



From the spirituality of Nicolas Barré (Minim) (1621-1686)

INTRODUCTION

On 7th March, 1999, we look forward to the Beatification of the 17th century French Minim priest, Nicolas Barré. This is providing a unique opportunity to re-examine the life of this saint and draw inspiration from his reflections on prayer, his missionary zeal and his vision of God's kingdom.

Nicolas Barré is best known as founder of the Infant Jesus Sisters. However, the special grace given to him and to which he responded with such fidelity, isn't exclusively for Infant Jesus Sisters. In fact, many of his writings were addressed to the general public, to specific individuals who sought his guidance, as well as to the members of the Institute which he founded. He set up that Institute among the laity but, for historical reasons, very few today have the opportunity to be an integral part of it.

Perhaps, history is again being made by an increasing number of people from many walks of life and from various christian denominations who are responding to the inspiration of Nicolas Barré, particularly with regard to the primacy of God in our lives, our relationship with Christ, the nature of God's Kingdom and about how we can be in God's hands 'like a brush in the hand of the painter.'

In this collection, many of the quotes come from the Foundational Documents of the Institute founded by Nicolas Barré. These extracts are as relevant today, to anyone serious about following Jesus Christ, as they were in France over three hundred years ago. They were originally written in 17th. century French; we are grateful for the painstaking work which continues to be done to translate them for the 20th century English-speaking world. However, to understand the thought behind what Nicolas Barré said, it may sometimes be necessary to bear in mind the historical, social and religious context of the France of his time.

Our hope is that during our Programme of preparation for the Beatification, many people will gather to focus on the values that are most needed in our society today, such as respect for each human person and trust in the God who is journeying with each one of us so that all may be one in mind and heart and find their place in the Kingdom as God desires.

Margaret Walsh (Infant Jesus Sister.)

CONTENTS

	page
Introduction.	1
Table of Contents	2
PART I	
GOD ALONE	3
PRAYER	6
OUR VOCATION	11
HUMILITY	13
PART II	
ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE	15
ALL FOR THE LOVE OF GOD	19
INCARNATION	22
LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR	23
PART III	
COPIES OF JESUS CHRIST	25
FILL MY HOUSE	27
MISSION	29
ALIVING FAITH	33
PART IV	
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION	35
OUR OWN SALVATION	38
REMAINING AT PEACE	40
'Backdrop' Margaret Walsh.	43
ABBREVIATIONS and BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
FOUNDATIONS OF THE INSTITUTE	52

PART I

GOD ALONE

*In God alone there is rest for my soul,
from God comes my safety;
with God alone for my rock, my safety,
my fortress, I can never fall. (Psalm 62)*

1. It is God alone who can satisfy us; all else is but a means, a direction or a path. God is our goal, the centre and object of all our motivations. We should devote our energies only to whatever will lead us in this direction. (Letter 9)

2. The pleasures of the world cannot satisfy the heart, but one drop of interior sweetness which the Holy Spirit pours into the soul delights beyond measure so that it becomes drunk in the Lord. We should abandon ourselves totally to the goodness and the way of God, and have great confidence. This confidence will lead to zeal, fervour and perseverance in the silence of God so as to belong to God alone. (R.R. 1)

*3. Never forsake your centre within,
But find your being always in God;
Neither have nor see another way
But be brought to life by the object of your affection;
Sensing God at work in your being, desist from taking
control and leave all to Providence
Acting no longer on the purely human plane;
This is what constitutes the difference
In this silent state where God dwells.
(Spiritual Canticle 44)*

4. Because of original sin, people often run after what is useless, where the truth is not to be found. Before we can recapture the taste for worthwhile values, we must stop chasing false and empty pleasures. (M.A.P. 32)

*5. Give us a holy longing
To die to the passing things
Of the world and of the senses.
In order to make room for your life in us.
Make us pass on into You
Die to ourselves and lose ourselves,
Cease to be so that You may act in us.
Your love for us would indeed be small,
If you were to deny us this good.
(Spiritual Canticle 46)*



6. Focusing on getting worldly recognition is the greatest obstacle in the way of finding inner peace. Many people long for peace but behave in a manner entirely contrary to the Spirit of God. They want things to happen for them in the way they want. We must not seek for peace in externals or in worldly terms even if this may seem to lead to peace. It must find its home in our inner life and be with us in times of suffering and opposition. This will come about, without fail, if we are living with conviction that God is our all - for God alone we live. This is our only way of attaining true peace. (R.R.3)

7. Seek total conformity with the desires of Jesus, abandoning yourself to the wishes of your All. In order to do this well, you should desire only what is in tune with God's will. God alone is just, wise, and gracious and watches over you continually. God never misses out on what concerns you, whether it be small or big, temporal or spiritual and desires only what is for your greater good.

Seek therefore to surrender your own will, entirely and always, so as to do the will of God with a living faith and an ardent love. In this way you will preserve yourself from all that would lead you away from God and from all harm. (Letter 12)

*8. Divine Being, in possession of my soul,
Holy Spirit, hidden in my inmost being,
Sacred flame, consuming from within my bones,
Spirit of the spirit of my flesh,
No longer need we search for you abroad,
since you surround us on all sides,
and are present in the very depths of our being.
We imagine you as dwelling in the highest heaven.
Yet you are to be found here among us
in the lowliest places.
(Spiritual Canticle 1)*



9. Be faithful in allowing yourself be led by God. Like a feather drifting in the wind, be receptive to the inspirations of the Spirit and obedient to what draws you. (Letter 9)

*10. They belong to God, and God belongs to them,
The Spirit carries them where it wills,
Acts in them, possesses them, moves them,
Like faithful servants,
No feather borne hither and thither upon the wind
Moves with such grace and freedom,
As do they who allow themselves
to be carried by God
Without resisting.
(Spiritual Canticle 37)*

11. We must long and thirst for God who is love. We must dispose ourselves and devote all our attention and zeal to the continuous effort of seeking and finding God in simplicity. (R.R.7)

12. To establish the reign of God in us and over us, our whole being must be united to the One who is our beginning and creator; our goal, our centre, our place of rest and supreme happiness, in such a way that for us to live is to reach out and to be founded and rooted in God. (Letter 13)

13. *LORD, I want nothing more,
I desire nothing more
only to be ready to desire what you desire
and as you desire it.
It is enough for me that you hold me in your presence,
that you take care of everything,
that you watch over all my concerns,
all that happens to me
and that nothing escapes your adorable guidance of my life.
O Jesus! O Love!
You are my God and my All,
centre and unfathomable depth of goodness and greatness!
May Jesus live and his will be done!
There is nothing left for me to desire.
Choose, Lord, what you want of me.
Order all things, plan and arrange all things in the way that pleases you,
and I will try to make my desires and actions yours,
to follow you in everything and everywhere,
without reserve or limit.
Finally, Lord, I want to belong totally to you,
no more measuring or portioning out,
neither in life nor in death,
in sorrow or in joy, on earth or in heaven.
My beloved is all mine and I am his forever.
O Jesus! O Love! (Letter 12)*

14. What a wonderful resolution to want to belong to God alone! What a lofty and precious desire to be committed to and lost in God in this way! Think often of this:-
*Nothing but God
All for God
God alone
My God, nothing else but only You! (Letter 30)*

PRAYER

Stand your ground, with truth a belt round your waist, and uprightness a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to quench the burning arrows of the Evil One. And then you must take salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit that is, the word of God.

In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people, and pray for me to be given an opportunity to open my mouth and fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel of which I am an ambassador in chains; pray that in proclaiming it I may speak as fearlessly as I ought to. (Eph. 6:14-20)

1. On awaking, turn your thoughts to God, be thankful for the grace of a new day in which to work selflessly for God's glory, your neighbour's salvation and your own sanctification. Above all ask for the special grace to do God's will in all things, and live your vocation to the full. (S.R. 3:1)
2. Try not to let one hour of any day go by without casting a glance at Jesus, who is your One and Only, your All; a glance either of love, trust, pleading, wonder or surrender, irrespective of whether you feel totally dry or spiritually empty or full of supernatural affection. A loyal and generous person never complains, convinced that apparent desertion by God serves but to test, increase and confirm his or her love. (Letter 55)
3. It goes without saying that whatever you are doing you should not let even one day go by without spending some time in prayer. If you neglect it, things go wrong and however poor it may be, it still has the power to raise us up, sustain us, and gain for us in a mysterious way, great blessings which we would otherwise be without. Be very careful then, to be especially faithful to the exercise of prayer and meditation, setting aside several periods for it. (Letter 18)
4. The habit of thinking frequently about God uplifts the spirit. It enables a person to concentrate on his or her main aim in life and find the truth. What greater gift than the truth could we desire? Thinking of the virtues, or of other holy things does not produce the same results because they are only means to the truth - they are not the truth. Neither are they God who alone makes our happiness complete. (M.A.P. 103)

5. Going to prayer without preparing a subject and emptying oneself in the hope that God will fill the void are both risky approaches. Few people succeed, although many try it, believing it to be the best and most perfect way. It is safest to follow the advice of a wise person: "Prepare yourself for prayer and do not be like someone tempting God." (M.A.P. 172)

6. There must always be something to occupy our mind in prayer. With power and authority God may take possession of the soul, raise it up and fill it. We will allow our intellect and the heart to be taken over. The soul can then do nothing else but follow this powerful attraction and obey God. And when the attraction fades, the original approach must always be resumed and the usual method taken up once more. (M.A.P.173)

7. If we are walking by night with the light of a small lantern and meet someone carrying a large torch, we take advantage of the torch while it lasts, but we do not extinguish our own lantern because we know we shall need it again once the torch-bearer has turned into another street. If God bestows some extraordinary grace on us at prayer, we must beware of saying: "From now onwards, I shall have no need of meditation methods or books." As soon as we meet the first difficulty, we shall have to turn to them again. (M.A.P. 116)

8. People who think of God feel that God is thinking of them. Thus they become aware of God's love and are compelled to respond. This mutual love is a source of intense joy and delight. They discover that God with infinite goodness has taken the initiative: "I have loved you with an everlasting love". (M.A.P.101)

9. God treats you with the tenderness of a good parent who knows the child's weakness, not leaving you in desolation but allowing you to experience the joy of a parent's love from time to time, and filling you with peace and serenity. (Letter 46)

10. Leave your salvation to the parental providence of God. Don't waste time thinking about your unhappy state, your infidelities, the times you turn away from God or your frequent falls. This would only lead you to depression. In getting rid of this desire to think only of your own misfortunes, you can be sure that you will begin to forget yourself. Finally you will find yourself more closely united with God and absorbed in his very gentle peace. (Letter 29)

11. Filial confidence is the total surrender of oneself to God, our Father, forgetting all that we are and placing all our concerns in his hands. We know that God will take great care of us and that all that relates to our salvation will be under the guidance of his providence, to his glory and ours. (Letter 22)

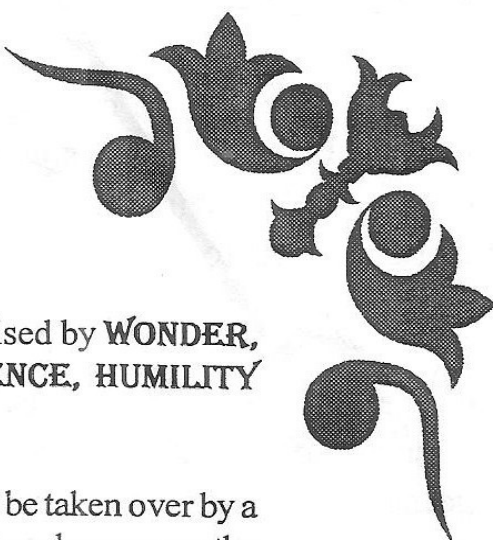
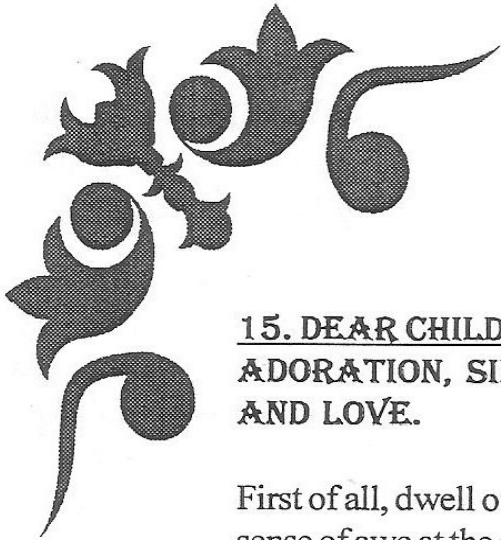
12. Contemplation is the respectful and loving attention to God's presence and majestic greatness. God sees and penetrates untiringly, with infinite care, all that we are, all that we think and do in the most secret recesses of our being. God's way of seeing is both active and effective for it creates, sustains, guides and orders all things to God's purposes. (Letter 4)

13. The first thing to do is to seek God who is infinite in regard to our potential for union as in all other things. We never find God so fully that there is no further need to seek. What is amazing is that we take the second search more seriously than the first and the third more than the second. We become so intent on each quest that when we consider what remains to be done, we think we have not yet sought, found, or united ourselves with God. And yet we never tire of this game of divine love. The more we possess God the more ardent, eager and capable we are of receiving more. (Letter 4)

14. Allow your mind to dwell on God's greatness; from wonder move on to adoration, contemplating God's infinite majesty on the one hand and our own weakness on the other. From adoration move on to silence and to a profound attitude of reverence, interiorly and exteriorly. From the silence, enter into a mysterious sense of being seized, recognising that God is mindful of us. "I shall not take my eyes off you" (Ps. 32:8) God cannot do otherwise.

It is God who enlightens us and who stamps these truths in the depths of our understanding and of our heart. All these movements become transformed into love, joy, tremblings of pure love, immense goodwill and mutual friendship between God and ourselves. We are sure that all this comes about so that we may be happy, honoured and satiated: like God, in God and with God.

O Love! O Joy! O Comfort! O Jesus! O Love! (Letter 13)



15. DEAR CHILD OF GOD, let your life be characterised by **WONDER**, **ADORATION**, **SILENCE**, **NOTHINGNESS**, **OBEDIENCE**, **HUMILITY** AND **LOVE**.

First of all, dwell on the **WONDER**, allowing yourself to be taken over by a sense of awe at the sight of God reaching out to you, as though you were the only one that mattered. Reflect on the mystery and wonder of being chosen to be God's dwelling place.

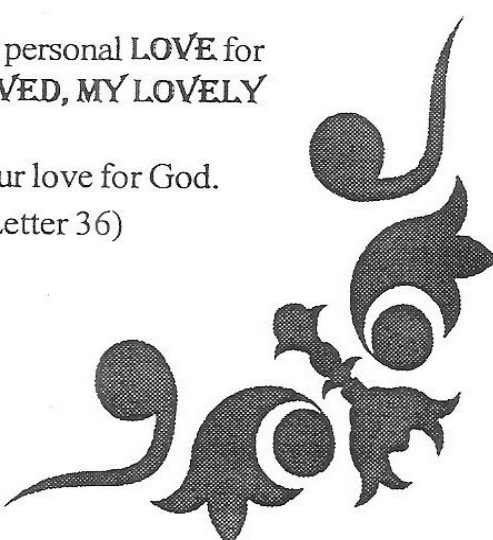
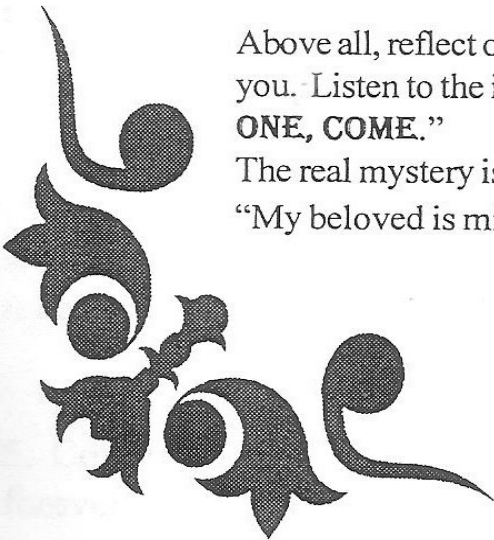
Bow down in **ADORATION** before God whose greatness exceeds all that we could ever imagine. May this sense of greatness so permeate you that it will be reflected in all that you do and say.

Pay attention to inner **SILENCE** which means trying to quieten the thoughts, emotions or impulses which lead to anxiety. Too much inner activity, and even multiplying acts of devotion, prevent us from hearing the gentle voice of God in the depths of our being.

Enter into your own **NOTHINGNESS** before the immense greatness of God. Recognise your total dependence and be ready to let go to God's desires. Ask for nothing more and desire nothing more.

It is not enough to reach this stage in thought and desire; it calls for a response in **OBEDIENCE** to God's will as it makes itself known. With humility, gentleness and discernment, be alert to the ways in which God reaches out to you through the people with whom you live and work.

Seek to live your life in a true spirit of **HUMILITY**. Pray for the grace to be able to say thanks when you are not offered the first place or recognised for what you have done. Jesus has gone this road before you.



Above all, reflect on the immensity of God's unique and personal **LOVE** for you. Listen to the invitation: "**COME THEN, MY BELOVED, MY LOVELY ONE, COME.**"

The real mystery is in God's love for us rather than in our love for God. "My beloved is mine and I belong to the beloved" (Letter 36)

8:19-22) (M.A.P. 4)

18. To be effective in our work, we require an inner attitude of pleading with God in order to obtain the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary for ourselves and for those we seek to win over and sanctify. As St. Paul said: "We pray continually that God may be pleased to fill you with a spirit of holiness." (P.M.21)

19. The Holy Spirit who prays in each one of us draws us together for the community prayer of adoration and praise, intercession and thanksgiving. This prayer binds us together in mission. We help one another to discover the presence of God in our lives and to hear, as God hears, the cry of the poor and the aspirations of all people.
(B. I. 16)

20. *O God, by whom all that is, has being,
O Depth, by which all is supported.
O Milieu, by which all is held together.
O King, Master of all.
O pure and sovereign Spirit,
Holding all things in your hand.
Life that animates every soul,
Through your goodness,
Be the Spirit, the source and the flame
Animating our will.
(Spiritual Canticle 45)*



OUR VOCATION

I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation.

Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace which binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all. Each one of us, however, has been given our own share of grace, given as Christ allotted it. (Eph. 4:1-7)

1. The beauty of the world consists of many different kinds of beauty. If a tree wanted to glow with brilliance of gold and if gold took on the green of the leaves, the flowers or the fruits of the tree, the whole of nature would be in disorder. So it is with the spiritual life; you must not try to follow the path that is right for another or lay claim to the same graces. This would lead to the ruination of everything, including oneself. It can be truly said of every saint: 'There truly has been no other person like this one'. (M.A.P. 113)

2. Whatever may be the condition of our calling or the position in which we find ourselves, in town or in the country, we must fulfil the duties of our vocation in accordance with the apostle's words: "Lead a life worthy of your vocation in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience." (M.A.P. 22)

3. Many people want to serve God, but the majority do not want to become God's instruments. Yet, this should be the proper disposition of everyone who is faithful. We should be in the hand of God like the brush in the hand of the painter; like the quill-pen in the hand of the writer. Note, by the way, that the quill, if it is to write well, must often be cut, trimmed and shaped. (P.M. 31)

4. Many people are willing enough to serve God, but they are not ready to become God's instruments. They prefer to be in control. We should be ready to let go and abandon ourselves to the Lord if we wish to become what God wants us to become and reach our true goal. (M.A.P. 141)

5. Commit yourself to God in a spirit of total and unconditional abandonment, now and forever. Captivated by the Spirit, let us make a real act of self-giving into God's keeping,

to be renewed every day and every moment of our lives, at the expense of anything we could wish for or have in this world. (Letter 43)

6. It is enough to present ourselves before God and to want to belong to him alone, without considering ourselves worthy to be favoured ones or especially loved. Then we should get on with the task of forming and fostering the development of those who have been entrusted to us in love as God's very own children. It is already too great an honour for us to have been given such a great and holy task. (P.M. 5)

7. If you desire to be blessed and loved by God continually, even without feeling anything, do not ever give up serving him in the small and meagre ways. (Letter 46)

8. Let your hearts be opened with a holy joy as you contemplate your happiness and the excellence of your vocation. (P.M. 35)



**MAKE STRAIGHT THE
WAY OF THE LORD
IN 1.23**

HUMILITY

Live not by your natural inclinations, but by the Spirit, since the Spirit of God has made a home in you. Indeed, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But when Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin but the spirit is alive because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you. So then, we have no obligation to human nature to be dominated by it. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the habits originating in the body, you will have life. (Rom. 8:9-13)

1. The Kingdom of God is God within us, Jesus is within us; God alone and Jesus alone through our self-emptying. This is the treasure hidden in a field i.e. in our heart and within ourselves; this is what we have to discover. Let us seek it. This is the precious jewel for which we must be prepared to sell everything, that is forget ourselves completely. Our soul must be to God what the hand is to our body. This can only be achieved by humility and by destroying in us what is not of God, so that God may take flesh again in us, so that Jesus may become incarnate in our very selves. (R.R. 1)
2. The adoration of God's Majesty reigning universally over us all and casting light into the depths of our hearts, reveals two abysses: our own nothingness and God's greatness. It will plunge us deeper and deeper into humility, that sea abounding in all virtues and the inexhaustible source of God's graces and most intimate communications. (Letter 27)
3. God often gives marvellous gifts of light and grace to the simple and unlearned if they are humble and lowly in their own eyes: "God gives knowledge to the little ones." (M.A.P. 47)
4. From the standpoint of humility and the low estimation we should have of ourselves with regard to our perfections, let us open our eyes to the similarity between this spiritual experience and the growth we notice in plants and trees, for nature begins, continues and terminates its growth in the roots planted deep in the earth. (Letter 14)
5. Whoever is not prepared to accept being humbled can never enter the state of contemplative prayer nor advance in the way of perfection. (M.A.P. 43)
6. We are really wasting our time and our very life, if we are not making progress in humility and reaching down to its admirable depths, fully aware of our own nothingness before God, at all times and in all places. (Letter 32)
7. Mary Magdalen and her companions, having gone down and lowered themselves into the tomb, found heavenly lights and saw the angels there. We can learn from them. They had prepared everything well and had taken perfumes. They had an ardent love for

the crucified Jesus. Their minds were filled with his death, crucifixion and degradation rather than with the splendour of his glory. They did everything with the greatest care but they had no trust in themselves, or in their strength, because they began to say to one another: 'Who will roll back the stone for us?' Who will remove the obstacle that prevents us from descending into the tomb with Jesus? They poured out their hearts to him and trusted in him. Who took away the stone? It was either Jesus or an angel whom he asked to do it.

It is he who teaches us to descend to the depths of humility, the holy women did indeed reach this depth and saw the angels there. (R.R. 8)

8. Lowliness is the exercise of true humility which helps us to remain among the least of all God's people, leading us into our nothingness in order to give glory to God and enter into a state of true adoration. The exercise of humility also helps to empty us of all pride and anger, of all bitterness and indignation, of all ambition and emotional disorders. Only the humble possesses all these blessings, not to mention the other great graces they experience. (Letter 22)

9. Lights which are true and sure are gifts from God, poured out by the Holy Spirit. It is only to the humble that God gives the greatest and truest gifts and there is no humility without obedience to the will of God. (Letter 37)

10. One of the many good effects of humility is the great peace it imparts to our whole being, including our emotions. In this way, it restores us to our true selves and we enter into the true wisdom which is the most active, and at the same time, the most tranquil thing in the world. (Letter 27)

11. Be at peace. Do not be afraid. God's ways can be strange and surprising. "How incomprehensible are God's ways" (Rom 11:33). You need a tremendous amount of humility, simplicity, obedience and fidelity in order to set out on these ways, persevere and arrive at the goal, which is none other than God. (Letter 8)

12. *She is nothing within but what is herself,
In total simplicity.
And contemplative union,
The one she loves takes over from her
It is as if everything belonging to her is gone.
That her very being has ceased to exist
She no longer is, neither does she live nor act.
She has no being or dwelling place
Her mind, bathed in this light, sees now
That nothing exists, except in God alone .
(Spiritual Canticle 11)*



HE BEGAN TO WASH *
THE DISCIPLES' FEET ←
JN 13.5

PART II

ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworms destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it... Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. (Mt. 6: 19-21, 25,33-34)

1. Nicolas Barré wanted members of the Institute to be totally dependent on the wise, loving and all-powerful providence of God so that they could rely upon it continually, for their maintenance and upkeep. He was firmly convinced that when their services for God and their neighbour were given freely and out of pure love, they would receive a recompense which would be beyond human power to give. In fact, they would become worthy and certain of the great rewards that God promises to give in this life and in the next to all those who seek only to advance the Kingdom in others. (F.S.2)

2. Abandonment and entire surrender of oneself and one's concerns to God as to your Father, is an integral part of spiritual childhood. Let trust regarding spiritual things be combined with abandonment in temporal matters. Rest assured that your heavenly Father will take care of them. True abandonment is the complete surrender of oneself to God. To abandon oneself, is to go back morally and mystically to a state of nothingness. In this movement the soul returns to God, its true source, to be re-created in a purely divine manner. (Letter 14)

3. *In a word, all we need to know is that,
In the innermost recesses of the spirit,
God decrees, prescribes and carries out
A work which his hand withholds from our eyes;
That the human spirit has never yet
Been so malleable in his hand,
So open to his light;
And that there will never be matter
Quite so disposed to the workings of the supernatural.
(Spiritual Canticle 21)*

4. If you cannot give up what you have, let go of yourselves and then all is left behind; when you renounce yourself interiorly, you also renounce what is outside of yourself without even realising it. It is self which is the support and basis of everything. We must take away this basis and put Jesus there instead. This is the only foundation stone on which to build a lasting edifice. (R.R.8)

5. If we rely on God for everything, it can happen that we choose to do nothing at all and little by little laziness takes over and a desire to seek the easy way. This would be a false tranquillity and would be harmful for the soul. We must always act as if we were the doers, while being convinced, however, that it is God who does everything; bringing together the two extremes of grace and free will. (R.R. 10)

6. With regard to the future, members of the Institute will abandon themselves entirely to the providence of God. Those who undertake to maintain them in the various parts of France to which they are sent, are under no obligation to continue providing for them. Sacrificing their own interests with serenity of mind, they give of themselves totally and allow themselves to be used, so that souls may be saved. They show no anxiety about what will become of them one day. (M. I. 6c)

7. If anyone asks you why you have come, say that God has sent you and that you have been placed here. You shall stay for as long as it seems good to me. Whatever you do or suffer will be in accordance with my will. Be happy to place yourself in my hands, to abandon yourself to my guidance, to do everything in and through me, in confidence, love, obedience and abandonment. Therefore, close your eyes, throw yourself into my arms, act only through me. Let your one concern be to obey me and follow me in everything and through everything. (Letter 13)

8. *Then this darkness, these shadows,
These deep abstractions,
These pure denials,
Are to the soul as cherished gifts.
Her inner being is at peace.
Nothing delights her heart as much
As these things of the spirit.
In non-desire is her desire;
And her eternal riches lie
In having nothing and desiring nothing.*
(Spiritual Canticle 24)



**LOOK AT THE BIRDS
IN THE SKY-MTG-26**

9. The Institute is a completely supernatural project, which must always be kept free from what is of this world. It must not be made to depend upon the ordinary means of human prudence and wisdom. (F.M. 8)

10. Outstanding charity, genuine virtue and the sincere pursuit of evangelical perfection will be the surest guarantee that this Institute will keep its character. Then it will not degenerate like other groups, who put more trust in endowments and the security of temporal possessions, than on the genuine charity and integrity of their members. (S.R. 14:18)

11. The temporal goods of the Institute are entrusted to us as "the patrimony of the poor". They should be administered with disinterestedness and with a sense of responsibility with regard to the "little ones". (B.I. 109)

12. The spirit of disinterestedness (i.e. acting out of pure love and for no reward) is considered to be the source of all the graces and blessing which God bestows on the mission. It is the basis of whatever progress is made in helping to bring about the salvation of others. (M.I.6d)

13. We must let go of all self-interest so that nothing be for oneself, but for God alone. God alone must be the motive for this purity of heart which should be accompanied by purity of intention. (R.R.10)

14. The spirit of the Institute draws its strength from disinterestedness, love of poverty, pure desire to work for the salvation of one's neighbour, together with self-abandonment to Divine Providence. This strengthens the members' vocation and keeps them firm and constant in their zeal. (R.E.4)

15. Freely and out of love, we enter the Institute. Freely and out of love we remain. Nicolas Barré wanted us to be totally dependent on Providence. Our attachment to the Institute, therefore, is not based on laws or securities, but on the assurance of God's fidelity. To seek any other assurances or securities is "to move away from that spirit, to move away from the Holy Spirit." (S.A.5) We have a responsibility to help one another to persevere in this way of abandonment and disinterestedness which may sometimes be difficult. (B.I. 71)

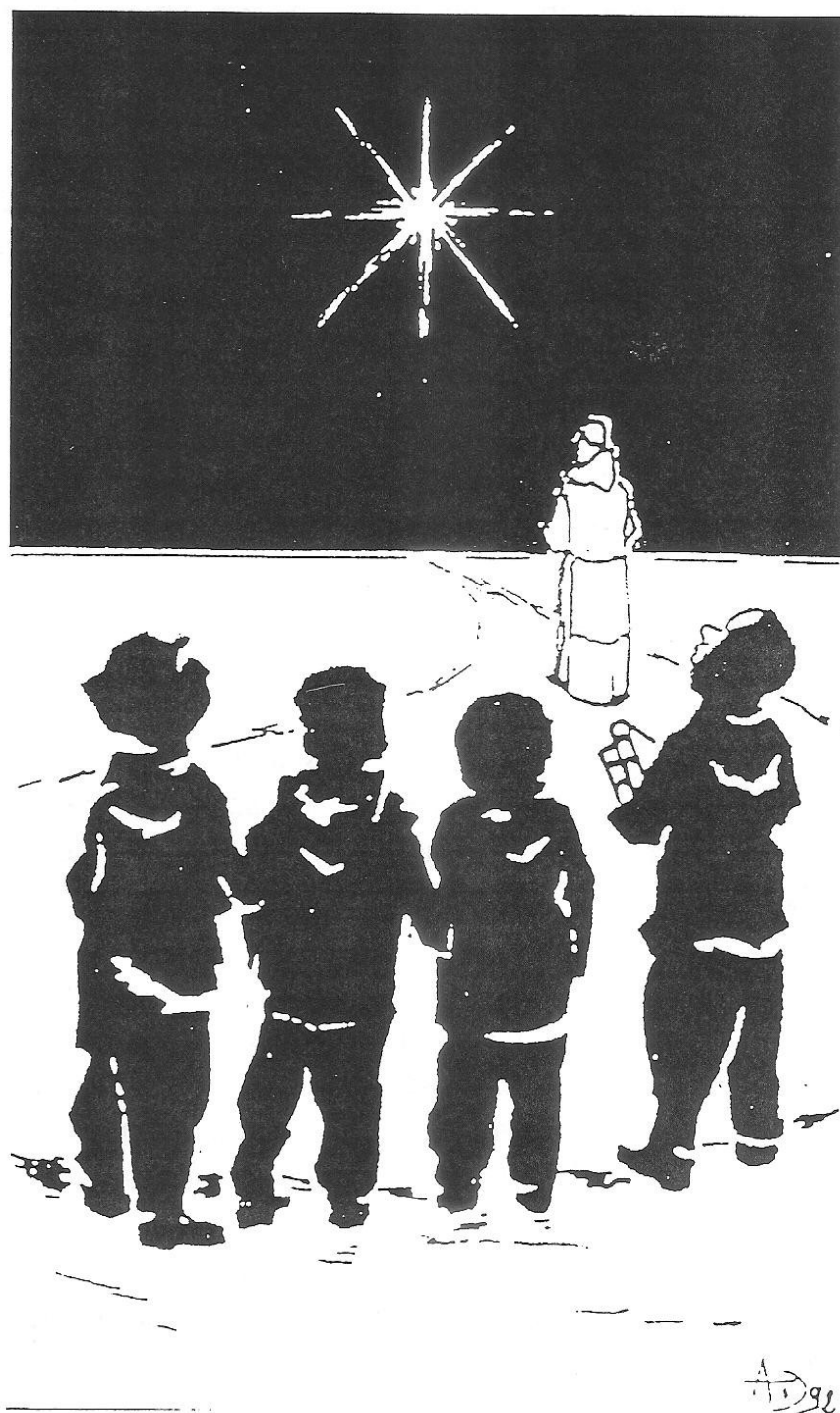
16. In our apostolic service we will be humble and unassuming. This calls for a letting go of the world. We will not seek privileges or honours for ourselves and will be on our guard, so that the attraction of prestige, power or money will never divert us from the work of God. Out of love for Christ, we will also accept in faith and with patience the deprivations which life brings such as failure, old age and illness. (B.I. 30)

17. A true spirit of humility will enable us to shun all desire for praise and flattery. It will strengthen us in times of humiliation or contradiction which God could allow or which could arise through our own fault. (Letter 22)

18. Firmly but gracefully refuse to accept whatever is offered you by the children or

their parents as a reward or a gift. The same rule will hold whether for rich or poor, in the town and in the countryside. All the more so, this Article expressly forbids anyone to ask for anything, directly or indirectly. (S.R.8: 16)

19. Be sure not to wander far from the crib of Jesus, so, a great simplicity in everything, even in what concerns the chapel, its furnishings and decoration - neither too much nor too little. No gold or silver, nothing precious, for this is not according to the way of Jesus. (F.M. 11)



ALL FOR THE LOVE AND GLORY OF GOD

This, then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

(Eph. 3:14-21)

1. Let us work for pure love and the greater glory of God. Let us do all that we can to accomplish our duty well and above all with great fidelity. God will be faithful in rewarding us in this world and in the next. But it is not the thought of a reward that should motivate us. It is pure and holy love which should encourage us. (Letter 50)
2. Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, our whole life is animated by love which is for us the source of disinterestedness, humility and availability, freedom and daring. (B.I. 1)
3. When our hearts and wills are totally at one with those of Jesus, all that we do and suffer will flow from his heart and will, which gives infinite merit to the least acts of love done in the name of Jesus. (Letter 43)
4. Reflection on God's greatness will lead us to worship in spirit and in truth and to desire to depend totally on God's divine guidance and will. Reflecting on such infinite goodness, we will strive, with the help of grace, to love God alone with our whole heart, and to ardently seek to give him glory. (R.M. 5)
5. When love is present in the heart, it wants the place for itself alone. It seeks to drive out all else. It is like an inner voice constantly urging us on to let go of all that would lead us astray. The light of this divine love makes us more aware of our unworthiness and leads to true humility. We become more aware of how far away we are from the state of perfection and find ourselves saying: 'Lord, I am not worthy'. (R.R.10)

6. This love will give rise to an increase of faith in all the truths of the Gospel and unlimited trust that, in whatever is in store for us, God will help us with grace and special protection. We will then be ready to accept the outcome of our work whether good or bad, like a servant who, despite affliction, is determined to carry out God's will until death, with the help of grace. (R.M. 6)

7. A Master orders his servant to draw water from a well and pour it into a drum. The water escapes from the drum through a series of holes and flows into several canals. The master has set up these canals to water different parts of the garden, but the servant being unaware of this, grumbles against him and complains that it is a waste of effort and time. But later, when the master leads him to the garden and shows him the well-filled reservoirs of water, he recognises his master's wisdom, and resolves in future to carry out his orders without bothering about anything else. (M.A.P. 201)

8. Let us seek the reign of Jesus in us. Let us take possession of him alone - our Lord and Master - as well as his gifts and graces which always accompany him. They are as inseparable from him as light is from the sun. If we want to have the sun we do not have to seek light as well. Scripture says that when we have wisdom in our hearts we also have all that is good. This eternal wisdom is ours, uncreated and incarnate. Let us set our hearts on nothing else but the desire and love of this wisdom, never turning away, so as to be filled with its gifts. (R.R.11)

9. For God to reign in us and over us, our whole being must be united with him as our beginning and creator, our goal, our centre, our place of rest and supreme happiness. For us to live is to reach out and be founded and rooted in God.
(Letter 13)

10. In living out our mission, we are animated by "pure love". This is a gift which enables us to love God and all people with complete disinterestedness. Being free with regard to persons and places, money and success and even with regard to works undertaken, we place our trust in God's love, not worrying about what will become of us one day. Our belonging to the Institute is founded on no other security and calls for a spirit of abandonment and total detachment. (B.I. 6)

11. Our sole desire should be to work for the salvation of others with complete disinterestedness. The love which animates us expects nothing in return. "Freely you

have received, freely give." (Mt. 10:8) United with Jesus we enter into a process of self-emptying, where he himself becomes our security. This inner experience of our own basic nothingness expresses itself in our life and frees us to be on the side of the poor, recognising their dignity as children of God. (B.I. 29)

12. *She is, and God is within*
It is enough just to be,
Even without any feeling of emotion,
Without distinguishing one from the other.
There is no more "me" or "mine"
There is nothing of herself left in her
Nothing but God in the very depth of her being.
He alone is her world.
As for herself, she has the very depths of her being
With God alone as her foundation.

God now present to this soul
Is free to act in it as He wills
He alone is its life and fiery flame
If a soul cannot describe His action
It is because she has no perception of it.
Nor does she seek to understand it.
Here any kind of reflection,
or effort to feel or understand, is not even possible.
(Spiritual Canticle 19,20)



INCARNATION

*God's love for us was revealed
when God sent into the world
his only Son so that
we could have life through him.
(1Jn. 4:9).*



1. The Institute has its origin in the very heart of God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son to instruct people and teach them the way to salvation, so that those who believed in him may not die but have eternal life. (S.R. 1:1)
2. In her YES at the Annunciation, Mary gave her entire life so that the mystery of the Incarnation could be accomplished. In accepting that God would make use of her, she has given us an example to follow. Our prayer, like that of Mary, gradually leads us to will what God wills for us. (B.I. 21)
3. Let us long and yearn deeply for a second incarnation to take place within us. Let us trust in God and abandon ourselves to him alone. God appears to be moved by and to respond to the pleas of the poor, the weak, the powerless and the destitute. Let us continue to cry out and to plead until our prayer is heard - it is the only way. Let us not give up, whatever the apparent rejection or refusal or when things seem impossible or whatever difficulties arise. God hides and withdraws only to bring about a more perfect result. (R.R. 4)
4. We must go on receiving Jesus in Holy Communion so that eventually he may take possession of us. The real aim of the Eucharist is to complete in us the mystery of the Incarnation, the purpose of which is to enable all people to share in the divinity of Christ. (R.R. 9.)
5. The Incarnation is the work of the Holy Spirit. We must allow the Spirit to take possession of us and gradually bring about the unity of our apostolic lives in which action and contemplation permeate each other. Our whole life can then become an experience of God whom we will encounter in the joys and difficulties of mission as well as in moments of silence and recollection. (B.I: 14)
- 6 To enter into the state of perfection in all its dimensions, there must be a holy and spiritual blending of the active and contemplative life, in such a way that the contemplative dimension extends itself and discreetly penetrates the active dimension, elevating and exalting it. (Letter 27)
7. The mystery of the Incarnation is a mystery of poverty: "God was rich, but became poor for our sake, to make us rich out of his poverty." (2Cor. 8:9) Christ entered fully into the human condition and chose to be born and live as a poor person. By his words and actions, he shows that the Kingdom of God is revealed when the Good News is proclaimed to the poor. Responding to his call, we discover the joy of entering into the mystery of his poverty and of sharing in the choices he made. (B.I. 28)

LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR



Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two, hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also".

(Mt. 22:35-40)

1. Now, although it is a good thing to fill one's mind with God and to desire to love God alone, it is not the whole of the Gospel. Jesus was not satisfied with this. He emptied himself, suffered, died to himself in his own death. He worked miracles, preached, taught, talked to and cured people. There was no limit to what he did for his neighbour whom he saw as another self. He went on working to the end. (R.R. 10)
2. Jesus, the head of the Mystical Body, suffered inner torment, much worse than his physical sufferings, at the sight of the ravages of sin in us. He carried the weight of the sins of others. In imitation of our Saviour, we must spare no effort to save our neighbour from sin. To that end we must be prepared to give up our time, our interests, our possessions, our lives, like St. Paul who said: 'I will gladly give everything I have, even my own self, for the salvation of souls.' (2Cor 12:15) (M.A.P. 217 +218)
3. There should be no limit to our efforts to ensure our neighbour's salvation. St Paul said: "I am perfectly willing to spend what I have, and to spend for your sakes." (2 Cor. 12:15) Jesus said: "There can be no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friend." (Jn. 15:13) (P.M.7)
4. Those whose ministry it is to promote the salvation of their neighbour and the sanctification of souls should be 'all things to all people'. They must be valet, servant, companion, task master. For love of others, Jesus became all of these. (M.D. 53)
5. We must not love God only, we must also love our neighbour. We should intensify our efforts, aware that our neighbour is a person capable of giving glory to God. He needs our co-operation for our own salvation and for that of our neighbour. God wants to work through us so that we can give him the support of which we are capable. We should always act with the intention of promoting our neighbour's salvation so that the love of God may burn brightly in his or her heart - a heart which will burn before God and for him. This is what is known as lighting a candle for God. (R.R. 12)

6. We must have a great desire and a great respect for all that is in the image of God. To give pleasure to one's neighbour is to give pleasure to God, for whom Jesus became flesh and for whom he died. From this springs the great love which we show to our neighbour and the great zeal for his or her salvation and sanctification. (Letter 22)

7. When our heart truly loves something, it only thinks of and breathes for the object of its love. It procures for the loved one every possible good, without setting any limits or calculating how much to give. There is joy over the loved one's success, and sorrow over failures. One lives for the other alone and is ever ready to sacrifice one's life for the other. Let us examine ourselves and see whether we are animated by the same sentiments and motivated by the same incentives to please Jesus and his Church - his Mystical body. (M.A.P. 207)

8. Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? Let us see as we reflect on the signs of this love. Do we feel sadness and distress when we hear that the salvation of the other is in danger? Do we rejoice at the success of our neighbour's work for God and at the abundance of grace lavished by Jesus? Do we give as much thought to our neighbour's good and advantage as we do to our own? Do we do for the other what we do for ourselves? (M.A.P. 215)

9. In considering the infinite majesty of God who is so great, and who desires to communicate with us, we become aware that the love of God which penetrates our heart, also enkindles love of our neighbour. This love leads us to do whatever we can, to give whatever we can and to undertake whatever we can for the good of the other, without any distinction and forgetting our own concerns. (Letter 57)

10. With regard to our neighbour we must never grow weary or discouraged whatever the hardness, the resistance or stubbornness we encounter. (P.M. 29)

11. When Jesus Christ sees that for love of him, we are taken up with the service of our neighbour, with his or her good and sanctification, he himself undertakes to see to our salvation and our spiritual progress. (P.M.11)

12. To arrive at familiarity with God, we must freely, respectfully and lovingly ask him to bestow graces on our neighbour. We must make use of the favours granted us and the benefits stored up for us, in order to do good to others and above all to promote God's glory. Much more glory will surely be given when we reach out to others in this way rather than focusing on ourselves only. Our friendship with God will be all the more real and profound, the more detached we are from ourselves and our personal interests. (Letter 14)

PART III

COPIES OF JESUS CHRIST

The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit. (2Cor. 3:17-18)

1. Listen to Jesus Christ. He is your model. Weigh all his words and act accordingly. (P.M. 8)
2. We must walk in the ways of Jesus, suffer and die like him and for him. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born of many". (Rom.8:29) In this way, the Eternal Father will recognise us as "images of his Son." That is all that matters. (M.A.P.162)
3. The children of God take no credit for the light which they have. They remain in darkness and nothingness and God's light shines in them. The deeper the darkness and emptiness, the greater the divine light, Jesus. To live in this state of luminous darkness we, like Jesus, have to be children of God. This means following the paths that Jesus followed in the same state of lowliness. In this way people will grow in his image and likeness. (R.R.10)
4. Damp wood must be sawed, dried out and then put into the fire. It burns and in the process it loses its substance of wood and is changed into fire. We dry out the dampness by renewing our faith, hope, good works and burning love. Jesus, who is the true mould (form) for our lives, will so dwell in us that he will change us into himself. (R.R. 9)
5. Rooted deeply in the mystery of the Incarnation, we do all in our power to foster the growth of all people in the image of God, so that each one may be formed in the love and knowledge of Jesus Christ. (B.I. 1)

6. We must have as our sole purpose to form likenesses of Jesus Christ and strive to make them so like the original as to reproduce perfect images of God. "In his image and likeness he created them." (Gen. 1:26) God is holy and it is he who makes people holy. (Lev. 11:44) Human beings, however make others holy and then become holy themselves. It is easier to make others holy than to become holy oneself. (P.M. 6)

7. Even though God wants to use us for such a holy and noble task of fostering the growth of people in the image of God, we ought to humble ourselves sincerely, and being aware of our lowliness, abandon ourselves to the guidance of God's Spirit who gives grace to the humble and speaks through them. This disposition will enable us to enter into God's plans and intentions. We must leave aside all human considerations and seek only to establish the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in souls for whom he gave his life. We should ask the Holy Spirit to speak to their hearts so that the seed of the Word may not be lost. (R.C. 2-3)

8. *Yes, these souls, having become like their Saviour,
Sharing in his happiness
Are, like him, pure and unadorned.
Through his communication of himself
And even through his lesser blessings
They share in his essence
No longer caught by another milieu
Despite the great difference in nature
They are, in a sense, like God. (Spiritual Canticle 42)*



FILL MY HOUSE

'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' "Sir," said the servant, "your orders have been carried out and there is still room." Then the Master said to the servant, 'Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and force people to come in to make sure my house is full.'

(Luke 14:22-23)

1. Jesus evangelised in the towns and villages as well as in the cities, and his mission was directed especially to the simple and poor. (S.R. 1:17)

2. Christ calls us to himself, to share in his life and unite ourselves with his mission. He invites us to follow him in the ways he chose in his Incarnation and to recognise him today in the poor and the "little ones" with whom he identified. "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40) (B.I.4)



3. God is supremely great, yet is happy to reach out humbly towards the little ones. In his plan for his Son, he willed not only that he should become a human being, but also a little child. Jesus placed a child in the centre, the place of honour, among the apostles. He forbade them to prevent the children coming to him. He said that whoever scandalised a single child would deserve to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Jesus also said that all those who consider themselves superior to others would never be saved if they did not become like little children. Finally, he said that whoever received a little child in his name would receive him and that whatever is done to one of the least,

the poorest, the most despised, is done to himself. It follows that whoever receives a poor, abandoned child doubly welcomes the person of Jesus Christ. Herein lies the first and most important aim of the Institute. (S.R. 2)

4. Christ reveals the sign of the presence of the Kingdom among us: "The Good News is proclaimed to the poor." Therefore, in a world which often rejects them, Nicolas Barré would want us to give priority to the poor, with particular attention to children and young people. (B.I. 5)

5. The Institute has its origin in the very heart of God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son to instruct all people and teach them the way to salvation, so that those who believe in him may not die but may have eternal life. (B.I. 3)

6. The aim of the Institute is to establish the reign of Jesus Christ in all hearts. (M.I.3)

7. Spiritual needs are of much greater importance than those of the body. Beggars are rarely at a loss when it comes to wheedling a few shillings but they may die of spiritual hunger. People giving alms are often deeply moved by the poverty they can see, but often remain unaffected by the fact that the same beggars are in danger of losing their souls. Admirable as it is to feed and clothe the body, it is better still to teach the poor the truths of salvation. The sign given in the Gospel to show that Jesus is the Messiah is that 'the poor have the Gospel preached to them'. When Jesus miraculously cured physical ailments, it was in order that he might cure the soul. (M.A.P. 219 + 222)

8. The principal activity of members of the Institute will be to keep schools for poor and needy children and to receive there the grown-ups whom God will draw to them, since the Christian Instruction which they give, implies that no distinction be made between persons; neither should anyone be excluded. (S.R. 1:15)

9. As Sisters of the Infant Jesus, Christ calls us within the Church to follow him by dedicating our lives in total abandonment to the proclamation of the Good News "especially to the simple and the poor." (B.I. 1)



MISSION

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.
(Isaiah 61: 1-2)*

1. Areas of apostolic involvements in the Institute are the result of a continuous historical evolution. We must assume responsibility for this situation and together search for ways that will enable us to hear Christ's call in his poor and respond to it. (B.I. 203)

2. With creativity and daring, we will seek to adapt our means of evangelisation, to the realities of life where the mystery of the Incarnation continues to take place.

We must always ensure that the means we choose, whether teaching, pastoral work, apostolic movements, action for justice and human rights or any other form of involvement in education, lead to the proclamation of the Good News.

In places where we cannot proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly, we will make every effort to prepare the way of the Lord, knowing that we have to be patient, so that, little by little, communities of believers spring up or continue to develop. (B.I.8)

3. Following Christ in his poverty, we try to find ways of seeing and understanding the situations in which the poor live and to become sensitive to their aspirations and their sufferings. In the face of privations resulting from unequal distribution of wealth, we will come to understand the necessity of sharing as a step towards creating a more just world. (B.I. 221)

4. To proclaim the Good News to the "simple and the poor" is also to commit ourselves, wherever we may be, to the building up of a more just world:

- allowing ourselves to be challenged by the Gospel and the teaching of the Church, so that we may seek the justice which God wills;

- searching with others for the way of salvation in Jesus Christ, in solidarity with the oppressed;

- taking action against the root causes of poverty rather than merely rectifying its effects;
 - knowing how to speak out against unjust systems and refusing to support them in any way;
 - seeking a way of being present which makes a sharing of life possible.
- All this presupposes courage, credibility and detachment from self. (B.I.202)

5. In our ministry of 'instruction and education' we aim to further the growth of persons in the image of God so that they can:

- express themselves according to their own identity;
- live in harmony with one another,
- become freer and more responsible with regard to their future. This process of growth is already an acceptance of the Good News. It is also our way of journeying towards an encounter with the living God, whom we desire to know and love. (B.I. 201)

6. The Holy Spirit teaches us how to love as Jesus loved. Gradually set free by this love, we become truly ourselves. We then become more aware of the need to help each person to grow in accordance with his or her own innate ability so that, together, we may all become what God wants us to be. As we grow in this genuine and disinterested love, we will be more ready to accept each person in the mystery of his or her God-given personality. We will then open our hearts to all, giving first place to the poor and the "little ones." (B.I. 37)

7. Each one is sent on mission as a member of a community and, however varied our commitments, each one's mission is the mission of the community. So as to take on this mutual responsibility, we will work out together our way of living the mission of the Institute within our concrete situations. (B.I. 45)

8. Some means to achieve the aims of the Institute (in 17th century France): -

- to run free schools for children.
- to seek out in their own surroundings, older girls who are at risk, or who are already in trouble.
- to give instruction and talks in the public hall on Sundays and Holy Days.

Members possess a special grace which enables them to procure the salvation of others, to preserve the innocence of children, and to win over the parents through their little ones. Gently and gradually they reach the hearts of mothers through their daughters, ladies through their servants and even convert men through their wives.

With regard to the older girls and the women, they will teach them to pray from their hearts, that is, to reflect on the mysteries, truths and duties of their religion. (M.I.4)

9. In order to be effective (in mission), three things are necessary:

(1) Discernment of spirits in regard to the children and the other persons they instruct so that each be brought up in accordance with his or her own innate ability.

(2) A deep love for souls, and a supernatural, God-given love for the persons for whom they are responsible, behaving and acting like mothers, who, forgetful of themselves, endure everything for their children and who omit nothing that is for their good.

(3) An inner attitude of pleading with God in order to obtain the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary for themselves and for those they seek to win over and sanctify. As St. Paul says: "We pray continually that God may be pleased to fill you with his spirit of holiness." (P.M. 21)

10. Try to remember that God wants to use you to teach these children the way to salvation. Abandon yourselves to the guidance of the Spirit who gives grace to the humble and puts words on their lips. Ask the Spirit to speak to the hearts of these children through you. Do not talk too much, but proceed rather by way of asking questions. Avoid all affectation and complicated language. You will do better to speak in a humble, gentle, homely way, so that even the youngest and least educated can understand you. (R.C. 3 and 4)

11. Teachers will relate to all the school-children, big and small, as if they were their mothers. And so, they will love and instruct them with as much impartiality as possible without any favouritism. (S.R. 8:1)

12. Not only will they be content to instruct the little children, they must also pray for them and for their neighbour in their role as mothers to the children. (S.R. 8:7)

13. They will show great detachment with regard to all kinds of people and approach them only as their needs require. They will not consider the talents or the different dispositions, whether good or bad, of those they instruct, but will work purely and simply for God. Their only desire will be to win glory for God in working for the salvation of souls. (M.I. 6f)

14. Considering the great importance of their mission and how necessary it is for them to acquire competence in it, they will often devote time to perfecting their knowledge of all the truths of the faith and the practice of the virtues, especially gentleness, modesty, humility and perfect obedience. They will also apply themselves with great care to both reading and writing, so as to be able to instruct the children to the best of their ability, and teach them all that is necessary for their salvation and Christian perfection. (S.R. 1:6)

15. Unremitting work, with little rest calls for moderation. I think you should take a



break, which would not only be of physical benefit to you but it would also be of help to you spiritually. You would do well then from time to time, and indeed fairly often, to take some days off, or even weeks, to recover your strength of soul and body. During these breaks, you could devote more time to prayer and contemplation of the eternal truths, while avoiding any form of strain. Be content to simply empty your mind of all other preoccupations as well as whatever has to do with your work. You can then gently turn towards God for whom alone you are undertaking your work. "In peace, I lie down and at once fall asleep" All our activities must lead towards rest in God and particularly

towards a rest from which the soul draws new strength and greater energy to start work again with a renewed sense of purpose which will bear more fruit. (Letter 27)

16. *Time and place no more exist,
And all fixed objects pale;
Elaborate preparations too give way
As God invades this soul,
Depriving her of power to speak and act,
Flooding her with his own holy presence.
Her customary need to act suspended,
She no longer tries or needs
To play an active role.
She feels her inner self expand
In utter freedom, love and peace.
(Spiritual Canticle 16)*

A LIVING FAITH



Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I say? Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them - I will show you what he is like. He is like the man who when he built his house, dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built. But the one who listens and does nothing is like the man who built his house on soil, with no foundations; as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!
(Luke 6: 46-49)

1. The principal aim of the schools will be, not only to teach the children reading and writing, but to instruct them in all that is necessary for salvation and to give them a christian education. The teachers will rely on God to bless whatever they do, to the extent that their intentions are pure and detached from all personal interest and human prudence. (R.M. 2)

2. Teaching the children all the truths would be of little use if the teachers were not animated by holy zeal in leading them, according to their ability, to the practical living out of the principal truths of the Gospel. The fact is that we are bound to believe the Gospel with the same faith as we have in the Trinity, since we cannot be saved without making it the rule of our life and activity. (R.C. 11)

3. By inculcating evangelical truths which lead to the practice of virtue, children are given a christian education and helped to develop their judgement so that they can form an opinion, evaluate and choose; not according to disordered nature, but according to faith and with the mind of Jesus Christ. His wisdom is the opposite of worldly wisdom and will enable them to discern what it means to be blessed or accursed according to the Gospel. (R.C.14)

4. The Eight Beatitudes must be introduced and explained after which it will be suggested to the pupils that they compose acts of faith, such as the following:
"Yes, my God, I believe that the poor in spirit are blessed, that the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful, the pure of heart, those who weep, those who hunger and thirst for justice are blessed. I believe this O Lord, because you have said it." (R.C.15)

5. The children must be encouraged to make up acts of faith in these truths and shown that we cannot avoid the "woes" pronounced by Jesus Christ except by being humble in the midst of riches, by being detached from the things of earth, by loving the poor, giving them alms out of love for God, since the real treasures of Christians consist in the good use they make of their riches in all sorts of good works. (R.C. 18)

6. When instructing you must not merely impart knowledge; the important thing is to inspire piety, devotion, fear and love of the Lord and to give children an education that is truly Christian and spiritual. (P.M. 17)

7. In the Trade schools will be taught a real appreciation of prayer from the heart; the importance of looking inward in meditation, of striving towards a deeper awareness of the Divine Presence, of interior communion with God, Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother. (T.S. 8)

8. Educating people in the faith and leading them to God is far better than building churches or decorating altars, because what one is doing is preparing spiritual dwellings and living temples for God. (P.M. 13)

PART IV

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and meet that chariot'. When Philip ran up, he heard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 'How can I' he replied, 'unless I have someone to guide me?' So he invited Philip to get in and sit by his side. (Acts 8:29-32)

1. It is God's desire to reign in the human heart. He does not seem to be at rest until he can take possession of it. What a wonderful mission it is to facilitate whatever will enable God to find a house in the heart of another. (M.D.13)
2. Spiritual direction is a God given gift. We must cultivate it reverently, humbly and faithfully. (Letter 28)
3. The Director's role is to prevent the gifts of God from being lost and to recover what might already have been squandered. "He will gather together the scattered tribes of Israel" (Is. 11:12) (M.D.14)
4. It cost Jesus Christ his life to bring about the redemption and lead the human race towards their Creator. Why then should any less be expected of one who is called to co-operate with God's design. (M.D. 15)
5. Like St. Paul, the Director ought to give as much attention to the saving of a single soul as if the conquest of a whole world were at stake. (M.D.37)
6. It might be possible to count the number of people converted by Jesus Christ during his life, but those converted after his death would be innumerable. "Unless a wheat grain dies, it remains only a single grain..."(Jn. 12:24) It follows that unless the Director dies to the world and to self, the fruit produced will be very mediocre. (M.D.16)
7. Spiritual Directors must look upon God as the centre of a great circle to whom an infinite number of lines converge, all starting from different points. Let them take care not to divert the directees from their own particular path; otherwise they would hinder people in their progress or lead them astray. (M.D.23)
8. The Spiritual Director should win people over by gentleness and sincerity, enter into their hearts, listen with patience, show compassion when they are troubled, support them and help them to benefit from their difficulties, even grow through them when

God puts them in their path. (M.D. 24)

9. In order to win souls, you must treat them with great gentleness, never talking down to them but always acting with great humility and modesty. (P.M. 19)

10. Having reached out to others with gentleness and humility, you must follow this through with a warmth and enthusiasm inspired by love. People are more readily drawn to God by this kind of sensitivity than by the authority and rigour of laws. Besides, this is how the Holy Spirit acts in our hearts. (P.M. 20)

11. The Holy Spirit attracts and takes possession of souls more often through the gentle soothing balm of grace than through the force of law, since people are generally more influenced by their feelings, their natural impulses, their imagination and their interest in what relates to human nature before moving on to the spiritual. Thus the Director will emphasise the importance of God's will; while at the same time taking into account love, one's natural attraction and ability, rather than the austerity and authority of law. (M.D. 25)

12. Those who are troubled must be listened to even when one does not know how to relieve their sufferings. While waiting for God to intervene, they can be given some consolation. By means of kindly conversation, the most bitter part of the trouble can be gently removed from their heart. This, however, does not apply to the scrupulous, because the help they require is quite different. (M.D. 26)

13. It is more important to listen than to speak so as to gain insight from the knowledge God conveys through the persons being directed, all the while entering more deeply into one's own nothingness. (M.D. 22)

14. God often gives marvellous gifts of light and grace to the simple and unlearned if they are humble and lowly in their own eyes; - "God gives knowledge to the little ones." (M.A.P. 47)

15. Jesus said: "Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven." (Lk. 18:15-17) The more lowly a person is, the more willing Jesus is to let that person draw near and be at home with him. The surest way to gain access to God's most intimate favours is to become a child in every respect. (M.D.54)

16. The skilled Director should take great care to clip the wings of the proud who would like to serve God in a conceited and purely intellectual way, following their own presumptuous ambition. People of clay must serve God according to their ability, remaining in the lowly place that is theirs. When they go to God by the way of abjection and humility, they will be received favourably. God rejects proud and arrogant persons, who presume to approach like angels. (M.D. 54)

17. It is important that each one grows accustomed to facilitate whatever will enhance the attraction of God. When this attraction seems to wane or disappear altogether, it must be pursued. It can be re-awakened by fervour, recalled by strong desire and strengthened by steadfast fidelity. (M.D. 40)

18. Different species of trees produce different kinds of fruit. We must not look for cherries on a plum tree. So it is with people. Each one has to bear fruit according to its kind which is the combined result of grace and a person's special attraction. The Director's role consists in carefully distinguishing the fruit, tending it and bringing it to perfect maturity. (M.D. 41)

19. Milk is the food of beginners. They must be treated leniently at the start so as not to be frightened off while still fragile and weak: "I have given you milk to drink not solid food, because you were not yet able for it". Jesus also says in the Gospel: "I have still many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now." (M.D. 29)

20. If a person is fragile and weak, there is danger of discouragement and faintheartedness, so one must be careful. By demanding too much, all can sometimes be lost. (M.D. 34)

21. In order to help beginners make progress, their natural inclinations must be taken into consideration. They must be guided according to their gifts which is the way that the Spirit of God usually works. Gradually they must be led to a higher state, following the direction in which grace is leading them. (M.D. 47)

22. Most Directors use books to help them in their ministry. This is good but it is not the most reliable source. Books can be like dry cisterns containing only stagnant water. It is much better to go directly to the source for a supply of fresh and life-giving water. Unless the director is a person of prayer and ready to practice self denial where will he or she learn what to say, what advice to offer, what questions to ask? (M.D. 18)

23. Spiritual Directors should enter into their nothingness and act in accordance with what they perceive; they will draw light from on high, so that they may be able to help in every way possible, during privileged moments of grace. (M.D. 20)

24. Spiritual Directors often receive many lights and heavenly gifts to be shared with the directees. They are rich, therefore, in what belongs to others. If what is given to the directors for others were separated from their personal graces and virtues, they would find themselves almost naked, "poor and miserable." They are like a river swollen by many streams and brooks. (M.D. 11)

OUR OWN SALVATION

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." (Mk. 8:34-36)

1. You may be disturbed by the temptation to withdraw from your mission and from the exercise of charity towards your neighbour, under the pretext of working at your own perfection. The idea may even occur to you that before leading others to love God, you must first love him perfectly yourself. This would be a big mistake and a grave error. (P.M. 4)

2. We must be of service for God's sake, not for ours. Most people think too much about their own spiritual growth. They want to know where they are going, what will become of them. They want to see if they are making progress. They are impatient to get on, and worry about it, and get caught up in self-love, anxiety, anger. This causes them to go backwards instead of forward. The remedy is to abandon oneself wholly and entirely to God's will and eternal purposes. (M.A.P. 75)

3. When one forgets about self to any extent for the sake of the salvation of one's neighbour - to which one has been called by God - it is then that God sees to the salvation and perfection of the person who is fully committed to this service. (M.D.12)

4. Members of the Institute ensure their salvation through their mission; one can go so far as to say that if they persevere in it, they will not be lost or damned.

There are four reasons for this:

- (1) their living knowledge of the holy truths;
 - (2) their regular life spent fulfilling their observances;
 - (3) their constant practice of charity towards their neighbour;
 - (4) their detachment of heart and the abandonment of their will to the will of God, possessing nothing on earth and being always ready to go where they are sent.
- (P.M. 9)

5. We are called to become instruments of the Holy Spirit who is at work in us, in the people to whom we are sent and in their history. By drawing nearer to the people, we discover with them signs of the presence of the living God, and we help each other to respond to God's call. Thus we are sanctified through our ministry. (B.I. 7)

6. If God favours you with his presence during class-time, accept humbly and with gratitude. Ask God to postpone such favours until prayer-time and say that for the moment you have to devote yourself to the business on hand. Whatever happens, do not be distracted from the instruction of the children and your neighbour. By doing this you will lose nothing, and you will avoid the deceits and delusions of the devil. (P.M. 34)

7. Do not worry if you lose sight of the Lord in the midst of your work, for it is often necessary to be taken up with, and even be lost in the problems of our neighbour without being able to let the mind dwell on the thought of God. After all, it is God's work you are engaged in and even if the 'actual' presence is not felt, the 'real' presence remains. There abides in us the impression of God's watchful attention to us in the midst of the most distracting activities. (Letter 27)

8. Experience has shown that many teachers receive more grace during class-time than during prayer-time. During prayer they quite often experience dryness or little dew from heaven. On the other hand, during the exercise of their mission, they often experience the presence of God and interior consolation. It is here that God visits them and enriches them with divine favours, so as to show them that this, above all, is where they are wanted. Had they experienced the presence of God and interior consolation during the time of prayer, they would never want to leave it, and would be anxious to give up the active apostolate in order to pursue the sweetness they have tasted in solitude and contemplation. (P.M. 33)



REMAINING AT PEACE

*The mountains may depart,
the hills be shaken,
but my love for you will never leave you
and my covenant of peace with you will never be shaken,
says Yahweh who takes pity on you.
(Isaiah 54:10)*

1. Whatever happens, be always at peace and trust in God. What you experience will be in proportion to your faith, your hope and your love, and even more abundantly than that. (Letter 61)

2. Let Jesus reign and let whatever happens happen, even with regard to eternity. This is Jesus' affair and not ours, since he knows the plans he has in mind for us. May God's will be done even in ways unknown to us and without having any assurance, idea, or sense of what may happen to us. (Letter 47)

3. Worshipping God in spirit and in truth, disposes us in a very profound way to be aware of God's presence, to be discerning and humble in all our actions and to be patient in the midst of disappointments and difficulties. In this way, we show respect for the sovereign Majesty before whom we remain in a continual spirit of humility. (M.A.P. 234)

4. Rejoice when you are surrounded by thorns, powerlessness and darkness. In order to be complete and sure, God's peace is like roses that are always surrounded by thorns. (Letter 41)

*5. God of all depth and mystery,
Who dwell in the darkness
Of light inaccessible,
Before whom all creation silent falls,
The soul, in its unknowing,
Sees only by the light of faith.
Might I then brave
The charge of indiscretion
Were I to breach its silence,
And dare to lift the veil of secrecy?
(Spiritual Canticle 3)*

6. The Institute resembles the Church. As it develops, it will encounter persecution, trouble and opposition. What appears to destroy it, is precisely what will strengthen it.

Hence, it is necessary to live always in a spirit of abandonment, trusting in God for all our needs. (F.M. 12)

7. Nicolas Barré often said: "It is better for the schools to last only ten to fifteen years without endowment, keeping alive their initial zeal, than to last longer and become lax as has happened in so many other institutes that promise security." (R.E. 5)

8. We have to live in a spirit of complete abandonment to the desires of God and of Jesus, ready to accept the failure of our work, should it please God and Jesus. Nevertheless, we must pray with all our heart and have great confidence. Hoping against hope, and when everything seems to point to despair, we must continue to hope all the more, to the point of being able to say: "Even if God were to strike me down, I would still have hope." (F.M. 13)

9. *Whether God raises them up or sets them down,
Carries them here or there
In a thousand different states,
Of power and weakness,
They accept it all out of love.
Knowing always where to find
Their peace, their rock, their good.
Once God alone is in command,
His work in them
Will always know fruition.
(Spiritual Canticle 38)*



QUIET! BE STILL
MMK4-39

10. What a wonderful guide God is and what opposition and contradictions we have to pass through before reaching union with him; what anxieties we must endure before obtaining peace; what depths of darkness we must experience before attaining the source of all light, of all brilliance, the depth of all honour and of all contentment. And yet this is the only way! (Letter 2)

11. *This suffering is full of life.
Her being senses that it is being treated,
With gentle freedom, according to its most secret desires,
And consents that her God
Should have total liberty
To carry out in her
Whatever is pleasing to the divine wisdom.
And, when God takes action,
She relinquishes her personal activity.
(Spiritual Canticle 29)*

12. With regard to insults, we should behave in the same way as we do when it rains very heavily. We look for shelter, stand beneath a tree, let the storm pass without saying anything. Afterwards, we resume our journey or our work, as if nothing had happened. (M.A.P. 79)

13. It is in the valley of the greatest misfortunes and tears that God is pleased to bring the soul to the heights - heights that reach even the infinity of God's greatness. Experience shows that one can see the stars shining more brightly from the bottom of a well than in full daylight from the ground above. (R.R.8)



14. Remain at peace in the midst or at the height of your struggles, believing that God truly loves you. Since God's love is all-powerful, you know that you are greatly blessed and that this is how you will die, in spite of your weaknesses and infidelities. If you can really put all your trust in God's mercy, you will come to realise that you will be saved before being condemned for your unfaithfulness. God's goodness will triumph over you for his glory and yours. (Letter 29)

15. Jesus Christ, as he died on the cross, brought to completion the work of our redemption. A member of the Institute, dying amidst the weariness and exertions of her mission, perfects the unique and noble task of her eternal salvation. And since she has lived out what is still to be completed of the Passion of Jesus Christ, by instructing others and applying to them his infinite merits, she enters into the joys of her Lord, to enjoy the abundant fruits of having used well the talents he has entrusted to her. (P.M.36)

16. On his death bed, Nicolas Barré was asked whether he would be there to receive the Holy Spirit with the community at Pentecost. "I do not think so," he said, "but I will go to meet him." When they urged him to tell them what favours he would ask for the members of the Institute whom he had always held in such high esteem, he replied: "The Institute is a small body in the Church. I shall tell the Holy Spirit to always be its source of life. It is a school. I shall tell the Spirit to always be in control. It is a small army which I am sending against its enemies. I shall tell the Spirit to always be at its head to lead it. The Pentecost season which is now approaching is a time to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, so show them how the Holy Spirit must take possession of them and how they must take possession of the Holy Spirit." (A.D .9 + 10)

BACKDROP

Nicolas was born on 21st October 1621, the first of five children and an only son. 17th century France suffered the ravages of war and a dreaded plague which raged for 20 years, carrying off many of the weak and the very poor. In fact, during 1662, when the Institute had its beginnings, half the children in Rouen died of famine. Many were homeless and wandered the streets as beggars and for some prostitution was the only means of livelihood. It would appear that Nicolas and his family were fairly comfortable. His father had a secure trade, and he had some well-off relatives and friends among the elite.

Educated by the Jesuits, Nicolas finished his secondary schooling in 1640 with brilliant results. He next joined the Order of Minims, founded by St. Francis of Paola, and was later ordained priest. He was to remain a pastor and spiritual director until his death. Spiritual Direction was as significant in his life as was the founding of the Institute. Through this ministry, he grew in holiness and helped many men and women to discover God's will in their lives. In fact, through those he directed, he gained many insights which led him to found the Institute. Some of his first helpers were also those who came to him for spiritual direction.

While much of his time was spent directing the aristocracy and the many people of influence who came to him, Nicolas had a preference for those who were thought to be of little worth in the society of his time. "I prefer to have little to do with those of high rank, lest they monopolise me and interfere with all that I receive from the ordinary people." According to Raffron, his confrère and biographer: "He made no distinction between people, unless it was to prefer the poorest, the humblest, the most timid to all others."

As the years went on, he became much sought after as a theologian, preacher and confessor. After his death, one of his biographers, Fr. Thuillier, was to say: "Where the spiritual and mystical life is concerned, it is quite clear that Nicolas Barré was unequalled in this century." Great crowds came to hear him preach. It was said of him that his sermons were so down-to-earth and in tune with the lives of the people that they were always touched by them.

He seems to have had a particular gift for discerning what lies hidden in the human heart, for allowing people to be touched by God, and for encouraging them to respond in the way that is special to each one. Fr. Raffron, describes the great influence he had over the most hardened of sinners saying: "They never weary of acknowledging the great favours they have received from God through the dedication and tireless zeal of Nicolas Barré who, at the foot of the Cross, had learned how to win over the proudest and most hardened hearts."

One of the reasons why this saint appeals to me so much is the account we have of his 'dark night of the soul' in which he struggled for much of his life, sometimes even doubting the existence of God. At that time, there was also a lot of unrest and instability in religious circles. Owing to the influence of Jansenism, people lived in great fear of eternal damnation including Nicolas Barre' himself. He helped many find peace. I am sure that he was able to enter into and understand their sufferings because of what he was going through himself. In one of his letters, he speaks of his own struggles and spiritual desolation: "How often this happens on that admirable but incomprehensible road of the spiritual life, where the progress we make is proportionate to the suffering we endure and stay with, in the absence of any feeling of consolation. To all outward appearances, heaven leaves us in the dark while at the same time, strengthening us profoundly and imperceptibly". (Letter 54) He directed those who despaired to seek God's peace by following along the paths he had taken himself: humility and abandonment to Divine Providence. In fact, these were two key characteristics of the Institute he founded.

In 17th century France there was also a preoccupation with personal sanctification. It is clear from his teachings that Nicolas Barré reacted strongly against this self-centred spirituality and encouraged his followers to concentrate on the salvation of others. In one of his letters we read: "Throughout the 44 years I have devoted to the spiritual life, this is the path that I have found to be the shortest, the surest, the most peaceful and the most exalted." (Letter 56) This would have been contrary to the general thinking of the time.

His concept of humility was very much based on its Latin root, 'humus' meaning 'earth'. In the creation story, humanity is formed in the image of the Creator, when the breath of God gives life to the earth. For Nicolas Barré, this creation continues to take place when the spirit is breathed on the earth of our reality. Nicolas described himself as a 'destroyer' rather than a spiritual director. He sought to identify and destroy any illusions which might be blocking the person on the path to humility and re-creation. (Letter 2) He says that we must return to our 'nothingness', to the earth of who we really are before our Creator God, in order to be re-created and possessed by the Spirit. Within ourselves, we find our greatest treasure: the Kingdom of God. 'This is the precious jewel for which we must be prepared to sell everything, that is forget ourselves completely. This can only be achieved by humility and by destroying in us what is not of God, so that God may take flesh again in us, so that Jesus may become incarnate in our very selves.' (R.R.1) The 'earth' of human reality is the womb where the Incarnation takes place. Jesus Christ does not take flesh in our illusions or our dreams but in the ordinary, everyday, people and events of life. It is through this reality that Christ is brought to birth through the action of the Spirit.

Nicolas Barré was keenly aware of what was happening in his reality, especially among the most destitute, and he felt called to make some response. He deplored what he

considered to be “the most lamentable of all evils: the lack of learning and education”. There were hardly any schools for the poor, especially for young girls and very few for boys. To make matters worse, primary school teachers were well known for their professional inadequacy. Religious Instruction was almost non-existent and there was profound ignorance of the gospel.

Fairly early in his Religious Life, Nicolas had what could best be described as a mental breakdown. He was relieved of his responsibilities in Paris and was sent to Amiens for two years where he worked as a sacristan. During this time, and probably to a lesser extent for the rest of his life, he suffered great emotional, physical and spiritual stress. Yet it was in the depths of this dark night that he conceived the idea of a Charitable Institute for those who had no access to any form of education, and were generally neglected by their society. However, he was to wait a further 10 years before his dream could become a reality. Nicolas joined with others in an association specially set up to pray that God would inspire women and men to come forward as Christian teachers. Soon a group of lay people gathered around him, all willing to pray and to be available for whatever the Lord might be calling them to do.

The first non-fee paying schools were opened in 1662 in Sotteville near Rouen. By 1666, there were five or six schools and around twenty school mistresses. Many of those who became involved in this initiative were members of the Confraternity of the Holy Infant Jesus. Members of this organisation dedicated themselves to the Word Incarnate and cultivated a childlike spirit, following the invitation of Jesus who said: “Unless you change and become like little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” The mystery of the Incarnation was a particular feature of 17th century spirituality and prayer to the Infant Jesus was a popular devotion.

The first helpers taught reading, writing and practical skills, but their primary purpose was to give religious instruction to children, young people and adults from among the ordinary people, especially those most in need of it. Sometimes the schools existed only for a month or a year - for a time of concentrated evangelization. These would have been set up when Nicolas Barré was involved in parish missions in the locality. Later, they became more permanent. Schools for boys were also established, ‘though this initiative later became the province of St. John Baptist de la Salle (founder of the de la Salle Brothers)’. The aim of the Institute was to ‘establish the reign of Jesus Christ in all hearts’. Such a reign would have a particular significance in a country ruled over by Louis XIV - a king who was to say of himself at the end of his life: “I have loved war too much”. Of his 61 years as ruling monarch, only ten were free of wars.

Nicolas urged his teachers not to wait until pupils arrived at the school; they were to seek out especially those who might have been at risk. In visiting the homes, they came into contact with the whole family and became aware of their many needs. Sometimes they provided material help. Nicolas Barré also set up Trade schools, enabling girls to

earn their living. Again the education offered was to be entirely free; any profit derived from the pupils' work was to go to them.

In those days, educating the poor was regarded as subversive. Children were a valued source of cheap labour; prostitution was the accepted alternative to starvation for many young girls and even children. It was also feared that education for this section of society would encourage social mobility and that women particularly would become more independent and less available to work as servants or prostitutes. There was great opposition to upsetting the social order in this fashion and Nicolas Barré suffered much hostility and even persecution. However, neither he nor the members of the Institute were deterred from their mission which they knew had its origin in the heart of God' (B.I.3)

In a short time, owing to the quality of their methods, their originality and Nicolas Barré's reputation, the schools spread from Rouen to other cities. There is also evidence to suggest that, during his life time, some went on mission outside France. In fact, they seem to have reached Canada by June 1685. In 1685, they wanted to go to Siam (Thailand) but the King of France refused to let them. However, they finally got there in 1885 but the mission did not take root until 1957!

The best known form of Religious life at the time for women was almost uniquely monastic and not compatible with apostolic service of the poor "in their surroundings." Monastic religious life gave to its members a certain security which was often the underlying objective of those who entered. Young girls from the poorer milieux found their livelihood assured, while those from noble families found a revenue and social status. This led in some cases to a life of decadence. It also offered a sense of spiritual security in a way of life orientated towards the salvation and sanctification of the individual.

Nicolas Barré was very insistent that those who wanted to be of service to the most needy in this newly founded Institute would do so without vows or cloister and would seek out the people in their surroundings. This was carried out in the parish context and would have been regarded in those days as a way of life "in the world" In fact, this mission was very much an initiative among the laity.

It would appear that he attracted people from many walks of life. When recruiting for the communities, he made a special request to those who were employed as domestics among the well off: 'Would it not be possible for a few hundred of them, out of love for God and with the help of his grace, to serve Jesus Christ in the same way, by taking on the salvation and sanctification of others as their main work?' (S.A.6) In his Statutes and Rules for the schools, it is clear that many of those willing to help needed to become competent in reading and writing, as well as in their knowledge of the catechism.(S.R.1:6, 8:18) This suggests that they had little education. On the other hand, those who were

the 'Directors' and 'Lady Associates' of the Institute seem to have been people of influence from more privileged backgrounds: 'The Directors chosen will be people who have been highly recommended from every point of view.' (S.R.14:15) (These were men and women who supported the schools and looked after the material administration, so that the school mistresses 'may not have to lessen their zeal or neglect their work.') (S.R. 14:2)

After a few years, Nicolas Barré suggested to a few of the young women that they might start to have dinner together occasionally and then try and see if they could live in community. Later he made this proposal: "Do you want to live in community, on the understanding that you will not have any security? You will have enough to live on, but only just enough. If you fall ill, you will be sent to the local hospital' (which usually housed the abandoned and the homeless). 'You must be ready to die by the wayside, abandoned by everybody and remain in this attitude throughout your life.'" These courageous young women answered wholeheartedly: "Yes, we are willing to accept this and to abandon ourselves to Divine Providence in complete disinterestedness (i.e. without seeking any profit or advantage for ourselves)." While Nicolas insisted that they should leave everything to Providence, it is noteworthy that some of his Rules are very detailed e.g. Rules of the Caterer and the Cook (S.R. Ch.19) Obviously he was not willing to leave anything to chance, and made sure that they had the kind of structures and discipline which would enable them to have a solid formation and be available for the mission 'anywhere in Christendom.' (This refers to all countries to which Christianity had spread.)

These volunteers who had neither the status nor the security of making public vows, were sustained by their corporate mission and their union of mind, heart and prayer. "As the virtue of charity is the bond of all perfection, the most desirable of all the virtues, it will also be the bond between them. It will be at the heart of their obedience, their disinterestedness, their patience, their modesty, their constancy and their final perseverance in this mission..." (S.R.4) Nicolas Barré made sure that there would be this spirit of mutual union in their collective commitment to the service of the poor. 'Though he wrote Statutes, Rules and Maxims, it is clear that relationships within the Institute had priority over structures. Marguerite Lestocq, a member of the first community was to say: "We lived in union with one another, with gentleness and humility, and were kind and respectful towards one another.... I would like to point out that there were no difficulties among us for several years...." The difficulties which did arise then, came from parish priests, clergy, religious and laity! (M.L. 9 and 10)

Lay Directors and Lady Associates had a crucial role in this new foundation. They were motivated by the same spirit as Nicolas Barré, '...convinced of the value of evangelical detachment and disregard for possessions. Their charity and zeal should be such that they work effectively for the sanctification of others and the establishment of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in all hearts.' (S.R.14:15) A Lady Associate, called Mme du Buc, was

the superior of the first community. Madame de Grainville, who offered a property as a central house for the Institute, was named its temporal superior.

The acceptance of candidates for the Institute (S.R. 14:12), and the appointment of Superiors and Spiritual Directors were the responsibility of the Directors and Lady Associates. It was they who missioned the community members '... to cities, towns, villages and elsewhere, even to other Communities and houses of the same Institute to participate in the mission there, either on a permanent basis or for whatever length of time they consider necessary.' (S.R. 14:6). In fact, the Directors and Lady Associates had 'authority over all those involved in the work characteristic of the Institute, together with its implementation.' Elsewhere in these Rules it is stated that nobody, including the superior was allowed to give away anything belonging to the community, and there is a reminder that all belongs to the poor. It goes on to say: 'It is only the Directors of the House who have the right to dispose of anything.' (S.R. 5:3)

Regarding those who wished to be part of the Institute, Nicolas Barré had this to say: "You must not accept anyone, as Manager, Lady Associate or sister Mistress, in any of the communities, if they do not possess a spirit of deep faith, great zeal for the salvation of souls, complete selflessness and total dependence on Divine Providence. To neglect this spirit would mean neglecting the Holy Spirit! That must never happen, no matter what advantages these people may have to offer or promise in terms of material support or personal competence." (S.A. 8)

Members of the Institute were expected to do everything out of 'pure and holy love', that is, for no material reward. This attitude ran counter to the practices of the 17th. century Church which found most of its security in a system of endowments.

Endowments were made by rich patrons under legal contract and involved the legal investment of capital (money, house or lands) in particular projects. The terms of the contract were clearly defined e.g. the interest on revenue to be used for a specific work in specific circumstances. These terms could never be changed without the authorisation of the donor. Such endowments were a good source of income for congregations, but, there were the obvious restrictions. For example, they were not free to move from one place to another in response to a greater need.

Nicolas Barré wanted members of the Institute to be free and available to go to any part of Christendom. (S.R.10) They were to live in solidarity with the most neglected and 'go to them in their surroundings'. As for the future, he wanted them to share the insecurity of the poor, who did not have a guaranteed income. To live a life of solidarity Nicolas Barré said "Our neighbour is another self, for whom we cry as we would for ourselves... (R.R.10) and elsewhere: "... the distress of one member is communicated to all the others and the heart feels pain for all." (M.A.P. 214) They did not have any place of their own, and were ready to go where they were sent. There was great opposition

to this attitude. "When Nicolas Barré was being persuaded by many people to have at least one permanent house for the Institute, he would only agree on condition that the house belonged to one of the Directors or, alternatively, to a trusted friend who would then rent it or lend it to them. They would not own it." (R.E. 8)

His ideas were so innovative at the time that the greater part of public opinion was against him. Yet he remained convinced that the spirit of the Institute would not be preserved unless its members depended on Divine Providence rather than on any human security. He warned: "If you accept endowments, the Institute will crumble... In your zeal for the Institute, you will totally oppose endowments that anyone offers after I have gone. If in my lifetime I should weaken in this respect, then you must strongly oppose me, otherwise the spirit of the Institute will not be preserved. If we were to accept endowments, everything would change in a short space of time." (R.E. 6, 7) Being loved by God was the only security they needed. A year before his death, his provincial and the General of the Minims pressed him to accept endowments. He answered, "It is better to fall into God's hands, with no human establishment, than to fall into the hands of others through endowments." (R.E. 9)

Although Nicolas Barre' insisted on abandonment to Divine Providence, his attitude to material matters bears the hallmark of human prudence. In 1674, he allowed some members of the Institute to work part-time in the hospital at Rouen. He wanted members to be like other lay people who worked hard to earn their living. In promoting the spread of the Institute, he requested donations and accepted large sums of money from ecclesiastics and lay people. Parishes were expected to provide for the maintenance and upkeep of communities when they asked them to come and set up schools, etc.. In places where the parish priest could not afford to do so, Nicolas Barre' suggested that 'there may be some devout persons who could help in this matter.' (M.I. 9) In fact, he made sure that the material security of the Institute was safeguarded while, at the same time, the individual members were encouraged to rely on Providence with regard to their daily existence and their future.

Trust in Divine Providence involves a liberation from securities which may be holding us captive (in any age), but which nonetheless is often preferable to what may be a desert experience, involving the taking of risks and often requiring heroic courage. But, it is also the road to the Promised Land where we will have a new experience of God. "For forty years, I led you in the wilderness; the clothes on your back did not wear out and your sandals did not wear off your feet... so that you might learn that I Yahweh am your God.(Deut. 29:4)

The history of the Institute up to the present day bears testimony to an amazing spirit of courage and daring born from this dependence on Providence, especially when its members were faced with what seemed like insurmountable obstacles, including complete dispersion during the French Revolution. It makes fascinating reading but far, far too

long to go into any detail here! The Institute is now International - to be found in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the journey through the centuries since 1662, the role of the Lay directors and Lady Associates became less and less significant. After 200 years, those who were called to make a permanent commitment began to make public vows and to observe the accepted forms of religious life in the Church. In more recent years, the Infant Jesus Institute has been exploring more radical ways to be in 'Partnership with the Laity' (Acts of the Chapter 1989). This is paralleled in the wider church in terms of 'Collaboration with the Laity' It is an exciting time to be a christian and a religious. As already mentioned, the charism first given to Nicolas Barre' is characterised by a spirit of courage and daring. This spirit sustains us as we face the challenge to let go of structures which no longer serve the Kingdom of God and to take new paths on our journey in the footsteps of Christ. New initiatives in the living and the proclamation of the Good News will be very much in keeping with the spirit of Nicolas Barré who in his time blazed a new trail for those called to spread the gospel.

Is not the time long overdue for the laity, called to live the charism of Nicolas Barré, to reclaim their inheritance and to play a leading role in finding these new ways and play their part in fulfilling the dream of Christ: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!" (Lk. 12:49)

(Margaret Walsh 1st November, 1998)



ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY.

A.D.	Death of Nicolas Barré.
B.I.	Book of the Institute (1986)
F.M.	Fundamental Maxims.
F.S.	Document signed by the First Sisters.
M.A.P.	Maxims for All People.
M.I.	Memoir of Instruction.
M.L.	Marguerite Lestocq's Memoir.
M.D.	Maxims for Spiritual Direction.
P.M.	Particular Maxims.
R.C.	Recommendations for the teaching of Catechism
R.E.	Reasons for not accepting Endowments.
R.R.	Reflections and Recommendations.
S.A.	Secret Articles.
S.R.	Statutes and Rules.
T.S.	Rules for the Trade Schools.

POSITIO - Information and Summary Translated by Fr. Paul Jenkins S.J.

'Better than Light' Brigitte Flourez, (Translator - Helen Wynne)

'Life' Raffron

'Life' Thuillier.

'Theology, Spirituality, Practice' Fr. Santaner (1978)

'Director in the Darkness' Dr. William Makin

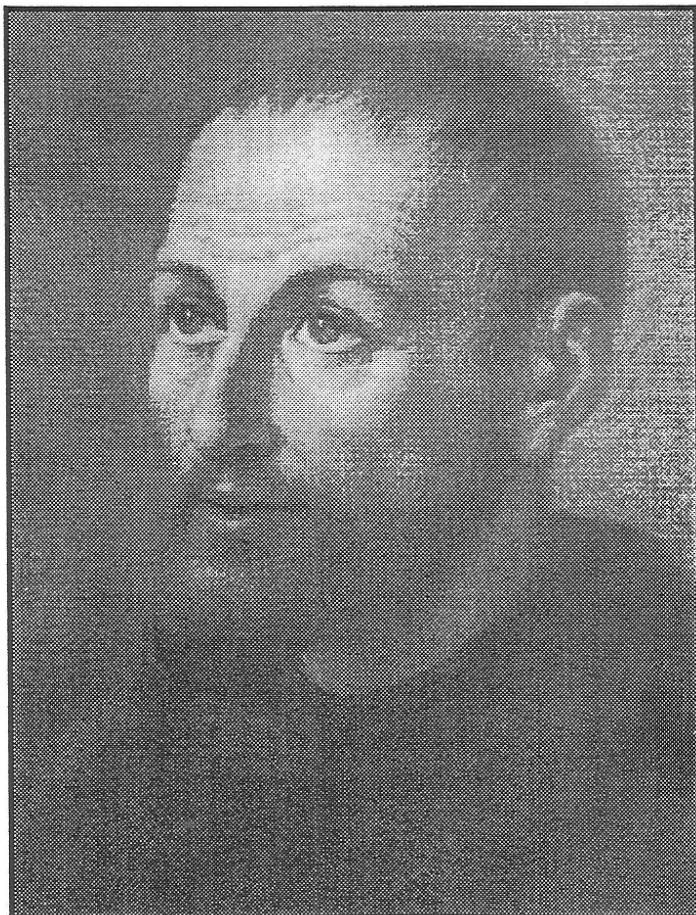
'Blockprints for Sundays' Artist SR Helen Siegli Publ : Pueblo

APPENDIX 1

France: 1662
Malaysia: 1852
Singapore: 1854
Spain: 1860
Japan: 1872
England: 1892
Italy: 1906
Ireland: 1909
Thailand: 1885-1907; 1957
Peru: 1967
Cameroon: 1968
Nigeria: 1983
Bolivia: 1992



GO INTO THE WHOLE
WORLD AND PROCLAIM
THE GOOD NEWS →
MARK 16:15



Nicolas Barré

