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In memoriam

Xaverian biographical profiles



Fr. Silvano Oreste Garello

31 December 1938 ~ 18 January 2017

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Fr. Silvano Oreste Garello

Valdagno (VI – ITA)
31 December 1938

Dhaka (BD)
18 January 2017

On 19 January 2017, announcing the death of Fr. Silvano Garello, the *AsiaNews* agency of Milan said: «With more than 200 religious books to his credit, including commentaries on the Bible and a “Christian Dictionary” containing 514 words translated from Italian and English, he was considered as the man who “translated” the faith of the Church into Bengali. Thanks to his unique mission, he made Christian values and writings accessible to the local people and his publications inspired many young people, both Catholics and Muslims». The Catholic author, Khakon Corraya, declared: «I owe a debt of gratitude to him for I was inspired by his articles in Catholic publications». The physician, Pallob Rozario, dedicated his last farewell «to the beloved Fr. Garello for his devoted love, commitment and enthusiasm for Bangladesh and its people».

Silvano Garello was born in Valdagno (Vicenza, Italy), on 31 December 1938. He attended elementary school in Cereda di Cornedo Vicentino (VI), junior high school in Vicenza and senior high school in Zelarino (VE).

Regarding his vocation, he candidly confessed that he had grown up in a family that was very devoted to St. Teresa of the Child Jesus and that he

decided to become a missionary when he was eight years old. In the questionnaire *Esame della vocazione*, the thirteen year-old Silvano wrote:

Since my earliest years, when I began to understand even the most simple things, there was this thought in my mind, initially a little uncertain, but then more and more insistent: I want to be a missionary.

I remember well how happy I was when I read the magazine *Crociata Missionaria* and others of a similar nature; as I read those moving tales I was struck by the exciting life of God's missionaries.

My parents are more than happy about my vocation because they know that this is the life for me, the ideal to which God has called me, removing me from the world and putting me here, in this Institute, to prepare me to be his worthy apostle in the lands of the infidels.

I am therefore doing my best to prepare myself for this great and sublime mission, the same mission that Jesus Christ first carried out in Palestine.

How good the Lord has been to me in choosing me from among many; I thank him with all my heart and ask for the grace of perseverance, that I may one day fulfill my desire to become a missionary priest.

He joined the Xaverian Institute on 11 September 1955, in the novitiate of San Pietro in Vinci (RA), where he made the First Profession on 12 September 1956. He then went to Desio (MB) for classical studies in the Xaverian Lyceum (1956–59). He served as assistant in the junior seminary of Alzano Lombardo (BG) from 1959 until 1961. He studied Theology in Parma, where he made his Final Profession on 12 September 1962 and was also ordained priest there on 25 October 1964. In their report presenting him for Major Orders, his formators described him: "Small in stature, he possesses many fine qualities. He perseveres in his duties, uses his time well and takes good care of his spiritual and intellectual life".

Fr. Silvano thus described the day of his ordination to the priesthood: «On that day, 25 October 1964, 25 of us were ordained priests in the Xaverian Mother House in Parma. My parents, my two brothers Olinto and Gabriele, my sister Silvana and a large group of people from my home parish were all present [...]. Recently, one of my confreres who was ordained with me sent me a photograph of that historical moment as a way of remembering that day and each other. It is not just a question of nostalgia, but rather of looking back on our life with gratitude for the gift and the task we have received».

Upon completion of his theology studies, he was sent to the junior seminary of Vicenza (1965–69) to teach and work in vocation animation. In the meantime, he also attended the Liturgy Institute in Padua, where he obtained a diploma of specialization in Pastoral Liturgy. Fr. Antonio Germano recalls those years:

Dear Silvano,
we used to jokingly call you “the prophet” and no one among us ever doubted that you were in love with Jesus Christ, who you wanted to proclaim to others, just like St. Paul. We met for the first time in Parma during the last two years of Theology. They were the enthusiastic years of the Second Vatican Council and we were the first lucky ones to celebrate the Eucharist in Italian. Both of us were then assigned to the junior seminary in Vicenza, which was packed with seminarians.

During our first year, we were assigned to teach the first class of junior high school, which numbered 60 pupils, divided into three sections: two for me and one for you. Both of us also studied in Padua, where you studied liturgy at Santa Giustina and I studied Philosophy and Letters at the *Livianum*. Every Saturday and Sunday we went out to the villages of the region for mission appeals.

Our community was made up of 11 confreres, some of whom were elderly. Do you remember our attempts to convey the spirit of the Council during the weekly meetings?

Fr. Luigi Lo Stocco writes:

Dear Silvano,
I remember the many excursions we made together during our vacations when we were both young.

We always did our best to ensure that missionary animation would become a priority in our Xaverian Family. How many battles we fought together to make this dream come true [...].

Do you remember the time we were going back home in the fog after yet another meeting with the young people of a parish? We were both praying the rosary and you were driving, but could not see far ahead. We stopped the car and got out and saw that we had almost collided with a steel pillar at the side of the road.

We thanked God and Our Lady for saving us from an accident.



In June 1969 Fr. Silvano was assigned to Bangladesh¹ (which was then East Pakistan) and he arrived there on 1 July 1970, after a brief stay in London

¹ The evangelization of this country began with the arrival of the Jesuits, Dominicans and Portuguese Augustinians in the XVI century. In 1971, after a war, Bangladesh gained its independence from Pakistan. Roughly 90% of the population is Muslim. The Pope asked the Xaverians to begin a mission in the country and the first confreres arrived in Jessore in 1952; as of today, they have given more than one hundred missionaries to the country. More than 60 years of work and constant dedication have passed. “Learning to

to study English. He spent one year (July 1970 – June 1971) in Boyra, in the diocese of Khulna, where he studied Bengali. From July 1971 until June 1973 he served as assistant priest in Satkhira, a district of Bangladesh that is in the division of Khulna.

The beginning of Fr. Silvano's adventure in Bangladesh was very difficult as he found himself caught up in the country's tragic war of independence with Pakistan; he spoke at length about this tragedy in his first book: *Morte e vita in Bangladesh: diario della liberazione*.

On 10 November 1972, Fr. Silvano wrote to the General Councilor, Fr. Lucino Piacere: «All things considered I am quite well, though I do feel somewhat inadequate in the face of the work.

It is with this weakness upon me that I work, but I must also say that I am happy to keep trying to improve myself and the situation. The most difficult thing is not so much the work "for them", but the work "with them", respecting points of view and awaiting results that do not come.

The war has made our community more united and reflective and our Christian community is more open towards others.

I am happy to live among these confreres without diplomas or any desire for purely intellectual skirmishes. Yet we are not afraid of experts who come to visit us, or those who may come to stay with us [...].

I am also happy to see that we are reflecting on our methods of apostolate. After two years here, I cannot teach, but I must listen; make suggestions without insisting. I must prove myself in the field of responsibility that has been given to me. Others have the vocation to work and enjoy success in the social field; I would like to work in the field of academic and religious education.

My ultimate dream is to achieve a more profound relationship with our Muslim and Hindu brothers and sisters. This will take time. I am not yet ready. I do not have a good command of the language or the culture, but I believe we must work in this direction.

Independence has created a greater euphoria, freedom and incentive to research because people are just as dissatisfied as before, if not more».

work and listen, to speak, pray, sing and also write in the Bengali language, they began a pilgrimage of insertion into the cultural and religious riches of this people". The growth of this mission was slow because it came out of nothing and germinated like the flower of peace after the sufferings of war, calamities, hunger and social inequality.

Bangladesh has practically no resources, with the exception of the creativity and great patience of its inhabitants, who struggle every day for survival. After years of work, the mission today has its own local clergy, nuns, Christian villages and many Bangladeshi catechists.

The Xaverians are present in various dioceses (besides Khulna, which they founded) with the hope and the desire to be able to continue to work for a long time for the growth of this great people, thus extending the prospects of the universal missionary Church.

In July 1973, Fr. Silvano became ill with a bleeding ameba and travelled to Great Britain for medical treatment. He wrote: «I thus spent Christmas in Glasgow with Fr. Domenico Bello, who had also worked in Pakistan. In Glasgow he was serving as chaplain to the Italians. I felt like one of the exiles who dreamed of the songs of Zion. My mission was not in that place, though I continued to relive it from afar by writing my diary of the liberation, *Morte e vita in Bangladesh*, and telling the story of Fr. Mario Veronesi in the book *Morire tra gli oppressi*.

In 1974, Fr. Silvano was assigned to Italy as collaborator at the CSAM in Parma. He also traveled back and forth between Parma and Rome because he had enrolled at the Gregorian University, where he obtained a Masters in Missiology with a thesis on *Il rapporto maestro - discepolo come metodi di evangelizzazione in Bangladesh*; he also collaborated with the magazine *Fede e Civiltà*.



In July 1980, Fr. Silvano was sent back to Bangladesh, where he was assigned to Khulna (1980–88) as rector of the minor Seminary and as chaplain in the parish of the Cathedral; this gave him an opportunity to instruct the catechists on Vatican II and get the seminarians involved in various forms of the apostolate.

In the meantime, he began to write his first books in Bengali, among them a Christianity course by correspondence and a monthly four-page publication named “Word of life”, which contained the testimonies of Christians. He also published eight pamphlets of 32 pages as a commentary on the “Our Father”, with a circulation of 3,000 copies. It was the first book in Bengali printed in offset by the Catholic Church.

From 1988 until 1996, and from 2001 until 2017, Fr. Silvano resided in Dhaka, where he was put in charge of interreligious dialogue and publications in Bengali, whilst working also in the pastoral ministry. After a sabbatical year in Jerusalem (1996–97), he carried out his apostolate in Noluakuri, in the diocese of Mymensingh, a new missionary presence in the north-east of the country, among the tribal peoples: the Christian Mandi, Muslims and the Hindus (1997–2001).

On 5 November 2000, Fr. Garelo wrote: «For some time now I have been working in Dhaka, in the area of Shantinagar, in this large Asian city in which 16 million people struggle to survive. On the one hand I feel helpless, yet I also hear powerful words of encouragement: “Be fearless; speak out and do not keep silence: I am with you. I have so many people that belong to me in this city that no one will attempt to harm you” (*Acts* 18:9–10). So here I am,

trying to perceive the signs of the presence of God, who loves all the men and women of this city. Goodness knows no frontiers, but penetrates everything gently, with respect and freedom. Evil, which tries to take us by the throat, challenges us to react [...]. The mission began with Jesus as a burning fire: “I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!” (*Lk 12:49*). [...]. Of this period I remember the publication of my commentary on the “Our Father”, the documents of Vatican II in Bengali and the profiles of Frs. Veronesi, Cobbe and Dalla Vecchia, three friends in Bangladesh».

In an article “Return to Bangladesh” (5 December 1997), he wrote:

I am now in the village of Noluakuri. My new mission is located in the north of Bangladesh, in the diocese of Mymensingh. Here I found everything ready: a house, a school with a small chapel, a hostel for Christian and Hindu children who attend the high school, a network of small schools and local pastoral contacts [...]

The small Christian community is made up of a little more than one hundred families of the Mandi or Garo tribes. To the Muslims and the Hindus, amongst whom they live, they cannot offer riches or knowledge, but only their great humanity and, above all, the light of their faith.

All people look to the sky to see which star can guide them on their journey. The light that shone in Bethlehem is the only one that can respond to the greatest desires of the human heart. It is like the light of a house during the night: entering into this house, people can joyfully discover that God has come to live among them by becoming a child. Here they will discover that God calls them his children and, therefore, they must love each other like brothers and sisters [...].

My superior, Fr. Antonio Germano, told me, perhaps in jest: “Go to Noluakuri. There you will be able to write all the books you want!” But is this to be the purpose of my presence among this people?

I cannot conceal my emotion at this new beginning. After perceiving with my heart the journey of Jesus along the roads of Palestine, will I now be able to walk along these country roads to proclaim the Gospel?

I have however found a good initial inspiration. I left Dhaka immediately after celebrating the feast of St. Francis Xavier, our patron saint. If I compare myself to him I feel very embarrassed. How I would like to have his flexibility and creativity in the face of the ever new challenges of the mission.”



After six months of rest and aggiornamento in Italy, Fr. Silvano returned to Bangladesh in November 2001 and he was assigned to the Xaverian house of Dacca, where he was engaged full-time in the ministry, vocation animation and in writing books of Christian formation and interreligious dialogue. He

commented on his enthusiasm for writing: «I am passionate about making Jesus and his message known, and telling people about how he has inspired many people down through the centuries to take the risk of imitating him. I personally am attracted by the spiritual works of mercy».

Fr. Silvano also said: «Spoken words disappear, but written words remain and for this reason I have based my mission on writing: I believe it is one of the most fruitful methods for the apostolate in Bangladesh. Many Muslims have also found my writings to be very useful, indeed, a *madrassa* (an Islamic school) bought many of my books for its library».

After a life spent between parishes, seminaries and the study of Bengali, in 2002 he decided to dedicate himself solely to the spreading of Catholic literature, and writing pamphlets and short books in Bengali for the *National Social and Catechetical Social Training Centre* of Jessore. He also translated the documents of Vatican II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and some encyclicals of Pope John Paul II.

From 1986 until 1996 he directed the bimonthly *Mogolbarta* (“The Good News”). Fr. Bulbul Rebeiro, the director of the Catholic weekly “Patibeshi” and of the Christian Communication Center, remembers: “Fr. Garello wanted to develop the talents of new writers and he encouraged them to follow this path”.

Fr. Garello explained to *AsiaNews*: «As of today, I have written the biographies of 50 saints and published more than 200 books, including commentaries on the Bible, liturgical books and books for prayer and catechesis, which are addressed to priests, religious, children and lay people [...]. My ministry of conveying the Christian message in Bengali is part of the mysterious plan of God, who enters into a dialogue of salvation with all peoples. I have often experienced that my written words awakened many consciences that were open to the truth. I therefore thank the Lord who made me follow this path in order to give voice to the Church’s service as seed, yeast, salt and light of the world».

He was looked upon as the man who “translated” the faith of the Church into Bengali. His unique ministry made Christian values and writings accessible to the local people, and he also inspired many young people, Catholics and Muslims, with his publications. In connection with this, a journalist, Gerolamo Fazzini, writes:

Fr. Silvano Garello can be described as a fecund writer thanks to his 200 books in Bengali and fifteen in Italian. He has become an important figure during recent decades in Bangladesh: it is partly to his credit that the local Church participates in the journey of the universal Church.

His experience may be rather less adventurous than his other confreres, but it is nonetheless rich and valuable. In his study in Dhaka, he pro-

duces resources and books for priests, religious and lay people, for the most part on behalf of the *National social catechetical training center* (NSCTC) of Jessore.

I had the opportunity to meet him in his house during a visit to Italy, and he told me: “Once, along with a PIME missionary, I drew up a list of projects that we wished to fulfill together. We looked at each other and burst out laughing when we realized that 200 years would not be enough!”.

Regarding “the goals and specific form of his missionary service, he wrote in his last book *Frontiera del vangelo: Bangladesh*² (Edizioni CSAM – Centro Saveriano d’Animazione Missionaria / Brescia, 2016; pp. 200):

As a Xaverian missionary in Bangladesh, I feel that I am entirely dedicated to the service of the local Church, giving voice and support to its pastoral priorities [...]. It is our constant task to insert ourselves into the culture and religious traditions of Bangladesh, and to try and walk together in mutual listening and collaboration, living the so-called “spirit of Assisi”.

Here I would like to share what I have learned working with the people.

What are the goals and the specific form of my missionary service? I lend my pen to Jesus Christ in order to deepen the knowledge of the Christian message and search for ways to live out his proposal. For example:

1. I try to teach people to pray with a missionary spirit and to renew the various expressions of popular devotions. I have thus prepared resources for the missionary reading of the Bible, the World Mission Month of October, the missionary Rosary, missionary eucharistic adoration and the way of the mission.

2. I try to teach people to look at history through the eyes of the mission. The history of the peoples and the Church, with its changes, crises and movements, when seen through facts, figures, methods and continental synods, helps us to shoulder our responsibility as Christians who live in a specific country. I therefore believe it is important to study and propose some missionary models, as well as people, such as Gandhi, who have played an important role as educators.

3. Another goal of my work is to teach people to dialogue with the world’s cultures and religions, and above all the cultures and religions of Bangladesh, to help them perceive the spiritual values we must share.

² Fr. Linus Kujur, S.I., who reviewed the book in *Gregorianum* 98/3, writes: “The book presents a new form of evangelization [...]. The author himself is a missionary and he highlights various forms of the proclamation of the Good News [...]. He has written down his reflections to bear witness to «the joy of the Gospel» and to pave the way for the first proclamation [...]. The book could be a useful guide for students of Missiology and, in a special way, for the new evangelizers”.

4. I am also interested in deepening some fundamental nuclei of the Christian life, such as the meditation of the Word of God, the spirit of the liturgy and prayer, especially of the psalms, the works of mercy, the beatitudes, Mary as Mother and model for the disciple, the formation of the heart, especially of the children and the young people, and the charism that is proper to the Christian laity.

5. As far as possible, I have tried to cultivate contacts with some inspiring local lay people in the world of culture, and to get priests, catechists and ordinary Christians involved in the study of some topics regarding the Church's presence in Bangladesh.



On 18 January 2017, around 2 am Bangladesh time, the Lord called Fr. Silvano Oreste Garelo to Himself. On Thursday, 19 January, his body was taken to the cathedral church of "St. Joseph" in Kulna. The funeral Mass was presided over by Bishop Romen Boiragi who read out the most important dates in Silvano's life and his various characteristic roles: priest and missionary, formator of seminarians, teacher of the faithful, a prophet. He was a man of prayer, from which he drew strength and inspiration; a teacher whose teaching came from the Bible; he was a man who proclaimed the truth with courage and denounced injustice, who helped the needy and encouraged young people and adults to do likewise.

Fr. Marcello Storgato writes: «At the end of the Mass, Fr. Giacomo Gobbi, the Superior of the Xaverians in Bangladesh, thanked everyone for taking part, especially the women and the men who had benefitted from the Christian formation given by Fr. Silvano in the spiritual retreats he directed; all the young people he educated when they were children, some of whom became priests and others who became parents to their own children; the women of the Legion of Mary, who prayed and sang from 8 pm until 6 am the following day, never leaving alone the beloved missionary that God had called to Himself».

The ashes of Fr. Silvano rest in the country of Bangladesh that he had chosen as his home.

In an article he wrote in the October 2010 issue of *Missionari Saveriani*, Fr. Garelo said:

In the villages of Bangladesh, whenever the sun is unbearably hot, or the rain is relentless, the farmers take a pause on the veranda of their hut. Most of them indulge in conversation, but it is no rare thing to see some Christians reading the Bible.

I must admit that this sight gives me great joy. The edition of the Bible used by the people was published in twelve thousand copies from the proceeds of the sale of the missionary cribs that was carried out by the Xaverians in Vicenza.

It is a horrifying sight to see Bangladeshi children scavenging in the rubbish for food; it is edifying to see the Bangladeshi poor nourish themselves with the Word of God.

If we had the same concern for nourishing the soul as we have for bodily nourishment, we would strike a healthy balance in our life. A good appetite tells us that we are in good health, yet who takes the trouble to check his own “spiritual hunger”? If we do not nourish our spirit, how will we have an appetite for it, since... “appetite comes with eating”?

It is becoming increasingly difficult to transmit the faith and commit ourselves with a creative imagination to leaven the various aspects of our life with the Gospel and make our children grow in a Christian manner.

In Bangladesh I prepared a poster with this message: “Jesus is the Lord and Friend of this family, the invisible Guest who listens to every word”. A Christian family can thus verify its own faith: if it experiences Christ as a friendly presence, if it speaks willingly about God and with God, if it seeks light and strength in the Word of God in order to become neighbors to those who are in need.

Fr. Domenico Calarco S.X.

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