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LETTER FROM THE POSTULATOR

On many occasions, Superiors and “confrères” gave me to understand that LETTER FROM THE POSTULATOR could bring some elements of answers to the questions, sometimes asked, about the Cause of Beatification of Father Jean-Marie de la Mennais. What’s happening now? What are the prospects of development in the near future? Such are the questions about which I wish to give some light. (At the end), I shall add a few words about the possible introduction of Father Deshayes’s Cause.

BRIEF HISTORICAL REMINDER

With many other articles written by his predecessors, Bro. Jean LE BIHAN presented in The Chronicle of the F.I.C.’s (October 1979 and January 1980), a synthesis of the history of the progress of our Father and Founder’s Cause. It seems to me useful to resume the steps known to all members of the Congregation. The “elders” have lived through the main dates of these steps, while the youngest ones were informed about them during their Noviciate or Scholasticate.

All I have to do is to remind you that the main step is the solemn Proclamation of the “héroïcité des vertus” (December 15 1966), which marked the closing and the happy outcome of the real “Trial of Beatification”. With this proclamation ended the extensive work done by the successive Postulators, and especially Bro. Hippolyte-Victor GÉREUX and Bro. Gabriel-Henri POTIER who had to deal with the “Historical Section” of the Congregation of the Rites, “Dicastère” in charge, then, of the Causes of Saints. Neither the lively interest, shown for the Cause by their immediate successor, Bro. Jean LE BIHAN, nor his great competence in the mennaisian world could make things progress.

You need to be quite aware that: in fact, the rules of procedure, established by the Church, to lead, beyond the “héroïcité des vertus”, to the proclamation of Beatification, and later of canonization, require the authentication of “miraculous” favors, scientifically verifiable, obtained from the Servant of God. For a very long time, two “miracles”, certified in due form, and acknowledged by a “tribunal” in which theologians and scientists sit, were required for each step towards Beatification and Canonization.

EVOLUTION AND NEW NORMS

As we can be aware of it in the text published in The Chronicle N° 299 (July 1979), presenting a synthesis of an article written by Father P. MOLINARI, S.J., a clear evolution has modified, in the last decades, the concept of miracle and its place in the Trials for Canonization. More recently, with the publication of the new CODE OF CANON LAW, other documents emanated from the Holy Father and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints were added to those used as references in the past.

First of all, the Code of Canon Law does not speak of Causes of Canonization for Servants of God, but says that they are ruled by a particular pontifical law (Can. 1403). On the same day (Jan. 25 1983) the new code was promulgated, John Paul II signed the Apostolic Constitution “Divinus Perfectionis Magister”. He established new norms for the investigation of Trials for Canonization, concerning the investigation conducted by the Bishops as well as the organization and the way of proceeding of the Roman Congregation for the Causes of Saints. This Constitution foresaw the publication of new instructions. On Feb. 7 1983, the Congregation issued the “Norms to be observed by the Bishops in the investigations for the Causes of Saints”, and gave in a “General Decree” on temporary norms for the Causes actually in hand.

These new clauses simplify the inquiries and formalities to carry out. But none of these texts speaks of Beatification. It's considered, from now on, just like a simple step of the proceedings for Canonization. As for "miracles", there is a mention of them to specify that the investigation they cause must be distinctive from the one dealing with virtues or martyrdom. Precise indications are also given about the way they must be examined by the Bishops and the Roman Congregation. On the other hand, no precision is mentioned concerning the number of miracles required for Beatification, the Code does not speak of it, as well as for Canonization...

It seems that the 1917 Code, Canons 2117 and 2138, continue to be used as a reference for the question: 2 miracles for Beatification and 2 other miracles for Canonization. In fact, for about 15 years (Holy Year 1975), the Pope has started exempting from the 2nd miracle, first, for Beatification and more recently for Canonization. The result in the exemptions of the 2nd miracle has become the usual practice, and the 1917 Code being abrogated, the Holy Father has decided implicitly that the recent rule becomes the norm. Therefore, for Beatification, first step in the Trial for Canonization, at least one miracle, accomplished after the death of the Servant of God, and authenticated by in a special trial, is required. To lead to Canonization, we need one more miracle obtained after Beatification.

ACTUALLY, IS A MIRACLE REALLY REQUIRED?

For the Servants of God whose holy life ends and reaches its peak with a heroic testimony of their faith and love of God and mankind, testimony given by the sacrifice of their lives, visible to the eyes of everybody, no other, humanly tangible sign is required for Beatification. Those whom the Church, owing to this exceptional testimony, classifies "Martyrs", are, therefore, proclaimed Blessed, once the "héroïcité des vertus" and the reality of their martyrdom has been proved. Such was the case, among many others, of Marcel CALLO, who died at the Nazi camp of Mathausen, after he was sent there because of his apostolic zeal. It was the case of Anuarite NENGAPSTA, assassinated in Zaire, and it will be the case, in a near future, for lone persons or entire groups killed for their faith in the past, more or less close to us, like the Korean martyrs or, in France, a good number of victims of the 1789 Revolution, numerous victims of the 1936 Civil War, in Spain, and so many others throughout the world.

However, the attribution by the Church of the title of "Martyr" meets quite precise criteria that should not be mistaken with the heroic practice of faithfulness to God or the self-sacrifice to others because of one's love, whatever the uncounted difficulties or sufferings may be. The negative judgment given in Father DAMIEN's case, the heroic apostle of the lepers on Molokai Island (Hawaii) sheds light in this matter.

We often hear people say also that with some, or much insistence, in return from certain "high" interventions of religious or civil personalities, we can obtain the exceptional exemption of the required miracle. Nothing is less exact. Recent examples of such interventions, with the Roman Congregation, or the Holy Father himself prove that. The given answer has always been the same: "Show a miracle!..."

ABOUT THE CAUSE OF JEAN-MARIE DE LA MENNAIS

It is to be quite understood that, with the Proclamation of the "HÉHOÏCITÉ DES VERTUS" (Dec. 15, 1966), the investigation on the life, writings, work of our Father Founder is over. To reach the first step to Beatification, we need to prove, in another trial, the authenticity of at least one "miracle" accomplished by him since his death. Given the current state of rules, nothing can exempt this trial.

Would one of the numerous healing favors already obtained in the past have chances of being recognized as an authentic miracle? Per se, in the light of recent examples, it's not forbidden to

consider this possibility. But, in spite of all the very impressive events reported by The Chronicle, the Courrier du Vénérable, the Newsletter “Missions”, or put together in leaflets published on different dates, no file exists, as much as I know, that could allow us to present either one of these cases with some chances of success. We would need, in fact, to collect the direct testimonies or at least the certificates, attestations, X-ray photographs, and so on, which could permit us to conclude that it’s a humanly unexplainable healing.

A little more than 30 years ago, in 1956-57, Bro. Hippolyte-Victor GÉREUX being the Postulator of the Cause, the healing of a young girl, a pupil at the kindergarten of the Daughters of Providence of St.Brieuc, at COMBOURG (diocese of Rennes, France), healing attributed to the intercession of Father de la Mennais, became the subject of a diocesan trial done in the regulation way. The Records of the trial, passed on to the Sacred Congregation of the Rites, were simply filed, without being officially examined. This decision, quite legal, was taken, following various consultations, by Bro. Gabriel-Henri POTIER who had become Postulator in 1958. It can be explained with reasons of tactical order, at the time it was necessary to make the trial on the “Héroïcité des Vertus” succeed. We could not take the risk, submitting not so convincing a file, of antagonizing the Consultants whose opposition considering the Cause had been rather hesitant in the previous phases.

The same file, emerging again quite recently, was again submitted in an informal way, to a member of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, very much interested in the Cause of our Founder. His opinion, motivated by both, the content of the file and the stand of the doctors bound to the Congregation and consulted in 1955, was clearly enough negative. According to him, it would be a loss of time, and presenting a case practically certain of not being accepted, they would risk to harm other files which could be presented later on. In fact, what constitutes the first required piece is lacking here: the indisputable proof of the true nature of the illness, and even of its existence. It was a question of fractural skull with hematoma in the brain. But it was attested only by the family doctor’s diagnosis, certainly very affirmative after a serious examination. The child, in a coma, being rushed to the Clinic, run, at Combourg itself, by the Daughters of Providence. In accordance with the doctor’s strict recommendations, the Sister in charge did not have any X-ray photography taken, while they were waiting for the arrival of the surgeon for a brain operation. In fact, when the surgeon, who had been delayed in another clinic located in a neighboring town, arrived, about two hours later, the child had recovered, without any mark of the diagnosed damage that could be spotted neither by auscultation or X-ray photograph.

The judgment given by the doctor: “error of diagnosis” can be explained, even if the family doctor had been positive. The three doctors sworn in, in Rome, consulted by the Postulator as soon as May 1955, without returning an absolute verdict of “error of diagnosis, or, therefore, rejecting a priori a supernatural intervention, have, themselves also, ventured a plausible hypothesis of a “spasm” generating the same effect of a coma or a hemiplegia as a progressive “intracranial” hematoma. Without a radiography taken as soon as

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they arrived at the clinic, it was practically impossible to establish the proof...

Another case, that of a young boy, studying at the Brothers’ school in Brest (diocese of Quimper – France) had to be abandoned due to an undated X-ray photograph, that could not be, therefore, a conclusive proof. It was in 1962.

WHAT’S LEFT TO BE DONE?

Practically everything... unless, here and there, we find waiting files, unknown to the Postulator, could have some chances of being withheld, either after an examination by the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, if all the people concerned are actually dead, or an informative trial at the diocesan level if some witnesses (healed persons, parents, doctors...) are still

susceptible of being cross-examined. In both hypotheses, it would be obviously urgent to contact the Postulator who would try, after examining the files, to decide what procedure to begin with.

More probably, we must count on new favors, obtained by our private or community prayers, and also on our concern to collect, in case of facts presumed to be miraculous, all documents likely to underline their supernatural characteristic. It's a question both of medical documents (attestations, X-ray photographs, graphics, and so on) and also of personal testimonies, numerous, detailed and duly certified. In case of photocopies of medical documents, it is essential that they be well authenticated and dated by the responsible departments.

The "official" prayer (annual and monthly novenas), is, of course, to be recommended, but we should not forget that it has to be always a true personal prayer. And that it's also to the humble and trustful prayer of everyone (the sick themselves and their families, friends, "confrères") whom the Lord takes pleasure in answering to generously. Let's say also that, to the "lowly" human beings that we are, the Lord does not forbid, yesterday's and today's events give evidence about it, to back up prayer with more "material" gestures, expressing our inner faith. I think of keeping in touch with a picture of the Servant of God or other things remembering his memory, pilgrimages to his tomb or to one of the places he frequented, monuments erected to his memory in various countries that have benefited from the apostolic work of his Sons and Daughters. Far from being superstitious if they are well understood, these gestures become both, an expression of our trust and signs of a humble acceptance of our condition of creature in a world not only spiritual but to which the Son of God Himself has agreed to belong fully.

WHAT ABOUT THE CAUSE OF FATHER GABRIEL DESHAYES?

First, we must say that it's a question, in this case, of a possible introduction of the Cause for Beatification. Our filial devotion and also, beyond all doubt, the objective knowledge of the life and multiform work of the "Co-Founder" of our Congregation make us really desire the introduction of this Cause in the near future. And in this, we are joined with many others, especially the clergy of the dioceses where he carried out his pastoral zeal or who benefited from the apostolic influence of his numerous Foundations, and, for sure, the members of the Congregations that owe him their existence or new animation.

But, all this is a long and exacting task, in order to prepare the preliminary steps as well as

to glance, then, at the numerous phases of the proceedings, even if the recent norms have simplified them appreciably. For the time being, further to a wish expressed by the F.I.C. General Council and transmitted by the last General Chapter, a wish communicated as information to the dioceses and especially interested Congregations, we are at the very first step. We need to collect, as exhaustively as possible, the writings, biographical data and very much scattered documents of archives, which we have an access to. An intensive work has already been done, in this field, for a few years, especially that of Bro. Raymond LABBÉ and Bro. Jean-Baptiste GENDROT, with the numerous collaborators they met either in our Institute or at the level of dioceses and Congregations, more or less related to Father Deshayes.

This preliminary work must still keep on and be intensified to lead to, very likely, in a first step, the composition of a new biography, historically sure and sufficiently concise. This work whose author would be to find together could allow those who ignore him or don't know him well, a first contact with the life and work of the Servant of God. It would provide also the concerned authorities with a first impression as for the validity of the introduction of his Cause.

Meanwhile, we must collect and display prominently the certificates, facts and documents, aiming at confirming the existence, in the past and in the present, of a real “reputation of holiness”. What did those who have known him and mixed with him, think of him, tell or write about him? What was, among other things, their reaction when he died? Did any testimonies or attitudes prolonged in the surroundings (dioceses, parishes, Congregations, work...) that have been marked by his zeal remain? The reception or rejection of the request to open the Trial for Canonization, will depend on the answer given to these questions.

All of these being collected, it will be possible, no doubt about it, for the administrators of the concerned dioceses and Congregations to agree on the choice of a potential Postulator, and with him, to decide the steps to take with a view to a formal introduction. This time is probably still far from now, but our possible collaboration and, in any case, our prayer as well as our brotherly support to all those who work in this field, may do something for it. There is no question, for example, but one of these important elements taken into consideration to prove the “reputation of holiness” lies in the favors attributed to the intercession of the Servant of God. This, added to our filial devotion, must encourage us to have recourse, with confidence, to his intercession, not only in cases of illness that can be the subject of “miraculous” healings.

This is true for both, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes. If a “miracle”, truly authenticated, is required for Beatification, all the favors, as a whole, spiritual as well as temporal, obtained by prayers to the Servants of God, are also examined by the Roman Congregation, in so far as they establish in their own way, a real reputation of holiness.

TO CONCLUDE

As a conclusion, I would like to say that, obviously, the “glorification” of our Founders, their solemn Beatification and Canonization, is not an essential element to the holiness and to the work of education and evangelization of our Institutes, no more than it is strictly necessary to the influence of the Church. Let’s acknowledge, all the same, and in all simplicity, that it can be one way to give glory to the Lord, for what He does in and through them, and also a way to create a new surge of faith and generosity in the places more marked by their lives and pastoral work. These places: the Institutes they founded and developed, the work,

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parishes and dioceses where they worked, have a right to it. And it seems to me that we don’t need to reject deliberately this means, on the pretext of escaping some kind of crowing or cliquishness.

The emphasis, put by Pope John-Paul II, on this aspect of the life of the Church where models, witnesses and mediators, now members of the “ ’triumphant’ Church” continue to play a major role in the life of those who still “militate” on earth, should, if there is a need, support our convictions and maintain our action. It may both strengthen our filial confidence and stimulate our prayer, so that, in a future we let the Lord the task to decide, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes may be proposed officially to the veneration and example of the whole Church.

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