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In memoriam

Profili biografici saveriani



Fr. Francesco Marini

19 September 1940 ~ 24 May 2016

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Venagrande (AP – Italy)
19 September 1940

Parma (Italy)
24 May 2016

On 25 May 2016, the directors of MISSIO (a pastoral body founded by the Italian Bishops' Conference) thus announced the death of Fr. Francesco Marini: «Yesterday (Tuesday, 24 May, *ed. note.*) Fr. Francesco Marini, a former Superior General of the Xaverians, died. He was one of the most important figures of the Italian missionary world in the last century. He was one of the first supporters of MISNA (Missionary Service News Agency), which he believed was “a concrete way to give a voice to those who have no voice”. MISSIO remembers him with great affection and admiration and offers its most sincere condolences to the Xaverian Family».

Fr. Marini was 75 years old and was a religious for 59 of them. He was born in Venagrande, one of the most densely populated suburbs of Ascoli Piceno, in the Marche region of Italy, on 19 September 1940.

He joined the Xaverian Missionaries on 18 October 1956, in the novitiate community of San Pietro in Vincoli (Ravenna); he had previously been a student at the Seminary of Ascoli Piceno.

He made his First Profession on 19 October 1957 and his Final Profession on 12 September 1963. In his application for admission to the First Profession, he wrote to the Superior General, Fr. Giovanni Castelli, on 12 September 1957:

As the end of the canonical year of Novitiate draws near (19 October), I ask to be admitted to the Profession. During this year I have reflected, prayed about and examined my vocation with the Novice Master and now, with his approval, I am forwarding my request.

I have no doubt that this is the path the Lord wishes me to follow. I am aware of the serious nature of the step I am about to take and I do so freely and irrevocably, ready to always do the will of God, which will reveal itself to me in a particular way through the Superiors.

I feel a great love for the Congregation. I worked hard to get to know it during this year and I have come to see it as the family that I like the most. Since there are no impediments, nothing prevents me from believing that the Xaverian family can soon be my family too.

I know the obligations that the religious vows impose on me and I am resolved to observe them. They are a means of sanctification for me and my neighbor. The missionary vow is also for our personal sanctification because our love for God grows in the struggles of the apostolate and we become closer to Him. Thus the religious vows are indirectly for the sanctification of our neighbors, according to the word of Jesus: I become holy that others might become holy.

Our life, as the Constitutions describe it, is entirely embodied in the religious life and missionary activity, since the love of God and the desire to make Him loved by others are inseparable and this is the life I intend to embrace.

This is how I see our life, the vows and the Congregation. May the Lord strengthen my will so that I may glorify Him and work for the good of the Church, the Congregation and my own soul.



Francesco then resumed the studies he had interrupted by attending the classical Lyceum at Desio (1957–60) and the Introductory year in Parma (1960–61). After a year as Prefect in Zelarino (1961–62), he went to Rome to study Theology at the Angelicum University (1962–66) and then at the Alphonsianum University (1966–68), where he graduated in Theology (with a specialization in Moral theology), on 30 June 1968, with the dissertation: «Un tentativo di rinnovamento: la filosofia morale delle “Neuf leçons sur les notions premières de la philosophie morale” di Jacques Maritain».

Fr. Giovanni Bonardi, the rector of the Collegio internazionale “Conforti” in Rome, gave his assent to the admission of Francesco to Major Orders and added:

Francesco Marini sometimes seems to be cold, but he is actually not so. He is a successful student and his companions look upon him as the most intelligent. They ask him to explain to them the most difficult subjects at school.

He loves music and sacred ceremonies with hymns. He is sociable and willing to serve. His piety and discipline are good.

Francesco was ordained priest on 17 October 1965 in Parma, «for the total service of the Kingdom of God in the Church, which is its seed and sacrament in the world» (cf. C 7).

Fr. Marini wrote about this “service” and its importance in one of his monthly editorials during his mandate as Superior General (1989–2001):

First of all, the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is not just the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The “de-Messiahization” of Christ and the faith (cf. Sobrino, *Concilium*, January 1993) is not an accidental distortion of his message by the primitive community and now correctable: it was tenaciously pursued by Jesus from the very beginning. The Old Testament prophecies are not fulfilled in the history of Israel, nor in the history of Christ. Nor will they be fulfilled in our own history. Christianity, therefore, has a Messiah, but not a (historical) messianism. Or better: it has a messianism *sui generis*, based on the acceptance of the Messiah, of the “Savior”.

On the other hand, the entire New Testament unfolds towards a progressive concentration on the person of Jesus, culminating in the declaration that He is the truth, the life, the light, the Passover lamb, freedom, justice and peace. Jesus is not reduced to values; values are identified with Him. “Jesus is the Kingdom of God in person” (Sobrino, *ibid.*).

It is important, however, that we have a correct vision of the centrality of Christ in faith. This centrality does not exclude, but calls for, his relationship with all humanity and with the entire world (cf. *Jn* 1; *Col* 1): all that is positive contains something of Christ. In some way, therefore, His kingdom is present and at work always and everywhere. Yet when the Word is proclaimed, that incipient reality is called to make a qualitative jump: the salvation event reaches its fullness “here and now”. This event, which is essentially communion with Christ, generates the merciful attitude and behavior of Jesus towards those who are suffering in any way, from an immediate response of service to the more elaborate forms of political organization [...].

Faith, therefore, is unable to generate technical solutions or political projects: it has a direct reference to the human condition; yet touching the intimate core of the person, it influences every solution and every project in its own way [...].

The complete Christ that comes to us from faith is therefore neither spiritualistic nor political. He suffers with and for every person and gets the disciple, and even more the apostle, involved in this intense love¹.

In 1968 he took on the position of lecturer (which he held until 1976) in dogmatic theology at the Philosophy-Theology community of Parma. He also served as vice-rector of the student community (1974–75).

Fr. Rino Benzoni describes his experience alongside Fr. Marini during their time in Parma:

Two particular experiences come to mind: the first concerns the “Navetta” and the second the “Comune”.

The “Navetta” is the district of Parma where I had my first pastoral experiences as a young student in Parma: a poor district, with a small Christian community that assembled in a small church that was often packed to overflowing.

At that time, the large Xaverian Theology community was subdivided into apostolate groups, each one supervised by a Father-formator-lecturer. The Navetta group was supervised by Fr. Marini. When I arrived in Parma, the memory of the occupation of the Parma cathedral was still fresh in people’s minds, an occupation in which Fr. Francesco had also played a part.

At the Navetta he had the opportunity to experience a Church of the least and that was not very attached to structures. As far as possible, we took part in the life of the district and the heated political discussions that were typical of those years.

I believe the idea of the “Comune” began with him: to leave, that is, our individual rooms and to live together in a large room that was divided in two by a curtain: on the one side were our beds (some of which were bunk beds), whilst our study desks were on the other side. Fr. Marini slept in the bunk bed above mine.

I say “I believe” the idea began with him because it may have been launched by others, such as Tobia Corna or Giuseppe Morotti, but Fr. Marini undoubtedly supported it in the face of the resistance that was inevitable in the large formation community of that time. I, the last one to arrive, adhered enthusiastically to the idea and I believe I was the one who loved it most, proposing it to others and carrying it ahead until my ordination to

¹ FRANCESCO MARINI, *Cordialmente vostro*, Roma, Missionari Saveriani, 1998, I vol., 50–52. *Cordialmente vostro* is the title of the two small volumes that contain letters written by Fr. Marini to all the confreres throughout the world. These “letters” are the editorials published in *Commix* — the Congregation’s internal bulletin — and they «deal with vital topics of the missionary life and the many aspects connected with it: a rich world of experience that deserves to be explored and read attentively» (Fr. Gerardo Caglioni).

the priesthood, even outside the “Navetta” group, when Fr. Marini left for the mission and the group dissolved.

Quite soon the “Comune” became a meeting place for many members of the community because there was always the possibility to meet someone, as well as enjoying a snack, since we had put in common everything that had been given to us. Without much ado, the “Comune” became a place for the transmission of ideas, ideals, assessments of events in the city and the country. The rector, Fr. Amato Dagnino, benevolently let us be.

For me it was a fundamental experience that enabled me to live the rest of my life with a certain degree of ideality. I cannot quantify its influence upon me, but I believe that it was fundamental. It was undoubtedly the beginning of a certain friendship and sharing of deals with “Macinino”².



In October 1976, Fr. Marini wrote to his friends in Italy: «Indonesia is the land of beauty. Everything is beautiful in Indonesia: the wonderful nature, the women, the children, the arts, the manners... In Indonesia the humiliated people do not stand out (they are discrete and keep life's blows hidden), but certainly those who have been offended by life are not few in number. To bring a little beauty, some life, in short, to those who have been wounded, and in general to every person who is in some way a victim, is the dream of the Gospel and the aspiration of every missionary. Jesus came to give us life in abundance!».

He had arrived in Indonesia, “the mission of the 15,000 islands”, on 16 October 1976. After about six months of “serious study of the country's reality and language”, on 1 April 1977 he was appointed assistant priest in Aek Kanopan (1977–79), the capital of the district of North Labunhabatu, in the province of northern Sumatra, diocese of Medan³.

Subsequently, he served as Regional Councilor (1978–81), assistant priest in Aek Nabara, in the province of northern Sumatra (1979–1981), and Regional Superior (1981–83).

Even when he was heavily engaged in pastoral activity, or carrying out tasks of government, he used his free time to reflect also on typical Xaverian topics, such as “insertion in the mission”⁴. In connection with this, he wrote to the Superior General, Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, on 21 August 1977:

² Fr. Marini's nickname.

³ Cfr. Aniceto Morini, *Indonesia, Missione dalle 15 mila isole*, in *I Missionari Saveriani*, Parma, Istituto Missionari Saveriani, 1996, 225–226.

⁴ Cf. *Constitutions*, 71.

I am happy with the place, the company and the people. But I don't want to dwell on my impressions; instead, I want to present a few ideas to you and ask for your opinion, as we continue to reflect on them together.

I am referring to the preparation to the missionary work that we do here. Normally there are no problems: we study the language, we read something about a given culture and then we are ready to begin working. Yet is this method entirely correct? I believe that the preparation is not a different period from the missionary work: we are always preparing ourselves for missionary work, in the sense that we must constantly strive to become capable of a more profound understanding and a greater communication with the people; from the very beginning we are always at work, since the preparation itself is actually a form of Christian and missionary presence. In other words: we are always preparing ourselves, witnessing and proclaiming. It is not a matter of learning a job first and then teaching it. It is a matter of living with the people, in a given context, with all our ability to receive (preparation) and to communicate (apostolate). This is why I was thinking that the best preparation should be done here, in the place where we will be working, and not elsewhere. However, Fr. Magnasco tells me that a contact with Samosir (a large volcanic island in lake Toba, in the province of northern Sumatra, *ed. note.*) is very important, not only for the language, but above all because many of our people here hail from Samosir and, in some cases, their relatives still live there. The place has a great importance for the Toba (the population of the volcanic lake Toba, situated in the northern part of the island of Sumatra, *ed. note.*) who live here, and not to know anything about it means to exclude oneself from a great part of the people's conversations and interests.

We therefore believe that a good period of time must be spent in Samosir, but how should this be done? I believe it is important that our approach to the Toba culture should not only be informative, but as far as possible existential and concrete too. Could we not ask to live with a family? Provided certain conditions are met, it does not seem an impossible endeavor. Instead of living in the parish of Samosir, I believe we could live with a family whilst remaining connected to, and serving, the parish, but I don't know how exactly it could be done.

Needless to say, if this is done in Samosir, it would be more of a general experiment in view of the work we will be doing here, than a true and proper sharing, given the temporary nature of the lake Toba period. It would, nevertheless, bring various benefits: as well as being a test for me, it could prepare me for a better insertion here in Aek Kanopan. Some mistakes could be avoided and we could be more careful in our search for the conditions to achieve it.

I believe that the greatest problem that will emerge is "how" we can reconcile animation and the creation of Christian communities in the area

(this also calls for a certain mobility) and a profound insertion in the Toba context: an insertion that should be a witness and prevent the professionalization of the work of proclamation.

I think this is the biggest organizational problem that we will have to deal with in beginning the work in the new area in the South. A correct beginning is the essential premise for a correct development.

It is also important that this should be a common journey. This, however, depends on us and we hope we will succeed in this endeavor. An isolated attempt would only be an oddity, not the novelty of the Kingdom.



Fr. Marini was elected to the General Council in July 1983; in 1989 he was elected Superior General and re-elected in 1995.

Fr. Gabriele Ferrari writes: «I worked with Fr. Francesco for six years [in the General Direction], whilst previously I had known and admired him when he was a lecturer in Parma and, later, Superior in Indonesia. He was an intelligent and courageous Councilor and, above all, a true brother and friend. It was impossible not to like him. Even when I did not agree with him on something (which was very rare), he never seemed detached or distant. I always admired his clarity of mind and ability to analyze problems, and his warm and fraternal humanity that became friendship. This mixture of intelligence and humanity, humility and availability, made him a friend to all and made it easy for anyone to approach him».

At the beginnings of his service to the Congregation as Superior General, Fr. Marini wrote to the confreres in December 1990:

Dear brothers, during the month of December we celebrate the memorial of St. Francis Xavier, who our Constitutions call our “model and patron” (*Article 2*). The ways of the Mission today are perhaps different from those known by St. Francis, but one thing certainly has not changed: its heart. And the heart of its apostolate lies, I believe, in the motto of the Institute: *Charitas Christi urget nos* – The love of Christ impels us (*2 Cor 5:14*).

The source and the purpose of the mission is this *Charitas Christi*: our love for Him and, even more, His love for us. The Mission is born of a personal encounter with Christ, indeed, from the intensity of this encounter and from the experience that Christ and his kingdom are enough for the life of a man. This encounter transforms our life and makes us missionaries: this is the encounter we strive to awaken in others so that their life too may be transformed.

Starting from that reality (from the Master in whom we have believed, lived and sought, from the experience that Christ is the solution to our problems, the key to interpreting our life, the Person we love most, the point where all our energies converge) the fullness of the mission will inevitably burst forth and draw us nearer to the people, make us free, open to dialogue and risk, capable of proposing and asking, forgetful of ourselves and joyful in difficulties.

The mission is born of faith and of the experience that Jesus is Savior and Messiah: that he is the Christ [...]. The Mission is not a mere consumption of God's gift and presence; nor is it merely solidarity with human suffering. The Mission is an encounter between this believed and experienced Presence as salvation and our mortified and longing humanity.

Dear brothers, the Mission is a consequence and challenge. It is the consequence of the *Charitas Christi* which is mature faith, and it is a challenge to our faith, which is always in danger, always in its infancy and insufficient, always inadequate to the very Word we proclaim⁵.

This long and intense *conversation*, entitled “At the roots of the Mission: the personal encounter with Christ”, was a constant theme of his mandate. The love of Christ is so powerful, so lovable and so extraordinary that we cannot resist it or flee from it, nor do we have any choice if our encounter with him is authentic. During the eighteen years he spent in the General Direction, Fr. Francesco was always inspired by the conviction that «Christian salvation makes a human being a humble and free protagonist in receiving the Father's love, and strong and responsible in serving his neighbor».

Fr. Rino Benzoni writes: «After the years in Parma, I met Fr. Francesco again when I was elected to the General Council during his second mandate as Superior General. I vividly remember his great humanity and his clear ideas on the mission. Even though the “Ratio Missionis Xaveriana” is the result of a commission work and a General Chapter, its guiding ideas and basic structure come from him. I believe that his second mandate was also marked by a certain degree of suffering because he saw how difficult it was to implement things that he believed to be logical and normal. I remember how he gave vent to these feelings in the General Council. One day, he confided to me that, for various months at the beginning of his first mandate, he had some health problems and found it difficult to sleep because of the responsibility that had been given to him, and he even thought about resigning. He eventually made peace with himself. The second mandate, however, was difficult as a result of a certain tiredness and the sluggishness and inflexibility he observed in the

⁵ Francesco Marini, *Cordialmente vostro*, cit., 11–12

Congregation, which he summed up in these words: “The main problem of the mission is... the missionary”⁶. His vision of the mission can be found in his editorials in the two-volume set of “Cordialmente vostro”. There we see his ideal and his doubts on the mission. In signing off each editorial with the expression, “Cordialmente vostro”, he expressed his deep love for the confreres and many of them loved him in return [...]. He loved a Church that was free and evangelical, and suffered because of its sluggishness and compromises. This is why I believe that the openness brought by the Spirit through his namesake Pope Francis enabled him to die serenely».

Fr. Gabriele Guarnieri writes: «As Superior General, Father Francesco Marini was very present in my life: it was during his mandate that I lived the crucial moments of the missionary vocation (novitiate, first profession, final profession, diaconate and priesthood). I remember how we first met, in 1985, when our novitiate group went on some “missionary trips” to Macerata or Ascoli Piceno. He introduced himself and asked me how things were going in the novitiate” I was struck by how likeable he was and by his spontaneity. Every time we went, his good humor and joviality made me feel at ease».



At the end of his service as Superior General, he spent a period as a guest of the formation and animation community in Madrid and then of the International Theology community of Mexico City.

On 15 June 2003, Fr. Marini arrived in Indonesia, where he was appointed assistant priest of the “Our Lady of Fatima” parish, in Jakarta – Toasebio (2003–09); he also served as Regional Councilor (2009–12) and was appointed vice-rector of the philosophy students’ community in Jakarta (2010–15).

The parish “Our Lady of Fatima” is located in *Greater Jakarta*, the capital of Indonesia, measuring 8 kilometers by 6, with unimaginable differences between luxury dwellings and the hovels of the poor. In the May 2004 issue of *Missionari Saveriani*, Fr. Marini wrote that “[the parish] is subdivided into 74 *basic communities*. We also have 13 *pastoral commissions* for catechesis, liturgy, the family and young people [...]. The pastoral council is also divided into various bodies. Much of our work is done with the people in charge of the communities and the commissions to direct all this complex activity. This might seem a complicated procedure and in part it is so, but we are happy because we have found a good response in the people [...]. In a large city such as Jakarta, there is a mixture of the old and the new and this makes it difficult to have a

⁶ Cf. Francesco Marini, *Cordialmente vostro*, cit., 155–157.

unified pastoral approach. We are organizing ourselves to move from a *pastoral ministry based on requests* — for sacraments and religious services — to a *pastoral ministry based on an evangelical proposal* that consists in deepening the faith experience. Given the complexity of the parish setup, it is not easy to reach all the levels involved, but it is a fascinating task and requires that all the missionaries study, reflect and commit themselves».

In connection with this, Fr. Marini took part as a speaker at a meeting organized by the magazine “Missione Oggi”, in Brescia (June 2013), on the challenging question: “Are we the last Christians?” This is what he had to say:

My last eleven years in Indonesia can be divided into two periods. I spent the first period in a parish and the second one (four years) in a formation center that stands out for its openness to dialogue. Every month we hold a dialogue meeting with members of other religions. It has been a time of two surprises for me.

During the first period of my return to the missions, after many years, and full of enthusiasm, I thought we would be sowing the Gospel. I noticed, however, that there was a certain manipulation of religion, along the lines of an animistic mentality. In short, God was being reduced to an instrument.

Working with Fr. Cambielli, we spent many years trying to make people understand that God is a precious treasure without any conditions, that He must not be tamed or made benevolent through various strategies. This ambiguity of religion was a problem for me. The people asked for blessings on objects and houses, for special prayers for something or on behalf of someone, but it was not always an expression of faith, but rather the result of a haggling mentality.

I could not refuse, yet it was not easy to explain that this was not a right thing to do. I eventually adjusted to them and ended up doing what they asked.

The second surprise came from dialogue. I was not surprised by the fact that there are fundamentalist groups among the Muslims (there are some among the Christians too), but I was surprised to find evangelical persons, sensitivities and experiences among them. It is wonderful to see how these experiences spread, multiply, become stronger and create bonds. It is not a theological dialogue, but an opportunity to build relationships, increase solidarity, strengthen their respect for others, for women, and take a stand against polygamy, in the effort to make a new interpretation of Islam.

Our contribution is to strengthen these novelties that they carry in their hearts and in their lives. There is a need for constant purification, discernment and growth.



On 1 August 2015, Fr. Marini returned to Italy and the Mother House for medical treatment: he was ill with Myelodysplastic syndrome and it had worsened in the meantime. Fr. Vito G. Scagliuso writes: «Father Francesco was serene during this difficult phase of his life and was a very affable and encouraging presence among his sick confreres. He was serene and welcomed visitors with an encouraging smile. He jokingly said to one, “Now that we have Pope Francis, I am sure that I will die a Catholic”».

He waited serenely for sister Death, well aware that it is something temporal, not eternal: a reality that confirms life, the door that opens to eternal life; he was comforted in this by the words of St. Paul: «For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens» (2 Cor 5:1).

On 24 May 2016, Fr. Marini — “a missionary who was open to surprises and capable of surprising others” — concluded his intense earthly journey.

The participation of the confreres and many friends in the Xaverian Family’s sorrow was unanimous, as can be seen in the following tributes: people remember him with admiration, gratitude and affection as one «called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God »⁷:

Although the news was not entirely unexpected, I heard about the death of Fr. Marini here in Orzano, in the province of Udine, where I am preaching a course of Spiritual Exercises [...].

Illness has taken him away from us while he was still young and active, leaving us with a despondent heart, almost as if he has been stolen from us. For all these reasons I am very sorry that I will be unable to attend his funeral in Parma.

However, I will be present there with all our Family in prayer, to thank God for giving him to us; I also thank “Macinino” for his kindness, his intelligent service to the mission and to our Family, and for his friendship. May the Lord welcome him into his House and from there may he continue to love our Family and obtain for us new missionaries who are full of intelligent zeal and industrious as he was (*Fr. Gabriele Ferrari*).

I was deeply moved by the news of “Macinino’s” death. I remember the long friendship we enjoyed during our time in Parma, when he was a teacher and the animator of Navetta group, and I was a young student;

⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 1:1.

our experience in the “Comune” and the six years we spent together in the General Direction.

Even though he removed himself from the limelight at the end of his service, I have always considered him as my master in the years of my own service to the Congregation.

It is still too soon to make a lucid assessment, but I would just like to remember and emphasize his kindness and intelligence.

May the Lord show him His face, the face he sought with passion and intelligence (*Fr. Rino Benzoni*).

I wish to join you in thanking the Lord for giving Fr. Francesco Marini to the entire Church, as you entrust him to the hands of the Lord, to whom Fr. Marini entrusted himself and, as he wrote in his last communication, to whose «divine language he was more and more attentive».

In actual fact he was always attentive to the Lord; he always bore witness to Him, announced Him and recognized Him in every situation, even in the most alienated and difficult circumstances that seemed entirely bereft of anything Christian. As one in love with Christ, he recognized him and made him known through his meekness, profound sensitivity and evangelical simplicity.

The extraordinary pontificate of Pope Francis had kindled many expectations within him; he had lived through the season of the Second Vatican Council and knew how to interpret, with great freedom, its missionary enthusiasm and dialogue with all.

I knew him with my brothers of the Community of Sant’Egidio and shared his great concern for peace, especially in Burundi.

I am certain that Fr. Francesco continues to pray for us, for the Church and for the world; I am sure that he has been welcomed by the Lord, to whom he had always stretched out his hands so that He could guide Him along His paths.

Thank you, Francesco. Rest in peace and pray for us (*Archbishop Matteo Zuppi of Bologna*).

I am sending this e-mail to you, Father General, and to the entire community of the Xaverians, to express my most sincere condolences on the death of the beloved Fr. Francesco Marini.

I speak on behalf of the Diocese of Ascoli Piceno and, therefore, of Bishop D’Ercole, who did not know Fr. Francesco well as he has been bishop of Ascoli for just two years; above all, I speak personally because Fr. Francesco and I studied together at the Seminary. When the Lord separated us and sent us along different paths, we always remained united by bonds of a

profound friendship, we were in constant contact, even when he was in Indonesia working with another son of Ascoli, Fr. Silvano Laurenzi.

We saw each other in the month of August last year for the feast of our patron, Saint Emygdius and we had planned to see each other again to celebrate our priesthood with a Mass and to share memories about our youthful past.

When he spoke to me about his illness, he told me of his total abandonment to God's will of God and I knew then that things were not looking good for him.

A great man has left us and you. His puny physical figure hid a great cultural, spiritual and communicative depth. We, his school companions, will offer Mass and prayers for his eternal rest, since pastoral reasons prevent us from attending the in Parma (that day is the feasts of Corpus Domini in our city). Along with sorrow at his death, we also experience a Paschal joy because, from his place in heaven, Fr. Francesco will accompany us until we meet again in the Father's House for the eternal banquet (*Fr. Emidio Rossi, Vicar General of the Diocese of Ascoli Piceno*).

These are hours of sadness for me and for many members of the Community of Sant'Egidio. We have received the sad news of the death of Fr. Francesco Marini, who was a dearly beloved friend and, for many years, a faithful companion in the proclamation of the Gospel and in friendship with the poorest.

Though we were aware of his illness, we never imagined he would die so soon. He had got us used to his rather laidback and sardonic way of considering it, almost giving it no importance at all. With this attitude he truly showed us just how strong his faith was.

Father Francesco was for me, and for many of us, a personal friend first and foremost. During the period he was in Rome, we frequented each other almost daily; he "was one of us". In some way he felt part of our family, part of a vast spiritual fraternity without borders, founded upon friendship, the Gospel and the respect of each one's faith experience.

I remember how, for many years, he would come down to Trastevere almost every day by bike, from the hill of Viale Vaticano, to take part in the evening prayer of the Community, in Santa Maria in Trastevere. He loved the prayer of the Community and felt at home here. I remember the many convivial moments, the dinners and the many celebrations, which he never missed. His presence was a constant point of reference for us during those twelve years in Rome.

Father Francesco was first and foremost a true missionary, even before being a priest. He was attracted by faraway lands, by the joy and the struggle

of the Christian first proclamation. He was truly a living witness of the Church which goes forth, as Pope Francis likes to call it.

It is no coincidence that, among his many community experiences with us, the ones he perhaps loved the most were the Sunday celebrations in the many districts on the outskirts of Rome, such as Primavalle, Serpentara, Garbatella and Laurentino; in small chapels nestling among the council houses and homes of the poor people. Here he showed all his humanity and his enthusiastic charm with the adults, the elderly, the disabled the young and the children.

His profound humility, combined with a direct, frank and spontaneous style, made him a very attractive person in his human relationships. Many of us (it is difficult to say just how many) remember him with great affection. He left each one of them with the memory of his solidarity and sharing (*Giancarlo Penza*)⁸.

There is a time for living and a time for dying. It was sad to hear the news of the death of Fr. Francesco Marini [...].

I remember how, at the beginning of the reform (the period following the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998, *ed. note*), I learned a lot from Fr. Marini and his Xaverian confreres Xaverian about interreligious dialogue. I have a vivid memory of when they invited me to spend two days in the Domus of Padang, to speak about Islam and interreligious dialogue in Indonesia. I will never forget that I was able to live in a religious House.

Rest in peace, Fr. Marini. Thank you for your commitment to interreligious dialogue which strengthens the bond between the Catholic and Islamic communities (*Budhy Munawar Rachman*, Muslim intellectual).

I met Fr. Marini in the House of the Xaverian student community in Jakarta. I recall that he was also present at Pondok Ranggon, in 2015, at the commemoration of the “May 1998 Tragedy” (the urban guerrilla warfare in Jakarta after the fall of the dictator Suharto, which resulted in hundreds of victims, *ed. note*) along with Fr. Matteo Rebecchi.

I was sad to hear about his death. During a long chat, Fr. Marini encouraged me to continue to give a voice to the victims of the May 1998 Tragedy and to the National Commission on Violence against Women [which was founded to denounce the sexual violence perpetrated against Chinese women during the May 1998 Tragedy, *ed. note*.] (*Mariana Amiruddin*, a former member of a fundamental Islamic group and current commissioner of the National Commission on Violence against Women).

⁸ On Fr. Marini’s relationship with the Community of Sant’Egidio, see “Apostolato e amicizia” in Francesco Marini, *Cordialmente vostro*, cit., vol. II, 130–132.



Who was Fr. Francesco Marini?

«I believe it is an impossible task to say who Fr. Marini was. His personality was so rich that it defies even a broad description. Instead, I would like to highlight some of his most outstanding characteristics and, even more, the gifts he gave to me during the many days we spent together. First of all, I emphasize his great humility. He was a very rich person from an intellectual perspective: he read and studied constantly and, consequently, he was very up to date on matters relating to the Church, theology, politics and current affairs. He was the friend of theologians with whom he exchanged letters, and with whom he probably was collaborating. He had a profound love for the truth and wanted to understand things, yet he had soul of a child. He put himself beneath others. He was often a silent listener during the community meetings. When he did intervene, it was with few words that were always very wise and useful for everyone. He never showed any arrogance, nor did he give the impression that he was teaching others. He asked often for opinions: he did not want to do things on his own [...]. When he was given space, all his ability to analyze came forth, along with his knowledge and the ability to draw clear and logical, sometimes surprising, conclusions. His humility put others at ease. He was very affable, kind, always smiling [...]. He never burdened others with the fact that he was very cultured, nor that he had occupied very important positions in the Congregation. In Jakarta he was not the community rector and never burdened others with his past that was so rich in experience and responsibility. He was a brother among brothers and he showed this in many daily attitudes [...]. He was an evangelical man. He lived poverty very radically by giving away all that he believed was superfluous. He did not accumulate anything that was unnecessary. He was also evangelical in his desire to see the Church ever more consistent with the ideal proposed by Jesus. Anything that he believed to be far from the Gospel in Church life made him suffer [...]. Careerism, riches, inflexibility and trust in structures rather than in the Spirit were things that was unable to accept. He wanted to see a new Church, one that was poorer and closer to the poor [...]. He was also a spiritual man. His evangelical consistency made him close to God. He was certainly not a man who loved devotions and some spiritual traditions. Nevertheless, Fr. Marini had regular moments of prayer and, above all, he was an assiduous reader of the Bible. He read the New Testament in Greek and knew it in depth. His homilies were always very rich and based upon exegetical studies, a sign of his love for the Word of God. He

was also very interested in interreligious dialogue. He built relationships with many persons, who also at the moment of his death came to offer us their condolences[...]. Budhy Munawar Rahman, an Islamic intellectual who was a colleague of Fr. Marini at the philosophy faculty attended by the Xaverian students, said that he often discussed and learned much from him on dialogue. In short, anyone who met Fr. Marini was impressed by his personal, attentive and profound love. That was the experience of many Catholics, especially in the parish of Bintaro, but also of many non-Christian brothers and sisters. Undoubtedly, these impressions of mine so soon after our brother's departure for Heaven do not do justice to who Fr. Francesco was, but they do aim to thank God for the gift of this elder brother. I believe that living together with him has made me grow as a man and as a Christian» (*Fr. Matteo Rebecchi*).

Who was Fr. Francesco Marini?

«In Indonesia we really felt the loss of Fr. Marini, who was a man of great culture, but very humble. His serene smile and contribution to the pastoral ministry and formation in Indonesia were of great help to our Province [...]. I am convinced that Fr. Marini was a “great man”, who preferred to listen rather than speak [...]. The fact that Fr. Marini was elected Superior General for two mandates shows that he was a very qualified person in the Congregation. However, as usual, he remained humble and generous [...]. We were proud and happy that a former Superior General was assigned to the Xaverian Province of Indonesia in 2003 where, whether he was deployed in pastoral work or in formation, carried out his tasks with humility and dedication» (*Fr. Antonius Wahyudianto*).

During an interview with *Missione Oggi* in October 2009, Fr. Marini was asked: «How would you translate the word “missionary” from the perspective of your unique personal experience?». He replied:

The missionary vocation is difficult.

The departure from one's native country and culture and immersion in a world which, no matter how beautiful and rich it may be, is always felt as something foreign, and sometimes threatening (at least for a short period of time), is particularly stressful.

Diversity and a never perfect assimilation of the new life conditions, the difficulty of living alongside different persons and cultures, inevitably leads to pastoral failures, misunderstandings and errors, which can give rise to guilt feelings.

At a time of widespread agnosticism, relativism and theological revision of old ideas, we must reinterpret and rediscover the motivations and goals of our vocation as an essential condition for a serene mission experience. This personal revision is not easy amidst the confusion of opinions and ideas, but unless the missionary vocation is sustained by a consistent and convinced vision, it can no longer defend itself even in a psychological and human sense.

The mission requires total dedication: it cannot become just a job, repetition, duty... all our personal energies, especially of the heart, must be focused on serving the Gospel. Yet loneliness, failure, the longings of the heart for a profound and exclusive relationship, the admiration and closeness of many people, especially beautiful and humanly attractive women... all conspire to weaken this concentration of the heart.

In the development of one's personal life history and different circumstances, it is almost impossible to remain oriented, consistent and profound. As with all battles, a 100% victory is never achieved. Every battle leaves us with scars.

The missionary is called to an ongoing and profound re-conversion, something that challenges us to the depths of our being and whose outcome is always uncertain. Perseverance in the missionary life is a faith-inspired choice, that is to say, it is always risky, uncertain and full of hope.

I hope to conclude my missionary life without regret and without great lacerations.

Finally, who was Fr. Francesco Marini for us?

The Superior General, Fr. Luigi Menegazzo, thus describes him: «Fr. Francesco was a happy missionary, totally dedicated to living the Gospel well. Indonesia had truly conquered him: he spoke the language well, he loved the people, he enjoyed interreligious dialogue, he studied the culture, he formed new missionaries and he always spoke positively about the country. He was a moderate person, a shrewd thinker, a frank and very human man.

He was a good confrere and father, just like the Good Shepherd».

Fr. Domenico Calarco, sx

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