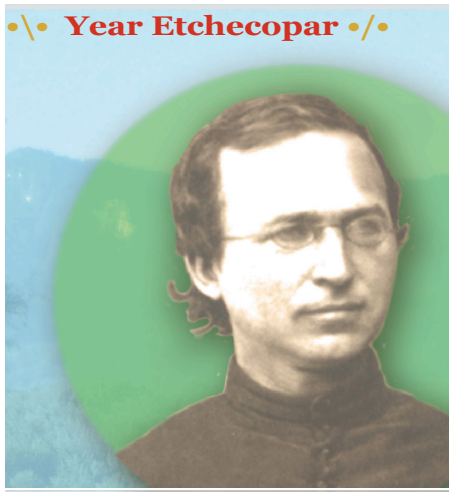


•\| • Year Etchecopar •/\| •



Father Etchecopar, a man of faith

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1. The Circular Letters¹, on which I limited my study, breathe everywhere the faith of Father Etchecopar. It is not an ideological, intellectual or rationalist faith. The faith of Fr. Auguste is a faith based on experience. He does not hesitate to express and share what he feels. He lives according to his faith, along with the religious of his time and the religious of our time. The feelings he transmits to us are abundant, but his faith is not saccharine. Based on the Word of God, it is an adult faith, which manifests itself in life's realities.

I do not pretend here to make long commentary, but simply to let Fr. Auguste speak for himself:

Dear Fathers and Brothers in Our Lord

*My heart is filled with joy. In the midst of the anxieties of the present time, let a deep peace guard your minds and your hearts; you work at your post, without worrying about tomorrow, trustfully **relying on the goodness of the Heavenly Father** and the vigilance of your superiors.*

*This disposition is a very precious grace. First of all, from the point of view of human wisdom, **nothing contributes to the salvation of a ship battered by the storm so much as calm and***

¹ "Circular letter" abbreviated C.I.

harmony in following duties and the respect for order under one command, with a prompt obedience.

In turn nothing attracts help from on high more than charity and the union of minds and hearts. And if God is for us, he will turn all things around for our greatest good.

Also, my dear Fathers and Brothers, let us have confidence in the infinite treasures of his mercy, let us have confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our refuge and consolation; in the Immaculate Heart of his gentle Mother who holds out her Beautiful Branch to the shipwrecked man ready to perish.

Let us trust in the intercession of our venerable Founder and of all those dear deceased members of our family, who, we hope, assured of their own happiness, are full of solicitude for us.

To our trust in God we add prudence in all our conduct. Everywhere we are besieged by visible and invisible enemies who prowl around us to surprise us, slander us, devour us. (C.l. June 1880)

2. This faith, for Father Etchecopar, is a spirit opposed to the mentality of the society of his time, to the liberal spirit of the Revolution and the Republic. With the spirit of **Here I am**, we must live the fidelity of our faith in a society that is gradually moving away from Christian faith:

*Also, waging war to the death against this judgmental, mocking, disobedient, sulky liberalism, etc., etc., with which the good themselves are infected, he [Father Garicoits] devoted his entire life to forming a Society relying on humble and devoted instruments, with the motto: **Here I am! Forward!** (C.l., To the Houses in France, Pau, 1/3/1886)*

***Here I am especially the apostle of respect, of perfect submission to Superiors, in hatred of the spirit of insubordination and selfishness which is the scourge of our time.** (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, 18/6/1886).*

Here, it was a question of founding a Society capable of fighting against this liberalism, so widespread everywhere nowadays

that its influence permeates the Sanctuary and the Church

itself: A Society of men stripped of everything, especially of their own pride; interiorly delivered to the law of love, exteriorly to the law of obedience and having as motto: My God! here I am, with your Divine Son! without delay, without reserve, without return, out of love for you! (C.I., Betharram, 15/5/1890)

3. Father Etchecopar recalls, as we have just read, that this social environment which is gradually losing faith, is a reason for the foundation of the Congregation. Father Etchecopar insists a lot on this. Father Garicoits also points this out in the Manifesto when he says: *“Men are made of ice, and among the priests there are so few who say: Ita, Pater...”*. Shouldn't we go deeper into this aspect to underline the importance of our mission in a society which is no longer Christian and which does not want to know Faith in Jesus Christ?

4. Father Etchecopar's faith is based on the Word of God, and tries to shed light on the situations of life and see in them, with the eyes of faith, the action of God. Some examples :

Phil 2, 7 and Hb 19.19, quotations that Fr. Etchecopar extracts from a letter from Father Garicoits, who bases the Manifesto on them (C.I., Betharram, 1/3/1885)

(Lk 2:12) *“And this will serve as a sign”*, the angel will say to the shepherds. Father Auguste took advantage of this to make this text a meditation applied to the Founder and to the Congregation (C.I., Bethlehem, 2/1/1893).

(Lk 24:26) *“Was it not necessary for the Messiah to bear these sufferings in order to enter into his glory?”* He first refers to the paschal Christ, to present Fr. Garicoits to us in this paschal perspective: suffering leading to glory (C.I., Betharram, 15/5/1890).

He starts from the application of the sign “to Jesus in the grotto of Bethlehem, swaddled and lying in the manger”, to see this sign in the

things that God has wrought: in religious life, the Founder and his work, our way of life as a religious of the Sacred Heart. This is the continuation of the letter:

The Almighty has already worked for us, despite our impotence, so many wonders; how can we not count on him in the future, unless we abdicate faith and reason itself?
For me, though unworthy and miserable, I do not cease to give him thanks, considering the glorious treasures which make up our heritage, Divitias gloriae haereditatis nostrae, namely: the extraordinary virtues of our already deceased elders; the Foundation of our Houses that really came out of nothing; especially the work in America, a miracle of suffering and fruitfulness; and that of Bethlehem, founded by angels of piety and charity, and which, at this hour, offers me an image of the fervour and joys of Heaven; the approval by the Holy See and the testimonies of our holy superiors the Bishops; and finally, the Cause of Father Garicoits, which has become one of the great preoccupations of the Papacy and which henceforth attracts upon him and his children the gaze of the Catholic world. (C.I., Betharram, 15/5/1890)

5. Another aspect of Father Etchecopar's faith, as a good disciple of Father Garicoits, is to know and practice the will of God, discerned in the events of life and practised in obedience. He quotes at least three times the letter 293 of Fr. Garicoits to all religious: "2nd, 3rd, 4th, 100th, idem, idem, idem. *Ecce Venio, fiat voluntas tua in me, sicut in Caelo.*" (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 4/12/1881 and C.I., Betharram, 10/1/1888). It is a sort of modulation of Our Lord's prayer. Fr. Garicoits prefaces the quotation with *Ecce venio*, he substitutes "on earth" by "in me". In other words, for the will of God to be accomplished on earth, it must be accomplished in me. It is in this quote from the gospel that our FVD finds its source (from "*fiat voluntas tua*" to "*fiat voluntas Dei*").

Glory to God and peace to your souls for all your Ecce Venios, all your Fiats of generosity that make real the union, the strength, the inner joy founded on the Divine Will. And may Our Lord and his Most Holy Mother, remove the scourges and obstacles that justice would heap on our heads for our sins, grant you a new school year, fruitful for all in the fruits of salvation and perfection. (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 3/1/1887).

*The Holy See has just verbally approved the Acts of our last General Chapter, of which I am sending you a copy here. By its Letters of August 26, it also approved and confirmed my re-election as Superior General: **I have only to submit myself to the will of God and commend myself to your prayers.** (C.l., Betharram, 14/10/1890)*

6. For Father Auguste, the foundation of his faith is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the person of Jesus viewed from the feelings of his Heart, following the tradition he received from Father Garicoits. It is not a simple devotion, but a whole spirituality which inspires an original style of living the Christian faith. Father Etchecopar knows, loves and follows Jesus seen via his Sacred Heart, as a disciple following the example of Father Garicoits. This is why he sends to all religious the document entitled "*The way of life of his Institute*" in C.l., Betharram, 12/4/1889. I believe that Father Etchecopar is inspired by this text to express the spirituality of the Sacred Heart, whose expression will abound in the Circular Letters by speaking of Saint Michael Garicoits and by exposing **the spirit of the Founder**, this is what today we call charism. Father Auguste refers to Jesus by also calling him "Master", it is a spirituality of the Following of Jesus:

Ah! this esteem and this mutual affection, this love, stronger than death, which unites and renders one invincible in the Heart of the Divine Master. Here, here, my Fathers and Brothers, the most precious treasure of the Community and the most excellent gift granted by Divine Goodness (C.l., Betharram, 29/5/1892).

It is with great consolation that I offer, in this month (June), your hearts to the Divine Heart of our good Master. (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 18/6/1886)

*These blessed Holy Places, consecrated by direct action, by the tears and the blood of the Saviour, remind me more vividly than anywhere else of the links that bind our Institute and its works to their first author: this Crèche, this Calvary and this side of the Holy Crucified One. **This pierced heart cries out to me where we came from, to whom we must attribute everything, bring everything back and the foundation on which we must constantly support and rise higher.** (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892)*

7. In these Letters, he speaks of the action of the Holy Spirit, first of all, in inspiring Father Garicoits to found a new family:

*At this very moment when the Process of Fama sanctitatis continues, a thousand voices proclaim that **Father Garicoits was a man filled with the Spirit of God**, one of those Apostles God raises up in difficult times, for the consolation and triumph of his Church; and on all sides the Christian people repeat the valuable testimony given by Bishop Lacroix over the coffin of our Father: “The Lord has led this just man by straight paths; he revealed to him the secrets of Heaven; he endowed him with the knowledge of the Saints, enriched him in his labours and crowned him in his undertakings” (Wisdom 10,10). (C.l., Betharram, 10/1/1888)*

And in this letter (To the Fathers & Brothers of America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892), so profound and so biblically inspired, in which he compares the circumstances of the birth of Jesus in the cave of Bethlehem to the origins of the founding of the community of America, he says this so beautifully of the experience of spiritual joy, the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

Ah! What parallels between the cradle of the divine Saviour and the cradle of all our works....first of all of Betharram, then.... those of the colony.... especially San José. In the house where our first Fathers settled, they found the destitution, the dirtiness of the stable of Bethlehem; but what a treasure they brought there, such as the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph! Joy in poverty, joy in sacrifice, joy in the Holy Spirit et justitia et pax et gaudium in Spiritu Sancto. With these dispositions, the hardest, darkest, most thankless work is made light: whether or not one succeeds before men matters little; whether or not one enjoys their consideration, their applause, and the favours and well-being of the temporal order. All this is useful as a means of zeal but basically, it does not give merit before God, nor his peace at the bottom of our heart. But with grace within, we can run, we can fly through thickets and thorns. (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892)

8. Father Etchecopar professes faith in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption, especially when he visits the Holy Places during his two stays in Bethlehem. The mystery of the Incarnation is very important, because he inherited it from the "Prophet" Garicoits.

*His goal [that of the Founder], in giving birth to the Institute, was to form and bring together men enamored with love for the Heart of Jesus, imbued with his sentiments, devoted to his interests, in union with the Heart of his Divine Mother, having as his motto the cry of his obedience, **from the moment he was incarnated in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin, until the hour when he expired in the arms of the Cross.** (C.l., to the Houses in France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)*

*Let us repeat it, dear friends: **our great God descended into this stable, which I have just visited for your intention, only by an act of Infinite Love; it was also with a goal of charity and zeal that our founder and his intrepid companions accepted the mission in America: rich in love for souls, like the divine Master, they were poor like the one who made himself poor to enrich us,***

propter our egenus factus est cum esset dives (2 C.). (*To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892*)

9. Also Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is part of Father Etchecopar's profession of faith, because surely, of her participation in the mystery of the Incarnation and her union with her Son Jesus, the Incarnate Word who came into the world doing good and offered his life on Calvary. He names her many times in the Circular Letters, with different qualifiers and much more than Father Garicoïts:

<i>Our Lady</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 15/6/1888)
<i>Divine Mother!</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 30/5/1887; C.I., Sarrance, 19/1/1889)
<i>His Most Holy Mother!</i>	(C.I., To the Houses in France, Betharram, 26/12/1884)
<i>Mary</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 30/5/1887)
<i>The divine Mary</i>	(C.I., Pau, 16/10/1876)
<i>the Most Blessed Virgin!</i>	(C.I., Rome, 15/3/1889)
<i>the Heart of Mary</i>	(To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 18/12/1886)
<i>the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary</i>	(To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 3/1/1887)
<i>her Heart maternal!!!</i>	(C.I., Rome, 10/5/1891)
<i>the Mother of Beautiful Love and of the all-inflamed Heart of NSJC</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 1/11/1891)
<i>the august Mother and of St Joseph</i>	(To the Fathers & Brothers in America, 12/12/1892)
<i>good Mother</i>	(To the Fathers & Brothers in America, 12/12/1892)
<i>His Most Holy Mother!</i>	(C.I., To the Houses in France, 26/12/1884)
<i>the Virgin his Mother</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 15/12/1894)
<i>the Virgin, his Mother and our Sovereign</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 7/5/1890)
<i>Mary, the Mother of grace and gentleness!</i>	(C.I., Rome, 18/12/1878)
<i>Our Lady and Divine Mother</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 26/3/1886)
<i>Our Lady of the Crib and of Calvary</i>	(C.I., Roma, 25/12/1878)
<i>Our Lady of Calvary!</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 23/6/1876; C.I., Roma, 29/4/1877; C.I., Betharram, 8/6/1877; C.I., Betharram, 1/5/1879; To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 18/11/1880; C.I., To the Houses in France, Betharram, 26/12/1884; C.I., Betharram, 30/5/1887; C.I., Betharram, 7/3/1894)
<i>the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady of Calvary</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 1/1/1885, C.I., To the Houses in France, 1/3/1885)
<i>the Heart of Our Lady of Calvary</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 5/1/1881)
<i>Our Lady of Betharram</i>	(C.I., Betharram, 13/5/1879, To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Betharram, 18/12/1880; C.I., Betharram, 16/9/1890; C.I., To the Houses in France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)
<i>the Blessed Branch held out to us by our Mother</i>	(C.I., To the Houses in France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)

Our Lady of the Beautiful Branch of Calvary (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Pau, 17/3/1886)
*the Immaculate Heart of his gentle Mother who holds out her Beautiful Branch to the shipwrecked
man ready to perish* (C.l., June 1880)

10. In these Circular Letters, Father Augustus also names Saint Joseph on several occasions as intercessor. Saint Michael practically only names him when he refers to him in the situations of the Childhood of Jesus, which the Gospels tell us about. In the circular letters, he uses *Saint Joseph* 10 times to designate *the school, the work, the parents of, above all... : the school of Saint Joseph.*

The Most Blessed Virgin and St Joseph! (To the Fathers & Brothers in America, Bethlehem, 12/12/1892)

the intercession of the very glorious Saint Joseph. (Pau, 1/3/1886)

To the great and good Saint Joseph recognition, love, trusting recourse everywhere and always. (C.l., Betharram, 23/6/1886)

***Deign the glorious Saint Joseph to inscribe these feelings in us!
Let us not forget, during this month of March, that we will
obtain through him what would be denied to us without him.***
(C.l., To the Houses in France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)

11. Father Auguste also expresses his faith in the Church and in the Pope. In the Circular Letters we can see that he was received in two audiences by Pope Pius IX (29/09/1876 and 29/04/2077) and in four, at least, by Leo XIII (18/12/1878, 3/20/1887, 3/20/1889, 10/5/1891). In describing these audiences with the Popes, Father Etchecopar expresses his veneration for the figure of the Pope and his faith in the person of the Pope, who is the Vicar of Christ on earth. Father Etchecopar said to Pope Pius IX:

***Ah! Holy Father, all the members have for your august person
a devotion ready to make any sacrifice.*** (C.l., Pau 6/10/1876)

*In the presence of this Venerable Elderly Man, so great by his genius, greater still by his virtues... before this worthy Successor of Peter... before this very Vicar of Jesus Christ, we were no longer, so to speak, of the earth: we thought we were transported to Heaven. **It is Our Lord whom we see; it is his words that we hear**; we said with the Apostle: Bonum is our hic esse. It is good and wholesome to stay here! (C.l., Betharram, 30/3/1887)*

There are many passages in the letters in which Father Etchecopar makes his profession of faith in the being and the mission of the Church:

*And I do not cease, **as the Church allows**, to address myself to Fr. Garicoits, in the depths of my soul, and to ask him, for everything, his upright spirit and his great soul: Recta sapere corde magno. (C.l., Bethlehem, 2/1/1893)*

*Let us look more deeply inside ourselves; **let us consider what we have promised, what we are by our vows, before God and before the Church, what we must show ourselves to be**, under pain of denying ourselves and causing the Angels and men to say: They say one thing and do another ; they have a name of honour and a low conduct; a glorious flag and a cowardly life, without discipline, without subordination, without a spirit of sacrifice... (C.l., Betharram, 10/1/1888)*

*This matter is important and far-reaching; **whoever Peter blesses, God himself blesses and communicates to him the life and fruitfulness of the Church**: “You are Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam, et portae Inferi non praevallebunt adversus eam”.*

*Now, **the Church can only approve as good and holy what is really there**. With her divine gaze, she will examine both our Rules and our Work; what will she see there, and what will be her judgment? Do you not hope, do you not believe, beloved Fathers and Brothers, **that she will find them and judge them to be full of the spirit of God, if they are imbued with the spirit of our venerable Founder?** (C.l., Oloron, 18/2/1889)*

12. Faith is expressed in prayer. The word prayer appears 69 times in circular letters. These words that we quote show Father Etchecopar as a teacher of prayer:

These are the men whom God chooses to transform the nations. Did not our Lord say to his Apostles after the Last Supper: "Whatever you ask my Father, in my name, I will do; and you will work greater works than mine: Et maiora horum faciet".
In humble, fervent, prolonged, almost continual prayer, our first Fathers became mighty in deeds and words, resplendent and ardent flames; in this incessant heart-to-heart with the Blessed Virgin, with our adorable Master, they drew the fire of a divine eloquence, the fire of a zeal which burst forth in a pure life, detached, mortified, crucified for the glory of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls redeemed with his blood. (C.l., Betharram, 6/7/1892)

Thanks to your prayers, thanks to the infinite mercy of the Heart of Jesus, we arrived safe and sound at the end of our journey. The good Lord has visibly protected us, covered us in the shadow of his wings during the trials inseparable from a long crossing and during the five days of quarantine that were imposed on us. This time, we had the good fortune to travel on our steamer, in the least unfavourable conditions possible during our ordeal.
(C.l., Buenos Aires, 5/12/1891)

13. Father Etchecopar composed this beautiful prayer that we can call the prayer of the sequela Christi. We can find it in the letter written to Fr. Victor Bourdenne from Jerusalem on 4 April 1893, where he spent the entire Holy Week. He tells him day by day what he is experiencing in the holy places of Jerusalem. The prayer is to be found in what he wrote on Easter Day, April 2, 1893. The prayer is longer, but I quote only what I consider the most interesting part.

Lord Jesus, my leader and my invincible master!! Here I am ! here we all are! following our founder, to humble ourselves

always, to work always, within the limits of our position, to live there and to die there, small, submissive, constant and happy; it is the law that you founded, followed; and which, therefore, is our law as it was your law... We want it, because you wanted it and exactly as you wanted it, right in the centre of our hearts: Legem in medio cordis. We want to accomplish this law of combat, like you, armed with only the weapons of truth and charity, legem in medio cordis; and always out of love, rather than for any other motive, according to the motto of Father Garicoits. And principally, in view of the wages of your love and the possession of your heart by ours! For you are the God of our heart and your heart is our share in eternity. Deus cordis mei et pars mea in aeternum. May this be, O infinite Mercy, the great grace of this pilgrimage for me and for all those who are dear to me! (To Father Victor Bourdenne, Jerusalem, 2/4/1893)

I have not gathered here all that the Circular Letters show about the faith of Father Auguste Etchecopar. An exhaustive and more complete study would require a greater more rigorous analysis and the contribution of new quotations taken from the Circular Letters. To further enrich the study on the faith of Father Auguste, it is necessary to look at other letters, as I did by going to look for the prayer that I have just quoted in this letter that Father Auguste writes to his assistant, Father Victor Bourdenne. We must not forget that there is an exemplary perspective in these Circular Letters addressed to all religious. But this first draft can help other researchers to complete this study. Nor does my study seek to reach other aspects of faith such as the sacraments, eternal life, praise, of which there is also material. I hope that many Betharramites will want to drink from this fertile source to enrich their own faith.
