

## BOOK REVIEWS

Montonati Angelo, *Coraggio e Profezia*. Un pioniere del Vaticano II. Il Beato Giorgio Preca (Malta 1880-1962), San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), 2003, pp.128, ISBN 88-215-4948-8 [16 pages with photographs].

Angelo Montonati is a professional journalist who presents us with a full biography of the life and works of Blessed Giorgio Preca. The text is original in a two-fold manner: in the way in which the life of Blessed Preca is presented to the reader and in the fact that this is the first biography of Blessed Preca in the Italian language. In this respect one can extract the significance of this historical account: it makes the life and the works of Blessed Giorgio Preca, especially the foundation of the *Societas Doctrinae Christianae*, known beyond the shores of the Maltese archipelago, reaching a far greater number of people.

Montonati starts the biography of Blessed Giorgio Preca by giving an outline of the history of Christianity in Malta and Gozo starting with the dramatic event of St. Paul's unexpected shipwreck on the island of Malta. The author also traces the major events which have coloured the history of Christianity in Malta. Montonati ends this excursus by describing Christianity in Malta in our contemporary times.

It is precisely at this point that the author introduces the early beginnings of the life of Blessed Giorgio Preca who was born on the 12th February 1880. Although much of his childhood is unknown the author is able to synthesise the known facts into an interesting story commencing with the childhood of Blessed Preca, then moving on to his priestly formation at the Seminary and the first encounters which he had with the youths at Hamrun. The foundations of the *Societas Doctrinae Christianae*, originally referred to by Blessed Preca as *Societas Papiducum et Papidissarum* is Society of the spiritual sons and daughters of the Pope, can be traced back to the encounters with these youths at Hamrun.

When Blessed Preca wanted to establish a name for the group, one of the Hamrun youths suggested that it should be referred to as a museum because in such a place one usually finds precious objects, and within the newly founded group they had really found a precious thing, that is, spiritual formation. Later on, Blessed Preca gave a more profound meaning to the acronym M.U.S.E.U.M. is an abbreviation

for “Magister, utinam sequatur Evangelium universus mundus”, (p.35) that is, Master, may the whole world follow the Gospel.

Every new initiative usually faces moments of trial and this was not an exception for the society set up by Blessed Preca. Many were those who looked suspiciously at Fr Preca’s initiative, and many even wrote in the newspapers criticising his efforts. At a certain moment the criticism was so strong that the Maltese Ecclesiastical Authorities asked Fr Preca to close down the edifices which he had already started using to conduct catechism classes. However, this was soon revoked on the insistence of some parish priests who argued with the Ecclesiastical Authorities that the initiative begun by Fr Preca was beneficial. After an inquiry by the Maltese Curia, the Church in Malta approved Fr Preca’s initiative. It was now time for M.U.S.E.U.M. to consolidate itself and to spread throughout the Maltese Islands in two separate branches: male and female. It was also at this time that Fr Preca sent his first missionaries to Australia.

The biography of the life of Blessed Preca reveals also that he was a very prolific writer who based most of his writings on Sacred Scriptures. He also spent much time in administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in Spiritual Direction and in private prayer, especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom Blessed Preca was a great devotee. Blessed Preca died on the 26th July 1962, and after a funerary service at the Parish Church of Hamrun he was buried at the Mother House of the Society which he founded at Blata l-Bajda.

In 1976, the diocesan process for the beatification of Fr Preca was initiated and in 1988 it was presented to Rome for the official approval as a process which ended by the formal approval on the 12th October 1999. Pope John Paul II held the beatification ceremony of Blessed Giorgio Preca together with two other Maltese candidates for the beatification at The Granaries in Floriana on the 9th May 2001.

This biography of Blessed Giorgio Preca by Montonati proves to be a well-researched work with the most up-to-date information about Blessed Giorgio Preca. However, it lacks a bibliography. Notwithstanding this, the author not only presents the real facts about the life of Blessed Preca but does so in such a way, and with such clarity, that the reader inevitably feels involved in the story and wants to keep on reading. One cannot ignore that the fluidity of the text helps the reader move on smoothly from one aspect of the life of Blessed Preca to another, this is a positive feature which Montonati is able to achieve in an excellent manner. Besides, the

few photos inserted in the book help readers to contextualise the facts and the major character with which the biography deals.

This biography by Montonati is an achievement which can be recommended especially to all those who are interested in the history of Catechesis in Malta because it presents us with an initiative of a humble priest who was able to set up a Society which partially transposed the responsibility of catechesis from the clerical domain and hand it over to the laity even before the Second Vatican Council had discussed issues. However, the biography by Montonati is also interesting to the general public because it presents the life of a person who was totally dedicated to teaching and forming others, starting from the youngest to adults. Blessed Giorgio Preca is indeed an example to all believers who are called to play an active role in the Ecclesial ministry of the Proclamation of the Word of God. Consequently, it would also be interesting and valuable if the book about the life and the works of Blessed Giorgio Preca were to be translated into other major languages, especially in Spanish.

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