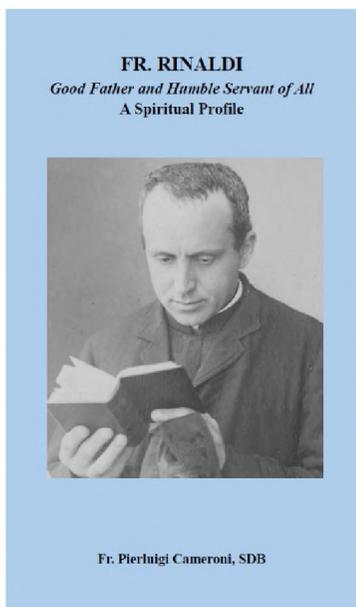


## BOOK REVIEW

**FR. RINALDI**

**GOOD FATHER AND HUMBLE SERVANT OF ALL**

*by John Puntino*



The translation of Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni's work on Blessed Philip Rinaldi makes a significant contribution to the scarce body of literature available to English readers.

Fr. Cameroni writes from his privileged position as Postulator General of the Salesians of Don Bosco, where he was able to access the documents and testimonies used in preparing Fr. Rinaldi's cause of canonization. Moreover, his enthusiasm and love for Fr. Rinaldi shines through, even as he carefully and respectfully uses his sources.

Fr. Cameroni divides the book into four chapters and a conclusion. The first, on Fr. Rinaldi's life, gives the necessary details of his life and historical context. However, it concentrates on his spiritual development, giving ample examples of his resolutions during the various phases of his initial formation and first years of responsibility as a

Salesian priest. It then shifts focus to his responsibilities as Prefect General and Rector Major. Fr. Cameroni continues to highlight Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual life as he describes the administrative challenges of the Prefect General's office and his apostolic and educational activities on behalf of the SDB and FMA. For Fr. Rinaldi's extensive activity with the laity and Salesian Sisters, the author inserts an extract from Fr. Egidio Viganò's 1990 letter, "Fr. Philip Rinaldi authentic witness and interpreter of the 'Salesian Spirit'" (AGC 332, pp. 24-34; pp. 39-46 in the text).

Surprisingly, Fr. Cameroni gives less attention to Fr. Rinaldi's time as Rector Major than to other periods of his life. Not surprising is the way he brings out Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual strength and moral authority as he gave his attention to the religious and professional education of the Salesians, the spiritual heritage of Don Bosco, the missions and Don Bosco's beatification.

The second and most substantial chapter addresses Fr. Rinaldi's heroic life of virtue.

It begins by noting that while Fr. Rinaldi was alive no one thought of him as a saint. After his death, though, his fame of holiness grew and reports of graces

received prompted a closer look at his life. Fr. Cameroni quotes from the testimonies of Fr. Peter Ricaldone, who was Fr. Rinaldi's Prefect General, other Salesian priests, a diocesan priest, a Salesian sister and Bishop Evasio Colli, Fr. Rinaldi's compatriot and friend. All point to how Fr. Rinaldi lived and presented an accessible holiness, devoid of extraordinary events, yet rich in the practice of all the virtues.

The author then gives an orderly presentation of the virtues studied in detail during the cause of canonization. He begins with the theological virtues of faith, hope, love of God and love of neighbor, and continues with the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. He concludes the chapter with a look at Fr. Rinaldi's practice of the virtues central to consecrated life, that is, chastity, poverty, obedience and humility.

Within each of these categories, Fr. Cameroni presents specific aspects of Fr. Rinaldi's holiness, for example, "A man entirely of God," Pillar of the Eucharist," Pillar of Mary," "They spoke of Fr. Rinaldi as they would of a father."

He uses over 120 quotes from the testimonies of 29 witnesses to illustrate manifestations of Fr. Rinaldi's holiness. In so doing, there is some repetition of references to events and situations in his life, because they relate to more than one virtue. They are viewed from different angles according to the virtue being presented.

The material that Fr. Cameroni collected reveals Fr. Rinaldi's expressions of everyday holiness, that is, how he responded virtuously to the realities confronting him. For example, in his prayers to Mary, pp. 66-67, he writes, "My most Holy Mother, the interests of the Pious Society are entrusted to my prudence and activity. You know how very clumsy I am, and how I would not know what to do. So, You do it." "Dearest Mother, I am placing under your direction the matter of our properties because I really do not know what to do." In the section on love of neighbor, pp. 80-87, Fr. Rinaldi advises his niece, Sr. Maria Rinaldi, FMA on how to be a Salesian superior. "Your first task is to safeguard the family spirit in the community.... Your role as superior is to radiate calm, serenity, joy.... Look at yourself often and see if your face spreads sunlight around you" (p. 82).

Fr. Cameroni's skillful organization of the heroic virtues of Fr. Rinaldi give the overall effect of an attractive, well-integrated, realistic son of Don Bosco who sought only to be faithful to God through his external obligations and in his personal, well-hidden ascetical life. The rich variety of testimonies further highlight the effect that Fr. Rinaldi had on a wide range of individuals, works and groups of the Salesian Family.

Chapters three and four are much smaller than the first two. Chapter three presents, first, a brief biography of Mother Maria Lazzari, spiritual directee of Fr. Rinaldi and foundress of Missionary Sisters of the Passion of Jesus. Through her prayers and actions invoking the intercession of Fr. Rinaldi, one of her young members, Sr. Carla De Noni was miraculously cured of an otherwise fatal wound suffered during a World War II air raid. The second part of the chapter is the extensive testimony of Mother Lazzari in which she relates her experiences of his virtuous life, his style of spiritual direction and two events that she considered miraculous. The second is her account of Sr. Carla's cure, which is the miracle accepted for Fr. Rinaldi's beatification.

In the fourth chapter, Fr. Cameroni turns his attention to Fr. Rinaldi as founder of what is today the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers. He traces in Fr. Rinaldi's life the ways in which he grew to understand feminine psychology, the economic and social challenges that young women face and the desire of some to live an apostolic and consecrated life but who were unable to enter a religious institute. He then relates the immediate steps taken in the founding of the secular institute. In so doing, he includes the two longest passages in the book of material originating from Fr. Rinaldi, his first conference to the original members, May 20, 1917 and his conference of June 25, 2022 to the members, his first after his election as Rector Major. The first gives us an up-close view of his clarity, organizational abilities and depth of Salesian spirituality. The second shows how he directed the young women to practice that spirituality in their mission to the secular activities of everyday life.

In a masterly conclusion, Fr. Cameroni reviews highlights of Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual profile without slavishly repeating or simply summarizing the content of his book. Rather, he synthesizes the key elements of his holiness, such as his humility, practical judgment, goodness, frankness, fatherliness and prayerfulness, adding illustrations, with the help of more testimonies. He identifies Fr. Rinaldi's outstanding characteristics, such as his serene and imperturbable character, tireless zeal and bold initiatives. He presents Fr. Rinaldi as a guide and model of fidelity to Don Bosco. He expresses the wish that Fr. Rinaldi's canonization will stimulate the Salesian Family in its mission and lead to an increase in vocations.

There follow three short addenda, the chronology of Fr. Rinaldi's life, the sequence of events leading to the beatification and a prayer for his canonization.

The book presents itself well. A sturdily bound, 8 1/4" x 5 3/8" paperback with 12 photos and sketches gracing the cover and text. In future editions it may prove easier to read the text if there were more than 3/8" left and right borders on each page.

A particular challenge in the translation of such a work as this is to remain faithful to the precise meaning of sworn testimonies while expressing those thoughts in fluent American English. Readers will judge the clarity of those passages.

*Fr. Rinaldi, Good Father and Humble Servant of All* adds a substantial study of the blessed's holiness to the small body of materials in English. Currently, that literature ranges from full-length to pamphlet size popular biographies and a study of Fr. Rinaldi's circular letters to the SDB, *The Salesian Legacy of Father Philip Rinaldi*, by Martin Dai Loc Nguyen. A word of gratitude to Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni for his original contribution, Don Rinaldi, Padre buono e umile servo di tutti and to Agnes B. Paulino and her editors who produced the current English edition.

Technical

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