



Fr. Garicoits

according to Fr. Etchecopar

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Introduction

Fr Auguste Etchecopar is the person who knew Fr. Garicoits best. They admired each other. Saint Michael did not make Father Etchecopar do the novitiate again, when leaving the Society of the Holy Cross to join Betharram. Fr. Etchecopar reminded Fr. Garicoits of the holiness of his uncle Evariste Etchecopar, whom he had met when he was studying at Saint Palais. After spending two years at the College of Oloron, he appointed him Master of Novices at the age of 25. What confidence in him he must have had!

Fr. Etchecopar found a treasure in Betharram, Fr. Garicoits. When he began to live with him, he experienced a great inspiration that he would never forget. We can say that the encounter with Saint Michael was his founding experience giving a new and definitive orientation to his life: the experience of the consecrated life, which until then he had ignored.

This is how Fr. Duvignau describes the atmosphere in Betharram when Fr. Etchecopar arrived with the other seven members of Holy Cross:

“The virtue of Father Garicoits was so ravishing; so much did he exercise, by the aura of his holiness, an ascendancy which made the most painful sacrifices lovable. Everything at Betharram, men and things, then reflected the virtues of its founder. This house was a sanctuary where the soul immediately felt filled with recollection, prayer and fervor. It was a community whose

members had a distinct stamp of exquisite simplicity, austere poverty, expansive charity, unfailing obedience.”¹

P. Etchecopar had a very intimate relationship with Fr. Garicoits. And besides, he is very attentive to collect all the memories that Fr. Garicoits communicates about his life or experiences, in community meetings, in informal talks, in conferences, etc. We have several writings that have been classified as follows: “Fr. Etchecopar, secretary of the Founder”, “Fr. Etchecopar, witness of the Founder”, “Etchecopar Superior”. Fr. Auguste Etchecopar personally took charge of collecting the testimonies of the people who had known Fr. Garicoits and kept them in written form. We have the written testimony that he gave before the diocesan court of the Cause of Beatification. We have a duplicated Letter, addressed to Leo XIII, which is a short life of Saint Michael Garicoits². All this material was passed on to Fr. Basilide Bourdenne so that he could write the “life and Work of the Venerable Michael Garicoits”. He took it upon himself to prepare an edition of the writings of Fr. Garicoits in the little book “Thoughts of Fr. Garicoits”.

1. The three portraits of Fr. Garicoits

Fr. Etchecopar gives us three portraits of Fr. Garicoits: One in a letter to Fr. Ramière sj, announcing the death of Fr. Garicoits a few days after it happened; another in a letter to his brother Severino, who is in Tucumán (Argentina) and another in a circular letter to the Houses of France but twenty years after the death of Fr. Garicoits.

1.1 In the letter he wrote to Fr. Ramière sj, Director of the Apostolate of Prayer, a month after the death of Fr. Garicoits, he says this about him:

¹ Fr. Pierre Duvignau, *L’Homme au visage de lumière*, p. 40

² Draft letter, kept in the Betharram Archives. It is the Postulatory Letter, with which Fr. Etchécopar asks for the introduction of the Cause of Fr. Garicoits. Published in the third edition of the life and letters of the R.P. Michael Garicoits (Bourdenne, 1918), p. 542.

Our superior was a true ascetic; he ate little, slept five hours, worked almost without respite, took virtually no recreation, displayed an unalterable kindness, charity, grace, although interrupted, torn in various directions by a multitude occupations, continual details. Work made him forget about food and sleep. Up at three o'clock, in his study at four o'clock, he gave a class in philosophy at half-past six, one in theology at eleven o'clock, sometimes remained in the confessional until four in the afternoon, without having taken no food all day, then returned to his books, gave a lecture to the priests, and gave the rest of the day to study and other offices which concern the superior of a community. He seemed indefatigable, indifferent to everything; this total and constant self-denial he drew above all from the respect and love he had devoted to the will of the Lord. Fiat voluntas tua! This is the continual cry of his heart. Respect for this divine will is what he always preached and sought to inculcate; forgetting or disrespecting this adorable will is what he constantly and excessively fought against. He sought it with virginal delicacy, to fulfil it in style and as he would say, with energy. That is the goal towards which one must always aim. In short, this is the story of his life.

However, the will of God asked three things in particular of Fr. Garicoits:

1° That he endeavor to found the work of the Diocesan Auxiliary Priests of Betharram;

2° That he help establish the Daughters of the Cross in our country;

3° That he direct people in the choice of a state of life. »

(To Fr. Henri Ramière, S. J., Director of the Messenger of the Sacred Heart, 4/6/1863)

1.2. Six months after the death of Fr. Garicoits, Fr. Auguste Etchecopar writes a letter to his brother Severin from Bétharram, November 20, 1863. Six months after the event, he tells him the following about Fr. Garicoits:

Did I not write to you to announce the death of the good and holy Fr. Garicoits, our superior? What a loss we have had! He was our assured guide, our father full of tenderness, our unshakeable support, our strength in all our weaknesses and all our needs, our model in everything, who traced and facilitated the path to Eternity.

(To his brother Séverin, Betharram, 11/20/1863)

1.3. Twenty two years later. In the circular letter to the houses of France, written in Betharram, on March 1, 1885, Fr. Etchecopar makes the following portrait of Fr. Garicoits:

*From then on, for 30 years, we saw him,
austere as an anchorite,
simple as a child,
tender like a mother,
humble as a useless servant,
tireless in activity,
of invincible strength and gentleness,
at the same time organiser, teacher, chaplain,
director of souls, wise in his counsels,
fearless in action, supporting his speeches with his
examples; we witnessed him, without a break and without
rest until his last breath, founding, raising, strengthening
the sacred work that has become our heritage.*

(Circular Letter to the houses of France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)

2. Other traits of the personality of Fr. Garicoits

2.1. In the last circular letter that he writes from Bethlehem, Fr. Etchecopar meditates on the words that the angel of Bethlehem says to the shepherds: 'And this will serve as a sign for you' (Lk 2, 12). From there he tells the Betharramite religious what are the signs God gives us today, both in the time of Fr. Etchecopar and in our time for those of us who read it today:

“the wretched state in which Our Lord plunged and the miracle evident of his divinity,...It is the sign of God, the miracle of God, the demonstration of God”. It is the Paschal Mystery. This also applies to religious life, to the Founder and his work, to the extraordinary virtues of those who preceded us and who are now dead; to the foundation of our Houses that truly emerged from nothing; above all, the work of America and that of Bethlehem, to the approval of the Institute by the Holy See, to the testimonies of our Bishops, and, finally, to the Cause of Fr. Garicoits. About Fr. Garicoits as a sign and miracle of God he says the following:

But it is no less certain, in my eyes, that by grace and goodness from on high, the same divine seal is engraved on the forehead of our Founder and his Work.

Who more than he rejoiced and even gloried in a more abject poverty?

And did not God fertilise his virginal purity, making him the Father of so many Apostles and Virgins?

Has he not above all blessed his humble and generous obedience by the glory which surrounds his tomb and which pursues his venerated name beyond the seas?

Yes, the Lord was with him, enlightening him with his wisdom, animating him with his virtue; Justum deduxit Dominus per vias rectas. (The Lord guides the just in right ways) God is the author of our Congregation; he consecrated it, he governs it. And hoc vobis signum. (this will be a sign to you) It is up to us, his children, to reproduce the divine seal of our Father, joyful in poverty, crucified in the world, although living in the midst of the world; especially proud to obey! It is up to us to show ourselves and to be like our Father, like our Divine Saviour, in the Crib and on Calvary, the sign of God, the miracle of God, the wisdom and virtue of God: Dei virtutem and Dei sapientiam.

(Circular Letter, Bethlehem, 2/1/1893)

2.2. Father Etchecopar makes the portrait of Father Garicoits already mentioned in 1.3. presenting him from the moment he began a new life,

when he returned from the Spiritual Exercises with Fr. Leblanc and received the illuminating consolation of his election, prostrated in the sanctuary of Betharram. In the second part of the quote, he commits all the religious of yesterday and today to preserve the heritage that we have received in the midst of all the difficulties that we may find ourselves in throughout history.

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.

From then on, for 30 years, we saw him, austere... founding, raising, strengthening the sacred work that has become our heritage (as cited in n° 1. 3 already)

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 generous heart and a resolute will: Expense, magno cord and animo volenti.

We will not miss the trials: 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 as best as we can, 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 hour.

(Circular Letter to the houses of France, Betharram, 1/3/1885)

The circular letter written by Fr. Etchecopar in Betharram on 5/15/1890, is a meditation on the phrase of Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus: "Was it not necessary for the Messiah to endure those sufferings and so enter into his glory?" (Luke 24, 26). In this meditation, Fr. Etchecopar gives us an Easter presentation of Fr. Garicoits. A Fr Garicoits configured with a patient Christ, dead and risen. It is "the law of the Gospel" realised in Fr. Garicoits.

At the sight of the Pontifical Brief approving our Constitutions, I sought, (speaking for myself) the reason for this new and signal favour; I found no other than the Gospel law recalled above: the cross alone leads to triumph, and it was necessary that Fr Garicoits, after having suffered much, following his Master, should one day participate in his glory: et ita intrare in gloriam suam.(and so enter into his glory)

(Circular letter; Betharram, 15/5/1890)

2.3. The objective of the foundation was very grand and due to this very fact it had to encounter many difficulties, humanly insurmountable. The existence of the Society of Betharram is like a miracle. Fr. Garicoits could not have achieved it with his own strength and strategies.

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 giving birth! The obstacles were humanly insurmountable; I regard the existence of this Society as a great miracle”.

It had to be so; the plan of the Founder was so lofty! The more a work is heroic, the more it is opposed by nature pushed to its last entrenchment and by Satan attacked at the very heart of his empire.

Here, it was a question of founding a Society capable of fighting against this liberalism, everywhere so widespread nowadays that its influence penetrates the Sanctuary and even Religion itself:

“A Society of people stripped of everything, especially of themselves; 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! »

What wisdom was needed to conceive such a plan and strength to execute it and bring it to a successful conclusion!

(Circular letter; Betharram, 15/5/1890)

2.4. Difficulties that came from the demands of the foundation because Fr. Garicoits was clearly aware of his limitations and that he was “nobody”.

He was also aware of the “hidden manna” that consists in trusting in the help of God, who had asked him for such a thing, in the midst of contradictions. This made Fr. Garicoits consider these difficulties as challenges that asked him for greater dedication and effort, in order to achieve the goal of founding the new Institute, as God wanted. The secret of Fr. Garicoits' performance was to constantly present himself before God and his representatives, recognising and confessing his nothingness, abandoning himself to them, going unnoticed, giving himself with all his capabilities and saying: **“Here I am! Give me that spirit of your Divine Son, Our Lord.”** Fr. Etchecopar provides two quotes from Fr. Garicoits that express the difficulties he was going through and how he lived them. I believe that he refers at one point to the suffering of Fr. Garicoits who humanly, at the end of his days, sees the situation of the Congregation very badly, even at risk of dissolving, due to the difficulties and confusion created by the Bishop's different way of understand the Society of Betharram.

How difficult it is among so many different characters and temperaments to establish one and the same spirit, so well balanced, that in all things obedience rules charity and charity animates obedience. In such just measure, let there be no illusion in piety, no excess in good!

And yet, this sublime goal, the Founder pursued it until his last breath. Oh ! That he must have suffered when he wrote the following lines:

“Why then not confine oneself to exercising, within the limits of one's position, the immensity of charity?... When one has fixed ideas, it is difficult to get rid of them! You think you're wasting your time by not succeeding according to your own imagination. Above all, we do not know how to understand, taste and embrace magno and animo volenti et constanti an obscurity, a sterility, even failures to which we see ourselves reduced by obedience...”

My God ! My God ! When will we understand that, of all our duties, 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”.

How he must have suffered, especially at those times when, as a last trait of resemblance to the Lord, he saw the very existence of his work threatened, and when all seemed lost on the side of earth and on the side of heaven!

(Circular letter, Betharram, 15/5/1890)

2.5. What saved everything was the conviction to which Fr. Garicoits remained faithful in the midst of trials, "with his eyes fixed on the Cross": the certainty that he had to trust in God in the midst of trials because it was He who inspired such an undertaking. God wanted the new Congregation:

Then above all, with eyes and heart fixed on the Cross, invincible in his faith and his hopes, he answered all the sinister cries:

“The Congregation is the work of God; He founded it; he will preserve it and advance it in his service and his love”.

(Circular letter, Betharram, 15/5/1890)

2.6. The glorification of Fr. Garicoits is manifested in concrete signs that show that he was not mistaken in his way of acting in the midst of difficulties or situations of cross, as Bishop Lacroix had said to the community gathered that same afternoon of the saint's funeral. God has been in charge of manifesting at every moment that glorification that is the reward for fidelity in the midst of trials, as happened in his Master, his Jesus. Paschal Mystery.

Was he mistaken? And hasn't Heaven taken on the task of responding and glorifying this great friend of the Cross? Et ita intrare in gloriam suam. (And so enter into his glory) What is this glory? In my eyes, it is first of all the renown of his holiness, the hubbub and the excitement around his tomb; then, the triple consecration of his Institute, emanating from the Sovereign

Pontiffs, and containing the highest praise: Amplissimae laudis Decreto condecorari mandavit. (He decreed that he should be honored with the highest praise.)

There remained the Constitutions, in which are indicated the goal of the Founder, the vows and the virtues characterising his work; a luminous furrow marking the way, abundant and always open source of life and devotion.

Analysed in the crucible of a long and strict examination, they have just been approved; the Pope as Doctor and Universal Pastor, in the exercise of his sacred Magisterium, has pronounced himself on their goodness and their excellence; and endorses each of its articles by his sovereign authority and sanction. On the one hand, he recommends them to the world as a religious Code worthy of being embraced, and on the other hand, he gives them to us to ourselves as a sure way to advance in the perfection of our state.

What glory for our Father! What glory also for his children! on the condition, however, of following in his footsteps and, like him, by the Cross, of achieving triumph.

(Circular letter; Betharram, 15/5/1890)

2.7. Fr. Etchecopar cites a letter from Fr. Garicoits. He praises his words and his person, he remembers him as a good Father who had seen bishops in tears. As he has done on many other occasions, he affirms that Fr. Garicoits along with the Congregation wanted to wage war against a liberalism that infects even the good. He thus encourages all religious to walk in his footsteps:

On October 31, 1861, he wrote to the Superiors of the Houses:

“The way to found, to resuscitate, to lead the works, is to be and to show oneself a ‘perfect auxiliary of the obedient Jesus Christ’. Insist on it, he added, insta in illis. May everyone be and always show themselves to be “perfect helpers”, never embarrassments, obstacles for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for their Superiors!!! May God give you this grace! »

What foundation and what form! What energy and what precision! What a feeling and what an accent in these underlined words, in these three exclamation marks!!

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

Also, devoting a war to the death against this judgmental, mocking, disobedient, sulky liberalism, etc., etc., with which the good themselves are infected, he had devoted his entire life to forming a Society counting only instruments humbled and devoted, with the motto: Here I am! Forward!

Oh ! let us walk, my Fathers and my Brothers, let us walk in such luminous, glorious footsteps! And may the Heart of Jesus grant us the grace to become, and show ourselves to be his perfect helpers for the greatest honor of his Divine Mother, ad majorem Mariae gloriam.

Let us implore this immense favour during this month of March through the intercession of the most glorious Saint Joseph.

(Circular Letter to the Houses of France, Pau, 1/3/1886)

2.8. In Fr. Rocq's obituary, Fr. Etchecopar, after using a quote from Fr. Garicoits, says that the content of that quote was experienced by Fr. Garicoits both during his life and at the moment of his death. This comment leads Fr. Etchecopar to evoke the death of Fr. Garicoits, which was an offering of his entire life full of endeavour, for which he does not claim any credit. Offering of "a combination of love and austerity and profound humility":

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 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, 16/1/1877)

3. The interior fire of the Love of God that consumed Fr. Garicoits

3.1. Fr. Etchecopar bears witness to what was in the heart of Fr. Garicoits. He was consumed by the inner fire of God's Love, as manifested in the Heart of Jesus throughout the Gospel:

I remember the impulses that escaped 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. (To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/6/1886)

*Since this happiness is even granted to me, I am sending you some of the words that I would have addressed to you, and which are fragments of Fr. Garicoits' lectures. You will find there the doctrine, the help, the strength, the **divine fire** which blows through the speeches and the letters printed in his Life; you will*

know more and more what kind of Father has formed us, with what substantial and supersubstantial (if one can say so) bread he has fed us, and what kind of blood must flow in our veins to be worthy of him.

Let us ask him for his spirit, his right wisdom, his spirit of humility and holy love, of strength and perseverance!

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/12/1879)

*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 Garicoïts?***

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 ...

(Circular letter, Betharram, 10/1/1888)

*Love well and we will persevere. During this octave, let us ask for **this sacred fire, which consumed our Founder** to the greater glory of Mary. You know his motto: *Fiat, Eamus! Obey and Forward!* He often repeated the cry of the Divine Heart: "That the world may know that I love my Father!" "Forward for his good pleasure !! Let us constantly repeat by our words, our actions and our examples: "So that the world may know that we love Jesus and Mary, now and always, we never retreat, but let us go forward, persevering in obedience and love, *ut sciat mundus quia diligo Patrem and Matrem.* (so that the world may know that I love the Father and the Mother).*Fiat! Eamus!* »*

(Circular letter, Betharram, 30/5/1887)

3.2. Fr. Etchecopar wants to encourage the religious in the spiritual work of resembling the Heart of Jesus, overcome by the fire of the Love of the

Holy Spirit both within oneself and in apostolic zeal. To that end he has prepared in Sarrance, a little book of "Thoughts", which contains a selection of letters, notes from his lectures, and conversations from the last six years of Fr. Garicoits' life:

Do you not hope, do you not believe, beloved Fathers and Brothers, that (the Spirit) will find them and judge them to be full of the spirit of God, if they are imbued with the spirit of our venerable Founder?

Forward then! following our Father! Forward! On the path traced by his doctrine and his heroic examples! Forward! as worthy auxiliaries of the divine Heart!

*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, 18/2/1889)

3.3 In a superficial reading of the other letters, I have been able to observe that for Fr. Etchecopar this interior fire is the Love of the Holy Spirit that dwells in the heart of Fr. Garicoits. He asks for it for himself and for all the members of the Congregation, especially in letters addressed to his sister Julie, Daughter of Charity, and to the religious of the San José school in Buenos Aires.

4. Father Garicoits is a man inspired by the Holy Spirit

Fr. Etchecopar was convinced that the Holy Spirit had inspired Fr. Garicoits to found the Congregation of Priests of Betharram and that he

was a prophet, a man of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, in those difficult times. Fr. Etchecopar tells us that Fr. Garicoits himself was fully convinced, by experience of God's love, of all these certainties. It is a precious testimony of Fr. Auguste in Circular letter. Betharram. 1/10/1888. This testimony is framed by the citation of two Letters: no.426 addressed to a priest of the Sacred Heart, (undated). And no. 293, addressed to Fr. Diego Barbé, without place of origin but with the date: 10/29/1860 (cf. Fr. Mieyàa Correspondence of St Michael Garicoits). Let us analyse this Letter, the only one to testify so clearly to the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits:

4.1. That he did not have to belong to an established order, as Fr. Leblanc sj had told him, 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 Garicoits believed in a work of new creation**, with its own purpose, organisation, spirit and means;*

4.2. 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 revolutionary independence

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 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.

4.3. And that the Holy Spirit had also inspired him as to what the unique character of the institute had to be and how Fr. Garicoits had to act:

*Here is your banner and your rallying cry ...
You will march ahead, 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 ”.*

4.4. Fr. Etchecopar also tells us that Fr. Garicoits believed in that inner voice that spoke to him, he raised the banner, (like the Eternal King) through meditating on the ‘two banners’ of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. He launched the rallying cry and began to make real 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.*

4.5. Fr. Etchecopar's affirmation seems to contradict the affirmation 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 affirmation, Fr. Etchecopar provides the proof that Fr. Garicoits was not mistaken giving the quotation from the Book of Wisdom 10.10, which the Bishop used in the homily at the funeral of the Father Garicoits. But he does not quote the Bishop's original words in the text of the homily itself.

*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 Garicoïts was a man filled with the Spirit of God. He is one of those Apostles whom god raises in difficult times, for the consolation and triumph of his Church; and on all sides the Christian people repeat the

imposing testimony given by Mgr Lacroix over the coffin of our Father: “The Lord led this righteous one in straight paths; he has revealed to him the secrets of Heaven; he endowed him with the knowledge of the Saints, enriched him in his labours and crowned him in his enterprises” (Wisdom 10.10).

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

(Circular letter Bétharram, 10/1/1888)

4.6. Faced with the truth of the inspiration of Fr. Garicoits and the wrong attitude of the Bishop of Bayonne, (proven by events that are happening), Fr. Auguste exhorts the religious of that time and us in this way:

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 Betharram, 10/1/1888)

5. Fr. Etchecopar considers Father Garicoits as a “Father”

Fr. Etchecopar, when he speaks of Fr. Michael Garicoits, considers him his “Father” and that of all the religious of Betharram. He also calls him Founder, but what strikes me most is that he calls him Father. We find this term Father many times in circular letters and it has many meanings: God the Father, the Holy Father the Pope, precedes the name of a religious priest: Father Magendie, Father Superior.... And the term “Father” is often

found to refer to Fr. Garicoits. He is “Father” because he has begotten us to religious life. Also in other Congregations, the religious call the Founder Father.

5.1. In two consecutive Circular Letters we find the prayer that Fr. Etchecopar prays to Fr. Garicoits above all before his tomb, where he goes almost every day.

5.1.1. In Fr. Etchecopar's letter, addressed to the Fathers and Brothers of America, written in Betharram on 1/3/1881, we find the complete sentence: Twice he calls him Father and he calls him that because he has begotten us by vocation of religious life:

“Thank you, O Father, for all that I owe you, for all that we owe you. It was you who gave us birth to religious life, it was you who associated us with your mission, which came from heaven; by you we were enlisted under this banner which bears two hearts, with the sublime motto: Ecce venio!

*You were our guide, our light, our perfect model, our strength and our consolation. **Oh! Father carry on!***

Let us be your imitators, as you were of Jesus Christ. Keep all that God has given you. Defend, defend your work, the very work of Jesus and Mary. May we be holy and perfect! »

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 3/1/1881)

5.1.2. In the Circular Letter written by Fr. Etchecopar in Betharram on January 5, 1881, he gives us a different and shorter version of the prayer to Fr. Garicoits:

*Almost every day for the last fortnight, I have gone to prostrate myself on this venerated tomb; and there, holding in mind all your hearts, all your needs ... **O Our Father**, I said, you who gave birth to our sublime religious vocation, who enrolled us under the banner of Ecce Venio, and Ecce Ancilla Domini, you who were our model, our strength, our consolation in the paths of*

the purest, of the most heroic dedication, continue, from heaven above, to instruct us, to form us, to ignite us with your ardour, to train us with the perfume of your virtues.

(Circular letter Bétharram, 4/1/1881)

5.1.3. Another admiration or kind of prayer from Fr. Augusto to Fr. Garicoits:

*O holy Founder! O noble and radiant figure! What virtues you remind us of! What benefits, what devotion, what sacrifices, but what wisdom too, what solid, practical, profound, sublime, evangelical doctrine in a word! At this thought, our soul feels tender... At the same time, what duties you impose on us with the examples you have given you and the mission entrusted by you, **O our Father**, to our gratitude and our filial love!*

(Circular letter, Betharram, 5/6/1888)

5.2. The consequence of Fr. Etchecopar considering Fr. Garicoits "Father" is that we have to be and appear to be his children. This has to do with the faith and charity with which we live. our actions more than our words have to testify to the inheritance that we have received from him:

5.2.1. In the Betharram Circular Letter 6/8/1879 he says:

*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 !*

And with his valiant heart, and with his generous soul, you will consolidate, extend, you will embellish the work of his heroic life,

the work of his holy death, in honour of the Heart of Jesus, for the love of Our Lady of the Calvary.

(Circular letter; Betharram, 8/6/1879)

5.2.2. He insists on the same reality of Father/children in another letter to the Fathers and Brothers of America, written in Betharram on 4/22/1886.

Therefore, you and we, consider ourselves, more and more happy and proud to belong to this work, which came from the sacred heart of Jesus and Mary and to be its honor and support; let us attach ourselves more strongly to obedience, to charity, to regularity, to the humility of love, which will make of all, inside, a heart and a soul, and outside a compact body, tight in the unity of the same laws and the same external observances.

*Here is the Unum sint that I have just requested for our very dear congregation, in the touching solemnity of Holy Thursday which has just ended, in our chapel, so piously. Father Barbé sang Mass, and we were all, priests, Levites, pupils, faithful, young and old, **children of the same Father**, eating at his table the bread of charity, so that those who live may not live more humanely, but divinely and eternally, **like their Father**... O goodness! O goodness! if we knew you well!!*

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 22/4/1886)

5.2.3. According to Fr. Etchecopar, Fr. Garicoits has not only begotten us, but has educated us and fed us with solid food. From these two actions of the "Father" it follows which blood we have to have to be worthy children of him.

*Since this happiness is still denied me less, I send you some of the words that I would have addressed to you, and which are fragments of Fr. Garicoits' lectures. You will find there the doctrine, the anointing, the strength, the divine fire which breathes the speeches and the letters printed in his Life; **you will know more and more what Father has formed us, with what substantial and supersubstantial (if one can say so) bread he has fed us, and what is the blood that must flow in our veins to be worthy of him.***

Let us ask him for his spirit, his recta sapere, his spirit of humility and holy love, of strength and perseverance!

Oh ! may he deign to obtain for us from this God whom he sees face to face (it is our firm hope!) the great virtues necessary in these difficult times, so that the storms which agitate us outside, anchor us within, in the perfect practice of the religious life, of the rule, of the constitutions. He will do so to the extent of our faithfulness in following his teachings, his heroic examples.

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/12/1879)

5.2.4. Use the same “Father” term on other letters.

From the venerated tomb of our Father to all!

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 22/4/1886);

*With the help of grace, ... you will launch yourself into your celestial flight, saying with our holy founder: My God and my all! Here I am; here we are without delay, without reserve, without return, out of love for you! **I have just quoted our Father’s motto.***

(To the Fathers and Brothers of America, Betharram, 18/12/1886)

*Does it not seem to you, my Fathers and my Brethren, that such feelings will have crowned the merits of **our beloved Father** and will have earned him a place of honour among our Brethren already crowned in Heaven?*

(Circular letter; Betharram, 16/1/1887)

*Yes, my dear Fathers and Brothers, let us give thanks to God, who, by decimating our Community on earth, increases our Community in Heaven, and increases the eternal crown of the children of Father Garicoits, who plead up there **the cause for the glorification of their Father**, and intercede on behalf of their exiled brethren here below.*

(Circular letter, Betharram, 21/10/1887, obituary of Fr. Castaighs)

*May his holiness shine above all in the lives of his children, and may all our conduct be the most irrefutable testimony given before men and before angels to the heroic virtues of **our glorious Father!***

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

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

(Circular letter, Betharram, 1/11/1891)

6. The testimony of Brother Arnaud on Fr. Garicoits

In the obituary of Br. Arnaud, Fr. Etchecopar transmits to us the testimonies of this Brother about Fr. Garicoits, because he had known him since he had introduced himself to him, in 1840. He was the first brother admitted to the Congregation. Fr. Etchecopar tells us that his formator was Fr. Garicoits, in the midst of all his activities “what teacher did Heaven choose to form him! Brother Arnaud tells us what Fr. Garicoits was like among his first missionaries, practising all the renunciations, all the heroisms of charity, offering men and Angels a sublime spectacle that will overcome the resistance of the pastor of Saint-Pé and will show him a moving portrait” (Cc. Bth. 6/16/1894).

6.1 Br. Arnaud had begun to testify to this about Fr. Garicoits:

“My first interview with Fr. Garicoits, recounted Br. Arnaud, took place in Igon, at the Daughters of the Cross, in a small cell built in the stable of the house; there was then no other

accommodation for the chaplain. After the required tests, I entered Betharram on March 24, 1840. I then saw Father Garicoïts carry out the following works: 1° at school, catechism lessons and the confessions of a hundred children ; 2° the direction of the community with a dozen priests; 3° the service of the chapel and of pilgrims; 4°, lessons in theology to abbots from outside; 5° Latin classes for some children; 6° the chaplaincy of the Sisters of Igon. I saw him, on Thursday mornings, in winter as in summer, leaving at 4 o'clock, a big stick in his hand: as sacristan, I opened the door of the church for him, through which he passed so as not to disturb the rest of the community ; he said pleasantly to me: Cheerio, Cheerio!; and that for many years. I was also very edified by the austere regularity of the Missionaries; their food was poor; they fasted every Friday; all the oldest wore hairs of horsehair. Father Garicoits also had a discipline and I heard him hit himself with this instrument of penance. In fact, the community only possessed furniture, linen, and dinnerware that the missionaries brought when they entered. Everything was in destitution, up to the sacristy”.

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16/6/1894)

6.2. Faced with this testimony of Brother Arnaud, Father Etchecopar cannot help but be moved. As he writes these words he can't stop..

“In writing these words, my Fathers and my Brothers, I cannot help feeling strong emotion. This is the cradle of our Institute! This is what our Fathers suffered! This is how they became so great, so blessed by God! Here are our models and here is the school where we must always re-temper ourselves, so as not to be too unworthy of our race: Noblesse oblige!”

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16/6/1894)

6.3. Brother Arnaud continues his testimony about Fr. Garicoits:

*The first of our Brothers understood this and launched himself into a career. Let us listen to him again: "As soon as I was admitted into the Congregation, I found myself, (until then a poor shepherd who only knew how to lead a flock), suddenly and at the same time charged with offices of which I understood nothing: I was at the same time sacristan, laundryman, refectory man, supervisor of servants, in a word, in charge of all the material things. Seeing me one day at these various tasks, Sister Marthe said to Fr Garicoits: **If this Brother had two pairs of feet and hands, he could not cope...** (with all this work). One Maundy Thursday, forced to leave the church to prepare the refectory, I forgot to put out the altar candles and let them burn for an hour. Another time, having to prepare the rooms for the missionaries, I arrived too late to set the supper table. Fr. Perguilhem, exact as a clock, was there at the regulation time, and he had to retire. The next day, same work, same delays, with bad cooking. In these sufferings, sometimes I wept, sometimes I prayed; when I couldn't take it any longer, I went to Fr Garicoits: I have too much work. - And me too, he replied, I have ten times too many. Let's do what we can, and then, patience! The good Lord does not ask for more".*

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16/6/1894)

6.4. Fr. Etchecopar, presenting us with another testimony of Brother Arnaud, makes the following comment: Thus, my Parents and Brothers, the good seed thrown to the ground to die, sprouted in the fecundity of death. Brother Arnaud said:

"It was, said Brother Arnaud, in 1843 and 1844 that good vocations presented themselves; Father Garicoits, who had organized the linen room and the refectory down to the smallest detail, and, as he said, out of a spirit of poverty, but without petty and selfish attachment, also organized the work in the fields at Sainte-Marie; he established there an orchard, vegetable gardens, washhouses for the laundry of the community, even going so far as to prepare fertilisers with his own hands for the instruction of the brothers. They worked in silence and, in the

evening, returned in the same way, carrying on their backs the milk, the vegetables, the fruits, the objects of lingerie, washed and dried in the countryside”.

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16/6/1894)

6.5. Fr. Etchecopar, upon finishing giving us these testimonies of Br. Arnaud about Fr. Garicoits, tells again with emotion, the praise of this brother who in his conduct reflects what the Founder was like:

What holy scents, my Fathers and my Brothers, emerge from these family scenes! and what a beautiful soul is revealed in its ravishing simplicity! Truly, within the bounds of the most humble employments, Brother Arnaud was a model of all virtues, a pillar of the Congregation; I witnessed him for almost forty years, turned towards God, with an angelic piety; towards the community a tireless dedication and gratitude; towards strangers, both politeness and reserve; vis-à-vis himself, free from all ‘front’, from all pretension, from all solicitude, despite age, services, infirmities, a mortifier of his body. But also what edification and esteem everywhere! And in his soul, what peace! This was reflected externally by a great and constant nobility of character, and by a celestial radiance which lit up his face. Several strangers had pointed this out to me; and one of them, after watching him pass and re-pass at the service of the table, said to me: “Who is this Brother? The sight of him does me good; it is the face of a saint”. I believe he was telling the truth. [...]”

(Circular letter, Betharram, 16/6/1894)

7. The Paschal Mystery of Fr. Garicoits

We are going to try to analyze this Circular Letter, written in Betharram. on 5/15/1890, which is very beautiful because it introduces us to Fr. Garicoits in his Paschal Mystery: Passion and Glory in the life of Fr. Garicoits. This Passion and Glory is the law of the Gospel for Fr. Auguste. First lived by

Jesus, our Master and then by our Founder. In it we can find the motivations and the greatness of the foundation, the difficulties and sufferings that he had to endure, his cross and the motivations of the Glory that he deserves. Although Fr. Etchecopar affirms all this about Fr. Garicoits, he submits to the judgment that the Church will reserve for itself, after studying the process of his cause.

Circular letter Approval of the Constitutions

F.V.D.

Betharram, May 15, 1890

Ascension Day of N.S.

Dear Fathers and Brothers in N. S.

7.1. Fr. Etchecopar has just received the Pontifical Brief that approved the Constitutions. This event leads him to meditate on the words of the risen Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus: "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer and so enter into his glory?" And he discovers that the gift of the approval of the Constitutions by Rome responds to the recognition of "the law of the Gospel": Fr. Garicoits, following his Master, after having suffered much, will be glorified

Our Divine Savior said to the disciples of Emmaus: "Was it not necessary that Christ suffered these things and thereby entered into his glory? "Nun haec oportuit pati Christum et ita intrare in gloriam suam?" "Luke 24.26. At the sight of the Pontifical Brief approving our Constitutions, I sought, apart from myself, the cause of this new and signal favour, I found no other than the Gospel law recalled above: the cross alone leads to triumph, and it was necessary that Father Garicoits, after having suffered much, following his Master, should one day participate in his glory: et ita intrare in gloriam suam

7.2. The objective that he set himself to found a new Congregation was very lofty and due to this very fact, he had to encounter insurmountable difficulties for its realisation. Having achieved that goal is a miracle. Fr. Garicoits could not have achieved it with his knowledge, strength and strategies alone. A work of this magnitude required Fr. Garicoits to empty himself, overcome contradictions to confront his “Ego” and the enemy of human nature, and allow himself to be driven by the laws of love and obedience. In this way he would achieve a Congregation, which was a work of God, capable of fighting against the liberalism of the time that infiltrated everywhere and made bishops shed tears, as he himself had seen in Betharram.

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 bringing to birth! The obstacles were humanly insurmountable; I regard the existence of this Society as a great miracle”. It had to be so; the plan of the Founder was so lofty! The more a work is heroic, the more it is opposed by nature resisting to the last and by Satan, who is attacked at the very heart of his empire.

Here, it was a question of founding a Society capable of fighting against this liberalism, everywhere so widespread nowadays that its influence penetrates the Sanctuary and Religion itself: “A Society of men stripped of everything, especially of themselves; 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! »

What wisdom was needed to conceive such a plan and strength to execute it and bring it to a successful conclusion!

7.3. These difficulties demanded a lot from Fr. Garicoits who was aware of his limitations, and that he was “nothing”. He was also aware of the “hidden manna”

that consists in trusting in the help of God, who had asked him for such a thing. This made Fr. Garicoits consider the problems that arose, the challenges of reality that demanded greater dedication and self-improvement, in order to achieve the goal of founding the new Institute, as God wanted. The secret of Fr. Garicoits' performance was to constantly present himself before God and his representatives, recognising and confessing his nothingness, abandoning himself to them, going unnoticed and giving himself with all his potentialities and saying: Here I am! Give me that spirit of your Divine Son, Our Lord. Fr. Etchecopar provides a quote from Fr. Garicoits that expresses the difficulties he was going through and how he lived them. This line, although it does not correspond exactly, can be found in Letter 163 of Fr. Garicoits, addressed to Fr. Diego Barbé, Superior of the community of Colegio San José in Buenos Aires. I think that, in the end, it refers to the suffering of Fr. Garicoits, who humanly, at the end of his days, sees the Institute in a very bad situation: even at risk of breaking up, due to the difficulties and confusion created by the different view of the Society of Betharram held by the Bishop. Fr. Etchecopar unravels the sufferings of Fr. Garicoits:

How difficult it is, indeed, to transform the intelligence of enlightened people, of theologians, to the point of reducing them to the humble simplicity of the children of the Gospel!

How difficult it is to transform strong and generous wills, to the point of keeping them equally distant from the impulses of indiscreet zeal on the one hand and the hesitations of excessive prudence on the other!

How difficult it is among so many different characters and temperaments to establish one and the same spirit, so well balanced, that in all things obedience rules charity and charity animates obedience, in such just measure, let there be no illusion in piety, no excess in good!

And yet, this sublime goal, the Founder pursued it until his last breath. Oh! That he must have suffered when he wrote the following lines:

“Why then not confine oneself to exercising, within the limits of one's position, the immensity of charity?... When one has fixed ideas, it is difficult to get rid of them! You think you're wasting your time by not succeeding according to your imagination. Above all, we do not know how to understand, taste and embrace magno and animo volenti et constanti an obscurity, a sterility, even failures to which we see ourselves reduced by obedience...

My God ! My God ! When will we understand that, of all our duties, the first and most indispensable, as well as the most precious, is to present ourselves constantly to God and to his representatives, recognizing 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”.

How he must have suffered, especially at those times when, as a last trait of resemblance to the Lord, he saw the very existence of his work threatened, and when all seemed lost on the side of earth and on the side of heaven!

7.4. What saved everything was the conviction to which Fr. Garicoits remained faithful in the midst of trials, "with his eyes fixed on the Cross": the certainty that he had to trust in God in the midst of difficulties, before which he could not stop, because it was He who inspired such an undertaking. God wanted this new Congregation.

Then above all, with eyes and heart fixed on the Cross, invincible in his faith and his hopes, he answered all the sinister cries: “The Congregation is the work of God; he founded it; he will preserve it and advance it in his service and his love”.

7.5. Fr. Etchecopar seems to refer to the words that Bishop Lacroix said to the community on the day of the funeral in the afternoon: “He was a saint but he had been mistaken. The glorification of Fr. Garicoits is manifested in concrete signs, which show that he was

not wrong in his way of acting in the midst of difficulties or cross situations. God took it upon himself to manifest at every moment, that glorification that is the reward for fidelity in trial, as happened with his Master, his Jesus, in the Paschal Mystery. The glory of Fr. Garicoits can be shared by his children if they are faithful, like him, to his inspiration.

Was he mistaken? And hasn't Heaven taken on the task of responding and glorifying this great friend of the Cross? Et ita intrare in gloriam suam. What is this glory? In my eyes, it is first of all the renown of his holiness, the hubbub and the excitement around his tomb; then, the triple consecration of his Institute, emanating from the Sovereign Pontiffs, and containing the highest praise: Amplissimae laudis Decreto condecorari mandavit.

There remained the Constitutions, in which are indicated the goal of the Founder, the vows and the virtues characterising his work; luminous furrow marking the way, abundant and always open source of life and devotion.

Analysed in the crucible of a long and strict examination, they have just been approved; Doctor and Universal Pastor, in the exercise of his sacred Magisterium, the Pope has pronounced himself on their goodness and their excellence; and investing each of its articles and the whole of its sovereign authority and sanction, on the one hand, it recommends them to the world as a religious Code worthy of being embraced, and on the other hand, it gives them to us to ourselves as a sure way to advance in the perfection of our state.

What glory for our Father! What glory also for his children! on the condition, however, of following in his footsteps and, like him, by the Cross, of achieving triumph.

Te Deum laudamus! Laus Deo and Mariae!

All yours in N.S.

Etchecopar priest

Conclusion

The Circular Letters of Fr. Augusta Etchecopar not only present us with fascinating stories from the life of Fr. Garicoits. The knowledge of Fr. Etchecopar found in these Circular Letters, give us a more complete personality of Fr. Garicoits. Above all, they provide us with knowledge of the interiority of Fr. Garicoits: his experience of God, his emotions, the interior fire that consumed him, his inspiration by the Holy Spirit to carry out the Foundation, his interior sufferings, and his conflicts.

This material complements the “Life and writings of Venerable Fr. Michael Garicoits by Fr. Basilide Bourdenne, which is the best we have, because it was written very close to the earthly life of our Founder. Today we would need a new life for our Saint, including all the elements of interiority that Fr. Etchecopar brings us. Fr. Etchecopar gave Fr. Basilide Bourdenne all the material that he had, but he could not transmit to him everything he was communicating us in his circular letters perhaps because he was not aware himself, of the wealth he was giving us in his letters about Fr. Garicoits. To this new Life of Fr. Garicoits (of which we are in need), we could also add all the reflections on the charism and spirituality of Fr. Garicoits, which have been taking place in the Congregation since the 1985 Betharram Session. These would have to be enriched with what I will present in another work on “the spirit of Fr. Garicoits and of the Congregation”, which is hidden in the caverns of the letters, especially the Circular Letters.