

TRUST IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The fundamental principle

The fundamental principle of Fr. Barre's spirituality imparted to the Sisters from the beginning was complete trust in Divine Providence. "If the Charitable Mistresses practise disinterestedness and let themselves be guided by the pure love of God, they need have concern about nothing else but abandoning themselves to Divine Providence." (FS 2)

For Fr. Barre, trust in Divine Providence would require three interlocking elements:

- be guided by the pure love of God
- practise disinterestedness
- abandon oneself to God's love

Be guided by the pure love of God

Awed by the unutterable mystery of God's love - 'God so loved the world that He sent His only Son...' (Jn. 3:16) - Fr. Barre wanted his Sisters to respond in love:

"Honouring and imitating our Lord Jesus Christ, who submitted Himself through love, to accomplish in all things the good pleasure of His Father, the Sisters will endeavour to do all for the pure love of God." (SR 1:4)

The Sisters will love the Christian way which looks only to God...relying on it...and will start and finish everything solely out of pure love of God" (SR 9, 14).

In his letters, Fr. Barre underlined the importance of pure love:

"Let us work for the pure love of God and for His greater glory. 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." (L 50)

Fr. Barre was intent on making the Sisters totally dependent on the wise, loving and all-powerful providence of God so that they would rely upon it continually, uniquely and always for their maintenance and upkeep. He was firmly convinced that if 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.

Practise disinterestedness

For Fr. Barre, the expression 'out **of pure** love' goes straight to the heart of the disinterestedness on which he insisted so much. This disinterestedness affected many areas of the life of the Charitable Mistresses, the temporal as well as the spiritual. To begin in a completely concrete way with regard to money: the Sisters were to renounce all salaries, and even the security for the future which belonging to a congregation could offer. "Those who work for the perfection of souls must act with complete disinterestedness." (MD 1) They were to teach "in an apostolic way, and in the disinterested way which inspired the apostles." (FS)

In the 'Secret Articles' it is written that those to be admitted to the Institute should have "...great disinterestedness, trust in Divine Providence" (SA 5). The text strengthens the statement by referring in the same paragraph to Scripture: "The Gospel is explicit about this, and to have any other motivation would be contrary to its message — 'So do not worry; do not say: What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed? It is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your heart on His kingdom first and on His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.'" (Mt. 6:3-33)

In the early days of the Institute, Fr. Barre asked the first Sisters: "Do you want to live in community on the understanding and condition that you will not have any security? You will just have what is necessary and that sparingly. If you fall ill you will be sent to the local hospital. You must be ready to die by the wayside, abandoned by everybody and remain in this attitude throughout your life." They replied: "Yes" with enthusiasm. "We agree and abandon ourselves with complete disinterestedness to Divine Providence." (ML, 8-10)

Fr. Barre wanted the spirit to stand clear as beaten grain, all worldly attachments being stripped to the bone. Not that he thought that there was anything evil in money itself but that it was the nature of our human mind to be betrayed and corrupted by all reliance on false securities...He wanted the Sisters to experience the world through the heart and mind of Christ. And to do this, it was necessary to prise human nature away from the comforts of this world:

"If the Sisters feel assured of their future security they will no longer surrender fully to Divine Providence." (RE 2)

"The more one is poor and empty of all created security, the more one is enriched and filled with the Creator " (L 16)

Disinterestedness is contrary to preoccupation with self and goes to the root of the tendency to keep turning back to self: "let us mistrust all that could give egoism an entry into the search for one's own perfection" (SA 4; PM 4).

Disinterestedness signifies the absence of all motives except love. Thus it goes hand in hand with the absence of vows: "To instruct the children out of love rather than to fulfill an obligation due to a vow." (SR 1, 5)

Abandon oneself to God's love

Fr. Barre could speak from his own experience of "abandonment to all that God wishes" (L 24:3) and invite to "a total abandonment of oneself into God's hands, for time and for eternity" (MD 50)

'Abandonment' does not mean a passive attitude but putting oneself at the disposal of God, to be used at His discretion and, as Nicolas Barre says, it implies confidence in God. **It** is the abandonment of a child into the hands of her Father; to live as a child, to be no longer a slave but free (Gal. 4:7). In order to be truly free. we must abandon our will totally to God.

Fr. Barre's insistence on abandonment is daunting in regard to spiritual goods and even those of eternity. Essentially. we must abandon our will to God. This does not mean that we stop desiring. It means that we must want what God wants. Abandonment is, in no way, simply inertia. We **must "act"** but act "in God" who attracts us to this total abandonment:

"Say that you are 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 everywhere." (L 13)

His letters make it clear that his vision of God centred on a complete abandonment to Divine Providence. The abandonment Fr. Barre asked for encourages neither negligence nor inaction. He confided to his lay directors the care of the temporal (all the administrative duties), in order to free the Charitable Mistresses for the tasks which were more specifically theirs. From these directors he required the same evangelical detachment.

The Charitable Mistresses were wholly abandoned to Divine Providence as regards the future. Those who undertook to maintain them wherever they were sent throughout France did not bind themselves to continue providing for them.

"These young women, with no thought for themselves but in peace and all serenity, wear themselves out with no other aim than the salvation of souls, unconcerned by what the future may hold for them. it is to this disinterestedness that can be attributed all the graces and blessings bestowed by God on the Charitable Mistresses' work. and it is the root cause of their success in converting souls." (MI, 6C)

Divine Providence was the great sphere in which all Fr. Barre's spiritual action turned. The incapacity and littleness of the ego stood at the centre of our purely human life. All the chances and disasters of this life, spiritual as well as material, were a necessary purgation to lead us to the realisation that God is Creator.