

## The healing of Josette Poulain, the first diocesan process

While Brother Hippolyte-Victor Géréux, the postulator, was trying to find the necessary documents to respond to the objections of the Promoter of the Faith, he had in his hands the story of a healing that many considered extraordinary. He had the intuition that this event could facilitate the cause for the Beatification of Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais. Though he was very ill, he began collecting all documents and testimonies concerning this healing which took place in Combourg, near Rennes (France) on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1955. For this he questioned doctors, nurses among the Daughters of Providence and relatives of Josette Poulain.

He sought the advice of three Italian doctors, consultors of the Congregation of Rites. Their opinions were generally favorable. He then worked to put together a thorough and well-documented dossier which he sent to the Archbishop of Rennes, Cardinal Roques. Once all the canonical procedures were completed, the diocesan process began on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1957. Thirteen witnesses were heard, written documents and medical documents were presented... The closing session was held on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1957.

The original dossier remained with the diocesan archives in Rennes. The *transunto* was transmitted to the Congregation of Rites in the Vatican by Vice-Postulator Emmanuel Tanguy and handed over to Chancellor Mgr Orazio Cocchetti. The procedural elements were translated into Latin, whereas the testimonies and other documents were translated into Italian. The *copia pubblica* was delivered to the Postulator of the Brothers at 9, via Colautti, Rome. This stage of the process was completed on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1962.

In the meantime, Brother Hippolyte-Victor, faithful servant in the vineyard of the Lord, long-term labourer in favour of the Cause, had passed away in 1958. The new Postulator, Brother Gabriel Potier, was so busy with the various *Summarium* in order to respond to the latest "animadversiones" (observations) that 'the Josette Poulain dossier' remained unopened in the archives of the Congregation of Rites.

One could ask the question, "How is it possible that this file was not examined immediately and that no one took care of it?" There are many explanations. At that time two miracles were required, so the first potential miracle ended up awaiting the second. Another reason was the wait for the proclamation of heroic virtues, which eventually took place in December 1966. Following the advice of the secretary, Mgr. Antonelli, the postulator feared that the cure was not completely inexplicable and that it therefore had the potential to hinder the Proclamation of Heroicity, which had already encountered so many difficulties.

Subsequently, the dossier was abandoned, re-emerging only in 1978, when, at the request of Brother Jean Le Bihan, the new Postulator, Brother Potier stated that "*The promoter of the faith, Mgr Antonelli, had declared, 'There is little chance that the dossier on Josette Poulain be taken into consideration, as there was not enough time between the moment the girl lost consciousness and her regaining it.'*" We then followed the advice to wait for the Proclamation of the Heroicity of Virtues. Subsequently, Brother Potier alluded to a letter from Brother Leduc, director of the Combourg school, saying that the event was of no interest to the cause. In reality, therefore, the case was simply dropped.

Perhaps the most authoritative motive was that expressed by the Postulator, Brother Vincent Guillerm, in a letter of 1990. After specifying that "glorification" is neither indispensable to holiness, nor to the mission of education and evangelization of our schools, he went on to say, "*Let us recognize that it can be a means of giving glory to the Lord through what he has accomplished in them and through them, a means also of arousing a new surge of faith and generosity, especially in those places that have been the most marked by their life and their pastoral action. And it seems to me that we should not deliberately refuse this means, under the pretext of escaping a form of triumphalism or chauvinism. The emphasis placed by Pope (St) John Paul II on this aspect of the life of the Church - where models, witnesses, and intercessors, currently members of this "triumphant" Church continue to play an important role in the life of "militants" here below - should encourage our beliefs and actions. It can both strengthen our filial confidence and stimulate our prayer, so that, in a future which we have to allow the Lord to determine, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes be officially offered for veneration as an example to the whole Church.*" (Bro. Vincent Guillerm)