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THE BEATIFICATION OF MARANTONIO DURANDO (1800-1880)

Chronicle

By Leone Galbiati
Turin, Italy

I. The Celebrations in Rome

The Rite of Beatification of Venerable Fr. Marcantonio Durando was held in the St. Peter's square on 20 October 2002. During the same celebration the Servants of God Daudi Okelo and Jildo Irwa, laymen, catechists and martyrs; Msgr. Andrea Hyacinth Longhin, OFM, Bishop; Marie de la Passion H  l  ne Marie di Chappotin de Neuville, Virgin; Liduina Meneguzzi, virgin, were also beatified.

The square was almost full of officials and pilgrims when, at 9:00 a.m., the preparatory rites began with the reading of the biographical profiles of the Servants of God and of some excerpts from their writings.

The cortege of concelebrants made its entry at 9:55 a.m.: five Cardinals, 27 Bishops and 51 Priests, preceded by several dozen other priests designated to distribute Holy Communion. Fifteen other Cardinals, numerous Archbishops and Bishops, hundreds of Priests and religious, and several thousand faithful in the square followed the celebration. The arrival of Pope John Paul II signalled the start of the rite and, as always, of the infectious enthusiasm which accompanied the whole celebration.

1. The Vincentian Family

For the Vincentian Family the following were present and concelebrated with John Paul II: Cardinal Stephanos II Ghattas, Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, and Msgr. Germano Grachane, Bishop of Nacala (Mozambique), Vincentians; Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, Msgr. Luciano Pacomio, Bishop of Mondov  , Fr. Robert Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Luigi Calcagno, Superior General of the Nazarene Sisters. The Mother General of the Nazarene Sisters, Sr. Pia Barale, together with numerous sisters, many of whom came from Madagascar; the members of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission; the Visitors of the three Italian provinces; numerous Italian confreres and confreres from Spain, Madagascar, Poland, Lebanon, Colombia, the United States; the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Juana Elizondo with some members of the General Curia; the Visitatrixes of the five Italian provinces, with a large crowd of Daughters of Charity, participated in the liturgical celebrations. From Mondov  , the birthplace of Blessed Durando, the

mayor, Dr. Aldo Rabbia, with the Banner of the City, and numerous pilgrims among whom were the sisters of the Congregations which work in the Diocese; from Turin and from other cities numerous devotees connected with the activities of the Vincentians and above all of the Nazarene Sisters also joined the celebration.

Also present were Mrs. Maria Elena Vottero, daughter of Mrs. Maria Luisa Ingianni. At the birth of Maria Elena, the mother, Maria Luisa Ingianni fell into a coma that was considered irreversible. But she was cured through the intercession of Fr. Durando: the healing was judged miraculous and concluded the process of beatification. Unfortunately, the woman who benefited from the miracle, Maria Luisa, died in June 2002. Also present were some descendants of the Durando and Vinaj family: Mrs. Regina Rocca with her nieces Regina and Elena Matteodo, the youngest descendants of Giuseppe Antonio and Giovanni, brothers of Marcantonio, as well as the family of Mimmi Battaglia Bertola; Mrs. Milly Nicolai, descendant of Bianca, the sister of Blessed Durando.

2. The Rite of Beatification

The celebration was held a few days after the 24th anniversary of the election of John Paul II as Supreme Pontiff: Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, Dean of the College of Cardinals, offered a homage: “We are infinitely happy to take the providential opportunity which is given to us today through the imminent and solemn beatification of certain elect, distinguished sons and daughters of the Church, models of faith and charity, to offer you our heartiest congratulations and our best wishes.”

And it coincided with the World Mission Day, a motive constantly present during the course of the liturgical celebration, enriched by dances, songs, and languages of faraway countries, and symbolically opened out to the whole world in which the missionaries work. John Paul II, bent over in body but strong and firm in voice, evoked this motive in the penitential act which began the liturgy: “The annual date with the mission of the Church in World Mission Day recalls the commitment of all baptized to cooperate in the proclamation of the gospel, in the sharing of spiritual and material goods, so that there be formed from all peoples one sole family, united in love. In this spirit we thank the Lord for the witness of the brothers and sisters whom we propose today for the veneration of the Church, for their faith, their total dedication, even to martyrdom, the untiring and courageous care of the flock of Christ, the generosity in the service of the poorest and the most needy.”

The rite of beatification started with the petition formulated by Msgr. Odama, Archbishop of Gulu, followed by the reading of some biographical excerpts of the six Servants of God, done by the respective bishops, accompanied by the postulators general. Cardinal Severino Poletto summarized the essential events about Fr. Marcantonio Durando.

After the reading of the short biographies, Pope John Paul II pronounced the formula of beatification and fixed the day of the liturgical celebration of each new Blessed: for Blessed Marcantonio Durando it is 10 December. The veils of the five great tapestries hung on the façade of St. Peter's were raised slowly letting the faces of the new Blessed appear. It was a strong emotion for all Vincentians to see the tapestry with the face of Fr. Durando, done according to the sketch of Sr. Isabella Battistella, a Nazarene sister, who had reworked the original portrait by the painter Paolo Emilio Morgari. But the emotion was certainly more intense for the Nazarene Sisters, who "finally" saw their "Father" in glory; and in those who, going over some pages of Italian history, saw Fr. Durando's glance extend beyond St. Peter's Square and meet the Tiber and that Rome which around 1870 was "conquered" by the Italian troops.

3. "He lived the faith and a burning spiritual zeal, shunning every kind of compromise or interior tepidity..."

In his homily, Pope John Paul II selected the words of St. Paul: "Remembering ... your work of faith, and labor of love and your steadfastness of hope" (1 Thes 1:2-3) to draw the spiritual portrait of Fr. Marcantonio Durando "of the Congregation of the Mission and worthy son of the Piedmont region. He lived the faith and a burning spiritual zeal, shunning every kind of compromise or interior tepidity. At the school of St. Vincent de Paul, he learned how to recognize in the humanity of Christ the greatest, most accessible and disarming expression of the love of God for every human being. Still today he indicates to us the mystery of the Cross as the culminating moment in which the unsearchable mystery of God's love is revealed."

In the prayer of the faithful, for the first time, the Malagasy language was used: "Give to your people, the reader said, priests and religious who, following the example of blessed Marcantonio Durando, promote the renewal of Christian life and that ardour of sanctity from which springs radical and total dedication to the mission, passion for the proclamation of the gospel, interest for the formation of missionaries, and solidarity with the suffering members of the body of Christ."

The Eucharistic concelebration lasted until 12:25 and ended with the recital of the Angelus.

4. The Meeting of the Vincentian Family in the lobby of the Paul VI Audience Hall in the Vatican.

On the very day of the beatification, at 5:30 p.m., the members of the Vincentian Family present in Rome and the pilgrims gathered in the lobby of the

Paul VI Audience Hall in the Vatican for a fraternal meeting in honour of Blessed Marcantonio Durando. It was thought that around a hundred people would participate but the turnout was much greater: more than 300 persons. It was a very agreeable gathering which took place in a climate of great enthusiasm and joy. The figure of Blessed Marcantonio Durando is certainly the pride and joy of the Vincentian missionaries, of whose family he was a member and of which he was an “executive” and a model of life; of the Daughters of Charity, whom he introduced and spread in Italy, and for whom he was director and animator for almost 50 years; of the Vincentian Volunteers (AIC), whom he guided and launched into new undertakings of charity; but above all of the Nazarene Sisters, of whom he was the Founder and is the Father. Because of this it should be noted that he is the glory in a special way of the Nazarene Sisters. And really, the Nazarene Sisters felt in a certain way the protagonists. It was felt that, together with their Father Founder, we also wanted to celebrate them: to them, who constitute the smallest family, the brothers and sisters of the bigger family addressed their attention. There was a desire to share their joy in seeing the end so long desired finally reached. And, on the part of the Nazarene Sisters, the desire to express their thanks for this sense of fraternity with which they were accompanied in this happy phase of their spiritual experience.

“We come here today to hear about and reflect on Marcantonio Durando. He was a remarkable man, who performed extraordinary works. But I encourage you ... to reflect on a single question: What made Marcantonio Durando not just a remarkable man, but a saint? How did God so transform him that even in his lifetime people said that he was a man of God? Was it his gentleness? Was it the wisdom in his judgment which attracted so many people to seek his counsel? Was it the simplicity and humility with which he fostered the vocations of others like the Daughters of Charity, the Nazarene Sisters, the Ladies of Charity, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Children of Mary and many other groups? Was it his confident trust in God’s providence during the turbulent revolutionary times in which he lived? That is the key question, I believe, for all of us here today: What made Marcantonio Durando a saint? And how can each of us grow to be like him? How can we sing the same song that he sang for God?” After the reflection of the Superior General, there was a desire to present the figure of Blessed Marcantonio, which, to be honest, is not well known even among the Vincentians. Sr. Isabella, a Nazarene Sister, outlined a very short but significant biography of the Blessed, accompanied it with some excerpts from his writings, which were read, interspaced with texts sung by a small choir formed of Nazarene Sisters and Daughters of Charity. A group of Malagasy Nazarene Sisters enlivened the recital with a joyful contribution of Malagasy dances: it was also a way of emphasizing the great development of the community in Madagascar.

5. The Thanksgiving Mass at the Church of St. Gregory VII

On Monday, 21 October, the whole Vincentian community in Rome gathered in the Church of St. Gregory VII for the celebration of a Mass of Thanksgiving for the gift of the Beatification of Fr. Durando, which was also the first liturgical celebration of the feast of the Blessed. Naturally there was the whole Vincentian Family who came to Rome for the occasion. The celebration was presided by Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, assisted by the Superior General of the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity and by the Superior General of the Nazarene Sisters; another 60 priests concelebrated.

“Who has read the newspaper this morning? It is not difficult to imagine the topics which the newspapers report today...,” he began in the homily. “When do the non-Catholic newspapers speak of the saints? ... How many people in Turin know of Fr. Durando? The Church, instead, seeks out her hidden treasures and puts them for people to see. This is the purpose of the Pope in proclaiming so many blessed and saints: to make a show of sanctity which does not make noise, but which sustains the world.” And commenting the text of the gospel just read, he added: “I would like to help you be attuned with the Word of God which we just read ... This page becomes, this morning, a suggestion for us. Jesus wishes that we also, today, praise, bless, give thanks to the Father for all that he accomplished in the life of Fr. Durando, a ‘little one’ in humility. Today our society is different from his time; today, to offer witness is more difficult; it is discouraging. Jesus tells us: ‘Are you depressed? Do you have the perception of not achieving anything? Do you have the feeling that your Congregation is becoming ever smaller, ever less efficient?’ Listen to Jesus: ‘Come to me, learn from me who am meek and humble of heart....’ If you are a saint, you are a gift for the world!” And after he summed up the salient features of the religious and Vincentian experience of Fr. Durando he concluded: “I close with a curious note. When photography was developed, Fr. Durando told the Nazarene Sisters: ‘Do not have yourselves photographed!’ We only have three photographs of him. It is not the exterior image that is important; the interior image is important. Let us take up this morning the invitation that the Blessed renews for us from heaven. Let us not be worried about the external image, let us worry about our interior reality, that which only God sees, and let us look at his witness to try to imitate him in our small and hidden daily life.”

6. The Audience with the Holy Father

The audience granted by Pope John Paul II, on the morning of 21 October, to all the pilgrims present in Rome to participate in the Mass during which the six new Blessed were proclaimed, was the last moment of great emotion experienced by the Vincentians for the Beatification of Fr. Marcantonio Durando. To them, John Paul II offered warm greetings: “A profound missionary yearning defines the life and spirituality of Blessed Marcantonio Durando. I am happy to great Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, and the Fathers of the Congregation of the Mission

and those who make up the great Vincentian religious family, that rejoices for the enrollment of one of their more illustrious members in the list of the Blessed.” To them, after having recalled the spiritual physiognomy of the blessed, he addressed this exhortation: “How much we need today this deep reminder of the roots of charity and evangelization. From the example of Blessed Marcantonio we should learn how to place ourselves in our turn at the service of the poor and most destitute, who are present even in today’s society of well-being.”

II. The Celebrations in Turin

1. 10 December 2002

From number 23 of the former Via della Provvidenza, now Via XX settembre, from Corso Einaudi, where the Motherhouse of the Nazarene Sisters is located, from San Salvatio, which continues to be the Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity, from many other houses of the Missionaries of St. Vincent and the Daughters of Charity of Italy, Nazarene Sisters, Missionaries, Daughters of Charity, friends and co-workers of the Vincentian Family went to the Turin Cathedral in order to celebrate the first liturgical feast of Blessed Marcantonio Durando, fixed on 10 December by John Paul II at the Beatification of 20 October 2002. It was not a huge or spectacular crowd: the city did not feel uncomfortable. It continued its daily workday rhythm. There was no awareness of what several hundred people intended to do: remember the figure of a meritorious personality of Turin, because he was, directly or indirectly, for half a century, one of the most active defenders and protectors of the weakest persons, of the Turin of poverty, and naturally, to make his example and commitment their own again.

The liturgical celebration was presided by Cardinal Severino Poletto, Archbishop of Turin, assisted by Fr. Bruno Gonella, Visitor of the Province of Turin, and by Ripa Buschetti di Meana don Paolo S.D.B., Episcopal Vicar for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Around 70 priests, Vincentians and diocesan concelebrated. During the entrance procession of celebrants and concelebrants, an urn which contains the relics of Blessed Marcantonio Durando was carried up and placed on a small altar erected near the presbytery. Together with the community of Nazarene Sisters, many Vincentians in fact and in sentiment participated in the liturgical celebrations. There were some descendants of the Durando and Vinaj families and of Mrs. Maria Luisa Ingianni, whose miraculous cure, obtained through the intercession of Fr. Durando, made possible the conclusion of the beatification process.

Cardinal Severino Poletto noted in his homily: “Fr. Durando was an extraordinary gift that the Lord gave to Turin, where he passed a great part of his life. It is not really that Fr. Durando is very well known, at least considering the talk of the

people. It is not only because he lived in the 19th century but also because his figure was not sufficiently made known: I make this observation. And now I repeat a consideration that I also made in Rome, that with the canonizations and beatifications this Pope is going to unearth the hidden treasures of the Church, as if to say: ‘Look where sanctity is found, which we ought to imitate and which is often unknown.’ Certainly his confreres know him, as do the Nazarene Sisters. But in general civil society is not knowledgeable about sanctity. And now he seems to say: ‘Look also at this priest, at this religious: without doing extraordinary things, without making miracles, without exciting waves of popular enthusiasm, he still lived in a heroic manner his Christian life of a priest and of a religious.’”

“With the recall of his commitment to work, of the great fruition of his ‘inventions,’ of the particular conditions of culture and time in which he worked, the confrontation with the present is not lacking: the sisters have disappeared from the hospitals and so many social institutions, many initiatives ended, because of the lack of vocations: what a void! And that gives the measure of what an extraordinary gift religious men and women and the religious life are both for the Church and society. Fr. Durando was a holy religious, and through the religious choice he made his way in holiness, above all on side of charity and evangelization. He guided the Daughters of Charity who, first in Piedmont, then they spread throughout Italy. He founded the Nazarene Sisters in 1865. The Vincentians ought to hold high this discourse about charity above all today with the new forms of poverty, and in these moments of great difficulties: the city of Turin suffers the nightmare of thousands of workers who risk the loss of their jobs. Even the Popular Missions, which were a major engagement of the Vincentians in the past, have changed: in the Diocese of Turin, these last for years and they propose to rebuild the fabric of a Christian community. They require a new method of work. The Vincentians should have the courage to be bearers of charity, of truth and of holiness.

2. The Fraternal Meal in San Salvatio

The “after Mass,” or the fraternal meal after that Eucharist, was held in the house of the Daughters of Charity, in the former convent of San Salvatio that had belonged to the Servite Fathers, which Fr. Durando acquired from King Carlo Alberto as the seat of the Provincial House and the first seminary of the Daughters of Charity in Italy: that San Salvatio which was the first root of a tree which became ever larger and which holds the treasure of tens of thousands of souls who within its walls learned to love the neighbour and to serve him/her in the most varying demands. After the meal, before the celebration of Vespers, the recital of “A Saint without a Halo” by Sr. Isabella Battistella, a Nazarene Sister, was again presented in the chapel. It had already been preformed in the lobby of the Paul VI Audience Hall in Rome on 20 October. A documentary prepared by Fr. Vittorino Zerbinati on the houses and activities of the Nazarene Sisters in Madagascar followed the recital.

3. The Veneration of the Relics of Blessed Marcantonio Durando

The body of Fr. Marcantonio Durando, enclosed in a zinc coffin donated by Mrs. Ernesta Racca, his penitent and great benefactor of his works, “as a sign of her and her family’s great veneration,” was carried to the Community’s tomb in the city cemetery of Turin, acquired by him two years previously.

In 1926, when the canonical process began, Fr. Filippo Traverso thought of transferring the body to the Church of the Visitation. The canonical norms and the funeral laws, which foresaw a series of transfers, had to be respected.

On 17 November, the official recognition of the remains was done in the presence only of the municipal doctor, the Superior of the House of the Mission and two Nazarene Sisters. The remains were placed in a small chest, which was carried to a new, drier tomb. On 4 December, the Prefecture authorized their transfer to the Church. Another recognition was done by two medical doctors, Fortunato Lanza and Domenico Borgna, a Vincentian Missionary, who made the examination and description of the remains, which they dictated to the Secretary of the Turin Curia. A niece of Fr. Durando, Flavinia, a cousin, the Honorable Viale, and numerous missionaries, Nazarene Sisters and Daughters of Charity were present. The remains were placed in a zinc chest, which was enclosed in one of wood. A long procession was formed for the transfer: it was really a out-of-the-ordinary spectacle to see, contrary to the usual, a large cortege which left from the cemetery and went toward the church. The urn was carried to the large Chapel of the Passion and, after the celebration of the Mass, was placed in the sepulchre prepared inside the chapel, on the left, near the balustrade.

In 1947 a recognition was made: it was certified that the bones were placed in a sealed zinc box and enclosed in a wooden chest.

Aside from the foreseen fulfilment of the norms, which regulate the process of beatification in Rome, the Provincial Superior of Turin, Fr. Bruno Gonella, initiated, in 2001, the procedure prescribed for the recognition of the mortal remains of the Servant of God. On 12 November 2001, the first inspection of the tomb of the Venerable was done: the chest was transferred to the Relic Room. On 24 November 2001, in the presence of the Archbishop’s Chancellor, the delegate of the Archbishop, the Visitor, some missionaries, the Mother General and two legal doctors, after previous examination, the relics were arranged by the Nazarene Sisters in a new box of zinc, in order to be placed in the new marble monument, located in the Church of the Mission, at the altar of the Crucified. On 27 December 2002, the Relics were inserted inside a block of black marble from Belgium, placed before the altar in the Chapel of the Passion, which opens on the left wall of the presbytery of

the Church of the Visitation, and exposed for the veneration of the faithful. For this occasion, Msgr. Luciano Pacomio, Bishop of Mondovì, the birthplace of Blessed Fr. Marcantonio Durando, celebrated the Mass in the presence of many missionaries, Nazarene Sisters, Daughters of Charity and faithful.