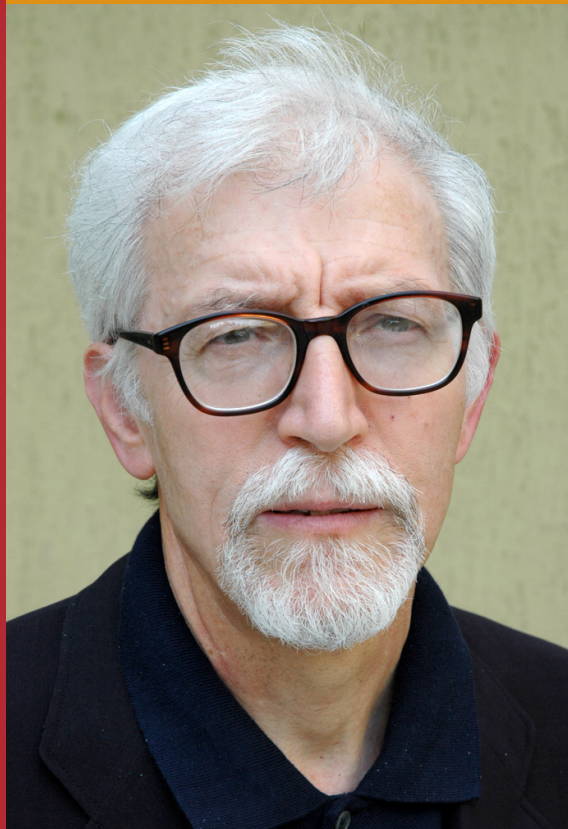


05/2016

In memoriam

Profili biografici saveriani



Fr. Gino Foschi

3 February 1944 ~ 2 July 2016

In memoriam

P. Gino Foschi

Forlì (Italia)
6 February 1944

Parma (Italia)
2 July 2016

Fr. Gino Foschi died in the late afternoon of 2 July 2016, in the Mother House, Parma, where he had been in care for three years. Fr. Vito G. Scagliuso writes: «A few days before he died, fraternally assisted by the Infirmary personnel, he received a letter from his niece Emma, in which she wrote: “Dear Uncle Gino, we know that you are ill in hospital. However, after the storm, there is a huge rainbow that will bring love, joy and prosperity. We believe in you and always will believe in you. With love, Emma”».

In presenting Gino to Major Orders, Fr. Amato Dagnino, the rector of the Theology community in Parma, wrote on 28 April 1971: «I admire his goodness which expresses itself in humility, sacrifice and abnegation, which are rare virtues *nostris diebus*. He would be even more excellent if his personality were stronger».

This brief expression of praise gives us a key to interpreting the existential and spiritual journey of Fr. Gino Foschi: a journey marked by humility, the virtue in which he excelled, and which all other virtues grow, and become robust.

In connection with this, the Superior General, Fr. Luigi Menegazzo, wrote in July 2016:

Whenever I met Fr. Gino, I was invariably reminded of the teaching we all received in the minor seminaries; the teaching of our Holy Founder: *love each other like brothers, respect each other like princes!*

I believe that Fr. Gino embodied this teaching in a simple, but complete manner: he was kind, welcoming, smiling, well-mannered and attentive; a man of moderate words, never offensive or insensitive. Fr. Gino gave serenity to those who met him, even if it was only a brief encounter.

He was born in Forlì, in the Romagna region, on 3 February 1944, to Angelo Foschi and Liliana Bertoni. Gino and his four siblings shared with their parents the struggles of the post-war period which was a time of great poverty.

After attending elementary school and junior high school, he enrolled in a technical-industrial school, where he obtained a diploma as an Industrial Engineer in July 1963, and was subsequently employed by ANIC (Azienda Nazionale Idrogenazione Combustibili), first in Ravenna then in Gela.

On 5 September 1964, he wrote to the rector of the Xaverian house for adult vocations in Desio: «In the meantime, I felt a certain attraction to the priestly life, but I did not give it any great importance. Some events later made me more aware of the missions, for example my experience with Catholic Action, which was very sensitive to missionary problems, and when my friend Bertoni joined the Xaverian community of Desio. Previously, I had a rather “romantic” vision of the mission and these events awakened in me the desire for the missions. I therefore decided to put my “vocation” to the test, convinced that time would tell if it was authentic. At the same time, I spoke about it with my parish priest who gave me his consent [...]. My family knows I have certain ideas in my head: they are happy and want me to make a serene and calm decision».

On 7 October 1964, his father wrote to the Superior of the Institute in Desio: «I am happy to give my complete approval to my son’s vocation. As I express the consent of my entire family, I ask the Lord to lead him to fulfill His divine ideal».



On 28 November 1964, Gino joined the Xaverian Institute in Desio, where he completed two years of philosophy studies. In his presentation report, the parish priest, Fr. Carlo Calderola, wrote on 7 October 1964: «I have known young Gino Foschi for 17 years. I have seen the Catholic boy, the good and devout altar server, the aspirant, the always enthusiastic and active delegate of

the *Catholic Action* aspirants. I have always seen in young Gino the priest his excellent father dreamed about».

On 2 October 1966 Gino entered the Novitiate of the Xaverian Region of Italy, in Nizza Monferrato (AT). He made his First profession on 15 September 1967. On his part, the Novice Master, Fr. Francesco M. Cavallo, declared:

Gino Foschi is an adult vocation [...]. He has a normal intelligence and an excellent degree of common sense; he is moderate, prudent and balanced in everything.

He is good, flexible, docile and generous [...]. He is sensitive, thoughtful and compassionate: he has a good heart, he is loyal, simple, serene and gets on easily with others.

He has a good piety and spirit of faith. He obeys his superiors without difficulty and observes the rules.

He will be a good religious, a good priest and a zealous missionary. I wholeheartedly approve his religious profession.

Gino then moved to Parma, where he studied Theology (1967–72) and was ordained priest on 26 September 1971. After his Theology studies, he was assigned to the minor seminary of Cremona as an “internal animator” (1972–’78).



In October 1978, Fr. Gino was assigned to the Xaverian Region of the Democratic Republic of Congo¹, where he spent more than two decades of missionary life (1979 –2003). He arrived there in August 1979 after a year of French language study in Paris.

After spending one year in the Regional House, in Bukavu, where he studied the local language, and with the exception of a two-year period in

¹ The Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) is a Central African country. Catholics are the majority (45%), followed by other Christian denominations (Protestants – 35%) and followers of the Traditional religions (20%). The ancient Congo is the African country that experienced the most systematic evangelization of the whole of Africa since 1482. Jesuits, Capuchins, the Holy Ghost Fathers, the CICM Missionaries and many others invested great energy and resources in the evangelization of this immense country, which responded with joyful openness to the Gospel. The Xaverians arrived in 1958 when the country was on its way to independence from Belgium. Today they work in formation (Postulancy, Philosophy and Novitiate), in parish pastoral ministry and in specialized sectors, especially in communications (Radio, TV, social-political reflection groups, etc.). Cf. AA.VV., *I Missionari Saveriani*, Parma, Istituto Missionari Saveriani, 1996, 265–273.

formation activity, Fr. Gino worked in the pastoral ministry: as assistant priest and then parish priest in Walunga (1980–90), assistant priest in Kaniola (1990–93) and parish priest in Bukavu-Cahi (1996–2003) «with his eyes always fixed on his goal: to live his faith in prayer, listening to the Word and in charity».

In February 1984, he wrote in *Missionari Saveriani*: «Walungu, in the diocese of Bukavu, is a large parish with 160.000 inhabitants. There are roughly 70.000 Catholics and 8.000 catechumens.

The parish or mission is divided into 24 outstations, each one of them composed of ten to fifteen villages called “living Christian communities” or “people-oriented communities”. The Christians meet in their own specific life context and examine their problems, everyday life, spiritual and social difficulties: fears, taboos, abuse of power, lack of hygiene and food shortages. They compare them with the Word of God and seek solutions. They thus bring together in harmony the Christian faith and the most important values of their tradition.

The Christians feel more and more involved in the problems of the community, they take responsibility for them and thus make it as self-sufficient as possible. These numerous lay ministries are flourishing in the service of the Word, worship, catechesis, human promotion, integral liberation and development.

Besides the strictly religious work: formation of leaders (the catechists alone number more than 300), the administration of sacraments, instruction, etc., we are also committed in the social field to make up for the shortcomings of the State. Thus various projects have been launched and are now being implemented: literacy programs and sewing courses, especially for girls and women; drinking water for every village; health centers to ensure every village has a minimum of health care; cooperatives; a mill to stimulate the production and consumption of soy, which is rich in protein, and thus combat malnutrition. Unfortunately, in our area there is a widespread illness (*Kwashiorkor*) that is caused by a lack of protein.

Undoubtedly there are many necessities and we often offer our benefactors and friends the opportunity to share in the various projects, but the first necessity is... missionaries. There are few of us and the needs are many. We ask you all to pray that the Lord will send workers to his harvest; we call upon you, the young people, to accept the invitation of Christ: “Follow me!” [...].

I thank the Lord for the journey of Faith that our community of Walungu has made: He alone understands the mystery of our growth in His love. During the past three years we have experienced the great joy and honor of having two new Congolese priests who are natives of Walungu».

In the new mission of Kanyola, Fr. Gino took an interest in the foundation of a “Health Center” to provide basic health care and assistance to pregnant women before, during and after the birth of their babies. He began this project with one nurse who had come to Walungu for two years with his wife and four children.

In 1996 Fr. Gino moved to Cahu, a parish of 60.000 inhabitants, in the region of South Kivu. Like other cities in the area, Cahu suffered the repercussions of the rural exodus. Areas that just a few years before were covered with trees and banana plantations were now teeming with people. The people scraped a meagre sustenance from agriculture, in small pieces of land on the outskirts, and from modest commercial activity.

The situation worsened in the 1990s with the arrival of Rwandan refugees and the problems they brought with them. The Christian community, made up of people from various tribes, lived this event with faith.

As assistant Novice Master, and then Magister Spiritus (1994–96), he made an exemplary contribution to the formation of the Congolese Xaverians, «by handing on to them, through his words and example, the experience of the Spirit transmitted to us by our Founder».

He was also sensitive to the need for ongoing formation and took part in theological-pastoral updating courses (1993–94, in Paris) and the “Tre Mesi” (1993, in Tavernerio).



In 2003 Fr. Gino was assigned to Italy and sent to the Theology community in Parma, where «he made good use of his solid and fecund mission experience». From 2003 until 2013, he served first as internal animator, spiritual director and vocation animator. In connection with this, the General Councilor, Fr. Salvador Romano i Vidal, wrote to him on 4 October 2002:

The fact that the General Direction has assigned you to the Xaverian Region of Italy is a sign of where the Lord wants you to be, and where He awaits you with His love. Perhaps we do not always understand the ways in which He leads us, but we are sure that He always prepares some special gift in the place where He wants us to be, and we must learn how to accept it.

I therefore ask you to live this moment as a time of total availability to the Lord, as the «Paschal event of a life that we leave behind and a new life that begins», as described by our Constitutions.

You will be accompanied by nostalgia for Africa; you will continue to love the people to whom you consecrated many years of your life; you will

continue to pray and suffer for them, praying to the Lord for the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters you left there; you will always be a missionary and, perhaps, even more so, but now the mission asks you to serve it with your work in Italy.

Your experience of love in the Congo, the personality that the Lord has given you, and your love for the Xaverian Family are all signs that you could work profitably in formation and missionary-vocation animation. «Though the work of converting souls to God is great and meritorious, no less important is the training of new recruits for the future and the practice of obedience» (FR 25).

We therefore thank you for your work in the Congo, which you carried out with serenity and trust in very difficult times; above all, we thank you for your serene availability to serve the Mission and the Congregation where you are needed.

From March 2013, Gino received nursing care in Parma. In spite of his illness, he was constantly active and available for any community service, and not only. Fr. Vito Scagliuso writes: «A volunteer who assists the elderly and sick at home and elsewhere told me he very often saw Fr. Gino in the words of the hospitals and clinics in which he himself had been a patient. He continued to visit the sick people he had met during his time in hospital. The nurse added that Fr. Gino had been for him like an angel from heaven sent to bring comfort and hope».

Fr. Gino departed this life on 2 July 2016 — his *dies natalis* because it was the beginning of a new life, peace and immortality —, after greeting the confreres of the Mother House, without ever ceasing to lighten their burdens and bring a smile to their faces.

There is no doubt that Fr. Gino deserved the grace of a good death. He ended his life with a song of praise, “for my eyes have seen a light for the revelation to the nations” (cf. *Lk* 2:29–32) and this is his testament: «But my soul God will ransom from the clutches of Sheol, and will snatch me up» (*Pss* 49:16).

He has left behind a great legacy of affection, wisdom and abnegation.



Fr. Gino Foschi thus lived God's salvific plan for humanity: «Just as the eyes of slaves are on their masters' hand» (*Pss* 122:2).

His enthusiastic attachment to Christ was the zealous love of the servant who dedicates himself without reserve and without evading «a heavy day's work in all the heat» (*Mt* 20:12): to work for the person, works and interests

of the Master, fulfilling His instructions and intentions, wherever He wants, how He wants and for as long as He wants.

Inspired by this spirit of service, Fr. Gino was aware that he did not have a life of his own to follow, nor a personal project to fulfill. His way was the will of God, who had asked him to leave «your father's house for a country which I shall show you (*Gen* 12:1); his project was God's project: «to bring everything together under Christ, as head» (*Ep* 1:10).

Although aware that he was “called to be an apostle, set apart for the service of the Gospel”, Fr. Gino always acted as a «servant of Christ Jesus» (*Rm* 1:1), without ever seeking rewards, honors or privileged places, because he knew that if he had accomplished anything that was good, true and beautiful, he had done so as a gift from God.

Thus, Fr. Gino, in placing himself at the service of God's salvific plan for humanity, and despite having «served the Lord in all humility, with all the sorrows and trials that came to me» (*At* 20:19), only considered himself to be a «useless servant», mindful of the Lord's words: «So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say: We are useless servants, we have done no more than our duty» (*Lk* 17: 9).

“A useless servant”, Fr. Gino gave up any personal project to place himself joyfully and solely at the service of the Kingdom of God, the “glory of the Most High”, and the salvation and wellbeing of the nations.

By cherishing forever in our hearts the life witness of Fr. Gino Foschi, we will have a valuable help to hand whenever storm clouds gather on the horizon of our daily life.

«Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones» (*Ps* 115:15).

Fr. Domenico Calarco SX

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