

•\• Year of Fr Etchecopar •/\•



The spirit of our founder

Fr Garicoïts

Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Introduction

The expression “spirit of Fr. Garicoits”, used by Fr. Etchecopar in the circular letter from Rome 3/20/1889 has the same content of meaning as the expression “Charism of the Founder”, which we use in the post-conciliar documents on consecrated life. Fr. Etchecopar uses other synonyms such as “the spirit of the Congregation”, the “spirit of our Founder”, the “primitive spirit”, “seal”, “mark”. I provide a quote from a letter from Fr. Etchecopar:

*Still very young, **Fr. Cescas** entered Betharram as a lay brother: his piety, his docility, his gentleness and his modesty made his Superiors judge that there was a priestly vocation there; and the new priest, joined with the work in America, devoted himself to it with that great spirit of our Founder which Father Didace Barbé had inculcated in the hearts of the companions his zeal, which remains the mark and the glory of successors.*

(Circular letter, Sarrance, January 30, 1889)

The spirit of our Founder is an original style of living the Gospel: configuring ourselves with one of its mysteries and committing ourselves to some aspect of its mission. This spirit comes from the pierced Heart of Christ and is continued in all those who, attracted by Saint Michael Garicoits, live it always and everywhere. What a rich way of speaking about the basics! The charism of Fr. Garicoits was based on an experience of encounter with "Jesus, humbled and obedient". This meeting led him to divest himself of self-centredness, and configure himself to Him, acting with humility and obedience, to live for others so as to "obtain for others the same happiness" of living with humility and obedience and living in a dynamic of love, which proceeds from God-who-is-Love and is destined to reach through all humanity. The charism of Fr. Garicoits is the great treasure that Fr. Etchecopar has received. He has interiorised it in his life and feels responsible for transmitting it in its greatest purity to all religious now and in the future.

In a letter that he writes to the community from the ship carrying him from Buenos Aires to Betharram, Fr. Etchecopar explains to the religious of Betharram the three reasons that led him to make that trip to the communities of America.

- The first of these is precisely to verify that the religious preserved and were animated by the spirit of Fr. Garicoits and Fr. Barbé (*"I saw it; ... Yes, I have seen it animated by the spirit of the saints"*).
- The second reason: *« To make them better acquainted with the common Father from whom we all come, Father Michel Garicoits, to uncover to them the treasures of his intelligence, the virtues of his heart, the heroism of his holiness, and above all to highlight the words, the facts, the wonders by which his mission, as founder of our little Institute, is revealed to our eyes. Oh! I do not doubt it: God has placed words on my lips which, during our retreats, have written in our hearts the superhuman image of this venerable Father, in lines of flame which will never be forgotten. To God be the glory! »*

- The third reason for the trip was to strengthen the bonds of obedience and affection between these communities in Argentina and Uruguay and the communities in France.

May 18th 1 p.m.

One last word on my love for America. It will be the last, at least until Lisbon.

I am nearing the end of my distant journey with my children. God has put this project into my heart; he allowed me to accomplish it: blessed be his holy name!

I wanted to see this work of which so much has been spoken, conceived by the saints, founded by the saints, continued by the spirit of Father Garicoïts and Father Barbé. I saw it; yes, what they said was true. Yes, I have seen the work of the saints, I have seen it animated by the spirit of the saints. God gave me this grace; May he be a thousand times blessed!

*I wanted to encourage my sons in the pathway of honour where they show great and inviolable devotion; and for this, to make them better acquainted with the common Father from whom we all come, Father Michel Garicoïts, to uncover to them the treasures of his intelligence, the virtues of his heart, the heroism of his holiness, and above all to highlight the words, the facts, the wonders by which his mission, as founder of our little Institute, is revealed to our eyes. Oh! I do not doubt it: God has placed words on my lips which, during our retreats, have written in our hearts the superhuman image of this venerable Father, in lines of flame which will never be forgotten. To God be the glory! To God the eternal hymn of my gratitude, for having called me to show that we are the sons of the saints: *Filii sanctorum sumus*; and that, to be worthy of our race, we must be, and show ourselves to be, heroes of piety and of religious and apostolic virtue.*

Finally, I wanted to further strengthen the bonds of obedience and love that were always so strong, despite the distance; and which form the essence, the merit and the infinite sweetness of

the sublime life which we have embraced. Did I succeed? Here is a testimony, that of Father Victor Bourdenne, well worthy of closing the expression of my celestial consolations:

“He wrote to me on April 4 that my letter on ordinations etc. would, in more than one heart, arouse enthusiasm... And he added: all of us, at least, we thank Our Lord and the Most Blessed Virgin for the consolations with which he fills your soul. You know how much we loved and esteemed these dear brothers; but it seems to me that they become doubly dear to us since you are among them! We are so touched by the filial veneration with which they surround you! And you, with your goodness as a Father, bring out their virtues and their merits so admirably that they delight all the good and affectionate feelings in our hearts.

[...]

(To the community, on board the ship that left Buenos Aires, May 18, 1892)

I. Dynamics that work within Fr. Garicoits

1. Father Etchecopar has been very attentive to the testimonies that Fr. Garicoits has entrusted to him or those that he shared with all the religious. In the first place, having seen the bishops cry in Betharram because of the disobedience of the priests and the divisions between those who had sworn and those who had not sworn on the Constitution, which emerged from the French Revolution.

He made this confession one day: “The tears that I saw fall from the eyes of the Bishops, inspired me with the project of founding our Institute, but what a slow and painful birth! The obstacles were humanly insurmountable; I regard the existence of this Society as a great miracle”.

(Circular letter, Betharram, May 15, 1890)

2. This situation of the clergy was due to the evil of the moment: the liberal mentality, where personal freedom was a criterion that led to free thought, individualism and personal autonomy, and an affirmation of the "I", which took no account of any reference to God. This produced a great de-Christianization, and was a consequence of the French Revolution. Fr. Etchecopar agreed with Fr. Garicoits on how disastrous this mentality was, which is being imposed at the political-social level and which penetrates even into the Sanctuary and the Church. We can find the description of this mentality in Fr. Garicoits who states the following:

*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. This can be seen on a grand scale amongst the peoples of the world, and on a smaller scale amongst individuals, in families and in religious communities. But here and there, above all here, it is a great disaster. Yes here where it is our profession to spread the Kingdom of God in ourselves and around us, it is far more monstrous than in the world, it is the region of darkness. What do we so often see in Christian families, amongst the clergy and in religious families? **Concern for oneself. 'Myself' the end of all things, of the best of things.** Everything is based, degraded by sensuality. Everything is false and defiled, philosophy, theology, characters, and the highest ministries. One can only see self, think of self, hence all those worldly preoccupations in which the world loses itself. What a loss of time. What monstrosity, what scandal. 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 so that looking at one another we will see God and give Him glory. 'Ut videant opera vestra bona et glorificent Patrem vestrum qui in caelis est'. (Mt 5, 16). 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven'.*

The reign of humanity is the oblivion of God, revolt against God, the crime of Lucifer who dragged a third of the angels with him into hell. It is the crime which will bring about the reign of Antichrist. Indeed when humanity has expelled God to a certain extent then we will see the end of the world. The Antichrist will be the fruits of this self love, egoistic, monstrous, horrible. Do we want to cure the world and cure ourselves? Seek God in all things, offer everything to God that He might reign in us and over His enemies. (DS § 60)

That is why the fourth paragraph of the Founder's Manifesto is so important, which was not included in the 1969 edition of the Rule of Life, while it was recovered in the 2012 edition: In this paragraph, Fr. Garicoits expresses the situation of society and the Church after the French Revolution:

This is how God loves us: this is how Jesus Christ our Lord and creator became an indescribable attraction for our hearts, a perfect model and an all-powerful help. But we human beings are cold before God! Even among the priests there are very few who say as their divine Master did: "Here I am, Ita, Pater!"² »

3. Fr. Augusto Etchecopar expresses the same content in expressions like this one that are constantly repeated, at least in the Circular Letters. I think that, due to his insistence, these are expressions that he had surely heard from Fr. Garicoits. Garicoits saw in the socio-political situation a challenge to founding the Congregation.

*Here, it was a question of **founding a Society capable of fighting against this liberalism, so widespread everywhere nowadays that its influence permeates the Sanctuary and the Church itself.***
(Circular letter, Pau, 1st March 1886.)

*Also, **waging war to the death against this judgmental, mocking, disobedient, sulky liberalism, etc., etc., with which the***

good themselves are infected, he [Father Garicoits] devoted his entire life to forming a Society relying on humble and devoted instruments, with the motto: Here I am! Forward!

(Circular letter to the Houses in France, March 1885)

Here, it was a question of founding a Society capable of fighting against this liberalism, so widespread everywhere nowadays that its influence permeates the Sanctuary and the Church itself: A Society of men stripped of everything, especially of their own pride; interiorly delivered to the law of love, exteriorly to the law of obedience and having as motto: My God! here I am, with your Divine Son! without delay, without reserve, without return, out of love for you!

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 15 March 1890)

4. Fr. Etchecopar bears witness to what was in the heart of Fr. Garicoits. It is about an ardour or interior fire, when he related the external facts with his love and desire to configure himself with the Heart of Jesus.

I remember the energy flowing from the soul of our venerable founder, when he recalled our special consecration to this adorable Heart, and our solemn profession to love him, to imitate him, to propagate his worship and the reign of its virtues.

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

II. Objective, means and method of the new Foundation

In the circular letter to the houses of France, Betharram. 3/1/1885, Fr. Etchecopar describes to us how Fr. Garicoits proceeded to found the Congregation. He conveys to us his goal, his means and his method as well as the attitudes that have guided him in this important and difficult undertaking.

Fr. Etchecopar writes this circular letter to the houses of France after speaking with Fr. Pierre Barbé who has visited them. The positive results and the fruits that are expected from that visit give him great joy. In all communities there are real good and excellent dispositions. He blesses God for this and asks him to sustain the ardour of all religious for the glory of the Virgin Mary.

To achieve this, we must follow in the footsteps of our revered Founder, continue to the finish, using the same means and method to reach it that he left to his children.

1. His goal, in giving birth to the Institute,

*was to form and bring together, men in love with the Heart of Jesus,
imbued with His feelings,
devoted to His interests,
in union with the Heart of his Divine Mother,
having as its motto the cry of his obedience,
from the moment he was born in the womb of
the Immaculate Virgin,
until the hour when he expired on the arms of the Cross
Ecce venio ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam (Hb. 10).
(here I am to do your will O God, Heb 10).
Humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens usque ad
mortem, mortem autem crucis
(he emptied himself and became obedient unto death Phil 2)*

2. What are the ways to achieve this?

*1° Outwardly, the Rule and the common life, living poor, humble, crucified, and guided by the Rule;
2. Inwardly, the spirit or the law of love, whose eye is ever fixed on divine good pleasure, and whose hand is ever stretched out to accomplish it with virginal delicacy. Quae placita sunt ei facie semper (I always do what pleases him John 8.29).*

3. The method of Father Garicoits:

*simply consists in relating everything to obedience
the purest,
the most filial,
the most confident
highest by motive,
in the smallest details of life,
in the exercise of the most humble employments.*

4. The spirit of Fr. Garicoïts in this founding enterprise :

Non praeire, sed sequi. Do not anticipate Providence, but when it has spoken, forward! despite all the obstacles; respect infinitely the limits of grace and position while exercising within these limits the immensity of charity.

To discover the will of God and his least desires, to renounce all illusions and deviations of the heart; dispose of oneself in the most perfect imitation of our Divine Master,

*be open to anyone who has the right to ask,
obey out of love rather than any other motive,
without delay,
without reserve,
without return. »¹*

5. It all began in the Shrine of Bétharram, where he received the consolation that confirmed him in the choice he made in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, with Fr. Leblanc sj, in Toulouse.

These principles and this art of our venerable Founder were the invariable rule of his conduct from the day when, prostrate in our ancient Chapel, his soul flooded with an extraordinary light. He embraced the plan that came from on high, and devoted himself to achieve It.

*(Circular letter to the Houses in France,
Betharram, 1st March 1885)*

III. Inspiration of P. Garicoits to found the new Institute

According to Fr. Etchecopar, Fr. Garicoits did not act mechanically or psychologically, he had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to found the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This testimony is found in circular letter of Bethlehem. From 1/10/1888. It is as if framed by the citation of two Letters of Fr. Garicoits: no.426 addressed to a priest of the

¹ There are here the elements of the “Method of Fr. Garicoits for discerning and practising the will of God”. Cf. Letters of Father Garicoits, letter no. 164, footnote no. 1.

Sacred Heart (undated) and no.293, addressed to Fr. Didace Barbé, (without place of origin but dated: 10/29/1860) (cf. Fr. Miéyaa CSMG). Let us analyse this Letter, the only one to testify so clearly to the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits:

1. Fr. Leblanc had told him clearly in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, in Toulouse, that he did not have to belong to an order already founded, but that he had to be the founder of a new Congregation, with an original charism:

*You see, my Fathers and my Brothers, despite his deep humility, **Father Garicoïts believed in a work of new creation**, with its own purpose, organisation, spirit and means;*

2. That God had chosen him and he had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to found a new institute in the Church, because it was needed in those troubled times due to the revolutionary spirit of independence:

He believed that the God of the little and the poor had chosen him for this purpose, the shepherd of the last house of the hamlet of Ibarre, a massacre, a nothingness, and that he had 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 to the Sanctuary...”

3. And that the Holy Spirit had also inspired him what the charism had to be, the originality of the institute and how Fr. Garicoits had to act:

Here is your standard and your rallying cry ... You will walk at the head with the banner 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.”

4. Fr. Etchecopar also tells us that Fr. Garicoits believed in that inner voice that spoke to him, and raised the standard (like the Eternal King in the meditation on the two standards in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius) and launched the cry of convocation and launched to realise the content of that inspiration:

He believed that voice; he seized that banner, and, in his own 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 !!

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

5. Fr. Etchecopar's statement seems to contradict the statement made by the Bishop of Bayonne, meeting in Betharram with the incipient Betharramite community: ‘He was a saint, but he was wrong (....)’. As if to cover up the Bishop's mistake in that evening statement, Fr. Etchecopar provides proof that Fr. Garicoits had not been wrong and cites the Book of Wisdom 10.10 which the Bishop included in the homily at Fr. Garicoits funeral,

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

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 Fr Garicoits 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).

6. Faced with the truth of the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits, the events that are taking place prove that it was the Bishop of Bayonne who was wrong. Fr. Auguste exhorts the religious of that time and ours to be and show ourselves to be, by our conduct, imitators of Fr. Garicoits:

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?

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 10 January 1888)

IV. Biblical inspiration of the founding experience of Fr. Garicoits

Where does Fr. Garicoits get his inspiration from? According to Fr. Etchecopar, who knew Fr. Garicoits well and had listened to many confidences, his inspiration came from the calls of the ecclesial and social reality in which he lived and from the meditation and contemplation of the person of Jesus who offers himself to the Father for the salvation of men, through his life and death, as the Gospel tells us.

1. This would be the synthesis of the charismatic originality of Saint Michael Garicoits as expressed by Fr. Etchecopar: The life of the Master Jesus, whose person, according to Fr. Garicoits, is concentrated in his Sacred Heart, in the mystery of the Incarnation, in obedience, in "Here I am to do your will". This was shown in the humility or humbling of Jesus from the moment of his conception, in obedience throughout his life, (whose food was to do the will of the one who sent him) to "remove this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done" and that culminated in

the giving of his life on the Cross. As to following him: united to the Heart of Jesus by an offering and configuration with his sentiments, we consecrate ourselves to the purposes of his mission, reproducing his attitudes, his actions, his way of treating people as brothers, children in the Son, of the same Father and of the Heart of Mary, our Mother. All this Fr. Garicoits drinks from the inspiring source of the Word of God, as Fr. Etchecopar transmits to us in this Letter. Towards the end he makes a little comment about Phil. 2, 5ff. It refers to the mystery of the Incarnation through the Immaculate Virgin. But later, he provides the two quotes on which the Manifesto is based:

*His goal, in giving birth to the Institute, was to form and bring together, men in love with the Heart of Jesus, imbued with His feelings, devoted to His interests, in union with the Heart of his Divine Mother, having as its motto the cry of his obedience, **from the moment he was born in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin, until the hour when he expired on the arms of the Cross. Ecce venio ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam (here I am to do your will O God (Heb 10). Humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis (he emptied himself and became obedient unto death (Phil 2).***
(Circular letter, Houses of France, Bétharram, 1st March 1885)

2. Previously, in the Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America Bth. On 12/4/1881, Fr. Auguste had already sent them letter 293 of Fr. Garicoits (cf. Mièyàa: Letters of St. Michael Garicoits) where the quotation from Phil 2, 7-8 can be found in French. It is a letter from the beginning of the year, in which Fr. Garicoits asks the religious to insist with their teachers on the importance of denying oneself and progressing in virtue in all areas of life. Garicoits heads this circular letter with these words: Ecce Venio! Fiat voluntas tua in me sicut in Coelo! Here I am! Your will be done in me as in heaven! (cf. SMG Letters) And he follows the letter quote like this:

« Bétharram 1861 ²

At the beginning of this new year, I feel more and more the need to recommend that you insist with your teachers on the following points:

1. On the solid foundation of self-denial, and progress in virtue, which must precede and accompany both the study of literature and the manner of using it.

Without this foundation, all good scholarship and good grades only produce a vain brilliance... ruins.

It cannot be otherwise. God from whom all good proceeds, asks for instruments stripped of everything, above all of themselves, entirely abandoned, in their hearts, to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the law of love and charity which he was pleased to engrave there, and to the great law of obedience, imitating under this double Our Lord Jesus-Christ: Spiritus Domini super me, propter quod unxit me. (the spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me... Luke 4.18) Factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem Crucis (He became obedient unto death even death on a cross... Philippians 2:8).

Under pain of denying our Profession of Auxiliary Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and placing ourselves under the standard of Satan, we must in all our deliberate conduct respond to the Holy Spirit and to our Superiors:

Here I am ! out of love for the will of my God, without delay, without reserve and without return! Taking great care to give ourselves over to all the means that the good God and the Superiors will deem appropriate to employ, to redress the deviations of our indeliberate conduct.

[...] 2°, 3°, 4°, 100°, idem, idem, idem. Ecce Venio, fiat voluntas tua in me, sicut in Cælo (may your will be done in me as in heaven!)]”

In this letter 293 of Fr. Garicoits, sent in its entirety by Fr. Auguste to fathers and brothers in America, we again find the quotation from

²) *Lettres du P. Garicoïts, Lettre circulaire 293, p. 574. Cf. note 1454 : « Copie d'une circulaire que St Michel a adressé aux supérieurs des maisons d'éducation, annoncée dans une lettre du P. Barbé (voir lettre 292), reproduite presque intégralement dans le recueil des Pensées. P. 449 et à Bourdenne, Vie et Œuvres, p. 539. C'est l'une des pages les plus denses de la Doctrine spirituelle.*

Philippians 2, but not from Hebrews 10. However, Fr. Garicoits provides another quotation that could replace it, that of Lk 4. 18: *Ecce venio Fiat will tua, in me sicut in coelo*. This is a petition from the Our Father. Fr. Garicoits glosses it by prefixing the *Ecce venio* of Heb 10, 5, and substituting “thus on earth” for “in me”. There is no doubt that our FVD is inspired by this quote from the Lord's Prayer, which both Fr. Garicoits and later Fr. Etchecopar would place at the top of important documents and also of many letters:

Fr. Garicoits adds, in this circular letter 293, a quote from Luke 4, 18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me", adding a new element: the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In my opinion, Fr. Auguste, by quoting Fr. Garicoits, understands the foundation of Fr. Garicoits' inspiration, which he also knew from his own testimonies, as we have said in point 2 of this study. In this Gospel quote, Jesus says that he is inspired by the Holy Spirit. In letter 293, Fr. Garicoits applies it to himself and to the Betharramites expressing that, following the example of Jesus, both he and the other Betharramites are inspired by the Holy Spirit, who has engraved in their hearts the double law of love and obedience.

In this letter from Fr. Garicoits we find three times the *Ecce Venio! Here I am*” that expresses a willingness to love and do the will of God:

- A. In the header: *Ecce Venio! Fiat voluntas tua in me sicut in Caelo! Here I am! Your will be done in me as in heaven!* (cf. SMG letters). Garicoits glosses the request of the Our Father.
- B. “Here I am, without delay, without reservation, without turning back, for the love of God's will”,
- C. *Ecce venio! Fiat voluntas tua, in me sicut in caelo!* He repeats the gloss at the top of the letter.

The originality of this letter consists in stating that point one is repeated 2, 3, 4, and up to 100 times: Everything is reduced and repeated up to a hundred times: *Ecce venio! Fiat voluntas tua, in me sicut in coelo!* This

expression that is repeated three times wants to express that both Fr. Garicoits and his disciples have to live in this way that God wants:

God from whom all good proceeds, asks for instruments stripped of everything, above all of themselves, entirely abandoned, in their hearts, to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the law of love and charity which he was pleased to engrave there, and to the great law of obedience, imitating under this double dynamic Our Lord Jesus-Christ.

(Circular letter to the Houses of France, Bétharram 1st March 1885, Saint Michael Garicoits' letter nr. 293)

V. The wealth of content of the Ecce Venio! Here I am!

The second time that Fr. Garicoits refers to that venio! in Letter 293, which Fr. Etchecopar includes almost completely in circular letter (Cf. Bth 3/1/1885, as explained above) expresses a synthesis of the content of Fr. Garicoits. It does not separate the Ecce venio from the love of God's will, but neither can we separate it from "he emptied himself": "Here I am, without delay, without reservation, without turning back, for love of God's will". It deals with love and obedience, the humbling and surrender of the "Ecce venio": the "exinanibit seipsum" of Jesus who strips himself of everything, to do the Will of the Father. Following Jesus, our "Ecce venio" has the same dynamic as in Jesus "emptying ourselves" to do the will of the Father. This is how Fr. Etchecopar presents the "Here I Am":

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. For this, dear Fathers and Brothers, it is necessary to suffer a lot and always...

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

We know that Here I am comes from Psalm 49, 7-9:

“You did not want a victim or an oblation; but you gave me a listening ear; You didn't ask for burnt offerings or sacrifices, so I said, “Here I am. In the book of the Law it is written what I have to do: I love. My God, your will, and your law is in my heart».

God has given the believer an attentive ear, as he gave it to the suffering servant of Isaiah, 50, 4-5, so that he is able to decide what he has to do: instead of victims, oblations, holocausts and sacrifices of animals, the suffering servant has to do the will of his God, whose law is engraved on his heart.

We also know that Heb 10, 5-10 is inspired by Psalm 40:

That is why Christ, **when entering the world, said: "You have not wanted sacrifice or oblation; instead, you have given me a body. You have not looked favourably on burnt offerings or expiatory sacrifices. Then I said: Here I am, I come – as it is written about me in the book of the Law – to do, God, your will"**. He begins by saying: "You have not wanted or looked with pleasure on sacrifices, burnt offerings, or expiatory sacrifices", to despite the fact that they are prescribed by the Law. And then he adds: "Here I am, I come to do your will". Thus he declares the first regime abolished to establish the second. And by virtue of this will we remain sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ, done once for all.

We have to consider the following original elements in Hb 10, 5-10:

- a). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews cites Psalm 40, but not with the Hebrew text, but with the Greek text of the LXX translation, which where the Hebrew put "you opened my ear", translates as "you gave me a body".
- b). This allows the author of the Letter to the Hebrews to speak to us not of a proclamation of Jesus but of an experience that consists in offering

himself to the Father through the body, in the Incarnation, in such a way that when he enters the world he says "Here I am ", at the moment of his virginal conception, he begins to give himself body and soul to fulfil the will of the Father, who because he loves us, wants him to give his life on the Cross for us, to save us.

c). Doing the will is more concrete in the Letter to the Hebrews than in Psalm 40: it is about the life of Jesus, who does not live for himself, but to please the Father in everything, dedicated to healing the broken hearts of men and restore them in their integral being of children and brothers. He totally stripped of himself and turned into a pure gift.

d). The *Ecce venio* (here I am) are the words that express the availability of Jesus, from the moment of his virginal conception. They will also be the words that express the same availability of the Betharramite missionary disciples who, like Fr. Garicoits, have decided to imitate him in that availability, which carries with it humility, obedience and love (Manifesto).

1. Living life from the spirituality of **Here I am** is, ultimately, making life an offering to the Father, united with that of Jesus. Sacrificing our self-referentiality and doing the will of God, we join Jesus who gave his life to the Father to save men. In the first circular letter that Fr. Etchecopar writes from Betharam, after returning from America, he gives the reasons why he was so interested in making the visit to the communities of Argentina and Uruguay and insists on that offering of life united to the Master's:

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

For this favour, crowning all the others, we offer, hasten to offer, I beg you, the Magnificat of the most perfect gratitude, and the Ecce Venio of the most complete devotion.

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 29 May 1892)

2. In Fr. Rocq's obituary letter, he tells us how this father made the offering of his life to the Lord, just as the Magi offered him their gifts. And then he calls all the religious to make that same offering to the Father as Fr. Garicoits did. He ends by telling us that both the life and death of our Founder were an offering to the Father.

May we all benefit from the lessons of such an edifying end and deserve the grace of a most holy death by this perfect oblation of our whole selves represented by the gifts of the Magi and which our venerable Founder constantly recommended to us.

He wanted, in fact, that each of our acts should offer to the divine Majesty a combination of love and austerity and profound humility. He could approve neither of a love without mortification nor of a zeal separated from humble prayer.

“God, he repeated, from whom all good things come, asks above all for men stripped of everything, [...] without ever going beyond this grace or crossing the limits of their employment”. These principles and this doctrine, were consecrated by his life, and sealed by his death.

You know his last and supreme word: Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam!

After a life so full of heroic labours, he attributed nothing but nothingness and sin to himself, only asked for mercy and great mercy only, and abandoned himself body and soul into the bosom of God. This surge of humility, confidence and absolute abandonment was was the meaning of his entire life.

Is it any wonder that a ray of glory shines around his revered grave?

Let us go forward, my Fathers and my Brothers, drawn by the scent of his perfumes on the path he has marked out for us; with many others, it will take you straight to Heaven.

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16 January 1887)

3. **Here I am** is a lifestyle that, imprinted in our hearts, as it was in the Heart of Jesus, and it characterises our words and our actions in order to bear witness to the Gospel, as Jesus did:

Thanks be to Heaven, the Tribunal of the Founder's writings has begun; and, last Monday, for 4 hours, I delivered to the Ecclesiastical Tribunal about 140 signed letters and 160 copies of other signed letters from our revered Father.

Oh ! Let us ourselves be, by our works, his credentials and the living expression of his doctrine and his teaching!! To this end, let us imprint on each of our thoughts and actions the Ecce Venio of his humility and dedication!!! What a consolation, at the hour of my departure, to tell me that you are resolved to it, and that this will be your motto, what you show to all, Superiors and Inferiors!

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 1st November 1891)

4. In this Circular Letter, Fr. Etchecopar, with all the members of the General Chapter, informs all the religious of the Congregation of the recent trip of the Superior General to Rome. There, Fr. Etchecopar, advised by competent persons, modified the Constitutions. The General Chapter has unanimously approved and adopted this work and has decided to present it to the Holy See, as it considers it to be of great benefit to the entire Congregation. This new wording includes: a new spiritual Rule, a body of Constitutions and a Ceremonial. It is a more complete and orderly wording and brings us closer to the spirit of our Founder and of the Holy See. And he ends by saying:

Also we hope, not without reason, from the divine goodness, that Pius IX will bless this form of life, will sanction it by condescending to grant us soon the formal approval of the Institute.

Redouble therefore, dear Fathers and Brothers, both your thanksgiving for the past and your humble and earnest prayers for the future.

All of you, with this faith, this piety, this devotion of which you give indisputable proofs, be and show yourselves to be ever more worthy sons, ever more faithful, more perfect imitators of this admirable Father who gave birth to us all in the religious life, in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Like him, with him let us say and repeat even more by our actions than by our speeches: Ecce venio! Eamus! Father, here I am! Forward!

*(Circular letter, Bétharram, 8 June 1877,
Feast of the Sacred Heart)*

5. These are the exclamations of Fr. Etchecopar when communicating to the entire Congregation the small volume of "Thoughts" that he has produced in Sarrance. They express the admiration, the impact, and the joy produced by the spirituality of Fr. Garicoits, engraved on us as the seal of a regenerating Ecce venio:

To excite our zeal, following the visions of the last General Chapter, I have just finished, at Sarrance, a small collection of letters from the Founder, and some notes on the Conferences and interviews of the last six years of his life. Oh ! What lofty vision! What marvelous perfection! What celestial beauty in the plan of the building! What an indomitable will for execution! What fiery zeal to imprint on us the stamp of a regenerating Ecce Venio!

(Circular letter, Oloron, 18 February 1889)

6. In these three obituaries, Fr. Etchecopar transmits to us how the "Here I am" that was burned into the personalities of these religious: In that of Br. Ladevèze, he tells us that his obedience bore the "Here I am" written in his life, the seal of the Founder::

His obedience bore the seal of our venerable Founder: "Here I am without delay, without reserve and without return, out of

love for you, O my God! The divine will was the nourishment in which he delighted and the tenderly cherished mother in whose arms he enjoyed an unalterable rest.

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 23 January 1888)

In the obituary of a Brother scholastic, José Victor Laforgue, who died at the age of 19, Fr. Etchecopar tells us that he wanted life but that he did not think of himself, and that he accepted what God wanted. He sought only the glory that he could give to God:

*Death ! At 19, we can hardly imagine it, even when death knocks on the door with redoubled knocks... And our poor TB victim nurtured the desire to live and be cared for, the hope of healing: who could blame him? Not me, of course. I find very legitimate, in a young man, this desire and this hope, when, as in the present case, one has in view only the glory of God and one relies only on his virtue. **With these noble sentiments one is basically disposed to all the wishes of Heaven; and when the generous illusion dissipates, one is ready to say to death as to life: Ecce venio, here I am!***

This dear child was already quite ready: so he made his final preparations with the greatest tranquility: an hour before his death, he wanted to pronounce his perpetual vows, and recited in a very intelligible voice: "I make a perpetual vow of poverty, chastity and obedience". Purified by this second baptism, the soul flew away, without the slightest shock, without the slightest effort.

(Circular letter, Betharram, April 19, 1894).

Fr. Etchecopar, in the obituary of Fr. Higuères, addresses the young religious, conveying how, in the midst of all discussions, Fr. Higuères asked them to grow in piety, which will bring many benefits and without which everything will sink.

Young people, young priests of the Congregation, whom he loved, whom he visited as the hope of the future, do you remember the word he constantly mixed with the most joyful frolics? “My friends, be pious; piety, piety!! this is the foundation without which everything will soon crumble, but with it, you will possess all that is good”.

*And he was right; **he was only the faithful echo of our Founder, of his motto: Here I am! By love!***

(Circular letter, Betharram, July 7, 1892)

7. Here I am is also a reason for thanksgiving for all the gifts received in the lives of all religious, he puts it in the plural and unites it with the **fiat**. At the same time he expresses his spiritual hopes for the Year that has just begun:

*Blessed be the Divine Saviour and His Most Holy for the graces you have received during these holidays. Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis! Glory to God, actions of gratitude and love for Retreats, Ordinations, interior renewals, the victories of Our Lord in the depths of souls, the invasions of his Spirit of sacrifice! **Glory to God and peace to your souls for all the Ecce Venio, all the Fiats of generosity that bring together the strength and the joy of consciousness built on the Divine Will.** And may Our Lord and His Most Holy Mother, removing the scourges, the obstacles that his justice and our sins heap up on our heads, grant you a new school year, fruitful for all in the fruits of salvation and perfection.*

*(Circular letter to the Fathers of America,
Betharram, January 3, 1887)*

8. To live the **Ecce venio** in all situations of life will be to practice the spirit of our adorable Master and to oppose the contrary spirit, that is the liberalism of our time that spreads independence from God and selfishness, thinking that I am the centre of 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. Beg our adorable Master, high on the Cross, to fill us with his spirit! Ask the Virgin, her Mother and our Sovereign, to obtain it for us, by the merits of her pains!! Then, let everyone strive to abound in it always more: ut abundetis magis (1cor 15.58 [Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4,1])

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 12 April 1889)

VI. The Sacred Heart of Jesus

Fr. Garicoits knew, appreciated and lived the devotion to the Sacred Heart. As Fr. Duvignau and Fr. Jean-Luc tell us, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was more than a devotion. It was a spirituality, inspired more by the French School, than by the movement created by the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary of Alacoque, in Paray-le-Monial. Saint Michael Garicoits in the Founder's Manifesto does not speak of the Heart of Jesus, but of the "Son", "Son of God", "Jesus", "Jesus Christ". This is understandable, because the Manifesto was written in 1838. Saint Michael in the Manifesto calls the group that wants to live the following of "an overwhelmed and obedient Jesus" called by Fr. Garicoits "Priests of Bétharram". The Congregation will not be called "Auxiliary Priests of the Sacred Heart" until the Bishop of Bayonne, Mgr. Lacroix, gives it that name in 1841. Fr. Garicoits assumes the name that the Bishop has given to the Congregation and of his own accord will explain the Christological reference of the charism by answering the question: "Why does our society bear the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus?"

But Fr. Etchecopar goes much deeper into this spirituality of the Sacred Heart. This is I think for two fundamental reasons: The first is historical:

this devotion, with a great tradition in the Church, finds great diffusion thanks to the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque starting on December 27, 1673. It developed more in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. Father Etchecopar quotes Saint Margaret Mary several times. Of Fr. Garicoits we do not know quotes from the Saint. But in addition, on August 23, 1856, Pius IX "accepting the supplications of the bishops of France, and of almost the entire Catholic world, extended the feast of the Sacred Heart to the entire Church." On June 16, 1875, the request to build a building dedicated to the Sacred Heart was honored as Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque had requested. "The Archbishop of Paris laid the first stone of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Montmartre (based on a French Act of Parliament of July 24, 1873). It was finished in 1919". Both in France and in Spain, in that period, this devotion had political connotations, opposed to the prevailing liberalism in society. The second reason is personal. Fr. Auguste Etchecopar manifests himself in his letters as a very affectionate man and, in addition to other reasons, the search engine has found the word "heart" in the Spanish version 3,286 times, most of them with an 'affective' meaning. He often uses the word "Heart" referring to the person of Jesus, including God and the Father. Also with the adjectives "Sacred" and even "divine": Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In addition, the Heart of Jesus appears many times united to the Heart of Mary, or the Heart of Mary is spoken of. The devotion to the two Hearts of Jesus and Mary also comes from the French School of spirituality, above all from St. John Eudes. I believe that Fr. Etchecopar deepens the spirituality centered on the Heart of Jesus that he received from Fr. Garicoits, although he is also influenced by the Paray-le-Monial movement. They have several homilies and conferences on this spirituality of the Heart of Jesus.

For Father Etchecopar, the source of all reality in the Congregation is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Everything comes from that pierced Heart, from which we have all come. In that Heart we take impulse to rise higher and higher in humanity and in the divinisation of our lives. In our Rule of Life

2012, art. 2, the last part of the underlined text that we quote here is quoted.

*The feelings which these memories [of his trip to America] arouse so strongly are in no way diminished by the deep impression caused by my second pilgrimage to the Holy Places, nor by the presence of all the great theatres where the divine mysteries of our religion occurred. **On the contrary : These blessed Holy Places, consecrated by direct action, by the tears and the blood of the Saviour, remind me more vividly than anywhere else of the links that bind our Institute and its works to their first author: this Crèche, this Calvary and this side of the Holy Crucified One. This pierced heart cries out to me where we came from, to whom we must attribute everything, bring everything back and the foundation on which we must constantly support and rise higher.***

*It is therefore here, at the feet of the alpha and the Omega of all things, consequently **at the feet of our principle and our end, that I like to recapitulate our little history and in particular that of the colony, for find there the mark of the Crib and Calvary, the seal of the divine, and apply to it the words of our founder: "God founded this work; he has consecrated it, he will preserve it and advance it in his service. »***

[...]

*Farewell, farewell, very dear Father; my good brothers, my dear Children, farewell but not goodbye... **For I cannot leave you in heart and soul; you will find me present, in spirit, everywhere, in the bedroom, in the refectory, in recreation, in the chapel, especially on working days and on Sundays. I will be there united to everything and everyone and on your side, you will see me, you will look at me, you will hear me, and you will be in my heart ever ready to welcome you as best I can, to embrace you like very dear children and bring you to the heart of Our Lord through the intercession of his august Mother and of St Joseph.***

(To Father Magendie and the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bethlehem, December 12, 1892)

In the following quote, Fr. Etchecopar tells us what is contained in the Heart of Jesus: It is a Heart that is always open to us and offers us the virtues of humility and charity; salvation, consolation and eternal glory. He protects us because in the midst of so many ruins we remain standing, when many feel defeated. Where many have been scattered, we can enjoy community life, and in the absence of other victims who have had to retreat due to persecution, it gives us the opportunity to offer our life in poverty, chastity and obedience. I have not found any phrase that can suggest a direct reference to the Manifesto among the letters that I have investigated. But in his letters, Fr. Etchecopar seems to comment on the Manifesto, he makes us delve into its contents. The Manifesto was found by Fr. Duvignau in notes from a notebook of Fr. Cassou, taken at conferences given by Fr. Garicoits, to explain the spiritual originality of Betharram. Duvignau says that the Manifesto is the synthesis of everything that Saint Michael Garicoits has written.

Yes, very often, you are present in my heart, dear Fathers and Brothers of the colony; and I commend you most especially to divine goodness, through the merits of Father Garicoits.

I ask for you his Spirit, his spirit of humility and charity which is the summary of all priestly and religious Christian truths...

One removes obstacles, the other unites us to God, humility is the foundation, charity is the beginning of the building...

Both are contained in the Heart of our model, which cries out to us:

Learn from me for I am gentle and humble;

Gentle, good and loving. For this, to be humble is an indispensable condition ... humble, detached from self, deeply penetrated, practically convinced of our nothingness, of our profound unworthiness.

*Let us enter, dear Fathers and Brothers, **let us enter ever further into this divine Heart where we find: salvation, consolations and glory.** (St Bernard).*

Salvation for all our sins.

Consolations in all our troubles.

Eternal glory, as a reward.

Let us enter, dear Fathers and Brothers, let us enter ever further into this divine Heart where we find: salvation, consolations and glory. (St Bernard).

Salvation for all our sins.

Consolations in all our troubles.

Eternal glory, as a reward.

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.

(Circular letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America, Bétharram, 18 December 1880)

Fr. Etchecopar presented us with the Heart of Jesus, with all its qualities, above all with its humility and its charity. These are qualities that we can find in the Founder's Manifesto. But the Manifesto also offers us, along

with the value of humbling and the love of Jesus, the value of obedience. Always love and also humility and obedience, "Jesus humbled and obedient": For Jesus, humility and obedience are the mood of his life given to the Father and his brothers. This is what Fr. Etchecopar says, exhorting us to engrave in our hearts the fire of the spirit of the Heart of Jesus and of Fr. Garicoits, which is our heritage.

In the obituary of Brother Martin, Father Etchecopar presents us with the humble Brother Martin intimately united to the Heart of Jesus that made him meek and humble of heart as He is. Thus, so many brothers of the Congregation are models in living the spirit of Fr. Garicoits.

Detached from external things, people, places and jobs, not by insensitivity, but by virtue; only one privation would have caused him real torment: the privation of Holy Communion. We have seen him tremble at the mere threat of this misfortune: hoc erat illi unus dolor, hac esca privari (StJohn. Chrysostom.).

Also the God of the Eucharist loved to descend daily, except one day a week, into the heart of his friend. Cum parvulis sermocinatio et habitaculum eius; and in this frequent commerce the interior Master instructed and formed in his image the attentive and docile servant, and imbued him with the sentiments of his adorable heart, a depth of humility and charity! Mitis et humilis corde. [...]

Oh ! my dear Fathers and Brothers, how useful piety is to everything, and what perfume it leaves behind! Oh! How advantageous it is to live humbly, generously, constantly, in the Heart of Jesus, under the wings of the divine Mother, to die there a sweet and precious death before God: Pretiosa in conspectu Domini! After the burial, a brother reminded me of one of his impressions: "I have been edified by seeing since my entry into Betharram the brothers die in peace and even in joy. I heard one of them say to me in his agony: I ask the Lord to extend, for his glory, the Congregation throughout the whole world".

Beg, my Fathers and my Brothers, beg Our Crucified Saviour and Our Lady of Calvary to spread the flames of their love in our hearts!

(Circular letter, Betharram, March 7, 1894)

Throughout all of Fr. Etchecopar's correspondence, the spirituality of the Sacred Heart that he learned from his teacher, Fr. Garicoits, is developed. It may be the subject of another work, coming out of the Circular Letters. I found this summary that I want to pass on to you:

I stop at this thought, to let you savour the perfume. Let us all cling more and more to the heart of this beloved founder; close our ranks around his standard. Let us unite in his spirit of great detachment and heroic love. Let's do this in each of our actions. And then, cor unum et anima una in corde Christi: cor Micaelis nostri cor erat Christi.

(Letter to Father Magendie, Betharram, 4/8/1892)

VII. The Exhortations of Fr. Etchecopar that cultivate and preserve the freshness of the Charism

The Circular Letters, which are addressed to all religious or groups of religious both in France and in America, are full of exhortations asking religious to be faithful to the inheritance received from the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Fr. Garicoits. On the other hand, these exhortations preserve the freshness of that hidden treasure that must be manifested by the conduct of the disciples of Fr. Garicoits, all the religious of Betharram.

1. In this Circular Letter, Fr. Etchecopar shows his sorrow because at this point in the year, seven religious have already died, but he says that he accepts the will of God. Later he affirms that in the project of the Congregation that God had inspired in Fr. Garicoits, the religious-brothers had a prominent place and that he would have told them this:

“You are not mercenaries, but sons; do not think of the whip of the slaves; you have to be motivated only by love.” He then praises Brother Fermín and Father Sarthy. And he ends with the following exhortation:

Let us walk, my Fathers and Brothers, let us follow in their footsteps; like them, let us preserve with jealous care the sacred deposit of the primitive spirit. Let us make the virtues of the ancients shine in all their brilliance, and at such a solemn moment when the cause of our venerable Founder is being pursued, may his holiness shines above all in the life of his children, and all our conduct be the most irrefutable testimony rendered before men and before the angels to the heroic virtues of our glorious Father!

(Circular letter, Betharram, 13/11/1887)

2. In this letter, written from Bethlehem, Fr. Etchecopar recalls the enthusiasm with which he experienced the Visit to Argentina and Uruguay. He feels full of joy contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, in the very place where Jesus was born. He praises the work in America for its poor, difficult and dedicated origins, which are the hallmark of the Gospel, and for how the mission has developed there. He compares the original poverty of the life of Jesus with the poverty of the origin of all our works: Betharram, San José...

*Yes, my friends, children of the Crib, of Nazareth and of Calvary, doubly marked with the sign of Our Lord Jesus Christ with the seal of Betharram, with the seal of the colony and of San José, you will always have to walk a narrow path of humility, of work, of suffering: this is your heritage, this is your glory and that of the congregation; it must also be for you, in the ever recurring and ever new trials, the source of immense consolation and the principle of indomitable courage, for you must say to yourselves: **Thus did our Fathers, sow in tears for a prodigious harvest; thus you must follow them, fertilize your furrow, come***

what may, in the hope of a reward that God has kept secret, but which will come in its time.

And you will be able to see that by this noble disinterestedness, you will carry out the wish of our founder; you will appear to be, and you will be in fact, his true and legitimate children: humble and devoted...humble, always humble in the heart; in the midst of success, saying in the spirit of truth, in the presence of truth itself: servi inutiles sumus ; we are only useless servants. And if success eludes your efforts, it makes you doubly humble, but never defeated, never defeated: he alone is our foundation, he alone is the ground of our being. A soul may be dominated by the thoughts of the earth, but not a soul which dominates the whole earth by the thought of heaven, and by the life in heaven: conversatio nostra in Coelis est. Our dialogue is in heaven.

(Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Bethlehem, 12 December 1892)

3. Circular letter written by Fr. Etchecopar in the month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom he offers the hearts of all religious. He also remembers the fire that devoured Fr. Garicoits when he thought of us as consecrated to the Heart of Jesus. He imagines him in heaven asking for fidelity to a vocation so beautiful and so appropriate to the needs of our time. And then he encourages all religious to contemplate and copy the admirable example that God has given us in our holy Founder:

It is with great consolation that I offer, in this month (June), your hearts to the Divine Heart of our good Master.

I remember the impulses that emanated from the soul of the venerable founder, when he recalled our special consecration to this adorable Heart, and our solemn profession to love him, to imitate him, to propagate his worship and the reign of its virtues. I imagine him, in Heaven, redoubling his prayers to obtain from each of us growing fidelity to this vocation so beautiful, so appropriate to current needs!

Let us think about it, dear Fathers and Brothers... let us often look at our coat of arms, then go to the bottom of our hearts to analyse the feelings that shape our words and our actions; and if we discover traits of resemblance to the Model given by God, chosen by us, let us give thanks to him from whom all gifts flow; that above all of union with the heart and love of our God... If, on the contrary, we notice a conflict between the banner and the soldier who raises it, pray earnestly to the Divine Leader who leads us, to give us a heart new and a righteous mind, worthy of him and our vows.

*And then, always forward, repeating the cry of our little troupe: **Ecce Venio! Here I am!***

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

4. This letter is written by Fr. Etchecopar at the beginning of the year, to thank you (the religious) for the Christmas and New Year greetings and to congratulate you for the interest you put in faithfully living the spirit of the Founder. It is a Circular Letter in which Fr. Etchecopar communicates that clear testimony about the conviction of the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits by the Holy Spirit. This testimony is framed with two Letters of Fr. Garicoits: c. 426 and c. 293 in Letters of Fr. Garicoits. After the letters of Fr. Garicoits and the testimony on inspiration, Fr. Etchecopar makes this exhortation to all religious, encouraging them to be faithful to what they have promised with consistent conduct.

*What teaching! 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 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!

(Circular letter, Bétharram, 10 January 1888)

5. In this Letter to the religious of France, Fr. Etchecopar communicates to them the joy he has felt with the very positive report of the visits of Fr. Pierre Barbé. "Everywhere there is real good and excellent dispositions." Bless the Lord for it. He then exposes the objective, the means, the method and the spirit with which Fr. Garicoits makes the foundation. He paints a portrait of Fr. Garicoits and ends with this exhortation to religious to live intensely the spirit of the Founder:

“We saw him (Saint Michael Garicoïts), without a break and without rest, until his last breath, founding, raising, strengthening the sacred work that has become our heritage.

Ah! with the help of God, we will keep it, will we not, my dear Fathers and Brothers, by the same means which established it, by expending ourselves with a big heart and a resolute will: impense, magno cord and animo volenti.

We do not lack challenges: everywhere, at the Mother House, in the Residences, in the work of the Missions and in teaching, there are many gaps to fill, for lack of sufficient personnel. Let us try to make up for it by minimising any shortcomings, by helping each other, by ‘multiplying ourselves’, by going where the general good calls us. That done, let us be silent and wait in peace for God's time.

However, apply yourself, I pray you, with all your strength, to grow in piety which is useful for everything: Pietas ad omnia utilis est (Piety is helpful in all things) (1 Tim 4.8) and in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, source of infinite treasure. And in these evil days, when Hell attacks us with fury, let us keep our eyes raised towards our dear Calvary, and do not let go for a moment of the Blessed Branch that our Mother holds out to us; yes, our Mother, our All, after her Divine Son.

*(Letter circular to the Houses of France,
Bétharram, 1st March 1885)*

6. In this other letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, he insists several times on the spirit that must characterise them: To continue the work of the Founder, they must go unnoticed (self-effacing) and give themselves (dedicate) to God and their neighbor, saying "Here I am" to the double law of Love and obedience. In addition, they have to appear before God and their superiors confessing their nothingness and with great confidence, to be sent to the most difficult places to offer themselves as a sacrifice to the Lord. They also have to be stripped of self-centredness to please the Father in everything by doing his will, to practice love that has no limits. within the limits of their

vocation and the grace they have received. In this the whole spirit of Fr. Garicoits is summed up, the rectitude that he savoured and did not stop recommending to us, the heritage that he left us, with which he opposed the liberal ideology of the time. On this foundation he raised his work, which was blessed by God, despite so many obstacles. If we are open, the Holy Spirit will engrave that mood in our hearts.

*In summary, I feel a great consolation in thinking that you are the children of Our Lady of the Calvary, and that over there, so far, **beyond the seas, you continue the work of our founder, with the spirit by which he was animated.** He often repeated to us: We must remember what we are; we must witness to what we are, by our state, and by our profession.*

And, what of our revered and heroic Father? What did he propose? What did he want for his Congregation?

Self-effacing and devoted men, saying: "Here I am" to the double law that must govern us:

1°- Within us, to the law of love of the Holy Spirit who never ceases to cry out, in the depths of our hearts: Father! Here I am!

2°- Externally, to the great law of obedience.

Self-effacing and devoted men, presenting themselves in everything and always recognizing and confessing their nothingness, abandoned, given body and soul inwardly to the feeling of the purest, most perfect love; abandoned bodies and souls given externally into the hands of their superiors, to be placed, moved, warned, corrected and missioned and sticking to their duty with sacrifice and devotion with the means at their disposal and chosen by them, and this until to death, even death on a cross!

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.

Such are the foundations on which he built his work, the solid stone on which it has withstood many assaults, and where it has been blessed by God, in spite of many obstacles.

Oh may God, during your retreats, give you the grace of that intelligence, of that hunger inside, of that supernatural love for the doctrine of our Doctor and Father... To build elsewhere following another plan would be to diminish, weaken, wreck the work of our Father! Absit! Absit!

So, O Holy Spirit, Spirit of our Founder who bursts into tongues of fire in words and in virtues, engrave in us this doctrine and this generosity... For this, uproot and demolish these fashions of the age, these modern trends that everywhere weaken characters, corrupt intelligence and encourage decadence and the collapse.

Dear Fathers and Brothers, you will embrace with new enthusiasm this sublime means of sanctification which is our own heritage; I mean the study and the more perfect imitation of the virtues and the spirit of Father Garicoits, in your lives; with these directions what a retreat you will make! what fruits you will derive from it! how you will engrave the seal of our Father on everything, how you will draw down on you and on us the greatest blessings from on high!

*(Letter to the religious of San José de Buenos Aires College,
Betharram, December 4, 1887)*

Conclusion

As we have been able to observe throughout this study, Fr. Etchecopar has a precise and complete knowledge of what the spirit of Fr. Garicoits is, the charism. He knows it first of all because of how Fr. Garicoits lives it, because of his life testimony. He also knows it through the writings of Fr.

Garicoits and of the religious Betharramites that he has known and he transmits it to us in his circular letters. He does not seem to know what we today call “the Founder's Manifesto” (cf DS § 1). But the elements that we have been contributing, taken from his circular letters, seem like a very complete commentary on the “Founder's Manifesto”, which is very important for us today. We make a small synthesis of all these elements.

1. The spirit of Fr. Garicoits is the spirit of the Gospel in which Jesus refers everything to the Father and to one's brethren. This opposes revolutionary liberalism, which is the mentality of the time that is evil, because it centres everything on the “self”. Father Garicoits refers to it in the fourth paragraph of the Manifesto and with these words: “What led me to retire to Betharram was having seen little obedience from the priest to his bishop, and the desire to combat such a great evil ” (DS § 221), which is why he has seen bishops cry. Fr. Etchecopar says that he founded the Congregation to combat that liberalism and that selfishness, which is the evil of the times and has penetrated even into the Sanctuary. He reiterates the content of this expression, no doubt because he has heard it many times from Fr. Garicoits.
2. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, has the evangelical spirit that is totally opposed to the evil spirit of the age. Jesus shows us with his conduct the Love that God has for man, and lives to please the Father, just as Fr. Garicoits was able to contemplate in Heb 10.5-10 and Phil 2. 5-11. A loving Jesus who “does nothing by himself, but moved by the Spirit of God”. That he has not come to do his will, but the Father's.
3. He is the “humbled and obedient Jesus” of the Manifesto. Humbled means "reduced to nothing" because he has divested himself of "his equality with God", instead of jealously guarding it and seeking to be served, he takes on the human condition of a servant. He has also been stripped of the rights of his human condition in his passion and death on the Cross. Stripped of what could close him on himself, of his

own will, he was in a position to give himself, in love to the Father and to men, "constantly abandoned to the orders of God, to suffer, (carry his cross) and do whatever he wants."

4. After a total dispossession, Jesus is in a position to fulfill the two laws, the interior one of love, "which the Spirit is accustomed to engrave on hearts" and the exterior one of obedience. Both love and obedience are two essential characteristics of the Gospel: He obeys who does not do his own will, but is open to the calls that guide him to do the will of Another or The Other. That call does not express a whim of the one who calls, but that voice always contains what God expects from his Son, since he begot him and since he gave him a body. The will of God, expressed in that call, was recorded in his condition as the Incarnate Word and expressed in his human behaviour: in his being, in his feelings, in his relationships, in his words, in the giving of his life without that contradictions can prevent it. A love stronger than death.
5. The exterior law of obedience disposes Jesus to love: to give the best of himself to please the Father and the brothers that the Father gave him, by becoming a man, without pleasing himself, giving his life for them and trusting that the Father would fulfill his life in the Resurrection. Love is an exchange of gifts: the Father gives life to the Son and he gives it to him, thinking only of pleasing him and making him happy, giving it for the salvation of all. Jesus gives his life for all men and encourages them to give theirs with him, to the brothers. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, remain in my love" (Jn. 15, 9).
6. 6. "The priests of Betharram have felt drawn to dedicate themselves to imitating Jesus, humbled and obedient and to give themselves totally to procure the same happiness for others" . It is about reproducing in the life of the religious of Betharram the traits of the person of Jesus, the Incarnate Word. The dispossession of everything that has us focused and closed on our "ego": prestige, self-image, strategies to

emerge victorious, pleasure, envy, living for oneself. Obedience, which is renunciation of one's own will in order to listen to the calls of God and of others, which responds to the project of humanity that has been engraved in my heart since the day I was created, which was broken in me by sin and that I find reflected in the person of Jesus, the Son of God, in his way of living, relating, acting and speaking. That dispossession and that obedience guarantees me a freedom to dispose of my life and to be able to give it so that others have a better quality of life. And on the other hand, it disposes me to accept the gift that others give me of the best they have, so that I too have an increasingly better quality of life and can bring to fulfillment in me what the Creator wanted for me from the beginning. beginning. Love is communication of goods between the lover and the beloved. In this way, there is something of God and of others in me and something of mine in others and in God, although in God, all that I have been able to offer him is a pure gift of his mercy.

7. It is a configuration with Christ and a reality of communion with our brethren through Him. Only in this way can I say with Saint Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; the life that I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2, 19-20). Here the religious of Betharram seeks the criteria of discernment to be able to make decisions and love and serve in everything. This happens in very specific and limited "positions" in which events and relationships with God as son, with others as brothers, with creation as responsible user and committed steward take place. In this way I will enrich myself in the pilgrimage of life until I reach the fullness that the good Father has reserved for me according to his adorable Will when creating me and redeeming me.
8. Dispossession, obedience and dedication are expressed very well by Fr. Etchecopar with a quote from Fr. Garicoits in this letter:

the first and most indispensable, as well as the most precious, is to present ourselves constantly to God and to his representatives, recognising and confessing our nothingness, abandoning ourselves to them, self-effacing and devoted, saying to each of them: Here I am! Give us this spirit of your Divine Son, Our Lord”.

(Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, January 3, 1881 and DS § 9)

This is the content of ¡Ecce venio! Here I am!, lived by Fr. Garicoits and Fr. Etchecopar, as well as all the generations of religious of Betharram who preceded us on this path. It is also what we live today, religious and laity, if we are authentic Betharramites. It is a lifestyle as in Jesus that begins with the “Here I am, to do your will” of the Virginal Conception: Here I am, I come to do your will; it continues in an obedient mood throughout his life: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn 4, 34) and culminates in Gethsemane and on the Cross: "Remove this cup from me, but let it not be done." my will but yours" (Mk.14, 36). United to Jesus, we will also do the Father's will and not our own, and in this way, we will make our lives an offering to the Father to serve our brothers, as we did on the day of our Baptism, on our decisions made through the Spiritual Exercises and on the day of our religious profession. Here we are, my God, Give us the spirit of your divine Son, Our Lord!
