

# The importance of the "how"

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**W**hen reading the correspondence of our Founders, it is striking how much their letters address particular circumstances. Through their letters they sought to discern, encourage, stimulate, correct and comfort the brothers and sisters in the various situations they lived or were going through. The Founders engaged with each other and with the brothers and sisters in a kind of open dialogue. Their writing style allowed them to think and pray through the answers to whatever questions or concerns they received. In addition, it was clear that the Founders thought about the recipients, the sister, the brother or the communities to whom these letters were addressed. They often appealed to the spiritual, pastoral and community resources of those to whom they were writing in the hope of finding in situ some elements that would allow them to face the difficulties. In the background, through their rich and varied correspondence, the Founders paid special attention to the "how" and to "whom" their letters were addressed.

Using words of encouragement, the Founders drew from their own experience, knowing first-hand that to follow Jesus is to respond to his inexhaustible love. They lived the risks and joys of the Gospel, confident that those who have left everything for Jesus will already receive a hundredfold in this life ... with persecutions (Mk. 10:30).

Whenever the brothers or sisters presented personal, ecclesial or social difficulties, the Founders recalled certain "essentials" or "fundamentals" that applied to those consecrated to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary: the commitment of religious profession;

the most essential "vow"; collaborating in a work of God that is greater than us and which precedes us; that it is in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary we find our strength and our joy. These are "known" things, but can be easily forgotten in those times when one is passing through some difficulty.

### **Strength in difficulties**

Because the Founders knew that these "essentials" or "fundamentals" were reserves of strength especially in times of difficulty, and having listened to the specific situation of the brother or sister they were able to point out how they might confidently and courageously get through whatever trials were besetting them.

This way of acting can be seen in how the Good Father communicated with Sister Alix Guyot, and through her, the sisters of the Cahors community. These sisters were being constantly monitored by the educational authorities of the time to verify that they belonged to a legally established congregation in France and that they understood the purpose of education (whether they were open or not to future candidates to the priesthood). Such a hostile context for the Church to work in had repercussions on relationships within the community. And so the Good Father, reminding the community of their most essential vow, encouraged them to unite all their efforts and sacrifices to the victory of the Risen One:

"Work then one and all to serve and adore this so good Teacher [Jesus]. If you are happy to be his children, I am happy for your happiness. Say this to your good companions, to these dear daughters of his Divine Heart: they are to love each other, they are to bear their weaknesses in the charity that drives away all fear. May all their actions carried out lead them to Heaven."

### **An attractive and attracting life**

And then the Good Father remembers and reminds them of the definitive, eschatological meaning of the religious vows that configure a religious to the Heart of Jesus and to his way of loving. The vows are intended to make the sisters' life in the here and now an attractive and attracting sign of how they will be together with the Lord, forever.

"May they think well and recall that they did not enter into religion save to die to themselves; May they be angels in obeying promptly, virgins in following the Lamb and remain detached from everything in order that nothing may weigh them down when the Spouse opens the doors of Heaven." (Letter of the Good Father to Sister Alix Guyot, 1827 or 1828, LEBP 1309 in *Correspondance*, vol. 7, Rome 2000, 93).

In another letter from the Good Father addressed this time to Fr. Xavier Balmelle, who was then in Cahors, he shares the good news that the Holy See, through *Propaganda Fidei*, has entrusted the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) to the Congregation. In addition, Fr. Coudrin expresses his desire to see the communities, to be with them and remind

them of the vocation to which they have been called. And finally, he reminds the brothers and sisters of Cahors how they can be associated to this new mission, and so imitate Jesus in his apostolic life.

"I feel the urgent need to see you and to tell you how much I wish, my dear friends, to see you happy (sisters and brothers) in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the holy state we have embraced for the greater glory of God and our sanctification. ... Live in peace and in charity. Offer yourselves to our Lord for the conversion of those that our poor missionaries are trying to convert. Oh, how great is the Lord to have chosen us for such a work! Let us live and burn with zeal and die for his Glory." (Letter of the Good Father to Fr. Xavier Balmelle, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1826, LEBP 1106 in *Correspondance*, vol. 6, Rome 1999, 230-231).

### **Confidence and endurance**

In his attention to the "how" the Good Father recalls for us the demanding beauty of the essentials of apostolic religious life SSCC. He invites us to face difficulties and to cross them with confidence and endurance. Only in this way can we discover the strength of the Lord's promises and the consolation of the words we have professed. Lastly, the Good Father appeals to the fact that because of our profession we are already pilgrims on the way to the heavenly homeland. We are already "here and now", tasting what we will definitively be, when we all meet together, face to face with the Lord.

I know that some brothers and sisters have in their breviaries the words of their religious profession and that they renew their profession day by day. Would not it be good for the health of the "inner life" of all of us to renew those words more often, especially in difficult times, so that the Spirit of Jesus may make our hearts burn with love for Him and with a desire to give ourselves over to Him?

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