

NOTEBOOK 1

GRACE, GOD, JESUS, THE HOLY SPIRIT

1

PREAMBLE

In the first place, Basilio was a man of God - a man seduced by God. Like Marcellin Champagnat, he was amazed by the gratuitous love that God had for him. He spoke of this special grace received from God in the Spanish magazine *Religiosos de hoy*.

“There is no doubt that God is the main agent... A complete change occurred in my life; I was no longer interested in the activities that had captivated me until that time... The centre of my interest became my prayer life; it came naturally to me to consecrate whole hours to personal prayer; daily Eucharist had become a need.

Writing for the J.M.V. magazine, he confided, “Attentive listening to God’s word gives birth to an intimate dialogue that in turn engenders a strong desire to proclaim by one’s life that God is the fullness of love... This listening makes one obsessed to seek God’s will in a generous ecclesial communion. Once a person has organised his life according to God’s love there is no more turning back... Whoever has known the fascination of God’s love knows whom he belongs to. The soul does not request anything, it gives itself...”

In his circular on Obedience he made this stunning statement, “We all carry in ourselves a great mystery: Jesus is I and I am Jesus”.¹

The above texts shed light on the entire heart of our Brother Basilio and reveal the dynamism of his apostolic life: a need to

¹ Circular on *Obéissance*, p. 37

(The indicated pages will always be those found in the French text).

give himself without any limit, even if the candle of his life had to burn at both ends! Hence we understand why, after the whole night at work, Basilio would sometime move to the chapel with the coming of dawn for a full hour of adoration. We also understand how, when he had been granted a sabbatical year in 1985, he devoted a month of retreat to pray in the manner of the Carmelite tradition, and then undertook the thirty days Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. These experiences of prayer were followed by a course on *Lectio Divina* and by a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

This veritable passion for God explains the numerous retreats on prayer that he led everywhere in the Institute, his circulars on prayer, on creativity in community prayers, his oral meditations with the provincial Superiors and his circular on prayer – meditation. He felt something sacred and urgent burning within him and he wanted all the Brothers to be set ablaze with the same flame.

This is the love that forged him as an apostle: a man who gave himself without counting the cost, sowing enthusiasm among the Brothers, his collaborators, the Marist Family, the former students, his novices, and among other major Superiors who appreciated his enlightenment, courage and peace.

Basilio was optimistic by nature; his experience of God kept the light of hope burning in his heart. To the capitulants who had attended the 1993 chapter he left a loud message, “Do not be afraid, be of great trust...” To a Brother from Ecuador who had asked him, “What renewal advice will you give to the Brothers busy with the Marist apostolate?” he answered, “Apostolic life without an interior life above the average, will eventually turn into a purely human activism.”

That is where Basilio wanted us to anchor our Marist lives: in God. The last message he sent to his most intimate friends, a few

days before his death, follows this logic: “I leave everything in the hands of Jesus Christ, and in the hands of the Father where I feel a deep peace and the desire to give thanks and praise. Having learnt that there are no better hands than those of God, this is where I took refuge.”²

The real Basilio can be understood only:

- in his faith in God
- in his friendship and intimacy with God.

He obtained both by grace and by his personal asceticism. He kept trying to initiate his Brothers into this faith and this friendship to help them to face the problems of the world, of the Church and our Congregation; all were in great peril. We have no difficulty in remembering the Vatican Council, but we tend to forget the 1960's: the revolt of the young, the unstable political world, the protests on university campuses, the cultural revolution in China, and its appeal to the western youth. Have we perhaps forgotten the emergence of the “theology” of the death of God, of liberation theology with priests joining the guerrillas, and the humiliation of the USA in Vietnam? That was a world in turmoil, a dark era. Yet, Basilio, in his faith, could already perceive a better dawn coming. He awaited better days, and often said, “We must help the dawn to be born!”

Many of Basilio's attitudes can be explained only by faith. His faith helped the Brothers to discover that religious life is much more than what they had lived thus far, and to rely on God who alone can bring about a Christian spring. Because of his faith, he looked for a competent spiritual director.³ Faith made him proclaim that if a brother regularly absented himself from prayer or could not keep his virginity he should look for another state of life. Faith made him assert that the real problem in certain provinces was the weakness of their Brothers' prayer lives. Thus,

² *Quemar la Vida*, p.307.

³ *Llamamientos a la renovación*, September 1972, p. 22, Prov. Norte, Spain.

he insisted time and again on the necessity of dynamic prayer lives and offered numerous practical suggestions. According to him, it is faith that will help us face the secularised world, to resist the power of the world by becoming a stronger spiritual leaven.⁴ Discussing the Angolan situation, when that country was in a full Marxist phase, but where he also wanted a serious Marist training, he elaborated in a ten-page letter a list of objectives, the first of which were FAITH AND PRAYER.⁵ This stress indicates Basilio's thought: the greater the challenge the greater faith and prayer must be. Speaking to the Brothers of Norte, Spain, he said:

“Brothers, take into consideration that the theological basis of our justification and of our Christian lives does not result from the immense efforts that one can make to become a saint, to love God and to be faithful to God. At best, this would be a Promethean notion. Remember Saint Augustine's case: so many times he tried to redirect himself towards God, but the weight of his flesh showed him that all his efforts were useless; only when he fell on his knees in front of the merciful Lord was Augustine raised permanently to God. The basis of our faith is not that we are good, but that God is good; it is not the fact that we love but that we are loved by an effective and infallible love. There is a notion that brings peace. In that line, we can rely on the Gloria, “Peace to the people that God loves!”⁶

Our archives reveal that Brother Basilio maintained an abundant and very friendly correspondence with the Brothers of Angola and Mozambique, two countries that had to bear with Marxism, with a civil war and with a severe lack of the means of subsistence. His fatherly heart was telling him that these Brothers needed more attention and contact than the others. He wished to rejoin these Brothers at the end of his mandate; he had chosen

⁴ Ibid, p. 25.

⁵ The two words in capital letters are in the original copy.

⁶ *Llamamientos a la renovación*, September 1972, p. 7-8 Prov. Norte, Spain.

these two countries because he loved missionary life and, above all, because life was harsh in these regions.⁷

Basilio's writings on prayer are numerous and enlightening; they reveal a man intimate with God. Prayer was his favourite theme for his conferences and retreats and he gave many of them. As Superior General, he reserved to himself the role of Animator of the Congregation.

Brother José Manuel Gomez Ramirez, who was the provincial of Colombia,⁸ spoke of the retreat on prayer that Basilio gave in his province. This provincial was sent to Troussures by Brother Basilio to learn how to pray. Many brothers were sent to Troussures, to Spello (Carlo Carretto) or to Loppiano. The purpose of these retreats was to invite the Brothers to a greater intimacy with God, to renew themselves spiritually.

A survey conducted among the six hundred Brothers of the Province of Norte in 1972 gave the following results concerning the spiritual direction: 83% of the Brothers found it essential, while 16% were of the contrary opinion. However, when asked whether this important exercise was used or not, the results were inverted: 18% had their spiritual directors while 82% did not. This led Basilio to conclude,

“Stupid people! If you are convinced of the importance of spiritual direction why this contradiction in the percentages? There are rare exceptions, but otherwise spiritual direction is truly necessary and extremely profitable. I doubt if anybody leads a busier life than myself. Before being elected as Superior General, I had worked in ten different countries. But I have been moving along with the same spiritual director for twenty-five years, ever since my scholasticate ...

⁷ Registered letter sent to Br. Spiridion, August 1994.

⁸ Witness: 5 September 2002.

And if I am able to leave him today, it is certainly because that man trained me in such a way as to enable me to survive in my life that is entirely consumed by work! If you really take seriously your growth in Christ, choose a man who has walked in Christ's path, who knows his whereabouts in Jesus' business and who can progressively lead you to meet Christ in your lives."⁹

On our journey to know Basilio better as a man of God, we will consider the experience that changed everything in his life; then we will study the types of relationship he entertained with God, with Jesus and with the Spirit. As Marist Brothers, we will also study his Marial devotion and his devotion to the Founder. We will study his prayer life extensively. We will reflect on Basilio's love and friendship in his life. We will ponder his wisdom, which is typical of all those who are intimate with God – Basilio would say of any prophet. Finally, we will consider his vision of consecrated life and of the vows.

⁹ *Llamamiento a la renovación*, op.cit. p.39.

2

AN EXPERIENCE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

These few introductory pages sketched the journey of a life wholly directed towards God. With all saints, there is a decisive turning point, a moment of profound and permanent conversion in their lives. Let us simply have a look at Basilio in the nineteen-page article he wrote for the Spanish magazine: *Religiosos de hoy*, Madrid, 1980.

1- A promising life but as yet without definitive orientation

Going back to his youth and to the origins of his vocation Basilio admitted frankly that as a young man he had been more interested in life than in God. “I was young and lived my life in a great euphoria, bursting with dynamism, without any particular predilection either for piety, for studies or for work.” Nevertheless, it is clear that all avenues with their diverse possibilities were still open. In the impetus of his youth, everything noble attracted him. He admitted, “My interests were wholesome although totally centred on the human level.”

His readings at that moment were in this area: Dumas, Jules Verne, love or detective stories. He noted the two tendencies of his youth: “a great attraction for everything noble and altruistic and a bent to go and help persons in difficulty”. He was possessed with a great ideal that made him disgusted with anything mediocre and eager to work for meaningful causes. He dreamt of becoming a great intellectual or of devoting himself to a great cause, although without being motivated by a conscious religious element. He did not like long family prayers; however, he willingly recited the rosary. He deeply esteemed his educators, the Marist Brothers: authentic educators, admirable examples of family spirit

and of a great devotion to the Holy Virgin. Yet, he had no desire to embrace the Marist life. He concluded, "Without doubt, the seed of my vocation had already been planted in my heart and was only waiting for the appropriate moment to germinate". His teachers did not make any vocational approach to him.

2- The turning point of grace

Basilio lived a very strong moment of grace, similar to the one experienced by Paul on the way to Damascus, or the fiery night that was a revelation for Pascal. Mystics do live those watershed moments when everything sets itself up towards God. From then on, Basilio undertook to make God the main actor in his life and to direct everything towards the gift of himself, or better, to follow Christ and to live a life of friendship with him, as close as possible to the Gospel.

"But God knows how to reach a person's core when it pleases him. This is what happened to me: very suddenly I felt enlightened in an unexplainable way... I felt I could live a life totally oriented towards an ideal that I would like to share with that group of humans whom I esteemed so much and whom I considered firm and coherent. Two or three minutes of reflection were enough for me to take an irrevocable decision. I must say that the inner impulse was very strong and that the attraction proved very powerful, without losing either my serenity or the most perfect balance. The emotion of that moment did not diminish the sharpness of my critical spirit. The power of God did not alienate me; on the contrary, it helped me become what God had planned for me in his unfathomable designs.

A change occurred in my life: my first activities and enthusiasms changed direction. The centre was relocated in favour of a prayer life and it was no longer difficult to

consecrate whole hours to personal meditation; daily Eucharist became a need.”

Basilio’s father and other persons tried to dissuade him and to advise him to choose other ways to give himself to God. But all these suggestions were crushed by the interior light that certainty created in him. Basilio did not run out of difficulties during his life, specially during his long years as our Superior General, but he was grateful that the good Lord kept giving him the necessary interior light.

This interior illumination unified his life. Did he not meet anti-clerical professors during his studies at different universities? Our brother left these professors’ declarations at the intellectual level. What did he do when turmoil first emerged after the Second Vatican Council? He kept his interior balance and knew how to integrate the past and the present. “That allowed me to be a legitimate son of the past, perfectly rooted in the present and very open to the future!” A little further, he adds, “I survived the Council without ruptures; it was like going through a normal transition. I agreed very well with the great axes of the Council message...” He referred to the grace he had received in this way when recalling that one of his former teachers said to him, “There is a lot of blue in your sky.” He acknowledged that this “blue in one’s life” comes from “the Father of Lights... and not at all from one’s nature”.

Nevertheless grace expects a human collaboration. Basilio puts it this way, “Religious life is inconceivable without abnegation and the cross”. He had to fight “against a tendency to gluttony, he had to wage war against his defects. He had to develop a mature manner in his social encounters so as to relate well with the others and thus to become a corner stone rather than a cause of breakdown in community life.”

That daily fight gave him a great inner freedom. In his circular on obedience he returns to this collaboration of man with grace: “God gives himself to us as a gift and a grace and He waits for our answer. This answer is to let go of our liberty to embrace God’s will, which is our good, our happiness and our future. Thus, we help Him to realise his plans for us, for our joy and our fruitfulness.”¹⁰

3- Grace compels us to commit ourselves.

Basilio could see two options:

- To sanctify himself while seeking his personal promotion
- To deny himself, “to lose his own life” and to live passionately for an ideal, for the Lord and for the others.

In all simplicity, he declared that he had opted for the second option. This was Basilio’s life choice: the Lord and the others. This is the Basilio that we have known, this is the way he lived with us. Nevertheless, although this commitment was beautiful Basilio did not hesitate to accept his own limits: “I must confess that I sinned, that there have been limits in my generosity, some reluctance to say ‘yes’ when one option or another deserved a greater fidelity, a more manifest authenticity and a faster response.” Besides, he was not shy to recognise that there was a lot of mediocrity, sinfulness and weaknesses in the Church and in the Congregation. As an active member of the Better World Movement and more still as the Superior General, he came to know how to gauge these weaknesses and he enumerated them with much realism: rigidity, liberalism, lies, hypocrisy, lack of generosity, desertion, false pretexts. He continued, “I must assert, however, that just as for twenty years I had to deal with the dark and sometimes dirty sides of humanity in my congregation and in the Church as well, I have also experienced more and more

¹⁰ Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 28-29.

enthusiasm and love for the Church and for the life I embraced in the Marist Institute”.

4- God's dominion

This second stage was God's loving invasion into Basilio's heart. In other places, he called this stage: the irruption of God's love into his heart, an event that accompanied the discovery that God is love, only love. Here is his text:

“Whoever has known the fascination of God's love does not belong to himself. The soul does not demand, it gives itself and this gift engenders a great intuition: life is worth living only if one is ready to gamble all on a single card. This person sets God's will way above love of self and desires uniquely to be constantly available to God.

When God's love breaks forth into a life it lets loose a type of love whose amount appears unreasonable. The ‘Thou’ of God and the ‘thou’ of neighbour prevail over everything. A premature death is the destiny of a love that condenses itself in time. Love wants to give and to consume itself.

One day, I discovered that God had showed us his love in the person of his Son and that Jesus Christ was the kiss of love and tenderness that God the Father gives us... That day, I felt that Jesus Christ was coming towards me in a very particular way to make me experience the Gospel. It just seemed very marvellous to accept this Magna Carta as the axis and code of my own existence and to follow Jesus, my brother and my saviour who was asking for my collaboration and my friendship to live and work with Him for the creation of a world according to the Gospel. I understood that the Holy Spirit had marked me with a special seal from the

countless crowd of the Church members since he had sowed an intense taste for the Gospel realities in my heart.”¹¹

5- Life becomes nothing else but a gift.

At this point, Basilio looked at all that God had asked him to do and realised that his apostolic field had gone beyond all that he had foreseen. About his experience of God he concluded, “Religious life is not an abstraction. It is a living reality. It is a loving dialogue between God and myself. On his side, God never runs short of novelty in his fidelity. My life however, is filled with imperfections and evasions, although thank God! I keep up the journey constantly correcting my course.”

Thus, he kept on trusting in the one who had called him, knowing that God is ever faithful. He wrote, “I received my call as a gift and the way I responded at the beginning will carry me until death.” A little further, when he was talking on fidelity and thinking of the great number of priests and religious who had preferred to withdraw, he explained the reason for his own faithfulness. “What leaps to my eyes is that Christ had called and chosen me before my commitment. What constitutes my vocation is not my commitment but God’s call. Infidelity starts when one stops acknowledging God’s tenderness and love...”

This testimony of his deep experience and the fidelity that followed it sheds a great light on Basilio’s life that enables us to understand him. It is through this very grace that God had granted him that his ideal became clear: to burn up his life for Christ and even to burn it at both ends, that is, by a life fully given. He helps us to understand his ideal in the following testimony:

¹¹ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 305, (Interview J.M.V. p. 162 Religiosos de Hoy, p. 162, Madrid 1980),

“Prophecy that has its origin in God is transmitted to man when the latter lives in union with God. This relationship is created mainly by prayer. Prayer arouses the passion for the Kingdom in man. Through attentive listening to the word of God an intimate dialogue is created that brings about a vehement desire to proclaim by one’s life that God is the fullness of love and that it is worthwhile to lose everything provided one gains this love.”

From the above and the preceding paragraph, we conclude that the prophet must constantly seek God’s will. The love of truth and discernment of the signs of the times will help him to find new ways for his evangelical action. All this will be done in loyalty to God, the Church and man.

A passion for the glory of God burns in the prophet’s heart. The prophet proclaims this glory by his words, his actions, his thought and in his human contacts. His heroic commitment to God and to all people will manifest the transparency of his person and the authenticity of his ideals in regard to the Kingdom.

Once anyone has committed his existence to the service of love, there is no turning back. The candle burns at both ends.

Time can be analysed according to the intensity one lives it. But when love breaks into the heart of one’s life, time acquires an eternal density. Love has not been given to us to fill in any hollow parts of our hearts, but to thrust people to unsuspected heights of generosity and of self-oblation.”¹²

During the retreat Brother Basilio preached at Logroño, Spain, in 1972, he shared this extraordinary reflection with the Brothers:

¹² *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 304-305, (Interview J.M.V. p.162), *Lumières et Flammes d’une Vie*, pp. 343-344.

“When someone wants to go deeper into the world of faith he must definitely pay the price - the price to believe in Jesus Christ dead and risen. And blessed is this reward, a source of joy. Your merit lies here: the fact that you hope in spite of any insecurity, the fact that you hope against all hope... When you announce the risen Christ you implicate yourselves with him... to such a point that if you ever have to face the dilemma: to adhere to Christ’s kingdom or something else, you will let yourselves be martyred rather than renounce Jesus Christ. Everything may be lost, even your own mother, but not Jesus Christ.”¹³

During his last disease, at the hospital, Basilio dictated a letter for his friends. An excerpt of this letter: “Today I realise the practical realisation of the truth in what Brother Leonida told me, a long time ago: “You are burning your life by the two ends, your candle burns from both ends.” He was sending me the page of a magazine that depicted a big candle with both ends lit. I had replied in a nonsensical way, “That has always been my ideal.”¹⁴

That was Basilio’s last official testimony, his whole life had been one of loving fidelity and gift, and the candle was about to die out. An extraordinary divine power had rewarding Basilio with fidelity and generosity from the first moment the “light” had flashed on to the very end of his course,

At the end of his second mandate as superior general, as he was reading a report of the work done Basilio told the capitulants, “I tell you in all sincerity, I would have preferred to see a saint govern the Institute - yes, a man of God rather than a technician...” His biographer wrote, “Clearly, saints do not see themselves and do not put a price to all the work they perform;

¹³ *Llamamiento a la renovación*, pp. 2-11, October 1972, Prov. Norte, Spain.

¹⁴ Basilio’s testimony recorded one month before his death.

they are only interested in God's will. Basilio did not see the saint governing the Institute, but many others did. Perhaps even some of us did not see the saint either. But really, it is very possible that a saint did govern the Marist Brothers' Institute during those eighteen years".¹⁵

¹⁵ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 245.

3

WHO IS THE GOD OF BASILIO?

The preceding lines already speak very eloquently of Basilio's God. The narratives that will describe Basilio as a man of prayer will be similar. This is normal, for we are discussing a man whose life was fully dedicated to God. Think of the expression: this is an all-round man: expert at teaching, excellent at sport, and exceptional in human relations. God's love gave us this all-rounder. Will it not be interesting to report a good number of testimonies that reveal the face of Basilio's God as precisely as possible?

The God of Basilio is the one who seduces him, who is faithful and powerful. Love, personal love, will be the outstanding feature.

1- God perceived as a person.

Basilio experienced God as a personal being who seeks and creates dialogue, communication, intimacy, who acts in our human history and in the life of each person. Some brothers once asked Basilio, "Isn't meditation a beautiful dialogue where man plays two roles: the speaking part and the listening one, the one who asks questions and the one who answers them, the one who seeks an intimacy and finds a deeper one in himself but is still himself?"

In response, Basilio demonstrated how certain movements of the soul, certain lights, come from God only. God himself guarantees that he is the origin of these movements and lights that they are not mere sophisticated products of our psyches especially when he leads us to certain attitudes like the love of the cross, the

welcoming of a neighbour who irritates us and so on. This God-person reveals the characteristics of his personality; a revelation that is a part of his love.

2- God is love.

Basilio often touched this topic because this is what he experienced most in his prayer and in his life. His clearest conviction was that God is love, only love, always love. In his circular on obedience, he wrote this strong statement, “In God’s holy will there throbs a tenderness greater than one can imagine.”¹⁶

Let us be guided by a lecture that Basilio gave at Logroño, Spain in 1972 on the meditation theme. This will allow us to discover Basilio’s convictions. After he had expressed his faith in God-love, he explored deeply the constants of this love:

- It is a **gratuitous** love. He quoted John’s verse, “God is love”, and commented, “Hence God is love, gratuitous love that is neither brought about, nor conditioned, nor produced. God is gratuitous love. He does not love you because you love Him. He does not love you because you are worthy of love. God loves you because he is love – that’s all! When John tells us that God is love, he tells us that God loves us and that he does nothing else but love us. And that is the first truth, the fundamental truth. We must stress that God’s love is “gratuitous and eternal.”
- “It is a **historical** love: God came to us, He entered our history through his Son’s incarnation, he reached our inner being and the fabric of our human adventure.” And, to be more precise, “...a historical love, that means, Brothers, that this love accompanies us all along our existence and guides our human lives with his loving hands.”

¹⁶ Circular on *Obedience*, p.27.

- “God’s love is **faithful**. I trust fully that God is so faithful in his love that our lives will end with the triumph of his love over miserable human love.”
- “This love is **effective**. God does not bestow an exterior holiness but an interior one. Through the powerful mystery planted in our hearts, with the Spirit sown in our hearts, this acting love will end up transforming us.”
- “It is an effective but **supple** love. We ourselves are rigid. He is a patient God. (We often drum a rhythm that is our own by living ordinary spiritual lives).” Basilio added with his humour, “Let us see whether it is better to adopt the rhythm of tired donkeys or to move at a fast speed”.
- “It is a **concrete** and **inculturated** love. This means that it is a project of love. This project foresees the way, the strategy and the means to realise something important.” “Those God has known he also predestined them...” Romans 8, 29-30
- “God’s love is also constantly **merciful**. God descends into the mud to allow us to get out of our ignominious state. He who gave us Jesus Christ, how could he not grant us all we need? And if God gave us his Son why would he not also grant us his forgiveness?”
- “This love is **personalised**. It possesses all the above characteristics but shows itself differently in each person – in different nuances and rhythms.” In the circular on obedience, we read this revealing image: ‘God is not an industry that produces series of identical Coca-Cola bottles.’ God draws together the wealth of his Church from the extreme variety of spiritual natures that constitute his people. These are the charisms”.¹⁷ “It is a love that **dialogues with our freedom**. The greatness of God consists in gambling with our human liberty which is a true liberty, in tolerating a man who has the power of acting wrongly although God does not want him do digress.”¹⁸ A few pages above,¹⁹ we

¹⁷ Circular on *Obedience*, p 26.

¹⁸ Circular on *Obedience*, p 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 27-28.

read, ‘God is a love that gives itself to me in the guise of a mystery, that gives itself to me as a task that is firstly discovered, then becomes a passionate love and finally a realisation. I may refuse this gift but if I seek it I will surely find it. God gives himself as a gift and as a grace and waits for our answers. Our answers should be: to risk our freedom and to embrace his will.’”

- “This love leads us to live the second commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourselves.’” (We can find this requirement in the study of prayer in the chapter on love of others, Cahier 4.)

“God’s love is **Jesus Christ**. Here is the marvel of our lives. When the times were accomplished, God sent his Son to the earth. And Christ took a prostitute as a spouse. The Fathers did not intend to make us laugh when they called the Church, ‘the chaste prostitute’ that was taken out of a sinful world. God has to build his Church with sinners, build it out of a flesh of sin which has to be saved and which is saved.” In the Circular, *Mary in Our Lives*, he consecrates many pages to explain what the Mystery is; we quote: “His purpose is the Good News announced to us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ: God loves us gratuitously and adopts us as his sons in his Beloved by giving us his Spirit!”²⁰ Basilio insists on this truth, “According to a certain philosophy, man, jettisoned into history, comes from nought and will return to nought. To the eye of faith, things look better. We have our being as a consequence of God’s preferential love; he chose us through his Beloved One and we are destined to share the eternal glory of that Son.”²¹ This point is so important for Basilio that it deserves particular attention.

²⁰ A New Space for Mary, p. 325.

²¹ Ibis. P. 328.

Text 1: A greater tenderness than can be imagined

“God’s will is none other than to enlighten us towards the best possible future and to lead us towards the best spiritual and human gifts through history. This is God’s marvellous plan of kindness and love for us. This plan changes the colour of God’s will completely. Did you really meditate psalm 49? ‘If I feel hungry, will I go and tell you? I don’t know what to do with your offering of bulls... I know all the birds of the mountains’. God does not need anything. What he requests is not for him, it is for our good, for our collective good. God cannot desire that I be my brother’s murderer. If I must live with Brother X tomorrow, God cannot accept that I seek my happiness and my realisation at the expense of my brother’s sufferings...

What God wants is that we love each other like real brothers and that we realise our goals together. Alas! These are concepts, which do not enter people’s heads so easily! One’s asceticism’s colour might have to change: for God is not an executioner, let alone a sadistic executioner! And we repeat: a tenderness greater than one can imagine throbs in his holy will.” (Circular on *Obedience*, p. 27)

Text 2: We have learnt love at God’s school itself

“Our whole religion – when the word means the maintenance and the flourishing of an intimate life with God – is simply vain if love for neighbour is not included in it. Whoever would practise religion in that way would waste his time and his efforts would lead to no result; a very regrettable situation for a religious person. His vows, especially the one of chastity, to be lived for the Kingdom must engender a loving power, a loving style of a superior quality.

A Christian and a religious person is not permitted to entertain human relationships that are not charitable, otherwise what is the reason of the outpouring of the Spirit into our hearts? (Rom 5, 5). We learnt love not from any master, but from God himself. The power to love in a divine way was communicated to us as a gift of deeply living origin that lives and acts in our inner selves.

Spiritual theology teaches that the more the heart allows the Spirit to dwell in it, the more Christ's love and feelings reproduce themselves in that heart as in a mirror. At that moment, the Lord's command "Love one another as I have loved you." is observed. A community life without charity would be an absurdity and an aberration, a peaceful coexistence of selfish persons. (Circular on *Community Life*, 113, 120-121, 124, 127.)

4.

WHO IS JESUS ACCORDING TO BASILIO? ²²

It is certain that the love Basilio has for God, and particularly for God the Father is intensive, daily and concrete. He allows us to guess that the Father's will has become his passion. His love for God is above all filial: in the certitude of being one with Jesus. In fact, it is Jesus, the Lord who prays in us, who has sent his Spirit into our hearts so that with Him, in Him, and through Him that we are sons and we can pray with the word of his ecstatic state, "Abba, Father."

Let us leave Basilio tell us who Jesus is for him.

1- Jesus: What we can become for God and what God can become for us.

This is the way Basilio sums up the Incarnation, a mystery he often refers to. "God revealed himself to us fully and definitely in this Someone whom we call Jesus. This absolute and infinite You revealed himself as a 'I-Yahweh-among-you', living a history with us. This absolute 'Thou' chose a shared life and coexistence. Thus, after he had chosen his people he became so near to them that there was a moment in history when it was no longer somebody from outside who lived with men but someone who belonged to us who lived with humanity.

God is not only with us, but also one of us. God pronounced the 'I' of humanity; and that call to men hitherto coming from outside was became a call coming from the interior. Jesus of Nazareth is the outcome of what we, men can manage to become for God and of what God may become for men. That was the way the

²² This reflection on Jesus may be enriched by Basilio's lecture on the Word of God.

Word of God, God's call, resounded through a humanity that is ours, that is finally, each one of us.²³

Basilio formulated the same truth in very similar ways in his 'Discourse on Prayer': "In Jesus, God became human for good. God became man, assumed the language of men and expressed himself as a man. Finally, in the man-Jesus, it is God who talks to God, and this is the reason why prayer is the praying humanisation of God.²⁴ Jesus Christ is the person-encounter where a loving union is made between God and man; he is both the temple of God and the temple of man. Rightly, Basilio sees Jesus as the Father's love among us.

2- Jesus: the Father's kiss of love

In his Circular on Obedience, Basilio wrote:

"Christianity is none other than the historical kiss of love that the Father gives to humanity in the person of Jesus, a kiss that he then prolongs through the Holy Spirit. The Father is love to a point, as saint John says, "that he loved us enough to send his Son as a victim of expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4,10). The essence, the heart, the whole of Christianity, is love, a love which germinates in the Old Testament, but which blossoms fully in Jesus Christ. This love of the Father for humanity reached its peak in a total alliance – an alliance in Jesus, and an alliance through the Holy Spirit to make give us entry into the very heart of love."²⁵

This love carries fruits: union, peace and friendship. In the circular, dated 2 January 1968, *The Calls from the Church*, Basilio returns to the expression: "Jesus, the Father's kiss for man,

"Yes, we must never forget that the Christian religion is not man's product; God communicates it to man. Man is not a

²³ Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Church*, p. 610-611.

²⁴ *Entretien sur la Prière*, p. 505.

²⁵ Circular on *Obedience*, pp. 24-25.

Prometheus who steals fire from heaven: he is a creature that receives in Jesus the Father's loving kiss and redemption out of love.²⁶

In *Mary in Our Life*, Basilio presents a surprising but true reflection:

“In the life of Jesus there are many fortuitous episodes. For example, Christ happened to be born at Bethlehem; it could have happened that he would not have had to flee to Egypt; he happened to meet the Samaritan woman. But there is something that is essential and constitutive in the life of the Redeemer God-Man: that is his Passover. He had to die and to rise to gather all men freed from sin and death to allow them to enter with Him into definitive communion with his Father.”²⁷

3- Jesus and ourselves are one.

We now come to Basilio's most crucial profession of faith; he sometimes expresses himself in such rare and surprising ways that one cannot overlook them. He writes, “Each carries a mystery in himself: Jesus Christ is I and I am Jesus Christ, in the deepest meaning of the word.”²⁸ This is neither a felicitous literary invention nor a daring theological leap: it is the profession of a deep and living faith. He was to speak along these lines during the retreats he gave in Canada in 1970. At the end of a Chapter, he said, “We must never forget that religious life is none other than the evangelical life of Jesus Christ poured into our hearts and constantly perfected by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹

²⁶ Circular of 2 January: *The calls of the Church*, p. 522-23.

²⁷ Circular: *A new space for Mary*, p. 327.

²⁸ Circular on *Obedience*, p. 37.

²⁹ *Appel au dépassement*, retreats 1970, *Dynamic nature of the evangelical life in us*, p. 1.

One has to be more than an ordinary Christian to dare to speak along the above lines. Such ones can exclaim like Saint Paul, “It is no longer I who live; it is Christ who lives in me”. Reflecting on the fact that Jesus is no longer present in embodied human form and that for this purpose he places himself in human hands, Basilio wrote this prayer,

“Lord, you cannot rely on the physical humanity of Jesus. But here is in me, for your Word another integral humanity. Not only a body, feet, hands, a head, but a free will, a psychology and a heart that is waiting for you to flood it with your Spirit...Really, the Word who made Jesus-man in a divine way, living in us as new Christ wants to make revolutionaries out of obedient men!”

Already in his *Discourse on Prayer*, he had formulated the idea, “Christianity is an interpersonal life in unity... Jesus and I, we are two, but we are also one, because Jesus and I, we are Church.”³⁰

In many instances, Basilio tells us that true Christians are ‘lived’ by Christ, that baptism truly welcomed allows Christ’s life to invade the whole ego in all its most spontaneous instincts. Discussing ‘What a Christian is’ Basilio gives his definition: “The Christian is not the one who ‘practises’, but the one in whom Jesus’ life pours itself, the one whose life is Christ, who is inhabited by the Spirit. Then, if a Christian wants to live from the Spirit of Jesus, baptismal grace will enter him like a sea invading his heart, his head, the criteria of his judgement and conscience.”³¹

It is at such moments that Christians are sons in the Son. And in this case, our prayer becomes Christ’s voice that addresses his Father, “When a man prays and his life is a real Christian one; it is Christ, the first born of Mary’s womb, who prays in him; his prayer is none other than Christ’s life that expresses itself in

³⁰ *Talk on prayer*, p. 507.

³¹ *Talk on prayer*, p. 507.

words.”³² In his first circular, he had stated, “By becoming brother to the Unique One who is the Son, with Jesus who rightly claims the Father’s paternity, and being so configured into Jesus by the Spirit, we too can appeal and cry, “Abba, Father,” from the bottom of our hearts. And he insists, the question is not only to know that we are called by a transcendent ‘Thou’, but to really find out that we are Jesus’ brothers, configured like Him by the Spirit and with his power, and able to pray, “Abba, Father!”³³

4- Jesus, our life guide

Under the influence of the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus, we will establish him as our rule of life, the gauge for everything and our absolute model. In his profound vision of obedience, which is in fact, the passion he has to obey God’s will, Basilio writes, “The basis of Christian obedience is Jesus Christ. Why? Because of St Paul’s assertion, ‘We have no law. Our law is Jesus Christ.’”³⁴ Reflecting on the need to harmonise psychological realities with the spiritual life, and after having said that the psychological laws bind one’s conscience, he continued with this paragraph,

“We must insert the psychological data into the evangelical message just as we must accept spiritualist elements. Otherwise, we will meet failure. As regards the spiritualism sympathisers, what we strongly advocate is the priority not only qualitative, but also quite vital values of the Gospel over the human ones. On that issue, Our Lord, our law and our unique scale of values are clear and categorical.”³⁵

When Basilio discussed naturalistic humanism, he declared, “We must open ourselves fully to the values of our time; as soon as possible, we ought to take them into account in the formation programme and in the life of our communities. But I insist that

³² Ibid.p. 504.

³³ Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Church*, p. 616.

³⁴ Circular on *Obéissance*, pp. 44-45.

³⁵ Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Church*, p. 616.

we must beware of a humanistic mentality, in the immanent sense, that makes man his own purpose and model. Isn't our sole model Jesus Christ? Our anthropology is built on mystery and on salvation history with its great realities that are rich in consequences: the goodness of creation: the fact of the fall of our first parents with the accompanying disorders for human nature, and the blessed event of Christ's redemption that continues in us and in the world. In short, we can say, it is only in and through Christ that the world and man realise themselves--a world worthy of man and a man worthy of this name--in a Christian humanism."³⁶

Enumerating the characteristics of the new man's spirituality, Basilio stated:

"Brothers, a Christian cannot set his course on the legal justice. And legal justice means the whole moral code that man received from the Lord, or from his representatives. Brothers, I beg your forgiveness but there are many Israelites among you who are used to a legal spirituality. Yet, Christ nailed this legal justice on the cross and substituted his own image and the Holy Spirit, i.e., the evangelical justice that is dynamic and with which you can never say, "That will do!"³⁷

One of the best pages that Basilio wrote on this topic is the one found in His contribution on *The Community Project*, entitled, *The Community, a Reality Oriented to Christ*³⁸

In this world of grace, of life, of love, it is God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) who has the initiative. As for us, we find ourselves loved, surrounded by love, living in a world where everything sings God's glory. In this way of thinking, Basilio reminds us of the apostolic exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* (#3) by John Paul II, "The call to practise the evangelical counsels

³⁶ Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 131-132

³⁷ *Llamamiento a la renovación*, December 1972, Province of Norte, Spain

³⁸ *Communitary Project*, p. 129

issues from an intimate encounter with Christ's love which is a redemptive love. And the consciousness of the call is the fruit of Christ's loving gaze in the secret of your hearts." Basilio carries on, "Many saints experienced this call as one that became a passionate discovery of Jesus Christ who led them to give up everything to be his inseparable disciples and his collaborators in lives totally dedicated to the Kingdom and the Gospel."³⁹

5- **The community, a reality turned towards Christ** ⁴⁰

A community is a fruit of a relationship with Jesus Christ: in Him, through Him and for Him. The words of chapter 15 of Saint John happen to fit very well here, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me, ... Without me you can do nothing..."

In Him - This means that this certain man is my brother with all the power, the depth and wealth that the word implies. He is my brother and friend uniquely because Jesus Christ redeemed him and me, and that salvation brought us to meet each other since we both are fruits of his redemption.

What is true of Christian friendship is also true of community. It is built with Jesus as the corner stone and with the other stones that are men saved from distress, justified by Him and inserted into his building - indeed, men who have become Christians.

Through Him – Jesus is not only the source of all Christian community but also its dynamism and its hope. This '**Through**' must be engraved on the hearts and the wills of all communities that want to grow up. They will grow through him only, grafted to him, by surrendering to his healthy action. Bonhoffer rejects all hope for psychology, human preferences and personal ideas to establish a growing community. He will accept to call a group a

³⁹ *Llamamiento a la renovación*, conférence on meditation, p. 38.

⁴⁰ *Communitary Project*, pp. 129-131.

community if the members are faithfully trying to discern their chosen state with the help of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the so-called community is built on the sand.

In Him, all grace,
in Him all peace,
In Him, all hope,
in Him salvation!

For Him - We were redeemed and we became a people not only through him, but for him. He came, not for himself, but as a servant in order to die for the salvation of humankind and for his Father's glory. Thus, any real Christian community must turn itself towards God in a collective gift to Jesus, whose body it becomes to allow Jesus to work through them. That is why I have insisted so much on having Jesus as the basis and the centre of the community project. "Follow the path of love, following the example of Christ who loved you and surrendered himself for us" (Eph. 5.2).

This '**For Him**' must show itself in concrete situations, by daily care to avoid any human invention to corrupt the contents of the project.

The important law for a Christian community that plans a project and follows it day in and day out is discernment.

Text 1: Jesus, what we can succeed in being for God.

The inability of many people of our generation to remain alone and immersed in profound reflection or to enter with others into existential and human depth, together with their preference for frivolous and useless meetings, prevent this possible opening to God and make prayer quite impossible.

This desire of man and this ontological necessity of a transcendent dialogue do not clash in a vacuum nor do they fight against an unreachable enemy. “The core of the believing soul consists in accepting that God intervened into history, revealed himself as a concrete being, lived among men, called a few as prophets, sent them to his People and finally showed himself to us in a definite and total plenitude in this Someone whom we call Jesus.

This **Thou** without name, Absolute and Infinite revealed himself to us as a “I-Yahweh-among you”, living in history with us. This absolute **Thou** wanted a shared life, a coexistence. He chose a People, was so near men that at a moment in history he was no longer like somebody from outside but someone who in humanity, lived with humanity; and this being-God in humanity we call Incarnation: God is not only with us, but he is one of us. God pronounced the I of humanity. Jesus of Nazareth is the outcome of what men can succeed in being for God and of what God can succeed in being for men.

Thus, this is the way the Word of God, God’s call, echoed through a humanity, which is ours, that is our sister that is finally, each one of us. (Circ. *The calls of the Church* p. 610-611.)

Text 2: It is Christ who prays in us.

When a Christian really prays, according to Jesus’ method, i.e. according to the Spirit of Truth (remember the Samaritan woman); when a man lives a real Christian life, it is Christ, the first-born of Mary’s womb who prays in him. His prayer becomes Jesus’ life expressed in words. “Nobody can say ‘Jesus’ unless he

is inspired by the Spirit”, affirms Paul. It is the Spirit that leads Jesus to the desert. If we look for the relationships between Jesus and the Spirit, we find out how the man Jesus is led by the Spirit and we should find out that the Spirit that animated Jesus is the same one who animates Jesus in us. When we pray, we do so in a double movement: our words reach the Word who becomes the Father’s utterance in a human flesh. Through Jesus, God humanised himself for good. The Incarnation has considerable consequences. God becomes man, assumes man’s language and expresses himself like a man and must speak to the Father like a man. Finally it is God who speaks to God, from the human Jesus and this is why prayer is the prayerful humanisation of God. (*Circ. Talk on prayer*, p. 504-505)

Text 3: Bearers of a great mystery

I want to speak about an article written a few years ago. This article found fault with obedient religious who were content to realise a programme already prepared years before them.

“The author said that a Christian will never be a positive man nor a driving force in history, but always a man trailing the others!” A great theologian gave us the truth of this statement,

“If Christians were not such great innovators it is not because of their obedience but because they did not obey God’s word enough”.

As a matter of fact, God’s will thrusts men into a commitment in the world and towards a world to transform it. There is one clause: these progressive Christians must fight against superficial habits and ‘spiritual sclerosis’. It is then important to warn people against a certain current literature that suggests that there can be a sound reason to oppose God’s will. Psychologists may say whatever they want but the Scripture is clear: nobody can oppose God’s will and say that the Holy Scripture bears him out.

Anyway, to justify obedience we must not rely on some random quotation; we must look at the totality of the texts. Particularly, it is the whole obedient attitude of Jesus Christ that is destined to

penetrate the Christian. Besides, Christian life will be nothing different from this: "If you rose with Christ, think of the heavenly things, live like Christ". For everyone carries a mystery inside himself: **Jesus Christ is I and I am Jesus Christ**, in the deepest meaning of the word. (*Circular on Obedience*, pp. 36-37).

Text 4: The Lord who lives in us.

We must not forget that religious life is the evangelical life of Jesus Christ poured into our hearts and constantly perfected by the Holy Spirit. We rejoice to know that none of us will be left behind until everybody has reached this full spiritual life. Nobody will remain with an embryonic spiritual life, fixated at the very moment of his call. That is why there is a purgatory, a grace for which we must bless the Lord. This purgatory will not allow us to stop at the halfway mark in this work of transformation into Christ-like lives to attract the Father's love. This love is not only the love God has for us 'a priori', even when we are sinners, but the love we will possess in heaven when we will have attained our full stature, when we will be all transformed in his Son and he will be able to say, "This is exactly the one!" Then, the most cheerful truth is that none of us will reach heaven without having become really Christ-like. All those who, at the time of their death, will not have concluded this transformation, will be purified by the Lord. Let us rejoice! In spite of all our difficulties, our deficiencies and everything else, the Lord's grace will triumph. This is what makes purgatory a great grace. It is not a punishment but the perfecting of the work of grace.

The divine life that is transmitted to us continues to grow continually. We understand that the growth may not proceed without any slow down or wandering away. Yet, we may be sure that grace keeps increasing in our souls. This is why we should not imitate the Pharisee and proclaim, "It's done; I have completed the work of my perfection. I have reached my ideal". We are no longer under the ancient law where it was sufficient to make a few gestures to allow one to feel contented and to exclaim,

“Now, I am just, I am at peace with God”. Nowadays, God calls for an evangelical justice that involves listening and answering; collaborating with grace that is always acting in us in our spiritual ascent. And, as this life is shared with ‘Another’, “He who lives in me and I who live in Him” this life becomes a dialogue like any other life of love. The dialogue will be silent at times, for in love, gestures often suffice. We can even come to understand each other without gestures. (*Call To Transcendence*, 1970 retreat: *The dynamic nature of the evangelical life in us*, pp. 1-2)

Text 5: Our law is Jesus Christ.

The basis of Christian obedience is Jesus Christ. “We have no law. Our law is Jesus Christ” (Saint Paul)

After his death and resurrection, Jesus withdrew from his ordinary human condition; the new state of his body took him away from physical history. The man called Jesus, the son of Mary, had received the ‘injection’ of the Word. His personality became the Word; he lived by the Word all along. After his death and resurrection he lost his physical capacities among humanity. Thereafter, he will call other human natures, other wills, feet, other hands, other volunteers: “Lord, you can no longer rely on the physical humanity of Jesus. Here, for your Word, is another integral humanity, not only a body, feet, hands but a free will, a psychology, a heart that I beg you to fill with your Spirit, because I want your Word to possess others in whom he will live, to continue the task he started and to carry to its summit your salvation history for humankind”.

And truly, the same Verb (Word) that sustained the Jesus-man in a divine way, now lives in us like other Christs; he wants to change obedient men into revolutionaries. This is the key of Christian obedience. What alone deserves to be called sacred is an obedience understood in that way and a system that makes it possible to transform this ideal into reality, because only this conception of obedience is evangelical. (*Circular on Obedience*, pp. 44-45)

Text 6: At the school of Jesus

Jesus taught us religious love. The Christian is the person who succeeds in loving with the intensity that Jesus expects of religious love. Jesus taught us the great novelty, 'Loving our fellow men and women is the same thing as loving God, provided that we love with a Christian love. Inversely, loving God is synonymous with loving our fellow men and women. (These two loves form an equation, so that, if a person does not love others, the equation fails, and we will have to accept that the second half of the proposition is not valid. Whoever says that he loves God but does not love his neighbour is a liar...

According to the Gospel, love is the infallible thermometer of Christian life. The greater the love for neighbour the greater Christian life will be. If love of neighbour runs short, love of God will also run short and Christian life will decrease as well. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers". (Saint John) He does not say because we are baptised, nor because we pray a lot, but because we love our brothers.

The parable of the Good Samaritan tells us who is the true Christian. This is a parable, not a historical fact but a pedagogical way of giving us a clear message concerning real charity.

The parable teaches us this great truth; even though protected by a strong religious structure, if our behaviour neglects our neighbour, our structure will not be a Christian one.

Love is universal. What does that mean? **It means that if I exclude one person from my heart, my love has died.** I will remain with friendly understandings, human sympathies, but I will not possess Jesus Christ's love. (*Bética Marista*, n° 52, p. 9-11, October 1972)

5 THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many quotations stress the strong link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Others reminded us that Jesus lives in us through the Spirit's action. The Spirit prays in us and becomes the new law in our hearts, the law of love and freedom. Because of him our lives reflect the Spirit's gifts and the practice of the beatitudes. He assists us in important moments and guarantees what we do. When Basilio speaks of the Spirit, he knits many truths together not only because they stand together but also because they do have an influence on each other.

N.B. The paragraph headings were used to accommodate our analysis.

1- The Spirit guides Jesus and makes us live Jesus' life.

Here, Basilio simply recalls the Gospel, "It is the Spirit that leads Jesus to the desert to practise penance. If we wonder what relationships exist between Jesus and the Spirit, we find out how the man-Jesus is moved by the Spirit, and realise that the Spirit who animated Jesus is the same one who keeps the Spirit alive in us."⁴¹ Basilio had said the same thing almost word for word during the retreat he gave to the Brothers of the Norte province, Spain in 1972: "The Spirit that brought to life a man whose name was Jesus Christ by uniting him in an alliance of his person with the Word of God, this same Spirit who is the Holy Spirit, is the one who makes us live Christ's life: he makes us live his own life".⁴² To allow Christ to live in us is to allow him to print his image in us. Here again, the Spirit intervenes, "Given by God through Christ to men, he makes us sons according to the image of the unique Son. With the help of the Spirit we behave like

⁴¹ *Talk on prayer*, p. 505.

⁴² *Llamamiento a la renovación*, p. 7, October 1972, Norte, Spain.

brothers. Not only do we feel called by a transcendent ‘**Thou**’ but also we know that we are brothers in Christ, configured like him by the Spirit and that with the Spirit’s power we can cry, “Abba, Father!”⁴³ Besides uniting us with the Lord, the Spirit gives us the intelligence of God. He gives us lights that are always sources of joy because we wonder at the kindness and at the fidelity of God. “As soon that the Spirit who plumbs everything even God’s depths, enters him, a man becomes acquainted with God’s gifts thus making him feel that he is a son of God. We have come to the knowledge of God’s mystery, but it is an existential knowledge, a personal and intimate experience, irreconcilable with any natural knowledge. A knowledge of love in the faith that is participation in the science of God...”⁴⁴

2- The Spirit is the soul, the conscience and the light of the Church.

It is when Basilio presents his reflection on the Virgin Mary to the brothers that he describes the bonds between the Church and the Holy Spirit. We find again what the Church itself says about these bonds. But Basilio’s words reveal how clearly he had assimilated these relationships and we guess that they illuminate his life. What can be striking is that he applies to the whole Church what is promised to Mary: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon Thee and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:35)⁴⁵ The Church is conscious of itself because the Spirit’s light illumines it from inside, “Enlightened by the Spirit, the Church sees itself as it is: filled with divine life and mandated to transmit this life to all men. It is a leaven of resurrection that must raise the whole cosmos, potentially saved by Jesus’ blood.”⁴⁶ This same Spirit helps us to understand Christ’s message and gradually causes a new doctrine to permeate the Church, “The apostles,

⁴³ Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Church*, p. 613-615.

⁴⁴ *A new space for Mary*, pp. 325-326.

⁴⁵ *A new space for Mary*, p. 372.

⁴⁶ *A new space for Mary*, p. 373.

with the help of the Holy Spirit became more and more acquainted with Christ's mystery. They then tried to proclaim this mystery by their witness, their preaching and their catechesis. Thus they laid the foundations of our faith – the beginning of Christian theology and dogmatic tradition.”⁴⁷

Secondly, the Spirit is the soul of the Church, the constant presence of Christ among his people. Thus Basilio is right in saying that Pentecost is not only a past and isolated event, but also that each century will have its own Pentecost, one similar to the first one, “All centuries will also have their Pentecost, for the Spirit is the soul of the Church and the living organ that constantly allows it to keep the correct course towards the Lord Jesus. Evidently, the Spirit does not forget to reveal a new countenance of the Risen one, according to the times and circumstances. That is the living Church Tradition: this Spirit always at work can reveal a Jesus always living and acting. We may hope that Revelation gains in light and comprehension just as people are journeying towards God. The Church is not an archaeologists' club.”⁴⁸

3- The Spirit prays in us.

Made similar to Christ by the Spirit we end up by praying like Jesus or rather with his voice. We remember that Jesus' best prayer was, “Abba, Father!” As we go deeper into the spiritual life we find out that prayer is not so much the result of man's efforts as the work of the Spirit operating in the believer's heart. When this has been realised, we can exclaim sincerely with Jesus, “Abba, Father”. Consequently, we are not the ones meditating and contemplating but the Spirit himself in us.”⁴⁹ If “nobody can say Jesus is Lord without the Spirit's action”, then all invocation, all prayer and all movement of love can come only through the

⁴⁷ *A new space for Mary*, p. 373.

⁴⁸ *A new space for Mary*, p. 374.

⁴⁹ Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 613-615.

Spirit. Prayer is one of God's gifts. "But, this gift of prayer first comes with conversion. Love will increase our prayer life. This gift comes from the Holy Spirit and no human exercise can communicate it."⁵⁰

4- The Spirit is our new law.

The Second Vatican Council invited all communities to renew themselves. For Brother Basilio one of the main thrusts to achieve this renewal consisted in giving more evangelical structures to the Institute. He wanted us to adopt these new structures with a change of heart, a heart that had to move from the law to the Spirit, so as not to be guided by a text, but by the freedom and the generosity that are the Spirit's promptings from within the heart. In the oral meditation, Basilio told the Provincials, "I feel growing in me, with an irresistible and spontaneous power the decision to uphold, within the limits of my authority and with the chapter's approval, the loyal launching, the development and the realisation of the post-councilar and the post-chapter Marist lives.

I expect that you too, Provincials, may through prayer seek the Spirit's help to discern his impulses. The important thing is to discern that a certain movement comes from the Spirit and that we may discover this movement in due time. The day religious people discontinue to live by the Holy Spirit to nurture themselves by means of 'repetitive texts', they will have renounced their distinctive character within the Church."⁵¹

As for the brothers who are used to a spirituality where everything is prescribed, everything is prefabricated, may they learn that this is not a Christian spirituality. The Spirit requires more than this in peace and freedom".⁵²

⁵⁰ Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 522.

⁵¹ *Oral meditation*, pp. 348-349, 353.

⁵² *Llamamiento a la renovación*, conf rence on meditation, December 1972.

We have already mentioned how his experiential love of God led Basilio to high degrees of generosity, to long hours of work, to care for his brothers and to his filial attachment to the Church and to the Congregation. Basilio said in all simplicity, “The Holy Spirit had sowed an intense taste for the Gospel realities in my heart.”⁵³

Furthermore, when the Spirit finds an available heart he thrusts it towards magnanimity, which should be the ordinary behaviour of someone who has chosen to follow Christ. “A consecrated life cannot remain at the level of what is obligatory and what is non-obligatory; it has moved high up on the generosity and magnanimity levels. To remain in these beautiful heights, many graces will be necessary. The ‘climber’ will have to drink profusely from God’s word that it may increase his faith and preserve his generosity. In such a life, prayer will automatically be extensive. This life will have the dimension that prayer will give to it.”⁵⁴

Once a person has known the freedom that the Spirit gives he must be on the watch against two dangers:

- The temptation to achieve his salvation by his own efforts
- The attraction to ‘take it easy’ and to say that God does not ask for so much.

Basilio introduces them as the legalistic Pharisees and the liberal Sadducees. Even a mild ‘phariseism’ tends to destroy the freedom of God’s children, to ignore the fatherly character of God, and make religion rather repulsive.

The Sadducee-minded person settles down into his little comfort and rejects the cross. In the name of freedom and personality he claims the right to control his life. This leads him to a naturalistic mediocrity that allows him to put limits on his efforts.”⁵⁵

⁵³ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 305, (interview, J.M.V. p. 162).

⁵⁴ *Circular on Prayer*, p. 336-337.

⁵⁵ *Circ., The calls of the Church and of the Founder*, pp. 643-644.

Having observed the world straying far away from Christian principles and having found out that even religious life has allowed itself to be penetrated by the world's spirit and has consequently lost some of its sharpness and of its value, Basilio asks us a crucial question, "Which spirit has led you?"⁵⁶

How do Religious people return to a life of generosity, dynamism and to dedication if not through the Spirit of the Son? What must be done? They must first open their communities to the Father's love by living deeply according to the Word of God, the life of Jesus and in the Spirit's guidance. In other words, religious must return to their Founders' fervour.

A new regularity is necessary, no less exacting or dynamic than that of the first years of the Institute. Let us remember what Saint Paul told the Galatians (5, 3) who did not want to understand the law of freedom, "I wish to warn any circumcised man that he must obey the law completely." In a similar meaning, "If you do not want to go ahead with the community project, then return to the strict observance of the former Rule."

Although deplorable, the integrist movement at least shows a remarkable courage in its return to the old days' asceticism and discipline. We will not fight this movement with a pitiful lukewarm piety but with a new fervour. In this way we will aim at the necessary changes in our communities. We will not realise our changes in one day. We will work like pioneers with daring and with patience as well."⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit is very much present in the Circular *A New Space for Mary*. It could not be otherwise. Basilio makes this very apt remark, "The Spirit that inspired the Word of God is also the one that helps us to understand it. The words of Jesus, all his actions, all the events of his life carry a meaning greater than they appear to have. Jesus' hearers

⁵⁶ Circular, *Community life Project*, pp. 13-16.

⁵⁷ Circular, *Community life Project*, pp. 25-27.

understood Jesus' messages through the 'Pascal Light': the Holy Spirit. We will ask for the help of the Holy Spirit before tackling the study of the Holy Scripture and the Gospel."⁵⁸

5- The Fruits of the Spirit

When a Christian allows the Spirit to guide him, the fruits of the Holy Spirit appear in his life. Trying to lead the congregation towards the Holy Spirit Basilio expected the following results: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and self-control. "May these results make visible the fruits of the Holy Spirit which to show the fruitfulness of Christianity in the world."⁵⁹

Further, we will find whole pages on love and on wisdom that comes from the Spirit. We will also read a comprehensive explanation of consecrated life and of each vow. "Spiritual theology teaches us that when a heart allows the Holy Spirit to invade it, in the same movement, the love and the feelings of Christ copy themselves in him as in a mirror. Thence, obedience to the Lord's command, 'Love each other as I loved you' becomes possible."⁶⁰

Basilio wondered how he should govern as the superior general, particularly what type of prudence he should adopt. He could distinguish the difference between a human prudence, an average Christian prudence and the one coming from the Spirit, "The Holy Spirit can bring this Christian prudence to an abundant realisation; this is the gift of Counsel, the prudence of the saints. Here we speak of such a high level that ordinary men understand no more...This is the prudence that animated the realisation of the great Christian achievements. The wonderful action of the Holy Spirit on certain members of the Mystical body puts frail human wisdom to shame! The great movements of renewal in the

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 25-27.

⁵⁹ Circ. *The calls of the Church and of the Founder*, pp. 641-642.

⁶⁰ Circ. *Community life*, pp. 113, 120-21, 124, 127.

Church, from Francis of Assisi to John XXIII, cause a flowering of holiness in sincere souls but scandalise the prudent people of this world...”⁶¹

Basilio explored **prophecy** very well in yesterday’s and today’s worlds. Without fear he affirmed that the true prophet is a son of the Spirit, “I know that all perfect gift comes from ‘Above’, from the Father of Lights, and that prudence grows at the same rate as our life in Christ develops, and our hearts open themselves to the action of the Spirit. This is why the general councillors, the members of the chapter and myself count on your prayers to obtain this prudence.”⁶²

In Basilio’s thought, the Holy Spirit is above all responsible for our sanctification so that Christ may show through our lives, “The Spirit is given to us for a dual purpose: first, to configure us according the image of the Son so that this Son may be the first born of a multitude of brothers”, (Rom 8, 29), secondly to become our law (Gal 5, 18). This Spirit who lives in us and replaces the law is the true source of our freedom (2 Cor 3:17) and it is to this freedom that we have been called (Gal 5,1).

Let us understand well the freedom we are talking about. This Spirit who is source of action, does not lead us to just any action. Essentially, he tears us out from egoistic ways. Then his novelty consists in the availability to serve, which is the secret of Christian freedom.”⁶³ Basilio concludes, “It is in this mystery of sanctification, as work of the Spirit, that we must insert Mary, ‘the sanctuary of the Spirit’ (L.G. 53). Every Christian must be the Spirit’s sanctuary, but Mary constantly gives witness to this presence in herself and reveals to us what the Spirit can do in a fully docile heart.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 8-9.

⁶² Circular 2 January 1968, p. 9.

⁶³ *A new space for Mary*, pp. 384-385.

⁶⁴ *A new space for Mary*, p. 385.

The Spirit's gifts are not only virtues in the Christian's heart, but also the great marvels that produce fruits. When Basilio examines the Council's documents, and the results of our General Chapter of 1967-1968, the new Constitutions, he knows that they are all works of the Spirit. Left to themselves, men could never have produced such wise and holy texts. He wrote concerning the Council⁶⁵, "Vatican II is but the echo of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our time. We must acknowledge that this council has been a Pentecostal manifestation of God's will for us today. Infidelity to the Council is none other than infidelity to the Lord and his Spirit."⁶⁶ He returns to this conviction, a few pages further, "Vatican II, the Pentecost storm of the 20th century; was such an extraordinary storm that we have not yet had time to 'digest' it. This partially explains why we are somewhat disoriented. However, once we have assimilated the Council documents a new spring will come..."⁶⁷

Our Founder received a foundation charism. But who gave this charism? The Holy Spirit. Any authentic fruit produced in a person or in an institution is not the effect of this person's or institution's fecundity but is rather the fruit of the Spirit himself. Transparency and fidelity also come from the Holy Spirit. The Founder's attitudes had been the results of the Spirit's impulsion and the rewards of his fidelity to this same Spirit. ⁶⁸

The circular of Fidelity revealed the immense work of the Spirit on a multitude of Brothers, in the most varied circumstances of grace, sin, dramas, victories, crises, falls, renewals and wounds. Basilio considers this circular as a gift from the Holy Spirit, "The inspiration to write this book came to me like a flash of lightning seven years ago. I have been lucky to have had so many moving

⁶⁵ In the chapter on the church, p.79, other quotations on the Council are suggested.

⁶⁶ *Appel au dépassement*, retreats of 1970, *Renewal*, p. 2 – Canada.

⁶⁷ *Appel au dépassement*, retreats of 1970, *Renewal*, p. 5 – Canada.

⁶⁸ Circ. 2 January 1968, *The calls of the Church*, pp. 562-563.

testimonies to help me in my task. My heart wondered in joy at all these different forms of fidelity and perseverance in our congregation.⁶⁹

Attentive to the movement of the Spirit, Basilio wanted to orient the congregation towards the poor and the missions. These were two important points in his government. To those who remained insensitive to these two urgent changes, he said, “All advice and calls might be to no avail if the Spirit does not burn in our souls.”⁷⁰

The Holy Spirit was always present in Basilio’s life; his faith and his writings prove this fact. Basilio did not write extensively on the Holy Spirit,⁷¹ but he frequently made references to the Paraclete.

⁶⁹ *Fidelity*, p.9.

⁷⁰ Circ. 2 January, *The calls of the Church*, p. 578.

⁷¹ He consecrated nine pages to the Spirit in *A new space for Mary*, pp. 382-392.

Text 1: It is the Spirit that prays in us.

While praying, man is not alone doing mental gymnastics! We are not the ones meditating but the Spirit is contemplating in us. It is not man's work but the supplications of the Spirit that breathe in us. And we don't know where the blowing wind comes from or where it is going... In fact, it is uniquely through the Spirit that we can dare call this absolute **'Thou'** I mentioned above with this ineffable name, 'Abba, Father'. The Son is uniquely and exclusively the one who can claim, as Son, fatherhood by God; but we also, configured to Jesus by the Spirit and in union with him by the Spirit also can invoke him and cry, "Abba Father."

Allow us to recall this new Christian dimension of prayer. Not only we can feel called by a transcendent **'Thou'** but we can realise that we are Jesus' brothers, made similar to Him by the Spirit.

The Apostle was right to tell the Ephesians, "Before, you were in the dark but now you are lights in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

To ask you to pray in meditation and contemplation is simply to beg you to become one with the deepest dimension of human nature, being born as Christ's in and for God's plan of salvation. To cease the practice of meditation is to give evidence of a discordance within oneself and of the weakness of one's Christian life - or worse still, it is to reduce Christianity to a horizontal humanism. Prayer forms may change but what cannot disappear is a serious and a deep prayer life that will express one's interior vitality and will give evidence of a human personality that has reached maturity. (Circular, *The calls of the Church*, p. 613-615)

Text 2: It depends who plays the violin.

When a soul of good will, sincerely seeks the Lord's love and asks God for purification, this prayer is not a joke. Besides, if this soul, after having done all it can, realises that it just cannot reach the

level where the Lord waits for it can in all confidence say, "Lord, I am failing. Undertake this purification yourself because I need your help to become more worthy of your love." This soul will be placed directly in the stream of the Holy Spirit's gifts. All the writers of spiritual theology acknowledge the immense difference that appears in a soul when the latter collaborates with God's grace. One day, after having walked the rough road of the Christian virtues, this soul will be flooded with the Holy Spirit's gifts and will be called into his intimacy and be transformed by them. That will be the moment of holiness.

The great biologist Salazar who is also a composer and a violinist had gone to Mexico City where he played in front of the national lottery building. An Indian took up his place near by intent on selling some of his homemade violins. These instruments were rustic and primitive. Walking by, Salazar asked the Indian whether he would allow him to play on one of his violins. The Indian accepted with great pleasure and handed him one of his creations. The artist played on that valueless instrument. Evidently everybody was wondering how the artist could extract such beautiful music from that poor violin. At the end, Salazar asked the owner, "How much do you want for your violin?" The reply was just marvellous, "For you, nothing; I give it to you." It is really what happens in the spiritual life. We are miserable violins played by poor devils and naturally the sounds are not too melodious. Love and generosity are there but being so imperfect, we are discontented.

Text 3: It depends who plays the violin (Continued)

But if a very talented violinist, the Holy Spirit decides to play a concert for God, things are different. The Spirit then takes care of our prayer and of the harmony of our lives. Believe me, even if at the start there was a little generosity, some prayer life and fervour in a soul, the invasion of the Spirit into it will achieve incomparable effects. Every word of the gospel will mean so much! Then, we will understand the spiritual poverty we have lived

in up to that moment. What before we called generosity, fidelity, obedience, and humility; were mere groping-like gestures compared with what the Spirit can do. What a surprise to find out how well we can pray now that the Spirit prays through us!

Dear Brothers, we are not called to remain at a level of infrastructure as regards our Christian life or spend years blocked by sin. No, the Lord calls us to climb higher, to outdo ourselves to walk in generosity, in authenticity and fidelity so that one day the Spirit may flood our lives with his graces to allow us to really 'harmonise' our spiritual lives!

As we grow older, we must be encouraged to know that the love of God keeps waiting for us on the top of the mountain...

Text 4: Under the Spirit's light

The persons who live a high spirituality are deeply humble. They are well aware of sin. When some men, really penetrated by the Spirit, declare themselves sinners, they are not pretending but they are truly convinced. The nearness to the Holy Spirit allows us to see things from a divine angle. We become conscious that sin is still in us 'potentially'. I wish to explain: we experience that a very subtle pride still hides inside our hearts. This pride does not act because our love of God helps us. Whenever we are really sincere, we admit that we sometimes try to justify ourselves for certain failures in generosity. At the very bottom of the human heart there is a bit of sleeping hypocrisy that can wake at the first opportunity. We recognise that at the inner part of ourselves we continue to like certain impurities although we don't do anything impure. Fortunately, God's love surrounds and preserves us.

Then, a very deep pain assails our hearts because the love of God that had invaded them suffers from anything that is not evangelical. Redemption has not yet been realised in all its depth. It has touched the periphery; it has purified our habits, but has not yet reached the depths of our egos. At the same time, we

discover that this selfishness and this dishonesty are still found there in spite of our efforts to dislodge them: this causes us to suffer; for we believe we did everything we could to purify ourselves. (Cf. *Appel au dépassement*, 1970 retreats, *La montée de la vie spirituelle*, n° 8, pp. 8 – 9.)