



*Father Auguste  
Etchecopar  
through his writings*

*by Fr. Philippe Hourcade SCJ*

The "series" of the *Nef*

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2020



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

*Oh, Holy Spirit,  
Spirit of love and holiness,*

*You put in the heart of Father Auguste Etchecopar  
the will to imitate the feelings of the Heart of Jesus,  
as did St Michael Garicoïts,  
the founder of the Congregation of  
the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram.*

*In his mission as a religious priest,  
he has by your mercy,  
been fully given the virtues  
received from God the Father,  
as servant of the Church and his brethren.*

*Grant to those who ask his intercession  
humility, perseverance and faithfulness,  
and the happiness of an unwavering trust  
in Love of Heart of Jesus  
and Our Lady's protection.*

*Amen.*

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*litical leaders] cannot pierce the obscurities of a situation more than ours since the protagonists do not know what they are doing nor where they are going”*<sup>16</sup>. Concord and peace between France and the Holy Land and what he calls “*the colony*” (Argentina), are in his eyes the only possible answer. The union and communion of vision and lifestyle, especially between religious who are so distant from each other, could even become a real sign of contradiction to what this political world imposes on the outside. Each step taken in the peace and joy of a common life is for him an indication of this future which is emerging without his being able yet to see it. Between anxieties and joys, the path of Betharramite religious life is strengthened. Of course, this is not grandiose plan! It rather depicts the step by step manner of a holy vocation. The path is made by walking...

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16) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 17 May 1880



*risking their lives... let us rush... with the deep conviction that we suffer very little compared to glory...*"<sup>11</sup>. While everything around him is in flux, he remains firmly rooted:

*"In the midst of the anguish of the present hour, may the most perfect peace preserve your hearts ... Nothing contributes to the salvation of the ship ... except the calm and harmony of the navigation and the observance of order in unity and promptness in obedience. Nothing more attracts help from On High than charity and the union of minds and hearts."*<sup>12</sup> Not without a tactical spirit, he even considers that this respectful attitude and the work of religious could work powerfully in their favour, as the authorities are always interested in our outward success: *"... to maintain and develop the religious AND patriotic feelings of our Basque and Béarnais fellow citizens, so numerous in Argentina."*<sup>13</sup>

Above all, the loyalty and enthusiasm of the young shoots motivate him and give him a joy that opens up confidence; for him, he sees the opening of *"a new era of light and fervour"*<sup>14</sup> even though his diagnosis is negative both on the external situation and on the human and material resources: *"We walk a path day by day, without really knowing too well how we can keep to it and we foresee years when we will not be able to make ends meet."*<sup>15</sup> This was not the least of the paradoxes of the situation! When a military law from 1880 extended the obligation of military service to everyone, Bethlehem, and then Spain, were also seen as possible refuges for young people to escape. For him, as he repeats continually, the solution is holiness of life. But with this unexpected view from a Superior there is an unexpected human realism: *"Besides, the gaze [of po-*

11) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 19 February 1883

12) Circular letter, June 1880

13) To the minister of foreign affairs, [October 1881]

14) Circular letter, Bétharram, 15 June 1888

15) To the General Vicar of the diocese of Bayonne, Bétharram, 7 May 1889



A circular letter, 10 January 1888

F.V.D.

Bétharram, January 10 1888

Dear Fathers and Brothers in Our Lord

*On the occasion of the New Year, you sent me some very consoling words, and your love, for me, has double force at the feet of the Divine Child and his Virgin Mother. You took note of the weight which overwhelms my weak shoulders and that the danger is so much greater for a Superior, since his burden is heavier: Quanto in loco superiori, tanto in periculo maiori versatur.*<sup>1</sup>

*Although a little late, I want to thank you all, and send you greetings in my turn, with all my esteem and all my tenderness, (and urge) this going forward and this progress to which our venerable Founder constantly invited us. He kept repeating to us with his voice and example: Forward! Let us go! But at the same time, Father Garicoïts, as wise as he was generous, urged us to orient ourselves well. By this he meant men clearly enlightened as to the purpose of their vocation, deeply convinced of the holiness of their vocation, determined and resolved to achieve all the advantages of this vocation, as brave men, as heroes: Corde magno et animo volenti.*<sup>2</sup>

*Do you wish following Father Garicoïts himself to know what a picture of these brave heroes would look like?*

1) How much are those in a place of higher position in greater danger! Rule of St. Augustine 7.47

2) 2 Mac 1,3: With a great heart and a willing spirit

Betharram, February 3, 1859

My dear friend: here is what I recommend to you:

1 ° Always have before your eyes, above all, God and his adorable will;

2 ° Our way of life, which expresses this divine will so clearly for each of us;

3 ° Strive with all your power to reach for this end, to the extent of your grace and your position, embracing with immense charity the whole extent of your grace and your position, and at the same time respecting the bounds of both with virgin delicacy<sup>3</sup>.

*You see, my Fathers and my Brothers, despite his deep humility, Father Garicoits believed in a work of new creation, with its own purpose, organisation, spirit and means; he believed that the God of the little people and the poor had chosen him for this purpose, he, the shepherd of the last house in the hamlet of Ibarre, he, a nobody, a write-off, and that God said to him: "Go found a new Institute in my Church; it has a reason for its existence in these troubled times, where the great Orders are dispersed and where the spirit of revolutionary independence penetrates everywhere even onto the Sanctuary ... Here is your flag and your rallying cry ... You will march ahead, 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 that voice; he seized that flag, and, in his powerful voice declared: "It is an illness of our age, to substitute our will for that of God and to say to him: Go away ... for I want to be God myself! So I summon together the volunteer army of perfect obedience and good Divine pleasure!!!"<sup>4</sup>*

3) Cf. Correspondence of Saint Michael II, 426

4) Spiritual Doctrine § 215

*revolution"*<sup>6</sup> is all the more threatening as the Catholic political group is divided: *"The Catholic union is getting organised... but we are so divided, firstly on principles but above all on the manner of conducting the struggle."*<sup>7</sup> Faced with the implied threat to the very existence of our religious family, Father Etchecopar could never be simply a spectator! At the level of France, he never wavers from his devotion to be 'auxiliaries' to the bishop. He even sees it as a final bulwark against those who promise to expel only non-diocesan clergy: *"As we know that we are dependent on the Bishop I cling to the belief that as inhabitants and guardians of his houses we should not be concerned; we will be allowed to continue our works under episcopal responsibility."*<sup>8</sup>

The slow implementation of the founder's canonisation process, like the need to return explicitly to his doctrine because of the death of the first companions, pushes the Superior to always enliven the whole body of our little institute. Always with the same prudent concern: *"Let us not tie the hands of the Lord through our faults; let us be men of prayer and the Rule; innocence and prayer are powerful (according to the founder) ... so let us throw ourselves headlong into the bosom of the Father who is so good ..."*<sup>9</sup> Although the trials are stressful and a source of great uncertainty, the superior does not shy away from a deep trust in God; he even sees it as a providential opportunity: *"(The situation) will only purify the Church by giving us the opportunity to show what charity and the patience of the friends of God are really like... but the chalice always makes us fearful."*<sup>10</sup> The right reaction in the eyes of the religious is to stand firm in our vocation: *"Oh let us redouble our zeal at the sight of the efforts of the children of these times! Let us blush with shame when we see them*

6) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 9 November 1883

7) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 September 1891

8) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1880

9) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 19 July 1880

10) To his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 9 November 1883





“The prophecy of the future...”<sup>1</sup>

SOME PEOPLE HAVE THE GIFT OF FOCUSING ON THE SUMMIT, OTHERS ON THE WAY TO GET THERE!

Such was the gift of Father Etchecopar. Not that he was unaware of the goal. On the contrary! As much as our founder spoke very little about the politics of his time or the Second Empire, Father Etchecopar often alludes to the vagaries of France, which had become an anti-Catholic Republic from 1873-75. The superior is a convinced monarchist; He isn't shy about that! But when a local newspaper, “Le Mémorial des Pyrénées”, criticized the request to support the Republic in 1892<sup>2</sup>, he wrote: *“The Pope has just spoken and expressed his will... this newspaper flies a flag that is opposed to ours; this ideology offends convictions within us that are dearer than life itself. So allow me... to differ from you on this point...”*<sup>3</sup>.

He had received from the Founder an assurance of our indissoluble bond with the Pope. And that was a lot to say and think, when we know that everything was being secretly prepared in anticipation of an expulsion that was already worrying. *“We could be expelled at any time, so we have assigned to each one their own provisory base...”*<sup>4</sup>. To the Superiors of Argentina, he writes: *“Thank you for holding open your arms ready to welcome us”*<sup>5</sup>. The “volcano of the

1) Cf. Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of Latin America, Bethlehem, 12 December 1892

2) On February 16, 1892, Pope Leo XIII published, first in French, contrary to the usual Latin usage, the encyclical *Au milieu des sollicitudes* (Inter Sollicitudines), in which he called the bishops, the clergy and the Catholics of France, then majority royalists, to accept the republican institutions, in order to better fight the anticlerical laws.

3) To Mr. de Juantho, Betharram, 9 July 1892

4) To the religious of the San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 5 November 1880

5) To Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 June 1880

And he launched himself on this road of destiny like a giant and walked there until the end of his life.

Was he my Fathers and Brothers, the victim of a grand delusion?

No, no, thanks be to God... the facts prove it; and, at this very moment while the Fama sanctitatis process continues, a thousand voices proclaim that Father Garicoïts was a man filled with the Spirit of God. He is one of those Apostles whom God raises in difficult times, for the consolation and triumph of his Church; and on all sides the Christian people repeat the imposing testimony given by Mgr Lacroix over the coffin of our Father: *“The Lord led this righteous one in straight paths; he has 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 enterprises”* (Wisdom 10.10).

So what do we have to do, beloved Fathers and Brothers? What more could I want for you than to be well directed, understanding perfectly what you are, and open about it, with a large and generous heart? And being happy with that, wishing you to persevere and always move forward following your Father, by the scent of his heavenly perfumes?

Otherwise, we would no longer be the continuators of the work established and created by him; he himself wrote to all our communities:

“At the risk of endangering our profession as Auxiliary Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of placing ourselves under the banner of Satan, everything in our deliberate conduct, must respond to the Holy Spirit and to our Superiors: Here I am, without delay, without reserve, without looking back, out of love for the will of God, with the disposition to give us wholeheartedly to all the means that our Superiors deem appropriate to employ to correct any mistakes of our foolish conduct.

Either our commitment to strive for self-perfection and devote ourselves to the perfection of others is a fic-

tion, or we must make every effort to practice this doctrine ... first... second...third... fourth... to the hundredth degree ad infinitum!: Here I come! May your will be done in me as in heaven! Raise this standard high; it is on the battlefield and not behind closed doors that the soldiers of the Sacred Heart must walk under this standard.”<sup>5</sup>

*What a doctrine! What virginal purity! What a high ambition! What love of God and of his Church! What noble feelings! What flashes of fire! What a flame of heroism and devotion!... Don't you feel enlightened, moved from the depths of your soul, encouraged and electrified to think and act like true Sons of Father Garicoits?*

*Oh ! Let us all ask, Fathers and Brothers, for this fidelity, this generosity for each of the members of our Institute and especially for ourselves ... Let's go back, let's go inside ourselves; recall what we have vowed, what we are by our vows, before God and before the Church. We must show ourselves to be who we really are and not give men or angels the chance to say: "They talk the talk but do not walk the walk ; their name is high but their conduct low; a glorious banner but an easy life, without discipline, without subordination, without spirit of sacrifice..."*

*Wouldn't that be a monstrosity, a scandalous thing? Is it for this that we have left everything and begun with noble intentions? And where are we going to end up?*

*So is it not right and just and glorious to point out to you the holy way in which you began, for the honour of your venerated Father, for the usefulness of the desolate Church and the prosperity of this Congregation which has adopted you and given you so many good things?*

*Do not doubt it, my Fathers and Brothers, these salutary reflections, fertilised by a continual and fervent prayer, will obtain new energies and strength for all of us; and the year we have just entered will realise to a greater extent than ever the wishes expressed by the Angels themselves: Gloria in excelsis Deo and*

5) Cf. Correspondence of Saint Michael II, 293

level we say: *"Our nature has a horror of pain and death"*<sup>16</sup>, the believer answers him: *"Death can do nothing with us! It can separate bodies but not souls!"*<sup>17</sup>

The witness is not just spiritual. The superior is also attentive to the health of the workers for the Lord's harvest. As for himself: *"It is a pity I have to be so careful now, the result of lack of care in my rash younger days ..."*<sup>18</sup> Our works now depend on ailing sick folk: *"We have so many cripples! How many chests weakened and even a little damaged"*<sup>19</sup>; *"Huge gaps everywhere, lives that wear out and are worn out before their time..."*<sup>20</sup> The burden is real. Hence the encouragement of the necessary rest and the repeated urging of all to be careful and wise: *"There are conservation laws which cannot be violated with impunity; the author of nature established them... It is up to us to observe them ... To work in his service."*<sup>21</sup> His gaze never ceases to fix on the mystery: *"(God) spares our weakness and nevertheless allows us through these trivialities to feel that we are nothing and to unite the impotence and weaknesses of our sad nature [to Christ]"*<sup>22</sup>. Only one thing deserves attention, only one horizon to look at: *"The perfect joy of eternal goods. Beati Pauperes Spiritus"* with the same enthusiasm, the same desire for union with the Master of his heart: *"(The Lord) wants to share with us his poverty, his incessant labours. This is the portion of the chalice reserved for his best friends."*<sup>23</sup> ●●●

16) Letter to his brother Maxime, Bétharram, 1st July 1872

17) Letter to his brother Maxime, Saint-Palais, 12 October 1872

18) Father Etchecopar refers here to the fact of not having taken sufficient care of his health when he was young, of having abused his health too much... and paying the price for it now.

19) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4 September 1879

20) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, [without date]

21) Letter to Fr. Jean Bergez, Bétharram, 16 July 1881

22) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, Bétharram, 4 January 1882

23) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4/09/1883



er and of his love.”<sup>9</sup> This chalice drunk, the strength will be there to work only for divine glory. Let us not forget that, consumptive, Father Etchecopar will always remain at the mercy of a crisis: “*The ‘Always Forward’ [...] transforms our weaknesses into creative power.*”<sup>10</sup> An event will make it possible to go beyond this limit of his nature and allow to shine in his body what the heart tirelessly seeks: his first visit outside Europe. He had never thought of it. Yet after his successful trip to the Holy Land, crossing the ocean to go to Argentina became obvious. “*I, who could hardly leave my room [...], and not without some apprehension for the health of my puny and delicate carcass, hardly had I taken the road to the Holy Land, than I was transformed.*”<sup>11</sup> His fears have evaporated to give way to momentum in service of his mission.

With the death of the founder’s first companions, his awareness of living together grows stronger, thanks to all those who have chosen the Betharramite religious life. To these words, “*he loved so much the one by whom he was so much loved*”<sup>12</sup> are added some more: “*I don’t know, but this life and this death give my soul a perfume that enchants me...*”<sup>13</sup> Being present with the dying brothers witnesses to the common ideal of all life: “*His heart overflowed! He did not know how to love without giving himself generously...*”<sup>14</sup> But there again, he always concludes: “*Finally, whether life is long or short, may it be only an act of love towards the One who must be in Heaven the object of eternal love.*”<sup>15</sup> If at a human

9) Letter to Fr. Basilide Bourdenne, [Winter 1882-1883]

10) Letter to Fr. Augustin Abadie, Bétharram, 8 September 1885

11) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Buenos Aires, 16 December 1891

12) Circular letter, 27 June 1883 on the occasion of Father Bourdenne’s death

13) Letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America, Bétharram, 4 September 1882

14) Circular letter, 27 June 1883

15) Letter to his brother Maxime, Bétharram, 17 March 1873

in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis! *Glory to the Heart of Jesus and his Divine Mother!*

*Peace, glory, happiness, success according to God to the generous soldiers of the Sacred Heart, to the true imitators of Father Garicoïts! Fiat! Fiat! ... Oh my God!*

*Yours in Our Lord.  
Etchecopar priest*

*P. S. Please read this letter to the Conference, and then acknowledge receipt.*

...



## Father Auguste Etchecopar, one of us

ANY INTUITION CARRIED BY A FOUNDER CALLS FOR A CONVEYOR TO MAKE IT LIVE IN REALITY, HERE AND NOW. THIS WAS FATHER ETCHECOPAR, AN INSTRUMENT OF PROVIDENCE FOR THE GROWTH OF OUR RELIGIOUS FAMILY.

However, there is no question of comparing him to Father Garicoïts; through his personality and actions, he became a Betharramite. It was through and in his own appearance that Father Etchecopar conveyed and ensured the spiritual heritage from the founder to us.

Nearly 1960 letters make us know him both in his intimate life and his life of connections! Step by step, we recognize the slow crystallization of the gifts received in companionship with the founder. He was indeed a disciple! His holiness, if it is recognized one day, cannot however be summed up in this single aspect. Above all, he was himself first! Gentle but impetuous, he grew up in a family environment which will forever remain for him the *"school of the soul"*<sup>1</sup>. At the beginning of his spiritual life, he noted, *"I chase the esteem of men: a hundred times I get confused, I get sad, I get indignant."* He was to work constantly to let his deep vocation as a beloved creature of the Father shape his temperament. *"Between seeing and doing, there is a medium: prayer."* While still a member of the Oloron Cross Society, his ordination retreat notes give us the major key to understanding his spiritual path: *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* (Ga 2, 20) He remained deeply aware of the struggle between his nature and the supernatural until the day of his death. Re-

1) Letter to his brother Evariste, 2 November 1856



portunity to rethink our relationship to death and thus a conversion? Father Etchecopar's social and human context is precarious: an industrial society with its share of social misery; a country left to the vagaries of nature and devastating epidemics. With winters at -11°, Betharram is a real graveyard; typhus and influenza kill widely (on one occasion causing fifteen deaths among the Daughters of the Cross and 7 or 8 among the students of the College)! *"Poor fragile creatures"*<sup>6</sup> he exclaims!

Of course, he remains especially sensitive to these *"nothings ... which another person would ignore."*<sup>7</sup> The faith response is ALWAYS the same: *"The Lord is visiting us this winter through illness: His will be done!"*<sup>8</sup> and Father Bourdenne, dying, he shares his deep conviction: *"What is this persistent evil? ... Ah I can see it! the Lord who loves you tenderly wants to bring you to the perfect union of his Cross, to detach you from all created things, and to accustom you to throw yourself headlong into the hands of his wisdom, his pow-*

6) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 November 1883

7) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 23 February 1882

8) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 December 1883: Father Etchecopar tells that in this month of December in Bétharram, more than five religious are bedridden or suffering.



## Father Etchecopar and health

FOR ONCE NEWS OF HIS HEALTH IS ONLY A POSTSCRIPT...<sup>1</sup>

...A touch of humour to evoke health, his own and that of others, which appears in all letters! Should we fear seeing in it a complacent fragility? Far from being an obsession for him, health is the "place" where man responds to his Creator. This is what helped him to orient and fertilise his life: *"As we advance in life or rather in death, we see that everything else [...] matters very little, provided that Jesus and Mary be glorified."*<sup>2</sup> His vision of life? A dying religious expresses it well: *"Without doubt, the thought of death is not likely to give pleasure, especially when one finds oneself empty-handed, but [...] I tell myself that we will have to die all the same. Soon, and that in ten or twenty years I will hardly be more ready than today ... [...] Tell all these dear confreres, Priests and Brothers, that I do not forget them [...] and that I love them all with all my heart. [...] May they continue to pray for me; I will try to suffer better and thus give them back through suffering what they will do for me."*<sup>3</sup> And the superior exclaimed: *"O precious death! O blessed death! May our death be like this death!"*<sup>4</sup> Here, nothing but super-natural! *"Is not this desire for death one of the most consoling pledges of predestination? ... Yes, provided it joins in a true and sincere humility."*<sup>5</sup> Our Western consciousness, which has taken death away from life, finds itself wrong-footed. Why would this not be an op-

1) Cf. Letter to his sister Julie, 25 December 1886

2) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 1st August 1878

3) From the letter of Fr. Basilide Bourdenne, who was at door's death, to Fr. Etchecopar. The latter quoted precisely this extract in his circular dated 27 June 1883 in which he announced Fr Bourdenne's death.

4) Circular letter of June 27, 1883, Bétharram

5) Circular letter of January 16, 1887, Bétharram

alizing thus the words of Psalm 130: *"My heart is not proud Lord, my eyes are not haughty; no, I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother."* A mother! This man will be forever marked by his discovery of Mary at Bétharram: *"To want to take a step without her, is to try to fly without wings."*<sup>2</sup> *"Man is from God, to God and for God!"*<sup>3</sup>. He will not receive his religious vocation by violating his nature, on the contrary, he will find it in gentleness and vigilance, by letting it express all human potential and interconnectedness.

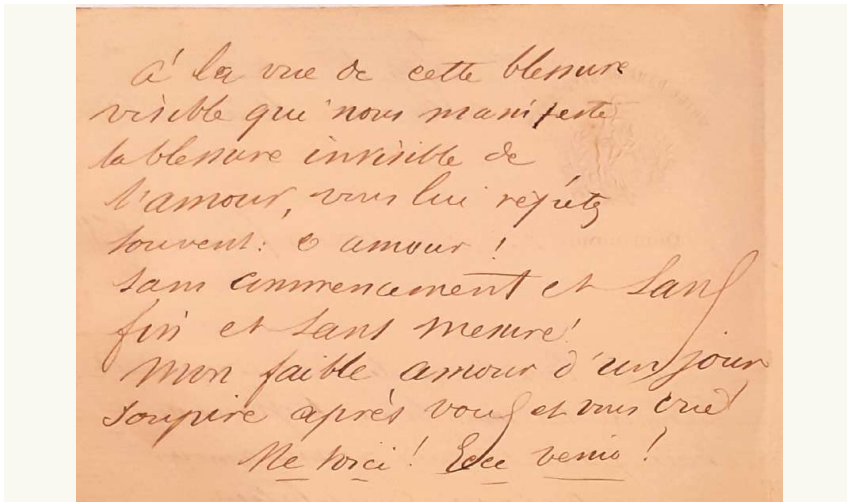
The awareness of the fragility of existence, of its precariousness will forever imprint in it, the aspiration to join the true homeland, Heaven. *"The chest is the chink in the armour"*<sup>4</sup> he confides. He can be criticized for having been too attentive to this dimension of human life. Why wouldn't it be an opportunity to observe better and see how he made it a springboard for his fraternal life for example. He certainly did not lack courage! His concern for the physical led him to always measure the realism of the mission and its limits as well as to marvel, unceasingly, at the way in which others lived their relationship to the world and to death<sup>5</sup>. Be, before you act! The letters in which he speaks of the deaths of the founder's first companions are astonishing in this regard. This, moreover, is the intuition of the founder: to train men, religious, capable and available priests before anything else. In this, as in all dimensions of his life, we can see a dual spirituality: attention to reality, and an invitation to a view that sees beyond it. Speaking of Providence, he wrote to his brother who had emigrated to Argentina: *"I feel [Providence] every day, I see it, so to speak, through the veils*

2) In «Resolutions made during the retreat on June 16th, 1882»

3) Letter to his brother Evariste, 30 October 1847

4) Letter nr 911 to his sister Madeleine, 17 December 1886

5) Cf. Letter to Fr Jean Bergez, 16 July 1881



«At the sight of this visible wound which manifests to us the invisible wound of love, we keep on repeating to him: O love! Without beginning and without end and without measure! My weak love of just one day sighs after you and calls out to you Here I am! Ecce venio!» (From the letter to the religious of the San José community in Buenos Aires, 18 June 1882.)

of events which relate either to me or to you”<sup>6</sup>. Later, he was to evoke the same reality: “the visible wound which manifests the invisible wound”<sup>7</sup>. Our current living conditions in the West should not make us forget the trauma that epidemics and climate still caused between 1850 and 1890!

The articles that will follow will talk in more detail about certain aspects of his human and spiritual personality. Let us note at the outset: he was a man who was the incarnation of the charism. He accompanied each breath with it, each step during his 30 years of service as Superior General. In this role again, he displayed all the treasures of a personality formed of prudence and respect, without

6) Letter to his Evariste, 30 October 1847

7) Letter to the community San José in Buenos Aires, 18 June 1882

religious, it is as if the truth of things was being made real; every step verifying goodness. It requires a great spirit of listening and paying attention to others who should always be heard and allowed to have their say.<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere, he specifies: “Let us listen to all the observations with humility and simplicity, let us weigh everything before God in prayer, and then start again, relying on God alone to fulfil our task, to be the model for the flock ...”<sup>17</sup> Sometimes it is better to give up your own opinion: “In general, put you and me,” he wrote to Father Magendie, “behind the council. When the latter, in the great majority, supports us, we are very strong. If it thinks differently from us, no more responsibility; therefore we are quiet...”<sup>18</sup> A tireless peacemaker, the superior will always have sought this union between Love and Truth for his brothers (Ps 132). Without ever ceasing to be realistic: “We all are a burden to each other”<sup>19</sup> and “when one is carrying the weight of a large community, one can fail at taking care of everything, rather than there being a shortage of things to take care of.”<sup>20</sup>

...

16) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 29 September 1889

17) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 April 1885

18) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 21 May 1889

19) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, without date (probably February-March 1887)

20) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, Bétharram, 20 May 1878

*and brighter lights to advance us in the virtues of our state.”*<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the lives of religious as well as of communities are truly a melting pot in which discernment is experienced: *“let us all present our best selves... (to) draw from their source the lights that we need at this time and that will illuminate the next chapter.”*<sup>10</sup>

Such is the goal! Putting it into practice becomes an art of discernment. Acting wisely, the superior combines group dynamics with the practice of subsidiarity: *“the council here watches over this matter, but at this distance, it is better to deliberate with Father Magendie, his Council and the superiors of the residences.”*<sup>11</sup> The Lord manifests his will more in the twists and turns of life than in solitary inspirations! *“In practice, it is to be hoped that here we will only have to ratify what has been decided over there.”*<sup>12</sup> Governing requires advancing, clarifying and arriving TOGETHER, each in his place: *“You would displease the Council here if, unless there were strong reasons, you decided on things which are within its competence according to the constitutions.”*<sup>13</sup> To repeat: patience and kindness is always needed. Insist, clarify without ever going against the rule of love! Here as elsewhere, the grace of his personal sensitivity knows how to develop for the common good what might otherwise appear as weakness. Repeated abandonment (to providence) and endlessly renewed confidence in prayer.

Guarantor and servant of this *“distinctive stamp”*<sup>14</sup>, he will preserve and embed it beyond his own personal journey: *“the Chapter has shown the providential path that we must always consider and follow, the source of light.”*<sup>15</sup> For the

9) Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, Sarrance, 17 September 1877

10) Letter to Fr. Jean-Pierre Barbé and the General Council, Rome, 6 March 1889

11) Letter to Fr. Victor Saubatte, Bétharram, 1st November 76

12) Letter to Fr. Jean-Baptiste Harbustan, Bétharram, 28 October 1872

13) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, 19 January 1883

14) Circular letter, Bétharram, 15 June 1888

15) Circular letter, Bétharram, 15 June 1888

ever departing from a sensitive humor: *“We are all burdens to each other.”*<sup>8</sup> *“It is about having a cool head in the fire, unwavering courage, firmness and prudence to steer the boat through the thousand pitfalls”*<sup>9</sup>. Political turmoil raged in France as in Argentina threatening the very freedom to live as a religious, a complicated management of people and works! Far from hardening him, these difficulties spurred on his desire to join the most distant brothers through his first canonical visits. So many times these words of the psalmist come into his writing: *“It is good and sweet for brothers to live united and together.”* (Ps 132) His deep joy to have seen his brothers, to have lived daily life with them, provided peace to his soul of responsibility. How beautiful and great it is to read his enthusiasm and joy during the official recognition of the Congregation by Rome! Such moments were a grace for him, the sign by which he recognized the good direction and presence of the Founder. His story shared with us did not stop shaping his brotherly heart: *“I take with me (the scholastics of Bethlehem) because they have become part of me.”*<sup>10</sup>

...

8) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, without date, but written probably in February 1887

9) Circular letter to the residences in America, 18 April 1885

10) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, 17 July 1891





## A school of the soul

IF THERE IS ONE DIMENSION OF FATHER ETCHECOPAR'S LIFE THAT HAS BEEN DEEPLY ILLUMINATED & TRANSFORMED BY HIS FAITH, IT IS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FAMILY! WHERE DO WE BEGIN WITH THIS STORY?

From the start, his focus was deep: *"O lend me your heart, dear father, dear sisters, to show him my gratitude less badly ... I hope that your tenderness will give me a little bit of this treasure of love without which our souls would be so languid and so sick."*<sup>1</sup> One thing is obvious: there is a sharing of invisible riches; the family is the mysterious fabric of the communion of saints. It is a real springboard for everyone on the path to their vocation. As a religious he was quick to recognise what he had received: *"sensitivity so great in (our) family, (this) blood which boils, (this) heart which is stirred up..."*<sup>2</sup>. His vision of the couple is very original in this 19th – very classic – century: *"but as you reflect one another in the picture you paint together"* he wrote to his father, *"you actually paint yourself. In this, it is the reflection of God who spreads over his creatures the beauty of his face, his trinity, his unity, his infinite love."*<sup>3</sup> He has an extraordinary awareness of a union that continues after his mother's death. *"He is still there,"* wrote the religious to his brother, *preserving us in his person, and the reality of his paternal tenderness and the image of this maternal tenderness which flew off to Heaven..."*<sup>4</sup> There is nothing of human value that doesn't find its root in a spirit of faith: *"A God who descends to the inner space of my heart to say to me: take courage, I struck you but I love you; I am your father ... I am your joy ... I will take the place of everything"*<sup>5</sup> he wrote after the death of

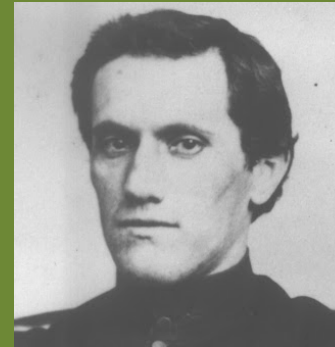
1) Letter to his father, 28 March 1869

2) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 31 July 1865

3) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, no date

4) Letter to his brother Evariste, 21 November 1866

5) Letter to his brother Evariste, 18 February 1866



*Father Etchecopar's correspondence with Father Jean Magendie scj, his Vicar General in Argentina, will be woven into a true friendship.*

As both friend and teacher, he shares as much as possible his experience, in mutual trust: *"Certainly, we know you,... how we have had our hand forced by events (decisions taken hastily) ... FOR ME, I try even harder to foresee things on which I must consult and follow the Rule."*<sup>6</sup> Humour is never far away: *"I see, from my experience, that I am approved when I respect the views of others and disapproved when I ask for sacrifice, even from saints ..."*<sup>7</sup>

His faith vision of authority is to foster in everything the psalm: *"How good, how delightful it is to live as brothers ..."*. Thus when Rome approved the vow of poverty (1875): *"... the more the branches are pruned and united to the vine, the more they will produce good fruit... Have the spirit of obedience everywhere, always in everything with joy in small things... so that this obedience may sanctify us in truth, unify us in charity, preserve us in hope."*<sup>8</sup> His secret? The virtues are woven into everyday life! Recognition by Rome is an essential struggle; far from being a vanity project, it is the seal of brotherhood: *"(the Rules being) more assured guides*

6) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 April 1883

7) Letter to a "Carissime fili", Bétharram, 4 March 1878

8) Letter to the religious of the San Juan College in Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 3 April 1876





### Living authority in practice

*"If only they (the superiors) would rest their heads on the pillow of the will of God ..."*<sup>1</sup>

Carrying important responsibilities for more than thirty years, Father Etchecopar properly enabled the family of Betharram to be born into the life of the Church. He lived this in a spirit of friendship simultaneously mixed with a great trust in God: *"the bonds of fraternal friendship have already drawn me very strongly and on an incline as gentle as it is helpful."*<sup>2</sup>

Resting on the pillow of God's will gives us a peace, generating patience and compassion in response to the pressures of the moment (political events, internal decisions and the bustle of daily life): *"As regards charity, I do not think I will ever practice it enough other than by working to sanctify others... remembering sweetness in style: humility and gentleness; but firmness in purpose."*

The correspondence with Father Magendie, his Vicar General in Argentina, will be woven into a true friendship: *"you are our arms, our eyes, our treasure, our heart, our tender love..."*<sup>3</sup>, *"you are like my other self"*<sup>4</sup>. In the bi-weekly correspondence with Father Magendie, Father Etchecopar never wavered from his fundamental conviction: *"you know what I think of you,... in a word, my esteem, my affection, my confidence... so this little incident will have no other consequence than to offer each other the opportunity to practice the Christian virtues."*<sup>5</sup>

1) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4 March 1881

2) Letter to Fr. Lazare, Betharram, 10 October 1877

3) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 February 1877

4) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 17 June 1877

5) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 May 1880

his mother to whom he was able to give communion ... *"she breathes at the Gate of heaven"*<sup>6</sup>. An ineffable peace, a consolation greater than his pain. And when his father exclaims: *"You have to submit to his will"*, a spiritual energy makes the son say: *"As this way of thinking and acting is simple ... super-human. There he is, the man depending only on God ... nothing knocks him down; wealth does not inflate him, he receives everything as gift... sorrows... as orders... from the Good Father, to whom we must obey with our hearts in everything, always at once."*<sup>7</sup>

How then could Auguste not develop an original relationship at the heart of his siblings? There too, *"something greater"* is at work: first of all, being in the image of God, being his work<sup>8</sup>. With his sister Julie a nun, her consecrated heart is open: *"hold firm to the cross; wrap around it the left arm of humility and the right arm of confidence ..."*<sup>9</sup> Julie truly embodies the ideal of religious life. Later, he will recognise: *"although in a manner of speaking I see you every day in the heart of our divine Master... you are almost as present to me as if I saw you in the flesh, and although silent, I hear the sound not only of your words but of your actions, your thoughts ... (all this) is a fire that warms us, but is also a mirror which shows us the truth ... without doubt you know me in him, as I know you... holy society... blessed communion..."*<sup>10</sup>.

To his brother Maxime, who left when very young for Argentina, he wrote: *"I know you as little more than an 11 or 12-year-old little brother; but I have this portrait in my heart..."*<sup>11</sup>. Admittedly, contact is rare: *"I hardly find a minute*

6) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 10 December 1865

7) Letter to his brothers Evariste, Séverin and Maxime, 30 March 1864

8) Letter to his mother, 13 August 1860; to his father, 26 January 1866; to his brothers Evariste, Séverin and Maxime, 3 October 1868

9) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 31 July 1865

10) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 5 September 1881

11) Letter to his brothers Séverin and Maxime, 17 January 1862

for dear Maxime, he also cannot find one ...”<sup>12</sup> The ideal of life left by their father<sup>13</sup>, is for Auguste the opportunity to send best wishes to his brother: “I do not know if the Good Lord wants you to be a millionaire ... what should be desired more (especially when this money has cost so much fatigue)... is that it be a school for the soul...”<sup>14</sup>. “Always be the docile child of the Heavenly Father, fulfilling his wishes with ... spiritual joy ... complete surrender!”<sup>15</sup>. A joy at its height during his visit to Argentina in 1891-92. It was present from the start “I am inundated with consolation at seeing the feelings of your heart ...”<sup>16</sup>; via the figure of his brother, sometimes entangled in money matters, he discovers the ideal of the Christian in the world: “In you, everything is deep satisfaction for me... your heart is fixed on what is good before the God of love, your gaze still fixed on heaven...”<sup>17</sup>. With his sister Madeleine, the brother will also forge a unique relationship: she becomes “servant of my apostolate”<sup>18</sup>, source of spiritual assistance. Having remained single with his father, the religious brother indicates to her the way of a consecration: “you are therefore happy in the cradle of your vocation! ... May your divine Saviour lead you himself in the solitude of perfect detachment, let him speak to your heart ... and let yourself be led ... like his poor servant ... thank him a thousand times ... Lord, what do you want me to do? ... Finally, behold the handmaid of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup>

Like an “invisible cloister”, the union of their hearts is a source of deep dynamism: “I am convinced that you are for

12) Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Marceline, 6 May 1883

13) Letter to his brother Séverin, 20 November 1863

14) Letter to his brother Evariste, 2 April 1854

15) Letter to his brother Maxime, 3 January 1873

16) Letter to his brother Maxime, 2 December 1871

17) Letter to his brother Maxime, 17 March 1873

18) Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 21 May 1877

19) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 1864; to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 8 October 1877

flash of openness, he notes: “Oh my God, if only these poor Turks had the Faith... they would honour it with same reverence and devotion as they do their current beliefs.”<sup>17</sup> Likewise the Orthodox whom he calls “heretics”, “schismatics”<sup>18</sup>. It sounds harsh to us. For him, they express the awareness of a truth held by the Catholic Church alone. During a stopover in Africa on the way to America, he will not go down to the city: too much dirt! But Father Etchecopar is not simply a prisoner of his own opinions. In Argentina, he is not fooled by what he observes socially: “We imagine that we meet, alongside the multitude starving for fortune, only big capitalists, rich traders and landowners! This is a mistake, because there are also educated men of sound science.”<sup>19</sup> If we want perfection, we will not find it in Father Etchecopar! If, on the other hand, we want to discover how a man, marked by his time, has agreed to let himself be moved, wrong-footed and sometimes bowled over by what he was experiencing while remaining fixed on his essentials, then we have in him the man that we need!

...

17) Letter to Fr. Victor Bourdenne, Bethlehem, 27 December 1892

18) Letter to the religious of San José College of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 19 February 1885

19) Letter to Fr. Victor Bourdenne, Buenos-Aires, 15 March 1892

East, Father Etchecopar felt a profound transformation: *“(these graces) now permeating my whole life have given my life increasing strength... I feel a sap, a flame that I did not know, which revives and energises my direction, my work... as though I had wings.”*<sup>10</sup> Before it is a theory, missionary impetus is an experience. This man feels himself a “citizen”<sup>11</sup> of Bethlehem as well as of Argentina. Used to analysing life in France from a political angle, sharing the life of the brothers for a long time elsewhere makes him understand that life itself is a religious issue. Though by nature he will always be sentimental he sees realistically how much here and there, *“there is a lot of religious evil and indifference but also a lot of good”*<sup>12</sup>. Without ever departing from his spirit of faith: *“It suffices that his will be done and his kingdom come”*<sup>13</sup>; *“Though the storm clouds gather outside, you have more consolations inside than ever.”*<sup>14</sup> In Argentina, he admires the creative pedagogy implemented, a move away from simply repeating what is done in France. In Bethlehem, the local community is at the source of the very spirit of the Congregation: poverty, simplicity and availability of Christ<sup>15</sup>! Thus emerges the pattern of a diversity which, far from impoverishing, will become the crucible of vital energy. Recognise that far from the birth-place (of the Congregation), and the first bonds, these brothers have *“become part of myself...”*<sup>16</sup>

Of course we can't forget the difficulties! And Father Etchecopar, in his journey of discovery, is nonetheless marked by his “world” and his cultural assumptions. The “Mohammedans” find little favour in his eyes even if, in a

10) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Bétharram, 17 July 1891

11) Letter to au P. Pierre Estrade, 21 December 1891

12) Letter to au P. Victor Bourdenne, Buenos Aires, Colegio San José, 11 December 1891

13) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Rome, 9 May 1891

14) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4 July 1891

15) (Letter 1231)

16) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Bétharram, 17 July 91

*your brother a source of light, of strength, of comfort”*...<sup>20</sup>; *“Continual (are) the visits that my memory makes to you.”*<sup>21</sup> *“Let us continue to walk together, side by side, along the path of the poor life ...”*<sup>22</sup> *“Happy because you have believed and you still believe and hope in the love of the One who chose you and who is your portion.”*<sup>23</sup>

...

20) Letter to his sister Madeleine, 5 September 1881

21) Letter to his sister Madeleine, 6 March 1882; see also to his sisters Madeleine and Suzanne, 8 October 1877

22) Letter to his sister Madeleine, 5 September 1882

23) Letter to his sister Julie, Sr Elisabeth, Sister of the Charity, 16 May 1876



“There is another temple...”<sup>1</sup> or going out from the Heart

NOTHING MUCH OF FATHER ETCHECOPAR’S LIFE CAN BE UNDERSTOOD WITHOUT THIS INNER DIMENSION OF FAITH.

*“The interior life consists... of building a dwelling at the bottom of one’s heart... of being locked in it, closely united to God, conversing with him, listening to his voice and receiving with his paternal hand, with holy gratitude, sorrows and tribulations, anything that can increase conformity with Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>*

These words, written in 1855, before entering Betharram, will remain the foundation of his existence. The figures of Christ and Mary are decisive in the development of his spiritual sensitivity. This religious knows how his temperament can lead him to anger & impatience<sup>3</sup>. Aware of his own lack of fervour, he doesn’t deny his tendencies but repurposes these inner faults.

*“O precious faults... light which reveals my Jesus to me... yes, it is my infidelity which shows me the extent of his fidelity, my inconstancy which makes me admire his constancy, it is the bottomless abyss of my sin which makes me see that his love is even more unfathomable.”<sup>4</sup> “The more sick we are, the more boldly we have to claim this medicine. We must have no greater fear than that of having too much [fear] or not enough confidence in this merciful savior.”<sup>5</sup>*

1) Letter to his brothers Evariste, Maxime and Severin, 18 November 1867

2) Summarius 49

3) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1871

4) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, Betharram, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1868

5) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, Betharram, 25



of a way of life conducted according to other rules, as yet invisible and unsuspected. For him it is obedience to life as it is given: *“I see no other way to judge and make decisions things than through the Fiat of our adorable Master. Other things may influence me but when we do what we can with the modest resources of our poverty before God, on reflection, I only esteem obedience.”<sup>8</sup>*

Here again, being sensitive to fraternity and humility, –the foundations of the inner spiritual life–, he makes himself an apostle among others and a source of pastoral action. Referring to the dispensation enjoyed by Betharramites in the Holy Land, he wrote: *“our dear Franciscans may have cause to be unhappy with this breach of their privilege. But since God speaks through the mouth of his Vicar, let us hope that, far from harming them, we will be like second brothers to them, while they in turn will be our holy protectors.”<sup>9</sup>* Strengthened and encouraged by his first trip to the

8) Letter to Fr. Ernest Lullier, Oloron, 1<sup>st</sup> August 87

9) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 22 January 1879



“We will be as second brothers to them...”<sup>1</sup>

“Let us contemplate Eternity<sup>2</sup>... for as eternal life is a life of love, we must love here on earth...”<sup>3</sup>. The ideal of religious life is crucial for Father Etchecopar; he gradually evaluates the affect on the world of this type of holy life desired by the founder. “Everything here smiles upon me”<sup>4</sup>; the decisive experience in Argentina shows him that between the moment of founding and that of present rooting, “the connections are true”<sup>5</sup>. A real thunderbolt! A true confirmation of the impression left by the first trip to Bethlehem: “I had barely taken the path to the Holy Land, when I was transformed...”<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the various encounters with the Pope help to forge in him the consciousness of a universality, of a participation in this solicitude of the Pope for the whole Church, well beyond the birthplace of the family, with its routine and organisational concerns. He realises that an authentic “bringing to birth”<sup>7</sup> must necessarily incorporate a missionary dynamic. In fact, in the 19th-20th century, apostolic religious life was in practice a monastic life without a cloister. In the writings of Father Etchecopar, this life is about becoming a saint by praying and working; the outside world seems to have no connection with this way of life. The outside world has no impact on him. But rather than becoming a form of escapism, the work and the visitations of the Superior outline for him a pattern

1) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 22 January 1879

2) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of Charity, 24 July 1866

3) Letter to his parents, Bétharram, around 1859

4) Letter to Fr. Victor Bourdenne, Buenos-Aires, 15 March 1892

5) Letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America, Bethlehem, 12 December 1892

6) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Buenos Aires, 16 December 1891

7) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of Charity, Bétharram, 30 July 1877

When his letters are punctuated by “Oh” (when a meeting, a landscape, or an event delights him), everything seems to vibrate in him to the extreme. The encounter with the founder and some of his expressions or certain features of his spirituality, will tame and orient the sensitivity of this disciple. He will be forever marked by the call to holiness represented by religious life:

“The religious is a vessel of election ... (he) enlightens the world by showing it, mainly in actions, the most sublime lessons of the Gospel.”<sup>6</sup> A choosing which is fundamentally a love story: “by the side of Christ one quickly forgets oneself and the cares of the land and the whole world, to rest and lose oneself in the ocean of his love.”<sup>7</sup>

“Such is life. It is indeed a pilgrimage, where we put up our tent in the evening to remove it and reposition it the next day... What does it matter! If we have the will of God and God himself with his love.”<sup>8</sup> “Let us meditate on Eternity...”<sup>9</sup>

In theory one could believe in a spirituality disconnected from life. But on the contrary! Turning your life into a pilgrimage opens the door to learning from it. Several major episodes will be like founding stages which will reveal to Father Etchecopar something of his creative fidelity: the difficult politics and perspectives of exile, the first visits to the Holy Land and Argentina, the formal recognition of the Congregation in 1890, the appeal of the Pope Leo in 1892 for Catholics to back the Republican regime, the manifold citations from 1888-89. So many steps that nourish and deepen the faith of this man (not without pain).

None of this was ever foreseen or predicted for him.

March 1880; Letter to his sister Julie..., Betharram, 4 January 1882

6) Letter to the Fathers and Brothers in America, Betharram, 4 November 1878, and see also Letter to his sister Julie, 16 May 1876

7) Letter to his sister Julie..., Betharram, 25 November 1887

8) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Betharram, 19 October 1881

9) Letter to his sister Julie..., Betharram, 24 July 1866

Born into a large family of a petty bourgeoisie, Father Etchecopar made the voluntary choice of poverty. What joy for him when this vow is made official by Rome!

*"If your heart is all for God, it will carry everything else with it... just as in a fire, fire forces you to throw everything out the window."*<sup>10</sup>

Even his uncertain health, among other things, is a reminder to always remain in a state of dependence vis-à-vis the Lord: *"The poor machine ... the carcass ... given up everything ... rejected what remains of precious little "me", like the crucified one who sheds his blood..."*<sup>11</sup>

How can one sustain a life, given to others, at the feet of one's Master? It is in this perpetual learning of a deeper, higher or distant vision (as St. Paul said of his experience of the mystery in Ephesians 3:18). If the founder is exemplary by the gift received from a dazzling intuition that has animated his whole life, Father Etchecopar is just as much driven by his constant attention to mystery.

*"We don't live from what we see and hear here and there, but from what we love and what makes it good and better."*<sup>12</sup>

Not without his teasing humor, the superior speaks of a thousand little occasions: someone knocking on his door, the confessional, the letters piling up, sermons and lectures to write and those who bend his ear<sup>13</sup>. Let all this *"leap from the region of the natural to the region of the supernatural..."*<sup>14</sup>.

However, Father Etchecopar mind sometimes remains closed to what is different: the Turks, the lack of attention to cleanliness, even in the way he looks at the

10) Letter to the Fathers and Brothers in America, Betharram, 3 August 1882

11) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Betharram, 26 January 1886; Letter to his sister Madeleine, Oloron, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1887; Letter to his sister Julie..., Betharram, 10 April 1885

12) Letter to Fr. Jean-Pierre Barbé, Rome, 19 March 1887

13) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Betharram, 25 February 1883

14) Letter to the scholastics who were studying in Toulouse, Pau, 30 October 1887

of south-western France, suddenly, Father Etchecopar discovers the universal dimension of his family, as of his service.

It is very touching to read many times his hand-written appeals to write to him. *"Write to me with an open heart: it will do you good and bring great joy to me"*<sup>17</sup> For him, there is also the safeguarding of the fraternal bond between the members of the dispersed family: *"despite the distances hearts are always close and united by a frequent and very affectionate memory."*<sup>18</sup> Here again his extreme sensitivity to sounds, people, atmospheres allows him to put his whole person at the service of this common ideal of fraternity. He will never cease to maintain a cordial correspondence, always sensitive and affectionate towards the other. It is really surprising to read how his affection comes into play in all dimensions of life, even obedience! It operates in him, in this dimension as in so many others, as a transfiguration.

...

17) Letter to Fr. Jean-Jacques Mouthes, Bétharram, 3 January 1884

18) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 August 1882





*may well be right: everything here smiles upon me.”<sup>12</sup>*

Having been able to contemplate these places (Argentina and the Holy Land) where our religious family puts out its branches, is the opportunity for him to appreciate the deep bond that unites all those who are dear to him: *“thus extending as much as possible my mind and my heart to all those I love and whose I am loved.”<sup>13</sup>* He never travels alone: “there” always brings him back to “here”, Betharram whom he deeply loves, and “here” is now full of sounds of relaxation, cries of joy or the beauty of the holy places! *“Tell everyone that they are in my heart, that I feel them in my heart”<sup>14</sup>* He has a very beautiful expression: *“the prison of love”<sup>15</sup>*. Deeply touched by the visit to Bethlehem, he recognized: *“Yes, we felt that (the Christ child) loves our little institute, precisely because of its smallness, that is to say the simplicity which is the hallmark of our family.”<sup>16</sup>* After many years of serving as a superior within the limits

<sup>12</sup>) Letter to Fr. Victor Bourdenne, Buenos-Aires, 15 March 1892

<sup>13</sup>) Diary, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1892

<sup>14</sup>) Letter to Fr. Jean-Pierre Barbé and to the community of Bétharram, Rome, 5 March 1889

<sup>15</sup>) Letter to the religious of San José College in Buenos Aires, Sarrañe, 18 December 1888

<sup>16</sup>) Letter to Fr. Victor Bourdenne, Bethléem, 27 December 1892

Orthodox<sup>15</sup>: *“the rest (of Christianity) is schismatic, heretical or Muslim... they deserve our pity since they have not been given the same grace as us [of belonging to the Catholic Church].”<sup>16</sup>*

Is it not the observe side of a beautiful medal that makes us appreciate it more. When he shares with us on his boat journey returning from Argentina: *“With each hour there is a growing pain of separation. Yes I feel within me a pain arising in my feelings. A flame which ... thrilled me ... made me smile a permanent smile ... Right now I am suffering from having lost this treasure, and I console myself by thinking of the grace that God has given me to have once fully enjoyed it.”<sup>17</sup>*

...

<sup>15</sup>) Cf. Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Marceline, Bethlehem, 4 January 1891 and logbook on 12/11/91

<sup>16</sup>) Letter to his sisters Madeleine and Marceline, Bethlehem, 4 January 1891

<sup>17</sup>) Logbook on 10/05/92



“O Father, continue!”<sup>1</sup>

INCARNATE! NOT ONLY REMEMBERING THE FOUNDER, BUT GROWING HIS INTUITION.

There are two main directions for this: that the Church should recognize the work founded by Father Garicoïts and his spiritual inspiration for his sons. Between the founder and the young religious, recognition was immediately established: 1857-1863 were the crucible in a life shared in the service of the charism. The period 1887-88 saw the multiplication of long quotes from the founder: a turning point? The diocesan process resumed in 1888, the disappearance of the first companions surely played a role in this new awareness of the disciple. Until then, Father Etchecopar had alluded to this or that pithy expression of the founder. “*Ecco venio*”, “the law of love”, “the immensity of charity within the bounds of employment”, a strong and vivid translation of a still palpable memory: “*I remember the impulses that escaped from the soul of the venerated founder... I picture it to myself...*”<sup>2</sup>. As much as possible, in Betharram, Father Etchecopar will not stop repeating this filial and emotional gesture: going up to Calvary and praying at the tomb of the founder. “*When I kiss the name of the one who is more alive and more powerful on the marble every day, I feel that I am being answered.*”<sup>3</sup> “*I like to bow down to the grave and ask him to have a bigger care in his mind for all his children...*”<sup>4</sup>.

1) Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bétharram, 3 January 1881

2) Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bétharram, 18 June 1886. See also the features of the founder: Circular to the houses in France, Bétharram, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1885

3) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4 January 1883

4) Letter to the Fathers and the Brothers of America, Bétharram, 2 December 1880 ; letter to the religious of the College San José of Buenos Aires, Bétharram, 18 February 1881

of God. Be united, be of one heart and one soul.”<sup>6</sup> Unity, close union, mutual dependence are the guarantees of the future. The more so as the family strengthens in Argentina and launches out in the Holy Land.

To the young people of Argentina, he delivers this key to understanding life: “*In my eyes, and in the eyes of everybody, your past is a guarantee of the future.*”<sup>7</sup> Thanksgiving for the gift of divine life, gratitude for the gift of the charism, rooted in fidelity to the Church through the person of the Pope: these are the 3 axes of Father Etchecopar’s religious ideal. “*Getting closer and closer to the spirit and practices of our revered founder.*”<sup>8</sup> ... for wise uniformity.”<sup>9</sup> “*It is therefore clear that it is not enough for us to be good Christians and good priests... but that we must also carry in everything the character of true religious... by inserting this Ecce venio of humility, obedience and love ...*”<sup>10</sup>

His sensitivity will continue to be expressed after the first canonical visit to the Holy Land (1890-1) and to Argentina (1891-2). The joy he felt in sharing times of relaxation (with the community) keeps coming back to him; he doesn’t hesitate to speak of an “*injury ... a sorrow that rises from my affections. Yes, I feel a flame which ... thrilled me... made me happy with a perpetual smile and which now touches each strand of my feelings producing there a material burn... right now I am suffering from having lost such a treasure, I console myself by thinking of the grace that God has given me to have fully enjoyed it.*”<sup>11</sup> Not ceasing to talk about what touches him, he will confess: “*with all these endless details, you must think that I have fallen in love with the people and things of this country and that I’ve put down roots there... You*

6) Letter to Fr. Jean Vignolle, Pau, 28 October 1887

7) Circular letter to the houses in America, Bétharram, 18 April 1885

8) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 January 1887

9) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 April 1885

10) Circular Letter, Bétharram, 12 April 1889

11) Diary, 10 May 1892



“A portion of my soul and my life...”<sup>1</sup>

RELIGIOUS FRATERNITY COUNTED FOR ALMOST EVERYTHING IN FATHER ETCHECOPAR'S LIFE.

There are many occasions in the letters where Father Etchecopar repeats this sentence from Psalm 132: “How good it is, how sweet it is for brothers to dwell together in unity”. It was a refrain of his whole life! Craftsman of our charism at its birth, he was above all a member of the same body. Father Garicoïts immediately made him take on a role of formation, recognizing in him that ‘impulse of the heart’ which desires to give itself without hesitation to the Lord. The gradual appropriation of the Rule of life of the Congregation makes it possible to live a “a life more surely safe and solid”<sup>3</sup>. It is about learning to discern the signs of the goodness of the present moment in the dark, and the unexpected things of life, “deep down in our heart”<sup>4</sup>.

While the elders are called to give witness to fidelity and an example of the ideal in practice, the young remain the primary concern of Father Etchecopar, as he accompanied many of them as novices. To them, he reveals the secret: “Without prayer, life is simply human ... but sanctified by prayer and regulated by obedience, your work will be a fruitful apostolate. Apostles of the divine heart of Jesus, we must be the light of the world by knowledge and the salt of the earth by piety.”<sup>5</sup> “Be good scholars ... it is very helpful for the salvation of souls; but this is not the absolute mark of the chosen

1) Lettera a P. Augustin Abadie, Pau, 8 marzo 1886

2) Letter to Fr. Augustin Abadie, Pau, 8 March 1886

3) Letter to Fr. Pierre Pagadoy, Sarrance, 16 September 1877

4) Letter to Fr. Augustin Abadie, Pau, 19 February 1886

5) Letter to the scholastics of the ‘San José’, Pau, 18 March 1886

The physical bond is transformed into a mysterious communion: “O Father, these are your sons, you have trained them, you are still training them ... to make them utter the cry of your tender soul: ‘Ecce Venio’ ...”<sup>5</sup>.

Privileged witness, he likes to make clear the characteristics of the founder that marked him and that describe this spiritual figure: “austere like an anchorite, simple like a child, tender like a mother, humble like a lowly servant, tireless in activity, tender with an invisible strength, and at the same time organiser, teacher, chaplain... we saw it without ceasing, founding, raising and strengthening the sacred work that has become our heritage...”<sup>6</sup>. The faces of the first companions, like the challenge of Argentina are for him, the living manifestation of a charism which is written in the life and flesh of so many religious; he confided to one: “You who were one of the dearest children of our holy founder, one of his sweetest consolations.”<sup>7</sup> Also providential is this meeting with the Pope who assures him: “From the heights of heaven, your founder has obtained for you in such a short time this union of minds and hearts which I consider to be a miracle and which is rare on such occasions.”<sup>8</sup> In the most faithful tradition to the founder, he firmly indicates with regard to Roman approval: “The Church has found the Constitutions penetrated by the spirit of our venerated founder ... What Peter has blessed, God has also blessed and communicated his life through them for the fruitfulness of the Church.”<sup>9</sup> It is this almost sacramental confirmation that he seeks through his 8 stays in Rome.

The more the superior grapples with family life, the more he is convinced that “a new era of light and fervour”<sup>10</sup>

5) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4 January 1883

6) Circular to the houses in France, Bétharram, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1885; letter 1078

7) Letter to Fr. Jean Vignolle, Pau, 28 October 1887

8) Circular, Bétharram, 2 December 1879

9) Circular, Oloron, 18 February 1889

10) Circular, Bétharram, 15 June 1888

is at work. It is the life of the sons that becomes the place of rooting in the charism of the founder. It is the verification, the seal and the manifestation: “*Everywhere, we work with our eyes fixed on Father Garicoïts*”<sup>11</sup>, “*his spirit hovers more and more over us, more and more sweet and strong*”<sup>12</sup>. His assurance is all the stronger since he measures it by a decisive criterion: holiness of life. The call to be “*living and speaking copies*”<sup>13</sup> flows constantly from his writing: “*So let us be holy and perfect, let us keep and promote this great and rich heritage*”<sup>14</sup>! Elsewhere, he does not hesitate to speak WITH the founder: “*I limit myself to telling you all with Father Garicoïts... above all have God and his adorable will constantly before your eyes ...*”<sup>15</sup>.

The deaths of the first companions, like the geographic distances, are a sign of the urgency to transmit the treasure of the founder’s spirituality. He spent three months in Sarrance compiling and organizing these scattered writings to make them a source that would speak for themselves. The figure of the founder must remain that of the “*assured guide ... father full of tenderness ... unwavering support ... our strength in all our weaknesses ... model in everything that formed us and facilitated the path to Eternity*”<sup>16</sup>. Over the years, it takes place as a slow maturation of what the charism must be: the passage from the happiness of a shared life to the joy of a spirit that never ceases to generate. Thus is deposited “*At the base of our souls,... a first layer of granite, primitive feelings ...*”<sup>17</sup>. “*Like him, with him let us say and repeat more in our actions than in our speeches: Ecce*

11) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bayonne, 7 February 1888

12) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 29 June 1876

13) Letter 1066

14) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18 April 1879 ; letter 529

15) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 3 February 1882

16) Letter to his brother Séverin

17) Letter to his brothers Evariste, Séverin and Maxime, Bétharram, 24 July 1866

*these two dispositions in the service of this divine Mother.*”<sup>8</sup>

Mary is truly the architect of the growth of faith in the believer’s life. Mary comes as a substitute for him to show him how to live: “*Be my heart through this communion!*”

How not to finish this little article on the tender and strong Marian faith of Father Etchecopar without citing this little invocation of which he had the secret in the impulse of his heart ignited with love: “*O Mary, mother of sinners, I need you for me. O Joseph, guide of inner souls, I need you for others. O Mary, O Joseph, I need you for me, because as a priest, I am another Joseph, I am another Mary.*” (Epiphany 1870?).

● ● ●

8) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Aire-sur-l’Adour, 22 July 1883

presence was in his life. Here is one of his prayers, from his own pen, the fruit of his sensitivity: *“O very humble and loving Mother, lend us this bouquet which embalms heaven and earth, disarms the wrath of God and trains the people of the Chosen, may our hearts steeped in selfishness and pride be converted and become with you and for you, conforming to the one who is meek and humble of heart, to the one who loved me and gave himself up for me: love, so humble, humility so loving...”*<sup>4</sup> Mary, like the Mother who gives birth again and again to the faith of the disciples of Christ, gives birth to Father Etchecopar in a life of hope and charity: *“I belong to you, I belong neither to myself nor the earth, but to you who called me to your work. Make me less unworthy of you.”*<sup>5</sup>

However, the mother does not take the place of the Son. *“She is our everything after her Son. We will lack nothing from her; everything will turn to her greatest glory and our greatest good because all are animated by the best feelings in the spirit of dedication to the dear work which is our treasure, our love and our life.”*<sup>6</sup> In the prayer which is often the refuge of the superior, Mary is there: *“No pain should be banished from an encounter with Her.”* To work with and for her is to be in deep union with her Son. To let yourself be formed by her, is to accept to be born by her to the life of faith: *“May this Mother be for you, next to Jesus, to form him in your mind, your heart and your life because she is our mother for that”*<sup>7</sup>, he wrote to his sister Julie, a nun. Mary, mistress of life: *“(she) will lead us to Jesus, because she is the shortest, sweetest, easiest way to go to this divine saviour... let us go to her with increasing respect and love. She is so holy and so good at the same time. Blessed are those who know how to combine*

4) Letter to his sisters Suzanne and Madeleine, Betharram, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1868

5) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Betharram, 4 May 1883

6) Letter to the religious of the College San José de Buenos Aires, Betharram, 5 November 1880

7) Letter to his sister, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of Charity, Betharram, 15 January 1884

*venio! Eamus! Father, here I am! Forward!”*<sup>18</sup>

*“Thank you O Father for all that I owe you, for all that we owe you. It is you who gave birth to religious life; it was you who associated us with your mission from heaven ... it was you who were our guide, our light, our perfect model, our strength ... O Father continue! May we be your imitators as you were of Jesus Christ! Keep all that God will give you. Defend the work of Jesus and Mary. May we be holy and perfect!”*<sup>19</sup>

...

18) Circular, Bétharram, 8 June 1877, Feast of the Sacred Heart

19) Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bétharram, 3 January 1881



“Mary our Alpha and Omega,  
after Jesus...”<sup>1</sup>

**IN THE PILGRIMAGE OF FAITH OF FATHER  
ETCHECOPAR, MARY IS MORE THAN A COMPANION!**

Thy Kingdom come! This could be the summary of the Marian spirituality of the religious... an amazing statement! Mary, for him, is like the perfect manifestation of the Christ-like life. In fact, from the very beginning of his religious life even before being in Betharram, Mary occupied an essential place: “O Mary, after Jesus, you are everything to me!” “*Omnia per Maria! In Maria! Cum Maria!*”- Can be read in the notes of his first retreats. Entering Betharram will only seal an already committed love story, the origins of which would remain to be found in his personal history: Mary is “*mother of the work of Betharram*”<sup>1</sup> and “*To try to take a step without her help, it is to try to fly without wings*”. We read elsewhere, “*The Most Holy Virgin will watch over this work, we are only her instruments.*”<sup>2</sup> The inner and particular impulse that brings Father Etchecopar to Mary is not a 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion. Was there a subconscious influence of the feminine in the family environment? Without a doubt! However, not everything can be explained by family. His own life experience shaped his devotion to Mary. Between 1880 and 1890, at the height of the storms, the name and the love for Mary were mentioned less! And if the intuition of this religious is different from that of the Founder (the “*Here I am*”, for example, is less present), Mary remains the treasure from which to draw the virtues necessary for life. Mary is really the heart of

1) Letters nr. 308, 310

2) Letter to the religious of the College San José de Buenos Aires, Betharram, 4 July 1878



the work as much as  
Jesus!

From the encounter between this man and this mother at Betharram, it occurs as a kind of chemical precipitate:

*“In all things, look at The Star, call on Mary  
By following her, you will not go wrong  
By praying to her, you will not despair  
In knowing her, you will not make mistakes  
In holding fast to her, you will not fall  
She protects you, you will not fear  
She directs you, you will not tire  
She favours to you, and you will reach your goal.”* (in 1882)

*“Unless my heart deceives me, ... you can always hope in her.”*  
It is as if the piety of this man, sensitive to the extreme, receives strength, power and security from obedience to this Mother. A plenitude that the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, especially the enlightened journey to Mont Carmel will rekindle: “*what a mixture like everything that is of Mary, of grandeur and sweetness (all the elements of nature) form the various traits that charm and delighted and who is called Mary! She was, she is, she will be ... I want to take with me your image and your perfume which is the image of my mother and the perfume of her heart.*”<sup>3</sup> In the great freedom of tone with which the superior expresses himself in his letters, we can measure how immediate and real Mary’s

3) Letter to Sr Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethelhem, Nazareth, 16 April 1891