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In memoriam

Xaverian biographical profiles



Fr. Tiberio Munari

5 November 1919 ~ 14 September 2016

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Grantorto (PD – Italy)
5 November 1919

Zapopan (Guadalajara Jal. – MX)
14 September 2016

On 4 July 2003, Fr. Guadalupe Robledo wrote to Fr. Tiberio Munari to congratulate him on the 58th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood: «We who have lived with you for a long time have witnessed the missionary enthusiasm and tenacity of your commitment in Mexico [...]. We therefore congratulate and thank you for your dedication to the mission and hope that your presence in Mexico will continue to be “a proclamation of God’s wonders” and a source of inspiration for the young generations».

Upon hearing the news of Fr. Tiberio’s death, Fr. Luigino Marchioron stated: «Fr. Tiberio worked hard and generously for the Xaverian Region of Mexico, which he always looked upon as his beloved family; he understood it and served it, he encouraged it to love its missionary vocation more and more, as true sons of Conforti, and he forgave it often with tact and sensitivity».

Gabriela Hernández — a spiritual daughter of Fr. Tiberio —, declared: «Fr. Tiberio was a “one-off” Xaverian missionary in his dedication, guidance, constant effort, joy, dynamism, tact, attentive listening and, above all, in his faithful love for and service to God until the very end of his life».

These tributes describe Fr. Tiberio Munari: the man, the Christian, the priest, the missionary, the apostle of the Word, the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary.



Tiberio Munari was born on 5 November 1919 in Grantorto, in the province of Padua, the last of five children born to Emilio Munari and Elvira Chiomento. His father was a shoemaker and his mother was a housewife. Tiberio was just four years old when his mother died suddenly of pneumonia on 18 December 1923. Although he had just some vague memories of her, there was always an intense communion between mother and son, as he wrote in *Missionari Saveriani*:

In 1943, two years before I was ordained priest, I wrote to my two aunts (my mother's sisters) and asked them to tell me something about my mother's life when she was a young girl. I had never got to know her because she had died young.

They assured me that my mother had been an excellent catechist in the parish school of San Pietro in Gu (PD), under the guidance of Fr. Beniamino Socche, who later became the bishop of Reggio Emilia. On Sundays she taught the catechism to the little girls of the parish and she had also been appointed a minister of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Every morning, she and her friends walked three kilometers to the parish church for Mass. She kept this good habit even after she was married.

She was in charge of the Post Office and the work was very demanding because of the thousands of soldiers who were coming from and going to the front (during the First World War, *editor's note*), and she also had to look after her large family while her husband was at the front. In all of this, morning Mass and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the evening after work were her daily nourishment, strength and consolation [...]. I owe my entire priesthood to my mother.

When their mother died, the children were entrusted to their aunt Luisa, their relatives in Verona and a family of Grantorto. Tiberio and his brother Fausto remained with their father. The dispersion of the family was a deep wound for Tiberio that never healed. When he was an adult, he said: «My beautiful and happy family had fallen apart. In spite of this, we entrusted ourselves to the heart of Jesus».

Tiberio became an altar server in the parish when he was ten years old. At the end of primary school the religious life began to attract him. The Scalabrinians (Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo) were well known in the region as religious who gave spiritual assistance to Italian emigrants. Nevertheless, a providential meeting of his father Emilio with a certain Father Giuseppe, a Xaverian missionary, changed the course of his vocation and, on 9 October 1931, Tiberio joined the minor seminary in Vicenza, where he was warmly welcomed by the rector, Fr. Pietro Uccelli.

Tiberio's aunt Marcella was convinced that her sister Elvira had obtained a priestly vocation from God for two of her sons: Timoteo, a Salesian and Tiberio, a Xaverian. She told how her sister asked God every day at communion to call at least one of her sons to the priesthood.

Fr. Tiberio said: «I owe my vocation to my mother. I believe that many missionaries and priests can confirm this simple truth. My mother used to attend Mass and receive communion every day and she prayed to God that at least one her sons would become a priest. We are proud of our holy mother [...]. I am certain that she, together with Fr. Giuseppe and our teacher Castagna, who spoke to us about the missions at school, contributed to the birth of my vocation».

He also remembered with gratitude and respect the formators of the minor seminary of Vicenza: «They always gave great importance to the Eucharist — “the bread of the strong and the nourishment of the apostolic life” —, and bore witness to its priority and centrality in our formation».

After finishing secondary school (1931–36), Tiberio, animated by the desire to «be one of the Apostles of Christ in the conquest of the pagan world», joined the Xaverian Novitiate in San Pietro in Vincoli (RA).

The Novice Master, Fr. Faustino Tissot, concentrated all his formative work on two great slogans of St. Guido Maria Conforti, the Founder of the Xaverian Institute, namely, “The love of Christ impels us” and “Love each other like brothers and respect each other like princes”.

During Novitiate Tiberio read the book “True devotion to Mary” by St. Luigi Maria Grignion de Montfort and it made a profound impression on his priestly and missionary life.

He made his First Profession on 2 September 1937 and moved to Parma to study Philosophy and Theology.

In 1944, his Theology rector said that «Tiberio Munari was very committed to his formation», a formation that was based on the “sublime nature” of the religious-priestly-missionary vocation and on the “heroic nature” of the response.

Looking back at his years as a Theology student, Fr. Tiberio wrote in his *Memorie*:

The four years of theology were years of combat (during the Second World War, *editor's note*). We lost more hours of lessons than we attended because of the bombing.

In the period when Parma was being bombed, the Superiors transferred us to the house of Capriglio. During the night of 2 July 1944, we were taken prisoners by the Germans who thought we were partisans. Fortunately, we were liberated thanks to an intervention by the bishop of Parma and our superiors [...].

I made my Final Profession on 5 November 1941¹. I was ordained priest with eight confreres, in the early hours of the morning of 29 June 1945, in the cathedral of Parma. We went to the cathedral and came back as if it were just another day at school. Almost no members of our families were with us. None of my family attended because they lived faraway. The lack of people was also because the majority of the railways were out of use as the war was coming to an end [...].

I arrived back in Grantorto on 16 July, the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, for the patronal feast of the village. I celebrated a sung Mass and gave his first communion to Valeriano, my six-year old cousin, the son of aunt Assunta. I was welcomed by the people, who were proud of the first missionary in the history of their parish. In the afternoon, after solemn Vespers, we went to the cemetery and laid flowers at the tomb of my mother, to whom I owe my entire priesthood.



In 1945, Fr. Tiberio was assigned to Indonesia, but he never set foot in the country despite making good progress in the study of the language. He therefore continued with his ordinary duties and the new tasks that had been entrusted to him.

He taught Latin in the minor seminaries of Vicenza (1945–46) and Udine (1946–48): he himself had founded the seminary of Udine; he served as visitor of the Pontifical Mission Societies to the Seminaries of Italy (1948–50); he was vice-rector of the Mother House, in Parma (1950–56) and rector of the same (1956–57); he served as rector of the minor seminary in Brescia (1957–60) and made plans to be visit Pordenone, Venice, Bari and Salerno.

¹ On the occasion of his Final Profession, Tiberio wrote to the Superior General on 12 September 1941: «Prostrated in spirit at the holy feet of Jesus, I ask you a grace from you, who are his representative [...]. Although I have hardly made any progress after almost four years of Profession, I nevertheless dare to ask God and you to allow me to make the holy perpetual vows, always trusting in God's infinite goodness and in the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Reverend Father, I ask you to grant me the grace that many of my Brothers already possess. With the help of God, I hope to make some more progress, indeed, much more than what I have made until today».

In 1960 Fr. Tiberio arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Belgian Congo), his new destination. After studying Kiswahili, he served as assistant priest in Kamituga (Feb–Jul 1961).

He was elected to represent the Xaverian Region of the Congo at the General Chapter (4–22 September 1961). His missionary experience in the Congo was very brief, just short of one year, because, in 1962, he was sent to Spain with the task of opening a Xaverian Circumscription in the native country of St. Francis Xavier. The only help he received was the generous blessing of the Superior General on his departure for Spain.

This project was not new². In the period 1947–49, Frs. Cattenati, Ambrico, Paolucci and Marchetti had made an attempt to fulfill it. However, Spain in those years was still suffering the consequences of the civil war and the Second World War: poverty was rife everywhere and the Fathers had to give up after trying with all the means they had available.

It was now the turn of Fr. Tiberio, who was an expert in the opening of Xaverian houses in Italy: he traveled all over Spain to make the Xaverians known. Very soon he was joined by Fr. Emaldi, who had been a missionary in China, and together they traveled throughout the whole of Spain. When Fr. Corinaldesi arrived they opened up a space for the communications sector and began to publish the *Newsletter* of the Xaverian missionaries, which was sent out to seminaries, parishes and many families; they also began to publish the first books of the Xaverian Publications, whose headquarters was in Madrid.

In the space of a few years the houses were ready: Madrid (Regional House), Araya, in Navarra (Seminary), Pozuelo de Alarcón (Theology community), Guernica (minor seminary) and Pamplona (Vocation Center).

In the meantime, Fr. Tiberio was the rector of the Regional House (1962–64) and the House of Pamplona (1971–77). Although his many occupations prevented him to a certain degree from «working directly and fully in propaganda work», he was still able to attend to it with his usual dedication, as he said to the Superior General, Bishop Gianni Gazza, in a letter dated 19 June 1973:

² «The Xaverian presence in Spain began in March 1947, but the first document referring to it bears the date of 12 April 1940. Seven years of experience, research and reflection were necessary before things got underway [...]. The General Direction had entrusted Fr. Bonardi with the task of seeking someone in Rome who could facilitate the task. He sent the results of his meetings with Mgr. Unzalu, the Spanish director of the FIDES Agency in Rome (who had known Bishop Conforti), to the General Direction, stating that Mgr. Unzalu believed it was a good idea to open a Xaverian House in Spain, indicating the region of Catalonia as the most suitable place [...]. Fr. Bonardi was authorized to seek further contacts: he was the great animator of this project». (Marco Milia, “Spagna, nella terra del Saverio”, in AA.VV, *I Missionari Saveriani*, Parma, Istituto Missionari Saveriani, 1996, 157).

This year, my work in Pamplona and Navarra consisted of a few hundred missionary conferences in state and religious schools, especially with young boys and adolescents in the second, third and fourth years of secondary school. At the same time I also followed some groups of adolescents in Pamplona, Tafalla, Alsasua and Estella.

Some of these, who I visited on a weekly basis, or every fifteen days, holding small group meetings, projecting slides and commenting on the Gospel, should be ready to enter next year, in the fourth or fifth year of high school.

If we manage this year to organize the work well also in the other parishes of Navarra, something concrete should take shape by next year. Furthermore, now that we are three in number, we should be able to organize the community life in a better way [...].

In the meantime, I take advantage of the end of this academic year to express my total availability to you and the Provincial Superior for any task, commitment, or mission, so that I may live according to the will of God. I am sure that He will give me the necessary good will and strength to leave for any Xaverian mission.



In his *Memorie*, Fr. Tiberio wrote: «I had spent fifteen years in Spain when the Superiors asked me to decide if I wanted to go to Colombia or Mexico. I chose Mexico, the country of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patron and Queen of the Americas and the Philippines».

Before leaving for Mexico, his desire was «after 32 years of priesthood and aged 59, years of constant frenetic activity, to spend a period of time in the Mother House to update myself on some topics that were never dealt with in our theological formation, for example, Sacred Scripture, Ecclesiology and the Sacraments, and participate fully in the school and the life of our Theology students». It was not possible to fulfill this desire because he was needed in Mexico.

In April 1977, Fr. Tiberio began the last, and the longest, phase of his life (1977–2016). After almost fifteen years in Spain he was ready for Mexico, where he continued to strive to fulfill the will of God with enthusiasm. In connection with this, he wrote to the Provincial Superior, Delio Romagnoli: «I am happy to return to direct missionary work. I am happy to belong to the Xaverian Province of Mexico, where I know almost all of the confreres. I hope that I will be assigned to the apostolate, even though my age means that I can only promise a humble and modest service».

He was assigned to San Juan del Rio as treasurer of the minor Seminary and the “Centro Union” School (1977–83). He thus remembered his time in San Juan del Rio:

In the morning I celebrated Mass in the Beatario, a convent of nuns founded by Fr. Antonio Margil de Jesus O.F.M. (1657–1726), one of the greatest missionaries of Mexico and Latin America.

Saturdays and Sundays were dedicated to the ministry in the villages, especially in the community of Galindo, where there is a fantastic group of catechists with whom I had planned the construction of the new church.

After a “sabbatical year” in Parma (1983–84), Fr. Tiberio was assigned, first, to the community of Guadalajara and put in charge (1984–95) of the Centro Xavier, the Xaverian publishers and the house of Zapopan (1995–2016) and, afterwards, as a collaborator of the Centro Xavier, where he gave full expression to his ability as a writer: he served as director of the Xaverian “Newsletter”, he wrote widely about the Missions and became known to a vast number of readers. At the same time, he was a well-liked speaker in many cities and villages of Mexico, the spiritual guide of many men and women, and the founder of prayer groups, all of them inspired by the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary. In connection with this, he wrote to the Superior General, Francesco Marini, on 7 November 1991:

I have been working in Mexico for almost eight years. I believe have never worked more than I did this year.

I have been conquered by the very beautiful messages of Our Lady of Medugorie and I am making them known all over Mexico. Sometimes I am told that it is not exactly a missionary work in line with the charism of Bishop Conforti. I have wondered about this myself on several occasions.

Since I am not neglecting my other work — the newsletter, ministry, spiritual direction of young people —, instead of spending the rest of my time watching television or going for walks — a pleasure I could easily take at my age —, I send out books on Our Lady. I think, therefore, that this too is a great missionary work because they bear the name of the “Centro Xavier”, which is a source of propaganda for our Xaverian Missions and Houses.



Fr. Tiberio wrote in his *Memorie*: «My retirement began in December 2008». Nevertheless, until the very end of his life his room was a place of encounter and study, guidance, consolation and listening.

In the words of the Regional Superior, Fr. Juan Antonio Flores, «Fr. Tiberio, at the end of his days had become a living Gospel, completing in his flesh what is lacking in Christ's passion, walking hand in hand with Mary, who leads us to Jesus. Fr. Tiberio was a complete missionary».

In his *Memorie* Fr. Tiberio confirms what Fr. Flores said: «In my long life as a priest I have always asked the Holy Spirit to guide me in such a way that all my actions were in harmony with God's plan and his divine will, and not my own fragile and unstable will. The great temptation of these times is spiritual tepidity, the propagation of iniquity, in a word, the apostasy of Christians».

The personal tributes of some people who knew Fr. Tiberio shed light on his ability to listen to people. He spent many hours in patient listening, in a spirit of charity, with his eyes fixed on God!

I am with you — since I feel part of the Xaverian Family — as we mourn the loss of the great priest, Fr. Tiberio. He filled us with his wisdom, explanations and good advice that I will always carry in my heart (*Elisabeth*).

Fr. Munari was and is a great man and a true apostle of God, always ready to help anyone in need, in any place and in every circumstance (*Anonymous*).

Fr. Tiberio was always faithful to his consecrated life and to communicating God's grace through his writings (*Javier Mexicano*).

Thank you, Fr. Tiberio, for your great love of people, for your service through confession and spiritual direction. Thank you for helping me to become a better daughter of God. Thank you for your great love for Our Lady, the Church and Our Lord Jesus Christ (*Hilda*).

I will carry Fr. Tiberio in my heart for ever: I cannot forget his smile, nor the day he baptized my son. Thank you, Fr. Tiberio, for the peace you sowed in me every time you heard my confession (*Barbara*).

I have no words to express my thanks to Fr. Tiberio for his love, his teachings and the peace he always gave me (*Ana Bautista*).

The immense peace and joy of Fr. Tiberio was contagious; his unshakable faith in Our Blessed Lady helped us to know her better and to find strength in her; his simplicity enable us to enjoy the most simple things of life (*Hector*).

Fr. Tiberio's was a "listening apostolate", a logical consequence of a profound spiritual paternity, based on an intense Christian life, with Jesus Christ at its center, thus making him an attentive and diligent brother. His encounters

with people always began with a profound and sincere smile that broke down all barriers and walls.

His “listening”, in other words, his spiritual paternity, led people to unlimited horizons and to hear the needs of all humanity, because a Christian who is absorbed by his own problems and sufferings is an egoist. Fr. Tiberio, by giving peace to others, opened their souls, like Christ, to the suffering of humanity.

The Regional Superior, Fr. Juan Antonio Flores, declared: «Many people were struck by the words of Fr. Tiberio. His proximity, friendship and kindness were the expressions of a spiritual paternity that were enjoyed by many people: men and women, young people and adults: all of them benefited from his advice, exhortations and spiritual guidance».

Our Blessed Lady accompanied Fr. Tiberio throughout his entire life. «I have always loved her like my own mother», he wrote. «She helped me with her love to persevere as a priest and Xaverian missionary. I have dedicated a great part of my life to making her known to others. I have prayed the Rosary every day for many years since my youth».

He took every opportunity to speak about Our Blessed Lady: personal conversations, conferences, homilies [...]. He knew well that her mission as Mother of the Church was to lead men and women to Jesus.

In connection with this, he fought long and hard to have the words “our Mother” added to the second part of the “Hail Mary” after the words “Mother of God”. This idea had been launched by the auxiliary bishop of Guadalajara, Javier Navarro, at the Marian Congress in 1995, but nothing came of it. Fr. Tiberio embraced the idea and did his utmost to have it approved.

It was indeed approved, on 22 December 1995, by Cardinal Juan Sandoval, who informed the parish priests about it in a circular letter. In 1997 Fr. Tiberio wrote the book “A mother for humanity in the third millennium” to promote the idea and he sent a copy to all the bishops of Mexico [...].

In line with his Marian devotion, Fr. Tiberio was very interested in the alleged apparitions in Medjugorje, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and spoke and wrote widely about them³, with beneficial spiritual effects on his listeners and readers. Alfonso T., who was born and grew up in a Catholic family in Guadalajara, Mexico, declared:

I graduated in medicine with a specialization at one of the best hospitals in Madrid [...]. On my return to Guadalajara, I continued to take an interest in things that distanced me more and more from God: astrology, mental control, transcendental meditation and reincarnation. I had abandoned

³ Other books written by him on the topic: “Medjugorje, school of Our Lady”; “The Virgin Mary speaks at Medjugorje”; “Science and Medjugorje”.

prayer and many years had passed since I last attended Mass or made my confession. However I experienced a great spiritual emptiness deep in my heart.

I found some books in a bookshop that made a great impression on me: “The apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje” by Fr. Svetozar Kraljevic and “Medjugorje, the Marian school” by Fr. Tiberio Munari, a Xaverian missionary.

I was not struck so much by the great signs (the miracle of the sun in Fatima, miraculous healings or the many conversions), but by the messages of Our Lady: prayer, fasting and abandonment to God and His Divine Providence.

These messages surpassed the atheistic and materialistic rationalism into which I had fallen during my years of “searching” and perdition. The messages went against my way of living and thinking. It was therefore not easy for Our Lady to “rescue” me, but little by little she became the “path” that led me to her beloved Jesus.

My rebirth through the encounter with Our Lady of Medjugorje, the daily prayer of the Rosary, fasting and the Eucharist, all led me to serve the sick and the poor as best I could in my work as a physician [...].

Nevertheless, Fr. Tiberio’s involvement with “Medjugorje” was a cause of some concern to the Superiors. On 11 August 1987, the Superior General, Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, wrote to him:

The other day, when you called me as you were preparing to travel from Rome to Medjugorje, you will certainly have noticed that I was not very happy about your journey. I did not want to conceal my disapproval from you. I want to make it very clear that I am not against devotion to Our Blessed Lady, because when one has to say certain things it is easy to be accused of iconoclasm.

I want you to understand that the bishops of Italy (and others too, for example, Cardinal Salazar of Guadalajara) have forbidden priests from organizing pilgrimages to Medjugorje. Let us not waste any time debating whether or not your case is one of organization or participation... The spirit of the norm that is referred to priests is very clear and it is just a matter of whether we want to obey it or not.

I therefore ask you to accept the rules and not to take advantage of any divisions among the bishops: accept them with the same obedience that you would expect from others if you occupied the place of those who have issued them, and try to grasp the counter witness that can be given when, in order to venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary, we go against the instructions of those chosen by the Holy Spirit to guide the Church of God. This also applies to your work in Mexico [...].



After his brief missionary experience in the Congo, Fr. Tiberio turned to writing. During his time in Spain he had already written articles for the newsletter “Misioneros Javerianos” and other missionary pamphlets.

However it was in San Juan del Rio that he began to write seriously and he published the biography of Fr. Antonio Margil de Jesus O.F.M. His writing activity became even more intense when he was appointed director of the “Centro Xavier”. Fr. Tiberio himself thus summed up this activity:

I have written about 80 books⁴ on lay people, missionaries, martyrs and, in a special way, Blessed Oscar Arnulfo Romero, St. Luis Servín, the “Gloria de Arandas”, and the servant of God, Mother Yolanda, whose confessor I was during the last years of her life.

Fr. Tiberio also worked on radio and television. In 2008, by a providential coincidence, he was invited to collaborate with his spiritual daughter Gaby Hernández de Alujas, on the television channel “Maria Visión” of Guadalajara. The weekly program was obviously dedicated to “Mary, our Mother”. At the same time Radio Maria opened its doors to him.



Fr. Tiberio Munari, “a Xaverian missionary who loved intensely the One and Triune God and Our Blessed Lady and Mother”, died on 14 September 2016, aged 96.

During the homily at the funeral Mass, the Regional Superior said: «two distinctly missionary Marian titles stand out in his spirituality: “Maria, Reina de la Paz” and “Señora de todos los pueblos” [...]. As he grew in his devotion to Mary, Fr. Tiberio identified with her “Let it be done to me according to your word”. The last years of his life were filled by the Divine Will. He lived his missionary vocation as a collaborator of the Spirit, in harmony with the sentiments of the People of God towards Mary. He thus achieved the fullness of his existence and service. Mary accompanied him on his way to Jesus».

*Fr. Raffaele Piras S.X.
with the collaboration of the editorial staff.*

⁴ Cf. CDSR for a list of books by Fr. Tiberio Munari.

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