

**HISTORY OF THE CAUSE FOR BEATIFICATION OF
JEAN-MARIE DE LA MENNAIS: PART 3
THE STUDY OF HIS HEROIC VIRTUES**

The first stage of the Apostolic Process consisted of the proclamation of the decree of “non cultu”, then that of the Founder’s “reputation of holiness”, followed by the collection of testimonies. We then arrived at the more delicate phase of recognising his "heroic virtues".

The Tribunal given the responsibility of organising the Process began with the private identification of the mortal remains of Venerable de la Mennais. This visit to the Mother House took place on December 1st, 1926, under the chairmanship of Canon Dieulangard, Vicar General of Vannes, who had already represented the Ordinary during the exhumation of 1900. The body of our Venerable Founder appeared intact and recognisable.

A second process could then begin in Vannes to judge Fr. de la Mennais’ practice of Christian virtues. During 1926-1927, 28 witnesses were heard. As a result, 17 documents were added to those produced by the first diocesan investigation (1899-1901). The final collection of collated testimonies came to two volumes of 1094 pages in total. To avoid overloading this *Positio*, important pages containing the testimonies of Canon de la Villerabel and Reverend Brother Abel, the former Superior General, were removed.

These pages were subsequently reclaimed by Monsignor Frutaz and would prove invaluable in pursuing the Cause. The final collected documentation was presented to the Chancellery of the S.C. of Rites by Brother Philippe de Néri Prigent, the new postulator, on July 14th, 1931. The Congregation of Rites then published a decree proclaiming the legal validity of the 1926-27 Vannes investigation.

From that moment, the Process of Fr. de la Mennais passed directly under Rome’s jurisdiction. Mgr. Beltrami, the advocate (lawyer) for the Cause, prepared a *Summarium* of 1900 pages, from which one could draw the arguments in favour of the heroic practice of the Christian virtues by our Venerable Founder.

The *Summarium* was then handed over to the General Promoter of the Faith so that he could present his objections, called "*Animadversiones*". These were made public in 1940 and were considered to be relevant. To allow them to be studied in detail, the Promoter recommended entrusting this study to the recently instituted historical department of the Congregation of Rites, in particular the section which dealt with historical causes for canonisation. This in-depth study was based more on the written documents than on the oral evidence.

It was Brother Hippolyte-Victor Géréux in particular who worked on producing the response to these objections. He had previously collaborated with Brother Abel who was highly knowledgeable about the Founder and was known to have a great devotion to him. Whilst residing at the Generalate on the island of Jersey (GB) during the German army occupation, Brother Hippolyte-Victor used this time of "enforced rest" to search for documents which could answer the "observations" (objections) of the Promoter of the Faith. He focussed in particular on the archives of the Congregation, the fruits of his research being collected into four typed volumes that were sent to Rome.

The study undertaken by the Congregation of Rites historical department took two years. The documentation provided by Brother Hippolyte-Victor finally convinced the General Reporter of the Cause, G. F. Antonelli, that this in-depth study was sufficient to respond to the *Animadversiones* of the Promoter of the Faith. "*It would only take a good, historically knowledgeable legal expert to be able to respond to any objections based on this work.*" The lawyer in question should have been Bishop Beltrami, but in the intervening period, he had been appointed Apostolic Nuncio. As a result, the responsibility of preparing the answers requested by the Promoter of the Faith fell to a young lawyer, Mr Giulio Dante. He studied the material provided by Brother Hippolyte-Victor and prepared a 250-page dossier, based in part on the work of the aforementioned Brother. He considered that this dossier provided a solid base and sufficient argument on which to build a case that would satisfy the judges.

(to be continued)