

Section 4

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

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

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

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

Or, as it has been said by Fr. Dennis Murphy MSC: *"To share in Father Chevalier's own 'experience of the Spirit' is to be given the gift of rediscovering*

today his enthusiasm, an enthusiasm capable of carrying him through extraordinary difficulties and disappointment.”

A reflective moment

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

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

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

(Dennis Murphy MSC)