

**BOOKLET 6:**  
**HIS INTELLIGENCE, HIS WORK**

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**A Man for Others**

In 1985, Brother Demetrio Alzaga, inspired by certain biblical qualities that Basilio had cultivated during the years of his generalate, wrote some pages in praise of Basilio. His long article, full of admiration and gratitude, ended in this way:

“He was, in God’s providence, a gift of the Lord and of Our Lady, in view of the times that we had to live through after the Council, a period of world-wide crisis, when patterns of thought demanded a clear spirit that might direct our steps along paths of truth and security. It is commonly said that each generation produces a man unlike any other, one in a million. In our generation Brother Basilio was this man like none other. The way he went about responding to his lofty calling has left an indelible historical mark in the annals of the Congregation. His honesty simplicity, and his insight into people never failed: they were a constituent part of his life...”<sup>1</sup>

In the pages that follow, we would like to focus on this Basilio, this man who was *sui generis*, one of a kind. We will look at Basilio precisely in this way, as a man, having regard for his *intelligence, his culture, his passion for work, his love of the world, his being brother among brothers, cultivating the personal qualities* that, while being the highest social values, are also truly Marist since they take their place alongside simplicity and humility.

The first part of this collection, *Basilio, Man of God*, has been largely concerned with the religious world: his life with the Father, with the Lord Jesus, with the Spirit of holiness, his child-like regard for the Virgin Mother and for Marcellin, his

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<sup>1</sup> *Madrid Marista*, Al Hno. Basilio Rueda, número extraordinario, 1985, p.15.

life of prayer and his religious consecration through the vows. Through this we caught a glimpse of a vast and rich panorama.

This second part is concerned with the humanity of Basilio, or, as the title suggests, *Basilio, A Man for Others*. We treat the subject in this way because it is convenient for the purpose of our analysis; of course this is artificial, since in fact although life and the person interact in continuous development, they always comprise an indivisible whole: the man who lives in intimate friendship with God is nonetheless man; the man who lives close to others incarnates his love of God and reveals that he is filled with the Spirit of God. The two commandments, “You must love the Lord your God, with all your heart and all your strength ...” and, “You must love your neighbour as yourself,” really make up one whole: they are described in this discrete way in order to define the manner of their accomplishment. As Basilio himself said, they form an equation: love of God = love of neighbour. If one premise is missing, the other is missing also: in that case you just have emptiness.<sup>2</sup>

Our work therefore has to do with the man Basilio, though not failing to note his human qualities are placed at the service of both God and his people, and that they can be seen as the human dynamism of holiness. In this concrete example, for example, the intelligence of Basilio, how can we fail to notice that it is both prophetic and always disposed to love? The qualities are human, certainly, but enhanced by grace.

As we look at Basilio from the point of view of his humanity, we find in him an intelligent, cultivated man, a hard worker, a man passionate about the world, a born leader, and above all a simple approachable brother. He is an example of one fully human, a person to be admired by everyone, Christian or otherwise, one who is sensitive to greatness and nobility of heart. The testimonies left to us by a multitude of Brothers and friends are so real that reading them gives the impression that we are walking along a gallery of portraits. Nevertheless, they can do no more than offer the likeness of a human hero. Our ultimate purpose, however, is to reveal to what degree the love of God, when it takes hold of a man, is itself constitutive of human nature.

If this section does emphasise the human, the second commandment, “You shall love your neighbour...” at the same time it will constantly allow the first

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<sup>2</sup> *Bética Marista*, octubre, 1972, pp. 9-10.

commandment to show through, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...” It is impossible to do otherwise, certainly in the life of a true servant of God. The two commandments either come together as a unity, or they exist neither as the one nor as the other. The humanity of Basilio is rich because of the two loves, God and neighbour.

## Basilio's Intelligence

A person's intelligence permeates the whole of his being and is revealed by what he does. A man of high intelligence stands out in decisive moments; people talk about it; many ask for his help. In our study of Basilio's intelligence we leave the facts to speak for themselves, and then we listen to the evidence of witnesses; after that we look at the countless aspects that come together in his intelligence and make him a man *sui generis*.

### 2.1 The Facts

We know that Basilio pushed back the boundaries of the apostolate, but from his first profession he gives the impression of always having been recognised as a leader; he impressed as a person of conviction, enthusiasm, optimism, availability and simplicity, respect for others and as a good listener - and he knew how to bring the best out of a person. All of these qualities were had their place in a mind that was always ticking over, quite remarkably so in certain situations. On the completion of his master of Philosophy thesis, *Being and Meaning*, on 17 November 1961, he was awarded the degree *magna cum laude*. The board of examiners commended him for his work, and suggested that it was worthy of a doctoral thesis. However, in presenting this thesis, Basilio submitted only the first of a series of three parts, which duly led to his doctorate.<sup>3</sup>

A year earlier the general council had agreed to release him from the Institute to assume work for Father Lombardi in the Movement for a Better World.<sup>4</sup> He was engaged in this work from the end of 1960 until the end of 1964. During that time he was responsible for the Movement in Ecuador, beginning in 1961. We know what he achieved in the Church and in the political world in this time. The bishops went out of their way to listen to him; they trusted his guidance in adopting new pastoral approaches; the Church of Colombia also asked him to put in place a new pedagogy for the religious education of the country.<sup>5</sup>

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*Quemar la Vida*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., pp. 82-84.

<sup>5</sup> Op, cit., pp. 82-101.

An Ecuadorian politician, Mr A. Patino, who was to become a great friend, held Basilio in very high esteem: “Whenever Basilio stayed with us in Ecuador, during his conferences, or in his work, we were able to admire the qualities that enriched his personality, especially his intelligence, his brilliance, his dynamism and above all, his holiness.”<sup>6</sup> When Patino was following a retreat at Rocca di Papa,<sup>7</sup> Father Lombardi said to him, “How fortunate you Ecuadorians are to be able to count on Brother Basilio, he is the pride and the glory of the universal Church.”<sup>8</sup> The book, *Basilio, Un Autre Champagnat*, quotes several extracts from letters Father Lombardi wrote to Basilio; every one of them expresses admiration and pays him compliments: “Your letter brought me great consolation because I had heard Brother Basilio Rueda spoken of so well and now know that he has joined our modest effort; that truly gives me some hope.” ... “The great success of the last programme of *Pro Ecclesia* is a crown that the Lord wished to give you; it is the most beautiful proof of your devotedness.” ... “I have great confidence in your ability and your good will; certainly you will know the best way to go.” ... “How good you are at getting things going! Everywhere I go in my travels around the world I catch an echo of the courses that you are giving your Brothers. Truly, Jesus has given you a mission as their animator, to such an extent that you are changing the image of a General.”<sup>9</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, the first biography of Basilio, deals with this period in one of its longest and richest chapters. We meet here a brilliant Basilio at the height of his youthful energies.

As Director of the Second Novitiate in Spain in 1965 Basilio was equally successful. He won the admiration, enthusiasm and affection of the Brothers who followed his courses. The library at l’Escorial still reveals evidence of his contribution; two aspects stand out: the cinema discussion groups that he led, which were so valuable, since he was able to set art and the problems of human life side by side, and the cultural outings when they would often visit art galleries. He updated the whole programme, brought in specialists, widened the scope of the course to deal with human problems, the Council documents, and Marist spirituality, and he introduced the custom of the pilgrimage to the Hermitage steeping the Brothers in our sources.

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<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit., p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> A village in the hills near Rome.

<sup>8</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 91.

Much of the documentation from the year 1967 indicates that the choice of Basilio as Superior General was due to his great intellectual qualities, his rich personality and solid spirituality, and the international experience he had gained as a result of his time with the Movement for a Better World. The expectations were fulfilled, as can be seen by the way his writings were quickly sought after by many in the Church, and by the initiatives he took in the Institute that are still very much in evidence. He received honorary degrees, and he was asked to lecture at universities. In 1985 he was nominated by the Brothers in Spain to assist them to establish their position vis-à-vis the new Education Act, LODE. Together they documented guidelines, and then during the period 25-27 March, Basilio gave a series of conferences on the theme of education at the Pontifical University of Salamanca. In a review of these conferences, it was recorded: “The person of the educator, his socio-economic milieu, his weaknesses and his hopes were treated at great depth, as well as the values that should be proposed to and developed by the teaching profession.”<sup>10</sup>

Many congregations asked him to give them retreats or conferences or to be an adviser in their general chapters. The Vatican appointed him as an auditor at the Synod on the Family in 1980, and then named him as a consultant for the Congregation for Religious in 1995. Our own Institute recalled him when the decision was taken in 1990 to establish a programme of formation for future formation personnel. On his return to Mexico he became a sought after member of EPSIMO, a group made up of catholic and protestant doctors and theologians, psychologists and sociologists, who maintained a study of society in order to propose Christian responses to the challenges of the times.

Here we point out simply the highlights of the life of this one man; they speak volumes about the intellectual gifts of Basilio.

## **2.2 The Witnesses**

Many of us had the opportunity to have personal contact with Basilio and to read his circulars but some were closer to him than others, both in friendship and in work. We let them have a word here.

The attention of his university professors was attracted not only by his intellectual gifts but also by his deeply Christian character. Two of them in particular were

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<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., p. 252.

drawn to him, Dr Oswaldo Robles and Fernando Sodi Pallares; they did everything they could to pass on to him their own learning and wisdom. Basilio always knew how to learn from the outstanding people he met along the way. It was under their guidance that he prepared his M.Ph. thesis *On Being and Meaning*.<sup>11</sup> Brother Gabriel Rodriguez,<sup>12</sup> one of his councillors, spoke of him in this way: “He is one who gets to the bottom of problems, and looks at them in the light of faith and of his love for people. He has a gift for creating family spirit, enthusiasm and teamwork, and to keep everything moving towards the Lord. He animates others by bringing their spiritual riches to bear on things.”<sup>13</sup>

Brother Antoine Kuntz, a missionary in Central Africa, sees Brother Basilio as a man in whom intelligence and heart interact harmoniously: “My impression is that we have a Superior General of great intelligence, which is fine, but he also knows how to govern in a great hearted manner which is better still and deserves to be greatly appreciated.”<sup>14</sup>

Brother Santiago Erra,<sup>15</sup> Provincial of Norte, Spain, agrees with this opinion and those before it: “Brother Basilio is a clear sighted man, who knows how to give confident guidance; he is an exemplary religious and a tireless apostle, totally devoted to the Church and everything Marist. He is the helmsman that God has put in charge of our boat, so we can trust in a safe passage.”<sup>16</sup>

When Brother Basilio died, Brother Paul Sester, who had been a general councillor and after that secretary general, sent the moving eulogy of a man who lived daily with Basilio: “With the death of Brother Basilio Rueda a landmark figure has disappeared, a personality well above the ordinary, forged by eighteen long years as superior general, but also the fruit of extraordinary personal richness.”<sup>17</sup>

We also have the testimony of one of the members of EPISMO, Fr. Francisco Migoya SJ, who describes Basilio’s contribution to the work of the group. “I was a

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<sup>11</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 75-76.

<sup>12</sup> This Mexican Brother had been on Basilio’s staff when he was Director of the Juniorate, so he speaks from experience.

<sup>13</sup> *Norte Mariste*, octobre-novembre 1967, p. 1190 et *Orientaciones*, octobre 1967. p.524. (*Orientaciones* is the review of the Province of León, Spain.)

<sup>14</sup> *Orientaciones*, octobre 1967, p. 523.

<sup>15</sup> At one time he was Basilio’s deputy at l’Escorial.

<sup>16</sup> *Orientaciones*, octobre 1967, p. 521.

<sup>17</sup> *FMS-Message*, no. 19, pp. 29-31.

member of EPISMO. We were a group of doctors, psychologists, theologians ... who got together to study the problems of the modern world and the responses that faith could offer to them. When Basilio explained the results of his study he went to the very root of the problems – he was an expert. Sometimes he summed up a question in such a way that we were all taken by surprise and full of admiration. On the other hand, when a solution seemed not to be evident to him, he remained open. At other times he sketched the main lines of a response and left it to the members to follow it up in their own way. In Basilio you have a man who is quite out of the ordinary, his life so enriched by the whole dramatic history of the Church and of the world after the Council. You must put the task of writing his biography into the hands of a real expert so that these aspects will be given proper attention. Basilio is one of the great witnesses of the second half of the XXth century; and then there are his writings which are so rich.”<sup>18</sup>

Brother Javier Garcia Terradillos,<sup>19</sup> who was a member of the general council during Basilio’s second term of office, describes him in this way: “He knew how to combine perfectly a great capacity for summarising facts with acute attention to details, which is rather uncommon ... a rare balance of subjectivity and objectivity.”<sup>20</sup>

During the VXIIIth General Chapter, 1985, Brother Pedro Garcia Gonzales interviewed 28 capitulants seeking their views of the man who for 18 years had guided the directions of the Institute. A good number “think of him as a very intelligent and deep person, with a great vision of the future and an enormous ability to understand situations and problems: dynamic, extremely dynamic.”<sup>21</sup>

For Brother Alain Delorme, who was elected to the general council during this chapter, “Brother Basilio leaves the image of a man ahead of his time, one who knew how to use modern methods to get to know the Institute... He was the kind of extraordinary personality that cannot easily be described. He lived only for the Institute; he gave it his mind and his heart.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Testimony of Francisco Migoya SJ, written in Rome, 31 December 2002.

<sup>19</sup> According to Fr Amador Menudo, Brother Terradillos was the councillor general whom Basilio consulted most; they were alike in both clarity of thought and spiritual intuition.

<sup>20</sup> *Madrid Marista*, Al H. Basilio Rueda, 1985 ou 1986, pp. 19, 22. This was a special edition of their review published on the occasion of the conclusion of Br Basilio’s terms of office as superior general.

<sup>21</sup> Op. Cit., p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Op. Cit., pp. 20, 22.

Brother Powel Prieur, general councillor under Basilio and later under Brother Charles Howard, offers us an unusual picture: “He never seemed to stop working, even during council meetings, and yet this did not prevent him from following the details and taking part in the discussion as it developed. He could do this because of his great talents and his immense interest in everything that was happening in the Institute.”<sup>23</sup>

The Rector of the Pontifical University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brother José Otão, summarised the reasons for conferring upon Basilio the Doctorate *Honoris Causa*: “Endowed with a great intellectual capacity, you have become a great leader, Your Excellency, thanks to the clarity of your ideas, the power of your thought, your ability to convince, to win support... your personal research projects, your skill in team work. To your outstanding personal qualities we have to add the remarkable preparation in the areas of sociology, psychology and Marist spirituality that allows you in a few minutes to take charge of a situation, understand a problem and find an answer that addresses the real situation, all the while using rigorously scientific methods...”<sup>24</sup>

The book, *Quemar la Vida*, tells of the attention that he won during his talks: “Listening to him you could pick up the collective feelings, the heavy silences, the attention suspended until the very end, the release of tension, the laughter, and at the same time deep reflection.”<sup>25</sup> “For me, listening to his conferences was an opportunity to enjoy his urbanity and at the same time to be enriched by his ideas which were so applicable to our actual concrete situations.” “His words opened doors, smoothed rough patches, created communion and broke down suspicions. You believed him and you trusted him because he was above ideologies or partisanship: the truth above all.” “His talks went straight to the heart of the problem and approached questions from a scientific point of view, clarifying them in the light of the Gospel, and showing what the Council documents had to say about them. His conferences, which were the fruit of long studies, and careful preparation, had the depth of lived experience, the freshness of his lively and attractive eloquence, and his openness to dialogue in the most friendly, frank and open manner.” “What impressed me was the clearness and the charm of his exposition, the depth of his thought, and the insistence with which he outlined unchallengeable principles. He was an attractive and incisive orator, a man of God

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<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>25</sup> Op. Cit., pp 216-219. The quotations that follow are also taken from these pages.

who passed on his message with a heart shaped by the Gospel, deeply respectful of everything Marist... He was wonderfully charming. His expositions were solid, easy to follow, well structured, attractive. He was always willing to take questions about the subject he was dealing with. The charm of his humorous word play and his Mexican whimsy immediately put the assembly at ease.”<sup>26</sup>

It should be said that Basilio was always admired, first of all by his students, at CUM (Centro Universitario Marista), and in the Cursos, and by men of the Church: bishops, priests, religious, when he was the leader of the Movement for a Better World in Ecuador. When he was Director of the Second Novitiate the Brothers lauded him to the skies. As Superior General he came under notice for his writings, and he was sought by many congregations for retreats, conferences and interviews. That explains the great number of those who offered to give testimonies. However, we have to ask whether we should be discussing intelligence in the singular or in the plural: intelligence, or intelligences: there are many nuances in this *man unlike any other*, as Brother Demetrio Alzaga<sup>27</sup> saw him. In fact, a person’s intelligence permeates the whole man and all that he does.

### 2.3 A Man *Sui generis*: Different Aspects of his Intelligence

It was always a pleasure to hear Basilio speak and it is always a pleasure to read his circulars. Why is this so?

This may be partly explained by the fact that we were in touch with an **intelligent and clear-sighted** man who loved the play of ideas, arising as they did out of his **rich fund of learning and culture**, and he presented them with **enthusiasm**. His deep and nuanced understanding of persons, situations, mentalities and problems can be attributed to his close intimacy with God, which put its own light on things. **His intelligence was assisted by faith and was at the service of faith**. One of us who heard him speak had this to say: “His talks were illustrated by a great variety of quotations, revealing his vast knowledge, reading and familiarity with modern culture. He combined science and experience, doctrine and a direct knowledge of problems, theological knowledge and an understanding of human depths: this was a formidable and rare combination.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>27</sup> *Madrid Marista*, Al H. Basilio Rueda, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Madrid Marista*, Al H. Basilio Rueda, p. 15.

In regard to this area where intelligence is linked with faith, we should recall that Basilio was endowed with a **prophetic and mystical intelligence**. Being so close to God, he could speak of Him and of what it was to live with Him with a clarity worthy of the great doctors and mystics of the Church. And this God whom he loved gave him the foresight that enabled him to maintain his confidence and enthusiasm during a period that was difficult for the Church and society. Some of the texts to be found at the end of this chapter verify this.

The title of the book, *Je Veux Éveiller l'Aurore (I want to Awaken the Dawn)*, invites us to understand that Basilio was going to do his utmost to bring about a new way of living the religious life, one inspired by the Gospel. For this purpose he needed the intelligence of a pioneer. But the dawn is also a symbol of waiting, of hope. **Basilio's intelligence was nurtured by hope.** Today the Institute reflects its own style and structures, just as Basilio had wished, had described, had felt necessary but for which the times were not then ready. We can point out a few of these:

- BIS: the Bureau of International Solidarity.
- The Marist patrimony: under Basilio periods of formation called *Champagnat Years* were introduced.
- The invitation to capitulants to undertake an experience among the poor before coming to the General Chapter so that their hearts might be touched and enlightened when they had to adopt measures in support of the poor.
- The Hermitage as our Marist sanctuary where Brothers of every age can reinvigorate their identity and their spirit.
- The work of refoundation and renewal called for by Vatican II: in this regard the title he gave to his first Circular was programmatic: *2 January 1968*. In his *Community Project* he invited everyone to make his novitiate again<sup>29</sup>, and to remain in a condition of ongoing formation, an expression that was not common at the time.
- The need for a stronger formation of the young Brothers. In Africa and Asia this was to be realised in a concrete way through the establishment of MIC and MAPAC under Brother Charles Howard. (According to Basilio, failing this would mean “suicide for the Institute”).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Projet Communautaire*, p.7.

<sup>30</sup> *Circ. 2 January 1968*, P. 652.

- Prayer with the Constitutions.<sup>31</sup>
- Marist Apostolic Spirituality<sup>32</sup>: all his reflections on prayer emphasise the strong link between prayer and life...

His rich cultural endowment and his exceptional human experience gave him an insight into the future and the confidence to speak about it with sureness. In his Circular 2 January 1968 he had already foreshadowed a more central place on the political chessboard for China and the Third World, each of these bringing its own ideological choices and problems, as well as the cracks in capitalism and the soviet system, the globalisation of commerce and culture that was to lead to the phenomenon of an increasing number of collaborating groups in view of the pressures of governments, an expanding movement of migration, great missionary opportunities for the Church as entire continents became open to it, and in the Church, the era of the laity. To those who were somewhat confused by all this Basilio offered the possibilities attached to new human aspirations:

a more personal and authentic life, with the interior freedom that facilitates self-knowledge, tranquillity, security, self esteem, and the aspiration for encounters at the inter-personal level involving more authentic human relations;

the aspiration for the humanisation of social structures and services, a healthy equality of opportunities, possibilities, avenues of service, and the aspiration for a secure future: opportunities for employment that would not put family life under threat...<sup>33</sup>

When we look at this thirty five years later we can see how what he foresaw has largely come to pass, and how much still remains a dream. No wonder so many people welcomed Basilio's clear sightedness: they could put their trust in his vision because it could be relied upon.

Basilio was **greatly skilled in both analysis and synthesis**. When, in his first circular, he reviewed everything that had taken place in the first session of the general chapter of 1967, he saw different pieces that had been fitted together, a variety of cultures, influences and standpoints. In the retreat that he gave at Longroño in 1972<sup>34</sup>, he dealt with the theme of renewal; he presented the

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<sup>31</sup> Circular, *A Talk on Prayer*, pp. 534-535.

<sup>32</sup> Third Conference given to the capitulants of the XVIIIth General Chapter in 1985.

<sup>33</sup> Circular of 2 January 1968, pp. 175-178.

<sup>34</sup> We have ten booklets containing the texts of the conferences of this retreat, under the general title of *Llamamiento a la renovación*, each conference having a subtitle. They came out during the period September 1972 to June 1973.

complexity of it all so well, the different groups and their possible reactions, the paths, the pitfalls, the means... that his whole reflection brought to mind a picture of the Milky Way on a clear cloudless night, the bright highlights connected by smaller luminous threads.

**He handles opposing views with great facility**, analyses the elements of each position, each theory, every point of departure, and then points out what is positive in each and how they may be brought together. He points out the problems that are bound to follow if any group is not taken into account. Others are impressed by the **equilibrium of his intelligence**. Brother Maurice Bergeret, at the time provincial of the Hermitage, said: “He knew how to avoid two extremely dangerous reefs: on the one hand, following an excessively conservative line which could have led to integralist attitudes in some sectors of the Institute, and on the other, losing control in the face of an openness that would have allowed experiments leading to the breakdown or to the spiritual deterioration of our Congregation.”<sup>35</sup>

Basilio grasped the core and the different hues of a current of ideas, and you might say that he enjoyed juggling the different elements; for example, here is how he listed the characteristics of demagoguery:

- It can be identified by its lack of objectivity,
- By the use of sensational means,
- It creates confusion,
- It creates problems but does not offer any solutions,
- It sets up a painful gap between putting off the question and creative collaboration, giving more importance to the first than to the second: often enough to cure a problem it creates a worse one.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time he could make good use of the contraries, riding the enthusiasm to energise his listeners, and urging cool headedness in the analysis of questionnaires or the elaboration of weak and strong points. His analyses bear the stamp of scholarly research where there is no place for sentiment: “I will adhere to objectivity and impartiality with a view to being constructive,”<sup>37</sup> he wrote to the

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<sup>35</sup> *El estilo de una vida*, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> *Circ.* 2 January 1969, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

capitulants and to the whole Institute in the period between the two sessions of the Chapter of 1967. Some pages later he adds, “This study has led me to ask myself if, for future Chapters, it may be necessary to complete the notes of individual Brothers by scientific sociological questionnaires, the responses transcribed on perforated cards, thus allowing an evaluation of multiple aspects of the life of the Brothers and of the communities.”<sup>38</sup> He knew that scientific principles had to be respected: “You cannot fly without obeying the laws of aeronautics!” he said to the Provincials assembled for the first general Conference in 1971.<sup>39</sup> And when he had to draw attention to weak points he sometimes used a **certain irony** as you might among a group of friends.

Intelligence may be considered a **gift of nature**, and culture as something **acquired by personal effort**. He tells how at one point during his studies he spent the whole night at his typewriter from the evening *Salve Regina* to the morning *Salve*. The combination of intelligence and culture thus permitted him a great **adaptability**. During the retreats he gave in Spain in 1972 he changed the themes according to the differing needs of the Brothers of each province, although he had one common central structure for all. In the province of Norte<sup>40</sup> he treated in depth prayer, apostolic life, love as the source of peace as heart of community life, consecrated virginity, the renewal asked by the Church, prophecy, confession, the Virgin Mary in the life of the Marist Brother, the nature of obedience, and Marist religious formation. The following month in the province of Bética<sup>41</sup> his conferences centred on the new commandment of love, the members of the Council, the rejuvenation of the Institute, peace as response, consecrated virginity, the real sacrament of penance, community life, vocation and poverty. He could tailor the conferences to the needs of different provinces because some time before the retreats he had the Brothers respond to a sociological and religious questionnaire through which he came to know their different situations.

The questionnaire was developed by a team of priests and Brothers under his direction; it took two weeks working 10-12 hours a day to arrive at a unified theological set of questions.<sup>42</sup> The finished questionnaire was sent by night train to

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<sup>38</sup> Op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Closing Conference of the Reverend Brother, p. 439, Circulars, Vol XXV (after the meditation Aloud).

<sup>40</sup> See the 10 booklets *Llamamiento a la renovación*, 1972-1973, of the province of Norte, Spain.

<sup>41</sup> The review *Bética Marist* published the conferences of these retreats in the numbers from October 1972 to April 1973.

<sup>42</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación*, p. 1, September 1972, Province of Norte.

Barcelona to be processed by IBM and returned the following night. This enables him to offer nuanced and exhaustive responses, while at the same time, during the retreats, he had interviews with nearly all the Brothers, often as many as a hundred of them, and was able to offer them spiritual direction in the light of all that this effort revealed. We are not surprised to learn that he undertook some interviews in the early hours of the morning. Altogether, this work brought together intelligence, culture, questionnaires, the efforts of a team of specialists, and human experience – an amalgam that was further enriched by each interview, touching as it did the real daily problems of the Brothers. True, Basilio was the mastermind behind the theory, but it was the life and the personal experience of the Brothers that provided the material for it and gave it life.

The same adaptability was to be seen, for instance, in the visits he made every year to the second novices at l'Escorial.<sup>43</sup> Each time the subject of his reflection was different, or if sometimes there were some things in common, the exposition and the different nuances were treated with great freedom.

We can say that Basilio's intelligence was not speculative, office-bound, but had to do with personal contacts, incarnation, inculturation, closeness, life. He takes upon himself the problem, the group, or the world that he analyses or the Brother he welcomes. Both sympathy and distance are there at the same time: sympathy enables him to see the positive side of things; distance makes him aware of the weak points and the possible dangers. So when he looks out at the world in which he lives, a world of great change at what is for him one of the most important turning points of history, he sees the extraordinary opportunities that science and technology are creating for society and for evangelisation, while at the same time he warns that pluralism, practical atheism and materialism, and tolerance that amounts to indifference, all penetrate the whole social and cultural fabric, and how even the most basic values are brought into question. He knows how religious may be disturbed by inner confusion, even the best of them, and looks for a meaningful way of responding to a world and a society that needs other words and other models.<sup>44</sup> He says that he prefers to look at things as they are, to be realistic, to undertake work that is intellectually honest.

Others have seen in him an **intelligence that radiates enthusiasm**; it not only sheds light on problems, it also gets people moving, conquers hearts, inspires

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<sup>43</sup> There are many notes in the library at l'Escorial.

<sup>44</sup> Cf *Llamamiento a la Renovación*, 5, p. 4, February 1973, Prov Norte, Spain.

apostles. It was Paxti Loidi who said that while he was Superior General Basilio radiated enthusiasm and that some of his talks, particularly his *Meditation Aloud*, lifted the spirits of his audience with great hopes.<sup>45</sup>

His thought was always broad and encompassing, and his language matched this. Brother Victorino de Arce who received the last letter Basilio wrote, notes: “ That was his style: words never failed him; he covered the ground several times, to say all that he wanted to, to deepen and to perfect the idea that was in his mind.”<sup>46</sup> At the same time, however, he often expressed himself in a paragraph as concise as a maxim, neatly bringing together truth, clarity, surprise and forcefulness. There are a host of such sayings:

- You cannot change hearts by words.<sup>47</sup>
- Freedom does not become creative and fruitful until it is rooted in human and supernatural maturity.<sup>48</sup>
- A mature person is one whose faith and life are consistent; his life is not untouched by real failings, but he continually renews his ideals.<sup>49</sup>
- When a teacher stops being in tune with the times, he stops being a teacher. He can still be an effective agent of learning, but in losing contact with the younger generation, which depends upon dialogue, he loses his influence, and consequently his ability to form their hearts and minds.<sup>50</sup>
- The path of disloyalty and neglect is no way to prepare for any vocation, not even for the most basic one of all, which is life itself.
- It is not enough to speak to people about God; it is necessary first of all to speak to God about people, praying that they may take His word into their hearts.<sup>51</sup>
- There is no sadder role than that of a superior playing a policeman; there is no attitude more childish or degrading than playing hide and seek, living a double life; that amounts to a relapse into a moral void, instability and psychological immaturity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> Testimony given on 17 February 2003.

<sup>47</sup> *La Contemplation à partir l'Action*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> Op. cit., p. 503.

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit., p. 493.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit., p. 600.

<sup>52</sup> Circ. 2 January, pp. 512, 514.

- Humility requires consistency between the inner and the outer person; one must be what one seems to be.<sup>53</sup>
- We don't belong to a people sanctified in advance.<sup>54</sup>

As far as the purely intellectual goes, there is a constant **convergence of his principles and his spiritual life**. Granted, he speaks with great intelligence, but his words are the **fruit of his life, of his intimacy with God**. Underneath reflections of a spiritual nature, or those touching on God, there lie not only moments of great feeling and flashes of intuition concerning the highest religious values, but also a **whole life, a long experience**, that of a man who has long since thrown in his lot with God. His intelligence has been **evangelised and enlightened** by the one his heart loves.

Something more may be said of his intelligence: it is always respectful of persons and their ideas. This allows him to engage himself with the position of another and recognise its valuable strengths. He knows how to empathise with another. At the same time, he never condemns anyone, but rather follows the other's thinking, and after spending time with him in this way, points out the limitations of his thought and shows him the strength of the contrary opinion. When you are in the company of Basilio you never feel rejected, but rather totally and fully accepted. **His intelligence never lacks the truly human touch**. He is not **fond of irony**: humour, yes, but irony that is hurtful, no; or, to put it better, he knows how far he can go, and that sometimes it is necessary to be clear and sharp.

There can be no doubt about the power of Basilio's intelligence. He did not hesitate to point out weaknesses in the clearest way, the errors in an argument that on the surface seemed valid; **he shunned pretence as much out of intellectual as moral honesty**. During the period of November 1967 to August 1968 the congregation was between sessions of the special General Chapter; during this time it was necessary for the Brothers to assimilate the work that had been done in the first session, September-October 1967, and forward suggestions for the second session of September-October 1968. Basilio pointed out to the Brothers the stumbling blocks to be avoided and the sources of inspiration they could depend on:<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Op. cit., p. 619.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit., p. 644.

<sup>55</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968.

Stumbling Blocks	Sources of Inspiration
Demagogy The clash of generations mentalities Revisionism Changing the words but not substance	Scripture The Council The Founder Real theology Sociological research Consultation of specialists

He suggested that they try to give up tobacco, spirits and cameras that were not needed, and he foresaw that some Brothers would smile at this: “ ‘How fanciful!’ some will say, and that may be true, but I am not ashamed of such fancies,”<sup>56</sup> and he warned them that they should not count on him to authorise concessions that could not be justified: “I am absolutely opposed to anything that would betray the Chapter.”<sup>57</sup>

Because he was so **frank and clear** he got to the bottom of things: “Let us admit that we are not accustomed to treating questions at real depth. Paradoxical as it may seem, our kind of life limits us to a working situation in which we are caught up in the many small details of each day, to things as they present themselves rather than what lies behind them; this puts us at risk of becoming caught up in routine, or rather, of sliding across the surface of the real, whereas this humble work demands above all a profound anthropological vision, engagement in the making of history and the conviction that in our hands lies the possibility of forming, or deforming, the man, the society and the institutions of tomorrow.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 141.

<sup>57</sup> Op. Cit., p. 138.

<sup>58</sup> Op. cit., p., 158.

It is helpful to recall his courage in pointing out to the Brothers of Canada<sup>59</sup> the risk of falling into the middle class comfort influenced by society around them, in warning the Brothers of Switzerland that the style of their communities did not offer to young religious the conditions necessary for perseverance, and in telling the Brothers of Zaire-Rwanda that they had much work to do to create an real unity in the communities...<sup>60</sup> He did not hesitate to tell the provincials gathered at the first general conference, 1971, that he was not afraid to say, “I think that we all know that, without any bad will on our part, and perhaps without any lack of virtue, our poverty is, in many respects, a joke.”<sup>61</sup>

We are left with the impression of a man who is clear sighted about ideas, people, situations, and above all, about the responsibility that he has accepted. His reflection, however, is never simply an intellectual exercise: it goes to the heart of problems, engages with the real, and remains practical and helpful. He wishes to be objective and impartial. We can say of many of those suggestions of 1968, that now we live with them peacefully every day.

Of the communities, he had this to say: “There are communities that are marked by a genuine social fervour, witness and apostolic dynamism, able to make use of their freedom to arrive at ways of continual collective renewal; alongside them there are others that, unfortunately, are centres of mediocrity: for them, freedom has only led them to comfort, even to abuses.”<sup>62</sup> (His focus is clear enough: two and a half lines describing generous communities, just a single line for the mediocre.) Basilio’s good sense, wisdom and boldness are evident when he says, “As long as this kind of life conceals not only a pattern of weakness that they can be aware of, but also a mentality, then the phenomenon is more dangerous because the community is the victim of an abuse that it does not even perceive.”<sup>63</sup> We not only enjoy being in touch with the intelligence of Basilio, but we are also enriched both by the loftiness of his mind and the richness of his person.

These intellectual gifts, manifested in different ways, often drew people’s attention. He could grasp a problem, reduce it to its different parts and then point out how to resolve it: diagnosis accurately accomplished, he gave the appropriate

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<sup>59</sup> *Appel au Dépassement*, Report of the retreat of 1970.

<sup>60</sup> This has all been reported in the First Part of this work, *Basilio, Man of God*.

<sup>61</sup> Closing talk at the General Conference, 1971, Circulars, Vol. XXV, p. 449.

<sup>62</sup> Circular 2 January 1968, p. 57.

<sup>63</sup> *Idem*.

prescription. We leave the last word to Brother Claudio Girardi: “He was a man who could not bear mediocrity... Basilio was an honest intellectual: there were no half-truths about him. If there was something he did not know he took every means to inform himself about it. If something caught his attention he studied it deeply. He was a seeker. He devoured books, and such was his memory that he could quote from them freely.”<sup>64</sup>

We are now going to quote quite a few pages, among the first that he write, in his circular *2 January 1968*.<sup>65</sup> (Here we have a young superior general, only 42 years of age, who offers a very substantial work during this period of the special general chapter: September 1967 to November 1968. Between these two long sessions of the chapter, where he was the main animator, he travelled to Brazil, visited the missions of Africa and Madagascar, then Oceania, met more than a thousand Brothers, adapted himself to changes of circumstance, climate and a great diversity of people, and at the same time produced this five-part circular of 657 pages, one of the riches he ever wrote.) It ought to be read, or better still, meditated. It still retains all of its original impact; his vision is even truer of today than of yesterday. In the sections *The Calls of the World*, *The Calls of the Church*, and *The Calls of the Founder* he sheds light on the future more clearly than in any other circular that he was to write. It remains one of the pinnacles of Basilio’s thought.

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<sup>64</sup> Br Claudio Girardi, Testimony of 18-12-2002.

<sup>65</sup> This circular is made up of five parts: the last three are the most important, *The Calls of the World*, *The Calls of the Church*, *The Calls of the Founder*.

## TEXTS

The reader can judge for himself whether what follows in these pages confirms what has already been said about Basilio's intelligence. In the first of these texts Basilio makes an analysis of two groups of Brothers who were attending the Chapter, one emphasising spirituality and the other psychology.

### 1. Binomial spirituality-psychology

“We may use the terminology of mathematicians and speak of *binomial spirituality-psychology*. We are dealing with two clearly identifiable groups that, all things considered, do not stand in opposition to each other, but rather overlap and complete each other. However, in practice, the ways their ideas are presented prevent them from dovetailing.

Each of the two attitudes that we will analyse manifests both strengths and weaknesses, which appear in various ways. Those Brothers were right who drew attention to the urgent necessity of taking into account psychological aspects of the human person and his needs in the context of religious life: understanding the value of the person, recognising all that it implies, success in his undertakings, the need to be happy and to be useful, the need of friendship and company, the need to be understood and to know that he can rely on his confreres and enjoy their confidence, and finally the need to have the necessary rest, see his personality and his freedom respected, and feel that he is a member of a working team and not just another piece in the hands of a chess player.

Paying due attention to all this does not merely satisfy human appetites that are difficult to provide for – that is the other side of the coin – but it assures the necessary foundations for the full maturation of a religious which requires balance and fullness. It is true that spiritual development is possible for persons who are timid, weak and feeble, but that is unusual, and besides, it does not give the witness necessary to attract and hold young people in the congregation.

And being attentive to all that, it is still possible to give joyful, fruitful and positive witness in the eyes of the world; and finally, it makes people more free of psychological conflicts so that they can offer better service to their neighbour in their work whether that be personal or institutional.

“On the day that everyone understands that well founded psychological laws underpin the moral conscience, great progress will be possible,” says Fr Paul Joseph Hauffer,<sup>66</sup> (*Maturité Spirituelle*, Circular, 5 January 1958).

So it is necessary to include these psychological givens in the Gospel message just as it is necessary to include spiritual aspects. Otherwise there is a risk of ending in failure.

As for those Brothers who emphasise spirituality, what we can maintain very strongly is the qualitative and vital priority of the Gospel over human values. Regarding this, Our Lord – our law and our unique scale of values – is clear and categorical. He not only speaks of the superiority of the supernatural over the natural in the parable of the pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in the field, as well as in the meeting with the rich young man, but, in the eastern genre of the metaphor, he points out that in the case of overwhelming opposition we must sacrifice the natural for the supernatural. The extreme case, but one that is always valid in terms of obligation and of the highest witness, is martyrdom. Beyond that, if there is one group whose reason for existence consists in offering to the world bravely and joyfully the absolute priority of the spiritual in life and in action, it is religious, the living eschatological presence in the world and in the Church today.

In the light of these priorities which need to be understood and appreciated by the Chapter, our attitude is one that not only conforms with the present Canon law – which of course at the moment is being totally revised – or one that does not fail to be in line with the historical tradition of the religious life and of the Marist congregation, but is also in line with both the message and the life of Jesus, the imitation of which is our way to perfection. *We know in whom we have placed our trust* (2 Tim 1:12).

It is therefore necessary that “*psychological*” arguments be presented free of the shortcomings discussed above, and that when they are presented by way of concrete applications they be in line with the authentic adaptation prescribed by the Council rather as concessions to nature.

In the same way it is necessary that “*spiritualist*” arguments be couched in an evangelical context while respecting values that, until yesterday, did not cause any

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<sup>66</sup> Superior General of the Marist Fathers.

problems whether because they did not offend a mentality that did not have the same sense of objectivity or social behaviour, or because some religious were not aware of or took no notice of the presence among them of the values we are speaking about.

In fact today these values are seen and provoke reactions, not to mention revolutions, when young people see that without reason they are misunderstood, hurt by the laziness, by the negligence, or by the mental stereotyping of generations who are charting their course along a line that begins with life.

The reality is that if we do not study ways of adapting to the psychological aspects of the human person, scarcely any of the young (and even of the less young) will put up with external structures of the regular life that contain quite a few problematic aspects which sooner or later will lead to mediocre lives, covert escapes, or to lives full of sadness and submissiveness under the pretence of fidelity, or even, unhappily, to scandalous lives. The result is that, on the one hand, superiors and confreres will have a hard time in their relations with these men, and on the other, people will have no love for the Institute since one can only love an ambience that one believes in, not one that is quite subjective, a source of frustration, repression and unhealthy complexes; such an ambience will turn away noble hearted people who otherwise would have felt very attracted to and in sympathy with a congregation or an apostolate.

It is also true that if a submission of a psychological nature is not seriously examined, teased out and transformed in the light of the Gospel, it becomes, in another sense, perhaps a more harmful one, the source of ambivalence or problems in the religious life. For, if we are not careful, the most important emphases of the Gospel are altered by the application of “naturalist” criteria which can succeed in supporting, for a particular time, a certain harmonious community life and human collaboration but which will never be able to sustain people in the joyful gift of their lives in the sense of a consecration that includes a heroic forgetfulness of self and the constant state of availability to God and to others which give virginity the joyful and positive aspects that a religious must allow to be seen by the world.

In that case what the world sees – in the best case – is a model of human structure, but not the fruit of the power of the grace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding.

It is quite naïve to think that without a love of the cross of Christ, without the gradual adequate and serious practice of asceticism, one can accomplish the moral miracles of witness, devotedness, and self-gift that are the fruits of Christ's Church. And in turn, this asceticism cannot be practised and still less imposed without the profound motivation of a spirit of faith. We have to remember that the life of faith, which is above all a gift, is developed and sustained only by constantly and adequately nourishing it." (Circular, 2 January 1968, pp. 50-55)

## **2. Structure-freedom**

Reflecting on the relationship between structure and freedom that attracted his attention in this Chapter of the circular, he wrote:

“One group wished to keep intact a series of regulatory or legal structures. Another insisted on the right to freedom that is ours not only in view of the dignity of human nature, but also because of our redemption by Christ making us sons of God. Once again, both groups were right.

Consider the attitude of the first group. It is clear that the common life is not possible without a minimum of structures; those that embrace and protect functional and primary values have to be maintained to defend these values against the shortcomings of decentralisation and against the exercise of a freedom that is only creative and fruitful so long as it is anchored in a maturity that is both human and supernatural.

Lacking this condition, it is pure sophistry to appeal to freedom and the need for dynamism in the community. The freedom that St Paul talks about is the freedom of the sons of God, the fruit of grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit; it is manifested by the kind of life and action that nurtures it; when, under the mirage of this word, forms of life arise that are not evangelical, but supernaturally worthless, it is a proof that the milieux in which they arose were not mature enough for the fullness of freedom...

It would be a serious mistake to abandon the structures that we have spoken about and speak only of the changes in the movement of persons or of contemporary thought, above all when we know that those structures, once

demolished, can never be restored. We need to think about the mystery of human solidarity, not only in space but also in time, to take into account the seriousness of a response, of a concession, not only in the present but also for the future. This is a duty attached to a vital and dynamic fidelity to a tradition; we are heirs, and as such we are responsible for the preservation, purification and enhancement of our inheritance.

When we speak of the dynamic charism of the Founder we think not only of a stream that is passed down through time but also of one that must grow in quality, as pure and full of energy as its source...

That brings us to the second group. What is true about their position is that structures are of no use unless they are adopted freely. A rule that instead of being at the service of the community places the community at its service becomes a cause of irritation and waste of energy, even for people of good will.

If it is all up to the rule, the community loses its sense of responsibility and falls apart – paradoxical as it may seem – leading it to become an aggregation in which coexistence is difficult. Coming together in time and space, the members each live their own lives, do their own work, leaving others to lead their own lives and attend to their own responsibilities. While coexisting, they ignore one another... The appearance is of people marching in step, of regularity in their place of work and life which might lead one to have the impression of the heroism of people vitally united to God, but which causes the majority to fail to achieve transparency or to make contact with people.

Obviously nothing is hidden from God, and in the Mystical Body everything becomes fruitful. But if rules and other structures do not help to express the deepest sentiments of our being, then community life is not nourished in every aspect and does not achieve the intensity and fruitfulness that might be expected of it.

Such a religious life, worthy though it may be, gives a limited witness to freedom and charity. Without a doubt it has little influence on the Brothers, and is incapable of awakening the enthusiasm of younger generations for the cause of Christ and the salvation of souls. That is no longer true.

Further, with the Gospel as our criterion, we may ask if religious life has not been the victim of poor formation and a waste of time, and if the weight of structures has not, without it being realised, squeezed out two essential elements of evangelical life: free and joyful obedience, and the inspiration of love. Let us keep in mind the extraordinary personal freedom manifested by Christ when confronted by countless Judaic observances and his severe criticism of them.

But then it will be said that if everyone is right what remains to be done? The answer to that is beyond dispute: purification and synthesis, carried out within the limits imposed by the reality of individual and social human dimensions, a reality that nevertheless must be stretched tight in the effort to reach the ideal.

We are not to speak of opposing groups, but groups keenly searching together for the shape of a synthesis, by a purification and self-critique of their own attitudes and their own positions. The truth is that justice will never be found in either the open-endedness or the one-sidedness of a point of view.” (Circular, 2 January 1968, pp. 55-61)

### **3. Some pages of the same kind**

I know quite well that in a number of places in the Institute great efforts have been made, and that in spite of that there are groups of Brothers who reveal an unhealthy state of affairs, for example, in regard to the daily obligation of meditation.

As far as this lack of appetite is concerned, doing away with it, or shortening it unfortunately does not resolve anything, and the determination, on its own, to uphold the obligation and insist on the time like a picture frame without a picture, is not, any longer, an adequate solution.

We must maintain the picture frame, above all knowing that within it there is no painting or picture, but something alive; and it is necessary, beginning with the symptoms, to arrive at a diagnosis and a remedy... If the diagnosis of a community cannot but judge the arguments of the Brothers as specious, and that really there exists a profound doubt or notable reticence about accepting the idea of an extended time set aside for prayer and religious culture, there are strong reasons for wagering that we are dealing with a genuine pathology.

In fact, a Brother thirsting for religious culture, who feels the personal need for prayer, cannot find a way to return to a structure that guarantees the satisfaction of these two needs given an inclination to acceleration that does not know how to control the engine, the lack of organization that cannot find a time for his spiritual life until the very end of the day, and even – although more rarely – an excess of good will that does not know how to deal with his superior's requests (that are really an abuse) for extra work that he never refuses...

So long as the law is what it ought to be: providing really efficacious means to achieve the ends that are desired and decided upon, so long as the means are rendered more dynamic by the particular effectiveness of the law – the law of Christ is a law of grace – so long as it is to pursue the ends that have brought men together in a common life and common work creating real community, and finally, so long as there has been on the one hand wisdom in legislating and prudence in governing, and on the other hand, equal love for both law and freedom, then there is no clash between law, structure and community.

Moreover, when a person is truly free (and here we do not speak simply of psychological freedom, a kind of adolescent thing, but of an integral freedom that, beginning with freedom of choice, develops in a coherent way towards the perfect freedom by which he accomplishes and perfects what he has chosen to be and to do), and above all when love has raised freedom up above the law – not against the law but up above the law, for love achieves very much more than the law demands - then, at that time, obedience, initiative and freedom no longer find themselves in opposition to one another but have a reciprocal relationship that makes them complementary and brings about their fullness. Structure incarnates the law, and this protects the values and causes them to be upheld. These values lead to the maturity of the person who is no longer satisfied with just any exercise of freedom whatever, but only with that which has an objective result.

In this way, the community becomes the milieu, the locus and the fruit of a union of persons who give themselves to God and to others in the community while fully living their own individual personality in and through the community. That is the synthesis we are striving for.

... Community life considered not as just any kind of coexistence but as a *vita*; union, in the love of Christ, of a group of men who in living their lives together

sharing a common history and a common task, through communication and contact put at the disposal of others all that they are, especially their friendship, their heart, their interior life, their collaboration and their service.

Community life does not come about quite simply as a result of group dynamics but of something deeper than that: a mysterious way of living in the love of Christ, an eschatological way that foreshadows and somehow makes already present the shape of the life and love that is to come. They are radiant, open and joyful communities that give witness to the cheerfulness of freedom that are both the condition and the fruit of their singular kind of life: consecration. It is these who become a shining lighthouse capable of attracting to the religious life today's young people who are able to respond to<sup>9</sup> the positive aspects of virginity, poverty, commitment and community.” (Circular, 2 January 1986, pp. 60-67.)

#### **4. From action to contemplation**

(In the conference that Basilio gave to the major superiors in 1979, *From Action to Contemplation*, he analysed the factors underlying the changes in modern society that distance us from the time of our foundation and make the spiritual life more difficult.)

Here are some disturbing elements:

1. We have moved from a rural world to an urban world, from a society of artisans to one that is highly specialised and pluralist.
2. The rhythm of life that in an earlier time was governed by the rules of the “religious house” will henceforth be influenced by the modern society around us.
3. We are under siege from the spirit of communication and consumerism. Until thirty years ago life was rather protected and even controlled in religious houses. But the following new tendencies will not go away.
  - a. There is a greater exposure to entertainments because of the media, granted that some are of value.
  - b. People are struck by the possession of the material objects that a productive society has to offer, and are confounded by the number of ways in which advertising promises to satisfy this or that desire.

- c. Where Brothers are salaried and are no longer preoccupied with buildings or developing institutions and ways of carrying out the apostolate, there is a danger that poverty becomes more and more problematic. Not being sufficiently attuned to sharing and charity, they allow themselves little by little to slip into a comfortable middle class life style. In 1793 Fouché made the comparison between some thousands of comfortable citizens and 24 million of the poor. In 1978 Marchais speaks of 17 million poor which leaves 36 million citizens living in comfort.
- d. Academic demands have become heavier: the need for a degree and for specialisation make the educator a man of a certain class. One who could be satisfied, and in days of old had to be satisfied, with an Elementary Diploma (which was achieved at the age of sixteen) or with other very short studies, now can or indeed must take on higher studies, some specialisation and ongoing education. In certain places he even has to win his place by in a competition that is sometimes quite ruthless.
- e. The school system becomes more complex. Besides academic requirements there are other obligations arising from bureaucracy, administrative requirements, unionism and so on that we cannot get away from.
- f. At the same time, today's young people pose an increasing number of difficulties. Formerly they were docile, even pious, but today they freely indulge alternately in confrontation and criticism. The task of education thus becomes exhausting and seems to be unsuccessful if not useless.
- g. Our age is marked by a powerful movement towards secularisation and even towards secularism. The former has some positive aspects that could be helpful for the educator, but unfortunately, it has often been taken up under its more superficial and harmful aspects.
- h. There is a danger much closer to our problem: a crisis in prayer and meditation has deeply shaken certain sectors of the Church. Prayer has been spoken of as outdated; in the technological and space age, man must no longer live his religion like that... (*From Action to Contemplation*, pp. 4-6.)

## 5. Stay in the schools – or leave them?

In one of his meetings with the Brothers of France, at Quimper in 1974, Basilio spoke of de-schooling the congregation. This is an expression that has been seized upon by the media and has been understood in a superficial manner.

First of all, Basilio spoke in the precise context of France where education of good quality in schools is assured for all. It was in those circumstances that Basilio believed that brothers might well open up other apostolates that would always be centred on the young: catechesis in the parish, houses offering hospitality to the young, works in favour of the poor, those with physical or mental disabilities... He invited the Brothers, above all the French Brothers and those from developed countries, to consider and take up apostolates that might be chosen at least as much as the traditional schools. Basilio suggested that we should not remain prisoners of the schools. He did not wish to abandon the schools, but rather to bring about the diversification of the apostolate of the Brothers.

However, in his first circular, that of 2 January 1968, he strongly and clear-sightedly affirmed that in the world the task of education was an immense one, and it was our duty to make young people more aware of the needs of the world and more enthusiastic about giving themselves generously, and that we must not hesitate to guide them towards politics. Among other things he wrote:

“In view of the real state of education, its urgent demands but lack of means, in view too of the overwhelming, galloping growth of the young population, the task of education and its institutions is of fundamental importance. Putting in question our vocation, above all among those who have based it on apostolic foundations and love of the young, and who are naturally suited and inclined to the work of education, would make no sense, and would spread doubt about the actual value of this work; that would be not only a wrong attitude from the sociological point of view, but also a particular and serious obstacle to the progress of evangelisation.

How much sense would there be for us, who were born for this, in doubting the importance of our activity at the moment when the Council has affirmed its importance?” (Circular, *2 January 1968*, pp. 272-273.)

## **6. Basilio and our world**

We need to be men of our times and men in our times, sharpening our consciousness of our moment in history, living in the dialogue and communion that the Church has established with the world, and particularly listening to discover the signs of the times. What we hear and observe needs to find an echo in the depths of our conscience and be accepted with without antipathy, in an understanding way, in the light of the Gospel... Only by being permeated by the Spirit of the Lord and of the Gospel can we adapt to the signs of the times and make adequate responses.

We need to discover the future at the heart of the present, and so have the foresight to prepare young people suitably. The Christian, more than others, because of the prophetic nature of his existence before the world, must accept his time with joy, provided, certainly, that this does not imply the disintegration of everything good from the past, and accept new values in a human and eschatological perspective. In fact, by word and by witness, we have to be an alarm signal when the times are interpreted inadequately. By freeing themselves from such errors and also from the forces of demagogy and from a complacent acceptance of novelties that sees everything as perfect or as a desirable end to be achieved, the Christian purifies the present time by accepting it while at the same time being conscious that the future has to do with more than a future moment in time, indeed, an eschatological future.

We need to be sensitive to the great problems of the world and consequently wish that our congregation, our institutions and our structures may be functional in view of what the present requires. It is not difficult to see that this functionality must begin with the right heartfelt disposition of every Brother, though of course it does not finish there...

We need to bring our adult generation closer to the young generation, struggling with all our hearts to narrow the distance and prevent the gap that already lies between us from becoming any bigger. The new generation has to be listened to and understood: that does not mean that the young have to be in charge, nor that we have to change our authentic traditional values and give way to what is false, lacking in objectivity, or simply fashionable. I simply want

to say that the young must be listened to and that we must accept what is authentic and legitimate in what they say...

To live on the margins of this reality would be for us, above all as educators, a failing of immeasurable consequence. Of course, this young generation is the brew, the new product of a world that I have tried to describe to you in these pages. Besides, we don't have any choice; we have no other youth to work among. I will put it better: with all its absurdities and rebelliousness, a significant part of this young generation has better values than the middle class and individualistic youth of times past.

In every case, we meet this young generation at the heart of the world, and we tailor it for the world. I speak of the world here in a dynamic sense, since we speak of a world that has its origin in the hands of the Father, a world given to humankind, the agents of history, for them to make it fruitful, a cosmic talent if you will..." (Circular, 2 January 1969, pp. 281-287.)

## **7. A Prologue written by master Basilio**

This prologue appeared in *Auriga*, the review of philosophy and culture of the University of Queretaro in 1990. Basilio is introducing the work of his friend, the philosopher Antonio Pérez Alcocer... The prologue itself has been described in these terms: "... the delicacy of style of Basilio allows us to guess some of the deep anguish that master Antonio Pérez Alcocer has suffered.... In a few exquisite brush strokes he outlines the profile of the man and reveals the countenance of the philosopher before penetrating the metaphysical heart of the work. A deep thinker, he moves from the exterior to the most intimate interiority by a method that is discursive, analytical and synthetic at the same time, in the manner of one who has confidence in his ability to do justice to the prologue.

Master Basilio, a man of undisputable intellectual honesty and at the same time of profound religious and mystical conviction...a passionate thinker who continues to be invited to speak all over the world... a man with a deep love of God, whose bedside book is always the work of St John of the Cross... As a philosopher he has written, in the brief period between two appointments, works of great depth.

Master Ruedo was appointed by Father Lombardi to the Movement for a Better World... He was seconded as his immediate collaborator to give conferences, but above all, to offer theological, philosophical and sociological reflections on the future as seen from the perspective of the period of preparation for the Second Vatican Council.

Steeped in philosophy and the theology of history, a little less so in regard to fundamental ontological axiology, he set himself to read volumes of traditional metaphysics in preparation for the prologue to Pérez that we are reviewing here. This commentary should be of great assistance since it comes from a veritable authority on the subject, master Basilio Rueda Gúzman. (*Quemar la Vida*, pp. 272-273)

## BASILIO AND WORK

What personal qualities explain the election of Brother Basilio as Superior General? Looking back at the situation in 1967, the Church after the Council, a young generation coming to the boil, a world changing very quickly, Brother Domingo Ruiz writes, “The Institute needed a superior young, mature, with a religious and scientific formation, and, on the other hand, with a great capacity for work, not only to undertake the long hours of work that had to be done, but also knowing how to use modern means whether in the choice of helpers or in the use of modern techniques.”<sup>67</sup> Basilio had precisely these qualities, especially in regard to the amount and the quality of his work.

### 3.1 The Amount of His Work

Basilio always carried out a surprising amount of work. He had certainly learnt a lot from his professor of philosophy, Oswaldo Robles, who used to urge his students, especially the better ones, and particularly those who seemed likely to become future Christian leaders, to work long into the night, to skip meals, and to go without sleep if that was necessary; however, they were never to be sparing in the time required if intellectual work were to be fruitful. Basilio himself acknowledged the influence of his professor who could be regarded as the father of both his intellectual and his faith development.<sup>68</sup> He confessed that many times he and other young Brothers like him spent the whole time from the evening to the morning *Salve Regina* at their typewriters. When he had to prepare the message for the Marial Congress held in Brazil in 1982, he admitted that he spent the whole night reading the documents and then writing the message.<sup>69</sup>

The evidence of his labours is overwhelming. It might be said that he loved the stimulation of work. Brother Paul Sester says that he would have been

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<sup>67</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al. Hermano Basilio*, p. 32, Special Number on the occasion of the end of Basilio's term of office as superior general, 1985.

<sup>68</sup> Circular, *Obedience*, pp. 47-51.

<sup>M</sup>*Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, Viamão, 16 de Janeiro de 1982, p. 1.

astonished to see Basilio in the corridors of the general house and going into the offices of general councillors or secretaries without a bundle of papers in his hand.<sup>70</sup> Brother Luigi di Giusto, who was the administrator of the general house for seven years, tells us that he would see the lights still on in Basilio's office at three o'clock in the morning.<sup>71</sup> In many of his letters Basilio confides in all simplicity that that he works long into the night. Sometimes he is at work until nearly four o'clock, and thinking it not worthwhile going to bed for just an hour, he goes to the chapel and spends the time before the Blessed Sacrament while waiting for the community to arrive for morning prayer.<sup>72</sup>

This is not to say that his work was without personal cost, that he never knew exhaustion, nor that this was his regular daily practice. In many of his letters he tells his friends that he leads an exhausting sort of life, that he is hard pressed by his work and that he has to keep his letters brief.<sup>73</sup> A glance at the appointments noted in his calendar reveals occasions when he was quite exhausted and had to cancel retreats or take some days off to build up his physical resources.<sup>74</sup> He himself recognised that he was burning out his life at both ends; nevertheless, this was to some degree his ideal, to burn out his life for Christ and at the service of his Brothers.<sup>75</sup> Thus he gave himself to his work generously and enthusiastically, and with such vigour that often his helpers were not able to keep up with him.

Imagine, for example, how much work was involved in giving a retreat to a province of more than 600 Brothers. The preparation took two weeks with a team of twenty helpers: priests, Brothers, doctors... He would administer long complex questionnaires, and analyse and interpret the responses, while all the time giving his conferences and meeting the Brothers personally for spiritual direction. He would give these retreats first of all to the superiors, then to all the Brothers, then to the formators, and after that move on to the next

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<sup>70</sup> *FMS-Message*, No. 19, May 1996, p. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Testimony written 21 September. Nearly all the testimonies published in *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio* mention this aspect. The book *El Estilo de Una Vida* contains several testimonies of Brothers to whom he gave an interview in the early hours of the morning.

<sup>72</sup> *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> Many of his letters begin with a paragraph about the amount of work he still has to do.

<sup>74</sup> This was the case for the retreat in Canada in 1970 which had to be postponed; before that, in 1967, he took some days of rest at Taormina with brother Gabriel Michel: *I want to awake the dawn*, p.43.

<sup>75</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 36-37.

province.<sup>76</sup> Sometimes without as much as a day's rest he would travel from one continent to another and start the same process all over again, but with different themes, all dealt with at great depth. He wrote to his close friend, the Nuncio of Lebanon, Mgr Alfredo Brugnera, that he was not feeling well, that he had the flu, which he just could not shake off. That was due to the frequent changes in climate, diet and sleeping conditions, but above all to the enormous amount of work he got through.<sup>77</sup>

When he was in Rome he was quite capable of presiding over plenary meetings of the general council in the morning, and giving conferences or retreats to the Brothers of the International College in the afternoon. Father Manuel Portillo, one of his closest and most regular collaborators tells us: "After finishing a retreat and then interviewing Brothers the following night until the early hours of the morning, he continued his work on the plane. I used to go ahead to make sure he had room for his briefcase, his papers and his tape recorder. He kept in touch with the Mother House, dictated letters – there were no PCs at that time – and he would give me letters for Brothers that we both knew and say, 'I am going to sleep; wake me up when the stewardess comes with coffee.' He would shut his eyes and immediately go to sleep. Coffee was good for him because he had low blood pressure."<sup>78</sup>

For many years Brother Luis Puebla Centeno worked in the general house and in the Vatican. He passes on this information: "I remember that one day in 1980 he was tired, just at the time when he had to go to the synod hall. In a moment of conversation he said, 'I don't know if I am going to be able to stay awake.' Someone said to him, 'Today the Pope is going to speak.' His reply was, 'It's just that I had less than two hours sleep last night,' to which the response was, "Don't superiors general have the right to sleep?" Silence was his diplomatic response."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Everything published here is taken from the booklets *Llamamiento a la renovación, de 1972-1973*, of the province of Norte, Spain. The booklets publish the conferences of Basilio, and personal details. We find the same teaching in the reviews *Bética Marista* of the same period.

<sup>77</sup> Mgr Alfredo Brugnera was one of his closest friends whom he first came to know in Uruguay when he was the apostolic nuncio. We have a good number of letters of Brother Basilio to Mgr Brugnera, particularly when he was nuncio in Lebanon.

<sup>78</sup> *El estilo de Una Vida*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>79</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 26.

Father Amador Menudo, one of the priests who used to help Basilio during the retreats, writes: “He used to work night and day. He used to sleep only four hours each night. He used to take a thermos of coffee to his bedroom. But he never worked hastily; he attended to one thing after another as if that was the only thing he had to do. I warned him that he was ruining his health. He told me once, ‘I know that I am burning out my life like a candle burning at both ends.’ Concerns about his health never got in the way of his work.<sup>80</sup>

Consider how Basilio spent his time during the year 1974. To get a complete picture of this period overflowing with activity we have to begin with the month of December 1973. Basilio took a plane to Sri Lanka for the visitation of the province. In January and February 1974 he was in Australia, at Drummoyne. In June he was in Brazil: Veranópolis, Caxias do Sul, Porto Alegre. In the month of July he visited Azelo (Belgium-Holland). Throughout the whole of August he was in France with 400 brothers who were getting ready for the restructuring of their provinces, and he interviewed almost every one of them for spiritual direction. From mid-October until the end of November he was in the United States; then he returned to Belgium and Holland, and from there went on to Fribourg in Switzerland. The 25<sup>th</sup> of November found him in Spain; on the 26<sup>th</sup> he took a plane to Guatemala en route to Australia. On December 27 he was at Somerton Park in Australia, in which country he spent all of January and February 1975.

That was a period of fifteen months on the move. Between times he was back in Rome for plenary sessions of the general council, he maintained a correspondence that in some months amounted to more than 200 letters, and he started work on several circulars that would appear the following year, *The Spirit of the Institute*, and *Obedience*<sup>81</sup>. In the middle of such a busy life, how could he manage to write any circulars? In the conclusion of his first circular, 2 January 1968, at 657 pages the longest of them all, he explained, “This circular was not entirely written during a single unbroken period of reflection, but in the midst of the coming and going of your correspondence, attention to administrative matters, journeys to a good number of countries, the work of chapters and so on...”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 17; this is followed by five other similar accounts.

<sup>81</sup> This information is confirmed by various sources in the Archives, above all his letters and his itineraries. The letters of Basilio are catalogued by number, month and year; he often wrote more than 300 letters a month.

<sup>82</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968, p. 656.

The itineraries of his journeys were not always determined by the straightest line, but by the line of his heart - the Brothers he needed to listen to, and strengthen in their vocation. If his route to Australia took him through Guatemala it was because in that country there were two or three Brothers who wanted to see him and whom he wished to meet. The safeguarding of a Brother was always of greater value than the cost of an airline ticket. He would return to Rome from Australia via Chile, Colombia and the United States.<sup>83</sup> The money could have been found to make separate journeys back to those places, but in all these countries there were Brothers anxious to speak to him and share their problems. Besides, he had made the decision to take upon himself the animation of the Institute, and he accepted the consequences of that decision.

Brother Luigi di Giusto recalls another event that recalls Basilio's attentiveness to the Brothers: "One day Brother Antolin Sanz and I went to visit Brother Francisco Oleagar in the Hospital of the Daughters of St Paul at Albano. We found him not well at all, and what's more, he was under the illusion that he was fit enough to leave hospital quite quickly. We had a word with Brother Basilio. He immediately went to Albano, and when he saw the Brother he told him how serious his condition was and helped him to prepare for death. A short time after that Brother Francisco died.<sup>84</sup> There are many accounts of how Basilio was ready to spend the night with a sick confrere to make sure that his needs were being met, and this remained the case even after he became Superior General. Brother Esteban, of the province of Madrid, recalls that when he was a student at the International College Brother Antolin injured his foot. Brother Basilio used to visit him several times a day; he adds, "I don't know what Brother Antolin thought about this, but he certainly experienced the affectionate attention of a Brother."<sup>85</sup>

There is another silent witness to the volume of work carried out by Basilio: that is the archives. Although he spent two months, October and November of 1985, destroying a great number of letters of a personal nature to maintain the confidentiality that he had promised, the archives still contain more than 10,000 other letters. The space taken up by the documents of Basilio is far

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<sup>83</sup> *Basilio, An other Champagnat*, p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> Testimony of 21 September 2002.

<sup>85</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 16.

greater than that kept for any other superior general. The same can be said when you compare his circulars with those of the superiors who preceded him or followed him. As for the circulars, he took upon himself a kind of marathon with the one on *Fidelity* of 8 December 1984. He received an enormous number of testimonies, some of them very lengthy, that he had to read, classify, follow up with inquiries, and put to use, resulting in a circular of more than 600 pages, and then he had to thank all the Brothers who offered him something in writing. This work was in addition to what a superior general had to deal with normally. He told us himself, “My time is practically already consumed by the work of government and visitations. I am on the move all the time...”<sup>86</sup>

The amount of work undertaken by Basilio is undeniable. Countless people would testify to this. But it is beautiful that they all speak also of the quality of this work in the most admiring terms.

## 3.2 The Quality of His Work

It is obvious that, had the quality of his work been in any way lacking, he would never have been sought in such a way to preach retreats, give conferences, write articles, give interviews, speak at the general chapters of other congregations, accept special missions on behalf of the Vatican, offer spiritual direction... He would not have been described as a sure spiritual master, or as an expert in humanity, nor would people have waited on the publication of his writings, which received such wide distribution. There is one phrase that is often repeated in the opinions expressed about Basilio: *competence in both the human and the spiritual*. The last booklet in this series (No.8) will present one of Basilio's conferences, the one on *The Word of God*. It is a powerful proof of Basilio's competence: he brings together a treatment at depth, mastery of the subject, a new perspective and above all the conviction that makes him a witness whose words and life come together as one.

### 3.1.1 The Witnesses

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<sup>86</sup> Circular, *Fidelity*, p. 10.

We still think it best to let his closest collaborators speak first. Father Manuel Portillo recalls: “Brother Basilio prepared the retreats like a perfectionist: the content, the method, the plan... he was very attentive to the smallest details, the silence, the meals, the time of rest...”<sup>87</sup> Brother Gabriel Michel attests that when Brother Basilio had the time to prepare a task there was “nothing commonplace about it.”<sup>88</sup> However, he later gave a more detailed account: “If I made a reference to a conference that had seemed to me somewhat weak, it was because on that day Brother Basilio had been meeting Brothers for interviews until 1.00 a.m. And I said to myself, ‘At last he can only say that he was too tired, that he hadn’t enough time.’ I have the impression that quite to the contrary, on that day he had to say to the Lord, ‘I came here to give a series of conferences on obedience. I have to do that. Too bad if it is rather weak and I am humiliated.’ We all know that the circular was one of the most highly appreciated; the conferences that went before it were, in fact, only a rough draft.”<sup>89</sup>

Brother James Langlois, a missionary in Zimbabwe, speaks of “being seduced” while listening to Basilio: “It was in September 1969, however, that I had to opportunity to get to know him a little better. At the time I was in Rome for the Champagnat Year programme. Brother Basilio took charge of the first part of the course, standing in for two speakers who could not make it. I regard the two weeks that he spent with us as a precious grace that set me on the way to a spiritual and religious rebirth. Like most of the other Brothers at this session, I had never made any study of Vatican II, and I was anxious about the crisis that was developing in religious life. He gave us questions to discuss in small groups that enabled us to understand the little that we knew about the Council documents. After the groups reported back he launched upon a long explanation on this subject, which he repeated several times later on. I was seduced by this... Here was man who had a real passion for the Church and for religious life, and a great love of our Congregation.”<sup>90</sup> Many others had the same experience when listening to Basilio; they hung upon every word. We pointed out in the last Chapter how the bishops of Ecuador wanted to listen to him above all; how the second novices at l’Escorial felt that their problems were understood and that their need for a new vision of the world, the Church

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<sup>87</sup> *FMS-Message*, No. 19, p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 40

<sup>89</sup> Testimony written 16 October 2002.

<sup>90</sup> Letter of 15 November 2001, Dete, Zimbabwe.

and the Congregation was richly satisfied. “Among the listeners you could feel the collective emotions, the heavy silences, attention hanging by a thread, laughter, and at the same time, deep reflection.”<sup>91</sup>

Brother Honorio Giraldo Medina was his deputy at l’Escorial, a time that saw the beginning of a great friendship and a very close collaboration first in Spain and later in Rome. In 1985 he wrote two long pages in praise of the retiring Superior: “Brother Basilio enjoyed and still enjoys a high regard among ecclesiastical, cultural and civil authorities. The former President of the Republic of Italy, Guiseppe Saragat, came to dine with him at the general house. Professors at the Gregorian, the Angelicum and other universities came to see him to discuss the subjects that were their specialty... In the Union of Major Superiors his reputation was well known... He had an extraordinary influence: congregations of different kinds came to him to talk about their problems and seek solutions...”<sup>92</sup>

It was Basilio’s custom to work with a team and he had a great respect for subsidiarity, putting his confidence in his councillors and his co-workers. He described how for the preparation of the retreats in Spain in 1972 he brought together a team of specialists who met for two weeks working 10 to 12 hours a day.<sup>93</sup> Brother Gabriel Michel and Father Manuel Portillo recall how he gathered his co-workers together near Rome in a quiet spot to write his circulars.<sup>94</sup> They also tell how he sought the advice of experts if he was in Rome, inviting them to a working meal at L’Eau Vive so that they would not lose their time: among these were the two Jesuit theologians, Urs Von Balthasar and Lyonnet. If he was in Spain he sought the advice of Fathers Sebastian Aguilar, secretary of the Episcopal conference, Vincente Alcalá SJ, who was the psychiatrist of FERE,<sup>95</sup> Father Ruiz Mateos, the Redemptorist psychiatrist of Confer, and Father D. Andres Avelino.<sup>96</sup>

We should say, too, that Basilio pondered for quite a long time on what he would write, letting it mature in his thought and prayer, in his direct contacts with people and situations, and in the conferences in which he had already

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<sup>91</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>92</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio*, p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> *Lamamamiento a la renovación*, September 1972, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 42.

<sup>95</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 35.

<sup>96</sup> Testimony of Brother Conrado Trascasa Garcia, 24 November 2002.

canvassed the subject. Brother Gabriel Michel tells us that the theological introduction of the circular *Mary in Our Lives* was produced at jet-like speed as Basilio dictated it. The same was the case for the circular, *The Spirit of the Institute*.<sup>97</sup>

Another aspect which illustrates Basilio's serious approach to his work was the questionnaires that he prepared whether for a single province or for the whole Institute. He wanted to have a map of the psychological and spiritual identity of the province or of the Institute, to obtain, so to say, the most scientific understanding possible, and to suggest in each case appropriate remedies and a programme of action.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Circulars

His circulars were the fruit of a long gestation period, coming together at the crossroads of reflection, prayer, life (travels, visits, interviews with Brothers) and the conferences, which were their launching pads. He would have loved to write one on Poverty: he gave very rich conferences on this subject, but he thought that the Institute was not yet ready for it. When published, his circular, *Community Life*, went through successive reprints amounting to 30,000 copies; it was considered a best seller among religious books.<sup>99</sup> Other circulars, too, were edited for general publication, such as *A Talk on Prayer*, *Mary in Our Life*, *The Community Life Project*, all of which give some insight into the quality of Basilio's thought. In our institute particular circulars were received with great enthusiasm, such as *Mary in Our Life*, and *Fidelity*. Experts consider that his circular, *Obedience*, was his masterpiece. The impact of others was less immediate, whether, like the long circular, *2 January 1968*, with its special sensitivity to the world, the Church and the Founder, they were too far ahead of their time or whether they were too demanding, like *The Community Project*, and *The Project of Community Life*. Nevertheless, they all have many passages noteworthy for their observation and wisdom. Most Brothers would agree that the circulars are a rich treasure for the Marist Family and for the Church. In particular sessions of the two months French language programme of spirituality, the director, Brother Alain Delorme made the circulars the focus of

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<sup>97</sup> See our Chapter on the Virgin Mary, the part that deals with the Circular.

<sup>98</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio, m* .p. 36.

<sup>99</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 166.

reading, meditation and prayer during the course. Brothers taking part in this programme were surprised to discover the riches they contained. Even today, thirty years later, in a world that continues to change so quickly, they still retain their freshness of style and thought. The depth of his thought, which assures its competence, its reliability and its value, stamps Basilio's work.

### **3.3 Some Characteristics**

Like his intelligence, Basilio's work has many facets, but three in particular are deserving of mention: *the great humanity* that characterises his work, his *sense of responsibility*, and *the prayerfulness* underlying it.

#### **3.3.1 A Man Close to Others**

His visits, his letters, his conferences and his writings put us in touch with a man who wishes to be close to others, who has a passion and a respect for the other, and for whom the person is an absolute value. He gave people a warm welcome; his door was always open; he would listen to another for as long as he needed; he had the experience and the advice necessary for one who undertook to guide others. More will be said about this in a later Chapter that deals with Basilio as Brother and friend. For the moment it is enough to consider this tribute:

“You made us face the reality of life. You accepted both selfishness and generosity. You knew how to give each one the slap he needed. For you, nothing was unimportant: physical health, lack of maturity, personal doubts and uncertainties. Your constant preoccupation was the man, ‘the man of flesh and blood’ as Unamuno would say, the man who walks and falls, who gets up and falls down again, who sometimes takes wings to the heights and at other times plunges to the earth. It was from you that I learned that friendship is not a thing that can be forced upon someone, nor manufactured... It was from you that I learned the difficult task of being a superior, giving oneself to all, being concerned about all, not falling into behaviour that excluded anyone. From you I learned disinterest and renunciation, love of work and acceptance

of weakness... You were always the same, simple, tireless worker, organised, ready to be of service to everyone, a true Marist religious.<sup>100</sup>

There was another kind of work that was part of Basilio's life as a Brother. He delighted in the most simple tasks that showed his affection: carrying the luggage of those who had just arrived, waiting on the table, offering pre-dinner drinks on feast days, washing up, sweeping the yard. He said, without naming the university, that he had obtained a special degree in washing the dishes. One of the student brothers at the International College has written: "One night I was clearing away the table after some Brothers who had arrived late for supper. It was midnight. Basilio came in to get a glass of milk, which I understand was his custom to help him continue working through the early hours of the morning. When he saw me he came up and helped me until we were quite finished."<sup>101</sup> More of that in the Chapter on the humanity of Basilio...

### 3.3.2 A Responsible Man

The sense of responsibility is another constant in the work of Basilio. We can see this from the first pages of his circular *2 January 1968*, the first he wrote as superior general. It contains a long reflection on prudence, and he prays to the Holy Spirit and to the Blessed Virgin for this virtue. His wish for himself and his council was "an audacious prudence".<sup>102</sup> He always sought the advice of his co-workers, even in regard to matters about which he was well informed, and he would accept the advice of his council even when their vote was contrary to his position. When visiting the provinces he supported the provincial and the provincial council in the strongest possible way: "When confronted by problems in a province Brother Basilio made them his own and made every effort to solve them, explored every possibility, every means of help."<sup>103</sup> At the same time, he also wished to be responsive to the Spirit whose call he recognised in those Brothers whom he called the prophets of the province."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Madrid Marista*, Special Number 1985, Testimony of Br Victorino de Arce, p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> *Madrid Marista*, *Al Hermano Basilio*, p. 16.

<sup>102</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968, pp. 4-10.

<sup>103</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, p. 225.

<sup>104</sup> *Appel au dépassement, Retreats of 1970: Renewal*, p. 5. The same ideas are published in the reviews of the provinces of Notre and Bética during 1972-73.

His sense of responsibility is also evident in his efforts to provide a process of discernment for every Brother who was in difficulty, and in the long detours he made in his journeys to meet a Brother, listen to him, confirm him in his vocation or help him to withdraw if that was the case. His responsibility, too, is quite clear in regard to the confidentiality he maintained in regard to what the Brothers shared with him either in conversation or in writing.<sup>105</sup> As for the written testimonies that he received for circulars like *Fidelity*, he had a list graduated in terms of the privacy that had to be assured for such confidences, sorting them into eight different categories...<sup>106</sup> And, at the end of his mandate, he was to spend two months destroying every letter of a personal nature.

### **3.3.3 His Love of the Church**

His sense of responsibility was also shown in his obedience to the Church. Did the Council ask for the renewal of the Institute? He would put all his energies into the task of instilling the values of the Gospel, returning to the sources, to the spirit of the origins and responding to the world today. The same sense of responsibility drove Basilio to redirect the congregation towards the poor and the missions. In 1981 he said to the second novices at l'Escorial, "It is necessary to sensitise the Institute to the great rhythm of the universal Church: no compartments with sealed walls, no ears deaf to the cry of the world."<sup>107</sup>

### **3.3.4 Responsive to the Talents that God had Given Him**

We are used to seeing Basilio as a public person who takes on responsibilities and discharges them well. That can make us forget how great was Basilio's awareness of his responsibility to God and to himself. He developed to their fullest the talents God had engraved in his nature. Then there is the self discipline we often forget that gave him great self control, the capacity to concentrate, to be totally present to a problem, a person or to God. It also contributed to what a number of witnesses speak of, his even temperament.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *FMS-Message*, No. 19, May 1996, Testimony of Brother Leonard Voegtle, Procurator General.

<sup>106</sup> Circular, *Fidelity*, p. 615, The Use of the written submissions.

<sup>107</sup> See the document, *History of the Sessions of the Second Novitiate in Spain*, 7-VIII-81. p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> *El Estilo de Una Vida*, pl. 117-121.

Brother Luis Puebla gives us this picture, among others: “The period when he was superior general was affected by very many defections from the religious life, some particular cases being very painful... Whether you like it or not, that had repercussions not only on the body of the congregation, but also on superiors. It is clear that this was very trying and exhausting. In spite of these difficult circumstances no one ever saw in him any signs of discouragement or low spirits, quite the opposite: he always manifested great peace of mind, a smile, friendliness, strong nerves and a transparently great spirit. He always exercised an exemplary self-control, constantly encouraging, welcoming affectionately all those who came asking him for help, advice or direction.”<sup>109</sup>

Basilio told the young Brothers following the *Jesus Magister* programme, “There are two golden rules in life, one at the natural and the other at the supernatural level. At the natural level, ‘To do whatever you can to achieve balance is to do what is necessary to develop a mature personality.’ At the supernatural level: ‘To work for peace is to work for the presence of the Holy Spirit.’ You can be sure that when the heart is at peace at the spiritual level, the Holy Spirit is truly present. From the human point of view, where there is balance, there is maturity.”<sup>110</sup>

### 3.3.5 His Work came to Flower in Prayer

Basilio’s work bore the shape of his rich human qualities, but it was always carried out in a *spirit of prayer*. We are told by many that he asked communities of aged Brothers to pray very much for him and for the congregation. He also asked for the prayers of the cloistered nuns whom he helped financially. We have already noted<sup>111</sup> that he finished all his circulars in an atmosphere of prayer in some place near Rome, often on the shores of Lake Albano where he could be sure of a peaceful space. Above all, he was a man of God, always keeping plenty of room for intimacy with the Lord, for he was convinced that God alone is able move the heart. As for Marcellin, Psalm 126 was very important for him: “*If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour.*”<sup>111</sup> We know that he once said, “Hearts are not changed by words.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 25.

<sup>110</sup> *Encontros con el H. Basilio Rueda*, p. 25, (Source: Brother Elias Peña, Rome, 15-12-1969)

<sup>111</sup> On the booklet *The Univers of Prayer*, more than 40 pages are of this same token.

<sup>112</sup> *La Contemplation à partir de l'Action*, pp. 6-7

Towards the end of his second term of office, writing his circular on *Fidelity*, he noted: “The average Marist Brother is not much given to writing a spiritual diary, still less to going to great lengths to describe his interior journey. He is more inclined to be a man of action, of socialisation, of self-giving. Anything, no matter how noble, that is oriented to interior reflection, is rather foreign to his nature. If you win his confidence, he may open up his whole life to you, but for him to write it down is quite another matter.”<sup>113</sup>

Like the average Marist Brother, Basilio is a man of action, of socialisation, of self-giving. But he has these qualities in a remarkable way. To these can be added a capacity for contemplation, introspection, discernment of spirits and the art of writing. All of these come together in a very rich human experience.

To the very end, Basilio kept this habit of hard work. Brother Remi Vericel mentioned that on his return to Mexico he was given responsibility for the Marist Family, and then he was co-opted into the committee charged with the direction and development of education which supervised 60 schools, and that he became a provincial councillor responsible for the accompaniment of the young Brothers in every community of the province, and later he was novice master, and had to write numerous letters, and give many conferences and direct numerous retreats.<sup>114</sup>

Brother Claudio Girardi, speaking of the amount of work that Basilio took upon himself, for example, with his colossal questionnaires, says that Basilio certainly recited the prayer of his great friend Father Alberione, founder of the Society of St. Paul, “Lord, that each of my hours may be worth two, that I may do twice as much work, that one hour of sleep may be worth two.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Circular, *Fidelity*, pp. 11.

<sup>114</sup> *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 27.

<sup>115</sup> Br Claudio Girardi, Testimony, 18-12-2002.

## TEXTS

### 1. The circulars

When I was his secretary, I participated actively in the editing of those very long circulars of brother Basilio. Here is the approach that he always followed:

Armed with a pencil and a blank piece of paper, he would trace an outline of the subject that he wished to treat. That finished, Brother Basilio and I would shut ourselves up in the house of *The Divine Master*<sup>116</sup>, a retreat house outside Rome owned by the Paulist Fathers where their founder, Father Alberione,<sup>117</sup> lived. We always attended his Mass.

Brother Basilio worked hour after hour, night and day; he elaborated with characteristic exuberance his teaching, examples of how it might apply, and his practical conclusions. I assisted by fetching quotations and looking up references. After that came the task of putting it together and touching up the literary style. Brother Basilio was an attractive speaker, and no less brilliant writer. I have to admit that I am somewhat slow in my working practices; the circulars were very long in every respect, and I had to spend many days making them just right. On one occasion Basilio disagreed with me on this so much that he said, “Publish the circular just as it is; don’t be so concerned about style.” Somewhat intimidated, I replied, “Remember that this is a document of the superior general, so it is necessary to be careful to present it in a decent manner.”

The circulars were printed at the publishing house Luis Vives in Saragossa. I remember that on one occasion their meticulous editor, a purist if ever there was one, said: “This circular was written by a Mexican, and edited by a Chilean, so now we have to put it into good Spanish.”

In elaborating his ideas Basilio needed to travel through a vast wood, with all sorts of trees, bushes and shrubs. When faced with this kind of exuberance, it was not easy to be brief and concise. (Brother Honorio Medina Giraldo, in *Madrid Marista*, Supplement to No. 71, April 1996.)

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<sup>116</sup> At Ariccia, in the hills near Rome.

<sup>117</sup> Father Alberione was an old man at the time; he was the one who celebrated the Mass often attended by Basilio and his coworkers. Father Alberione, who has been beatified, was a great friend of Basilio.

## 2. The reputation of the man

This is what a member of the Union of Superiors general said to me: “Brother Basilio is one of those rare superiors general, a quite remarkable person, who sets the tone for this institution.”

On two occasions he facilitated the general chapter of the Paulist Fathers; they had a great admiration for him and frequently consulted him. They published a number of his circulars among their books on spirituality.

The Salesian Fathers also asked for his assistance in the course of one of their general chapters.

Often general councillors of congregations of sisters came to seek his advice and hear his suggestions about how to approach certain delicate matters of government.

He had a very close relationship with Father Arrupe. I think that they were a help to each other in dealing with the problems that were arising in both congregations. On one occasion he invited the whole general curia of the Society of Jesus to the house.

He was often invited to give talks to other religious congregations or apostolic movements like the Movement for a Better World...

Often Cardinal Pironio would meet me as I was leaving work. On at least three or four times he asked me for news of Basilio, what would be his next port of call, whether he was in Rome or not. Really, he did this out of friendship, you could see how fond he was of Basilio; it was not simply a case of seeking information.

A person of high rank in the Congregation for Religious asked me what Brother Basilio's next work would be, and he finished by saying, “Never let go of the values that he possesses and that he represents.”

His Eminence Cardinal Antonio Maria Javierre Ortás, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, told me that he had

been a capitulant at the chapter of his congregation when Brother Basilio gave them a conference on the Constitutions, and he added, “I would never have thought that any man could know so much about Constitutions.” (*Madrid Marista*, Supplement to No. 71, pp. 14-15, Testimony of Brother Luis Puebla Centeno.)

### 3. How to govern

As you are aware, the system of government has undergone important changes. Despite all the transformations made, I think that the difference between what used to be and what is struggling to be formed, rests not in the structures but in the spirit which is *slowly* (I insist on this “slowly” not to stir up comment, but because it seems just so to me) changing our mentality and our way of doing things – a spirit that without undermining the experience we practise, tries to integrate the principles of subsidiarity, decentralisation, corresponsibility, delegation, participation, dialogue, etc.

Good leadership will try to ensure that decisions can in practice be made with freedom and responsibility by those most nearly involved in the problem; for we must not forget that in the Christian order, and more so in that of the vows, decisions in the Church and in the Congregation can only be made by considering all the circumstances in the light of an overall understanding of our task. It is not a matter of simply finding out at what level the decision is to be made, but of consulting the will of God. The major authority has the obligation of correcting a decision made on a faulty basis. When it is the superior who is basing his decision on inadequate grounds, the other Brothers have the duty of dialoguing with him, acting in a prophetic manner, and even of having recourse to a higher authority.

Are we prepared to accept this? Or does the weight of years hinder us from using obedience and authority in a way that promotes the mystery of communion with the Father’s will?

Corrective action in the exercise of authority clearly must be used as soon as the decision made departs from the Lord’s will. (Circ., *Vocal Meditation of a Superior General*, 12 may 1971, pp. 322-333.) (This quotation leads into Booklet 7, *Basilio, Leader and Brother*.)

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