

Congregation for the Causes of Saints

Concerning the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God

Louis Brisson

Priest and Founder of the Oblates and Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales (1817-1908)

Decree Concerning His Virtues

“At this moment I am aware of the effects of your presence in my spirit. You are sons of God, who made me mindful of my commitment to holiness, and because of whom I can at this moment cry out in faith: ‘Abba, Father!’ Nor will I any longer regard my God as a fearful judge but rather as a loving father to His brother and a friend to His sons.”

Thus spoke the venerable Servant of God Louis Brisson in a meditation written near the end of his long life, as he obediently and trustingly resigned himself to the plans of divine Providence. The Servant of God was born on 23 June 1817 at Plancy, France, the only son of a strongly Christian family. His early education clearly emphasized the liberal arts, which he cultivated, as one would a seed, over the course of the years. Soon, however, he manifested unmistakable signs of a priestly vocation. At age fifteen, he was accepted in the Minor Seminary of Troyes, and, later, the Major Seminary, where a life of piety and intellect stood out among his gifts. On 19 December 1840, he was ordained to the priesthood. Then, because of poor health, he was appointed teacher of religion and natural sciences at the school of the Sisters of the Visitation and at the Seminary. In 1843, the Visitandines entrusted him with the ministries of Chaplain and Confessor to their community. He served in these roles for forty years, basing his teaching on the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and practicing the virtues of humility, simplicity, and gentleness in a heroic manner. Throughout this time, Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis, the Superior of the Visitation Monastery, zealously exhorted him to found a Congregation of priests who would live according to the spiritual teachings of the eminent Bishop of Geneva.

In 1857, the Bishop of Troyes put the Servant of God in charge of the Catholic Association of St. Francis de Sales. The Association’s purpose was to protect the faith from heretical teachings, which at that time were rejecting every notion of the supernatural. During his time as Diocesan moderator of this Association, Fr. Brisson undertook a number of initiatives designed to help and teach young women working and living in large numbers in the highly industrialized city of Troyes. The leadership for this effort came from Visitation school students, among whom was St. Léonie Aviat, who over time laid the foundation for the Institute of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, which was officially approved in 1890 by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII.

Subsequently, Fr. Brisson accepted the responsibility of starting a diocesan school. It was then that Providence provided what Fr. Brisson had for some time hoped for and Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis had herself predicted would come: the School of St. Bernard, which is truly the cradle of the Congregation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. This Congregation was finally approved in 1887.

The Servant of God combined a very active priestly ministry with an exemplary life of prayer. The Eucharist was the summit of his way of life and of his daily, zealous search for the glory of God and His holy will. It was unfailingly clear that Fr. Brisson’s spirituality was the primary cause and source of his pastoral work. As a spiritual director, he sought to lead souls to experience the same intimacy with Christ as he did and to imitate His virtues in fidelity to the Holy Father and the teachings of the universal magisterium.

In 1878, the Servant of God’s earthly journey became especially difficult because of a number of disagreements with the Diocesan Authority, which caused him considerable suffering and torment. Nevertheless, Fr. Brisson never failed in his duty of charity toward his Bishop, even in the most combative circumstances, always conducting himself in a moderate, temperate, and sincere fashion. A timely intervention of the Holy See restored harmony between the Bishop and the Servant of God, who acted with such constant care and profound gentleness that in an audience with him Pope Leo XIII declared: “Oh, Fr. Brisson, you are truly a man of peace!”

In the early 1900s, the Servant of God and his work faced a new and very bitter struggle when a number of laws enacted over time by the Republic ordered that Congregations dedicated to teaching boys and young men and preaching God’s word be suppressed and their assets be confiscated by the State. The Oblate Fathers chose exile and left France, so that they would not be deprived of functioning as priests. Fr. Brisson, entrusting himself to

God's will with customary equanimity, having grown old and physically weak, yet still providing spiritual guidance to his children in the Lord, chose to retire to his birthplace, Plancy, where he continued his active direction of both Congregations and where he experienced with strengthened faith a deepened understanding of the Cross.

With his body exhausted and greatly weakened by illness, the Servant of God, Louis, passed away peacefully in the Lord on 2 February 1908, adding his own "Now, O Lord, You can dismiss Your servant, because my eyes have seen Your salvation" (cf. Luke 2:29-30) to the prayer of the prophet of old.

Because of the Servant of God's well-known reputation for holiness, which had existed throughout his lifetime and indeed increased after his death, on 11 February 1938, the Curia of Troyes initiated the "Cause of Beatification and Canonization" by instituting the "Informative Process," which, delayed because of war, was concluded on 15 December 1949. Following a Supplemental Process lasting from 8 July 1963 to 13 January 1964, the conclusions of the "Informative Process" were given the force of law by decree of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints dated 6 October 1995. After a proposal was prepared and in keeping with the usual practice, in a meeting of the Theological Consultors it was declared that the Servant of God had practiced Christian virtues in a heroic manner.

The Cardinals and Bishops in Ordinary Sessions on 2 October 2007 and 29 September 2009, having received the required explanations from the Postulator as well as the report of His Excellency, Franco Croci, the Titular Bishop of Potentia in Piceno and Presenter of the Cause, declared that the Servant of God, Louis Brisson, had practiced the theological, cardinal, and related virtues heroically.

Pope Benedict XVI, having in hand an exact report of all of the foregoing and having received and approved the recommendations of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints signed by the Archbishop Prefect, today made the following declaration:

It has been established in the case at hand that the Servant of God, Louis Brisson, priest and founder of the Oblates and Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, practiced the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity toward God and neighbor as well as the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude and related virtues to a heroic degree.

The Holy Father ordered that this decree be given the force of law and placed in the records of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given at Rome on the 19th day of December, 2009 A.D.

+ Angelus Amato, SDB
Titular Archbishop of Sila
Prefect

+ Michaël Di Ruberto
Titular Archbishop of Biccari
Secretary