

**Booklet 5**  
**Poverty, Celibacy, Obedience**  
**A Saint?**

**1.**  
**The Vow of poverty**

Like all the vows, evangelical poverty makes demands on the heart, on life: it has a soul and a body, that is, it is first of all the fruit of faith and love, and after that it becomes a style of life. To get in touch with Basilio's poverty we will first listen to some witnesses. We will then ask Basilio himself to tell us how he saw poverty, how he lived it in faith, and what his poverty was as superior general.

**1.1 The witnesses**

*"...these men who under the action of the Holy Spirit offer everything they have to others, men who constantly live attentive to the good of others..."* We note these words which were part of a quotation posted at the general house at the time of Basilio's funeral for this is exactly how most of his Brothers and friends had seen him: a man who gave of himself unreservedly. This was poverty indeed.

Let us get to know Brother Basilio, the poor man, by listening to those who lived with him and took note of the different ways his poverty was observed.

Brother Hilario Schwab submitted his testimony in two parts, *Superior and Pastor*, and *A Poor Man*. In the second part, finely nuanced, we read: "From Basilio's multifaceted rich personality I would like to zero in on his evangelical poverty which I always admired and which I still see in him. I listened to him talk on poverty during a full week during a course on spirituality, but I also saw how he conducted himself in every circumstance as a man who was truly poor in the Gospel sense. This poverty allowed him to cultivate with diligence all his personal talents of nature and grace. What comes to mind is the image of 'the tree planted near waters that always gives fruit in due time'<sup>1</sup> A second characteristic of his poverty was that he was always ready to serve the Church and his Brothers, and thirdly, he constantly sought after the higher good. A final characteristic of his

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 1

poverty was his sensitivity and joy in his fraternal relationships, just by being with the Brothers, encouraging them, urging them on, listening to them or simply enjoying their company. God alone knows the extraordinary amount of good that Brother Basilio, son of Mary and St Marcellin, did for the Church, the world and his Brothers.”<sup>2</sup>

For Brother Sebastiao Ferrarini, who worked closely with him, Basilio “had a great sense of poverty. He gave us simple but meaningful examples of the state of the world. Basilio stated that it was unthinkable for a Marist community to spend Christmas without thinking of the poor.”<sup>3</sup>

Brother Alessandro di Pietro, Procurator and Postulator General, reported how easily Basilio gave away gifts that he had received as superior general that were lying on his desk. «As a good psychologist and a connoisseur of the Brothers’ tastes, he spontaneously offered what pleased them with the smile and the words of affection that came naturally to him. Brothers came to know that it was imprudent to praise any of these things; immediately moved by his generous spirit, Basilio would invite the visitor to take whatever it was that he had tactlessly admired.”<sup>4</sup>

However, where Basilio really showed his poverty, that he possessed nothing for himself, was his patient and joyous listening to the Brothers who could come any time and stay with him as long as they wanted. He was no longer his own master; his all was for his Brothers. Concrete examples keep coming to mind.

Brother Victorino de Arce of Madrid had been sent to Mexico to help Brother Basilio at the novitiate and stayed with him until a short time before he died. Victorino wrote in dialogical style: “In front of my working desk hangs a little alarm clock that you know well. You gave it to me soon after I arrived in your country. I was not yet familiar with the times of sunrise and sunset. ‘This way you will sleep better,’ you told me. On the day before I left, when I wanted to return it to you, you simply said, ‘I have another clock like it; keep it, you will still need it.’ The clock was inscribed ‘Basilio Rueda Guzmán’. It had surely been a gift from one of his friends. ‘Thank you very much for the souvenir, I will keep it as a relic.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Br. Hilario Schwab, Cordoba, Argentina – Christmas 2001*

<sup>3</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 41

<sup>4</sup> *FMS-Message*, n° 19, May 1996. Spanish version, p. 45

<sup>5</sup> *Madrid Marista*, supplément n° 71, April 1996, p. 3

Brother Gabriel Michel remarked that Brother Basilio's policy towards the poor was so well known that the General House never sent away a beggar.<sup>6</sup> His novices recalled many cases when people were welcomed, taken care of for days or invited to the Brothers' table. In their programme, there was a time reserved for visits to the poor and the sick as part of their formation. All the novices agreed that Brother Basilio had been a very generous but exacting Brother. He was the first to do what he asked of them. When he asked anybody to become involved, he became involved with that Brother too. Sensitive to suffering, he invited us too to solidarity. On one occasion he exclaimed, "You'd have to be degenerate to refuse to go and work in a mission country!" He set up a special place in the novitiate to take in people in need whom we met during our apostolic activity. Brother Basilio lived his poverty but he was generous to others."<sup>7</sup>

Here is a specific example of his kindness for those in need. Brother Conrado Trascasa Garcia, who was Provincial of Madrid in Basilio's time, let us have this: "One day, he told me that he wanted to go to the Escorial and to return for lunch. All went normally until the return journey. We were nearing Madrid when we noticed a poorly dressed middle-aged person lying in a ditch. Basilio asked me to stop and he quickly got out. He saw that the man was not wounded, but that he had fainted for want of food. We put the man in the car and drove on. Reaching a subway station, he asked me, 'Do you have any money?' I opened my wallet and found six thousand pesetas. 'Let's stop near this bar so that he can have something to eat, and leave him the rest of the money. When we get back to the house, put this down on my account.' I guessed that he was not totally satisfied, but he had to travel that night. Still, he asked me, if it was not too much trouble, to stop by the bar to ask for news about the poor man. As expected, nobody at the bar knew him, and nobody was able to say what had become of him."<sup>8</sup>

All of us in the Congregation admired his capacity for work; it often made him stay up very late. Work, hard work, is necessarily one of the characteristics of those of profess the vow of poverty. An idle man can never be poor in spirit. Other traits often mentioned by his friends were his simplicity and his joy, two

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<sup>6</sup> *Je veux éveiller l'Aurore*, p.41

<sup>7</sup> *FMS Message* n° 19, May 1996, p. 50

<sup>8</sup> *Témoignage du Frère Conrado T. Garcia*, 24 November 2002

distinctive features of the soul who lives the first beatitude like Saint Francis of Assisi whom Basilio often spoke of in his talks.

## 1.2 The signs

Many events in Basilio's life give us insights into his love of poverty. Various ones come to mind at random. He admired a twelve-year old child who had become a shoe-shine boy to earn his living and provide his brothers with food. And he found a benefactor to help the boy go to school.<sup>9</sup> He invited the Brothers to help Mother Teresa whenever she needed lodgings or an introduction to charitable organisations.<sup>10</sup> When his first mandate was coming to an end, he was hoping to go and work in Mozambique or Angola<sup>11</sup>, because the Brothers of these two countries were living in conditions of great difficulty and poverty. His largest correspondence was with the Brothers of these two missions, to encourage them like a father, and to let them know his interest and affection. A religious sister told him of an adolescent in need of medical needs and school fees; Basilio asked the General Bursar to follow up this case and pay the expenses. He suggested to the publishing houses that sold his books that they pay the royalties to the poor. For years, he sent Mass stipends to an Argentinian priest who had financial difficulties. He followed up Brothers who left the Institute and cared for their social and economical situations; he often found work for them. Finding out that certain convents were short of money he sent them substantial aid every year.

We remember that in the spirit of the renewal required by Vatican II, he put two priorities in place: a preferential option for the poor and a systematic commitment to the missions.<sup>12</sup> On 15 July 1968, during the period between the two sessions of the general Chapter, he wrote a six-page circular on the missions. It is the fruit and the echo of his African journey, of his contact with a world in search of Christ although suffering from poverty. The purpose of the short circular is to invite the Chapter to put missionary work on the agenda and adopt a timetable for action so that “a serious, planned and progressive effort be made at the level of the whole institute during the Chapter.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See de first text in the Chapter on Charity

<sup>10</sup> Idem

<sup>11</sup> Registrated letter to Br. Spiridion

<sup>12</sup> *Circ. 2 january 1968*

<sup>13</sup> *Circ. sur les missions*, 15 July 1968, p. 9

In the same years, there was a war in Biafra, Nigeria - a civil war with all the inevitable atrocities. Basilio's response was to write on 10 February 1970: "For the last two years, we have followed with fraternal interest our Brothers' activities in that part of Nigeria known as Biafra. We have supported their work not only by our prayers, but also by generous contributions to allay the nation's sufferings and especially to feed the children who were dying of hunger."<sup>14</sup>

Brother Olivier Sentenne, General Bursar, at the general Conference in 1971 reported how the Institute had reacted to the two main requests of Basilio, from 1967 to 1971 the number of missionary Brothers increased by 98, that is, by 11.6%. The general administration disbursed \$US400, 000 to support different training houses and \$US163, 000 for the Nigerian needs. New missions were opened in Paraguay, Ivory Coast, Oceania and Amazonia.

In our study of the criteria of Basilio's wisdom we concluded that one of them was the person is absolute. We understand therefore how much Basilio would move away from the centre of the stage to make way for another. In his circular on *The Spirit of the Institute* he speaks of the virtues of humility and simplicity in such a way that we see full well that he himself was an extremely simple soul; he had the soul of the poor. Let us now see how he viewed poverty.

### **1.3 In the universe of evangelical poverty**

We may well ask if there is much point in examining the concept of poverty. Here, however, we get a glimpse of evangelical poverty as presented by a talented and holy man who really lived poverty. When we see Basilio's understanding of poverty we may renew our vision of this vow and our enthusiasm to live it in the way he describes it.

Basilio was very conscious of the danger of remaining at the theoretical level. "We have sometimes produced some beautiful literature on poverty, but when the time comes to practise it, we lose our courage! It often happens that those who speak most about poverty are the ones who spend most!"<sup>15</sup> Basilio said this in a conference that he repeated in all the Spanish retreats in 1972 and in many Latin

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<sup>14</sup> *Circ. sur le retour des missionnaires du Nigéria*, p. 27

<sup>15</sup> Conférence: Avila 1972 – *Bética Marista*, p. 148-149, May 1973

American countries - Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru – and later in Canada. It was clear that he thought that poverty should be a priority in the Congregation. Later he was to say that, as a return to poverty had been an appeal from the Council, then it was God's will. Let us allow him to explain to us how he understood evangelical poverty.

### **1.3.1 Created to be rich**

The horizon that he sketched came as something of a surprise to those who professed the vow of poverty. “Brothers, I belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. God gives himself totally, in all things and he created us that we may be rich, that we may possess.»<sup>16</sup> God's plan for each of us is full of grandeur and nobility; He wants us to be his sons, holy and without stain; He created man to be the king of creation. But we must know how to possess: God wants us to possess in a particular appropriate way, as lords, as sons, as brothers. God does not want bourgeois, victims of their own bourgeoisie, slaves, incapable of possessing without being possessed, without becoming slaves of things. He does not want people for whom the gift prevents them from seeing the Father. Similarly, he does not want persons who idolise God's gifts and renounce the Giver because of the gift. He wants persons who through the gift feel the giver, and jump for joy, as from a springboard, in gratitude to the Father.”<sup>17</sup> This was certainly a new vision of poverty for us: to know how to possess so that we may praise, thank, share and serve, so that the nobility that God granted us in making us lords, sons and brothers may be confirmed.

### **1.3.2 Evangelical poverty**

When our relationship to material and cultural goods is that of ‘lord, son or brother’ we are living the first beatitude, “Happy are the poor in spirit!” Evangelical poverty brings true values to the centre of things, “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven...”, and establishes a true hierarchy of values. Basilio distinguishes between a poverty that is the fruit of faith and love of Christ, and social or ideological poverty: “It is not a matter of sociological or Marxist poverty, nor of the poverty of someone who joins a group of poor people to hate his brothers, to launch the class struggle, to set up a revolutionary dialectic or to

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<sup>16</sup> Avila 1972 – *Bética Marista*, p. 147, May 1973

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

detonate a bomb in a building with all sorts of unforeseen consequences. There is a radical distance between evangelical poverty and these non-evangelical methods. As religious we have an informed vision of poverty; there can be nothing capricious about our actions. You will remember why I told you in a circular, ‘Anyone who entertains Marxist or Leninist ideas must choose between giving them up or ceasing to be a Marist Brother’ It has nothing to do with capitalism or socialism: we have made the vow of poverty.”<sup>18</sup>

### **1.3.3 Not a human choice.**

The great interior freedom that the first beatitude gives is offered to all Christians. However, some people, such as religious, are invited to live this beatitude in a more evident way and to bear witness to the whole Church. “There are certain people whom God touches through the Holy Spirit, inspiring them to profess evangelical poverty. It was in regard to these that Jesus said, ‘Happy are the poor!’ The Spirit attracts them so that they may train themselves to practise evangelical poverty and learn to live like the lilies of the fields. You and I have embraced this kind of poverty even though we knew it would not be easy.”<sup>19</sup> It is God himself who gives the heart of the poor and reveals the beauty of the first beatitude. But in this regard, human nature has lost its way and has given up.

### **1.3.4 The heart of evangelical poverty**

We welcome evangelical poverty and we find it appealing because through it God is seen, chosen and loved as the absolute treasure. Basilio asks, “What is the soul of poverty? It consists in a passionate love of God. There is no Christian poverty if it does not originate from a passion for God, a God who becomes all-important to me, the nucleus of my heart, my whole. That is what underlies the manner of living that accompanies the soul of the poor.”<sup>20</sup> We are in the realm of love. It is love alone that justifies the choice and the life of evangelical poverty. We are also in the realm of worship since God is now seen as the first one in our lives: “Poverty is our way of living God-centred lives, of living in our pilgrimage and in our relationships with our brothers the theological virtues of hope and charity vis-

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<sup>18</sup> Avila 1972. Bética Marista, p. 147, May 1973

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Br. Basilio’s Conference – Avila 1972 – Bética Marista, p. 151, May 1973

à-vis earthly goods.”<sup>21</sup> Having in this way made the connection between evangelical poverty and the first commandment, Basilio speaks of the second commandment which he calls the soul of poverty; it is: “a benevolent love for all my brothers, that is, for all men, opening my heart to all the needs of others for the simple reason that this is God’s desire.”<sup>22</sup> Loving God passionately and putting him at the centre of our life gives us back a great freedom that will help us to deal with our natural insecurity and consider earthly goods as relative: “God is the source of my security; the poor of Yahweh live like the figurative lilies of the field; they feel more secure than those who depend on social security. What constitutes the soul of the poor? It is the relativisation of all goods, out of which emerges a new mysticism regarding these goods.”<sup>23</sup>

### **1.3.5 The need for conversion.**

It does not follow that we always live according to our convictions. Belonging to the *anawim* demands a conversion. Basilio gives two reasons for this: “We have lost the capacity to be rich! We are poor devils who do not know how to be rich or how to possess. We are rich beggars, rich slaves, rich orphans, and even homicidal rich. We need a new vocabulary, a basic teaching, a new education to learn once more how to be rich, to return to the state where God wants us. This apprenticeship is called evangelical poverty.”<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, we live in fragile flesh: “The consecrated person knows very well that the same sinful flesh he feels at the sexual level exists in his heart as well: the flesh of the miser, the flesh of the proprietor, the flesh of the capitalist! If we are imprudent, if we forget to pray, if we do not make ourselves strong through the contemplation of Jesus Christ, if we do not provide spiritual nourishment for the mystery of poverty, if we do not practise our poverty day in and day out in all the little things, we will not be able to make great efforts when the moment comes.”<sup>25</sup>

### **1.3.6 But poverty has a body.**

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

So far, we have spoken of the soul of poverty. In addition to that, Basilio sometimes referred to the body of poverty; in a series of questions, he says: "How many among you are ready to dedicate themselves to the poor? Do we really love poverty? Does it have a place in my heart? Poverty has a body because the Christian spirit is incarnated; it becomes a visible and tangible mystery that leads us to the invisible. The heart of poverty makes us like the poor, but at the same time, different from the poor. Sociologically, we are not poor!"<sup>26</sup> In explaining what he called the body of poverty, Basilio used the following headings:

- Not to possess anything, not to own anything,
- To accept insecurity: a poor man lives out of his work and if he loses his job, he does not know how to go forward,
- To agree to become dependent.

Basilio avoided a false dichotomy between the spirit and the practice of poverty. "Poverty means to love poverty, to practise poverty. This virtue also means to love the poor and to grant them access into our houses!"<sup>27</sup> "Religious are called to live a life of poverty in the Church not only with a detached heart but also with empty hands."<sup>28</sup> In Canada he ended his talk on poverty in this way: "If there is no evangelical ring to our discussions on poverty, we will find thousands of reasons to run away from all that could embarrass us a little. Let us not forget that poverty is a Christian value. It is very rare to find a love of poverty outside Christianity. At the same time, we must admit that poverty is not the unique Christian value, and certainly not the supreme value of Christianity. The pillar of Christianity is love, filial love and fraternal love."<sup>29</sup>

## 1.4 A Superior General's poverty

Does a superior general live the same poverty as the other Brothers? Did Basilio who was our superior general for a period of eighteen years, distinguish himself in any particular way in this area? He did practise his poverty like any humble Brother, and his poverty also consisted in this, that he made the Brothers reflect on the way they had practised this particular vow so far and, he led the provinces to make an option for the poor. He lived in the hope of a new dawn and was

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Conférence du Frère Basilio-Avila 1972. Bética Marista, p. 156, May 1973

<sup>28</sup> Appel au dépassement. La pauvreté personnelle, communautaire et institutionnelle. n° 12 p.2

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 15

trying to renew the Institute while at the same time having to bear with the sad departures of so many Brothers.

#### 1.4.1 Sharpening awareness

We have seen how Basilio explained the nature of evangelical poverty. The conference that we drew on so heavily was reproduced in almost identical language in the Norte (Spain) magazine and in the Canadian *Appel au dépassement* n° 12, 1970, a fact that indicates how central this reflection was in Basilio's mind. In this same conference, he made the Brothers reflect on the school fees they charged in their best colleges. Those fees were so high that it was not only the poor who were excluded, but even children from the middle classes could not afford to pay. He pointed out what a contradiction that was for a congregation founded for ordinary people! He asked the provincial councils and their economes whether they made room for the poor in their budgets, and to what extent. He asked: "How many provincial councils have met to study whether they were using the province goods according to poverty and charity, and not simply in the social sense which poses a challenge even to run of the mill capitalists who have not made a vow of poverty? How many provinces, provincial and local economes are able to see further than that, and ask themselves, not if it is financially possible and advantageous, but if it is acceptable in the light of the Gospel?"<sup>30</sup>

"If we remain insensitive to the poor who, because of the system, have no access to our education, to Christian education, something that we passionately wish to impart, and giving which involves much more than simple almsgiving, it is because our love of poverty has become weak."<sup>31</sup>

As early as on 2 January 1968, he had sent a first signal to the whole congregation, "Our schools have allowed themselves gradually, almost inexorably, to direct their efforts to other classes in society that cannot be described precisely as the poor... Honestly, I don't think that it can be shown by anyone statistically that this is not the case, certainly in regard to the majority of our schools, particularly in the Third World... An Institute may decide to undertake different work in different fields... but it cannot do this without ceasing to be itself, that is, not dedicated to the

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<sup>30</sup> *Conférence – Avila 1972. Bética Marista*, p. 150, May 1973

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

purpose for which it was founded.»<sup>32</sup> Basilio spoke in the name of Marcellin, but he was at one with the Founder in wishing that we would open our eyes to the poor:

“My dear Brothers, I often think we have lost our capacity for positive and constructive self-criticism... We have to open our eyes and our hearts to see painful realities of this world and to be moved by a burning desire to come to the assistance of these marginalised groups.”<sup>33</sup> et <sup>34</sup>

We will conclude with the two opening paragraphs of the conference on poverty given to the Iberville Brothers: “The Council was not satisfied with our way of practising poverty. If we look for a substantial point on which the Council wants a clear answer from religious, it is poverty: We have to renew our way of understanding and practising our poverty. The world has no doubt about the obedience of religious... but it does not have the same confidence about their poverty. Why? It is because our standard of living is higher than that of the middle class. We must have the courage to tell things as they are.”<sup>35</sup> Then, in an even more direct manner, he said: “Let me tell you something: in general, as far as concerns the way you actually live personally ... unless I am mistaken, you are not witnessing to poverty in today’s Canada.”<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, in the same talk he invited the Brothers to share their interior lives: “Share the wealth of your hearts, of your interior lives. You live your interior lives in a very private way. There would be an impressive growth if you learned to share your spiritual wealth in common, to show your real selves to your brothers, and to help each other in this area. Your hearts count more than your belongings, more than your services. The power to share your difficulties, your sufferings and your joys that interests me more than all the rest. Unfortunately it is this wealth that you protect, not wishing to share it. What would you prefer: John XXIII’s Journal that acquaints you with his life and the interior marvels of his heart, or his shirt?”<sup>37</sup>

How practical, straight to the point and honest Basilio could be! And he was accepted because the Brothers knew he loved them. After this 1970 retreat, a

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<sup>32</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, Les appels du Fondateur, p. 569-570

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 573 and 577.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 590.

<sup>35</sup> Appel au dépassement. La pauvreté personnelle... n°12, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*. p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*. p. 3.

number of Canadian Brothers left for mission countries. A while later, they opened schools and training centres in Haiti

### 1.4.2 To stimulate

It was not enough to conscientise the Brothers; he had to turn the Congregation towards the poor and the missions, two things that followed from the vow of poverty. In his first circular dated, 2 January 1968, he wrote twenty pages urging a return to the poor and marginalized<sup>38</sup> and thirty pages on the theme of the missions.<sup>39</sup> He asked the Congregation to take action in these two areas, and he even looked for the creation of an organisation that would look for funds to open or help schools for the poor. Today, this is our well-run and successful **B.I.S.** (Bureau International de Solidarité).<sup>40</sup> He saw to it that the Brothers disposed themselves in this new direction: “We have to avoid seeking a secure life based on economic security: I am convinced that in many places this is not understood or if it is some Brothers do not have either the capacity or the will to take the risk of living it in the face of the insecurity of certain situations in some places...”<sup>41</sup>

Basilio started this movement, and since that time it has continued to gain in momentum with more and more enthusiasm and creativity on the part of the Brothers. Hoping that his message about the poor would be better understood, he urged the capitulants of the 1976 Chapter to go and stay a while with the poor before coming to the chapter, so that they might arrive with changed hearts, moved by the anguish of the poor.

### 1.4.3 Tested in his Friendship

Basilio had to live a very special poverty, a very painful one that purified the most human and noble inclinations of his heart. Being in charge of the Congregation during the years that followed the Council, he saw many Brothers leave. That was his cross. He understood very well that some Brothers had made a wrong choice; he was the first one to help these. But so many friends whom he esteemed, who were near him, his close collaborators, valuable people he had trusted, ended up by

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<sup>38</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 567 to 587.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pp. 409 to 445.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 585 to 591.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 567.

leaving the congregation! A virus was attacking the virtue of perseverance. So many interviews, journeys, letters, so many hours of listening, discerning and encouraging! He sent so many Brothers to prayer centres; he sent circulars full of clear teaching, wisdom, light and love. In spite of all this the bleeding continued. Caught in this storm, some provincials lost their courage and left as well. Basilio could not be blamed for anything but for such a friendly and human heart as his, for a man so committed, so faithful to his word, those times must have been excruciating.

Besides, less evident, but nevertheless very real, was the mediocrity of some Brothers who remained in religious life without really living as religious; that must have been very painful for Basilio. He rightly wondered how people who made the sacrifices demanded by the vows could lead such commonplace lives.

If he did not lose his equanimity it was because he always stood before the Lord as a poor man, his hope centred on the love of his Father whose will had become his passion. In this way he lived a particular kind of poverty, that of a Superior General in post-conciliar times.

The more we see of Basilio's poverty, the more we come to understand the fundamental concepts underlying his convictions: God is the highest love, and, we prove our love for God by loving the human person. The person has an absolute value, and our love of one another is like a sacrament of our love for God. Poverty is a fruit of love, it is born in the heart, it is one aspect of the grace God gives us to love him above all. Poverty is an act of worship of God, an act of love for neighbour, an acceptance of truth concerning our own fragility ... all of this he accomplished not with great heroics, but by his constant, faithful and inspired engagement with the events that filled the hours of his everyday life.

## TEXTS

### 1. Poor and open to the poor

We must be prepared to surrender a life of peaceful existence based on economic security. I do not wish to encourage you in rashness, but I am convinced that in many places this idea is not understood, or if it is, we have neither the capacity nor the desire to live it...

(And, in regard to responding, and going to the poor). If there is no inner flame of enthusiasm, then all promptings and appeals will fall on deaf ears. There is no question of ill will or disobedience; such a verdict would be too absolute and unjust. Let us rather suggest that the risks and difficulties are so considerable, our social fixations and habits of mind so strongly entrenched; certain Brothers have come to take comfort for granted and are not ready to face sacrifice; these factors are enough, and more than enough, to condemn a province to stagnation and inaction. This amounts to saying that there are situations where simple good will is insufficient and where only the powerful breath of the Holy Spirit can set the human dull embers aflame...

Each superior should examine his conscience sincerely, and see if he is moved by no more than a "sense of duty" towards the poor, having no real sympathy with them. Or is he disturbed by real uneasiness and is genuinely saddened when he realises that he can do little for them? If a Brother finds that he is relatively indifferent to the poor, he must realise that he is lacking in something that is essential in any Christian, even more essential for a religious, and more so again for a Marist. A superior honestly seeing himself so lacking must realise that there is a grave deficiency at province level, and must strive to awaken sensitivity on this point, both in himself and in his Brothers. Once again, however, let me repeat, please let's have no demagogues among us.

*(Circ. The calls of the Church and of the Founder, pp. 567, 578-579.)*

### 2. Poverty makes the heart free.

Some Brothers are unwilling to accept any curtailment in their personal way of living, and adopt the attitude that any effort in favour of the poor should be financed from house, province or general administration funds... At times it is the superiors who are culpable; they refuse to support efforts for the poor since these

come from some other Brother's initiative. They seem to be very conscious of their position as director-in-chief, yet there must be no upset in the easy tenor of their life... Basically Christian poverty consists in affective and effective detachment from material goods, so as to share them with others, beginning with those whose need is greatest.

The superiors may seek to reform personal poverty before proceeding to revise collective poverty; the Brothers, on their side, feel that this individual poverty does not make much difference, and insist that collective poverty be reformed, not just the tiny world of each individual. Both are wrong, and such thinking will end up achieving nothing on either the personal or the institutional level.

To the Brothers, it is well to recall that a kind of exhibitionism in the matter of poverty can be no more than a sort of currently fashionable hobby, and that means mere pharisaism. There is no merit in sheer display, and not even in their privation; the real point in voluntary poverty is to liberate the heart from selfish slavery to material things and to help those in need as a step towards the betterment of mankind and the establishment of universal brotherhood. Even if men at large do not witness the reduction in our personal level of living, it still remains true that our personal economies have done something to help the needy and to democratise our educational work; our economies have not just found a source of new revenue, but have channelled resources into social works aimed at transforming the world of the poor.

This does not exclude the motive of asceticism. In the Christian life there is an essential ingredient, for the heart must be purified of self-seeking if we are to arrive at intimacy with God.

(Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Founder*, p. 579-582.)

### **3. If Marcellin returned...**

Humble and all as he was, if the Founder came back among us, he would not hesitate to say: "You see today that we have made much progress in the domain of theology, but don't forget that Christianity is much more than a science; it is religion, a way of living." And he would repeat St Paul's words, "As for me, brothers, when I came to you it was not with any show of oratory or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God has guaranteed. During my stay with you, the only knowledge that I claimed to have was about Jesus, and about him as the crucified Christ." (1 Cor 2:1-2)...

He would remind us that our dedication is not to the following of this or that theologian even were he the greatest in the world, but wholly to the following of Christ, who has the power to keep us faithful to his grace unto the end (cf. 1 Cor 1:8) and who is himself the origin and the end of our dedication...

He would insist that it is not enough to speak of God to men; we must speak of men to God. This is essential if men are to be receptive to the Word. He would tell us that it is futile to imagine opposition between action and prayer.... For it is a general law of nature and of the spiritual life, this constant alternation, like systole and diastole. Without this combination life runs down and dies. Service to the neighbour must never be invoked to justify abandonment of prayer; prayer is not time wasted as far as service to one's neighbour is concerned, but rather it is time better employed, since it renders our activity more fruitful and brings one's neighbour within the compass of God's action. To those of us seeking a living community inspired by love, our Founder would tell us that any community will soon fall apart where there is not at least a minimum of prayer.

*(Circ. The calls of the Church and of the Founder. pp. 598-600.)*

#### **4. A Concrete Case**

I have just come out of hospital after a stay of seventeen-days. In these circumstances I discovered the full meaning of your message on poverty. I was brought to hospital in an emergency, and was placed in a modest four-bed ward together with three other sick people.

When the duty resident learnt I was a religious, he told me, "You should not be here. This type of room is reserved for the poor, for ordinary people. The rich and others like priests and religious always take private rooms with bathrooms and toilets." When I heard this observation I decided to stay in that four-bed ward, to get to know and to appreciate the poor and show my love for them.

I heard more than enough blasphemous and crude language, and also severe criticism of the rich, of the Church, priests and religious. The biggest reproach people make is that we do not understand them, that we do not like them, and that we make the vow of poverty but live like the rich.

These people have a good heart, they are bitter, but they are right in their judgment of ordinary life. In their own suffering, they are generous and always ready to help those who suffer more than they do.

If we really want to win their esteem and their understanding we have to share their worries about the future. I had the experience of sharing a meal with a 73 year old sick person who did not like the food that had been prepared for him. I said, “Try some of mine.” He did so with pleasure and I ate his meal. Immediately, there was a climate of trust and friendship between us, and when I had to leave I saw his tears that were much more eloquent than words.

I tell you of this little experience because during my short stay in hospital I succeeded in becoming real a real friend with the sick people in my ward.

This leaves me thinking that hospitals offer us an apostolic field that we have hardly explored so far. If my Provincial agrees, I will add to my programme the visitation of people left alone in hospital; I could even have a certain amount of money to help them and bring them the treats that nobody else does.

*(Llamamiento a la Renovación, El Profetismo, la confesión, p. 2 and 3, March 1973, Norte)*

## **5. Summary**

One of the major orientations that Brother Basilio wanted to give to our Institute was to direct our apostolate towards the poor, to become again a congregation for the education of marginalised youth. He wished to accomplish this by fidelity to our origins, fidelity to our Founder’s charism, and by our response to the explicit call of the Second Vatican Council to become sincerely a Church for the poor. In this way Basilio he was obedient to the Church and to the Holy Spirit.

His ideas were expressed in his Circular of 2 January 1968, pages 567-591, in the fourth part, “The Calls of the Church and of the Founder”. What follows is taken from those from those pages. We take note of the circumstance: he had been superior general for only a few months, so the Circular provides a glimpse of his planning for the future. The calls were addressed to the whole congregation, but he wished particularly to sensitise the capitulants who were about to meet for the second session of the extraordinary chapter that had been requested by the Church to launch a renewal in the whole world through a return to the sources

and an appropriate updating. The capitulants themselves in September-October had to take the decisions that would give the congregation its new directions. The title of his circular included the special date ‘2 January’ to remind the Brothers of our foundation date and to signal that it was a moment of re-foundation. From this point of view, this circular was the most pertinent and most important that he ever wrote. It summarised what he foresaw as the changes necessary to bring us into line with the texts of the Council.

The book *I Want to Awaken the Dawn*,<sup>42</sup> describing Basilio’s concern for the needs of the poor, records a number of particular cases where Basilio had been directly involved in helping the poor. He did this whenever he could. The authors make it clear, too, that Basilio did not speak of the poor because that was a popular theme at the time, but because he wanted to make us understand that the education of the poor had been and still was an integral part of our Congregation’s charism. “A religious institute may do some other apostolic work different from the one for which it was founded; but what it cannot do is to cease to be itself, stop committing itself to whom and to what it was founded for.”<sup>43</sup>

This reflection on the poor intended to guide the capitulants revealed the heart of the one who wrote. These pages are alive with Basilio’s spontaneous sympathy for the poor: a sense of justice, God’s own choice, fidelity to the Founder and to the Council come together to express God’s will for the whole Congregation.

Hence, it is by turning our attention to the poor that we begin to walk once more in the Founder’s footsteps. “I believe that this is what would interest our Founder most today.”<sup>44</sup> “He would ask us first of all for a resolute return to the poor, to abandoned youth.”<sup>45</sup> Reminding us of the Founder’s reasons for inviting us to return to the poor, and in view of the great multitude of abandoned young people, he urged a conscientious review of all that had been done thus far, not so that we might be satisfied with our efforts, but rather that this should be the starting point for new and more generous efforts. He pointed out why today the Founder invited us to return to the poor, reminding us of the original thrust of the congregation which was to benefit children in the country, whereas at the time many of our schools were providing for upper or middle class children. He therefore added, “The need to attend the poor and to educate them is not only a

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<sup>42</sup> *Je veux éveiller l’aurore*, p. 14

<sup>43</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 570

<sup>44</sup> Circ. 2 janvier 1968

<sup>45</sup> Circ. 2 janvier 1968, p. 586

Christian fundamental duty but an urgent and an awesome necessity for the Church; in the face of this, the choice between standing by the poor or abandoning them would have the gravest consequences for the Church.”<sup>46</sup>

In support of the poor, Basilio appealed to our ascetism - personal, provincial congregational, and he left us with this optimistic entreaty: “We must convince ourselves that we can do more.” As we have already mentioned, to sensitise the capitulants to the necessity of returning to the poor, he invited them to travel to Asia or Africa to have a direct experience of the world of the poor, so that their conscience might be stirred and their hearts touched. At the time, this prophetic gesture was not well understood. It was not until the 1993 chapter, that such an experience was almost imposed on the capitulants.<sup>47</sup> His words revealed the depth of his feelings about the poor and the missions; his language revealed the depth of his feelings: “How disappointed I would be if these efforts were to remain without result! In Christ’s name, in Father Champagnat’s name and for the missions’ sake I am grateful to the Brothers who sacrificed so much time and money for this cause. These journeys were not touristic affairs. Many delegations reported their decisions to commit themselves to the greatest possible assistance to the missions in a serious and progressive way.”

## **6. B.I.S.**

Agreed then, that our work is to be among the poor, we should seek State aid... We should be ready to appeal to other sources also, especially to the Episcopal Conferences of the developed countries... I raise the following question for the consideration of the Chapter: might we not select and prepare a competent Brother who would be willing to handle all such transactions at the international level?

We cannot arrogantly demand such aid, but neither need our attitude be that of cap-in-hand suppliants, for such works are social works wherein every man has responsibility in varying degrees. Some put up the capital: we work with it. We get nothing out of it; we are simply a part of the common gift. Those who receive are those who have every right to receive. They are the ones living in society’s twilight zones, and according to the teaching of *Populorum Progressio* and *Gaudium et Spes*, they receive neither more nor less than that to which they have a right. Hence, aid

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<sup>46</sup> Circ. 2 janvier 1968, p. 570

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 414, note 232.

of this sort in no sense puts us under obligation to the donors. We are just one element of social, cultural and Christian service in the work of governments in the good of society. Hence, when anyone asks for our assistance, we don't give it merely as something given out of friendship, nor from any sense of obligation we might feel ourselves to be under; we should state clearly and respectfully that we are acting for the common good, in support of a sound policy, and for human and social betterment. (Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 589-590)

(The above vibrant pages foreshadow the most vigorous circular written by Brother Benito: *The Evangelical Use of our Goods*, 1 October 2000 – evidence indeed that Basilio was a man ahead of his times.)

## Consecrated Celibacy

We have few testimonies regarding consecrated celibacy. That is normal: this is a love that is lived with modesty. Some Brothers mentioned Basilio's freedom and prudence. He was not inhibited, but he knew that the sexual drive experienced in the body needed a certain discipline. "There is nobody in whom sex is entirely purified and presents no danger at all. We are all men. I remember this extraordinary passage from a Mexican philosopher in a book entitled *Litanies for the Evening of Life*: 'I wanted to be an archangel but God told me that I needed only to be a man'."<sup>48</sup> At the same time he said: "Nobody is excepted from temptations of the flesh: a young man asked his father, a man more than 50 years of age: 'Father, tell me, when will this fight against the flesh end?' The father replied, 'My boy, I don't know, ask your grand father!'"<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, his life itself witnessed to his integrity. His thoughts were expressed in his conferences and in his circulars. The man and his thought are coherent: they both recognise the nobility of virginity.

### 2.1 The man

When we read his conferences, we are immediately struck by the fact that the author is an educated, well informed person who has a penetrating and well balanced understanding of sexuality, of human love and of virginity for the Kingdom. He can use medical terms such as germinative and interstitial cells, testosterone or oestrogen hormones, and as a psychologist, he spoke with scientific rigour.<sup>50</sup>

Before going to lecture a group, he used to suggest a questionnaire and would study whatever statistics were available to really know his audience.<sup>51</sup> When he dealt with the problem of masturbation, he admitted that there were cases where there was no moral responsibility. He advised people to be wise in choosing a

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<sup>48</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 10 retraites 1970, Canada

<sup>49</sup> Id., p. 14

<sup>50</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 6, retraites 1970, Canada

<sup>51</sup> Lamamiento a la renovación: Virginitad consagrada, p. 2 Enero 1973, Norte

priest for confessions. At the same time, as a psychologist, he conceded that part of this problem was always incomplete maturity.<sup>52</sup>

In him, no false modesty, he was a free man, but prudent. “I have no fear at all for a consecrated person who wishes to make an objective and wholesome study in the area of sexuality. There is no cause for worry if a consecrated person reads a scientific treatise on the process of procreation between man and woman. On the other hand, I don’t approve at all of people who flip through a magazine that has one page on the visit of the Pope to Athenagoras and another on Brigitte Bardot! One must not accept either what is pornographic or what is simply banal because that ridicules both woman and sexuality.”<sup>53</sup>

He spoke to the Brothers, not from the moral perspective, but from the reality, from what science reveals about sex and the maturity of the human person, without neglecting the light that psychology sheds on the human heart. This was a very new attitude, open, full of good sense and wisdom. He discussed a complete vision of human love: he explained virginal life, but he also had beautiful pages on love in marriage and on the beauty of Christian life lived in the love of marriage. He understood male psychology and the characteristics of the feminine heart. That gained him the audience and the respect due to a specialist. The texts that are quoted at the end of this chapter show that Basilio dealt with this subject in a straightforward way.

His contemporaries willingly agreed that he was a man of great maturity, with a great personal poise. Many said that he had attained an exceptional self-control, keeping his calm, maintaining interior peace in the most dramatic moments; his joy and optimism stood the test of the hardest trials. This maturity can be seen in his writing just as it did in his activities. So many people asked for his advice, while others shared with him their lives of grace or sin or of psychological sickness. Other religious orders asked him to give retreats, or recommended the study of his writing. Of psychological maturity he said: “We must insist more on psychological maturity not only to live our virginity well but in order that our vow of virginity may be fruitful and produce positive, radiant, dynamic religious, rather than people who are narrow minded, difficult, with hearts withered up and without love.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Appel au dépassement, conference on virginity, p. 6, retreat given in Canada, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación : Virginitad consagrada, p. 20, January 1973, Spain.

<sup>54</sup> Appel au dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 6, retraites 1970, Canada.

A little further, he added this important nuance: “To maintain one’s virginity it is not sufficient to have attained human maturity, for God’s grace and the charism are also necessary. But human maturity is indispensable. At all costs one must accomplish this task. Do you realise how much psychological maturity is really necessary for religious life? A man who is unable to love with fidelity and detachment and who has no desire to be fruitful is not suited to the religious life.”<sup>55</sup>

He was appreciated among the members of the union of superiors general, and by the Vatican which sometimes entrusted him with special missions as in 1969 when he visited the countries of Latin America. In 1980 he was invited to be an auditor at the Synod on the Family, and to address the assembled bishops. In 1995 he was named a consultant for the Congregation for Religious.

In conversation Basilio gave the impression of a sure, constant, enlightened, deeply tranquil and unified person. He often spoke of psychological, moral and spiritual maturity; he was calm and self possessed, marked by a clear *joie de vivre*, and proud to be a Marist. He said that a positive image of oneself was a sign of spiritual and human health. His long circular on Fidelity was a later indication of this maturity. He made it possible for the Brothers, through their testimonies, to reveal their deepest experiences in regard to chastity and their love of God and men, where consecrated virginity is really lived. In this way, he helped the whole Congregation to acquire greater maturity in this marvellous but delicate world of love.

We would not be straying from our current topic of consecrated celibacy if we added the following nuance: Basilio was a man who had much experience. He did a great deal of travelling and met all types of people in the most varied countries. When it came to the subject of love, he was not naïve; he knew that no men, not even the Brothers, are angels. “We are not a caste sanctified in advance,” he said (Circ. 2 January, 1968, p. 644). He was ready to admire love in its purity, as when he quoted a poem about a couple who were reaching the end of their lives, but he also knew the snares used by men and women to entrap others, and the thousand pretexts and reasons to justify false loves or desertions. Once, in 1967, when he spent a few days resting in a hotel at Taormina, the maid told him that priests and religious did not marry but still ‘enjoyed’ themselves. Basilio told Brother Gabriel

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<sup>55</sup> Id. p. 8

Michel: “This is what people really think!” He told the Brothers of the province of Bética, “To some people this vow makes us look like rare animals.”

Basilio had friends among scholars and theologians, politicians and labourers, clergy of the highest rank and simple Brothers. He invited D. Saragat, a former President of Italy, to the General House for supper. He was a personal friend of D. Conto Patiño, a great Ecuadorian politician and Vice-President of the Senate who would sometimes visit him to seek his advice. Giuseppe Palladino, a famous Italian economist, was a warm friend of Basilio...<sup>56</sup> He was not one to remain enclosed in a convent; he spent his life at the crossroads of the world. And he invited us, his Brothers, to be open to meeting and encountering people also.

Above all, Basilio had gambled everything on God, in a wager of love and passion. His whole life was unified, purified and made transparent in this extraordinary friendship. It was love that energised all the strength of the man. We saw how he gave himself to God who loved him, and how he dedicated himself to his Brothers. Love alone is the source of all virginity. That was very evident in Basilio. That is the context in which we are to understand his virginity: knowledge, maturity, life experience, satisfaction and joy in his work, and that passionate love of God that leads to the total gift of self.

## 2.2 The thought

Basilio knew that his Brothers needed to be enlightened and encouraged in regard to chastity, especially in the light of the renewal called for by the Council and in view of the development of a more and more permissive society. After the Council, contrary to the genuine thought of the conciliar fathers, some doubtful voices were suggesting that to live the vow of chastity it was sufficient to observe the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments.<sup>57</sup> Basilio made the situation quite clear by going to the heart and the totality of the vow.

### 2.2.1 The heart of the vow

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<sup>56</sup> Madrid Marista, supplément au numéro 71, avril 1996, p. 13

<sup>57</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 1

Basilio harked back to his central experience, which was no different from that of the saints, or of any religious who slowly develops his dialogue with God: love. The explanation of this total gift, the vow of chastity, was not to be found in the first place in a dissertation on virginity, but in that extraordinary moment when God powerfully took possession of Basilio's heart. From that moment his whole being became a gift, totally adhering to God's will. All that was said in an earlier chapter on grace and God's love sheds light on this decision, justifies it and allows us understand it. As happens in the best cases between a man and a woman who end up marrying, love alone provides the interior energy that leads to the gift and is the key to understanding it. Consecrated celibacy is the consequence of the love we have for God and of the love that he had for us in the first place. This love produces the total gift of self: "The greatest thing that Jesus revealed about God was that God is a Father. To say it better: God is not celibate. God is love. The Christian God is a family..."<sup>58</sup>

To the Spanish Brothers, he said: "We must avoid showing off (los machotes), we must aim at being the Lord's slaves."<sup>59</sup> He asked, "Why does one choose such an exacting life?" and he replies, "Because, You alone have the words of eternal life!"<sup>60</sup> Already, in his first circular, he pointed out the essential element: "We have not committed our lives for a certain theologian, nor even for the sake of a better world. No, we committed ourselves to Christ, who has the power to keep us faithful to his grace till the end (cf.: Cor 1:8); it is he himself who is the origin and the purpose of our commitment."<sup>61</sup> "For some persons this revelation, by the action of the Holy Spirit, wins them over so completely that they make a total gift of themselves. We make a vow to the Lord that involves the whole being: heart, psychology, life, times, love - all. In turn it also leads us give ourselves to men, a gift without interest... For a religious it is absolutely necessary to have a spiritual experience of God, that is, God must be someone in his life. We cannot live in solitude."<sup>62</sup>

He uses this surprising but true image: "There are religious who have been in community for forty years but if you tap them, you obtain a hollow sound, like hitting a hollow tree trunk. The reason is simple: They never experienced a

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<sup>58</sup> Id., p. 10

<sup>59</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación: *Virginidad consagrada*, p. 3. January 1973, Norte, Spain.

<sup>60</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación: *Virginidad consagrada*, p. 13. January 1973, Norte, Spain.

<sup>61</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968. The calls of the Founder, p. 599.

<sup>62</sup> *appel au dépassement, conference on virginity*, p. 14.

genuine conversion.”<sup>63</sup> He kept returning to the idea that love expresses itself by the totality of the gift: “Those who commit themselves by the vow of chastity, commit their hearts, their psychologies, their strengths, in an irreversible and undivided love.”<sup>64</sup> He is quite blunt about where the heart of the vow is to be found: “The vow of virginity is not an organic vow, nor genital; to express myself somewhat crudely, I tell you that our genital organs do not matter much to the Lord. What is important to Him is our hearts, our eyes and our thoughts.”<sup>65</sup> Even for a humanly mature and well-balanced person, virginity is decided and is lived only by a strong relationship with the Lord: Virginity can be maintained today by:

- 1- an integral sexual and affective formation; but this being insufficient, we must add
- 2- the lived experience of the Lord, tangible and cultivated, without which it is impossible for a person to live alone.»<sup>66</sup>

What type of religious do you find if love is the motivation and the energy of his virginity? “In a psychology where sex and love have been integrated, virginity produces hearts able to love, to take part into real life, to share the sufferings, joys and great needs of humanity. On the contrary when this integration does not occur, the so-called virginity produces pitiful and hardened bachelors, a new middle class who organise themselves to live comfortably, holding their salaries in common so as to manage their lives profitably and without problems. This is a deception.”<sup>67</sup> «Celibate life must be a source of love, not a cemetery of love.”<sup>68</sup>

We stressed that virginity is the fruit of the love that God has for us, love that seduces us and leads us to try to respond with our hearts. But our neighbours share in this gift; they witness a beautiful, dynamic and fecund virginity: “The core of community life is true love and the capacity to engender friendship, to set up a network of friends along our way.”<sup>69</sup> In his circular, *Community Life*, speaking of the vows, Basilio wrote: “We believe not only in God but also in neighbour; we hope not only in God but also in our neighbour; we love with the same unique charity both God and neighbour.”<sup>70</sup> He made himself more explicit, “Certain

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<sup>63</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación: Virginitad consagrada, p. 31

<sup>64</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 1

<sup>65</sup> Id., p. 1

<sup>66</sup> Id., p. 2

<sup>67</sup> Id., p. 8

<sup>68</sup> Id., p. 6

<sup>69</sup> Circ. La vie communautaire, p. 176

<sup>70</sup> Id. p. 179

things are evident: If poverty, chastity and obedience have one single purpose which is love, then it goes without saying that by our three vows we have committed ourselves to love. The vow is a means of loving our neighbour, and love of neighbour leads to the gift of our ourselves as a community.”<sup>71</sup>

For Basilio the great axes of the vows are:

- poverty as liberty and poverty as love
- obedience as availability and obedience as a means of sanctification
- virginity that is love and virginity that is fruitful.<sup>72</sup>

More than the two other vows, consecrated virginity is linked to love, comes from love and has a sense only if in the same movement we love God and neighbour. Basilio’s life exemplifies this statement as the chapter on love explained.

### **2.2.2 Heart and body**

In some places after the Council a false interpretation had filtered into the understanding of the vow of chastity: it seemed to assert some kind of dichotomy between body and heart. It was said by some that in observing the vow it was sufficient that the body be maintained within the limits of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> commandments, a physical virginity, but that the heart could be allowed some freedom. Basilio forcefully reacted against that vision: “Do you see the serious problem that religious can face if they want to maintain their vow of chastity at the level of the body while at the same time allowing their hearts to be vulnerable to an ambiguous affective life? That is an impossible gamble, and what is more, it is an unhealthy attitude psychologically, because, given that we are dealing with dynamic realities, these people live divided, dissociated lives. In practice, this situation is tantamount to a compromise that leads neither to the sanctity of marriage nor to the sanctity that must normally flow from consecrated celibacy lived without reserve. Again such an attitude will simply engender hardened and selfish celibates who are trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.”<sup>73</sup>

With the same frankness he told the Spanish Brothers: “There is much to say about the comfort we give ourselves nowadays. When we are looking for comfort,

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<sup>71</sup> Id. p. p. 180 and 182.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

<sup>73</sup> Appel au dépassement, conference on virginity, p. 2.

we don't want to hear about asceticism, about what is 'hard'... This is a situation we need to beware of because, in having negative effects on both our psychology and physiology, it may begin to condition our practice of chastity.»<sup>74</sup> Then Basilio pointed out how the physical and the psychological influence each other. Neither of the two remains strictly in an exclusive domain of its own; there is an essential interaction between the two, each affecting the other reciprocally. It is impossible to think of them as unrelated, separate realities. Such a dichotomy simply erodes the heart. As for those who thought of themselves as angels, he noted: “You see immediately the danger incurred by those who believe that a profound spiritual love is possible between a Brother and a Sister... That's an old wives' tale! By its very nature, love for a woman seeks bodily fulfilment.”<sup>75</sup>

### 2.2.3 A few wholesome principles

Basilio speaks to educators, a part of whose task will be to train the young to chastity. The advice he offers is valid to both the educator and the educated: “We must train to chastity not as if the latter were a burden, but in terms of the value that it is. If a young man perceives God as a tyrant rather than a father, he runs the risk of moving away from Christian faith, because nobody loves a tyrant. Too many young people understand nothing about chastity, which is the virtue of YES and not the virtue of NO. It is the virtue of YES to dialogue, to sex, to love and even to pleasure. Chastity is nothing else but the virtue that helps one to dialogue love and sex.”<sup>76</sup>

More directly, he addresses us as pedagogues, “We should be afraid of teachers who are unable to discover the firmament of values that stands above the ceiling of the law. Freedom is never attained through a moralising ceiling that obscures the view of the firmament of values. Today, parents and teachers give youth all that is needed to live humanly and even religiously but something essential is missing: educators who live close to youth as opposed to educators who live miles away, limiting themselves to teaching Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and so on. Then goodbye! A communion of life is needed, a proximity, an availability even in our own residences.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación: Virginitad consagrada, p. 7 Enero 1973, Norte

<sup>75</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 7

<sup>76</sup> Appel au Dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 8

<sup>77</sup> Id. p. 9

Basilio also called our attention to a soft pedagogy that does not dare to exact anything from the young and to the escapism of educators who do not keep abreast of the real problems of adolescents. He called this pedagogy and escapism an abdication of the responsibilities of educators.<sup>78</sup> To everyone, especially to those who had masturbation problems (after thoroughly treating its various causes), he recommended meditation: “It is unbelievable how true meditation and exercises of piety can help us!”<sup>79</sup>

In a realistic way, he reminds the Brothers of the beautiful ceremony of perpetual profession in front of a statue of Mary Immaculate: “That was so marvellous! But just wait, five, six, seven years there arrives on the scene a young woman, who, though beautiful and noble, understands nothing of our values, and regards our vow of virginity as stuff and nonsense. She befriends you, and more, she gives you her affection. You feel loved and she seems to be one who will make you happy and be a splendid mother to your children. Brothers, that is the time ‘to pay the bill!’ the time to tell the Lord, ‘Lord, my words were not those of a child at play, they were the words of a man. It is not the moment to say, ‘I had not realised’, ‘I lacked experience’; I had never experienced that...”<sup>80</sup>

“Sex has to be understood in the light of three realities: creation, fall and redemption: creation, insofar as it cannot be denied that sex is God’s gift in all its splendour and grandeur; the fall, after which sex, like everything else, continued to be a good thing in itself, but became like a slippery floor where one has to manoeuvre carefully; the redemption, by which Christ returned sex to its grandeur.”<sup>81</sup>

Basilio never had a negative vision of this power for love that has been sowed in all of us, and he knew how to be realistic and how to free people from any puritanical vision: “If one considers sex solely in the light of the fall, it becomes a taboo, something demeaning, and one will fall into Jansenism, become puritanical. One author, speaking the bad habits of puritans, said, “They were so villainous and hypocritical that they did not have the courage to admit what they were doing!”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación, virginidad consagrada, pp. 7-8, January 1973, Norte, Spain.

<sup>79</sup> Llamamiento a la renovación: Virginidad consagrada, p. 21. Enero 1973, Norte

<sup>80</sup> Bética Marista, n° 56, février 1973, p. 96

<sup>81</sup> Appel au dépassement, conference on virginity, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> Appel au dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 12

Basilio was a complete man, very generous, who had a sense of commitment and fidelity. He knew very well what he was giving up by the vow of chastity: the beauty of human love, the wonder of one's own family. Some of his pages touch on that point with lucidity and peace. But when someone commits himself to this difficult path he is sure to arrive at a more universal love, more staggering and fulfilling: the love of God that calls him to the love of all men and of the whole of man. Seeing this vow as he did, exacting but noble, he was amazed that religious who had generously relinquished a woman's love and the joy of a family could thereafter sink to living an insipid and indifferent life.

He wrote to the Brothers: "It would truly be a stupid joke and pharisaism if the vow of chastity should lead us to a comfortable middle class life, without love, a life seeking to obtain in secret what we voluntarily sacrificed for the Lord's love. No, that would lead to nothing. You understand why a religious congregation has no desire to engage in anything like pharisaism: we would rather have ten times fewer religious provided that they want to live the totality of the gift they have made to Jesus Christ."<sup>83</sup>

Rejecting any theory that might put together reasons and pretexts for a commitment less total, Basilio replied: "Life and experience demonstrate the emptiness of all such theories, bringing us face to face every day with painful dramas that demolish all these unfounded theses. After giving up prayer and yielding to all sorts of imprudent behaviour, some have pretended to be authentic by announcing that they would serve the Church better by working as laymen and so on. These are lovely assertions, very easy to make at a press conference! But life has the last word in due time."<sup>84</sup> The vow can be lived only by a love of God, a love that renews itself every day: "We should not forget that it is not easy to learn how to love. There are times when the community, despite its best efforts, does not succeed in replacing the family we have given up. Then what remains to us is real contact with the Lord in prayer to obtain the strength to persevere and make our vow of virginity fruitful. Otherwise, virginity becomes difficult if not impossible. If we wish to keep our vow and remain happy and faithful, we live prayerfully and prudently."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Id., p. 14

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Appel au dépassement, conférence sur la virginité, p. 14

Basilio's language was marked by frankness and clarity. What he had to say came from a well informed man who was passionate for life and wished to live it to the full. He knew how to integrate his talents and attain a solid maturity. The various appointments he assumed made him an expert in the life of human persons; for that reason many asked him to help them towards a more total gift to the Lord. The Lord was his passion: he entrusted himself entirely to Him. For Basilio virginity was instrumental in fulfilling his desire to burn out his life for Christ and even 'burn the candle at both ends'. We cannot help seeing God's love overflowing in him. He wanted the Brothers to anchor their virginity in a similar experience so that their lives might become love.

## TEXTS

### 1. Spiritual maturity

We will try to explain briefly what is meant by spiritual maturity in terms of sexual life. It has to do with a flood of grace into the sexual domain and a vision of sexuality through the eyes of faith. We must not consider sex as a taboo or as something evil, but in the light of faith, we simply allow grace to pervade the dialogue between sex and love.

The greatest thing Jesus revealed is that God is Father. To put it better, God is not a celibate, God is love. The Christian God is a family. From all eternity, He has been father in his son, but He has willed to extend his fatherhood by creating man. Man, even if you consider him in the light of evolution, was not created so much as a creature but rather as a son. Then, God tied his own hands as it were, and left to men themselves the task of satisfying His desire to be father and to give Him sons. He gave to humankind the power and the means for this, love, sex and marriage...

Sex integrated in love will play a psychosomatic role in giving sons to God. It is not possible to have a correct view of Christian sex if it is not seen in the threefold light of creation, fall and revelation. There is nobody in whom sex is entirely purified and for whom sex does not present any danger... We are all men. I remember this extraordinary passage from a Mexican philosopher, who in his *Litany of Life's Sunset* said, "I wanted to be an archangel and God answered, 'You need only to be a man!'"

Sex must therefore be seen with the eyes of faith. If we understand it only from the perspective of creation, sex is good, but it can play villainous tricks on us which we will regret not having thought about seriously enough.

If we consider sex in the aspect of the fall only, it becomes taboo, something demeaning, Jansenism and puritanism.

The true way to consider sex, both for married people and for religious, is under the three aspects that we have just described.

(*Appel au dépassement, conf. sur la virginité*, pp. 10-12, *Retraites* 1970, Canada)

## 2. A Treasure in an earthen vessel

It cannot be denied that we carry things of great value in our very weak bodies. It is just as certain that Virginity is a gift from God and a charism: it is not everyone who can consecrate his virginity to the Kingdom. We should therefore thank God that we possess this charism at least in our desire. But as in any other virtue or gift, the effort to obtain this charism consists of two halves: on the one hand, God's help from whom this gift comes, and on the other, our collaboration (here we sometimes fail).

In this duality, we observe on the one hand the persistence and the love of the Father, who helps us and stimulates us, independently of our response; on the other hand, we humbly notice that our effort sometimes at the end of its tether, gives in much more out of weakness than out of malice - although sometimes malice is hidden in weakness. We must offer all this to the Lord. Brothers, it is important that, in order to preserve this gift, we seek to identify the human elements that interfere with what is a strictly supernatural gift so that in a moment of crisis, doubt or hesitation, we may detect the risk of throwing overboard all that is a gift.

To live our religious life well and to witness to it, it is necessary to receive a proper sexual formation that will lead to sexual maturity... However, sexual maturity is insufficient to live our consecrated virginity. There is no use in bragging that we can resist any temptation; rather, we need to be the Lord's slaves and to say that along with our *fiat* we will do what we have promised – grace will do the rest. At the same time, our yes must be logical and coherent.

Now, in order that the witness to chastity that I give to the young with whom I live, to my Brothers, my relatives, and my mother, may be effective, I must have an adequate formation. In this regard sometimes, I don't say that we are limping, but that we fear to let it be seen that we are conscious of our option and of what we have renounced...

Absolute maturity on all levels will be very difficult to achieve and nobody will be able to say, I got ten out of ten at all levels of my personality...

Psychological maturity consists in understanding the problem of love. A man is mature when the two kernels that make up his personality, sex and love, can be integrated and become one – just like a fruit. It is this integration that constitutes psychological maturity for the consecrated person and for the married alike.

*(Llamamiento à la renovación, virginidad consagrada, p. 1, January 1973, Norte)*

### **3. On the three vows**

We believe not only in God but also in neighbour; we hope not only in God, but also in neighbour, we love with the same and unique charity God and neighbour.

In this way, religious are Christ's witnesses in this world. They wish to be the signs of the fruitfulness of the Spirit, which is communicated and made visible in a life that is not only united in poverty, obedience and virginity, but is also one that is for God and neighbour. This 'being for neighbour', must be made visible through vows, vows that are seen precisely as being made out of love and for the purpose of serving others. As the years go by, our service of others must not become resignation to an inevitable duty, but a living act by which we publicly committed ourselves to a generous and permanent duty.

Then, if one professes the means, the more the reason will one have to profess the end. If poverty, chastity and obedience have no other purpose than to love, it is clear that by these three vows, we commit ourselves to love.

In my world, there are men who make the vow to love me and, in return, I made the vow to love them. These persons who love each other give witness to

- a poverty – freedom and a poverty – love,
- an obedience – availability and an obedience – sanctification
- a virginity – love and a virginity – fecundity.

The day the world sees religious like this, as men who have made their lives 'beings for others', for the benefit of humanity on a permanent basis, this world will end up admiring religious life. This means that the vows that are meant to destroy our selfishness and to create, direct and consecrate all our energies so as to engender a dynamism that leads straight to God and neighbour. We want to add

that this dynamism leads to God more at the affective level, since God does not need us for Himself, whereas it is His will to need us for neighbour, who needs our love. (Circ. *The community life*, pp. 179-181)

#### **4. The son's desire**

The Chinese say that a man cannot return to the earth without having written a book, planted a tree and fathered a son. He wants to leave with the knowledge that his life has been useful, he does not wish to leave this world empty handed. Well, there are moments when the desire to have a child can be felt as a deep need...

Brothers, one of the strongest and noblest temptations where man foregoes all the power of his being, all the strength of his deep love, is not in the wish to have a spouse and make her happy, but in the longing to father a successor and to leave something in this life. In these moments of temptation we must remember that religious life possesses an enormous fruitfulness if we know how to live it with passion and love, as we must do. Myself, I am only a poor man, but I wonder: if I had married, would I have been able to provide the help that the Lord willed to do by my hands in this world, in the midst of men and women, to children, priests and religious? I needed the freedom, the availability, to be unattached to any spouse, in order to be at the service of everybody, and in order that nobody might have the right to call me his; so that free of the spirit of possession, I might stay open to all needs.

And now you, Superiors: take great care of the heart's power. May the apostolic wealth, the personal wealth, that the vow of virginity has freed for the service of humanity, reach every place where love has not yet penetrated, so that the unloved may be loved. May they be loved thanks to structures that, although exacting on the point of virtue, are open to pastoral care, structures that will not inhibit the power and the availability liberated by the vow of virginity. This is crucial if we really want our apostolate to be fruitful. Then, religious and the vow of virginity will be a blessing for the world. (*Bética Marista*, n° 56, February 1973, pp. 95-96)

### 3. **OBEDIENCE : THE PASSION TO DO GOD'S WILL**

In Basilio's life, no vow was lived so concretely and passionately as the vow of obedience. When he became superior general, he was conscious that the Council was calling us to renewal; for him that call became a commandment. He reflected on it, and then he wrote the best and the deepest of his circulars, the one on obedience. This passionate desire to do God's will drove him every day, as superior general, to look for what it meant for him and for his congregation. He had already faced crucial moments where his obedience had demanded great generosity. As a result, his obedience was not narrow-minded, far from 'only what the constitutions say', or 'only what the superior wants'! Rather, his obedience was a loving quest every day for the Father's will and a generous effort to live it. His obedience might be called majestic, since it had immediate repercussions on nine thousand Brothers, on their apostolate with half a million youth in hundreds of dioceses and countries. His obedience typified his life, dynamic, creative, truly apostolic and open to God's Spirit.

#### **3.1 The Commandment of Renewal**

Basilio was elected as superior general in a very particular time. The Council had just drawn to a close and its documents had to be studied and assimilated, a task that took time. The spirit of renewal and rejuvenation that had breathed on the Church required each congregation to establish a process of renewal by a return to its sources and to the Gospel, and an adaptation in keeping with the needs of the world.

We know that our 1967 general chapter was the special chapter that the Church had asked for. Since the Brothers had to ponder the implications of renewal and were required to re-write the Constitutions, this chapter was prolonged, running to a second session in 1968. "During this second phase of the Chapter, the Church specifically asks our Institute to undertake a serious self scrutiny, an examination of its life, its actions, its members and its rules of government."<sup>86</sup> Basilio considered what the Church wanted as God's will for the institute and for himself.

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<sup>86</sup> Circ. 2 January, p. 4

During the retreats that he directed in Latin America, 1969-1970, in Canada, in the summer of 1970 and in Spain during 1972, he always gave a long conference entitled, *The Commandment of Renewal*.<sup>87</sup> The brothers were struck by the title given to these retreats, *The Call to Excel*, or, *The Call to Renewal (Llamamiento a la Renovación)*. In this way the Brothers came to see how Basilio understood the will of the Church. We can say that he had foreshadowed this in his very first circular when he elaborated the agenda of the special chapter so that our renewal could start on the right footing. Some may have found this circular, all 700 pages of it – rather daunting. However, it was full of excellent doctrinal richness and displayed a prophetic audacity that the congregation was not used to. Even the title was somewhat unusual: dated January 2<sup>nd</sup>, it evoked the anniversary of our foundation, precisely because the congregation was about to engage itself in a process of re-foundation.

In this circular, Basilio specified the conditions for a true obedience to the Church: a knowledge of the conciliar documents, the rediscovery of the true picture of the Founder, an understanding of the world in which we live. His treatment of these three conditions constitutes the longest and the most important part of the circular: *The Calls of the World*<sup>88</sup>, nearly 180 pages, *The Calls of the Church*<sup>89</sup>, 130 pages, and *The Calls of the Founder*,<sup>90</sup> about 100 pages.

As we read this circular, we come in touch with a man who is searching, a new and a daring superior who was not afraid to use all his intellect, faith and love to pursue this task. He communicated to the Brothers not only his views, but also his enthusiasm and generosity. This intelligent and loving obedience inspired the whole Congregation. He continued this same work during the whole period of his first mandate. The Circular on Obedience provides the perspective from which that we can read his circular, *Community Life*, the whole thrust of which was to indicate the ways we might build communities that were more fraternal, more evangelical, and more daring in their apostolic undertakings.

During the first general conference, in July 1971, there was an oral meditation with the provincials in which Basilio strongly appealed to them to engage themselves promptly in the task of renewal: “I feel growing more and more within me with a

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<sup>87</sup> Appel au dépassement, 13, Le Renouveau, retreat given in 1970 ; see also Bética Marista, 52.

<sup>88</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 161-342

<sup>89</sup> Id., pp. 347-474

<sup>90</sup> Id., pp. 478-587

spontaneous and irresistible force, the decision, to undertake in a spirit of loyalty, and to accomplish, as far as my authority permits but in a collegial way, the post-conciliar and the post-chapter Marist way of life. I expect that you will, in your moments of prayer, listen to the Spirit and be led by his movements... It is important that the wind does come from the Spirit and that we know how to respond to it without delay. Forgive me for repeating this, but the day when religious life declines to replenish its life from the Holy Spirit and continues to nourish itself from repetitive texts, it will have renounced not only its Christian substance that is life lived in the holy freedom of God's children, but also its own identity amidst God's people, that is to say, its charismatic character."<sup>91</sup>

Father Manuel Portillo was the person who gave most help to Basilio in the Spanish and Latin American retreats. Here is how he described Basilio's obedience to the Church: "We call 'prophets' those men who at the behest of God can forewarn men of the novelties God will bring into the world. Brother Basilio, at the end of Vatican II, was already doing what the Extraordinary Synod of 1986 was to recommend. He drew on the sources of tradition and he listened to the Holy Spirit in every effort to achieve renewal. Without changing the Institute, Basilio and so many other Brothers, renewed it beautifully. In some ways it has been like 'All the Brothers return to the novitiate!'; <sup>92</sup> it has been a true re-founding of the Institute. Something new was accomplished, just as Champagnat accomplished something new."<sup>93</sup>

The renewal that Basilio had in mind did not stop at the intellectual and structural levels. He worked at the heart of religious life: He wanted the Brothers to renew their style of prayer, so that they would more spontaneously become familiar with God through prolonged efforts at contemplation and the assimilation of the Word. This is the spirit that inspired the circular, *A Talk on Prayer*, all his retreats on meditation and prayer, and the circular *Meditation*.

Again and again, he insisted on the quality of formation necessary for the young Brothers so that they might be apostles in society. The circular, *The Spirit of the Institute*, takes us back to our sources, putting us in touch with their clarity and the Christian and human values that they offer.

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<sup>91</sup> *Méditation à haute voix*, pp.348-349; 353

<sup>92</sup> *Circ. Project communautaire*, p. 7

<sup>93</sup> *FMS-Message*, n° 19, May 1996, p. 35

To turn the Brothers' hearts towards the Founder, Basilio launched 'The Year of Champagnat Spirituality'. Then, he declared the Hermitage our family's sanctuary. Next, he wrote a short but important circular to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Founder's beatification: *1980, The Champagnat Year*.

An obedient response to the Council's call to renewal had to be based on a knowledge and love of the Church, the conciliar documents, the Founder, our origins, our spirit, and the changing world, but above all we had to renew our hearts for God. Basilio's method of work exemplifies his style of obedience: He used scientific means of gathering data, questionnaires, statistics and surveys made by specialists. These gave him an objective basis for the advice he gave and for appropriate decision-making; in this way he led the Congregation towards an intelligent, enlightened and appropriate renewal.

The renewal was applied to all sectors of Marist life: the central or provincial government structures, the innovation of provincial chapters, the new Constitutions presenting our life in terms of Gospel values, community life, a more spontaneous and authentic style of prayer, an orientation of the apostolate to include young people who were not in schools, the poor and the missions. Obedience touches the heart of everything. Basilio wanted our obedience to come from our hearts since only the heart can transform obedience into love, love being the true nature of the vow and the virtue of obedience.

There is another project where Basilio succeeded beautifully. This was a reflection on God's will, together with numerous testimonies, a pure masterpiece of spiritual writing, his circular on *Obedience*.

### **3.2 A Precious circular**

If there was one great lesson that Basilio wished to give the Brothers, it was the need to acquire a loving passion for the Father's will, to be convinced that God's will always means an expression of love and life enrichment and that it is the only way to develop the whole man. This is the constant theme of the circular *Obedience*.

This circular dated 30 May 1975, a modest volume of 150 pages, is certainly the most beautiful of all his writings insofar as it revealed a man passionate for God, always eager to do the Father's will and to do so out of love. It is the writing of a spiritual master, of one close to God, and of one who excelled in the knowledge and understanding of human nature. It gave him the opportunity to place his most intimate experiences and convictions alongside the concrete situations in which the Brothers lived their obedience. Father Manuel Portillo confided, "One day as we were preparing some material on obedience, he said, 'I will never shrink from loving God's will for us; his will is kind and loving'. That observation helped me to live the day in contemplation."<sup>94</sup>

This circular taught us how to keep seeking the Father's will, how to join our obedience with that of Jesus.<sup>95</sup> It elaborated the roles of mediation, of discernment, of dialogue and of metanoia.<sup>96</sup> In this way Basilio led the Congregation, the provinces and the communities, to a responsible and adult obedience. He drew our attention to the reality of group obedience. The vow of obedience is not only a matter for the concern of the individual; the whole community must also seek what God wants for the whole group in its fraternal and apostolic lives. This explains why Basilio wrote his two circulars on *The Community Project* in 1973 and *The Community Life Project* in 1980. He asked us to imagine the source of life, of holiness and apostolate that might animate the communities if every year they honestly and without fear asked the question, "What does God the Father want us to do this year?" and based their programme of life on their response. What he proposed was exacting but vital; it would mean a new start every year, every day, assuring the vitality of the community. Obedience of this kind truly ennobles those who live it: the heart becomes permeated with the attitudes of God. It would be a great pity if these circulars were not given the attention they deserve in the Institute.

This quick overview of the circular on obedience is intended to indicate the source of Basilio's obedience: a heart seduced by God, a heart touched by God's fatherly love. At the same time it also indicates the intellectual and educational effort needed for the growth of the whole congregation in obedience. It was the effort of a man who was responsible of his Brothers' obedience and for the quality of the spiritual life of the family.

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<sup>94</sup> El Estilo de una Vida, p. 55.

<sup>95</sup> Circ. On Obedience, pp. 42-48.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. pp. 58-59.

We will offer many excerpts from the circular. But we would like to invite the Brothers and their friends to use it as a source book during important spiritual moments such as a recollection or a retreat. It enlightens the mind and warms the heart.

### **3.3 The Obedience of a Superior General**

All that has been said already is obviously relevant to this, but we can add more details. First, he was conscious that he had to live a particular obedience and that he had to be the first one to seek God's will for him and for the Congregation. He confided what he had felt during the first few days after his election: "I sensed that a confusing responsibility had just fallen on my shoulders. I was far from knowing exactly what I had committed myself to, the scope and the limits of my obligations and, the practical means of carrying out my duties. I even wondered whether the chapter would truly hear the calls the Spirit, whether it would choose the more demanding path of the Gospel or opt for easier ways... A happy and enthusiastic obedience to the demands of a responsible superior was one thing; to have become responsible for the whole Institute was very different."<sup>97</sup>

Then, he revealed his interior feelings: "When the moment came I finally made my choice and accepted the office. I did not have to improvise, for a charitable soul had warned me that I was on the list of candidates. I therefore had the opportunity to foresee this possibility and think about it a few days in advance. And after some time of interior hesitation, and much prayer and meditation, I pronounced my Fiat. God alone judges men's intentions. I placed myself in his fatherly hands."<sup>98</sup>

Thus Basilio came to realise that he would be the one to set the Marist renewal in motion, a renewal that, with the other major superiors, was a task for the whole of religious life.<sup>99</sup> However, in the particulars of daily life, how was he going to exercise the obedience of a superior general? For him it meant constantly giving of himself and remaining always at the service of others. What could God ask a superior general to do if not to be the shepherd, to care for his flock and therefore to welcome all the labours his new task involved? The immense amount of work of his late nights, the long journeys, the interviews he had in directing so many

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<sup>97</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 4

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> See the book I want to awake the dawn.

Brothers, the retreats he gave to other religious orders, the confidential missions confided to him by the Church – is not all this an important part of his obedience? We have to say yes, since God had placed these responsibilities on his shoulders. Moreover, Basilio assumed all these tasks with enthusiasm, sowing joy through his constant attention to the person. Far from simply resigning himself to his duties, he entered into things with a generosity that gave him joy. At the same time it should be noted that he had to pay a heavy price: fatigue, sickness and premature ageing. He knew very well that he was ‘burning the candle at both ends’, but that was for the Lord that was his ideal. We therefore understand why in the course of his journeys, he would sometimes make long detours to meet a Brother to help him discern God’s will and to accept it. God asked him to make himself available to all, especially to those who were suffering. He kept in close contact with a few provincials who with him were making their way through post-conciliar storms. He helped them carry their crosses and to serve God during those terrible years. The testimony of Brother José Antonio Guardado of San Salvador is very strange. During an interview, Basilio asked him abruptly: “Brother José, do you think you would go mad if you agreed to be Provincial?”... “I don’t think it would come to this.” Then, Basilio continued, “Brother José Antonio, don’t worry about yourself, take care of your Brothers.” “That was checkmate for me! I can tell you that the retreat with Brother Basilio allowed me to plan the following six years during which I had to serve my Brothers. His questionnaires pointed the way I had to go.”<sup>100</sup>

Brother José Manuel Gomez, who was the provincial of Colombia, wrote, “He helped me every time I asked for his help, either for my personal needs or those of the province. He did not grudge anyone the length of time used to settle a situation, day or night.”<sup>101</sup> The door of his office was always open, and he spent countless hours welcoming Brothers, listening to them and encouraging them. This is the way he discerned God’s will for himself and helped the Brothers to do the same thing. The voluminous reports of his visits to the provinces show his care to enlighten, to redress, to encourage, to find the truth and especially with the persons in-charge to seek what God was asking from this or that province. In one province, meditation had to be energised, another province had to be stimulated towards greater apostolic daring, or community life had to become more apostolic, or a province where poverty had given way to a middle class life style had to be

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<sup>100</sup> Testimony dated, 2 September 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Testimony given in Rome, September 2002, Manziana.

corrected. His responsibility was to help the whole Congregation to say ‘yes’ more generously to God, and this entailed instruction in reading the signs of the times.<sup>102</sup>

Skill in reading the signs of the times was a gift characteristic of the prophets. Brothers and others often attributed this quality to Basilio who often reflected on it himself.<sup>103</sup> Two conditions are needed to become a prophet: to hold God with one hand and to take the pulse of the world with the other. Although Basilio was in constant relationship with God, he remained passionate about the world; he followed current events and would discuss them wisely at any time.

Because of his sensitivity to the action of grace, he often saw in an event the movement of Spirit: he regarded the Council as a true Pentecost, the beautiful texts of the general chapter bore the Spirit’s signature, the new constitutions were born from the Spirit’s breadth. Attentive to the Spirit he accepted the intuitions he received even when that meant a mountain of work, as was the case for the circular on *Fidelity*: “After seven years of work with the Brothers the intuition for this work came to me like a flash of light. This intuition arose from the thousands of moving confidences that I had received and kept on receiving: they held me to this resolution. My heart was full of admiration at all these manifestations of fidelity and perseverance in our Congregation.

The circular came to germination without my realising it, beginning with unforgettable interviews where Brothers poured out their memories, joys, difficulties, crises, falls, re-starts; thousands of details of lives spent for God progressively prompted me to write.”<sup>104</sup>

Basilio invited us to a dynamic, living and daily obedience. God had given him his ten talents and expected him to make them bear fruit. A multitude of Brothers have acknowledged that his talents were very well used in the Congregation and in the Church.

### **3.4 And in More Evident Moments**

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<sup>102</sup> Briefings after visiting Provinces as Cordoba, (Argentina), Zaire-Rwanda, Swiss, United States...

<sup>103</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 304-305

<sup>104</sup> *Circ. sur la fidélité*, p. 9

Now that we know what Basilio understood by obedience, a passion to do God's will, we can turn our attention to a few classical moments where an immediate 'yes' proved necessary.

One such case was the time when he was just finishing his doctoral thesis and was practically ready to present it. At that very moment, his provincial asked him to give up his studies and assume the direction of the Juniorate. Basilio confided in his teacher, friend and model Oswaldo Robles: "Just as that thesis is almost ready, I am sent to the Juniorate. I will seek out my professor and tell him, 'See, it is practically ready, and I am sent elsewhere.' The Professor replied, 'Brother, when God asks you to go elsewhere, you must not argue. I live in science but science is not worth Jesus Christ.'"<sup>105</sup> Basilio called his professor his spiritual father.

Another dramatic moment that greatly moved the capitulants was his election for a second mandate. He was elected on the first ballot. He gave his full consent but only with some difficulty. In his simplicity, he had already packed his suitcases, he had told his friends that he had ended his task as superior and had written his farewell circular: *Mary in Our Lives*. At that time he was already feeling relieved of a burden weighing down his shoulders. He revealed later that each ballot-paper that bore his name hit him like a hammer on the head. He perspired so much that he had to withdraw for a time to regain control of his body. Nevertheless, at the festive meal that followed, he was among his Brothers with his usual smile. So, he took up another nine years of overwhelming work as superior general. Brother Maurice Bergeret, Provincial of Our Lady of the Hermitage, recalls that moment: "The expression on his face during the vote made a lasting impression on my mind. As president of the capitular assembly, Brother Basilio closely supervised the count. At first, his expression was just normal for a procedure that was progressing properly. But as the votes carrying his name went on accumulating, his expression and his face became sombre. One could guess the terrible struggle within himself. When his re-election became evident, he gave his agreement with words that revealed neither emotion nor sadness; then he added joyfully, 'Tell all the Brothers that I love them and that I will put myself at their service with all my strength.'"<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 30

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 30

When his second mandate ended he took a sabbatical year, and then expressed his desire to go and work in Mozambique or in Angola.<sup>107</sup> His provincial asked him to use his talents for his original province, Central Mexico. He took care of the novices in all simplicity. Brother Charles Howard invited him to open the Champagnat Movement of the Marist Family in Mexico. He set himself to this task also with the passion that characterised him. That was something else he could do for the people of God, His Church.

How many times this man reminded us of Marcellin's obedience and faithfulness to the Church! In his very first circular, he had devoted eleven pages to strengthen our availability to the Church and our obedience to the pope.<sup>108</sup> He reminded us that it was safer to listen to the voice of the pope rather than to those of theologians, and that he preferred to follow the footsteps of the saints rather than the doubtful doctrine of a few contemporary doctors. He even said that he was ready, should the need arise, to sacrifice the congregation if this action would advantage the Church.<sup>109</sup>

We recall the letter of apology that he sent to Cardinal Somalo, when he had learned that a Brother had dared to send a disrespectful letter of criticism to the Pope.<sup>110</sup> We refer here to the obedience that all the saints have practised vis-à-vis the Church and the Pope. Basilio walked in the Founder's footsteps.

Brother Luis Puebla Centeno narrated something that illustrates Basilio's obedience in ordinary life: "As he had to give a conference to the Union of the Superiors General, he asked for certain information that he was interested in. The information was close to hand, but it was marked 'top secret'. It was decided to ask for the authorisation, explaining the need that underlay the request and specifying that the petition was coming from the superior general. The authorisation was not granted. Basilio commented, 'There is no problem, since it was refused we have only to obey.>'<sup>111</sup> Obedience in seeking and welcoming God's will had penetrated the substance of his ordinary life.

His Yes led him successively from Mexico to Ecuador, 1960-1964, as leader of the Movement for a Better World, and to Spain where he assumed the task of master

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<sup>107</sup> Enregistred letter to Bro. Spiridion, august 1994.

<sup>108</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 524-534.

<sup>109</sup> See the chapter on the Church.

<sup>110</sup> The letter is presented in the notebook on the Church.

<sup>111</sup> Madrid Marista, supplément au n° 71, avril 1996, p. 15

of the second novices, 1965-1967. After that, he was in Rome for eighteen years as superior general. During all these years he became a Marist pilgrim to the whole world, 1967-1985. He had had only a few years of respite in Mexico when he was asked to return to Rome to head a special eighteen-month course organised to prepare future formators in the congregation, 1990-1991. He returned to his home country to be the master of novices for the two provinces, 1991-1996. But by then, he had practically reached the end of his earthly career.

During his last illness he clearly told his superior to discontinue all care if medicine could not guarantee a worthwhile life. The last message he sent to his friends was full of confidence in the Father whose will is always an expression of love and life. “I realise today the practical realisation of a truth that Brother Leonida told me years ago, ‘You are burning your life at both ends, your candle burns at both ends,’ and he sent me a page of a periodical that had a picture of a rather large kind of candle lit at both ends. I gave him a somewhat foolish answer, ‘That has always been my ideal’. To burn my life for Christ and for my congregation even if my life is shortened.’ Did I do the right thing? Or was I mistaken? I don’t really care very much. I place everything in Jesus Christ’s hands, into the Father’s hands and I feel a deep peace in thanksgiving and praise of God. I know there are no better hands than God’s and this is where I place myself.”<sup>112</sup>

Such an obedience is beautiful, worthy of a man, makes him the man he is, bears abundant fruit, and it is beneficial to others. It dwells in love, it is love, and it produces love. It is a proclamation of the fatherhood of God, an act of trust and loving worship of the Father. It enables Christ to give us his heart to become totally available to his Spirit. Basilio lived the great mystery that he had revealed to the Brothers in his circular *Obedience*, that “Jesus Christ is me and I am Jesus Christ,” in the deepest meaning of the word.<sup>113</sup> The countless testimonies to be found in the book *El Estilo de una Vida* agree with this summation.<sup>114</sup>

## TEXTS

### 1. For a dynamic obedience

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<sup>112</sup> Message recorded by Basilio one month before his death; *Quemar la Vida*, p. 306-307

<sup>113</sup> *Circ. Obedience*, p. 37.

<sup>114</sup> *El Estilo de una vida*, Bro. José Flores (Chepo), Mexico, 1998.

There is a further wonderful element in this will of God. God would have us to be saviours of our Brothers, saviours united with His Son in the redemption and transformation of the world. We are not called merely to a passive role, even though it be a noble one, the role of acceptance. Rather we are called to work with Him to achieve the coming of His Kingdom, the creation of a better world, worthy of men, a world made up of men of good will, where peace will be a natural concomitant.

We should look to Mary, the ideal woman. She lived at a time when a woman's role in affairs was entirely passive, yet she found herself involved in an extraordinary forward march towards a new world, very different from the picture we get from St Paul. With her sense of contemplation, which appears in the Gospel account of the divine infancy, and her sense of initiative, which is so evident at Cana and on Calvary, she stirs the initiative of her Son, and this issues in the dynamism that we see exhibited in the Visitation and at Pentecost. She is the valiant woman *par excellence*; she can never be imagined a quietist; her obedience is more than merely passive.

Like the radio, we must be attuned carefully to the divine will, otherwise we shall not receive the divine emission; rather, we shall receive all sorts of other distracting noises. We shall go on believing that joy is a thing we can find by the use of our intelligence, by employing some technique. There are religious who look to psychology to bring about their liberation, who fondly believe in their own self-sufficiency. Such self-seekers are the ones least capable of helping to lift the world out of the ethic of individualism that has weighed it down over recent decades. Yes, they are children, having no idea of what is good or bad for them.  
(Circular on *Obedience*, pp.31-32)

## **2. God's will, where alone we become like Christ**

The point I am making is that the will of God can place you in a situation that is not natural for you, which demands things beyond your strength. There are two elements involved, however; first, my nature, which fancies it can find satisfaction only within its own preconceived conditions; and secondly, there is the incomprehensible element – an incredible degree of divine aid, a notion which the

simple faith of earlier days accepted without surprise but which the unbelief of today makes it harder to accept.

Faith has been undergoing, so to speak, a hardening of the ear drums. Take David Oistrakh, the finest violinist in the world, and set him to work with a pick in a mine for a week, and then see the concert that follows! The musician's sensitivity will be blunted for a long time. We too need sensitivity, for in the will of God there is an infinity of nuances, which do not always stand out clearly. Only a great spiritual delicacy can divine them. Tell me, for instance, can you give a rational explanation why God consigned His own Son to death?

If we want to rationalise the will of God in such a way that our limited idea of what is good for us becomes the measure and criterion for discerning that will, we are wasting our time. With such a criterion we shall accept the Father's will where it is manifestly easy, but not where it calls for sacrifice. Yet it is these latter exigencies that make us into other Christs.

I have not the least desire to facilely label all sorts of human follies as being God's will, such, for instance, as issuing orders without reflection... Many things happen contrary to the will of God, despite God's power...because we are not puppets, and he takes our liberty seriously. He leaves the unfolding of the history of salvation to the free will of men and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And we can really put obstacles in the way of God's planning. The grandeur of God consists in seeking to influence this human liberty – which is a genuine liberty – dealing with the human person who has real power to act wrongly, even if God does not want him to act wrongly. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp.34-35)

### **3. The path towards God's will**

The will of God is not always clear. It is characteristic of the human condition to need the help of mediators in discovering this will. And not everyone can be such a mediator. I can live a long time with a man and even love him greatly without being sure what is God's will in his regard. Some people – and this is not uncommon – want to have a kind of mathematical certitude. They construct a series of syllogisms to justify what they do as being God's will, whilst in reality they are following a caprice. This is not the way to find God's will. Here is the right way: the transcendent god is love, presented to me under the form of

mystery, facing me first of all as a task of discovery, then as a realisation of intense love, then as complete fulfilment. I can refuse to accept this will, but if I ask for it I shall surely find it....

God offers himself to us as gift and as grace and awaits our response. Our response involves the use of our liberty: we are free to embrace his will, which means our wellbeing, our happiness, our future. Thus we help him fulfil his plans for our joy and our fecundity. But so long as we go through life without having discovered this way of looking at God's will for us, the human-divine interplay of our lives is more like a relationship with the Greek gods than with the father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 29-31.)

#### **4. A real passion for the Father's Will**

I simply add my comment: the kind of formation that prepared a religious for the previous style of obedience – let us call it the classic concept – is quite insufficient today. Neither religious formed fifty years ago nor those trained five years ago, have been prepared for the new phase of obedience that is coming into being, and neither of these age groups (apart from a few saints) are ready for obedience in the sense we see unfolding today.

In this new vision of obedience, a more intense spirituality is called for, much greater purity of intention, more renunciation of egoism, a complete willingness to follow the ways of the Lord, a real passion for the Father's will. And it is here that our difficulties arise. We have set about establishing a new system of obedience – and one that is authentic – but the time is not propitious, for it comes at a moment where in large measure the sense of prayer is lost, where there is a crisis of faith, when the world is invaded not by a commendable secularisation that would make itself Greek to the Greeks, Gentile to the Gentiles, and all things to all men so as to win them for Christ, but by a frivolous secularism which robs the salt of its savour and the leaven of its ferment, and which replaces the Gospel by an utterly destructive psychology. All these circumstances are matters we cannot substantially alter. Dialogue is an indispensable tool in the new form of obedience, and it should be frequent, even habitual. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 104-105.)

#### **5. Obedience built on a serene dialogue**

When I speak of “dialogue”, I envisage serene community exchange at depth. But if a Brother is incapable of frank and open evangelical dialogue with his superiors, how can he be frank and open before the community? A meeting can go off with some stimulating sparring, with a certain amount of entertaining debate, but it is not that which I am speaking of. If we are concerned with a spiritual manifestation which reveals me in depth, so that the community can assume responsibility for my life and we can walk together in God’s paths, while I in turn assume responsibility for my Brothers and with them seek out God’s will for us all – if this ideal is to be achieved, a high level of charity is called for and all must put their cards on the table. But how many communities arrive at this level? How many Brothers, passing through a crisis, can speak of it to the community? Before this can be, the individual Brother should be capable of that frank dialogue with his superior, which is the vestibule of obedience.

Desire to embrace God’s will is an attitude susceptible of growth, and this growth depends upon several factors both in those who command and those who obey: human maturity... a level of honesty. For in the same words we can express both truth and falsehood, and what is devious in man can be gradually eliminated by progress in sincerity, openness, sharing, a spirit of faith and a life of prayer. Just as virginity is not possible without prayer of faith, hope and charity that fills the heart and gives it strength, also dialogue in a spirit of obedience is not possible without this same prayer. If we want to achieve this form of obedience we must cultivate the prayer that paves the way to it. And we shall find at the same time that we are growing in maturity. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 105-106.)

## **6. One can acquire the virtue of obedience.**

In the past there were serious mistakes in carrying over the notion of blind obedience into the professional, pastoral and apostolic domains, but the contrary danger exists today: we are preparing aspirants for obedience while giving them no exercise in it – gymnastic champions who have never done gymnastics!

No one is born with facility in prayer: we learn prayer through the breath of the Holy Spirit and by personal effort. No one is born chaste; little by little we acquire the fidelity and self-conquest, which at a given time are concentrated in our dedication. No one is born sincere, but becomes such throughout a long life of

authenticity and sincerity. No virtue is mature at birth; all develop from an initial small seed, even the infused ones.

So no one is born obedient, and one who does not train himself to it will never learn obedience. He will accept, more or less contentedly, the exigencies of religious life until he is ordered to do something he does not like, and then, no matter how clear is God's manifest will, he'll let superiors know what he thinks!

When to a lack of training in obedience during formation years there is added a deficient faith and a shallow spirituality, what is there to cling to when a crisis comes? It is all too plain that to insist on drill in obedience is not a popular attitude today. Yet Brothers responsible for formation must ask themselves whether that is a sufficient reason to dispense with so essential an element in the training of young religious. Most people are ready to obey when they have superiors who are ideal and the situation is normal enough, but when superiors are difficult or a situation makes unwonted demands? (Circular on *Obedience*, pp 117-118)

## **7. Responsibility precedes obedience.**

It would be pleasant if all answers to problems were clear and simple, but life is not like that, which explains the need for analysis and dialogue. In other words, we resort to rules for the discernment of spirits: i.e. we analyse the data, and then act with uprightness of intention. One who has not a simple, pure and upright heart will find this difficult, for in all these problems of practical obedience he simply has not the equipment to reach an untroubled solution....

The heart of man has an enormous capacity for self-deception and justifying what it will... Therefore, if we want to reach a position of perfect honesty with ourselves, this will be achieved only by a progressive fidelity towards God, a progressive purification of our own heart, and a simplicity in speech which calls black black and white white. And as we discipline ourselves in ascetical obedience, we must, in line with this simplicity and honesty, be careful not to shuffle off our responsibilities.

Yet this is precisely what can be done under the pretext of obedience. We must remember that obedience is not an easy and graceful way of evading duties, owing

to the fortunate presence of the person we call the superior – an adroit way of doing the reverse of God’s will: “The superior has given permission; everything is all right!”

Even Canon Law, with its very juridical standpoint, does not fall into this trap. It makes plain that no one has the right to seek a permission which is in conflict with his conscience, and no superior can grant a permission which is contrary to God’s will. Moreover, if a superior has given an unwarranted permission, or if on my part I make an unwarranted request, I am obliged in conscience to refrain from using that permission. And should I venture to use such a permission, I thereby violate my conscience and my vow. It is entirely wrong to view the superior as a packet of aspirin that serves to calm consciences and permit each one to do as he pleases. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 122-123)

## **8. Responsibility, an important aspect of obedience**

It tends to be more and more seen as abnormal that a community of consecrated men or women, who have made the Gospel the lodestar of their lives and the object of all their activities, should be passive about directly aiding their members to be attuned to God’s will. Such an attitude might well shock anyone who reflects, yet this is our heritage from a past where the exercise of obedience was viewed almost entirely as an individual relationship.

A great many religious accept no responsibility for others and for the quality of their life-style. If we are strictly logical, we must confess that this amounts to saying that they have no concern for the community as such in its living out its consecrated life and in the witness it should give to the Church and to the world. We can find also men who personally are excellent religious but who are incapable of saying a fraternal word about the conduct of the community when it is obviously running against what God would want. They suffer from it, they see a confrere, or a whole community, slipping from their ideals or their fidelity, or maybe even abandoning fundamental values, possibly under the guise of some fine-sounding theory, and yet they say nothing. Any prophetic action, any mediation is, in their judgement, reserved to the superior, on whom alone devolves the disagreeable task of rectifying on every occasion anything that is amiss. Such an attitude finds no support in the Gospel. (Circular on *Obedience*, pp.126-127.)

## 9. The Last Letter

“To so many friends whom I consider as my brothers, my own brothers, as my beloved friends, let them understand that my friendship has never grown less, and that, on the contrary, it has over time become stronger and warmer than ever.

During these recent years I have been very happy. All my life, obedience has been my guide. Experience has taught me that thanks to the mediation of superiors and others, the Lord has led me through unusual paths which at times were even somewhat abnormal for a Marist Brother, working both within and without the Congregation, with affectionate support but always under the obedience and direction of my superiors. I have lived without any personal choice of work; this has simply been to assume my mission with all my heart and all my soul. I recall the numerous places where I have stayed, the unforgettable locations, the vastly different countries I visited, the poorest and the richest social conditions in the world, the comfortable and more than comfortable houses where I was lodged, and on occasions, the cramped narrow accommodation where the modest facilities had to be arranged before I arrived. Still, everywhere I felt at home and I enjoyed the love and affection of my Brothers to whom I gave all that my heart and my strength could give...

‘You are burning your life at both ends,’ Brother Leonida had told me. My answer had been a little foolish, ‘That has always been my ideal.’ to burn my life for Christ and for my congregation at the risk of shortening my life.

Did I do the right thing? Or was I wrong? I don’t care much. I place all this in Christ’s hands, in the Father’s hands and I enjoy a deep peace in thanksgiving and praise. I know there are no better hands than those of God where I have placed myself. The dying Christ committed himself into these very same hands.

I have been in hospital for twenty days. Severe disorders have finally blocked my two kidneys. The doctors have done their best to remedy one kidney at least – dialysis has helped this. However, I don’t know what the outcome will be; an improvement seems possible and I hope to recover at least part of my health.

But that does not matter; if the Lord wants things to move in another direction, I happily accept his will. These last few days, I have thanked Him for the gift of life, for the gift of health, for the gift of life in Jesus Christ, for my vocation in the Marist Congregation, and I can assure you that I have been very happy. But I have been most thankful of all for the Paschal Mystery of Christ, this Mystery of the death and resurrection that surrounds us and eases our own sufferings and infirmities and accepts these for the glory of God and the needs of the Church.

I have offered all my pain for the Church, for all those who suffer in the world that I see every day on television: those caught up in senseless wars, in absurd situations and incredible cruelty... When you see all that you realise that you have suffered comparatively very little yourself. I have asked the Lord: that he may do his will in me. And I have begged him to keep the gifts of faith, hope and of love alive as new in me. I asked for these gifts not because of my merits, for the more I look at my life, the more I find it has empty spaces and many weaknesses. I think that all of them, or nearly all, have been involuntary, but they are there with all their limitations. So I do not place my trust in myself, or in any merits I may have, but purely and simply in the blood and death of Jesus Christ.

I also offered my sufferings for my friends: the group of people to whom I am now writing, who will receive a letter that I would have wished to be more personal... But at least may this letter tell these friends that I do not forget them and that they are very present in my prayer and in my heart.”

*(December 1995, Letter supplied by Brother Victorino de Arce, 17 Feb. 2003)*

## **10. 1976 Re-election**

What was happening in Brother Basilio's mind when the general chapter re-elected him for another nine years on 7 October 1976?

“I had come to know the Institute in the most profound way. Because so many Brothers had put their trust in me in the past and they were doing so once more, I could not escape! Yet, I had carried out my duties as superior general with a feeling of unworthiness. So many times, I had told myself, ‘Poor Institute!’ ‘Poor superior general!’ Before the chapter, I had travelled through Mexico where I had left a few personal records. Obviously, when my re-election came it was really a surprise. This second election was more dreadful than the first one! But it was the

decision of the majority. Then, almost crying – I had to make an effort to control myself – I said yes. Then, a strange thing happened to me that had never occurred before: after the *Magnificat* ceremony at the chapel, I started to perspire. I went to my room and lay on my bed and slept. Then, my nervous system relaxed a little.

I continued to believe that it would have been better to have another superior general. It is too hard and too dangerous for an institute to keep the same person during such a time of renewal. (Interview compiled by Jean Dumortier, in *Présence Mariste*, n° 163, June 1985, p. 11)

## 4. A SAINT ?

We have made a long journey with Brother Basilio. We have followed him from the moment grace had conquered him, in the gaze that he returned towards the Father, on Jesus the Lord and on the Spirit. We have discovered the great place he made for Mary in his heart and in his congregation, and the intimate knowledge he had of the Founder. We have entered his world of prayer, of his love and of his wisdom. With him, we have renewed our understanding of poverty, virginity and of obedience. These were moments of enlightenment, admiration and of conversion. Basilio was certainly a man who drew others towards God. He gave an intelligent, positive, challenging vision of spiritual life. In short, he made us grow towards a fullness of life.

### 4.1 A saint of today and for today

We have to acknowledge Basilio's rich spiritual life. We make this statement all the more easily because he is our contemporary. Although he died in 1996 he has continued to live on with us. What really keeps him close to us? - his openness to the changing world and his positive approach to it. Cultured as he was, he loved the values of society today. He spoke to us with the honest language of one who seeks truth and finds it in the crucible of the times as it emerges in history. He was not a moralising person, but he knew how to propose values. He had a sense of the greatness of the person, conscious that the human person, although so fragile, is capable of great generosity. He knew, too, the importance of keeping one's word.

People found him attractive because his simplicity made him so approachable. Besides the jokes he made to enliven his talks, he enjoyed exchanging witticism with his friends. A joyful and intelligent man, brother among other brothers, he readily offered his sympathy and friendship. That was a part of his ideal "to travel joyfully with friends along the journey of life."<sup>115</sup> The author of remarkable circulars and publications, he was the first after a meal to wash the dishes or sweep the floor! A man who had patiently listened to the numerous problems of his

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<sup>115</sup> Circ. La vie communautaire, p. 176

brothers, he was also the welcoming servant who would carry suitcases and check the readiness of the rooms. While watching for the coming of the dawn of a new religious life, he was content to live with us in all simplicity.

He was a prophet: As Marcellin's true son, he was possessed by the same daring and passion to make Jesus Christ known and loved. Deeply attached to our origins, he wanted a congregation with a renewed spirit that would know how to take its place at the crossroads of humanity: "We must be willing to open ourselves wholeheartedly to the values of our times".<sup>116</sup> He had vigorously offered this invitation in his first circular: "We must be men of our times and in our times; we have to take the pulse of our historical moment, not forgetting to take our place in the dialogue and communion that the Church has established with the world, and especially to attune ourselves to the signs of the times. We can do that only if we are permeated by the spirit of the Lord and of the Gospel: that will enable us to respond to the signs of the times in an appropriate way."<sup>117</sup>

In his circular of 19 March 1978, *The Community Project*, he wrote: "We must pull down the walls that enclose our house! This saying contains a great deal of truth. We have to pull down some walls so that we can open our eyes on the history we are currently living, and take off the blinkers that tie us to our domestic problems, so that we can breathe the sweet air of the Kingdom of God!"(118)

Brother Gildo Cotta, an intimate of Basilio, summed him up in this way: "He was an exceptional personality: He combined kindness and strength, prudence and daring, a fondness for wholesome traditions and the capacity not only to accept what was good in the new but also to take the initiative in renewal. Not only did he work to renew the structures of the Institute, but he also laboured to rejuvenate the spiritual life of every member and of the whole the Institute."<sup>119</sup>

As for Basilio, how did he see himself? Speaking of the grace that he had received, he said: "This allowed me to be the lawful son of the past, I am perfectly rooted in the present and very open to the future."<sup>120</sup> Whenever he spoke of this grace he revealed the purposefulness of one who was passionately committed: "It was out of this that there arose a need to passionately seek God's will in an ecclesial, generous and indispensable communion. A love of truth and discernment of the

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<sup>116</sup> Circ. 2 January, p. 131.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. pp. 280-283.

<sup>119</sup> Bro. Gildo Cotta, FMS-MESSAGE, n°19, p. 46.

<sup>120</sup> Vida Consagrada, Religiosos de Hoy, Madrid 1980

signs of the times make us discover new ways of evangelisation, in complete loyalty to God and man, even at the risk of our own existence.” The general impression is that he was very much ahead of many of us and drawing us forward; he invited us to put our trust in God and to be audacious in taking new apostolic initiatives or in adopting a more fraternal life style: “Anything can fall by the way, but not love!”<sup>121</sup>

Making Basilio known and proposing him as a model to Christians of today is to offer a real companion and model who will help us to live through the uncertainties of our world and Church. Not only will he help us to keep in touch with a quickly changing world but he will give us enthusiasm to acquire the contemporary mind that is eager for knowledge, technology and progress, but also for justice and truth and the values that make things clear in confusing times. As for the soul of modern man, he leaves it in the care of the Spirit of the Lord. We are therefore offering to the man of today a Christian of their own time whose human and spiritual values are just the ones our society needs and looks for.

## **4.2 The voices of witnesses who call him a saint**

Everything that is said here has in one way or another been touched upon previously; still, it is useful to consider what others say of him. Many people insist that in him they had met a saint, while others say they pray to him every day. At the end of his second mandate, Basilio had only one regret: “Truly, I would have preferred a saint to govern our Institute...” Once during a conference on the Word of God, Basilio had underlined the difference between us (himself included) and the saints: “When we look at the subject in this way we are greatly helped, I believe, in responding to the call of the Word of God, by keeping in mind the Word in its totality, in its unlimited salvific purpose. This point is crucial. In reality, the enormous difference between the real saint and the majority of us others who call ourselves believers is the fullness, the integrity, the totality of the welcoming we give to God who becomes the Word in our own flesh and life. In us, the Word is more often like a latent seed anxious to germinate even though we love it dearly and use it for our meditation and shared prayers, whereas among the saints the Word has already blossomed and has become an abundant harvest.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Circ. La vie communautaire, p. 135

<sup>122</sup> Conférence: La Palabra de Dios y los ritmos de vida en el cristiano, p. 2

Basilio's first biographer, Brother José Flores, made the following reflection: "The saints do not look at themselves and they do not put a price on all the work they do; their only interest is God's will. Basilio did not see a saint governing the Institute but very many others did; it is quite possible that some of us did not see him as a saint either. The truth is that it is quite possible that we had a saint governing the Institute of the Marist Brothers during those eighteen years".<sup>123</sup>

The Brothers who were near him during his last illness knew they had been favoured with a special grace: "I truly feel that it was a grace to have been with him during his last moments. Even in this painful circumstance, it was possible to see Basilio's trust in God's will... It is something we have to learn."<sup>124</sup> The same opinion is held by Brother Léonard Ouellet who begins his testimony with these words: "I had the good fortune and the grace to visit and to assist Brother Basilio in his last illness at the Guadalajara Carmel Hospital, in January 1996." And Léonard ends his statement: "An exceptional man of God, a saint, has just left us to be reunited with his God whom he loved so earnestly.»<sup>125</sup>

Other Brothers, on hearing of Basilio's death, sang a thanksgiving song:

*At the service of your brothers and to so many others, without distinction,  
you spent your life in a plenitude of kindness;  
Sower of the truth, witness that lit up the way.  
Light and Truth were your life's poles;  
they explained your life style,  
you who prayed in Mary's way.  
You changed a torrent of light into life,  
your presence inspired confidence,  
in the daily lives of many people.  
You gave yourself to all without limit.  
Our beacon, soft light, subtle perfume.  
Thank you for being such a great witness to God and love. <sup>126</sup>*

Some Brothers reported what they felt when they heard of the decision to open the cause.

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<sup>123</sup> Quemar la vida, p. 245.

<sup>124</sup> El Estilo de una Vida, p. 142. Eduardo Preciado Rábago.

<sup>125</sup> FMS-Message, n° 19, May 1996, p. 11-12

<sup>126</sup> El Estilo de una Vida, p. 156. Br. Roberto Jimenez

From Canada, Brother Borromée Caron wrote, “When I learned that Basilio’s cause of beatification had been introduced, I rejoiced greatly. In all sincerity I had already started to pray to this champion of faith. I dare to regard myself as one of his friends.” In the same mail he sent a little note carrying Brother Basilio’s teasing bit with his signature: *‘Un perro sin dueño’*. Brother Caron had kept this piece of paper as a relic.<sup>127</sup>

Brother Arthur Duguay, also from Canada, sent us a letter Basilio had written to his mother with his good wishes: “I pray for the success of all your steps towards the canonisation of this holy man.”(128)

Brother Spiridion, of Rwanda, returned a letter Basilio had sent him in August 1994.(129) He added a few lines, “My best greetings to you! The decision of the General Council to introduce Basilio’s cause fills me with joy. I really believe he is a saint.»<sup>130</sup>

When he received the book, *I Want to Awaken the Dawn*, Brother Nicolas Dellatolas of Athens communicated his feelings: “This is a living and convincing testimony, one that is worthy of such a man as Basilio Rueda. In him we have a new model of virtue, a real example for superiors, for educators and for all Marist Brothers.”<sup>131</sup>

Brother Jesús Bayo Mayor ends his three crowded pages of memories and admiration: “This is why I am not afraid to say that Brother Basilio was a man of God, a ripe fruit of grace. The Spirit had flooded his heart so that love could reach us through him. We, who have had the good fortune to live with him, feel challenged to imitate him in his following of Christ in the way Mary and Marcellin did.”<sup>132</sup>

Brother Gabriel Michel, the secretary general from 1967 to 1976, answers the following question: What are your feelings about the fact that Brother Basilio Rueda’s cause will probably be introduced? “This gives me very great joy. I am so convinced of his holiness.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Bro. Borromée Coron, testimony of the 19 November 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Letter written on 4 October 2002

<sup>131</sup> Postal Card, 12 October 2002.

<sup>132</sup> Testimony, 7 October 2002.

<sup>133</sup> Interview: 23 March 2002

Brother Alessandro di Pietro, the Procurator and Postulator during Basilio's first mandate, expressed his gratitude when he received the book, *Basilio, Another Champagnat*: "My sincere thanks for Brother Basilio's short biography; I feel as if I have received a visit from a very dear friend."<sup>134</sup>

Travelling through Rome, Brother Muller Estevão, Provincial of Sao Paulo, exclaimed during a table conversation, "He was really a holy man!"<sup>135</sup>

Brother James Langlois, from Zimbabwe sent a page recalling moments spent with Basilio; he mentioned the admiration he had for him: "Here is why I have no doubt at all that Basilio was a saint. There was so much evidence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in him. The extraordinary impact he made on the Brothers and on many other people showed that he acted through the power of this same Spirit. His challenging teaching spoke volumes of his intimate relationship with God."<sup>136</sup>

Throughout his five-page testimony, Brother Teófilo Minga reminds us of how Basilio was a man of prayer and of dialogue, how he promoted unity and tolerance, how he was so available, and how he respected the person. Brother Teófilo's conclusion is: "If our Brothers are the blessed ones who intercede for us in heaven, there can be no doubt at all that Basilio is a saint. We must make him known to show the world one of today's saints."<sup>137</sup>

The Bishop of Velletri, Mgr. Andrea Maria Erba, one of Basilio's friends who had worked with him in the Union of Superiors General, sent his words of condolence, remarking: "Brother Basilio's kind face will remain in my mind as a blessing, together with a deep feeling of admiration and gratitude."<sup>138</sup>

It would be possible to repeat such expressions many times over, but we conclude with just these last two. Father Raul Soto Vasquez offered an unusual comment: "I always thought that the Church would elect him as a Cardinal Lay Brother, because of his great contribution to the Church and the world after the Council. I am told his cause will be introduced. I never thought of it, and yet...yes! He was

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<sup>134</sup> Letter, March 2002.

<sup>135</sup> Conversation in Rome, 12 February 2002.

<sup>136</sup> Testimony: 15 November 2001

<sup>137</sup> Testimony, 13 October 2001.

<sup>138</sup> FMS-MESSAGE, n°19, mai 1996, p. 20.

really a saint. I think the saints should be like him. I don't doubt his holiness at all."<sup>139</sup>

Brother Arnaldo Braguti is a Colombian who spent a long time with Basilio in the Novitiate at Quinta Soledad. Brother Arnaldo shared everything in the whole life of the novitiate: prayers, courses and even the dish washing where Basilio often beat him to it and where again confidences were exchanged. After having said that he had lived with a saint, he ended his declaration with these words: "My very dear Brother, I have tried to tell you what I experienced. There is one thing you must never doubt: Brother Basilio is a saint for our times."<sup>140</sup>(140)

### 4.3 Those Who Pray to Him

Similar testimonies are given by persons who pray to Basilio every day: "I do not say this of other people; I have his photograph on my desk and in other community rooms. I pray for him but I pray to him especially every time I see his picture."<sup>141</sup>

Brother Gabriel Michel, another of Basilio's intimate friends and collaborators, does the same thing: "I prayed for him after his death. But since then I have mainly prayed to him."<sup>142</sup>

Brother Claudio Girardi was the provincial of Sao Paulo in Basilio's time and he became the director of the International College in Rome from 1975 to 1978. When he was sick he was constantly visited and encouraged by Brother Basilio. When he was asked what he thought about Brother Basilio's cause, he answered: "I was been waiting for this decision for a long time. I am certain that Basilio is a great saint. This has been a great joy for me. I have already begged for many favours through Basilio's intercession. Brother Basilio is one of a group of my friends in heaven: Brother Peter Adrian, Father Jacquemin, Brother Olivier Sentenne, Father Franco Sportoletti, Brother Sylvestre, an old Brother from Velletri and many Brothers from my province, more than a hundred in all. It is

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<sup>139</sup> Raul Soto Vazquez, M.Sp.S. *Un Estilo de una Vida*, p. 65.

<sup>140</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 71.

<sup>141</sup> Brother Gildo Cotta, *FMS-Message*, n° 19, p. 46

<sup>142</sup> *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 40.

clear that among them all, Basilio shines like a star of the greatest brightness. For eighteen years Basilio was the living presence of Father Champagnat.”<sup>143</sup>

We read similar statements in *El Estilo de una vida*: ”When he died, I had the impression that a saint had left us. I invoke him every morning.”<sup>144</sup>

Brother José Manuel Gomez, a former provincial in Colombia, on hearing of the introduction of the cause, felt the need to start praying: “When I heard that the cause was going to be introduced I experienced his presence with great joy - from now on, I will say, with love, ‘Brother Basilio, pray for me, pray for us.’”<sup>145</sup>

Another collaborator during retreats in Africa, Brother Guy Lachance says that he not only prays to him, but he also makes novenas to him. He insists that he received the graces he had prayed for: improvement in the health of his sister-in-law and then, one of his brothers. This brother has made himself a great promoter of Brother Basilio among the MIC (Nairobi) young Brothers.

The Sisters of the Oasi Movement maintain a special veneration for Brother Basilio. He had always supported Father Rotondi, their founder and his friend. Basilio had assisted him in his last moments and had organised the funeral. When Basilio himself died, the Sisters wrote: “We feel the need to join the Marist Brothers in our prayers. Together again, we will pray to Brother Basilio and to Father Rotondi.»<sup>146</sup>

Brother Edouard Blondeel, at the time Provincial of Belgium, wrote a circular letter to his Brothers to announce Brother Basilio’s death. He recalled the various occasions when Basilio had visited their province and the favourable impression he had made: “Basilio led a very active life. Nevertheless, prayer, contemplation, adoration, silence...these surrounded, impregnated, and supported all his movements, his activities, his travels, his intensive working sessions and his long nights. May all the Masses we will attend for the repose of his soul be occasions to thank God! God reveals himself as God by loving us so much as to give us Brother Basilio.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Bro. Claudio Girardi, testimony, 18 January 2002.

<sup>144</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 43.

<sup>145</sup> Testimony, September 2002, Manziana, Rome, Italy.

<sup>146</sup> Letter sent to Brother Falchetto, on 9 Feb. 1996 – dossier documents

<sup>147</sup> Circular letter, 23 January 1996. The last sentence is in capital letters.

This same Brother Blondeel wrote a series of poetic words of gratitude, “Thank you, Brother Basilio”. The last one of them reads, “Thank you, Brother Basilio for being our big Brother and continuing to be our Brother through your heavenly intercession for us.”<sup>148</sup>

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2002, I received a testimony from Madrid that read: “I consider the decision to introduce the cause very appropriate. On many occasions, other Brothers and I have suggested it. He was certainly a saint, among those we call ‘confessors’... I would like the cause to be introduced before the Lord calls me back to Him, (this Brother is 87). I often entrust myself to his protection.”<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.4 A Decision

It is clear that Brother Basilio was a very rare phenomenon of God’s grace among us. His Provincial, Brother Joaquin Flores Segura, spoke in this way when Basilio had been recalled by his Lord: “Thank you Lord, for the example and the dedicated life of Brother Basilio. Thank you for the gifts you granted him, for the fruits that your love produced in him. He was a real disciple of Jesus Christ, a good Marist Brother who walked joyfully in the footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat. It is now our turn to walk in the same path.”<sup>150</sup>

To walk in Champagnat’s footsteps is exactly what Brother Carlos Martínez Lavin asks us to do. Brother Lavin, a former provincial, is currently a missionary in Cuba. In his farewell speech, he said, “He left us the precious heritage of his teaching handed down in his circulars and in the book of his life. It is our duty to make him known. Some members of this assembly will light a candle to express our gratitude to God and to show our desire to commit ourselves as individuals, as a province and as members of the Church to convert this ‘gift’ into the dawn of a day even more radiant than all the days we have lived so far.”<sup>151</sup>

To ensure that his memory was preserved, the Mexican Brothers immediately thought of writing his biography and of collecting testimonies. Thus, we were enriched by the biography *Quemar la Vida*<sup>152</sup> and by the book of testimonies, *El*

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<sup>148</sup> FMS-MESSAGE, n°19, mai 1996

<sup>149</sup> Brother Conrado Trascasa Garcia, 24 November 2002

<sup>150</sup> Bro. Joaquin Flores Segura, Provincial of Central México, FMS-MESSAGE, n°19, pp. 6-7.

<sup>151</sup> *Mexico Marista*, n° 10, p. 14

<sup>152</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, Bro. José Flores (Chepo), Mexico, 1997.

*Estilo de una vida*<sup>153</sup>. These are two basic books, two treasures. On its part, the Congregation published a special issue of *FMS-Message*.<sup>154</sup> This edition featured biographical data and grateful testimonies from Basilio's intimate friends. Several provinces published a special number of their reviews.<sup>155</sup> Such feeling, such an outpouring of testimonies, had never been seen in the Congregation.

It was in this general climate that the General Council took the decision to open the cause on 5 June 2002. This was not in the least a sudden decision coming from the top. Rather it was the outcome of the respect that so many Brothers and friends had for Basilio. The action was started at a meeting of the two Mexican provincial councils, on 20 December 2001. The communication that was sent to the superior general read:

#### The cause of canonisation: Brother Basilio Rueda:

The Brothers attending the inter-provincial meeting reached the following conclusions:

- First, we agreed that the cause ought to be launched from the Institute level, since he is much better known and admired there than in his own country.
- Secondly, we accepted that Mexico could initiate the cause until it becomes the task of an international commission of postulation.

This is why we wish to ask you and your general council for the authorisation to begin the procedures. The votes were: twelve in favour and one abstention.<sup>156</sup>

The General Council, giving its decision, explained it in this way:

“During the first vespers of our Founder's feast, on 5 June, the General Council decided to open the cause of Brother Basilio Rueda, our Superior General from 1967 to 1985. Born in Mexico in 1924, he died in the same country in 1996. All his life Basilio was a man for all. Our Superior General during a tumultuous period in the Church, he was a prophet and an artisan of religious life following Vatican II. He combined a genius for friendship, a care for people, a generous hand, an untiring and penetrating intelligence, optimism and a gentle sense of humour. Besides, he was one of the most reliable of spiritual masters. With us, he lived the

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<sup>153</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, José Flores (Chepo), México, 1998.

<sup>154</sup> *FMS-Message*, nº 19, May 1996 – Edelvives, Saragosse, Spain

<sup>155</sup> Like as: *Mexico Marista*, September-December 1996, *Madrid Marista*, 1996, *Orientaciones*, august 1996.

<sup>156</sup> *I Want to Awaken the Dawn*, p. 10

passions of this world in a happy relationship with God. He taught us that it is possible and thrilling to love Christ today.»<sup>157</sup>

## 4.5 A responsibility

Basilio was certainly a great grace given by God to our religious family. But all gift implies the responsibility to make it bear fruit. The first aspect of our responsibility is to know Basilio and his thoughts adequately, if not profoundly. For this reason books and pamphlets have been published. All the work that will be undertaken to prepare the cause will aim to demonstrate that Basilio is a saint and therefore, that he is a treasure that belongs to the whole Church, to all Christians.

Our duty is to bring to notice and also to piece together all the necessary facts of Basilio's life. This work will require thorough and long labour. The Church requires that the demonstration of holiness be done with scientific historical rigour. It should never be said that the Church auctions holiness or proposes weak models. The honour of Christ is also at stake, since the more we can demonstrate the Lord's hold on a human person, the more we evidence the Spirit's action on a human heart, the more God is glorified.

A saint is always God's masterpiece, but his life has a historical context, and it is by assembling proven facts that we succeed in admitting the holiness of a servant of God. Once recognised by the Church, a saint becomes an official and a sure way that leads us to God, a treasure for humanity that invites each and everyone to realise better his human vocation: as Basilio once said, "More is always possible."

Knowledge is important; it allows God's servant to enter our hearts and our prayer. We Marists should normally maintain daily contact with our models of holiness, not only by brief morning invocations but also by personal intimate moments, even if they are short. By repeating these moments friendship is built, the friendship I need in my journeying towards the Lord, despite my faults and failures. These moments of friendship are also moments of revelation where I come to know and to esteem our friend better.

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<sup>157</sup> I Want to Awaken the Dawn, p. 5

It is possible that François, Alfano, the Spanish martyrs, Henri Vergès, the four Brothers of Bugobe, Basilio and others are little known and prayed to, that they do not live in our hearts. In such a situation we would have no hope that they would ever be beatified. One cannot overlook the possibility that the absence of blessed ones in our community might be the sign of another absence: those we would like elected saints are not in our hearts. Prayer, dialogue, intimacy, and brief moments of friendship with our models are indispensable; they are signs of a wholesome spiritual condition, and constitute the clearest justification for the recognition of their saintliness.

The assignation of the title ‘venerable’ to one who has practised virtues to a heroic degree is brought about by the skilful technical work of the postulation team, of the diocesan tribunal and the congregation of the saints. But only prayer will open the road to beatification and canonisation. Miracles do not fall from the sky like meteorites. We must pray for a miracle with faith, perseverance and humility.

Responsibility is complete when it becomes imitation. Basilio is very close to us, he does not puzzle us, for he had to face situations that are similar to ours. We can always imitate the saints at the heart of their sanctity, which is their art of loving. We are not called to long nights of prayer nor to write thousands of letters, nor to preach retreats. But we are all called to love. In regard to this, Basilio, François, Alfano and the martyrs give us sure directions. The passing of time does not cause the heart of the saint to grow old. Choosing the way of love is also our best thank you to God.

#### **4.6 Thank you, Brother Basilio**

- For twice accepting to be our Superior General, burdening yourself with this very heavy and exacting responsibility.
- For being a Father Champagnat for us for eighteen years; you loved us, you inspired us, just as he did with his first Brothers.
- For your long journeys, sometimes urgent, sometimes perilous, always charitable.

- For being an untiring labourer in communicating your clear and limpid messages to your brothers.
- For the time spent for the least among us, for the youngest of us and the oldest, by letter, by phone, by a visit, by an unexpected message or by a strikingly fraternal gesture.
- For your infectious joy, your jovial laugh, your hearty teasing and your endearing language.
- For the example of your intense prayer life, your evident fidelity to the presence of God, your immense thirst for contemplation.
- For the mystery of love and unity of which you were the bearer, the prophet and the creator wherever you appeared.
- For being a universal Brother to all and fighting to initiate us into this total charity; for your respect and discretion in any encounter.
- For preserving the Marist patrimony of Notre Dame de l'Hermitage where we are given the opportunity to meet our Founder and our pioneers.
- For being our big Brother and continuing to be so by
- interceding for us.<sup>158</sup>

#### **4.7 Prayer of a Brother**

I would like to conclude my own testimony with a prayer:

*Brother Basilio, our beloved Brother, we think of you. You remember how much you suffered on this earth, the times when in spite of all your efforts you did not succeed in spurring on all the Brothers to live their great vocation generously. The mediocrity of many also made you suffer. You felt powerless to remedy the lack of vocations and stem the tide of departures. Now, you are in heaven; you are our Big Brother of whom all the Marist Brothers of this valley of tears are very proud. Today, you are near Jesus, near the Father, near our Mother. Hear our prayer! It is time*

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<sup>158</sup> Brother Edouard Blondeed, in FMS-MESSAGE, n° 19, pp. 55-56

*for things to change, otherwise the Institute you loved so much will die out and Champagnat's dream of seeing us in every diocese of the world will not be realised.*

*Please, intercede for us with the Triune God, and with Mary, Joseph and Champagnat, as you often meet them. It is high time: Tell them that we would not like to die before seeing the resurrection of our congregation! Do this, Basilio! You who have been such a friend to all of us, hear us! Amen.<sup>159</sup>*

## **PRAYER**

**God, our Father  
You gave Brother Basilio  
A magnificent heart  
A penetrating intelligence,  
And a great passion for your kingdom.**

**His heart was a generous spring of friendship.  
His intelligence knew how to solve our problems.  
His passion for your kingdom renewed our Marist family.**

**We give you thanks  
For this precious gift of Basilio  
For the Church, for his numerous friends and for us.**

**Allow us to call him to our help  
When doubt disturbs our lives  
When disease, problems or the years make us anxious.  
At this moment, we pray you especially for \_\_\_\_\_**

**And you Mary, our Good Mother,  
To whom Basilio dedicated one of his most beautiful circulars,  
Intercede for us.**

**Father, may our prayer glorify you,  
and your very Holy Spirit  
and your Son Jesus Christ  
through whom we offer this prayer.  
Amen.**

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<sup>159</sup> Brother Claudio Girardi, Testimony: 18 December 2002

<b>1. The vow of poverty</b>	
1. The witnesses	
2. The signs	
3. In the universe of evangelical poverty	
1.3.1 Created to be rich	
1.3.2 Evangelical poverty	
1.3.3 Not a human choice	
1.3.4 The heart of evangelical poverty	
1.3.5 Need of conversion	
1.3.6 But poverty has a body	
1.4. A Superior general's poverty	
1.4.1 Sharpening awareness	
1.4.2 To stimulate	
1.4.3 Tested in friendship	
<b>TEXTS</b>	
<b>2. Consecrated Celibacy</b>	
2.1 The man	
2.2 The thought	
2.2.1 The heart of the vow	
2.2.2 Heart and body	
2.2.3 A few wholesome principles	
<b>TEXTS</b>	
<b>3. Obedience: the passion to do God's will</b>	
3.1 The commandment of renewal	
3.2 A precious circular	
3.3 The obedience of a Superior general	
3.4 Some more evident moments	
<b>TEXTS</b>	

<b>4. A Saint?</b>	
4.1 A saint for today	
4.2 The voices of witnesses who call him a saint	
4.3 Those who pray to him	
4.4 A decision	
4.5 A responsibility	
4.6 Thank you, Basilio	
4.7 A Brother's prayer	
4.8 A prayer to Basilio	