THE BASILIAN CHARISMS AND EDUCATION

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1. THE NOTION OF CHARISM

The term "charism" comes from the Greek *Charisma,* which means a gift, often a free gift or grace. In the epistles of Saint Paul *Charisma* can refer to the free gift of salvation to all people, or it can mean special gifts given to particular people. These gifts usually are abilities to do things, and are given for the common good. Some receive the gift of prophecy, some the gift of teaching, or contributing money, healing, performing miracles, speaking in tongues, performing acts of mercy. These abilities are given by the Holy Spirit not to be used as private property but to build up the Body of Christ.

The term "charism" is used sometimes to refer to the particular gifts of a religious congregation. Here it would be well to distinguish two slightly different types of charism, what I will call the occupational charisms and the qualitative charisms.

2. OCCUPATIONAL CHARISM

By "occupational charism" I mean simply the type of work in which a particular religious congregation specializes. The list of such charisms in the history of religious life is not long: contemplation, preaching the faith to non-Christians, especially in foreign lands, preaching to the fallen away at home, education, care of the sick, and a few more specialized works for the poor and unfortunate, such as ransoming captives or distributing alms.

The Basilian occupational charism has been principally education. We were founded in France to educate seminarians during a period when the government made that work difficult. We came to North America to teach in a school in Toronto, and most of our men are still are involved in education.

As part of the renewal of religious life mandated by the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation of Saint Basil published a basic document called *The Basilian Way of Life.* Paragraph 3 of this document states that: "Ours is an active, apostolic community ... which seeks the glory of God in every form of priestly activity, especially in the works of education and evangelization."

Here, notice, the term "evangelization" has been added to "education".

Evangelization means the proclamation of the good news of salvation by Jesus Christ, and the acceptance of that good news by people in such a way that they turn to God present in Christ. To be evangelized is to become Christian, not merely by external ritual but by accepting the saving message of the Gospel.

For Basilians evangelization is not a new work to be added on to education. It is a dimension of all the work that we do, including our principal work of education. A few decades ago Catholic schools for the most part reinforced the beliefs and values that students had already accepted in the home and the parish; Catholic schools gave students a better intellectual grasp of those truths and values they had already accepted. Today many of our students are not really evangelized. Their beliefs and

values are products more of secular society than of home or Church. If we continue to teach Christianity in the way that was successful forty years ago, we may find that our students simply are not buying it any more. We may, as a result, then try to hold our students' attention by down-playing Christian belief and values and concentrating on secular learning and a vague humanistic set of values. Then we lose our reason for existence as Catholic schools. A third alternative, surely the correct one, is to grapple with the task of evangelization as a dimension of education.

Not only should evangelization be an aspect of our work of education; education should be an aspect of our work of evangelization. When Basilians went to Mexico in the 1950's they found that many of the people who had been entrusted to their care were not active members of the parish. They needed evangelization. Led by Father Max Murphy, Basilians responded by developing a very successful method of instruction that has been adopted by others in Latin America. Families that go through this process of instruction really do find their faith renewed. Currently Basilians in Mexico are developing a program of adult education to supplement this family instruction. Given their background and training, it was natural for them to approach the problem of evangelization by way of education.

3. QUALITATIVE CHARISMS

By a "qualitative charism" I mean a sort of collective character of a religious congregation. It includes attitudes, interests, priorities and ways of doing things.

a) lack of a central founding personality

Some religious congregations were founded by distinctive central personalities such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola or Vincent de Paul. Such central personalities give a strong, distinctive quality to the congregations that they have founded, and one can get a fairly good idea of the congregations' qualitative charisms by looking at the founders. With Basilians it doesn't work quite that way.

The founding of the Basilians involved two different events. The first, of course, is the foundation in France in the first decades of the Nineteenth Century. That was a gradual process, a sort of foundation by committee. A group of diocesan priests gathered together to do a work - the education of seminarians, at a time when the French government made such work difficult. The first Basilians, after they had already come together to begin their work but before they had formed a religious congregation, lived for a time in a small village in the hills of central France. That particular village was chosen because it had only one access road by which government troops could approach. When the troops showed up in the neighbourhood the local people would send a signal and the priests would disappear into the surrounding neighbourhood before the soldiers could find them.

I visited that town last December with Fr. Jacques Deglesne, a confrere who was born in that neighbourhood. He told me about an ancestor of his who had befriended these fugitive priests. At one of the early visits of the government soldiers this M. Deglesne invited the officers into his large home for a feast. As they were departing he apologized to the commanding officer for not being able to give them a better meal. He had had very little time to prepare to welcome the soldiers with proper hospitality. From now on, he said, let me know a day or two ahead of time and we can prepare properly. So from then on, the priests had advance notice

before the government troops came up the road searching for fugitives.

The early Basilians did not lack for strong members; but there was no one strong personality among them who impressed a distinctive character upon the little group. They were just a group of good diocesan priests who got together to do a difficult and important work, and the way of life that they adopted was a mixture of things borrowed from the universal law of the Church and from other religious congregations, with a large dose of common sense reaction to the needs of the time.
North American Basilians are the products not only of this French foundation but also of a development that took place on this side of the Atlantic. During the early part of the twentieth century it became clear that between the confreres from France and those recruited in America there were irreconcilable differences about how to proceed in the New World. This ended eventually in a separation. During the 1920's the Basilians in North America established themselves as a separate religious congregation, and they also adopted the regular vow of poverty according to canon law, which the original French foundation had not done.

Again, this North American "refoundation" did not lack for strong characters. Indeed, one reason why the differences between France and North America were so troublesome was because there were strong personalities on both sides. However, there was no one personality that impressed a particular, distinctive quality on the congregation on this side of the Atlantic. Again, these were men already gathered together to do a work that they saw to be important. Again, they developed a way of life and work that borrowed much from the universal law of the Church and from other religious congregations, combined with common-sense reactions to local needs and situations. At times these reactions took innovative directions, as evidenced in establishing a Catholic college federated with the University of Toronto, a bold step that prepared the way for similar arrangements elsewhere in Canada. The founding of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto was another successful experiment with something quite new and different.

b) guidance by the Universal Church

Lacking a single strong forming personality, the Basilians ended up borrowing from others. I would say that in borrowing from others, North American Basilians have looked first to the Universal Church. I sometimes try to explain this by saying that Basilians are like Ontario farmers; - it was mainly Ontario farmers and small town boys who were the early North American Basilians. (This is not quite the same as being like Saskatchewan farmers. Perhaps to be like Saskatchewan farmers is an ideal to which Basilians can aspire. Right now, prior to the parousia, we are more like Ontario farmers.) Now there is one thing about farmers - when something has to be done they just go ahead and do it. When it is time to do the seeding, you don't hold a meeting about it. You do the seeding. When the wheat is ripe you don't check your master plan or consult a committee. You harvest. You respond to the obvious need.
But the intelligent farmer will look for the best equipment and methods possible to do his work. Partly he will learn from experience. But he also knows that the government runs experimental farms that develop new kinds of wheat, and that the Department of Agriculture has experts who can advise you about the rotation of crops and what kind of phosphates or nitrates are needed by your soil.

This is more or less what the North American Basilians did. They knew some things

from their own experience, but they also looked for help and guidance, and the fact is that they looked mainly to the Universal Church. Large parts of the Rule and Constitution of the refounded North American Basilians were lifted out of Canon Law and these were interspersed with common sense observations. When they looked for intellectual masters they looked again to the Universal Church, which since Pope Leo XIII had been stressing that Catholics should adopt Thomas Aquinas for guidance amid the intellectual muddle of the times. Basilians did not adopt Aquinas in a merely mechanical and dutiful way. They looked for the best teachers of Thomism they could find. I have heard that when Father Henry Carr was trying to strengthen the faculty at Saint Michael's College, he talked to Father William Murray, who had been studying in France. Who, Father Carr asked, are the best Catholic philosophers in the world? Father Murray replied that there was a lot of excitement in France about two fairly young men, Etienne Gilson, an historian of philosophy currently popular in Paris, and a firebrand convert from agnosticism named Jacques Maritian. All right, Fr. Carr is said to have replied. Those are the two we will get.

When they looked to the Universal Church for intellectual guidance the Basilians of the '20's, '30's and '40's were also introduced to the social encyclicals of the popes. Basilians like Basil Sullivan, Ed Garvey and Ralph MacDonald did a great deal to make the social encyclicals better known in Canada. When I came to Saint Thomas More College in 1950 I quickly discovered the excitement of the notion of the transformation of social and economic life on the lines of the Church's teaching.
When the Basilians went to Mexico City in the 1950's they took with them this habit of looking for help to the best that the Universal Church had to offer. When it became clear that many of the people in their parish needed more instruction, Fathers Max Murphy and Frank Launtrie looked to the catechetical movement that was developing elsewhere in the Church. They adapted the "Come to the Father" series developed in Canada to the needs of Mexico. Within several years they sent one of their younger confreres, Richard Ramirez, to study with one of the leading catechists in the world in order to bring back to Mexico the best that could be found elsewhere. Presently our priests in Mexico are working to adapt the best that the Church has to offer in adult education, the RCIA, to the needs of the people they serve.

c) spirituality

The founders or refounders of the Basilians did not develop a distinctive spirituality, nor did they adopt one particular spirituality for the congregation. This meant that Basilian spirituality has been eclectic. One more or less constant factor, I think, is that in their borrowing from others, Basilians have for the most part looked to the classic spiritual writers rather than to current fashions. The early French Basilians had been diocesan priests, and the spirituality that they learned in the seminary was greatly influenced by the 17th Century French School which included such great names as Vincent de Paul, Jean Eudes, Cardinal de Berulle and Jean-Jacques Olier. In North America Father Louis Bondy preached a demanding spirituality that borrowed from St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Those who were uncomfortable with the Gallic rigour of Bondy found spiritual sustenance in the Benedictine tradition as mediated by Abbot Marmion or in Cistercians such as Eugene Boylan and Thomas Merton. This lack of a prescribed spiritual approach has advantages in that it allows each individual to find what is best suited to himself. The individual unwilling to engage in the search energetically,

however, is likely to be left behind.

d) respect for the intellect

Having been steered by the Church towards Thomas Aquinas, Basilians generally learned to have a healthy respect for the intellect. By this I don't mean an emphasis on academic accomplishments, or the notion that intelligence makes you a more admirable person than are those less gifted. I mean a profound appreciation that the truth is important, that truth is not to be subordinated to any other purpose. I mean an enjoyment of discovery of the truth in any area. I mean a conviction that religion must begin and end in knowledge.
I remember in 1962 or '63 at a public gathering one of the brightest students in St. Thomas More College stated that the Basilians had taught her to be critical, and that this meant also being critical of the Church. I was a little bit surprised at the time, because none of the Basilians that she had met were particularly critical of the Catholic Church. (Fathers Paul Mallon, Joe O'Donnell, Bob Finn and Peter Swan did not strike me as typical rebels.) But I think I understand what she was saying. She had been taught in class not to be afraid of questions, to go ahead and ask them. Behind that confidence in asking questions was a respect for the intellect that had become so much a part of her teachers that they might not have noticed that they were conveying it to their students.

e) the whole person

Those whom the Basilians had chosen as their masters taught them that you do not educate the intellect in isolation. It is the whole person who is educated. The Thomistic tradition does not split the intellect from the will and emotions in the way that much later thinking has done. The will is the intellectual appetite. One appeals to the will through the intellect. Cardinal Newman distinguished between real knowledge, that moves the knower, from merely notional knowledge, that leaves the knower untouched. Jacques Maritain first arrived on the intellectual scene in France with his thesis on the degrees of knowledge, in which he shows how the so-called "objective" knowledge that is supposed to leave the knower uninvolved is only one of many kinds of intellectual knowing. He knew, too, that there are many kinds of co-natural knowledge that come only when the knower has well disposed emotions and will. In the Thomistic tradition, as in Newman, as in Plato, as in any view of the human person that does not suffer from schizophrenia, the knowledge that is most worthwhile, most true to reality, is the knowledge that, while it floods the mind with understanding, at the same time moves and directs the heart.

A primary way of educating the whole person is humanistic learning. The education that Basilians have received and imparted has tended to be broadly humanistic. We have taught and continue to teach the liberal arts and the social and physical sciences. We have been taught to respect and treasure the truth found in all of those ways. I think, for example, of Father Stan Murphy, who founded the Christian Culture Series at Assumption College in Windsor, Ontario. He used to arouse a great deal of excitement each year as he brought great artists, singers, poets, novelists and scholars to the Detroit-Windsor area. I remember Roy Campbell talking to us scholastics when he was in town for a lecture in the Christian Culture series, his talk including more or less equal parts on poetry, Christian living and

African game
hunting. We had a sense that we were being enriched by contact with people who lived deeply the gifts that God has given to raise our lives above the ordinary.

If any of you are regular listeners to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts from New York, sponsored by Texaco, you are familiar with Fr. Owen Lee. If you have heard him commenting on an opera by Wagner you have heard humanistic teaching at its best. Fr. Lee weaves together themes from the classics, theology, opera and any number of other sources to show how opera not only entertains but deals with the eternal questions and truths that form the core of a truly human existence. The musical genius of Owen Lee is something for which no religious community can take credit, but that he expresses this genius in the context of broad, humanistic teaching is part of his being a Basilian.

At its best, and that is much of the time, Basilian involvement in athletics has been part of this emphasis on education of the whole person. Of the Basilian teachers who have had the most impact on their students, a surprising number have been coaches, and much better than average coaches.

Father David Bauer was elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame, largely because he initiated the concept of a hockey team of amateurs who would train to play in the Olympic Games while also getting an education. I suspect that those who elected him to the Hall of Fame had mainly in mind that he introduced Canada to a new dimension of international hockey. That is not what Dave Bauer had in mind when he started the Canadian Olympic hockey team, however. He was convinced that there was a noble human and even Christian meaning possible for athletics, and that this was being neglected. Those who played for him on that first Olympic hockey team, Brian Conacher, Terry O'Malley, Marshall Johnson and the rest, had to live for two or three years in run-down, crowded facilities on the campus of the University of British Columbia and they claimed that it was an educational experience that changed their lives, and changed them much for the better. Father Dave had a vivid sense that athletic performance has much to do with character, and that character has much to do with your relation to God.
Father David Bauer was part of a tradition. There have been many others. I think, for example, of Father Tim Whelihan, who was awarded the Order of Canada before he died several years ago. What I remember most about him is not that he won any number of Alberta High School football championships. I remember him, a man in his mid-seventies, dropping into Saint Mark's College on his way back from doing pastoral work in Alaska, and staying up half the night swapping stories and laughing with several graduate students that he had never met before. The next morning one of the students, a man from Africa, said to me: "Fr. Whelihan, he is a great man." Fr. Whelihan's secret for success as a coach was, surely, that he liked people and wanted them to enjoy life as much as he did. Winning football championships was one way of enjoying life, but learning to become a better person in the effort was a much better way to become aware of what is worthwhile in life. Any of my confreres could give you a list, a sort of pantheon of Basilian coaches for whom the playing field was a wonderful opportunity to teach.

At their best, Basilians have found opportunities to teach the whole person in many other areas. Saint Thomas More College for many years enjoyed the theatrical presence of Father Joe OTDonnell, whose Shakespearean productions were not only excellent drama but an introduction into something both enriching and exciting.

Similarly, I can think of Basilian directors of music and debating who had the same goal for their students, the education of whole persons in their many talents and levels of activity.

f) association with students

This mention of the impact of these Basilians on students brings me to another aspect of Basilian education as I experienced it in the 1950's and 1960's - a close association with students. Partly this was an attitude in the classroom of friendliness and availability. But there was also an emphasis on informal contact outside of class, where one did not play the role of teacher, where one was more likely just to be oneself. When I began to teach high school our work by no means ended with teaching classes. We coached; we attended student activities and games; we just hung around our classroom after school until the students went home. When I was at Aquinas Institute in Rochester in 1957 there was a rule that students were not allowed to use the gym unless there was a faculty member present. So there was a regular ritual on Friday evenings. We scholastics would have just settled down to watch Gunsmoke, or some such program, and the doorbell would ring. A minute later someone would come into the room and announce: "Gallagher, your friends are here." So I would groan and head off to put on my running shoes to join the neighbourhood kids for basketball. I always used to hope they would forget that it was Friday night, but once I got going I was always glad to be with them.
When I came to Saint Thomas More College to teach in 1961 I had just completed a lot of years of study, which is a very private sort of activity most of the time, but I had to change my habits quickly. Father Bob Montague gently but firmly invited me to be present for some time every day in the Newman Club. I soon noticed something quite extraordinary. The number of students who hung around the Newman Club was in direct proportion to the number of hours that priests spent there. I suppose for the students it was the presence of the priests that made it different, a reason to be there rather than at some other university facility.

I am not saying that I myself, or all Basilians, have always practiced this habit of associating on an informal basis with students. I am saying that when we failed to do so, we knew we were failing; and we have always looked up to the Basilians in each school or college who excelled at this sort of thing.

In the middle of this century we added Saint John Boscoe to our list of patrons precisely to highlight this aspect of our work, that education means being close to students. In a recent discussion among Basilians involved in higher education several men pointed out that this emphasis on closeness to students may sometimes mean sacrificing the academic prestige that comes from volumes of publications.

g) collaboration

Mainly because we are a small congregation, without one impressive founder, having to borrow much, we Basilians have been, for the most part, outward looking. To find answers, to find heroes, to find guidance, to find people to get things done, we have tended to look beyond the Basilian congregation. Sir Bertram Windle, Marshal McLuhan, J. Francis Leddy and many other lay people, as well as religious of other congregations, have provided leadership to Basilians and have co-operated with Basilians. At times at the Pontifical Institute in Toronto there have been almost as many Dominicans on faculty as Basilians. The "Violetta" Sisters have played an

essential part in our work in Latin America.
One of the principal results of collaboration by Basilians is that while we have learned from others we have also helped those others to get their message across. It was especially through the agency of the Basilian Fathers in the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies that the voice of Etienne Gilson began to be heard in North America. There was a time in the life of Marshal McLuhan when, besides his wife and a few of his students, perhaps only a dozen people in the world were interested in what he had to say, and maybe half of them were Basilians. At St. Thomas More College Father Ian Boyd has managed to establish a successful journal to extend the influence of another person from whom we Basilians have learned much, Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

I suppose the most innovative form of collaboration for which the Congregation of Saint Basil has been responsible is the federated college within a provincial university. This model, worked out first between Saint Michael's College and the University of Toronto, was later repeated elsewhere across Canada. It is not a perfect system by any means. It severely limits what can be done. But it has several great advantages, not the least of which is that it makes Catholic higher education available to many people who otherwise could not afford it. Furthermore, it has ensured that Catholic higher education in English-speaking Canada never passed through a "ghetto" phase. We have had the challenge of educating in the public arena. We must deal with the questions raised by professors of other religions or of those who oppose religion.

This atmosphere has not only allowed us to help educate Catholics in the kind of pluralist milieu in which they will live. It has also given us an opportunity to reach out to others who otherwise would not hear what we have to say. This was brought home to me in 1982 when I attended the graduation of the Faculty of Nursing of the University of Alberta. I discovered that I had taught three of the five medalists, about one half of those who graduated with honors, and about one quarter of the rest; and I was only one of several at Saint Joseph's College who were teaching courses taken by nurses at that university.

Basilians are educated not in specifically clerical institutions but with lay people. Our associates, in the first phase of their formation, take their undergraduate education in regular university programs. Our seminarians study in a Faculty of Theology which, canonically, is Basilian, but in which Basilians constitute a small minority of students or faculty. Well before the Second Vatican Council our Basilian leaders had developed many forms of collaboration with the laity, had recognized that lay persons have a central role in the ministry of education.
I believe that at the present moment in history we Basilians have to look at a further aspect of this charism of collaboration. Within a faculty composed mainly of lay teachers, what is the particular gift that Basilians can bring? What contribution can and should be made by a religious congregation in this situation? Partly we can learn the answer from the past, but we also have to take account of the changed situation of the present.

4. CONCLUSION

By choosing to talk about charisms I have been able to confine myself to the positive side of the Basilian tradition, to the particular gifts of the Congregation of Saint Basil. I have not had to talk about our failures or about what may be chronic

weaknesses or dangers in our kind of approach. We could, I suppose, spend a good deal of time on this negative side, but I have the suspicion that this has already been done frequently enough in one form or another.

Basilian charisms have not been the gift of one or two strong personalities. They have developed by rather ordinary, good men responding to particular situations. Our Basilian "occupational" charism is education, with a realization that in our day education must involve evangelization. Our "qualitative" charisms are not so easily summarized or even defined. We have looked outside of ourselves, to the universal Church for direction and resources, and at the same time have responded in a common sense way to local needs and conditions, without too many preconceptions about what is or is not possible. We have learned a strong respect for the life of the intellect and have tapped into the great intellectual tradition of Thomas Aquinas, with the help of his best modern disciples. We have chosen as masters many other great Catholic thinkers, such as Newman and Chesterton. We have focused on the education of the whole person, have respected humanistic learning. We have worked with, learned from and helped out a great variety of non-Basilian colleagues. We have prided ourselves in associating closely with our students.

That is the ideal. Then there is the reality, which often falls far short of the ideal. Charisms in a religious congregation are not like real estate that can be passed on intact to the next generation. Charisms are traditions, gifts that are made available, encouragements, ideals, that must be personally appropriated by each individual if they are to continue. For example, the Thomistic tradition that I have so valued in my life came to me as a gift from my Basilian predecessors. I did not stumble upon it by chance. It was there, something offered, honoured and appreciated by my teachers and confreres, so it was easy for me to accept it. But I had to reappropriate it for myself in order for it to live in me.

In the real world, the charism is not always lived fully. Yet it remains as a tradition that urges me to become better than I am. It is a corporate character that makes the whole congregation greater than the sum of its parts. When the charism has been left to languish at any time, it can be revived. The Second Vatican Council encouraged all religious communities to revive the charisms of the founders. If in any way the Basilian charisms in education have been left to languish, I think they are well worth reviving.