

Without waiting for the official opening of the Cause at the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome, the necessary experts began their canonical study of **the writings of this Servant of God**. These writings included 4,935 letters representing 6,237 pages of dense text, 2,920 pages of homilies and 24 volumes of varying sizes, written by solely by Jean-Marie De La Mennais or in collaboration with others. They were collected into 30 volumes that were then studied by the Congregation of Rites. Their examination was meticulous and time consuming, especially since Jean-Marie was suspected of having shared the ideas of his brother Féli, ideas which had been condemned by the pontifical magisterium. Despite the objections of the Promoter of the Faith, Alessandro Verde, the S.C. of Rites pronounced the nihil obstat on December 10th, 1907.

The S.C. then proceeded to study the **investigation led by the diocese of Vannes**. The resulting 2,000-page dossier was reduced to a *Summarium* of around 700 pages and printed in Rome in 1911. The study was validated and the Postulator, the Reverend Fr. Copéré of the Marist Fathers, requested a dispensation from the standard canonical requirement of a further 10 years before the official introduction of the cause to the Congregation.

In the absence of objections, on March 21st, 1911, Card. Vincenzo Vannutelli therefore proposed to introduce the Cause to the S.C. of Rites. The next day, March 22nd, Pope Saint Pius X, applied his signature to the document introducing the Cause of Jean-Marie Robert de la Mennais, the date from which he has been declared “**Venerable**” (NB. This title is awarded only after recognition of heroic virtues). On this landmark day, “*the whole of Brittany rejoiced with legitimate pride; sadly, the Brothers had long since been forced to abandon Ploërmel and other places connected with their Founder due to the laws of secularisation*” (Br. Jean-Charles Bertrand).

From then on, the official process of the Cause could begin under the direction of the Congregation of Rites, in collaboration with the diocese of Vannes. The **first phase** concerned the recognition of “*non cultu*” which consisted in demonstrating that the Venerable Founder had never been the object of public worship which would have anticipated the judgment of the Congregation. This difficulty was resolved despite the objections of the Promoter of the Faith, or devil's advocate, on March 9th, 1915. The **second phase**, delayed by almost ten years due to the First World War, resulted in the apostolic decree recognising his Reputation of holiness (*fama sanctitatis*), signed on June 11th, 1924. The **next phase**, the most important and the most difficult, consisted in the recognition by the Congregation of the heroic nature of his theological and cardinal virtues.

We may be surprised at the slowness of the process and the obstacles that marked the history of the cause of Father de la Mennais. Without wishing to question the mysterious designs of Providence, one can suggest some form of explanation based on **two testimonies**. The **first** is from Br. Jean-Charles Bertrand, a Canadian Brother known for his great devotion to the Founder: “*Neither must we forget that the Cause of Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais is unlike any other because of this priest's prodigious ecclesiastical activity in all aspects of clerical life during a very troubled and ambiguous period in the history of religion in France. The close and lengthy relationship between the blood brothers Jean and Féli, and their well-known collaboration also gives rise to an a priori mistrust on the part of the Consultors. A more careful study is necessarily called for. Not a single one of the actions of this priest, Grand Vicar and Founder, banned in two dioceses, can escape a meticulous examination under the magnifying glass*”.

The **second testimony** is that of André Merlaud, a biographer who had an extensive knowledgeable of the historical and ecclesial context. He credits Jean-Marie's humility for not exposing himself “to the media” given his influence in civil and ecclesial society of 19th century France. “*History, which has many possible refuges available for its geniuses, does not have too many for M. de la Mennais. Brittany is not enough to frame his memory. We need France, the world ... and the future of the world. People came from the various urban centres of Christian renewal to ask this prophet hidden in a rural backwater for advice, encouragement, and assistance. This priest, who repeatedly refused the episcopate, saw himself rather as the confidant and counsellor of the episcopate. He was the one who would speak out, who would bring people together, but who would then disappear from view when a victory was to be celebrated. In him the humility of the prophet went hand in hand with the humility of the priest who always referred back to his bishop. The love and charity of Father de la Mennais knew no bounds. In addition to the successful projects of the congregation he founded, he also liked to help bring to life the initiatives of other organisations that were inspired by the model set by his own.*” (Card. Pie).