

History of the Cause for beatification of Jean-Marie de la Mennais

(Part 1 - after research accomplished by Brothers Jean-Charles Bertrand, Vincent Guillerm and Delfín López).

Jean-Marie de la Mennais's reputation for holiness did not end with his death. On the contrary, it continued to grow as more was rediscovered about his work, leading to a greater appreciation for what he had achieved. Between 1860-1890, only brief biographies were published, lacking in detail.

In 1894, Brother Cyprien, Superior General, asked Brother Stéphane to write a more detailed biography. The author emphasised the Founder's fidelity to the Church and to the Pope. This biography aroused the admiration in Rome of Monsignor Angelo Mariani, Secretary of the Congregation of Rites which also dealt with the causes of saints.

Mgr. Mariani then contacted Brother Abel, the new Superior General, to urge him to introduce the cause for beatification in Rome: such an ardent defender of the Church and the Pope deserved to be better known. Advice was sought from the Bishop of Vannes, Mgr. Bécél, and Cardinal Richard of Paris, originally from Nantes. Both were great admirers of Father de la Mennais and they encouraged the congregation's Superiors to begin the necessary procedures for opening the process of Beatification.

On October 7th, 1899, Mgr. Latieule, successor of Mgr. Bécél, constituted the tribunal in charge of investigating the Cause of beatification in Ploërmel. The first postulator was Father Nicolet, Procurator General of the Marist Fathers. This informative process, carried out by the ordinary episcopal authority, lasted almost two years: from October 7th, 1899 to August 29th, 1901. A total of 86 sessions were held and 86 testimonies were collected, either direct or indirect.

In accordance with the provisions of the Congregation of Rites, the Tribunal also undertook a search for the Founder's writings. The bishops of Brittany, in particular of Saint-Brieuc, Vannes and Rennes, urged all the faithful to pass on the writings in their possession, or at least to lend them, so that copies could be made.

In the meantime, an exceptional and moving event took place: the exhumation and translation of the remains of this servant of God from the Mother House cemetery to its chapel. The older Brothers saw their Father once again, practically intact. Those who had not known him personally could now see his face.

La Chronique reported the event as follows: "On August 6th, 1900, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the community, together with friends of the Brothers, awaited the arrival of the coffin which was to be deposited in the vault prepared for this purpose. A wave of excitement and emotion swept through the assembly. More than a thousand voices sang together a Magnificat of thanksgiving. Just as Mary, a humble servant of the Lord, was proclaimed 'blessed', so will John Mary, God willing — this man whose humility was even greater than his genius."

At the closing session of the Diocesan Trial, R.F. Abel swore, with his hand on the Gospel, to bring to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome, in the name of the diocesan Tribunal, the entire file of the Trial. The "transporter", thus designated according to the rules, arrived in Rome on September 4th, 1901 with his precious load.

A few days later he learned that the Holy Father, Pope Pius X, had just signed two decrees. In the first, he appointed Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli as Cardinal Relator of the Cause. In the second, he officially declared the Process open to the Congregation of Rites. However, according to the rules established by Pope Urban VIII, it would take ten years for the next steps to be carried out.