

The official ceremony on December 15th 1966 in the presence of Pope Paul VI

Brother Gabriel-Henri Potier, Postulator and first-hand witness, recounted events as follows:

“This morning, December 15th, the ceremony of the reading and promulgating of the Decree proclaiming the heroic virtues of 6 new Venerables took place in the presence of the Holy Father. The ceremony had been simplified by Paul VI himself. The Postulators were instructed to be at the Vatican in time for 10:30 am. At 10 o'clock precisely, they were welcomed through the Clementine Hall door by an officer of the Pontifical Guard and immediately ushered into the Throne Hall where, shortly after, they were joined by His Eminence Mgr. Antonelli, the Secretary of the Congregation of Rites, Fr. Perez, Promoter of the Faith and a Consulter of the Congregation of Rites. Then came Cardinal Aloisi Masella, ponent (or chairman) of 3 of the Causes, and Cardinal Larraona, Prefect of the Congregation of Rites. Cardinal Tisserant (Protector of our Mennaisian congregations) was prevented from attending as he was obliged to attend a meeting of the Consistorial. At the invitation of the Holy Father's Private Secretary, Mgr. Macchi, the small group of 10 people headed for the Pope's Library. A few moments later the door opened and His Holiness invited them to enter. After receiving the homage of each of the Postulators, Paul VI advanced towards a slightly elevated throne, flanked by a number of Cardinals. The Secretary of the Congregation of Rites sat directly opposite, the team of Postulators sitting on either side of him. After the recitation of the "Veni, Sanctus Spiritus" by the Holy Father himself, each of the Decrees were read out, together with a brief summary of the life and activity of each of the new Venerables and confirming that they practiced to a heroic degree the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and neighbour, the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, strength, as well as the other virtues of poverty, chastity, obedience and humility. The 6 new Venerables were Mgr. Grandin o.m.i., Gaspare Bertoni, founder of the Stigmatini, Fr. Beltrami, Salesian of Don Bosco, and one of the first defenders of the cause of Fr. Jean-Marie, Fr. Petit s.j., Reverend Mother Michelotti, Foundress of the Poor Servants of the Sacred Heart and our very own Fr. de la Mennais.

When the reading ended, the Holy Father asked for some general explanations about each Servant of God: the region where they had lived, the characteristics of their holiness, their particular apostolate and the present vitality of their projects. His Eminence The Secretary of the Congregation of Rites answered all the questions, the Holy Father then giving his approval and ending with a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for what he has achieved in and through his saints. The Holy Father then spoke briefly with each of the Postulators. To the writer of these lines, he expressed, among other things, his great satisfaction of seeing the cause of J.-M. de la Mennais moving towards beatification.”

The proclamation of the heroic nature of the Founder's virtues aroused great enthusiasm in the Mennaisian congregations, which were going through a period of great expansion and hope for the future, as was the case throughout the whole Church. Ceremonies took place wherever the sons and daughters of Jean-Marie were present. The ceremonies in Saint-Malo, his birthplace, were particularly solemn and grandiose, involving the participation of both civil and religious authorities: the Archbishop of Rennes, Mgr. Gouyon and the Minister Yvon Bourges. Thanksgiving celebrations also took place at the Mother House in Ploërmel, in the presence of the Bishop of Vannes, Mgr. Boussard, the Superior General of the Brothers, Brother Élisée Rannou, and Sister Thomas d'Aquin of the Daughters of Providence. Other festive events and celebrations took place throughout Brittany and elsewhere.

Now that this fundamental stage of the overall process had been accomplished, the Cause began focussing on the process of beatification. For that it needed a direct intervention of God: a miracle, which would infallibly confirm the holiness of our Venerable Founder. The witness to his "holiness" on the part of his fellow men and women had been recognized and proclaimed. We were now awaiting divine confirmation. This subsequent stage, like that which had preceded it, has proved to be very challenging, suggesting that the defining characteristics of Fr. de la Mennais's cause are its length, difficulties and obstacles. While striving to do the best we can, let us leave to the providential designs of the Holy Spirit the initiatives and graces which he has set aside for the Church and the world through the mediation of this humble worker in the Father's vineyard.