



*Fr. Auguste  
Etchecopar,  
second founder  
of Betharram*

*by Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez SCJ*



The “series” of the *Nef*

YEAR  
**2019**





SOCIETAS  
SACRATISSIMI  
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*Betharram*



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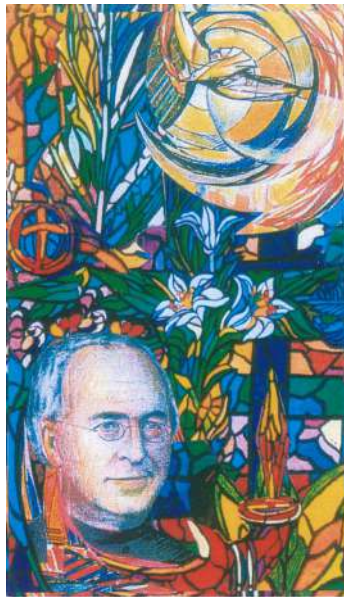


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## Father Auguste Etchecopar, the second founder of Betharram

*In the December edition of last year's magazine<sup>1</sup>, Fr. Beñat Oyhenart presented Fr. Auguste Etchecopar as the person Saint Michael Garicoits had influenced the most. This is one of the reasons that make him a key person in the history of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, someone to whom we all feel particularly connected.*



*Pious image made by  
Fr. Francesco Radaelli scj*

### Introduction

The first generations of Betharramites had great admiration and reverence for the attractive personality of Fr. Etchecopar. I knew some of these religious men in Argentina, Juan Craviotti, Darío Rodríguez, for example. Their time in the Nazareth and Bethlehem seminaries had transmitted this veneration to them. When we met them on the occasion of a Chapter or congregational meeting, they always reminded us that the importance of the figure of Father Auguste Etchecopar should be recognised.

Due to the initiative of these religious saints, the 1993 General Chapter stated:

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*1) NEF • Series in 2018*

*'Supplementary motion  
(unanimously voted)*

*To respond to the wishes expressed especially by our brothers in the Province of Argentina: on the occasion of the celebration in 1997 of the Bicentenary of the birth of St. Michael Garicoïts, which coincides with the centenary of the death of Father Etchecopar, the General Chapter encourages all religious of the Congregation to deepen their witness to the life and spirituality of Father Etchecopar. This will contribute to us renewing our identity as Betharramites and our belonging to the Congregation.'* (General Chapter 1993, Part 4, B)

During a visit to a patient in Adroque, I saw an image of Father August Etchecopar on the bedside table. I suggested that this patient say a novena with me for the attention of the Servant of God to ask him for a cure. From what I know, this person has been healed. There are also other testimonies of graces received.

These are small things that add to the testimony of the one who was Michael Garicoïts' second successor, and of whom the General Chapter of 1897 pronounced the following eulogy, just after his death in the same year:

*'The General Chapter proclaims that it has a duty of filial piety to fulfill and a special debt of gratitude to pay, in the name of the whole Congregation, to the venerated memory of Most Reverend Father Etchecopar, who has died since the last Chapter.*

*Together with the most authorized voices and with general agreement, the Chapter recognises with respect, in the deceased Very Reverend Father, the person who carried on the virtues and work of Father Garicoïts, an admirable model of all the Christian and priestly virtues, an accomplished example of religious life and the second Founder of the Congregation.'* (Acts of the General Chapter of 1897).

The intention of NEF's editorial team is to respond to the Superior General, Father Gustavo Agín's desire, to make Fr. Etchecopar better known to the new generations of Bethar-

ramites, that they should consider him a model of a life of charism in the midst of current challenges and that they can appreciate the true value of his unswerving dedication to maintain the memory of Saint Michael Garicoïts, as well as to promoting the unity and development of the Congregation.

I believe that by the testimony of his life and through his writings, Fr. Etchecopar gives us this:

- an immense love for Saint Michael Garicoïts whom he designates '*our Father Saint Michael*', because he considered him the one who initiated our religious life;

- an immense love for the charism, as by reproducing entire expressions of St. Michael, he allowed the charism to be preserved and transmitted in all its purity. How important it is to discover and know the key points he emphasized in order to regain our identity!

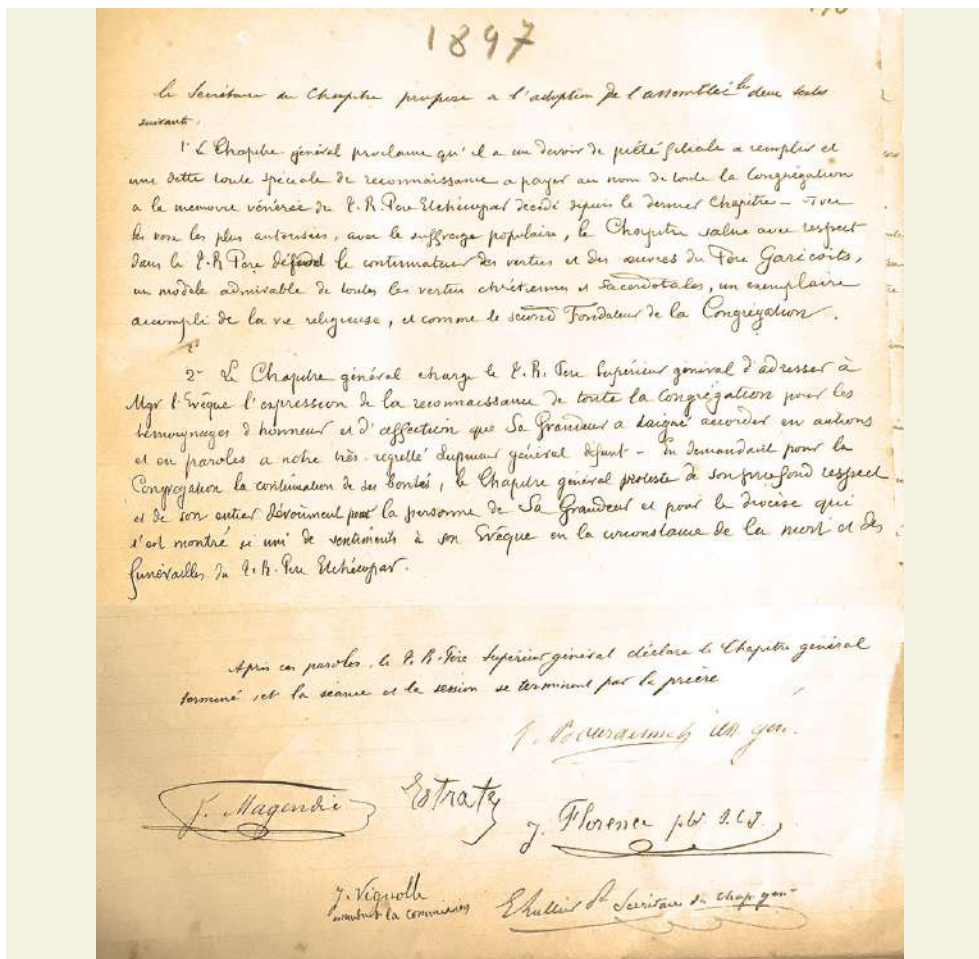
- love for people and for the work of the Congregation.

- a love for the spiritual heritage of the Congregation.

*'As far as I am concerned, though weak and poor, I do not cease to thank him, when I look at the glorious treasures that constitute our heritage: divitias glorie hereditatis nostrae,' he said. The glorious treasures of our heritage were for him: 'the extraordinary virtues of those who preceded us and died. The foundation of our homes, really out of nothing. Above all the work of America, a miracle of suffering and growth, and that of Bethlehem, founded by Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified and Mademoiselle Berthe d'Artigaux, two angels of pity and charity, and who at this moment give me an image of fervor and the joys of heaven. The approval of the Holy See and the testimony of our Bishops. And to complete the cause of Fr. Garicoïts, who is one of the great subjects of the pontificate and who has been drawing the attention of the Catholic world to him and his children ever since.'* (p. 62, C IX, 2/1/93)

On the occasion of the centenary of the death of Father Auguste Etchecopar in 1997, Fr. Bruno Ierullo, then Provincial of Argentina, received an invitation to the celebration organized by the descendants of the family of our religious in Tucumán. I remember that Father Bruno was undecided about what he should do. With his Council, we recommend-





ed that he did not miss this event. He attended, accompanied by Father Miner and Father Cabero. This celebration was an opportunity for the Congregation to reconnect with the family of Tucumán that had been long since lost. Since then, this friendship has been maintained through Fathers Agín, Gouarnalusse, Monzani and some lay people.

The Congregation began its cause of beatification in 1935, thirty-eight years after his death, with the collection of testimonies on his life in the diocese of Bayonne. On 4 December 1945 it was taken to Rome. The Process was interrupted in 1964 and resumed in 1997, recent General Chapters have insisted that a follow-up be given to it. It resumes this year with the appointment of a new postulator.



## The seed that sprouts in good soil

Like Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier and Michael Garicoïts..., Auguste Etchecopar was Basque. He was born in Saint-Palais (*Pyrénées Atlantiques*), on the banks of the Bidouze, on 30 May 1830. He was baptised with the name Bernard-Auguste on 1 June 1830 by Father Salaberry, parish priest of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine of Saint-Palais. His parents, Jean-Pierre Etchecopar and Ninette Sibas d'Etchecopar, had fifteen children: five died in infancy, two of them in the year of their birth, and ten reached their thirties: Evariste, Severin, Maxime, Jean-Baptiste, Susanne, Madeleine, Marceline, Eugenie, Julie. Auguste was the eighth of those who survived.

His father, Jean-Pierre Etchecopar, worked as a postmaster in Saint-Palais. His daughter, Susanne, practised the same profession first at Audence (Gironde), then at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. Madeleine remained at home, where Susanne would return because of a serious illness, and Marceline, after the death of her husband and her children. Eugenie married in Bayonne. Julie became a nun with the Daughters of Charity; she lived in Cartagena (Spain), Madrid and Tarbes. Evariste, Severin and Maxime left for Argentina, to the province of Tucumán. The first two did not have any children, while Maxime Etchecopar, married Lastenia Molina, had six children, who gave him numerous descendants in the well-known families of Tucumán: Etchecopar, Nougues, Terán, Cossio, Avellaneda... Jean-Baptiste went to the United States, where we lose track of him.

The correspondence of Fr. Etchecopar enlightens us as to the peculiarities of all the members of the family, their family virtues, and the very deep affection which united them to each other. The family lived in a comfortable position until 1847, when debts caused a setback. The three brothers mentioned earlier went to try their luck in Argentina. Father

Fernessole makes some assumptions about the possible reasons for falling into debt:

*'The causes have remained unknown to us; but it seems, according to some of the seminarian's discreet allusions (Auguste Etchecopar), that Mr. Etchecopar suffered from some injustice on the part of the Administration, and that some financial investments were unfortunate; it must not be forgotten that the salary of a postman or even a postmaster was not enough for such a large family.'*<sup>1</sup>

The abundant correspondence of Fr. Etchecopar with his family shows that he had very deep bonds of affection with each of his parents and that he frequently visited his sisters who had remained at the family home:

*'It must be admitted that our family is a privileged family. A father and a mother, models of virtue; children, all imbued with most excellent principles drawn from the cradle and fortified and engraved in souls at the school of sacrifice and labour ... Twelve hearts from which an uninterrupted concert of praise and thanksgiving is exhaled. Twelve hearts united by the same thoughts of confidence and acceptance, all having the same starting point: the holy examples of the family, all walking under the same inspiration and the same guide: the love of virtue and the eye of God; tending to the same end: the heavens, through pain and difficulty, sufferings and sacrifices which form the path of the just on earth, the mark of predestination and joy to come.'* (Letter to Evariste, 24 June 1852).



Frs. Joseph, Jean-Baptiste and Bertrand, faithful Betharramite guardians of Etchecopar House in Saint-Palais.

1) Pierre Fernessole: *El Venerado Padre Augusto Etchecopar*, Editorial "F.V.D", Buenos Aires 1949, p.46

Auguste was a dynamic boy. His excessive sensitivity drove him to have impetuous reactions, and his impulses were prone to violence which could swamp the ardent affection he had for his family. Thanks to the serious education received from both his parents and his school teacher, Mr. Castet, he was able to master his temperament and cultivate his relationship with his family wisely. But he could not afford to lower his guard over his reactions, which even in adulthood, *'we see reappearing during his life, when the situation required it, but never out of the blue.'*

After primary school, Auguste joined the municipal college of Father Eugène Ségalas: *'The most tender father, the most enlightened guide, the surest support of my youth'* (Letter of 27 January 1853). Auguste Etchecopar was very attentive to his guidance. The boy was good at music and had a lovely voice, which he will always keep. These qualities did not prevent him from concentrating very seriously on his studies. He was sent to Aire to study rhetoric and received several end-of-year awards. He communicated his last achievement to his brother Evariste in this way: *'I am writing to let you know that I am a Bachelor of Arts. I underwent my exam on 10 August, and my name was proclaimed the first among the accepted candidates.'* (Letter of 30 October 1847)

Here is the portrait that Father Duvignau traces of the young Auguste:

*'A rich nature. A tall figure, harmonious proportions, regular and fine features, a clear and frank look, a golden voice, a heart full of delicate and deep affections, such is the young Auguste Etchecopar. Later, he had a kind of majesty; at 17, his appearance was clearly attractive. He was, to say the least, without reserve, the fruit of grace and early self-control.'*<sup>2</sup>

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2) Pierre Duvignau: L'homme au visage de lumière, Editions Marie Médiatrice Edit Genval, 1968, p. 18.





## The vocational discernment of Father Auguste Etchecopar

In his biography of Fr Etchecopar, Fr Fernessole writes that *'signs of a call to the priesthood were manifest in Auguste Etchecopar from a very early age'*<sup>1</sup>. He adds that Fr Salaberry, parish priest at Saint-Palais, had been impressed by his human qualities and in a letter dated 18 June 1838 to Auguste's father, he wrote: *'Embrace Auguste for me whom I believe is called to the priesthood'*<sup>2</sup>.

In the earliest of Fr Etchecopar's letters to have been preserved, he tells his brother Evariste, who had left home to make his living in Argentina, how he discovered his vocation. Through his letters we are able to experience his vocational discernment. Personally, I have always found this a very striking and moving story. He was eight when he first voiced his anxiety about vocation: *'I am constantly asking God to give me some direction as to my vocation. If he listens to my desires, I will be consecrated to the ministry of the altars'*<sup>3</sup>. He was already able to make a clear distinction between his will and what the will of God might be.

He also recounts how torn he feels when, scarcely yet twelve years old, he is faced with two options:

*'• Sometimes I feel as if I am called to follow you to those distant shores where Nature seems so different.*

*• Then at other times, it also seems that God has destined me to sing His praises and join the ranks of His ministers.'*<sup>4</sup>

When at age seventeen he is preparing for his baccalauréate exams, he has already been wrestling with this dilemma: go to Argentina and make his fortune, or stay in France and become a priest. He is thinking deeply about a vocation. Once he had passed his baccalauréate (in literary studies),

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1) Le Très Révérend Père Auguste Etchecopar, Pierre Fernessole, p. 29

2) Ibid. p. 29

3) Letter Nr. 1, 8 May 1838 [Saint-Palais], to his brother Evariste

4) Letter Nr. 2, 26 October 1842 [Saint-Palais], to his brother Evariste

his vocation to the priesthood became a certainty. *'I believe I was born for this'*<sup>5</sup>. *'God, dear brother, has other plans. In his Providence and wisdom, He is calling me irresistibly to His service.'*<sup>6</sup> He is convinced God loves him, that He has a preference for him and wants him to stand aside from the crowd and give himself entirely over to God and the things of God: praising God, celebrating His sacraments and preaching His word. God also wants him to work to save men's souls, to intercede on behalf of all mankind but in particular for the members of his family. *'I confine myself to praying for you, working for the salvation of your souls, and I am proud of my mission.'*<sup>7</sup> He passes on this experience of discernment as being a struggle between what he wants and what God wants. He is conscious of the obstacles and resistance to God's call. He is well aware of the value of all that he is renouncing by saying 'Yes' to the Lord. He is grateful to Him who showed him special preference by inviting him to live with Him in closer friendship. God's preference is also manifest in the preference shown by Mgr Lacroix, Bishop of Bayonne, who, excusing him from attending the seminary, asked him to teach maths at Saint-Palais during his years of formation (1847 and 1853), and allowing him to gain experience by spending a year before his ordination with the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in Oloron.

When recounting how he felt after hearing the sermon on celibacy upon being ordained a sub-deacon, he is full of enthusiasm and assurance. He is happy, full of joy, confidence and the personal equilibrium of a fulfilled human being. *'Dear brother, The Lord has spoken and in spite of my unworthiness I ran towards Him, My Lord; I have given Him my all, my heart, my soul and my body... Oh what joy! Oh what happiness! If the world could understand how I feel...'*<sup>8</sup> He was twenty-two years old.

Yes he expresses how important prayer is in recognising

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5) Letter Nr. 4, to his brother Evariste, 27 April 1849 [Saint-Palais School]

6) Letter Nr. 3, to his brother Evariste, 30 October 1847 [Saint-Palais School]

7) Ibid. Letter Nr. 4

8) Letter Nr. 6, to his brother Evariste, 24 June 1852 [Saint-Palais school]

and choosing a vocation, but we see that the experience of his vocation goes beyond moments spent in prayer; it requires knowledge and strength to take a decision. He bears witness to experiencing a communion with God which overcomes every aspect and moment of his life. *'For a long time... in my hurry to give God my whole being, undivided and unconditional, which I derive from His merciful bounty, I waited silently to hear clearly and distinctly the loving voice of my God, who for some time had spoken to me in the secret places of my heart; for in spite of all my intuitions, irresistible inclination, the needs of my soul, in spite of my hopes, never would I myself have dared to claim to be an intimate friend of God, the depositary of His powers, His representative and minister for His people, His flaming torch - a representation and model of Him for the faithful of His Holy Church.'*<sup>9</sup>

His brother, Evariste, is his confidant and a witness to the joy which floods his whole being as he worked as a teacher before ordination and again when ordained deacon at twenty-three and a priest at twenty-four, and of the concern he had to prepare his sermons properly.

At that time, the Bishop Mgr Lacroix had the idea of forming a Diocesan Society of Auxiliary Priests of the Holy Cross at Oloron. This was a group of priests chosen and formed to hold the most important posts in the Diocese<sup>10</sup>. To be admitted one had to be extraordinarily gifted and talented, robustly pious, desirous of perfection, blessed with good health and to have completed at least three years of theology. The founder, and first Superior, of this institution was Mgr Menjoulet. Fr Etchecopar entered the Society one year before his ordination to the priesthood, which took place in Bayonne on June 10th, 1854, on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. The experience was short-lived<sup>11</sup>.



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9) *Ibid.* Letter Nr. 6

10) *L'Homme au visage de lumière, Pierre Duvignau s.c.j., p. 31-32, note 29*

11) *Le Très Révérend Père Auguste Etchecopar, Pierre Fernessole, p. 55-76*



## Father Etchecopar finds a treasure in Betharram

The project of the Holy Cross Society of Oloron\*<sup>1</sup> fizzled out. The Superior, Mgr. Menjoulet, and other members of the so called Society left to occupy other posts in the diocese of Bayonne or elsewhere, so their number remained reduced. Mgr. Lacroix tried to merge the Holy Cross Society with the community of Bétharram with the idea of changing the spirit of the latter, which he wanted without perpetual vows and in the exclusive service of the diocese. *'Father Garicoits, though always ready to obey, would have always declared that such a combination would only result in ruins.'*<sup>2</sup> Consequently, St Michael did not accept the assimilation of the group of the Holy Cross as a whole, but studied each individual case. Of the 11 members of the Holy Cross Society, 8 were accepted at Bétharram, including Auguste Etchecopar. By then it was the summer of 1855.

The 8 priests who came from Holy Cross found 26 priests, 23 brothers and around 15 scholastics in Betharram, as well as a climate of spirituality, fraternity and ministry. But above all they met Father Garicoits and for Father Etchecopar, it was like finding a treasure. When Father Etchecopar met St. Michael, he experienced a spiritual consolation, which he never forgot, and which made him say: *'The virtue of Father Garicoits was so delightful; he exercised, by the halo of his sanctity, an ascendancy which made even the most painful sacrifices pleasant. Everything at Bétharram, men and things, then reflected the virtues of its founder. This house was a sanctuary where the soul immediately felt full of contemplation, meditative prayer and fervour. It was a community whose members had as their own stamp of exquisite simplicity, austere poverty, expansive charity, and unquestioning obedience.'*<sup>3</sup>

Etchecopar was aware that a new life had just begun for

1) also called the House of Superior Studies

2) Le Très Révérend Père Auguste Etchecopar, Pierre Fernessole, p. 76

3) L'Homme au visage de lumière, Pierre Duvignau s.c.j., p. 40



him; he discovered the ideal of the consecrated life hitherto unknown to him; he committed unconditionally to the spiritual path of the man who was, in his eyes, a perfect teacher of doctrine and a perfect model of perfection.<sup>4</sup>

St. Michael recognized the validity of the novitiate made by Fr. Etchecopar at Holy Cross. He was happy to welcome him because he reminded him of the sanctity of his uncle Evariste Etchecopar whom he had known while studying at Saint-Palais. The first destination of Father Etchecopar was the community of the College of Oloron that the Bishop had just entrusted to Bétharram. He was to be there with Father Minvielle, also of Holy Cross, and with Father Rossigneux, who had a university education. (see DS § 302)

A year and a half later, having lost several reliable colleagues who had been sent as a team to Argentina in 1856, Fr. Garicoïts named Fr. Etchecopar master of novices, at just 27 years old. Every morning for eight years, before the novice conference, Father Auguste would have an interview with Father Garicoïts, followed by a time before the tabernacle to internalize the Founder's guidance. In this way he came to the source of the charism that Saint Michael Garicoïts had received by divine inspiration. He took notes from weekly lectures or daily retreat conferences, trying to faithfully collect the experience, memories, thoughts, and even the feelings and emotions of the Founder and the divine character of his vocation. In order to gather his thoughts faithfully, Fr. Etchecopar would sometimes have to hide - Fr. Garicoïts being uncompromising on this point - or ask a novice to take notes.

Saint Michael was convinced that Father Etchecopar had an intense spiritual life. This is why, in addition to the novitiate, he entrusted him with the preaching of ordination retreats, retreats for teachers, or the Daughters of the Cross, and retreats for those who came to consult St Michael in

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4) Cf. *L'Homme au visage de lumière*, Pierre Duvignau s.c.j., p. 41

Bétharram, as well as certain canonical visits, notably in Oloron and Orthez.<sup>5</sup>

Here are some indications of Fr Etchecopar's admiration for Saint Michael Garicoïts: He calls him Father because he considered him as the one who gave us the gift of being born to religious life (Letter 2, January 1893). *'I saw Saint Michael as a true Master in following and imitating the Sacred Heart'* (Letters: 4 March 1894; 28 October 1889; 18 June 1886). He regarded St Michael as a charismatic man, a man of God, because he lived a strong experience of the Spirit (Circular 1888). He introduces us to Saint Michael as a man of discernment (Letter 19 February 1885). Those who study his writings, says Fr. Etchecopar, *'are amazed to see him [...] working for 40 years, 1°, with so much depth of sight; 2°, so much strength in the choice of materials; 3°, so much method, clarity and precision that they write: "Happy the Congregation which possesses such a Master, an initiator so complete, so perfect in all his ecclesiastical knowledge for the formation of its members.'*<sup>6</sup>

Father Etchecopar collected all the testimonies he could from people who knew Saint Michael in order to be able to transmit to future generations as faithful as possible a portrait of our Father.

Father Etchecopar was the only one who could leave us these two portraits of his spiritual father and master, Saint Michael Garicoïts:

- *'From that moment, [the moment when, on his return from Toulouse, having finished the Spiritual Exercises, he prostrated himself before the Virgin of Bétharram to offer his election and received a great consolation by way of confirmation] we see him as austere as an hermit, simple as a child, tender as a mother, humble as a useless servant, with indefatigable activity, with invincible force and gentleness, and at the same time an organizer, professor, chaplain, director of souls, wise in his counsel, intrep-*

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5) Correspondence, Vol. II, Letter 215

6) Letter 1605, 2 November 1893

*id in action, supporting his word by example; we witnessed him, without pause or rest until his last breath, founding, elevating, strengthening the sacred work which has become our inheritance.'* (Circular letter 1 March 1885)

- In his letter sent on 4 June 1863, Fr. Etchecopar writes from Bétharram to Fr. Henri Ramière, SJ, Director of the «Messenger of the Sacred Heart»: *'Our superior was a truly mortified man; he ate little, slept only five hours, worked almost tirelessly, had no leisure activity as such and showed himself to be of unalterable goodness, charity, and grace, though this was interrupted as he was torn in various directions by a multitude of occupations and continual details. Business made him forget about food and sleep. Up at three o'clock in the morning, studying at four o'clock, he taught a philosophy class at six-thirty, theology at eleven o'clock, and sometimes remained in the confessional until four o'clock in the afternoon, without having taken any food all day, then he returned to his books, gave a lecture to the priests, and devoted the rest of the day to study and to other duties as superior of a community. He seemed indefatigable, indifferent to everything; He drew this total and self-denial from the respect and love which he had devoted to the will of the Lord. Fiat voluntas tua! This was the continual cry of his heart. Respect for this divine will is what he has always preached and sought to inculcate; renouncing and considering our own will with contempt, that is what he battled with constantly and to extremes; to search with virginal innocence, and to accomplish like a soldier, as he said with energy, is the goal to which we must always strive. In a nutshell, that is the story of his life. The will of God has asked three things of Michael Garcoits in particular: 1. that he should endeavour to found the work of the auxiliary diocesan priests of Bétharram; 2. that he help in the establishment of the Daughters of the Cross in our country; 3. that he should direct souls in their choice of a state of life.'*

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## The charism: from Saint Michael to us, through Father Etchecopar

Father Etchecopar had the privilege of living in great intimacy with St. Michael Garicoïts for eight years, from June 1855 to May 1863. At the very source of the saint's heart, he was able to drink the living water inspired by the Holy Spirit and to know the Betharramite charism, which was destined to become a flowing river (see Jn 7: 37-38) and which would help many people to live as Christians.

The daily interview he had with St. Michael Garicoïts before giving his lessons to the novices, the notes he took conscientiously at each of the saint's lectures and the confidences he was able to collect during impromptu dialogues were all elements which allowed him to know the mystery of the revealed charism more closely.

Saint Michael Garicoïts was convinced that he had received the charism through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to found the Congregation. It is through Fr. Etchecopar that we know this. He wrote it in particular in Circular Letter No. 995 (Bétharram, 10 January 1888):

*'You see, my Fathers and Brothers, despite his profound humility, Father Garicoïts believed in a work of new creation, having its purpose, its organization, its spirit and its means; he believed that the God of the poor and the insignificant had chosen him for this purpose, that he was the shepherd of the last house of the hamlet of Ibarre, he, a nobody, had been told: "Go and found a new Institute in my Church; it has its reason to exist in these troubled times, where the great Orders are scattered and where the spirit of revolutionary independence penetrates from all sides into the Sanctuary ... Here is your flag and your rallying cry ... You will walk at the head with the flag of the Sacred Heart, uttering the cry, the Ecce Venio of my Son, and you will be his joy and the support of his Church."*

*He believed in this voice; he seized this flag, and with his powerful voice: "It is a craze nowadays, to substitute our will for that of God and to say to him: Take leave, so I can put myself in it ... Come to me those who*

*surrender their will to perfect obedience and Divine good pleasure!!* “

*And he rushed into his field of work, like a giant, and walked there until the end of his life. Was he, my Fathers and my Brothers, the victim of a generous illusion? No, no, thanks to God ... the facts prove it; and, at this very moment when the Fama sanctitatis continues, a thousand voices proclaim that Father Garicoïts was a man filled with the Spirit of God, one of those Apostles called up in difficult times, for the consolation and triumph of his Church.'*

The Holy Spirit always inspires remedies to meet the challenges which are the signs of the times. Fr. Etchecopar says so: *'[a new institute] has its reason to exist in these troubled times, where the great Orders are scattered and where the spirit of revolutionary independence penetrates from all sides into the Sanctuary...'* (Ibid.)

Father Etchecopar uses other expressions to describe the state of society and the Church of his time: the spirit of insubordination and selfishness (p.8, Letter 11), the liberalism of the moment (p. 12, Letter 15) (circa 1887), the spirit of revolutionary independence (46, Letter 71, Letter 88). This is what St. Michael Garicoïts formulates in the Manifesto: *'But we human beings are cold before God! The independence of priests had a very detrimental effect: even among the priests there are very few who say as their divine Master did: "Here I am, Ita Pater!"'*

Father Etchecopar testified several times to having heard the founder say these things:

*'The Servant of God told me himself that having seen the difficulties and even the tears of the Bishops, and the spirit of independence which seemed to invade the clergy, he had said that it would be a very useful thing to form an Association of Priests, ready to go, at the first sign, wherever they are called by the Bishop, and especially to the most difficult ministries to be filled.'* (Fr. Etchecopar, witness of the founder, T.II, 135).

In the Manifesto of 1838, St. Michael Garicoïts does not name Jesus as the Sacred Heart, but as Jesus Christ and *'Jesus, annihilated and obedient'*. It was Bishop Lacroix who gave this name to the nascent congregation in 1841, when he imposed its rules. But this name given by the Bishop pleased Saint Mi-



chael, as it also explains the charism.

*'Why does our Society bear the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus?*

*1) Because it is specially united to this divine Heart saying to His Father: Here I am, with the purpose of being His co-operators for the salvation of souls.*

*2) Because it professes to imitate the life of Our Lord in a way that is special to*

*us: the Society trains its members to live in a spirit of humility and charity towards each other, according to the example of the disciples of Our Lord, and to conform to this divine Saviour, principally in his obedience towards his Father, and in His zeal for the salvation of souls.'* (DS § 7)

Father Etchecopar often uses the expression 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' to refer to the love of Jesus, the son of God made man: in one of his lectures (July 23, 1861), he describes the centrality of the love of Jesus Christ for the Betharramite religious:

*'But where will we find the source of this gentleness, this obedience, which demands a continual sacrifice?*

*In the love of Jesus Christ.*

*In the Heart of Jesus Christ.*

*Oh! when we love Jesus Christ, we are gentle, devoted, obedient!*

*Oh! when one looks at his brothers in the heart of Jesus Christ who carries them, who loves them, who bears them, who looks on them favourably and who gives himself to them, we can easily bear them, we esteem them, we love them: a love that nothing can weaken.*



*And when we see the Superiors in the Heart of Jesus Christ, we obey with promptness and filial joy. [...]*

*Let's go every day to take refuge in this Heart. He is always open to everyone, but especially to us, his favourite children.*

*Let's throw ourselves often into this Heart, or rather let's establish our home there. Jesus permits it and desires it. And how good it is to live in his heart.'*

This reflection reminds us of St. Michael Garicoïts: *'Everywhere and always alone with Jesus Christ. The will of Jesus Christ in all I do by the Rule. Jesus Christ in my superiors, whoever they are, Jesus Christ in my brothers, receiving the services I render them, as rendered to Himself.'* (DS § 245/8)

We do not study the writings of Father Etchecopar which are very abundant, especially the letters. But even a very superficial reading allows us to find the vocabulary and all the expressions of St. Michael: *idoneus, expeditus, expositus, ecce venio* and *ecce ancilla*, the five Betharramite virtues. He proposes obedience as the virtue as opposed to the evil of the moment that is the spirit of independence. He says as follows:

*'As to the obedience described in our holy Rules, you know that it is nothing less than the obedience of Jesus Christ, that is to say, in all his perfection.*

*Sincere obedience, which makes us whole, with all that we are in the hands of the Superior.*

*Exact obedience, which makes us submissive and eager, not only to the formal orders, but to the least desires of our Superiors.*

*Prompt obedience, which makes us leave everything, even a letter just started, to obey the voice of the Superior as the very voice of God.*

*Generous, joyful, constant obedience, which makes us undertake, continue and lead to the end of the most painful things, with the joy, the immense happiness that gives this thought: "I do the will of God!"'*

Finally, total obedience, which sacrifices everything to God, action, will, judgment, and offers him an infinitely precious holocaust and infinitely pleasant. Obedience! Obedience! The perfect obedience of the son. All that will happen,

that will be carried out without obedience, will be carried out *magni passus* perhaps, but *extra viam*. (*magni passus sed extra viam*: Great steps, but made on the wrong path, see St. Augustine) .

Father Auguste considers Saint Michael Garicoïts as our father because, through the gift of the charism that the Holy Spirit has given him, he has initiated us into the consecrated life. *‘Thank you, Father, for everything we owe you. It was you who initiated us into religious life. It was you who grouped us with your mission from heaven.*

*[...] You were our guide, our light, our perfect model, our strength and our consolation...’* (Fr. Etchecopar’s prayer to saint Michael).

...





## The Approval of the Rule of Betharram: a difficult process

In 1835 the first companions of Saint Michael adopted the Hasparren Missionary Rule which, in practice, proved to be insufficient in their eyes. From 1836 to 1837, Father Garicoïts introduced them little by little to the constitutions of the Jesuits. In 1838, he placed at the head of these constitutions the Manifesto, which expresses the new spirit according to which they must be interpreted.

On 6 September that year, Mgr. Lacroix, who had been bishop of Bayonne for a year, authorized them to follow this text. But three years later, on 9 September 1841, he imposed on them constitutions that he wrote and signed himself, inspired by the Sulpicians, the society to which he belonged.

While Saint Michael and his first companions aspired to a religious institution characterized by vows, a community life and the election of the superior by assembly, the bishop put them into a diocesan association where he intended to appoint the superior with his council, direct the mission and review the accounts. He did not authorize the profession of vows or give this association the chance of being approved by Rome. He went as far as to give him their name: Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Then the Bishop allowed them to conform to the constitutions of the Jesuits and, at the request of Fr. Guimon, to profess vows, albeit in a limited way. These exceptions were maintained in the corrections made both in 1851 and 1853. This conflict between the Congregation and Bishop Lacroix started in 1841 and was prolonged and provoked a crisis within the Congregation, which would not be resolved until 1875.

After the funeral of the Founder on Saturday 16 May 1863, the Bishop met with the religious community present at Bétharram and *'Mgr. Lacroix, we read in the report, said in the most formal terms that his firm and unchanging intention was that they*

*keep to the constitutions of 1841; that all that had been attempted and carried out contrary to these constitutions had been the effect of a holy illusion*<sup>1</sup>.

With these words the bishop drew a line under all the concessions he granted. At the same meeting, he appointed Fr. Chirou Superior, Fr. Auguste Etchecopar Secretary, and three councilors.

Three months later, Mgr. Lacroix returned to impose the constitutions of 1841 again, but accepted that the Superior and Council should be elected: Fr. Chirou was elected Superior and Fr. Etchecopar, Novice Master. The situation was difficult for the managing team, because it was caught between the bishop, who had the fate of the Congregation in his hands, and the majority of the religious, who wanted to remain faithful to the Founder. Faced with so much confusion, some left the Congregation.

Fr. Chirou's three-year term ended in 1866. The bishop kept him in office without informing the community. This created a bad atmosphere in the community and the situation became untenable. On 11 May 1868, without announcing his visit, Monseigneur Lacroix arrived in person at Bétharram and gathered only the religious of the Mother House to reaffirm his position categorically: *'There can be no question for you,'* he said, *'of forming a religious body. You are a purely diocesan society, engaged in missions and teaching, under the direction of the Bishop*<sup>2</sup>.

The discussion focused on the vows, the most sensitive subject. The religious asked him what would happen, whether the vows would be mandatory or simply optional. The bishop answered that in his opinion they must be optional, but he would submit the decision to the vote of the assembly. The religious said that the religious of other residences should be consulted. The bishop was impatient and replied that the

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1) *L'homme au visage de lumière*, Duvignau, p. 55

2) *Ibid.* p. 57

matter must be concluded. The result of the vote was of 23 voters, 16 votes for mandatory vows, 7 votes for optional vows.

Father Duvi-gnau commen-  
ted: 'This improvi-  
sed vote showed the  
depth of hearts and  
contributed greatly  
to improving the at-  
mosphere. From this  
moment, we notice a  
rise of courage; the  
spirit of the founder  
has just won a victo-  
ry that augurs other-  
s'.<sup>3</sup>

Until then, Fr.  
Etchecopar see-  
med to be in re-  
treat. He suppor-  
ted Fr. Chirou with  
all his might. It was

he who wrote all the minutes of the council. Shaken by the  
tensions of 11 May, the bishop made him come to Bayonne  
to draft new statutes that took into account the wishes of the  
Community <sup>4</sup>.

Faced with the Council's irregular situation, he asked

Magendie  
F.H.D. 87  
Betharram ce 3 Septemb 1873  
H. Magendie  
Mon très-aimé Confre,  
Nous voici depuis le 29 du mois dernier  
plongés dans le deuil. Notre si bon  
supérieur, H. Chirou, a été emporté par  
une crise qui n'a duré que 24 heures  
environ — Après les vives douleurs qu'il  
essentait à chacune de ses attaques, il  
s'est affaibli rapidement et après s'être  
confessé et reçu l'extrême onction, il s'  
est éteint sans secousse aucune —  
O mon Dieu! quel coup! pauvre Congrégation!  
Quelles pertes!  
Cette œuvre léguée est si précieuse  
qu'il faut bien se garder, que les  
survivants s'y dévouent et disent:  
En avant toujours —  
C'est la pensée qui me retient, mon  
cher ami, malgré toute ma impuissance,  
à la tête de l'Administration, jusqu'au  
20 août prochain —

3) Ibid. p. 59

4) La Vie et l'Œuvre du Vénérable Michel Garicoïts, par Basilide Bourdenne, Beauch-  
esne, 3e éd., 1918, p. 413

F.V.D.

Betharram, the 3rd of September 1873

Fr. Magendie

*My beloved Brother,*

*We have been in mourning here since the 29th of last month. Our good Superior, Fr. Chirou, was seized by a health crisis that lasted only about 24 hours. After the sharp pains he felt with each of his attacks, he quickly weakened and after having made his confession and received Extreme Unction, he died peacefully.*

*Oh my God! What a blow! Our poor Congregation! What a loss!*

*But the work that is his legacy is so important that for sure, we the survivors must devote ourselves to it, and say 'Always forward'*

*This is the thought that drives me, my dear friend, in spite of all my weaknesses, as the head of the administration until the 20th of August next. Thus the General Chapter decided. At the first sitting held after the burial of the dear departed, it declared that it did not want to proceed to any election and closed the meeting immediately. (...)*

*Fr. Auguste Etchecopar scj*

Fr. Etchecopar, who *'wishes and requests that the elections be held as soon as possible'*<sup>5</sup>.

Father Etchecopar could count on the confidence of the Community and the Bishop. He did not want to hear about elections, which would take another four years. The constitutions of 1841, which still bore the imprint of the Bishop, were revised. Bétharram was not going to accept them.

Fr. Etchecopar suggested to the Bishop - and he accepted - that it was the

Community itself which was to draw up the constitutions and approves them before sending them to Rome. The new constitutions were written in August 1869. They are very timid about the vow of poverty. So they were rejected by Rome. On 7 August 1870, a new text was drafted, which took into

5) L'homme au visage de lumière, Duvignau, p. 61



account what Rome was asking for. This text was voted in and the return to Bayonne was sealed. Bishop Lacroix, for whom the concessions had a high cost, put the text quietly in a drawer of his office.

On 13 October 1871 Fr. Etchecopar returned to Bayonne, obtained an episcopal approval, provided that the constitutions were not presented in Rome.

Once the new text was in hand, it was possible to hold the elections, which had been requested for a long time. The General Chapter, chaired by Fr. Chirou, met on 20 May 1872. Fr. Etchecopar was elected vice-superior, visitor and secretary.

The Chapter also decided that once the Bishop's authorization was obtained, two members of the Congregation would go to Rome to present the constitutions. The bishop approved the acts, but maintained his veto that they should not be presented in Rome.

In August 1873, an extraordinary General Chapter was convened, but it was interrupted by the death of Father Chirou. The Chapter designated Father Etchecopar as Superior, up to the election chapter, set for 20 August 1874, during which he was elected Superior General by 30 votes to 34. The bishop's confidence in Fr. Etchecopar was such that he granted everything he asked, with the exception of the constitutions, which irritated him.

Mgr. Lacroix held in high esteem a Carmelite with a white veil, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, who lived in the Carmel of Pau. He had an in depth investigation carried of the extraordinary phenomena of which she had been the subject. Now on 2 May 1875, she received an extraordinary message from heaven on two occasions, and once again on 4 May: this message said that Fathers Estrate and Bordachar must go to Rome before the end of the month to take the constitutions of Bétharram there. She communicated this inspiration to the bishop.

On 10 May, by order of Sister Marie de Jesus Crucified, Miss Berthe Dartigaux, the visionary's friend who was known

to the Bishop, came to meet him to find out his answer. After praying together, the Bishop recognized that God's will was to send the constitutions to Rome; he signed them and gave them to her. From Anglet where he found himself, Father Etchecopar immediately went to the Episcopal Palace to receive the precious treasure.

In accordance with Mariam's instructions, he entrusted the constitutions of Bétharram to Fathers Estrate and Bordachar to take them to Rome. Everything was planned and went well for the approval of the constitutions of Bétharram. On 30 July 1875, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars implemented the act of approval by praising and recommending the Institute of Bétharram. In the spring of 1877 Fr. Etchecopar went to Rome, accompanied by Fathers Estrate and Etchegaray, who acted as secretaries, to correct the text, which would be approved by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 5 September 1877, after 36 years of conflict.

In Rome, they were not allowed to modify the order and the plan of the constitutions: the same titles and chapters were maintained, the Rule of St. Augustine was preserved. The content could be corrected.

This is why, under the rather unfortunate title of the Institute's Particular Devotions, Father Etchecopar succeeded in having only three articles approved: one on the Sacred Heart and the Charism, the other on Bétharram and Calvary, a third on devotions to the Heart of Jesus, the Cross, the sorrowful mysteries, the Virgin and Saint Joseph<sup>6</sup>.

Father Etchecopar did not cease to include the spirit of the Founder in the constitutions. He achieved this in the constitutions of 28 April 1890, *ad experimentum* for 10 years. Father Etchecopar no longer appears in the constitutions of 1901 on the other hand and the *Ecce venio* no longer appears in the text.



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6) P. Duvignau, «Petite histoire des Constitutions de Bétharram», NEF, pp. 13-14



## The Foundation of the Betharramite Community of Bethlehem

Father Etchecopar maintained the charism in the communities and missions founded by St. Michael Garicoïts. Also, to satisfy the Bishop, and having been elected Superior General, he accepted in 1874 that a community should lead the Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague College in Bayonne.

The founding of the community of Bethlehem was difficult and surprising. In August 1875, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified was part of the community that was en route to Bethlehem. She is accompanied by Miss Berthe Dartigaux, Fr. Estrate and Abbé Bordachar, the latter two having been in Rome to present the Constitutions of Bétharram a few months before. In Bethlehem, the Carmelite community moved to a temporary house. Miss Dartigaux acquired land on the hill of David and soon after the construction of Carmel began. In December 1876, Sister Mary urged Fr. Etchecopar to send one of his religious to ensure the chaplaincy of Carmel. Father Etchecopar sent Father Chirou.

Although she was a religious nun of the white veil<sup>1</sup>, Sister Mary had a lot of influence on the community because of her extraordinary spiritual experiences. A great friendship bound her to Miss Berthe Dartigaux, who always supported her financially in her projects. Both worked together so that there was a community of Bétharramites beside the Carmel, where the chaplain could live.

Sister Mary contacted the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Mgr. Bracco, both orally and in writing, to convince him of the importance of the presence of such a community near the Carmel in Bethlehem. The Patriarch *'promises, temporizes, eludes. Finally, in his response dated 27 November 1877, he declares that the admission to the Holy Land of future chaplains... [requires] the direct*

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1) And not a superior (Editor's note)

*and formal order of the Holy See.'*<sup>2</sup>

The 'little one' was to become a diplomat. In addition to praying and fasting with the whole community of the Carmel for this purpose, she sent a letter to Fr. Etchecopar: *'I wrote to Father Bianchi... I wrote to Cardinal Franchi too; I recommended Bétharram's matter in Bethlehem to him.'* She also turned to the prefect for the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Simeoni, who believing that he was dealing with the prioress, responded on 6 April 1878, that the foundation of this community of Bétharramites *'presents many serious difficulties'* and that it seemed preferable to *'abandon the project'*.

'The little one' wrote to Leo XIII on 16 April 1878, who sent his correspondence to Propaganda Fide. The prefect, Mgr. Simeoni, said that the project must be definitively abandoned. But when this news reached the Carmel of Bethlehem, Mariam had been dead since 26 August 1878.

Before leaving this world, Mariam confided to Miss Berthe Dartigaux: *'I cannot wait,'* she said to her in July, *'to see the permission granted! But let me tell you that, in order for you to succeed, I believe you need to go to Rome yourself, to throw yourself at the feet of the Holy Father Leo XIII, ask him for this grace, just as has already been said. I believe you will succeed if you do.'* And on the 23rd of July: *'My God, go quickly to Rome yourself, if you haven't already left yet; I am sure you will have it (permission) sooner; no one speaks their own cause better than the actual person concerned.'* On 4 August 1878, a few days before dying, she was still making enquiries with Fr. Chirou, to find out what was going on: *'As it is done in heaven; so will it be on earth.'*

In December, Miss Dartigaux left for Rome. Thanks to the high protection of Cardinal Chigi, who she met in Paris, she obtained a private audience with the Pope. She spoke to the Holy Father of Sister Mary and her extraordinary spiritual gifts: the way in which Sister Mary had known through a rev-

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2) All quotations are taken from the biography written by Pierre Fernesolle, The Most Reverend Father Auguste Etchecopar.



elation of the death of Pius IX and his election after him of Leo XIII. She asked him to grant her a grace on behalf of Mariam: a Bétharramite community for those who would be the chaplains of the Carmel of Bethlehem.

The Pope was impressed, he recognized the divine intervention and told Miss Berthe to send him the request in writing through Propaganda Fide. Berthe let him know that they did not want to hear about it. The Pope replied that this did not matter and that she should do as he told her. Propaganda Fide rejected the requested foundation, a decision which the secretary of the said Congregation communicated to Berthe, warning her in addition that he would bring this resolution to the Pope on Sunday 14th December and that they would return on Monday the 15th. Berthe went to Propaganda Fide at 6am that day. The secretary, on seeing her, said to her, *'Mademoiselle, you have conquered all along the line. When I arrived at the Vatican last night, the Holy Father said to me: Are you coming with Miss Dartigaux?... The Pope immediately said: Are you bringing me one of her letters? Very Holy Father, I said to him, this lady has indeed written to you through Propaganda to ask for a foundation of the Bétharram Fathers... - How did the Sacred Congregation answer? - It refused unanimously. - Well, I command that this foundation be made. This lady is taking care of all the costs, we do not have the right to oppose this work. Moreover, Palestine and Syria are a field vast enough for several workers at the same time You understand, Mademoiselle, added the Secretary, that Propaganda can no longer resist! I am ordered to give you the edict concerning this foundation. On Saturday 21 December, Miss Dartigaux received the precious document.'*

Fr. Etchecopar was aware of the steps taken by Sister Mary and Miss Dartigaux. For his part, he convoked the General Council to decide on the foundation of Bethlehem. On 25 December he specified in a circular: *'Bétharram in Bethlehem on the express order of the Holy Father!'* In this letter, he recommended discretion because there was the question of preserving the relations with the Patriarch, Propaganda Fide

and the Franciscans, who had opposed the project...

On 12 May 1879, Fathers Estrate and Abbadie and Brother Hilaire left to join Father Chirou to found the community of Bethlehem. Fr. Chirou was named superior of this founding community at the Council on 15 February, to which Father Planche also was member and who was to supervise the work on our house. A big celebration took place in Betharram for their farewell.

The land and the house of the community of Bethlehem were a gift from Miss Berthe to Betharram. Mariam said that the house must be spacious because, she said, *'they will come in large numbers from Betharram'*. And this was the case. In early 1890, the Council made a decision: on 6 December 1890, Fr. Etchecopar embarked for the Holy Land with Father Bergez and two scholastics. Thus, we benefited from a positive backlash against the law of Jules Ferry, who also threatened Catholic education in France and imposed military service on candidates for the priesthood: According to Article 50, the young religious who, before the age of 19, left for the countries of French missions and spent ten years there, would be exempted from military service (see Fernesole). From then on, all the scholastics of the Congregation received the same formation. For the academic year 1910-1911, only theologians remained in Bethlehem, and the philosophers went to Nazareth. Due to the insecurity caused by the Second World War, the scholastics returned to France in 1948 to *Bel Sito*, a house located in Floirac, in the south-eastern suburbs of Bordeaux.

A file containing the 14 documents that underpin the steps of the founding of the Betharramite community of Bethlehem is available in the archives of the Generalate House in Rome.





## Father Etchecopar and the Cause for Father Garicoïts' Beatification

According to Father Duvignau<sup>1</sup>, Father Etchecopar had two priorities in his mandate for governing the Congregation: consolidate the Congregation and do all in his power for the Church to recognise the holiness of the Founder, holiness that he was convinced of, having lived closely with him for seven years at Betharram.

The first thing was to ask Father Basilide Bourdenne to prepare a biography of Father Garicoïts. To that end, he supplied him with all the documents he had available; he collaborated in the writing of the text and corrected all the proofs. The book was published in 1878.

Father Bianchi encouraged him to begin the case before the witnesses who knew Father Garicoïts passed away.

The moment seemed to come with the appointment of a new bishop at Bayonne, Monsignor Ducellier, and with the election of a new Pope for the universal Church, Leon XIII. Father Etchecopar tried to meet with these two authorities. He left for Rome on 25th November 1878 to deal with the case. He gathered information from the Congregation of rites and from Leon XIII who, during a private audience, encouraged him to undertake the case of the Founder. On his return to Betharram on 18th January 1879, he sent to Father Bianchi the documents necessary for his mission as postulator. On the same day, he met with Monsignor Ducellier to ask him to begin an enquiry as soon as possible. Monsignor Ducellier accepted with interest the proposition of Father Auguste, who returned to Betharram very happy.

Also on the same day, 18th January 1879, Father Etchecopar sent a circular letter to the whole Congregation to announce the good news.

On 30th January, he asked the fathers of America to re-

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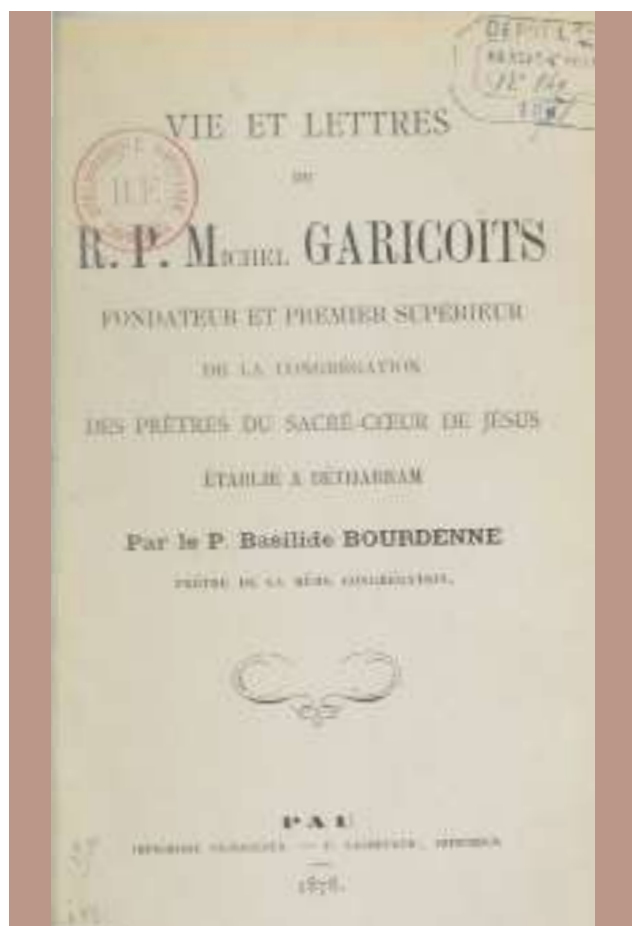
1) *Refer to L'Homme au visage de lumière, p. 74*

cord facts and personal memories that they still had of Father Garicoïts in view of the process. Following the directions that had been given to him in Rome, he drew up a plan to facilitate the categorisation of these accounts: '*We must state clearly what is certain and what doubtful*' (to Father Magendie on 3rd April 1879).

On 26th February 1879, supported unanimously by his Council, he returned to Bayonne accompanied by Father Vignau, appointed vice-postulator, to get in touch with the Bishop and move into action. On 13th March, he announced that the process would begin after Easter.

But the bishop was engrossed in other matters: getting to know his vast diocese, learning about administrative questions, making ad limina visits, making the annual round of confirmations, examining the difficulties occurring in the Church in France. He recognised himself that he was not very efficient. Once more, Father Etchecopar had to get used to the slowness of the new bishop, as he had to do with Monsignor Lacroix. The promises of the bishop would come one after another for six years, before nominating the tribunal in charge of the process of Father Garicoïts. Without losing his calm and able to find justifications to his bishop, Father Etchecopar did not stop asking him during these six years to set up this tribunal. At the end of 1879, he wrote: '*It seems that we are on the eve of the opening of the process*'. The tribunal was formed little by little and held its first meeting on 3rd August.

The diocesan tribunal undertook a diligent job under the chairmanship of the Vicar General, Monsignor Inchauspe. The process would be considered at the heart of the Congregation of rites as an '*excellent example of its type*'. Father Etchecopar was the first to bring his account to Betharram where the tribunal had run for eight days and where he would return on 17th October 1886. He followed the work of the tribunal and was delighted that the Father Garicoïts case advanced little by little, although the members of the tribunal (Messrs Cassou and Joanchuto, Assessors of the President, and Mr Joseph,



the promoter) were also directors of the major seminary.

A new difficulty: Monsignor Ducellier was appointed Bishop of Besançon; the process would therefore see a brief pause until the arrival of Monsignor Fleury-Hottot, Bishop of Digne appointed at Bayonne. Father Etchecopar would take advantage of this time to do a stocktake of notes left by Father Garicoits. The richness of this spirituality awakened in him such an enthusiasm that he burst forth into writing a circular letter sent to the Fathers in America, dated 4th December 1887: *'Oh may God, during your re-*

*treats, give you the grace of that intelligence, of that hunger inside, of that supernatural love for the doctrine of our Doctor and Father... To build elsewhere following another plan would be to diminish, weaken, wreck the work of our Father! Absit! Absit!'*

The tribunal recommenced the work of the process on 3rd September 1888. In the series of statements they listened to, the members of the tribunal did not hide their deep admiration for the heroism of Father Garicoits which came out of it.

Another difficulty: sickness struck the promoter, Mr Joseph, and the Bishop who died on 9th August 1889. The new Bishop, Monsignor Jauffret changed almost all the members of the process tribunal of Father Garicoits, including its president.

The new bishop dealt with the case so well that it was finished in four months. This is what Father Etchecopar announced in a letter on 14th October 1890: *'I inform you that the Episcopal Process of Father Garicoits is finished. Praise be to*

*God! The members of the tribunal are in admiration of this life so pure, so heroic.'*

The tribunal appointed Father Miro, who was vice-postulator, to lead the work in Rome. Father Miro had already worked hard so that the process went well. Father Etchecopar, who was in Bethlehem, asked him to go with the process documents to the Holy Land, to leave them on the site of the Incarnation, the manger and the tomb of Our Lord. After which, Father Etchecopar accompanied Father Miro to Rome to return the file to the Congregation of rites on 6th May 1891. In Rome, he visited all those who might be interested in the case and obtained an audience with Leon XIII.

On 22nd May 1891, he had only just got back to Betharram when he was asked for the writings of Father Garicoits, taken from the archives. The letters were still in the hands of their recipients. Father Etchecopar attempted to contact the owners of these letters, asserting that the Holy See was asking for them. What is more, he made Father Quilhahauquy responsible for gathering the manuscripts in question back into the archives and that is how he could announce on 19th July 1891: *'The writings of Father Garicoits are ready and have been sent to the Tribunal.'* Learning that Rome did not require the originals, he appointed a team of scribes who, in a year, transcribed more than 17,000 pages. Six episcopal commissions compared the copies with the originals. Father Etchecopar got 43 consecutive commissions to speed up the work.

Rome also asked for the postulatory letters from the bishops and important persons to introduce the case. Father Etchecopar attended to this question himself. These letters arriving from all over and reaching in number 208 are considered an important proof of the *'fama sanctitatis'*. He had the joy of knowing the approval of the writings, but not the decree of introduction of the case, which would be issued in 1899, after his death.





## Fr. Etchecopar visits the American communities

When already very young, Fr. Etchecopar is attracted by Argentina, especially since his brothers, Evariste, Séverin and Maxime went to settle there.

Since the departure of the first community of missionaries for Argentina, no authority went to visit it to admire the development of the missions among the population, and of the educative missions founded in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Far from the conflict between the Bayonne communities and their Bishop, those of Argentina remain serenely faithful to the intuitions and orientations given by the Founder since 1856, as Fr. Victor Bourdenne testifies during his visit (letter Fr.V.B. January 1885). Health problems prevent Fr. Etchecopar to travel so far.

Unable to go to America himself, he sends his Assistant, his confidential man, Fr. Victor Bourdenne, who shall be thus the first Visitor to the American communities. Fr. Bourdenne arrives in Buenos Aires on December 31st 1884 and will sail again for Betharram on March 1st 1885. In his correspondance, he tells what takes place during his visit. In January, he directs both retreats in the Quinta de Almagro residence and takes this opportunity of conversing with the religious of San José Colegio. He stays for a week in the community of Montevideo, then for another week in that of San Juan, where he will make an important visit to the Clarisses. He will also visit San José during the last days of his journey. He will call on the Jesuit Quinta in San Miguel, on the Archbishop of Buenos Aires twice, and he will spend long moments with the friends of the community who expose to him what they are expecting from the Fathers and valorize their educative work. In his letter dated February 22nd 1885, he gives a description of the house Quinta de Almagro.

According to Fr. Mieyaà, Fr. Etchecopar's health is getting better, apparently, along the years and so he can achieve his lifelong dream : to visit the American Betharramites. The doctors agree. Fr. Etchecopar is more than 60 then, and has been the General Superior for 17 years. Six journeys to Rome and a pilgrimage to the



Holy Land have made him a new man.

The crossing is fixed to November 3rd 1891 and May 27th 1892. He is happy to announce it to his brother Maxime and to Fr. Magendie, the

Superior of the communities of Argentina and Uruguay. Fr. Romain Bourdenne and three scholastics join him in Bordeaux to board the ship Portugal on November 5th 1891. They land in La Plata on December 3rd 1891 after sailing for 30 days. There, Fr. Magendie, Maxime, the brother of Fr. Etchecopar and his son Evariste, welcome him.

Fr. Etchecopar devotes 148 days to the visit, from December to May, a period corresponding to the Summer holidays, and from March to the beginning of the school year. There are three communities : the religious who live and work at the S. Juan Bautista church as chaplains of the Clarisses ; the religious of the Colegio San José in Buenos Aires, and those of the church and school of the Vascos in Montevideo. At the time, the Congregation owns two residences called Quintas : that of Almagro in the town of Buenos Aires, which they shall have to sell because of the expansion of the town, and that of Caseros<sup>1</sup> in the Buenos Aires Province, 30 kilometers away from the capital, where the religious-teachers of Colegio San José spend their three months' holidays devoted to rest, spiritual retreats and writing books for their tuition.

1. Fr. Etchecopar is welcomed in the Colegio San José which, already at that time, has acquired a lot of prestige due to the

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1) See here above, *Quinta de Caseros in the middle of this old picture.*



seriousness of its educative project ; The school will welcome the children of the great landowners in Argentina, attracted by the French education given by the Fathers. The various activities to which Fr. Etchecopar will participate will enable him to measure this prestige:

- On December 6th, 380 alumni organize a great reception in his honour, in spite of the absences due to the elections taking place on that day. He celebrates mass, and a great banquet gathers 300 guests. Many speeches are given , especially that of Dr. Pedro Goyena. This alumnus praises the Congregation of Betharram, starting from Fr. Garicoït's humility to end with the excellent education level reached by the Colegio San José pupils. In his answer, Fr. Etchecopar congratulates the teachers, quoting the praises of a traveller he met on board the ship. On the same day, in the afternoon, he has taken for a visit to the Quinta de Almagro.
  - On December 14th takes place the prize-giving at the San José, with musical accompaniments, crowns of flowers, small plays and speeches.
  - On March 2nd, he goes back to the Colegio San José by tram with 34 Brothers for the beginning of the course on March 3rd. On March 19th, he presides the solemn celebration in the honour of Saint Joseph.
  - On April 29th, he returns to the San José in Buenos Aires where he stays until May 5th, and from which he will sail back to France.
2. The Quinta de Caseros is the place where Fr. Etchecopar spends most time. The Religious of San José stay there, specially during the holidays, a little before Xmas and until the first days of March. On December 25th 1891, he blesses the new chapel and sings the midnight mass . In January 1892, he preaches two retreats (1st-10th and 15th-24th) ended by the celebration of taking the habit and profession. From there, he visits the Lugan sanctuary on February 13th. On February 25th, he attends the sacerdotal ordination and minor orders

of our Brothers, celebrated by the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who congratulates him for his visit.

3. From December 17th to 19th, he goes to Montevideo where he attends the school prize-giving, presided by the local Bishop, Mgr.Soler. From March 28th to April 21st 1892, he makes the official visit of the Montevideo community, and meets the family Jackson-Hébert-Buxareo, a benefactor of the community. On April 1st, he preaches in Spanish in our church of the Immaculate Conception and at the Dominican sisters. He celebrates the Holy Week with the community, and on Easter Day he preaches in French. He visits the Cistercian Fathers of Manga and their school, as well as the Bishop of Montevideo.
4. He visits the community of the San Juan church from March 20th to 27th. The religious of this community are in charge of the chaplaincy of the Clarisses and of the spiritual and sacramental care of the faithful who come in numbers because the priests are devoted. The cloister reminds Fr.Etchecopar of his beginnings and of his retreat in Toulouse with Fr. Leblanc, when the Congregation was only a project .
5. In the harbour of La Plata, Fr. Etchecopar is waited for by his brother Maxime and Evariste who have spent a few days with him in the school. On January 2nd 1891, from the Quinta de Caseros, he thanks his nephews Lastenia, Julia and Evariste for the beautiful letters they sent to him. On March 3rd 1891, he meets other people bearing the name of Etchecopar in Argentina, who say they are parents of Fr. Auguste. At the end of April 1891, he meets his brother Maxime's family, coming to Buenos Aires for a few days to know him. The Argentinian dream is fulfilled.

To come back, he boards the ship Brasil in Buenos Aires on May 5th 1892, and lands in Bordeaux on May 26th to arrive in Betharram on the 27th, after a journey of twenty two days.



## Father Etchecopar in the Mother House of Betharram

Father Etchecopar entered the Congregation of Betharram with other members of the Society of the Holy Cross of Oloron in 1855. St Michael Garicoits asked him to be part of the community that from that year on would take over Saint Mary College in Oloron, until the holidays of 1857, at which point he was called to Betharram to be a Novice Master. From that date his residence would be Betharram for forty years. There he would also carry out his mission as Visitor, Secretary General, Assistant General and Superior General. The latter for twenty-four years: first to replace Father Chirou who died on August 29, 1873, and then on being himself elected Superior General in the General Chapter of August 20, 1874. He was absent from Betharram only during his travels to Rome, to the Holy Land and Argentina and Uruguay for the canonical visit.

He was the Superior of the College of Betharram, and he had up to 300 students, two thirds of whom were destined to become priests. Here he presided over the principal events, he was their confessor for many years, followed their spiritual progress and concerned himself with how they were doing in the studies.

On him rested the responsibility of the mother house and the sanctuary of Betharram, the elderly priests who finished their days there, the missionaries who prepared their preaching there, the spiritual life of the teachers, the lay brothers and their different manual activities. Throughout the whole of Betharram he made many important adjustments: he built the chapel of the school, sanitized the rooms that were occasionally flooded with the floodwaters from the Gave, installed a special place for the novitiate, made significant repairs to the Sanctuary of Our Lady, also installing a new clock and a third bell. As students and community numbers grew he made new buildings, repaired the house of the

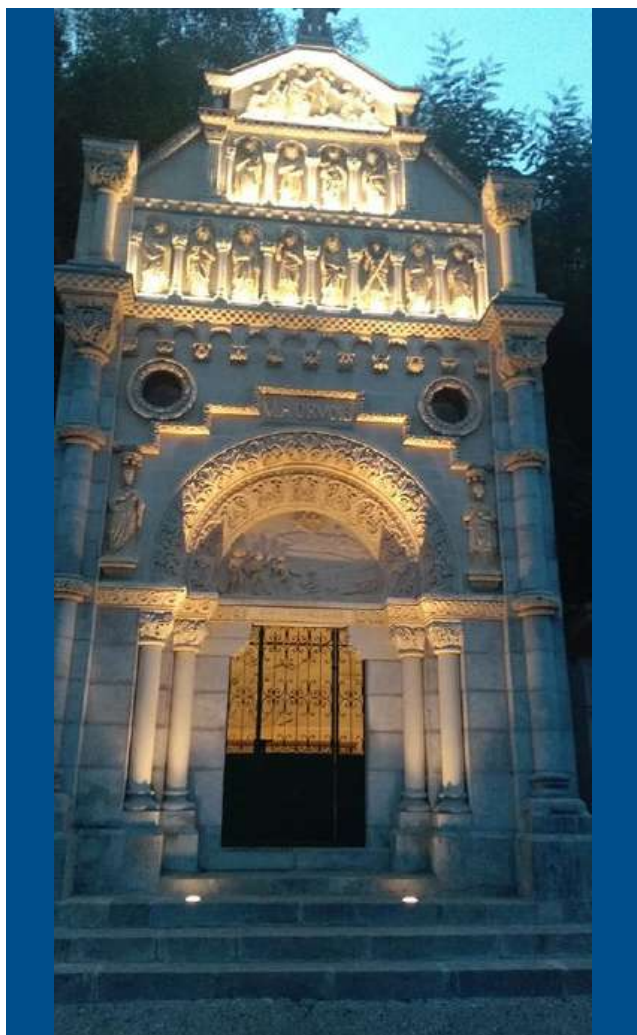
sisters who served in the school, enlarged the buildings of the Matéou farm, completed the missing chapels of Calvary, bought land and real estate and discovered several springs that could secure the water supply for the growing population of Betharram.

The members of his council also lived there. We have minutes of 732 meetings of this council for the whole of his 24 years as Superior General. That means an average of one meeting per week, concerning legal & economic issues with the diocese of Bayonne, to whom all the works of the Congregation in France then belonged, personnel issues such as appointments of superiors and local councils, accountability for their administration, maintenance of peace and order in the communities, good relations between auxiliary teachers and public authorities.

As Superior General, he had the ability to lead the debates both in the councils and in the 12 general chapters that he had to convoke in this busy period of the Congregation. He had what others lacked: the invaluable advantage of having in great depth the spirit of the Congregation. He had detailed information on the practice of the Holy See in laws concerning religious and had exercised flexibility in endless discussions with Mons. Lacroix.

As he was a good disciple of St. Michael Garicoits, doing God's will was always the determining motive. He sought this in prayer and reflection; in the Council, he studied it in collaboration, listening to all the reasons given. Once the will of God was known, he adhered to it and wanted everyone to be docile to it.

Other activities of the Superior General were the weekly conference for all the religious who lived in Betharram, the retreats and the Sunday sermon. In the weekly conferences he took the opportunity to instruct the religious by transmitting to them the charism that he had assimilated so well from the Founder. Sometimes these conferences were to correct some public infraction, where witnesses say he could



*A small jump in time,  
yet staying at the  
Mother House of  
Betharram:*

*Early November the  
restoration of the first  
station of the Calvary  
of Betharram has been  
completed.*

*LED lights highlight  
the beauty of this not  
only spiritual, but also  
artistic and historical  
heritage.*

be frightening and scary. But once the conference was over, he quickly regained his gentleness.<sup>1</sup>

After getting the Constitutions approved by Rome, he dedicated himself to restoring in their hearts the original ideal that not all the members accepted, especially those who took advantage of the vacillation of Bishop Lacroix. There were obvious and uncompromising opponents, for whom the return to the origins of the Congregation was nothing more than a wild dream. The good thing is that he succeeded. With one exception, everyone made or renewed their vows according to the constitutions approved by the Holy See. They even accepted the vow of poverty, giving up the right of keeping a portion of their goods for personal use,

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1) Cf. *L'Homme au visage de lumière*, p. 96

but keeping the ownership. He dedicated himself heart and soul to correct some observances that had been introduced in the years of confusion.

Usually it was from Betharram, in the midst of all these activities, where Fr. Etchecopar sent most of the 1800 letters with which he also kept up with both his family and the communities: his brothers and sisters, the Carmelites of Bethlehem, Father Jean Magendie, other religious of America and other religious of the communities of France, as well as circular letters addressed to all religious.

From Bétharram, Father Etchecopar would also follow the situation of our schools in France, threatened by the secular movements that would rise in Parliament against the educational Congregations from July 8, 1875 until January 17, 1881. Some of these, starting with the Jesuits, would be expelled from France. Betharram was not then expelled, and the persecution petered out for the time being, to revive itself at the beginning of the following century, in the time of Father Victor Bourdenne.

At a distribution of prizes in Betharram, he publicly defended the Bishop of Bayonne, who was challenged by almost all the priests, defending the Pope in a divided Church, just as St. Michael Garicoits would have done. (Source: Duvinhau: *L'Homme au visage de lumière*).



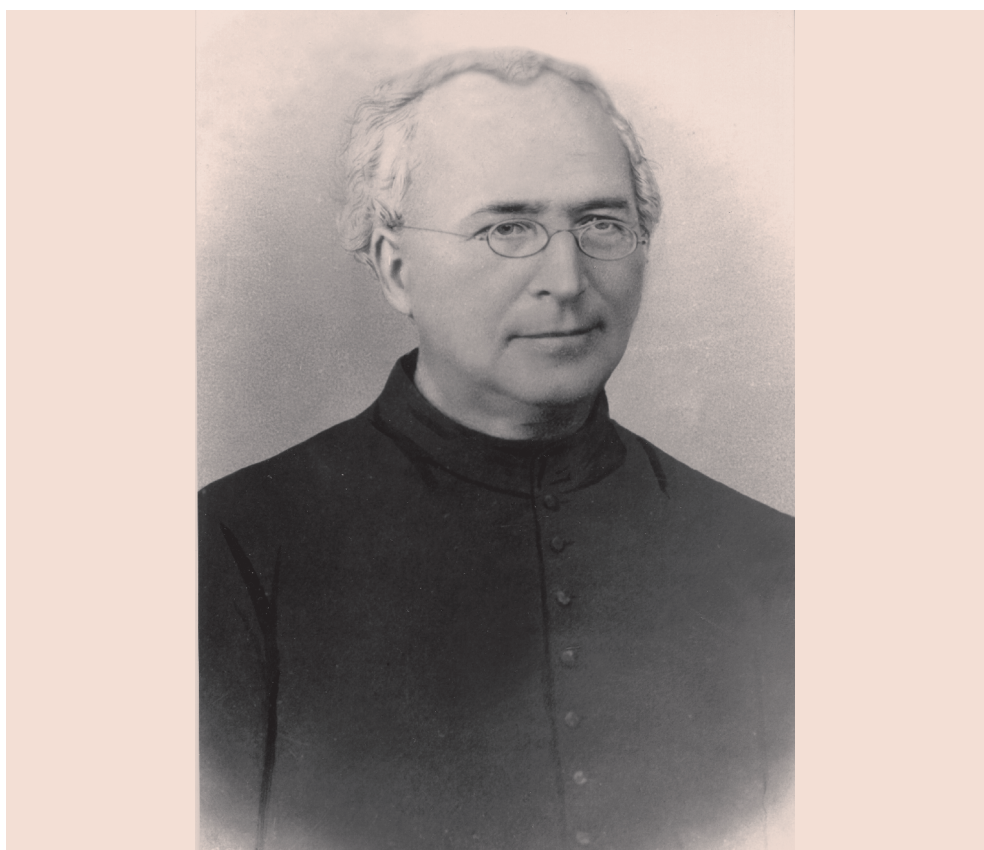




## Fr. Etchecopar: what kind of a man was he?

Throughout the year, we have been looking closely at the energy that Fr. Auguste deployed in the service of the Congregation in order to surely build upon the foundations of the charism left by Fr. Garicoïts and to ground it on that particular rock who is the successor of St. Peter. But it is also important to take a look at his person.

Father Etchecopar was tall in stature. He had harmonious, regular and fine features; a colourful face, a clear and frank look, and a mellow voice. He moved those who attended his sung masses. His whole person radiated an air of majesty, of a natural and sovereign dignity, tempered by a gentle and cordial simplicity... He fully put the gifts of a first rate personality at the service of his mission: an easy and penetrating intelligence, supported by a broad humanist culture; a very sure practical judgment, formed by a fine subtle understanding of faith and reason, open to all the issues of his age and



mastering them with ease. He had no university degree. So it has been said that he never had to regret an untimely decision or step.<sup>1</sup>

The nobility and the warmth of the affection of his heart impress even more. He never had any trace or tendency towards bitterness or hatred<sup>2</sup>. For him, people came before things. His gentleness towards the little ones, the poor, the sick, especially his family, was expressed both on the family level and the religious level, and often in new creative ways. But, here again, his tenderness was always enkindled by the Heart of Christ or that of Our Lady and thus penetrated all human activity. He was also sensitive to the turbulent political situation in France and the difficulties facing the Church. He was a man very attached to his family: fathers, brothers and sisters from America.

By nature, he could have been violent, but helped by his family and his education, he acquired great self control. He sometimes reacted vigorously to defend the rights of God or faithfulness to the Rule or duty. He knew how to reconcile strength and gentleness.

Given the circumstances of his life, he could have imposed his own ideas in the search for serenity on the Congregation, but the veneration he had for Saint Michael Garicoïts and the knowledge of his project did not allow it. He had the merit of understanding better than anyone the excellence of the charism of Saint Michael Garicoïts almost as soon as he got to know him. His greatest concern was to assimilate it fully and to communicate it to all religious.

But the most astonishing is this: the more he tried to fade and disappear into the background in order to highlight his model whom he never ceased praising, the more his own personality stood out and commanded the other's respect. All considered him a disciple of Garicoïts, both in the dio-

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1) *Duvignau, L'Homme au visage de lumière, p. 7 and following*

2) *Cf. Fernessole, Le Très Révérend Père Auguste Etchecopar, pp. 256-264*

cese and in the Congregation. One of his almost daily activities was to go up to the Calvary, to prostrate himself before Fr. Garicoïts' tomb in the chapel of the resurrection and to entrust to him the people and the great projects of the Congregation.

He was a man of God. He celebrated mass with great dignity and spent long periods of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. He presented there before God the serious issues of the Congregation and there renewed his imitation of the Founder to discover and put into practice the will of God as the great objective of his life. He maintained his union with Christ all day long, in prayer and in the accomplishment of his daily tasks.

Hence the luminosity of his face which several witnesses could perceive: it was *'a light which seemed to come out from inside and made the face of Fr. Etchecopar translucent'*<sup>3</sup>. Many others joined the testimonies of Father Buzy and Father Fernessole. The phenomenon occurred very frequently and varied in intensity depending on the situation in which Fr. Etchecopar found himself. Here is the testimony of Fr. Buzy: *'He always produced for me, like all my fellow students, an impression of radiance which made me consider him as a supernatural being'*<sup>4</sup>.

In 1862 he had his first pulmonary embolism. The other eight caused by a simple cold or draught, did not give him much respite until 1869. In 1872 he relapsed and the doctors ordered him to rest for three months. Consequently the pulmonary congestion attacks recurred every year, increasing his state of weakness. Doctors forbade him to travel to South America in 1876 due to his heart condition.

This condition was his personal cross and he accepted it as a sign from God. The total self-control resulting from the great struggles from his youth, and his constant meditation on the mystery of the Cross (especially after his stay in

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3) Duvignau, *L'Homme au visage de lumière*, p. 164

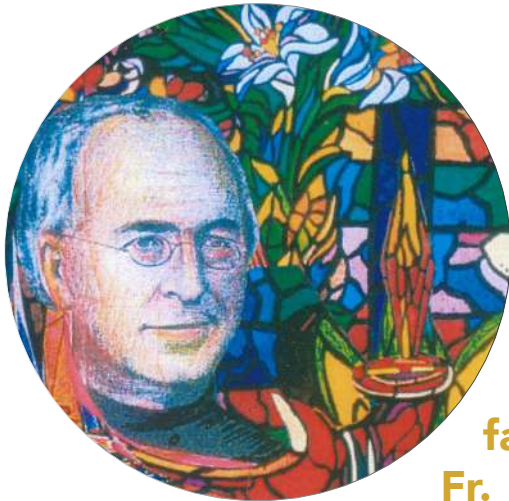
4) Duvignau, *L'Homme au visage de lumière*, p. 167

Oloron) helps explain both the friendly welcome he always had for the suffering and the apparent ease with which he adapted to his permanent disability.

Witnesses to his life unanimously declare that he had never been heard to complain. Those closer to him even go further; they say that he saw sickness as a great gift from the Lord. He cared about the health of others and comforted them with chosen words. He himself confided his ills only to his sister Madeleine.

If Fr. Etchecopar expended his life in tireless labour, if he lived his illness as an offering, until the total exhaustion of his strength, it is because, on the day of his religious profession, he had given his whole life to the Lord without any conditions. If he had taken away from God's will any part of his activities, he would have felt that he was denying something of his love for Him.

...



« Prayer to ask a  
favour by intercession of  
Fr. Auguste Etchecopar

*O Christ,  
from this moment you are my example,  
my rule of life, my will,  
my thought, my love.  
I will love you, I will bless you, I will imitate you.  
May your name be hallowed  
by your unworthy servant.  
Your kingdom come in him,  
and your luminous will be done  
in him and for him.*

*Etchecopar Fr.*

