and it is pleasant to speak of kindness and goodness, of smiling and being nice to people. But this remains superficial and sentimental unless we weigh well that we are to live a faith in a love that is also faithful, constant and enduring. The Church, and some in the Church in special

fashion, are called to witness to this love. Otherwise the Church will fail to be the Church. It is this kind of love in which we claim to believe. It is to a love that is kind and faithful that we profess to witness.

A lot of modern ideas are a long way removed from any concept of lifelong fidelity. These ideas certainly did not come from any prolonged meditation on the Scriptures. In vogue at the moment is a concept of fidelity to oneself. It is instructive and helpful to see where it came from, otherwise we can get taken in by very specious reasoning. So let's try to see how we got to the stage we have now reached. The process has been a long one, and many of us have been only vaguely aware of it, until the new attitude which crept up on us declared itself openly. Let us see some of the currents of thought contained in this process.

One factor is quite clear. This is loyalty to expectations; for a gentleman, loyalty to a Code or to oneself as a gentleman. Even good thinkers can say things that later on lead to false interpretations. Shakespeare said: « To thine own self be true and thou shalt not be false to any man ». Later on this became « be true to yourself ». Tennyson wrote: « self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, these three alone lead life to sovereign power. » These were expressions — particularly that of Tennyson — of an attitude very much in vogue, containing a double element of loyalty: first, to thine own self be true: fidelity to oneself. Secondly, there were objective standards to which one should conform if one were to be true to oneself: to be a gentleman or to be the sort of person I want to be. There were some things a gentleman did not do — there was

a code of conduct. A whole humanist movement resulted in similar ways of thinking in different countries. In their time the various standards were a valid aid to fidelity. Often they had Christian inspiration although some of it got distorted or anaemic along the way. But these standards were bound to crumble someday, because they had inner weaknesses that would eventually come to light. Tennyson wrote: « self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control — these three alone lead life to sovereign power ». Chesterton looked at that, objected and wrote: « self-reverence, self-knowledge and self-control — these three alone will make a man a prig. » He saw clearly that referring everything to self had a very definite weakness. When the objective standards crumbled, all that was left was being true to oneself. When the code was seen as being of no great value, then being true to oneself was all that remained.

The norms originally proposed for being a gentleman — or a Christian gentleman — often had a Christian moral inspiration. But in the course of time even Christians ceased to listen for the voice of God in these prescriptions; not all Christians, naturally, but a considerable number. They listened to a pseudo-conscience, anxious for personal success, acceptance and a good social image or a good spiritual image. In certain books of devotion — e.g. *the Garden of the soul* — we were asked to spend our time cultivating the flowers of various virtues in the garden of our own soul. There was a possibility of distortion here. The attitudes that were in the world often affected the outlook on religious fidelity too. It would have been strange had it not been so — because we all live in our own world, are affected by our own culture and we use it to incarnate our faith

and religion. The questions have been raised: « To what extent were Christians led by a living love? » or « To what extent were Christians concerned with correct order and 'doing the right thing' »? 'Correct order' and 'the right things' were very frequently informed by deeper motives, but one could live in the structures without deeper motivation. At times, a pseudo-conscience told us what to do. For some protestants, smoking or drinking is not Christian. There is a very interesting sect in the United States called the Amish. For them, cars, tractors and all things mechanical were somehow un-christian. They drive horses and carts; they still plough with horses and they don't have electricity in their homes. Their Christian conscience tells them that this is how they should act.

We had our own religious codes that had nothing to do with the Gospel. « Nuns don't eat in front of people »; « priests don't wear beards or shorts ». There were all sorts of things students did not do. The code was there — the image of the priestly gentleman; the religious lady; the good seminarian. These things could be, and very frequently were, informed by deeper motives. Frequently, however, we merely tolerated many prescriptions. After fidelity to norms, to a code, to an image, the next step is a realisation that this situation is non-authentic. We could all quote a number of examples of rules that with the passage of time lost their authenticity. We found them very difficult either in the Novitiate or later. Students simply did not speak to lay people around the Seminary. Students did not talk to the lay-brothers and the lay-brothers must not talk to the students. This was part of the code that we gradually realised was non-authentic. The stage that

follows is a suffering from the lack of authenticity. There is frustration. There are times when this frustration, this feeling of non-authenticity is so strong that some people can't stand it any more, and leave. When there has been only loyalty to a code, an image, a pseudo-conscience, some react by rejecting all law, even eternal. Some who have left, have not only left the priesthood and religious life but a lot of Christian ways of living as well.

Into this stage of a feeling of non-authenticity regarding social and moral prescriptions came Sigmund Freud. Many accepted him gladly. His ideas of the super-ego, the cramping source of inhibitions, often unhealthy, told what many wanted to hear. Let us throw off the yoke of the super-ego, they said. The authentic norm became the « I, in my existential situation ». Autonomy was perfect identity with the « real Me ». Fidelity to self was the only fidelity really possible.

The time was then ripe for the existentialist influence which had more to do with shaping modern non-fidelity than we realise. I don't speak of Christian existentialism such as that of Gabriel Marcel who refused to be called an existentialist, but of the sort typified by Marcuse for example. Here there is a definitive break with the transcendent, a mystique of fidelity to oneself. Marcuse was the philosopher of the hippies. He came up with a penetrating criticism of the bourgeois society in the technological era. Giving what has been called a Marxist existentialism of Freudian inspiration, he claimed that man needed to be freed from standardized perfection, from the feverish imitation of others, from the need to live up to the expectations of others, of their

ideologies, their norms, from ascetical inhibitions. All this is the « logos » as he called it. « Now we have to be free to follow the eros, in liberated spontaneity; Let us leave behind all imitation of others, of their ideologies and norms, and give ourselves without reserve to the creative instinct always in movement. » This leads to a break with the transcendent.

The result is the man who, wanting to know what he should do, asks his mirror which replies: « Be faithful to yourself; be faithful to yourself. » When this happens, and it has happened a lot, people say that to be true to themselves, they cannot continue in their situation within a religious Society which they no longer find to be authentic. There is no more dialogue with God in this case. The old refrain returns: « I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. » The new version is less defiant but is no less definite. I am a possibility of self-expression. But there is no possibility of dialogue with others when there is no absolute vocation common to all, no absolute values. There are only external, superficial contacts.

Now, if a Christian was affected by the old atmosphere of being a religious or Christian gentleman, by a certain legalist morality and by bourgeois expectations, he is no less affected by the new. There is much good sense in the new, but we have not yet succeeded in making a synthesis of philosophy and theology that combines the objective and the subjective, the existential and the essential. In the transition time, a number are enticed by the call to liberation. The new trends are baptised before they are completely converted, and at baptism they are given Christian names such as sharing in the creative acti-

vity of God, total openness to the future which the Lord wants to give us, obedience without limits to the Spirit, the liberty of the children of God, the prophetic role that we are to play, etc.

This trend has become so bad now that even American psychiatrists are worried. An article appeared in *Time Magazine* (September 20, 1976, p. 70) entitled *Narcissus Redivivus* (Narcissus Alive Again). The author said that psychiatrists are concerned about this loyalty to self and concentration on self. One author calls the 70's in which we are still living, « the *Me* decade », the decade in which everything is concentrated on « Me ». It is important to reflect on this, because it is the climate in which we live and much of it can sound very good. Once a man has entered on the path of existentialist fidelity to himself, a lifelong fidelity becomes a very shaky proposition. If one day he is asked to sacrifice, so to speak, a part of himself, in order to keep a promise, there will be no question of a crisis of conscience. He will simply note that this way of life has lost all its meaning for him.

In recent years in religious life we have been doing a very good thing by insisting on the development of the person. But as a result — particularly when it is a new emphasis — a lot of people take it too far. I'm quite convinced that many of the dispensations given over the past few years have been dispensations from decisions that have been no decisions at all. People have said « yes — I will make final profession — I accept celibacy because at the moment there's no girl around who is interested in me; but if I should meet a pretty girl, and she should get interested — well, that could be dif-

ferent. Until then, celibacy poses no great problem. Obedience, yes, I'll take that on provided of course Superiors never ask me something that I can't accept. And poverty, of course, provided I have all that I need for my self-development. » There are no crises of conscience because « although I did promise these things, well the situation has changed: I discovered a girl who is interested in me; I discovered that obedience is something difficult, and it is not the full flowering of my own self to which I must be true. » They say, for instance, « I have in fact become another man. I'm fundamentally different from the one who in the past promised fidelity in marriage or celibacy. So, if I am to be true to myself, I've got to be logical and bring this equivocal or inauthentic situation to an end. » Of course the only way to bring it to an end is to regard oneself as no longer bound by a past promise, because I cannot give up a part of myself while being true to myself. Another formula is: « If I wish to be true to the spirit of my promise, (again, fidelity to self) then I must break with the letter of the promise and of course break with the institution which is so impersonal and does not consider my sacred self. » The Institution then comes in for attack.

Whoever reasons in this fashion (and a number do today) can discover no meaning in a lasting commitment. In the light of the new existentialist image of man, no promise of any kind has any value. « How can I promise fidelity when I do not know what sort of person I'll be in 10 years' time? How could I know now what would best respond to my deep need for personal development and enrichment in future years? » The existentialist concept of fidelity — fidelity to self — puts an end to all fidelity. And —

strange irony — it leads not to the enrichment of personality, but to impoverishment and emptiness, because it rules out all real love — all self-giving to another for the good of another. Psychiatrists are trying to tell people this. Here is the repeated human discovery of what Christ told us: that we have to lose our life in order to find it. Updating the terminology, we might say: « If you want to find your life you have to lose it — that is, lose your preoccupation with your own identity, with your personal development, with being yourself, with the satisfaction of your immediate needs. »

Since we are concerned with the fidelity of a Christian as lived in a special vocation, we have to look to the Bible. There we find frequent references to fidelity. There is a combination of words that is fairly often quoted: *Hesed* and *Emet*. Semitic languages have no superlatives such as « most faithful », so they emphasize by repetition. The expression really means « faithful and faithful ». *Emet* is often translated as « faithful » and *Hesed* as « Merciful »; but the double expression really is a repetition of faithful. God is the faithful one. He is faithful and faithful in his mercy.

In the epistle to the Hebrews there are many examples of fidelity and comparisons to show the fidelity of Christ. Let us recall one comparison — that between Christ and Abraham. Abraham — called to sacrifice his son — goes up Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac. From the point of view of any modern thoughts about existentialist philosophy, it is absurd and impossible to sacrifice one's son. But it became possible because Abraham had faith in God. Christ goes up Mount Calvary — the lamb to the slaughter

— again absurd and impossible. Yet he goes with faith and confidence in God, in fidelity to his will even through the « why hast thou forsaken me ». Both instances would be absurd indeed were God not faithful, *Hesed* and *Emet*, faithful and faithful. Both would be impossible without a faith in God's presence, even in his silence and seeming abandonment. To be faithful is to be able to keep on believing, loving and following. To be able to believe in the presence — even in the dark — of a God of love. We profess to believe in God's love. Such faith won't always be easy. We will have our own mountains to climb. We will have our own sacrifices to make, and that is when we will know whether we have learned to believe in the love God has in our regard: a love that is forever faithful. If he is too much affected by the modern philosophical climate, a man who cultivates fidelity to himself, who desires his own fulfilment, will take back the word he has given, under stress. But in difficulties, Father Chevalier would have us inspired by the Epistle to the Hebrews. Those to whom the Epistle was sent are actually passing through a period of difficulties and persecution, where their faith and endurance are in danger. The author himself says: Courage! Christ himself has known this temptation to escape from the will of God in the face of suffering and death. But he triumphed, and his compassion, like his priesthood, is eternal. Thus we find indicated the Christian attitude to suffering. It is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus humbled and suffering, tempted and victorious. We know that the Lord understands.

Of course it is more difficult than this to analyse all the things that go into the consideration of fidelity. But we know that the Church and the world

need people who believe in and witness to a love that is marked by fidelity. If we as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart make an explicit declaration that we believe in God's love and want to testify to it, then we need to consider the kind of love in which we profess to believe. To what kind of love do we profess to witness? If we do not witness to the love of Christ that is forever faithful, then we are of little help to the people in the world today. The Apostles needed to believe in a faithful love. When Judas couldn't, then life was not worth living. We have to make up those things that are wanting in the body of Christ, which is the Church. When fidelity is being called into question we are called to give witness to a love that is faithful, constant, enduring, compassionate and forever kind.

It is not sufficient for people who go through their trials — who make their sacrifices and climb their mountains, that we witness for a few years while things are easy, with a love that can smile and be pleasant, but cannot endure. Today, more than ever, people will have need to be helped to believe. This is why there is often unease and disappointment among the laity when priests and religious leave.

It is not that they don't make allowances. Even if they are understanding, there is always disappointment when there is one more light turned off in the darkness; when there is one less help to believe in a love that is forever faithful.

Note. For a number of ideas in this Chapter I am indebted to Fr. V. Walgrave O. P. in his article *Jé Promets Fidélité, Vie Consacrée*, Nov. 1973, pp. 328 ff.

8. FIDELITY

In response to our belief in a love that is forever faithful we are called to a life-long fidelity in our call to follow Christ. However, this fidelity is not as simple and straightforward as some would make it. I have heard religious say that, on the one hand it is hard to excuse from infidelity those who leave religious life or the priesthood, while on the other hand we can certainly say that we who have stayed are faithful. The grace of fidelity is a gift of God, and yet it is a very human reality which can never be as cut and dried as we might wish. It is useful to see some of the elements involved in a living fidelity.

Firstly *fidelity* is not *fixity*. There are those who consider that religious fidelity consists in doing what we always did, or with taking a decision to adopt a certain way of life and never changing. However, in the bible there are at least three different aspects of fidelity. One of these looks to the past, with the idea of fidelity as a duty because of one's given word. However, if this is too rigidly imposed, it leads to legalism and to trouble. For instance, the first Covenant with God was accepted in the desert when the Jews were a nomadic people. But once they had

settled down and ceased to be nomads, they had all kinds of difficulties in trying to observe legal prescriptions drawn up for different conditions. Another kind of fidelity is one which looks to the present, to what we do now. A clear example is exactitude in ritual observance. If it is exaggerated, it subjects man to the Sabbath in a way which merited Christ's condemnation.

In the bible there is a third kind of fidelity which looks to the future, putting the accent on real faithfulness, that of a personal relationship made by choice and willed as the continued association of two persons as life unfolds.

This means a readiness to take risks to follow the loving God wherever he leads. Clinging to the past is not fidelity. For fidelity we need to cling to some things that come from the past, but as we read in Deutero-Isaiah, thus says Yahweh: « No need to recall the past. No need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed, and even now it comes to light. » Or again: « Now I am revealing new things to you — things hidden and unknown to you. Created just now, this very moment. Of these things you have heard nothing until now. » (Isaiah 43, 18-19; 48, 6-7).

True fidelity, then, consists in being ready to follow in whichever ways God may lead. It does not rule out fidelity to the past, or observance in the present, but it puts the accent on the personal gift of oneself — a personal surrender — in trust to a personal God. This links up with one aspect of poverty of spirit which we have considered. Someone wrote about this: « A true Christian is one who can call

himself into question, be open to revision of all that he is and does, of his own line of action. This is not to be self-reviling, nor should it lead to insecurity but it is the realism which recognises the emptiness of man, of his ideals and his efforts. No structures, no system, no collection of values can substitute for the living God. » Fidelity is following the living God wherever he might lead.

We are certainly not entitled to conclude that we are faithful merely because we have stayed in our Congregation. We can't say automatically that we are faithful because we have not left. Those are faithful to their vocation who assume or embrace their vocation day after day, in the tough spots and in the continued demands of self-forgetfulness that this vocation entails. There are unfaithful ones who remain within the Society. We have to confess unfaithfulness or infidelity in many ways, as we do at the beginning of each Mass. Those are unfaithful who stay but seek all sorts of human compensations. Those are unfaithful who stay and yet use the Society in which they live, for their own ends. Those are unfaithful who stay but live a very self-centred sort of existence. In a sense these are unfaithful to all vocation; they have become dead weights. A living fidelity means a willing re-affirmation day after day through life's difficulties, of the gift of ourselves to God and to others within this brotherhood of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Each of us has to ask: in this sense, how faithful am I? And each of us has to pray that a more generous fidelity may be given to him and lived by him, with the grace of God.

With regard to those who leave, we must make a

distinction between a first and a second fidelity. The first is the gift of oneself to Christ and his following in the belief that He has the words of eternal life and that it is He whom we want to follow. This basic fidelity to Christ must remain if we are to live our Christian vocation. However, this first fidelity to Christ has to be expressed in a second fidelity. It becomes incarnate for us in our M.S.C. Society, in our relations with our brethren, in carrying out a specific mission. It is possible of course to separate the two, to withdraw what we might call the second fidelity whilst being faithful to the first; and this is sometimes the case. There are very well known examples in the modern world of people who in order to live fully their first fidelity to Christ have been called to withdraw the secondary expression of their fidelity.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta left her Loreto Institute in order to follow Christ in the service of India's poor in the new congregation that she founded. In France a well known priest, Father Loew, left the Dominicans in order to found the Society of Saints Peter and Paul — a group of worker-priests.

However, the normal situation for religious and priests is that their first fidelity should be lived out lifelong in and through the living of their profession. It becomes easier now to say that in fidelity to Christ, to be more effective and more dedicated to the Church, I should give up this secondary expression of my faithfulness to God. A lot of people have said this, but where are they today? The normal call to fidelity in following Christ will mean continuous fidelity to a particular life-style.

It is not for us to judge that those are unfaithful who leave; but many I think, claim too easily that they are faithful to Christ by leaving a Congregation so that they might serve him more fruitfully elsewhere. Their subsequent history has not indicated that this was a call to a more generous following of Christ. However, we have to answer for ourselves, not for others.

Called to be missionaries of a love that is forever faithful, we are called to witness to that love by living out in fidelity the profession which we have made. It is a covenant fidelity which we try to live, motivated by a personal love for Christ who was « faithful as a Son in his Father's house » (Heb. 3,6). In order to live our call to fidelity we do not think about contracts which we have to keep. We are on guard against the pleas for 'fidelity to self' which make the individual the centre of his own universe. Our inspiration is drawn from the word of God. In the Old Testament we see that the conjugal imagery used for the covenant underlines the free loving choice which must be made and lived if we are to be God's people and if He is to be our God. He is the faithful God who can make us faithful. We see that in the bible, God's fidelity means that he is never used up; he is the eternal source of love. He is the bush that burns but is not consumed. We can therefore lean on his fidelity, which is rock, not sand and which gives firm support. We look to Christ the faithful one who believed in God's presence even in the darkness. We ask for the strength to follow him, for we know that fidelity is God's gift.

Fidelity to Christ is lived out in the Church and, for us, in a religious Society. This is necessary if the

Church is to be the sign and sacrament of God's love. Yet it is precisely here that a stumbling-block arises for some and tension exists for us all. This is the tension between the very personal response to the call of Christ in individual freedom and the material, restricting element of Church and Society. The individual's possibilities for being are restricted by his choices — choice to be a member of the Church, choice to join a particular group. It is not uncommon for people to reject their Society, or even to reject the Church, on the plea that they do not see there the face of Christ. This is a failure to accept the truth and the poverty of the Incarnation. It is an inability to accept the limits imposed on individualism if we are to create a christian community.

Nevertheless, it has to be recognised that if the weight and restrictions of any institution crush the individual or reduce him to a mere follower of rules and prescriptions, then true christian fidelity is diminished if not destroyed. Fidelity is a living human reality. Even within the community it needs « living-room » with possibilities of free and creative choice. We can recall, here, some of the points made in Chapter 1. They will recur when we discuss our response to the signs of the times.

Nevertheless, however wise and enlightened the members of a community may be, a religious vocation is essentially a way of living the faith. In one sense it is living the basic christian virtue of fidelity seen as the total response to God's word. It is man's response to the fidelity of God — a God of love. To live this response prayer is absolutely necessary.

« Let your face shine on your servant, save me by

your love, *then I will be faithful*. Do not hide your face from me nor turn away your heart — then I will delight in being faithful to your law » (Ps. 31, 16).

It is necessary that we seek the face of God and the heart of God if we are to live true fidelity in which we delight in being faithful to God's law. It is not enough to pray at the last minute when one gets to the stage of wondering about vocation. As one author said: We need personal prayer, interior, prolonged, wrested from our daily occupations and faithfully given to God; prayer which is adoration, an appeal for light; prayer to a person, prayer which binds us to him in a relationship of faith, hope and love.

9. LOVE AND MEANING

In our Documents of Renewal of 1969 we find, twice, an expression which would not have been included in Constitutions some years ago. In nn. 5 and 29 it is said that as MSC religious we are called, and able, to help people discover « the true meaning of life ». The presence of these phrases in our DR implies two things: 1. That our modern world is especially concerned in giving meaning to life; 2. That we believe in the love of God which gives meaning to our own lives and to the lives of others. Here we touch on an important aspect of living our MSC vocation in the psychological conditions of our modern world. A vital modern question concerns the meaning of life. « Man's search for meaning is a primary force in his life. » Being primary it has always been present in man's searching: he has always asked, « What is the meaning of life? » But today, people are asking it with increased intensity, and find satisfying answers less easily than they did in the past. There is an increasing number of people to whom life appears meaningless, who feel an inner emptiness, an uncertainty as to what life is all about. Deprived of any real meaning, their lives lack direction and purpose; they often finish up in real hopelessness, mental illness and despair. This

state of mind has been called « the existential vacuum of the twentieth century » and is behind a lot of alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, finding its typical product in the hippie movements of modern youth. It can be compensated for in forms of the will to power, money, position, or in the will to pleasure of which sexual compensation is one form.

The real Christian is a person who has discovered life's meaning — this is an important part of his faith.

There are two sides to this matter of meaning:

a) Discovering the meaning of life. We believe that this discovery comes to us through faith and the revelation of Christ.

b) We are called to give meaning to our lives. And in a sense this is what vocation is all about. It asks: what value are you prepared to live? what meaning are you going to give to your own life in response to your faith?

It would be useful to note here something which Karl Rahner says about celibacy. People pose the general problem of celibacy, he says, when what is being asked is the « answer to my problem which has strictly to do with my unique existence... (it is a question not of the meaning of celibacy in general but of my life of celibacy)... the speaker... *he* is the man in mind, whether he realizes it or not. »

The question which is often put is: what is the meaning of religious life (or the MSC vocation). The question (if the questioner is sincerely looking for an

answer) is always a plea: please make my life appear meaningful to me. And how can any of us do that for another unique person? I can not give meaning to your life.

A second truth about the « search for meaning » is that many moderns are far too passive with regard to it. Their search is one-sided; they are looking for life, or a way of life, to « have some meaning for them. » There is an objective value and meaning to religious life; it has been insisted on by the Church for centuries; it has been spelled out clearly by the Vatican Council; it has been well developed in much recent writing. But this is only one half of the « meaning » we must find in religious life, and even it will not be found without the second half. Victor Frankl in his books on logotherapy, and many others too, insist that we do not challenge life to have a meaning for us. Life is there, and we are here, and « we are challenged by life » to give a meaning to our existence. What meaning is any man going to give to his life? How is he going to make it mean something? In one sense, our life is in our own hands, we can make it what we will. We are made in the likeness of God; to some extent this is a likeness to God as creator. We are called to creative discipleship — called to give a meaning to our own life. Not only faith, but sound psychology tells us this: to make a success of life, you have to give it meaning — in response to values, certainly, but values which it is up to you to incarnate in a living expression. In this sense, your life is what you are prepared to make it. Faith presents us with a set of values; by vocation we are « called » to respond by living a life in which we give expression to what those values mean to us and can mean for others.

Accordingly, the « meaning of religious life » will differ for each one. It will not be the meaning which anyone else can tell you your life ought to have, although it must be one of the many possible values which religious life can carry as a personal response to God in Christ. You must say what is the meaning of your religious life. The meaning will differ from one individual to another: for one it will be a personal response to Christ's invitation to follow him; for another it will be a complete dedication « for Christ's sake and the Gospel »; it may be « communion » seen as the essence of life in the household of God. Many a religious today will see his or her life as one of selfless dedication to Christ's poor and needy ones. For everyone religious life will be a personal response to the word of God as addressed to us, calling us to see that our life and activity are filled with Christian meaning.

For the MSC the meaning you will give will flow from faith which is belief in God's love for mankind, a love made manifest in Christ, which alone gives meaning and purpose to human life and existence.

Religious will, then, be people who see their lives as a special sharing in the mystery of the Church as the « sacrament of God's love for mankind » — and this in its many elements.

a) God's love will be recognized and accepted in faith, gratitude and trust, giving a basic personal and spiritual security, casting light on the meaning of their lives and all human existence.

b) This love will be returned in a responding love and Christian commitment to Christ and the Church.

c) God's love is recognized and proclaimed especially in the liturgy, where, within the Church as a worshipping community, our return of love in gratitude and praise is caught up in Christ's offering to the Father.

d) This love is seen as bringing fulfilment on the human level maturing people in themselves and in their attitudes, both as individual persons, and as people conscious of being members of a Christian community and of the community of mankind. They must thus be, and appear to be, mature Christians.

e) This love is then mediated to others through our living faith in God's love for everyman, and through our own manifest love and concern for mankind.

f) It is a love that lives in confident hope of its final perfecting after this life is done.

10. A SAVING SENSE OF HUMOR

Our Documents of Renewal say that our spirit is marked by good humour (n. 12). The General Chapter of 1969 which wrote these documents gave no explanation of why this characteristic (not mentioned in older Constitutions) was included. There are, however, good reasons why it should be there. The first of these reasons comes from tradition. Those who lived with Fr. Chevalier say that he was a man who liked to have fun with the other members of the community. A number of instances, fondly recalled, are contained in memoirs in the archives. On special occasions he wrote songs to be sung about members of the community. Often this was merely to contribute to a festive occasion. At other times it aimed at helping people see their faults more objectively through being able to laugh at themselves.

One example of this concerns a member of the Is-soudun community who was extremely gullible with regard to patent medicines. Whenever he saw a newspaper advertisement for any kind of cure, he felt compelled to buy it. Fr. Chevallier thought that he should be helped to grow out of this foolishness and that a bit of humor might be the best cure for it. Accordingly, on the feast of the Holy Innocents,

Fr. Chevalier wrote a song which he had another member of the community sing at dinner.

Although the following is a free translation in order to conserve the rhyme, it conserves the spirit of the original and is fairly accurate. An experiment with patent hair-restorer helped inspire the original song.

« Today, my boys let's sing the joys of Fr. Bizeuil's
feast

Of all kind men in Issoudun, this lad is not the least.

Refrain: Innocent and without guile, with an open
candid smile,

Let us praise his simple style.

This is his feast, you'll all agree — the Holy Innocents and he have a marked affinity.

Let's praise the Lord who could afford

To bless our town with this renown — and have an
innocent abroad.

But what a cruel blow of fate — our father has a
shiny pate without a hair to flourish there.

Once, in the ads for latest fads, he read a new prescription

For spinning threads on threadbare heads;

Oh 'twas a fine description!

Upon his head, he quickly spread a coat of this fine
ointment.

But harvest day, I'm sad to say, brought only disappointment.

« Dear lad I have a notion

that some lotion or some potion

which you apply without compunction

will be your Extreme Unction ».

Fr. Chevalier produced a glass of special wine to help Fr. Bizeuil digest the lesson, which he did quite successfully.

In a relatively recent Provincial Chapter one group of our members wrote that « An MSC is one who can laugh at himself and smile at others ». There is more to this statement than might appear at first sight. Firstly if we are to practise the virtues of charity and hospitality, if our apostolate is that of communicating the human love of the heart of Christ, then we have to be able to smile at others and often forget ourselves to do so. If we are to be humble, simple, poor in spirit we need to learn to laugh at ourselves. It is when we take ourselves too seriously that we are prone to make wrong judgments about ourselves and others. When we think that we are not given the just measure of consideration which we deserve, that our talents are not recognised, that nobody loves us, we are well on the way to falling victim to illusions. The ability to laugh at ourselves can be very salutary in this regard. According to the masters of the spiritual life, illusions are a great obstacle to perfection and they can spoil happy and harmonious living in community. A sense of humour helps to a sane view of reality.

There is much talk about discernment in our days. The over — serious person is not good at discerning reality. It was Benjamin Franklin. I think, who wrote that there are two reasons why we do most things — the good reason and the real reason. If we have studied philosophy and theology we can usually find a good reason to justify what we want to do. A sense of humour helps us stand off from things to judge them objectively. It helps us stand

off from ourselves and admit our own mixed motives so that we can be more open and receptive to the ideas of others.

11. WE BELIEVE IN A LOVE THAT IS PATIENT

Our official documents make little reference to I Cor. Ch. 13. Yet what is taught there sums up extraordinarily well some of the finest qualities of Fr. Chevalier's character. It also expresses much of what he tried to teach by word and example. « Love is patient and kind... Love bears all things... hopes all things, endures all things. » (I Cor, 13, 4, 7).

Fr. C. Spicq comments on this passage:

« Patience is often praised in the Psalms as a divine attribute, in the Hebrew idiom of 'slow to anger'. It is long-suffering under insults; it endures them without paying back... Just as God restrains his anger, puts off punishment to give sinners the time to repent, the children of God must conquer their resentment and silence their desires for vengeance. You can not win such a victory without a lot of love and humility; and this is so much the more so because Christian patience must be practised in all possible forms. It supposes a very great strength of soul and gives to charity an aura of kindness and meekness. This combination of energy and benignity indicates the sovereign self-mastery which the christian conserves. Thanks to this 'patience', full of pardon to those who offend him, and courageous in adversity,

he lives in an inner calm... This 'patience' which is never bitter, which knows neither despair nor fear, nor recriminations nor touchiness... » (1)

In Chapter 11 of « JULES CHEVALIER » I quoted from Belleville's beautiful tribute: « Trials are naturally inevitable and supernaturally necessary. Fr. Chevalier met with them along his way. He was neither surprised nor discouraged by them. He did not ever lose that serenity of soul which singled him out ». (2)

It is worth recalling a number of things from that same Chapter 11. « Fr. Chevalier was a strong man and in his own personal life this strength was brought to bear on acquiring the virtue of meekness — as meekness is a strong man's virtue, for it is strength directed and controlled » (3). This regards his own personal life. However charity ranges wide — it is patient... it bears, endures and hopes all things... it is not discouraged, it does not become bitter.

In the life of our founder we have solid teaching and encouraging example. He wrote that « courage, strength, constancy » are virtues of the heart of Christ for they express the very qualities of love (4). He certainly expected that this constancy, this courage, this 'patience' would be an integral part of the spirituality of his missionaries.

(1) *Agapé dans le Nouveau Testament*, Paris, Gabalda 1959, p. 78.

(2) *ib.* p. 284.

(3) *ib.* pp. 298-9.

(4) *ib.* p. 129.

« He himself had the courage to *undertake* difficult enterprises for the cause of Christ... He had the courage to be *constant* and to *persevere* through the multiple difficulties met with in the course of his life. He had the courage to *hope*, even when others did not, even when others thought there was no future for religious life...

Jules Chevalier was a strong man — strong with that extraordinary strength which, based on confidence in God, can go ahead in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties. » (5) In other words Fr. Chevalier lived the patience and magnanimity (or « greatness of soul ») proposed by St. Paul in I Cor. 13,4.

So — courage and constancy are virtues of the heart of Christ. Are we going to practise them in our life and mission? Certainly this is not always easy — there are reasons for discouragement — lack of vocations, dwindling task-force, attitudes of certain people in certain places and so on. But let us not feel sorry for ourselves. Temptation to discouragement is commonplace, especially for apostolic men. Elijah is a classic case, way back in the Book of Kings, as the Lord had to rouse him out from under his juniper tree where he bewailed his lack of success.

« Religious life is finished, at least in some countries ». Some are saying this today. We have just seen that some were saying it at the beginning of the century. Fr. Chevalier said that this was foolish talk for a man of faith. An old man in his 80's, he fought

(5) ib. pp. 129, 298.

free-masons and police, fought the opposition of a narrow-minded Archbishop and the apathy of some of his own confreres. He did this with courage, constancy, perseverance in order to keep intact the basis of the Society he had founded at Issoudun. Had he not done so, none of us would be MSC today. When I remember this, I find it hard to recognise as his sons the droopy and the down-hearted, and the « what's the use? » brigade. I don't believe in false optimism, and I think that it is irresponsible to ignore difficulties. However challenges to faith and to finding new solutions need not get us down. Here we need some of that spirit so well summed up in this phrase of St. Joan of Arc: « We will fight, and God will give the victory ». Let us not forget either of these two sides to christian courage and endurance.

In order to persevere with courage we need to be clear-eyed about some of the ways we are influenced to give up the effort. One factor here is the one we have considered previously, namely that of being affected by the expectations of achievement of our modern technological age. I recall it, but will not repeat what was said, asking you to reflect on it well. To illustrate another factor, I'll tell you about an incident which caused me to do a lot of reflecting.

I was giving a retreat in a community of teaching brothers, and had some discussions with a man who impressed me very much. He was superior of a large college — after having passed six years as superior of another rather large community. In the opinion of members of both communities he was a very good superior. But when I met him he was thinking of resigning as superior; he would also, he said, probably leave religious life. He was a fine and refined type

of man, but he was downhearted because, he said, he could not stand the pettiness of a number of his confreres. I was rather favourably impressed by the man, and I returned home thinking that here perhaps was a person whose very qualities of character were making it impossible for him to stay in religious life. And of course I remembered the statement which is not infrequently made: 'Our best men are leaving the priesthood'.

I was not very happy with this conclusion which was forcing itself on me, for it was complimentary neither to the priesthood nor to religious life. Not long afterwards I read a book by Karl Rahner called 'Biblical Homilies'. From that book I remember one thing only — some comments which Rahner made in a homily about the unjust steward of the parable in Luke 16. This man was a rogue and a swindler. Yet, as Rahner pointed out, Christ who was the most refined and sensitive of men could use « this shabby character and this sordid affair » as a parable of the Kingdom of God. Reflecting on this fact, Rahner concludes that true christian nobility includes the ability « to endure pettiness and yet remain open to greatness ». (And my difficulty disappeared.)

We do not approve pettiness — we endure it; we only endure what we admit as being a natural and necessary element of our human world. We endure it because we would suffer untold, useless frustration if we mounted a crusade to get rid of all pettiness from the church or from our communities. It could only be done with the help of guillotines! Yet the presence of pettiness does not defeat us. We remain open to greatness: we go on believing in others, and by this belief (and the acceptance that it engenders)

we lift them to some kind of greatness. (This incidentally is what St. Paul means by 'love believes all things'). In fact, our vocation is due to this that, in our lives, we met with people who, in spite of our pettiness, believed in our possibilities of greatness. Also, we have to believe, that, in spite of our pettiness, God can use us to help others along the way to greatness.

One other factor often makes our courage flag, and that is that our faith in « the church of the poor » grows rather dim. You might tell me that the only church you believe in is the Church of the poor. But before you become too positive in your conclusions, I would ask you to follow me on some round-about considerations.

There are poor men in every country in the world. In many places they will hold out their hands to you asking for aid. How do you react? Do you tell them not to bother you, or does your heart feel for them even when you can not help?

There are blind men tapping their way through the great city streets — in Paris, Rome, New York. You will meet them at times as you make your way through the streets, you will be held up by them; they will get in your way, perhaps even bump against you. Then what is your reaction? Do you tell them to get out of your way, to get off the streets? In every country there are the incurably ill, the crippled, the aged, the mentally retarded. In some ways they are a burden on humanity; yet any man would lose his humanity if he wanted to get rid of them because they are a burden.

There are blind men on all the ways of the world, there are people with their limited intelligence, their weakness, their handicaps, their poverty. There are no other kind of men but these. These are the men and women who make up the People of God. Even those who are asked to lead us, to be our priests, our bishops and our Pope are made of the same human stuff as this. And because this is so, there are some people who say that they lose their faith in the church; they can't stand the limitations and the pettiness, they say.

What sort of a church did they think they believed in? This is one of the oldest heresies — to seek a church consisting only of the perfect, a heresy which has expressed itself in different forms from the Priscillianists right to our own day. Here one is forced to marvel at human inconsistency. Before Vatican II, many rejected the church because she was arrogant, claiming to be the one, holy catholic church. Then she confessed that she was a church of sinners, imperfect and in constant need of reform. Now there are those who leave her on the grounds that she is imperfect and in need of reform — as if the Pilgrim people of God could be anything else. Others do not reject her, or leave her, but her poverty becomes a stumbling block for them. They use it as an excuse for lack of effort or become discouraged by it, or turn sour and critical.

As Manaranche writes, it is almost as if these people had changed that prayer of the Mass which says: Lord Jesus Christ, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom. In effect they say: Look not on the sins of your Church nor the limitations of its

bishops, but look on our faith and our bright ideas, and our sincerity etc.

She is the Church of the poor... but there is a deeper poverty than that of material want — the poverty of darkness and doubt, of limited ideas and simply not knowing what to do to heal the world. If we cannot accept her as such, then we are not being very realistic. And it is in her that we have become children of God. We can not leave her without letting go of Christ.

We profess to believe in God's love for the world: this world with its pain, its violence, its drugs, its greed, its ignorance and uncaring. If there is one truth of which I'm more convinced every day it is that men have need of redemption.

For your encouragement, let me quote the following passage: « The crucifixion was the sign of Christ's complete involvement in this world of ugliness and beauty, of life and death, of hate and love, of hope and despair. He did not pray that his disciples would be taken out of this same world, but that they would be saved from the evil one. The evil one provokes a discontent that has nothing to do with the agony of Christ. It is a false agony, a sterile labour that produces no new life, but leads only to ultimate bitterness and frustration (which is the opposite of the charity that is patient, long-suffering and kind).

The agony of Christ is the agony of a love that brings forth new life... the agony that still calls out 'Father', that says 'friend' even to his betrayer... that in the midst of hatred, fear and greed still proclaims that

nothing can demand that we cease to believe in God's love for him and for others ». (6).

We profess to believe in his love.

...The patience to pray...

Fr. Chevalier wrote once that we are not an Order of contemplatives. At least in this, many of us have taken him seriously! Fr. Piperon, by nature a more contemplative soul, thought that in Fr. Chevalier's life there was not enough time given to prayer to fit his idea of the perfect Founder. However, l'Abbé Belleville wrote that Fr. Chevalier was a man of an idea and a work. The idea « is a mystic idea... having taken his place, so to speak, in the Heart of Christ, he will never leave it, come what may. »

I believe that he had what we all need to acquire — what I have called a mystique of mission. By this I am trying to complement the idea that is often formed as of the one who is sent on a mission being out there on his own. To be a missionary you must have a concern for others. But you can have a concern for others without being a christian missionary, or an MSC. For this you need to have met with the Christ who, far more than you, bears in his heart a concern for mankind. You need to feel that, united with him, you are assumed into his mission, he remaining with you and acting through you.

Christ said: He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone. I am not alone for the Father is

(6) The Way, ?.

with me. (Jo. 8, 29, 16, 32). Any man who looks into his own heart knows that he has a crying need not to be left alone — particularly if he is to live and work in the world of faith and apostolate.

We claim to have learned to believe in the love God has for us (I. Jo. 4, 16). This text goes on to say: « anyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God lives in him ». The prayer of the apostle will be living in God, and letting God live in us, through the gift of his Spirit, and through his action in our apostolate, or Christ in our heart and in our hands, as the French School says.

Prayer is God's gift to us. In a sense it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, « God's breathing in us, by which we become part of the intimacy of God's inner life, and by which we are born anew... So the paradox of prayer is that it asks for a serious effort while it can only be received as God's gift. We can not plan, organize or manipulate God; but without a careful discipline we can not receive him either. » (7)

Without prayer covenant becomes contract — and no more. Celibacy is going to be impossible without prayer, for it supposes a solitude which can be filled with a love for Christ. Without prayer solitude becomes loneliness; community becomes a Club. Without prayer, mission becomes no more than a job to be done; fidelity deteriorates into routine and ritual.

At the beginning of his first epistle St. John has a

(7) H. Nouwen. *Reaching Out*. London, Collins, 1976, p. 116.

truly magnificent passage about: « that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands: the Word who is life. » The obvious and immediate thought these words suggest is the personal association which John enjoyed with Jesus during his life-time. They speak of the wonders of close friendship and the privilege of the years spent in the company of Christ. They can arouse our envy. With this experience and with these memories, it would have been easy for the apostles to pray. But if you look closer at the words, you will find that there is more than you might have thought.

They saw, but in a unique fashion (*et theasametha*) they contemplated, regarded with attentive eyes. With a vision enlightend by grace, they were able to penetrate the veil of outward appearances to see in the man of Nazareth the glory of the only Son of the Father. They, too, had a veil to pierce, an effort to make.

« We have touched with our hands ». Here the verb signifies ' to feel, to make contact with an object by long and careful touch, verifying and measuring the details, seeking to supply for the insufficiencies of one's vision '. One thinks of a blind person feeling the countenance of a person he wishes to get to know. In Acts, 17, 27, St. Paul speaks of men groping for God, like a blind man in the dark. St. John, after his initial experience of Christ through his senses, never ceased to search that he might know him better and possess him more fully, groping in love in the darkness of faith.

We have to have the patience to pray — the patient persevering effort to get to know the Christ in whom we believe. There is no other way. And if we do not make the patient effort, we might be forced to wonder how truly we have learned to believe in his love.

In his Rules, Fr. Chevalier writes: « The missionaries will have a tender devotion to the adorable Heart of Jesus; they will not forget that it is the source of all graces, a hearth of light and of love, an abyss of compassion; they will have recourse to it often in their trials, their temptations, their tedium, their difficulties. » They will « unite themselves with this divine heart, be penetrated by its sentiments, co-operate as docile instruments of its designs of mercy and compassion ». (8)

(8) *Premières Règles manuscrites des Missionnaires du Sacré Coeur*, 1857, Ch. III, art. 6, 1. 1.

12. « A NEW HEART »

I would propose for your reflection two texts from the Documents of Renewal, 1969, « Looking on him who pierced on the cross, we see the new heart that God has given us. » (n. 3).

« contemplation of the heart of Christ, and possession of its sentiments » (n. 4).

The considerations which I am going to put before you will not have the tidy unity of a thesis. However they do hang together as connected and coherent parts of a living response to an MSC vocation. The response to any call to follow Christ has elements common to all christians; it has special characteristics in the different schools of spirituality. To those who would follow him, Christ said that they were to deny themselves and take up their cross. We know how many of the saints and faithful have felt the need of mortification and penance in various forms as their way to following Christ in unselfish love. Fr. Chevalier wrote what I believe to be a most important text for our spirit and life. He said:

« Those who enter our Society can very well let others surpass them in knowledge, mortification and

poverty; but when it comes to *obedience and mutual charity*, they will allow no one to do better than they ». (Formula Instituti. § 4,3).

Let us draw out the implications of this text. The Founder does not here dismiss us light-heartedly from the need for self-denial. We have already considered our call to a loving service in which, in the self-forgetfulness which this demands, we are expected to be 'sacraments of the kindness of God'. If you do not know how demanding and self-denying this can be, then you have never really tried it. Here all of us have a constant challenge and continued matter for examination of conscience, in honesty, humility, in daily confession of failure, in prayer that we might not grow weary of the continued effort required of us.

However, I should like to ask you now to reflect on what seems to me to be a key-phrase for our life and spirit: Fr. Chevalier's extolling of obedience and fraternal charity. If we fail to grasp (or refuse to accept) the implications of this, then we do not get beneath the surface to the strength of the spirituality which Fr. Chevalier proposes.

He does not say that as MSC we can leave the mortification and poverty to others, while we have a relatively easy time of it paying attention to obedience and mutual charity. He indicates rather that we embrace the mortification and accept the personal poverty implied in a dedicated living of obedience and mutual charity. To this we are called by vocation — but we will perceive and respond to its full implications only if we have the courage to « contemplate the Heart of Christ and make its sentiments

our own ». The source — the only source — of strong spiritual renewal is here.

There is one fact which makes me suspect that we have shirked the full implications of our vocation — unconsciously, no doubt, and to a limited extent — but to some extent none the less. The fact of which I speak is this. Throughout the whole Society we have echoed the Founder's stress on mutual charity — but it is rare that « obedience » receives an equivalent emphasis. Yet, for Fr. Chevalier, the two were co-relative. And, for me, if a claim is made to stand strong for « charity », while « obedience » is left out of consideration, the claim is very suspect, and I wonder how much real virtue there is in the so-called charity.

Now, before anybody starts to back off mentally, let me say that I am not referring (and I am not going to refer in this chapter) to what is called 'social obedience'. I am not trying to work round to getting you to take orders, from me or from anyone else. I am inviting you to consider, rather, an internal attitude or disposition of soul (like to that found in the Heart of Christ) which, if perfect enough, would make orders unnecessary.

Son of God though he was, Christ learned obedience as man. Let us try to see what was this obedience that he learned, and which we must try to learn from him. What was this particular 'sentiment' or 'disposition of soul' in Christ which we have to try to possess in some measure if we are devoted to him? Here I believe we are given one of the most fruitful insights into the depths of Christ's personality. It can be for us a source of renewed love and more willing service.

Let us begin our search for a fuller understanding with reflection on the almost solitary intervention of the Father recorded in the Gospels: « And a voice spoke from heaven: This is my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on him » (Mt. 3,17. cf. Mk 1, 11; Lk. 3,22). The meaning of this text will enlighten us on the real biblical significance of « the Will of God » and the corresponding attitude of obedience on the part of man. The Hebrew word which the Vulgate persistently renders by *voluntas* means ' longing, love delight, and favour given '.

For instance Isaiah, 62, 3-5: « You are to be a crown of splendour in the hand of Yahweh, a princely diadem in the hand of your God; no longer are you to be termed ' forsaken ', nor your land ' Abandoned ', but you shall be called ' My Delight ' and your land ' The Wedded '; for Yahweh takes delight in you and your land will have its wedding. Like a young man marrying a virgin, so will the one who built you wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you. »

God's « will » is not an arbitrary imposition of commands — it is the delight of God's love poured out, his favour bestowed. The fulness of this Love now rests on Jesus. He is the desire of the Father, His delight. In him, the Father's desire to love finds repose. As a modern author writes: (1)

« Now, in the fulness of time the well-beloved Son has united himself with what is essentially human.

(1) André Louf, *TEACH US TO PRAY*, Darton Longman and Todd, London, 1976. p. 30.

His being born of the Father he must now express in human fashion. This is to be his obedience. He must allow this Father-love to flow through his whole being-as-man. It must occupy and capture His human body and His entire psychology. In that way the Father's love will be realized and endorsed. Where the first man had said: No, Jesus, the new Man, will say: Yes. He will make the will of the Father wholly his own. He has to become the first man in whom the fulness of God's love can become a reality. That is his obedience. »

This is why, coming into the world he could say: 'God, here I am, I am coming to obey your will' (Heb. 10. 7). He could repeat the words of Ps. 40: 'I delight to do Thy will, O My God; Thy law is within my heart;'. (We can see already, I think, how Fr. Chevalier would see obedience as linked with the heart of Christ). As we think of Christ's « delight in Thy law » responding to this knowledge that in him the Father found his « delight », we can feel a touch of envy for what would seem to be a natural and easy response to the Father's love.

However — not so fast! To re-take and continue with the text from Fr. Louf: « He has to become the first man in whom the fulness of God's love can become a reality. That is his obedience; that is also his death. And these two are his love. » That is also his death! He had come in the manhood he took from the race of Adam, in the likeness of our sinful flesh. He experienced the flesh's reluctance to surrender completely to God, he lived the 'agonia', the struggle to love, even unto the end. God's law in the midst of the heart of a son of Adam would burst that heart asunder with its exigency. He

« shared our flesh and blood, so that by his death he could take away the power of the devil, who had power over death, and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death ». (Heb. 2,14 f). But he himself was touched by the fear of death even as he sought to free us from it. In a mysterious fashion which we can glimpse yet not fully understand, Jesus had to labour under the burden of our sin. His love and his obedience must take him through death to the Father. It was not done without difficulty. « During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears to the one who had power to save him out of death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard. Although he was Son, he learned to obey through suffering ». (Heb. 5, 7-8).

He had listened to his Father's testimony by the Jordan, that he was the Son in whom was his delight. And at the end, he was tempted to doubt his Father's love: « He puts his trust in God. Let God deliver him now, if he takes delight in Him » (Mt. 27: 43). The same phrase is used now, not in approval but in mockery. Yet, even in his darkest hour as Son of God he could not let go of his belief in his Father's love. As Son of man and our brother who loved us, he could not forget the need we had that he should succeed in loving unto the end. Sustained by these two loves, he breathed forth his life as a gift of love into His Father's hands. And then the Spirit of love could be poured forth to renew the hearts of men.

« Contemplation of the Heart of Christ... » It is not a sweet, valentine heart that we contemplate. The symbol of the « deep things of God », of the inner

life of Christ in the depths of his personality is « the pierced Heart ». This is the real symbol and sign of the special love that was Christ's; only this expresses the reality of what that love asked from Him... Christ's side was pierced by the soldier's lance. This was far more than the infliction of a wound on a body already dead. It was the outward sign of the inner reality of the heart which, while living, was torn by the tension between the love of the Son and the weakness of our sinful flesh. His inner life of love, with all that it cost, is here revealed. In the heart of the Son, God's law is a delight; but in the heart of a son of Adam it is learned and given through suffering and blood-sweat in the « Not my Will, but thine be done ». It is only through this total surrender that the prophetic words come true about the new heart that God will give his people. If we want our prayer to be heard: « Give to us, Oh Lord, a heart renewed », we know where to look for inspiration and strength.

We profess to be Missionaries of the Heart of Christ. We say that we wish to make our own the sentiments of his heart. I suggest that we need long and serious reflection on this deep sentiment of « obedience » in the heart of Christ. I would suggest further that it is because we have failed to make our own this special sentiment of (or attitude of) obedience before the Father that we have some other woes. This is why some of us can not pray. This is why fraternal charity is deficient (at times sadly deficient) in some of our communities. This is why some of us live very superficial spiritual lives.

Let us take these things one at a time. Later we shall think more about fraternal charity:

PRAYER. It has been said that, in our days, many of us need to learn to pray again; that we, like the disciples have to ask « Lord teach us to pray ». Most of us, I think, can say this prayer very easily. We feel the desire to pray; we want to know, to love and to be near our Lord, to speak to Our Father as his children who believe in his love. We would like to share Christ's prayer, his filial intimacy with his Father.

All this is very good, very commendable. But if we are to share Christ's prayer, then we must be prepared to go his way. « Lord teach us to pray. » This is a prayer which we can all say easily. But it is not a prayer that can be said lightly if we really want to be heard. It must be accompanied by the readiness to share in the attitude of obedience which filled the Heart of Christ. Let me take up again and complete a text I have quoted twice already: Christ « has to become the first man in whom the fulness of God's love can become a reality. That is his obedience, that is also his death. And these two are his love. So too is his prayer. » It is noteworthy that when the Father spoke to say that Jesus was his beloved Son in whom was his delight (at the baptism and at the transfiguration) in both cases the word of the Father was a response to the prayer of Jesus. « His prayer was at the same time a loving surrender to the Will of the Father, and a further disclosure of that same will... His agony... is the struggle of obedience but also of prayer (' he prayed the longer '). A battle of prayer and of obedience in prayer. » (Louf).

« He learned obedience, even though he was the Son of God. As man... he had to wrest that obedience from sin, our sin. We can say the same of prayer.

In this temptation, Jesus learned to pray... Only loud entreaty and tears — the prayer of extreme desolation — could scoop out in the man Jesus those bottomless depths of surrender and obedience in which ultimately the Will of God, i.e. the Father's love, could be fully realized... » His death is a surrender and a prayer, and then « All at once he discovers the response to His Father's declaration of love: ' You are my Son, my Well-beloved. All my favour rests on you '. It took Jesus his whole life as man to get through to the deepest reality of these words. And only now does He know. Only now can he *really* pray. Only in death will he be able to utter in its fulness the long matured Yes of His own love for the Father, to speak it in peace beyond all despair and doubt... Father into your hands I commend my spirit.

Had Jesus given in to that temptation, he would have remained in death forever, and the way to prayer would forever have been barred. Now that way is open and free again. He himself is the Way... and the Life (Jo. 14, 16). » (2)

It is to Him we look when we ask: Lord teach us to pray. The well-springs of true prayer lie deep in our souls, and deep in the heart of Christ. I do not wish to suggest that all our prayers are to be serious and solemn. Our prayer runs through the whole scale of human life and emotion: joy, sorrow, confidence, love and patient waiting. However there is a fundamental attitude needed if the full range of prayer is to find a place in our lives, if we are to sing

(2) Ib. pp. 30-33.

our *Alleluias* as well as our *Misereres. De Profundis clamavi* is true for all real prayer. It springs from the depths of our need, our love, our longing, our faith, our gratitude, our hope.

Like Jesus, we get through to the deep reality of prayer only when we can sincerely say « Into Thy hands ». We can truly say « Our Father » only when we can say « Thy Will be done ». If we are attached to our own will, determined to get our own way, then we need not bother to ask the Lord to teach us to pray. An attitude of obedience and openness is a fundamental prerequisite to prayer; and yet it is in prayer that we, too, learn obedience and openness to God's will.

13. MISSION

Fr. Chevalier chose for his Congregation the title of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. The choice was made in accordance with his vision of the Christ of the Gospels and with his view of the spirit and aims of the society he was founding.

« At all times, in all his actions, Our Lord is taken up with the mission which he has come to carry out on earth » (1). The compassionate Christ is concerned for mankind; the Good Shepherd goes in search of the lost sheep; He invites all men to come to him in order to find rest for their souls.

There is no need, here, to stress the importance of apostolic zeal, nor the special place of the mission « ad gentes ». The whole history of our Society bears eloquent witness to these realities. Other aspects of « mission » in our Society are not so immediately suggested by the terms « mission » or « missionary » in their popular understanding. For this reason there is need to insist that these aspects, too, are an es-

(1) Quoted by H. Vermin, « *Le Père Jules Chevalier* », Rome, 1957, p. 368.

sential and vital part of our MSC vision and spirituality.

Firstly, « Missionaries of the Sacred Heart are given the wonderful mission of *glorifying the Heart of Jesus* and of making known the treasures of grace which fill it... » (2) It is rather well known that, after Vatican II, the first efforts at renewal in religious congregations gave their greatest attention to involvement in the world. This was a necessary phase and a good one. Fortunately « there are many indications that the Spirit is leading congregations to a courageous reassessment not just of their relationship with the world but of their relationship with God. We are discovering that, just as a spiritual quest which dried up all apostolic desire would be suspect in the eyes of the Gospel, so too a *missionary* commitment which would not be open to the free gift of self in worship *before God* would be evangelically unhealthy and unconnected to the 'following of Christ'... For more and more religious, generous commitment to the service of human causes, in the name of the Gospel, has no real meaning or worth unless it is lived within the *before God* of their call. This *before God* becomes all important to them. Without questioning their commitment to their mission, or refusing to take part in the movements of human liberation which are stirring wherever they are at work, they try to give to their relationship with God all the importance which it holds in any life spent 'in the following of Christ' » (3).

(2) Formula Instituti, n. 6

(3) J. Tillard, O. P. in *Keynote Address to the third Interamerican Meeting of Religious*, 1977.

In this quotation Fr. Tillard makes an application of the thesis which he develops in his book « *Devant Dieu et Pour le Monde* ». As the title indicates he sets out to stress that religious life is lived « before God and for the world ». Fortunately for us, these two elements are united in the concept of mission if it is rightly understood in the light of the Gospel. It is by examining the biblical concept and the spirituality of mission that we see how we are called to live *before God* — constantly and consciously — if we are to say truly that we have a mission to the world.

A mission is *to* someone (to all who labour and are burdened); it is also, and essentially, *from* someone. If the « from » dimension of mission is not lived faithfully, we are hardly entitled to claim that we are carrying out a mission, that we are 'missionaries'. Ours is a sharing in the mission of Christ or it is no mission at all. Reflection on the way that Christ lived his mission is essential if we are to live our MSC vocation. Central to such reflection are the points contained in the following passages from Fr. A. Feuillet:

« 'The world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what Father told me.' (Jo. 14,31).

'I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love' (Jo. 15,10).

In these two passages the love of Jesus for his Father is synonymous with his unconditional attachment to the will of the Father, an attachment which will lead him to Calvary for the salvation of men. In view

of this synonym, even if explicit declarations are rare, Jesus constantly proclaims, implicitly, his love for the Father since he constantly proclaims his unfailing attachment to the will of the Father.

In the fourth Gospel Jesus is as if obsessed with the desire to carry out the mission which the Father has entrusted to him. This explains why he speaks so often of the Father who has sent him. » (4)

« We need to begin with what is implied by the ordinary concept of an envoy (one who is sent). The envoy of a sovereign represents him... the importance of the role that he plays comes from the one who speaks and acts through him. Furthermore the authentic envoy who fulfils his mission as he should is not content to express thoughts which he does not share. He puts himself entirely at the service of his sovereign. He forgets himself in order to make his own the thoughts and desires of him who sent him...

All this applies to any envoy whoever he be; it applies in the most perfect possible way to Christ sent by the Father, as described by St. John. Constantly in the Fourth Gospel Jesus declares that his words are not his own, but those of the Father (3,34; 7,16; 8,26,38,40; 14, 10,24; 17,8), that the works he does are not his own but those of the Father (4,34; 5, 17, 19, 20, 30, 36; 8,28; 14,10) that he does not carry out his own will, but the will of the Father (4, 34; 5,30; 6,38; 10, 25,37). He is only the voice and the hand of the Father — and this is his claim to

(4) « *Le mystère de l'Amour Divin dans la Théologie Johannique* », Paris, Gabalda, 1972, p. 69.

honour from men: « so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. Whoever refuses honour to the Son refuses honour to the Father who sent him (5, 23; cf. 7,18; 8, 50, 54).

There is this difference from human missions that, at no moment is he who is sent really separated from the one who sends him: the Father who has sent his Son into the world does not leave him alone (8, 29; 16,32); Jesus and his Father are always one (10,30); always ' the Father is in me and I am in the Father ' (10,38; cf. 14, 11; 17,21). Consequently when Jesus loves men and gives his life for them, it is the love of the Father that reaches out to them through him: ' To have seen me is to have seen the Father ' (14,9). » (5)

A good deal of « living before God » is necessary if we are to share the « mission » of Christ. Yet without this sharing we can not claim to be sent on a mission to men, no matter how deep our concern for men, no matter what our involvement in the world.

Here, too, our Founder provides us with example and inspiration.

« Chevalier », wrote Belleville, « was the man of an idea and a work... The idea ' is a mystic idea... Having taken his place so to speak in the Heart of Christ, he will never leave it, come what may '. In these words l'Abbé Belleville rather beautifully describes what he considers the mystic quality of Fr. Chevalier's spirituality... The term mystical is often used to indi-

(5) ib. p. 26.

cate the conscious living of the spiritual life as God's gift experienced, rather than our own effort at asceticism or the practice of virtue... He seemed to live the mystery of Christ-living-in-him and acting and loving through him. Conscious as he was of Christ before his eyes in meditation, and Christ in his heart in his prayer and exercise of charity, he seemed to live a conscious union with Christ 'in his hands' — Christ working with him his apostolic efforts. He was as conscious of the presence and action of Christ in his activity as he was in his prayer. And he would write in his Rules:

'The Missionaries will have a tender devotion to the adorable Heart of Jesus; they will not forget that it is the source of all grace, a hearth of light and of love, an abyss of mercy; they will have recourse to it often in their trials, their temptations, their tedium, their difficulties'.

Furthermore he would find Christ in the people for whom he worked, seeing them always as 'the souls who were so dear to Christ'. He had in a sense a *mystique of mission*, conscious of sharing in the mission of Christ, High-Priest and Apostle, conscious of the love of God given to every man whom he met. This did not mean that he thought one could find God in others and not make efforts to meet him regularly in prayer and especially in the eucharist. In his own busy life, his assiduous practice of the religious exercises of his religious community is stressed by those who knew him. » (6).

(6) E. J. Cuskelly, « Jules Chevalier », 1975, pp. 300-301.

A second aspect of mission is the constant challenge to try to discover the signs of the times and what should be our response to them in the spirit of our vocation. In an earlier chapter we have seen the importance of this. Some of our Provinces have faced this issue squarely and give an example of what should be done in all parts of the Society. Questions such as these need to be asked: What are the appeals which are addressed to us today in the spirit of our mission? What are the real needs of the Church? Where are the real « poor » who need our help? Does the work in which we are engaged respond to our MSC mission today? Is it an obvious expression of our MSC vocation? Does it fulfil a real need in the local Church? Or are we doing this work simply because we began it some years ago? Can existing apostolates be re-vitalized and adapted so that they will, in fact, better respond to modern needs and be more vital expression of our own charism?

The different elements of a spirituality are lived with conviction in the measure that they are felt to be integral and constitutive parts of a unified spirituality. This unification exists when we see how the various components of our life flow from our central vision of Christ or are integrated into our response to that vision. The particular MSC vision has been considered in a previous Chapter. We have learned to believe in the love of God for all men — and this is the source of mission: « *caritas Christi urget nos* ».

The evangelical counsels should be informed by that same vision, integrated into our response as missionaries of the Sacred Heart. This integration was not favoured by the older form of constitutions requested by the Holy See. That formula gave the impression

that some things were the expression of our MSC spirit while others, such as the vows, were required of us as religious. Often enough we looked to Canon Law and writings on religious life to see what the vows implied in our lives. This did not give us false knowledge; but it limited our view and detracted from the unified vision of a sound spirituality.

Fortunately we have begun again to look to our charism and mission to see what they tell us about the way we should live poverty, chastity and obedience in our Society. For instance, with regard to chastity, some Provincial Chapters in recent years have composed texts such as these:

« celibate chastity allows us to live more like Christ lived — compassionate, human, open to the needs of people with whom we associate, both those within the community and those outside ».

« religious chastity is a commitment to a creative, non-exclusive love — a love of Christ in faith, friendship and prayer; — a love of others in warmth, care and concern. »

The call to evangelical poverty, too, must be considered within the context of our mission. Some religious Orders such as the Franciscans have a special mystique of poverty inherited from St. Francis which we are not called to share. We are called to a mission of loving service, to witness to the compassionate love of Christ. The possession and use of material goods fits into this context and must be judged accordingly.

A case from one of our missions provides an instruc-

tive example. A missionary was sent to a poor parish where there was no house for the priest. A well-to-do Catholic of the area offered the priest the use of one of his houses. However, the missionary realized that the house was so much better than the houses of the ordinary people that, should he accept it for himself, the people would not feel that he was there to serve them. He therefore lived in a poor house in the village. He thus gave clear witness that he was there in the service of the poor. After some months the people sent a representation to him to say that they would like to help him build a bigger and better house. They felt that the very poverty of his dwelling was a hindrance to his better service. In a bigger house, he would be better able to receive people and could take better care of his health. They saw that too much material poverty was an obstacle to the service he was sent to give.

There is far more, of course, to the living of evangelical poverty and consecrated chastity. Many good things are being written on these aspects of our religious life. However, the point I wish to make here is that we must not simply copy what others write; rather we need to think out the meaning of these spiritual realities in the light of our own vision and in the context of our mission. This is true, too, of obedience which will be treated in a later chapter.

In the same way we have to think things through with regard to community. Wherever we are, what is our mission as an MSC Community? Again, what kind of a community should we have as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart? Our mission requires that many of our dedicated members live alone. If one takes the Benedictine concept of 'community', these men

do not live in community. On the other hand, for the Jesuits, it is mission which constitutes community. We are neither Jesuits nor Benedictines. Yet we have not, as a Society, worked out a commonly accepted idea of what is the essence of an MSC Community. We need to do this.

The following quotations may help stimulate some creative thinking.

« In view of the incongruity between the academic praise of community and the hard facts of life, I shall make bold to wonder aloud if we could substitute our present emphasis on 'community' by the richer and more free New Testament term of *koinonia* (fellowship). The charity, concern and devotedness which characterize a truly fraternal spirit can and should be present in a group of dedicated men even when the structures of community are minimal. Perhaps we have a great deal to learn from the missionary congregations who show an admirable *esprit de corps* and a truly evangelical bond of fraternity even when their apostolate precludes the close structural ties which seem to inhere in the word 'community'....

The example of the missionary congregations may serve to cut the Gordian knot tied around our necks by excessive 'community' emphasis. Though we may not be able to guarantee a closeknit community structure, our institute.... must be able to guarantee a strong and helpful community spirit. It is this alone and not an abundance of 'community' structures that the Gospel requires ». (7).

(7) B. Ahern, C. P., address to S. C. Relig, and U. S. G., 1973.

« We see community life as a spirit of communion based on a firm commitment to Christ and the apostolate, manifesting itself in sharing on the spiritual, material and companionship levels, and in a deeper concern for one another. There are different ways of sharing for those who form a community which lives together and those who form a dispersed community. » (8).

(8) U.S.G., 1972.

14. OBEDIENCE AND FRATERNAL CHARITY

Our basic christian obedience acquires a special dimension at religious profession. However, even more than the other evangelical counsels, religious obedience takes on special characteristics according to the charism and spirituality of the Institute in which it is practised. Its exercise has also been strongly influenced throughout history by the sociological background of the times. « This is why the Benedictine monastery acquired the traits of the roman family; the organization of feudal society passed into the Cistercian abbey; the Dominican community reflects the democratic ideal of medieval communities; the Company of Jesus reproduces the internal architecture of a strongly centralized ecclesiastical society. » (1). These orders have their own way of adapting the practice of obedience to suit the mentalities of different generations. Such adaptation is necessary. Ways of speaking about obedience which were once quite acceptable are displeasing today. « With regard to evangelical content neither christian obedience nor, more particularly, religious obedience has

(1) J. M. TILLARD, « *Problemas en torno e la obediencia* », in *Vida Religiosa*, Vol. 42, N. 327, (1977) p. 444.

anything to do with the obedience of an *automaton*, a *disciple*, a *slave*, a *child*, a *son*, a *soldier* or a *subject*. » (2).

It is important not to put religious obedience into wrong socio-cultural categories. It can be confusing and unproductive to look too much to Benedictine or Jesuit concepts in order to work out what our 'religious obedience' ought to be. Here we need to recall the vital importance of a text already quoted:

« Those who enter our Society can very well let others surpass them in knowledge, mortification and poverty; but when it comes to *obedience and mutual charity*, they will allow no one to do better than they. » (3).

As Fr. Vermin points out (4), here we get an essential insight into Fr. Chevalier's view of how his Society was to live and operate. It is worth repeating that Fr. Chevalier « does not say that as MSC we can leave the mortification and poverty to others while we have a relatively easy time of it paying attention to obedience and mutual charity. He indicates rather that we embrace the mortification and accept the personal poverty implied in a dedicated living of obedience and mutual charity. » (5). Obedience is seen in the context of mutual charity, the context of community generously lived. I therefore believe that the primary field for ascetical effort for

(2) J. Alvarez Gomez, « *Diversas formas de obediencia religiosa* », *Vida Religiosa*, Vol. cit. p. 431.

(3) *Formula Instituti*, par. 4, 3.

(4) « *Le Père Jules Chevalier* », pp. 374-375.

(5) cf. Ch. 12.

an MSC must be that of being a member of the MSC community, belonging to the group, giving himself to and through the group, renouncing all independent action, helping to build community.

It is clear that for Fr. Chevalier obedience and community (in the sense of *koinonia*, fellowship, brotherhood) were inseparably bound together. As elements of our MSC vocation they must be lived as essential and as complementary. An MSC who does not really live as one who « belongs » to the group is not living the kind of mutual charity which Fr. Chevalier wanted. If he does not see obedience and the exercise of authority as operating within the ' mutual charity ' of community and brotherhood, he has falsified the Founder's view of obedience.

This is one more instance of how Fr. Chevalier's fundamental insights are adaptable to different times while remaining substantially unchanged. The following passage could well be a commentary on Fr. Chevalier's view. It is, in fact, a proposal of « some conclusions regarding the way in which we should live the permanently valid values of evangelical obedience »:

« a) Religious obedience should be lived as availability to community life. In reality obedience is no more than a dimension of community life which consists in listening, giving attention, freely accepting, consenting (*sentire cum*)... That is, obedience is the manifestation of the relations of religious with other religious, and naturally with the one who, in the community, is the sign of the life of communion and fraternity of all.

b) Religious obedience has to be lived as availability to the service of men. The *being* and *doing* of religious has a very special characteristic: availability to the call of all men. The witness which religious try to give is expressed through a service which they have not chosen, but to which they have been called, as Christ was in receiving a mission from his Father. Logically, this radical availability includes an obedience to the service which the community has to give. Obedience to authority within the community is justified in the measure that authority has to unify this decision of service. In turn this signifies that, within the community, all make their contribution to seeing more clearly which is the best way to serve.

c) Religious obedience demands personal commitment and responsibility. Certainly, to obey is to accept certain rules of operation which are necessary wherever reasonable beings want to live reasonably together. However such acceptance is not to be merely passive as could have been the ideal in a not too distant past. Today obedience is expressed through the co-responsibility and the personal commitment of all the members of the community, not only of the one who exercises authority.

d) Religious obedience demands realism from all concerned: i.e. the acceptance of decisions taken by those in charge, decisions which will not always fit in with my own desires — this has to be taken for granted often enough. It is clear that, even after thorough consultation, there will be cases where there is no unanimity. This is when we have to be realistic, accepting all the consequences of a life in brotherhood and in communion. We have to take into account that, in the ultimate instance, religious

obedience is a practical reality not merely a speculative theory. And it will be easy to accept the sacrifice of self and of my own preferences only if a religious sees things in the perspective of the faith. When, in the demands of obedience, some things are difficult, there is no call to cry to heaven as if there were some question of injustice against one's own rights. Whoever has consecrated himself without reserve to the service of others, has, like Christ himself, renounced his own rights on the altar of service. This truth can be accepted only in the light of faith. In any other light it will appear to be without sense. Whoever sets out to follow Christ will have to accept being treated as he was. And Christ was the one without rights. (This of course does not suggest that the superior has carte-blanche to act as a despot).

e) The supreme meaning of religious obedience consists in allowing the grace of God to have full play in us. Only in this way will we be a sign of that liberty for which modern man hungers so much. However, religious have to show that they are free in the midst of a common life and that they *can* grow and develop fully within a submission which is accepted. » (6).

The community aspect of obedience is clear in this text. There is also a strong emphasis on service. Further comment is needed on both points. However, before such comment is made, it would be well to consider another text written by Fr. Chevalier: « The Master of Novices will endeavour to make them love, cherish and practise especially *obediente* and *humility*

(6) J. Alvarez Gomez, art. cit. pp. 432-434.

which should be the chief virtues of the order because they are those of the Heart of Jesus » (7). This text has been used by Novice Masters and Superiors to bolster an insistence that religious should be humble and do what they are told. This can be a trouble-saving device on the part of those in charge, but it would not seem to do justice to the spiritual richness suggested by Fr. Founder. Nor does it suggest the right approach to religious obedience. Furthermore it fails to situate obedience within the coherent vision and response of an MSC spirituality.

If we are to be more positive and constructive, we need to go back to the text of Matthew, 11, 25-30 which we have already discussed at some length. We saw that « humility », poverty of spirit, kindness, humanness were the qualities which typified the compassionate Christ who came to give rest to all who labour and are burdened. The 'obedience' to which we are called has the same source and the same scope. It is linked with service — with this special kind of service.

In a work of this kind there is no place for prolonged biblical exegesis. One quotation will have to suffice:

In commenting on this passage of St. Matthew, Feuillet writes of: « the allusion to the absolutely universal doctrinal mission of the Servant of Jahweh. This allusion is implied by the qualities which Jesus applies to himself as teacher: 'I am meek and humble

(7) *Règles and Formula Instituti.*

(8) A. Feuillet, « *Les Mystère de l'Amour Divin dans la Théologie Johannique* », Paris, Gabalda, 1972, pp. 164, 165, 71.

of heart... ' Jesus' attitude recalls above all that of the humble Servant of Yahweh, careful not to break the broken reed (Is. 42,3) who by his words strengthens the discouraged (Is. 50, 4)... The Servant declares that he is constantly listening to what Yahweh is saying to him to instruct and strengthen men... the Servant of Yahweh, the intimate friend of God, accepts to be counted among the guilty in order to ensure the salvation of a sinful world. » (8).

In the obedience of Christ the Servant of Jahweh, (even as indicated by this short text) there are three aspects which should be present in our own obedience as we follow Christ.

a) *Obedience as service*, where all that we have said about the mission of Christ is included, as well as what has been said about our sharing in that mission.

b) *Obedience as « listening »*. « In biblical language, obedience is 'to listen to the voice of someone', in reality to listen to the voice of God. It is to keep one's ears and heart open to the words of the one who speaks to us. Obedience is far more than conforming or submitting to a moral code. Obedience is a living response equivalent to a person's giving himself to the words of another (Jer. 7, 23-24; Psalm 81,12) It is a relationship between persons. Here lies the radical distinction between obedience and submission. Obedience in the sense of interpersonal relationship, of listening to the voice of another, is something co-natural to man.

From this point of view one can not speak of any difficulty or sacrifice implied by obedience. Dialogue

is easy between persons who love one another, but only in the measure that they do love. The problem of obedience, basically, is a problem of personal relationships, not of submission. Any sacrifice implied in obedience is not that of doing what someone else says; it comes rather from the relationship which exists between the one who commands and the one who obeys. The same thing can be easily accepted if proposed by a person whom we love, but rejected as impossible or beyond our forces if proposed by someone from whom we feel distant. Evangelical obedience supposes communion and love. Only where there is a personal love-relationship is there obedience and dialogue. » (9) Here we are brought back to Fr. Chevalier's « obedience and mutual charity ».

c) *Obedience as sacrifice*. Christ's loving acceptance of the Father's will, his willing acceptance of his mission sent him into a sinful world. In order to undo man's disobedience, in order to lead men back to the way of life and listening to God, he became obedient even unto death (10). To speak of religious obedience only as sacrifice is to distort it. But to speak of obedience as if it could exist without self-sacrifice is to forget the 'mystery' of Christ's obedience into which we enter. It is also to forget the reality of being called to mission within a limited human church, within a human community.

« The true concept of obedience integrates both elements: obedience is sacrifice and service, it is

(9) Pedro Franquesa, « *Obediencia y Biblia* », in *Vida Religiosa*, Vol. cit. p. 414-415.

(10) Phil. 2, 8.

renunciation ad prudence (*recta ratio agibilium*) although not always in equal proportion. The ways in which the two elements combine are many and varied. However, both are always present in the exercise of obedience. Perhaps the key-point for the exercise of faith and reason here is to discover what service and what sacrifice are asked of us. At times the service we are asked for is simply our sacrifice, our renunciation, not doing what we think best, but doing what others think. This renunciation is a real service we give to the community » (11).

Obedience, fraternal charity, service, mission and community are realities which blend together in MSC life and brotherhood. Christ came to redeem men to make them children of God. There is no redemption in isolation. In a sense our mission is to « create christian community », to contribute actively and consciously to building brotherhood. While we do not want to establish « closed communities », the creating of a real religious brotherhood is part of our mission. Some of our members — provincials, other superiors and many brothers will have a special role to play in this or a special « care ministry » to exercise.

As we saw in a previous chapter, there are a number of factors which, in recent times, have contributed to a certain individualism inimical to true community. On the other hand, among younger religious there is a strong aspiration towards brotherhood. Good in itself, this aspiration is at times accompanied by 'idyllic' expectations which can not be realized.

(11) Pedro Franquesa, art. cit. p. 419.

Realism is needed to build community as much as it is needed for obedience. And faith is needed for both.

Many good things have been written on community today. The following quotation may well serve to conclude this chapter:

« ... it is important to remember that the christian community is a waiting community, that is, a community which not only creates a sense of belonging but also a sense of estrangement. In the christian community we say to each other, ' we are together, but we can not fulfil each other... we help each other, but we also have to remind each other that our destiny is beyond our togetherness. ' The support of the Christian community is a support in common expectation. That requires a constant criticism of anyone who makes the community into a safe shelter or a cosy clique, and a constant encouragement to look forward to what is to come... It is of special importance to remind each other that, as members of the christian community, we are not primarily for each other but for God. Our eyes should not remain fixed on each other but be directed forward to what is dawning on the horizon of our existence. We discover each other by following the same vocation and by supporting each other in the same search. Therefore the christian community is not a closed circle of people embracing each other, but a forward-moving group of companions bound together by the same voice asking for their attention » (12).

(12) Henri Nouwen, « *Reaching Out* », Collins, London 1976, pp. 140-141.

15. A LOVE WHICH LIBERATES

Speaking to a group of Superiors General, Fr. Leouw proposed the following parable for our consideration:

« In the realm of nature, in the history of the progress of beings towards perfection, there existed at one time a type of being known as invertebrates. These were well-constituted animals, but for protection they needed a shell or a carapace. They had no backbone (for example, the oyster, the mussel, the lobster...) But then nature evolved. The vertebrates appeared, beings furnished with a backbone. They no longer had a shell.

I have known the time (he said) when we lived protected by shells: the cloister, the habit, the rule, etc. Life became such that the shells had to be discarded. However, if we do not effect the same evolution as in nature, if we do not replace the shell with a backbone, we find ourselves at the mercy of the first devouring fish that comes our way...

Secularization is the waltz of the shells, and the fish can go by the name of Margaret or Karl Marx: In either case, it will devour us.

I therefore propose two questions:

- 1). What is the backbone which must be ours today?
- 2). What is the environment necessary for the religious to live his religious life among men? »

The parable can have a number of useful applications. The environment to be discussed is obviously referred to the kind of community we need in the modern world. Where religious are closed to new ideas, or conservative in clinging to old ways, we could discuss openness.

We have to give some thought to the hardness of the shells — if not that of a large shell in which a province is encased, at least of the individual shells into which we can withdraw. We saw something of this when considering the different types of mammons which we can set up. E. Vallacchi writes: « The poor man never sets himself up as judge, but he lives in an attitude of listening and receptivity. He listens to and receives and welcomes God, his brothers and the whole world. » He has what has been called ' a hospitable mind '. « Hospitality means to receive and to listen; it is something sacred because in the guest, it is God who visits us. This hospitableness is expressed principally with regard to God whom the poor man seeks constantly and humbly in his word, in his works, in his sacramental manifestations and in prayer — always in an attitude of readiness to do his will.

It is also expressed in regard to our brothers — all men whom the poor man considers as sons of the same Father, and in whom divine Wisdom has sown some seeds of knowledge. Every person is a divine

idea launched into time, and therefore constitutes for the poor man a message to be received, thought about, valued and retained. Therefore the poor man never sets himself up in hostile opposition to another person, but looks for dialogue, contact and friendly interpersonal relationships. »

Without this attitude of poverty of spirit, we will remain forever in our shells, with barriers between us, unable to grow as individuals, unable to develop community. We should be able to listen: to the Spirit, the Word, the other, the world. If we can listen to others with respect, we can build community. If we can listen to the world, we can respond to the signs of the times, adapting and updating. If (and only if) we can listen to the Spirit and the Word, we will be able to pray.

We need to turn our attention not only to the hardness of our shells, but also to the softness of our backbones in this stage of passing from shell to vertebrate. We have left the shells behind in regard to many religious rules and practices — and some have been devoured by their Margaret's, while in some Provinces there have been those who have been swallowed up by Karl Marx.

We have been liberated; FROM what is clear — FOR what is often not quite so evident. We have been liberated from strict rules, uniformity, soutanes, from blind obedience, from an unquestioning acceptance of authority. But what have we been liberated to and for? Have we attained the true liberty of adult christians? We believe in a love that liberates. « Love God and do what you will ». Here, too, we are in a field where the Scriptures provide

us with a lot of matter for reflection — matter that differs considerably from the sort of freedom proposed by Marcuse and company.

Just cast your mind back to the Old Testament and you will recall that God's initial act of salvation was also one of liberation. He 'set his people free': free from slavery in Egypt; free to worship the living God and to enter into a Covenant with him, to become his People. God's invitation was freely, willingly accepted: « These things we will do. »

In the bible every meeting with the living God takes with it an experience of liberation. Only God *could* set his people free. Moses could not succeed until, in the strength of his arm, the Lord came to their rescue. The people in exile could find no way out of their captivity until the Lord, using Cyrus as his instrument, led them home from Babylon. No one could deliver mankind from the slavery of sin except God in Jesus Christ — and his truth will make us free.

Here we touch on another reality which we have to experience before it can become reality for us. Faith in Jesus Christ, faith in a living God is a liberating thing. Let me ask you a question: If you were to compose a prayer about the commandments in your life, how would you phrase that prayer? Think about it... Now, how many of you thought of asking that you might keep the commandments? The Church has a very beautiful prayer for one of the Sundays during the year in which she says: « Lord, give us an increase of faith, hope and charity, and in order that we might obtain what you promise, make us love what you command. » Not 'keep your command-

ments ' as if these were impersonal rules to be observed — but LOVE what you (a person) command. One is the prayer of the heart that through faith, hope and charity, has come to liberty. The other is not. I think that very many christians have the idea that Christ came to help us, yes, but to oblige us to certain duties which otherwise would not have been necessary. He came in fact, to show us what it was to be fully human, freed, through faith and love, from all that makes a man less a man. He came to give rest to our souls, to lighten (through love and the gift of the Spirit) the burden that was already there — the burden of being human, of needing to struggle against egoism and apathy. It is faith in his love that lightens the load we carry, and that leads us out into the world of men who are really free.

St. Paul wrote a number of pasasges about the christian being liberated from the Law. From now on there is only one law: to love God and our neighbour. There is only one sin: the sin of refusing to receive the Spirit of life and love. There is only one death — that of refusing the Covenant and thereby refusing the Spirit of Christ. There is only one Saviour — who wills to pour out in our hearts the spirit of sonship. At baptism, Paul insists, we are called to liberty (cf. Rom. 7, 1-14; Gal. 5,1, 5,13).

In the Gospels we read that Christ was asked: ' Should we worship on Garazim or in Jerusalem '. His words in reply were: ' Worship wherever you will — provided that you worship in spirit and in truth '. ' What shall we say before the judges? ' they asked him; and he said: ' The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say '. ' What must we do to have eternal life? ' Reply: ' Look at the Good Samaritan who

was a long way behind the scribes and Pharisees when it came to observing the Law — and go thou and do as he did, in unselfish love'.

Has the Law, then, no meaning? The reply to this question needs to be considered carefully, for it has important applications to our present situation as religious. (It has important consequences for formation, also). The Law is a pedagogue. It has a role to play — that of teaching, forming, disciplining until we grow to true Christian liberty. It is necessary to pass through a stage of the Law, but the Spirit of Christ liberates us from subjection to the Law as pedagogue and tutor. He does this by leading us to follow Christ readily and generously, loving Him and loving what he commands.

The Good Samaritan has fulfilled the Law, but is above the Law.

Zacchaeus had fulfilled the Law, but goes beyond the Law in sharing his goods with others.

However we are never freed from human nature; and during this life we are never totally freed from human nature's inclination to sin and self-seeking. The Law, even when it has fulfilled its tutorial and pedagogical role, still has a role to play even for those who live habitually above and beyond the Law. On the German autobahns, on the edge of the road there is a strip of specially designed concrete surface which gives off a high warning sound when your car-tyres run on to them. This is a warning to the careless, sleepy or distracted driver that he is running off the road. The law performs this function for us now — it is a signal that we have deserted the Spirit

of Christ, that we are not following the way that he indicates. It is a limit, warning us to look again at Christ and his will. Whenever we run up hard against the law, this is a sign that we have not been attentive to the Spirit of Christ. We have to learn to look for Him again. Whenever we fall back into categories of what is 'permitted' and what is 'forbidden', we show that we are not living in the liberty of the Spirit.

He who loves his neighbour in Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ with a disinterested, altruistic love does not have to ask what is allowed and what is forbidden by the commandments. The commandments of not robbing, not killing, not committing adultery no longer exist. But whenever I fall back under the Law, it is a sign that I have deserted the Spirit of Christ. This can happen in many areas. 'Am I obliged to go to Mass on Sundays?' Or, for religious; « How often am I obliged to go to Mass? » « How far can I go in friendships with women? » « Am I obliged to talk to my brothers in community? » « Am I justified in telling Superiors that I am going to ignore their directives? » People who ask these questions have not grown to freedom. They have not experienced the love that liberates.

The Law still exists; it is the vigilant witness which denounces my sin, my infidelity to the Spirit. Its value is that it is the vigilant witness in our existential life-situations. The liberty which Christ gives does not *abolish* the law; it *frees* us from the law as burden IF we accept the gift of the Spirit. Whenever we forsake the Spirit, whenever we start thinking selfishly, we fall back under the law.

As religious we are called to live more intimately the grace of sonship and the call to liberty which every christian receives at baptism. Therefore we are called to live more intimately, and more evidently, the truth and the love that set us free. Fr. Rondet has recently written a book in which he sustains the thesis that the religious life is one which is and manifests a special living of this liberty. To some extent of course, this thesis has to be accepted. And it is helpful to think out its application: Consecrated chastity sets us free to love God and men in a special way; and it frees us from the obsession with sex and the captivity which affects many people in our world.

Poverty sets us free from the feverish chase after this world's goods; and it frees us for service. By obedience we are freed from the need to assert ourselves, and freed for mission in the service of the Gospel.

If we are to live freely beyond the law, we have to live profoundly our own charism. We have to be receptive to the Spirit who is given to us from the Heart of Christ to interiorize in our hearts the spirit of love, service and courage that we find in his heart. We need attentiveness to the Spirit to be freed from what otherwise would be the weight of institutionalism. « The institution » has almost become a dirty word today. But a Protestant theologian, from Taizé, has some good observations to make in this regard. He says that the young often confuse organization with institution. As St-Exupéry said: « Order does not create life; but life does create order ». Every group of men (church or society) needs organization. But the organization can become heavy; it can become

institution with laws and structures playing too strong a role. This happens whenever the Spirit is no longer the life of the organization. We have thrown off some of the laws and got rid of some of the structures.

A valid and pertinent question is:

Have we merely abolished laws, or have we been freed to live above the law? Have we grown in the spirit of Christ to full christian liberty in our religious life? Would that the answer were 100% affirmative for all of us!

Let us have a look at a few areas:

1) We have got rid of a lot of community structures and rules, of control from on top. At the General and Provincial levels we have less organization, less directives; and we no longer have an unquestioning obedience. What do we have as a result: do we have only groups of individuals, each one looking out for himself? Or do we have a deep sense of belonging, in fraternal charity — 'because I want to'?

2) We had rules about times and forms of prayer, community and personal. Many of these have gone. What has been the result? — a better prayer in the Spirit? You hear it said at times: « If there is no enforceable rule that says I should pray, then who says I must? » If the Spirit of Christ within me does not say so, then I have not profited by my time under the law; I have not grown under it. It has not served me as pedagogue or tutor.

3) Once we had obedience to appointments given with little consultation. What do we have now? A number of irremovable religious? A number of people each 'doing his own thing'. Instead of 'obedience' many

of our religious have gladly begun to use the word co-responsibility? The word is there, but what of the reality? How seriously have you assumed, in the province, a share of responsibility for anything outside your own little area and your own interests?

4) We used to have rules about obligatory recreations. What were they for? Have you passed to a stage of thoughtful concern for your brother's human needs, his hopes and his fears?

I suggest that privately and in community we would profit very much by thinking through the application of these principles to all areas of our religious life v.g. poverty, chastity (especially as regards reading, films) and so on. How much have we grown, in the Spirit to full christian living in liberty and love?

We cannot return to the old laws. Very few of us would even want to. Our sole security for the future is in fidelity to the spirit of Christ and our own response — from which the word *responsibility* comes: response to a vision. Our full liberation will come only when totally possessed by the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With the limited human nature that we have, in the environment of a world suggesting all kinds of liberties, we need some form of law that will serve as pedagogue and alarm to lead us back to Christ when we have strayed from his Spirit. What shall it be?

We must find the answer to this question in a shared seeking. In our parable, we saw that there were two questions: one regarding backbone, and the other regarding environment.

The environment that we need is the community. How do we build a community of brothers who are understanding and attentive to human needs; attentive to the demands of charity, fidelity and co-responsibility? A community where one feels one is living in a community of faith in Christ. How do we make community a place where we keep trying to live out our commitment to our brothers in Christ, with a great respect for other persons? This is the kind of environment that we must have. And what is the backbone that we need? Since we're not long out of our shells, I propose a very primitive backbone of four segments only: we shall have to discover the others as we grow in liberty.

Firstly, I would say that a necessary segment is our charism interiorised, willed and lived so that we can be sacraments of a faithful love, not just a sentimental love. A compassionate love, yes, but a love that tries to be a sacrament of the love of God that is forever faithful.

The second element is prayer. If we don't pray because we want to, then we haven't learnt to believe in the love of Christ.

It is up to us to work out what particular measure of prayer we need as individuals and community.

A third element is a certain determination, because as Father Chevalier said, « courage is a virtue of the heart of Christ ». We need the determination, the belief that we can give meaning to our lives.

Few of us achieve spectacular things. But if each of us, with determination, tries to do what he can then

the end result may not be spectacular but at least it will have value.

Finally, devotion to the Holy Spirit lived a little more fully than we have done, is part of a new backbone.

Most of us need to appreciate more the role of the Spirit of Christ in our lives. In writing on the Heart of Christ today, the biblical-traditional element of the Spirit being given to us from the pierced heart of Christ is being re-stressed. In the past, because of the emphasis on the teaching authority of the Church, many of us did not develop the habit of looking to the Spirit for light and guidance. If Catholics had a doubt or problem, they asked what the Popes had said, and what the Councils had taught. This is not bad, but where is the confidence in the promise of Christ that when we have difficulties, the Spirit will bring to our minds all the things that we need to know?

Devotion to Our Lady, in its external expression, varies from one country to another, from one century to another. I think that today, most MSC would find it hard to repeat some of the phrases used by Fr. Chevalier and his early companions, v.g. that giving Our Lady a new title was to add a further jewel to her crown. Today, in general, devotion to Mary is expressed more soberly and more simply, and thus probably more effectively. I think it worth quoting the following text from a « Rule for a New Brother » got out by a certain religious community:

« Mary will have her own place in your life.
You can not separate her from the Lord
who chose her as his mother and his bride.

She is the selfless space where God became man;
she is the silence in which God's word can be heard.
She is the free woman, subject to none, not even to
the powers of evil.

She is the image of the Church,
Her self-effacing service will guide you to the
Lord.
Her faith and fidelity are a model for your life.

She has trodden all the paths of our human existence,
She has gone through darkness and suffering,
through the abyss of loneliness and pain.

She is the little creature
through whom God's grandeur shines out;
She is the poor one filled with divine riches.
She is wholly grace
and grace for you.

Then take your part joyfully in the prophecy of Scripture: « Behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed. »

« She will have her own place in your life ».
For the MSC, this place will be between the Christ who reveals the love and kindness of God, and the world in need. It was she who first and most faithfully believed in the love of God who willed to send his Son into the world as Saviour. In her love (which was the most wonderful response to his) she was most intimately united with the Person of Christ, most fully sharing in his salvific mission. At the foot of the Cross, she gazed on him whom they had pierced, and was given to us as mother.

We shall see her as touched with the splendour of God's love, of the « Sun of justice coming into the world ». We shall see her as the specially loved Woman, the « archetype of the Church » in the image of some of the Fathers. This, in spite of its complicated sound, was a very beautiful idea taken from Platonic philosophy. It was as if God, before making the Church, first thought out and made the perfect miniature which would later be realized in the Church: Mary the spotless bride, loved, redeemed, assumed.

Each of us has to reflect on the particular place she will have in his life. It is clear that she lived to perfection the ideals which we accept and try to live. She believed most strongly in the love of God; she responded to it most generously, and she lived in the fullest personal intimacy the love for Christ and the Father that is the soul of spirituality and prayer. She was the « faithful virgin »; and we can think of St. Bernard's beautiful tribute to Mary who suffered so deeply under the cross, and the magnificent *fideliter* which he gives in answer to the question: And did she not still believe?

We have reflected on our call to be poor in spirit: 'She is the little creature through whom God's grandeur shines forth; she is the poor one filled with divine riches'.

We have thought about the call to liberty: 'She is the free woman', freed from all sin and selfishness, freed for love and service.

May she help us in every way to be MSC, believing in the love symbolized by the human heart she gave to her Son, faithful and free in our response; generous in our service; following Christ with courage, and yet humbly, poor in spirit, and yet filled with the joy and peace that ring through Mary's Magnificat. Let us take our part joyfully in the prophecy of Scripture: Behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

We have reflected on the need for prayer. She was the one who 'pondered in her heart' all the things she had heard in attentiveness to God's word and God's ways. In love, she had learned to live in God, and, in

a unique way, to let God live in her, and through her to come to the world's redemption.

For these reasons Fr. Chevalier said that she was the first Missionary of the Sacred Heart. May she inspire and help us who are called to be M.S.C. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, pray for us.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this book I should like to refer back to the beginning, specifically to the sub-title: Reflections on MSC Spirituality. No complete or exhaustive treatment was intended. Other aspects of MSC spirituality could have been discussed; far more could have been said about any single subject, for example, missionary activity, justice, solidarity with the poor in the world of today, celibacy, prayer, Our Lady, etc.

Many good things have been written about these matters; much more will be written. However, no matter how much is published, there still remains, for each man, his personal call to discover in his own life the place he must give to all the elements which blend into his own spiritual life.

The purpose of this book has been simply to show that, from our MSC charism as starting point a unified and integrated spirituality follows. This spirituality has its special inspiration and dynamism, its strength and its demands. Within the basic principles given by the Founder it contains not only the possibility but also the call for adaptation. For this reason an attempt has been made to show how an MSC spirituality must take into account both modern strengths and modern weaknesses.

In a sense it is no more than an invitation to further research and discovery.

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