

OUR CAUSES FOR BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION (I)

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In this report we intend bringing up to date that given to the General Assembly in 1992 (Cf *Vincentiana* XXXVI (1992), pp 532-537). This report, also, is divided into three parts: our beatified confreres and sisters who are awaiting canonization; the servants of God whose beatification process is under way; those whose beatification process has just begun, or will begin.

I THOSE ALREADY BEATIFIED

1. Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre for Canonization:

A miraculous cure of a Daughter of Charity in 1889.

The miracle which was recently accepted by the medical commission of the Congregation for the Saints, and which will bring about the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre (1802-1840), was obtained more than a hundred years ago by a Daughter of Charity in Héverlé, Malines, in Belgium. Sister Gabrielle Isoré DC (1851-1906) was cured, at the age of 38, of a type of paralysis, diagnosed as acute progressive spinal lepto-meningitis.

The Sister, in a desperate situation, invoked Blessed John Gabriel. A Sister suggested a novena, which was organised by the superior, Sister Josephine Hauff, who asked all the community houses in Belgium to unite in prayer. The novena was to finish on the day of the beatification in Rome, Sunday 10 November 1889 (Cf *Annales de la CM*, 55/1890 pp 239-242).

The sister had been reduced to total immobility, with a poor prognosis; her death was by now expected. On 9 November the doctor said: "...I had given up all hope of seeing Sister's condition improve. I thought she was close to death". Instead, on Sunday morning Sister Isoré got up, cured. "...I then went as far as the chapel, opened the door, and shouted: I'm mad, or I'm cured!". As she herself and the sisters had promised, there were prayers of thanksgiving, and devotion to Blessed John Gabriel spread. The sister, who from now on would be called Jean-Gabriel, always enjoyed good health afterwards and continued to work right up till her death in 1906. The doctor had to admit: "For an illness which had reached the state to which Sister Gabrielle Isoré was reduced, months of active treatment would be needed to obtain a cure, which perhaps would not be total". The Process was opened in Malines, Brussels, in 1892, with her doctor, Dr Boine, the superior, Sister Isoré herself, and others, as witnesses.

In 1901 there was the ante-preparatory commission in Rome, and the preparatory commission in 1903 with a new "*positio super miraculis*".

Everything suggested a favourable outcome. The Postulator, Fr Veneziani, wrote to the Superior General: "As you will see from the catalogue of causes for beatification and canonization dealt with by the Congregation of Rites, which I sent you some weeks ago, the cause of Bl. Perboyre is the one most favoured by the Congregation to partner that of Bl. Chanel. So, if nothing to the contrary happens, our blessed martyr will, along with Bl. Chanel, be solemnly inscribed in the catalogue of the saints by the time of the forthcoming papal jubilee, or at the latest by the time of the 50th anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception. For the present, things are going rather well; already a doctor appointed *ex officio* is studying the position for the voting on the miracles. The Rev. Promoter has promised to let me have the comments soon" (From a letter of Fr A Veneziani to the Superior General, Rome, 11/6/1901).

"As I wrote to you previously, Dr Lapponi, the chief Pontifical Physician, is convinced that the proposed miracles are excellent. Morani, the advocate, who is most experienced in these matters, says the cause will succeed" (From a letter of Fr A Veneziani to the Superior General, Rome, 23/12/1902).

But then came some objections, or rather doubts, put forward by two doctors who questioned whether the diagnosed "leptomeningitis" might not rather be due to hysteria, and therefore functional. At the level of the Preparatory Commission, which met in 1903, it was decided to make further examinations. The Pope agreed to a new more detailed examination by two very experienced doctors.

The difficulties being met with (Fr D'Isengard, meanwhile, had succeeded Fr Veneziani in 1908) also involved a second similar miracle, which took place in Reims, concerning Sister Josephine Destailleur DC, and probably discouraged further attempts.

In a letter to the Congregation of Rites, dated 3 June 1957, the Postulator, Fr Bisoglio, reported: "From enquiries made, from that decision onwards nothing was actually done". He therefore asked that the more detailed examination requested be carried out.

We have, in fact, a *Report by Professor Vincenzo Lo Bianco*, 10/5/1959, on the miracle relating to Sr Gabrielle Isoré, in which the Professor says, in substance, that he cannot add anything further to what the doctors had already said for and against.

So we concentrated our attention on the case of Sr Gabrielle Isoré DC to see whether, in the light of modern scientific progress, the doubt which blocked discussion at the time could be dealt with in a better way: is it a question of an organic or functional illness? And can the cure, as it is documented, be explained in a natural way?

In a detailed report (23/12/1993 & 28/5/1994) the two present medical experts first of all interpreted the documents in the light of more advanced scientific knowledge, thanks to which they were able definitely to exclude functional illness (hysteria), saying that

the more appropriate diagnosis of the case would be to call it *progressive poliradiculonevritis*. The opinion of the medical commission appointed to advise (17/11/1994) was that the cure must be regarded as instantaneous, total and permanent, and inexplicable according to our scientific knowledge.

Also, from the files in the archives of the Daughters of Charity (Rue du Bac, Paris) from 1887 to 1906 it can be seen that the sister's health, which was originally very bad, was good from the year of the miracle, 1889, up to her death in 1906.

When the Theological Commission summoned by the Congregation for the Saints, and the meeting of the cardinals concerned, have received the results from the aforementioned Medical Commission, it will be up to the Holy Father, with the infallible authority of the Vicar of Christ, to pronounce his definitive and decisive judgement on the canonization of our blessed martyr, which the Vincentian family above all, all over the world, await with impatience.

2. Bl. Francis Regis Clet, beatified 27 May 1900.

3. Bl. Marie Madeleine Fontaine & her companions, beatified
13 June 1920.

4. Bl. Ghebre-Micahel, beatified 3 October 1926.

5. Bl. Louis-Joseph François & Jean-Henri Gruyer, beatified
17 October 1926.

6. Bl. René Rogue, beatified 10 May 1934.

7. Bl. Marie Anne Vaillot & Odile Baumgarten, beatified
19 February 1984.

As has been said many times, nothing can be done in Rome about these causes if there is no miracle, which is necessary for canonization, even of martyrs; no miracle is needed for beatification of martyrs. It is necessary to spread knowledge of them, to pray with confidence, and to let the Postulator know, so that the required documentation may be assembled.

(Continue n.2)

(Traduction J-F. Gaziello, cm)