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Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1918

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DECREE OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, 1918

INTRODUCTION

The following decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites authorized the opening of the process leading to the eventual beatification and canonization of Felix De Andreis. Its importance lies in that it presents a succinct summary of his life and virtues, one arrived at after initial canonical investigations. In addition, it evaluates the importance of his life for the Church. Thus the decree can serve as a somewhat official version of his life and introduction to his writings.

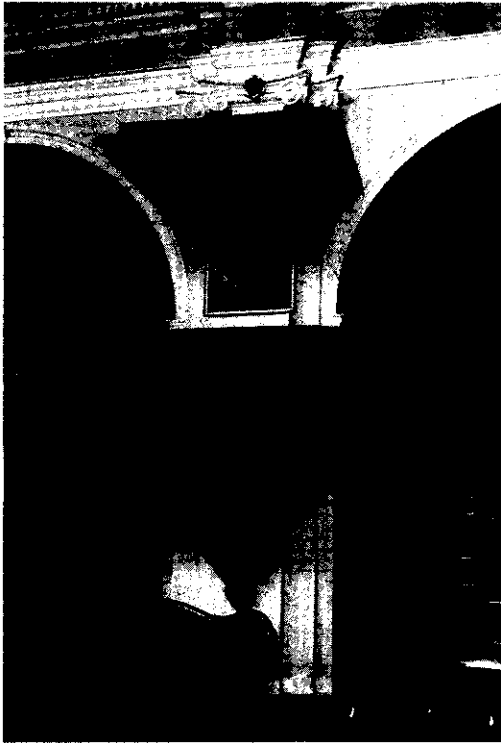
The decree contains two sections. The first and longer section lays out the details of his life. The second reviews the canonical process up to the time of publication.

DECREE ON BEHALF OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT LOUIS CONCERNING THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD FELIX DE ANDREIS PRIEST AND FIRST SUPERIOR OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN AMERICA

Felix De Andreis was born in the town of Demonte, in the diocese of Cuneo, formerly the diocese of Turin, on 12 December 1778 of pious parents, and was baptized on the same day. At the age of eight he received the sacrament of confirmation. While still a boy, he once fell into a deep river, but with God's help he was miraculously saved unharmed. At age fifteen, he went to a college where he devoted himself to the study of liberal arts, especially poetry. At that time, he felt inclined to join the Congregation of the Mission, but when he expressed his intention and desire to the visitor of that community, he was prevented from following his desired purpose because of his diversified interests and his various courses of study. However, he was not discouraged nor did he stop trying to prepare for everything, and finally his desire came true. Dropping his inclination to the arts, he was first accepted for a year of probation, and then, in 1797, was admitted to the

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novitiate of the Congregation of the Mission at Mondovi. Having successfully completed the novitiate, he pursued his studies first in Turin and then in the college at Piacenza, where he completed them well. When he had fulfilled all the requirements, he received the sacred orders of subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood, striving only for the glory of God, his own eternal salvation and the salvation of his neighbor.



The parish pulpit at Demonte.
Courtesy of the author

After ordination, he laudably and fruitfully performed various functions, as ordered by his superiors, such as director, teacher and preacher. He was well versed in the languages and literature of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Spanish; in addition, he diligently pursued the natural sciences of mathematics, geography, chemistry, pharmacy, medicine and music. But with particular diligence and piety he culti-

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vated and taught the theological sciences, together with canon law and sacred scripture with the commentaries of the Church Fathers and Doctors, using these subjects both in preaching and ministry, especially in seminaries, monasteries and other religious institutions. In his desire to preach Christ's word and to spread his faith among the pagans, he asked and with great joy obtained permission [for this], although the carrying out of such permission was deferred to a more suitable time. In the meantime, some other work was assigned him both in Piacenza and Rome.

In March 1806 the visitor of the Roman Province called Felix De Andreis to Rome and entrusted to him, besides the chair of dogmatic theology in the house of the Congregation next to the curia of Pope Innocent,¹ various other ministries of preaching and hearing confessions inside and outside the house for the benefit of the clergy and the laity, especially in colleges, religious institutions and families, and in the priestly Sodality of Saint Paul, into which he was received and made a member of its Council of Moderators.² Thus he gained the high esteem of Cardinal [Giulio Maria] di Somaglia, then vicar general of Rome, as well as that of the Holy Father, who judged him worthy of the episcopal dignity.

The most prominent members of both clergy and laity have testified privately and publicly how much this servant of God, professor of theology, teacher of the clerics of the Congregation of the Mission and of the students of the College of the Propagation of the Faith, and excellent preacher and missionary, had contributed to the renewal and preservation of the integrity of faith and morals in Rome during the hostile government when Pope Pius VII of holy memory lived in exile, as well as when freedom and peace were restored to the Church and to the sovereign pontiff.

¹ Decree, 1918. Printed sheet, 28" x 17 1/2", Latin. Copy in the archives of the General Curia, Rome, De Andreis papers.

The "curia of Pope Innocent" refers to its location at Monte Citorio, where about 1697 Innocent XII had placed his administrative curia in an effort to centralize all pontifical tribunals.

² Little is known of De Andreis's participation in this organization. It differs from the "Adunanza della Porta" which met in the Monte Citorio house, and to which he wrote the long letter, number 66, published in this work.

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During the year 1815 Father Dubourg, named bishop of New Orleans in North America, came to Rome to pay due homage and obedience to the Apostolic See and to the Roman pontiff, and also to look for capable and worthy workers for his diocese. Received as a guest in the aforementioned house of the Mission he could easily see that the Congregation of the Mission should be fittingly and usefully established in his diocese, especially in the city of Saint Louis. Once certain difficulties that had arisen were overcome with God's help, and he had obtained the generous permission of the superiors, the Holy Father with his august presence expressed his best wishes and bestowed his blessing. Felix De Andreis and his chosen companions then departed for distant regions, while Bishop Dubourg rejoiced over the treasure he had acquired for himself and his diocese.

On the way, he [De Andreis] stopped for six months in Bordeaux, where he willingly and diligently performed the functions entrusted him by the diocesan archbishop in prisons and hospitals and with the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent. Bishop Dubourg acknowledged him as the visitor of his Congregation³ and conferred on him the title and office of vicar general of the diocese. He and his companions then traveled laboriously on sacred expeditions through the various regions of North America, sowing the good seed and gathering the fruits accordingly. The servant of God himself acknowledged in his writings that he and his companions, while staying at Saint Thomas near Bardstown with remarkable men like Bishop Flaget and Father David, a missionary, made their apprenticeship in learning languages, becoming acquainted with the country, experiencing the ministry and the functions that offered themselves to a missionary priest in public and private life. While he was engaged there in teaching theology and in the ministry, Felix was suddenly sent with his companions to the city of Saint Louis, where he was placed in charge of the parish of Sainte Genevieve.⁴

³ This title was only informal, but De Andreis exercised the functions of a visitor since he was so far removed from Rome. The first formal visitor was John Timon, who assumed that office in 1835.

⁴ The decree confused the parish of Sainte Genevieve in the town of Sainte Genevieve, where De Andreis worked temporarily, with the cathedral in Saint Louis, where he lived regularly.

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After the example of the Divine Shepherd, who willingly became an example to the flock, he used to describe the purpose of his mission with the words: "He sent me to preach the gospel to the poor," and fulfilled this purpose with the proper intention, intense study and hard work. But that the Congregation of the Mission might acquire a permanent home according to the norms of law and spread through America, a novitiate was established on 3 December 1817 in Saint Louis by the consent and approval of Bishop Dubourg and under the name and patronage of Saint Francis Xavier. Felix De Andreis was appointed to this college and a neighboring school as administrator, rector and teacher.⁵ Under his authority the novices and students always responded to the wise and paternal care of their teacher. The servant of God planned to extend the benefits of the mission also to peoples wild and barbarous in their language, nature and character. For that purpose he learned their native language and was always ready to receive them and help them in everything.

Physically weakened after so many labors, the man of God felt that the hour of his departure from this world was approaching, and quietly and peacefully awaited the blessed reward promised by the Lord God to a good and faithful servant. As one devoted to our Lord's incarnation and passion, as a loving son of the Virgin Mother of God, and as a faithful disciple and imitator of Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Francis de Sales and his father and lawgiver, Vincent de Paul, while his health was declining and his incurable disease was worsening daily, he most devoutly received the sacraments of the Church. After giving to the grief stricken who were present the testimony and proof of his faith and charity as well as his paternal blessing, he peacefully passed from this life on 15 October 1820. After solemn obsequies had been celebrated by the clergy and devoutly attended by a large crowd of laity and civil representatives, the body of the servant of God was borne to the seminary of the Barrens, and solemnly laid to rest near the altar of Saint Vincent, confessor, and founder of the Congregation of the Mission.⁶

⁵ The language of the decree confuses his being novice master ("administrator, rector"), and a professor of theology, for the clerics who taught in the Saint Louis academy.

⁶ His burial near the altar of Saint Vincent took place some years later, once the Barrens church had been completed.

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In the meantime, the fame of the holiness which Felix De Andreis acquired during his lifetime and which shone forth even more after his death provided the reason for an inquiry about it by ordinary authority both in Rome and in the ecclesiastical Curia of Saint Louis. When the informative procedures had been completed and submitted to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, and the writings of the servant of God had been diligently examined as prescribed by law, nothing stood in the way to impede the further procedure. At the instance of Father Raffaele Ricciardelli, postulator general of the Congregation of the Mission, together with the whole Vincentian family, and considering the written requests of the eminent cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, several bishops and archbishops, as well as the superiors general of orders and congregations, and other prominent churchmen and civil dignitaries, the undersigned Cardinal Antonio Vico, bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina, substituting for His Eminence Cardinal Raphael Merry del Val, the Ponent of this cause, in an ordinary meeting of the Congregation of Sacred Rites, on the date mentioned below, proposed for discussion the following question: Whether a commission for the introduction of this cause should be appointed for the purpose under consideration. Their Eminences, the Fathers in charge of the protection of sacred rites, after the report of the same cardinal Proponent, heard and read the opinion of Father Doctor Angelo Mariani, Promoter General of the Faith. After diligently considering everything, they decided on the following answer: the commission for the introduction of the cause ought to be appointed, if His Holiness gives his approval. 24 July 1918.

After the undersigned cardinal prefect of the Congregation of Sacred Rites reported all these things to His Holiness Pope Benedict XV, His Holiness approved the rescript of the same Congregation and deigned to sign in his own hand the commission for the introduction of the cause of beatification and canonization of the servant of God Felix De Andreis, priest, and first superior of the Congregation of the Mission in America, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month and year.

+ A. Cardinal Vico, bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Alexander Verde, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

[Seal]