

*The CHRONICLE n° 250 (April 1967) inserted the photographic reproduction (Latin text and small size) of the decree on “héroïcité des vertus”. On this 10th anniversary, The CHRONICLE is happy to give its French translation.*

**DECREE Diocese of Vannes Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Jean-Marie ROBERT de la MENNAIS, Priest, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel and of the Daughters of Providence.**

“There is no doubt: appears clearly the practice of theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, towards God as well as towards neighbors, and also that of the cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, temperance and force, and other virtues related to them, in the present case and for the purpose concerned”.

The decree itself is followed by a résumé of the life and work of the Venerable presented as follows:

Among the provinces of noble France, Brittany is noted for her religious practice, moral integrity and tenacity in enterprises. The ardor of her “tempérament” and the rightness of her character she brings for the defense of faith, allowed her to resist bravely the assaults of events and of men, and to protect firmly her right to religious freedom. A long list of distinguished people honored, in the past, this Region, happy to enter again in glory the name of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. A renown, not very common, clings to him, but he turns down all praises like some honors for the organization of his work of charity and of salvation of souls.

Born in the former diocese of St.Malo, now the archdiocese of Rennes, on September 8 1780, son of Pierre-Louis and of Gratiennne-Jeanne Lorin, he was regenerated in baptismal water on the very day he was born. His mother, looking after his education, made sure, herself, to infuse into his soul the seeds of all virtues. As he became an orphan still at a tender age, his paternal uncle, Robert des Saudrais, and his aunt, his mother’s sister, kept on educating him and his brother, Félicité. They carried it out with care. The young teenager’s piety developed, as the fervor of his first communion testifies.

Jean-Marie learned the first elements of humanities from his uncle, and then, from Mr. Carré, and finally from a private tutor, Father Louis Vielle. While he devoted himself to his studies and pious exercises, he was consumed with the desire to help the priests who were violently persecuted at that time and could not carry out their sacred duties; he hid them in his house, at the risk of his life. Moreover, he wandered through the city to make inquiries about the sick and to watch over the sacred ministers, so that they might give them religious assistance and the comfort of the sacraments.

Moved by the examples he had right in front of his eyes, the Servant of God felt he was destined to enter the priesthood and prepared himself carefully, studying and praying. His dream came true, on February 25 1804, when he received the priestly unction from the hands of the Bishop of Rennes. Afterwards, Father de la Mennais devoted himself with all his forces to the instruction of young people; two priests helping him, he opened for them a school in the

same city, St. Malo, assuming both the duties of teacher and principal. Meanwhile, he became assistant priest at the cathedral, function he fulfilled with great zeal.

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The activity of the Servant of God was intense: he became, since then, the intrepid defender of the rights and privileges of the Holy See, showing, thus, that he was an ardent apostle of the doctrine of the Roman church.

The back-breaking and restless work worn out the young priest. In order to recuperate, he withdrew to “la Chesnaie”. He stayed there for two years with his brother Félicité, who was, himself, very much interested in the study of sacred sciences. During this stay, he conceived and prepared a book necessary in his opinion, to achieve fruitfully his priestly duty. The spiritual advices he gives are sufficient enough to highlight the outstanding virtues of the Servant of God.

Having recovered, he returned to the college in St.Malo, which he made illustrious with his doctrine, until its abolition, in 1812, due to an imperial decree, for being a Catholic college.

Following the paternal bankruptcy, he put, the best way he could, his father’s affairs in order, and set to study again with his whole heart. Right at that time, the Bishop of St.Brieuc called on him and asked him to become his private secretary, a post he held with prudence, punctuality and zeal.

After the Bishop died, in 1815, he was appointed Vicar of the Chapter. During the 5 years he administered the diocese of St.Brieuc, with his whole and ardent soul, he did his best to restore discipline among the clergy, to revive his faith and piety, and to defend courageously the rights of the Church. He developed an equal concern for the people whose salvation he wanted to ensure. For that, he set up the “missions”, noteworthy for their numerous and lasting fruit. In many places, he established associations of men and women, as well as confraternities for young people; he gave back the royal college of St.Brieuc its original splendor.

Assigned by the king, Louis XVIII, Vicar General of the “Grand Chaplaincy of France”, in Paris, he carried out this delicate office with great prudence and solicitude, thinking only, in the steps inherent in his office, of the interest of justice and religion; his zeal and prudence excelled mainly in his concern for having assigned only Bishops devoted, with all their hearts and souls, to the apostolic See and well-known for their virtues and knowledge.

On July 25 1825, he became Vicar General of the diocese of Rennes.

In 1817, hoping to promote the Christian formation of young people in the city of St.Brieuc, the Servant of God assembled some postulants, establishing, by doing so, the foundation of the Congregation of the Brothers of Christian Instruction, later on, called “of Ploërmel”. In 1819, he joined his Brothers with a Congregation founded, for the same purpose, by Father Deshayes. In 1818, he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Providence, living by a rule he had himself written. Later on, these Sisters set up institutions always flourishing, in faraway regions. In 1825, he founded the Congregation of the Priests of Saint-Méen, which became, three years later, the Congregation of the Priests of Saint-Pierre whose management was taken by his brother, Félicité.

Endowed with exceptional gifts of understanding and heart, Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais will be a model of true teacher and apostle for young people. In union with his brother Félicité, he did his best to promote doctrinal science, and integrity among the clergy, values in

crisis at that time. He also defended passionately the traditional doctrine of the Church for the faithful people and the clergy, then subject to unfair vexations, and worked especially for the spiritual and moral renovation of Brittany.

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The defection of his brother Félicité brought down on him aversion and opposition from the Bishops of Rennes and of St.Brieuc, as well as from a part of the clergy and the faithful; but his deep faith and indefectible perseverance overcame all obstacles. His soul and heart being devoted to God alone, he kept on working with all his strength to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Asked by the French government, he sent Brothers to the faraway missions in order to open schools, that he did also for other regions.

Till the end of his life, he took pains to make progress in his spiritual life. Finally, laden with merits, and devoutly comforted with the sacraments of the Holy Church, he breathed his last at Ploërmel, on December 26, 1860.

The reputation of holiness he had already when he was alive, increased so much day by day after his death, that the canonical trial, fixed at the diocesan level, was taken to the Court in Rome.

At the request of R. F. Louis Copéré, Society of Mary, postulator of the Cause, a decree of “Nihil obstat” was emitted on December 11, 1907, concerning the writings of the Servant of God, allowing to continue the preliminary investigation of the Cause. On March 22 1911, the Holy Father, St. Pius X, signed, in his own hand, the introduction of the Cause. Later on, on March 10 1915, a decree proved officially that, in accordance with a decision of Pope Urbain VIII, the Servant of God had not been worshiped publicly. A little later, the apostolic proceedings on the virtues and miracles attributed to the Servant of God, began. Their validity was admitted in a decree on June 5 1936.

These proceedings having been obtained, the ante-preparatory Congregation met on July 13 1946, at the request of R. B. Gustave-Marie, a member of the Institute of Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel and postulator of the Cause, to examine if the Servant of God had practiced the theological and cardinal virtues to a heroic degree. A certain number of difficulties having been raised, the examination was transferred to the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation of the Rites.

The research work having been quickly accomplished, at the request of Bro. Gabriel-Henri Potier, the Postulator, on May 25 1965, the preparatory Congregation met in order to continue the examination on the virtues of the Servant of God, and on June 21 1966, the Congregation General met, H. H. the Pope Paul VI being present.

H. E. R. Cardinal Eugène Tisserand, Bishop of Ostie, Porto and Ste.Rufine, Ponent of the Cause, stated, in the following words, the “doubt” to clarify:

“Can we prove clearly the practice of theological virtues of faith, hope and charity toward God and neighbors, as well as those of cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and force, to a heroic degree, in the case which interests us and to the purpose concerned?”

The Eminent Fathers assigned to protect the Rites, the R. F. Prelates of the Congregation and the Reverend Consultants (theologians) gave their advice by vote.

The Holy Father having examined everything attentively, did not hesitate to reveal his intention on the spot, and asked them to prepare the decree on the “héroïcité des vertus” of the Servant of God.

On the same day, after celebrating the Holy Sacrifice and convening the Most Eminent and Reverend Cardinals Eugène Tisserand, Ponent and Reporter of the Cause, and myself, Prefect of the S. C. of the Rites.

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as well as R. F. Raphaël Perez, O.S.A., Promoter General of the Faith, the Holy Father proclaimed solemnly:

“(that) Appears clearly the practice of theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, as much towards God as neighbors, and also of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and force, as well as the connected virtues, in the Servant of God, Jean-Marie Robert de la Mennais, founder of the Institute of Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel, and of the Congregation of the Daughters of Providence, to a heroic degree, in this case and for the purpose concerned.”

He ordered the decree to be known publicly and be written in the Acts of the S. C. of the Rites.

Made in Rome, on December 15, in the year of the Lord 1966 Arcadius M. Cardinal LARRAONA, Prefect of the S. C. of the Rites      Ferdinand ANTONELLI, Arch. tit. Idicren, Secretary of the S. C. R.

*ANTONELLI, Archev. tit. Idicren, Secrétaire de la S.C.R.*