
BOOKLET 7

SUPERIOR AND BROTHER

- 1 -

BASILIO THE SUPERIOR

Basilio was Superior General for eighteen years, but throughout his whole life he was a leader. The pages that follow focus on the leadership of Basilio: how he was accepted as Superior, what people thought of his style of leadership, what this style of leadership exactly was, and how much this style persists in the Institute twenty years later.

What stands out is that throughout his whole life he was always asked to take the lead, to assume responsibility; his gift of leadership was obvious. From his first years of apostolic work he had a great formative influence on the students at the *Centro Universitario de México*, CUM, then among the young people who followed the Cursillo programme. The rest of his life, beginning in 1961, took him from one important responsibility to another yet more important one. He was the leader of the Movement for a better World in Ecuador from (1961-1964), director of the Second Novitiate in Spain (1965-1967), Superior General of the Marist Brothers (1967-1985) being re-elected for a second term of office, formator of formators for eighteen months (1990-1991), and finally Master of Novices of the two provinces of Mexico; while still carrying out this work he was called home by the Father on 21 January 1996.

He spent half of his lifetime, 36 of his 72 years, holding great responsibilities. He expanded all of these roles raising them to new dimensions that broke all earlier moulds. What did his co-workers, his Brothers and his friends think of his leadership qualities and of his actual leadership?

1. The Testimonies

We can organise in two categories the testimonies concerning his leadership: first, those that reflect on the reasons underlying the Brothers' choice of him as their superior, and second, those that offer some evaluation of his work.

1.1 Reasons underlying the brothers' choice of Basilio as Superior General

Without a doubt, his intellect, his capacity for hard work, and his spiritual maturity – manifested by a constant audacity in the apostolate – were well known. We have already noted that Father Lombardi, founder of the Movement for a Better World, was delighted to have him as a co-worker, and all his letters are loud in his praises.¹ We have also noted the sentiments that show the high esteem in which he was held by the Brothers who followed the sessions of the Second Novitiate at l'Escorial during the years 1965-1967: they all felt that they were breathing a new air, were reinvigorated, and believed they were ready to face the great changes of the Council and of a world that was forever rapidly on the move. These Brothers were reassured by two things: the new instruments of work that they were offered for the apostolate, suited to the times, and the fact that these instruments were proposed to them by a man of God of rare stature.²

However, we come back to the crucial point of 1967, the special Chapter that the Church required of all religious congregations. Why did the choice fall upon Basilio? We listen to the words of Brother Quentin Duffy who was to be his Vicar for eighteen years: “Although he had none of the traditional qualities expected of a Superior General, those who knew him recognised his great intellect, his stability, his pride in his vocation as a Brother. He was well known and highly esteemed by several of the most well known religious institutes. For those who heard the Holy Spirit calling for an excellent religious, intelligent and open, and for those who remained attentive to the calls of the Holy Spirit who in a certain way was indicating the one he had chosen, filling in the ballot slip was quickly done and we

¹ *Basilio Rueda, An other Champagnat*, p. 20.

² We need to read here the pages written in the historical documents of the sessions of the Second Novitiate in Spain, 1965-1972, and those that record the joy of a visit of Basilio – and his conferences – when he was Superior General.

had a “new” Superior, ... someone capable of grasping the new realities of the world and of the Church...”³ We have already noted the opinion of Brother Domingo Ruiz on Basilio’s work at the beginning of the Chapter: “The Institute needed a Superior with the qualities of youthfulness, maturity, religious and scientific training, as well as a great capacity for work, not only in enduring the long hours of work that had to be done, but also in knowing how to use modern means, either in the choice of his helpers or in the use of technical means.”⁴ The reviews of the Spanish provinces of this time have numerous accounts of the same nature, and the Brothers of Spain were ready to ask that Brother Basilio be invited as an expert to the General Chapter should he not be chosen by his province, Central Mexico, or by any other, as a capitulant. Moreover, Basilio had been the animator of the preparation for the 1967 Chapter in Spain.⁵

Some important witnesses recall the image they had of Basilio at the moment of his election in 1967. First we hear from Brother Leoncio Martin, Vicar General in the council of Brother Charles Raphael. He had enrolled Brother Basilio as a school student, then encouraged him to enter the Juniorate, and eventually became his Provincial. The two had great respect and admiration for each other, master and disciple, although a master who intuitively knew that he had an exceptional disciple: “He was always regarded with much affection,” recalls Brother Leoncio, who speaks eloquently about the young Basilio as a teacher and then as a leader in the Movement for a Better World; “I did not expect that; I was convinced that his outstanding qualities were unknown, because he avoided all ostentation... It was a moment of great emotion for me when he was named Superior General as I recalled the child that I had enrolled in the school and then in the Juniorate...”⁶

Second, we hear from Brother Arturo Chaves de la Mora; he lived with Basilio in the houses of formation - juniorate, novitiate, and scholasticate - and later they were teachers together for six years at the *Instituto México* and for three years at the *Centro Universitario de México* – we are hearing from one who was Basilio’s companion in formation and in work. Their paths were going to cross again later

³ *FMS-Message*, No. 19, May 1996, pp. 26-27.

⁴ See Note 53 in the chapter on *Work*.

⁵ *Madrid Marista, Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 7, Special Number on the occasion of the end of Brother Basilio’s term of office in 1985.

⁶ *Norte Marista*, October-November, 1967, p. 1188.

when Arturo became Provincial, but above all when, in Basilio's second term of office, Arturo became a general councillor. When asked, "What human quality do you most admire in Basilio?" he replied, "He has a heart of gold, which makes him attentive to all the needs, the pains and the joys of others. Then, I have always been impressed by his integrity: his life, all his actions, follow a straight line, never deviating for reasons of expediency or personal convenience."⁷

The third one who speaks about Basilio is Mexican Brother Gabriel Rodriguez who was in Basilio's first general council (1967-1976). When Brother Gabriel was a scholastic at *El Instituto Queretano*, Basilio was one of the teachers and formators. Later he found himself among Basilio's team when Basilio was director of the Juniorate at Queretaro. Brother Gabriel spoke of him in these terms: "He is a man who gets to the bottom of problems and considers them in the light of faith and of his love for people. He can create a family spirit, high morale and team spirit, and lead everyone towards the Lord. By drawing on his spiritual riches he inspires others."⁸

During a period of eight months Brother Raul Coral Burbano worked with Basilio in the Better World Movement in Ecuador; he insists that his life was completely changed by meeting him. He believed that the outstanding aspects of Basilio's leadership were, "a total openness to the Church that was most fruitful; perfect planning of our activities as religious educators, and a clearer and deeper knowledge of our religious family and its place in the Church."⁹

An interview with these four Brothers was published in the review *Norte Marista*. The review of the province of Léon, *Orientaciones*, publishes shorter accounts of interviews with a dozen Brothers (including those of the four already mentioned) but from much more diverse backgrounds: Brazil, China, Mexico, Africa, France, Argentina, Spain, Central America, Santa Maria, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. These Brothers give their own opinions, but also recount what was agreed by the Brothers in the places they came from. In fact, the review *Norte Marista* of October-November 1967 prefaced the remarks of the four contributors

⁷ *Norte Marista*, October-November 1967, p. 1189.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 1191.

⁹ Op. cit., p. 1193.

(above) by a description the new Superior General as “*young, enthusiastic, and full of the Gospel spirit*,”¹⁰ and on the first page of this issue, a prayer signed by Brother Cibrian begins, “*Lord, it has already been said, We have a new Superior General; a young man, wise, simple and pious.*”¹¹

The foreword of *Orientaciones*, written by Brother José García, speaks of Basilio as “*a noble figure, who enjoys respect and affection, who is loved because of his authenticity, the serenity of his judgments, his inclination to mix with everyone with a real sense of camaraderie, his spirit of service and sacrifice, and above all because in him we see the incarnation of the three Marist virtues: humility, simplicity and modesty.*”

Brother Vicente Lorenzo, the architect of the general house and a delegate to the Chapter, had the following thoughts on the election of Basilio: “We have always thought that, in the face of the uncertainty and the ideological ferment of the present time, the congregation needed more than a kind of juridical framework; it needed a clear self understanding and a pastoral orientation faithful to Vatican II. Facing the task that had to be done, one obvious figure emerged from the heart of the Chapter, the person of the new Superior General. He had apostolic experience of a kind that surpassed that of any other one of us; he knew how to combine the virtues of a good religious with untiring apostolic activity; in him simplicity and kindness came together with firmness and respect for others. Here was a reflective man of great maturity and of unquestionable scientific training, and not only does he work, he also has the art of making others work enthusiastically too.”¹² Brother Mario Guagliotto, provincial of Santa Maria, Brazil, saw Basilio as “a Superior who knows man under every aspect. In this post-conciliar period the congregation must work chiefly at forming religious with an ecclesial spirit. The Chapter has chosen the man for this mission.”¹³

This gives us a clear picture of how Basilio was regarded in the Latin-American world and in Spain. One cannot mistake the joy underlying these plaudits: the Latin American world and the Spanish Brothers had seen their candidate become Superior General. Moreover, there is no exaggeration here, for at the end of the

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 1179.

¹¹ Op. cit., p. 1180.

¹² *Orientaciones*, p. 522.

¹³ Op. cit., p. 520.

1967 Chapter every one of the capitulants shared these feelings; this esteem and admiration went on growing with the passage of the years.

1.2 Evaluating Basilio's leadership

We come now to look closely at two moments: what was said when he completed his second term of office as Superior General in 1985, and the tributes that came from far and near on his death in January 1996.

1.2.1 At the end of his term of office

At the end of 1985, the province of Madrid published a special number of its review, *Madrid Marista*, under the title, *Brother Basilio Rueda*. It was an act of thanksgiving for his eighteen years of government at the head of the Institute. Brother Demetrio Alzaga was a friend of Basilio (they exchanged more than 100 letters) who became provincial in Basilio's time; in the review he wrote: "At every moment he offered models, and indicated the paths we could take safely. He adapted to the demands and the necessities of each time, each country in the light of our Marist spirit and the teachings of the Gospel. Brother Basilio was a light and a guide throughout the years of his government."¹⁴ Brother José Llanillo has much to say along the same lines: "Many describe him as a gift of God, a providential man, an extraordinary agent of unity and renewal. He was a Superior for our times, open, magnanimous, both imaginative and balanced, patient and free of discouragement during difficult moments for the Church and the Institute. He was able to look to the future and be realistic about it..."¹⁵ Brother Javier García Terradillos, one of his general councillors, sums up his presence at the head of the congregation in this way: "We cannot say what the Institute might have been in other hands, but I can say that in his the crises were softened. He gave a direction to the provinces, and he maintained a real balance during this period of rapid change... And above all, in his last years, his emphasis was on deepening the

¹⁴ *Madrid Marista*, *Al Hermano Basilio Rueda*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 20.

Brothers' prayer life which sooner or later would have its effect and lead to a more serious and richer congregation."¹⁶

1.2.2 The testimonies after his death

The death of Brother Basilio brought about a wave of immense emotion in the whole Institute and in the Church; never had a Superior been surrounded by so much prayer and affection at the time of his final illness. All the tributes around his coffin were full of gratitude, admiration, praise and expressions of great affection. We give a little space to some extracts.

"I have been asked to say what kind of Superior General Brother Basilio was from 1967 to 1985... Personally, I think that it was his life's mission to be Superior General of the Little Brothers of Mary; God had in mind for him a mission of total service lovingly given, a mission to the whole world. That is what he was born for. That is how I have come to know him; that is the image of Brother Basilio that is engraved on my heart... Speaking of the Brothers of the whole Institute, he could say quite truthfully what Marcellin said one day: 'I hold all the Brothers deeply in my heart,' and all the Brothers of the Institute during the years 1967-1985, of every race and every language, could reply: 'Basilio, we also hold you deeply in our hearts.' Today I repeat the words spoken of Marcellin by Brother François on June 6 1840: 'We here on earth have lost a friend, a counsellor, and a comforter, but we have gained a powerful intercessor in heaven.'"¹⁷ Here Brother Aureliano touches on one of the charisms of Basilio's leadership: he loved truly, and he was truly loved – love, the indispensable quality for good government.

Brother Carlos Martínez Lavín was an outstanding person in Mexico during Basilio's time; in his eulogy at Basilio's funeral he said: "Today, during this requiem Mass, we wish to proclaim with him the glory of God, the glory of His grace, of His mercy and of His providence. God made Basilio, for us, a sacrament

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁷ Brother Aureliano Brambilla, in *FMS-Message*, no. 19, p. 15. He was provincial in Mexico during Basilio's time and he collaborated in realising Basilio's dream of having specialists on Father Champagnat. He is one of the most skilled experts in the letters of the Founder.

of His power and love, exceptionally rich and touching... He leaves us the precious inheritance of his teaching written in his circulars and above all in the book of his life. We have a duty to make it known.”¹⁸ Brother Joaquim Flores, who was Basilio’s provincial at the time when he died, had this to say: “This long period at the head of the Marist Institute coincided with the application in the Church of the teachings and directions of the Second Vatican Council. We can say that the presence of Brother Basilio at this moment was providential for the Institute. His special charism, his prophetic intuition, and the thrust he gave us at this historical time for the Church and the world were great blessings for us... If Brother Basilio experienced no anxiety at being Superior general, he was as little disturbed by it when he became the former superior general. He lived and worked with us with the same simplicity and the same availability for service. He was always offering his help, his sympathy and his friendship, and he remained close to each one of the Brothers and the people with whom he worked. Thank you, Lord, for the example and the life of service of Brother Basilio. Thank you for the gifts that You gave him, for the fruits that Your love caused to spring up in him and in those who knew him and were drawn to him.”¹⁹

These three testimonies come from Mexicans, friends of Basilio who held important responsibilities. But praise of Basilio as Superior comes together from all parts. In a portrait of Brother Basilio that Brother Charles Howard sketched with bold strokes, we find: “He was a prophetic voice who invited us to accept the challenges issued by Vatican II and to respond to its calls. In a special way he directed our attention to the needs of the missions and of the poor... He inspired a profound renewal of our personal spiritual lives... He was never disheartened; he was a source of inspiration for all of us. He gave to many Brothers a new faith in themselves and in the Institute. We never forget this intrepid guide who, like the prophet of Exodus, showed us the way and led us through it, saying, ‘Tell the people of Israel to march on!’ In truth, Brother Basilio was a leader in this journey.”²⁰

¹⁸ Brother Carlos Martínez Lavín, in *México Marista*, no. 10, p. 14. He was provincial of México Central. At the present time he is working in Cuba among the first group of Brothers who have returned to that country.

^BBrother Joaquim Flores Segura, Provincial, México Central, in *FMS-Message*, no. 19, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 86.

Brother Seán Sammon, our Superior General, was present at the funeral of Basilio as Vicar General. His eulogy also touched on Basilio's leadership: "This simple and good Brother directed our Institute and each one of us during periods in our history that were full of challenges and difficulties... Brother Basilio had a marvellous vision of religious life, his enthusiasm was infectious and he went with great ease to the heart of the subject... He always gave his very best. The memory of this good and generous man will live on in the hearts and spirits of each one of us and in the lives of so many others."²¹

At the time of Brother Basilio's death Brother Benito Arbues was Superior General. Some days before he had been at his bedside and marvelled at the way Basilio put himself into the hands of the Father. In the words he wrote in the foreword to *FMS-Message* no. 19, May 1996, which was entirely devoted to Basilio, he said: "He was our Superior general for eighteen years, at a historic and very important time, since it fell to him to carry out the renewal of the religious life required by Vatican II and by our General Chapter. A man open to the Spirit, to the church and to the signs of the times, he gave a decisive thrust to our Institute. He also helped us to rediscover our vocation as Brothers, lay persons consecrated as gifts to the Church, and to live with joy the call of the Lord who has chosen us..."²²

It is not difficult to understand that the testimonies could be multiplied many times over. We quote just these six, three Mexican provincials and the three Superiors General who succeeded him.

Among the messages of condolence are those of cardinals, bishops, many Superiors General of other congregations, a great number of religious, men and women, politicians, and friends that he had made everywhere in the world since one of his mottos was "to travel the journey of life in the company of friends."²³

What was it, then, about the government of Basilio that attracted so much sympathy, so many eulogies?

²¹Brother Seán Sammon SG, in *FMS-Message*, no. 19, pp. 13-14.

²² *FMS-Message*, no. 19, May 1996, pp. 13-14.

²³Circular, *Community Life*, p. 176.

2 A style of leadership²⁴

Brother Basilio's style of leadership is marked by *a clear vision* and *strategies to achieve it*.

2.1 The vision

Basilio inherited an Institute that, after 150 years of existence and traditions, was characterised by a style of life that was shaped by the rule and regularity. He inherited it at a time when the Church had the will to make changes, and was given a Council for the purpose of renewal or of *aggiornamento*²⁵, to use the term that was current at the time. Above all it was a time when the world had begun to undergo very rapid changes in science, technology and philosophical concepts and ethics: the world had become a great workshop of change.

There were four advantages that Basilio had in drawing up a clear vision of what he had to try to ask of the congregation in renewing itself in accordance with the Council's directions. His time in the Movement for a Better World coincided with the years of the Second Vatican Council; his responsibility included the duty of assimilating the documents of the Council and making them known. This was an extraordinary advantage because his spirit and his heart were to become imbued with the ideas and the intentions of the conciliar fathers. This work of assimilation and teaching was to continue during his two years at El Escorial as the formator of Brothers who already had considerable experience of the apostolate and contemporary culture. Basilio became a man of the Council. At El Escorial he was to perfect another attribute, a knowledge of the Founder and of the charism of the Institute. This knowledge he passed on to the Brothers, and better still, he organised a pilgrimage to the Hermitage for each group of Brothers.²⁶ He gave them the opportunity to take in the spirit of our origins from their very source,

²⁴ The testimony of brother Quentin Duffy of 26 February 2003 is quoted extensively in the texts that follow this part of the Chapter.

²⁵ This was a term often used by the Council to indicate the updating that the Church was in need of.

²⁶ In the library at El Escorial records are kept of the preparations for these pilgrimages and of the spirit in which he wished them to be undertaken, along with accounts by Brothers who were surprised at the knowledge Basilio had of the Founder.

and he quenched his own thirst for this living spirit. On the other hand, his leadership role in the Movement for a Better World also required that for four years he lived outside the mainstream of the congregation and involved many journeys, meetings with all kinds of people, in a word, opening his eyes to the complexity of the world and of humanity and of all the newness that was bursting forth in it.

The brilliant young Basilio, Marist Brother that he was, observed, meditated in his heart, and considered how far and in what way it was possible for religious life to come to terms with the mainstream of human life. Above all, he was a man of God, who gained his strength from the Word of God and viewed everything in the light of the Spirit. These then were the four sources of light: his assimilation of the documents of Vatican II, his absorption of the spirit of the Founder, his understanding of the world, and his intimacy with God; they allowed him to have a precise vision of what the congregation of the Marist Brothers had to do to remain apostolically effective in the Church and the world of the present and the future. Still, there was one important element lacking in his knowledge of the Congregation: his experience was limited to the Spanish-speaking world. That explains the journeys that he took beginning in 1968, visiting 13 African countries; at the same time he sent his Vicar his Councillors to visit other parts of the Marist world.

2.1.1 What was his vision?

His vision was in line with the renewal required by Vatican II, which was to have an impact on the body and soul of the Institute. This meant imbuing the Institute with the Gospel, rediscovering the spirit of the origins, and adapting to respond to the youth and the world of today. This entailed a conversion of heart and an option for true values, those of the Gospel, and therefore letting go of a way of thinking that was sacralised by tradition: the primacy of the Rule, regularity, the performance of exercises, a spirituality of Law and thus a notion of salvation achieved through respect for the Rule. It was as if a distancing, a displacement, had been slowly coming about between the Marist universe and the world, between exercises of piety and prayer in spirit and truth, that of sons in communion with the Son who always sees the face of the Father, and between

relationships in the community and the sincerity and spontaneity that should characterise them. All of these called for changes that would to be expressed in the drawing up of new Constitutions that addressed three broad areas:

- Prayer, and our relationship with God,
- Community life, and relationships among the Brothers,
- The apostolate, and relations with the young and the world.

In practice the new Constitutions had implications for the structures of government, prayer, the style of community life, the nature of the apostolate, and religious formation.

In regard to government, there were to be new structures, provincial chapters and general conferences, and a greater sense of collegiality. The former were intended to bring about the renewal required by the Council by reflection and programmes in each province at the local level according to the social and cultural context of each situation. The renewal was not going to drop in from above by parachute; it was to be facilitated by the superiors in Rome, in the light of the documents of the General Chapter and the circulars of the Superior General. At the end of this chapter we quote certain texts of Basilio that make this quite clear. The General Conference was also a new structure in the Institute; it was convoked in the middle of the Superior General's term of office so that he could consult with all the provincials about the Institute and the decisions of the General Chapter. The first of these, that of 1971, became famous because of the *Vocal Meditation of a Superior General* a meditation-conference in which Basilio looked at what renewal had been accomplished in the Institute and what still remained to be done. Basilio told the provincials, "We cannot afford simply to be administrators in these changing times. We cannot avoid or even soften these changes; on the contrary, it is our duty to manage them so that there is a fruitful outcome in accordance with the Gospel and with Marist values."²⁷

His desire to involve Brothers at the community level was to become even more evident when he later asked every community to draw up its Community Project as requested in his two circulars, *The Community Project* and *The Project of Community Life*, the aim being to seek the will of God together as He makes it known in the events of life, always touching on every aspect: a more creative and biblical prayer

²⁷ *Vocal meditation of a Superior General*, p. 389.

firmly rooted in the liturgy, and a prayer that takes into account the life of the world: these are the first steps on the path to Marist Apostolic Spirituality. The project had to take into account fraternal relationships that truly come from the heart. It required a scrutiny of the apostolate with a view to becoming audacious witnesses of the Lord. It gave the Brothers an opportunity every year to harmonise their lives with the will of God and the rhythm of the world. It was no longer, as it had been in the past, a style of life defined once and for all by the Constitutions and the Statutes. Today, guided by the Constitutions and the Statutes, we are given a flexibility that enables us to choose the spirit, organization, work and horarium that best responds to the calls of God, of humankind, and of the members of the community. This is truly a new vision for our times: it helps the Brothers to move from an almost monastic life style to one more suitable for an active congregation which must march in time with the world and with the Gospel.

In regard to the apostolate, Brother Basilio has spoken of the “de-schooling” of the Institute. By this he did not mean closing the schools: what he had in mind was, on the one hand, to encourage the schools to respond with closer attention to the apostolic realities of our time, and be attuned to the spirit and the expectations of the young, and on the other hand, to become sensitive to other ways of making the congregation present among marginalised young people: houses of welcome, libraries, houses for victims of drugs, cultural centres, parish catechesis... The world was developing in such a way that more and more a community would be made up of a group of Brothers of different specialisations and who would not necessarily work in the same school but in different aspects of the pastoral care of the young. That would require a more flexible life style.²⁸

Living in such a community would require a change in formation, especially for the young who wished to become Brothers. It would be a formation that developed from within a personality that is stronger, more convinced, and more thoroughly evangelised, while at the same time the external structures would become less restrictive.²⁹ In the conferences he gave on personal formation he foresaw four main stages: the person, the Christian, the religious, the Marist: it was

²⁸ Several of the circulars talk of this: *Community Life, The Community Project, the Project of Community Life*.

²⁹ *A vocal meditation*, p. 363.

essential that the first of these stages achieved a balanced personality since this ensures a healthy basis.³⁰

The renewal he had in mind had to penetrate every vital aspect of Marist life: prayer, fraternal relationships, and apostolate. But how did Basilio go about getting the Brothers to share his views? What strategies did he use?

2.2 Strategies to put the renewal in place.

We can speak of direct strategies and group strategies.

2.2.1 Direct strategies

Direct strategies were aimed at individuals. Here we refer to the direct contacts of the Superior General – and also of the general councillors – with particular Brothers. Nothing is mentioned so often as the availability of Brother Basilio, his willingness to meet the Brothers at any time when he was free, in circumstances of all kinds, in the great retreats or visits when he was available for interviews, even if this required going late into the night, or meeting in a waiting room at a railway station or airport, and even in buses and trains. In particular Basilio met in this way two kinds of Brothers: those who had problems or those who simply wished to meet him for the sake of friendship, and interviews with key Brothers, Provincials and Brothers in charge of formation... Many of the provincials who gave testimonies emphasise how they were given his total and lucid attention.³¹ Meetings with him always tended to lead, if we may say so, from the old testament of Marist life to the new. His personal contacts were sustained by letters, by telephone calls, and by gifts made at just the right time. He was convinced of the importance of direct contact at which time he listened attentively to the other and

³⁰ See the notes of the courses given at El Escorial to the Brothers following the *Jesus Magister* programme. Basilio gave courses on the Religious Life that gave proper attention to these four aspects.

³¹ See the testimonies of Brother Antonio Lopez Guardado, provincial of Central America, Brother Manuel Gomez, provincial of Colombia, Brother Conrado Trascasa Garcia of the province of Madrid, or the book, *El Estilo de una vida...* Brother José Manuel Gomez Ramirez wrote: “He gave me help every time I had recourse to him, whether about personal matters or about difficult cases among the Brothers of the province. He never counted the time, day or night. And with what insight he showed in solving the most difficult cases.” (Cf. Testimony of 5 September 2002).

understood him with great respect. For Basilio the person was always an absolute. This manner of working became a feature of Basilio's style of government inasmuch as he took upon himself the animation of the Congregation while leaving its general administration to Brother Quentin Duffy, his Vicar General. Basilio always preferred and tried to arrange meetings person to person, and in these interviews he was mature, clear-sighted, human and very skilled.³² This aspect will be studied in detail in the Chapter that deals with Basilio as a Brother among Brothers. One result of this strategy was the sending of many Brothers to houses of prayer to renew their contemplative spirit: Troussures, with Father Caffarel, Spello, at the school of Carlo Carretto, and Loppiano, the Focolarini Centre. In all the retreats that Basilio gave in the Americas and in Spain from 1967 to 1972 Basilio kept saying that renewal begins in the heart, in conversion of heart; unless the heart is open to God there can be no renewal. This point always lay at the base of his famous circulars on prayer and the retreats on prayer that he continued to give in his second period of office. Cardinal Pironio, who from 1975 was Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, echoed these words: "Some time ago I read a magnificent circular of Brother Basilio on prayer. It seems to me that this is the authentic path of renewal for the times in which we live, to be a prophetic presence in the world. After the council there was an attempt at renewal, but because of haste, it was only a simple adaptation of forms and not a true renewal: it lacked conversion of heart and spirit, it was lacking in deep prayer."³³

2.2.2 Group strategies

The group strategies had a wider reach: communities, centres of formation, provinces, the Institute. His ideas were communicated during conferences, retreats, pastoral or canonical visits and the reports that followed, the circulars or the great moments of the Institute such as the general conferences or general chapters.

³² Whole pages of the books, *El Estilo de una vida, Basilio, An other Champagnat*, FMS Message No. 19 of May 1996, and a great number of reviews: *México Marista, Madrid Marista, Bética Marista...* dwell on this charism of Basilio, the warmth of his welcome and his attentive listening.

³³ *FMS Special 1976*. This was in a conference that Cardinal Pironio gave to the capitulants at the 1976 Chapter. He was a friend of Basilio who invited him to speak as a friend and as the Prefect of the Congregation for Religious.

We have already referred to certain reports of his visits such as those he left for the Brothers of Switzerland, Congo-Rwanda, Canada and the province of Madrid. He never failed to tell them how they were to view the young of today in order to attract them to Marist life, and to proclaim the Lord not with the words of yesterday but with a voice understood by the young today.

2.2.2.1 The circulars

From a quick glance at the whole range of the circulars, it is clear that some deal with conversion of heart (*A Talk on Prayer, Meditation, Obedience, Mary in our Lives, the Spirit of the Institute*), others address community life (*Community Life, the Community Project, the Project of Community Life*), while others are concerned with understanding the Church, the world, and the calls of the Founder and the manner in which our approach to the apostolate must be adapted in the light of these: this is the subject of his first circular, 2 January 1968. The circular on *Fidelity* offers us encouragement in the face of the difficulties met in adapting to new things; today fidelity is possible: it produces religious personalities of great worth, and fidelity is always an ideal that can be realised as Marist life is renewed. All of the circulars propose the new vision of Marist life that Basilio dreamed of; all of them offer a rich, dependable and bold body of teaching. In the circulars our family has a real treasure. They need to have a place in the Brothers' renewal programmes: the six months programme of spirituality, the two months sessions for the Third Age, the special programmes for formators. They urge us to find our bearings in God who possesses us and energises us, and in a constant sympathetic regard for the world of the kind that every educator and man of God must have; the intelligence and prophetic hope of Basilio assure us of this.

Brother Quentin Duffy, speaking of the circulars, noted: "His writings are not only many in number; Brother Basilio was never afraid to address matters that were causing problems for religious life. One of these, obedience, was a difficulty for many. Basilio's text dealt with this in such an accomplished way that that it was sought by several groups of young people in Rome. His reflections on community drew close attention in spite of the difficulties inherent in the subject. When he wrote about Our Lady he spoke to her directly and analysed what he thought to be her response. The old Brothers enthusiastically read his text on Our Mother". He

was a philosopher quite at home in modern discussions; his analyses were subtle.”³⁴

2.2.2.2 Chapters and general Conferences

Finally we come to those great moments in the life of the Institute, the General Conferences and General Chapters; their purpose is to examine closely the state of our religious family and to determine what directives should be given to enable it to keep in step with the Church and the world. In these moments, when Basilio intervenes, he gives voice to the conscience of the Institute. In 1967 and 1968 the Special Renewal Chapter required by the Council took place. In the period between the two sessions Basilio wrote his circular, *2 January 1968*. It was offered above all to the capitulants to offer some light and provide an instrument of work. This circular is certainly one of his richest. Parts IV and V, the calls of the World, of the Church and of the Founder, which break new ground, still retain all their value today and awaken the conscience of the congregation concerning what it should be open to and where it should take its place at the crossroads of the world. Had this circular been heeded the renewal would have proceeded at a more rapid tempo. However, Basilio knew that the circular had not been understood. He returns to this matter at the General Conference of 1971; in front of all the provincial gathered there he gave his *Vocal Meditation*, a strong, direct, almost brutal text which brought the provincials face to face with their responsibility to set up programmes and speed up renewal in their provinces. These 80 pages are a true *vademecum* for the provincials on the most important aspects of renewal. Basilio made them aware of the urgent need of a richer formation for young people wishing to enter the congregation and the acute need for the formation of formators: “Our way of thinking about formation has not, in fact, changed very much and this is serious for the future, since the young have themselves changed profoundly. The change that we have to envisage for our houses of formation must go far past alterations to structures, stages and levels. It is a matter of the method, the objectives, and the spirit. Either young people find in our houses a new formula (one that is neither soft nor condescending, but serious and demanding), and at the same time, a new way of living, and that later they also find

³⁴ Testimony of Brother Quentin Duffy, received in Rome on 26 February 2003.

welcoming communities and superiors able to understand them and continue their formation... or we lose a good number, perhaps the majority of these young people...”³⁵ Certain pages of the *A Vocal Meditation* will be found at the end of this Chapter. In the General Chapters of 1976 and 1985 he gave the capitulants a report on the state of the Institute, indicating its strong points and weak points, and noting what he had been unable to find. In 1985 in particular, he asked the capitulants to begin the Chapter with a long period of prayer, and he gave them three conferences, the last of which was on Marist Apostolic Spirituality.

2.2.2.3 Decisive orientations

Finally, during his time the Congregation took decisions and initiated directions of work still in place today, intended to put into action the renewal required by the Council and by the world: openness to the poor and the missions,³⁶ the Hermitage as our Marist sanctuary and centre for formation in the spirit of our origins, and the Champagnat Year of Spirituality which has been more recently called our Marist patrimony... Among the initiatives are the B.I.S. to expedite our option for the poor, the formation of the young Brothers seen in the foundation of the Marist International Centre in Nairobi for the Brothers of Africa, and the Marist Asian and Pacific Centre in Manila for all of Asia and Oceania. In fact, the whole Congregation has become aware of the need for a formation that is longer, deeper and more specialised.

2.3 Gospel-based Constitutions

We can also attribute to Brother Basilio the new Constitutions approved on 7 October 1986. Of course, they are the result of the work of all the capitulants in 1985, and of the commission that worked to present them for the study of the General Chapter, but all that took place in his time. These Constitutions, so evangelical, are a real gift of the Holy Spirit; they are the expression of a

³⁵ *A vocal meditation*, pp. 363-364.

³⁶ During the time of Brother Basilio 10% of the Brothers newly took up missionary work. Cf. Br. Claudio Girardi's testimony of 18-12-2002.

Congregation that has already achieved much in renewal, incorporating a rule of life that shapes religious in the way the Council wished, by a determined return to the Gospels and to the origins, and by a response more appropriate for the world today. Brother Roque Salet was one of the capitulants and also a member of the Constitutions Commission of which Brother Basilio was a member; he gives some precise details about the composition of particular articles. His account is to be found among the texts at the end of this Chapter. Various ones have said that it was enough that Basilio be present for the working group to feel sure they were taking the right directions – he created confidence.³⁷ He himself, even in the most difficult times, never lost confidence; he was optimistic by nature, but his unshakeable optimism also sprang from his intimacy with God. He left a beautiful message of hope for the capitulants of 1993: *“I think that the message that we must give the Brothers, particularly the very heart of the message, is to tell them that the Institute is on the way to arriving at a turning point in its history. It is a turning point that calls for greater fidelity, and at the same time for very important changes.”*

Let me explain. *This is the fourth general chapter that I have been blessed to participate in, and looking back at them all, it seems to me that actually we are now confronting challenges, historical circumstances, that are going to make greater demands than ever, and that this says to the Brothers that our Institute is as authentic as ever, as if it had been conceived, planned and founded for our time and for our circumstances – but at the same time it says that, probably, the way we have been managing, the institutions we have set up in the past and the way we administer them are not appropriate for the present time which calls for some very important changes.*

Here, I think, is the heart of the message: *to let the Brothers know our reality more clearly than ever, and let them understand better than ever the need to face a turning point in our lives, our communities and our work. Going into more detail, I would like to tell the Brothers that they should not be discouraged, and that when they receive the calls of the Chapter, when they are asked for very important changes, they should have every confidence. I really believe that what the Chapter has decided upon and the priorities that it is about to recommend to the Brothers truly represents the will of God and a true epiphany of our charism revealed through the calls of*

³⁷ This was very obvious when it was necessary for him to take the responsibility for the 18 months programme for formators, 1990-91. His presence immediately made the team feel more sure of themselves. Other groups had the same experience: EPSIMO, and the team in Mexico that was responsible for the animation of 60 schools.

*the times and the historical circumstances that are ours. May the Brothers accept this with great confidence, and peace and courage.”*³⁸

Brother Charles Howard, his successor, said appreciatively of him: “Brother Basilio, with his clear-sighted spirit, his work for the Movement for a Better World, and his preparation at El Escorial, understood very well the challenges of the Council when he was elected in 1967. He knew very well that the Church had asked religious congregations to take their place in a new way, to rewrite their Constitutions in the spirit of the Council, to take into account the situation of the world, and to undertake a movement of renewal; it was a time of challenge, a formidable task, and the responsibility of all of us, but a responsibility taken upon himself in a special way by this young Mexican Brother... Our documents speak of the superior as “a Brother among Brothers”, and in this regard Brother Basilio was an example for the whole Institute. His love of the Brothers and his relationships with them became legendary, and were a great blessing for many. Each superior general has his own style; that of Brother Basilio was charismatic and very personal, and this was a grace for the whole Institute.”³⁹

Among the Brothers, Basilio always enjoyed admiration and affection. We are sure that in him we had an exceptional leader. Brother Quentin Duffy, Vicar General, summarises the efforts and initiatives of Basilio’s leadership in a phrase that Basilio was fond of repeating – he knew and he stated in writing that we found ourselves in a period of infancy:⁴⁰ every effort had to be made to “help to awaken the dawn.”⁴¹

³⁸ Source: Br. Galo Rivera A., Provincial of Ecuador, 12 January 1996, fax to the provincials of México.

³⁹ Br Charles Howard, *FMS Message*, No. 19, pp. 24-26.

⁴⁰ *A vocal meditation*, p. 346.

⁴¹ General Conference, 1 July 1971, p. 340.

TEXTS

1. Brother Basilio and the government of the Institute

(Testimony of Brother Quentin Duffly, his Vicar General for 18 years.)

Brother Basilio established the style of government that he thought was best for the Brothers. Above all, it consisted of visits to the provinces and districts. The Provincials had the opportunity to give Brother Basilio the advice they considered necessary, and Basilio took the opportunity to meet the Brothers there where they worked. He was also able to see whether a Brother might need to be shifted to another place more suitable for him. Meeting every Brother helped him to get better results in his efforts, and also to get some idea of a change that would make it possible for a Brother to do better. If a change was not possible, Basilio was able to help the Brother know himself better, and thus obtain better results. More particularly, he was able to spend time with the Brother Superior and study with him how to improve the work of the community.

It was quite clear that Basilio was truly committed to person to person contact. This had become characteristic of him when he found himself in the Movement for a Better World and in the direction of Brothers that was his responsibility as the one in charge of the Second Novitiate.

At the beginning of his first mandate he began a study of each Brother. The fact that this was too much for him did not prevent him making the effort to do so; but he did not have the time that this demanded. Although he never brought this work to a conclusion, many Brothers benefited from it. Basilio often spoke of that task, but he admitted that he did not have the time to accomplish it. Very many Brothers made use of this study, which is an indication of the good that he would have been able to do had he the time for it. At the same time, we should understand that in the context of the Second Novitiate many Brothers were able to take advantage of a more detailed study of their lives by spending more time with Basilio.

There is no doubt that he was quick to see what might help a young Brother, as also to discern whether he should remain a Brother or not. I remember a case, not of a young man, but of a mature Brother who had decided to leave the Institute and marry. The members of the Sacred Congregation noted that never before had a dossier so careful in its analysis been submitted to them. It was a privilege to be one of Basilio's collaborators in every circumstance.

His work with each Brother was greatly appreciated by other Superior Generals at whose meetings they found him quite extraordinary. Among those who admired his work were Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, the Superior General of the Marist Fathers, and the Superior General of the Salesians, just to name a few. Young though he was, he was asked to speak to these experienced men, and he was always much sought after. Beyond the requests that were received from male congregations, many congregations of women sought his help, especially in Latin America. Because of this, he was highly regarded by a number of Apostolic Nuncios. (*Br Quentin Duff*, *Testimony*, 26 February 2003).

2. What kind of renewal?

When Basilio came to the end of his long circular, 2 January 1968, which was written to help the special Renewal Chapter, having studied and presented the documents of the Council, and after listening to the calls of the world, the Church and the Founder, he said:

“We are moving towards styles of, life

- Less legalistic,
- Apostolically more daring
- More inserted in an increasing number of professional contacts
- With forms of life that are more independent and externally more free.”

The renewal was going to affect the style of government, community life, the style of prayer, the quality of our apostolic action, through a rediscovery of our origins, adaptation to the world of today and assimilation of the documents of the Council. This required a new spirit and new Constitutions. The spirit and the Constitution would have to be more Gospel-based, marked by the signs of the

beatitudes and the fruits of the Spirit, but at the same time, nurturing more maturity, initiative, freedom and personal responsibility. One of the convictions by which Basilio was led was this: “If renewal does not start by prayer, it will be of little consequence” (Circular, *A Talk on Prayer*, p. 521). We find the same idea in some pages further on: “Renewal will become a reality if we have two points of reference, the Gospel and the origins of the Institute,” (p. 539).

All of this work is to be undertaken in obedience to the Church, but also through understanding the urgencies arising in a world that is rapidly changing and which has need of apostles both for the present demands and for those that the historical and cultural context will entail.

The pages of the circular, *2 January 1968*, the long study our Superior General made of our world and its needs, of the Church and its calls, of the Founder and the reality of our origins, are full of the intuitions that bring us face to face with renewal. The title is, of course, significant, the only one of its kind; this is the only one to include a date, and it is the date of our foundation. He chose this title because, in fact, we have to re-found the Congregation.⁴²

3. About renewal

My dear Brothers, the first step to be taken for our Institute to take on a post-conciliar attractiveness has to be taken in our houses of formation... The definitive reality of the application of the Council will come into being through the preparation of new generations according to the spirit and the great lines of Vatican II... One thing seems clear to me: there will be no renewal or adaptation, or rather, no adapted renewal if we do not look again, in the light of the Council, at the problems of the persons and the various other factors that influence formation...

The most important consideration in formation is the formators. I am inclined to say, in the most serious way, to all the Provincials and their councils, that they

⁴² See *The Community Project*, Ch. 6: “From the Old Community to the New”, and Ch. 1, “The Marist Brothers in Renewal”.

must not hesitate to put at the head of the houses of formation the best men in the province, and then, to make up the rest of the team, the most promising Brothers. The choice of these men already puts in place the first and fundamental phase of the renewal of the province...

The director of a house of formation has to be a man who undertakes the work of formation and organises the houses of formation in the light of the guidelines of the Council. He must not only be open and receptive to the Council, he must love it and know it well. Rather than just a scholar, he has to be a man moved by the spirit that was always present in the Council and throbs in the pages of the conciliar documents. Formation is no more and no less than a consequence of the inborn capacity of humankind, of the desire to engender life and help it to increase. What is true at the biological level is true also in every way in regard to all the levels of human life. The process of bringing this about is always accompanied by goodness, strength and love, or, more precisely, is brought about through the extraordinary conjunction of these virtues. A generation of true fathers, by reason of being so, resolves a good number of the problems of youth. When we see a generation that turns its back on older people, should we not ask whether this may be the case because they have lived as orphans all their lives?

In formation, all the events of the day are characterised by this inborn co-educative relationship, which extends from sport to the deepest and most beautiful area of spiritual direction: it is a relationship that, in a climate of friendship, kindness and love, always leads the young to grow, to be self confident, to become competent, to grow into adulthood and become true masters of their freedom. (Cf. *Vocal Meditation of a Superior General*, pp. 363, 391, 396... Conference at the closing of the General Conference of 1971, pp. 452-453, Circulars, Vol. XXV).⁴³

4. Towards what renewal?

I think that the first result to be expected (of the Renewal General Chapter) is an institutional presence alive in the heart of the Church and turned towards the

⁴³ In *Llamamiento a la renovación*, "The Formation of the Marist Religious", 8, presents the principles of a Christian formator, pp. 15-16. (Province of Norte, Spain, May 1973.)

world. The institution and its members have to give witness by a kind of life that is purely evangelical, young, free and lived joyfully; this presence has to be a sign for the world of mystery and love that leads people to ask questions of themselves about this rare and beautiful phenomenon. It must be an encouragement to Christians in their journey towards the Father, in the middle of their difficulties and temptations, because it shows them factually that the Gospel is not a utopia that can be bought and sold. However, so that this presence will be still more convincing for the Christian, it is necessary to know how to share the suffering and live the reality of the paschal mystery with enthusiasm. Young people, who above all live this holy and noble dissatisfaction in a particular way, must find among religious a model that makes attractive something worth the pain of sacrifice and of a definitive existence and commitment. But for this to come about, certain qualities will have to be found among the new apostles who will be their witnesses. It is necessary

- That they know how to look for, and find, in community life both satisfaction and their full development – not in concern for themselves, but in concern for the Kingdom of God and the happiness of others.
- That they make visible the spirit of the beatitudes as opposed to the hierarchy of human values.
- That they make visible the fruits of the Spirit that reveals the fruitfulness of Christianity in the world.

The world needs people who love, who are free and who are available. (*Circ. 2 January 1968*, pp. 641-642.)

5. The calls of the world

What I want to say is that the heart of this circular is not asceticism... but charity. It is the message of a dynamic Christianity, daring, creative, able to make our capitulants and all our Brothers more receptive to the calls of the world and of the conciliar Church, and more docile in their response...

We are threatened by this danger: stirred up by the discussion of questions that I dare to call domestic, are we going to use up and exhaust the months of the Chapter in resolving details of the Rule or the habit, and have debates about concessions... forgetting to reflect seriously on what we are doing and what we must be doing so that the whole congregation can become deeply immersed in this thrilling historical moment of ours resounding with urgent and pain-filled calls?

In fact, today we recognise these calls as the Will of God...

The precious enthusiasm that drives all the capitulants to wish to give to community life the depth and the surging vigour that manifests itself and exists in the heart of the Brothers as vow, desire and hope, should not simply remain “*quam bonum et iucundum habitare fraters in unum.*” No, the love of Christ urges us not to shut ourselves up in the joy of community life, sweet and pleasant though it may be, but to make this initial spirit of our Chapter the point of departure towards an opening to the drama of the world that surrounds us. Asceticism, dialogue with God, and fraternal life are three great forces that drive us towards prayer and an authentic zeal growing in love, for love, when it is truly love, is not satisfied unless it brings results in the face of the needs of those we love. (*Circular 2 January 1968: “A Chapter for the World of Today”, pp. 161-164.*)

6. Being present at the crossroads of the world and the times.

Becoming a little island in the middle of modern currents or shutting ourselves up in the walls of a school to dedicate ourselves to an exclusive task is not an adequate solution. Without setting aside anything that is truly our own, we have to compel ourselves to live in permanent and immediate contact with centres of social thought, organizations established for the development of peoples, pedagogical, catechetical and pastoral institutions, apostles of social justice, centres for the formation of activists, and leadership groups, and above all to take the fullest advantage of the research, planning and documentation that are already available. In brief, it is up to us to be present and active at the crossroads of the world and of our times...

Given that we have an enormous amount of work to do in our specific and exclusive task as educators, the narrow means of the school or the traditional college is an outmoded one requiring great changes, perhaps even the use of means not used before in this work. We should not be surprised if the means that were successful until recent times and which in the hands of our older Brothers were very effective and produced marvellous fruits, must today be seriously revised and greatly modified...

Obviously, this revision does not question the existence, or less still, the value *per se* of free Catholic educational institutions. The Council has spoken very clearly... How nonsensical it would be, when we have rightly an official conciliar affirmation of the actuality and the great value of the Catholic school, to suggest that it presents a crisis as far as the authenticity of our mission is concerned...

One thing is certain: the school must be our first activity; but it also seems that it cannot be the only work of the Brothers and that it should not be so. (*Circ. 2 January 1968*: "The Calls of the Church and of the Founder to the Chapter", pp. 354-357.)

7. The post-conciliar shape of Marist life.

A glance backward to the General Chapter will show us what we have done and how we have done it. What we have done, we did well, even very well....

How we have done it: - I think that when confronted by a General Chapter that calls us to a change that is quite vitally important, a man adopts a particular attitude, or he takes a place in the scale that reaches from resistance and caution to the deeply felt conviction that change must be made even with boldness. It seems to me that my position was then somewhere about the middle of the scale, dominated rather by caution. I must say now that with each passing day I see more and more clearly how change is forcing itself upon us, yet this is a change that gives a dynamic response to the Gospel, to charism and to history, and I have the feeling that we shall never attract youth by conservative attitudes or by a defensive determination to hold the line. There is growing within me with a spontaneous and irresistible power, the decision to promote to the limits of my authority and

within the framework of collegiality and subsidiarity, a faithful launching, developing and achieving of the post-conciliar and post-capitular form of Marist life.

I expect that you all, Brothers Provincial, know in moments of prayer how to discern the Spirit's action in order to recognise his promptings. The important thing is that it is the breath of the Spirit, and that we know how to discern it at the time. Allow me to return to this point; for the day when religious life gives up living by the Holy Spirit to draw its life only from "a repetitive text", it will have renounced not only its Christian substance which is life lived in the freedom of the sons of God, but also its authentic function at the heart of the people of God, that is to say, its charismatic character. (*Vocal Meditation of a Superior General*, pp. 348-349, 353).

8. A more serious problem: the crisis of the world.

For the reasons already quoted, this fourth part of the circular intends to be a vigorous sounding of the gong, calling on our capitular generosity to surpass the honest level of an ordinary Chapter and to attain, thanks to the confluence of points of view, the results of a truly extraordinary chapter. We need to undertake a self scrutiny not only of our internal life, but also one reaching out to questions outside ourselves, that is to say, examining the most serious and gravest problem that faces the historic mission of our generation and of the Church in the world today. This is the problem and the mission that our heart cannot remain a stranger to nor our action be absent from without sinning gravely against charity and without deeply surprising and even scandalising men of good will.

In our situation, to speak of a witness of life without it also being a witness of action is to run away from real life... We remember the reaction of our Founder when he learned that a Brother had let a poor man leave without offering him some help. How keenly would he wish today, facing the call of the Council and the profound needs of the times, that the collective poor of the 20th Century that knocks on the door of our institute, should receive not only that which we are able to offer it at the institutional level but also be able to discover its deeper source: yes, that our gift may reveal to it our true love; that it be able to recognise in this

love the authenticity of the gift that we have made of ourselves, and that this gift of ourselves may lead it even to the knowledge of the death of Christ whose hands and feet we are, dedicated to the service of humankind.. (*Circ: 2 January 1968*, “A Chapter for the World of Today”, pp. 166-167).

9. Being men of our time.

It is with an immense respect for the person of those we educate, and solely in the conviction that by our work we put them on the path of truth, goodness and the development of true values, by guiding them towards Christ, the way to the Father, Sacrament of the Father and true path to life – it is, I repeat, out of this single conviction that I beg you to go deeper into what we are and what we do. In no way do I wish to provoke a crisis of institutional identity, but rather, with new insight reaffirm our activity and seek to make it more far-reaching, deeper and more generous. My remarks here arise from my confidence as I ask that the Chapter undertake without fear a serious re-examination in the light of the world today...

We have to be men of our times and in our times; we have to become vividly aware of our moment in history, take our place in the dialogue and communion that the Church has established with the world, and particularly be on the look out for the signs of the times...

We can do this only if we become permeated by the spirit of the Lord and the spirit of the Gospel; this makes it possible for us to adapt to the signs of the times and make adequate responses. (*Circ: 2 January 1968*, “*A Chapter for the World of Today*”, pp. 280-283.)

10. Reform is achieved by living it.

We are reminded by the Council that charity lived in community can become fruitful. Between the ideal and the reality – and this goes not just for us – there is a great chasm. This is not just a problem of generosity, but also of circumstances. Human existence has been complicated, specialised and exteriorised to such a

degree that Christians, and therefore religious, are caught in an enormous net of conditionings, relationships and interdependencies, and a real meeting of persons, deep and fruitful, is becoming more rare. In fact, the time and the opportunities for contact have been reduced; relationships have become artificial, without depth, without authenticity, associated with tasks and business - sometimes quite demanding – that have nothing to do with the life of the community.

I will not dwell on this, but simply add that it is indispensable to guard against an error that is just as common, which is to think that things are put in place and changed because of words and decrees. Reform comes about only through living it, never before living it; all the rest is just rhetoric. It is a curious fact that the reality achieved is inversely proportional to the amount of theorising about it; the more publications, conferences, workshops and congresses about the theory there are, the less the practice follows. For some, perhaps even for many, this is an illusion by way of compensation, or complete evasion. Speaking about the subject assuages their conscience. (Circ.: *Community Life*, pp. 201-202).

11. Change is inevitable, but what change?

We are always witnessing a transformation of the religious life, not in the essentials, but in the accidentals, not in its evangelical inspiration but in its cultural expression. We are caught up in an abandonment of former ways of life forms and in the new formulation of the Religious Life. For that reason it seemed to me that the word “mission” was incomplete in itself, and that it needed to be supplemented by that of BIRTH. This notion of “giving birth” accords well with the dynamism of institutionalised charisms and the intrinsic fecundity of the religious life that we see today. I find it very meaningful above all because it presents us with a dilemma: when a woman is in the labour of childbirth, either she brings a child into the world or she dies. The Religious Life today, I maintain, will either give birth to a new form, or it will die.

It would not be out of place here to apply to the Religious Life what was said not long ago by a Bishop to a group of conservative Catholics who came to him hoping to find some sympathy for their laments over changes: “How little you know of the process of history. We have no choice between change and not

changing, but rather between a change that has a Christian connotation, or one that has a non-Christian one. You do not wish to change: in this you are wrong; this is not the Christian attitude.”

In the religious life the point at issue emerges in this way: we, Superiors, either have to turn our situation and our powers to profit, to ensure that the changes are made in the truest possible fidelity to the Gospel and to the Founder, or else we must accept the responsibility that the changes, inevitable today, go their own way, drawing us away from the Gospel and the Founder. Such a change would swiftly write FINISH to our Religious Life (*Vocal Meditation of a Superior General*, pp. 346-347, July 1971.)

12 What spirit leads us?

But perhaps still more serious is the loss of a certain spiritual quality. What has happened to the “prayer life” in religious life – considered from the point of view of the basic “interior life” or even as “Exercises of Piety” leading eventually to real dialogue with God?

Is our consecrated life acting as a leaven in the world or has it, on the contrary, allowed itself to be swamped? Has the evangelical concentration, which consecration implies, become diluted? How great a part does the mystery of the cross play in our life? While it is regaining a central position in the theology of the Protestant Moltmann, has it not been relegated to a very secondary place in the practical lives of a great number of Catholic religious?

Have we tried to be “evangelical” in our use of goods, or in our manner of administering them? Has our conception of law, institutions and structures become more enlightened or is it all just TALK?

Wherein lies the quality of our relations with the present day world? We have been rather immature in this field for a considerable time as compared with secular institutes they have been accustomed to working in an atmosphere of ferment at the heart of secularisation....

What are our relations with regard to ecumenism, to beliefs that differ from our own? For instance, one can appreciate more and more the values of Islam and at the same time become more and more a disciple of Christ. On the other hand, one can establish superficial contacts of a kind that would weaken one's Christian faith... Apart from that, the real question is: what kind of spirit motivates you, motivates us and continues to do so? (*Circ: Project for Community Life*, pp. 13-16).

12. Evangelising the community

What, then, has to be done? First of all, by opening the community to the love of the Father, in Christ; by not living a life based solely on the moral virtues, but solidly on the word of God and on the life of Jesus, under the guidance of the Spirit, we will make progress. In other words, restore to the religious life and to each of its essential elements the Gospel-based richness it had in the Founder and in the early beginnings of this congregation before it crystallised into a tradition...

A new type of regular life is needed which will not be less exacting but more dynamic than the former life. Remember what St Paul says to the Galatians (5:3) who are unwilling to adopt the law of liberty: "I testify before all men that anyone who has himself circumcised is under the obligation to practise the law in its entirety." In other words: "If you do not wish to advance and enter wholeheartedly into the Project for Community Life, then take up again the strict observance of the old Rule."

Whatever regrets it may cause, the movement towards integration displays, at least, remarkable courage in its return to the asceticism and discipline of former times. It is not the lamentable tepidity which undertakes nothing that one is going to compare it with, but rather a new fervour; not of people saying, "God can't be asking so much?" but of those who know that God demands everything, at each new epoch.

With people of this stamp, yes, one can envisage a metamorphosis of the communities. It will not be done in a day. We are entering into it like pioneers, with boldness and patience. (*Circ: Project for Community Life*, pp 25-27).

13. A will dedicated to evangelisation

Carrying on what has already been started, filling in the most important gaps, that is what is demanded of us and it is also what our conversion to the Gospel consists in, because it simply means rousing ourselves to complete dedication to the work of evangelisation.

The world is slipping out of our hands – not *our hands*, of course, so what! – the Church's hands. The world is becoming de-christianised, i.e. it has no connection with Christ, it ignores Him, does not pray to Him any more, does not live His kind of life any more.

It is possible that the future of the Church lies in small, scattered communities of the faithful buried in a world, which is secularised and godless; that it will have to endure this situation in the manner of one walking through a desert or surviving a hard winter. Is the assurance offered to us by the theologians and sociologists not too facile?

This should make us deeply aware of the double dimension of evangelisation: not reading the Gospel in an ethereal way making its social dimension an abstraction; but also not reducing it to a social justice manifesto or a call to revolution at a time when a spiritual ice age is already completely enveloping a half of the planet, where faith is being extinguished.

Let us not forget that our congregation was founded to evangelise and catechise a world that had already been converted to a vague form of theism or even atheism under the successive attacks of secular writers (the Encyclopaedists) and philosophers and then by revolutionary laws... There had been a breakdown of religious men and values prior to the Revolution that allowed it to harvest the fruits, which were ripe for the picking. No doubt a reaction would set in, but much later, and one ought to be able to see, looking back, what could have been avoided. (*Circ: The Project for Community Life*, pp. 30-32.)

14. The Signature in the Constitutions

The General Chapter of 1985 had, among its most important objectives, the elaboration and approbation of the Constitutions and Statutes. Brother Basilio and I worked on Chapter 2: Consecration. I remember two significant interventions of Brother Basilio in the work of the commission. They indicate his vision of the future and of the newness of religious life, as well as his deep human sensitivity.

He said that the Institute was not yet ready for *the obedience of the community*, and that Article 43 of the Constitutions would continue to be a challenge. The obedience of the person was one thing, the obedience of the community quite another. The communities, the provinces and the Institute had to take note of that and educate themselves in it. Such a study is difficult because the obedience of the community, in seeking and achieving the will of God, demands discernment, a spirit of faith, attention to the Word, fidelity to the charism of the Institute, an adequate interpretation of the signs of the times, contemplation and becoming free of the interests of persons and groups.

But what drew the attention of the members of the commission more closely was the following. When Chapter 2 of the Constitutions was practically finished, there were some Brothers who had the audacity to say that the content of the chapter was for saints, for the perfect, and not for imperfect men, pilgrims on the journey towards holiness. The chapter lacked a certain realism about the lives of the Brothers who have their limits, their weaknesses, and also their failures in the face of temptations. This statement in the commission did not cause much repercussion, except for Basilio.

Some days later, in a new meeting of the commission, Brother Basilio proposed that a supplementary article be added to Chapter 2. This was discussed, amended and approved, and was placed at the end of the Chapter under a different heading from the others, as can be ascertained.⁴⁴ It summed up the whole chapter and the responses that had been evident. The article recognises the setbacks, hesitations, doubts, weariness and dryness of heart, and waywardness in the pursuit of false consolations on account of human nature. It also proposes the means to combat these and overcome them. The Institute owes this article to the sensitivity of

⁴⁴ This refers to Article 46 of the Constitutions.

Brother Basilio, who had such a deep understanding of the human person. (*Testimony of Brother Roque Ari Salet*, Rome, 24 April 2002).

15. Basilio, a man of his times?

I would say that he was a man of his times, an extraordinary one. He understood the signs of the times better than anybody. He had been a collaborator of Father Lombardi in the Movement for a Better World. In this work he gave much of his energies to Chile where he made many friends and where he preached retreats and gave courses to many groups of bishops. His heart being open to the needs of the world, he made his talents available far beyond the boundaries of the Congregation.

He had a vision of the world that far surpassed that of ordinary men. In every country he wished to have contact with the highest authorities in government to be able to speak with greater relevance to the Brothers about the socio-political realities of the country in which they offered their apostolic collaboration. He was careful also to have contacts with important people who knew the situation of the Church and religious life. In Brazil he never failed to visit those who were leaders of the CRB⁴⁵ and the CNBB⁴⁶. In the towns where he directed retreats he always visited the ecclesiastical authorities. I remember that when he was giving courses of formation for superiors and retreats in Rio Grande Do Sul, he took a great number of Brothers to visit Cardinal Dom Vicente Scherer with him. In San Paolo we accompanied him on a visit to Cardinal Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns.

Yes, he was certainly a man with his feet firmly planted in the world of today, but his heart was looking towards the future, to help “to awaken the dawn”, as one of his favourite sayings had it. (*Testimony of Brother Claudio Girardi*, 18 December 2002).

16. Basilio's cross

⁴⁵ Conference of Religious of Brazil.

⁴⁶ National Conference of Bishops of Brazil.

This is difficult to say. For me, one of the crosses that Basilio experienced was the lack of sincerity and even the deceitfulness of some people. I remember that when he preached a retreat on prayer in the province where I was provincial, there was a Director who had fallen in love with his secretary. Brother Basilio came to an agreement with him that he would give up the post of director and go to Rome where he would undertake various courses and retreats to give life to a vocation that was in danger of dying. At the end of the retreat Brother Basilio called me and asked me to go and find the Brother in order to resolve the situation and appoint a new Director. But the Brother insisted: “I assure you that the Superior General did not understand me; I never did what I was accused of.”

I went back by bus, a journey of about 800 kms. I told Basilio the result of my journey. I have never seen Basilio as sad as he was on this occasion. After a little silence, his face revealed a deep sadness, and he said to me: “What a shame, this man is telling a lie and in the face of this deceit I cannot do anything.” This director left the Institute the same year and married his secretary.

Another cross for Basilio was the departure of many Brothers for futile reasons. He himself helped the departure of those who did not have a vocation. A man like him who loved the Institute deeply and who had done everything possible to lead the Brothers to a greater fidelity must have suffered deeply at our loss of numbers, especially through defections. I have no doubt that, like Champagnat, he suffered for each Brother who left.

These departures weigh heavily on a Provincial... During a period of several years there were departures that amounted to the membership of one whole province. That is truly sad. You can imagine how that must have echoed in the heart of a Superior General as sensitive, delicate and generous as Brother Basilio. (*Testimony of Brother Claudio Girardi*, 18 December 2002).

- 2 -
BASILIO: THE BROTHER

Under this heading we look at Basilio as a *brother* in the more human sense of the term, as a family reality and not as a religious title. All the same, his way of living gave back to the religious title its truest meaning, its ideal sense.

His brotherhood, inspired by faith, was characterised by a truly human affection; it consisted of attention, respect, encouragement, truth, uprightness, simplicity, fidelity and joy. He had a gift for mixing with people in the friendliest way. This aspect of his character made a deep impression on those who had anything to do with him. Many testify to this. The book *El Estilo de una Vida* (pp. 10-26) brings together testimonies under meaningful headings: *a magnanimous heart, an unconditionally supportive man, boundless kindness, overflowing sympathy*. Casting an eye over these pages provides a rich harvest of phrases that express the *humanity* of Basilio: cordiality, joy, love, delicacy, understanding, comfort, sense of affection, sympathy, frankness, unselfishness, simplicity, service, help, the impression of being valued, sincerity, amiability, freedom, humour, welcoming, modesty... We have here an extraordinarily rich human being.

This is of course one of the reasons why he was elected a Superior General. We have the witness of 1967. The Brothers of Latin America and Spain who had the opportunity to know him before the election of 1967 held him in high esteem. In describing Basilio's leadership we have made great use of the review *Norte Marista* of October-November 1967; other more recent witnesses draw attention to his humanity.

The former secretary general, Brother Joannès Eugène⁴⁷, has much to say. "*Brother Basilio Rueda distinguished himself from the beginning of the Chapter by a host of qualities that drew the attention of all the capitulants: a noble simplicity, cordial affability, perfect self-*

⁴⁷ Brother Joannès Eugène Minot was secretary at the time of Brother Charles Raphael, 1958-67.

mastery... All of this pointed to a deep supernatural spirit that is acquired only by intense prayer and assiduous meditation on the Gospel."⁴⁸

These few lines introduce us to the world of Basilio's heart.

1. He had the gift of friendship

Many people note warmly that friendship was part of Basilio's nature; friendly by birth, he showed this in his relations with others. He himself tells us something of his makeup when he writes, "The source of all the sources of community life is true love and the ability to foster friendship, to journey through life in the company of friends."⁴⁹ Many of the quotations from the circulars found in the book *Basilio: An other Champagnat* reveal this generous nature in their very headings. Here are some: *To read with the criterion of love*⁵⁰, *Religious life is based on generosity and magnanimity*⁵¹, *we have learned to love at the school of God*⁵², *Let your eyes convey sympathy*⁵³. Moreover, all his letters give assurance of his friendship and express a tender regard.

His golden jubilee was celebrated at Loma Bonita the year before he died. The Brother who proposed the toast observed: "There are two things that we cannot ignore: his passion for whatever is Marist, and the humanity of his language and his actions... We who know you know that you are a prudent judge, you ask only what is possible, you are on the side of what is right and *you share your friendship in a prodigal way with everyone...*"⁵⁴ The novices who lived with him remember him in the same way: "*A Brother among Brothers*; he knew how to bring joy and warm spirit, and he always tried to make us live in a family atmosphere... He was a Brother attentive to the needs of others, who never counted the cost when it had to do with our good...a Brother whose outstanding feature is joyfully recalled as

⁴⁸ *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 521.

⁴⁹ *Circ. Community Life*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ *Basilio: Un Autre Champagnat*, p. 23.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 285.

simplicity... Basilio was our Brother, a brother who related to us warmly. Every time we went to him we had the experience of his affectionate attention and availability.”⁵⁵

The speeches made at the time of his funeral return to the spontaneous sympathy that he evinced. Brother Charles Howard recalls: “Our documents speak of the superior as a Brother among Brothers, and in this regard Brother Basilio was an example for the whole Institute. His love of his Brothers and his relationships with them became legendary and were a source of blessing to many.”⁵⁶ His personal physician, Dr Calleja, has this to say: “At the human level he was an extraordinary person who radiated warmth. He was a very intimate person, warm and affectionate...”⁵⁷ His friend Brother Arturo Chaves de la Mora, who became a general councillor, also recalls: “He brought a great delicacy to his relations with others. He could develop a rich sensitivity that made him full of care for others. He was amiable, attentive to details, and helpful in the extreme. *His great heartedness led him to be a “universal friend”... He had the art of friendship, making friends and keeping friends.*”⁵⁸

Brother Jesús Bayo Mayor⁵⁹ was with Basilio at Oasi⁶⁰ during the programme for formators in 1990-1991. One of the traits that struck him was his “*skill in human relations, his great sympathy, his ability to establish contacts and make friends*. He was simple and spontaneous, becoming close to everybody, familiar and without any pretence.”⁶¹ He later repeated this in another way⁶²: “What I admire about Basilio is the art of interviewing, his kindness and understanding. You noticed that he was both father and shepherd... This was to be expected since in his life he had met thousands of people and written thousands of letters. He was an expert in human relations and a real master of the human heart.”⁶³ A Colombian Brother, Arnaldo

⁵⁵ (A group of his novices, in *FMS Message*, No. 19, p. 49).

⁵⁶ Br Charles Howard SG, *Op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.

⁵⁷ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 136.

⁵⁸ *México marista*, No. 10, September-December 1996, p. 1.

⁵⁹ A Spanish Brother whom Basilio sent to Chile; he made his perpetual vows during a retreat preached by Basilio.

⁶⁰ The name of the residence of Father Rotondi, on lake Albano, across from Castel Gondolfo, near Rome.

⁶¹ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 65.

⁶² Testimony given in Rome, 7 October 2002.

⁶³ Testimony given in Rome, 7 October 2002, p. 2.

Braguti⁶⁴, spent several months at the novitiate where Basilio was master of Novices⁶⁵; he developed a deep friendship. He remembers his friend as “a great humanist, a religious, able to live and sanctify the reality of creation, a man wonderfully positive towards life and human relations. With Brother Basilio it was possible to move from the scullery to the concert hall with the same elegance and cordiality.”⁶⁶

One of his novices said, “He had the wisdom, the advice and even the appropriate gesture for each person who came to him.”⁶⁷ An other recalls how he was immediately won over: “I remember the first interview I had with him. It was as if a spontaneous friendship brought us together. I knew that I could rely on him, that I would be able to trust him with the most precious thing I had, my soul and my heart; *it was as if I had always known him*. Over time this feeling was strengthened to the extent that I had confided to him my deepest desires and feelings. I do not know whether it was his smile or that of Jesus reflected in his, or his attitude, so full of affection, that gained my confidence.”⁶⁸ Another one had imagined the Superior General to be someone extraordinary and distant. In Basilio he found “a friendly person, joyful, who enjoyed a joke and was simple.”⁶⁹ Brother Claudio Girardi spent long years with Brother Basilio, as Provincial, then as Director of the International College in Rome, and finally as general councillor; his praise is endless: “*Basilio was a master in humanity*. He treated at depth every human problem whether happy or sad. He was very interested in everything human. *He had a heart without boundaries*. He had a precise knowledge of the affective domain. He knew the different degrees of friendship. He was easy to approach and he himself easily touched a person’s heart. He was absolutely free of possessiveness or jealousy. He was a friend who gave himself... who created an extremely respectful friendship.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Religious of the congregation founded by Blessed Daniele Comboni.

⁶⁵ Basilio was his vocational guide, *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 71.

⁶⁶ *En Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 71.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁶⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁷⁰ *Testimony*, 18 December 2002.

From Madrid, Brother Conrado Trascasa, Provincial in Basilio's time, then his right hand man in the Spanish capital, notes that "*Basilio won the sympathy of everyone who had anything to do with him.*"⁷¹ We recall how Brother Borromée Caron of Canada thought superiors as "winter" but Basilio reminded him of summer: "That day in his person I met a sympathetic man, happy, laughing, communicative, brotherly... Basilio was summer, sweetness, love, simplicity, he made himself all things to all men."⁷² From Argentina, Brother Hilario Schwab remembers him above all as superior and shepherd and as a poor man: he points to "*his warm and sympathetic demeanour*, and the interest he had in every Brother, his deep and clear human and spiritual understanding of difficulties and longings, and the wisdom that made him a spiritual director of the highest rank."⁷³ In *Quemar de Una Vida*, the chapter on interviews begins with this paragraph: "Brother Basilio was the friend and confidant of many Brothers and persons outside the Institute. He was able to win their full confidence from their first contact: always ready to listen and accept the person just as he was, breaking down the barriers of language, race, and rank regardless of their merits or weaknesses. He always had a word of encouragement, comfort and hope,"⁷⁴

These testimonies allow us to understand the *brotherliness* of Basilio, rich in all that goes to make up the solid relationship with others that we call *friendship* which is more dependable than love.

2. Love⁷⁵

Many of those who had a relationship with Basilio testify to this experience. We will not repeat the testimonies of Brothers Seán Sammon, Aureliano Brambila or Charles Howard already quoted in the Chapter on love. But there is much more to say. Four days before his death, 17 January 1996, Brother Bernadino⁷⁶ spent the

⁷¹ *Testimony*, 24 November 2002.

⁷² *Testimony*, 19 November 2002. The note that we still have, dated 28 June 1977, bears Basilio's fine signature.

⁷³ *Testimony*, Christmas, 2001.

⁷⁴ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 234.

⁷⁵ A whole Chapter (Notebook 4) has dealt with the place of love in the life of Basilio. Here the emphasis is on human love rather than spiritual, although the latter is the soul of the former.

⁷⁶ An Italian Brother who spent some time with Basilio.

night with Basilio. In his testimony he writes: “Very often on he nights I spent with him he said, ‘What are you doing here? Go to bed!’ When I left him that morning (January 18) to go to the novitiate at Morelia, he said, ‘Tell all the novices that I love them very much, that I love them in the heart of Mary that they may be faithful to their vocation.’ Then he gave me his blessing.”⁷⁷ A novice confirms the truth of this affection: “*Brother Basilio knew how to love everybody*, just as Marcellin did, different though we all were with our faults and our own ideas; he understood every one of us without exception; we all felt very much loved by him.”⁷⁸

A moving example of this love is given to us by Brother Ermezindo, provincial economo of Portugal, who was guilty of a financial indiscretion that he greatly regretted. “Called from Rome, the Brother Superior General at that time, Brother Basilio Rueda, was advised of the case and spoke with the provincial council. Then, one night, he summoned me. He had a long interview with me. He pointed out to me with affection and kindness the gravity of the case, the fault and the mistake, the disobedience involved: he embraced me twice and embraced me again, gave me a small penance, embraced me again on both cheeks, consoled me, encouraged me and declared that the wealth of the congregation was not in money but above all in its sons, in good and holy religious.”⁷⁹

In the Spanish world Father Manuel Portillo⁸⁰ was without a doubt one of his closest collaborators. They criss crossed Spain and Latin America preaching retreats. He left a testimony of several pages in which we read: “When a Brother confessed some fault to him and acknowledged it, or when one had done something prejudicial to the Institute, or caused important but involuntary financial losses, *Brother Basilio invariable welcomed him warmly and gently*. He was extremely understanding, and he possessed a great intuition on account of which he could go beyond the appearance of things and interpret them, *because his heart was full of love*... What was important was the life of each Brother. Everything – the budget, the structures, the time, his person – all was at the service of life and of

⁷⁷ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 301.

⁷⁸ *El Estila de Una Vida*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Letter of Brother Ermezindo Pires. He was one of a group of basilio’s intimate friends and became a frequent messenger.

⁸⁰ At the beginning of February 2003, Father Manuel Portillo spent two weeks at the general house. He repeated for me in conversation the long testimony that he had given in 1996 at the time of the death of Brother Basilio.

people.”⁸¹ Brother Robert Tremblay, who was at the General House for a long time, remembers what happened on his return from journeys. “On his return he enjoyed sharing with the Brothers the richness of his experiences that he had had in his visits. He loved all the Brothers in a concrete way and each one felt himself loved, as if he was the only one in the Institute.”⁸² “*There was much love in his heart!*” said Father Portillo, and Brother Tremblay adds that this love was very concrete, consisting of attentiveness, respect, help and selflessness.

3. Attentiveness to persons, respect, help, selflessness.

While these reflections were being put together (15 January 2003), Father Amador Menudo⁸³ happened to be in Rome and the conversation got around to memories of Basilio. He recalled the end of journeys: he would buy some souvenirs for his family, and Basilio used to do the same, saying that he had a big family also, but all the souvenirs were intended for lay employees at the general house; he was especially attentive to them. During his journey to the Holy land in 1968 with Father Amador, he thought of getting a little souvenir for every person who worked at the general house. On other journeys Father Amador was able to catch a glimpse inside Basilio’s small suitcase: it was arranged in two parts, one for his papers, and the other for a little linen and for gifts. The amount of linen was so little that the priest several times offered him his own shirts which he accepted in all simplicity “like one of the poor” the father adds.⁸⁴

We find a similar echo from Brother Roland Bourassa, one of Basilio’s general councillors: “His love for his Brothers was manifested in the great delicacy with which he approached everyone. His charity was seen in his attentiveness and in his concern for the future. He did not wait for someone to make a sign to him, he was always on the look out to give a handshake or offer a word of comfort. He made himself all things to all men.”⁸⁵ The mothers of Brothers had a call on his particular attention. He freely visited them, especially those who were sick, and on

⁸¹ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 56.

⁸² *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 17.

⁸³ Father Amador Menudo was another great collaborator of Basilio in giving retreats; he lives in Seville.

⁸⁴ *Testimony*, 15 January 2003, p.5 given in Rome during his visit.

⁸⁵ *Basilio: Un Autre Champagnat*, p. 106.

his return to Rome never failed to send them a papal blessing. We have already mentioned the letter he wrote to the mother of Brother Arthur Dugay, 13 May 1976, at the time when one of her daughters died; he wrote it in Rome and put it in the hands of Brother Arthur telling him to take it to his mother and keep her company. Brother Daniel Roy, speaking of his friendship with Brother Basilio, said: “He was interested in my family and visited them before leaving Russey. My mother had cancer. When he returned to Rome *he sent her a papal blessing and wrote to her at the end of each year.*”⁸⁶ Father Amador Menudo reports a similar event: “I remember being with him when we were giving a retreat; it was Christmas time. He knew that my mother was very old. He had the delicacy to call her on the phone on Christmas eve to offer her some words of sympathy for agreeing to let me go and do this work for the congregation.”⁸⁷

He was a very thoughtful person, *naturally generous*. In 1976, Brother Ricardo Dumrauf of the province of Lujan, Argentina, became gravely ill; his kidneys had ceased to function. Basilio offered to give him one of his. Unfortunately it was not compatible.⁸⁸ Once a Brother admired the shirt he was wearing, and he gave it to him immediately.⁸⁹ Another old Brother dearly wanted to have a personal souvenir of Brother Basilio, and seeing his profession cross, asked him for it. Basilio took it off and placed it on the Brothers chest.⁹⁰ Brother Alessandro di Pietro tells how anyone in Basilio’s office who was so imprudent as to admire some object that he saw received it as a gift.⁹¹ There were three priests of the Holy Family who wished to follow the course for formators that was to take place near Rome in 1990; Basilio told them that the course was intended for Brothers. Then, as an after thought, he said, “At least one of you could come as chaplain.” But the course was to be in French. That would not be an obstacle: Basilio found a place in Paris for several months of the study of French, all at the expense of the Marist Brothers.⁹²

⁸⁶ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ *Testimony*, 15 January 2003, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 203.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁹¹ *FMS Message*, No. 19, p. 45.

⁹² *Quemar la Vida*, p. 268.

His attentiveness to people and his generosity often took the form of concrete help: books, cassettes, medications, information, notes, retreat centres, especially for the missions that were have a difficult time such as Angola and Mozambique. Basilio was naturally on the look out to learn the needs or simply the tastes of people to give them a little pleasure. Brother Arturo Chaves de Mora thought that “helping others was his hobby; he was especially attentive to the sick. In every community where he lived he was the infirmarian, sometimes appointed by the Director, at other times voluntarily.” Brother Falqueto Alfonso of Brazil recalls how Basilio welcomed him at l’Escorial on 20 August 1967, a few days before the beginning of the Chapter: “his attentiveness, his understanding and fraternal welcome; he had an extraordinary spirit of service making himself totally available.”⁹³ Once a group of Brothers was visiting the general house during winter, and Basilio, showing them around, quickly saw that one of them was lightly clothed; he slipped away for a few moments, and returned with a warm coat; he told him to keep it as long as he needed it.⁹⁴ A young novice once spoke of Spanish castanets, and he got him a pair of the best. “He could not stop himself helping us,” said one novice, “no matter what it might have been, he was the first one to learn whatever we needed.”⁹⁵ Another tells how he would go to him about the smallest problem: “*I knew that he would stop whatever he was doing and give his attention to me.* That was one of his virtues, *helping those who came to him* whatever the time of day.”⁹⁶ In fact, we find here the human side of the love that he had for God and that God had for him. The text that follows has already been quoted, but it is so beautiful: “Whoever has known the fascination of the love of God knows that it does not belong to him. The soul, in fact, does not ask for it, it gives itself, and out of this gift is born the great understanding: life is not worth living unless one loves God unconditionally... When the love of God finds its place in a life, it releases a kind of love that defies rational measurement. The Thou of God and of the neighbour surpasses everything. A love that is limited in time is destined to a premature death. Love always wishes to give itself, to burn out its life,”⁹⁷ This saying, “The Thou of God and of the neighbour” characterises Basilio. It is the light that allows us to understand why he found the strength to watch over the

⁹³ *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 524.

⁹⁴ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 15.

⁹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁹⁷ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 305, (Interview J.M.V. p. 162)...

sick during the night and get everything possible for them; why he replied to all those letters, why he added detours to his journeys in spite of the cost involved, and why it was possible for him to live one of his great principles, “*the person is absolute*”. He well knew that love is something owed to a person, not just something aimed at. His *brotherhood included a great respect* for the other, and recognition of the other as an absolute value precisely because he is a person.

Two other elements of his friendliness become clear: *the total absence of a regard for his own concerns, and the affirmation of the other person*. One observation coming from Colombia shows Basilio: “serving others with a smile on his lips and without letting them feel that they are being served, working methodically and intensely, even giving up his proper and necessary sleeping time’ radiating light, comfort and ideals, and in personal contacts, prolonged and always friendly, with the large number of people he was directing”⁹⁸ The second comes from the pen of a French Brother: “Brother Basilio knew humanity at its most wretched and he made himself all things to all men. He possessed love for his Brother to a degree rarely met, to the point of being ready to die to save him, handing himself over and at the same time witnessing to the love of God as Jesus did.”⁹⁹ Brother Miguel Lopes says precisely the same thing: “I think that it would be difficult to find in Brother Basilio a concern for himself, his interests or his convenience. He had absolutely no time for the least concern about himself because his preoccupation was the Kingdom.”¹⁰⁰ His self-effacement left all the room for the other who was always affirmed. Fr Manuel Portillo recognised this: “He wished the Brothers to be open, communicative; concerned about small details – the little virtues of Champagnat – *he recognised the value of each Brother, of each charism*.¹⁰¹... *He appreciated everything that was positive, the sunny side of the life of the communities, Brothers and the Church*.”¹⁰² Brother Victorino de Arce¹⁰³ who knew him from his time at L’Escorial until his last year in Mexico speaks of him in this way: “*For me, he was a wise man, respectful of others’ freedom, attentive to details*. His friendliness seemed to

⁹⁸ Victorina Erloz, *Ecos de Columbia, El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 12.

⁹⁹ Br Camillo Gros in *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁰² Op. cit., p. 57.

¹⁰³ Provincial of Madrid, one who provided much testimony, beautifully written. On 17 February he sent a parcel of letters that Basilio had written to him. We are to learn that Basilio was his spiritual director.

me to one of the distinctive features of this joyful Mexican....”¹⁰⁴ Brother Jesús Bayo Mayór comes close to this view: “*He had a great capacity to admire, discover and praise whatever was positive in others; he concentrated on their good points, without ignoring their faults and limitations.*”¹⁰⁵

The Capuchin, Father Jaime Zudaire, who lived in Rome for seven years (1974-1981), wrote: “I don’t know what the Marist Brothers think, but me, I always saw him praising the qualities of each Brother and seeking the collaboration of all.”¹⁰⁶ His novices also had the same view: “*He was one who never imposed himself during interviews; he knew how to listen and deeply respect what people felt, what they lived, and he always gave wise advice and then left you to think about it...*”¹⁰⁷ An affiliated member of the Institute¹⁰⁸ confirms this general impression: “Brother Basilio was a friendly Marist, open to everything and to everyone, *with a great respect for persons*, a good listener. He was a man of prayer with a very clear vision of service to his Brothers.”¹⁰⁹ It follows that people who were open to Brother Basilio found themselves immediately on the way to his brotherliness and friendship, knew that they were listened to, understood, respected and valued. As his novices said, “*he never imposed himself*”; in the face of the human person and its deep mysteries, Basilio was *humble* and self-effacing so that a true dialogue might be established between the person and God.

4. Simplicity, joy, good humour, enthusiasm

In speaking of humility as the basis of Basilio’s brotherliness we have only to recall the great number of people who speak of his simplicity, the joy that he created around him, and the enthusiasm that he had for life and for all that was good. He once confided, “I am not someone who is easily excited, but I am easily pleased and feel things strongly.”¹¹⁰ His brotherliness was all the more easily accepted

¹⁰⁴ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁰⁶ Op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁰⁸ Mr Augustín García Blanco, of Venta de Baños, Spain.

¹⁰⁹ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 131.

¹¹⁰ *Mensagem por acaso da abertura do congresso marial*, Viamão, 16 January 1982, p. 2.

because it was simple, joyful and enthusiastic. You left a meeting with him reinvigorated, as if he had put a little piece of the sun in your heart. Speaking of Basilio as a young man, Brother Leoncio¹¹¹ recalls him as “a young man well organised, jovial, very communicative, a little mischievous and sometimes playing tricks on his companions which, among students, created a healthy joyfulness. He was a friend of everyone. You always noticed his joviality. Even in the novitiate, during times of recreation, he loved to play practical jokes on his confreres who took them well.”¹¹² Brother Arturo¹¹³ confirms these remarks: “He was very sympathetic and friendly. *He was always the cause of joy* and the promoter of family spirit in the community, and his jovial spirit on many occasions played practical jokes – in good taste – on his confreres. *His practical jokes became legendary.*”¹¹⁴ In a letter to Basilio, Brother Leonida, one of his great friends, who had been his Superior, told him: “There is a lot of blue in your sky.” This must have been true because he always tried to make other people’s sky calm. That is the impression of Brother Gabriel Michel: being close to Brother Basilio helped him to be *a more free and more peaceful person*.¹¹⁵ He adds, “He gave himself to everyone, he was always available... Among his friends you found people of other religions, and of other ideas about society. He was a man of dialogue.”¹¹⁶ This simple unpretentious man lived without prejudices and left people to take whatever opportunities they were inclined to, a brother to all spontaneously. If his heart was thus simple, we are not surprised to see him washing¹¹⁷ the dishes, dusting his office¹¹⁸, getting a bucket of water to wash a courtyard¹¹⁹, carrying suitcases of Brothers arriving at

¹¹¹ Brother Leoncio Martin was the one who recruited Basilio, later became his Provincial, and finally was Vicar General in the time of Brother Charles Raphael.

¹¹² *Norte Marista*, October-November 1967, testimony on pages 1185-1188. *Orientaciones*, October 1967, pp 525-526.

¹¹³ Brother Arturo Chavez de la Mora made his juniorate, novitiate and scholasticate with Basilio and then spent his first teaching years with him; he became Provincial of Central Mexico, then one of Basilio’s councillors general.

¹¹⁴ *Norte Marista*, October-November 1967, pp. 1188-1190. *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 523.

¹¹⁵ *FMS Message*, No. 19. May 1996, p. 40.

¹¹⁶ *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 21. Brother José Lopez followed the programme on *Lectio Divina*. He remembers the surprise of a sister at seeing Basilio always the first at the washing up; she was pained to learn that he was a Superior general. The Brother, giving his own impression, said: “I saw an intelligent man, wise, learned, deeply cultured, and all that together with an astonishing simplicity and a humility that shone through all his behaviour.”

¹¹⁸ *El Estila de Una Vida*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

L'Escorial¹²⁰, or Rome, or Mexico, waiting on the table,¹²¹ and serving liqueurs at the end of festive meals.¹²² A simple man, he was pleased to take unforeseen journeys that allowed him one or two days at the seaside, to enjoy a ride on one of the streams of the Amazon, or the happy surprise of the Eucharist surrounded by this immense forest.¹²³

To make others happy, this simple Brother donned a large Mexican hat, wore a Peruvian blanket, a Japanese kimono, held the reins of a camel in the Holy Land, and showed so much pleasure and gratitude for the smallest gift that was given to him. With simplicity and sound common sense he listens with attention to the sociology lessons that the taxi driver in Caracas gives him,¹²⁴ becomes a friend of a shoe repairer, replies at the appropriate level to children who write to him and to his novices, never having a mind to the fact that he has been superior general; he avoids speaking of himself and draws attention to others. Brother Demetrio Alzaga spends an entire page on Basilio's simplicity: "It might be expected that a man who was of higher rank than others would regard himself in that light. But what really evoked my admiration was to see a man full of good qualities and virtues who, conscious of these, *could also be humble*. Basilio was all this, to a very high degree. His mystical fervour springs, no doubt, from a well tested humility... When he was Superior General he dropped all titles: he wished to be called Brother Basilio, only that; he liked the term "Brother"; so it is with great people; they know themselves and consider themselves to be humble servants of the Lord."¹²⁵

In his circular on the Spirit of the Institute, Basilio wrote some delightful pages on humility and simplicity. These ideas lie at the root of his life and his deepest convictions.¹²⁶ For him, the fruits of humility are; "self acceptance, interior peace, harmony in social life, availability, adaptability, love of the poor and the

¹²⁰ Op. cit., p. 15. Brother Luis Minguillon, his travelling companion in many journeys, says the same. Basilio would carry his suitcase when it ought to have been the other way round. Cf. *Madrid Marista, Al hermano Basilio*, p. 19.

¹²¹ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 19.

¹²² Op. cit., p. 20.

¹²³ *Quemar la Vida* and *El Estilo de Una Vida* contain many photographs of these different situations.

¹²⁴ *I want to awake the dawn*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁵ *Madrid Marista, Al hermano Basilio*, p. 12 (Special issue, 1985-1986).

¹²⁶ *Circular on the Spirit of the Institute*, pp. 233-234; in these pages Basilio describes the fruits of simplicity.

abandoned.”¹²⁷ Brother José Llanillo notes that: “the old Brothers, accustomed to the image of ‘Very Rev Brother’, respectfully keeping at a slight distance, were surprised to see Basilio so familiar, affectionate, rolling up his sleeves to take on household tasks.”¹²⁸ Replying to a questionnaire about Brother Basilio, a good number of the Brothers of the Province of Madrid saw him as “*a Brother who loves the Brothers very much and they feel themselves truly loved by him. He was a friend and confidant, one able to engender a great confidence from the moment of first meeting him, a very warm person. You always found in him a welcoming attitude, listening, accepting the other as he was, giving an encouraging word... He was a simple man, close to us, who won the hearts of people and taught us to live our religious consecration with all our heart.*”¹²⁹

Many of the tributes link simplicity with *joyfulness*. *Joyfulness* is certainly one of Basilio’s greatest qualities. His joyfulness was all the more appreciated since the Church and the congregation were both passing through the pains of the postconciliar period, or rather, the birth pains of a new world¹³⁰. The Church had taken the path of renewal, and this in a world that was becoming more and more a demolition and rebuilding site. Everyone, including religious, lived through the pain of constant adaptation. It was a difficult situation, but in facing it, we Marists had the good fortune to have at our head an extraordinary man, always confident, naturally optimistic, who radiated joy. Basilio loved the dawn, but he once made this profession of his faith: “In the darkness of night it is beautiful to believe in light.”¹³¹ Father Amador Menudo says that we were fortunate because those in charge were truly open to the future, while others, such as diocesan priests, were often left to themselves, only sometimes with dependable corks.¹³² Brother Gabriel Michel noted that Basilio wished joy to prevail, but that now and again he seemed too gay, too much of a joker. As soon as he saw the attention of an audience begin to wane, he would use an idiom or tell an amusing story which won back and held their attention.¹³³ “Clever as he was, he had a great sense of humour,” wrote Fr Amador Menudo. He had a great admiration for Cantinflas, his

¹²⁷ *Circ.* 2 January 1968, p. 621.

¹²⁸ *Madrid Marista, Al hermano Basilio*, p. 20.

¹²⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

¹³⁰ He uses this expression in his *Vocal Meditation of a Superior General*.

¹³¹ Conference at the closing of the General Conference of 1971: Circulars, Vol XXV, p. 435.

¹³² Testimony, 15 January 2003, p. 3. Dependable corks, those that prevent water from leaking.

¹³³ *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 42.

countryman, and it was not unusual in his talks to let slip one of his sayings which made everyone laugh and held the audience.”¹³⁴ *His joyful spirit was seen in his frequent pranks.* The book *El Estilo de Una Vida* contains accounts of several of them: “With Brother Basilio, a sense of humour always went hand in hand with tranquillity, and I don’t know whether one was the cause or effect of the other. For example, a little time before he became superior general, during a retreat that he gave at Burgos to the superiors and directors of Spain, I had to give the report of my discussion group. When I presented our conclusions to the assembly, they were so inconclusive that Basilio said in a teasing manner: ‘Many of the observations reported remind me of the story of two canons in Galicia discussing the latest changes introduced in the liturgy. One asked: “What do you think of the changes in the liturgy?”’ “Well!” said the other, “on the one hand you see that yourself think, and on the other what you would like me to say!”

During a stay in France, both of us had to be vaccinated against cholera, a needle in the shoulder. When I uncovered my chest, which is very hairy, Basilio exclaimed: “Mingui, one might say that you have not yet begun the Darwinian evolution!”

The chaplain of the general house, Fr Jacquemin, was the victim of several of his practical jokes. This Marist Father prided himself, in the best French, in being a connoisseur of cognac. Brother Basilio filled a French styled bottle with Fundador brandy and at the right moment offered him a glass. The priest slowly savoured this Spanish brandy and then exclaimed: “This is a really good French cognac!” The joker nearly killed himself laughing and tapped my foot under the table as much as to say, “I got him then, hey?”

He could be delicate and ironical at the same time; he would say of handsome and pleasant people, “How well his mother made him!” And for those who seemed born just to annoy us he would say, “It is not his fault, that’s the way his mother made him.”¹³⁵ *Quemar la Vida* tells of the jokes he shared with his novices just a few days before his death.¹³⁶ He offered them chocolates that had been injected

¹³⁴ Testimony, 15 January 2003. See also *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 23.

¹³⁵ Br Luis Minguillon, in *El Estilo de Una Vida*, pp. 24-25.

¹³⁶ *Quemar la Vida* is studded with pages recounting his jokes, pp. 41, 58, 64... There was a Brother who loved his large collection of ties. Once Basilio succeeded in getting into his room and took some of them and gave them to

with a bitter substance, and cakes that were so spicy that that some shed tears when they ate them.¹³⁷ The story of this visit is told with great feeling: “*We were filled with joy when we came into his presence.* He welcomed us with open arms, having a happy word for each of us, and then he invited us to taste the chocolates that were on the table.”¹³⁸ It is well known that he was rather short, and that he did not hesitate to stand on a chair when he had to embrace a Brother who was much taller, or, rather differently, when during a conference the blackboard was full, he asked the shortest in the group to clean it, pretending that he could not reach it.¹³⁹ Brother Claudio Girardi tells of one incident during a conference in his province. On the blackboard in the meeting room there was a picture of a lizard, which had been covered over by a drawing in chalk. When Basilio wrote on the board he tried not to spoil the drawing, but when it was full he apologised and began to erase the drawing. It was then that he realised why the drawing had been put there, and turned around to the Brothers and caused much laughter by praising the skill of the artist.¹⁴⁰ Brother Jésus Bayo said, “He was always good humoured. I have seen him when he was serious and preoccupied, but never irritated. He had a smile and a ready joke...”¹⁴¹ I myself remember one evening on the terrace of the school at Antsiranana (Diego Suarez) in Madagascar in 1978. The sea breeze made it very pleasant and above us the Milky Way was in full splendour. We were talking of stories about mad fellows. I remember two that Basilio shared with me. “There were two mad men one night in the street, one with a lighted torch that lit up a window on the fifth floor of building. ‘Climb up,’ he said, ‘there is a stairway.’” The other replied, “I am not mad, I know that when I am almost there you will put out the light and there will be no stairs!” And the other one: “There was a madman at the top of a ladder in a corridor hammering in some nails with the head of the nail against the wall and the point towards himself. Another madman

other Brothers asking them to wear them at the midday meal when they said hullo to the collector. He congratulated the first few, telling them that he also had those ties in his beautiful collection, but eventually when the number was just too many, he knew a joke had been played on him.

¹³⁷ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 298.

¹³⁸ *Idem.*

¹³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 152 and p. 189 in the English version.

¹⁴⁰ Testimony, 19th December 2002.

¹⁴¹ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 64.

came along and said to him in passing, ‘Can’t you see that you have to hammer the nails into the inside of the surface?’”¹⁴²

A novice, recalling how Basilio Basilio insisted that it was possible to be faithful, concludes by saying, “That is how he was himself: faithful, holy, joyful, a prankster...”¹⁴³ Equally, his novices, who well knew his simple, happy inclination to jokes, made him the butt in their humorous sketches in the most comical way. *He was the first to laugh at them.* The joyfulness was a constant that helped Basilio maintain *his unshakeable good humour.*

The evenness of his good humour was yet another quality we may mention in regard to Basilio’s friendship. One did not have difficulty in meeting him because he was known to be free of highs and lows. He did know moments of fatigue, when he was quite drained, and then he would give another appointment to those who had to see him, but his welcome was always respectful, attentive, affirming understanding and encouraging. Brother Gabriel Michel and Fr Amador Menudo valued his even temperament most of all. In fact, Basilio had acquired a general mastery of himself: his temperament, his physical health, his sleep and his work load...

Father Amador thinks that, while Basilio was not an artist, he had a *sense of the beautiful.* *He loved life:* he liked beautiful movies, art galleries, great works of music, meetings with friends or family members, feast days; beautiful occasions for jokes, chapels that truly helped prayer, the great woods of Ariccia near lake Albano where he was able to ponder his circulars and pray in the fastness of nature, the luxuriant Amazonian jungle, the peace of tranquil beaches. His enthusiasm was already apparent in the first classes he took. As teacher and educator he impressed his students by the quality of his preparation, his closeness to the young, his initiatives to make his classes active, and the evangelical emphasis in his lessons. Brother Arturo Chaves says that his courses of catechesis and philosophy were remarkable. According to Brother Leoncio, it was Basilio, along with other Brothers, who introduced the Cursillos in Mexico City,¹⁴⁴ but he was also the

¹⁴² Basilio was visiting us with Brother Jean Thouilleux, General Councillor. He had come to assist us to make our community life project.

¹⁴³ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁴ *Norte Marists*, October-November 1967, p. 1188; Brother Arturo confirms this on p. 1189.

promoter of other apostolic movements such as Catholic Action and catechesis in the poorer districts. Brother Arturo, who taught with him, says that, “his students appreciated him to an extraordinary degree, and he left an indelible mark on them. Even now a good number of them continue to consult him like an oracle. They would telephone him in Spain from Mexico to have his advice.”¹⁴⁵ Brother Gabriel Rodriguez, seeing him teaching, said, “He gave himself totally to his students and wanted to see them progress in every subject. He continually invented new methods to capture their interest and lead them to love work.”¹⁴⁶ Even his confreres were swept along by the great apostolic zeal he showed. “The young found in him,” wrote Brother José Garcia, “a teacher and a friend, a spiritual confidant and adviser, a good and wise man to whom they could unburden their problems and ask his advice...”¹⁴⁷ Brother Raul Coral¹⁴⁸ is quite explicit on this point: “Listening to his luminous teaching for eight months and witnessing the transparency of his religious life could not but awaken in me great ideals of apostolic life.”¹⁴⁹

In the very first circular he wrote, he confessed: “*I love with all my heart whatever is positive and dynamic, and I take pleasure in spreading optimism, responsibility and enthusiasm... I am an enthusiast of our Congregation... We must face the world with enthusiasm because it has a great many good things and a great number of hearts thirsting for truth and justice.*”¹⁵⁰ It would be interesting to make a study of Basilio’s vocabulary; the most frequently used words would be *enthusiasm, joy, generosity, friendliness, dynamism, and daring*... On 16 January 1982 he sent a message on the occasion of the opening of the Marial Congress in Brazil. Here are some of the typical words of Basilio found in the first page: *immense joy, a most pleasant impression, enthusiasm, union, creativity, a great joy, spirit of collaboration, admirable, marvellously, very beautiful, full of joy, a happy idea.*¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 523, and *Norte Marists*, October-November 1979, p. 1189.

¹⁴⁶ *Norte Marista*, October-November 1979, pp. 1190-1191. Brother Gabriel Rodriguez y Martin del Campo was a general councillor during Basilio’s first term of office – *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 524.

¹⁴⁷ *Orientaciones*, October 1967, p. 515.

¹⁴⁸ *Norte Marista*, October-November, 1967, pp. 1191-1193. Brother Raul Coral is a Cololumbian who worked with Basilio in the Movement for a Better World.

¹⁴⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁵⁰ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 148.

¹⁵¹ *Mensagem por ocasião da abertura do congresso marial, Viamão*, 16 January 1982, p. 1.

We understand why Basilio had so much success in human relations; he offered sure friendship completely without self-interest. He had hundreds of close friends.¹⁵² Those who went to him found a warm welcome, attentiveness, respect, love, affirmation, wisdom, help, simplicity, joyfulness, an even temperament, serenity and a passion for life. Humanly speaking, his friendship was something to be envied. All this richness was open to grace and put at the service of God and human persons. We still find a deep unity of the first and second commandment, of contemplation and action, the heart of Marist apostolic spirituality: God and man, two absolutes for Basilio. Brother Roland Bourassa, a councillor general, puts it this way: “Through his actions and also by his writings Brother Basilio made us understand that he was nurturing in himself two sincere loves, love of God and love of man, and he understood all the light, security, strength and assurance that faith gives us.”¹⁵³ Basilio said this very well in a letter he wrote to friends in the Movement for a better World; it is cited among the texts at the end of this Chapter.

5. Fidelity

Basilio’s friendliness comprised a range of human qualities among which *fidelity* was always present. He was a man who prized someone’s word, a commitment. It is not by chance that his last circular was on *Fidelity*. This, too, allows us to understand his deep respect for old Brothers: he was full of gratitude to them. Many confidences that the old Brothers sent to him for the circular, so full of emotion and shared with such reserve, show the confidence they had in him and the deep affection he had for them. Revisiting this circular helps us to discover the astonishing fraternal bonds that Basilio had with these Brothers who had given their total Yes to God. Other indications of his *fidelity* were his telephone calls to contact a Brother in difficulty, the detours he made in his travels for the sole purpose of meeting a Brother who longed for a moment of friendly dialogue, the thousands of letters he wrote, and his habit of always replying to a message. His friendship continued even after Brothers left the Institute. He remained interested in them, found work for them, and asked their provincials to be generous to

¹⁵² *I want to awake the dawn*, p. 80: the letter that he wrote on 15th December 1979 at Christmas to his friends.

¹⁵³ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, pp. 25-26.

them.¹⁵⁴ Then there was the group of his close friends assured of a long letter from him for Christmas, of having a place in his heart and in his prayers, of being followed, often visited when their health began to decline. We *admire his cordial and faithful friendship*.¹⁵⁵ Brother Arnaldo Braguti¹⁵⁶, was surprised that Basilio took him to the airport together with all the novices, even though he was still getting over an operation on his leg and movement was very painful for him. But friendship makes everything possible.¹⁵⁷ His faithfulness and friendship underlay his inventiveness in giving surprise presents, or, when a friend was too distant, he called him to the telephone and asked the novices to serenade him or play the guitar on the phone. It is quite moving to read the letters he wrote to his friend Fr Arrupe¹⁵⁸ when he was so ill: that friendship was an extremely affectionate and encouraging one that continued for ten years by letters and visits.¹⁵⁹ The same could be said for his friendship with Fr Lombardi, the founder of the Movement for a Better World, and for Fr Rotondi¹⁶⁰, founder of Oasi. This priest died in the arms of Basilio in 1990. The 18 months session for formators was held at Oasi, the house of Father Rotondi.

Friendship of the kind that Basilio lived could not but be appreciated and valued. That was the man. He won the hearts of many inside and outside the congregation. Letters that reveal the quality of his friendship are cited in the texts at the end of this Chapter. His friendships came to flower in his extraordinary humanity, but was always motivated by grace – it is because all is given to God that all can be given to man, the only place where God can be truly loved. It was God who ennobled the heart of Basilio, and a heart thus ennobled discovers that

¹⁵⁴ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 235: “When someone left the Institute, he did not show any displeasure; he extended his hand, offered spiritual, human financial assistance... None of those who left the Institute had bitter feelings towards him; he never left anyone alone on his journey.”

¹⁵⁵ *El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 67. It is well worth the trouble to read all the testimony of Father Jaime Zudaire, Capuchin.

¹⁵⁶ Arnaldo Braguti, is a Columbian Brother who was sent to be near Basilio at the novitiate in Mexico to help him resolve some personal problems. His testimony is a series of deep insights into Brother Basilio.

El Estilo de Una Vida, p. 71.

¹⁵⁸ Superior General of the Jesuits in the time of Basilio.

¹⁵⁹ *Quemar la Vida*, p.p. 184-185.

¹⁶⁰ The friendship and esteem of this priest for Brother Basilio went so far as to wishing to found a congregation of priests to be at the service of the Brothers.

the other, the human person, is an absolute.¹⁶¹ The heart welcomes and lives with the same fullness the first and the second commandment.

Basilio always extended to the members of his natural family all of these wonderful virtues. He was happy to be with them, proud to carry in his arms a little nephew, to have a photograph taken with his large family, or simply have a game of cards with them. To each one of them he offered a love and a welcome full of tenderness. (Quemar la Vida has an extensive treatment of his moments among the family, pp. 274, 279-281.)

We get an insight into Basilio when he was asked to give a conference on the Word of God under two headings:

- Word of God as something to be listened to,
- Word of God as the object of life.

“I find that with these two themes, the effort to define them and especially the effort to separate them as distinct entities leads me to one conclusion: I was trying to attempt something really impossible and quite artificial. In itself, and in practice, when one of these aspects is true, it leaps forward, crosses over and becomes so entangled with the other that the two are inextricable, just like the transcendental relationship between philosophy and theology.”¹⁶²

It is simply artificial to wish to separate the human and grace in a man of God. The friendship of Basilio was what it was (love, attentiveness and so on) because that was God’s manner to Basilio, and his to God. The same can be said for all those who take the same path. When we look at them we understand what it is to be a Brother, and the greatness of the vocation to which God calls us.

¹⁶¹ *Circular, Community Life*, p. 250.

¹⁶² Conference: *la Palabra de Dios y los ritmos de la vida en el cristiano*, p. 1. This was a conference given by Basilio to the Brothers of Comboni, the Brothers of la Consolata, and members of the Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions (PIME). Cf. the letter of Brother Javier G. Terradillos, 4 january 2003.

TEXTS

1. **Quotations from a letter that reveals the qualities of his friendship.**
These quotations are taken from letters that Basilio write to Father Arrupe¹⁶³ to be with him and give him comfort during an illness that lasted ten years.

My very reverend and highly esteemed P. Arrupe,

News has come to me during the winter that your health has grown worse; this has caused great anxiety among us who love you and especially among your confreres. I recall with deep feeling the many contacts we have had with you as Superior General, and especially the happiness I have had in visiting you at your house in your sick room before leaving Rome.

I promised to send you from time to time a few lines, kept brief to avoid tiring you. I even left it to the discretion of your infirmarian to read them to you or not. In heaven, you will see that I have written them from the bottom of my heart. I hope that they let you know my great esteem for you and that I am keeping company with you in your Calvary, so painful for you, but how fruitful for the Society of Jesus and for the Church. I pray that when it is my turn I may carry the cross of illness with the same admirable integrity. With deep respect, and with affection, I am yours in J.M.J.¹⁶⁴

Dear Father Arrupe,

This is Brother Basilio Rueda, the Mexican, writing to you. I send a brief note; I know that your health does not invite a long message. I was glad to visit you at the end of November, and to assure you of my friendship my prayer and the warm

¹⁶³ Father Pedro Arrupe was superior general of the Jesuits 1965-1983; in 1981 he had a stroke from which he suffered for ten years.

¹⁶⁴ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 185, Mexico, 6 March 1986.

memories I have of you. I admire the exemplary way in which you carry your cross. I ask and beseech the Lord to give you the strength to continue, for with your cross you make present the interior consolation that allows you to be consoled as Christ was on Gethsemane.

Be sure, Father, that even if the ways of God cannot be foreseen, and are sometimes very upsetting, there is always in them a marvellous wisdom and fruitfulness. You have made an extraordinary contribution to your Society and to the Church, which is still much in evidence in many places. I am sure that this present stage, as was the case with Fr Lombardi, is spiritually the most fruitful and the most admirable of your whole life.

I conclude, Father, by assuring you that I do not forget you, and that before long I will write to you again.

P.S. I send you, Father, this little image which I think, because of the deep message it bears, will awaken in your spirits sentiments appropriate for your condition. The hands of God are always the hands of the Father. Perhaps you may not find the word “joy” appropriate, but “abandonment”, yes. Moreover the image will let you know that your friend is near in prayer and thinking of you.¹⁶⁵

2. The kind of letter sent by Basilio to his close friends

15 December 1979

My Dear Brother and good friend,

This is your old friend writing for Christmas; I am using this collective but resolutely personal means of getting in touch.

¹⁶⁵ *Quemar la Vida*, p. 184, Mexico, 20th February 1988. Brother Basilio continued to write to Fr Arrupe until his death on 5th February 1991.

The form is collective, and I put up with that for the sake of our friendship, but I dare to call it a personal letter because I am sending it exclusively to those who are my best friends. The Lord has given me the joy of knowing thousands of people – it is no exaggeration to say probably no fewer than ten thousand, speaking only of those with whom I have had some real contact from time to time.

Certainly, there is a Christian love that binds us in sympathy and charity with everyone we are acquainted with, as also with the world we don't know that is presented to us by the mass media and the imagination. From that there arises in me a solidarity in Christian faith and in the human family with each one. The Lord has also given me the privilege of maintaining friendship and more personal relations by meetings, occasional letters or even Christmas greetings that are able to keep me in touch with this or that friend at the heart of a group or a community. But there is a circle of even closer friends, and even though they are many in number, the Lord has allowed me to feel very close to all those who are among them; and you are one of those; you cannot imagine the permanence and the growing strength of my friendship.

I write to some of this group from time to time, but almost never to others. But when some particular circumstance in their life or some journey gives me the opportunity to meet one of them I find that, even after five or ten years, my affection has remained just as warm as, if not warmer than, at the beginning. There is no special merit in this either for you or for me. It is the design of God, and also the natural fruit of Christian charity and of spiritual friendship, and I would say also of love consecrated by virginity.

When I think of my early youth I never could have imagined this experience although it is now clearly such a part of my life: that the heart can love so many people as if each one were unique, as if I had for each one a deep and lasting friendship of the kind one can have with an intimate friend. Finally, I have to say that rather than reducing or dividing the strength of love, the number of people purifies it, enlarges it and makes it more freely given and more stable.

So why is it that I now wish to express the sentiments that are at the bottom of my heart, that you know anyway, and respond to? It is because the feast of Christmas,

so close at hand, is the best moment to say with simplicity and without false embarrassment what God has conceived for our betterment.

Christmas is the feast of universal solidarity that rejuvenates feelings through contact with their sources. The crib tells us that the ineffable inaccessible love of God for humankind has been made tangible in this little baby. He is the historical kiss with which the Father embraces humankind, and by this action he makes us sons in the Son, brothers in our Brother. And with St Paul we can invoke “the unsearchable riches of Christ, the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers” (Eph 3:9-10).

Yes, now is the moment to live in contemplative wonder this loving kindness that brings us to our knees: “in the presence of the father from whom all fatherhood gets its name” (Eph 3:14) and who sustains us in hope “awaiting in hope for the blessing that will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:12-13). Yes, we are sacraments and also the proclamation of this good news, which has been, which is, and is to come and which waits for the hour of its fullness for our joy and that of the whole world.

It is the burning light of Christ that I bring to you now more than ever in my prayers, poor as they are, but truly sincere, to join you in praising, adoring thanking and blessing Him. For you and with you I pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire in us the heart of disciples and servants of the Gospel, praying for ourselves and humankind whose joys, troubles, worries and desires we share. (Here he gives some news.)

I need not tell you that I will be delighted to receive some echo from you, my friend, but above all I count on the continual accompaniment of your prayer and friendship. Forgive me for not signing this letter and for not adding a personal word or two. I just do not have the time, and besides, I have to keep an eye on the expenses...

I embrace you most affectionately in Christ, and I wish for you and for me that that Christmas will enable us to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, in a passionate love for Him, and in total commitment to his service. This gift given to

us unconditionally must rise above all our weaknesses and engender in us an interior peace, joy and hope. It must also convey goodwill and tenderness, openness and hospitality, that is to say a deep love for everyone, for each person and for all humankind.

May the dear Virgin Mary, who welcomes and nursed the Word of God, who enfolded Jesus with tender love, preside over our celebration of Christmas. Thinking about her, I would like to repeat the words of one of you contemplating the Divine Child: “How happy this child in the company and the care of such a Mother.”

Truly yours in Him who loves us,

Basilio Rueda fms.

3. A letter to Basilio

Dear Brother Basilio,

Oh yes, it's me again, answering your request and giving you news of my health since my operation. I have perfectly recovered, although naturally I have to take it easy for a week or two.

I was in hospital for ten days. I was at St Anne's with the Irish sisters. Since the hospital is outside the town, it is peaceful and quiet. I made a real ten days retreat. I had time to read, pray, meditate, reflect and talk with God like an old Friend, like a much-loved father. We had the time to review some entire chapters of my past life. *What memories were stirred, what reasons for saying thank you, thank you.* It is always more interesting to do that in the company of another.

Now, Rev. Brother, I am going to tell you something quite original. I would never have believed that it could be so *interesting* and *enriching* to grow old. God plays his

part. Little by little he steals our strength, our vitality, the powers of our body, of our senses, of our faculties, of our spirit. It is the evening of life, pointing towards the horizon.

God helps us to let go of everything, to create a vacuum in us and around us, little by little. Then He wishes to fill this void with His presence, with His love. His greatest desire is that there no longer be room for anyone but Him.

The older I get the more I experience interior joys and consolations that I never did during my active life. I have struck a bargain with God. I said to Him, “Before drowning me with your joys and consolations, give me, in return, something to suffer, some obstacles, every day. If you forget, I will remind you.” That is a bargain well made, right?

For a long time during my life I have thought that the gift of oneself, renunciation, self denial and the spirit of sacrifice are a little bit like the compost you put on the flower garden: the more you add, the more the flowers become vigorous and beautiful, and the better the soil is prepared the more splendid the results. In the same way, on the happy day when we decide to give our life to God, to grow in his love, to give our soul a great supernatural vigour, let us use the same means, use good compost.

My duties leave me some hours of free time each day. I have the time to go for a walk in the groves, the gardens, the flower beds, among the lawns and the flowering shrubs. I often stop to listen to the birds singing, the buzz of insects and the whisper of the wind in the tall tress along the pathways. Everything in this great nature speaks to me of God who has created all that for us human beings, for love of us.

As a result of seeing things like this every day in persona, animals, things, in all of nature, it seems to me that at a given moment I am taken by the hand. Before the Blessed Sacrament, where I have the pleasure of spending at least an hour every day, it is not always the same. There we see with the eyes of faith. He is present there in person, truly. Immersed in nature, we see Him through the senses, helped of course by our spirit of faith and our love of the Creator...

To conclude, Rev Brother, I can assure you that I pray for you every day, for all the superiors, for the Congregation and for the intentions that you have recommended to me.

In union of prayer, Brother Bernard Perrault.¹⁶⁶

4. A letter to a priest

My dear friend,

For some years now we have lived separated from each other. I say “separated”, but not distanced from each other. Space cannot create distance if spirits are united, as in our case. In all sorts of ways your obligations and mine have prevented us from having even a normal friendly correspondence.

Today, however, I am writing to you because I have been told of the sadness that has befallen your family. It was our friend Ocazanza who gave me the news of your brother’s death and the circumstances of it. That is why today I stir myself to send you some lines of condolence, sharing your present pain, as in other times we have shared our joys and apostolic dreams.

You don’t need me to accompany this sentiment with a spiritual reflection that might comfort you. I know beforehand with what peace you have accepted the will of the Lord and his mysterious plans for humankind. I can only tell you that your brother does not lack the spiritual assistance of my prayer. And you yourself do not lack a small mention before the Lord, that your apostolate may be truly fruitful, and that you may find in it more joy than disappointments. If you have the time, tell me how things are going.

¹⁶⁶ Letter of 18th February 1977 from Kutama, Zimbabwe. – Archives 77 02 154. (The Perrault family gave seven Marist Brothers to the Congregation, one of whom, Br Regis Aimée, was a councillor general in the time of Brother Leonida. In addition, the family gave to the Church some priests and sisters. The words printed in italics are underlined in the letter.

As for me, I can say that God gives me much assistance. My work is quite intense, and humanly speaking, excessive; but one could say that God keeps that in mind and gives me adequate health, as much as is necessary to maintain my somewhat chaotic life. In a fortnight I will go to the Cameroons, in May and June I will be in South America, and a little later I will visit France, and so on. Pray for me too, that I may always be useful to Our Lord.

For the moment, I will stop here. With fraternal thoughts of you and a special friendliness, I remain yours affectionately in Christ.¹⁶⁷

5. Two greeting cards

Greeting Card to Cardinal Pironio

Your Excellency and dear friend,

From the other end of the world, Australia, I send my best wishes for a holy feast of Christmas and for a very fruitful and *very new* year, since the Lord guides your life marvellously along an unexpected path but one full of edification and good for His Church.

I assure you of my prayer and that of 420 Brothers who will be meeting during the month of December. They belong to the Sydney Province. I will pass on to them your best wishes, and we will be with you in spirit and in heart and with prayer for your first steps as Prefect of the Congregation for Religious.

Your work there will be for the good of the Church and for that of our own Congregation. My affection as a friend will ensure the realisation of the promises I am making to you. Mgr Tabera leaves among us the memory of his kindness and never failing closeness. Yours will certainly be no less...

¹⁶⁷ A letter that Basilio wrote from Rome on 28th February 1978 to father Juan Manuel Gonzalez, Mungia 128, B. Guadalajara – 2. Cf. Archives 78-03-017 – 51.09, Basilio D3.

With all the affection of a friend, and the obedience and respect of a son in the Lord,¹⁶⁸

6 Testimony of Cardinal Pironio

Cardinal Edouard Pironio was Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. On the 19th October 1976, during the XVIIth General Chapter, he gave a conference to the capitulants in the course of which he said, “ With all my heart I thank you for your words, so intimate, cordial and fraternal, my dear friend Brother Basilio – and I underline “dear friend” because, as he has just recalled, our friendship is a longstanding one of fifteen or sixteen years. We are friends united only in the Spirit, in the Lord, and in the our common misfortunes... I want to tell you how joyfully the Sacred Congregation for Religious and the Union of Major Superiors, meeting at Ariccia on 7th October, received the news of your re-election as Superior General.

In the name of the Church, I have to thank you for the fidelity with which, as a good Marist, you have again said yes to the Lord, as Mary did. I am exceedingly glad about that. I wish to say to Brother Basilio that we will accompany each other in the service of the Church... Some time ago I read a magnificent circular of Brother Basilio on prayer. I believe that this is the true path to renewal for the times we live in, to be a prophetic witness in the world.

After the Vatican Council there was an effort at renewal which, because of haste, was only a simple adaptation of forms and not a true renewal; it lacked conversion of heart, it lacked the depth of prayer.”¹⁶⁹

Greeting card from Cardinal Pironio

Dear Basilio,

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Archives 7512 220. AFM 51.09. Basilio D2.

¹⁶⁹ *FMS Special*, 1976

May God reward you for the thoughtfulness of the sentiments of charity that you express and that you live. Continue to pray much for me, as I do for you, as I embrace and bless you in Christ and the most holy Virgin Mary.

Your marial postcard, “Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19) is very beautiful.

There, in the poor and and contemplative heart of Our Lady we will experience the joy of a Christmas that is renewed every day. And the Holy Spirit will make us know ‘the love of the Father, manifested in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” (Rom 8:39).

That is my wish and my prayer for you at this holy time. Happy Christmas!

E. Card. Pironio

Rome, Christmas 1976¹⁷⁰

6. Two friends write to each other

It happened that the Apostolic Nuncio of Lebanon, His Excellency Mgr. Alfredo Bruniera, and Brother Basilio had become acquainted with each other at the time when His Excellency was Nuncio in Uruguay. They exchanged many letters, often in Spanish, sometimes in French, and as great friends they shared their experiences of God.

Your Excellency, Mgr. Nuncio,

I have much pleasure in writing these few lines to you; you know very well the how much I value your friendship and my deep esteem that our cordial relations arouse in me.

I have two particular reasons for writing to you with joy and simplicity. First, to send you Christmas greetings; I do this with all my heart, friend to friend. Then there are the special circumstances that have arisen in Lebanon and which still

¹⁷⁰ AFM, 51.09, mD2, 76-12-113. Note the friendly style o the two cards. Cardinal Pironio and Basilio were close friends, as close as two people truly seized by the Spirit of the Lord and a passion for the Kingdom can be.

affect the Church there – a situation that touches you closely. For this reason, my wishes for this Christmas and for the year 1978 are full of a desire for peace for you personally and for all the Lebanese people. I join my prayers and those of my Brothers to those that you will be addressing to the Infant Jesus, that he may send true peace and true love among humankind.

Equally, I include the wish for your perfect health in my greetings. That is really necessary if you are able to try to find a solution to the grave problems that beset the country with serenity, prudence and balance. I pray for you in this sense too...

Again, allow me to express my happiness in being in touch with such a good friend as you; I put myself and my services at your disposition, and I remain truly united with you in Christ.

Basilio Rueda, Rome, 15 December 1977¹⁷¹

Dear Honoured Brother,

Your letter of the 15 reached me by the diplomatic bag from the Secretariat of State...

First of all, thank you for your fraternal affection, and for your Christmas and New Year greetings. In turn, I offer you mine with the same affection and with the same deep and sincere esteem that has united us since our first meeting in Latin America.

I wish you a happy new year for 1978, as fruitful as in the past, full of grace and divine assistance, so that your numerous activities on behalf of your important Institute may enjoy success.

Show a little more restraint in your frequent journeys and have a little charity for yourself so that you may also give your attention to your confreres.

¹⁷¹ AFM 51.09.Basilio D2 – 77-12-168.

May the year 1978 bring you to Lebanon so that you can see for yourself the good done by your religious and what still remains to be done.

Give my regards to your Councillors and your confreres in the General House. As for me, I will remember you warmly at Mass. In union of prayer and charity,

Alfredo Bruniera, Apostolic Nuncio, Beirut, 24th December 1977.¹⁷²

7 A letter to friends in the Better World Movement

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to accept the friendly invitation of Father José Boson to write something in the next issue of the bulletin that he sends out every month to friends of the Movement for a Better World in Venezuela. I send my warmest greetings to everyone. Allow me to introduce myself. I am a Marist religious, a former member of the Movement in which I worked for five years, first of all in Mexico, then in Rome, and finally in Ecuador. During the past ten years I have visited your country many times, enjoying a very warm friendship with many bishops, priests, religious and lay people. For two years I was the Director of the Spanish American Centre for Marist Spirituality in Spain, and then I was elected Superior General of the Marist Brothers at the General Chapter of 1967.

A few weeks ago, when I had the opportunity to visit a number of Latin American countries, I was delighted to visit your country for the fifth time. It was a pleasure to greet some old friends and visit the headquarters of the Movement in Caracas. It has been a real joy for me to see the beautiful work that the Movement is doing to spread the kingdom of Jesus in your country.

That is why, dear friends, I send with my greetings some brief reflections about the most important aims that the Church has in mind and for which the Movement works wholeheartedly in many corners of the world.

¹⁷² AFM 51.09 Basilio D2 – 77-12-290.

I would like to say this: that the Father has, in Jesus Christ, made us his sons and established us as brothers, and that is how we live in community. When we call God our Father, we affirm at the same time that we are brothers of everyone, and we undertake to live as sons and as brothers to everyone. That is why Holy Scripture teaches us that the love of brothers is the guarantee and the sign of our love of God. If this is absent, it is a proof that we are dead to divine life. And so, this dialectic between life and death, between love and hatred, urges the Christian to take part in a constant battle to drive out selfishness within himself and in the world.

As selfishness is gradually overcome in our hearts, we become more sensitive and hear the voice of the Spirit, and our will becomes docile to its most intimate movements. However, that requires, today as always, that the Church purify itself interiorly and preach in every way the need for conversion of heart. The Holy Spirit can only put Christian love into a heart that has been purified of all selfishness; after that the new face of the Church will shine brightly as a witness to the whole world.

St John, referring to brotherhood in Christ, said to us: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and no murderer has life in him.” “Whoever says that he loves God, but does not love his brother, is a liar. For one who does not love his brother whom he can see, cannot love God, whom he cannot see” (1 Jn 2:10; 3:15; 4:20).

All of our religiosity, as well as our concern for and development for a life in relationship with God is in vain if love of the neighbour is not part of it. Whoever finds himself in such a situation totally loses his time and his efforts. That would be an extremely lamentable thing for a Christian since by baptism he is consecrated in an exclusive manner to Jesus Christ and since by its very nature baptism has the power to engender in the heart a higher capacity and style of loving. St Paul has taught us this in a remarkable way: “Even if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, if I do not have charity, I am only sounding brass... Even if I give away all my goods to the poor or if I give up my body to the flames, and have not charity, that would count for nothing...” (1 Cor 13:1-3).

The text of St Paul speaks in an obvious way of a Christian charity that, in the same movement, embraces love of God and love of humankind. That is why we can say with equal certainty that there is no love of God in those who do not love their brothers. In the same way we can say that there is no true love in charity of our brothers if we do not first of all love God and keep the commandments. “In this we know that we love our brothers: if we love God and do whatever he commands” (1 Jn 5:2).

My dear friends, it is not necessary for me to complete this discourse. In conclusion, I wish to express all the love and joy I experience in the Lord when I see you attached to a Movement that aims to be of service to the Church by living and spreading the Gospel message of effective and universal brotherhood so that the kingdom of Jesus may come.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ AFM 51.09 Basilio D1 - 70-11-112. Letter written from Rome 22nd Novemebr 1970.

- 3 -

WHAT KIND OF A MAN? WHAT KIND OF A SAINT?

We have taken this journey with Basilio knowing that in regard to each aspect of his life and his personality there is much more that we could say. The sum total of his letters, the reports of his visits to the provinces and his conferences have barely been merely dipped into. When you try to catch Basilio you have the impression of being in the presence of a giant, although he was always so simple and approachable.

But, having made this journey with him¹⁷⁴, let us take a last look at the man and the saint that he surely was.

1. What kind of man?

First of all, he was a man you could feel was close to us since he lived with us in the difficulties we had, in these times of ours. As far as our time is concerned, he loved the challenges, the progress and the opportunities that it opened up though he knew its opposition and its dangers. His rich humanity was made of the stuff of today. He is our contemporary.

He approached the world with intelligence and enthusiasm, with the eyes of faith and the virtue of hope, which cast a brilliant light in the darkest hours: "It is at night that it is beautiful to believe in the light."¹⁷⁵

We can follow his passion for the world and for humanity from his enthusiastic years as a university student to his very last years as a member of EPSIMO. At the university he was an admirer and disciple of his professor Oswaldo Robles; this was seen in his faith, his serious approach to intellectual work, and the amount of

¹⁷⁴ The journey we have made with him .. consider Notebooks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7... It will continue in Notebook 8: Conference on the Word of God which brings us in touch with the style of Basilio; Notebook 9 is intended to deal with the aspects of faith and hope.

¹⁷⁵ Conference at the closing of the General Conference of 1971, p. 435.

that work. Christ has to be revealed through the intelligence of his disciples; Christ must be served generously by his disciples. In his intellectual work two strands come together: assimilating and mastering the world of ideas today and therefore reading and keeping up to date, riding the crest of the wave from one year to another; and the love of the world in which we live and therefore seeing the opportunities it offers, the sunny side of things, the achievements of humankind, though not ignoring the dangers and the risks. Basilio was the kind of person who by nature was good-natured, happy and at home with himself. He was never one to withdraw or run away from a situation: “We must open ourselves with all our hearts to what is good in our times...”¹⁷⁶ He called the world “the cosmic opportunity”,¹⁷⁷ an inheritance that God has left us in trust. He was an open person who looked to the future: “I will spend all my strength in pleading the cause of modifications and freedoms that are useful for the kingdom of Christ and to improve the quality of the witness of our life.”¹⁷⁸ The Marist Apostolic Spirituality that he proposed to the whole Institute is one of incarnation, of presence, of life, of work in the world. These are the lessons he learned at the university, in the courses of Professor Oswaldo Robles, then in the deep friendship that developed between the two. These were the years of his youth where intellectual and human habits were born.

During the last period of his life, Basilio was Master of Novices and a member of EPSIMO. This group, made up of psychologists, doctors, sociologists, formators, priests and pastors, undertook to maintain a constant observation of the world as it was moved and changed by various currents, in order to offer some understanding of what was emerging from the meeting of faith and this new culture. When we look at the programme of formation that Basilio drew up for his novices we can only admire its balance, openness and down to earth character. Basilio had in mind forming Brothers for the world of tomorrow, in a great freedom of spirit, avoiding all intellectual or spiritual rigidity.

Between these two poles, the university and EPSIMO, Basilio carved a passage through the world, first as a member of the Movement for a Better World, and

¹⁷⁶ Circ. 2 *January 1968*, p. 131.

¹⁷⁷ Op. cit., p. 287.

¹⁷⁸ Op. cit., p. 138. In the section, *The Calls of the World*, comprising 200 pages, we often find phrases like these.

then as Superior General. Free from care he brought the renewing breeze of the Second Vatican Council, he helped the new day to be born, the dawn of a new style of religious life: real, open and audacious because it was, in the first place, profoundly evangelical.

His journeys put him in touch with all kinds of peoples, cultures and countries; through this he came to know humankind: its many problems, and the marvels that grace constantly engraved in human hearts. He became an expert in humanity, underpinned by the principle, “the person is an absolute.” Basilio became more and more human as he discovered the mysteries of the heart with the understanding and compassion that God inspired in him.

“There was much love in his heart,” said his friend and collaborator, Brother Arturo Chavez. As a person he was charming, blessed with a happy, optimistic, open and benevolent character that made him both human and noble. The last chapter has rightly revealed the human face of Basilio: a true friend, attentive, respectful, generous, simple, faithful, one who created new opportunities. He was simply Brother; he was totally Brother.

Basilio was also greatly admired because of the vast amount of work he accomplished. He was a true son of a world that prided itself on the amount it produced. He took upon himself this work as our leader. He was born to win all hearts; all his life he was an engine; he found himself at the head, he shouldered responsibilities as a service but also with competence. He had the sense of responsibility, but at the same time a great mastery of himself by which he maintained his good humour and the interior freedom that he needed most of all. You found him close, simple and warm, yet distant and cool, like a clinician who examines a patient without allowing feelings to interfere with the diagnosis. These are indeed two characteristics of our world: simplicity in social life and a serious approach to scientific work.

Did Basilio have any human limits? Physically, yes. *He was prone to catch the flu, and bronchitis, which he got over only with difficulty.* That was the physical cross of his life. One result of this, added to his workload, was that he sometimes became so fatigued that he had to take a few days of rest away from his usual workplace. In letters to close friends, he said that really the amount of work that he took on

drained him of all his resources, and that he often felt exhausted. He described this in the metaphor of the candle burning at both ends. He knew that such a workload would shorten his life. Often he was obliged to make heavy demands on his will and his generosity to go ahead. Nevertheless, he was prudent, and he maintained regular contact with his personal physician, Doctor Calleja, and with his spiritual director.

He was really too generous, *and had difficulty in saying no*, especially when he was asked for help. He could not refuse people in difficulty or say no to the problems in the management or administration of a Congregation: requests for new foundations, buildings, the sale of properties, the appointment or a move of Brothers ... Every report of his visits reveals his courage in pointing out the weak points in a province, sometimes with a candidness that alerted the Brothers to their real situation, their group habits. But the person was always precious for Basilio. Brother Camille Gros said truly that “Basilio was ready to die for the Brothers,” and Brother Powel Prieur, his councillor, insists that if he went looking for him in his capacity as councillor he was not always easily able to find the time, but if he went to him with a personal problem, then the door was always open, and all the time needed was available.

Some think that *it was easy to deceive Brother Basilio*. That is the other side of the man who is instinctively trustful, and friendly and who thinks the other is as honest as he is. He would gladly have made his own the words of St Francis de Sales: “If I make a mistake, I prefer that it be on the side of kindness rather than through severity.” Basilio chose to believe in the person and respected his freedom. There were some who abused this kindness.

He had some difficulty in mastering foreign languages. From the time of his novitiate he was not at ease in French. His Spanish was exuberant, imaginative, extraordinary and sometimes emphatic, but he knew his own limits in other languages. He said that he had his own English, Basilian English, just as the Americans have their own, and the Australians, Scots and Irish... But we should not put too much importance on this limitation. On the one hand, his work as superior general allowed him little spare time, and on the other, with the passing of time he expressed his ideas very well, especially in French in which his vocabulary was astonishing.

These limitations make him closer to us, all the more because he recognised them and tried to make do with them. Expert in humanity that he was, he said that no one attained a perfect psychological balance; there is always some chink, some weak points.

Nevertheless, many admire the self-mastery that he had attained, over his body, his sleep, and his mood... Many welcomed him as friend and as brother, sought him out for spiritual direction, chose him as leader, read him to be enlightened, wept at his death and pray for him at present.

Brother Kieran Geaney, Provincial of Sydney, was a distinguished person who might have succeeded Basilio in 1976. He suffered a stroke that left him very weak. When Basilio died, he wrote a note, a series of words, that was all he could do, but his words sketch a marvellous portrait of Basilio:

Presence. Wisdom. God.
Humility. Simplicity. Modesty.
Joy. Peace. Trust.
Integrity. Freedom. Courage.
Calm. Vision. Mystery.
Interior life. Peace. Grace.
Friendliness. Faithfulness. Justice.
Strength. Patience. Kindness.
Jesus. Mary. Joseph.¹⁷⁹

This luminous framework of words gives a true account of the humanity of Basilio and points towards the mystery of the man of God, “of a man who does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

2. What Kind of Saint?

The humanity of Basilio is suffused with the second commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

¹⁷⁹*El Estilo de Una Vida*, p. 153.

Humanly speaking, his personality was rich and fascinating, but it was constantly guided by faith, animated by the love he maintained for God, in fact, as if God loved through him. It is the love that the saints give to others which first of all has been given by Christ himself, and which is an extension of this love. If we wish to understand the whole personality of Basilio and do it justice, we must conclude by a reflection on holiness. That puts light on everything and explains everything. It is an invitation to return to the first part of this book, which explored Basilio's spiritual life: grace, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit...

That is not to say that there is a dichotomy between human life and the spiritual life; on the contrary, there exists a constant osmosis, or rather, one is the soul of the other; the person is a unity. Our approach in presenting Basilio as we have, though practical, is nevertheless artificial. Still, it is necessary to repeat that while Basilio truly loved our world, God alone justifies the kind of life he led: a life of consecration, apostolate, faithfulness, abnegation and a passionate search for the will of the Father.

2.1 Faith

No chapter has been set aside for Basilio's faith¹⁸⁰, it is so obvious in everything that he did. When you read attentively his circular *Mary in Our Life*, you are struck by his frequent allusions to the faith of the Virgin Mary. Sensitivity to the presence of this faith, constantly active, is the connecting thread that unifies the whole circular. With Basilio, we learn that Mary is to be admired and is close to us, precisely because of her faith. But this sensitivity also reveals a man who lives his own faith, who ponders it in prayer and who has the experience that enable him to speak with such exactness. We cannot measure the faith of the great mystics without having entered their world, without being a part of their group. Basilio kept for his bedside reading the works of St John of the Cross, the mystic whom he often quotes and whose work he had assimilated in mind and heart.

¹⁸⁰ A later notebook will be devoted to this.

His faith shines through everywhere. It is the key to understanding his equanimity, optimism and enthusiasm in view of his life and the long hours he spent in adoration or contemplation, and the responsibilities that he shouldered, with the work and problems inherent in them – all this, only because he saw in them the will of God. His apostolate, which led him to so many journeys, letters and writings, to the work of leadership, to his closeness to the Brothers, to his retreats, conferences, articles – all this proclaims the Lord Jesus and the infinite love that the Father has for him. We come in contact with an audacious and generous faith that gives witness to others, fortifies and wins them over; it is a passion for the kingdom of God. We need to read what he himself wrote about prophecy and about the experience of the love of God to understand how, stirred on by an interior prompting and by the nature of vocation and love, this grows into witness, word and a life that challenges all. And, seriously, it is not possible to be a spiritual director of so many, as Basilio was, to write spiritual books that have been acclaimed in the Church, giving it total love and obedience, without faith. Basilio said himself that all his life he was dealt a unique card, the love that God had for him. That is an option for faith.

Giving a series of conferences on the Word of God, Basilio treats the point of the obedience of faith to this Word. Looking back on his own life, he said: “Welcoming the Word of God produces... interior operations that transform us from the inside

- It brings a new way of seeing things;
- it brings about in us a devotion to and affection for the Word of God;
- and it becomes the place where ‘our heart is to be found’:
 - a place of light,
 - a place of peace
 - a place of strength
 - a place of love;
- one lives in the Word, on seeks the Word, one finds in it the light to understand and to take one’s place in the light of interior and exterior events and of the whole reality.

On the other hand they makes us aware of the priorities of the Word that challenge our heart, our relations, our action, our organization and our insertion.

If we are faithful, the work will follow, the ways of doing things will follow and the engagement normal for a life of faith will follow..."¹⁸¹

Here we are faced with the language of faith, experiences of faith, the habit of living in faith, the witness of faith. Further on he tells us how it is necessary to welcome the Word (Jesus) of God: "Fundamentally, it is a matter of letting something that is not the like of us come to us, enter us, make its way progressively deeper and totally inside us, transform us and change us to such an extent that it becomes not just a new life but a unique life, and, if necessary, the life for which we are ready to lose our first life."¹⁸² Speaking to the Brothers of the Province of Norte, Basilio told them to be ready to be scourged for Christ, and ready to lose their mother rather than lose the Lord.¹⁸³

Basilio remains focussed on God to the very end. But, in the last moments of his life, his faith becomes a great trust in the Father, a trust that is proclaimed so that it may be apostolate, encouragement to others, and certitude that God helps us to be faithful. In the letter sent to his friends a month before his death he wrote: "This has always been my ideal, to burn out my life for Christ and for my Congregation." And after saying that he has placed himself in the hands of Jesus Christ and the hands of the Father, he finishes: "I feel a deep peace, the action of grace and all to his glory. I know that there are no better hands than those of God and into those hands I have placed myself." That is how death comes to this man whose faith had been to work for the kingdom, to witness to the people of God, and above to love God and men. His faith had been an unconditional gift of himself in the unity of the first and the second commandment.

2.2 Hope

We do not give a lot of thought to hope - above all to hope as a theological virtue indispensable for the Christian. Love is more welcome, more longed for, more often presented. In theological thought and the attention it gives to Christian life,

¹⁸¹ Conférence: *La palabra de Dios los ritmos de la vida en el cristino*, p. 19

¹⁸² Op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁸³ *Llamamiento a la renovación*, No. 1, p. 9, October-November 1972.

hope seems to be going through a time of purgatory. On several occasions Basilio drew attention to the fact that it is not possible to be a Christian without hope.

He often spoke of prophecy, of the prophetic values of the religious life, and it was said of him that he was a prophet. Now the prophet is a man of hope, not so much because he foretells the future, but because in times of difficulty he reminds people that God is present. He is the man who, in moments of despair, revives the flame of courage in people's hearts and makes it possible for the pilgrimage of life to continue its journey toward God. He is the man who strengthens "trembling knees and shaking hands." He is the man who, no matter the present time may be like, awakens trust in God.

He often mentioned another truth, one concerning eschatology, eschatological values, the religious life living these, proclaiming these, keeping them alive in the people of God. For eschatology to become a force that energises life, the theological virtues of faith and hope are certainly necessary.

The times of Basilio have not been easy for the world no for the Church, and still less for the Congregation. During his time as general, a period of eighteen years, the Congregation lost a third of its effective members. That did not diminish his optimism; his love of God and of his Brothers was not weakened. He asked all the Brothers to have confidence. Many remember how much he believed in the dawn, and he did everything "in order to awaken the dawn." "One could say that Basilio was a lover of the dawn, and therefore of a day that still held every opportunity. That is what he was accustomed to: "to live to the rhythm of the will of God ... to see human events from God's point of view, to help to awaken the dawn."¹⁸⁴ In the Message at the end of the 1993 Chapter he told the Brothers that "the Institute has reached a turning point in history... it is necessary to confront the challenges and circumstances of the times which are only going to become more intense." In the face of difficulties that were becoming greater, Basilio invited the Brothers "to confidence, to peace, to courage."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Circular on *Obedience*,

¹⁸⁵ *Basilio Rueda, Un Autre Champagnat*, p. 59,

Hope is a virtue, which Basilio lived, but also one to which he applied his heart and his mind. In the conference on the Word of God there are several pages on hope. Christian hope has a triple part to play: desire, patience, and speed.

Desire, because everything turns on promise and reality, on “the already here but not yet”, on the waiting and the welcoming. Biblical tenses are ambiguous and the Christian has to know how to conjugate and superimpose the tenses, “he came, he is coming, he will come. We live with a memory that awakens gratitude and an experience that heightens the thirst, a promise that keeps us awake and watchful... Desire is the most typical human origin of hope.”¹⁸⁶

In *patience*, Christian hope waits for something that is truly coming, because God has given his word... It is the source of many existential attitudes; being patient, remaining sure, optimism and peace...”¹⁸⁷ It helps us “to live the word of God patiently and actively.”¹⁸⁸ “Patience teaches us to walk in step with God and according to the rhythm of God in our action, in our thought, in our interventions, in what we tolerate and what we don’t.”¹⁸⁹

Speed refers to the fact that the Spirit prays in the soul of the Christian that “the day of the Lord may be close at hand”¹⁹⁰, but the Christian commits himself to this and by his apostolic efforts helps “to awaken the dawn.”¹⁹¹

This patience, this certainty of the coming dawn derives from the hope that is part of Basilio’s life. But he also waited patiently for another dawn, that of 21 January 1996, when he returned to the Father.

His whole life was marked by this tension, the fullness of life that he gained in his death. Eternal life, his thirst to be with the Father, son in the Son, filled by the Holy Spirit in the great family of the saints, this was the ultimate end that hope

¹⁸⁶ Conference: *La Palabra de Dios y los ritmos de la vida en el cristiano*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁷ Idem.

¹⁸⁸ Op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁸⁹ Op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁹⁰ Op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁹¹ Op. cit., p. 38.

inscribed on the most true desires of his heart. Faith in eternal life¹⁹² and the tension of hope, which creates the desire and hunger for it, are what give sense to the Christian life. It is an act of adoration that proclaims that God is true to His word, that confidence in Him is fully justified, and that His promises can be depended on. That is how Basilio understood the hope of martyrs.¹⁹³ This is the hope that Basilio lived.

2.3 Love

Strong in faith, secure in hope, Basilio above all knew how to love. This book has devoted two Chapters to this theme, in the first part on his love, and in the second on his fraternity.

His most beautiful texts are those that speak of the love of God, of the Word of God. The most intense moments of his life were those he spent in adoration. His most significant gestures were the attentions he gave to others, his welcome, his attentiveness, his encouragement, his fidelity and his total gift of himself.

His life emphasises the constant link between the first and the second commandment, following the logic of a faith that wishes to be true and concrete. This is the kind of love that Basilio lived, proclaimed and urged. He dearly wished the whole Congregation to have this experience.

The thing that most comes to mind about him is certainly that *he was a Brother among Brothers*, and “*that he had much love in his heart.*” An essential aspect was his ideal “*to burn out his life for Christ.*” He said this often during his life, and he repeated it a month before his death when he saw that indeed his life was burned out.

Basilio is:

- an extraordinary man
- a fascinating man of God

¹⁹² Here one should read what Basilio said of the judgment of God, and how much he longed for it; see the passage on p. 9 of the conference, *La Palabra de dios y los ritmos de la vida en cristiano*. Reported here in pp. 135-136

¹⁹³ Op, cit., p. 21. Also in the allusions to Matthew 25, the last judgment.

- a man that God gave us as a gift
- a man whom God proposes as a model.

This man leaves us

- the heritage of his wisdom in his writings
- the fruit of his love in all the Brothers he helped, strengthened, consoled, the fidelity of whom he has put on record
- a thirst for the dawn that springs from hope and faith
- He has taught us the patient art of “helping to awaken the dawn”.

Because he loved us so much we are his heirs and therefore responsible

- for his wisdom
- for his love
- for his hope
- for his faith.

Our life shares in the work and the spirit of Basilio, and we feel that he still loves us today.

*Brother Quentin Duffy,
who worked for 18 years as his vicar,
remembers Basilio*

FOR
HIS YOUTHFUL SENSE OF HUMOUR

FOR
*HIS GREAT MIND
QUICK TO SEIZE THE ESSENTIALS
OF A GOOD RELIGIOUS LIFE,*

FOR
*HIS INFLUENCE AND EFFECT
ON MEN AND WOMEN
OF ALL AGES,*

FOR
HIS REMARKABLE PIETY,

FOR
HIS STRONG FAITH AND ARDENT CHARITY,

FOR
*HIS FLUENT SPEECH
AND HAPPY PEN.¹⁹⁴*

¹⁹⁴ *Testimony*, 26 February 2003.

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