

## *Cahier 4*

### **Charity and Wisdom**

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#### **Basilio and Charity**

The reality of love in Brother Basilio's life, the love that Christians call 'charity', is certainly the richest feature of his life. His charity manifested itself in concrete actions, in his attentiveness to God and his neighbour, and in the depth of the convictions that permeated his intelligence and his heart.

#### **1.1 A loving person**

Those looking for testimonies to Basilio's charity will find that there are plenty to choose from. Brother Seán Sammon, our current Superior General, spoke in this way at Brother Basilio's funeral: "One of the great gifts he gave to each one of us and to the Institute was this: he was our Brother. He loved us all as his Brothers and loved all those he met as brothers and sisters. His way of being a Brother with us and for us was a blessing for each of us, for the Institute and for the Church..."<sup>1</sup>

Brother Charles Howard, who succeeded Brother Basilio, in an eloquent description of Basilio, highlighted the love that lived in him, and reflected on Brother Basilio, an apostle in our Marist world,  
 a herald of the Good News,  
 a man obsessed by care for his Brothers, always giving special attention to those in the greatest difficulties,  
 a man able to plumb the depths of the heart, giving priority to persons before institutions,

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<sup>1</sup> *FMS-Message*, n° 19, May 1996, pp. 13-14.  
 (The quoted pages are those on the French document.)

one whose dedication at our service by his work and prayer was total.<sup>2</sup>

We find a similar emphasis in the litany of ‘thank yous’ prepared by Brother Edouard Blondeel. We select the most meaningful of these. Notice how many times there is an allusion to love:

- Thank you, Basilio, for being a Father Champagnat for us for eighteen years: you loved us and you inspired us, just as he did for his first Brothers.
- Thank you, Basilio, for your long journeys, sometimes urgent, sometimes perilous, but always full of love.
- Thank you, Basilio, for the time spent for the least among us, for the youngest or for the oldest, by letter, by phone, by a visit, by an unexpected message or by a strikingly fraternal gesture.
- Thank you, Basilio, for the joy you never failed to spread, for your jovial laugh, your helpful teasing, and your endearing language.
- Thank you, Basilio, for the mystery of love and unity, which you brought, for being the prophet and the creator wherever you were.
- Thank you, Basilio, for being a Brother to all without exception, for striving to initiate us into this universal charity; for your respect and discretion in every encounter.
- Thank you, Basilio, for being our big Brother, and for continuing to be so by interceding for us.<sup>3</sup>

It is easy to imagine the mischievous smile of Brother Borromée Caron who wrote from Canada, on 19 November 2002: “It amuses me to recall the times when we used to be taught to ‘compose’ our faces... well, to wear a mask! I have known the masquerade of those so-called holy religious, men without warmth, cold as the Canadian winter! Brother Basilio was summer: kindness, love and simplicity. He gave his all for everybody.”<sup>4</sup> Brother Borromée attached a note in which Basilio teased him by calling him, “un perro sin dueño” (a dog without a master). Under the note, Basilio had traced his best superior general’s signature! Out of friendship, Brother Caron kept this piece of paper up to 19 November

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<sup>2</sup> *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> *FMS MESSAGE*, n° 19, pp. 55-56, Fr. Edouard Blondeel.

<sup>4</sup> See the whole document in suggested texts.

2002, like a relic, and jotted in a corner: “Our Superior General will have his joke with Boroméé”.<sup>5</sup>

Brother Arthur Duguay sent me a copy of a letter Basilio had written to his mother on 13 May 1976. The lady had just lost one of her daughters. Basilio shared her pain in three ways: he wrote a letter full of affection and handed it to Brother Duguay who was then working in Rome as sub-Master of the second novices; then, he sent the grieving Brother to attend the funeral and to stay for a while with his mother. And then, while in Canada in 1977, he went to visit this mother who was at that time suffering from cancer. I have the photo of Brother Basilio with Mrs. Duguay.

These are posthumous testimonies, but the descriptions we have of Basilio when he was first elected in 1967 abundantly reveal how much he was already esteemed for his capacity to love and to care while at the same time remaining so simple.

The text of an address of appreciation from the Brothers of the province of Bética in 1972 says much of the way the Brothers felt about him. It is taken from the review, *Bética Marista* of October 1972, after the retreats that Basilio had recently given to the Brothers of that province at Avila:

“To Brother Basilio Rueda, Superior General of the Institute, the Bética Province dedicates this first issue to his conferences at the Avila retreat.

- For his generous welcome from the very beginning
- For his life that burns minute after minute for a renewed Institute
- For his prophetic example in his conferences and the Eucharistic celebrations
- For his far-sighted vision of the future of the Congregation
- For his call to institutional and personal conversion
- For his pertinent remarks in the Message
- For his dedication at the service of his Brothers
- For his proclamation of the truth
- For washing the dishes, carrying suitcases and wearing the Mexican sombrero
- For his gentle pats on our shoulders to find numerous “chic complexions” and others “with the face of a rascal”
- For helping to awaken the dawn

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<sup>5</sup> See whole document written in proposed texts.

- And for promising us to come and enjoy the Andalusian sun when he gets a little free time ...FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS, THANK YOU!”<sup>6</sup>

This text, so full of affection and familiarity, shows that Basilio knew well how to win hearts, and reveals how the Brothers felt loved, accepted and respected. “He quickly won the hearts of those he met. When he first arrived in a community he did not forget to greet the maintenance people, show an interest in their families and congratulate them on their dedication.”<sup>7</sup>

When Basilio went to visit the Editorial Luis Vives at Saragossa, he had an affectionate and attentive word for each employee. On the following day, while exchanging my impressions with the same employees, they exclaimed, “What a heavenly gift you Marist Brothers have received in the person of your superior general, a person so simple and warm. He treated us as if we were members of his own family!”<sup>8</sup> The Madrid province review notes the friendly letters that he used to write to a great circle of close friends, more than a hundred of them: “He never missed out on the letters he would write to his circle of friends just before Christmas; they were full of the warmest affection. They carried the breath of his friendship and fatherly care, together with an appropriate spiritual note, his heart overflowing with love for the Brothers and for all those whom God put in his path.”<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 Seduced by God’s love.

On many occasions, Basilio spoke of the cost of grace, of the discipline necessary, of the need to purify our natural instincts in order to open ourselves to God, but he always recognised the primacy of God’s loving initiative: “Brothers, what gives us peace fundamentally is not that we are good, but rather the fact that God is good. It is not the fact that we love, but the certainty that we are loved by an efficacious and infallible love... God loves us, He does nothing else but love us, and He cannot help loving us.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Bética Marista*, p. 1, October 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Brother Conrado Trascasa, testimony: 24 November 2002.

<sup>8</sup> *Madrid Marista*, número spécial, December 1985, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Madrid Marista*, December 1973, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación, amor de Paz*, p. 7-8, December 1972.

Basilio said that he knew that he was loved, chosen, set apart by the Spirit, and that he had received the grace of the Lord's revelation. He insisted that one cannot turn away when God's love breaks into the heart, no more than when the Spirit seizes a prophet by the hair and whisks him away to the rivers of Babylon ... or to Rome!<sup>11</sup> He often said that God was love, only love, that this was God's only occupation, that Jesus was the kiss of God's love<sup>12</sup> for the salvation of humankind, and that the Spirit was the fire within that nurtures love. It is always God himself who changes our hearts and gives the final and decisive thrust.

It is enough to read again earlier pages dealing with the intimacy that existed between Basilio and God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, and also to go to those pages that come later in this Chapter where Basilio describes love. There are two other exceptional texts in his circular on Obedience where everything becomes love: poverty, chastity, prudence – he refers to everything in terms of the law of love<sup>13</sup> ... and the last message he sent to his intimate friends, a month before his death, where he says that he is placing himself in the Father's sure and loving hands.<sup>14</sup>

Being loved carries with it the invitation to love, and in a way this is what underlies the first commandment; God asks us to love him because he is exclusively love for us. Basilio felt in himself this need to respond to God's love. "Brothers, it is of the essence of love, and given that Christian life is a life of love, that nobody can be at peace if he does not return God's love as well as he can."<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3 Love as I have loved you.

Basilio spoke about this command, but first he lived it with a universal love that excluded nobody. He had a very clear understanding of this dimension of love: "If you exclude just one person from your heart, your love is dead. You are left with natural acquaintance, human feelings, but not Jesus' love. Christ's love is the Holy Spirit at work in you, who causes you to love heart and soul. And since the

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<sup>11</sup> Circ. *Obéissance* pp. 31-32.

<sup>12</sup> See the pages on Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> Circ. *Obedience*, p. 24-25 and 30.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in the first pages.

<sup>15</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación, Amor de Paz*, p. 8, December 1972.

Holy Spirit loves everyone, and this Spirit is at work in you, you cannot exclude anyone.”<sup>16</sup>

So Basilio was careful to see that nobody was deprived of his love. That is why he liked to sit up with the sick even late at night, why he would make long detours to meet and encourage a Brother, why in an airport in Nigeria he spontaneously set about laundering the habit of a sister who had just arrived there travelling by muddy roads, why he was a past master in washing up. His jokes and humorous sallies came from a heart that loved and wanted to give joy. Brother Carlos Martínez, Provincial of Central Mexico at the time of Basilio’s death, left us this testimony: “Brother Basilio burnt out his life for Jesus Christ. He did so in the manner of Mary, the faithful Virgin. He loved us all deeply - the shoe polisher, the young Brother, the father of a family, the colleague - but he loved above all and without limit the Church, the world, the Congregation and what he called Holy Will of God.”<sup>17</sup>

Basilio revealed a part of his ideal when he wrote: “The very source of community life is true love and the capacity to engender friendship, to be able to create friends all along the path of one’s life.”<sup>18</sup> We know that he had a variety of friends all over the world: children, parents, taxi drivers, shoe shiners, nuncios, bishops, cardinals, many religious, men and women and of course countless Marist Brothers.

The numberless letters he wrote and his obsession to reply to all letters he received are also great signs of his charity. His letters spoke of his affection, and when he met any friends he warmly hugged them, especially those who needed encouragement. Basilio asked the Brothers to let their eyes make their feelings known: “Things are for the use of all. Words and human relationships are in a constant state of change. Charity should govern their function in the community. My greetings, words and gestures should betoken my love for my Brothers, my joy in living with them. My eyes should show my real sympathy for every member of the community. Let me show that the Brothers constitute my love, my family, and that I want to be all in all for them.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Bética Marista*, n° 52, October 1972, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *México Marista*, n° 10, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Circ. The community life*, p. 176.

<sup>19</sup> *Circ. The community life*, p. 219-221.

Basilio indicated a criterion to determine whether our love is authentic or not: it is when the human person is your purpose, your absolute. He saw everything as being at the service of the person: community, prayer, even love, these were not ends in themselves, simply means: the end always remained the person: “A community should never forget the sovereignty of each of its members. The human person is absolute and if certain duties are required of the person it is only in view of a superior absolute, God, to whom the person has dedicated himself. We therefore make no demands in terms of an infraction, but in terms of coherence with the choice that he has freely made.”<sup>20</sup>

We could enumerate so many facts, testimonies and writings that give witness to the concrete, active, and creative love that Basilio showed in his life, as well as the great number of people he advised, comforted, reoriented, welcomed and listened to, giving them all the time they wished or simply financial help. (The section on poverty will show how much the love of Basilio can be seen by way of financial help.)<sup>21</sup>

#### **1.4 Without love there is no religious life**

Basilio was admired particularly because of his love, and he wanted all the Brothers to share his convictions and live accordingly. Thus, during the retreats he gave from 1972, his central theme was religious life as life of love. To the Spanish Brothers, he said: “Religious life is nothing else but a Christian life taken seriously with a love, an intensity, a total and irreversible commitment, to the point where Jesus’ Gospel becomes the complete and absolute model of one’s life... The remaining definitions are trivial! The substance of religious life, its marrow, is found in the Gospel.”<sup>22</sup> In the same breath, he asked: “So then, what is Christian life? To love. To love with our whole hearts, all our strength, with all our souls, to love God above all and to love neighbour, the world and the whole world. Love must be cosmic.”<sup>23</sup>

He says of the priest that it is not the liturgical vestments he wears; his true measure is love. Otherwise, we are back to the phylacteries! “Without a life of

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<sup>20</sup> Circ. *The community life*, p. 250-253.

<sup>21</sup> Suggestion: Re-read the books, *Basilio, another Champagnat* and *I want to awaken the dawn*.

<sup>22</sup> *Bética Marista*, October 1972, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, p. 7.

love there is no Christian life, there is no religious life and there can be no true renewal. Renewal of Christian life consists in restoring the commandment of love, with more power, truth, intensity and quality.”<sup>24</sup> One conference he gave to the Brothers was entitled, *The New Commandment of Love*.<sup>25</sup> In this conference, he said that religious life had its origin and its end, its soul and its witness, as well as its fruit, in love. He added that the renewal required by the Council could only be accomplished in the context of love and unity: “If that is what religious life is all about, to renew it we must seriously start to live love in a new way.”<sup>26</sup> (The texts that clarify this assertion are to be found at the end of this reflection.)<sup>27</sup>

In any case, the message is clear: to decide to become a religious is to decide to love. Basilio becomes more explicit when he tells the Brothers what love is.

## 1.5 What type of love is meant?

### 1.5.1 God’s love

God’s love is gratuitous, eternal, faithful, efficacious, flexible, patient, concrete and historical.<sup>28</sup> We looked at this earlier when we considered Basilio’s relationship with God.

### 1.5.2 Our love for others.

In the retreat already mentioned, Basilio presents love, as he understands and lives it, in three parts. This may look theoretical. But he speaks with the conviction of someone who lives what he says. One’s manner of speech reveals the person; in certain fields a person can assert only what he really lives.

#### *a. Love is Jesus’ great message:*

“Jesus taught us religious love. A Christian is one who succeeds in giving to that love the intensity that Jesus demands from religious love. For Jesus taught us a something really new: loving others is equivalent to loving God. It goes without

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<sup>24</sup> *Bética Marista*, October 1972, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Appel au dépassement, retraite de 1970, Le commandement nouveau*, n°3.

<sup>26</sup> *Bética Marista*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Bética Marista*, n°52, Oct. 1972, p. 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> *Llamamiento a la renovación – Amor de Paz*, n°3, pp. 8-10.

saying that we mean loving with a Christian love. Conversely, loving God is equivalent to loving others. In this way, if anyone does not love others, the equation breaks down, and we will have to say that the second proposition fails also.”<sup>29</sup>

According to the Gospel, love is an infallible thermometer of Christian life. “You can measure the substance of your Christian life according to your love, concretely for your neighbour. If love for neighbour is missing, the love of God is also missing, everything is missing.” Here Basilio spoke at length on the parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>30</sup>

*b. Love is universal.*

We have already quoted the opening paragraph on this topic: “If you exclude one person from your heart, your love is dead.” Here, Basilio liked to quote Roger Schulz, the prior of Taizé, who said: “All true relationship with Christ necessarily leads to our neighbour.” Basilio then makes a telling point: “If it is true, and it must be, that the evangelical counsels are like kettles visibly bringing love to the boil, then we must wonder what is going on when these counsels produce in religious such a feeble love, lacking in creativity, intelligence, and fruitfulness either towards themselves or towards others.”<sup>31</sup>

This universal love must permeate all the aspects of life: “The soul of community life is love. If there is no love, there is no Christian community... If love does not penetrate our very being we will not be able to change, we will not be able to renew ourselves.”<sup>32</sup> Virginité is a life of love. If we don’t love, we are not virgins, at least in the Christian sense, we are practising the virginité of the Roman Vestals not Christian virginité which is a life of love.”<sup>33</sup> “What do we mean when we speak of ‘pronouncing vows?’ Above all, it implies love, but that is insufficient if this love does not manifest itself in friendship.”<sup>34</sup> This has consequences, too, for poverty: “Poverty consists first in a passionate love of God. There is no Christian poverty if its origin is not a passion for a God who becomes everything for me, the core of my heart, everything.”<sup>35</sup> He shares what he feels in his heart for his

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<sup>29</sup> *Bética Marista*, October 1972, pp.9-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Bética Marista*, October 1972, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Bética Marista*, October 1972, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Bética Marista*, 1972, p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151.

Brothers: “Truly, I don’t know whether I did a bit of good for the Brothers, because day after day I realise my poverty and my limits; nevertheless, in great peace without any feeling of regret. What I do see clearly is that I love the Congregation and the Brothers with all my heart. Today, the Brothers are the centre of my life after God and the Blessed Virgin.”<sup>36</sup>

When talking about the love in Basilio’s life, we are tempted to say too much and lose our balance, whether we speak of his love for God or of the fraternal love he shared with all. The book of testimonies, *El Estilo de una Vida* devotes fifteen pages to the memory of the love he had for his Brothers and friends. We find eloquent chapter headings such as: *A Magnanimous Heart, An Unconditional Assistance, A Prodigal Kindness, An Overflowing Sympathy*. A selection of these testimonies is offered in one of the supplementary texts, which shows how his beneficiaries considered him a champion in the universe of love. This reciprocal esteem, the certainty of being the sons of God’s love, produced the circular on Fidelity. This was his swan song as superior general, the music that still echoes in the Brothers’ memories. It is the meeting point of three loves: the love that issues from God, fraternal love in the daily grind, and the love for the Church, the family in which we become other Christs.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Madrid Marista*, numéro spécial, December 1985, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> *Circ. Fidelity*, pp. 9-10, and especially p. 15.

## TEXTS

### 1. A twelve-year-old child

I remember a twelve-year-old child in Bolivia; I was concerned to see that he got a good education. A Brother was taking me to the office of the Bishop of Cochabamba, to speak with the Vicar General. The child came up to me and asked,

- Father, can I polish your shoes?

- No, thank you. I want to be alone with the person I am talking to.

On leaving the Bishop's house, I noticed the child again. I asked him to give me his name and tell me where he was studying.

- I don't go to school, I polish shoes!

- Would you like to study?

- Yes, I would like to.

- Why don't your parents pay for your school fees? And where is your father?

- They killed him.

- And your mother?

- She passed away.

- How did she die?

- She went to bed and she died.

- Who cares for you? Do you have any relative?

- Yes, two little brothers.

- How old are they?

- One is six and the other two.

I was trying not to show any emotion because one must not traumatise this type of people. They suffer enough and life is a struggle for them.

- Don't you have any uncle or aunt who looks after you?

- No, we have nobody.

- Then, who feeds you?

- A lady. I work; I give her what I earn, and she feeds my two young brothers.

- That's why I have to shine shoes.

Then, I told the Brother, look, take this child to the school and I will take care to find a foster father to take care of him and his two little brothers. In whatever part of the world we are, no matter where, there are people like this one who may well save the nation. These are the ones whom we must educate. When you find a twelve-year old boy, able to give up games, studies and everything interesting in life to take care of his young brothers, he is someone who can do more than we

think in life. (Example quoted in the conference on poverty – *Bética Marista*, April 1973)

## **2. At the university of a taxi driver**

(On his first trip to Venezuela, Basilio arrived at the airport at 3 o'clock in the morning. There was nobody waiting for him. He took a taxi, and travelled to Los Teques, 30 kilometres from Caracas to the place where the retreat was to be held, but this had been changed without letting Basilio know. As he was very early, nobody came to open the door in spite of several loud knocks. So, while waiting for somebody to come and open it, he went back to the taxicab – it was a good opportunity to talk with the driver.)

- I think we have time to talk, unless you don't like to speak with travellers. I would have liked to find an acquaintance at the airport but I am glad to help you in getting your day's salary. What's your name?

- Ramón Sanchez, at your service. I can see right away that you are a distinguished person with noble feelings. I happen to hear all kinds in this car! And you, what's your name?

- Basilio Rueda, Brother Basilio Rueda. I am a Marist religious. My cassock is in the suitcase. The Mexican laws don't allow us to wear it publicly. You have a family?

- Yes, a marvellous wife and five children who are growing up properly. But they eat so much! This job pays well, I can't complain, but I have trouble making both ends meet.

And we talked! He told me everything I wanted to know about Venezuela: politics, society, the education system, the country people and those who lived in the rich parts of the city. He also told me what he knew about the Church, the priests and the faith of the people. He was an honest man of remarkable intelligence. He had no book learning but his vehicle was as good as a university! At the hour determined by the Rule, a sister opened the door of the house. I introduced myself and quickly told her that I was pressed for time and wanted to take a quick shower before the opening of the retreat.

But, the retreat is taking place at the diocesan seminary!

Fortunately she offered us a hot coffee, which was very welcome on this September morning in Los Teques at Caracas! As we travelled on to the seminary, we had time for another enriching conversation. When we arrived at the seminary

the first conference-meditation was just ending (the one Basilio should have given).

- Don Ramón, how much do I owe you? Think of your wife, your children, of the and the hours you were kind enough to give me.

- Yes, I know all that, but I am sure you are a good man who does not deserve such a poor welcome in Venezuela. Give me what the clock indicates and a little for the petrol which is cheap in this country.

- Well, you will get all that plus the cost of the Venezuelan sociology lesson you gave me!

- I promised I would visit him at his home at the first opportunity.

(And Basilio did so. When he had to leave for Mexico, we left the house a little early so that we could stop at the taxi driver's house. The joy of this humble family might be compared with that of Zacchaeus when he welcomed the divine master to his home. This simple story about the taxi driver says a lot about Basilio!) (*Brother Jesús María Gómez, Caracas, Vénézuéla*)

### **3. Attentive to the needs of others**

(Selection of testimonies taken from *El Estilo de una vida*)

“After periods of intense work he used to offer a rest period to the members of his council. They went together to a quiet and solitary location suitable for prayer and recreation. There, he entertained everybody with his stories and jokes.”

(*Br. Gildo Cotta, p. 12*)

“Brother Basilio knew men even in their deepest troubles and he made himself all things to all men. He had a rare degree of love for a Brother, willing to die in order to save him, giving of himself and at the same time witnessing to the love of God “as Jesus did.” (*Br. Camille Gros, p.14*)

“His attentiveness to his Brothers was remarkable and his manner was exquisite. Isaiah's words suit him well: “The bruised reed he will not crush and the smoking flax he will not quench.”” (*Br. Elias Peña, p. 15*)

“His love for his Brothers expressed itself in a great courtesy that made him close to all of us. Through his love and attentiveness he was able to understand the other. He did not wait for someone to make a gesture, he was ever ready to help, to say the soothing word. He gave his whole self to everyone.”

(*Brother Roland Bourassa*, p. 16)

“The old Brothers remember the sympathy and the love Basilio showed for everybody without exception, and the young Brothers recall that he was understanding even when he did not agree with them. We all appreciated his wisdom and his honesty. When somebody was in need, Basilio did his utmost to help.” (*Br. Quentin Duffy*)

“I would describe as ‘maternal’ the attention he showed for the Brothers’ health. ‘Take a tablet’, he once told me when I had a headache – ‘and if the pain persists during the night call me, I will give you another medicine.’ I learned later that he suffered from much more serious headaches.” (*Br. Victorino de Arce*, p. 17-18)

«We Australian Brothers liked him because of his sincerity, his rich gifts and his love for the Institute. For us, he was the ‘Supermex.’! (*Br. Frederick*, p. 22)

A group of eleven religious from different congregations came to visit the general house. He gave us a tour of the house and offered us a drink. Noticing that I was lightly dressed for winter, he went to fetch a leather jacket. As he gave it to me, he said, “Use it as long as you attend your course, and give it back before your return to Bolivia.” (*Br. Florencio Puente*, p. 14-15)

“We had become great friends. He wanted to know my family and he went to visit them before leaving le Russey. . My mother was suffering from cancer. Back in Rome, he sent her a papal blessing and he wrote to her at the end of the year.” (*Bro. Daniel Roy*, p. 15)

“Our Brothers have very lively memories of the 1973 and 1974 visits and retreats. Besides his enormous energy, Brother Basilio showed a great human sympathy and a gentle sense of humour that endeared him to everybody.” (*Brother James Jolley*, p. 23)

“He was available to all, a man who took time to laugh and to make others laugh. Because of my training, it was difficult for me to understand the jokes, the tricks, the plays on words and the mimicry that the novices exchanged with him not only in words, but also by the sketches and witty cartoons they put on the notice board in the novitiate.... His novices adored him and this is why they behaved in such a free and spontaneous way with him. (*Bro. Victorino de Arce*, p. 22)

#### **4. Love is...**

“Religious life has its source in love. If we happen to be religious it is because the spring of eternal life called Love of God and Love of man has led us into this special state of life. That life is not so well known; in many places people look at us the way they look at rare animals! But we are not here to play a role in a farce.

Love is not only the source of our religious life, it is also our goal: we became religious to love and to love more and more, to love with large hearts, affectionate hearts. If after years of religious life our hearts do not glow with love, something is wrong.

Love is the soul of religious life. Other definitions concern themselves with our structures but they are not as essential as love... When, love runs short, the structures are worth nothing.

And this love has to be seen by our witness. Religious life must make known to the world through all the senses, eyes, ears, smell...that there are people who continue to believe in Jesus Christ and that they take the Gospel so seriously that they make it the whole of their lives, the sole reason for their existence.

Finally, love is also the fruit; to the degree that we keep moving forward, to the degree that the tree grows and develops, it produces love, bears the fruits of love, and invites those who wish to taste it to draw close to the tree so that they can taste its fruits and enjoy their sweetness – that is to say, through this tree they savour the love of Jesus Christ....

If religious life is so, renewal means seriously trying to increase our life of love.”  
(*Bética Marista*, n°52, pp. 8-9, October 1972)

#### **5. Everything can go amiss except love.**

One thing is indispensable in community life: everything else may be lacking, but not opportunities for practising love. This statement makes complete sense: it could be used to evaluate the many articles written about the common life, and to clarify the ultimate reasons underlying them, even if for their authors those reasons may be obscure. Many of these articles contain a deeply narcissistic view of community life: one might come there to be loved, to fulfil his hopes, to achieve personal fulfilment, and so on. That is not to say that the community

must not accomplish such ends for its members. Of course not: but it must be clearly stated also, that the picture of the common life that the New Testament traces for us, scarcely permits one to infer an ideal of community whose members would live ‘to be loved.’ Love does not hoard, it gives itself, and finds its reason for existence in our participation in the life of the Trinity.

The common life, then, is directly connected with love. It is not a case of excessive adherence to timetables and rules. Granted, there is no question of falling into chaos or individualism; but our community life needs to be ‘remeasured’ and “revalued” in the light of the discovery of and contact with persons, in the light also of creativity and even of a newness of expression and effectiveness which mutual love will engender

If community life meant basically not getting out of step, and maintaining uniformity, the religious life would be no better than life in a well controlled prison. No, it is not in that that Christian love dwells, but in the fact that the members of a community love one another, that they have the opportunity and facility of meeting one another in depth, that persons esteem one another and are devoted to one another, and that each strives to do the best he can for others. All should receive with love and joy the kindness shown them by others.

(Circular, *Community Life*, pp. 135, 137)

## **6. Striding with friends along the road of life**

The mainspring of community life is true love and the capacity to engender love, to go striding with friends along the road of life. That supposes that one should be able to and should try to establish a firm and spiritual contact with the people whom the Lord has set on our road. There are some who possess this particular charism in a high degree. For others the degree is less, and that for a thousand different reasons, but the essential thing is that contact should take place...

One can speak of a spirit of objectivity when a group of men is unified and enlivened by a mentality, a sense of values, a manner of reacting, a will, common goals of truth and well-being: “...the multitude of believers had but one mind and one soul”(Acts 4:2).

There is a question not only of ideas, objectives, and values. Those things would link men from the exterior, as it were by grafting. That would suggest an extrinsic, non-personal union. But it is quite another thing that is meant here. Members of a community should love one another personally without exception. Their varied relationships should have their roots in nature, in grace, and above all in the unifying power of Christ given by his Spirit – a power that makes a united community blossom with love one for another.

(*Circ. Community life*, pp. 176-177)

## 7. A Letter that speaks of tenderness

Dear Brother Ermezindo,

Your letter, dated 24<sup>th</sup>, gave me very great joy, particularly because I had been waiting for it for a long time. I was surprised not to have received any news from a friend I loved with my whole heart and from a religious I admire for his numerous services to the community. I am very edified by the humility and the contrition that keeps bringing you back to that administrative error in the past. Be at peace, you already know what we feel and think about that in the province and in the general council.

The good news you give me of the community spirit, the welcoming of the juniors and the way you are working for their welfare also gives me joy. Congratulations! I was also pleased to hear that you are preparing your vocation testimony. I was about to write to you about that because of the affection I have for you, and because I was keen that you should not forget your promise.

My dear Brother, you have not only been touched by the love of an intimate friend, but also by the tenderness with which I treated you, especially in your time of trials. I believe that what you felt and what I expressed do not do justice to the affection I have for you which is very great, and which only grows greater the more I know you day by day.

With a very affectionate embrace which carries with it my prayers, good wishes and greetings for Christmas.

I remain your great friend in the Lord,

Br. Basilio Rueda, fms, Sup. General. (Rome, 10 December 1977)

## **8. The sharing of our most intimate feelings**

The new community is going to make further demands on maturity and affection. Formerly, one never crossed the barrier of intimacy. Christ says: "I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you" (John, 15:15). This passage should have opened up for us new horizons but nobody saw the connection. There was a mystical world of affection between Christ and Christians that was regulated by the Gospel, and then a world of affection between Christians and Christians, and indeed between religious and religious that rested squarely on the Gospel and on principles of worldly prudence...One could live for years in community and know thoroughly from experience the life style and reactions of a confrere, but know nothing about his family, his childhood, his history, his ideals, his projects, his difficulties or his tastes.

I do not know if I have yet apologised sufficiently for talking as if the "old" community had ignored sentiment and affection; you can rest assured that I am aware that they were just as real then as they are now. I am preparing a circular, for another year, on fidelity and I have already gathered together some wonderful material for it. If I had not made inquiries about it, who would ever have known that Brother So and So, who accepted every change without the least resentment, never left a community without weeping? He did not think that this information could be passed on. The display of feelings that are very intimate is therefore quite normal and has nothing to do with a system of emotional balance more or less unstable. It is something that can be very manly. Why wish manliness to be opposed to emotion?

(Circular: *Community life project*, pp. 103-104)

## **9. Amazed by the brothers' fidelity**

It is seven years now since, for the first time, like a flash of light, the inspiration for this book struck me. That inspiration was enshrined in a host of touching confidences that I had received and was still receiving. And my heart swelled with

loving admiration at the myriad forms of fidelity and perseverance in our Congregation.

There had already been, without my realising it, a germination of the idea. That germination sprang from unforgettable interviews in which Brothers poured out memories, joys, difficulties, crises, falls, new starts, a thousand details of their life lived for God. So, imperceptibly, the decision to write forced itself on me.

I can list the names of a few Brothers, already dead, before they could write their testimony: Brothers Michel-Antoine, Jesus Rodriguez, Miguel Dario, Estanislau, etc... for lives as full as theirs were for me a persuasive force ending in a decision that has come to maturity during all those years. I am sure that the Holy Spirit had a hand in it!

I would even say that there are signs of supernatural intervention. When I consider how long the maturation process has taken, the intensity of effort required in all my spare moments, the quantity of correspondence to be gone through, classified and read as opportunity presented itself, I am at a loss to know how I was able to persevere in the decision I had made. I never had a moment's doubt even in the most hectic and exhausting stages. (*Circ. Community life*, pp. 250-253)

## **10. A friend's letter**

Beauceville, 19 November 2002

To: Brother Giovanni Maria Bigotto, Rome

*"Un perro sin dueño"*: this is the name Brother Basilio Rueda gave me when he greeted me on his arrival here.

The scene is still very much alive in my mind. I am happy to add this little incident to the numerous testimonies that you must have received from all over the world in praise of Basilio. That day, I met a compassionate, happy, jovial, communicative and fraternal man.

I was the superior of this house that accommodated eight of us and 114 young ladies aged 17 to 20. He showed no surprise; I was exercising a normal function in a community of Marist Brothers. I felt accepted, affirmed and understood. I had a friend with whom I could fraternise and be at ease.

Later, when he had gone, as I was reading the quotation in his native language beautifully written just above his name - I had asked for it and he had done so immediately with a mischievous smile - a warmth of friendship invaded me. I had met a man who took God with him wherever he went.

Basilio could laugh at somebody without hurting him, with good humour. You can't help walking with one who walks on water and can change it into wine.

It amuses me to recall the times in the past when we were taught to 'compose' our faces... well, to wear a mask! I have known the masquerade of those so-called holy religious, men without warmth, just like the Canadian winter! Brother Basilio was summer: kindness, love and simplicity. He gave his all for everybody. He gave himself totally to others.

When I learned that the canonisation process had been set in motion in Rome I was very happy; I have already started to pray to this champion of faith.

Humbly, I enrol myself as one of his friends. I hope he will be near me for the rest of my days.

Borromée Caron, fms.

## **11. Attention and courtesy**

In response to your invitation I am sending you a letter that Brother Basilio wrote to my mother when my sister, Gabrielle passed away. At that time, I was in Rome as the sub director of the second novitiate, May 1976. The same day, he authorised me to come and attend my sister's funeral.

I also send you a photo that was taken in 1977 when he was on visitation in Canada. He wanted to visit my mother, who was suffering from the cancer that

was to take her off a year later. Basilio had this photo taken with my mother in her house at Rougemont.

I pray for the success of your endeavours for the canonisation of this holy man.

Br Arthur Dugay, Iberville (November 2002)

*Rome, 13 May 1976*

Very gentle and courageous Mama ANNA,

I wanted to start my letter with the words of your beloved son, Arthur. I wish to tell you of the deep pain felt by each one of us, in union with the grief of your heart, when one of your favourite children, GABRIELLE, was recalled to the Father's house.

The telephone call that brought the sad news helped to unite our Marist family more closely with your own beautiful and distinguished family.

The news was immediately communicated to the different communities of the general house. We have already prayed for your dear daughter and we will continue to pray for the eternal rest of the DEPARTED ONE, and for the intentions of her good Mama ANNA. We will also pray for you and for all the members of that beautiful crown of children who make up the family of Irénée DUGAY. He has gone ahead to heaven before his dear spouse. You can be sure that he and GABRIELLE will be quite special protectors of Mama ANNA and the eleven children of the DUGAY-DALLAIRE family.

Arthur, far from his home country, has his heart in CANADA, near his own and particularly his very dear Mama ANNA! He is doing excellent work for the Congregation, particularly here in Rome. I am happy with the enormous task he carries out for our Institute and for the Holy Church. I take this opportunity to thank you for offering your son to the Lord, and for all that you have done to encourage him to persevere in his vocation.

I insisted that Arthur be near you and all your family members in this circumstance that has grieved your maternal heart.

Brother ARTHUR will express our sorrow and will forward our deep sympathy for you and for your family blessed by GOD. He will also be the best one to bear our message of comfort to you, "Life is very short, but eternity will never end" (Marcellin CHAMPAGNAT).

The VIRGIN MARY who is so loved in your family, this heavenly mother of us all, knew not only the pain of separation but also the joy of being re-united with a loved one; may she lighten the pain of your grief and help you through this time of sorrow and console you and yours in the days to come, bringing you calm and peace and the serene joy that THE LORD always grants to those whom he loves deeply, as he does you.

Religiously yours, kind and brave Mama ANNA. Be of good heart. In union of prayer with the Virgin Mary,

Br. Basilio Rueda G. fms. S.G. *(The capital letters are in the original; they manifest the heart of the writer.)*

## 2. The Wisdom of Basilio

Living with Brother Basilio or reading his writings leaves you feeling that you are in the company of a truly wise man, one whose wisdom comes from God. He inspires confidence; you are sure that he knows how to lead. Here we offer a series of testimonies and other evidence that will take us to the sources, to the criteria and to the reality of this wisdom.

### 2.1 Testimonies

These testimonies vary; some give a general impression, others record how they were taken by surprise by a preciously insightful remark, others still share something very personal.

Victorino Erloz, from Colombia wrote that Basilio “in personal contacts, often prolonged and always pleasant, radiated light, comfort and enthusiasm among most of the people he directed.”<sup>38</sup> His successor, Brother Charles Howard, found him to be “a dynamic superior, a wise counsellor, an intrepid disciple of Jesus and a true son of Mary and Marcellin.”<sup>39</sup> Brother Camille Gros related that he had discovered “a man in whom one could fully confide. With Basilio, no weakness, no problem was insurmountable.”<sup>40</sup> Brother Victorino de Arce: “He was a wise man, respectful of the others’ freedom, attentive to the smallest detail.”<sup>41</sup>

At the time of Basilio’s death, remembering all he had experienced with him, since Basilio had been his spiritual director, Brother Victorino wrote: “We met at the personal level in 1966 at the second noviciate. He was young and dynamic, but we could already observe his maturity, his sound judgement and a certain intuition regarding human problems. His speech was simple and warm; his judgment was practical, complemented by appropriate advice. He never asked for anything that was beyond anyone’s capacity.”<sup>42</sup> One of his last novices, Oscar

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<sup>38</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>40</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> Witness of Br. Victorino de Arce received: 17 Feb. 2003 with ten letters from Basilio.

Zuñiga, who sketched so many humorous cartoons of Basilio, offered us this beautiful testimony: “He initiated me to prayer life. Thanks to him I managed to understand and desire contemplation. He was not only my master of novices, but my life master, my spiritual guide who made my life full of joy. I always admired the joy showed by his smile and his whole demeanour.”<sup>43</sup> Another novice composed a poem that celebrates how Basilio touched their hearts,<sup>44</sup>

*Each of your words inspired us to improve ourselves,  
and each day of your life was a model of virtue.  
To us, your disciples, you handed down  
the inexhaustible torrent of your knowledge.  
Through your noble teaching, you showed us  
the way to truth and life.  
The light that surrounded you  
now shines in our intelligence.  
Nothing of what was really yours  
has passed away...*

The Province of Madrid received a visit from him in 1973. From the magazine that gave the report of that visit we read: “Brother Basilio Rueda, the Perfect Balance. He smiles all the time, he listens, and so he inspires confidence wherever he goes. Right now he must be checking the list of those who want to meet him: two thirds of us? three quarters? Not to worry, there will be some time for all, even in the airport waiting room, even if some Brothers must stay up all night. Thank you, Basilio for thinking so much of others and so little of yourself.”<sup>45</sup>

Frequently, when Brothers were reading something he had written, they would exclaim: “That is so true, spot on, how wise this is!” Speaking to the Brothers about confessions, he would distinguish between “garage” confessions, classical ones and “aspirin” confessions! To the Brothers who erred, he said they had to learn how to bounce back: “The art of bouncing back is important. A ball, which has a bit of resilience, does not stay on the ground; when it falls it bounces back immediately. The same thing is important in our spiritual life because it won’t roll along smoothly all the time on well-oiled rails! One must know how to keep some

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<sup>43</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> *Madrid-Marista*, December 1973, p.3.

‘air’ in himself to be able to bounce back”<sup>46</sup> In the margin of this passage, I jotted the note: “Wisdom of the man of God.” So many times, we would like to write a similar remark, as, for example, when he told us:

‘If your heart does not long for conversion, you have a problem.’

‘Man has an enormous power to rationalise and justify what he does!’

‘The superior is not an aspirin tablet to put your conscience to sleep.’<sup>47</sup>

‘Dialogue is the corridor of participation and collaboration!’

‘We have to avoid the kind of charity that in order to be divine has to cease being human.’

‘It is easier to receive material goods than to give them. It is easier to tell the truth than to accept it.’

‘Very often, the only way to be faithful to tradition is to be willing to change it’.<sup>48</sup>

Often his remarks simply reflected common sense, but wisdom starts with common sense! Here is a case where we see his good sense linked to experience and spiritual daring: “During the interview I had with Brother Basilio at Quimper, France, in August 1974, I made him aware of my hesitations about continuing in my vocation and that there was a woman waiting for me. When I told him that she was a divorcee, he told me honestly, ‘If you leave, look for a woman who is not already married. A married woman already has her own sexual habits and you take a serious risk of losing your freedom, of becoming her slave, and you will have much difficulty in building your family! If you want your own family, build it with some new material!’ I found this remark true to life and wise. After this conversation, he prescribed for me a triple dose of retreats: at Spello with Carlo Carreto, at Loppiano with the Foccolarini and at Troussures at the prayer school of Caffarrel.”<sup>49</sup>

## 2.2 Indicators

In addition to the testimonies witnessing to Basilio’s wisdom, we must consider other indications. So many people wanted to meet him and entrust him with their

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<sup>46</sup> *Bética Marista*, n° 57, March 1973, p. 105.

<sup>47</sup> These three quotations come the circular: *Obedience*.

<sup>48</sup> These four quotes come from the Circular on *The Community Life*.

<sup>49</sup> *Basilio, another Champagnat*, p. 92.

problems; a great number used to wait patiently for his letters. Many wanted to have him as their spiritual director even when he was superior general. About one hundred people can claim that they were his intimate friends. The most typical case was Brother Henri Vergès, killed in Algeria, on 8 May 1994. The assassination-martyrdom of this brother led us to examine his notes and letters. His limpid spirituality was under the welcome direction of Brother Basilio with whom he kept exchanging letters.<sup>50</sup>

Equally, the esteem in which the members of the Union of Superiors General held him is very noteworthy. They listened to him with attention, and often his advice was adopted as the final report of a meeting. Many among them recognised in him a skilled spiritual master. He was a personal friend of Fathers Arrupe, Lombardi and Rotondi, and Cardinal Pironio, remarkable men. Basilio sought the advice of Fathers Urs von Balthassar, Lyonnet, Alcalá SJ, Ruiz Mateos, the Redemptorist doctor and psychologist of CONFER, and of Fr Andrés Avelino. The last named seems to have been his spiritual director.<sup>51</sup>

Basilio was always being asked to give conferences, retreats and interviews, and to write articles. Many congregations of Sisters asked him to guide their days of prayer and reflection.

His writings, requested by publishing companies, became reference books in many congregations, for example, the circular on *Community Life*.<sup>52</sup> Religious life was going through the turbulence that followed the Council and everybody felt the need of a prophet. “Prophecy” - true prophets and false prophets” - was a frequent theme of Basilio’s conferences. Our different magazines such as *Bética Marista*, *Llamamiento a la Renovación*, and those published in Canada that reported his conferences reveal what a man of God Basilio was as he looked towards the future.

The Holy See trusted Basilio with confidential missions when he happened to travel to Latin America. The Vatican invited him to be an auditor at the Synod of the Family in 1980 and to speak to the assembled bishops. And, in 1995 the Vatican appointed him as a consultant to the Congregation for Religious.

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<sup>50</sup> *Convergences*, Br. Alain Delorme, July 2002.

<sup>51</sup> *Testimony*: Br. Conrado Trascasa García, 24 November 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Father José Antonio Lezama, Vicar General of the Clercs de Saint Viateur told me it this been the case in his congregation, in Spain.

What has been presented here as ‘Indications’ is just that; it cannot be claimed as hard evidence. It is something, however, in the public domain. The texts that are cited in the second half of this booklet will speak for themselves.

## 2.3 Basilio’s sources :

Where are we to look for the roots of Basilio’s wisdom? Where did he himself seek to nurture it? The answer is simple, in books, in the books of men and the books of God.

### 2.3.1 Books:

Basilio was a man of deep learning. He always had a great hunger for human knowledge, was always engaged in the search for truth, always investigating and discovering. He surprised his listeners by his varied references from ancient and classical times, from the world of literature, from modern psychology and current anthropology. When he returned to Mexico, at the end of 1985, he joined the Epsimo Group made up of psychologists, psychoanalysts, doctors and theologians. This was an ecumenical group that included Catholic priests and Reformed pastors. Basilio soon stood out in the group, which had undertaken to take the pulse of the world and offer it Christian, and human answers.<sup>53</sup>

Basilio was invited to attend conferences at the national and international level. He was asked to express his views on Catholic education in Spain and to give his advice on the new law, LODE that was intended to restructure education in that country. In 1973, the Pontifical University of Rio Grande do Sul honoured him with a Doctorate *Honoris Causa*. What did the rector of the university say when he conferred the degree upon the one he called “the flamboyant doctor”? “This celebration represents our sincere homage to a champion in the field of education. Brother Basilio is a singular figure in this phase of the Christian and religious world, the transitional period between Vatican II and the application of the Council directives. Endowed with formidable intellectual capacity, he quickly became a leader because of the clarity of his ideas, his powerful thought and persuasiveness, his open and balanced demeanour, his personal research and his

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<sup>53</sup> *El Estilo de una Vida*, p. 96. and *Quemar la Vida*, p. 278.

work with teams of collaborators. To these eminent personal qualities, we must add his excellent academic preparation in sociology and psychology, and his deep knowledge of Marist spirituality, fields that allow him to take in a situation, to understand a problem and to find its answer.”<sup>54</sup>

Basilio was fortunate to be blessed with the great personal gifts that allowed him to acquire this vast learning. This is how Brother Paul Sester, who had been a General Councillor and the Secretary of Basilio, sees it: “With Brother Basilio’s decease, an outstanding luminary disappears, a personality well above the average, whose hallmark is not only his eighteen years as superior general, but the fruit of a personal wealth quite out of the ordinary.”<sup>55</sup>

It would be wrong to suggest that here we have been treating an exclusively human dimension that has nothing to do with the wisdom of God. The fact is that the wisdom of God’s quickens in a talented man who uses his gifts for God and men.

### **2.3.2. His knowledge of men:**

It has already been said that Basilio had a profound knowledge of men. The various duties he assumed took him to many countries, among the most varied social groups and in contact with all types of cultures. He spoke to people of every kind: clerics, religious men and women, labourers, businessmen, educators and even politicians.

In particular and above all, as superior general, he spent a lot of his time observing the lives, the dramas, the joys, the graces, the falls, and the returns of many religious and priests. His circular on *Fidelity* says it all, but, every one of his circulars reveals his knowledge of life and humanity.

Witness after witness reports that Basilio consecrated hours and hours listening to people, or reading their confidences or writing them letters. Brother Jésus Bayo Mayor wrote during a stay in Rome in October 2002: “I admired Basilio’s skill in his interviews, his kindness and his understanding. I quickly perceived the father and the shepherd. It was not to no avail that he listened to thousands of persons

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<sup>54</sup> *Quemar la Vida*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>55</sup> *Basilio, Another Champagnat*, p. 46.

and wrote thousands of letters. He was an expert in human relations and he knew the depth of a person's heart." This Brother Jésus Bayo had been fortunate to have Brother Basilio as his retreat master when he was preparing for his final vows. Later he followed the eighteen-month course for novice masters directed by him in 1990-91.

Together with his writing, his visits to the provinces, and the reports on them that he compiled – always so much to the point - his listening to the Brothers made up the largest part of Basilio's apostolate. In Paris someone asked him for a book dealing with sexual problems; at this, one of the organisers hesitated a little, until another said to him, "Don't worry, you have here an expert in the human condition." We have in front of us so much written evidence that there is no point in going further: everything written about Basilio tells the same story: *Quemar la Vida, El Estilo de una Vida, Basilio, un autre Champagnat, Je veux éveiller l'aurore.*

### **2.3.3 His relationship with God**

Basilio's heart beat to the same rhythm as God's. Here, we have the main source, especially in regard to the task given to him. He opened his life space to God in prayer of listening. He told the Brothers: "We speak too much to God, we don't listen to him enough." He gave hours to the prayer of adoration, in the early morning, hours of contemplation, of meditation on God's word. Prayer continued during the day: we have to speak of a certain ambience, of an air that he breathed without thinking of it, living, as our Founder said, "in the presence of God". In his writings and in his life, Basilio developed what we later came to call Marist Apostolic Spirituality. He treated this topic in the last conference he gave as Superior General at the 1985 General Chapter, elaborating in the second part elements that were specifically Marist.

He understood that both the Church and the world have evolved very quickly, that our times needed prophets and that any true prophet must be a humble friend of God, totally available to him. To speak fully about a certain family one must belong to this family: "The more we bring our hearts close to God's heart the more we end up thinking like him".

His circular on Obedience showed how much Basilio was passionate about seeking God's will. He often said that true wisdom could be found in God only. At the time when he was still working for the Movement for a Better World, he addressed the Brothers in charge of our Guatemala schools; he asked them: "In your opinion what is the most important virtue for a superior?" The Brothers hesitated about what to answer... For some Brothers, it was their presence in the community, punctuality in the community exercises; for others, skills in administration, planning, managing the school. At the end, they realised that none of them had hit the nail on the head. Basilio answered his question, "It is the virtue of prudence... If there is anyone among you who does not possess this virtue to a high degree, he would do well to hand in his resignation! Although we have all been lacking in this respect, we haven't got around to resigning..."<sup>56</sup>

As soon as Basilio was elected superior general, he immediately reflected on this virtue, which he and his council stood in need of. First, he explained the spirit that guided him in accepting the appointment, and then he described the kind of prudence he was seeking: "When I speak of prudence, I am speaking of a positive virtue, even of an effective technique, a discernment of the best means to accomplish our purpose... Prudence is one of the higher Christian virtues. It has a vital place in the realisation of the mystery of salvation."<sup>57</sup> His prayer for the gift of prudence was: "I desire and I beseech God to grant this my dearest wish, and I pray that Our Lady, Throne of Wisdom, may obtain for me the virtue of prudence essential for a superior."<sup>58</sup>

## 1.4 The criteria of wisdom

Christian wisdom is underpinned by criteria that are absolute, reference points that ensure balance and truth. Basilio's most frequent criteria were Jesus Christ and the Gospel, the absolute value of the person, attention to reality: in the world, in the Church and in the congregation – and common sense.

### 2.4.1 The Gospel

The Lord and his teaching must be our inspiration and the measure of what we are, of what we decide and what we do. When Basilio thought about the renewal

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<sup>56</sup> Brother José Antonio Lopez Guardado, 2 September 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Circ. 2 September 1968, pp. 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

requested by Vatican II, he sought directions in the Word of God. Thus, what he or the general council proposed always had its point of reference in the Gospel. The Word was the touchstone of the goodness and justice of the proposals. Renewal had to be characterised by a new style of fraternal relationship and collaboration, one in harmony with the Lord's commandment of love, embracing a greater intensity of love and attention, conducive to the sharing of deep feelings. Here are three pieces of advice he gave to the Swiss Brothers:

“Commit yourselves to building communities with great fraternal charity and family spirit; turn your communities into families of consecrated people in Jesus Christ, through Jesus and for Him. One who is unable to befriend another who has offended him is unsuited to living in community. It would be absurd that a Brother could not forgive, for a religious consecrates himself to reproducing the mystery of Jesus' love.»

In the circular *The Community Life* he asked: “What is meant by ‘renewal’? It means an adjustment and a conversion of the old structures, but also a conversion of the truth in such a way that my good morning is sincere, that my words and gestures convey a true love towards my brother, my joy in living with him, and that even my eyes show the affection I feel for him.”<sup>59</sup>

When we read again the circulars on *Community Life* and *The Project of Community Life* we re-visit Basilio's insistence that our community life must be characterised by Gospel values: “I would simply like to call your attention to certain evangelical elements that will greatly favour our community life: the attitude of relating to God as our Father, as Love, with a growing filial feeling in our hearts; a certain vision of the universe as the Lord's home; a sense of universal fraternity centred on our Big brother, Christ, that extends to the most difficult forms of love; a serious habit of filial prayer, for the more we feel and act as sons, the more we will feel and act as brothers.”<sup>60</sup>

In his circular on the *Community Project*, he reflected on quantitative and qualitative elements, with particular emphasis on the latter. He said that we had to evangelise the community, to convert it to a regularity inspired by the Spirit, to consecrate our religious lives anew. He gave considerable attention to the pillars of “the old community” - the Rule, personal virtue and regularity. Then he presented the

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<sup>59</sup> Circ. *The community life*, p. 219.

<sup>60</sup> Circ. *The community life*, pp. 70-73.

foundations of the new community intended to meet the new requirements of the Church and the world. The new project had to bring about, in maturity and affection, through the development of co-responsibility and personal conscience, a community truly turned towards Jesus Christ, built in no other way than in Him, through Him and for Him. The spirituality of this new community was to emphasise three great truths of revelation: Christ is in my brother; Christ is between my brother and me; Christ is in the midst of the community.<sup>61</sup> In other pages, he had said that Christ is our only law and our only ideal since he is the mediator between God and man: in Him we see what God can be for man and what man can be for God.<sup>62</sup>

In his reflection on prayer, Basilio criticised rigidity. He preferred a slow prayer, calm, similar to the Son's prayer, a true encounter with God. (We have treated this at length in the section on Basilio's Prayer.) When writing about the renewal of the congregation, and stressing the need for a concrete effort to be with the poor and at the service of the poor, and to increase our outreach to the missions, he always reminded us that these two were demanded both by the Gospel and by the Council. We would have to admit that a man of God could invoke no wiser criteria for his thought, action and government.

### 2.4.2 The person

The second criterion constantly invoked by Basilio is the absolute value of the person. Brothers living with Basilio were always sure of his respect. Procurator General, Brother Leonard Voegtle, said that Basilio always gave precedence to persons over institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Things that Basilio said sometimes took people by surprise as, for example, when he said that community, prayer and love were not goals in themselves - the person was the goal. He added that nothing should be required that conflicted with human liberty, apart from what was the logical consequence of a person's freely chosen gift of himself to God. One of his words of advice to the Swiss Brothers was: "Room must be provided to allow each Brother's personality to blossom. In the past, we had become used to a tendency to uniformity. Now, we

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<sup>61</sup> Circ. *The community life*, p. 138.

<sup>62</sup> See the chapter on Jesus.

<sup>63</sup> *FMS-Message*, n° 19, May 1996, p. 43.

should still promote a deep unity in spirit and in love, but in accomplishing what is essential in our common task, we ought to respect the pluralism of tastes, criteria and personality which are not central to it.”<sup>64</sup> He said the same thing to the Brothers of Congo and Rwanda: “The best way to improve community life is to care more for persons than for institutions.”<sup>65</sup>

When Basilio mentions the word ‘person’, he has in mind the Brothers, the pupils, those who attended his conferences, and any people at all that he happened to meet like the shoe shine boy in Bolivia and the taxi driver in Venezuela; he gave this respect to every man. Concern for the person is particularly important for us Marist educators: the child or the youth, each has an absolute value. He insisted that we had to be guided by Jesus’ love, a universal love. (In the pages that follow, some texts will provide further evidence of Basilio’s thought and conduct in regard to this.)

### 2.4.3 Respect for reality

Basilio was not one for theorising, or working in the abstract. His intellectual honesty restricted him to reality: the Church in a state of change, the world as it was evolving at the time, the congregation as he saw it with his own eyes, the provinces just as he found them in his visits, individual people as he met them.

In his very first circular dated 2 January 1968, he gave much attention to the contemporary world. His analysis reveals his appreciation of it, but at the same time he did not hesitate to call for some changes in view of its demands and the need for action. Basilio was not nostalgic about the past, but he did not turn his back on its values just to follow a current fad.

In a chapter entitled *The Calls of the Church*, he drew attention to the Council documents, to what was wanted by the Church. It is enough to read the messages he addressed to the provinces he had visited to recognise the keenness of his observation, the accuracy of his analysis, and the relevance of his message. He always remained in touch with the reality of things. The questionnaires he used

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<sup>64</sup> *AFM*. 51-09. B3-Suisse, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Message to Congo and Rwanda*, p. 15 – 6 Sept. 1976 – *AFM*. 76.09.038.

during the retreats targeted every aspect of the reality of a province in a scientific way. It was clear that what he wanted to know was the reality, that he knew how to explore and find it, and that the reality, no matter what it might be, never scared him, for that was the very material on which he wanted to work. The message he sent to the Swiss province was “a loving message of truth and objectivity.”<sup>66</sup> Many times he had to make the Brothers hear unpleasant but true remarks: “I think you need to resist this tendency towards a spiritual comfort which deprives you of the capacity to make the efforts necessary to assure your spiritual progress...You have been affected to some extent by your milieu, which fosters a gradual decline towards comfort and the easy life. You need superiors who will inspire you to go beyond yourselves.”<sup>67</sup>

Later, as frank as ever, he says: “Those who say, ‘I cannot do what you request’ may very well leave immediately!”<sup>68</sup> All his reports of province visits make their points quite directly. To a group of Brothers in Switzerland whom he liked and admired, he said: “Your communities are for the most part positive, but young people are not interested in living in them. So, either you re-organise your communities or you give up recruiting. You might well have a juniorate with plenty of young people, but when they came to take their place in community they will become discouraged and leave. Why? Because the young ones are different from us. You may well say that this ought not to be the case, but it is the case, and you would simply be wasting your time and energy, not to mention your pains, in trying to change them. Times have changed, radically changed! There can be no returning to the past. We have to open our eyes, board another train and move forward!”<sup>69</sup>

To some missionary brothers, he said: “We have observed that some worthy missionaries who have spent most of their lives doing excellent work in their apostolate have become ill, worn out, or depressed, some have become temperamentally inflexible, while others have been unable to adjust to new ways. In spite of their good will these missionaries have a rather negative influence in their milieu. I have no hesitation in suggesting that these missionaries should return to their native countries.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *AFM* 512.90. B3-Suisse.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Pearls not to be thrown away’, p.3, revue d’Iberville.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>69</sup> *AFM*, 51.09. B3- Suisse.

<sup>70</sup> *Message to province: Zaïre-Rwanda*, 6 Sept. 1976.

Basilio was not only unafraid to tell the truth, but he also felt it his duty to communicate the raw truth so that Brothers would not cling to any illusions they might have had; again, to the Swiss Brothers he said: “I have tell you the truth even if it turns against me because the Lord said, “The truth will set you free.” He used the same language in whatever province he visited.

The circular on *Fidelity* carries some daring testimonies that conventional reticence would have preferred to hide! His circular on *Community Life*, the one that made the biggest impression on outsiders, was published under the meaningful title *Community Life: Apologia and Demythology*. It became a best seller in 1973, selling 30,000 copies. Its success was due to its accurate analysis of community life and the author’s courage in pointing out how it had to change. The work is highly regarded both for its intellectual honesty and its good sense. Basilio admitted that his obsession with scientific honesty in trying to discover reality was part of his nature.

#### **2.4.4 And the Marist charism**

Here, Basilio’s wisdom consists in knowing the Founder well, in understanding the Spirit of the Institute and the charism that characterises the Marist Family, and in his use of the most appropriate way of communicating with the Brothers who were to be the first recipients of his work. His perception of Marcellin was extraordinary, as were his analyses of our spirit and charism. We are astounded by his depth and precision.

We do not find devotional language here: it is a discourse that is true to life. This is Basilio’s way whenever his writing reflects his passion for anything Marist. There is no sign of an instinct or a naiveté inclining him to defend his family; it is more like a beam of light, gift of the Spirit, on the Founder and the charism. To confirm this, one has only to consult the texts cited in the chapter on *Basilio and Father Champagnat* or what is said about the three Marist virtues of humility, simplicity and modesty. With Basilio, we leave behind the banal and find ourselves at the heart of things.

Basilio’s wisdom is always characterised by these four standards: the Gospel, the person, the real and what we might call Marist grace. Those who were close to him felt that the power of his word came from these four sources together with

his intimacy with God, his experience of humankind, the world and the Church, and his extraordinary depth of culture so rich both humanly and spiritually.

In the wisdom of Basilio we recognise both evangelical and human qualities. Its framework was his love and respect for the person. It always aimed at the true and the good. It knew the frailty of people, but treated this with mercy and encouragement. He knew how to help Brothers to regain their nobility, how to re-open the springs of generosity and ideals. To the Swiss, he wrote: “Dear Brothers, having come in touch with your ‘reality’, I send you this honest little message with an open heart: it is an affectionate message, full of sympathy and enthusiasm for the work of your province, in communion with you... I am moved to write as I do by a love of truth and objectivity.” He had the same affectionate regard for the Congolese Brothers: “It is with great pleasure that I send you this message. I write with the same affection and the same confidence in your goodness and your future as when I was with you.”<sup>73</sup>

His wisdom had the courage of clarity, of truth and was not without a strong word *a propos*, but at the same time it opened up ways to a new future. It knew very well how to admire, congratulate, surprise, encourage and affirm; while free of naiveté, it remained optimistic. After many pages in which Basilio drew attention to things that needed to be corrected, he finished his letter to the Brothers of Zaire-Rwanda in this way: “In the Congo and in Rwanda, you are really in the heart of Africa, of the young Africa, as we like to say... Your numerous young indigenous Brothers – I say this again - are ready, or soon will be, to take over. The harvest is ripe and ready to be garnered. It is right and proper for the present generation to reap with enthusiasm the field that was sown so energetically by a previous generation of worthy missionaries. Of course, in any harvest, worms damage some fruit; the greater the harvest the greater chance to find worms! But, looking at your orange orchards, do you regret a few diseased fruit? No. You are delighted to see the whole orchard full of golden fruit. And that is just how your province of Zaire-Rwanda appears to me, an immense orchard, planted and cultivated with love.”<sup>74</sup>

Surely his wisdom was optimistic and life giving. The great number of people who shared their confidences with Basilio, who entrusted to him matters that caused the deepest personal anguish, all these witnessed to his rich insights. He

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<sup>73</sup> AFM 76.09.038, 6 Sept. 1976.

<sup>74</sup> AFM 76.09.038 – 6 Sept. 1976.

was a co-worker of Christ who is the Master of History, the Wisdom that comes from above.

## TEXTS

### 1. Prudence

When I speak of prudence, I am speaking of the one that is a positive virtue, even a technique of efficiency, of discernment and of the use of means to reach the end. Four types of prudence are necessary to reach Christian virtue. The Christian virtue of prudence is a major one. It is necessary to realise our salvation and it even guides all human enterprise in the light of the great mystery of Jesus, following the signs of divine revelation. Fruit of faith and grace, it is absolutely necessary for the administration of God's works. Any institution, any work, established with the Christian mystery in mind or a society that has emerged from a charismatic impulse of the Holy Spirit, would be in serious danger if it were not managed by people of the second prudence (the natural one which is one of the authentic cardinal virtues). However, this is, as it were, just the beginning; if it goes no further the work remains strictly at the human level and cannot be lifted to that of the Gospel.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit can bring Christian prudence to its full realisation: this is the gift of Counsel, the prudence of the saints. At this point, we are at such a higher level than ordinary Christian prudence that people just cannot understand it. Even the best of them, like those who criticised Champagnat, speak of folly. However, it is this very prudence that underlies great Christian achievements sometimes accomplished at the expense of well-intentioned people and the structures they have over-confidently designed for the service of God. Sometimes the actions of the Holy Spirit take certain members of the Mystical Body by surprise, cruelly putting feeble human wisdom to the test.

*(Circ. 2 January 1968, pp. 7-9)*

### 2. Christian prudence (continued)

The great reforms in the Church, from Francis of Assisi to John XXIII, made an impact which provoked a lot of good in sincere souls but which scandalised the prudent of this world and misled those who only followed out of self interest.

My dear Brothers, you will better understand now the concerns of a superior. Appointed because of certain human qualities, it is possible for him to dedicate himself completely to the service of his community, his province or the institute with obvious devotion and even a certain ability to attract attention, but still without the spirit of the Gospel.

At the same time, I know that every good gift comes from above, from the Father of lights, and that our prudence grows at the same rate as our lives in Christ develop, as we open our hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit. That is why I am relying on your prayer to obtain at least the third prudence, and that the Holy Spirit will raise up in the General Council and in the Chapter men full of the gift of Counsel who can bring about among us truly prophetic action at this time of 'aggiornamento'.

### **3. The audacity of wisdom**

Without being rash, I think we are progressing towards less legalistic, more daringly apostolic forms of life, that increasingly find their place in a greater professional socialisation, with greater independence more free from external structures than before.

Now this obviously means that the spiritual training we had that was adequate for the past is no longer appropriate. If we cling to the same formation methods, we will eventually face some vocational crises. Furthermore, it is not only a question of the amount, but also of the style and even the system. We must acknowledge that the means and the system must change wherever this is necessary, but the amount and the quality of formation cannot be reduced. Otherwise we would be suicidal!

We are really at the end of one historical era and at the birth of another similar to what happened after the invasion of the Barbarians or after the French Revolution. But the death of an era brings about the birth of a new one. We are living through the beginning of a new era with all the confusion that implies and the radical changes it brings about in the world. And we cannot close our eyes to this without grave consequences for the Institute, for the Church and for our mission as educators. At the same time, we are not looking for systems, which will make religious life easy!

We must remember that the Lord had the courage to bring about a revolution in the right meaning of the word, a revolution in his Father's religion. And the changes he brought in were truly impressive! He interfered with the temple, he attacked the Sabbath, and we could list many observances that were also swept away by the breath of the Spirit, starting with Jesus Christ. We have to understand that we are Christians, sons of Jesus Christ. We aren't sons of lame people, but sons of the God made Man who brought the storm of the Spirit! We have to preserve this spirit of freedom, this dynamic spirit, this spirit of truth that Jesus brought us: "The time will come when the Father will be worshipped in Spirit and in truth." (*Call to Excel, Retreats 1970, Renewal, p. 1-2, Canada*)

#### 4. Speech of the new doctor *Honoris Causa* (excerpts)

First, what is a university? It is a spirit that creates thought and makes people capable of universal scientific action. Every young person who enters a university is a life just opening up, a process that is beginning, a person for whom life is about to be completely different from what it was when he first entered.

A sociological function of the University is education in leadership, leadership in the deepest and most Christian meaning.

Any university capable of discovering truth, and producing truth, is already inherently Christian... But the Christian university seeks not just any truth, but the Truth that loves and saves; it is Christian because it is faithful to its search for this Truth.

A university is a spirit in place; that is to say, it finds itself in a historical moment, able to envision the future, to live in the future and to create the future.

A Christian university has a responsibility to maintain values, and to influence change, invoking these values as criteria in critiquing change and foreseeing its outcome.

The objective spirit of the university will include the following aspects: speed and energy in following the historical process, a well-defined orientation, and the intellectual honesty essential for university teachers. It must become an antenna

of the future, trying to sound this future, discovering where history is going, and preparing humanity to take charge of this history before it imposes itself on us...  
*(Lumières et flammes d'une vie, pp. 246-247.)*

## 5. The passion to do God's will

These pages are the outcome of long years of reflection on the mystery of obedience. What is written here has been slowly developing in my mind.

Gradually there has come home to me the capital role that obedience plays in the mystery of salvation, and the need there is for a renewal of obedience – a renewal that will not be limited to structures and to practices, but will be genuinely charismatic ... the heart of obedience.

The heart of the matter is an ardent desire to do the will of God and to make the divine will the dominant factor in our lives. Hence a readiness to repudiate beforehand any personal preferences that might stand in opposition to God's will, and a readiness also to take practical steps to discover his will. These steps are primarily prayer and the mediation of a fellow human.

Our obedience is first of all Christian, even before being ecclesial or religious.... The whole point of obedience is its purpose: a constant desire to seek and discover the divine will and make it the core of our life ("I have food to eat which you know not.") This implies two things:

- Obedience is a genuine sign that the Kingdom is present, since we have the reality of a person proclaiming himself completely at the service of another's will, that other being God. Such an act of self-denial and self-giving is no less radical than virginity or poverty.
- There is something more than a counsel; here: there is something that is of the essence of Christian life and hence of religious life. Christ is unthinkable without the notion of perfect obedience to the Father. And this is the ideal for every Christian. *(Circular on Obedience, pp. 7-9)*

## 6. A true passion for the Father's will

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

In this new vision of obedience, a more intense spirituality is called for, much greater purity of intention, more renunciation of egoism, a complete willingness to follow the ways of the Lord, a real passion for the Father's will.

And it is here that our difficulties arise. We have set about establishing a new system of obedience – and one that is authentic - but the time is not propitious, for it comes at a moment when in large measure the sense of prayer is lost, when there is a crisis of faith, when the world is invaded not by commendable secularisation that would make itself Greek to the Greeks, Gentile to the Gentiles, and all things to all men so as to win them for Christ, but by a frivolous secularism that robs the salt of its savour and the leaven of its ferment, and that replaces the Gospel by an utterly destructive psychology. All these circumstances are matters that we cannot substantially alter. Dialogue is an indispensable tool in the new form of obedience, and it should be frequent, even habitual.

*(Circular on Obedience, pp. 105-106)*

## 7. The courage of imperfection

We must be reconciled to our limited, imperfect human condition. Many friends, above all many married couples, have wrecked their union because they did not have the courage to acknowledge their imperfection. They had expected the absolute and found the relative. Thinking they lacked compatibility, they naively hoped to obtain elsewhere the perfect intimacy of the absolute. They missed possible happiness by pursuing a chimera, when by admitting their limitations they would have seen their love deepening daily and becoming a source of ever increasing happiness.

“The feeling of solitude is God’s sign in the hearts of men. It is the infallible sign that we cannot find complete fulfilment in this world, and that we have been created for another life where hearts will be known intimately after having for so long remained hidden, and where souls will become crystal clear to all in the light of God who himself has become transparent to them. If solitude is the essence of life, why should death not be the approach to a country where one is never alone?” (Vieujean, Jean).

I should need now as much insight and spiritual help as Vieujean when he speaks to those who want to replace God by the community, because I wish to finish this section by dwelling on another aspect more appropriate to the theme of this circular. I shall speak of the importance and the function of silence in the community. An authentic community can only be effected by men of interior life. Their contribution to the community depends upon this interior life.

Silence and solitude become harmful and insupportable if they do not help encounter. Nobody becomes effective except by making contact with another, and there is not a single aspect of structure that can dispose of this contact.

*(Circ. Community life, pp. 257-259)*

## **8. My Brother, this stranger!**

This state of permanent community is not that ambiguous condition where community life seems pleasantly peaceful because all conflict is avoided. Conflicts that are avoided, even if consecrated by charity, remain, especially if one withdraws into a morbid silence. Everyone remains static, preferring silence and solitude to dialogue, which would oblige members to get to know one another. Communion demands more than passive silence; it requires a genuine atmosphere of dialogue carried on continuously. We never have a complete knowledge of the other person. Like ourselves, he is subject to change, grows old, and has his past and his present. Communication on the personal level means that our inter-relationships go further than the absolutely necessary. They reach out to the warmest personal contact. That is important. Many inter-relationships are defective from the start, because we see our Brother in a vague sort of way. I know the Brother who has been living with me for 25 or more years. I am aware of his mannerisms, his caprices, and his talents as a teacher etc.; yet he exists for me as an unknown person to whom I speak only occasionally, and often only

when necessity requires it. He also has his apostolic yearnings and his anxieties. He has, in common with me, an interior life full of experiences, which form a deep dimension of that person whom I do not know.

We are a box of surprises for one another, under a false exterior. We hide our little secret world. (*Cir. Community life, pp. 260-261*)

## 9. Wisdom

May the Lord bless you  
for the good you have done for me  
by your wise words and fine example!  
Brother, your words are light and fire,  
impregnated with a prophetic charism,  
words that inspire the desire to soar away,  
a light that reveals  
the splendour of our horizons.

Your enthusiasm invigorates  
and strengthens the weak  
so they can continue on their journey.  
May the Lord bless you  
for the good that you do  
by your healthy optimism,  
this warm sun in our hearts!

May he bless you  
for dispersing so many clouds!  
for opening up so many new horizons!  
for so much joyous hope!  
for the desire to be good,  
and to climb always higher  
Up to God, our Father,  
through the path of the Gospel  
and its holy precepts...  
*(Madrid-Marista, December 1973, n° 10, p.14)*

## 10. A guide to be listen to, a man of balance.

I often found myself with him at meetings of the Superiors General during the 'hot' years. Although difficult, those years were full of hope and efforts for renewal. Those were real encounters of discernment during which we examined proposals for various changes, starting with the most revolutionary innovations down to a revision of the most traditional conditions. By re-visiting the traditions of our institutes, we sought some light in our attempts to adapt our lives in ways that would embrace the conciliar decisions and prepare to face the future.

One of the most valued members was Brother Basilio. His writings on religious life were well known and appreciated for their keen observation of things and for their doctrinal soundness.

During the workshop groups, his extraordinary knowledge of the daily problems of religious life and his understanding of its different cultural contexts was remarkable. He knew how to combine knowledge with experience, doctrine with direct knowledge of situations, theological science with an understanding of the depth of the human spirit. He summed things up in a way rarely seen in others.

Very often, his observations became the agreed position that we kept coming back to in our meetings, and they were invoked as sure points of reference in the documents of a number of institutes.

There is no question that, by his writings and by his active and unique presence among us, Basilio was one of the most trusted guides, one of those with the soundest judgement during the renewal years, not only in his institute but for the whole of religious life.

Thanks to his writing and his witness, innumerable religious have been able to progress surely and joyfully towards the mystery of the living and true God.

*(P. Pier Giordano Cabra, FN, Congreg. Sacra Famiglia di Nazareth, in FMS MESSAGE, n° 19, p. 37)*

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