

□ Reading time: 10 min.

Camille Costa de Beauregard (1841-1910), a Savoyard priest born in Chambéry, could have taken advantage of his high social status. Instead, he gave his life for the most disadvantaged, dedicating himself to orphans and the poorest of the poor, to the young and their education. He founded an orphanage for boys at Le Bocage (Chambéry). He will be beatified on 17 May 2025.

Camille Costa de Beauregard was born on 17 February 1841. A marble plaque on the main façade of a building in rue Jean-Pierre Veyrat (then rue Royale) in Chambéry recalls the event.

It was the family's winter residence. They spent the rest of the year in the Chateau at La Motte-Servolex.

His father, the Marquis Pantaléon Costa de Beauregard, a senior member of parliament in Turin, a man of letters, art and science (he had been appointed president of the Academy of Savoy three times); he was also a fervent Christian who had never compromised his faith. Despite being very close to King Charles Albert, when Savoy was annexed to France (1860) he did not hesitate to side with Napoleon III and for his regime, more favourable to the Church than that of Cavour. The renunciation of his brilliant career in Turin was compensated by his appointment as President of the General Council of Savoy and a member of the *Legion de Honeur*. His faith, which led him to reject any compromise, was nourished by regular religious practice and made practical in numerous charitable actions.

Camille's mother, Marthe de Saint Georges de Verac, had been marked by the death of three of her grandmothers on the gallows. This gave her a strong sense of life's brevity and the ephemeral nature of earthly things. A spiritual level that was reflected in the way she raised her children: six males and three females (two others died at an early age). She educated them according to their rank, but with a rather constraining rigour and a disinterest in any well-being or pleasure she did not consider essential. As time went on and she grew in motherhood, she became more gentle and more understanding.

Like her husband, the marchioness was very attentive to human misery. She had accustomed her children to giving a coin to any poor man they met or to share a snack with the sick in the small hospital built by the Marquis on the estate.

After three years of studies with the De La Salle Brothers at the College de la Motte-Servolex, the young Camille, fifth son of a family of brothers, continued his education in the Jesuit schools in France and Belgium until the end of secondary school. At the age of sixteen he was stricken with typhoid, aggravated by serious lung complications. His parents recalled him to the castle to continue his studies under the guidance of a tutor, Father Chenal, from September 1857.

A renowned teacher at Rumilly College, Father Chenal adapted to the rhythms of his pupil, because he was able to discern the severity of the crisis his pupil was going through physically, morally, and spiritually. He waited until he had overcome his extreme weakness (three months in bed), then accompanied him to thermal treatments in Aix-les-Bains, in Biarritz...

Camille thus spent two or three years alternating work, reading, train journeys, piano or painting sessions, walks in the surrounding hills and, later, a long trek around Mont Blanc... and even attending parties hosted by the young nobles and bourgeois of Chambéry, where he shone for his courtesy, his humour, the charm of his conversation and his elegance in dress... which earned him the nickname: "Beautiful Knight".

At that time, religious laxity led him to lose faith to the point of no longer setting foot in the church. However, on the advice of Father Chenal, he remained faithful to the daily recitation of a prayer to Mary, the "Memorare".

And then the day came when everything changed, because the Lord from whom he had fled for so long had never stopped waiting for him. In fact, he was waiting for him in the cathedral in Chambéry, where he felt drawn to enter in spite of himself. This was the moment his soul was illuminated. Behind the pillar against which he had hidden himself, he suddenly rediscovered the faith of his childhood and felt the call to the priesthood, to which he decided to respond.

"I still see the pillar in the cathedral behind which I knelt... and where I cried sweet tears, because that was the day I came back to God... On that day, my soul took possession of my God forever, and I believe that was the origin of my vocation to the priesthood."

In September 1863, Camille entered the French seminary in Rome, accompanied by Father Chenal. His years in the seminary, he would later say, were the best of his life.

He was ordained a priest in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran on 26 May 1866.

Refusing the high ecclesiastical office that was reserved for him, he returned to Chambéry in June 1867.

His bishop, Bishop Billiet, offered him an honorary position, which he refused.

At his request, he was entrusted with the post of vicar of the cathedral of Chambéry, without accommodation or remuneration. This allowed him to take care of the workers who were working hard on the construction of the cathedral, who earned little and had no social security.

He set up a mutual aid fund for them under the name of "Saint François de Sales". Bishop Billiet added the functions of confessor and preacher to his ministry.

1867 CHOLERA

In August 1867, cholera struck the city, killing 135 people until autumn. Father Costa took pity on all the orphans who were without parents, without a roof over their heads, without money. He took in a half-dozen of them in the two-room apartment he had rented on rue Saint-Réal. But their numbers soon grew and he needed a home to house them. To this end, the Count of Boigne, a great benefactor of the city of Chambéry, granted him the former customs building on one hectare of land: this was Le Bocage.

Father Camille was looking for an assistant to help him start his work. Father Chenal, his former tutor, responded favourably to his request.

This is how the Le Bocage Orphanage was founded **in March 1868**.

Thanks to his own funds, a substantial contribution from the Count of Boigne and regular payments from his family (especially his mother), the Carthusian Fathers and other donors, Camille was able to renovate the premises, expand them and build a chapel... The number of pupils rose to 135.

Fathers Costa and Chenal had to surround themselves with people who took care of them: after the De La Salle Brothers for the first years, they appealed to the Daughters of Charity who played the multiple roles of teachers, supervisors, nurses, cooks and surrogate mothers, especially for the youngest children...

From the age of thirteen, the boys learned the gardening trade in greenhouses built on land purchased from year to year. For the older ones, Father Costa bought the La Villette estate in La Ravoire in 1875 (thanks to funds donated by his mother and sister Félicie), where they practised growing vegetables, fruit trees, working in the vegetable garden and fish farming as well. Camille moved with them to La Villette and entrusted the management of Le Bocage to Father Chenal.

This experiment ended ten years later, with the death of Father Chenal. Father Costa returned to Le Bocage with his older apprentices, for whom he built a new wing parallel to the first.

Over the years he was assisted by a group of priests formed in the Le Bocage spirit, including his nephew Ernest Costa de Beauregard.

But what is this Le Bocage spirit?

It is an education based on that of Saint Francis de Sales, similar to that of Don Bosco, whom Father Costa met in Turin in 1879. It was a preventive education, as opposed to that of the educational systems of the time, made of obligations and prohibitions, with a heavy dose of punishment for those who transgressed the rules.

An education based on trust and affection, on a deep family spirit, on appreciation of effort, on the appeal to reason and on listening. All in an atmosphere of faith that is passed on and lived every day.

To make working hours more efficient, Camille Costa de Beauregard gave ample space to leisure activities: walks, theatre, music (singing, brass band), swimming, festive meals on the occasion of liturgical festivals, where the older ones were invited to meet their families.

As soon as someone finished their apprenticeship, Father Costa found them a job as gardeners and kept in close contact with each of them. In this way, Camille achieved his goal of forming “good Christians, good workers, and good fathers.”

Despite poor health throughout his life, Father Costa continued to lead Le Bocage until his death on 25 March 1910. It was Good Friday, which that year coincided with the Feast of the Annunciation.

He was buried in Paradis Cemetery; a year later, in 1911, his body was returned to Le Bocage. It is said that the elders and young people of the orphanage detached

the horses and pulled the hearse themselves to Le Bocage, where the body was laid in a specially prepared tomb.

The next generation was assured

By the will of the Founder, his nephew Ernest Costa de Beauregard succeeded him as head of the association. He was the son of his brother Josselin. After becoming a priest a few years before, he joined his uncle at Le Bocage and became one of his closest collaborators.

For 44 years, assisted in particular by Father François Blanchard, who had been one of the orphans taken in by Camille, he carried on the work of his uncle, making sure that the spirit of the founder lived on and perpetuating his memory.

Before his death, in 1954, Father Ernest handed the work over to the Salesians of Don Bosco, who remained until 2016, maintaining the same spirit. They continue to supervise the two establishments that are still very much alive today:

- the Children's House
- the Horticultural Vocation High School (agricultural professions, personal assistance).

2012-2024 - Towards beatification

As soon as the founder died, his reputation for holiness spread to Chambéry.

In 1913, Ernest Costa de Beauregard published the first biography of his uncle, entitled "Une âme de saint - Le Serviteur de Dieu, Camille Costa de Beauregard", which was reprinted several times.

In 1925, a petition from the priests of the diocese was sent to Bishop Castellan, Bishop of Chambéry, asking him to take steps for his beatification. The first diocesan process was held in 1926-1927; in 1956 the "Positio Super Introductione Causae" was published; in January 1961 Pope John XXIII issued the "Decree of Introduction of the Cause" in 1965 the apostolic process followed, during which the body of the founder was exhumed; the "Positio Super Virtutibus" was published in 1982.

In 1991, Camille Costa de Beauregard was **proclaimed Venerable by Pope John Paul II**, who thus recognised his heroic virtues (decree of 22 January 1991).

In 1997, Father **Robert FRITSCH**, a Salesian from the Bocage community, published "Camille Costa De Beauregard. Fondateur de L'Œuvre des Jeunes du

Bocage à Chambéry, 1841-1910, Chronique d'une Œuvre Sociale et éducative dans la Savoie du XIXeme Siecle", an historical chronicle of 371 pages, (La Fontaine de Siloé).

It was then that Bishop Ulrich, Archbishop of Chambéry, sought to relaunch the process of beatification of the founder of Le Bocage. He asked **Françoise Bouchard** to write a biography that was published in 2010 by Salvator entitled "Camille Costa de Beauregard - La Noblesse du Cœur".

Since then **the Costa de Beauregard Committee**, established in 2012 by Bishop Ballot, and the **Association of the Friends of Camille Costa de Beauregard**, established in 2017 to support the Committee, have been actively working to advance the Cause of Beatification.

In particular, the goal is to document and promote the recognition of an alleged miracle due to the intercession of Camille: the healing in 1910 of young René Jacquemond who recovered from a serious eye injury. A dossier has been compiled and sent to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in Rome through **Father Pierluigi Cameroni**, postulator of the Cause.

Five reports - drawn up between 2015 and 2018 in the Savoy region and in France by recognised ophthalmologists - have stated that the condition suffered by the child "could only progress towards no recovery or even the loss of the eye", and that the suddenness of the healing was inexplicable.

The culmination of a long process

At the end of October 2021, Bishop Ballot convened a diocesan tribunal at the Myans Shrine to conclude the investigation into the alleged miracle. A detailed case would be sent to Rome.

On March 30, 2023, experts convened in Rome by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints unanimously recognised the scientifically inexplicable nature of a healing attributed to the intercession of Camille. There are still several stages to go, but this recognition paved the way for beatification.

On 19 October 2023, the college of theologians issued a positive verdict on the cause for beatification of Camille Costa de Beauregard. The next stage, in 2024, would be the opinion given to the Pope by a college of cardinals...

On 27 February 2024, the Dicastery (cardinals and bishops) unanimously ruled in favour of the inexplicability of the miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard.

On 14 March 2024, Pope Francis authorised the publication of the decree recognising the miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard, paving the way for his beatification.

The beatification rite will take place in Chambéry, in the diocese that promoted the cause of the new blessed, on 17 May 2025.

The miracle attributed to the intercession of Camille Costa de Beauregard
Here are some explanations for this miracle, which occurred in 1910, a few months after the founder's death:

"On 5 November 1910, ophthalmologist Amédée Dénarié, who had visited and treated the child, said "I do not hesitate to declare that the healing took place outside the laws of nature and in an extraordinary way."

Little René, 10, an inmate at the orphanage, had been **seriously injured in the eye** by a burdock root thrown at him during a walk. At first the children said that it was a stone thrown by a passing car, but soon after they admitted that they were playing at throwing burdock roots (these are well-known plants that are found along the edges of roads and that many children use to throw). René got one in his eye: it had been thrown forcefully. Because of the pain, he tried to remove it, tearing the cornea... The wound worsened from day to day, so much so that after a few weeks all hope of recovery was lost. But the child's eye healed overnight, without any medication, after the Sister, a nurse, applied a cloth belonging to Camille Costa de Beauregard on the last day of the novena with the child.

The dossier of testimonies collected at the time was carefully preserved in the archives, although for many years it was somewhat forgotten. Only when it was rediscovered in 2011 was it decided, with these new elements, to relaunch the cause of beatification of the founder of Le Bocage.

Beatification: with the act of beatification, the Pope decides that a person – lay or religious – can be venerated publicly and is therefore designated by the Church as "Blessed". There are two kinds of beatification: martyrdom or heroic virtues.

The two acts of beatification and canonisation differ in the degree of extension of public worship. Veneration of the Blessed is limited to an area designated by the Holy See. Veneration of the Saint is authorised, or even prescribed, everywhere in the universal Church.

Camille summed up in a few dates

Birth

Birth: 17 February 1841

Baptised the following day in the church of Notre Dame

Young priest

Ordination: 26 May 1866

Return to Chambéry: 1867, vicar of the cathedral

The Bocage

Creation of the Le Bocage Orphanage: May 1868

His death, which took place on 25.03.1910

Servant of God

Opening of the diocesan process: 1926

Venerable

Apostolic process: 1965 – 1966

Decree of Venerability: 22.01.1991

Blessed

Recognition of miracle: 14.03.2024

The celebration of the beatification is scheduled for Saturday, 17 May 2025.
An example of a dedicated and luminous life to be known and imitated.

Françoise Bouchard