



THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS

THE DECREE

of beatification and canonisation of the servant of God

Marie Madeleine de Bengy, de Bonnault d'Houët,
Foundress of the Society, Faithful Companions of Jesus.

This is addressed in response to the Church in Paris.

In regard to the question whether it is beyond any doubt

What is at issue in this case and what is to be established for the desired outcome (i.e. Beatification and Canonization) is whether it is beyond any doubt that the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity towards God and neighbour, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude and virtues associated with them, were present to a heroic degree.

Since the very beginning of the Church, imitating the zeal and example of the holy women who followed Christ our Lord on his apostolic journey, ministered to him and stayed with him to the foot of the cross (cf. *Mk 15, 40f.; Luke 8, 1-3; John 19, 25*), many other women have dedicated themselves to the service of Apostolic work. (cf. *Acts of the Apostles. 18, 18-26; Romans 16, 3*); their example, according to the teaching of Vatican Council II, must also be offered to the faithful in our age. Furthermore, even greater participation of women in various sectors of the Church's apostolate is highly desirable. (cf. Decree on the Apostolate of Lay people, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nr. 9).

Such an example as theirs, suggested the servant of God, Marie Madeleine de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houët, whom John Bosco called a mirror of perfection, should be followed and applied steadfastly to her own time. That this is equally appropriate for our times is demonstrated by the life and deeds of the Servant of God herself.

Born and baptised on 21st September 1781 in the town of Châteauroux within the bounds of the diocese of Bourges, she was brought up austere and piously by illustrious parents of noble birth. In her tenth year, she made her first Holy Communion. At home she learned

Arts and Letters and, gifted with a sharp intellect, she became quite accomplished in them without losing the art of household management acquired whilst helping her mother. At sixteen she became ill and was on the point of death, a death she showed herself ready to welcome; but she recovered and dedicated herself to visiting the sick with her friends. On 21st August 1804 she was given in marriage to Antoine Joseph, Viscount de Bonnault d'Houët, with whom she lived a holy life in Bourges where both were noted for their charity towards the sick, but within a year she was a widow; she raised the son born to her in the love of God and she always loved him most tenderly.

By the year 1804 she had said goodbye forever to conventional social life. The young widow devoted herself to household management and works of piety and charity, so much so that in 1809 whilst caring for patients with typhus she nearly died. Yet in 1814 she accepted as guests in her home several priests who were being harassed on account of their religion, among whom was I. Mancini who was later appointed archbishop of Siena.

In the following year 1815, whilst she sheltered Father Varin, SJ, who was fleeing the hostile pursuit of the returning Napoleon, she began to think of entering religious life. Having taken advice from Fr. Varin, whom she rivalled in piety for honouring God, she began the new Religious Society in Amiens on 1st April 1820, taking the rule of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. The goal which she determined in advance for herself and her companions was this: to follow Christ like the holy women of the Gospel; to teach girls, especially those who were poor; to gather women for the Spiritual Exercises; to offer help to preachers of the Gospel. She was vigorous in following through what she had begun, leaving her father and son, her companions being poverty and her trust in God alone. Within six years she founded three other houses of the Society. When, however, enemies rose up against the new Institute, the Servant of God, with the encouragement of the Bishop of Amiens, travelled to the See of Peter and obtained from Leo XII approval for the Institute through the Brief of Praise, given on 2nd August 1826, under the seal of the Fisherman's Ring. Relying on this, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to spreading the Society more and more, even moving into territories which were entrusted at that time to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Therefore, in the year 1830 she founded a large school in London and later she opened several houses in England, Scotland, Switzerland, France and in the States of Savoy. Indeed, in the year 1837 urged on by adversity, she set off again for Rome, where she was finally received with much kindness by Gregory XVI, who praised the missionary spirit of the Institute and gifted her with a new Decree of Approval. On her return to France, still fearless and trusting in God, she persevered in bringing her great work to completion and in the year 1847 she established the Mother House of the Institute in Paris. In 1829 she had also established the Society of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was later dissolved during the public unrest at that time. She also had in mind to found a sodality of working women and a rule for this

had even been written. With the steadfast courage by which she was led forward, she undertook many journeys, founding or visiting houses.

The illnesses from which she had frequently suffered in her life became worse day by day and, as a consequence of this, the Servant of God finally died peacefully in the Lord on 5th April 1858.

The Servant of God had firmly set forth for herself a way of life to attain the heights of sanctity, always choosing the most perfect way. She was most zealous about prayer and meditation in which she would be seen engrossed for many hours every day and she practised pious exercises fervently. Attending to the development of her own faith in an extraordinary way, constantly holding fast to God and his Will, she would make time for spiritual reading and she either established, strengthened or spread the faith amongst the people, even amongst the separated brethren, communicating what she had come to know by contemplation through catechesis and conversations with them. She loved to be called a daughter of the Church and she willingly suffered much for the Vicar of Christ. Making excellent use of her charisma as foundress, she was forever zealous about drawing her neighbour to God, devoting herself and all she had, even the works of her Institute, to this end. The orphanages, workshops, oratories, colleges, schools, and communities she founded were seen as the home of faith and love. These the Servant of God directed with sweetness and love, but also with firmness. Calumnies and insults she repaid with prayers and blessings. Interiorly and externally humble, always accepting wise advice, she wholeheartedly, and at all times, obeyed her superiors. Never depressed, she constantly trusted God with an invincible spirit.

To this present age we live in, where everything is uncertain, the Servant of God brings a message of hope and faith in God, of hard work done quietly and of fidelity towards the Church.

In fact, as her reputation for holiness grew, clearly confirmed by exceptional signs from God, when the normal procedures had been set up (1888-1893), and when the writings of the Servant of God had been carefully scrutinised (1903), the cause for her beatification was introduced on 13th December 1916. Thus, after the apostolic process had been drawn up in the Curia of Paris (1922-1925), the pre-preparatory Congregation regarding the heroicity of virtues of the Handmaid of God was held on 20th July 1954, followed by the preparatory one on 25th January 1966. They examined the life of the Servant of God and once the result of this was related to Pope Paul VI, his Holiness decreed that the process could move forward, after the vote of the Historical Section had been taken about the various aspects of the Servant of God's dealings with the Bishops and the Fathers of the Society of Jesus. The said vote, after much evidence had been collected and sent forward,

was published in 1969 by the Hagiographical Office of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Meanwhile, however, since a new law has been passed regarding causes of beatification and canonisation through the Apostolic Constitution set up by the Supreme Pontiff, Paul VI, on 8th May 1969 which no longer prescribes that it be celebrated at a General Assembly, a plenary Congregation was held in the Vatican Palace on 7th July 1970. As the result of a report made to the same Supreme Pontiff, by the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, the Holy Father ordered a decree to be prepared on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God.

Finally today, in the presence of their Eminences, the Cardinals, who had been invited to the Vatican - Paulo Bertoli, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation, Paulo Giobbe, Promoter or Relator, and myself, the undersigned secretary, and others summoned as is customary, Pope Paul VI solemnly decreed that:

Regarding what is at issue in this case and for the desired outcome, it has been established beyond any doubt that in the case of the Servant of God, Marie Madeleine de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houët the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity towards God and neighbour and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and other virtues associated with them, were present to a heroic degree.

He ordered this decree to be duly promulgated and registered in the Acts of the Sacred Congregation for the Canonisation of Saints.

Given at Rome 19th November 1970

(Signed) Cardinal Paul Bertoli (Prefect SCCS)

L.+ S = Place of the Seal

+ Ferdinand Antonelli (titular Archbishop of Idicra, Official Secretary, SCCS)