



Father Etchecopar and the signs of his time

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Introduction: summary of the historical-political context in 19th century France

The French Revolution was a social and political process that took place between 1789 and 1799, whose main consequences were the abolition of the absolute monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic, eliminating the economic and social foundations of the Old Regime. But the social transformation of the people was not achieved all at once. The political organization of France oscillated between republic, empire and monarchy for 75 years after the First Republic fell following Napoleon's coup (1799 consulship, 1804 empire). In 1815 came the restoration of the monarchy with Louis XVIII, Charles X and Louis Philippe. The truth is that the Revolution marked the definitive end of absolutism and gave birth to a new regime where the participation of the citizens, and on some occasions the popular masses, became the dominant political force in the country.

In 1848 Louis Philippe abdicated under pressure from the popular and working classes. The Second Republic is proclaimed, which lasts a short time and approves new laws: universal suffrage for all men, labour law, national workshops, President by universal suffrage for a period of

four years. Napoleon III, nephew of Emperor Napoleon, is elected. The new president, in 1850, supported by conservatives and monarchists, will pass dictatorial laws contrary to those of 1848, until eventually he staged a coup, proclaimed the Second Empire, muzzled the press, prohibited the right of assembly and in 1857 dissolved Parliament. It will be a time of scientific progress, that applied to industry gives rise to great development and economic well-being.

From 1860, a more liberal regime is installed. On September 4, 1870, the Republican deputy Gambetta proclaimed the end of the Empire and the restoration of the Third Republic. The elections of 1871, renew the Assembly with a Republican majority. From 1875 democracy is installed in France, which will not be interrupted until the Second World War.

In 1879 the first republican president, Jules Grevy, is elected, popular decisions are made: total freedom of the press, compulsory primary school for everyone from 6 to 13 years old, freedom of association in 1884, election of mayors in the municipalities. In that same year the celebration in Paris for 1889, centenary of the Revolution, the Universal Exhibition is decided. Construction begins on the Eiffel Tower in 1887. Until now, moderate Republicans had controlled the Assembly, but the radical left and socialists are gaining more and more power. On the second Labour Day, in 1891, a large demonstration demands an eight-hour day.

The Case of Captain Dreyfus: A Jewish officer in the French army is wrongfully convicted in 1894 of treason and espionage. This case demonstrates the power of the written press, the "fourth estate" that will continue to strengthen during the 20th century.

The confrontation with the Church intensifies during the Third Republic. As of 1880, the most radical, anticlerical left acquired greater representation and will promote the process of a secular France. It will pass laws such as that of compulsory and secular primary education. Teaching religion at school is prohibited and a day off is provided for parents to take their children to catechism in the parishes. In spite of everything, Betharram will continue fulfilling its mission and will not have

any major inconveniences in the times of Fr. Etchecopar. Things will go further at the beginning of the 20th century, during the time of Superior General Fr. Bourdenne , as secularisation continues to be promoted. In 1901 the Government of Waldeck Rousseau gets the Chambers to approve the Law of Associations. The Combes government will carry this project to the end, with an anticlerical spirit that no one could contain: the persecution of all the educational Congregations, who will be dispossessed, suppressed, dissolved and expelled from France. The expulsion from Betharram was communicated to the Superior General on April 3, 1903, at 2.00pm. This process will culminate with the law of the separation between the Church and the State, which was voted in 1905¹.

In this context, the lives of Fr. Michael Garicoits (1797-1863) and that of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar (1830-1897) unfold. Both will experience the impact of revolutionary ideas and the liberal mentality, with greater or lesser intensity in the flux of more democratic and more authoritarian moments.

I. References of Fr. Garicoits to this situation

1. Fr. Garicoits lived more in the period of the First Republic, the Napoleon I empire, the period of the restoration of the monarchy, the Second Republic and the dictatorship of the Second Empire of Napoleon III. He says the following about the mentality of the time:

If there are no longer any characters, any homes or any lands on earth the revolution is to blame, having replaced the Kingdom of God by the kingdom of man. Even the most honest people forget that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things and they relate everything to humanity. [...] What do we so often see in Christian families, amongst the clergy and in

¹ Cf. Roberto Cornara: “La legge francese del 1° Luglio 1901 e l'espulsione dei Betharramiti dalla Francia” [litt.: The French law of 1st July 1901 and the expulsion of the Betharramites from France]. This is a well-documented study of the historical and legal context in which the Betharramites were expelled. They took refuge in Lesves (Belgium) and in Irun (Spain), near the border with France, where also remained the General Council and where several General Chapters were held until 1920.

religious families? Concern for oneself. Myself the end of all things, of the best of things. Everything is based, degraded by sensuality. [...] One can only see self, think of self, hence all those worldly preoccupations in which the world loses itself. [...] Man is put in the place of God, we become materialistic, humanist instead of divine; instead of being for one another the image of Jesus Christ, referring everything to His Father [...]. The reign of humanity is oblivion of God, revolt against God, the crime of Lucifer who dragged a third of the angels with him into hell. [...] The Antichrist will be the fruits of this self love, egoistic, monstrous, horrible. (DS [Spiritual Doctrine] § 60)

2. Fr. Garicoits refers to Napoleon III's coup d'Etat, which declared the Second Empire.

Remember the deputies of 1852. Were they lacking in knowledge? They were the most enlightened men in France, but they thought they could manage without God. With such dispositions they inaugurated great reforms, wonderful new ways of governing. They were no doubt inspired by philanthropy, yet still showed no interest in the approval of God the true Father of men. The great military generals and the politicians were at a given time declared useless, incapable of working for the good of humanity, and were locked away like hardened criminals... Until that moment these great intellectuals were looked upon as necessary to the nation, now they are pushed aside into a corner as unfit, and even harmful, and all because of a man who gave every sign of ambition, imprudence and temerity. He was at that time a man of God. (DS § 63)

3. Fr. Garicoits declares that obstinate postures, opposition to the superior must be rejected just as the inclination to impurity. The lack of obedience of the priests towards their bishop is the fruit of the spirit of independence of the mentality of society. To combat this mentality he retired to Betharram to found the Congregation.

We must repel with horror, like impure leanings, or vice, all obstinacy, all prejudice against the will of the superior. [...] What has led me to live withdrawn at Betharram is seeing how little the priests obey their bishop and the desire to fight so great an evil. (DS § 221)

4. In Fr. Etchecopar's Letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America (Betharram, 2/3/1887), we find this quote from Letter 257 of Fr. Garicoits to Fr. Pierre Barbé (Betharram, April 26, 1860)². It is interesting to hear Fr. Garicoits affirm that this destructive spirit of *non serviam* is not only in society, but in our hearts, whose reform we have to take care of. We have to combat that spirit by replacing it with the spirit of obedience and love that will bring us many advantages and lead us to happiness.

Forward then, dear Fathers and Brothers, and as our venerable founder wrote: "Courage against the destructive spirit which wants to substitute man for his God by saying, non serviam... This is the reform that we must all proclaim, operate in us and around us by tasting it ourselves, by making others taste its necessity, its advantages, its happiness. God will bless our efforts for this purpose, and in the end, isn't it better to perish in obedience, and in extending the reign of divine obedience?"
(Letter of April 26, 1860)

II. Fr. Etchecopar's references to that mentality that is being created

In the Circular Letters, Fr. Etchecopar describes the political mentality of the time, arising from the Revolution, which has become hostile to ecclesial life and has an impact on society causing people to become indifferent to Christian faith, and generating a de-Christianising movement. Fr. Etchecopar calls it the evil of the moment, characterized by liberalism, individualism, the spirit of independence.

1. Fr. Etchecopar reminds the religious of the Colegio San José that times are bad, as Saint Teresa of Jesus also said: "these are tough times". Evil manifests itself in sensualism, independence. In that context we have to worship God, be humble, patient and take up our Cross.

² cf. Letters of Fr. Garicoits, p. 532-536. Where we find only the beginning of the quotation: "I encourage then, against that destructive spirit...". I did not find the rest of the quotation in the letter indicated.

My brothers, times are bad; hell claims many victims! let us console God with the fervor of our adoration... The spirit of sensualism and independence floods the whole earth like a deluge; let us escape it, let us fight it on the hill of Calvary, in humility, penance and the Ecce venio of the Cross.

(To the religious of San José College in Buenos Aires, Betharram, September 2, 1880)

2. This Circular Letter to the communities of France is written by Fr. Etchecopar in Pau. He writes it after receiving the very positive report of the canonical visitation that Fr. Pierre Barbé has just made to the communities. Fr. Etchecopar blesses God, rejoices and congratulates the religious for the good dispositions that the Father Visitor has found in all of them. He exhorts them to reinforce charity, apostolic zeal and obedience, as our Founder wanted, in order to be able to face the political and social environment that exists in France. That combative sense against that mentality was one of the reasons for Fr. Garicoits to found the Congregation:

Ah! this good Father could not forget the tears he had seen flow from the eyes of several Bishops, dispirited by the spirit of independence and criticism, alas! so widespread, even among the Clergy.

So vowing a fight to the finish against this judgmental, mocking, disobedient, sulky liberalism, etc., etc., with which even good people themselves are infected, [Fr. Garicoits] devoted his whole life to forming a Society comprising only people humble and dedicated, with the motto: Here I am! Forward!

(Circular Letter to the Houses of France, Pau, March 1st, 1886)

3. Fr. Etchecopar reminds the religious of America that seriously living the *Here I am!* with humility, charity and obedience that understands, will be the best way to combat pride, selfishness, and the spirit of insubordination that is the plague of the time.

*And then, always forward, repeating the cry of our little troupe: Ecce Venio! Here I am! **Here I am, according to the words of the founder, in the service of humility and charity, in hatred of the pride and selfishness of the century...** Here I am, united to my Saviour, in his obedience to his Father, and in his zeal for the salvation of souls. **Here I am especially the apostle of respect, of perfect submission to Superiors, in hatred of the spirit of insubordination and selfishness which is the scourge of our time.***

(Letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America, Betharram, June 18, 1886)

4. Fr. Etchecopar reminds the religious of the Colegio San José in Buenos Aires that the secret of Fr. Garicoits to face the liberalism of the moment was humility and dedication to do the will of God: exercising the immensity of charity within the limits of the vocation and of the service that obedience has entrusted to them.

Humble and devoted men so dead to themselves, so enamoured of divine good pleasure that in everything and everywhere they have only a double concern:

1°- To never exceed the limits of one's vocation and job;

*2°- To exercise within these limits the immensity of charity. **Here, my Fathers and my Brothers, is the whole thought and spirit of Father Garicoits: here is his recta sapere, (rule of wisdom) which he never ceased to recommend to us, to fight against the spirit of the age, the fashions of the day or the liberalism of the day.***

*(Circular letter to the religious of the San José College,
Betharram, December 4, 1887)*

5. In Fr. Etchecopar's testimony on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to Fr. Garicoits, he considers part of this inspiration to propose a spirit different from the spirit of independence that is everywhere, even in the Church and that makes the moment in which they are living is so turbulent.

*'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"**.*

(Circular Letter, Betharram, January 10, 1888)

6. Fr. Etchecopar says in this Circular Letter to all religious that, if we are Priests and Apostles of the Sacred Heart, we have to demonstrate it by our style of life, that we have to distinguish ourselves by humility, obedience and love with the that Jesus saved the world and that it is contrary to the style of independence, selfishness that permeates everything.

*It is also manifest that we have a pressing and sublime duty to justify before God and before men our name of Priests and Apostles of the Sacred Heart, **by constantly combating any spirit***

that would be contrary to it, especially the spirit of independence and selfishness, (which comes at us from all sides) by substituting for it this Ecce Venio of humility, obedience and love, which one day saved the world and which, at this hour, must regenerate it.

(Circular letter, Betharram, 12 April 1889)

III. Description of the evil of the age

The French Revolution began a process that ended the old regime and began a path in which the democratic system of representation would be strengthened, recognizing more and more the equality of all citizens before the law. At the beginning, the Revolution persecuted the Church and gave rise to martyrs, in the first half of the 19th century the Church lived more serenely, but from 1860 liberalism gained ground, at first moderate, then more radical, to which was added socialism and the practice a combative secularism that carries with it the declared persecution of the Church.

In the different quotes of point II, Fr. Etchecopar has been unravelling some characteristics of the evil of the century: **spirit of sensualism and revolutionary independence, critical spirit, liberalism that judges, that laughs, that disobeys, that rebels, pride and selfishness of the century, spirit of insubordination.**

Where best we find this evil of the moment described with all the characteristics together is in a letter from Fr. Etchecopar to his brother Evaristo, who has had to emigrate to Argentina.

My dear brother, religion and faith leave societies and governments and retreat to individuals. The governments and the masses no longer have faith... The public mind is perverted... the evil is in the heights and in the masses; it spreads through the press and secret societies... And this evil which dominates is pride, the independence of individual reason, voluptuousness, Protestantism, Pantheism, incredulity,

*indifference, selfishness, idolatry, paganism, all agree to drive God from the earth and reign quietly in his place. They have been trying to win for a long time; but they have an enemy, the Catholic religion, which wants the reign of God on earth, in our hearts, the happiness of man in the service and dependence of God, in the victory over pride and pleasure. There is an enemy, the Catholic Church, whose centre and head is in Rome, in the person of the Pope. The Pope is the bishop of bishops; it is up to him to feed the lambs and their mothers; to him Jesus Christ has promised infallibility in matters of dogma, and to him alone. He is therefore the rock on which the Church rests. If that foundation can be destroyed, the Church is down; but Jesus Christ said to St Peter: you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it...³ The prophecy has been fulfilled for 1800 years; but some always hope to prevail against it, those who will not believe in Jesus Christ. But we, dear brother, cling to the faith of the Sovereign Pontiff, cling to him from the heart, in life and in death. **Souls, spirits are tossed about everywhere, carried away by the winds of all doctrines. Shipwrecks everywhere, even in the clergy, in the good clergy... As for the bishops, there was only one apostate, who is in the service of the king of Piedmont; all the others, even those who are under the knife of the Revolution, respond to everything that Pius IX says. Let it be Amen.***

(To his brother Evariste, Betharram, July 17, 1862).

1. Like Fr. Garicoits, Fr. Etchecopar denounces a process of de-Christianisation and secularisation of society: religion and faith are lacking. And an evil predominates in it, which is pride, independence of individual reason, selfishness and all its consequences...
2. But this socio-political mood has an enemy, the Catholic Church, presided over by the Pope, who cares for lambs and mothers, but even among the good clergy there are still defections... He tells Evariste that

³ Cf. Mt 16,18.

we have to remain faithful to the faith of the Pope, clinging to him from the heart. The dogma of the infallibility of the Pope is voted and defined in Vatican Council I and promulgated by Pope Pius IX on July 18, 1870 with the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*. The Constitution contains all the biblical and theological arguments, but it is also a defense of authority against liberalism, which is considered the evil of the century.

3. Among the evils he includes Protestantism, pantheism, paganism, the press, secret societies, which are all bent on expelling God from society and reigning in his place.
4. We have to be very respectful with the mentality of Fr. Etchecopar, which is the mentality of the Church at that time. For example, the Catholic Church participated in some ecumenical movements throughout the first half of the 20th century. But until the Second Vatican Council, the *pathway of return* was maintained, which considers that the Catholic Church is the one that has remained faithful to the Gospel and that all the other Churches have separated and must be reintegrated into it. Today we are immersed in an ecclesial culture of interreligious dialogue that did not exist in the 19th century.
5. The French Revolution was a socio-political movement that attacked the privileges of the old regime both in the monarchy and in the bourgeoisie. In the Church there were many martyrs who died out of hatred of the faith. We have a different mentality today. Many things that were innovated since the revolution in the social and political spheres, for us are acquired (good) values: democracy, the dignity of work, the Labour Party, the vote for all, which was extended to some aristocrats first, then later to all men and in the 20th century, also to all women. Our mentality is totally different and we cannot measure

Fr. Garicoits and Fr. Etchecopar with our cultural, political, social and even ecclesial scales.

6. Fr. Etchecopar accepts the facts in their complexity, with what they bring both positive and negative. As a Christian, religious and priest, he denounces what is happening: the persecution of the Church, depriving her of the freedom to continue her mission, the liberal mentality of society that absolutises freedom and leaves no room for God. He is not afraid to show his patriotism. He tries to scrutinize the signs of the times and strongly proposes fidelity to the consecrated Betharramite vocation because he is convinced that the Congregation was founded to confront the atmosphere of independence, liberalism and selfishness that is prevailing in society. I believe that he lacks perspective to assess what was positive in so many initiatives and decisions that are being imposed at a social and political level. We now perceive things differently. But neither society nor the Church were prepared to realistically perceive the positive aspects of the changes that were taking place. The oscillations of the three republics, the restoration of the monarchy and the Napoleonic empires with victories and defeats in Europe and Africa show the difficulties that new ideas have to take hold.

IV. Historical events commented by Fr. Etchecopar

Fr. Etchecopar lived during the Second Republic, the Second Empire, the Third Republic, in which democracy was being established more, first moderate and then the power of a more radical left and socialism was imposed, and with it a increasingly open persecution against the Church, with a secular and anticlerical spirit. The entire movement will be institutionalized with the Combes Law of July 7, 1904, which abolishes the Congregations, prohibits them from teaching and

preaching to the religious who in 10 years have to disappear. In 1905, the Separation Law of Church and State is voted, approved in both Chambers and enacted, became law on January 1, 1906. This law proclaims freedom of conscience, guarantees the free exercise of 'cults', does not recognise as its own any particular cult nor does it subsidise any. Father Etchecopar is also a witness in the Dreyfus case.

1. The Crimean War (1853-1856), in which France and England and the Kingdom of Sardinia sided with the Ottoman Empire against Russia, to reject the claims of influence of the Russian Empire in the Black Sea and over the possessions of the declining Turkish empire. This event is highly topical. Napoleon III gives continuity to the Empire, started by Napoleon I, continuing its colonialist expansion both in Europe and in Africa.

*And the news? This long letter is coming to an end and I have only told you old news. You know that since 1848 we have had a provisional government, a Republic, a Consulate and that we have ended up with an Empire. Napoleon III holds the reins of power with skill and energy against all obstacles. It seems that the French do not know any other regime in terms of government, so much are we dominated by the ascendancy of this man who was called crazy and drunk, but who has the blood of Napoleon in his veins. , and his uncle's genius in the head. Socialism, unleashed on two occasions and which almost upset everything, has received a bit, which it bites in silence; the bad heads are in Cayenne, in Africa, in exile. **We are entering a new direction. Russia growing every day, believed itself strong enough to impose on Turkey, its neighbour, a dangerous protectorate; then she raised claims that threatened the independence of Turkey; the powers responsible for maintaining the European balance, alarmed at these invader-like steps, i.e. France and England have tried to safeguard the rights of their protégé, Turkey, by diplomatic notes; the negotiations failed; the Anglo-French fleet has entered the Black Sea, war is inevitable, we***

are talking about a naval battle, where our sailors and the English would have completely defeated the Russian fleet. But nothing positive. Where are we going ? Only god knows.
(To his brother Evariste, College of Saint-Palais, August 3, 1853)

In this other letter, Fr. Etchecopar shows his nationalist side. Patriotism was a very common value at that time, which has subsequently been seen to be rather dated in a more global world. Even then Russia was perceived as a threat to the rest of Europe. The alliance of France with England, Austria and Prussia will support Turkey to free it from the domination of Russia.

I tell you nothing of the family, except that thanks to God, and by a well-marked sign of his goodness, papa and mamma enjoy good health; they have more courage than ever, your last sending produced this effect. We live in very extraordinary times.
Formerly France was 2 fingers away from its loss, the Red Republic devoured us with its hideous saturnalia. Only yesterday Turkey, sinking in decrepitude on the sandy and muddy base of Islamism, was about to fall prey to Russia. Yesterday this last power threatened all of Europe... Today France seems solid and calm as in the Middle Ages. Turkey is recovering carried by this Catholicism (of which it was so long the enemy) and as if carried on the arms of the France, England, Austria and Prussia with the aid of the arms of the two leading powers, has set back the Muscovite by 110 years. Our armies will soon be masters of the Crimea and the naval power of Russia on the Black Sea destroyed⁴. What extraordinary time! We don't think about it. Man stirs, God leads him.

***(To his brother Evariste, Sainte-Croix d'Oloron,
 November 7, 1854)***

⁴ Allusion to the Crimean War (cf. note 2)

2. The letter to the Fathers and brothers of America, from Betharram, November 18, 1880. Fr. Etchecopar imagines the curiosity that all the religious of America will have to know how the recent events of persecution have affected the religious in France and wants to give you some very specific details so that you know how they have come out safe and sound from the persecution that "has swept away such holy and important Institutes, covering France with the most lamentable ruins."

2.1. The decrees issued by the Chambers (of Parliament) are executed with an iron fist with the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Toulouse, expelling the Cardinal Archbishop of Toulouse from the diocesan house, they also have the Lourdes Fathers in their sights, who remain locked up and surrounded for several days by barricades. They were hated more because they did a lot of good. All these facts create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion throughout the region:

When we saw the iron fist executing the decrees, even strike the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Toulouse and brutally chase their cardinal-archbishop from the diocesan house, everyone believed (our friends especially) that it was done (as with the Fathers of Lourdes), with so much hatred because they do so much good. Likewise with us too, especially because of our colleges. On all sides people were saying: Betharram is closed; we warned our students who journeyed to our School of the uselessness of their trip. We telegraphed from Lourdes to Pau to confirm these fears: the Sisters of the Cross of Igon even spent a whole night in prayer at the Chapel, to deflect the lightning rumbling on us. The position of the Fathers of Lourdes aggravated these fears: they remained locked up and barricaded for several days; and as I said, it is certain that hell must have waged an implacable war upon them.

*(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram,
November 18, 1880)*

- 2.2. Until now they had persecuted above all the religious. The two chambers that have achieved the majority of radical liberals and socialists have authorised the Ministry to execute the decrees that made the persecution more aggressive and aimed at limiting the rights of the bishops and undermining the constitution of the Church, trying to dissolve it as much as fast as possible.

Indeed, here are the two Chambers which have just given, despite fine speeches, a vote of confidence in the Ministry executing the decrees... The most draconian laws are drawn up to apply the organic articles of Napoleon 1st, limit the rights of bishops, undermine the Constitution of the Church. Judging by appearances, this work of dissolution will go quickly, because of the majority acquired in the two Chambers, and it is to be feared that after the religious, it will be the turn of the episcopate.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, November 18, 1880)

3. Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Pau, March 17, 1886. Fr. Etchecopar tells the religious of America the facts that show the situation in which they find themselves of political persecution. At the conclusion of the letter he says: *I tell you nothing of external events, nor of the progress of religious persecution. They are ruthless with us, they go slowly to proceed safely. Deus irridebit eos... Mais sobrii estote et vigilate.* (God will laugh at them... For yourselves, be calm but vigilant).

- 3.1. The fact: The Senate has voted the laws of persecution that exclude the Brothers and Sisters from official primary education, the subsidies that still existed for the Church are withdrawn, fiscal laws now impose new taxes on the Congregations to make it impossible for them to continue their educational work, religion is considered an enemy of the state, the press accuses officials of clericalism, for example the director and the chaplain of the Pau high school.

Every day increases the demands on our patriotism and sounds warnings about our Faith!

Tax laws will crush religious congregations with new and enormous impositions.

The last votes of the Senate passed into the persecution code the exclusion of Brothers and Sisters from official primary education. They have withdrawn the funds allocated to a host of parish priests...

Public opinion is accustomed to considering religion as the enemy of the state; everywhere there committees which, in the newspapers, carry out the vengeance of the government and employees accused of clericalism...

As I write to you, the headmaster and the chaplain of the Pau high school, thus denounced by the Independent (newspaper) are, it seems, going to resign.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Pau, March 17, 1886)

- 3.2. Faced with these facts, Fr. Etchecopar asks the religious of the Congregation to reinforce the coherence of their lives in order to truly be what they are in prayer and conduct. He asks everyone to help each other, not to waste time in regrets and vain worries. That they do not complain about the setbacks that life has, cultivate hope and strive to beat the world and themselves in the daily struggle.

And he poses three questions:

Is this action worthy of a son of the Sacred Heart?

Is this going to contribute to the honour of Our Lady of the Beautiful Branch, of the Calvary?

Is this or that going to leave, after me, a useful example, a luminous trail on the pathway of the Primitive Spirit?

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

Let us help ourselves in this clamour,

to be and to appear to be worthy ministers of the Saviour,

*in prayer,
 in work, i
 n a life which knows the pain of exile,
 a surge of hope in the crowns of the fatherland,
 a generous and constant effort,
 to overcome the world and ourselves in the struggles of each
 moment.*
*Let's help each other, let's help each other,
 don't waste time in vain concerns,
 in desires and regrets,
 unworthy of the soldier who has left everything behind
 and cares nothing but to acquit himself by deeds of valour.*
*Do we often say to ourselves:
 is this worthy of a child of the divine heart?
 Will this contribute to the honor of Our Lady of the beautiful
 Branch...of the Calvary?
 Will this or that leave behind me a useful example, a luminous
 trace in the path of the Primitive Spirit?
 May St Joseph pour into our hearts
 a spark of that love and that courage
 which made him so dear to God, so glorious in Heaven after the
 trials and hardships of his life.*
*I will ask him at the feet of our divine Mother:
 for with their help,
 I will return tomorrow to Betharram, after a rest which has given
 me back part of my strength.
 May I make better use of it than in the past!
 I hope for your prayers.*

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Pau, March 17, 1886)

4. The Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America from Betharram, September 27, 1889. The letter begins by revealing the difficult situation they are experiencing and asks everyone for prayers for the general interest of the Congregation:

4.1. And he goes on to say that they (the French) have just had an election that it doesn't look like it's going to end the threats of the past and lessen the evils of the present. On the contrary, the Revolution, more intense and determined than ever, is going *to continue with its disastrous projects, especially with regard to religion.*

4.2. The second issue he is going to touch on is the new law on military service. This law of military service will be one of the reasons for the creation of the Scholasticate of Bethlehem.

It is probable, at the very least, that the new military law will be put into effect next year and that it will affect successively for more or less long periods, the novices, the scholastics, the brothers, the priests even, until they reach the age of 45. Undoubtedly there are still many ballots; but ordinarily, in these sorts of fights, the power prevails especially in the second and last battle.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, September 29, 1889)

4.3. We make an aside, citing a letter dated 9/29/1889, addressed to the Fathers and Brothers of America in which he also speaks of the concern caused by the problems posed by military service in Formation:

What about the people, you ask? What happens to them under martial law? Thereupon, in practice, there is information to be taken, then consequent measures: what I observe, thanking God with all my soul, are the dispositions of our young people, ready for anything, to stay faithful to God and to the Congregation... With this, we must watch and pray, but in no way be disturbed: quite the contrary, in the difficulties, in the hazards of war, we huddle together and we rush, at the voice of the leader with our

eye on the flag : Forward! without delay, without reserve, without return, out of love for God.

May St Michael [Archangel] on this feast, fill us with this spirit with which he animated our venerable founder; and may Father Garicoits from heaven make us and find us worthy of him!

(To the Fathers & Brothers of America, Betharram, September, 29, 1889)

4.4. He then comments on the elections in the *Department* to which Betharram belongs. He criticises the results: M. Léon Say, a Protestant, has been elected, despite the fact that committed Catholics displayed great activity, but the opponents were more daring and energetic and he gives the example of the results of Lestelle. At the end he laments the situation in France and the Church. He wants God's will to be done and for him to thank us so that we are able to remain faithful despite all the demands of the situation.

We have just had elections which do not seem likely to remove the threats of the past, nor diminish the evils of the present. On the contrary, it seems that the revolution, as strong and as resolute as ever, is going to pursue its disastrous projects, especially from the religious point of view. [...].

You must know this; we are in this Department, beaten almost everywhere, and our so religious district has given voted for a Protestant, M. Léon Say. And yet the good people showed more activity than ever; but our enemies displayed an irresistible audacity and energy. May the will of God be done; and may his grace support us and make us capable of all sacrifices!... How many details I could give you about this terrible campaign! It would be a maze from which I cannot escape: I will only tell you that in Lestelle, although at least 2/3 supported the candidate of religion, there were 65 votes for those (candidates) of the principles of 1789. Poor France! poor Church! What bad days, or rather what dark nights will you not have to go through?

*(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram,
September 29, 1889)*

5. The year before his death, 1896, he was outraged by the tone that religious persecution had reached, with the foundation of a Masonic lodge in Paray le Monial, which had exhibited an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the legend "Contemptible heart!" It is an unbearable mockery for Fr. Auguste and he describes this situation as blasphemous in all the letters he writes in those days.

*At Paray-le-Monial, the demon has established a most infernal
Freemason lodge. They have just published an engraving
representing the divine Heart with this blasphemy: Execrable
Heart!
Jesus, on the Cross prayed for his executioners, let us pray for
them.*

*(To his sister Madeleine, Betharram, February 16, 1896;
Cf. To Fr. Jean Magendie, February 20, 1896;
Cf. To Fr. Auguste Dulong, February 20, 1896;
Cf. To Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem,
Betharram, February 6, 1896;
idem, March 3, 1896;
To Fr. Auguste Dulong, Betharram, March 5, 1896).*

V. Gratitude for being able to follow the mission and guidelines for fidelity

On September 4, 1870, the end of the Empire and the restoration of the Third Republic were proclaimed. Democracy is installed in France and will not be interrupted until the Second World War. The elections of 1871, renew the Assembly with a majority of Republicans. Little by little, the most radical positions and the arrival of the socialists are producing increasingly anticlerical laws. We can see Fr. Etchecopar's reaction to that situation. Most of the letters in which he refers to her are from 1880, 1886 and 1889.

1. In the circular letter written from Rome on 12/18/1878, Fr. Etchecopar tells us about the audience he had with Pope Leo XIII. He was previously received by Pius IX and several times by Leo XIII. He introduces himself as Superior General of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram. He informs him about the situation of the Congregation and the Pope gives him this confidence about France:

I have returned from a private audience with the Sovereign Pontiff, moved, and happy more than I can say. Hardly had I pronounced my first words than the Holy Father began to question me about Betharram, its location, the date of our foundation, about our works, the number of our Houses, and in particular, about the business of teaching in our Colleges. Then he gave me a short but sharp exhortation:

“You are dedicated to religious life: attach yourselves to what constitutes its spirit and substance, to piety, to devotion, to sacrifice, to regularity...!

*Take care mainly of the Novitiate. You understand that on the good education of the novices depends all the good of the Institute in the future. In your ministries bring souls to the good God; save souls by prayer and by a zeal which seeks only the glory of the divine Master. **In your colleges apply yourself to forming a truly Christian youth: for this purpose, make efforts all the more generous as the perils of society are greater and France is nearer the abyss...***

France, I love her... I pray for her... I commend this poor and dear France to God. But we must not lose courage... Our duty is to pray, to work in the service of God, and then to rely on Him, as I try to do myself”.

(Circular letter, Rome, December 18, 1878)

2. The circular letter of June 1880. It is a letter full of optimism and even happiness on the part of Fr. Etchecopar. Appreciate the good dispositions of all the religious who, in the midst of the distressing

situation that is being experienced, are serene, carry out the work that has been asked of them, do not worry about tomorrow, trust in the heavenly Father under the gaze of the superiors. In addition to this confidence that they already have, he asks them to be very prudent in all their behaviour in the midst of the harassment that is being experienced: there should be no opportunities for calumnies (against us).

My heart is filled with joy. In the midst of the anxieties of the present time, let a deep peace guard your minds and your hearts; you work at your post, without worrying about tomorrow, trustfully relying on the goodness of the Heavenly Father and the vigilance of your superiors. [...].
To our trust in God we add prudence in all our conduct.
Everywhere we are besieged by visible and invisible enemies who prowl around us to surprise us, slander us, devour us.
Following the advice of our venerable Founder, we must strive not to say anything, to write anything, to take any step that could give rise even to calumny.

(Circular Letter, June 1880)

2.1. It is a great grace to have such a positive position and it will bear fruit: serenity, concord, order, unity with superiors, prompt obedience, charity.

This disposition is a very precious grace. First of all, from the point of view of human wisdom, nothing contributes to the salvation of a ship battered by the storm so much as calm and harmony in following duties and the respect for order under one command, with a prompt obedience.
In turn nothing attracts help from on high more than charity and the union of minds and hearts. And if God is for us, he will turn all things around for our greatest good.

(idem)

2.2. Fr. Etchecopar's call for the religious to rise to the occasion with a mature and responsible conduct, each fulfilling his duties. With great confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the intercession of our Founder, in that of all the religious of the Congregation who preceded us. With great prudence in schools, with students, in relationships with strangers, in the pulpit, about authorities, about elections, about the press. If this prudence is lacking, they may have an excuse to intensify the persecution. At the end he asks that certain prayers be made at certain times for the Congregation.

Also, my dear Fathers and Brothers, let us have confidence in the infinite treasures of his mercy, let us have confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our refuge and consolation; in the Immaculate Heart of his gentle Mother who holds out her Beautiful Branch to the shipwrecked man ready to perish. Let us trust in the intercession of our venerable Founder and of all those dear deceased members of our family, who, we hope, assured of their own happiness, are full of solicitude for us. [...]

Following the advice of our venerable Founder, we must strive not to say anything, to write anything, or take any action that could give rise even to calumny.

*Caution in the colleges vis-à-vis the students;
caution everywhere in dealings with strangers;
caution especially in the pulpit:*

*there the slightest word on the decrees,
civil authorities, elections and even on journalism
would be raised as a political allusion
and could bring the greatest evils on our Institute.*

The Bishop of Bayonne whom we have just visited, in the name of the Council, and who is so devoted to our cause, hopes to save us by claiming us as his Auxiliary Priests.

Pray for His Greatness! May the Lord bless his efforts and reward his zeal for a long and fruitful Episcopate.

Farewell, my dear Fathers and Brothers, I ask the Divine Heart to fill you with its graces for the love and honour of his Divine Mother.

P. S. Every day, from the 23rd of the current to the 2nd of July next, After the evening prayer, we will say the Parce Domine and the Litanies of the Most Holy Virgin three times with the prayer Defende.

During this novena, the Priests will offer the Holy Sacrifice twice for the Congregation and the Brothers will make 2 communions and recite 2 rosaries.

(idem)

3. Letter to the religious of the Colegio San José de Buenos Aires. Bth. 7/19/1880. In it, Fr. Etchecopar points out what must be done in this situation of persecution that they are experiencing both in France and in Argentina. Father Etchecopar lets them know that he is also aware of the civil war situation in Argentina. "We are distressed and worried about each other; However, we learned, by telegraph, almost at the same time, that the civil war began in Buenos Aires and that there were talks to lay down arms and make peace". This situation does not prevent the religious from dedicating themselves to doing their work well in the College.

*Here, too, we live from hand to mouth, **guarding against contingencies, but without noticing the slightest cloud of anxious solicitude at any point.***

It must be so for people, who, deep down, would not be sorry to suffer a little while supporting the rights of Our Lord, and thus to have characteristic traits of the author and purpose of our faith.

*On the other hand, we know positively that while classifying ourselves among the Congregations approved by the Holy See, **we recognise the interplay of diocesan interests with our external existence.** It is likely that the government will not worry*

us, but we have long been on a downward slope in France which makes extreme violence and bloodshed possible at short notice.

Always forward! I often say to myself: We are all by condition and by heart the children of the Blessed Virgin Mary; She directs us: regis nos; and then, nihil deerit; nothing will be lacking to us of what we will need, in peace and war, even in persecution and in trials of every kind.

In the midst of social decomposition, we see appearing and grouping and uniting the elements of the restoration of the edifice, on the foundation of faith; the good become heroes and sacrifice their souls, their position, their livelihood perhaps and that of their children for the defence of right, of equity, of the true freedom which the law of God and his empire give in the hearts... The victims of tyranny, also give it harsh blows, by unmasking it and having it unmasked on the ground of legal claims... Let us pray to God to accept, to bless, to reward so many generous sacrifices, let us join in the work of redemption through the Cross, as St. Alphonsus Liguori said, do not bind the hands of the Lord, through our faults; let us be men of prayer and Rule; innocence and prayer are all-powerful; and then, according to the words of our venerable founder: let us walk imperturbably on the path of abandonment to Providence, let us throw ourselves headlong, soul lost into the bosom of this Father so good, that no one is a Father like Him.

*(To the religious of San José College in Buenos Aires,
Betharram, July 19, 1880)*

4. Letter to the fathers and brothers of America from Betharram, 11/18/1880. In this letter, Fr. Etchecopar recounts how, despite the persecutions that other Congregations have had, Betharram has come out safe and sound from that persecution.

You are impatient to know in some detail how we came through, safe and sound, the persecution which carried off so many holy and important Institutes, covering France with the most lamentable ruins. [...]

- 4.1. The recent events that happened in Toulouse and with the Fathers of Lourdes made us suspect that the same thing was happening in Betharram:

Everyone thought [...] that it was over [...] for us too, mainly because of our colleges.

On all sides people were saying: Betharram is closed; we warned our students who journeyed to our School of the uselessness of their trip.

People telegraphed from Lourdes to Pau to confirm these fears: the sisters of the Croix d'Igon even spent a whole night in prayer at the Chapel, to deflect the lightning rumbling on us.

- 4.2. Fr. Etchecopar explains how they lived through those most difficult moments and how they did not come to suffer any direct attack.

For ourselves, we were ready for all eventualities; we had assigned everyone their home, in case of eviction. We kept watch at daybreak.

Nothing moved against us; no threat, no visit from the commissary, as had happened for the Fathers of Lourdes.

Only the prejudiced newspaper of Pau l'Indépendant, signaled us to the blows of the revolution; fortunately, it did not find an echo;

and without anyone outside being able to suspect the slightest apprehension in us, we found ourselves in the aftermath of these religious catastrophes, without the slightest shock.

It has been said that they were afraid, by striking us, of irritating public opinion too much. It is possible: in any case, we receive from our divine Patroness, a most propitious favour ... Here we

are still standing for some time, to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify souls, to foresee the new trials which threaten religion and to to prepare. [...]

- 4.3. At the end of the letter, Fr. Etchecopar ends by telling the religious of Betharram the best thing they can do at this time: practice humility, apostolic zeal and dedication to the service of the Lord. He tries to discern the will of God in this situation of pressure that they live, due to people spying on their movements, the slander and the denunciations to the Bishop:

May the Lord help us!... May he have mercy on us!

Let us redouble our humility, zeal and devotion to his service.

The days are evil:

hallow both ourselves and others in fear and trembling.

They [the authorities] spy on our every step: we have already been slandered twice before the bishop in a very short time. Pray for us, dear Fathers and Brothers!

And may Our Lady of Calvary fill you with her blessings

5. In the letter to the fathers and brothers of America, Betharram. 12/2/1880, he continues to communicate the elements that he uses to discover the Will of God in such a difficult moment. He uses a thought of Fr. Garicoits that he has already referred to several times in his letters. It is about the argument that he uses 1st... 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 100th idem, idem, idem..., as many times.

Outside, the revolution prepares the most oppressive laws. If the good Lord does not order it, the legal persecution will quickly take its course. Let us pray, let us pray, do not stop praying for the Church and for Betharram.

Farewell, dear Fathers and dear Brothers.

Fr. Garicoits once wrote:

*“1° Under pain of denying our profession of Auxiliary priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, everything in our deliberate conduct must respond: **Here I am, out of love for the will of God, to his Holy Spirit, and to our Superiors, without delay and without return, taking care to deliver ourselves to all the means that the good God and the Superiors will judge appropriate to employ, to redress the deviations of our indeliberate conduct.** – Where our profession of attending to our own perfection and employing ourselves unlike that of others is only a fiction, **or we must make every effort to practice this doctrine.** 2°, 3°, 4° 100° ditto, ditto, ditto; *Ecce venio; fiat voluntas tua in me, sicut in cœlo*”.
I beg you, dear Fathers and Brothers, each to copy these golden words and to meditate on them during the retreat.*

*(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram,
December 2, 1880)*

6. The circular letter to the communities of France, Pau, 3/1/1886, was written after the canonical visit made by Fr. Pierre Barbé, in which he made a very positive report. He blesses God for those holy dispositions that he finds in all religious and asks them to strengthen the bonds of charity, an ardent zeal and to show perfect obedience.

*May God, my Fathers and Brothers, be a thousand times blessed! May he still preserve and develop these happy and holy dispositions! **You know it ; right now we are more than ever a spectacle for Angels and men.***

*Now, it is only by tightening the bonds of charity between us more and more, by inflaming each other with zeal, by giving each other reciprocal examples of the most perfect obedience, **that we will deserve the applause of Heaven, that our works will glorify God, and save souls, despite the hatred and persecution of the wicked.***

What will contribute to maintaining you in these generous dispositions, my Fathers and Brothers, will be to conform yourselves carefully to the wise instructions of the Father Visitor and to remind you often of his observations.

(Circular Letter to the Maisons de France, Pau, March 1, 1886)

7. In the Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, he wonders why they have not succumbed to persecution as has happened to other religious Institutes, *among so many piled-up ruins*. It has been a miracle. But if we have been preserved it is so that we can relieve them in the apostolic gaps they have left with the example of the virtues they practiced. We have the privilege of living community life and offering ourselves to God as an offering with the practice of our vows, since that is what the Christian life consists of.

Let us enter into this ever open Heart, opened by us, opened for us, we who are specially charged with discovering its treasures in the world, by our words, and above all by our example.

For us, who have this duty, especially now that we have been preserved as if by a miracle and for some time at least, in the midst of so many destroyed (apostolic) Institutes, preserved, I say, in order to replace them as best as possible, in order to practice, in their absence, those religious virtues of which they gave such admirable examples....

Oh ! this is, for us, a very great duty!

Why do we stand among so many piles of ruins?

Why, for a few months, perhaps longer, will it be given to us to taste in our various houses, and especially in the Motherhouse, the joys of community life, which are truly a foretaste of the delights of paradise?

Why ! if not to offer to God, (in the absence of so many expelled holy victims), the holocaust of chastity, poverty, obedience, which are so dear to him, if not to offer him worship par excellence, which is perfect christianity religio nihil aliud quam holocaustum. (Christian religion is nothing less than a burnt offering.) St Thomas

Let us do this, my dear Brothers. Our Lady will multiply Her blessings for you.

*(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram,
December 18, 1880)*

8. In the Letter to the fathers and brothers of America that he has written to them from Pau 3/17/1886, Fr. Etchecopar complains about the persecutory actions that continue in a more aggressive way:

Every day increases the demands and the calls on our patriotism and our Faith!

Tax laws will crush religious congregations with new and enormous impositions;

the latest votes of the Senate passed into the persecution code the exclusion of Brothers and Sisters from official primary education. We withdraw the funds allocated to a host of parish priests...

Public opinion is accustomed to considering religion as the enemy of the state;

everywhere there are committees which, in the newspapers, signal the malice of the government employees accused of clericalism... At the time I write to you, the principal and the chaplain of the Pau high school thus denounced by the Independent [Newspaper] are going, it seems, to resign.

*(Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Pau,
March 17, 1886)*

Fr. Etchecopar, always supported by a vision of faith, gives guidelines on how to act in this situation: our behaviour must reveal that we are children of the Sacred Heart and that we contribute to the honour of the Virgin of Betharram. In this way, the situation of persecution becomes an opportunity to live better the primitive spirit of the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits:

*Dear Fathers and Brothers, **let us help each other in this crisis,**
to be and to appear to be worthy ministers of the Saviour, in
prayer; in work,
in a life where there is the pain of exile,
a surge of hope in the crowns of the fatherland!
a generous and constant effort to overcome the world and
ourselves in the struggles of each moment.
Let's help, let's help,
let's not waste time in vain concerns,
in desires and regrets, unworthy of the soldier who left
everything
and cares for nothing but to acquit himself by deeds of valour.
Do we often say to ourselves: is this worthy of a child of the
divine heart?
Will this contribute to the honour of Our Lady of the Beautiful
Branch, of the calvary ?
Will this or that leave behind me a useful example, a luminous
trace in the path of the Primitive Spirit?
May St Joseph pour into our hearts a spark of that love and that
courage which made him so dear to God, so glorious in Heaven
after the trials and hardships of his life.*

(Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Pau, March 17)

Conclusion: Fr. Etchecopar scrutinises the signs of his time

It is embarrassing to us today when Fr. Etchecopar speaks of “the colony” when he refers to the religious and communities that live and work both in Argentina and in Uruguay. It would be a common way of thinking in France, which during the 19th century led a conquering spirit during the two Empires, both in Europe, as well as in Africa and even in Latin America. He does not hide his patriotism at all and is proud of the leading role that France has, for example, in the Crimean War. As a Christian, religious and priest, he finds it hard to accept the republican regime like many Catholics because of its anticlerical nature, until Pope

Leo XIII, supporting the French episcopate, calls the Catholics of France in 1892 to accept the Republic and to learn to live Christian faith in it, however adverse. In this way the Pope thought that it would be easier to combat the anticlerical laws from within.

Beyond that, Fr. Etchecopar is not at all oblivious to what is happening, he feels like a protagonist, owns the situation, defends the faith from the persecution to which it is subjected and does something that was not very common at that time: scrutinise the signs of the times to be able to act in living the faith with Christian realism, with trust in Providence and making the necessary discernment to act from the evangelical values with responsibility, dedication and without setbacks preventing us from being what we are : consecrated people faithful to our vocation and our mission. Fr. Etchecopar is convinced that Saint Michael Garicoits was inspired by the Holy Spirit to found the Congregation that will counteract the liberal and independent spirit with humble behaviour, obedience and charity of those who want to be part of his *"mobile camp"*.

In the introduction to the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, there is talk of the important changes that are taking place at that time, the 60s of the 20th century, in the world. The changes produced in industry, in the economy, in the social and political spheres in the 19th century were no less important; and thanks to the consolidation of these changes, it was possible to continue, to go further with the changes produced after the second world war. And the changes are increasing in the 21st century, thanks to what was achieved in the 20th century. The story is dynamic and proceeds by taking time for the changes to take hold and thus projecting itself later in humanisation.

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council takes a very optimistic reading of what is happening in the world after the Second World War. Without making such an optimistic reading of what happened in the 19th century, the criteria of *Gaudium et Spes* can help us to illuminate and understand Fr. Etchecopar's reflection on liberalism, secularism, the war on the education of the Congregations and the persecution of the Church. Auguste Etchecopar seems to take the

position affirmed by *Gaudium et Spes*, which is not reserved for the Church of the 20th century, but is also found in the social Magisterium of Leo XIII with the *Rerum novarum* of 1891.

To carry out such a task⁵, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. (Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, 4. § 1).

As we have previously pointed out, From the end of the 19th century, together with this movement of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the liturgical, patristic, ecumenical, theological, pastoral, interreligious movements developed during the first half of the 20th century, whose ripe fruit is the Second Vatican Council. If the life of the Church had its difficulties, the Church of our time has not fully stabilised from the renewal that Vatican II called for. As in the nineteenth century there is resistance to the desired *aggiornamento*.

For everything that we have been presenting in this work of Father Etchecopar's circular letters, we can conclude that Father Etchecopar scrutinises the signs of the times, with their limitations certainly, in their context that is indisputably different from ours and discerns the best way to to be faithful to what God asks of Betharram in this confusing context, with so many changes, with a fighting anticlericalism. I want to conclude with another quote from *Gaudium et Spes*.

The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests

⁵ The mission of the Church is: "to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served." (GS 3)

God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

This council, first of all, wishes to assess in this light those values which are most highly prized today and to relate them to their divine source. Insofar as they stem from endowments conferred by God on man, these values are exceedingly good. Yet they are often wrenched from their rightful function by the taint in man's heart, and hence stand in need of purification.

(Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, 11 § 1 & 2)
