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*The Extraordinary Life  
 of Padre Blas Valera, S.J.*

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*To my husband, William*

We were like strangers in our own city, visitors who had lost their way. It was your books that, as it were, brought us back home, so that at last we could recognize who we were, and where we were. It was you who revealed to us the age of our country, and sequence of events, the laws of religious ceremonies and of the priest-hoods, the traditional customs of private and public life, the position of geographical areas and of particular places, and the terminology of all matters, human and divine, with their various kinds, functions and causes.

—Cicero, writing about Marcus Terentius Varro,  
quoted by St. Augustine in *The City of God*

## Preface



This book grew out of my dissertation research on the debates over ordaining mestizos as Catholic priests in early colonial Peru. My dissertation, “Conversion, Custom, and ‘Culture’: Jesuit Racial Policies in Sixteenth-Century Peru” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1994), focused specifically on the Jesuits’ attitudes toward mestizos in the viceroyalty. When the first members of the Society of Jesus arrived in Lima in 1568, they intended to encourage mestizo vocations to the Society. It was believed that mestizos—the children of Spanish fathers and native mothers—would make ideal missionaries, combining a Christian heritage from their fathers with a knowledge of native culture and language from their mothers. Yet fourteen years after arriving in South America, the Jesuits in Peru voted unanimously against ever allowing any mestizo to join the Society; this legislation would remain in place until the Jesuits were forced out of South America in the 1770s.

As I explored the reasons for this change of policy, speculating on how the Jesuits’ experience might shed light on the development of racial and cultural ideologies in Peru, I became intrigued with the story of one particular mestizo Jesuit—Blas Valera. Some Jesuits in Peru claimed that the reason for the ban on mestizos was Valera’s



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misdeeds, which had proven mestizos to be unfit as priests. What were these heinous acts that Valera allegedly had committed? According to the Jesuits at the time, the Spanish Inquisition had convicted him of fornication and sentenced him to a long imprisonment. Yet, searching through Inquisition archives, I discovered that the Jesuits' story was false and that Valera had never even been brought before the Inquisition, let alone convicted by the Holy Office (see chap. 8 for the true story). Moreover, it became increasingly clear to me that Valera had been an ardent defender of the native peoples of Peru and had devoted his life to gathering the legends, histories, and myths of the native Andeans.

Therefore, I decided to write a biography of Valera, an entirely new book that would incorporate material from my dissertation. This biography was almost completed in 1996 when Laura Laurencich Minelli announced that a series of seventeenth-century documents had been discovered in Naples. These manuscripts make extraordinary claims about Blas Valera (see chaps. 9–10) that have inspired intense debates over the life of this mestizo priest. The passion behind these current controversies reveals how much the issues that dominated Valera's life—issues concerning native languages, cultures, and religion—are still vital today.

Many people have generously assisted me in writing this book. Richard Burger, as a dissertation director and colleague, has contributed his profound knowledge of Andean civilization and the Inca chroniclers; he is a model scholar and mentor, whose support and friendship over the years are deeply appreciated. This work has benefited also from numerous conversations with Mike Coe about Native American writing systems; his unwavering support during the writing of this book has meant a great deal to me. Noble David Cook trained me in Peruvian colonial history and paleography and helped to clarify my ideas about Blas Valera and mestizo ordination; his kindness is much appreciated.

This book owes a special debt of gratitude to Brian Bauer, who encouraged me to publish it and whose criticisms have improved the manuscript considerably. I am indebted also to Sabine MacCormack for her very careful and highly informed reading of the manuscript. Gary Urton's thoughtful comments have greatly improved the entire work, especially chapter 6—on language and writing. Frank



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Salomon's suggestions for further clarifications have likewise benefited this work. Warren Church has provided insights into Chachapoya society, along with helpful comments on chapter 2.

I am very grateful to Laura Laurencich Minelli for her sincere friendship and support over the years of writing this book. Monica Barnes has contributed to this work in many ways, and her help is much appreciated. William Klimon provided invaluable bibliographic assistance. Many other friends and colleagues have provided assistance, criticism, and encouragement, including Harold Conklin, Davide Domenici, Maurizio Gnerre, Esther González, Teodoro Hampe Martínez, Bill Isbell, James John, Marti Lamar, Bruce Mannheim, René Millar Carvacho, Craig Morris, Jeremy Mumford, Joanne Pillsbury, Charles Reid, Elayne Zorn, and Tom Zuidema. My departmental colleagues, Cheryl Carpenter, Jim Benton, and Tom Faase, have patiently supported me through this endeavor.

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The book has benefited greatly from the prayers and friendship of the Benedictine monks of St. Benedict's Abbey, Kansas, especially Father Denis Meade, O.S.B.; Father Benedict Laroque, O.S.B.; and Brother John Peto, O.S.B. I am also deeply grateful to the monks of



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Much of chapter 8 originally appeared as the article “The Imprisonment of Blas Valera: Heresy and Inca History in Colonial Peru” in *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (1998): 43–58.

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Finally, my largest debt is to my family. My mother, Sigrid Campbell, read through the manuscript and provided very useful comments and encouragement. I would like to thank my lovely daughters, Margaret and Eleanor, for sharing their mom with Blas Valera. My husband, Bill, has been at my side throughout all phases of this work. He has critically read the manuscript many times, provided translations of Latin texts, and cheerfully endured countless conversations about Blas Valera and the Naples documents. To him I owe more than I can adequately express.

### Note on Translations and Orthography

The English translations of selections from Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru* are from the translation by Harold V. Livermore (Garcilaso de la Vega 1987). Unless otherwise cited, all other translations from Spanish and Quechua are by the author. Translations from Latin are by William P. Hyland. To remain true to the spirit of the original sixteenth- and seventeenth-century documents, the spellings of Quechua words conform to the common usages of the colonial period.

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