

GASPARE DEL BUFALO

almost a divine oracle

DEPOSITION

of

Fr. Biagio Valentini

at the Ordinary Roman Process

for the Beatification and Canonization of

ST. GASPAR DEL BUFALO

Founder

of the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood

Under the care of

Beniamino Conti

Rome, 1990

PREFACE

Not to be missing from the collection of *Testimonies* already published, namely those of the Ven. Giovanni Merlini and of St. Vincent Pallotti, is the testimony of Fr. Biagio Valentini who, being among the first and most qualified companions of St. Gaspar, was also his spiritual director and his successor as Moderator General of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood.

Valentini's testimony, which we are publishing in its entirety, is important because he acquaints us with St. Gaspar from a point of observation which is altogether very particular to Valentini since he lived alongside him for nineteen years, was his spiritual director for almost eighteen years. Even though Valentini's testimony is less precise than that of Merlini with respect to a chronological narration of facts, it nevertheless has a particularly human flair in his accounting of episodes in which the charismatic figure of St. Gaspar stands out. Many of these episodes will certainly have a savor of newness for those who have read biographies of St. Gaspar.

Valentini's testimony is important likewise because it offers us the opportunity of getting to know close-up one of the first companions of St. Gaspar who was not in the least inferior to the knowledge and holiness of his teacher. Unfortunately, his image has not been given due attention in the history of the Congregation.¹

In order to prepare the reader to be able to take into his hands the pages of the deposition and also get a picture of the personality of Valentini, I have taken the liberty of drawing up a biographical profile of him taken principally from that deposition itself. Then from the reading of this profile, the reader will get an appreciation of the gigantic figure of Valentini and perhaps may feel regretful that such an individual has been so quickly overlooked. Just as Valentini gave

¹ Said of Valentini as is noted in – the circular letter written by the Secretary General, Fr. Giovanni Merlini, on November 26, 1847 in which he announces to the Congregation the death of Valentini:

--- “Fr. Biagio Valentini II Director General of the Congregation”, in E. Rizzoli, *Brevi cenni sulla vita di alcuni membri della Congregazione del Prezioso Sangue*, Frosinone, 1880, 42-70;

--- “D. Biagio Valentini II Director General” in *Nel primo centenario della Congregazione*, Grottaferrata 1915, 169-171.

Other special articles, as far as I know, have not been written, but just short references to him in some books or articles, as for example, M. Colagiovanni, *Ragazzi dell'Ottocento*, Rome 1985; Id. I “Missionandi” a Vallecorsa (*Storia della Casa di Missione di Vallecorsa*), Rome, 1989. This same Colagiovanni has recently discovered some letters of Valentini addressed to Dr. Gioacchino De Sanctis and they are presently located in the communal archives of Patrica and some in the episcopal archives of Gaeta.

In the offing is the presentation of the life of Valentini, being done by Msgr. Giovanni Cittadini, his fellow countryman. Because of the author's accurate research into the archives, the publication has been delayed.

his testimony, other witnesses will have quite a bit to say to people of our time, especially to priests and, obviously, to Missionaries of the most Precious Blood.

In tracing this profile, we will focus on the following points: Valentini's vocation as a missionary; Valentini as a Missionary of the most Precious Blood and as Moderator General of the Congregation. We shall conclude with a brief, spiritual profile after having given a bit about his death.

His Vocation as a Missionary

Fr. Biagio Valentini was born in Porto Recanati (Macerata) on July 22, 1792 of Crispino Valentini and Maria Ragnini, one of the most upright and well-to-do families of the town.

In pursuit of his vocation to the priesthood, he first entered the seminary in Recanati and then in the one of Ancona for his ecclesiastical studies. After his ordination to the priesthood, he zealously exercised it at the nightly oratory and in other small services of apostolic ministry² in his home town.

After he heard St. Gaspar speak at the end of 1816 upon the occasion of a Mission in Ancona³, it was in August of 1817, and precisely August 15 that Valentini met St. Gaspar for the first time in Loreto where St. Gaspar, invited by the diocesan bishop, Msgr. Stefano Bellini, was preaching a Mission which started on the fifth of that month.

Valentini, in his deposition, given after the passing of more than twenty-five years, recalled that encounter: "I made his acquaintance on that occasion after he had preached on the feast of the most holy Assumption in honor of the most holy Virgin. It made a very, very special impression upon my soul so that I felt that I had been listening to a St. Bernardine of Siena or the mellifluous voice of Chiaravalle. Scarcely had that sermon come to an end when I, along with my friend Fr. Anacleto Gigliucci, who knew him before I did, went to pay him a visit in the house, where even though he was covered with perspiration and was quite exhausted from his work, he welcomed me with great courtesy as though we had known each other for a long time. He was scheduled to begin a conference for the clergy of the basilica at the *Ave Maria* hour at which the bishop would likewise be present, but he still attended to me with kindness until the exact time for that conference came up. He did not want me to leave him until I had first made an appointment to return. I was surely surprised when, after such a moving and exhausting sermon, he now went to preach with a refreshed and vigorous mind to a very venerable group of those clergymen along with the bishop who could not give sufficient praise for the instructions that were given, all of them most appropriate for the priests gathered there. They contained sound

² Cfr. Deposizione, p. 33

³ Cfr. *ibid.* pp. 33 and 111-112

doctrine and showed an immense amount of erudition and heavenly unction, going directly into the depths of their hearts as they themselves admitted and that was apparent to me also.”⁴

In all truth, St. Gaspar wanted to engage Valentini likewise for the Mission to be given in Loreto because he had heard that in Valentini’s home town, he had been involved in the work of the nightly oratory, but, this time, Valentini was not able to accept the offer since he was still in the process of convalescing from a serious illness in his chest. In fact, to be perfectly clear about it, a direction issued by Doctor Calvani of Ancona said that he was consumptive and would survive just a few more days. And his own home-town doctor, Dr. Bellini, had forbidden him to take on any demanding work. When he heard the invitation given to him by St. Gaspar, the doctor “was greatly astonished since he was quite aware of how laborious those Missions were. He dissuaded him and informed his parents, begetting doubts in their minds as to whether he should go or not.”⁵ However, two days after their encounter, namely on August 17th, St. Gaspar sent him a certification as an aggregator for the devotion to the most Precious Blood and did not fail to repeat his invitation to participate in at least the upcoming Mission in Recanati.

Attracted by St. Gaspar’s friendship, Valentini secretly aspired to share his own life with him but was not able to come to a decision because of the opposition of his doctor and his relatives. He sought advice from St. Vincent Maria Strambi, Bishop of Macerata, who went to Loreto to meet with St. Gaspar and speak to him. With the permission of his own bishop, Mons. Bellini, he decided to help with the mission that followed in Recanati (August 25 - September 11, 1817), “notwithstanding the desperate wishes of his doctor and the displeasure of his parents and relatives.” In fact, Valentini’s narration continues as follows: “The doctor in charge came to the point of saying: ‘You can go, but within three days you will be dead’. The Servant of God (St. Gaspar) was aware of all of this, but adhering more to the counsel given by the Venerable Strambi as well as his own interior feelings which concurred perfectly with Strambi’s, I drew off to a place apart and together we recited three Ave Marias to the most holy Virgin: ‘Let’s go, he said, in the name of Jesus and Mary, and don’t be afraid!’”

Valentini comments on the decision that St. Gaspar made: “The facts show that he was inspired by God because after fifteen days of that Mission in Recanati and as many more days in Montefano, when I returned to my hometown on my way to another Mission in Civitanova, the doctor in charge was summoned in the presence of my parents who had invited the Missionaries to have a bit of refreshment in their house, and everyone there, including the doctor, declared the I was like a dead man who had resurrected. All were joyful and eager for me to continue on to the Mission in Civitanova which was pending.”⁶

⁴ Ibid. p. 129

⁵ Ibid. p. 130

⁶ Ibid. p. 130. Cfr. Ibid, p. 33

The conquest of Valentini for three Missions did not signify to St. Gaspar that he had completely won over Valentini for mission work nor much less as a member of the Institute of the Missions. So he continued his efforts the following year, 1818. Before leaving Rome to resume his missionary campaign after Easter (ordinarily Lent was reserved for various apostolic activities in Rome), St. Gaspar wrote to him to see whether he wished to return to giving missions with him.

“I sent my answer to him in Rome, that after hearing Easter confessions I did not have the heart to abandon my home town which was lacking a sufficient number of priests to hear confessions there.”⁷

St. Gaspar went back again to his work. “After that, he wrote to me again asking me whether I still wanted to be united with him...My answer to him was: Willingly would I go along with him. Even though my friends and close family were dissuading me, I handled that situation by saying that I could no longer be doubtful about my vocation after the cure that everyone judged to be something prodigious, taking place in me through the intercession of Mary most holy and through the prayers and blessings of the Servant of God.”⁸

During those missions St. Gaspar gently unleashed his final assault to win Valentini over for the missions and for his Congregation. Once again it is Valentini who gives his own narration: “At this juncture in time, the discussions that had begun in Loreto were resumed with reference to our souls, both his and mine as well as my vocation. He was very reserved in trying not to give the appearance that he was its founder and he spoke to me about a Doctor Del Monte, of the Marquis Imperiali, of the Oblates of St. Charles, of the Company of Jesus and other groups so that I would be moved to want to imitate their examples and to do all I could to be of assistance to the diocesan priests in any locale and thus be able, like them, to go out on mission work. Finally, he told me about a certain Fr. Gaetano Bonanni, a Roman, the superior in San Felice in Giano, who had joined up with other companion priests and was doing great work; so, if I wished to do so, I could join with them, and that he would be able to prepare the way. But, then, I indicated to him that while I was in the seminary I had read about the restoration of the Company of Jesus and that I was somewhat stimulated or inspired to become a member there. He said to me that he was also thoroughly a Jesuit and that he too had had the same intentions, but that since he was already priest and a worker, he had to be very careful not to inconsiderately abandon the career which he had assumed. He said St. Philip Neri was accustomed to say that from evil to good it is necessary to step lively, but from something good to something better one must employ mature consideration, since it might be a deceitful thing and then neither the one nor the other will be done. Then he added that I must be grateful for the blessing I obtained from the most holy Madonna in Loreto and the cure that followed. Finally, he

⁷ Ibid. p. 142

⁸ Ibid.

said that he had discussed this matter with an outstanding spiritual director in Rome about my case and about which we had talked in Loreto, and that director stated that the universal good achieved through mission work was something preferable to that of one's hometown and that once one had assumed his career, it was not a good idea to turn back."⁹ Valentini decided to share the missionary life with St. Gaspar and he never turned back.

Thus, it can be said that from the beginning of May 1818, Valentini had dedicated himself fully to mission work without any worry about his own health. He himself gave this testimony: "In support of the truth of the favor obtained through the intercession of the most holy Virgin and the prayers of the Servant of God, it will be sufficient to say that from that moment on, having given myself fully to preaching and hearing confessions during the missions, some of them even more demanding than the earlier ones, I have never again suffered any ailment in the chest whereas before that I had coughed up pus and blood. Then, too, even when climbing up mountain sides and difficult rocky cliffs, I went along those heights singing hymns and praises that we were accustomed to sing during missions, and I did so for miles on end without the least distress."¹⁰

Valentini never turned back not even in situations that were for him very, very delicate. Towards the end of June, 1818, when they were about to initiate the mission in Forlimpopoli, he learned that there were hired assassins who were all set to murder the missionaries and he was there in the company of St. Gaspar.¹¹

In October of 1818, with St. Gaspar he was preaching the mission in Gualdo Tadino. He got word that his own mother was very gravely ill and wanted to see and speak to him. What was he to do? Here is his own sober account of what took place: "Ever since the mission in Serra San Quirico, the news had reached the Servant of God that my own dear mother had become deathly ill. He himself, with great delicateness, gave me this unexpected information, asking me whether I would want to go to console her before her death, since she herself was greatly desirous of this. I replied that I wished only to be, as best as I could, obedient to him and be completely dependent on his advice. Even more dire reports arrived along with even more burning requests from my mother to be with her in her final moments. But, since the mission in Serra San Quirico was just at the most important moment of fervor, I did not want to ruin the work by leaving it. This response of mine pleased the Servant of God and he said: 'Let us recommend her to God and let us have the people offer prayers for her and God will provide.' In fact, when we arrived later in Gualdo Tadino, we continued, along with the people there, our prayers for my dying mother. A few days after the prayers that we offered, we received a letter, addressed to me, from a secular brother who had assisted her, along with the priest, up to the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 142-143

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 130

¹¹ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 150-153

point of my poor mother's death. It said that she had died very, very happy and had yielded her soul into the bosom of God, as we hoped she would, and that before she died she had mentioned some scruples to me at her side and that I had replied point for point to those scruples so that she remained totally relieved and at peace; then she called immediately for my brother who was in the other room and with great feeling of joy said: 'Oh, now I die very happily. Did you see Fr. Biagio who came all the way from Gualdo Tadino to visit me? He just left. I manifested to him some doubts that I had and he answered me so and so. The Lord really wanted to console me and the most holy Madonna has come to my help'. After I received that letter, I gave it to the Servant of God and he, raising his eyes heavenward, joyfully replied: 'Blessed be God who has provided this'."¹²

After the mission in Gualdo Tadino, St. Gaspar sent Valentini to San Felice in Giano as his place of residence to be with Fr. Gaetano Bonanni and other priests. But then another obstacle to be overcome arose. The diocesan bishop, Mons. Bellini, had given Valentini permission to preach some missions, but not to permanently absent himself from the diocese which needed priests and confessors. Hence, he was recalling him to the diocese. This obstacle was likewise hurdled: "Through the services of Monsignor Bellisario Cristaldi, at that time the most holy Auditor and a close friend of Monsignor Bellini, my diocesan bishop, (St. Gaspar) obtained for me the permanent residence in that beloved place of solitude while that good Pastor kept calling me back with great persistence to my home town. The Servant of God himself wrote from Rome to San Felice encouraging the companions there to remain dedicated and courageous in the good work that had been begun. A short while later, Fr. Raffaele Brandimarte joined us there. We all enjoyed the letters that the Servant of God wrote to us for they were like oracles of the divine will. The esteem and veneration, the reputation acquired in his apostolic ministry to the people and for us kept growing more and more because of his virtues which were resplendent and because of the most ardent zeal that burst out at every turn as he went about spreading the glories of the divine name for the welfare of his neighbor."¹³

The requests of the bishop were put to rest, at least out of friendship, but not necessarily the requests emitted by devoted souls who continued deriving benefits from the wise spiritual direction of Valentini. Valentini himself gives us a picture of this other side of the story of his vocation: "Mrs. Eleonora Politi from Recanati wrote a letter to the Servant of God expressing her disapproval for having taken me from my home town. The Servant of God sent her a reply saying that it was a more useful thing for me to be among the number of missionaries than that of being only a particular individual, while pointing out to her that she would not be at all displeased when she would see a Mission House opened right there in Porto di Recanati. As a matter of fact, in the following year 1846 -- [Valentini adds this in confirmation of the truth of St.

¹² Ibid. pp. 165-166

¹³ Ibid. p. 166. In regard to the intervention of Mons. Cristaldi in the resolution of the problem of Valentini's missionary vocation, cfr. Epistolario I, letter #196.

Gaspar's gift of prophecy] – through the beneficence of his Eminence Franzoni, a Mission House was opened in Porto di Recanati, on a piece of land left to me by my father. The house was beautifully erected along with the church, and joined to it was a garden donated by the Commune. At this present time, there are Missionaries in residence to the immense spiritual good of the people there. Thus, the aforementioned Countess Eleonora Politi must have seen verified completely the prediction made by the Servant of God.”¹⁴

A Missionary of the most Precious Blood

In a circular letter dated November 26, 1847, announcing the death of Valentini, Merlini writes as follows: “Having overcome every obstacle and having authenticated his vocation even through extraordinary signs, he was firmly decided. Then, because of his prudence and learning as well as the spotless integrity of his life, Del Bufalo showed him such love and such esteem as to wish to have him as a wonderful companion on the Missions and also to take him as his own spiritual director after the death of Msgr. Albertini. Along with our beloved father, he was occupied in other endless works of the sacred ministry and in every way showed himself to be prompt, tireless and most zealous. He took up residence now in this now in another of our Mission Houses and for not a short period of time was also the President and Teacher in one of our Boarding Schools.”¹⁵

In reality, in the beginning of the missionary vocation of Fr. Biagio Valentini, as also in his life as a Missionary of the most Precious Blood, he showed many, many signs of his distinct learning and sanctity, that were also charismatic. We shall now cite a few.

Previously we mentioned that for Valentini, as well as for the other missionary companions, the words of St. Gaspar were “like oracles of the divine will” (hence the subtitle for this present volume), and St. Gaspar was for them “a true model.”¹⁶ Many times during his deposition does that *obbedienza cieca* to the will of St. Gaspar appear as though it were obedience to God. We shall emphasize the words that express that obedience.

“At the time of the Mission in Sant’Agata, precisely the day of July 2, 1828, around noontime, the sky became so horrible that the people became terrified and as a crowd rushed madly toward our dwelling which was high above that town. Then, the rumblings of thunder began and frequent bolts of lightning which struck many people who were in the market place. One was thought to be dead and this news was brought to the Servant of God. At once, he ordered me to bring the relic of the Holy Cross to the person who was thought to be dead. When I got there, I blessed him with the relic in keeping with the order that I had received, even though, to me, he still appeared to be dead. Shortly after the blessing, he let out a cry, asked

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 273

¹⁵ CPPS General Archives, Folder *Membri della Congregazione Deposizione*, p. 233

¹⁶ *Deposizione*, p. 233.

where he had been taken and then asked for his cloak. When he was told what had happened, he replied that he was unaware of anything and continued asking for his cloak. Once he came to realize the incident more clearly, he grew fearful and said: ‘Poor me, and I was in the state of sin!’ When he became more fully conscious of himself and looked at the articles that he was selling, that is, small trinkets also singed by the action of the lightning bolt, he became penitent and made a sincere confession. That day was, for all the people and also the entire diocese, a reason to send out a special call to God for an amendment of their lives and for penance.”¹⁷

“I recall that when I was in Giano, devoid of money and provisions, and weighed down with debts to the providers of our necessary articles of sustenance, I did not know what to do to get out of that predicament for the maintenance of the community made up of some twenty individuals, missionaries and young men. I wrote this to the Servant of God who was in Rome. He replied that with faith I should bless the stones and I would see wondrous things. I obeyed him and since I had to go to Foligno to make some needed purchases, I opened the little cash box in the presence of Alessandro Pontoni, our helper in charge of finances, and we noticed that in that little container there were only around five paoli along with some half-*paolis* and some *baiocchi*. Pontini said to me: ‘How are we going to manage with that? At least fifty-five paoli are needed to pay what we owe and to provide those things that are needed! So, I again counted the money there and, to the astonishment of myself and Pontini, we found the needed fifty-five paoli! Overjoyed, I left to do the shopping.’”¹⁸

“On another occasion, likewise in Giano, when time came for our meal, there was no wine, nor could any be provided since we were not in an area where it is sold, so, we began with just water. At this time, while we listened to the reading from Rodriguez about the miracle that took place at Cana and the passage that said: ‘*Vinum non habent*’, all of a sudden unexpectedly a burro, bearing a load of wine, entered into the refectory. He was driven by a peasant who had been sent by one of means as an alms. I add that he came into the refectory because in order to get to the pantry in that place it was necessary to go through the refectory itself. This incident aroused both astonishment and joy for the entire community.”¹⁹

“In the mission conducted in Alatri, the now-deceased Fr. Pasquale Aloisi, a priest in that city, approached the Servant of God to be accepted into the Congregation. But, since he was quite advanced in the Servant of God and I, as kind of a jest, took hold of the man in between the two of us, and walked him around in the room. He was relieved of every affliction and eventually was accepted into the Congregation. For many years, he worked in the missions and

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 211

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 230-231; Cfr. also Ibid. pp. 271-272

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 231

died in Sermoneta from ailments of the chest from which he had not suffered when he had all those former attacks on his health.”²⁰

Wherever Valentini was in residence, but especially in southern Lazio, he was regarded as a saint. Fr. Enrico Rizzoli recounts various miraculous occurrences in Frosinone and Ceccano that have been verified.²¹ Fr. Michele Colagiovanni, in his volume *Ragazzi dell'Ottocento*, in which he treats the difficulties faced by the family of Doctor Gioacchino De Sanctis, a doctor in Patrica and a very close friend of Valentini, mentions this very same judgment.²² Also elsewhere, that same author reports facts and testimonies related to the public esteem that was held for Valentini.²³

Valentini's deposition in behalf of St. Gaspar is rich in episodes that manifest his generous zeal²⁴, his benevolence in handling sinners,²⁵ his wisdom in guiding souls. Here is an episode that reveals his enlightened knowledge of souls. In the mission conducted in Cerreto in September of 1818:

“A false devotee, who had heard the Servant of God preach in other missions, was asking, with great anxiety, for him to hear her confession. He summoned me and asked me to hear her confession since he did not have the time. I heard it and to my deep displeasure, I discovered from the whole incident that she had been deceived and was herself a deceiver. Four bishops had directed her without any of them knowing about the other. She had pretended to have the stigmata, visions, ecstasies; she bragged about having infused knowledge. Having gotten to the local tavern, she became intoxicated on the day before I heard her confession. In that tavern, she did some shocking acts of immodesty and boasted about having the power to fly, in a second, a distance of fifteen to twenty miles back and forth. She came with a cunning attitude saying that she wanted to talk to Canon Del Bufalo so that she could find out if the things that she was experiencing were things coming from God or from the devil, otherwise, she was going to go to the Pope. I, after having listened to her on two or three occasions in reference to the conduct of her life, with the help of the Servant of God, I realized that here there was question of a mound of manifest contradictions so that I had to tell her sincerely that her stigmata, her visions, her ecstasies were neither from God nor the devil, but rather from her own spiritual pride and vanity.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 275

²¹ Cfr. E. Rizzoli, o.c. p. 58-59

²² M. Colagiovanni, *Ragazzi*, p. 38

²³ M. Colagiovanni, I “*Missionandi*”, p. 70-73.

²⁴ *Deposizione*, pp. 85 and 150-153.

²⁵ Cfr., e.g., Ibid. pp. 200-201

As a result, the Lord had made her appear at that mission as the soul most in need of help that there could possibly be. Likewise, that this was a sign of his divine mercy, calling out to her to a renewal of life. Then, I said that she should prepare to make a sincere general confession and that she should abstain from receiving communion until she had made satisfaction to divine justice, at least by demonstrating a heartfelt conversion. The woman, almost jokingly, replied that she had undergone any number of tests even from four bishops. To that, I immediately added that this was not for her a question of a test but the prevention of a sacrilege to which I myself could not be a cooperator and so, in the meantime, she should abstain from communion. The more she fidgeted the more evident was her obvious pride. Finally, I simply told her that I did not have time to waste but if she wanted to make a good confession, I was ready to hear her, otherwise I would be waiting for her at God's tribunal, at least on judgment day. If only she would once and for all shake herself free and renounce the hypocrisy that I had discussed with her in the sessions that she and I had. At that point, she broke out into a sneering laughter showing a complete devastation of her spirit of humility. Still, in an effort not to disappoint her, I did not fail to suggest to her spirit that the cure would be something difficult and that we might try again another time. I related to her the incident about a bigotted woman who pretended to observe a perfect fast by not taking any sort of food on Fridays and Saturdays. She was seen, through the keyhole, by one of her grandchildren while she ate preserved ham and drank good wine. In the meantime, she pretended to her spiritual father that she was in a lions' lake etc.

“Finally, arriving at the point of death, after having her life's story written, she was dying in despair. Then, another priest, who had known her well in life, moved with pity, made his way in to see her. Hearing her desperate cries, he went in to comfort her and that miserable woman started shouting out that she was damned if the priest who had known her so well would not hear her confession. The good priest saw to it that her life's story, filled with all sorts of fraudulent items about her confessor and about those who considered her to be a saint, was burned. If she would have a change of mind about all of her acts of hypocrisy and cunning, God would accept that profound, true act of humility in his infinite mercy. But, that poor lady was just too hardened and that poor penitent acted as one who was deranged. I gave her time to reflect since I really wanted to work with her and bring things to an end and, with God's help, to set all things straight. But, no matter what I did, she went into tantrums and cried because of her ruination. I could not achieve any good at all, except toward the end when she seemed to realize that what I was saying was true and not a testing of her. But then, she began to break out in an endless number of curses against me and as many against all missionaries. This made her appear for what she truly was. After forcefully giving her some final possible bits of advice along with an expression of compassion, I concluded by saying to her that I would soon be leaving the area, never to see her again until judgment day and that, if she wished, there was still time for her to be converted. Otherwise, I would weep for her as one who has been lost.”²⁶

²⁶ Ibid. pp.

Valentini was also highly esteemed as a spiritual director both for his knowledge and his own sanctity. For that reason, St. Gaspar, as Merlini also has reminded us, after the death of Msgr. Francesco Albertini did not hesitate to select him as his spiritual director, obeying him blindly. The following item, which Valentini recalls in his deposition in reference to the program of the spiritual direction of St. Gaspar, is significant.

“Every month he would set aside one day which he called a day of retreat in preparation for death. On that day, he would review everything that he had done during that month and on that occasion he repeatedly made a general confession for his own greater peace of mind. From that I was able to note that he had always preserved the stole of his baptismal innocence. One day the Servant of God told me that when he found out that I was not here in Rome, he went to the Caravita to make his confession to a confessor who, in the Servant of God’s confession, did not find enough certain matter for absolution. The confessor asked him in particular whether in the course of his past life he had ever committed any mortal sins. He gave the confessor this reply that this was his usual way of accusing himself under the directions given to him by his spiritual director and that is what he was doing on this occasion. The confessor asserted that it was necessary to know whether that spiritual director was a man furnished with knowledge, experience and prudence. To this, the Servant of God responded that the man was more than well-equipped with those gifts. At that point, the confessor said that he would like to know who it was and he got the reply that it was I. With that, the confessor said that I was a good friend of his, and, without further ado, he would grant him absolution, which he proceeded to do. This incident shows clearly that even if he struggled to find matter in the Servant of God’s confession, he did not succeed.”²⁷

As a matter of fact, according to what was written by Fr. Enrico Rizzoli in his biographical profile of Valentini: “he was judged to be the most intelligent one in asceticism in Rome.”²⁸ Hence, various prelates went to him for advice and different monasteries invited him to give them spiritual conferences. Even Gregory XVI “had charged him with the task of directing that newly-born Institute of Religious Women of the most Blessed Sacrament,”²⁹ where, because of the lack of experience of their former spiritual director, they had lost that tranquillity that is so necessary for the spiritual progress of souls dedicated to the Lord.”³⁰

Valentini also worked along with St. Gaspar in the foundation of the Sisters of the most Precious Blood. He testifies to this himself:

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 233-234

²⁸ E. Rizzoli, o.c., p. 61

²⁹ The residence for these religious women was located in Rome on Via del Quirinale 60, where Valentini also had his residence for a period of time.

³⁰ E. Rizzoli, op. Cit. P. 61.

“The Servant of God, in the beginning of his ministry, for prudential reasons, showed himself to be averse to such foundations for sisters under the title of the most Precious Blood. His main interest was to give a stable foundation to and perfect that of his own missionaries. In the closing years of his life, seeing that his own Institute of missionaries was making progress in their number, in their reputation and in the fruits of their holy work, felt disposed to set in motion, through the assistance of Fr. Giovanni Merlini and myself, work on the Institute for sisters, referred to previously.”³¹

He recalls the part that St. Gaspar and he himself had in support of the efforts of the Blessed Maria De Mattias.

“When I was in the Mission House in Vallecorsa, I received a letter from the Servant of God which charged me to summon the young lady, Maria De Mattias, a well-to-do native resident of Vallecorsa, to give her my blessing and to send her off to Acuto, in the diocese of Anagni, to be a teacher there, where she would do a great deal of good work. I carried out that order and, summoning that young lady Maria to the church associated with that Mission House, I communicated to her, in the chapel, the order that I had received. I gave her my blessing and she promptly departed for the area of Acuto where she actually accomplished much fruitful work in changing completely the way of life for both men and women, the adults and the children in that small town, through the founding of her Institute there, as is attested to presently by the resident Monsignor (Pier Paolo) Trucchi, bishop of Anagni.”³²

Valentini recalls with joy the expansion of the Institute of Blessed Maria De Mattias not only in Italy but also abroad:

“The aforementioned Institute of sisters was blessed by God; we have presently [we are in 1847] the most consoling news of the good work that is being done by them not only in our towns where ten houses are established, but also abroad and in towns in America, that is, in Cincinnati where they work along with our missionaries in the esteem and veneration not only of Catholics but also by Protestants. Their progress in those towns has received the praise also of the present Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX.”³³

Valentini’s name is also associated with the foundation of the Adorers of the most Precious Blood by Brigida Contenta in Patrica³⁴ and with the efforts made for Adorers by Luigia Del Bufalo.³⁵

³¹ Deposizione, p. 274

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cfr. M. Simoni, *Brigida Contenta e le Adoratrici di Patrica*, Rome, 1983.

³⁵ Cfr. M. Paniccia, *La spiritualita' e l'opera di Maria De Mattias*, Rome, 1983, p. 141

Notwithstanding his dedication to a very apostolic life as a missionary of the most Precious Blood, Valentini, with humility, confesses that while the body of St. Gaspar was placed on view in the church of San Paolo in Albano before his burial, he approached him to beg his forgiveness for not having worked along with him as he should have:

“As for me, at the time when he was on view on the bier in the church of San Paolo, I went there to pay a visit to the body of the Servant of God. Kneeling before him, I asked for his pardon for all of my failings and for the irksome acts that I had done throughout all of the time of my life spent with him in the Congregation. I begged him with all my soul to obtain for me the grace of perseverance in all of my duties.”³⁶

Moderator of the Congregation

A year or so after his entrance into the Congregation, Valentini was named “vice Director General”, as is evident from the meeting held in the house in Albano on October 4, 1823. In that office he had to carry out at times some very delicate assignments given to him by St. Gaspar, for example, to write to Fr. Gaetano Zapponi a letter of dismissal from the Institute,³⁷ to intervene in the question of the habit to be worn by the Brothers-in-service, to recall to obedience the house in Benevento.³⁸ Hence, it was almost a natural result that upon the death of St. Gaspar, Valentini was unanimously elected to be his successor as the Director General of the Congregation. In the history of the House in Albano, Merlini wrote:

“On January 12 (1838) they gathered together the votes of this community as well as those of all the other Houses *uti singuli* and they were delivered to Rome to his most Eminent Odescalchi, the Cardinal Vicar of Gregory XVI, by the missionary Merlini, the Secretary General. His Eminence opened all of the votes, read them and after observing a majority, issued the following decree: ‘Since the will of the Founder of the Congregation entitled of Missions and Retreats of the Blood of Christ is clearly known, since the ballots likewise were submitted closed and sealed, which we then opened, numbering thirty from the individual priests belong to the same Congregation, and, finally, since twenty-nine of them favored the Reverend Biagio Valentini, we declare that the election of Fr. Biagio Valentini as the perpetual Director General of that same Congregation is valid and legitimate. We declare that this election, according to the statutes notwithstanding anything to the contrary, declare and confirm it as valid. January 20, 1838. C. Cardinal Odescalchi’.”³⁹

³⁶ Deposizione, p. 284

³⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

³⁹ *Istoria della Casa di Missione e Spirituali Esercizi di S. Paolo di Albano*, pp. 46-47

This unanimity in the election of Valentini, his own vote excepted, was respectful, according to what is affirmed by Cardinal Odescalchi himself, of the will of St. Gaspar who looked upon Valentini as his successor and therefore had made him “trustful heir of all of his belongings.”⁴⁰ In his deposition, however, Valentini does not hide his sentiments of unworthiness in the face of the challenge that is entrusted to him. Consequently, he turns to St. Gaspar: “I went to visit the sepulchre of the Servant of God, but privately, in order to ask him to help me in the office placed upon my shoulders as the superior of this, our Congregation.”⁴¹

During Fr. Biagio Valentini’s term as Director General, precisely on December 17, 1841, the approval of the Rule, so desired by St. Gaspar, was obtained. Also, by the papal brief issued on July 27, 1841, the House and the Church of San Salvatore in Campo in Rome, was assigned to the Congregation, becoming, thereby, the *domus primaria* of the Congregation. It remained as such throughout the entire term of Valentini’s office as Director General as well as for the first eleven years of Merlini’s holding of the office of Director General, that is, until the middle of 1858 when the Congregation received from Pius IX the House and Church of Santa Maria in Trivio on the Piazza dei Crociferi, in Rome. Furthermore, under Valentini’s direction, Houses in Ancona and Porto Recanati were opened.⁴²

During Valentini’s tenure, Fr. Francis De Sales Brunner (1795-1859) was received into the Congregation and in 1843 he brought the Congregation to the United States to the full satisfaction of Valentini who was one who was quite open to the idea of foreign missions.

In regard to this matter of foreign missions, in his deposition, Valentini recounts the following:

“During our mission in Sant’Elpidio, a young priest by the name of Fr. Raffaele Brandimarte, was discovered. Well self-educated, he became a missionary who was very effective and achieved unusual success in the laborious missions that he worked in. He wrote to the Servant of God that he felt inspired to go to India, placing himself under the direction of the Propaganda Fide. However, his request was not heeded, and so he remained only with the merit of his good intentions. As a matter of fact, it was clearly seen that the fulfillment of his going on mission to India was not effectively the divine will but simple a burst of fervor on his part, since he began from the point on experiencing palpitations in his heart. After the death of the Servant of God, he kept urging me insistently to make his wish of going to the foreign missions a reality, particularly since he was a very fervent devotee of St. Francis Xavier. I gave him permission to go to Rome and offer himself to the Propaganda which had already selected him to be the Vicar General in one of those mission areas upon the assistance of a bishop. But, at the moment when he was slated to leave, the palpitations of his heart recurred so that the Propaganda, fearful that he might succumb from the ocean voyage, suspended his departure. He, then, requested as a

⁴⁰ *Deposizione*, p. 96. Cfr. *Ibid.* p. 247

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 284

⁴² Cfr. *Ibid.* 272-273

favor that he be assigned to the city of Frosinone where the climate had proved to be most favorable for him.”⁴³

The Death of Valentini

After being elected Moderator General, Valentini remained almost always in Rome, engaged in various ministries. In July of 1845 he was summoned as an official witness in the Ordinary Roman Process for the beatification and canonization of Gaspar Del Bufalo (he was asked many ex officio questions). His deposition was interrupted twice: the first in September of 1845 until February of 1846. One of the reasons for that interruption was Valentini’s illness. Merlini, in the aforementioned circular letter informs us of the nature of that illness: “a sad case of apoplexy.” It struck him in November of 1845. Hence, when the sessions were resumed on February 11, 1846, the investigators went to the Institute of the Nuns of the most Blessed Sacrament on Via del Quirinale, 60, where Valentini was in residence. The other interruption was required by order of his doctor on June 17, 1846 until April of 1847 when Valentini had to go to Naples for medical treatments.

On the morning of November 21, 1847, Fr. Biagio Valentini had a new attack of apoplexy so that, as Merlini writes in that cited letter, “the evening of that same day, at the second and a half hour (Italian time, 7:45 o’clock astronomical time), comforted by those acts that were called for in his condition, he died.

His body was buried in the church of San Salvatore in Campo, in front of the main altar in two coffins with special indications so that if it would please the Lord to accept him as glorious on earth, his mortal remains could be given recognition.”⁴⁴

A Spiritual Profile of Valentini

Rizzoli reports some of the many principles that the Nuns of the most Blessed Sacrament took down in notes from the spiritual instructions the Valentini gave. We will mention a few:

“Too much perfection impedes perfection.”

“Don’t give a hair to the devil so as to allow him to make a rope from it.”

“We are nothing more than a ragged piece of cloth which God with his own hand embroiders into a magnificent design: we should be careful not to set up any sort of impediment and we should always remember that we are just a ragged piece of cloth.”

“We must not cut off the wings of the dove, that is, the Holy Spirit for He is the master of prayer: one must allow Him to work as he wishes in our souls and we must not hinder him with any sort of artifice.”

⁴³ Ibid. p. 159

⁴⁴ E. Rizzoli, o.c., p. 70

“Whenever in doing a good work something evil interferes, one must quickly put off that evil and one needs to keep doing the good work.”⁴⁵

In the previously-mentioned circular letter dealing with the death of Valentini, in addition to what we have already stated, Merlini delineates Valentini’s spiritual profile as follows:

“One knowingly noticed in him the simplicity of a dove. He was angelic in mode of life; he was benign, affable, gentle and charitable toward everyone and was equally eager to content others as to content himself.” He endured humiliations and contradictions with such a peacefulness and serenity of visage that he was truly imbued with the spirit of DeSales. In short, his life was nothing else than a continuous dedication of himself to the service of God and the salvation of souls. With his penetrating mannerisms, he also captured in Rome the hearts of the people that dealt with him because of his reputation for learning and his holiness. He showed an admirable patience and conformity to the divine will in several dangerous seizures of illness, pleasing God by his endurance. His frequent recommendation of himself to Mary most holy, his daily nourishment of the Bread of the strong, his attention to the reading of the lives of the Saints, his edifying exchange in discussions, all made him look sweetly on any act of bitterness and lightly on any act of suffering. His very death appeared to be nothing other than a peaceful falling asleep.”⁴⁶

As I am presenting this deposition to be printed, we express our desire to have the body of Valentini transferred as soon as possible to the church of Santa Maria in Trivio. Thus, we can bring together again that historical trio – St. Gaspar, Valentini and Merlini – who were the principle instruments of Divine Providence for the foundation, the growth and the development of our Congregation. We will be more than abundantly compensated for the work and the concern that this publication has required.

Don Beniamino Conti, CPPS

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 68-69

⁴⁶ CPPS General Archives, Folder Membri della Congregazione

EDITOR'S NOTES

1. The deposition of Fr. Biagio Valentini is found handwritten in the *Processio Ordinaria Romano* for the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God, Gaspar Del Bufalo. Its official title is: *Sacra Rituum Congregatio, Romana seu Alban. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo, Institutoris Congregationis Missionariorum a Pretioso Sanguine D.N.J.C. Copia Publica Processus Ordinaria Auctoritate hic in Urbe constructi super fama sanctitatis, vita, virtutibus et miraculis d.S.D.*, Vol. I (ff. L-468) and II (ff. 469-932). The Ordinary Roman Process was held between February 27, 1843 and February 24, 1848 and took place in 157 sessions.

2. Valentini's deposition is located in Vol. I (ff. 441-468) and II (ff.469-840). It began on July 16, 1845 and was concluded on June 26, 1847 with two interruptions: from September 4, 1845 to February 11, 1846, the first due to the illness of the Delegate Judge,⁴⁷ then for the autumn vacation, and finally because of the illness of Valentini himself: from June 17, 1846 to

⁴⁷ The first Delegate Judge was the Conventual Msgr. Pietro Francesco Muccioli, titular bishop of Messenia, who, for reasons of health asked, in 1847, to be replaced and flanked by another judge in the cause for St. Gaspar. In the meantime, the Postulator for Gaspar's cause, Fr. Francesco Verili, had recourse to the Cardinal Vicar with the following petition: "Most eminent and very reverend Prince, since Monsignor Pier Francesco Muccioli, bishop of Messenia and Delegate Judge appointed by your most reverend Eminence in the process for the Servant of God Gaspar Del Bufalo, must for reasons of health leave Rome, the postulator of that cause beseeches you most reverend Eminence to deign to name another subject as a co-judge so that the process for the Servant of God may continue without delay [f. 783]. On May 1, 1847, Mons. Francesco Pichi, titular bishop of Eliopoli, was assigned as a co-judge.

May 10, 1847. Valentini was advised and ordered by the doctors: ‘you must go to Naples for the baths and be cured of a perilous infirmity.’⁴⁸ Valentini’s deposition is contained in session 67 to session 129. Some of those sessions were held in the headquarters of the Vicariate, St. Apollinare (sessions 67-86) ; July 16-August 29, 1845 – ff. 441-595. Others were held in the Convent of Santa Maria della Pace (sessions 87-90): September 1-4, 1845 -- ff. 596-628; others were held on the Via del Quirinale 60, where Valentini was lodged in the place of the Nuns of the most Blessed Sacrament (sessions 92-110); February 11 to May 29, 1846 – ff. 630-755); still others were held in Valentini’s room in the Mission House of San Salvatore in Campo in Rome (sessions 111-114): June 12-16, 1846 – ff. 756-777: sessions 116-129: May 10 to June 26, 1847 – ff. 784-840.

3. The text of the *Copia Publica*, the handwritten copy of the process, has been faithfully reproduced. Some sentences that were too long have been shortened; the punctuation has been adjusted and corrected and the spelling has been brought up to date. A certain uniformity in the use of capital letters has been adopted. We have not reproduced the juridical formalities observed in the opening and closing of the sessions, nor the questions placed by the investigators. The division into chapters, the titles, the underlinings and the notes are all editorial.

4 The originals of the *Copia Publica* for the Process are preserved in the General Archives of the Congregation of Missionaries of the most Precious Blood.

5. When references are made to the volumes of the *Epistolario di San Gaspare*, they are as follows:

- Epistolario, I* (1808-1820) Rome 1986
- Epistolario, II* (1821-1823) Rome 1986
- Epistolario III* (1824-1825) Rome 1987
- Epistolario IV* (1826-1827) Rome 1987
- Epistolario V* (1828-1830) Rome 1988
- Epistolario VI* (1831-1833) Rome 1989
- Epistolario VII* (1834-1835) Rome 1990

⁴⁸ Here is the testimony of Fr. Beniamino Romani: “I , the undersigned Missionary and Procurator General of the Congregation of the most Precious Blood, swear that the Director General of the same Congregation left Rome on the 17th day of June 1846 upon the advice and order of the doctors to get to Naples and there to undergo baths and to be cured of a perilous infirmity and that he returned to Rome at the end of April of 1847. Sworn to in Rome on May 6, 1847. Beniamino Romani, Procuaator General of the Congregation of the most Precious Blood”. [782v]

THE DEPOSITION

Preliminaries

The Testimony

My name is Biagio Valentini, the son of Crispino and Maria Ragnini, both deceased. My hometown is Porto di Recanati, diocese of Recanati. I mentioned that my age is fifty-four. I am a priest and the Superior General of the Congregation of the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood. I am supported by that same Congregation.

By the grace of God I have frequented both sacraments {confession and communion} from my earliest age, also when I was in the seminary, first in Recanati then in Ancona. After being promoted to the priesthood, I had the custom of celebrating holy Mass daily.

I have been directed to come to this location by a citation delivered to my by a messenger of the Vicariate, Eugenio Nobili, for the purpose of being examined in reference to the cause of the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Fr. Gaspar Canon Del Bufalo.

I know that the funeral eulogy for the Servant of God was given by one of our Congregation and, handled by the Reverend Fr. Cristoforo Frioli who was its compiler, has been sent to be printed by the Contedini firm of printers. I recall that, while the Servant of God was living, various defenses of the *Metodo delle Missioni* written by the Servant of God were made along with satirical criticisms that resembled those that were made against the Venerable Fr. Paolo Segneri the Elder, printed in Florence and forbidden by the Holy See. The above-mentioned defenses were written and composed by Reverend Fr. [Francesco] Amici, an Olivetan priest. As for the author of those satirical criticisms, I do not know his name. It might well have been a person from Camerino since from there a hand-written copy of those criticisms was sent to me. Furthermore, since we were ocular witnesses of the life of the Servant of God, both I and Fr. Giovanni Merlini have submitted memoranda which have served as a basis to be used in this present process. In addition, upon the encouragement of their Eminences Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Falzacappa, now deceased, and [Giovanni] Franzoni, still living, we have drawn up a compendium of the life of the Servant of God. It is hand-written but still not edited and is presently under the care of one whom I do not know. Finally, I remember that at the beginning of this current year a layman of French origin by the name of Carlo Maria, with whom I am acquainted because I have been in Rome with him several times, told me that he had just returned from France and was determined to do me a favor. He presented me with some bronze medals minted in France. On one side, there was the image of the Savior sweating blood in the Garden and on the other side, the figure of the Servant of God. Also, he had other medals, made of the same metal, also minted in France, which had, on one side the image of three hearts “Jesus, Joseph and Mary” and on the other side the image of the Servant of God. I expressed my disapproval that medals had been coined with the image of the Servant of God along with those sacred mysteries. I made him understand how improper was the distribution of those medals. To this, he replied that in France those medals were in the process of being made by the thousands. I replied with my disapproval and my complete rejection of it. I enjoined him to cease distributing them since it was something extremely irregular. Likewise, I know that in France, after the death of the Servant of God, public flyers were published in which miraculous occurrences that had taken place in various towns and at different periods of time appeared, due, as it was supposed there, through the intercession of the Servant of God. The aforementioned recollections, defenses and the compendium referred to, I am certain are the products resulting from the edification of the faithful having the same intention and the same reason with which we see being published other recollections made of young people, of men, both lay and ecclesiastical,

who in their lives left examples of Christian piety and virtue. The satirical criticisms are the antithesis to the edification of the faithful and I am sure were written with a malign feeling, a feeling of hatred that so many evil people have smoldering in their hearts against the Church and the servants of God whose virtues they were like to obscure.

I am not induced by any human goals in the deposition which I will make in this process. Obedience to the commands of your most illustrious and reverend lordship is the reason which induces me to make this deposition. Consequently, I shall testify to those things which pertain to the Servant of God in accordance with my knowledge of them and my conscience, describing things that are certain as certain and things that are for me doubtful, as doubtful.

I first got knowledge of the Servant of God, Fr. Gaspar Canon Del Bufalo. Apostolic Missionary, from the beginning of 1816 when he came to conduct the Mission in Ancona along with Monsignor, later Cardinal, Odescalchi who is now deceased, Monsignor Don Antonio Piatti, likewise now deceased, Canon Fr. Antonio Muccioli, also deceased, Fr. Andrea Butirroni, still living, and Monsignor {Pietro Antonio} Cristianopoli who was moved from Loreto, but is now among the deceased. At that time, I was assured by my superiors and teachers that the aforementioned Servant of God was a man full of zeal, endowed with a most affable manner which attracted everyone to the grace of God, to doing good work, to being virtuous, especially among the clergy. Together with the other Roman priests who were with him in those exhausting labors, he displayed unselfconsciousness and a great unaffected humility. That was what inspired them as well as his kindness and compunction. There were whisperings among the people that they were hidden saints and that because of their zeal and attractiveness, they would have been sufficient to convert not only Ancona but also Geneva. As a result, thousands and thousands of words of praise arose for those Roman priests as well as for the Servant of God, thus giving glory to the Lord because of these faithful servants. In 1817, he himself, invited by Monsignor {Stefano} Bellini, came to Loreto to conduct the mission for the people and a retreat for the clergy. With him was Canon {Antonio} Muccioli. It was then that, through the intervention of the priest Fr. Anacleto Gigliucci, my friend, that I made the acquaintance of the person of the Servant of God who had heard that in my hometown not too far from there, we were taking care of the nightly oratory as well as in other small functions of the apostolic ministry. He asked me whether I would like to take part in the mission in Loreto along with him. Because of the ill condition of my health, I begged to be excused. But he kept insisting that at least I should come to visit him often while he was conducting the mission. With the advice of Monsignor {Vincenzo} Strambi, who was present there, he wanted to get me participate in the mission in Recanati which was upcoming after the one in Loreto. From that moment, I got to know and work with him until the time of his death. I simply felt moved to be with him in the ministry of giving missions.

I feel deeply within myself a devout affection and esteem for the Servant of God because of his virtuous life which I witnessed cautiously becoming resplendent in him. In whatever way that I can legitimately bring about his beatification and canonization, I feel that I must do so as

the Superior of the Congregation which he founded. For the sake of pure truth and for the glory of God, I desire that he be raised to the honors of the altar. I have been and I always will be submissive to the dispositions of the Holy See.