

A difficult context for the recognition of Josette Poulain healing

The news of Josette's healing came at a very difficult and problematic time for the cause of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. In 1946, at the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome, the pre-preparatory meeting in view of the proclamation of heroicity in virtues was held. This meeting raised many questions because of the complexity of this dossier.

Jean-Marie de la Mennais was a leading figure in the ecclesial and civil life of the nineteenth-century France. In the field of education he had founded two teaching Congregations, and had participated in the movement that wanted to give France Christian educational institutions. The government had instructed him to open schools in the Overseas colonies for the emancipation of slaves. He was one of the personalities most consulted by the Ministry of Education for the development of various school reforms. In the ecclesial domain, he had assumed responsibilities in the appointment of bishops. As the Episcopal vicar he had given a strong impetus to the Christian revival of the dioceses of Brittany after the anti-Christian wave of the Revolution. He had strongly supported the reconciliation of the Church of France with the Pope, thus fighting against the temptation of Gallicanism.

In addition he had collaborated in the theological and cultural renewal of the Church of France with his brother Félicité Lamennais. The two La Mennais brothers had founded a Congregation, composed of priests and lay people, devoted to high ecclesiastical studies, pastoral renewal and the presence of Catholics in society and in political life. This Congregation bore the name of "Saint Peter" to show its fidelity to the Pope and the close collaboration with his Magisterium. Unfortunately, for various reasons, the relationship between Felicité and the Pope became tense, leading to an open opposition on the part of Felicité.

Pope Gregory XVI condemned Félicité who, little by little, distanced himself from the Church of Rome until he rebelled. Jean-Marie found himself involved in these sad events in spite of himself, but affirmed with all his strength his submission to the Pope and his absolute fidelity to his Magisterium, trying at the same time to bring his brother back into the bosom of the Church. Jean-Marie was thus confronted with two contradictory attitudes towards his brother Félicité, who from that moment on, distanced himself from Jean-Marie, refusing to meet him. On their side the members of the Congregation of St. Peter accused Jean-Marie of ambiguity in his fidelity to the Church.

In the pre-preparatory meeting of the Congregation of Rites, in 1946, the position that Jean-Marie de la Mennais had adopted in these delicate and dramatic events did not seem to be well clarified. Some important points remained in the darkness. On the one hand, was his relationship with his brother Félicité imbued with true fraternal charity, and on the other hand was his fidelity to the doctrine of the Church and to the Pope sincere? Did the relations with the most opposed members of the Congregation of St. Peter develop in truth and charity? How had he behaved with the bishops of the dioceses of Brittany with whom he had already collaborated and continued to collaborate? These "*animadversiones*" (critical remarks) required precise answers, as well as a very detailed historical and theological study.

During this period (of Josette's healing) the Postulator, Brother Hippolyte-Victor Géreux, was very invested in the search for a precise documentation in order to present it to the historical section appointed by the Congregation of Rites to provide answers to the various "*animadversiones*". The answers provided resulted into a voluminous "*summarium additonale*" of 770 pages, which would be published in 1960, under the responsibility of Mgr Frutaz.