


3-2003

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Recommended Citation

Gonnella, Bruno C.M. (2003) "Three Invitations of Blessed Fr. Marcantonio Durando to the C.M. of the Province of Turin and to the Vincentian Family," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 47: No. 2, Article 2.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol47/iss2/2>

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Three Invitations of Blessed Fr. Marcantonio Durando to the C.M. of the Province of Turin and to the Vincentian Family

*by Bruno Gonnella, C.M.
Former Visitor of the Province of Turin*

1. An invitation to revive the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul

Fr. Marcantonio Durando, CM, was always “fascinated” by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul. Thanks to the presence of the *Signori della Missione* [the “gentlemen” of the Mission] in his native city of Mondovì, he chose to enter the Congregation with the intention of realizing his desire to “go as a missionary to China.”

He cultivated that “spirituality” for his whole life.

Of his many letters, I cite one written to a sister¹ where our beatified confrere manifests clearly his search of (and his request for) “the spirit of St. Vincent”:

... I recommend myself to you during this novena to St. Vincent. I need his spirit, and I lack it and I do not see in me any mark of it except a faint desire to have it; as I get older and approach death, I still I feel in me the spirit of the world, and the spirit of vanity.

Obtain for me then this spirit of St. Vincent, so that I can still do, or better, that I can begin to do some good for the Congregation of the Mission, and pray to him that that he may enroll me in the number and in the book of his sons who are good, pious, humble, and observant....

At his death it was said: *We have lost another St. Vincent.* In the 79 years of his life he focused attention on the *Vincentian vocation* through the ministries characteristic of the Company:

- he began his priestly ministry with the *preaching of popular missions to the people;*

¹ P. Marcantonio Durando, *Epistolario*, letters transcribed by Luigi Chierotti, CM, Vol. VI, pp. 65-66, Sarzana 1979, letter of 13 July 1862.

- almost immediately he added the *formation of the clergy* especially as guide of priests, confessor and advisor of souls in the Turin of his time;
- the task of being a “spiritual guide” allowed him to “raise up vocations,” especially among women (Daughters of Charity, Daughters of Mary, the foundation of the Nazarene Sisters);
- like St. Vincent de Paul, Fr. Durando worked creatively in the area of *enhancing the role of the laity*, directing them toward collaboration with the Daughters of Charity in the numerous “charitable groups” which he established in Turin (the *Misericordie*);
- He did not neglect, notwithstanding the decision of superiors not to send him to the missions *ad gentes*, a commitment in the area of a *missionary spirit*: wherever he could he sent confreres; he supported the work of the “College for Clerics of the Foreign Missions” (*Brignole Sale Negroni* of Genoa); in a letter to Fr. Fiorillo, Assistant General, in 1841, he wrote: *the needs of a mission touch me*.

Fr. Durando was one of the collaborators and supporters of the work of the Propagation of the Faith, whose purpose was not only to raise funds, but to make people aware of and to form in them a *missionary spirit*.

2. An invitation to be faithful to the characteristic Vincentian virtues

Convinced that *the extraordinary is suspect*, Fr. Durando grew in holiness by following, as he himself loved to say, *a normal life*.

He found the path to holiness, in fact, in ordinary ministry, working on himself (often keeping silent and keeping himself out of the limelight). “His” *normal life* called him above all to *concreteness* (cf. the well-known phrase of St. Vincent: ... with *the sweat of one’s brow*...). Holiness, for Fr. Durando, was of the type that *nothing appeared extraordinary*.

Rich in the “wisdom” of valuable persons, and balanced by an deep-rooted (from his character?) practical bent, he worked on “reeducating people, rather than complaining about institutions,” from a sense that *evil comes from persons and not from things*.

He taught that the love of God is exemplified in accepting his will, remaining faithful to one’s own commitments, practicing charity toward the

neighbor, but a *delicate* charity, especially toward the sick. He was accustomed to recommend to his confreres to *preach more with good example than with words*.

In becoming an example of gratuitousness and availability, he interpreted in the best way possible the five Vincentian virtues: (*prudence in*) humility, simplicity, meekness, mortification, and apostolic zeal. St. Vincent called these virtues the *five stones of David*, calling to mind the noted biblical story in 1 Sm, 17.

3. An invitation to rethink our presence as confreres and as the Vincentian Family

The many courageous intuitions that Fr. Durando left us invite the Province of Vincentians and the Vincentian Family to be “creative” even in the third millennium, as St. Vincent knew how to be brilliantly creative in the 17th century.

Fr. Durando lived during a time of “transition” (as we are accustomed to say): after the French Revolution and after the “fall of Napoleon Bonaparte.” The confreres were few in number, the “laws of suppression” provoked the *scattering of subjects* (the dispersion, and in many cases even the abandonment of the Congregation). In so many “difficult” moments he remained “in the faith that everything hopes,” convinced that “everything is in God’s hands.”

Thanks to his marked ecclesial sense (even though he could not have grown up with it in his own family of origin) Fr. Durando collaborated with everyone without distinction: in the ecclesiastical world of Turin (bishops, priests, saints), with the civil-political world (Kings Carlo Alberto and Vittorio Emanuele II), and with the Christian people (the *Misericordie* foundation).

Blessed Fr. Durando found the solution for *helping the poor girls who were not accepted by any Congregation in their plan to give themselves to God in service*: for them he instituted the *Company of Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified*.

His was a vigilant “presence” in events, as if the solution to problems depended on us, yet with the greatest trust in Divine Providence! A secret as we *rethink* our presence as Vincentians today.

(ROBERT STONE, C.M., translator)