

PRESENT SITUATION OF THE BEATIFICATION CAUSE OF LOUIS QUERBES

The last General Chapter had asked that the beatification cause of Father Querbes be introduced as soon as possible and requested that the General Council provide leadership for the cause and actively pursue the process for introducing the cause, especially by designating a postulator. The Superior General, shortly after being elected, asked me to collaborate as postulator. I responded that I would first of all have to take the course that the Vatican offers for future postulants. Having completed that course and counting on the indispensable collaboration of Robert Bonnafous, I agreed to be the postulator of the beatification cause of Father Louis Querbes. That decision on my part was motivated not only by the belief that there existed rather extensive archives concerning Father Querbes, but also by the conviction that we should take advantage of Brother Robert Bonnafous' competency and availability for everything referring to Father Querbes.

A detailed preparation

At the beginning, I felt that we were facing a serious problem as we prepared to introduce the cause - namely, the reputation for holiness. This "generalized opinion, manifested publicly by a great number of people concerning the virtuous life of the Servant of God that would lead people to venerate him and commend themselves to his prayers," is an indispensable prerequisite for the introduction of a cause. Certainly, in times past, that reputation for holiness of Father Querbes was more widely held, but today it appeared to me to be insufficient. It was for that reason that I thought that it would be best, as a preliminary step, to try to increase people's knowledge, esteem, and veneration of Father Querbes, as well as his reputation for holiness, in our provinces and foundations before requesting that the cause be introduced.

Father General, with the collaboration of the Provincial Superiors, had created the International Querbes Commission, whose membership also included the postulator. From the time of our first meeting, we thought that one way of promoting Querbesian leadership would be by asking religious, associates, and friends to provide written testimonies about Father Querbes' reputation for holiness so as to increase that reputation for holiness and to help the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons to see that such a reputation existed.

During the second meeting of the International Commission, which was held in Vourles in January, 2004, we - Roger Bou (Secretary General), José Antonio Lezama, André Crozier, and Robert Bonnafous - had a meeting with Professor Guy Avanzini, who had received from the Cardinal Archbishop the responsibility for accompanying canonization causes in the archdiocese. Professor Avanzini strongly encouraged us to ask for the immediate introduction of the cause, without any further delay. Professor Avanzini was not concerned about our fears regarding a currently insufficient reputation for holiness. The cause itself would help that reputation to grow. He suggested that we also invite bishops whom we knew well to send to the Cardinal of Lyons their personal testimonies in favor of the cause's introduction. The Provincial Superiors collaborated actively in that regard and, soon afterwards, Cardinal Barbarin began receiving letters from everywhere. In addition to those letters from bishops, testimonial letters were received from 135 lay people asking that his cause be introduced.

On October 4, 2004, we forwarded to the Cardinal of Lyons several letters from bishops received in Rome but directed to him. The Archbishop of Lyons responded three days later, saying that he had received many other letters and that "he was waiting for the documentation necessary for beginning the cause." That automatically spurred us into action and, on October 13th, we sent to Professor Avanzini a packet of carefully selected documents so that himself could see them and turn them over to the Cardinal Archbishop. The following day, we sent to the Archbishop of Lyons three copies of all the writings edited by Father Querbes, which would be examined by two theological censors. It is evident that it was Robert Bonnafous who saw to it that both the preliminary documents, as well as the copies of the works edited by Father Querbes, were all perfect.

On November 13th, the Cardinal responded to the questions that had been put to him in the documentation that we submitted, accepting Fr. José Antonio Lezama as the postulator of the cause of Father Querbes and Fr. André Crozier as the vice-postulator of the cause and agreeing that Robert Bonnafous could be a member of the team of historical experts.

So that the expenses involved with the cause would produce less of a shock for the provincial treasurers, as well as to make it possible for lay people to collaborate with those costs the E.G.C. members decided, in January, 2005, to create a special fund for the cause. To the initial 18,000 Euros (\$23,090 U.S.) would be added 5,000 Euros (\$6,414 U.S.) in 2005. Then, in each of the succeeding eight years, 16,000 Euros (\$20,524 U.S.) would be added in order to arrive at a total of 150,000 Euros (\$192,409 U.S.). In the Province of Spain, a bank account has already been set up to which the faithful can donate their alms for the expenses of the Cause. Contributions from the faithful will be the first funds to be used. At the conclusion of the process, if there is a surplus remaining from what the provinces have deposited, that money will belong to the Congregation.

Two theological censors were appointed. Fr. Michel Demaison, O.P., holder of a Licentiate in theology and former Conference Master in the Faculty of Theology of Lyons, is currently the Director of the *Lumière et Vie* magazine. Fr. Didier Gonneaud, of the Diocese of Dijon, who holds the titles of Doctor in Theology, Conference Master in the Faculty of Theology of Lyons, and Assistant Dean in the southern sector of Dijon, is pastor of the "Blessed Isabel of the Trinity" parochial team. Frs. Demaison and Gonneaud began their additional work by integrating it into their normal daily duties. Their task consisted in determining if, in the writings edited by Father Querbes, there was anything against faith or morals. In case of an affirmative discovery, the cause could not be introduced.

By 4 April 2005, we had received news that the censors had concluded their work and declared that the writings edited by Father Querbes contained nothing against faith or morals. Two weeks later, we received another letter from the Archbishop's secretary asking us for the text of a prayer to be approved by the Archbishop as the official prayer for the Cause. On April 27", the Cardinal wrote to say that "he heartily approved of the prayer, appreciated its formulation, and would himself be joining those who were thus praying to the Lord." Shortly afterwards, he asked the bishops from his ecclesiastical region for their opinion about the ecclesial appropriateness of introducing the Cause of Father Querbes.

During the summer, Robert Bonnafous' book entitled *The Accidental Founder* was published. Several copies were distributed to persons working on the cause, all of whom approved of the excellent work done by Robert. That book will certainly be a very useful instrument for the Roman stage of the cause.

On September 12th, André Crozier, the vice-postulator, announced to us that the Archbishop of Lyons had requested the *nihil obstat* of the Roman Offices of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. To facilitate the work of those Offices, a succinct chronological biography of Father Querbes was submitted to them. On 21 October 2005, the Feast of Saint Viator, we received a telephone call from the secretary of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints indicating that the *nihil obstat* document had been sent to the Archbishop of Lyons.

On 28 November 2005, three of us - the postulator, Fr. André Crozier (the vice-postulator), and Robert Bonnafous (who would be the president of the historical commission) - met in Vourles with Professor Avanzini to determine what the next steps would be. Professor Avanzini, seeing that all the preliminary steps had been easily accomplished, proposed that we remind the Cardinal about our desire to continue with the opening of the canonical process. Even though the Superior General, in his letter of presentation, had already requested the introduction of the cause, that step would now have to be repeated, accompanied by the presentation of the names of several persons who could serve as members of the tribunal and of the Historical Experts Commission. He himself suggested the names of several people from the Lyons intellectual world whom we could propose to Cardinal Philippe Barbarin.

Additionally, we prepared a list of witnesses who had agreed to make depositions before the tribunal and a series of questions that would help the promoter of justice to prepare for the interrogation sessions. Given the fact that several of those witnesses were in Spain, Professor Avanzini indicated that the judge delegate of Lyons could ask for an "auxiliary commission" so that a given diocese in Spain could set up a diocesan tribunal to interrogate witnesses. Such a procedure would reduce complications of travel, lodging, translators, and the like and would greatly facilitate things.

During the Christmas holidays, the postulator took advantage of a courtesy visit of the Spanish Provincial Superior to Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid, to consult with him about the possibility of establishing an "auxiliary tribunal" in Madrid for the benefit of the Spanish witnesses. The Cardinal of Madrid readily accepted.

At the same time, in Lyons, the Archbishop issued a decree to conclude the investigation into the reputation for holiness and established the diocesan tribunal, appointing as Judge Delegate Father Jean-Michel Fabre, a priest of the Diocese of Rodez and officiating judge of Appeals of the Province of Toulouse, he has a license in theology, doctorates in Canon and Civil Law and is the author of various books; as Promoter of Justice, Father Pierre Vignon of the Diocese of Valence, officiating judge in the region of Lyons; as Notary Actuary, Brother Pierre Duvert, c.s.v., holder of a diploma in philosophy. He also invited the faithful to communicate, in the following three months, everything that they know about Father Louis Querbes.

At the same time was established the Historical Experts and Archives Commission, with Brother Robert Bonnafous, c.s.v., as president; Mr. Henri Hours, former director of the Municipal Archives of Lyons and current director of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Lyons; Fr. Jean Comby, former professor of history at the Catholic Faculty of Lyons and author of various works about the history of the Church; Mr. Jean Lestra, professor of history at the private Chartreux Lyceum in Lyons, son of a Lyons historian, and member of the pastoral team of the parish in Vourles.

Several days later, Robert Bonnafous, who had closely followed all those events, notified us that the Judge Delegate was urging us to communicate immediately to the Archbishop our intention of pursuing the cause, since it would be desirable for the announcement of the introduction of the cause to appear in the February issue of the official bulletin, preparations for which would have to be completed one month in advance. We quickly sent to the Cardinal Archbishop the requested documentation and, in fact, the news was announced in February in the official bulletin of the Archdiocese. Along with that came the announcement that, on the 23rd day of the same month, the *de primordialibus* session would be held, thus marking the official introduction of the cause.

The Introduction of the Cause

At that session of introduction of the cause were present, owing to their geographical proximity, the Provincial Superiors of the two European provinces, a group of representatives from the province of Spain, and a huge group of French religious and associates, who filled the room being used in the archdiocesan offices. Being in the United States for his father's funeral, the Superior General could not be present. With the reading of the Superior General's petition by the Postulator, the reading of the *nihil obstat* document, and the decree of introduction of the cause issued by the Archbishop and read by the Chancellor of the diocese, the cause was introduced. Cardinal Barbarin used the occasion to direct some warm words of encouragement and congratulations to those in attendance. Thus, the initial phase was completed and the cause, as such, was underway.

Work will continue at the same time on two fronts. On the one hand, the tribunal investigating the current reputation for holiness will continue its work in Lyons, with branches in Rodez and Madrid. On the other hand, the commission composed of specialists in history and archives will collect the historical proofs that will serve as the basis for Father Querbes' reputation for holiness. That team of historical specialists will have to determine if the historical investigations that have been undertaken are generally satisfactory, if they were carried out in conformity with modern historical methods, if that documentation makes it possible to have an image of Father Querbes' personality, work, and virtues. As a conclusion of their work, they will have to present to the Archbishop of Lyons, along with the writings that have been collected, a detailed report in which they attest that they have faithfully carried out their task, with a list of writings and documents, expressing their judgment about their authenticity and their value, as well as an opinion about the personality of the Servant of God as it emerges through the documents. Additionally, the Judge Delegate has invited them to prepare several responses or explanations in anticipation of possible questions that the Vatican's promoter of the faith might pose with respect to the difficulties that Father Querbes experienced in the government of the Institute (Foundations in Rodez and in Sirdhana, his "times of silence"), in his responses to letters, the fragility of those who were placed in positions of responsibility, and so forth. Perhaps we will have to explain certain things to dispel the suspicion that Father Querbes lacked the virtue of patience.

Fr. Jean-Michel Fabre, the judge delegate, for his part, while interviewing witnesses in the area (five in the vicinity of Lyons), took advantage of a trip to Vourles, during which he visited several Querbesian sites (the cemetery, the room where Father Querbes died, and the parish), to determine if any undue veneration was being accorded to Father Querbes. At the conclusion of his visit, the judge delegate opined that no such undue veneration was present and said that he would so certify officially. In Rodez, he also interviewed witnesses from that region (five witnesses).

In the meanwhile, the same Judge Delegate sent to the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid an *Exhorto* to request the creation of an auxiliary tribunal for Spanish-speaking witnesses. That tribunal (or "commission for inquiring about the reputation for holiness"), composed of the Judge Delegate, of Mr. José Bosom, of Mr. Bernardo Santos (the Promoter of Justice), and of Miss Maria Calva (the Notary Actuary), began to exercise its functions in the second half of April. Presenting testimony were 16 witnesses, some coming from Vitoria, others from Valladolid, and the majority from the capital itself. The interview sessions concluded on May 19th. The results would be sent to Lyons and, along with the declarations made in France, would become part of the official files. Other witnesses from different countries will continue sending, to the Judge Delegate in Lyons, their written testimonies proving the current reputation for holiness, after those testimonies have been authenticated by the Chancellor of the diocese or by a notary public.

Robert Bonnafous is preparing a collection of non-published writings of Father Querbes so that they also can be examined by the theological censors. Besides that project, he is finishing up a booklet with other documents from the archives that will make it possible to throw light on the personality and virtues of Father Querbes. That collection will consist of 250 compact pages. The Historical Experts Commission will study that documentation in September. We must not forget that in a historical cause, such as ours, the only proofs that can be adduced concerning Father Querbes' virtues are those that come from documents from his time. There are no longer any witnesses.

The postulation process, for its part, will also have to prove, at least succinctly, by citing General Chapters, letters from Superiors General, and other publications, that the Institution has kept alive that reputation for holiness of its Founder during the time that has transpired since the death of Father Querbes until the present moment.

While the historical experts have until the end of February to complete their work, it is highly probable that they will conclude it before then. When they have completed their work and made their deposition, as official witnesses, before the judge delegate in Lyons; and when all of the documents collected have been verified and duly paginated and copied; there will take place the final session in the diocesan process, which will be more solemn than the first session. Once all the documentation has been sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the diocesan phase will have ended and the Roman phase will begin.

Toward the Roman Phase

In the meanwhile, Robert, with the assistance of Élie Salesses, will continue computerizing the Querbesian documents that have been selected, thus getting a head start on what will have to be done when presenting the foundational proofs for the reputation for holiness of the Servant of God – or, in other words, his heroic virtues – during the Roman phase.

The fundamental stages in the Roman phase include: a) the sub-secretary, who is the person who receives the documents, will ascertain that everything has been done according to the [established] norms; will insist that any *lacunae* be filled in; and, finally, will accept the documents coming from the diocese; b) the promoter of the faith (formerly called the Devil's Advocate), after familiarizing himself with the history of Father Querbes and presenting to us whatever doubts and difficulties that he encounters with respect to his holiness, will have to resolve all his difficulties before going any further; c) the reporters will be responsible for the *POSITIO* [position paper], through which documentation of Father Querbes' virtues will be treated one by one so as to demonstrate his holiness. Personally, I am very confident that Robert Bonnafous will not find it excessively difficult to compose the *POSITIO* on Father Querbes, since, while he was writing *The Accidental Founder*, he was already gathering all the materials necessary for completing an appropriate position paper. But that will be in the years to come.

José Antonio Lezama, c.s.v.

Rome, June 6, 2006

Postulator