

II

GOD WILL PROVIDE

The believer who trusts in God knows that "all shall be well". Such an attitude can only rest on a strong and living faith.

For contemporary theologians, Christian hope covers a wider range than does "trusting in God's help". Christian hope axes itself on the Reign of God. It is useless, however, to seek this eschatological dimension in the writings of Father Querbes. It is present only by way of exception in the classical times of the XIXth century. Indeed, the word "hope" is little used by Father Querbes. He speaks rather of "trust in God" and especially of "Providence", expressions frequently repeated in his writings.

1. Witnesses

Father Querbes was known to be a man who anchored everything in a God from whom he expects much. Contemporary witnesses often turn to this trait in the Founder.

Having entered the Congregation in 1839, Brother Saulin knew Father Querbes well. The picture he draws of Father Querbes ends with these words:

In good as in ill fortune, he was even tempered. He was cultured as well as pious and modest. He had unlimited confidence in Providence. His favorite saying was: God will provide¹.

God will Provide, the same words Abraham spoke to Isaac (Gn 22:8). Brother Saulin offers an abridged version of the founding of the Congregation:

But how realize this project without any resources or protection? Father Querbes, confiding all to Providence, made an appeal to the charity of the clergy and laity of the diocese of Lyons. It was in this way that a series of trials and criticism began (ibid).

It was in this way.... One can ask if Brother Saulin was conscious of the link he establishes between Providence and "trials"? One is reminded of Christ's words to Theresa of Avila: *It is thus that I treat my friends....*

Father Pailhès also knew Father Querbes. His notes were put together in view of the obituary notice of the Founder. They are, of course, edited in the "ecclesiastical" style of the time....

The physical fatigue was little compared with the moral trials and difficulties which followed upon his every step. Anyone else would have faltered under such a task. Full of confidence in God regarding the future of his work, he was unshakable--nothing could lessening his trust in God. His priestly brothers refused their help, many disapproved of his work or were unsympathetic considering him rash they

predicting failure. His eyes were fixed on God whose glory was his sole preoccupation... thus he went ahead...².

A third witness, François Favre, Brother of Hughes, was the secretary of Father Querbes a few years before his death³.

His disinterestedness was so sincere and his confidence in God so great that it pleased him to call his brothers children of the Providence of God who would never abandon them⁴. Father Querbes had great trust in Providence. How many times have we not seen him without the necessary resources to further his work? Always calm and resigned, he awaited help which often arrived from the hands of a stranger. This he would often relate to his children encouraging them to offer thanks to Providence and to pray for the charitable person who came to his aid⁵.

In the above testimonies we notice a constant: an unlimited confidence in the Providence of God. This was indeed needed when we consider the trials and difficulties he had to face. Besides this confidence in God, a certain healthy tenacity was also needed to realize his plans. If the Clerics of Saint Viator exist today, it is because of the interaction of these two qualities.

2. A Constant Invitation

Material difficulties constantly plagued Father Querbes: meager resources and the growing needs of the Society at a time of national economic crisis left much to be desired. In his letters, Father Querbes invites the Catechists to rely on "He who feeds the birds of the air" (Mt 6:26). This is always the attitude he himself maintains.

That which fills me with confidence in the future, in spite of trials (grave economic problems) which have only increased with the misfortunes of Lyons (floods), is the wonderful spirit which enlivens all those of the Society. Let us try, says Peter, to strengthen our vocation and election by good works and God will not fail us (DQ 336 6.57 - to Brother Archirel, January 5, 1841).

I am more than ever reticent (in purchasing a house), but if the right moment comes, one must trust in Providence (DQ 485 7,104 - to Bishop Croizier of the diocese of Rodez, July 1, 1854).

As regards yourself, my dear child, do your best until the day comes when your resources are gone. Profit from this occasion to abandon yourself more than ever into the hands of Providence. Do not in any way worry (DQ 463 7,78 - to Brother Archirel, April 17, 1850).

Economize your resources.... The chapel wall must be paid out of the 2000 francs I left you. Try covering all the other expenses by obtaining a few gifts. God must feed His children (DQ 151 3.142 - to Father Faure, June 24, 1836).

To the religious of France facing the tumult of the 1848 revolution, he recommends practical measures: keeping well the rule and being ready to assist the principal house (Vourles). The conclusion of this circular reads:

Also keep money in reserve for an unexpected departure, but especially put your trust in Providence (DQ 444 7.57 - March 17, 1848).

Another indication: Trust in God and God will provide:

You must also know that the donation of 20,000 francs is assured. Now, with the sale of Poyet, this will pay off our debts, and we shall become masters of our own house. Blest be God, but may He not give us riches (DQ 373 6.102 - to Father Favre, February 22, 1842). On this last point his prayers were heard.

In times of confusion, trials and worry, the invitation remains the same: The Master of souls and hearts will give the necessary strength and courage. Father Querbes invites his brothers to view trials as so many signs of God's solicitude: do not fear, have no worry. With this assurance, human difficulties are perceived differently:

It is not the Montbrison Committee we have to fear but the Rector and Mr. Bernard, the Secretary, who speaks for the Rector. But then si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos? (DQ 182 4.49 - to Father Faure, February 20, 1838).

Under God's care. If you want to come to Paris (where Father Querbes is), you will help me bear my burdens.... And together we shall return either beaten or content, but always submitted to Providence (DQ 418 7.29 - to Father Faure, April 20, 1845).

While seeking the help of the Roman Curia in the pontifical approval of the Institute, the certainty is the same:

Also pray to God, Master of all hearts, to dispose our Common Father's heart and that of the venerable Counsellors who surround him (DQ 191 4.78 - to Father Faure, May 22, 1838).

So many trials. All the better since we have not merited them through any fault of our own.... Do not count on men (DQ 409 7.20 - to Father Faure, January 21, 1845).

I invite you to toss all your cares into the arms of Providence (DQ 531 8.43 - to Brother Gonnet, February 5, 1858).

Regarding disappointment (which Brother Gonnet expresses), it will teach you to place your trust in God alone and not count on men (DQ 531A 8.44 - to Brother Gonnet, February 10, 1858).

This abandonment into the hands of God should not immobilize the believer nor turn him away from action. The virtue of prudence brings in a note of realism:

One must not defy Providence, nor tempt it (DQ 341 6.66 - to Father Faure, April 26, 1841).

It is with regret that I was forced to tell Mr. Rouchance that it is impossible for us to receive the young Cellier gratuitously. To do otherwise would be to go against my word, my conscience and Christian prudence. God watches over us and so we stopped following a way of presumptuous trust in Divine Providence in time (DQ 323 6.46 - to Father Faure, June 3, 1840).

Do not tempt Providence. In what measure, however, can we not say that, on certain occasions, Father Querbes did rely a bit too heavily on Providence? One example: the first foundations in other countries. In 1841 and again in 1844, the first two groups of missionaries left France--six religious each time. After six years both are complete failures. Only Fathers Thibaudier

and Lahaye remain religious. Brother Clavel, studying these two foundations concludes:

*In these two circumstances our Founder was truly mistaken. For it is rash to believe in the promises of missionary bishops. These bishops can promise nothing: nothing stable, nothing fixed--all is to be created (from nothing) in their diocese. In matters of recruitment, one cannot count on the natives...neither on the colonists....*⁶

One can no doubt go even further than Brother Clavel: these foundations, especially that of Algiers, were far too improvised. The distances did not allow for any type of guidance by Father Querbes. These religious were often sent without preparation or qualification and, at times, against their will.

Trusting in God is not always easy: at times God seems busy elsewhere.... To say spontaneously: "I place my trust in You", supposes a long apprenticeship. For Father Querbes, however, this assurance, at times this cry, is a given certainty.

Courage (he writes to Father Faure), having nothing, seeking nothing, we shall have God (DQ 157 6,6). And on the same line: That which I conclude for each step taken is that if we are good religious, there will always be good to do and Providence will always be on our side. (DQ 377 6.106).

This same certitude that God will not abandon those who trust in Him runs through Sacred Scripture. It is the certitude of the Poor of Yahweh. They know they are dependent. They experience God's actions in their poverty and through their need⁷. With this poverty, this humility (the "ordinary" virtues so stressed by Father Querbes), all is possible: *God will be on our side*. It is the faith commitment of Father Querbes which gives him this assurance, an assurance which crosses the years.

3. The Crucible of August 1838

Facing the difficulties the Society was undergoing in France, Father Querbes placed his hope in the approbation of the *Statutes* by the Roman Curia. It seems that, at first, Father Querbes did not envision travelling to Rome (DQ181 4.44 and DQ 182 4.44). Then all at once he leaves in May. Was he aware of what was awaiting him? Was he forewarned? Did he pay heed to the prudent minded? His friend Guy-Marie Deplace writes him in July:

Do you recall the sinister predictions made by an Excellence at your departure? You seemed, with your innate stubbornness, to want to gainsay the oracle: I hope you do. No one more than I wishes you success; and yet I remain doubtful (P. 1198 6.32).

Guy-Marie Deplace was not mistaken: Rome is neither Paris nor Lyons. Father Querbes found support, made the necessary arrangements, prayed at the tomb of the Apostles, at Loretto, at the Gesu. He did all that was necessary. But he was in Rome....

At the beginning of August, everything was at a standstill. After three long months of negotiations, work, and textual revisions, Father Querbes counted on an approbation. Low and behold the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars *did not think they should make a decision* (DQ 242 4.124). One can easily understand the decision of the cardinals: the Society of Catechists of Saint Viator was but 5 years old and had only 24 members most of whom were committed for less than a year. Ordinarily pontifical approbation was only accorded to those institutes who had proven themselves.

For Father Querbes this was a very rude awakening. He now had to renew negotiations and once again solicit the advice of Bishop de Pins (DQ 239A 4.120). Once again he had to renew the lines of communication with the Curia. It is at this moment that his health gives out.

Worry as well as the heat have obliged me to pay my tribute to the Roman climate (DQ 239A 4.120 - to Bishop de Pins, August 6, 1838).

I am in poor health and am consumed and exhausted by an intestinal inflammation. Pray to God for this poor French Priest who is struggling here to lay the foundation of our work (DQ 194 4.122 - to Father Faure, August 9, 1838).

I can hardly hold my pen, I have to stop at each sentence, I have been bedridden for eight days (DQ 196 4.131 - to Father Faure, August 22, 1838).

My stomach continues to refuse nourishment. My health has been sorely tried (DQ 197 4.132 - to Mr. Magaud, August 25, 1838).

August was a difficult month both physically and psychologically. But what do we again find in all these Roman letters?

August 9: This is the moment when obstacles seem mountain high, but also the moment when God gives me the grace to remain firmly resolute. In te Domine speravi non confundar in aeternum.

August 22: Although very weak, I am more than ever full of confidence in God. A.A.J.

August 29: *Your letters from Lyons, those of the Ladies (Comte), and all the news which interests me, no matter how sad, are the best remedy in my weakness. I must confess, however, that never has confidence in God and His Holy Mother abandoned me. Ah, it is here that one learns to love Maria santissima* (DQ 198 4.133 - to Father Faure).

Father Querbes has no doubts. Less than a month later, the Congregation receives pontifical approbation. Another person also had no doubts. Upon learning that Father Querbes was leaving for Rome, Pauline Jaricot sent him a note putting him in contact with a Capucin who might well help him. Pauline added:

I am very pleased with this wonderful venture. Long live Jesus and Mary! How good it is to embark in their admirable company! (P. 1142 5.243).

All this seems so simple! Is it "ordinary"?...

4. The Flickering Flame...

Here I would like to evoke Father Querbes' attitude before the foolishness of certain religious whether that of a young naive beginner or that of an old companion. Perhaps one might think that I am extending myself beyond the topic at hand. I do not think so. How can one say he loves a God he does not see, and not love a neighbor he does see (1Jn 4:20)? How can one expect much from Providence, place his hope in God and expect nothing of his brother? To hope, to be patient, to guide, to forgive is to believe that after being lost, after a failure or fall,

all is not over. An awakening, a return, a re-birth is always possible. Such we call a "Paschal" attitude. We are not only within the domain of hope, but also that of charity. We shall now view Father Querbes from this vantage point.

We know that Father Querbes saw himself as quick-tempered (DQ 306 6.30). Brother Saulin uses the words *contentious* and *absolute*. Witnesses agree in stating that his *repartee was extremely prompt* (Saulin); another states *He had a violent temper when something irritated him* (anonymous); he had a *lively temperament which could at times be redoubtable to those who contradicted him* (Pailhès). Even Father Robert (always so benevolent...) speaks of his *verve*, his *tendency to mock* (a trait) *which would have proved redoubtable had he not energetically contained it*. We know of instances in which this tendency was not always contained...

His character inclined him to caustic and sharp responses. The passive correspondence gives us traces of this. A Catechist asks that he not *assail* him too forcefully so as not to induce gastritis! Another complains of receiving *too heavy a load* (bourrées) from him (P. 826 4.181).... And one could cite other examples.

And yet this trait does not stop him from responding as a confident father. The conduct of the Catechist Damoiseil is deplorable. Father Querbes upbraids him in no uncertain terms, yet closes his letter with these words:

You know me, come again if you so desire and you will find me always the same, that is, full of tenderness and desiring that you not hinder the good that God has placed within you (DQ 155 4,4).

Another Catechist, Jean Delmas, who as also been foolish, takes the first step, he writes:

If you would forget the past and remember only the fatherly solicitude which characterizes you, I would be very happy (P. 862 4.225).

The contrast between these two character traits of Father Querbes is well brought out by a witness who writes:

He loved all his brothers as if they were his own children, to the point of becoming ill when he lost one. Most people had a hard time believing this for his character was naturally sharp which left the impression that he was severe and even indifferent. Those who did not know him might well suspect he was angry when he seemed to lose his temper⁹.

Father Francois Favre lived in Vourles and close to Father Querbes. He testifies:

We have seen him receiving a wayward brother with open arms and tears of joy.... As would a generous father, he no longer thought of their waywardness, showing them the same confidence and an even deeper attachment. On that day, the return of the wayward, a little celebration was held in the community¹⁰.

On the other hand, one must not kill the fattened calf: one was poor in Vourles.... But a fatherly heart was there. A father who was, at times, taken advantage of:

He despaired of no one.... Perhaps there were times when he placed too much confidence in those who were unworthy of it--but can we reproach him of this?¹¹.

Reading the passive correspondence, one is astonished by what seems the all too often infantile, stupid and even blameworthy conduct of a not insignificant number of Cate-

chists during the times of Father Querbes. Arguments, rowdy debates fill the pages of long letters. Quarrels over nothing, irresponsible conduct, scandals, and, at times grave incidents which end up in court.

What is happening? One must remember that being a teacher in the first half of the XIXth century France meant belonging to a profession with very little to recommend itself. Among the first companions of Father Querbes figure men who had already been teachers: with their past and habits. There are also former seminarians (nine), former religious (seventeen), that is, persons who had already failed elsewhere (12). On the other hand, Father Querbes did as most founders--he tried to respond to the numerous requests being made. He often withdrew incompletely formed young men from the novitiate to send them into parishes. He accepted postulants of weak character hoping that formation would strengthen them. He did this in spite of the advice of the Jesuits and the Archbishop of Lyons who advised him to anchor the Society firmly on a demanding formation and to accept few school and always with good contracts (13). Finally, taken up by administrative tasks as well as this pastoral responsibilities, he had little time to visit his local communities, regularly answer letters, or direct and correct those who needed it.

These Catechists whose conduct was sometimes shocking became the occasion of discontent, in particular among those majors who would have wanted to take their role as consellers seriously. Father Clavel prudently broaches the question:

Our beloved Father has often been accused of accepting subjects too readily, and once admitting them, his constant desire to keep them although these showed neither ability nor good will and whose conduct proved that they were not called to the religious life. He responded to these objections

by saying: "Yes, I think as you do, such a subject does not now have the necessary dispositions, but who can assure me that he will not have them tomorrow? If we send him away, will he be the better for it? Let us work to reform his character and correct his shortcomings. Did not our Divine Master come to earth for both the just and the sinner? Following His example, should not religious communities open themselves to support the weak, the perseverance of the just and the conversion of the sinner? May we not lose patience, let us not defy both Providence and the working of grace." These words silenced the malcontents and lessened the murmuring¹⁴.

One need not agree with Brother Clavel. One may still regret that Father Querbes did not anchor the Congregation more firmly in stressing a serious formation and a more rigorous selection of candidates. One may also retain the concern of giving "another chance", this desire of not wanting to stifle, as he says, that which God has placed within the heart of his brothers. The flickering flame may glow again.

5. The Seconds-in-Charge...

One of the difficulties Father Querbes faced as Founder, was the absence of strong collaborators who would have firmly seconded and supported him and upon whom he would have been able to delegate some responsibility in the governing of the Congregation. This is not an attempt to place Father Querbes in a vacuum so that he might appear all the more exalted. In fact, impressive figures are present: Jean-Pierre Blein, Claude Robin, Pierre Archirel, Jean-Baptiste Clavel and many others. But these religious directed schools and were not

in Vourles to second Father Querbes. His closest adjuncts were Hugues Favre, Charles Faure and Pierre Liauthaud.

Let us consider briefly the first of these men: Father Favre was timid, scrupulous and for whom Father Querbes was the main support:

He was always frightened, he notes, of receiving Holy Orders.... His exactness is perfect, his aptitude more than sufficient. But his irresolute character sometimes removes the energy needed to do things (DQ 270 5.61).

Father Favre is vicar of both the parish and Congregation. In 1859 he was the only priest of the Congregation living in France. He succeeded the Founder, who, a few day before his death, invested him with his authority:

You have seen the oneness which as always existed between Father Favre and myself. Offer him the same obedience which you have given me¹⁵.

Father Charles Faure was already ordained when he pronounced his vows in 1838. The reading of his letters to Father Querbes corroborates the picture drawn by Father Robert:

He lacked initiative, a clear vision, and the ability for making prompt decisions. He lacked energy and a constancy of will.... Timid, hesitant, with a tendency to be lethargic.... Most of his activity was in his imagination...¹⁶.

Father Querbes writes, guides, supports, and at times upbraids him. In 1848 Father Faure, chasing phantoms and shadows, leaves the Institute to found another teaching congregation where agricultural labor would have been given higher

priority than that given by the Clerics of Saint Viator. One can imagine anything! Of course, he failed. In 1852 Father Querbes received him back into the Congregation. Now he becomes a Savonarola, he collects and then makes a list of all the infringements of the *Statutes* of which he accuses the Founder. His intention is to send this denunciation to Rome (P. 6977 32.87). We do not know if this dossier reached the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Father Faure died in community just a few months later. His papers went to Father Querbes who preserved them, including the accusatory pages. These will give the Devil's Advocate material to work on.

At the death of Brother Liauthaud in November 1857, Father Querbes is said to have cried: *My right arm has been torn away! And all the brothers wept the one to whom they went in moments of worry and trials because he knew how to console and encourage*¹⁷. This was *Good Father Liauthaud*.

Brother Liauthaud was one of the first disciples of Father Querbes. He had retained that "devouring fire" with which he had been seized in his earliest years: it is said that he taught catechism from the age of ten years!¹⁸. As a teacher, he had adopted a severe rule of life, prayer had high priority: two hours of prayer, the rosary, and breviary (according to Clavel). It was in the *Bulletin des Lois* that he had read the official notice of the birth of the Association of Saint Viator (P. 389 2.229). He joined Father Querbes at the age of 38.

Concerning him, Father Querbes notes:

He knew how to gain the affection of parents and children everywhere. He teaches catechism very well and his piety is lively and joyful. He is discerning, zealous, intelligent and very devoted. Nevertheless, he needs moderation and guidance (DQ 270 5.61).

He needs moderation. A short sentence but revealing sentence. Brother Liauthaud was Master of Novices and was insistent that the brothers receive a solid formation. He grieved that the Founder, taken up by a growing number of schools and the necessary academic requirements of the brothers, seemed to give professional formation priority. An opposition to the methods of Father Querbes grew becoming at times moments of severe crises. Brother Liauthaud did not spare Father Querbes, and in letters to friends, adopts a tone which, to say the least, is surprising¹⁹. In a few letters to Father Querbes he literally explodes. In one such letter he cites the reasons for refusing the direction of the novitiate (P. 4872 22.147). In another, he lists a dozen reasons for believing that the Society is *tending toward dissolution* (P. 4908 22.206). The replies of Father Querbes, if there were any, have not been preserved--unfortunately!

And yet, in what seems to have been a severe crisis, we do know the reaction of Father Querbes. Here it is rather important that we go into some detail.

In June 1856, Brother Liauthaud requested and obtained permission to make a retreat at the Grand Chartres. From here he writes Father Querbes that he finds it *invincibly repugnant to return to Vourles* (P. 8003 37.11) indicating that he would go to the school of Thel. A flight of Brother Master of Novices! Six days later he explains his reasons: the untenable position he finds himself in Vourles is because of the Superior's ability to deal with him through "murmurs" which Brother Liauthaud gathers from the brothers. In brief, he experiences "resentment" (his word) toward his Superior (P.8018 37.29).

In the meantime, Brother Oriant, Director of a school is accused of immoral acts with a young boy (P. 8041 37.63). In fact, the inquest revealed the accuser to have exaggerated, though the religious was very imprudent (P.8053 37.79). A

scandal was in the offing. And this scandal reverberated on the formation being given by the Master of Novices. In the schools the brothers learn two facts at the same time: the departure of Brother Liauthaud and the Oriant scandal. Some sympathize with Father Querbes, as does Brother Blein who recognized that Brother Liauthaud *edified* the novices in spite of his *eccentricities*; nevertheless, learning of his departure, states that was *pained beyond measure* (P. 8045 37.69). Brother Archirel also wrote to Father Querbes. His letter has been lost, but the reply of Father Querbes has been happily preserved:

Your letter arrived just in time to put a little balm on a wound which has been torturing me for some fifteen days and which added itself to that of the singularities of Father Liauthaud. I have kept all to myself and have opened my heart to God alone. Father Liauthaud has now learned everything from Brother Borot (assistant to Brother Oriant)....

The thing is more serious than you think. You know that, on my part, I did not have confidence in the unfortunate Oriant. He is now in flight and elsewhere than where some may have told you. God keeps watch, and let us pray that things will remain where they are....

Be at rest regarding Father Liauthaud. I am sure that all will go well. He has too good a spirit to push his point to the extent of causing disorder among us only to satisfy his puerile susceptibility.

In all this matter I ask you secrecy and discretion. Courage. There are, on the other hand, consolations. Pray for him who with tender affection is your father in Our Lord (DQ 511 8.13).

Three comments which will serve as conclusion:

. *singularities*, the inflammatory letters to the Superior?

. *He has too good a spirit*: to see the other side of the coin!

. *I have kept all to myself and opened my heart to God alone*:
In te Domine speravit....

1 *Feuillets querbésiens*, #41, March 15, 1960, p. 431.

2 *Feuillets querbésiens*, new series, May 1964.

3 It is to him that we owe the last words of Father Querbes: "And so, my children, it is now up to me to speak with you, but I do not have the strength. You have seen the oneness which always existed between me and Father Favre. Give him the same obedience which you gave me. Banish far from you a partisan spirit. Be obedient. Share my recommendations with those who are absent. I give you my blessing as I give it to everyone" (*Annals on Father Querbes*, #4, 1954, p. 26).

4 *Feuillets querbésiens*, #6, January 15, 1956, p. 47.

5 *Feuillets querbésiens*, #7, February 2, 1956, p. 69.

6 *Feuillets querbésiens*, #34, April 15, 1959, p. 335.

7 Laur (Pierre), Un "pauvre" par sa foi: le P. Querbes, *Servir*, May 1968, p. 271.

Bonnafous (Robert), La disponibilité du P. Querbes, *Vie*, #141, December 1990, p. 10; *Servir*, #434, February 1991, p. 27; Spiritual Openness of Father Querbes, Chicago, December 1990.

8 Comment of Brother Saulin: *He left for Rome accompanied simply with a letter of his bishop requesting that His Holiness Gregory XVI approve the*

statutes composed by Abbé Querbes. The latter was treated as foolish and presumptuous. He had not a cent; a few good souls defrayed his travelling expenses. Feuilletts querbésiens, #41, March 15, 1960, p. 433.

On the trip to Rome see:

Prud'homme (François), Voyage du P. Querbes à Rome (1838), *Feuilletts querbésiens*, new series, #6, October 1964; #7, January 7, 1965; #8, February 1965.

Bonnafous (Robert), L'approbation pontificale des status, *Viator*, Vol. II, #2, February 1989.

- 9 Anonymous. *Feuilletts querbésiens*, #53, November 15, 1961, p. 604.
- 10 François Favre, *Feuilletts querbésiens*, #44, June 1, 1960, p. 475.
- 11 Anonymous. *Feuilletts querbésiens*, #53, November 15, 1961, p. 606.
- 12 Lévesque (Benoît), *D'un projet primitivement utopique à une congrégation religieuse. Sociologie génétique des Clercs de Saint-Viateur*, thèse de doctorat en sociologie, Paris V, May 1975, p. 360.
- 13 Cf. P. 1582 7.183 and P. 3206 14.153.
- 14 *Feuilletts querbésiens*, #27, September 15, 1958, p. 263.
- 15 Cf. above, note 3. Doubtlessly, Father Querbes was aware of the vacillating nature of his successor. His last words were not only in view of recommending obedience in general....
- 16 Father Robert, p. 513.
- 17 Jean-Baptiste Clavel, *Feuilletts querbésiens*, #31, January 15, 1959, p. 41.
- 18 *Annuaire 1891-92*, p. 12.
- 19 Cf. for example, P. 6560 30.132 and P. 6640 30.234.

III

AN ARDENT AND DISINTERESTED ZEAL

The life of Father Querbes can be summed up in one word: charity! but, let us agree on the meaning of this word. We do not mean what one might call benevolent-charity, though of this he had much. We are dealing with the theological virtue of charity: the love of God and neighbor.

It is because of love that Louis Querbes consecrated himself to God; that he was a faithful servant; that he was able to read the signs the times as so many God-given nudges. It is because of love that Father Querbes was able to see in hardship an invitation to a deeper faith and another step in the direction of God. Love led him *to taste but the will of God...to be but an instrument in God's work*--words he used in giving a retreat (DQ S308 14.65). His faith rooted itself in love. His love authenticated his faith. It was a love that went far:

Yes, we must be saints, and I in particular. More than ever I feel that God asks of me every sacrifice. Thanks to His goodness I experience repulsion for none (DQ 306 6.30).

Like Saint Paul and the saints, seized by the love of Christ (2Co 5:14), Father Querbes makes one his love of God and neighbor. He rarely uses the word charity; and if he does, he

uses it is in the sense of "doing charity". Instead, he uses a word which has all but disappeared from our vocabulary: zeal. In France the word "zeal" has taken on a rather pejorative meaning due, perhaps, to an attitude a bit too zealous on the part of those promoting political or similar causes: one who is overly "zealous" in such causes does not necessarily have the best of motives.

At the time of Father Querbes the word "zeal", according to the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, signified *affection, a movement of a soul which is alive, and ardent in pursuing the success of something, or for the interests of another. This word is especially used in religion: zeal for the glory of God, in matter of faith, for holy things....* This is followed by some fifteen examples all of which are in positive. This passionate and ardent desire to serve the cause of God and neighbor is the meaning of the word "zeal" for Father Querbes. But how might we translate this word today? Catholic action? Commitment? Mission?.... but these words have their own meaning. Charity and love ring truer.

1. An Urgency to Act

Many French pastors, especially those in villages, had a garden whose produce was often admired by visitors: these gardens were very well tended, one had time. Did the rectory of Vourles have a garden? Perhaps. If yes, was it well tended? One might doubt it: the pastor had other things to do and does not seem to have been particularly gifted horticulturally.

Father Querbes was a very busy man. Documents and registers give us an idea of his pastoral activities both in and outside his parish. During his first years as pastor his ministry took up much of his time.

First worship: long Sunday Masses as was the custom, baptisms (some twenty each year), marriages (a little less than ten), burials (averaging twenty-five), confessions (confession and communion were tied closely together), many devotional practices which took place either as part of the liturgical year (instructions during Lent or on the ember days...) or as part of the confraternities established in the parish (Rosary Guild, etc.).

The re-construction of the Church decided upon before his arrival took up much of his time from 1824-1827.

In 1823, Father Querbes enlisted the help of the Sisters of Saint Charles to open a school for girls. The following year Pierre Magaud did the same for boys.

In 1825, he published *Recueil de cantiques* in which he edited some 350 hymns. The following year its supplement appeared, *Airs notés* (180 pages).

He found time to preach at the jubilee celebration of the neighboring parish of Charly (15 days, with two lengthy sermons a day), and then that at Vourles. He participated, most likely as preacher, in a large mission of which he has left us an account (DQ 32 1.59) giving us an idea of what these marathon missions were like.

And it is, he tells us, *toward the end of 1826 that the Founder of the Clerics of Saint Viator conceived the first plans for his society* (DQ 270 5.60).

Pastor, builder, preacher already being sought out, author, and, we might add, staunch advocate of parochial schools (cf. DQ 314 6.36), the young Father Querbes was a busy man. In the rough draft of a letter written around 1828 we find this surprising paragraph:

Nevertheless, Reverend Vicar General, I would not be telling you everything if I failed to admit that the well being which I now enjoy and which I wish to avoid becoming a burden to me. The parishioners who are very kind to me and who are entrusted to my care, have become a burden because my ties to them are becoming chains that grow stronger day by day. Devout relatives whose proximity I constantly fear could prove detrimental. There are friends and confreres whose company is a joy, but time flies, I am thirty-six years old and I am practically idle (DQ 53 1.79).

2. The Charism of Foundation

In 1824, Father Querbes wanted to enlist the help of a Marist brother to direct the boys' school in Vourles. His request was denied. "But," says Brother Saulin, *the zeal of Abbé Querbes for the salvation of souls...would not deter him.*¹ Love is inventive.

The Pastor of Vourles knew the need:

- . of assuring a solid catechetical formation for the children;
- . of forming competent teachers;
- . of countering schools being run by liberals;
- . of assisting country pastors, especially in liturgy;
- . of discovering a new formula better adapted to poor parishes.

But we have already developed this elsewhere².

At first he developed a non-complicated plan (DQ 52 1.78), followed by a more realistic one. He accepted that the modalities of his project be reviewed, amended, changed, although this, at times, was difficult. Still, the heart of the project would remain unchanged: the Catechists of Saint Viator were destined to teach Christian doctrine, especially to the poor, and to serve the Holy Altar, according to the terms used at that time.

- . He sends *catechists*. They will also be teachers. The teaching, however, is primarily meant to support their apostolic activity. The school is to assure a good primary education, a good moral formation, and especially offer the Catechist the opportunity of teaching of Christian doctrine.
- . He sends *parochial-clerics*. They will assist priests in their pastoral duties, especially liturgy. In this way their ministry will also touch adults.
- . The Catechists will go to what, at that time, comprised the majority of the French population: the countryside, especially those country parishes "farthest removed".

Father Querbes received a founding charism. Father Tillard, in an enlightening study, distinguishes the "founding charism" from that of the "founder's charism"³. It will be worth our while to consider this distinction.

A man or woman forms a project in which other men and women become involved. At times this project has a wide and deep range, even going as far as proposing a re-reading of the mystery of Christ, a re-reading which is singularly adapted to the times and which elicits a new way of understanding and living the Gospel message. Dominic becomes aware of the "desert" situation of doctrine and is particularly sensitive to: *Go and teach!*; Francis contests a well-seated Church and lives with his brothers in radical simplicity and poverty seen as more faithful

to the Gospel message, etc. The vision of these founders creates waves which cross the centuries. Around them, living their spirituality colored by their reading of the Gospel, is born religious congregations, third orders, confraternities.... Dominic, Francis, Ignatius received a "founder's charism."

At other times, the project envisioned by this man or woman, can be born, not out of a personal Gospel vision, but from the perception of a specific need of the People of God, where there is a void to be filled and to which one feels impelled to adapt an adequate response. This man or woman is gifted with a sharp vision and an innate creative ability (Tillard) in spreading the Gospel message. He or she sees the cause of the suffering and knows how to communicate the enthusiasm needed to remedy the situation. The remedy will be adapted to the day and age. In such a case we can speak of a "founding charism".

Father Querbes does not re-read the Gospel in a unique way. He has not created any current in spirituality. He saw a need and responded with enthusiasm, energy, and even hard-headedness. On several occasions his project was on the verge of failure (1828, 1829, 1831). The Society was threatened (1836, 1840, 1845). He held on, and the Congregation with him. This caused him to be treated as *foolhardy and presumptuous* (Saulin). It brought about a *terrific storm* from his bishop (Jean-Baptiste Martin), and contemptuous treatment and biting remarks from Cardinal de Bonald (P. 3206 14.153 and P. 5668 26.111), and all this without mentioning the day by day troubles coming from the brothers. Father Querbes could have been a good pastor leading a quiet life in his rectory, content with visiting his parishioners, teaching catechism, offering good liturgy, and cultivating his garden.... But Father Querbes had much more to do than cultivating crispy salads!

3. The Love of the Poor

Father Querbes designated a specific field of ministry to his catechists, on this there can be no ambiguity: "especially to the poor". His experience told him that a small rural parish could not expect to be served by two or three religious. His Catechists would, therefore, go there, alone if need be. Other founders had similar ideas (Dujarié and the Brothers of Saint Joseph du Mans, the Brothers de la Somme, a Congregation of Saint Claude), which would indicate that such a need was being felt⁴. The three congregation listed were all short-lived; the Clerics of Saint Viator proved far more robust.

The ministry of the Catechists to the poor is well inscribed in the basic texts of the Congregation:

- . *He must not neglect any opportunity of preaching Jesus Christ, especially to the poor* (article 4 of the statutes - DQ 246A 5.17).
- . *This Society helps form young men who are poor* (Decree of Approbation, September 27, 1838)
- . *To form pious and literate young men of the poor class during their early years...* (Apostolic Letters, May 31, 1839).

And, in practice, it was to small parishes that the Catechists did go; oftentimes under conditions far from comfortable as is well attested to in the passive correspondence. One example among many: in 1846, Brother Robin calculated that in the school he directed and which included three other religious, the food cost was less than \$800.00 of which about \$20.00 was spent on meat in a given year.

The Catechists will go into rural parishes and also into foreign countries. The Society was still a small diocesan congre-

gation approved by the civil authority to teach in three French departments. In February 1838, Father Querbes wrote:

Take care of yourself, and sound out the happy dispositions of Brother Archirel and, in general, his zeal for the missions.... There is one which interests me for later on: it would be to Algiers to catechize the Arabs (DQ 180 4.43).

The Society is merely beginning. The French have been in Algiers for less than ten years occupying only a small portion of the territory. And yet Father Querbes wants to go catechize the Arabs! In 1849 he will indeed go to Algiers to ascertain the feasibility of this mission. This desire of announcing Jesus Christ to the to the poor and dispossessed in far away lands incites him to found a mission in Missouri and then in Agra. Restrictive educational measures taken by the French government provided another reason for going to foreign countries, but one could easily imagined European solutions to this problem. Going to the poor in far away lands was his choice.

There were times when Father Querbes mingled with the "bourgeois" society of Vourles though these comprised but a handful of his "more fortunate" parishioners: the Misses Comte, the painter Duclaux and his family, Paul Jaricot and a few other persons. Certain brothers reproached him on this score, a bit petty considering these persons often supported the Congregation financially. But Father Querbes related to other social groups as well.... The testimony of his contemporaries often takes on a hagiographic coloring: the narrative of Brother Clavel contains interesting data mixed with long panegyric passages. Nevertheless, all the testimonies agree on certain key points: the intelligence of Father Querbes, his vivacious temperament, his simplicity, his goodness, and that with which we are now dealing: his care and attention to those in need.

Full of compassion for the downtrodden, he would have liked to alleviate all their misery and to give them not only the bread of knowledge, but his last copper coin. He always gave to the poor⁵.

He often intervened on behalf of persons in difficulty: a separated couple (P. 55 1.71 and P. 64 1.85...), a young woman in moral danger (DQ 325 6.48), a priest suspended by his bishop (P 1323 6.174). He did not, for example, count the cost in helping Father Poggi, an Italian Dominican, who had taken refuge in Geneva. He writes him (DQ 355 6.86 and DQ 360 6.91), goes to meet him (P. 2310 10.175), pays his debts, intervenes in reconciling him with his Order; and while waiting, receives him in Vourles for seven months. Father Poggi then leaves for Holland where he later became the superior of a convent. From there he corresponds with Father Querbes relating his nostalgia for Vourles (P. 3100 14.6, and P. 3248 14.206). Fr. Poggi was not the only beneficiary of the interventions of Father Querbes (for example, P. 3186 14.125 and P. 6074 28.79).

4. Full Days

Time flies, I am 36 years old and I do almost nothing. Throughout life, time will always be lacking for Father Querbes. He will constantly remind the Catechists that they are to use their time well. His days are filled. Two short citations:

To Father Favre, Friday, May 27, 1842:

See how harassed I am, I can only resume this letter at eleven in the evening, May 29. I hasten to finish it in order to bring it to Lyons tomorrow morning (DQ 374 6.103);

To Father Favre, February 2, 1843:

I began this letter on the above date but was unable to continue until February 13. You see, my dear friend, how sorry I am to postpone answering letters which I am no less eager to write than those who await them (DQ 388 6.119).

The unbounded trust of Father Querbes in God would never immobilize him. He is always a man of action and lives the adage: *God helps those who help themselves*. He is also capable of reprimanding those who cry: *Lord! Lord!*, who take refuge in a decaffeinated prayer or who dream away their lives. First among these was Father Faure, but there were others.

Do not take pleasure in self contemplation: settle down to work more boldly. Where there is a will there is a way in the work of your sanctification. There are two inconveniences in such self complacency. First, one loses precious time which could be put to better use by working, and the result is that we almost always get discouraged, which is, however, impossible if we are well united to God (to Faure, November 10, 1840 - DQ 330 6.53).

One gets lost in vagueness when one dwells on so many thoughts, it is better to act. Education easily becomes an illusion when it does not materialize daily in our practical conduct (to Archirel, May 4, 1847 - DQ 437 7.49).

Be especially punctual in following your daily schedule so that your days may be full in the eyes of God and you may

not be found wanting in the balance on judgement day (to the religious of Canada, November 14, 1855 - DQ 496 7.122).

Wasting time is wasting what belongs to another. It is to pass up an "ordinary" means of sanctification so dear to the heart of Father Querbes. This asceticism is worth many others:

The principal way of avoiding temptations is assiduous and serious work. In using this means, you will have no need of having recourse to certain measures of which I do not totally approve, for these might well affect your health adversely (to Brother Alex, June 18, 1852 - DQ 476 7.91).

Father Champagneur lived an austere life. On several occasions he sought to join the Trappists. He even spent some time in a Trappist monastery in Kentucky (P 8354 38.141). Father Querbes tries to convince him on where he can find his true Trappist monastery.

Trials and tribulations are the penance of your calling. They are worthy of the austerities and mortifications of the Trappists. Discipline is the effort we must make to correct and revive our character and patiently to raise its spirit.... Providence chose you to plant the seeds and bear the fruits of Saint Viator in Canada. Your work must not end except with your last breath (December 3, 1857 - DQ 524 8.36).

In a retreat preached to priests, Father Querbes drafted a few instructions, he stress the need of using one's time well. He does this from a particular point of view, the danger of wasting one's time:

What is a dissipated spirit? It is a spirit which is almost always dwelling on the past or the future and is never totally into that which is at hand.... While waiting, precious time is lost. Time! If God requires an account of each useless word spoken, what would that mean is one wasted an hour each week, an hour each day! Time! God gives us time drop by drop as a loving father gives a prodigal son his inheritance cent by cent. Time! (DQ S309 14.91).

The *Commentary on the Statutes* offers firm directives on "the love of labor". They are directives of one who has arrived at the evening of life. He no longer has the impatience of the young Pastor of Vourles, and yet he knows that he must not rest while he still has some strength:

There should not be a moment lost, or badly employed in the day of a Catechist. All his days must be full, so that, before the tribunal of God, he may not be asked to render an account of a useless life. By an imperceptible decline, one drifts from light negligence to the state of apathy and indolence, and thence to laziness and idleness. Years pass by, and he remains plunged in ignorance, he becomes a useless instrument in the holy family in which he has been adopted, and where he should be a faithful worker.... Let us not lose time flattering ourselves on what we have already done, so long as there is still something left to be done. Let us long for nothing but eternal rest the life of a man is a continual combat.... (DQ 550 8.96).

Perhaps this is what Brother Clavel had in mind when he described the life of Father Querbes: *The life of our Founder was a continual struggle*⁶. A struggle, certainly with an unfavorable civil administration; a struggle with liberal lay schools; but especially a struggle to firmly establish his Society, to sent

Catechists on mission, to support, guide and encourage them so that Jesus Christ be proclaimed to the poor. The days of Father Querbes were full days.

Father Querbes was a man filled with an "ardent charity" and all that adjective implies. There were times when his zeal appeared brash! He lived at a time of re-conquest--the restoration of the Church, a Church which was trying to restore Christianity after a century of Enlightenment and Revolution. A French historian tells us that the young priests of the day were "muscular" (P. Pierrard).... Their zeal was intransigent, their methods at times disconcerting.

Father Querbes belonged to this generation of priests:

- . a young man distracts others during the recitation of the Office? he is expelled! (DQ 91C 2.78
- . another, contrary to the custom, sits among women? he is severely reprimanded! (DQ 257 3.38).
- . an anticlerical insults him? two blows on the spot!⁷.
- . a priest publishes an "offensive" book? he threatens to denounce him to Rome! (P. 1333 6.184).

Father Querbes' text on the "Protestantism of Mr. Guizot", prime minister, has nothing ecumenical about it! (DQ 450A 6.33). This should not surprise us: Father Querbes is a man of his times. His zeal is indeed "ardent" and his temperament takes care of the rest!

Father Pierre Laur compares the style of a passage taken from the *Commentary on the Statutes* with that of first Corinthians on charity⁸. Father Querbes frequently uses the then customary periodic sentence with all its subordinate clauses. But in this instance he does not. Instead he takes but one word and

weaves a development on the attitude of one who lives an "ardent and disinterested zeal".

Zeal is born of faith. Ardent zeal never acts out of routine or as a matter of fact, puts no limits on obedience, readily accepts all required tasks and hastens to answer every call, even to the ends of the earth. It fears no obstacle which it resolutely tackles and surpasses, gives to every confided work all the attention required. Disinterested zeal has no other goal than the glory of God and the salvation of souls, is indifferent to praise and to honorable distinctions, and clings courageously and steadfastly to the assigned task living its success to Providence (DQ 550 8.96).

If one were to replace "zeal" with "love" or "charity", the page takes on an even greater relief:

Charity is born of faith.

An ardent charity
never acts out of routine,
puts no limits on obedience,
readily accepts all required tasks,
hastens to answer every call, even to the ends of the
earth,
fears no obstacle
but resolutely tackles and surpasses it.

A charity which gives to every confided work
all the attention required.

A disinterested charity
has no other goal than the glory of God and the
salvation of souls

is indifferent to praise or honorable distinctions.

A charity which clings courageously and steadfastly to the assigned task leaving its success to Providence.

The above is a portrait of the ideal Catechist of Saint Viator. It is also the self-portrait of Father Querbes. His contemporaries were not mistaken when they had engraved on his tombstone: *priest of admirable zeal, unselfishness and charity.*

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- 1 *Feuillets querbétiens*, #41, March 15, 1960, p. 432.
 - 2 Bonnafoos (Robert), *A l'origine de la Société: Louis Querbes et sa fondation*, Les Clercs de Saint-Viateur Canadiens, October 1989; *At the Origin of the Society: Louis Querbes and His Foundation*, Chicago, December 1989.
 - 3 Le dynamisme des fondations, *Vocation*, #295, July 1981, p. 18.
 - 4 Zind, op. cit., pp. 157 and 294.
 - 5 Anonymous. *Feuillets querbétiens*, #53, November 15, 1961, p. 605.
 - 6 *Feuillets querbétiens*, #37, November 15, 1959, p. 368.
 - 7 François Favre, *Feuillets querbétiens*, #6, January 15, 1956, p. 47.
 - 8 *Notas sobre el Padre L. Querbes*, Lima 1991, p. 61 (zerex copy).

EPILOGUE

ADORED AND LOVED BE JESUS

The above words pointedly summarize the life and faith-journey of Father Querbes.

At the conclusion of *The Life of Dom Augustine Lestrangé* these letters appear: L.A.J.C. The book was published in 1829, its author anonymous. It is now rightly attributed to Father Querbes¹. We do not know his reasons for publishing this biography. Certain "notes" had been given him by the chaplain of the Trappistines of Vaise. Did he merely review the text? Did he edit the text? Did the "notes" given him include this four letter acronym? Are these four letters from the hand of Father Querbes or are they the customary letters with which certain monasteries ended a treatise? At present, these questions must go unanswered. One cannot exclude the possibility that this acronym was suggested to Father Querbes by another.

The *Nouvel ABC des petites-écoles* was published in 1830. It contains "short Mass prayers". The text ends with the words "Adored and Loved Be Jesus Forever" (DQ 554 2.67). In 1836 the *Directory* definitely fixes the expression in Latin and French: "Adoretur, ametur Jesus", "Adoré, aimé soit Jésus"--in English, "Adored and Loved Be Jesus"--(DQ 163A 3.111). The same formulary, but with the conjunction, concludes the statutes

approved by Rome (DQ 264A 5.17). Inscribed by hand or printed, the expression appears as letterhead on Father Querbes' letters. At times, he also uses the simplified acronym: A.A.J.

This acronym is, therefore, old and accompanies the birth of the Society. In fact by way of importance, it surpasses the official motto of the Society, *Sinite parvulos venire ad me* which appears on the seal of the Congregation (and on cassock buttons!); yet few texts of Father Querbes incorporate it.

Is there not here a synthesis of the spiritual and apostolic life of Father Querbes? Contemplation and action; adoration and love; love of God and neighbor.... Father Querbes lived to adore and to love Jesus. In this he was not unique. For 2000 years many a Christian has tried and continues to try to adore and love Jesus. What is original is that Father Querbes could aptly summarize his hopes and life in such a simple and yet replete sentence.

I have perused hundreds of devotional and theological books and pamphlets of the times, writes Father Marcel Genest, and have found nowhere in France the two ideas of adoration and love applied to the person of Jesus except in reference to the Sacred Heart or the Blessed Sacrament. This short way of extending the cult of love, this stroke of genius which fits theology so admirably well as it does also catechetics and the service of the Holy Altar, appears for the first time in the writings of Father Querbes very soon after what we have come to call the "inspiration" of the founder².

For Father Querbes, contemplation is paying attention to God in the little and great events of life; of worshipping in prayer and Eucharist; of listening to God's Word and letting oneself be

drawn into a spirit of filial abandonment--and all this enkindling a Charity impelling one to love and serve God and our brothers and sisters through the teaching of Christian Doctrine.

Father Querbes lives this double élan which marks the disciple of Christ: a love of God which reaches the littlest of our brothers and sisters (Mt 10:40-42), and a love of the littlest of our brothers and sisters which reaches the Father (1Jn 3). One cannot exist without the other.

In his unique way--his love of the "ordinary" virtues, his temperament, his enthusiasm, as well as his limitations-- Father Louis Querbes lived his motto to the full. He lived it to the end.

And this motto is our heritage....

1 P. 290 2.111; P. 305 2.127; P. 306 2.129; P. 329 2.157.

2 *Réflexion sur l'Institution fondée par le Père Querbes et sur l'actualité de son charism*, Les Clercs du Saint-Viateur Canadiens, May 1957.

Further references:

No commentary can replace the reading of the original documents. See, therefore, the *Documents-Querbes* and the *Correspondence passive* (most of these remain untranslated into English). Useful no doubt are the *Selected Documents*, in which a limited number of texts can be read.

If most of the biographies of Father Querbes present various facets of his personality, few dwell on his spirituality. See, especially, the work of L. Cristiani and his chapter on "The Spirituality of Father Querbes", *The Clerics of Saint Viator*, Chicago, December 1991.

On this topic one might also consult:

Drolet (Bruno), *Regard sur la spiritualité du Père Querbes telle que révélée par sa correspondance, Feuilletts querbésiens*, ## 45-49. This study has been recently re-edited under the title: "L'association chez les Clercs de Saint-Viateur, Province of Joliette, 1989, pp. 14-42.

- . Laur (Pierre), *Notas sobre el Padre L. Querbes* (Lima, 1991). The fourth part of this study, pp. 47-73, is devoted to "la spiritualité du P. Querbes". This study is presently being translated.
- . Marcotte (Maurice), *Quelques lignes de force de la spiritualité du Père Querbes*, a Master's dissertation presented to the Institut supérieur des Science religieuses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal, 1963, 86 p.
- . Roux (Jean-Marie), *Visage du Père Querbes, Quelques traits de sa personnalité*, (Rodez, 1961), 50 p.

During the 50's and 60's various provinces published reviews such as *Feuillets querbésiens* and the *Annales du Père Louis Querbes*. These brought together contemporary testimonies on Father Querbes. These reviews also published numerous articles on the Founder. Though one must be critical, these documents and texts can still be useful today...