

## **BL. SEBASTIAN VALFRÉ OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY IN TURIN**

Blessed Sebastian Valfré was the first of St. Philip Neri's followers to be raised to the honors of the altar. He was an ardent forerunner of the season of priestly holiness that Piedmont experienced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, producing St. John Bosco, St. Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, St. Joseph Cafasso, St. Leonard Murialdo, and Bl. Frederic Albert<sup>1</sup>, to mention only the best-known priests. His annual liturgical memorial provides the occasion to revisit the origins and development of the Congregation of the Oratory in Turin. The Office of the Procurator General offers its congratulations for the invaluable work of reorganizing and taking inventory of the Congregation's Archives that was recently commissioned by the Fathers in Sara Valentino. The Archives' inventory may be accessed on the Congregation of Turin's website ([www.sanfilippotorino.it/archivio](http://www.sanfilippotorino.it/archivio)).

### **1. The Congregation of the Oratory and its church**

Bishop Alessandro Crescenzi<sup>2</sup> was the Apostolic Nuncio at the court of Charles Emmanuel II of Savoy. He came from a noble Roman family that was close to St. Philip Neri<sup>3</sup>, and he promoted devotion to the Saint, inspiring a particularly zealous young priest, the theologian Pietro Antonio Defera, to start a foundation of the Congregation<sup>4</sup> in Turin. He was assisted by the musician Fr. Ottaviano Cambiani<sup>5</sup>. They spoke to the people of Turin about St. Philip Neri for the first time in 1648, in the little church of San Michele outside the walls, very near Porta Palazzo; and for the first time the people of Turin venerated the image of the Saint<sup>6</sup> that was given to the new community by Bishop Crescenzi. The Oratory's spiritual exercises began to draw many people, due above all to the preaching of Fr. Defera who "spoke directly to the ears of the heart of his listeners"<sup>7</sup>.

The beginning was difficult, but Fr. Defera made it memorable by living a life that was totally dedicated to the Lord and to the ministry, in the spirit of St. Philip Neri, visiting hospitals and prisons. The Congregation received canonical approval from Archbishop Giulio Cesare Bergera on 26 January 1649, and subsequently from a brief issued by Pope Clement XI<sup>8</sup>.

There is a chronicle in a manuscript that describes the beginnings in this way: "Their assets were their virtue and their confidence in God. They were poor in material goods but rich in devotion. They looked after their tiny church with generous hearts and fervor of spirit".

But one should consider the very large plot of land adjoining the Blancardi home near the Church of San Francesco d'Assisi, where a small church and attached Oratory were quickly built.

Six boarders were preparing to become members of the Congregation when Fr. Defera died at the young age of 34 on 11 September 1650. He was struck down by polio that he contracted after walking through a downpour on his way back to Turin from Chieri. The boarders abandoned the young institution, and only Fr. Cambiani remained. He was a spiritually gifted man of extraordinary simplicity, which endeared him to everyone, including the Princes of the House of Savoy. He stayed to

shore up the Oratory as it followed its destiny, although he was not suited to be a preacher. He died on 15 April 1655, a little more than four years after Fr. Defera's death. In 1651 the subdeacon Sebastian Valfré had joined him, and he is the one who can truly be called the Congregation's founder. He was quickly joined by other outstanding men, nearly all of whom were enrolled in the Theological College at the University: in 1653, Francesco Amedeo Ferrero di Ormea, a canon and civil lawyer († 1709)<sup>10</sup>; in 1654, Giovanni Ludovico Romagnano da Santa Vittoria († 1665); in 1656, Alessandro Capris from Turin († 1675); in 1657, Michel Antonio Tenivella († 1662); and many other fine men who are mentioned by Marciano in Vol. 5 of his *Memorie Historiche*.

Since so many of the faithful were coming to meetings at the Oratory, the place in Via S. Francesco was quickly outgrown. Fr. Lorenzo Scotti donated the use of his own house to the Congregation; it was located on Borgo Po. But a short time later, the royal regent Duchess Marie Christine of France wanted the Oratory Fathers to administer Corpus Domini Church, thinking that they were a gift from God that was being wasted outside the city walls. The city fathers and the Archbishop agreed, and so on 4 December 1653 the Oratory Fathers took possession of Corpus Domini Church. They arrived in procession from their residence on Borgo Po, accompanied by the municipal authorities, musicians, and a huge crowd of people who were organized by the Archbishop, the Duchess, and her son Charles Emmanuel II. But the parish house was too small to house twelve priests and proved inadequate for the Congregation's needs. So after a year, the Fathers returned to their place on Borgo Po where they ministered in the church that had been built by Prince Maurice of Savoy.

But the people of Turin, who had rejoiced that the Oratorians were at Corpus Domini, demanded that they return to their ministry in the city. The Fathers considered San Eusebio Church<sup>11</sup>, which was located around the corner of today's Via Santa Teresa and Via XX Settembre. But they had to wait, because in 1665 the parish priest, Fr. Lanterno, succeeded Fr. Pier Gioffredo of Nizza, who then returned to the parish until 1763, when he handed it over to two Oratory priests.

The entry of the Oratory Fathers into Corpus Domini Church had been solemn and triumphal, and they were supported by the Princes, the city's leaders and the people. However, the entry into San Eusebio was a triumph of humility which edified and moved the people of Turin. The priests themselves, led by Fr. Valfré, carried their furnishings. Assisted by three novices, Fr. Valfré carried on his own back the painting of St. Philip that had been the gift of Bishop Crescenzi.

People of all social classes attended services at San Eusebio, and many times the Princes joined the people there. Eminent men came to meetings in the Oratory, and soon it was necessary to build larger venues.

When Charles Emmanuel II became ill, he called Fr. Valfré and Fr. Ormea to his bedside<sup>12</sup>. The Congregation received the gift of a sizeable piece of land for the construction of the new church, a part of the city's expansion toward the east but still within the walls. After the Duke's death, the royal regent Duchess Maria Giovanna Battista confirmed her husband's gift in a legal document, and on 17 September 1675 (one hundred years after the canonical erection of the Congregation of the Oratory in

Rome), the cornerstone was solemnly blessed by the Archbishop in the presence of the Duchess. It bears this inscription:

MARIA GIOVANNA BATTISTA  
DUCHESS OF ALBERGUINN AND QUEEN OF CYPRUS  
MOTHER AND TUTOR OF VICTOR AMADEUS II  
BELOVED CONSORT OF CHARLES EMMANUEL II  
AFTER SEEKING DIVINE COUNSEL AND IN FULFILLMENT OF A VOW  
PIOUSLY FOUNDED  
THIS CHURCH AND RESIDENCE  
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE PRIESTS OF THE ORATORY  
17 SEPTEMBER 1675

The architect Antonio Bettini from Lugano, Switzerland, designed one quarter of the residence and Oratory. In 1679 work was begun on a magnificent church designed by Guarino Guarini, who was famous for his bold architecture in the Baroque style. Generous donations permitted the church to be completed according to the grand and beautiful plan. The worrisome and uncertain political situation (just one example being the siege of Turin in 1706) caused construction to lag; when it picked up again, the new plan of Giovanni Battista Barocelli was used. The marvelous and unbelievably high dome had already been erected, supported by thirty-six columns of black marble from Corno. But on 26 October 1714, whether due to poor construction or the unrelenting rains that autumn, the dome collapsed, damaging the entire edifice. Fortunately there was only one casualty, because one of the priests had invited the workers to attend Mass in the nearby Oratory church. This church stood next door to the Academy of Sciences, a Jesuit college for sons of the nobility. This elitism was much criticized; the people had a saying: "If Jesus weren't strong, Philip would kill Him!"

The Oratorians were firm in their determination, and waited until someone presented a superb plan<sup>13</sup> – which was modified, since it was a bit too expensive. Fr. Filippo Juvara (1768-1736) had just arrived in Turin, summoned by Victor Amadeus II, who had become King of Sicily in 1713 and wanted to meet him. Fr. Juvara was named the King's Chief Architect, and in this capacity signed off on the plan for the church of St. Philip. The framework of one part of the sanctuary was still standing. In 1722, the two principal side chapels were built, and the Fathers began to officiate at liturgical services in the church. It was completed fifty years later: on 26 May 1722, the feast of St. Philip Neri was solemnly celebrated there; he had been proclaimed a co-patron of Turin in 1695.

Construction came to a halt when a decree by the French government (13 April 1801) dissolved the Congregation and sent the Fathers to a house which eventually became a barracks for the Imperial Guard. Only a few priests stayed to care for the parish. Yet if the Congregation of the Oratory was among the first to be suppressed, it was also one of the first to be restored when Victor Emmanuel I returned to Turin in 1814, after the fall of Napoleon. But only a section of the community's residence was given back. Work was begun anew in 1823 to complete the two side chapels of St. Lawrence and St. Philip. In 1835, with the help of the

King, the Turin City Council and some generous donations from private individuals, the porch of the church was erected, followed by the magnificent sacristy in 1850. But this new building phase was only a short interlude; in the turmoil of Italian unification, the Royal Decree of 29 May 1855 mandated the confiscation of a sizeable portion of the church's goods. And when unification of Italy (excepting the Papal States) was achieved in 1860, part of the huge city block that belonged to the Congregation was appropriated for various other purposes<sup>14</sup>. The Crispi laws of 17 July 1890 handed over the financial foundations to the state Ministry of Charity, and they have been administered by that office ever since<sup>15</sup>. In 1891, the façade and the monumental porch front designed by G. Talucchi were completed by the engineer Camuso. Lanfranchi composed an epigraph that sums up this history; it is located on the front of the church:

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. EUSEBIUS  
LOCATED HERE, NOT FAR FROM THE VERY RAMPARTS OF THE CITY,  
ITS WALLS HAVING JUST BEEN ERECTED,  
WAS RUINED BY THE COLLAPSE OF THE DOME IN THE YEAR 1714.  
THE CITIZENS, UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE RELIGIOUS OF ST. PHILIP, REBUILT IT  
ACCORDING TO THE DESIGN OF FILIPPO JUVARA IN THE YEAR 1772,  
ADORNING IT WITH A PORCH IN THE YEAR 1835.  
THE HOLY PRIEST GIUSEPPE DELFINO  
EMBELLISHED THE CHURCH WITH A MARBLE FAÇADE AT HIS OWN COST  
IN THE YEAR 1891,  
THE FOURTEENTH OF THE SACRED PRINCIPATE OF LEO XIII P.M.

In the "Historical Accounts" which Sara Valentino donated to the collection in the Congregation's Archives, one reads: "On the one hand, until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Oratorians had been privileged participants in the life of the Royal Court of Savoy. On the other hand, they paid for this privilege with unconditional fidelity [ . . . ] The Oratorians' apostolic vocation was always energetically challenged, whether from within or from outside the Congregation. Their versatile activities were carried out in a variety of ministries: preaching, counseling, spiritual direction, material help for the poor, visiting the hospitals and prisons, and especially the formation of youth in all its aspects. Here are just a few examples: Fr. Felice Fontana's important initiative of the Charitable Institution for the Education of Beggars in 1776; the construction of San Felice Oratory near Angeli Custodi (Guardian Angels) parish in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in 1904, the founding of an oratory and orphanage by Fr. Giovanni Domenico Peretti in the Millefonti district. [ . . . ] If since the beginnings near the Oratory headquarters were found confraternity residences and catechists' meeting places, in the course of history these multiplied and developed, to the point that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century they reached the point where they are today: the Lay Oratorians, a branch of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, a chapter of the Apostleship of Prayer, all the various branches of Catholic Action, a women's chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and probably other associations and activities of which we have lost track. [ . . . ] The Oratory tradition provided the archetype for successful expansion that saw oratories attached to nearly

every parish. It is superfluous to recall the importance that this became as a point of reference for the Catholic tendency to form associations, for their recreational and athletic activities, and for the support they gave to the dynamics of social relationships within city neighborhoods. Although one could say that this model of participation was especially prevalent with youth groups, it reached its apex in years gone by. In 1986, San Eusebio Church (or San Filippo Church, as it is commonly known in Turin) was deprived of its parochial status in the course of a reorganization of parishes. This limitation of its situation in the neighborhood has partially diminished its potential to attract members. There is at present a dispute about the exact definition of what belongs to the State and what belongs to the Congregation. In the areas that pertain to the Congregation, there are in place many cultural activities and associations: a music school, practice rooms for music groups, concerts, an amateur theater, a tri-annual magazine; cultural associations; a library and archives open to scholars; and a museum of contemporary applied arts. This many-sided availability demonstrates that the Oratory of Turin, even in the present day, is as open as ever to providing diverse and varied opportunities to the community, but with the expectation that these opportunities be an opening to a more profound spiritual search.

## **2. Bl. Sebastian Valfré and the Shroud of Turin**

Much has been written about Blessed Sebastian Valfré (1629-1710)<sup>16</sup>, and the third centenary of his death provides yet another occasion to shed light upon the wide range of his works. This brief sketch is limited to giving an account of his devotion to the Holy Shroud; its Exposition in 2010 will coincide with the third centenary of Bl. Valfré's death.

He was born of a humble family in Verduno in the diocese of Alba on 9 March 1629. Despite hardships and privations, he completed his studies successfully, first in Alba, then in Bra, and finally in Turin, where he worked as a secretary to support himself. Sebastian was poor, and so the poverty of the Congregation he wanted to join did not put him off. On the contrary, he considered that situation more suitable for making an unreserved donation of self. He loved that community with all his heart, and devoted himself to the humblest tasks, while at the same time undertaking pastoral ministry with incredible dedication, following in the footsteps of Fr. Defera. He was perfectly formed in the spirit of St. Philip, and enthusiastically lived that spirituality for the rest of his life. He died at the age of eighty on 30 January 1710, in his little room that was crammed full of scholarly papers (he earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Turin in 1656) and stacked high with packages of clothing and other necessities for the poor, whom he loved and doted upon with the dedication of a faithful servant. He assisted the dying Sovereign, personally nursing him and performing the humblest duties. Even in his own last illness, Fr. Valfré displayed his faithfulness to his duties. On 24 January he had preached to the monks of Santa Croce and then had gone straight to the prisons to console those condemned to death. He returned to the house, hurrying so he would be on time for Eucharistic Benediction, remaining on his knees during the service. Then he went immediately to the cold Oratory house for community exercises. The next morning he awoke with

a fever, but he celebrated Mass and heard many confessions. Afterwards, however, he had to go to bed. His few remaining days on this earth were taken up with attending to the continual visits paid him by his penitents and friends. He died about eight in the morning on 30 January. When his body was laid out in the church, all of Turin wanted to say goodbye to the priest who had trudged the streets and squares of the city for sixty years, teaching catechism and helping all sorts of poor people with the same dedication he had shown at Court in his office of Confessor to the Royal Family. He inspired courage and gave a witness of Christian charity among those in the prisons, in the hospitals, and in the citadel and its bastions during the war.

A man of prayer and contemplation, he drew his zeal for preaching from his fine intellectual training and fervent spiritual experience. He began his preaching of the Gospel in the Oratory chapel of Casa Blancardi, where he later served as prefect and provost. His services were constantly requested by convents and monasteries, parish churches, and various charitable institutions, and he never refused to serve their needs. In 1694 he celebrated the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Turin; this was the first time the feast was celebrated in Italy, and perhaps the first time in the world. The feast was officially instituted one hundred years later<sup>18</sup>.

His desire to proclaim the Word of God also took him outside his usual orbit of ministry. From the spirituality of St. Philip he had learned how to speak familiarly with people, with words that 'the simple' could understand, as his first biographers recall. He met with all types of people in the streets and squares. For forty years he taught catechism to wine merchants and their customers in Piazza Carlina. He would begin with a little group, speaking about some interesting topic and then answering questions from those who became involved in discussion. Young people were also his field of mission; among his very worthwhile writings<sup>19</sup> he left behind a catechetical text<sup>20</sup> that was used by the Church for a long time.

In the light of his dedication to this ministry of preaching and teaching, one must consider how little time Bl. Sebastian had for other activities. But he was no less outstanding as an Apostle of charity. He was aware of the people's problems and needs, particularly those of the poor due to his direct contact with them. He took an active part in all the charitable projects that were flourishing in Turin, but above all he was the one who personally dedicated himself to taking care of so very many people in need. In doing so, he captured Turin's heart. It was the soldiers on night-watch who were the first to give testimony about how often he could be seen traipsing through the streets at night, hoisting the raggedy poor upon his shoulders and taking them to some shelter, or stealthily climbing the staircases of wretched houses to drop off packages of food and clothing outside their doors. There was no category of needy people that was not the beneficiary of his charity.

The esteem in which he was held at Court, where the Duke had especially entrusted the spiritual formation of his children to Fr. Valfrè's care<sup>21</sup>, gave him the opportunity to develop programs of social and political action. This was extensively researched by Giovanna Olgiati for her doctoral studies at the University of Rome<sup>22</sup>. As one of the Duke's most trusted counselors, he reminded him in writing that justice should come before charity, and in this way Fr. Sebastian exercised a

profound influence on Savoyan society at a time tormented by war, legal conflicts, and difficult relations with the Jewish and Waldensian minorities.

The relationship between the Court of Savoy and the Apostolic See was complex, and Fr. Valfré realized the impelling need for the Church's diplomats to receive a training that was spiritual as well as cultural. And so he suggested the establishment of a school of formation to train ecclesiastical diplomats. The Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy has not forgotten the work he inspired: on the occasion of the Academy's third centenary, which was solemnly celebrated in the Vatican Basilica on 26 April 2001, Fr. Valfré was remembered<sup>23</sup>.

On 15 July 1834, Gregory XVI inscribed Fr. Valfré's name in the rolls of the Blessed. For many years, the chair in which he sat while teaching catechism had a place next to the altar where Bl. Sebastian's remains are interred. From that chair, Fr. Valfré seemed to be constantly offering his invitation: "It's time for catechism."

Fr. Valfré's had a special opportunity to express his well-known devotion to the Shroud of Turin during the Exposition of 1 June 1694. Since 1685, the Shroud had been enshrined in the chapel of SS. Stephen and Catherine, at the end of the left aisle of the Cathedral<sup>24</sup>. On this occasion it was moved to its new sumptuous chapel that Guarini had constructed especially for it. Fr. Valfré wanted to replace the linen backing that had been sewn onto the Shroud by the Poor Clares of Chambery, because it was old and worn out. On 26 June, in the presence of Duke Victor Amadeo and Duchess Anne, Fr. Sebastian Valfré was getting ready to do some sewing that would reinforce the Shroud's patches and stitching. He was so moved that he shed some tears upon the linen Shroud, just as St. Francis de Sales had done some years earlier. The Duke asked the priest to 'quietly' pull a few short threads from the cloth, and he gave them to Fr. Sebastian to place in a golden reliquary shaped like a heart; from then on, the Sovereign always carried this on his person<sup>25</sup>.

While Valfré was living in Turin, there were a number of expositions of the Shroud: in 1661, when Fr. Agostino Buzzuomo, Superior General of the Theatines, preached the devotions; in 1663 on the occasion of the marriage of Duke Charles Emmanuel II to Françoise d'Orleans, daughter of Gaston, Duke of Orléans and nephew of the French King Louis XIV<sup>26</sup>; in 1664 when Fr. Domenico di San Tommaso, the oldest son of Sultan Ibrahim and Sultanness Zafira, came to Turin (his original name was Osman; he died at the age of 35); in 1665 on the occasion of Duke Charles Emmanuel II's second marriage, to Maria Giovanna Battista of Nemours, daughter of Charles Amadeus of Savoy, Duke of Nemours (she became the second 'Madama Reale' when her son Victor Amadeus II became king); in 1668, as can be inferred from a speech given by Fr. Deza; in 1672, as mentioned by Fr. Amoretti; in 1674 "in order to solemnly celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Shroud on 4 May with the customary Piety and Devotion"; in 1683; in 1685 to commemorate the wedding, the previous year, of Duke Victor Amadeus II with Anne d'Orléans, granddaughter of King Louis XIV of France and daughter of Duke Philippe d'Orléans; in 1706, when the Shroud was taken to Palazzo Salmatoris on Via Cherasco in Genoa and handed over to the French under the command of the Duke of La Feuillade, who was preparing to lay siege to Turin; and on the following 2 October when the Holy Shroud was returned to Turin.

In the Congregation's Archives there is (724) a *Dissertazione Istorica della SS.a Sindone che fondatante si giudica composta e dettata dal Beato Sebastiano Valfré Indirizzata alle principesse figliuole del Duca Vittorio Amedeo II, poscia re di Sardegna*. We plan to publish this text very soon, but for now let us conclude with Bl. Valfré's famous words regarding the Shroud: "The Cross received the living Jesus and gave Him back to us dead; the Shroud received the dead Jesus and restored Him to us alive"<sup>27</sup>.

**Edoardo Aldo Cerrato, C.O.**

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<sup>1</sup> Federico Albert (1820-1876) was headed for an important career being planned for him by his father. He was inspired to become a priest while he was praying in the Church of St. Philip, near the altar of Bl. Sebastian Valfré. In the autumn of 1836 he was clothed in the cassock and began his religious formation with the Oratorian clergy of that church. Don Bosco took him on as one of his collaborators and in 1848 gave him the assignment of preaching a retreat to the young men of the Oratory of Valdocco. In 1852 he was appointed parochial vicar of the parish in Lanzo near Turin, and later became its pastor. He added luster to the Catholic cause in Piedmont.

<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Crescenzi (1607-1688) was a member of the Clerics Regular of Somasca. In 1643 he was made bishop of Termoli, and the following year he was transferred to the combined see of Ortona and Campi. In 1652 he was named bishop of Bitonto, remaining there until 1668. Pope Innocent X sent him as nuncio to the Duke of Savoia. In 1671, Alessandro Crescenzi was named Latin Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt, and in 1675 he was elevated to the dignity of cardinal with Santa Prisca as his titular church in Rome. He was nuncio in Turin from 1646 to 1675.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the entry "Crescenzi" in G. INCISA DELLA ROCCHETTA, N. VIAN (editor), *Il primo processo canonico per San Filippo Neri nel Codice Vaticano Latino 3798 e in altri esemplari dell'Oratorio di Roma*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, IV (1963), pp. 283-284.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. G. MARCIANO, *Memorie Historiche della Congregazione dell'Oratorio*, 5 vol., Napoli, 1693-1702; tomo V, libro III, pp. 309-317.

<sup>5</sup> For biographical information regarding Fr. Defara, a native of Borgomasino in the Diocese of Ivrea, other than documents in the Archives of the Congregation of the Oratory in Turin (AOT), 6, Biographical Notes about the first members of the Congregation, cf. G. MARCIANO, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 310-311; for information regarding Fr. Cambiano, the musician from Savigliano, cf. G. MARCIANO, *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 313; cf. also *Vita del ven. padre Sebastiano Valfré della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di Torino cavata da' processi fatti per la sua beatificazione e canonizzazione e data alla luce da un prete della medesima Congregazione*, ms., Torino, 1743, vol. III, pp. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. DI MACCO, *Tradizione e innovazione dell'Oratorio ai tempi del Valfré*, in F. BOLGIANI, G. GAUNA, A. GOBBO, G. GOI, *L'intuizione di san Filippo e la figura di Sebastiano Valfré*, Bologna, 2008, p. 90-92.

<sup>7</sup> G. MARCIANO, *loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> AOT, 6 copies of the pontifical brief issued by Clement XI.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. P. CAPELLO, *Vita del B. Sebastiano Valfré*, Torino, 1872, I, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. MERLOTTI, ed., *Nobiltà e Stato in Piemonte. I Ferrero d'Ormea in Atti del Convegno* (Mondovi, 3-5 October 2001), ed. Zamorani, 2003. He was a distinguished member of the Turin Oratory, and he had good connections in diplomatic circles and in the Apostolic Nunciature. He was highly regarded at Court, where he was partly responsible for its way of life due to the fine spiritual direction and political advice that he gave to Christine of France and Charles Emmanuel II, and later on to the second *Madama Reale* Maria Giovanna Battista di Savoy-Nemours. He also wrote numerous works (cf. A. VILLAROSA, *Memorie degli scrittori filippini o siano della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri*, Napoli, 1837, vol. I, pp. 186-187). He repeatedly accepted responsibility as the Congregation's provost, alternating terms with Fr. Valfré.

<sup>11</sup> San Eusebio Church was acquired thanks to the support of Rospigliosi, a noble Roman family. They were grateful to Fr. Ormea for rushing to the sickbed of a prelate who was a friend of

theirs, and for bringing St. Philip's rosary along with him. The prelate had fallen seriously ill during a journey from France to Rome to support their paternal uncle's candidacy for the Papacy; he was elected, taking the name of Clement IX.

<sup>12</sup> cf. M. DI MACCO, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> V. COMOLI MANDRACCI, *Le invenzioni di Filippo Juvarra per la chiesa di S. Filippo Neri in Torino*, Torino, 1967.

<sup>14</sup> Namely, the State Telegraph's Central Office, the printshop for the Chamber of Deputies (near Palazzo Carignano), and the securities office of the Ministry of Finance's civil engineers.

<sup>15</sup> The city administration acquired part of the huge building in 1908. In 1929, the Provincial Federation of the Fascist Party ousted this city office and made the building its own headquarters, naming it "Casa Littoria". After World War II, it became the university headquarters under the name of "Palazzo Campana". The church, oratory and part of the house remain the property of the Congregation, while the rest of the building (the large extension that occupies about half the block) is now State property.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the first biographies of Bl. Sebastian – *Vita del beato p. Sebastiano Valfré della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di Torino raccolta da' processi fatti per la sua beatificazione*, Torino, pub. Alessandro Vimercati, 1748, pp. (8), 416, 16, (1) complete with charts, tables and illustrations; *Vita del b. Sebastiano Valfré, prete secolare della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di Torino / scritta da un prete della Congregazione di Venezia; con l'aggiunta della novena per Santo Natale e della susseguente ottava composte dallo stesso Beato*, Venezia, A. Santini, 1837, pp. XII, 255 – biographies and studies have been written right up to the present day: L. BARBERIS, *Un grande piemontese del sec. XVII. Il beato Sebastiano Valfré: episodi e spunti tolti da una vita anonima del 1748*, (s. n. ma Pinerolo, Alzani, 1984, pp. 55, 16 fig.); C. FAVA, *Vita e tempi del beato Sebastiano Valfré, prete dell'Oratorio di San Filippo di Torino*, Torino, Sei, 1944, pp. 367, (12) complete with charts and tables; G. OLGATI, *Il Beato Sebastiano Valfré, d. O.: sua azione sociale e politica*, (Torino, Tipografia Noire) pp. 115; A. DORDONI, *Un maestro spirituale nel Piemonte tra Sei e Settecento. Il Padre Sebastiano Valfré dell'Oratorio di Torino*, Milano, 1992, pp. VIII, 210; N. CALASCIBETTA, *Il beato Sebastiano Valfré: un percorso iconografico attraverso i secoli*, in G. MOLA DI NOMAGLIO, R. SANDRI GIACHINO, GL. MELANO, P. MENIETTI (ed.), *Torino 1706. Memorie e attualità dell'Assedio di Torino del 1706 tra spirito europeo e identità regionale*, Atti del Convegno, Torino 29-30 settembre 2006, Torino, Centro Studi Piemontesi, 2007, vol. II, pp. 879-885; M. T. SILVESTRINI, *Sebastiano Valfré, Vittorio Amedeo II e la chiesa di S. Filippo tra Seicento e Settecento*, in F. BOLGIANI, G. GAUNA, A. GOBBO, G. GOI, *L'intuizione di san Filippo e la figura di Sebastiano Valfré*, Bologna, 2008, pp. 67-84.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. E. A. CERRATO, *San Filippo Neri. La sua opera e la sua eredità*, Pavia, 2002, pp. 234-238.

<sup>18</sup> G. TONELLO, *Un Paray-le-Monial italiano dimenticato*, Torino (no date given). Other talks that Valfré gave at the Visitation Monastery in Paray-le-Monial on the theme of the Sacred Heart in 1695, 1698, 1704 may be found in *Annali del Monastero* in the Archives of the Visitation Monastery.

<sup>19</sup> In A. DORDONI, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-166, a rich bibliographical listing of Valfré's writings. Even if a complete listing of his works does not yet exist, Dordoni's list of manuscripts of 13 volumes of sermons, numerous letters, tracts, reports, and moral indexes. The edited works of Valfré include an important catalog of works, almost all of which were published after his death.

<sup>20</sup> *Compendio della Dottrina cristiana per facilitare la pratica d'insegnarla e d'impararla. Dialogo tra il Maestro e lo Scolaro*, Torino, 1769; this was also published in a special edition of *Il B. Sebastiano Valfré. Bollettino di informazione per la causa di canonizzazione*, Torino (no date given, but perhaps 1980); and also in an appendix to C. FAVA, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-344.

<sup>21</sup> Even after they married, the Princesses Maria Adelaide (who went on to become the wife of Louis Duke of Burgundy) and Maria Luisa (the consort of Philip V of Spain) remained in contact with the priests who had taught them. Their correspondence reveals the delicacy of their souls and the profound formation they had received; Fr. Valfré's replies are true jewels of spiritual direction.

<sup>22</sup> G. OLGATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27 and 28 April 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Up until 1685 it was kept in the Ducal Palace, where it had been placed after the destruction of its shrine. This shrine was made of wood, with a roof supported by four columns, especially constructed to house it within the Cathedral.

<sup>25</sup> In an anonymous work (the 3 volume manuscript is in the Seminary Library in Turin) attributed to Fr. Francesco Marino (cf. A. VILLAROSA, *Memorie degli scrittori filipini o siano della Congregazione dell'Oratorio di S. Filippo Neri raccolte dal marchese di Villarosa*, Napoli, 1837, p. 73; G.

MELZI, *Dizionario di opera anonime e pseudonime di scrittori italiani o come che siano aventi relazione all'Italia*, III, Milano, 1859, p. 237), in chapter XII, pp. 217-218, the story is told of Fr. Valfré's special devotion to, and his comment about, the Holy Shroud. The Shroud was taken from the chest in which it was kept and spread upon a well-illuminated table. Fr. Valfré noticed that the edge of the upper border was unraveling, and he immediately proposed to repair this by stitching it up with silk thread.

<sup>26</sup> The exposition was described by Count Emanuele Tesauero.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. A. R. DREIBACH (translated by A. Belletti), *Una base teologica per la sindonologia e le sue ripercussioni ecumeniche*. A report presented to the Congress on the Shroud of Turin held in Vetralla, Italy on 26 May 2001, found in *Collegamento pro Sindone Internet*, June 2002.

-- translated by Fr. Timothy E. Deeter