

Robert Bonnafous, C.S.V.

**FATHER QUERBES
AND THE
"ORDINARY WAY"**

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This study was prepared for the Victorians of Peru on the occasion of their annual retreat which had as its theme: "Faith, Hope and Love in the Light of the new Evangelization in Latin America". Rome 25, 1991.

A free translation: George August, C.S.V. 1992

A SHORT ROAD TO PERFECTION

It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. A short road to perfection – short, not because easy, but because pertinent and intelligible. There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones.

John Henry Newman

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A free translation: George J. Auger, C.S.V.

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Foreword

To study the accomplishments of Father Querbes is to work on solid ground: the documents are available and can be readily analyzed and interpreted. To study his personality and spirituality is far more difficult. The hidden motivations of a man, his innermost thoughts, his spiritual journey cannot be easily deciphered if that man is discreet in revealing his personal faith-experience. This is especially true in the case of Father Querbes. In attempting to do so, therefore, one must be cautious.

The religious formation of Father Querbes was one with that of Christians and priests of his day, that is, the beginning of the 19th century¹. The catechism stated that *God created us to know, love and serve Him and by this means gain eternal life*. Religion consisted in a series of truths to be believed, commandments to be observed, and obligations to be fulfilled. Religion was highly individualistic as these two verses of a much sung hymn indicate:

*I have but one soul to save
From everlasting fire,
And I alone its guardian sure.*

Around the years 1810-1830, the priestly formation prevalent was that given in seminaries of the preceding century². It was that of the tridentine reform. It stressed a priestly spiritual-

lity interiorized by asceticism, meditation and individual piety. One of the standard works recommended that the priest *regulate his exterior life by fidelity, punctuality, and modesty; his interior life by doing everything through God, in the presence of God and in the sight of Jesus Christ* (Tronson). Furthermore, Jansenism, coupled with the Gallicanism of the clergy, gave priests a definite rigoristic bent.

Having said this, one must not try finding in the writing of Father Querbes what is not there. He is one with his times: he preaches more on sin, hell and the decalogue than he does on specific Gospel passages³.

Another difficulty is that Father Querbes was not a man to practice what one might call audacity or eccentricity in the spiritual life. An associate, Father Faure, spent much time dreaming of heroic virtues, the "narrow way" to perfection. Father Querbes reprimands him:

I have often disapproved of your forever recalling an idle question, namely, if we should vow to strive toward perfection or to attain it; if we should have ordinary or heroic virtues. Alas! my dear Father, while we chat away we lose time and remain idle. Let us promise less and act more instead. We already have enough to occupy us with the religious virtues of obedience, chastity and the spirit of poverty, as well as those of our state of life: faith, zeal, humility, purity, love of labor, retirement and silence. Let us begin by building on those virtues, which I consider ordinary (it is a question here of understanding one another) and the foundation of our salvation and of perfection, and the rest will be granted to us (DQ 342 6.67).

And in another letter:

It was not without reason that Rodriguez, skillful master of the regular life, dealt with our ordinary actions in his first treatise on the desire for perfection (DQ 341 6.66).

These "ordinary" virtues, these "ordinary" actions which Father Querbes recommends to others, he himself lives. It is, therefore, in the day by day that we can gradually decipher, not some tassellated mysticism or extraordinary spiritual practices, but a life animated by an intense spirituality, one which both touches and challenges us. Still, Father Querbes remains discreet; indeed, quite restrained in sharing how he himself lived this "ordinary" way.

We must garner the spirituality of Father Querbes from certain notes, observations, half-secrets found in his writings or in the correspondence received. This is, of course, a delicate matter. There are religious congregations in which the founders have left a plethora of writings on the spiritual life, some have even detailed their own spiritual journey. This is fortunate, and at the same time, risky: religious may well know the thought of their founder, but the writings may well be outdated. Many of the spiritual writings of yesteryear no longer nourish today. There are congregations where the founder has written little (a religious woman recently beatified has left but a single letter) or who have burned all their writings (Jean-Claude Colin).

We have the advantage of possessing about a thousand documents written by Father Querbes and ten times that number in correspondence received. And yet, in all these manuscripts, those which could be entitled "spiritual" are rare. There does exist many retreat outlines and notes which he used in preparing conferences or sermons. These, however, do not give evidence of what he actually said; besides many of these notes are quotations from standard spiritual works of the day or even anterior⁴.

Father Querbes did not write a treatise on the spiritual life. He had other things to do: pastor of a busy parish, Superior General of a congregation which counted 250 members by the end of his life; and, we might add, he was, in the main poorly assisted by a second in command. And yet, I do not believe that it was only a matter of time, for he did find time to publish, as in the meticulously done *Ordo perpetuus*. Father Querbes is a pragmatic man, we find little of the theoretician or speculative thinker in him.

What, then, do we have in getting to know him?

- . a few brief notations which seem to have gone unnoticed by him and, to some extent, reveal the heart of Father Querbes;
- . a few manuscripts where, in the midst of juridical or practical matters, he offers counsel or reflective thoughts of a spiritual nature. Such is the case in certain passages of the *Commentary on the Statutes* (DQ 550 8.96);
- . in the letters he addressed to the religious we sometimes find a brief spiritual comment interspersed among many practical and concrete details. In fact his letters contain a plethora of detail but little avowed spiritual direction;
- . the witness of those who knew him and who left notes or wrote biographies. But their witness must be cautiously studied in terms of the strong hagiographic tendencies of the times;
- . finally, we must see Father Querbes living his life story: see him react to little and great events; see him in memorable moments as well as the humdrum of each day.

One used to speak of someone's having a "medallion profile" if one's features were clearly delineated. The writings of Theresa of Avila, of Charles de Foucault provide such "me-

dallion profiles." For Father Querbes it is more a matter of "pointillism," tiny brush strokes carefully gleaned from certain observations and comments. The resulting portrait is, nonetheless, intimate, warm, familiar and, I believe, true.

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- 1 Cholvy (Gérard) and Hilaire (Yves-Marie), *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, T.I, 1800-1888, Toulouse, Privat, 1985.

Pierrard (Pierre), *La vie quotidienne du prêtre français au XIXe siècle 1801-1905*, Paris, Hachette, 1986.

- 2 Pierrard, *op. cit.*, p. 101-110.

see also: Soulcier (Jean), *La formation des clercs au Séminaire Saint-Irénée de Lyon, de 1659 à 1905*, thèse de doctorat, Faculté de Droit canonique de Lyon, 1955.

- 3 cf. the tables of the documents published at the end of volumes 10 to 13 of the *Documents-Querbes*.

- 4 Prud'homme (François), Les retraites du P. Querbes, *Feuillets querbèsiens*, #55, February 1, 1962, pp. 624-632.

I

A LIVELY AND ENLIGHTENED FAITH

On March 23, 1829, a version of the statutes was submitted for approbation (DQ 58 1.11). At that time the Catechist of Saint Viator was non-existent. Article 3 reads: *The characteristic virtues of a true Catechist are a lively and enlightened faith, an ardent and disinterested zeal, humility, chastity, love of labor, retreat and silence.* This article went through some twenty successive drafts of the statutes and appears in the final text approved by the archdiocese in 1833 and by Rome in 1838. There was but one modification: the verb *distinguishes* was replaced by *characterizes*. Though deep corrections changed some of the essential features of Father Querbes' project, the draft of article 3 remained definitive from the first to last.

Father Querbes repeated this article in his *Commentary on the Statutes*, written a few years before his death and published in 1861 under the title *A Necessary Manuel for the Cleric of Saint Viator*.

I am somewhat insistent on this chronology since some have maintained, perhaps a bit too hastily, that Father Querbes often changed his mind--*avait des "idées mouvantes"*¹. In fact, Father Querbes had very clear ideas to which he held fast. These

ideas formed the heart of his project. If at times he was supple, it was more a matter of the different forms his plan might take.

We deal here with the expectations of the Founder: what would "distinguish" the Catechist of Saint Viator. First in order: *a lively and enlightened faith*. One might think of starting the enumeration differently. But how can one be "zealous, humble, poor" etc. if not firmly anchored in a life of faith which supports and gives meaning to one's life and actions? The works of Father Querbes, his willingly giving up ecclesiastic preferment, the frustration and pain he went through, etc., all this would make little sense had not his life been rooted in a faith which moved him to action. Saint Paul closes his poem on brotherly love (1Cor 13) in affirming that of faith, hope and love, *love is the greatest*. Without pretending to contradict Saint Paul, can one really separate the three? Regarding Father Querbes, one has difficulty separating them. Each builds upon and animates the other. It is the man of faith who trusts in God and who gives of himself in the service of neighbor.

Faith is not only matter of words: it is expressed in attitudes revealing one's attentiveness to God, a constant turning to God, and a trust and fidelity in hardship. The person of faith has met and experienced the Lord. This encounter opens new horizons, incites prayer, prompts action. It is not a once and for all affair, it occurs in both the small and great events of life, and in all these events it is attentive to the voice of the Master. Again, such an encounter can take place in quiet moments of prayer, listening to the Word of God, celebrating Eucharist and, in the words of Father Querbes, "the holy exercise of the presence of God."

1. The Whole Meaning of a Life

We know well the passage in Hebrews (Chapter 11) where the author recalls the patriarchs and fathers of the Jewish faith: *It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out.... It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test.... It was by faith that Jacob.... It was by faith that Moses...etc.* One could paraphrase these texts and apply them to all founders of religious congregations including Father Querbes. *It was by faith that Louis Querbes obeyed the call to set out into the unknown of a foundation. It was by faith that he was put to the test and placed his trust in God, etc.* Could one actually conceive of the meaning of Father Querbes' life without this profound faith dimension? Without it, his life would make little sense.

In 1822 Louis Querbes is 29 years old. He is a brilliant young man, a fact attested to by all his contemporaries. He has received an excellent academic formation and holds a B.A. degree--one of the first in France to hold such a degree². He writes a flawless French. He knows Latin, Greek and Italian. He is highly thought of by his Pastor, Fr. Besson, a future bishop.

In 1822 he arrives in Vourles. It is one of the first steps in his ecclesiastical career which, no doubt, is promising: parochial vicar, pastor of a small parish, followed by a more important one, etc. to end, as his friend Pater, as pastor of a large parish in Lyons, or perhaps as bishop as his friends Loras, Dufêtre and Donnet. This, most likely, is what the future holds and is, perhaps, what he expects.

But Father Querbes finds himself committed to another less travelled road. Regardless of the cost, he lets himself be led. Gradually the project of which he dreams will become a reality. Though it will bring ever increasing worry and fatigue, it will completely absorb him. It will also put an end to thoughts of a high ecclesiastical career.

Humanly speaking, what profit does he personally gain in such an undertaking? It is fame or glory? Cardinal Donnet, senator for life, member of the Legion of Honor, has a mausoleum in the cathedral of Bordeaux. Father Querbes rests beneath a simple stone in a country cemetery.... Did he receive praise? Brother Saulin, speaking of Father Querbes' trip to Rome, says: *he was considered presumptuous and foolhardy*³. He received rebuffs from those whose support might have been expected. He was betrayed by some of his closest collaborators⁴. If one day the cause of Father Querbes is opened, certain letters of Father Faure and Brother Liauthaud shall have to be carefully explained.

A contemporary of Father Querbes was not mistaken when he wrote:

*At the moment Father Querbes thought of establishing his work, he renounced all ecclesiastical preferment to which his talents had a right to expect. He willingly accepted worry, fatigue, disappointment to which he would be put to the test. Who would have the audacity of counting his abnegation and sacrifice as worthless?*⁵.

What is it that impels him so? The answer is to be found in a saying that marked his entire life: *Adored and loved be Jesus*.

2. The Transparency of Events

In the calm of the day by day as in the more tempestuous moments, Father Querbes listened to the Master. His letters are studded with the advice that one must go beyond the events and seize upon the inner meaning of what is happening.

Following a trip to Paris which did not meet with his expectations, but which opened new unexpected possibilities, Father Querbes writes to Father Faure:

Men, without knowing it, are almost always the instruments of Providence (DQ 420 7.31).

Bishop Bourget would have wanted more religious. Father Querbes is unable to provide them. Behold the St. Louis mission fails. Fathers Thibaudier and Lahaye go to Canada. Father Champagneur takes advantage of the moment and resigns as superior. Father Thibaudier returns to France. Father Querbes writes to Father Champagneur:

He (Fr. Thibaudier) insisted on bringing some money which I believe came from the savings in the United States. God has a use for everything, this money came in handy during these times of profound distress.... I rejoice with you in the Lord that Providence sent you a valuable aide in the person of Father Lahaye. Do your utmost to assist him in fulfilling the important office with which he is entrusted (DQ 451 7.61).

In 1848 France is going through yet another revolution. Will the French again have to suffer the terrible times of 50 years ago? A circular addressed to the religious of France (March 17, 1848) reads:

Pray for France. It is God who opens and closes the chasms under our feet. Let us accept them from His hands, but let us pray to Him that He may dispose the hearts of men to the observance of His law, to enlighten those blinded by their passions, to fortify the weak, to pour into the hearts of all sentiments of peace and Christian charity.

Do not be eager to get news. Do not read newspapers regularly.... Beware also of spreading news and talking about it. When you hear news let it evoke only the expression of trust in and total surrender into the hands of Providence (DQ 444 7.57).

"Trust and abandonment." Whenever the meaning of an event is unclear, whenever obstacles seem insurmountable, there is an appeal to take another step in a deeper trust in a Father who will not lead His children astray.

To Brother Foucault who is having a difficult time with a neighboring brother:

You should know that the Good Lord loves you well and that He has designs of grace upon you, for you have suffered much this year (DQ 517 4.27 - June 23, 1857);

To Father Faure (November 10, 1836):

Courage! having nothing, seeking nothing we have God on our side (DQ 157 4.6);

To Father Faure (February 10, 1840), when the financial situation is very bad:

Therefore courage, my dear Father, aspice regiones quia albae sunt jam ad mesem (Look around you, look at the fields; already they are white, ready for harvest!); our personal miseries prove that we have only to depend on the help of God. He has supported us until now: He will not fail us, we know we are doing His work (DQ 307 6.31).

Contrary to the opinion held, at least, in France, Father Querbes did not enjoy excellent health. In the letters received

by Father Querbes, the brothers often inquire about his health and allude to this or that sickness. Father Querbes makes little mention of his health, but in his advice to the Catechists we find a short treatise on the good use of times of illness:

To Brother Gonnet (May 17, 1859):

I started to write you only yesterday and knowing you have gone to such trouble to find out how I am, I am pleased to write you myself with my trembling pen. So I must tell you that I have recovered and advise you to say a good Alleluia. I am completely out of danger, although not yet convalescing, and it is due to the prayers addressed to the Blessed Virgin that I owe this miracle. It became evident that I was better at the beginning of May. I came face to face with death. It was a combination of illnesses. The main one was diabetes, an illness that is difficult and slow to cure, however with the third urinalysis there was no trace of it left. Dr. Mathey, who, as you know, is not a great believer, declared it a miracle and said he no longer understood anything. I was resigned to accept the divine will and I shall continue to devote the rest of my life to the success of our Institute. But enough said about me (DQ 546 8.61);

To Brother Liauthaud (November 13, 1857) a few days before his death:

Brother Gonnet was only doing his duty by exchanging courtesies with you and you should have the highest regard for him. But you would be doing him a disservice by overly commiserating with his present or future problems. Let us not allow ourselves to be weakened, during the days that we have left on this earth, by only considering what is painful here. For men of good will peace and grace always accompany trials (DQ 521 8.33);

To Father Faure (May 27, 1842):

For the ailments of the body we have good reasons to be at peace which is to let God's hand operate after taking human means at our disposition and to accept peacefully, healing or suffering, knowing very well from where both come. It is another story for the ailments of the soul when we are the cause. When we know them and their remedy, we can only complain to ourselves (DQ 374 6.103).

One thinks of Saint Francis de Sales who recommended *we remain indifferent to either health or sickness* but that we not forget *to call in the doctor* (**Treatise on the Love of God**). An indifference to unforeseen events are also occasions to seek out the will of God.

3. A Matter of "Little Deaths"

Father Querbes did not know what we might term "major trials" as founder. Some founders were expelled from their congregations (Basil Morneau, Anthony-Mary Claret, Theresa Soubeyran). Others did not live to see the realization of their project (Charles de Foucault, Mary Ward). On the other hand, Father Querbes did know a goodly number of, to use his word, "ordinary" trials. In these, his reactions are always animated by the same spirit of faith. A difficulty or hardship is but an occasion for taking another step on the path being pointed out by God. Father Léon-Dufour defines hardship as *an invitation to a more intense life, to a deeper relationship with God*⁶. Certain events in the life of Father Querbes bring this out clearly. First, however, we must review their context.

1828. The plan for the Society is born in the heart of Father Querbes. He reveals this plan to his superiors. Father Cattet, Vicar General, without wanting to deter Father Querbes from his project, proposes that he take on the direction of a minor seminary or perhaps the direction of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart whose founder has recently died. In this way the good will and energy of the Curé of Vourles would be channeled and put to good use. Father Querbes studied these two proposals carefully. In them he clearly faces the possibility of having to leave Vourles which would mean the end of his plans for the Society. In these two proposals he sees

this situation as the manifestation of the will of God, and insist that I not become too eager about what I told you last year and that I wait for a formal decision, later, concerning me, so as to show complete adherence (DQ 56 1.84).

1829. Having received archepiscopal authorization, Father Querbes leaves for Paris in view of obtaining civil authorization for his Society. Returning, his spirits are dampened by archbishop de Pins' objections to the continuation of his project. Among other grievances he accuses Father Querbes of accepting university control. Father Querbes then writes a letter in which he explains his actions and other points concerning his project. He closes with the following:

It is with deepest submission to the decision which Your Lordship will be pleased to make that I end this letter (DQ 65 1.130).

Regarding these difficulties, Father Querbes adds these words:

This Association...displeased the Archbishop Administrator and he withheld his approbation (DQ 351 6.75). "Displeased"

is a charitable euphemism when we realize that the Archbishop's reaction was a "tempest blast"! (J.-B. Martin).

1831. The ecclesiastical administration refuses authorization for the project of the Curé of Vourles. To divert him further, it offers him a "beautiful parish", Bourg-Agenal. Father Querbes is not duped: the project of the Catechists of Saint Viator, already approved by the civil authority, could only be directed by the pastor of Vourles. To accept the promotion would mean the end of his project. In the end, he accepts:

I accept the Divine Will which was made quite clear by the decision of your Excellency regarding my transfer and I have accepted with resignation its inevitable consequences. The hope of found a society of Catechists became more and more remote (DQ 97 2.87).

The end result was that the government did not approve of his transfer; therefore, his project could continue.

1836. The state of the Society is far from being secure. The conduct of a few associates raised doubts. Denunciations reached the Archbishop. In November, Fr. Cattet, Vicar General, asked Father Querbes without apologies, *to select another habit (cassock) more in line with their state (catechists) ...and not to compromise their sacred habit (that worn by the secular priests)* (P. 7744.121). The question of a cassock or habit seems strange to us today.... The catechists of the time did not wear the cassock of the priests, but one resembling it. The archdiocese was revoking a point that had been agreed upon. In 1832, it had already taken the initiative of suppressing a point considered important to the founder: *to second, in minor orders, country pastors*⁸. Father Querbes responded to this new measure in a highly argumentative letter. He doubts the Episcopal Council's commitment to the Society:

I assure you beforehand, in the name of the Society, of our obedience.... I can vouch for the dedication of a great number of Clerics. His excellency can destroy us with the stroke of a pen. We shall rise...and guided by divine Providence, go forth seeking new trials (DQ 164 4.9).

Note that it is after this episcopal interference that Father Querbes resolves to go to Rome and place his statutes under its protection.

1850. The Clerics of Saint Viator established themselves in the diocese of Rodez. It was the hope of Father Querbes that there the Congregation would flourish. The bishop of the diocese then decides to create his own diocesan congregation placing the novitiate at Nant, the very location where Father Querbes intended establishing his novitiate. Father Querbes then writes the Bishop a beautiful letter worthy of being quoted in its entirety. It too ends with words which must have cost him much:

If Your Grace does not agree with this idea, we shall remain in l'Aveyron until the proposed Congregation is able to take over the direction of our establishments, and we will withdraw content that it does not matter who may be the one to give glory to God (DQ 465 7.80).

We know what happened: the little congregation lasted four years and finally became affiliated with the Clerics of Saint Viator who did indeed flourish in the diocese.

1855. The successor to Archbishop de Pins, Cardinal de Bonald, did not make life any easier for Father Querbes. France of the day was under the regime of the concordat, this gave bishops much power. In the words of one historian they were *quasi absolute masters* said to be *violet prefects*⁹. Here we have

not only a bishop, but a "Cardinal" bishop! Cardinal de Bonald dispensed religious from their vows, wanted to be consulted regarding faraway foundations, had ambivalent feeling towards the Society, and at least twice refused Father Querbes permission to visit his young Canadian foundation (1852, 1855)--although the second request was supported by Bishop Bourget¹⁰. Father Querbes shares his desire of visiting the brothers in Canada in a letter he writes them. For one who is said to have had a rather cold style (DQ 496 7.122), the letter is remarkably warm. When it comes to the reason for not travelling to Canada, he simply writes:

But this desire so ardent and dictated by such pressing reasons, Providence did not permit me to realize, and so I fill the miles which separate us by the expression of a few thoughts which I confide to the fidelity of your memories and the diligence of your reflections.

One can only dream what Father Querbes could have seen and learned in Canada.

Something even more radical touches the very heart of his project. In the beginning, Father Querbes did not envision founding a religious congregation but rather an association of lay catechists of which some would be married¹¹. Following the successive drafts of the statutes and the verifications and amendments which were brought to bear upon them not only by the founder but also by the Episcopal Council, the Society now includes a congregation and an association of lay persons. This received official approbation in December 1833 (DQ 127 3.10). Very soon the lay branch, which was the hallmark of the beginning of the project, atrophied. The statutes which the archdiocese wishes to submit to Rome does not even mention lay membership (DQ 213 4.69). In going to Rome, Father Querbes counted on, among other things, having his original

intuition confirmed. He had, in fact, took care in writing a detailed additional chapter which treated *confreres or secular catechists* (DQ 226 A and B 4.36). This text was submitted to the Consulter and to the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Did they let him know that the approbation of this appendix would take time--he who was in such a hurry? Or perhaps that such an appendix would compromise the overall project? In any case, Father Querbes indicates that in view of pontifical approbation, *the supplement containing the project of the Confraternity of Secular Catechists will not be published* (DQ 234 4.110). And thus it was as a religious congregation that the pontifical approbation was received.

Nevertheless, Father Querbes remained hopeful. In 1841, in a moral report presented to Cardinal de Bonald, he returns to the subject of Secular Catechists. Once again he seeks episcopal approbation. He pleads his cause in these words: *We shall await orders from His Eminence on this point* (DQ 351 6,75). The orders never came. This dream, so close to his heart, was abandoned. And yet since 1978, the Constitutions foresee the admission of lay persons' becoming associated with the Congregation. For some local communities, this has become a reality in our day.

We have seen that on many occasions Father Querbes is ready, no matter the cost, and after having done all he could, to renounce a project. No doubt a difficult thing to do--especially for someone who is characterized as *forceful, quick-tempered, and absolute*¹² and who Guy-Marie Deplace, teacher and friend, finds to have had "an innate stubbornness" (P. 1198 6.32). Father Querbes accepts all these "little deaths" which witness a radical renunciation and an attentive search for the will of God. It is an attitude resembling that which Saint Francis de Sales wishes for every Christian, *a ball of wax in the hands of God*¹³. We all know that, humanly speaking, such an attitude makes

little sense. This availability, this clinging to and communion with the will of the God inscribes itself in the grand line of believers, of those who *tremble at my word* (Is 66:2).

4. Sensing the Divine Presence

In the *Directory* written in 1836, the chapter on prayer lists different "exercises of devotion" to which the Catechists will be committed each day. They are invited to be faithful in following these exercises with application, in particular

prayer, spiritual reading, Mass, examen, the rosary, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, receiving the Sacraments, spiritual direction, and retreat (DQ 163A 3.106).

In his commentary on the statutes, Father Querbes adds:

The daily religious exercises are: meditation or prayer, examination of conscience, Holy Mass, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, the holy exercise of the presence of God and short invocations. Meditation occupies the mind with the contemplation of holy truths, the heart is penetrated with these through prayer, the application to our habitual conduct is shown by the examination of conscience especially by the particular examination, the awareness of divine presence, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament and frequent aspirations which maintain the union of our soul with God and predisposes it render it more and more intimate in prayer. Those who think they are less capable become so when they wish because the Lord is fond of communicating with simple souls (DQ 550 8.96).

These "exercises" are very much in line with the common practices of the day...and after as well: they were the practice up to a time not too far distant from our own. One can underscore two or three traits. First the last sentence: *The Lord is fond of communicating with simple souls*. Simple souls walk the "ordinary" path, they do not seek out esoteric ways. Is there anything we might term "extraordinary" in the enumeration of Father Querbes? One finds no exacerbated mortification, no morbid introspection nor preposterous practices. The Catechists have a job to do and should be able to do it. Father Querbes outlines no "special" way to sanctity or mysticism. He recommends only ways that are tried and true and, for some, banal. Neither would he himself seek God in any other way.

In his *Commentary*, Father Querbes elaborates on several points:

It is through the holy exercise of the presence of God...that the Cleric of Saint Viator will animate and enliven his faith...that he will penetrate and guide all his thoughts and endeavors, all his words, all his conversations, all his actions and movements (DQ 550 8.99).

He speaks of *simple souls*. Persons sensibly aware of a presence, persons who have a listening heart--this is what he desires for his brothers. This attitude would vivify the "exercises of devotion". Without such an attitude the "exercises of devotion" would become sheer formalism.

A sense of the presence of God, means, quite simply, paying attention. Father Querbes insists upon this regarding the Eucharist. He gives the Catechists much advice on the way they are to assist at Mass profitably and receive Holy Communion worthily.

They will try to make themselves worthy of receiving Communion and, with the consent of their confessor, receive Holy Communion on Sundays and Thursdays as well as on all solemn feasts whether they be of obligation or not (DQ 550 8.99).

This recommendation later became known as "frequent communion". The Catechists are also invited to pay daily visits to the Blessed Sacraments whether it be by rule or out of devotion:

Do not enter or leave class, if possible, without visiting the Blessed Sacrament (Directory, #102).

This sense of the Divine presence with which Father Querbes seeks to inspire his brothers explains the many details describing the attitude of those in charge of sacristies or liturgical ceremonies. These prescriptions appear in the *Directory* and reappear in the *Commentary on the Statutes*.

Those Clerics exclusively employed in the function of Sacristan will make all of these recommendations their invariable line of conduct. Vivid faith, enlightened religion, tender devotion to the Blessed Sacrament will guard them against sacrilegious familiarity with holy things. Modesty and silence will foster edification and inspire the faithful witnessing their behavior in the holy dwelling, the respect and religious fear for the presence of the Holy of Holies. They will always walk slowly, eyes lowered and will not genuflect in passing haste before the Most Blessed Sacrament (DQ 550 8.102).

Father Querbes also develops the attitude one must have who has the honor of serving Holy Mass. (He should) take

care now and again to re-read carefully the ceremonial so as not to intermingle the arbitrary or that such be only a matter of routine (ibid.).

A sacrilegious familiarity with holy things...a religious fear in the presence of the Holy of Holies.... Such language may appear outmoded. We are fortunately accustomed to ceremonies which express the faith of a living community. After Vatican II, liturgy has become ill at ease with rubricism. It would, however, be wrong to view Father Querbes' counsels as so many instances of formalism. The opposite is true: Father Querbes insisted that the Catechists fight against all forms of routine which would trivialize the presence of the Lord. This reveals a high awareness of transcendence. Simple gestures done with respect witness to a certitude: the presence of God who can only be perceived in the enlivened faith of the believer.

The third section of the *Directory* opens with a warning which will be repeated in the *Commentary on the Statutes*:

Reading nourishes the spirit; in prayer we speak with God; in spiritual reading God speaks with us and offers us matter for our prayer (I am unsure if contemporary spiritual writers would agree with these distinctions). *Be faithful to your obligatory reading (the legend) and do not forget other types of spiritual reading. The word of God, Christian doctrine as proposed by the authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the beautiful book of the Imitation of Christ, the most admirable book ever written by man, these are the writings which comprise the legend or the those readings to which the Catechist obliged. One must, therefore, bring to the legend a high degree of attention and respect (including a sense of the presence of God). Saint Charles Borromeo always read Sacred Scripture kneeling as if he were listening to God speaking on Mount Sinai, or amid fire and thunder.*

Try then to enter into what you are reading, apply it to yourself, examine your good faith and ascertain whether you are living that which you read and ask God to give you the courage and strength to conform you life to it.(DQ 163A 3.110).

Two comments on the legend. One can say that the legend is older than the Clerics of Saint Viator since the first text in which the legend is mentioned is of February 11, 1829 (DQ 26 1.96), at that moment there were no Catechists. The *Directory* specifies what is to be read: the morning's reading from Scripture was from the psalms and the New Testament; the evening's readings, over a period of two years, was the Old Testament. One should underscore Father Querbes' decision to have the entire Bible read--and this in the XIXth century--first of all to lay persons, and then to religious. One might well doubt the opportuneness of the first book of *Chronicles* or the genealogies of *Numbers* and yet it is worthwhile to note their inclusion. The mission of the Catechists is to teach Christian doctrine. They are to give life to their teaching and not merely parrot truths. To do this they must first of all pray by going to an ever-vivifying source, Sacred Scripture. This is why Father Querbes insisted on the Catechists' being attentive to the Word of God. In the last General Chapter (1988) the Cleric of Saint Viator was identified as "Servant of the Word."

5. An Enlightened Faith

Two traits should characterize the faith of a Catechist. We know the first, a lively and enlightened faith; the second, however, we may have forgotten: Father Querbes admittedly muffles his expectations on this point. Nevertheless, it is on this

point that we owe one of his clearest sayings, words which are always applicable: *The study and teaching of Christian doctrine: this is our life* (DQ 550 8.101). In another section of the *Commentary on the Statutes*, we find the same insistence: *His faith* (that of the Catechist) *should be enlightened by a wide range of knowledge, and rooted in the fundamental truths of religion. This is a life-long study* (DQ 550 8.100).

But this XIXth century priest has the responsibility of a community in which not all the members are blessed with a solid formation; he therefore adds a series of cautions: the Catechists will read only those authorized works, he may not subscribe to a journal without permission, he will take care not to decide on cases of conscience and, of course, will refrain giving *spiritual advice, especially to persons of the opposite sex*. These are all classical cautions of the times.

Ultramontane that he is (at the time this was modern!), another anchor:

Submitted in spirit and heart to the teachings of the Catholic Church and the voice of its supreme leader, the Holy Father the Pope, the Cleric of Saint Viator should never enter into discussions of debated opinions in the schools; rather he should invariably attach himself in the depth of his soul to the Holy Roman Church and to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to condemn all that which is condemned by the Apostolic See and accept all that which the Church proposes for belief (DQ 550 8.99).

Thus the Catechist will be firm:

If his faith is alive, it will be enlightened, it will be strong, generous and capable of working miracles. Without either

presumption or fear, it will never be disturbed by temptations or doubts concerning faith (Ibid).

As was mentioned earlier, Father Querbes does not easily reveal his interior life. Hagiography might portray him knocking at the tabernacle door. What meaning should we give to such an image? That of an urgent and supplicatory prayer? Without being iconoclastic, might we not also see a question asked to Someone who seems asleep, as in a certain boat battered by a storm at sea? At the beginning of 1838, as difficulties mount, Father Querbes, in two letters, seems to breath a sigh of weariness--as though the cup were too full:

When God inspires you to send me your signature (religious commitment of Father Faure), it will relieve me of a great worry. It seems to me that death has been looming over me for a long time. I will then say with infinite satisfaction my Nunc dimittis (DQ 179 4.33 - January 19, 1838).

This done (send the Statutes to Rome), I will say my: Nunc dimittis because formido mortis cedit, super me (the terrors of death have fallen upon me, Ps 55:4). (DQ 181 4.44 - February 6, 1838).

Again to Father Faure, May 31, 1845):

I beg you, always pray to God for the Society and for me. I was never in greater need of prayers: sorrows, worries and troubles superabound (DQ 420 7.31).

It would be hazardous to see in these brief quotations a crisis of trust in Providence or doubts capable of shaking his faith.

When viewing a scene from an elevation, the perspective becomes clearer. In a life, certain key events may allow us to view a certain cohesiveness in a person's life. Perhaps in the life of Father Querbes, his vow of chastity might be one such key event. Here I risk being somewhat categorical for I am convinced that Louis Querbes took this vow not in 1802 or 1802 as is traditionally cited, but on October 15, 1808.

In 1808, Father Querbes was 15 years old. He is a student of the clerical school of Saint Nizier. The preceding year he is confirmed and receives the tonsure. His life takes on a definite direction. Here it is not a matter of a boy pronouncing a vow in a touching moment of naive fervor. Here it is more a matter of a young man who lets himself be captured by God in the depth of his being and is led to think, decide and act in the certitude that he can only be truly himself in giving himself totally to God.

This is the beginning of a trajectory in the life of Father Querbes which will cross difficult moments as well as the commonplace, but which will not be deflected. A lively faith animated his entire life.

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- 1 Zind (Pierre, *Les nouvelles congrégations de Frères enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830*, doctoral thesis in letters, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Lyons, 1969, p. 422.
 - 2 The bachelor's Degree was created in 1808. Louis Querbes presented himself for the examination in July 1812. His diploma is #2083 (DQ XI 1.11).
 - 3 Feuilletts querbésiens, #41, March 15, 1960, p. 433.
 - 4 Cf. above, second part, point 5: "Avec les seconds".

- 5 Anonymous testimony, *Feuillets querbésiens*, #53, November 15, 1961, p. 606.
- 6 Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament, Paris, Le Seuil, art. "Épreuve".
- 7 Cf. DQ 65 1.130. See also Martin (Jean-Baptiste), *Histoire des Eglises et Chapelles de Lyon*, Lyons, H. Lardanchet, 1908, Vol. 1, p. 331. The tone of this essay is stronger than that of DQ 65. The text was published in *Viator*, I, #11 (January-February 1987).
- 8 This phrase was suppressed by the Episcopal Council while studying the *Statutes* in view of their approbation (DQ 112 2.113).
- 9 Pierrard, op. cit., p. 119.
- 10 Letter of Bishop Bourget to Father Querbes: *I humbly asked his Eminence the Cardinal of Lyons to free you (to go to Canada). He replied that he would speak about it with his Council for he did not want to shoulder the responsibility of your absence alone* (P. 7489 34.175).
- 11 See the draft of the first *Statutes*.
- 12 Charles Saulin, *Feuillets querbésiens*, #41, March 15, 1960, p. 431.
- 13 *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, Annecy edition, p. 124.