

# SAINT MICHAEL, MASTER OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

## IN THE HEART OF LIFE

At the threshold of the third millennium, the Pope invites us to deepen the mystery of salvation during the three preparatory years<sup>1</sup>. The first of the series - where we are now - is consecrated on *Christ, Word of the Father, made man through the action of the Holy Spirit*. With this perspective, we could not hope for a better travelling companion than the one we celebrate in 1997, the apostle of the *Here I am*, Saint Michael Garicoïts!

When one honours the memory of somebody, the choice of words is not taken for granted. More so when the person we commemorate is considered a *master of spiritual life*. This title would have been accepted by our Saint with an incredulous smile. However, two centuries after his birth, he remains for us more than a master-of-thought; a “master-of-prayer”, an illuminator. The theme of the Garicoïts year, therefore, must conjugate the bicentenary and the future, the intimate and the universal, the heart and the life. In other words, it should draw from the experience of the most personal faith to the more “Catholic” of hope. Such is the *cordial appeal* given to us by Saint Michael, re-translated and re-transmitted by the large family of Betharram: “Open your heart to life!”

There are some slogans of circumstance and there is the meaning of the message. The occasion is a beautiful one to explore it with new commitment. This would seem so much more necessary as Saint Michael is a too little known saint (as yet). In fact, he did not take time to systemise his thinking, nor to put his teachings down in writing. The best way to know him and, perhaps, to love him, therefore consists in scrutinising his life. From his example, his confidences and sparse notes, we can draw forth an entire dynamic of union to the Incarnated Word.

In the first part, we travel through the biographical stages which made a small peasant a priest according to God’s Heart. A second part will look at his spirituality, as revelation of the Father’s Love and openness to brotherly love. Finally, we will see how the way, loaned by Saint Michael, can open the road to our happiness.

### I. A MAN OPEN TO LIFE

Every itinerary of faith is born from the encounter of two desires. That of man towards God, and that of God on man. Saint Michael’s history is a witness of this in the way that the first enthusiasms of his heart were progressively adjusted on the Divine project. This is how the school of life will teach him, as seen in his own words, that “*the only solid and true spirituality is the one that ties in the heart of man to the Heart of Jesus Christ.*”<sup>2</sup>

#### a) SPIRITUAL INFANCY

Michael Garicoïts was born on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1797 in Ibarre, in a family of small property owners at the borders with the Basque Country. From his place of origin, he receives a lively character, tough to the task, deeply attached to his fathers’ religion. Raised in the fear of hell as in the desire for heaven, the eldest of the family very quickly manifests his sense of the absolute. One fine day, he abandons the meagre paternal herd to reach those peaks where, he was told, God lived. Having reached the top of the first hill, heaven seemed to be more attainable on the next mountain, and so it

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Apostolic letter on the preparation for the Jubilee in the year 2000, Tertio millennio adveniente, notably § 40.

<sup>2</sup> DUVIGNAU Pierre, *Un Maître spirituel du XIXe siècle, Saint Michel Garicoïts*, Beauchesne (1963), p. 288-289. From now on the note will read (M.S. + page).

was for the whole day. From now on, nothing would be able to stop the attraction for transcendence in him.

In the meantime, the Garicoïts do not escape the Jansenism diffuse during that period and in that environment. Michael's first communion will be postponed for several years, for fear that a badly done confession would make access to the sacrament a sacrilege. Past the age of thirteen, Michael is a farm hand in a nearby village... and still has not received the host. This adverse desire throws the adolescent into a period of intense depression. This is when the founding revelation of his itinerary of faith arises. Returning from the fields, on a sunny afternoon, Michael is suddenly submerged by a wave of joy and light.<sup>3</sup> Here he is dazzled by the illumination of a God who does not limit himself as the Judge of the Sinai, the one brandished at home, but who appears to be "*melted in charity*" (M.S. 133). All of a sudden, he is seized by the evidence that Someone loves him, of a God that is Love. Certainty follows anguish, peace follows internal torment. He comes out of this ecstasy by bumping into a fence; he also comes out of this with the intuition that "the Church will never reveal God to men if she does not look like a place of Love, in other words the Body of Christ" (A. Mansanné, scj). From now on, in his adventure as man and founder, he will have no other horizon. How can one not see, in this event, the faraway source of his evangelical charisma?

Admitted to the communion table on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1811, Michael very quickly understands that the only way to devote himself to God lies in the priesthood. But each time he opens himself to his parents, they oppose him with their poverty. With the complicity of his grandmother, he finally obtains a place at the college of Saint-Palais, and another, as servant, to pay for his studies. Through intense work, he overcomes all the stages of a formation which culminates with the large seminary in Bayonne. He will be ordained in this same city on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1823.

#### **b) DISCOVERY OF DEVOTION**

It is an abbot full of promise that is soon nominated to Cambo, as vicar to a disabled parish priest. He distinguishes himself for his tact with the old priest, but also by his devotion to the little ones and the penitent ones, his care for the liturgy and catechism, his pastoral sense. A year and a half of ministry are enough for the young vicar to transform the parish environment. The discovery and the diffusion of the cult of the Sacred Heart is not completely foreign there.

In those years, France is fully undergoing Restoration, political as well as religious. The Church intends to come closer to a population disoriented by revolutionary torment and marked by the Jansenist spirit. She also promotes a more popular religion, more festive, rather than the rigorous encounter which held the faithful at a distance from the sacraments and many other types of devotion. The message of Paray-le-Monial exalting the Sacred Heart as symbol of the love brought to men, the drama of this little known love, and the need for reparation, all this is inserted at the right moment in a means for the renewal of Christian life.

The day that a parishioner requests registration to a Brotherhood of the Sacred Heart, everything becomes clear to the spirit of the vicar of Cambo. Within a few months, he founds a *Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary*, then, he consecrates his parish to the divine Heart, and promotes the movement in the neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> Impassioned, Fr. Garicoïts has a manual of devotion published in the Basque language<sup>5</sup>, *The Calling of Love*; it is largely inspired by the message of Saint Marguerite-Marie, for the cult rendered to the "sacred kiln of divine love" as for

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<sup>3</sup> In his writings, Michael comes back to this experience called Oneix illumination: "*Here is what happened to a man: in the ardour that consumed him, he felt himself enraptured in such a light that he felt he was going to burn and be reduced to nothingness; it was necessary for God to temper these ardours in him, so that he could support this clarity.*"

Manuscript n°805, cited by BRUNOT, Amédée, *Michel Garicoïts, le Saint du "Me voici"* (Betharram, undated), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> On a whole, 40 brotherhoods grouping more than 5000 members are created in ten years on the model of Cambo.

<sup>5</sup> *Amodiozko deia Jesusen bihotz sakratuak guiristino leialer*; in English: *The Calling of Love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the Christian Faithful*.

the insistence on reparation. At Cambo, Michael Garicoïts accosts the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the pastoral view. According to his physical movements (and mental ones), this first contact will join other influences to finalise itself in a new spiritual synthesis.

### c) THE MATURING OF A SPIRITUALITY

In October 1825, Fr. Garicoïts is sent to the other end of the diocese, to the Grand Seminary of Betharram as a philosophy professor. The bishop's trusted man is entrusted with taking on an establishment going astray, due to the lack of assured direction. In a few months, the newcomer re-establishes the doctrine and the discipline, with this mixture of natural authority and internal joy that characterises him. But Betharram is also the sanctuary of Our Lady, where teaching loves to contemplate the luminous availability of the Lord's Handmaiden. Everything, from the place and from his spirit, incites him to meditate on the holy humanity of God, *Word made flesh in the bosom of the Virgin Mary*.

The discovery of the French school of spirituality precipitates this basic evolution. Between 1828 and 1835, Michael Garicoïts is filled by the thoughts of Bossuet, with a special taste for the *Elévations sur les mystères* and other *Sermons sur l'Annonciation*. Unceasingly, he returns to the Epistle to the Hebrews, one of the passages of skill of the spiritualists of the Grand Century. In the wake of Bérulle, he is fascinated by the *Here I am*<sup>6</sup> of the Word made flesh and its consequences. Never detached from the person of Christ, the *heart* occupies its own place, as the centre of personality. The place of love and desire, it is also the seat of will which originates from here and totally abandons itself to God. In other words, when he imagines the *heart* of Jesus, Michael takes into consideration the entirety of His person in its first thrust. The thrust so well expressed in the *Here I am* of the first moment.

Since then, the mystery of Incarnation occupies the lectures and the orations of Michael Garicoïts. Also, it is in his contemplation that he will draw his founding inspiration. It will even overflow into the field of mystique. During this period in fact, our Saint undergoes intense experiences: repeated levitation during the Consecration, a luminous halo on his face during the moment of the *Incarnatus est* of the *Credo*...

The spiritual thunderbolt is soon followed by the shock of religious life. The reputation of Fr. Garicoïts, very quickly, earned him the duty of chaplain in a neighbouring convent. There he encounters an exceptional woman, Jeanne-Elisabeth Bichier des Ages, the founder of the Daughters of the Cross. Unknowingly, a project for foundation begins to find its way in Saint Michael's heart and thoughts. In 1831, the events precipitate. Soon after having nominated Fr. Garicoïts as the head of a seminary, the bishop of Bayonne recalls philosophers and theologians under his wing. While Betharram is emptied inexorably, the "*superior of the four walls*"<sup>7</sup> ever more clearly perceives the need to renew the priestly ministry. On one hand, his presence among the religious, on the other, the sight of insubordination of certain clergymen - "*Ah! If only they had seen the bishops' crying like I did!*"<sup>8</sup> - everything brings him to thinking about a new form of consecrated life. In 1832, his discernment culminates during a retreat with the Jesuits of Toulouse. In that occasion, the Basque priest makes an election, confirmed by his companion, in these terms: "You will follow your first inspiration, which I believe came from heaven, and you will be the father of a family which will be our sister."

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<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10: "5 When Christ came into the world, he said: *Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God'.*" Citation Ps. 40 (39), 7-9.

<sup>7</sup> *Correspondance de Saint Michel Garicoïts*, presented and annotated by Fr. Mieyaa, tome I (Tarbes, 1958), p. 90.

From now annotated as (Cor. Tome n° + page).

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Duvignau, scj *La doctrine spirituelle de Saint Michel Garicoïts*, Beauchesne (Paris, 1949), p. 66. From here on noted as (D.S. + page).

Father Garicoïts returns to Betharram with his heart burning. Nothing will be able to turn him away from his project in which he has recognised God's Will. In a few simple words, he expresses this: "Oh! If only we could gather together a society of priests having for their program the very program of the heart of Jesus...: absolute generosity and obedience, perfect simplicity, unchanging gentleness! These priests would be a real mobile camp of picked soldiers, ready to hasten, at the first sign, wherever they are called..."<sup>9</sup> Ignatian influence and banner of the Sacred Heart uphold this dream of the founder. It takes form in October 1835: five companions join Michael Garicoïts to found the society of priests of Betharram. Only after six years do they take the name of *Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*.

## II. A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART OF GOD

*The experience of the God-Love*, revealed in Jesus Christ, constitutes the heart of the spirituality and the mission of the Betharramites. The "here I am" furnishes the key.

In Saint Michael, the religious ideal "holds" to Saint Ignatius of Loyola and his tradition, while the spiritual intuition feels the influence of the French School. As proof, the Constitutions of 1838: Father Garicoïts prefaces the 52 articles of the *Sommaire* of the Company of Jesus in a way that confers them with original breadth. First, he proclaims the primacy of Love by borrowing an introductory phrase from Bossuet: *It has pleased God to make Himself loved...*<sup>10</sup>

This text, which we are used to call the *Manifesto*, admirably designs the trajectory towards salvation. It goes from the Heart of God to the heart of all man, through the Heart of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Paradoxically, the word *heart* never appears. This is because it is so present that there is no need to mention it. This is how the *Here I am*, which summarises Michael's whole concept of the Sacred Heart, is at the heart of the text.

### a) FROM THE HEART OF THE FATHER

Everything begins from the Heart of the God who is the Father, and who takes the first steps towards us. All divine activity is motivated by love. God created the world and entrusted it to man, so that one could attain Him through creation, to discover the *Artist* in his works. But God surpassed the limits of natural knowledge. After having sent us men of the Word, the prophets, God spoke to us through His own Son. God makes Himself known (Jn 1,18) by manifesting His love in the Person of Christ (Rm 8,39; Jn 3,1; 4,9). Therefore, "*it has pleased God to reveal Himself...*", according to the words of Vatican Council II<sup>12</sup>. It could also be so well stated, as in the *Manifesto*: "*It has pleased God to make Himself loved...*" God takes pleasure in being loved by men. By us! In Jesus Christ, God reveals Himself in delivering Himself to us: this is the specificity of Love.

Love is God's secret, it is God in His most intimate part: love could not remain in Himself, it tries to communicate itself; since He is Love, God is relation, He is tension towards others. He is already, in Himself, communication of Love: He is Trinity. The history of Salvation, rightly so, is a history of love, at the same time the most beautiful and the most dramatic there has ever been. From the fall of Adam to the death of Jesus on the cross, it inscribes itself on the tragic background of the human condition: "*While we were his enemies, He loved us so much that He sent His only Son*".

<sup>9</sup> BOURDENNE Basilide, *La vie et l'oeuvre du vénérable Michel Garicoïts, fondateur des Prêtres du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus* (de Betharram), 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Beauchesne (Paris, 1918), op. cit., p. 65

<sup>10</sup> *Oeuvres complètes de Bossuet, évêque de Meaux*, (Paris, 1828), tome V: "Fêtes de la Sainte Vierge", 2<sup>ème</sup> Sermon de la fête de l'Annonciation, p. 439.

<sup>11</sup> "(The *Manifesto*) is a true and proper meditation which can be divided, without force, in three points: 1. From the Heart of the Father 2. Through the Heart of the Son 3. To the heart of Saint Michael and ours." (MIRANDE Joseph, "Le Manifeste de Saint Michel", in *Nouvelles en Famille (N.E.F.)*, January 1984.

<sup>12</sup> Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on the Revelation, "Dei Verbum", chapter 1§2.

The great revelation is that God responds to the indifference and the refusal of man on their terrain, but with His own weapons. He puts Himself in their place because He chooses to live the human experience from within. But He does not respond as they do: in Him, there is no trace of rancour or the will for expiation, nothing but the insistence on love. Even when we close ourselves into ourselves, even when we reject Him, God goes to all ends: He gives us His only Son, “*to be the magnet which draws us to divine love, to be the model which shows us the laws of love, and to be the means of attaining divine love*”. The *magnet*, because He attracts to Him while waking our deep desire, in educating it and orienting it towards the Father. The *model*, because we must regulate on Him our conduct and our way of loving, to do, like Him, the will of God which is none other than love. The *means*, because only grace can save love from its counterfeits. And our contradictions. Reduced to our own strengths, the task is overwhelming. This is why the *Son of God became flesh*...

#### **b) THROUGH THE HEART OF THE SON**

The Son of God enters the world *animated by the Spirit of His Father*: the Father, the Son and the Spirit are One in the realisation of the plan for salvation. Every moment of his existence, the Son will be the expression of the Love of the Father towards men. He will give body and face to the Love of God for each of us: he will *incarnate* it. Such is the object of the contemplation of the *Manifesto*, based on verses 7-8 of psalm 39 (taken up in chapter 10, verses 5 to 7, of the Epistle to the Hebrews): *in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then I said, Lo, I have come to do thy will.*”

We must be careful to not reduce this psalm of thanks to its sacrificial context. In the reading Saint Michael makes of it, divine justice does not call for the annihilation of Christ; it is “man who needs the Son to make the extreme gift, in the annihilation of himself, to truly believe in the love of God” (G. Gabaix-Hialé, scj). The Cross makes us understand the “passion” of God for man. Of course a suffering passion, because Jesus “*took the place of all victims*”. Passion of love above all: on the wood of the Cross, the pierced Side reveals the depth and the price of a design that Michael Garicoïts connects to its basis, the Love of the first moment of Incarnation. This is typical of Saint Michael’s approach: the Heart of the Son is not only the symbol of the suffering of the Innocent, it concentrates all the dynamism of life contained in the initial offering.

The *Here I am* unfolds all along Jesus’ worldly path; it becomes his usual state, until the supreme gift: he “*became obedient unto death, even death on a cross*” (Phil 2,8). In the Word made flesh, there is no distance between the being and the saying, between the saying and the acting. The *Here I am* corresponds to a deep predisposition of the person: it is the same structure of the Son in his offering to the Father, and in the docility to the Spirit which guides him. The *Here I am* expresses the thrust which came forth from the Heart of the Word made flesh. It is a cry of love sent to the Father; it is also an act of love for the profit of all of humanity.

This aspect of mediation is strongly underlined. Entirely turned towards the Father, entirely tending towards men, the only Son has the mission to guide everything back to the Father in the Spirit: “*We must go to God for the love of the Word made flesh, by the path and by the intercession of the Word made flesh*” (M.S. 104). The Heart of the Word is at the centre of Christ the mediator as in the history of salvation. It is this through the *Here I am*, when it begins the redeeming Incarnation, embedded in the body and in the acts of the Well-Loved. It is this on the cross, in that lacerated heart where the final *Here I am* of filial obedience reveals the glory of the Father. Finally, it is the centre, in as much as it is the rallying cry of the assembled humanity reconciled in God: the “*chant of the New Adam*” (Cor I,112) - as Saint Michael defines the *Here I am* - which in fact comes from a Heart where we will all be “*reunited to be consumed in unity*” (M.S. 66).

“*This is how God loves us...*”, the *Manifesto* continues. With this thought left hanging, Michael seems to have attained a new threshold of contemplation.

### c) TO THE HEART OF SAINT MICHAEL AND OF ALL MEN

The humanity of Christ has the same force of revelation at the very beginning of the Incarnation as on Holy Friday. In this perspective, the Paschal mystery is the object of adoration as well as the thrust for the mission. At the feet of the Saviour on the cross, Saint Michael no longer holds himself back: *“Oh my God, you have loved me so! Oh God, you have done so much to make yourself loved by me!... My heart is ready, I refuse nothing to prove my love to you.”* (D.S. 89) This state of the spirit signs the birth of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. As attested in the *Manifesto*: *“At the sight of this marvellous spectacle, the Priests of Betharram felt drawn to dedicate themselves to imitating Jesus, humble and obedient, and to working whole-heartedly”* for the announcement of salvation. Affective union, in contemplation, thus overflows on effective effort, at the service of our neighbour.

The heart of Saint Michael's experience, the apex of his spirituality, are synthesised in the famous formula: *“Here I am, instantly, unreservedly, irrevocably, by love for the will of my God.”* It links all of Saint Michael's exhortations to his Religious. It naturally imposes itself as the uniform of an Institute that aspires to reproduce the thrust of the Heart of Christ. In other words, his initial act of loving obedience, enthusiastic in the strong meaning. There lies more than devotion: a program of life, the *same program of the Sacred Heart*. *“Perfect devotement, from which comes the word devotion, heartens Saint Michael, wants us to do God's will with love. God loves for us to give with joy and, in all that is prescribed, it is always the heart it demands.”* (M.S. 195)

In his own way, Saint Michael expresses what constitutes Christian life: an answer of love to the infinite love of God. Nothing less. Nothing more... but all is therein! All in all, as the good Father Garicoïts would say, this means placing *“God in His place, me in mine”* (D.S. 76). Instead of crushing it, the all-mightiness of God-Love liberates in man his potential of charity, and reveals to him his true grandeur: *“I know your Heart, you know mine, Lord, you know I love you, this is enough: ‘Here I am!’ I can do all because I can do nothing.”* (D.S. 44)

From the moment when the life of God beats in man's heart, he can attain his true stature. Michael understands the Sacred Heart as He who makes the creature achieve: it was dehumanised by the sin, He gives it back its filial truth. Step by step, there is a *passion to exist*, that is to say the need to exit from oneself, a sometimes crucifying conversion, the call to self realisation in the will of the All-Else as plan for the happiness for all the others. Because this is what we are really talking about: *“to bring the same happiness to others”*...

## III. A PATH TO HAPPINESS

Spirituality can be defined as the crossing of two desires, the one we carry in ourselves and the one God has for us. On one hand, the quest for happiness which haunts every human being; on the other, the desire God has to make us happy in Him. Let us now look at how Saint Michael acknowledges this universal calling, and how the perspectives he opens up can concern us today.

### a) THE BROAD LINES OF HAPPINESS

*“God made Himself the Master of our hearts and, to make us happy with His own happiness, He pursues His aspirations unceasingly. This is the internal Master we must hear... Oh! If our whole being, body and soul, had only one movement, one generous impulse to place ourselves under the guidance of the Spirit of love, saying without ceasing: Here I am!”* (D.S. 145-146)

The spirituality of Saint Michael aims at the heart of faith, without embracing theological innovations. It goes straight to the object: it joins everyone in their desire for happiness; it links it back to its roots and to its divine horizons; it unfolds in the service of man and of the Gospel. Nothing too original in all this, except for the novelty of a Revelation which will soon have “two

millenniums of eternity”: *Deus Caritas*. But how to characterise Saint Michael’s contribution? Which guiding lines must be drawn from his intuitions and his example? We can attempt to re-organise them in three points, like a triptych where no part can exist independently of the others.

- A spirituality of the *soul’s strength*, pointed at the *heart as the seat of the will*. This supports and animates Michael’s long developments on filial obedience and apostolic dynamism. Two favourite expressions illustrate this: “*with a big heart and a soul that wants...*”; *Here I am, instantly* - immediately -, *unreservedly* - entirely - *irrevocably* - till the end. This is all the active and theocentric side of Saint Michael’s doctrine: “*God everything, me nothing.*” (D.S. 74) This means to refer to the Father all that, in us, means the effort of the will.
- A spirituality of *internal identification* with Christ, based on the action of the Holy Spirit, at the most intimate part of the being. He who is designated as “*the internal Master... the God of our heart...*”, incites the “*unceasing ferment*” of his “*creating hand*” in us (D.S. 144). He makes us taste from within the goodness of God. He configures us from within Christ, his deep feelings and attitudes. This is the contemplative and pneumatological side, which makes us see “*tenderness all around*” (M.S. 200), and which underlines the acquiescence to God’s work, his mysterious fertility in us.
- These two aspects join in the *Heart of Christ*, because he is Love Impersonated (the Second of the Trinity) and Enacted (the plan of salvation thrown by the *Here I am*). As for this, Saint Michael’s spirituality is less *christocentric* than *christological*: it does not stop at the Word, it marries the movement of the Son which makes us pass everything on to the Father. Here lies the dual polarity which tells of the entirety of the being: one, more “virile” and voluntary, of action on the world (the *soul’s strength*), the other, more feminine, of welcoming and contemplation (the sphere of the *internal*). All, under the most evident sign of “God’s humanity”: a Heart opened for our life.

Saint Michael recalls this to one of his correspondents: let us take care not to forget that in heaven we have “*a Father who is also our mother*” (Cor I,277). Created in His image, the human person is global, composed of male and female, of body and soul; his blossoming needs the cordial acceptance of our incarnated condition, and the integration of our energies in a project having Jesus as model. Is he not, Him, the achieved Man? He is “*our mirror, our example that we must never lose from sight, his life, his actions, his internal and external conduct...*”, the Saint of Betharram insists. *Yes, it is he, only he is my life.*” (D.S. 341) To be human in God’s manner, to be oneself in the fullest way, such are the stakes at play.

#### **b) A HAPPINESS ONE RECEIVES**

A true spirituality of *happiness* emerges from this. Happiness, this fundamental aspiration, this old “new idea” of the XIXth century, isn’t it the human hope in what is most sacred to it? Only in the beyond desire - purified desire - will coincide with its realisation. While waiting for celestial beatitude, Saint Michael indicates the paths of possible, even necessary, happiness to us. And above all, peace of heart.

“The heart is deceitful above all things”, the prophet once said (Jer 17,9). This problem is still existant today. Most of our contemporaries have problems in giving order to contradictory desires and tendencies, in other words to unify their life around a *CENTRE*. On his part, Saint Michael focalised on the *Here I am* of the Word made flesh. With this attitude man can find, once again, his ability to love, because then he discovers himself the receiver of a limitless love (*instantly, unreservedly, irrevocably*). In the Person of His Son, God placed Himself in our situation, He understands us - and He saves us - from within. God does not tell us: “I will love you if you do this or do that”. God is unconditional love, the only One able to erase cynicism or depression, and which

is found in God alone: *“Because you are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you”* (Is 43,4). This love is liberating, it gives life by revealing its true value to all men: not less than the price of the Cross, with the lacerated side.

This happiness should not be looked for externally, in the multiplication of pleasures and projects. It has its centre in the *heart*, true sanctuary where each person is who he truly is: *“Man’s happiness is in his heart, and nowhere else; it lies in the attitudes and not in the position”* (D.S. 218). It is centred on God and His will: *“in Him alone can our happiness be found”* (D.S. 63). *“Where lies the source of happiness?”*, Saint Michael always asks himself. - In union with God, he will quickly reply. God encountered in prayer, God glorified in action. *“Let us look for the source of happiness in prayer and then, in action, let us busy ourselves above all with pleasing God by the accomplishments of His will. Our happiness lies there; that is where we must look for it: it lies in the attitude of our heart... A heart that loves but God and His will (...) and which, on the other hand, is without worries because the celestial Father has taken care of it, this heart has the true science of happiness.”* (D.S. 63)

This happiness is received. What comes first is the **GIFT**. And the first gift given to me, is my own humanity: I was given to myself. Since then, rather than turn inwards into myself, taking consciousness of my limits brings me back to the One from which I received myself and which is distinct from *me*; the relationship is possible because I am not everything, because the *other* precedes me and makes communion possible in the joyous consent of difference. Because my limitations draw the surface of contact with my neighbour. Because my body is my place of communication with the world: *“Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me... Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come.’”*<sup>13</sup>

As I am, I am loved and saved. Not through any merit but by grace, in God, I am “achieved”. And spiritual life appears like a continuous deepening in the life of trust. At the bottom resides the certitude that the Merciful awaits us, and that pardon matures humanity: *“May our miseries themselves make us more humble, more generous, stronger, in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ”* (D.S. 81).

### c) A COMMUNICATED HAPPINESS

In this view, the entire secret of happiness consists in *“exercising the immensity of charity to the limitations of our position”* (D.S. 237). From this comes the strongly theological accent of Christian life etched by Saint Michael: in daily duty, in the most precise advice, in the least significant gesture, *“everything is great because linked to the primacy of God.”*<sup>14</sup> *“Nothing is small, when God wants it! There have been small things, they become great when they are done with great love!”* (M.S. 274). In a few words, this means doing less what we love but doing everything with love.

This happiness, on a daily basis, is therefore a task to be accomplished: it is a **MISSION**, a joy to share, because it is important, once the gift has been received, to propose it to the greatest number of persons. A happiness that renounces its communication is but an illusion. The surest way of undermining one’s happiness is to bury it in egotism. *“You have received freely, give freely”*, Saint Matthew said (10,8) - and this citation by Christ that the Gospel ignores: *“There is more joy in giving than in receiving”* (Acts 30,35)...

The *Manifesto* reminds that nothing is more important than *“bringing the same happiness to others”*. Nothing is so necessary in our disenchanted society, in which man insists on explaining things by himself. That he stuns himself in the rush towards having and power, that he searches for the reasons for being in the psychology of the unconscious, his drama remains: he seems to have

<sup>13</sup> Heb 10,5-7, taken up in the *Manifesto* of 1838.

<sup>14</sup> Citation by Father Michel Marie Labourdette, op. *Revue thomiste* n°3, 1952.



lost the key to happiness in the right relationship with others, with the All-Other and with himself. Now, it is right in “*our whole conduct, in our relationships with God, with our neighbour and with ourselves*”, that “*the joy of the Lord*” is to be lived (Cor 1,123).

To be happy, man needs a face to face which places in Him his trust and reveals to him that he is deign of faith. This someone, could it not be The One who gives us the consciousness of ourselves in the response to the call: *Here I am*? He who “*constantly keeps his eyes on us to purify us and to fill us with good doings*” (ibid.)? He who builds us through the *dual Law of love and obedience*<sup>15</sup> - love to consent oneself, obedience to become how He desires us? The first to help us find ourselves, the second to educate our liberty, confront reality, project us into the world.

To witness hope in others is part of the Christian faith. Christ resurrected overcame death. Evil and sin are no longer fatalities. Since then, how can one despair of man and his history? Alone, one is neither happy, nor saved. The only side authorised to us is that of reconciliation, the only one “*a priori*”, the prejudice of benevolence.<sup>16</sup> We are responsible for each other, we must answer the sufferings of others as well as their joys. From here stems the look of encouragement, this training towards good, this search for truth in charity, which inspired Saint Michael to a fearsome and magnificent invitation: “*Vos estis lux mundi, you are the sun (Mt 5,14), this is what each of us must say. And just as the sun is the light, fertility and the life of the earth, we must be one faced with the others. (...) Each of us is entrusted with all his brothers; he took them at his own risk and peril. Let us be for them what the sun is for the earth.*” (D.S. 313)

“Through His incarnation, the last Council declared solemnly, the Son of God in some way joined himself to all men”<sup>17</sup>: nothing human is strange to Him now. Since then, all beings and all events can become *sacrament*<sup>18</sup> for us, sign and means of the union with God through the humanisation of all realities. It is useless to look elsewhere for the justification of the project of missionary life developed by Saint Michael. It constitutes a true mystique of the apostolate, in as much as the union with God is lived and reinforced by the encounter with others, identity in witnessing, love in service. Faced with the divisions and convulsions of his times - and ours - Saint Michael dreamt of a “*society of obedient ones*”<sup>19</sup>, able to fraternise with everyone to evangelise everything. He founded Betharram in view of a ministry of communion in the Church and in society. The entire history of the Congregation attests the urgency and the perpetuity. Misfortune to us if we place such a precious treasure under lock and key!”

In concluding, let us return to the *heart*, to the Heart of Christ, as the key of the vault of life and of the message of Father Garicoïts. As a child, Michael was uplifted by the presentiment of a transcendental Love; during his formation and his vicarage, the young clergyman found himself naturally at ease with a devotion which agreed with his intimate inclinations as well as his pastoral needs. From his masters at the French School, the superior of Betharram assimilated, retranslated and pushed to the limits all that could go along with his theology of incarnated Love. But this was but the prelude to the decisive encounter, that with the Sacred Heart and the Word of Life. With the existential welcoming of the *Here I am*, devotion to the Sacred Heart became a spiritual project. Thus, a spirituality of the Heart of Jesus recognisable by all appeared, even if not very original in the details.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. D.S. 45.

<sup>16</sup> “*On the one hundred aspects offered by a proposition, a word, an action, if there is a positive one, charity demands its consideration before all else.*” (D.S. 171)

<sup>17</sup> Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the world today, *Gaudium et spes* n°22.

<sup>18</sup> “*God is love everywhere and always present... This is the point of view to be taken into consideration from down here. This way everything is sacrament.*” (D.S. 205)

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D.S. 196

All converges on and departs from the offering of Jesus to his Father. Now, the Word grasped in this attitude of thrust, of availability and of Love, has a name: it becomes the Sacred Heart.<sup>20</sup> In this way, Michael Garicoïts crystallised and organised the spiritual life around one central idea; he “takes” incarnated Love in its rising: a heart beating for the only will of the Father, and in his constitutional act: the *Here I am*, which sanctions the plan of salvation of the multitudes.

Identity and mission are reconciled in this attitude, in the example of Christ in whom being and acting are one. Far from opposing contemplation and action, spirituality and engagement, the doctrine of Saint Michael articulates life with the Spirit (in other words, spirituality) on the necessary realism of Incarnation. In placing the subject under the eyes of the Other, the “*Here I am*”<sup>21</sup> recomposes the unity of the person around love and obedience, charity and truth, gentleness and severity, identity (subjective) and alterity (objective). In a word, it brings back to the *heart*, as considered by biblical anthropology: the point of contact between the human and the divine, the environment for decisive choices and mysterious actions of God. “*More for love than for any other reason*” (D.S. 209).

This is the spiritual matrix of a Congregation which has as its own spirit “*the spirit of the Heart of Jesus, which these words: Ecce venio, express so well*” (M.S. 352). The *Here I am* appears as a dynamic synthesis of a life of faith united to the incarnated Word - one could say like the leitmotif of an authentic spirituality. Saint Michael considers the Heart of Christ as the concrete, carnal expression of the divine secret and his project for the world: “God is Love” (1Jn 4,16). “*Here I am! Here is the Heart of Jesus, here is the summary of Christianity... I believe in Love, is to say it all. He was made man, I believe it! He loves, and who loves, does everything... Let us have a heart of Jesus Christ, an extended heart, that does not exclude anybody from his love.*” (M.S. 66) The entire reason for being of creation, the entire meaning of our existence and the achievement of our freedom are all there, in this essential Love where man, known “by Heart”, is invited to open himself to the true life.

To begin, let us say: “Open your heart to life!”...

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<sup>20</sup> “L’esprit de Saint Michel Garicoïts” in *N.E.F.*, October 1980, p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> In French: *Me voici*. *Voici* is composed of the imperative of *voir* (to see) and the adverb *ci* (here). In ancient French “*vei mi ci*” (*vois moi ici*) changed to “*me voici*” in the XVth century. Cf. *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, Le Robert (Paris 1992), tome II, p. 2273 col. 2.