

Marcantonio Durando : The Decree on the Virtues

THE CONGREGATION FOR CAUSES OF SAINTS

Turin

Of the Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God

MARCANTONIO DURANDO

A priest of the Congregation of St Vincent de Paul
 Founder of the Institute of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazarene
 (1801-1880)

THE DECREE ON THE VIRTUES

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15).

These words of the apostle Paul were the norm for the apostolic life of St. Vincent de Paul, a man of action who was never satisfied with mere words. He left this very dynamic rule to his spiritual sons, and to those who carry out any work whatsoever in his Institute. An axiom which this saint suggested to his missionaries was: “Carthusians in the house, apostles elsewhere,” and he added to this: “to become holy, charitable work is necessary.”

Marcantonio Durando was a worthy son of St. Vincent de Paul, who spent the whole of a long life in the service of God, of the Church, of his communities and of the poor. His self-giving was serene and constant. “If I am able to do something good,” he used to say, “I do it; if not, I place the matter in the hands of Providence.”

This outstanding disciple of Christ was born in Mondovì in Piedmont on 22 May 1801 into a prominent and religious family. By the age of eighteen he showed obvious signs of a vocation to the priesthood. He did his philosophy in the diocesan seminary in his hometown and received tonsure and minor orders. He then entered the Congregation of the Mission. His great ambition was to be sent on the Chinese mission. He completed his studies in the theologate in Sarzana and was ordained a priest in the cathedral in Fossano on 12 June 1824.

He volunteered several times for the foreign missions, but his offer was never accepted by his superiors. Instead, he was appointed to the mission team

for parish missions in the rural parts of his own country. He was also named as a preacher for clergy retreats. He was a man of balanced and tireless zeal. He prepared thoroughly.

He was a man of interior life, and he was eloquent. He was therefore successful in injecting new life into these two main ministries of the Congregation of the Mission in Piedmont.

In 1831 he was appointed to Turin as superior of the house. In 1837 he became Provincial, and also Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity in northern Italy. Until his death forty-two years later he governed the Vincentian Province of Piedmont-Lombardy gently and firmly. He took on new works. In 1866 he protected the Congregation of the Mission against oppressive laws. He also renewed religious discipline.

In 1833 he had brought Daughters of Charity from France to Italy. His enthusiasm encouraged a wonderful increase of vocations and works. In 1835 he reestablished the Association of the Ladies of Charity, and his guidance led many very wealthy and noble ladies of Turin to become members. Through the cooperation of these ladies and the Daughters of Charity he created a veritable network of houses permanently open to the poor. These were called "The Mercy Units," and he was their indefatigable champion. Since he himself could not go on the foreign missions he worked enthusiastically for the spread of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In the house in Genoa he established a seminary, called Brignole-Sale, for the formation of future apostles for missions all over the world. (This was in 1856).

Turin was the main field of his ministry. He had a great reputation as counsellor and confessor. He dealt with all matters, even political affairs. The city's archbishop, politicians and prominent persons came to him for advice. King Carlo Alberto wanted to have him appointed bishop, but the Servant of God always avoided this honour through humility.

In 1865, in cooperation with the Servant of God Aloisia Borgiotti, he founded the Institute of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazarene, for young women who, because of their illegitimacy, would not be accepted in other congregations. The breadth of his Sisters, as the main thrust of their service, the care of sick persons in their own homes, day and night; he also recommended care of neglected teenagers.

The end of his busy life, a life full of merit, came on 10 December 1880 in Turin.

During a very difficult period the Servant of God engaged in lively, extensive and effective apostolic activity, energized by great faith. Every day he trusted in God's help and in that of the Virgin Mary. This was joined to unconquerable strength of soul and exceptional prudence.

Faith underpinned everything he did. He drew strength from the Eucharist; it was the centre of his priestly life. He felt greatly drawn to Christ's passion and to the ongoing mystery of the Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's death. He had the trusting attitude of a son to the Redeemer's mother. He liked to meditate principally on her Immaculate Conception, and he took on the direction of the Association of the Children of Mary in the houses of the Daughters of Charity. His hope, his confidence in God and his strength were very obvious at the time of the suppression of religious communities in 1866. At times like that he was accustomed to follow calmly the promptings of Providence. "In the intimacy of our hearts," he used to say, "let us adore God's plans; he allows such great changes in what is happening, things through which, in his own time, he reveals his glory, though we cannot see in advance that moment."

His love for God was total, free from all human considerations, and it showed itself in love of the neighbour, especially love for the Church and the Supreme Pontiff.

The Servant of God was a good father, receiving everyone, rich and poor, the powerful and the voiceless, with great love, kindness and affability.

He loved the Pope, and felt keenly what the Pope had to endure during the period known as the Italian Risorgimento. He wrote to his brother Giacomo, who was a minister in the government: "From the bottom of my heart I long for peace between the civil power and the Church, and I want an end to opposition to the Church and its Communities. Were it not for the Supreme Pontiffs Rome would be like Babylon or Niniveh." In anything with a political dimension he acted with the greatest prudence and instructed his missionaries not to preach any politics other than those of the gospel.

His own way of running things was to blend strength and flexibility, and he used to worry a lot when he was unable to avert some unfortunate happening. He was motivated by sincere simple humility to ask, several times, right up into his final years, to be relieved of his appointments as Provincial and Director of the Daughters of Charity. His major superiors never acceded to these requests, as they were aware of the high quality of his administrative ability.

He was an assiduous, temperate, chaste, just and considerate administrator, and his personal inclination was towards the strictest poverty and

exemplified it. The renewal of religious observance in the Vincentian Provinces was due to his example, and even more so to his advice and warnings.

After his death his reputation did not diminish, but actually increased. Because of this, the Archbishop of Turin initiated the cause for his beatification and canonization, and set up the Ordinary Informative Process, 1928-30. When the Decree on the Introduction of the Cause was promulgated (1941) the Apostolic Process on the individual virtues was carried out in the above-mentioned Curia of Turin. The authority and authenticity of these canonical processes were approved in 1951.

When the *Positio* was published there was the inquiry into whether the Servant of God practised the theological, cardinal and other virtues to an heroic degree. The Theological Consultors gave their opinion in a *Peculiaris Congressus* on 12 January 1971. An Additional Historical Summary was drawn up, and a further *Peculiaris Congressus* was held on 21 September 1978, with a favourable result. The Cardinals and Bishops studied the *Positio* on 27 March 1979. Then there were other special studies. Then on 20 June 2000 another *Sessio Ordinaria* of the Cardinals and Bishops was held, with the Most Reverend Ottorino Pietro Alberti, Archbishop of Cagliari, the *Ponens* of the Cause present, at which it was declared that the Servant of God Marcantonio Durando lived the virtues to an heroic degree.

When a full report of all these matters was finally presented to the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, by the undersigned Prefect, His Holiness accepted the decision of the Congregation for Causes of Saints as ratified, and ordered the Decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God to be published.

When these formalities had been completed, the Most Holy Father summoned to his presence today, the date given below, the Prefect, the *Ponens* of the Cause and myself the bishop-secretary of the Congregation, together with the other persons usually invited and their staff. He solemnly declared:

The Servant of God, Marcantonio Durando, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission of St Vincent de Paul, founder of the Sisters of Jesus the Nazarene, practised the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity towards both God and the neighbour, and also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude, and associated virtues, to an heroic degree, in the case and with the effect in question.

The Supreme Pontiff ordered that this Decree be published in the *Acta* of the Congregation for Causes of Saints.

Rome, 1 July 2000.

+ JOSEPHUS SARAIVA MARTINS
Archiep. tit. Thuburnicensis
Praefectus

+ EUARDUS NOWAK
Archiep. tit. Lunensis
a Secretis

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)