

**CAHIER 2**

**MARY, CHAMPAGNAT,  
THE CHURCH**

# 1. MARY IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF BASILIO

Basilio was renowned throughout the Institute for the circular he wrote on the Lord's Mother, *Mary in Our Life*. This circular came at a crucial time. The years that had followed the Council had brought in their wake a tendency to neglect Mary. This circular brought joy to many Marist Brothers – all was well again as Mary was given her proper place. That was Basilio's gift marking the end of his first mandate. He intended it as his final his final gift, comparable, to a small degree, with Jesus' last gift of his mother from the cross. He was convinced that he would not be re-elected; his suitcases were already packed. The circular was also an act of thanksgiving towards her who was remained "Our Ordinary Resource". He wanted to put on record all that Mary had done during his nine years at the helm of the Institute,<sup>1</sup> echoing the words of Marcellin "She has done everything for us!"

## 1.1 The young Basilio

Let us look back on Basilio as a young person before he realised his Marist vocation. He admitted years later that he did not like long family prayers but that he happily recited the rosary personally.<sup>2</sup> Evidently this was just the beginning. Many have testified that Basilio's marial devotion was noticeable during his novitiate<sup>3</sup>. When he was the leader of the Better World Movement team in Ecuador, he confided to a sister that he already had the desire to write a book on the Virgin Mary but that he did not have the time to write it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> His witness in the magazine, *Religiosos de Hoy* 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *I want to Awake the Dawn*, Brother Gabriel Michel's witness.

## 1.2 The Years of Confusion

Then came the Council. We know what consequently happened even in our own marial congregation. In some communities, the statues of Saint Joseph and the Virgin Mary were moved to the attic. On the other hand, Basilio, who had a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the texts and the spirit of the Council, said many times in a variety of places and circumstances that chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* on the Virgin Mary among the People of God was a real jewel, a pure gift from the Spirit. “Quite a few brothers feel ill at ease about their marial life. As I see it, we are faced here with a paradox: we wonder if people who have been called to a specific marial apostolate still have any place in this post-conciliar Church. Well, the Council did not change Mary’s place or diminish her lofty status, nor did it disregard the love that Christians have always had for Mary. On the contrary, the council’s message was an appeal to purify our marial devotion and make it more authentic; it used its authority to confirm (in a sober and short but serious and profound document) all the greatness of Mary and the essence and richness of our devotion to the Mother of God.”<sup>4</sup> Basilio’s conclusion is that although we have always had “a specifically marial function in the Church”, the council text asked us to renew our devotion.”<sup>5</sup>

## 1.3 Mary is a characteristic of Marists.

Basilio was quite definite in saying that our specifically marial function was the soul of our institute, giving it its spirit and purpose.”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, he alluded to the marial document that the 1967 chapter had composed which, in his opinion, and, as he had heard from others, was excellent. Surprisingly, perhaps being led astray, the brothers put the Circular on Mary aside; we can

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<sup>4</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, *The Calls of the Church*, p. 450.

<sup>5</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, *The Calls of the Church*, p. 451.

<sup>6</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968. *The Calls of the Church*, p. 451.

imagine their hesitation, or rather, their wait for the study they could get on with after the Council.

Basilio was delighted when he heard that the Brazilian Brothers were organising a Marian congress. He wrote to them, “I am certain this congress will be a blessing for Brazil and I am convinced that your vocation will be to rekindle, challenge, reactivate and enhance devotion to Our Lady in the Marist world.”<sup>7</sup> He was especially happy with the logo of the congress, ‘In the Style of Mary’. He wrote to the organisers, “You could not have chosen a more perfect and admirable model, for two reasons. In the first place, from the fingers of God, sovereign artist as He is, no human being as self evidently perfect and admirable as Mary could come... this woman, wonderfully endowed both morally and ontologically; so rich in virtue but at the same time so simple, archetype of the whole of salvation history.”<sup>8</sup> The second reason to rejoice was the pedagogical and pastoral consequences of the chosen motto “In the Style of Mary”. “May the Marist Brothers adopt the motto ‘In the style of Mary’ in their relationships, and in the way they see and speak about Jesus and present him to the young... To educate ‘in the style of Mary’ would bring about a real Copernican revolution in Brazilian education.”<sup>9</sup> The idea of “educating in the style of Mary” was to be included in the 1986 Constitutions in article 84: *Mary, the educator of Jesus*.

## 1.4 The Magnificat

Basilio had not forgotten the book that he had been nursing in his heart. He would sometimes divulge a few excerpts. For example, in his first circular of 2 January 1968 when he spoke about the Magnificat, he wrote: “As for the distaste shown by some Brothers for the recitation of the psalms, could we not attribute this to something deficient in their initial formation, something that leaned towards an individualistic spirituality in

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<sup>7</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, Viamão, 16 de janeiro de 1982, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, p. 5.

which their religious life could never become rooted? Furthermore, are not these religious aware of the religious life of both Jesus and the Church? That was not the case with Mary: her Magnificat is like a song that links her history with that of her people and the people's story with hers. We must allow ourselves to be formed by the divine Word.”<sup>10</sup>

## 1.5 Looking for Wisdom

In the first pages of this circular, when he had been superior general for only three months, he spontaneously turned in prayer to Mary to ask for the prudence necessary to govern, “This is my wish, and I ask God that my request may happily be granted: may Our Lady, Throne of Wisdom, obtain for me the virtue of prudence, the virtue so essential for a superior.”<sup>11</sup>

## 1.6 His Way of Praying to Mary

Through Father Manuel Portillo, his collaborator in almost all his retreats in Spanish speaking countries, we know how he recited his rosary, and the freedom he had in saying this prayer. “What follows is a summary of the conversation I had with Brothers Mariano Medina and Hilario Schwab when we were driving back to the Vatican on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2001. The conversation got around to Brother Basilio, and Brother Mariano told us: ‘here is a little story. I was returning from Monte Cassino with Father Manuel Portillo, Basilio’s great collaborator. At a certain moment, he told me, ‘Why don’t we say the Rosary as Basilio does?’ There were only two mysteries to this rosary, but it could go on for an hour. First, we had to pray for the persons we had met and with whom we had worked. In the *Hail Mary* Basilio would name a person then remind the Lord’s Mother of the needs, the responsibilities, the joys and the wonders of that person. These were very personalised *Hail Marys*, springing from

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<sup>10</sup> Circ. *The Calls of the Church*, pp. 375 – 377.

<sup>11</sup> Circ. 2 January 1968, p. 7.

life and revealing the care, the heart and the memory of Basilio; his great freedom in prayer made the traditional rosary more fervent and appealing and revealed his immense confidence in Mary. The *Hail Marys* became intercession, thanksgiving, admiration and devotion. During the second mystery, we had to pray for the persons we were going to meet; and it went on in the same style with the same generosity and freedom.”<sup>12</sup>

As I was writing this article, Father Manuel Portillo was with us in Rome. I spoke to him about Basilio’s rosary, and he told me: “Yes, it was a very spontaneous prayer. He always started by praising the Virgin Mary: Virgin of the Good Counsel, Virgin of prudence, Virgin of joy; Virgin who kept pondering in her heart, the poor of Yahweh.... There was a first decade for praise and there was a second one for thanksgiving. He gave thanks for the work done during the retreat or during the visit, and then he spent a long time on intercessions.”<sup>13</sup>

This reveals how spontaneous Basilio was towards the Good Mother. In the message he sent to the Brazilian Brothers on the occasion of the Marian congress they were preparing, he commented on the motto of the congress, “In the Style of Mary”: “In the company of Mary you find Christ nearer to you than you ever imagined, a Jesus with whom we can sit and eat, a Jesus we can touch, one whom we can proclaim – all this coming from an extraordinary spiritual experience. In the style of Mary you will know God as Father, you will actually feel the wonderful fatherly care of God.”<sup>14</sup>

## 1.7 The rosary?

Earlier, in the 1972 retreat that Basilio gave to the brothers of the province of Norte, Spain, Basilio had urged them to exercise this freedom in praying the rosary. “The rosary offers us a number of great advantages. For example, who has the authority to put us

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<sup>12</sup> Brother Mariano Medina Vice General Bursar.

<sup>13</sup> Rome, 14 February, Fr. Manuel Portillo spent two weeks with us.

<sup>14</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, p. 4.

under the obligation of saying the mysteries in the traditional way? I am perfectly able to take out my pocket bible (we must have a great degree of freedom, and rid ourselves of formalism). And if I want to combine the recitation of the rosary with meditation on the epistle to the Romans, I read a passage, I pray and then I return to the reading. In this way, I bring in a biblical dimension that will enriches me with Saint John or Saint Paul, and at the same time as I nurture my Marial spirituality I also deepen my biblical spirituality.”<sup>15</sup> This was exactly the reason given by Pope John Paul II when he introduced the five mysteries of light – to pray along with the whole public life of Christ.

Not only did Basilio feel free about the way of praying the rosary but he did not hesitate to tell the brothers, especially those who found the rosary a burdensome prayer: “If you find another Marial prayer better than the rosary, use it without scruple, without worrying about it. The important thing is that we really pray to Mary, that we love her and cultivate a deep devotion to her... I think that we have reached a turning point and that we must accept some variety in our prayer methods to help the brothers’ prayer lives. But remember, we need a daily rhythm in our marial prayer.”<sup>16</sup>

## 1.8 Mary in Our Life

All that goes before reveals the nature of Basilio’s relationship with Mary, but nothing sheds light on the marial soul of Basilio as much as his circular *Mary in Our Life*. Its theology is very sound, very advanced, yet still contemporary, based on the Scriptures - and it avoids loose devotions. (Basilio confessed that apparitions did not attract him, although he had nothing to say against them; he maintained that the Word of God surpassed all apparitions.) His exegetical opinions and his spiritual intuitions

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<sup>15</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación*, p. 38, October 1972.

<sup>16</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación*, p. 37, October 1972.

were always expressed in the language of respect and affection. In this circular we have a marial study, a message addressed to the whole family, and at the same time we are also pausing to praise God: prayer keeps reappearing in the flow of reflections. The circular includes the testimonies of many Brothers, evidence of their love of the Good Mother and providing to some degree a marial profile of the Institute rather healthier than might have been thought. We may add the detail provided by Brother Gabriel Michel, that Basilio dictated the first part of the circular non-stop, the theological part, in a little more than an hour. This proves very well that Basilio already had within him a book on Mary.

“In any event, one day, he decided to put in writing *Mary in Our Life*. Thousands of brothers had written to him telling him what Mary had been for them. He was going to publish a great number of these testimonies, but the anthology needed a theological prologue. Prudently, he brought together a team of student brothers who had followed Mariology courses. For fifteen or twenty minutes, he asked them questions and listened to them. Then, for an hour or more without interruption he dictated the first part of the circular. No one interrupted him because it was obvious that Basilio was so clear on what he had to say about the Good Mother.”<sup>17</sup> Basilio confirms this in the introductory pages: “This circular was conceived and carried out according to the plan and the content that I carried in my heart even before I brought the team together.”<sup>18</sup> Commenting on this circular, Brother Claudio Girardi wrote, “Basilio was a model of marial devotion for us, a messenger in the Marist style. The beautiful circular he wrote was like a spring of fresh water.”<sup>19</sup>

Writing to the Brazilian brothers, on the occasion of their marial congress in 1982, Basilio shares one of the reasons why he wrote this circular: “You know that in the Institute in recent times there has been a marial crisis, some loss of fervour, or rather a moment

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<sup>17</sup> *I want to Awake the Dawn*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> Fr. Claudio Girardi, témoignage du 18 déc. 2002.



of confusion - theological, devotional and pastoral – in regard to the Virgin Mary. I wrote the circular partly with this in mind, and as a tribute to the Virgin who was the source of my vocation.”<sup>20</sup>

## **1.9 In a Climate of Prayer and Brotherhood**

Very significant also is the spirit and the climate in which the circular was written. “I might add that this circular was prepared in a retreat house. Its writing was surrounded by prayer, and a real sharing of faith and walking with Mary... The marial dialogue sometimes lasted more than three hours... prayer, shared or otherwise, lasted half an hour to ninety minutes. For all this I thank the team who committed themselves to this enterprise with joy and with a true love of Mary. The group comprised brothers of different nationalities, functions, mentalities and ages.”<sup>21</sup> A few paragraphs further, he wrote, “May the Holy Spirit, who gave to the Church Mary, this marvellous creature, the anticipation and the summit of redeemed humanity, and who charged the Institute to make her known and honoured, bless the words of this circular! I invite the brothers to read it in the same spirit of love, of joy and prayer in which it was written.”<sup>22</sup> And that was indeed the way the brothers welcomed and read the circular, with deep feeling, in a climate of prayer and pride. The circular marked the peaceful and undisturbed return of the Mother of the Lord to community life and to the marial apostolate of the brothers: it was a joyous moment of rediscovery.

## **1.10 Mary’s Faith**

We will not analyse in detail this section, which is very rich and dense; its theme is Mary’s journey of faith. Basilio sees this faith being shown constantly, yet always on the move towards a greater knowledge of and attachment to her Son. Mary’s faith

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<sup>20</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial, Viamão, 16 January, p. 2.*

<sup>21</sup> *Mary in Our Life, p. 256.*

<sup>22</sup> *Mary in Our Life, p. 257-258.*

was not a static one; it was alive; it kept growing and maturing with each manifestation of the Son. By her 'YES', Mary welcomed not just any baby into her womb, but the Word of God. Later, when Jesus had become an adult and the Word of God had started to proclaim itself in numerous ways, Mary would still be there, she who had heard and kept this Word: "All this shows a development in Mary's faith, a circumstance that identifies her well as the Lord's Mother not only by her physical maternity, fostering a child, but also by a wider maternity as well which welcomes God's Word and makes of it nourishment and life."<sup>23</sup>

Some paragraphs earlier, at the end of one of his reflections, Basilio had recalled the thought of Saint Augustine: "What brought her so close to Jesus at the Annunciation was faith in the Word and adherence to the divine will. What is it that makes the divine maternity so marvellous, and why has the Church so exalted it? The most wonderful aspect is not a biological or psychological tie, but the spiritual bond. Mary had to conceive Jesus in her heart so as to conceive him thereafter in her womb: *prius mente quam ventre*," says St Augustine.<sup>24</sup> Considering the Gospel's silence as to the possibility of an apparition of the risen Christ to his mother after the resurrection, Basilio, true to the path of faith, prefers to see Mary among the numerous "blessed" faithful who "believed without having seen", a beatitude that can be placed alongside Elizabeth's: "Blessed are you who believed!"<sup>25</sup>

Here is a paragraph that summarises Mary's faith experience after Jesus' burial: "Mary is present then at all the crucial moments of Jesus' life, fully living out her faith, clear at each stage as to what God is asking of her. Jesus had come forth from the Father, and now she saw him laid in the tomb."<sup>26</sup> Every stage of Mary's life was an occasion for her to increase her faith, to renew the gift of herself to her son in love. Basilio had defined faith in the

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<sup>23</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>24</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 342.

<sup>25</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 364.

<sup>26</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 363.

following way, “Every act of faith involves ‘seeing’ with the intellect amid the obscurity of mystery. The light to ‘see’ derives from a will, which, moved by the Holy Spirit, adheres deliberately and lovingly to his designs.”<sup>27</sup>

This insistence on Mary’s faith reveals two important realities in Basilio: his relationship with the Saviour’s Mother did not consist simply in feelings of respect and affection, but in living Mary’s mystery in a profound way as if in communion with the Mother’s soul, with her real everyday existence. This insistence also tells us how much he was a man of faith, how he lived it and how he understood it. In almost all the pages of the circular, Mary’s faith surfaces, proclaimed by Basilio’s faith.

In a very dense paragraph in the message sent by Basilio for the marial congress in Brazil in 1982, Basilio described the faith of Mary almost in precise form: “It is a fact that the core of the story of Mary is characterised by one thing: ‘the woman overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, who brought God into our world, inserted eternity into history, and gave God a historical character, had to make the journey of faith all her life, from Jewish faith to Christian faith, from the synagogue to the Church ... in perfect docility to the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>28</sup>

### **1.11 The Litanies in the Circular**

Many quotations will be suggested as we are coming to the end of this reflection. However, I could not leave aside what we might call the litanies of the Virgin as they appear in the circular. They describe well the love that the author has for the Lord’s Mother. As he writes and the incense of his praise rises from his heart, his reflection is prayer and his prayer is inspiration:

Mary, Mother and model of the faithful,  
Mary, the choicest fruit of Israel,

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<sup>27</sup> *Mary in Our Life*, p. 287.

<sup>28</sup> *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial*, p. 4.

Mary, the perfect poor of Yahweh,  
Mary, the favoured one, God's beloved,  
Mary who speaks, takes initiatives, acts and reflects,  
Mary, a modest lady of Nazareth,  
Mary, the pondering virgin,  
Mary, all attentive, the chosen one, the first one to be  
evangelised,  
Mary, the maternal dwelling of the Messiah, of the Emmanuel,  
Mary, the obedient virgin,  
Mary, in your virginity, sign that speaks of the Son's divinity,  
Mary, the tent of the encounter,  
Mary, progressively initiated into the discovery of your Son's  
divinity,  
Mary, an untiring search for God,  
Mary, who experiences the Spirit of Power,  
Mary, the handmaid of the Lord,  
Mary, who welcomes Jesus the blessed fruit of her womb,  
Mary, our representative, our mediator,  
Mary, upon whom the Church models itself, that is to say, us  
Mary, the one who listens to God's word,  
Mary, the young visitor,  
Mary, bearer of the good news of salvation,  
Mary, the first one to receive and to represent the New  
Covenant,  
Mary, you are blessed among all women,  
Mary, the Mother of my Lord,  
Mary, blessed to have believed,  
Mary, who had a very communicative faith,  
Mary, the one who sings, 'The Kingdom is here!'  
Mary, driven by the Spirit,  
Mary, will of the generous giver  
Mary, woman whose soul was pierced,  
Mary, Mother of the suffering Servant,  
Mary, sister and disciple of the glorified Lord,  
Mary, who journeyed in faith,  
Mary, full of anguish at the loss of her Son  
Mary, who listens,  
Mary, who does not understand her Son,

Mary, attentive to the Word,  
Mary, who welcomes the Word with love,  
Mary, calm and serene in her heart,  
Mary, woman of openness, who knows how to read the signs of  
the times,  
Mary, who does not hesitate to accept change, the new, the  
unexpected,  
Mary, mistress of her own feelings,  
Mary, who waits, ponders, reflects, ponders, objects, searches for  
a little more light,  
Mary, whose presence brings the joy of living,  
Mary, whose word communicates the Lord's peace,  
Mary, who always carries God's Word in her heart,  
Mary, in contemplation of the Word,  
Mary, humble, lucid and enlightening,  
Mary, mother of Jesus,  
Mary, the first Christian,  
Mary, the perfect educator of the Child Jesus,  
Mary, whose soul is full of biblical wisdom,  
Mary, totally abandoned to God's will,  
Mary, the first of the little ones of the Kingdom to whom the  
Father likes to reveal mysteries,  
Mary, in the flesh that you give to the child, is the seed of the  
cross,  
Mary, the believer par excellence, the favourite daughter of God,  
who ponders everything in her heart,  
Mary, the one who lived in the shadow of the Spirit,  
Mary who introduced in this world the messianic wedding,  
Mary who gives the wine for the feast,  
Mary, who wants the feast to carry on,  
Mary, called by her Son, Woman,  
Mary, humble servant of the Lord, believer par excellence,  
Mary, the blessed one who carried and suckled the great prophet,  
Mary, one of the group that travelled with Jesus,  
Mary, silent presence in the Church,  
Mary, living and acting intercession in the Church,  
Mary, our Mediatrix,  
Mary, sole relative of Jesus

Mary, the virginal ear from which the grain that will die, falls,  
Mary, so far ahead of us in the knowledge of the Kingdom,

May Basilio's litanies, the fruit of his love, sometimes become  
our prayer, fill our intimate time with the good Mother and  
initiate us in the freedom of a loving heart.

## **1.12 Pedagogy of the Circular**

The circular answered a real need: to overcome the uncertainty associated with devotion to Mary that arose after the Council - although that was never the intention of the Council. Confronted by this confusion, Basilio proceeded with a remarkable pedagogy to reassure the Brothers in their love for the one "who did everything for us". He started with a solid theological study to situate the Virgin in the history of salvation. He follows this with the ancient tradition of the Church. He studies the presence of Mary in the origins of the Marist family and especially in the heart, the prayer, the teachings and the work of the Founder. From there he continues with the marial tradition in our congregation, from one superior general to the next. But his stroke of genius was to include in his circular the testimony of the Brothers today. They show that Mary is very present and active in the heart of our Marist apostolate; nothing could convince us more that Mary is made welcome among us and that she must remain in the middle of us as our Mother, loved, invoked, proclaimed, the inspiration of our faith and of our presence among the young. Following the publication of this circular, the whole congregation calmly and of its own accord once again returned to devotion to the Virgin, so much a part of the Marist charism and of Marist spirituality. The new Constitutions are explicit about this in the first articles and specially in Article 7, "The spirituality left by Marcellin Champagnat is marial and apostolic..." Basilio well knew how to convince the Brothers of our need for Mary's presence in our consecrated Marist lives, under pain of losing our identity.

### 1.13 1993: His Last General Chapter

At the 1993 General Chapter, Basilio was chosen to read the consecration of our Institute to the Virgin Mary. A new statue of the Good Mother was enthroned on 18 September. Some Brothers carried the statue from the main chapel to the chapter hall. A prayer of consecration concluded that ceremony and Basilio, called upon to express the feelings of the capitulants, made this prayer: “Holy Mother of God, gathered for this chapter, we place into your hands and into your Mother’s heart, our gratitude, our hopes and our works so that you may present them to our Lord. Our world, our Church and our Congregation must face huge problems and urgent needs. The task that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to us, through Marcellin’s charism, attracts us more than ever. Help us to know it, put it in place, and accomplish it, and be, like you, living signs of the tenderness of the Father and of the Church for young people.”<sup>29</sup>

### 1.14 Mary – When he was overtaken by illness

Brother Leonard Ouellet was at Basilio’s bedside during his last illness. He kept him company, prayed with him and saw him die. Brother Leonard wrote, “He asked me to pray with him. Knowing his great love for Saint John’s Gospel, the psalms, the *Salve Regina*, a few hymns in Spanish and in French and the rosary, I could accompany him with varied prayers. On Saturday, 20 January, he was in acute pain. He was only half conscious. The young Brothers who had come from Mexico City to visit him sang the *Salve Regina* at his bedside. This time, he was too weak to participate in the singing... On Sunday, the day of the Lord’s resurrection, 21 January 1996, at 9.45 a.m. he handed over his beautiful soul to God in peace and serenity. An exceptional man of God, a saint, had gone to be reunited in love with the God he had loved so fervently...”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *FMS Message*, No. 19, May 1996, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> *FMS Message*, No. 19, May, 1996, p. 12.

## 1.15 His Friends Said...

The testimony of Brother Angel Goni Larendegui speaks of the love Basilio had for Mary: “His devotion to the Virgin Mary was remarkable. Could it have been otherwise for a Marist like Basilio who loved his vocation so much? His beautiful circular *Mary in Our Life* describes his love in an extensive way, a circular that was admired and consulted by his Brothers and by many other people. The first part of it reveals his deep knowledge of the theme and his ardent love for the

Mother, the Queen, the first Superior and the Ordinary Resource of the Marist Institute.”<sup>31</sup> His novices, his direct disciples up to his last days, speak about him as “a man of prayer and faith who had a great love for Mary.”<sup>32</sup>

Brother Edouard Blondeel added his thanks to Basilio “We thank you for having saved us from forgetting and even abandoning the Marist patrimony of Our Lady of the Hermitage, and for giving us the opportunity to find again and hold close forever Father Champagnat, Brother François and our first brothers.”<sup>33</sup>

José Ocaranza Sainz offered a testimony that embraced the whole life of Basilio as a Marist Brother: “I seem to remember vividly the postulant Basilio in the common dormitory kneeling by his bed, before his night’s rest. He appeared to have completely immersed himself in a fervent dialogue with the Blessed Virgin... I believe that this was the beginning of a very deep, solid and at the same time tender devotion to the Mother of God that was going to show itself in many ways in his religious life and in his response to the Lord. Later, when he was finally confined to his sick bed, he accepted pain with an exemplary resignation and even with a smile on his lips. All his relatives and friends who went to visit him were brought nearer to the Lord by his total gift of himself to God’s will. He thanked

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<sup>31</sup> México marista, No. 10, pp. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> FMS Message, No. 19, May 1996, p.43.

<sup>33</sup> FMS Message, n° 29, May 1996, p. 56.



us for our attentions, and in a spirit full of love of God and of the Virgin Mary, he asked us to pray aloud and to sing him the old hymns of love to the Mother of Heaven. He followed with his lips as we sang the *Salve Regina*, the *Sub Tuum*, *Ever Forever* and other favourite hymns that offered us into the hands of our Mother, Our Ordinary Resource, to be reunited with Jesus.”<sup>34</sup>

## 1.16 And the Constitutions?

Like all other congregations, ours was also invited by the Council to re-write the constitutions. The new text manifests the characteristics that Basilio wanted for a renewal of religious life: they are more evangelical, more spiritual, they speak to the heart, and they call us to intimacy with God. It is strange to observe how the articles on the Virgin Mary have the same tone as Basilio’s reflections in his circular, *Mary in Our Life*. These articles also emphasise Mary’s journey in faith. The new constitutions were published by Brother Charles Howard, in 1986, but they had been thought of and written when Basilio was the superior general. There is very much of him in these Constitutions and it would be interesting to make a parallel study of the two texts, the circular and the Constitutions. The points of similarity are numerous. Mary is present in all the chapters of these new Constitutions because she must be present in our whole lives, as she was present in the lives of Marcellin and Basilio. There is no special chapter on the Virgin Mary, but there is a constant and precise presence. This is one of the characteristics of Marist Apostolic Spirituality.

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<sup>34</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 36.

## TEXTS

### 1: Which devotion?

Another important aspect of the general chapter was its courageous attitude regarding our marial character. The marial document is not only a work in depth and quality, but the brothers have also received it with enthusiasm; it was approved by the capitulants with an impressive majority.

I think it is useful to make two observations here:

a) According to what I could observe in different provinces afterwards, the first document, although received warmly, did not succeed in bringing our Brothers to renew their Marist spirituality. The Institute seemed far from that marial joy that had lit up the Chapter. That could not be seen; neither could a true renewal of catechesis or of marial spirituality.

b) It is clear that the council and the marial document, by aligning Mary's mystery not so much with her privileges and her apparitions as with

her divine and spiritual maternity,  
her life as a pilgrimage and growth of faith,  
her place in the Church,

had indicated everything in Mary's person that is essential. The numerous popular assertions about Mary that had their origin only in devotion do not seem to appeal to many people nowadays. We do not say that people do not love Mary any more but that the old arguments simply lack a serious foundation.

Therefore, either we undertake a true study of the mystery of Mary, and look at her from the new perspectives, or the document will remain misunderstood for a long time, without bearing the expected fruit. This would unhappily delay one of the warmest and most enthusiastic contributions of the General Chapter, one that was even further developed in the Constitutions themselves...

What is essential is that we must avoid communicating to our young brothers a marial spirituality that would not be in tune with the council texts, and we must avoid the risk, too, of our brothers passing it on to the young in our schools. Even our older brothers have to understand that they would work to no avail if they tried to pass on the same marial devotion they have always felt and lived, instead of trying to renew their devotion according to *Lumen Gentium* and our own marial document. One must not speak a language that a listener does not understand. (*A Meditation Aloud*; pp. 372-375, 1971)

## **2: Visitation: The first Christian mission**

The angel had said to Mary: “And behold, your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a child in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren, for nothing is impossible to God.” This sign was given in connection with the virginal conception of Jesus. It was not a thing to be mentioned merely incidentally as a piece of interesting news. No, it was more than that; it was a gift of God to Mary and formed part of the message to her, and she read into it a hidden appeal to go to her cousin. “Was it to render service?” we may ask. Yes, certainly: Mary’s readiness to help, her practical love of her neighbour, her sense of gratitude seeking expression, all incited her to this act of pure charity. Seeing that her Son came to save men and set them free, it is unthinkable that she, “the handmaid of the Lord and mother of the Servant of Yahweh”, would not have felt an urge to cooperate in her Son’s redemptive mission. Apart, however, from the acquired virtue of neighbourly concern, there was a further motive inspiring Mary’s promptitude. She carries her Child and in turn is moved by her Child, or rather by the Spirit who already rests upon him. In this visit, Mary is completely at the service of others in furthering the mission of her Son incarnate within her ...

When God gives her a sign she necessarily believes it; and as her faith is neither indifferent, nor lifeless, she responds to this sign with thanksgiving, and as genuinely one of the poor of Yahweh,

shares in her cousin's joy and gratitude. The angel had invited her to rejoice with messianic joy, a joy that faith would indicate is to be shared with others. So Mary seizes the opportunity now presented to share her joy with those devout Israelites who await in prayer and hope the coming of the Saviour...

How can she adequately express in solitude the gladness of her heart as she sings of this new creation that has been inaugurated within her? Haste seems to be the natural thing in the case of this simple and spontaneous young woman: her heart is too full of enthusiasm not to tremble with impatience at any obstacle that might prevent her from praising God in concert with her relatives. And so we see her on the way, messenger of the good tidings of salvation now embodied within her, eager to share with those who will understand. She, the first to receive and represent the New Covenant, hastens to greet the last of those barren women of the Old Covenant to whom the Lord has given fruitfulness. (Circular: *Mary in Our Life*, pp. 278-280, 8 September 1976)

### **3: Your Child, a disputed sign; a sword will pierce your soul.**

This prophecy mounts gradually towards a high point of intensity, and it is strange and significant to note that its culminating point is reached in Mary herself. Just as we would expect Simeon to follow up the notion of Jesus' "contradictions" and see them culminating in his passion and death, Simeon changes his viewpoint, and sees Mary's soul pierced with a sword. It is therefore Mary's compassion or transfixion that becomes the first means of announcing the redeeming death of Jesus. There could scarcely be a more profound demonstration of the intimacy of her communion and participation in the redeeming mission of Jesus. Isaiah has said (53:5): "He was scourged for our sins," and in contemplating the suffering Servant, her own Son, so treated, Mary is smitten in the depths of her soul. This grief is something more, however, than the moral suffering of a mother at the bedside of a dying child. It is the affliction of Christ reverberating

in the immaculate and maternal heart of Mary, who is intimately one with him in the mystery of his suffering and death...

The young mother will live henceforth in an awareness of her intimate association with the mystery of her Son's sorrowful passion. Possibly she sees henceforth a new aspect of his destiny: he is not only the Messiah-King, he is also the suffering servant of Yahweh, and she is called to share in this double destiny held out to him: death-and-glorification. (Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, pp. 292-293.)

#### **4: Listening to God who speaks through men**

We might notice a further constantly recurring factor in the progressive unfolding of the mystery of Jesus to his mother. God makes use of intermediaries in order to reveal to Mary the various aspects of the personality and mission of her Son: Gabriel, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds, the magi... Each of these could tell her something she did not yet know. We see here the social dimension of our faith. The Mother of God herself, then, is not dispensed from mediation from within the Church. From the middle ages on there was a tendency to see the perfection of the Blessed Virgin as static and complete once and for all. This was not so. The Gospel gives a different picture; Mary was not all-knowing, possessed of everything, giving but never receiving from others. Rather, she was one with ears always alert to God's voice speaking through the mouths of men. Later we shall find her in the Cenacle, among the disciples of Jesus, under the direction of Peter and the other apostles, a sister and disciple of the glorified Saviour. She has always to learn, like the rest of us. (Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, pp. 293-294.)

#### **5: A portrait of Mary**

If we are looking for the best possible portrait of Mary, we must go to the Gospels, for here the artist is the Holy Spirit himself. The picture is inexhaustible: all generations have contemplated it with joy and have discovered some new aspect of this sublime simplicity, for simplicity is Mary's characteristic quality. In her

everything is simple and everything is sublime. “Hers is the face that most resembles that of Christ,” says Dante.

How did the evangelists see the psycho-religious qualities of Mary? Before all else she is attentive to the word of God (The Virgin who listens). She could lovingly welcome God’s communication when it came to her, even though it overturned all that she had planned, pierced her soul, plunged her heart into grief, and left her in profound puzzlement. Even so, she faithfully followed God’s word and made it part and parcel of her life. Mary is the handmaid of Yahweh, ready in advance to do all that he desires.

Her personality is a winning one. Calm and serene in mind, she dialogues with God and with men; she puts her questions, and when she in turn responds, her replies are most apt. Open and receptive, she knows how to read the signs of the time, and welcome the unexpected. In perfect control of her emotions, she is by no means swept off her feet by an announcement that any other young Jewish woman of the time would have welcomed with enthusiasm and delight: to be chosen as mother of the Messiah. Mary waits, reflects, examines, raises difficulties, and seeks more light. As soon, as she is sure of God’s will, however, she trustingly accepts the mission proposed to her; and conscious that God is the master of the impossible, she abandons herself to the action of his Holy Spirit. In this clear-sighted, liberated and loving response of Mary to the Incarnation, what a wealth of even human values is revealed! (Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, pp.304-305.)

## **6: Portrait of Mary (continued)**

In all that she is and does she reveals herself most human. She rejoices with those who are glad, and she is full of compassion for those who suffer or are in need. And her compassion is practical and efficacious. She puts herself at the service of all, alert to anticipate needs, delicate, humble, modest and generous, translating her immense charity into concrete gestures of friendship and fraternal help. With ready smile and responsive

sympathy she is understanding and accessible to all. Her presence brings joy, her word communicates the Lord's peace, and at times brings down God's Holy Spirit on those who come in contact with her, for she always carries the Word of God in her heart, after having carried him for nine months in her virginal womb.

Still, she is a woman given to silence and recollectedness, hidden and almost unknown, living like so many others in her Galilean village, among the crowds at Jerusalem, or mingling with her Son's disciples along the roads of Palestine, or sojourning in Capharnaum. She does not draw attention to herself, she speaks little except when moved to praise and thank God, and then indeed she is happy to join in prayer with her friends and share her joy in believing. All her life is centred on contemplating God's word and seeing his will in the events of life, and loving Jesus and all mankind. More and more deeply she comes to understand the meaning of Jesus' words and actions, and the revelation of her Son's personality, without however reaching complete understanding. Her pilgrimage of faith goes on until the end of her days.

This faith of hers is humble, yet most illuminating; it explains her simplicity and throws light on her maternal relations with Jesus. With a grateful and trusting heart Mary accepts the constantly higher levels to which her Son calls her, often by words that have the abrupt tone of a prophetic oracle, which step by step introduce her to the mystery of the cross. On Calvary she sees herself called to sacrifice what a mother holds most dear: at the word of Jesus she surrenders her physical, human motherhood for another that is to be spiritual and universal. (Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, pp. 305-307.)

### **7: In the flesh taken from Mary was the seed of the cross**

When Mary gave to the Son of God our vulnerable mortal flesh, she communicated to him at the same time the intrinsic necessity of dying; in giving birth to him, she set his feet on the path that

led him of necessity to the cross. But the latter, because salvific, was of necessity a paschal cross. I shall explain my meaning.

According to one line of philosophical opinion, man thrown into history comes from nothingness and returns to nothingness. This view could not be held by those who have faith. The latter see us as springing from a love of preference on God's part: he chose s in his beloved Son, and destined us in him to share eternal glory. Christ most emphatically did not spring from nothingness; he was in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. Sent by the Father into the world through the action of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary and became man. Now this humanisation of the Word concerns all men, for their eternal destiny depends on it. The incarnation is God becoming flesh, God entering into history, God assuming our time-conditioned state, our mortality. Death, let us repeat, does not come to Jesus extrinsically, through the will of men, nor even by an exterior decree of his Father surrendering his Son to some sort of expiatory sacrifice. No. His incarnation already contains, in the flesh taken from Mary, the seeds of the cross.

Calvary would be the complement to Bethlehem and Nazareth, and the Resurrection would be the crowning, normal and necessary, of Jesus' death on the cross, for if Christ did not rise, how maintain his Incarnation and what would be the meaning of his redemptive solidarity with men who had to die and stood in need of resurrection? (Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, pp316-317.)

## **8- The circular evaluated in a review**

When it comes to marial devotion, what can we say about the Circular, *Mary in Our Life*, this monument raised in honour of Our Lady? Here the heart of Brother Basilio bursts its banks and pours out to the four points of the compass the love in his heart for the divine Mother, flooding every corner of the Institute with its fresh waters.



Here we see everyone involved. He wanted the brothers to participate in this universal hymn to the Virgin Mary. Letters from every race, in every language, arrived on his desk saying, “Me too, I want to take part in this concert; publish my feelings for Our Lady, do not leave me out of this beautiful Circular, I also have something to say for the honour and glory of Mary.”

Yes, it is a collective circular. Our head has given it structure, has given it a body, but we also have contributed life, we have placed our flower at the foot of Our Lady, we have added a sheen to her image, and we are delighted with this universal song to the Virgin interpreted by the sons of Marcellin Champagnat under the magic baton of Brother Basilio. (*Madrid Marista*, Numero Special, December 1985, p.5.)

## 2. BASILIO AND FATHER CHAMPAGNAT

### 2.1 Another Champagnat

*Basilio, Another Champagnat*<sup>35</sup>, is a small book of one hundred pages that presents the testimony of witnesses and quotations from the reflections of Basilio. The title was not given without reason, as there are many Marcellin and Basilio have many things in common. In his own way, Basilio was a modern version of Marcellin. This last statement implies a deep understanding of the Founder, his person, his thought, his charism and his mission, and, at the same time, an appreciation of the importance of being an educator, that is to say, one who nurtures life, faith and human qualities among the young. At the closing ceremony of the Champagnat Year, on 6 June 1981, Basilio gave a lecture at Lavalla. He showed us on that day how well he understood Marcellin, leading us to admire our Founder all the more.

“Champagnat was a man who knew how to listen actively. His heart resounded to the voices of religious ignorance and the clamour of a deficient pedagogy. He was a great spiritual artist who knew how to plumb the depths of the heart, to train disciples and to communicate the thinking of the Church. He was a man who called us loudly to serious action. To be faithful to Marcellin is to be faithful to the deep conviction that dramatic world situations challenge us to react quickly and efficaciously.”<sup>36</sup>

### 2.2 Similarities

Between the two there are numerous similarities. The first is the conviction that accompanied them during their whole lives, that they were greatly loved by God and the Virgin Mary. That was an experience that led them to a total offering of themselves and to

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<sup>35</sup> *Basilio, un autre Champagnat, Témoignages et Témoin*, Rome, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2002.

<sup>36</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 210-213.

a very intimate life with God and the Good Mother. That experience sustained their interior life. From this intimacy with God they became convinced that “prayer is the capital element”. Both kept repeating this point to the Brothers so that they too would draw strength from this source of energy and inexhaustible love. Both lived an equal passion for God’s will: on the one hand, the loving pursuit of the Father’s every wish and on the other, total availability. Their obedience, renewing itself from day to day, was more than a vow, it was a life. Marcellin was ready to give up the Brothers if that had been God’s will; Basilio accepted as God’s will the re-election, which he had not looked for. In a talk, he told the Brothers that he would be ready to sacrifice his congregation, which he loved so tenderly, had it been in the interest of the Church.<sup>37</sup> When Basilio spoke of Champagnat’s obedience, he also declared his deep conviction, “The Marist Brothers must develop a sense of God like Marcellin’s, have his passion for God’s glory, be attentive to and respectful of God’s presence – especially in the Eucharist – have confidence in their work, be convinced that loving the will of God takes first place before everything else, and finally, we must have the love and docility to do God’s will and abide by it as the unique ideal in events big or small.”<sup>38</sup>

It was from the conviction that they were loved so much by God that both felt a certain humanising freedom. Marcellin was set free from jansenist rigidity and fears: the training he gave his Brothers insisted on God’s fatherly love, on the sweetness of having Mary as our Mother. Basilio wanted to free the congregation from any formalism in prayer and from the sense of prayer as a duty, encouraging an evangelical spirit in our prayers, urging us to recite our prayers slowly and sincerely and to relate them to our lives, all of this motivated by love. At any rate, Marcellin and Basilio enjoyed a freedom that unified their lives, lives described passionately by Basilio as, “an existence taken up, unified and transformed for the sake of the sole Lord!”<sup>39</sup> In the third conference he gave to the capitulants at the

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<sup>37</sup> Testimony of Br Jesus Bayo Mayor, October 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Conference on Apostolic Spirituality, 1985 General Chapter, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> 1980, *The Year of Champagnat*, p. 172.

1985 Chapter when he talked about apostolic spirituality, Basilio often mentioned Father Champagnat. In one of his long reflections, he wrote, “Love was indeed the secret of the remarkably active life of Marcellin Champagnat, which was at one and the same time both contemplative and apostolic. Marcellin lived continually in God’s presence and was ablaze with an apostolic fire, first in his parish and later in his congregation.” In Basilio, this integrated, unified and transformed life at the service of the Lord alone was encapsulated in his motto, “To set my life on fire for Christ, and to burn it from both ends!” Just a month before his death he shared with his friends that his ideal had endured to the end, that the flame remained with him to the end, right to the very point of extinction.

We have seen Basilio’s bonds with the Good Mother, bonds identical with those of Marcellin: the same simple love, and the same zeal to make her known and loved. In his last lecture as superior general, on apostolic spirituality, he paused for quite some time to contemplate the love and confidence that Marcellin had in regard to Mary: “Marcellin’s spirituality, the most Christ-centred among the first Marists” – as Father Coste says – “is undeniably very marial. There is nothing here to surprise us. A 17<sup>th</sup> century French theologian had already declared, “Mary is the sacrament of the maternal tenderness of God.” A few paragraphs further, Basilio reminds us of the letter Marcellin had written to Mgr Pompallier in 1838, “Mary, yes, Mary is our sole prosperity; without Mary we are nothing and with her we have everything, for Mary always holds her loving Son either in her arms or in her heart”.<sup>40</sup>

Both had the same love for everything Marist. To Marcellin, the congregation was a precious gift from the Spirit, for Basilio, the congregation was the Founder’s precious gift. Marcellin’s love found expression in tenderness for the Brothers, attention, welcome, listening, encouragement and discernment. Every Brother had a place in his heart. “You know how much I love

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<sup>40</sup> Conference on Apostolic Spirituality, p. 14-15.

you”, he used to say. Basilio put no limits on his time or his energies - or his purse - when welcoming a Brother, listening to him or trying to strengthen his vocation. In that area, there is an abundance of testimonies, which is to be found in a later chapter of this work, “Basilio, Superior and Brother.”

Both showed a keen sense of responsibility that led them to do their utmost to help the congregation to grow in a wholesome and a holy manner, and for each brother to come to full maturity. Both offered the reflection, the advice, and the vision that guided the Brothers along the lines of the charism and the path of God’s will. We remember Marcellin’s ambition, “All the dioceses of the world come into our designs.” We can say that nobody did more than Basilio to realise the Founder’s ambition. His service of the Church and the Congregation knew no frontiers: nobody gave to the Brother’s vocation the dimension it attained during his life. The two are for us, always, a challenge and an invitation to go beyond the limits we have allowed false traditions to impose on us, notably that which has persuaded us in the past that the school is our sole field of apostolate. They were both attentive to the needs of the poor and the missions and turned the Brothers towards these two frontiers of the apostolate.

Marcellin and Basilio also resemble each other in other ways. They were both unsophisticated, close to the people with whom they worked; they had the knack of knowing how to acquire new friends and how to be esteemed. Of a happy and optimistic character, they loved flashes of wit. Manual work did not demean them. Basilio never actually built a house, but he was the first one at certain chores such as washing the dishes, preparing visitors’ rooms, sweeping the yards and doing his own laundry. These habits helped them both to make friends easily, to attract others to them and to become the confidants and spiritual directors of many.

Their similarities are barely touched on here; other pages will indicate the most important points.

## 2.3 The Founder in Basilio's writings

In Basilio, the resemblance to Champagnat is natural, but it is also the result of personal efforts to understand the Founder and to assimilate his spirit. When we read some of Basilio's writing we may be surprised by the sharpness of his observation of Champagnat. This is the result of the writer's intelligence, and his intimacy with the Founder: his heart assimilated the Marist values that an acute intellect had already grasped. This impression comes not from the late circulars, but from the very first one he wrote, on 2 January 1968. From this we learn that Basilio accepted his responsibility with a heart that had already been taken over by Marcellin. The fifth chapter of this circular entitled, *The Calls from the Church and from the Founder* and the fourth chapter, *'The Calls from the World'* constitute the richest, the most dynamic, invigorating and modern section of the circular. Basilio reserved almost two hundred pages to *The Calls from the Founder*.<sup>41</sup>

In three other official writings Basilio discoursed on the Founder and explained his vision. He did so because he knew that Marcellin was the model that the Spirit had prepared for us, the model we had to imitate to acquire the Marist spirit. These three works are, in their chronological order: *The Spirit of the Institute* (1975), *Mary in Our Life* (1976) and *The Champagnat Year* (1980).

In *The Spirit of the Institute*, after some introductory reflections, Basilio wrote several pages on the relationship between our Founder and our spirit (pp. 178-182). Is it possible to speak about humility, simplicity and modesty without understanding them in the Founder's perspective?

*Mary in Our Life* reserves a whole section (387-401) for a study of Mary's presence in Marcellin's life.

1980, *The Champagnat Year* was a brief circular that contained only thirteen pages on the Founder. It was written on the occasion of

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<sup>41</sup> Some extracts are included at the end of the chapter.

the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beatification, yet it foreshadows all that would be said at the moment of his canonisation. The beatification was the recognition of Marcellin's personal holiness, of his charism. It was also the recognition of the plan of apostolic life that he had elaborated. In these few pages, Basilio shares something deep about our Founder, "Study and research about him, both in the past and in the present, have shown us that we have an exceptional man as our Founder... His strength and his greatness lie precisely in the 'homeliness' of his character. He was a man raised up by the Holy Spirit to found, to form, to develop, and to consolidate a religious family. That was his mission, and his personality was ideally adapted for this mission."<sup>42</sup>

## 2.4 And the Hermitage?

It had been Basilio's dream that all the Brothers might have a deep hands-on experience of the Founder and of our Marist origins. It was an inspired decision to make the Hermitage our unique Marist sanctuary: a place for prayer, for making contacts and for formation. It was during his generalate that the custom was established of sending Brothers already attending formation sessions such as their second novitiate, Third Age programme or the Champagnat Year to spend at least two weeks at the Hermitage exploring the sources of the Marist spirit.

The new exercise went so well that even former students and members of the Marist Family Movement also started to attend renewal sessions at the Hermitage.

To this day the essential mission of the Hermitage remains the same: to be a Marist sanctuary that welcomes those who seek the spirit of our origins. Moreover, certain Brothers have spent longer periods at the Hermitage undertaking systematic research on the Founder and his spirit, to name but a few: Brothers Pierre Zind (who had been one of the pioneers in this area), Gabriel

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<sup>42</sup> Circular, 1980, *The Year of Champagnat*, p. 176.

Michel, Alexandre Balko, Juan Maria, Frederick McMahon, André Lanfrey, Aureliano Brambila, Alain Delorme. .

Basilio had started something like this before he became superior general. As early as the year 1965, he had begun to visit the Hermitage with his second novices. “The first time I met Brother Basilio was at the Hermitage in June 1965. He was directing a spirituality course for a group of Spanish and Portuguese speaking Brothers at Escorial, and he had taken them on a pilgrimage to the places connected with the history of the Institute. How I admired his knowledge of the life of Father Champagnat and the first brothers, and the deep love he showed for the Founder and the congregation! I also admired his family spirit, and the spirit of prayer and service that were so obvious during this visit to these places that are a real treasure for the sons of Father Champagnat. The meeting with him did much for me.”<sup>43</sup>

In the Escorial archives for 1965-1967, one can find many references to these pilgrimages made by the second novices to the Hermitage, to the meticulous preparation of each visit, to the details of their stay and the studies they made under the direction of Basilio.

## **2.5 The Champagnat Year**

Brother Basilio also launched a programme of formation that came to be called, “The Year of Champagnat Spirituality”; it ran for some years. The purpose of this year of study included the knowledge of the Founder, the assimilation of his spirit, the study of his time, of his work, of his letters, and of his training methods.

These two initiatives resulted in “The Marist Patrimony”, a document whose purpose was to shed light on our Marist reality through an understanding of the Founder’s spirit and our

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<sup>43</sup> Br Albertino Jorge, *El Estilo de una vida*, p. 37.



historical origins. It assists the Brothers to live their Marist spirituality with a clearer understanding.

Even when he was no longer the superior general, Marcellin remained Basilio's companion and ideal, for he worked in formation all his life. His province asked him to become master of novices in 1987. Then, in 1990, the Institute asked him to undertake the direction of a special course to prepare future masters of novices. That task ended, he returned to his previous task back in Mexico, where the two provinces had combined their novitiate. During this same period, Brother Charles Howard asked him to establish, organise and animate the Marist Family Movement in Mexico. By assimilating the Founder's spirit, Basilio had become a formation master par excellence.

To say that there were similarities between Marcellin and Basilio is not to suggest that the resemblance was total. Basilio was an intellectual, while Marcellin was gifted in things practical; Marcellin was physically robust but Basilio was of fragile health; Marcellin was the founder, the man of our origins, Basilio the disciple who tried to study and show the importance of the origins. Marcellin was a rural French man, whereas Basilio, a man of the world, was city born. Basilio was a present day Champagnat. Marcellin would recognise a real son in Basilio, one who might be called his portrait for today.

## TEXTS

### **1: Who was Champagnat**

Champagnat was a man who knew how to listen actively and efficaciously to the calls around him and those of the world. He was pained by the widespread ignorance of religion and its various consequences: inhibitions and frustrations of a personal and social kind

He was deeply concerned at the defective pedagogy of his day, mainly because of unfortunate practices that inflicted all sorts of harmful failures on children and the young.

He heard the cry of marginalised rural people. Seeing their needs he dedicated himself heart and soul to remedying their situation.

He was able to marshal a response to these needs that was many times greater than he could manage on his own: his voice was heard by those who were to become his disciples, his companions in the Society of Mary, and in society generally. A great spiritual artist, he quickly knew how to touch the heart and discern the whisper of God's call in his search for the right helpers in his passionate adventure.

Finally, he took pains to train his disciples very well – and such disciples! If we think of the first objective he had in mind, the results could not have been better. His disciples were simple peasants almost illiterate, but in fact, in just a few short years, practically without any resources, he made them natural teachers, educators who were highly regarded in the villages. (*Lumière et flammes d'une vie: Brother Basilio Rueda*, p. 233)

### **2: Marcellin's pedagogy**

Marcellin introduced a new pedagogy, more remarkable by its friendliness than by the new elements he brought in, although these did not want either.

His pedagogy brought about the harmony of heart and soul. He invited all to live in the presence of God, in friendship with Jesus, in filial relationship with Mary. Marcellin was so sincere that these unseen realities found their proper place in the lives of the children quite naturally. Rather than at stressing the idea of sin, his pedagogy aimed at making people love goodness and moral values underlying it.

His approach had a social dimension: he was concerned to train good citizens and co-workers dedicated to their social mission. There was no room for laziness and selfishness in Marist pedagogy.

The ways to obtain those results were simple but effective: continual presence, authentic love of children, attention, patience and trust, preparation, good example, and warm hospitality, especially towards those who were in pain or struggling.

Marcellin was a man who had had to nurture and spread a great sense of Church and he knew how to do this, a task difficult enough for us to day, inclined as we are to lean this way or that; dialectic moves us to the left or to the right, and we become in danger of losing our balance. (*Lumière et flammes d'une vie: Frère Basilio Rueda*, p. 233-234)

### **3: A powerful call to action**

Marcellin still calls us to action in the present world where the cries for help are so numerous: the cry of hunger, violence, injustice, drug abuse, and unemployment... In the present world, where many enjoy a surfeit of material goods but are frustrated by their powerlessness in the face of the paternalism of certain governments that destroy the sense of initiative, *this man, Marcellin challenges us with a powerful call to action.*

At the dawn of the space age, when traditional forms of society are in crisis, or worse still, on the point of collapse, where the infiltration of information and attitudes out of proportion to the real situation is flagrant and harmful, an even greater danger looms. This is the danger of a society that says to God, “We have no need of you to make us live in goodness, to be master of our history.” Together, we must be new Champagnats, and mobilise ourselves with courage to face the situation.

To be faithful to Marcellin, is to be faithful to the deep conviction that the alarming situations of the current world compel us to make a prompt and courageous response. (*Lumière et flammes d'une vie*, Fr. Basilio Rueda, p. 234-235)

#### **4: Marcellin, the master of formation**

One of the best ways to describe Blessed Champagnat was his skill and his style as a master of religious formation. His passion, his vehement desire, was to gather spiritual sons capable of continuing his work properly and seeing it through to the end. Reading his life or the biographies of the first Brothers, one wonders what is most admirable: the warmth and fullness of the human values he instilled in them or the intense spiritual life, the docility to the divine will, the hunger for intimacy with God and the generosity of the responses he inspired in them.

He had the indomitable will to carry through what seemed to be God's work, with a very clear vision, the kind of man and religious educator that this work demanded. By intuition, he came upon the right methods, the procedures and the structure that suited this first novitiate, and the manner of teaching that nurtured the spirituality that was emerging. In short, he developed the talent to train, select and preserve vocations.

In the formation of his brothers, he had no pedagogical means other than difficulty and contradiction, poverty and work, lack of comfort and a few reprimands. But everything took place in an

atmosphere of joy, simple acceptance and family spirit and also, of course, with the immense richness of total confidence in God, an intense devotion to Mary, and the example of a Father who by his manner of life encouraged and made tangible and real Marist and religious life at the service of the Church in the way he had envisioned. (*Cir. The Calls of the Church and the Founder*, pp. 483-484)

### **5: Marcellin, the master of formation (Concluded)**

I think that the era that followed the French revolution, the time during which our Founder lived, with all the worries, the ferments of revolt, and the changes and innovations brought about by the revolution and the liberalism in power, together with the naturalism of Rousseau whose theories, stretched as far as they could go, inspired the political notions of an earlier time, and with bitter results. I do not think that those times were more favourable than ours for the call of the Gospel to follow Christ, poor, obedient and chaste, or more likely to encourage commitment to the service of the urgent needs of the moment...

The Council invited us to turn our attention towards our Founder and renew ourselves in his spirit. To do that there is an urgent necessity first of all to try to rediscover the way he formed religious so well, to find his secret if you will. He knew how to reconcile the discipline that forges character with the freedom that ripens in responsibility. He knew how to join patient understanding and encouragement with a graduated firmness, how to accept the limits of each one, but above all, he had the art of sowing hope in people, imparting enthusiasm, helping them to rise above times of difficulty, temptation and discouragement, making his Brothers honestly and loyally accept the challenges of their chosen path, trusting in the support of the grace and the help of God always at hand. "There are difficulties in living the life of a good religious, but grace makes all things easy." All this work, this skill of God's artisan, was bathed in the light of grace with a constant reference to values of faith, to the gift from

above and to a deep eschatological sense. (Circular, *The Calls of the Church and the Founder*, pp. 485-486.)

## 3-Basilio and the Church

### 3.1 “Sentire cum Ecclesia” and the Mystery of the Church

*Sentire cum Ecclesia* – this sums up Basilio’s heartfelt attitude to the Church. This *sentire cum Ecclesia* expresses his feeling of belonging, belonging as a son, having responsibilities too, but above all, being at home in the mystery of the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the people of God, and deeply respecting the Church as God’s creation. In fact, it is only by living in the Church that we can live a profound and dynamic union with the Lord. Speaking about the Church, he talks as both a son and a theologian. As a son, he expresses his affection and his admiration in the warmest of words; as a theologian, he loves to explore the mystery of the Church in order to present it clearly. He wrote, “We must remember that the Church is a pure transparency. By looking at it, men should be able to contemplate the Father.”<sup>44</sup> An affirmation like this, which we might be inclined to say rather of Christ, exposes him to the criticism of those who see the Church in a negative light, with its ugliness and sinfulness. But those who love Christ passionately and are true children of the Church find the affirmation very appropriate. Without the Church we lack the transparency of Christ, and without Christ there is no revelation of the Father.

The Church is like Mary, the place of welcome, availability, love and mission. A few pages further, he added, “We live in difficult times: authority, mediation, all that is intermediary and imperfect is rejected. Well, the historical and real Church is hierarchical and it is an imperfect mediator, but it is irreplaceable. So there is an urgent need to train our Brothers, and through them future Christians, in such a way that they may live in both a dynamic and docile way under an ecclesial regime.”

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<sup>44</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968, *The Calls of the Church*, p. 363.

Always thinking about the mystery of the Church, he writes: “Every institution runs the risk of aging. Over the centuries, few human structures have managed to escape this law. But the same does not hold true for the Church. Insofar as it is made up of human beings, it is subject to sociological laws, but it continues to participate in the life of its leader, the man-Jesus, and in receiving the Spirit’s animation, to such an extent that we can say without falling into pantheism that the Church itself is the vessel of the divine presence, and that its life is that of the Holy Spirit. Conditioned yet transcendent, at the same time it organises itself to meet the changing needs of both time and place. As Cardinal Suhard has said, every age has left its mark on her structure and her face. She will remain faithful to Christ, her spouse, but not without being exposed to the risks and vicissitudes of all eras of history.”<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere, he likes to see the Church as the “chaste prostitute”, since it must constantly lead men from sin to Christ’s holiness.

### **3.2 His Experience with the Better World Movement: 1960-1965**

There is no doubt that the five-year experience Basilio had with the Movement for a Better World, 1960-1965, was one of the main reasons for his love of the Church which was both mystical and practical. That ministry brought him into close relationship with cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and committed lay people who had responsibilities at the national, diocesan and parish level or in Catholic Action. Basilio made these churchmen conscious of their political responsibilities to the nation in the realms of justice, peace and truth. The meetings took the form of a dialogue and exchange of information followed by an examination of conscience in regard to their responsibilities and the problems they faced. There were other occasions where he was the formation master, giving retreats and conferences to these people. As his work was extended to countries like Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, El

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<sup>45</sup> Op .cit., pp. 123-124.



Salvador and others, he soon acquired a universal vision of the Church and could truly appreciate its catholicity. We might say that he was preserved from that narrower field of the Church where most Marist Brothers have worked which is the world of the young often limited to the school... This field is precious and important for the people of God, as Basilio often acknowledged, but it runs the risk of having only a partial vision of the Church, something he is acutely aware of. The experience with The Better World Movement brought his intelligence and his heart face to face with the nature and mission of the Catholic Church, and gifted him with a heart and spirit attuned to the universal, which he never lost.

### **3.3 Superior General and Member of the Union of Superiors General**

Thanks to two other opportunities, Basilio was to deepen this sense of the universality of the Church. The first one was that as superior general he had to visit to many countries, where he met bishops and priests, communities and schools in various situations. It is true that he was engaged mainly with the Brothers but his experience and his knowledge kept him open to the Church and the world he was visiting.

The archives contain documents that indicate that before travelling to a new country, Basilio informed himself about it. He studied geographic, economic, political and religious aspects and learned how these affected the Marist communities inserted in them. We know that he made very many journeys, and that he loved to meet people, especially Church people, and in Latin America he also met people from political circles as well. Sometimes, the Vatican would trust him with a special mission as representative of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America among the Major Superiors.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Circulars, Vol XXV, 1968-1974, Letter of Br Quentin Duffy, pp. 8-12, 1969.

His other opportunity to live the universality of the Church was his active participation in the Union of Major Superiors. That was a privileged observation post from which could be seen how religious life was developing among various congregations in different parts of the world. Religious life is always linked to the life of the Church. We have the testimony of the members of this Union that Basilio's advice was often the one adopted by them because through his particular experience he had acquired such a deep and true ecclesial sense.

Father Camille Maccise, Superior General of the Carmelite Fathers, said: "For many years, Brother Basilio served his community with fidelity and loved the Church with a relentless dedication, and the Union of Major Superiors with affection and attention. His availability is something engraved on the hearts of all who knew him."<sup>47</sup> Another superior general, Brother Teodoro Barzal, said of him, "His open mind and his easy approach were great supports for all those who wanted a true renewal of consecrated life according to the Church orientations and the actual circumstances of the world."<sup>48</sup> Another superior was of the same opinion: "Quite often, his points of view became the accepted position and reappeared not only in other meetings but also in the documents of several Institutes as sure references. We can assert without fear that Brother Basilio, by his writings and by his active and unique presence among us has been one of the most sought after guides during the renewal years not only in his own Institute but also in the totality of religious congregations."<sup>49</sup>

Father Manuel Portillo is certainly a most important witness because he did much work with Basilio. Of the concern that Basilio had for the Church, he wrote: "Basilio was the pioneer of the Project of Community Life in Spain and in Latin America. He conceived it for his Brothers and also for other religious. He gave lectures on this theme to religious groups gathered for study weeks, to chapter assemblies, and to communities. This was a

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<sup>47</sup> *El Estilo se una vida*, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *FMS Message*, May 1996, p.37, Pier Giordano Cabra FN.

service to the Church. Brother Basilio did not limit his concern to the Marist community; he was available to the furthest frontiers to serve everyone. Like Champagnat, he gave sure guidance to the Brothers on the three dimensions of the Church: the parish, the diocese and the universal Church.”<sup>50</sup>

Here is the testimony of Brother Jesús Bayo Mayor: “Brother Basilio’s vast ecclesial sense, and his love for the Church and its representatives were outstanding. His friendship with Fathers Arrupe and Rotondi impressed me. These last two died during our last course in 1990-1991. Basilio visited them many times and we attended their funerals. When the Pope received us at Castelgandolfo, Brother Basilio reminded us of the ecclesial character of this visit to Peter’s successor. When we attended Mass at Saint Mary Major, he remarked that we were going as Marists but he wished to add that the whole Church had been marial since its origins.”<sup>51</sup>

He was often asked to give lectures or to direct retreats to the most varied organisations. He was often invited by the Sisters. That allowed him more occasions to be in communion with the Church and to do it favours. During the synod on the family, he had the opportunity to meet Mother Teresa. This meeting prompted him to send a letter to our whole congregation, “I have just had the occasion to meet Mother Teresa and to exchange many ideas with her. I felt very challenged by this woman whose life is totally dedicated to the Gospel. So, I would like to establish a permanent contact between our Congregation and the work that she is doing, for if any human group is dedicated to the least favoured, I think it is hers. I therefore was so bold as to hand her our address book in case she might need any assistance in getting accommodation or information, or in putting her in touch with anyone, or indeed if she needed any help at all.”<sup>52</sup> Our archives record that many congregations,

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<sup>50</sup> *El estilo de una vida*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>51</sup> Testimony given 7 October, Rome during a journey to Rome.

<sup>52</sup> Letter of 11 November 1980.

especially the contemplative ones, received substantial contributions through Brother Basilio.

### 3.4 Auditor<sup>53</sup> and Consultant<sup>54</sup>

The Church recognised Basilio's ecclesial experience when it invited him to the Synod of Bishops on the family in 1980 at which he was asked to talk to the assembly. During the same synod, the pope invited him to attend a working lunch with other auditors. The Synod was an opportunity for him to consider the congregation's place in the apostolate of family life, particularly in the way it might help couples to prepare for marriage. He invited the Brothers to enter this field of work and urged that some be trained for this apostolate.

Another gesture of recognition was Basilio's appointment as consultant to the Congregation of Institutes for Consecrated and Apostolic Life. When Brother Basilio died, Cardinal Martínez Somalo sent a telegram of condolence in which he said, "We thank the Lord for having given you a Brother who was a faithful administrator of God's treasures. Brother Basilio was a true disciple of Christ in his Church."<sup>55</sup> A few days later, another testimony came from Father Cipriano Calderón, of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America: "I lived with Basilio when we used to work together with Father Ricardi. I admired his immense work for the Church as superior general of the Institute. In both ministries his work accomplished immense evangelical results for the benefit of Latin America. For all that, and as Vice President of the Pontifical Commission, I thank God for the gift he gave to the Church in this Brother."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The text recorded at the end of this chapter explains this role.

<sup>54</sup> A consultant is a specialist in the subject who works on the preparation of the documents, whether to prepare the Synod or on behalf of the Congregation for Religious.

<sup>55</sup> *En Estilo de una Vida*, p. 105.

<sup>56</sup> Letters of Condolence.

### 3.5 The Years after Vatican II

There is a second aspect of Basilio's wide ecclesial experience: the period during which Basilio worked outside our Congregation corresponded to the time of the Second Vatican Council. He had to assimilate the extensive documentation of the Council, since one of his duties was to in sensitise the Church in Ecuador so that the teaching of the Council might find its way into the hearts and lives of Churchmen there. Brother Raul Coral Burbano had known Basilio, and for a period of eight months worked with him in the Movement for a Better World. In an interview at the time of Basilio's nomination as superior general, he was asked, "What role did Brother Basilio have in pastoral work for various American republics?" The reply was: "The most fortunate nation was certainly Ecuador, since he worked there for many years. Thanks to Basilio's labour, as I saw for myself, the former pastoral approaches in this country left behind the old ways, left the sacristy so to say, to engage in a new pastoral dynamic. You could say that it took on the character of Easter and Pentecost. The bishops listened to Basilio as if he were an oracle, and loyally followed his advice in regard to the pastoral approaches. His presence triggered a true religious renewal in Ecuador. No wonder the CELAM Pastoral Commission invited him to go and perform the same marvels in Colombia."<sup>57</sup>

As for the documents of the Council, Basilio had the opportunity to refine his study of them and present them again to the four groups of second novices who passed through Escorial from 1965 to 1967. His most explicit writing on the Council documents was the fourth part of his 2 January 1968 circular: *The Calls from the Church and from the Founder*. He wrote 130 pages to enlighten the Brothers on the Church and on the documents. Basilio had a great esteem for the Council. "What was the Council?" he would say, and then answer: "The Council was an extremely powerful action of the Holy Spirit just at the time when it was necessary for the greater part of the Church. The

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<sup>57</sup> *Norte Marista*, October-November 1967, p. 1192.

Spirit moved the Church, it shook it at all levels: the theologians and the little people, the prophets and the lay people, as well as the pastors. All that fermentation in the Church took shape in a pope who was inspired<sup>58</sup> Already he had said, “The Second Vatican Council, the true Council, not that of certain journalists, has been one of the most remarkable recent prophetic actions of God towards his people.”<sup>59</sup> Basilio believed that the Council, had made very important contributions in regard to doctrine, conversion and pastoral practice.

### 3.6 The Church before the Congregation

We already know how Basilio had set his priorities. Had it ever been absolutely necessary to choose between the Church and the Marist Congregation, he would have chosen the Church, founded, as it was by the Lord, animated by the Holy Spirit, a sacrament for the whole world. He understood all congregations as “fragments of the ecclesial mystery. These congregations have a meaning only because of their belonging to the Church and their service to the Church”<sup>60</sup>

Brother Jésus Bayo Mayor passed on this recollection from the course for Masters of Novices under Basilio in 1990-91: “I remember what Brother Basilio told us in one of his lectures, ‘I love Congregation above all others. But if one congregation had to be dissolved for the Church’s good, I would readily let it go. Although every congregation is important and adorns the Church like a spouse, ours is less necessary than many others.’ That assertion surprised me for its ecclesial sense and humility.”<sup>61</sup>

Basilio was conscious of the danger of religious families making their charisms, their communities and their fields of apostolate their own universe and forgetting the totality of the Mystical Body. Sometime, this “universe” is no more than a college whose prestige we want to preserve at all costs. “*Sentire cum Ecclesia*; this

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<sup>58</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación*, p. 1, February 1973.

<sup>59</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968, P. 125.

<sup>60</sup> Op Cit, pp. 368-369.

<sup>61</sup> Testimony of 7 October 2002.

is the central call of the Council. For any religious there is the danger of losing the sense of Church, of not loving the Church, of losing interest in the Church, and of believing that it is possible to relate to God and his Son exclusively through the congregation... The religious then runs the risk of imagining his congregation to be the real thing, sufficient in itself, and that makes him feel that the Church is somewhat superfluous. Well, it often happens that we don't like what is superfluous... That is why I have chosen as the main topic of this circular the wonderful loving discovery that the Council brought to light, the discovery of the grandeur and the humility, the importance and the limits of the Church.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.7 What the Church Thinks of the Religious<sup>63</sup>

Analysing the documents of the Council, Basilio arrives at interesting conclusions; for him the message of the Council to religious may be summed up as follows:

- a) *I believe in you.* Basilio wonders if there was ever a council in history that expressed this with the same clarity, amplitude and ecclesiology that we find in Vatican II.
- b) *You are the vanguard of the Church's eschatology* - not the total eschatology, for the whole Church is eschatological, but religious receive a special call to present eschatology in a strong way. You are the eschatological spearhead of the Church.
- c) *Your existence stands in direct relationship with the Church's holiness.* Religious have a place in the Church because of the holiness of the Church. Religious life is one of the ways, and I would say a privileged way though not a unique way of reaching holiness, by responding above all to a holiness that comes as a gift, which in this case is a charism.
- d) *But a reform is indispensable* and you need a chapter to revise your lives and to renew yourselves.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *The Calls of the Church...* p. 378.

<sup>63</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovacion*, pp. 7-9, February 1973.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.8 Obedience to the Church, Respect for the Church

Having observed that after Vatican II there was in some places a certain lessening of respect for the papacy, Basilio wrote in strong terms to the Brothers: “Today in certain places a certain contempt regarding our submission to the Pope, and a lesser one regarding our relationships with our bishops, is spreading more and more. Sons of the Church and sons of Blessed Champagnat, what must we do? We must firmly believe and reaffirm our docility and our unshakable attachment to the Magisterium.<sup>65</sup> Basilio did not see any justification for Brothers siding against the Pope. He continued, “I advise the Brothers whose faith and ecclesial docility have little by little broken down, especially in regard to the ordinary and extraordinary magisterium of the Church, to open their eyes and seriously take action against this tendency. If they are not prepared to do so, I can loyally tell them that their place is outside the Institute...”<sup>66</sup>

Obedience to the Church was certainly one of Basilio’s outstanding qualities. This obedience was manifested when the time came to engage ourselves into the renewal requested by the Council. For Basilio this request was a real command that deserved the respect and the commitment we give to the commandments of God. He was determined make his Brothers fully aware of this obligation which he regarded as the will of God and the best way to prepare ourselves to work in a changing world. In 1972, he preached a number of retreats in Spain. His theme was “Llamamiento a la Renovación” (Call to Renewal). One of his lectures happened to be entitled, “The New Commandment of the Church”<sup>67</sup>. Some idea of the content of that conference may be gained from the headings:

- New Ways of Life
- Some Changes Are Necessary to Live according to the Spirit and in the Truth.

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<sup>65</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968.

<sup>66</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp. 529-530.

<sup>67</sup> We also have a document in French coming from Canada, in the Series, *Appel au dépassement...*



- The Voice of the Council: the Manifestation of God's Will
- The Council Invites Religious to Conversion.
- Who Must Engage Themselves in Renewal?
- How do we renew our Congregation?
- Do we still Need Structures?
- Renewal and Tradition

Some time before that, in the Circular of 2 January 1968, he had written to all the Brothers, and more especially to the Chapter delegates who were about to start the second session in September-October, "Our great task will be the assimilation and application of the ideas of Vatican II in our special milieu, our institutions and our projects. The Council must therefore become something concrete for us, something alive as we generously try to apply all its ideas to the particular nature of our Congregation and the charism it has received from God.<sup>68</sup>

A few lines above, he had written, "This chapter, (that of 1967-68) has very special powers to attain one single goal: To accomplish what the Council requires - and only that."

Basilio's obedience to the Church was so unconditional that he wrote in the name of the Congregation, "If tomorrow, the Magisterium, were to indicate another point of view, it could immediately rely on us, as an obedient Institute always ready to walk on the path it marks for us, no matter what sacrifices this change would bring. This docility was handed down to us as a precious inheritance from our Blessed Founder."<sup>69</sup> To ensure that our obedience to the Church would be in harmony with the spirit of the Council, Basilio invited the capitulants to take the Church as the central theme of this Renewal Chapter. "As this theme has been at the very heart of the Council and is the key to interpreting it, I thought it should also be central to our chapter. To be the Marist echo of the Council, our chapter should see that its centre of gravity, its main criterion, its dynamism and the

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<sup>68</sup> Circular, 2 January 1968.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

justification of its various decisions are grounded in the mystery of the Church ...”<sup>70</sup>

### 3.9 Obedience Means Renewal

An obedience that is expressed by our engaging in renewal needs a spiritual climate that can be created only by biblical prayer and the liturgy. “A systematic biblical culture is just one step leading to faith, love and prayer.”<sup>71</sup> Study by itself runs the risk of becoming no more than biblical erudition and of making us empty preachers of God’s word, unable to listen to its interior voice.”<sup>72</sup> Other pages indicate how important community, personal and liturgical prayer was for Basilio. In the context of obedience to the Church, he wrote, “The Eucharist, as both sacrifice and sacrament, is the climax of our communion. All other communions, inside the community, from the simple recreation time to the apostolic life that makes us witnessing communities of service and mission, are born and will grow according to our degree of communion around the Eucharistic banquet...It is not normal nor acceptable – except in cases where it is physically impossible - for a community to adopt a timetable where each Brother goes to the church of his choice... It is certain that this does not represent the Council’s spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

The *renewal* of our Institute will come from our attachment to the Church and the application of Vatican II in practical ways. Renewal moves hearts to become open to the Spirit, to structures, and to a new vision of administration and apostolate, and is carried out at the base by new structures like provincial chapters that can bring together all the brothers of a province, and later by the project for community life by which each community discerns the will of God in the circumstances of its life. Hand in hand with *aggiornamento* (updating) must go conversion if we wish to become men of God for the man of

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<sup>70</sup> Op cit, p378 and preceding pages.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Op cit, p. 377.

<sup>73</sup> *The Calls of the Church*, pp. 384-385.

today. In a broad sense, our renewal must make a telling contribution towards a new vision of religious life in general and in particular, a more emphatic turning towards the *poor, the missions and the world of today*, where our unique mission lies. These last three areas reflect the great lines of Basilio's programme as superior general. Everything - his travels, visits, and reports of community visitations, retreats, and circulars - was geared to the appropriation of the Council in the daily lives of the Brothers. The Council had urgently asked the Church to become more evangelical. Basilio put all his efforts into bringing the Institute into line with this evangelical Church.

## TEXTS

### **1 The Council's voice: manifestation of God's will**

The Second Vatican Council is simply an echo of the Spirit of Jesus in our time. The Council called on all institutions to examine themselves and to judge themselves according to the spirit of the Gospel. We have to pray to ask for the courage to start this work of renewal. However, we must be careful not to fall into pharisaism or to betray the Gospel.

All our lives, we have been seeking God's will. If there is any manifestation of God's will for humankind today, it is the Council. There is no clearer revelation of God's will for our times than the Council. We must recognise that Vatican II has been a Pentecostal manifestation of God's will today.

Therefore, if anyone among us is seeking God's will, he cannot, without attracting ridicule, search for it in narrow preoccupations of his own creation while neglecting the study of the Council documents and trying to conform his thoughts and behaviour to them. We have to remember that infidelity to the Council is equivalent to infidelity to the Lord and his Spirit.

We must also remember that throughout history there has always been the danger of the return of various pharisaical ways of living the Christian life, substituting our own inventions for the Lord's commandments. On the other hand, others became like the Sadducees and fall into a liberalism that makes us interpret things in a subjective way, or even consider our whims to be the will of God. The Council addressed itself to all categories of Christians. It spoke to bishops telling them how things must be in future; it spoke to priests in *Presbyterium Ordinis*, as well as to lay people, about how the proper conduct of their lives in this time; it called everybody to conversion. It also spoke to religious... (*Appel au Dépassement*, Retreats of 1970, *The Renewal*, p.2 Canada.)

## **2: The Council invited religious to conversion.**

The Council addressed itself to religious: “Religious belong to the essence of the Church. And that is why they are spoken of in *Lumen Gentium* immediately after the chapter that treats of the universal call to holiness.” The Council therefore situates religious in the Church. It gives them an identity card, consecrated ‘citizens’ by right! Never in the past did any Council speak about religious as Vatican II did.

Listen again to what the Council told us, “We believe in your religious state. You are a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. But, while recognising your value, you probably do not accomplish the realisation of what you should be. You have done much good; there is much goodness among you; but you are seriously wanting when it comes to being what the Church expects of you. You do not present yourselves to the world in the way in which you should be seen. We do not approve of the manner in which you realise your vocation at the present time. You must embrace conversion through a double movement: *one of authenticity* – you have to become yourselves, you must return to your sources, that is to say, to the Gospel and to your Founder. You must *update yourselves* for you look like old ladies who in the 20<sup>th</sup> century dress like those of the 17<sup>th</sup> century! You stand in need of conversion...

We therefore find ourselves with a clear mandate from the Church that expresses God’s will. Let us not risk being unfaithful to this will either by omission – we do nothing, we don’t budge – or by refusal. If that were our attitude we ought to leave the Institute because we have no right to retard the Spouse of Christ in its march towards the eschaton.

The Council invites us to conversion that must be translated into action. This action should harmonise the two movements of identification and updating. That must be accomplished with a spirit of love and in love. This new commandment of the Church is observed in the context of the new commandment of the

Lord. (Appel au Dépassement, Retreats of 1970, *The Renewal*, pp. 3-4, Canada.)

### **3: Mission and charism**

This new commandment has been given to those who are endowed with a mission and a charism. The mandate is the mission; the charism has to do with the qualities and the capacities necessary to accomplish the mission in an appropriate way. Those who participate in the mission and share in the charism must commit themselves to responding with all their might to the mandate of the Church.

Who are those people? We are now dealing with a very profound concept. They are *prophets*. Recall who the prophets were. They are the ones who carry the breath of the Spirit. Thanks to them, the religion of the Father and the Son, which is a religion of truth and life, a living faith, does not fall into empty formalism or ritualism.

Throughout history, in every age, there has been a danger of relativising the religion of the Father. This appears in two forms: either by creating idols, or by transforming a religion of the spirit into a material religion, for example, by trusting in trivial ceremonies to obtain justification – you can be saved by carrying out this or that rite, you can be purified by washing your hands.... Then came the prophets to remind God's people that such was not religion...

I would be pained and really worried if there were not among you a certain number of brothers who have received from the Holy Spirit the gift of prophecy to be active at the heart of your provinces. I don't mean people who predict the future. The prophets are those whose action helps religious life to become authentic, free of anything that is false, and adapted to our times. These men must set conversion in motion in a more radical way.

It seems to me that in the history of the Church there has never been such a proliferation of prophets as there is today. One of the most serious needs nowadays is to have the wisdom to discern who the authentic prophets are, and not to silence them, harass them and put them to death. To do that would be to silence the Holy Spirit. (Appel au Dépassement, Retreats of 1970, *The Renewal*, pp. 4-5, Canada.)

#### **4: A true prophet**

Here are some criteria that help you to distinguish between true and false prophets:

- a) *A real prophet is one who commits himself to his prophecy.* It can happen that certain people accidentally tell the truth without abiding by it. They are not real prophets.
- b) *A true prophet remains faithful to God's word.* There is a lot of dialogue these days. But, do not trust any dialogue that was not born from prayer and that is not preceded by prayer. Only through prayer can we enter into God's vision of things and say what God's will is.
- c) *Prophecy proves itself by its fruits.* "You know a tree by its fruits." Certain people are inclined to identify protest with prophecy. No, not all protests are prophetic, although protest can be so. Although not a Christian, Gandhi indicated three characteristics of positive protest:
  - *Prayer:* he does not believe in a protester who does not pray.
  - *Constructiveness:* if one only demolishes without building up, the protestation is not positive.
  - *Love for those against whom the protest is made.* Tell me if that is not Christian!
  - *A true prophet remains faithful to his vocation.*

In the Old Testament the true prophet criticised Israel, and suffered at the hands of Israel, but never deserted Israel. If this was the pattern of the prophet in the Old Testament, you will understand how its demands are even more acute and more clear in the New Testament... Those who are capable of going to the

bottom with their boat, these we may recognise as prophets... And take note of this, a prophet always suffers. A prophet has to pay the price of suffering. . (Appel au Dépassement, Retreats of 1970, *The Renewal*, pp. 7-8, Canada.

### **5: Tangible love**

Basilio had a palpable love of the Church. His respect for the Church' authority was a byword. The example of his love of the Church and of the Pope was a reminder of that of Father Champagnat and the first brothers. This is not to say that he lived a kind of blind obedience: he was quite aware of how he stood in this regard. For example, when some people remarked that he did not insist on the brothers wearing the cassock, Basilio replied that the Pope himself, faced with the same circumstances, did not insist on this. Besides, on points like this one, he knew how to differentiate between the Holy Father and certain Vatican offices that were more conservative than the Pope himself! This is also how he responded to brothers within the Institute who asked him to insist on the wearing of the habit. He showed a depth of pastoral sensitivity: he knew such an insistence would meet considerable resistance, and besides, it was a secondary matter in comparison with others.

He showed a tangible love for the Church by finding in the Marist world a good number of talented Brothers for the service of Vatican Congregations: among these we might mention Valentin, Renato Schmadecker, Honorio Giraldo, Nemesio...

Basilio's love of the Church was recognised when he was invited by the Holy See to take part in the Synod on Education. He made a number of valuable interventions on this subject. His love, too, was obvious on account of the substantial financial contributions to the Pope in various circumstances. (Bro. Claudio Girardi, *Testimony*, 18-12-2002)



## **6: Auditor**

SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM

E Civitate Vaticana, die 9 agosto 1980

Prot. N. 1259/80

Very Reverend Brother Superior General

I have the honour to inform you that the Holy Father named you as

‘*AUDITOR*’

for the next general assembly of the bishops that will begin in Rome on 26 September, and will last one month.

This nomination gives you the right to attend all the Synod meetings (plenary and minor committees) and gives you the possibility of addressing the assembly whenever the President of the Assembly or the Moderator of a committee requests you to do so.

I have the pleasure to send you the *Instrumentum Laboris*, a document reserved to Members and Experts of the Synod.

Would you send your photo as soon as possible to the General Secretary for your I.D. card.

I take this opportunity to assure you of my sincere esteem.

Jozef Tomko, Secr. Gen.

## **7: Brother's Basilio's intervention during the Synod on family, 1980**

Your Holiness, Your Eminences and Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Auditors of this Synod:

In these simple words, I would like to thank you for your invitation to attend this Synod as an auditor and I would like to tell you what this Assembly means to me. Although I do not have the authority or the mandate to do so, and speaking only from my own appreciation of things, I would like to represent all the religious men and women who have consecrated their lives to the task of Christian education, and to be their voice at this moment in this assembly.

After having heard so many remarkable interventions from the floor, I have come to know very deeply your great activity, your intuition and your passion for the education of the children, for youth and for marginalised youngsters. For all of these, Don Bosco, de La Salle, Calasanz, Champagnat and so many other founders and foundresses have 'burned' their lives.

This intuition appears more important today than ever because of the pastoral challenges, the urgent needs and the painful situations that the Father's interventions have stressed.

To be clear, I would like to share my thoughts in three points:

- a) The need to call to life, revive and renew;
- b) The need for coordination
- c) The need for special action

### **1° The Need for a Renewal**

I would like to be realistic. We have seen presented here the whole panorama, the most beautiful ideal of the family. There have been calls for parents to initiate their children in life of faith, generosity in fecundity, responsibility for education of children in purity and noble love- in short, a whole panorama of holiness in the family and conjugal life.

However, other interventions have at the same time presented the raw reality of millions of families, families without faith, without any ideal, without wholeness. In the face of the abyss between the real and the ideal, two signs of hope were presented:

- i) The minority of excellent families, which is well represented here.
- ii) What was called the *ductus pedagogicus*, a very important concept, but one easier name than to describe or realise.

I would like to propose Christian educators, and the initiatives and institutions that their love has brought to life and will bring to life in the Church, as one of the elements and agents of this *ductus pedagogicus*.

We have seen that, because of the great modifications that urbanisation and technology, culture and the media have brought, it is difficult for the family alone - even the best intentioned – to educate its children in an adequate and Christian way.

In this context, considering that in many countries youth represents 30, 40% and more of the population, I believe it is not exaggerated or one-sided to insist that the Church, the family and society have need of those we call apostles of education, apostles of the young.

A word from the Church would be very useful in promoting such vocations, and comforting those already involved in this way. We would also like the Church to stress again the importance of the educational institutions that strive to be pastoral centres of Christian education and culture, centres for the integration of faith and life, centres for loving education close to the young, close to children.

But that is not enough. The current conditions of an industrialised and specialised society, the competitive spirit, the invasion of secularism, academic and bureaucratic demands and the conditions demanded by unions have greatly complicated the situation where many educators work. So it is not enough to re-affirm the importance of this vocation and these educational institutions; in addition, we need an energetic renewal of the educators, of education and of the Catholic school itself.

It is absolutely necessary to encourage a return to the love, the virtues, the tact and the passion that characterised the founders. They must be invited to make a serious revision of their scale of values and to prioritise their activities according to their pastoral and educational effectiveness. It is also necessary to call them to an effort that by preference includes the most humble and above all those who receive no attention for economic, intellectual psychological and other reasons.

Finally, it is necessary to summon the Catholic school to renewal that it may find again its appropriate self-presentation, and renew its pastoral and pedagogical action.

## **2° There Is a Need for Co-ordination**

Inexorably, modern life and urbanisation lead to specialisation and to separation, and the same may be said of pedagogical and pastoral systems. The Church plays its part in its own way, the family has its part and its way, but the Catholic school often proceeds independently of these two. Now, more than ever, the Church, the family and the school should co-ordinate their efforts in the task of education.

As an example, I may cite the case of Mexico where, in the 1930s, the state imposed an education system that was unacceptable to the Church. The opposition of pastors, families and Christian educators was clear and effective. But this negative attitude was complemented by a positive reaction: many Christian educators organised an underground Christian education; the Church supported those people and helped them to coordinate the work. The parents offered the use of their homes knowing the risk they were running. The children accepted this underground education without complaining that their lessons did not give them any academic credits. Persecution and all types of constraints were lived with joy and generosity in these silent schools. You have two witnesses of this situation here: Mgr Rafael Garcia and your servant. This situation lasted

for some years; finally the state gave in and recognised these *de facto* Christian schools. The outcome was extremely fruitful.

This is why I rejoiced to read your invitation to parents to be actively present in all the areas, good or not so good, where their children are educated.

A word from the Church would be very welcomed in the document on the family that is being prepared. That word would invite parents to commit themselves to participation in our Christian educative communities. This co-operation is the absolutely necessary for the Catholic school.

### **3° A Special Action Is Needed**

I am quite convinced that Christian educators and Catholic educational institutions in general – and here I refer to those that are engaged in systematic education - have not been working in an adequate and satisfactory way in regard to a formation that nurtures love, fecundity and family life in harmony with the plan of God, with what has been proclaimed in this Synod and with what the present times and world require.

We have been too occupied by other priorities and other needs. We have not sensitised or prepared our educators in this domain. Our approach has been too “scientific” (if I may use that word) to permit us to respond to the expectations, the beauty and all that is required of us by the plan of God in regard to this aspect of education.

I would like to state here and now that I am determined as far as possible to bring all this to the attention of my Congregation, my Brothers, the institutions and the other educators with whom I am often in contact... so that they may make a specific response to the challenge of a real education in family life with a view to helping particularly those who come from incomplete or wounded families, those who lack love and other essential qualities, and for the poor and those of humble rank who have need of the physical and intellectual service that will tangibly

reveal the face of God our Father and the tender love of the Church, mother and educator.

In this way, we will assume our role in the *ductus pedagogicus* that has been of such concern to the Synod.

Br. Basilio Rueda Guzman, f.m.s.  
Superior General

## **8 : A Letter of apology**

Rome, 16 July 1981

S.E.R. Mons. Eduardo Martinez Somalo  
Substitute Secretary of State  
Vatican City.

Your Excellency

I had just returned to Rome after journeys in a number of countries, when I saw the letter from the Secretariat of State bearing your signature.

You may imagine my disappointment and my pain when I read the letters sent by a member of our Congregation to the Holy Father. Had there been even a minimal reason for those letters, I would have to say that their tone was absolutely unacceptable.

One thing is clear, those letters do not at all reflect the spirit that animates our Congregation, and it is my view that in reality the Brother is expressing his own opinion or perhaps that of a few others, and that he is guilty of an intolerable abuse by pretending that he is speaking in the name of many Brothers.

To tell you the truth, I know this Brother only in a superficial way and I am unable to form an opinion about the reasons that

have led him behave in such a way. If it continues, I would be very obliged if you would let me know.

I am sure, your Excellency, that you well understand that in the current times, when the spirit of criticism is often badly understood, and when such a pluralism of theological and pastoral ideas is widespread throughout the world, it is practically impossible for a congregation to protect all its members from external influences. And I am sure that it will be understood that the way to govern, to forbid and eventually to sanction is no longer as easy as it was in the past.

But, rest assured, Excellency, that I would do all that is possible in this case.

We beg the Holy See and specially the Holy Father to kindly accept our apologies. We reiterate with joy and pride, our faithful and filial attachment to His Holiness, and we assure him of the prayers of the whole Institute for his prompt and total recovery.

Respectfully,

Fr. Basilio Rueda, fms.  
Superior General

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