

## St. John XXIII when he was Cardinal Angelo Roncalli on Guido Maria Conforti:

### One Fold and One Shepherd

*By Cardinal Angelo Roncalli February 17, 1957*

*A lecture given by Angelo Cardinal Roncalli, Patriarch of Venice (the future Pope John XXIII), at the Royal Theater of Parma (Italy), on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the death of the Servant of God, Guido Maria Conforti, founder of the Xaverian Missionaries.*

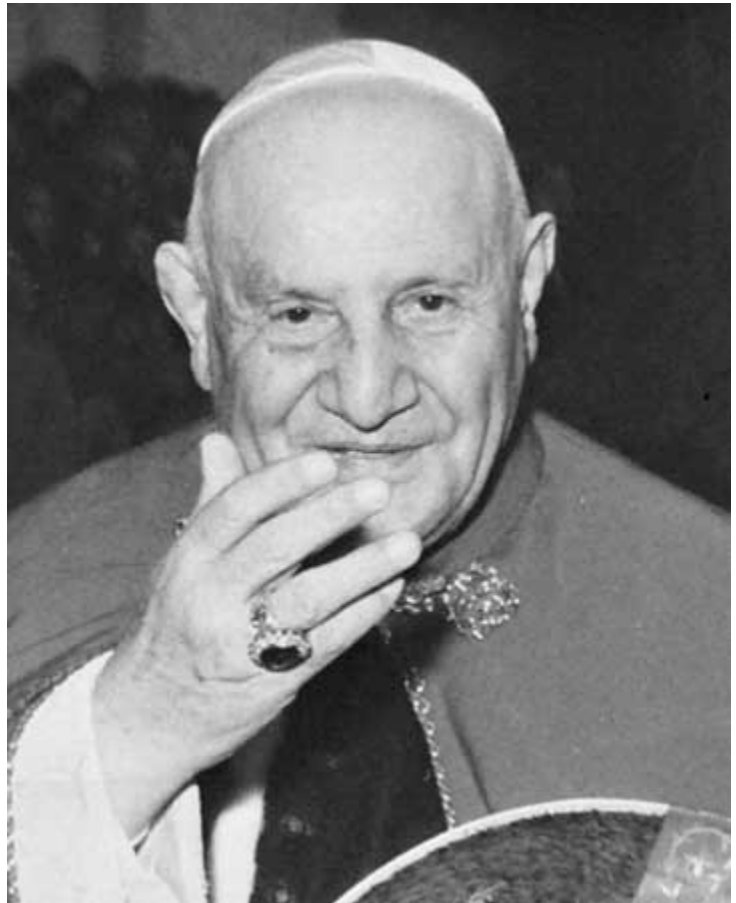
**H**ad I to choose a motto to summarize what I am about to say, I'd like to express it with the words: *"One fold and one Shepherd."*

All the pages of the Gospel are sacred and sparkling: but some concern especially the souls which accept their most intimate significance, and reveal them to the entire world in a more vivid and piercing light.

Take for instance, the following excerpt from the Tenth Chapter of St. John, when Jesus introduces Himself: "I am the door of the sheep... It is through the door that the shepherd enters... As soon as he shows himself, the sheep hear his voice... He calls them one by one, preceding them, and they follow him because they know his voice... I am the door. If anyone enter by me he shall be safe, and shall go in and out and shall find pastures. I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly... I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me... And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

Such is the rapturous vision of St. John flashed before us: more peaceful and clear than the pictures of the Apocalypse.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, employing these words, and directing His gaze from the pastoral landscape of Palestine to the boundless world, adds: "Even the sheep afar belong to me, because one is the fold and one is the Shepherd."



Cherishing this vision in my eyes and in my heart on the morning of April 26 1922, I climbed the staircase of the Episcopal residence of Parma, to meet the Servant of God, Guido Maria Conforti, Archbishop and Bishop, and Founder of the Saint Francis Xavier Foreign Mission Society.

## The First Visit

---

**In an old diary of mine, I read on this day only these words: “A cherished visit with Bishop Conforti.”**

My first meeting with him had taken place twelve years earlier in Milan at a Catholic youth rally, on the occasion of the celebration of the Third Centenary of the canonization of St. Charles Borromeo.

At that time, even at a distance, he impressed me as a man of dignity and meekness. Now, I was to meet him as a vital force in that providential missionary movement effected by the Encyclical “Maximum Illud,” of Pope Benedict XV, of blessed memory.

I recognized him, vested in the fullness of the sacred ministry of souls, combining the episcopacy with the missionary life: *Bishop of Parma, but missionary to the whole world.*

A short time before, I was engaged in an unexpected service to which I was called by the Holy Father. With the command to leave everything which had absorbed my activity for seventeen years in the priesthood, I was to dedicate myself, out of Rome, to re-organize the various activities of missionary cooperation in Italy, starting with the Propagation of the Faith.

It was obviously natural for me to get into respectful contact with a prelate admired by all Italy for his personal qualities of wisdom, meekness and pastoral zeal, and around whom, as Founder of a Missionary Society which in that very year received the Decree of definitive approbation from the Holy See (Jan. 5, 1921), notable attention was centered.

Such was Bishop Conforti when I first met him in April of 1922; such was Bishop Conforti as later I met him in Parma, in Rome, and elsewhere.

A perfect prelate, an efficient pastor in the fullness of the sacred service which is proper to every bishop of God’s Church, he was dedicated to the office entrusted to him by the Divine call and by holy obedience. He was endowed with a generous spirit and a great heart, committed to the great concept of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ.

The tribute of my unpretentious words to Bishop Conforti’s memory can but briefly visualize a life which was an altar of sacrifice, erected in the midst of the faithful to edify and to teach them. May God grant, even with the official blessing of the Church, that he may intercede for them to win earthly and heavenly graces.

Let us consider the Servant of God, Guido Maria Conforti, noting his youth, his maturity, and the years following his demise.

## Youth

---

**Bishop Conforti's youth was enlightened by a flaming glance.** St. Mark, in his Gospel, tells of that rich and good young man who, craving for greater perfection, asked Jesus about the most conducive means to attain eternal life.

Jesus, Mark relates, looked at the young man and loved him. He suggested that he sell his possessions, and distribute his money to the poor, turning it into a heavenly treasure which would follow him.

As a youth, Guido Maria Conforti, on his way to the school of the Christian Brothers, used to stop daily before the huge Crucifix in the Church of Peace in Borgo delle Colonne. He was more courageous than the rich young man. *"I was looking at Him,"* he would say, *"and He was looking at me. It seemed that He was whispering many things to me."*

Among these many things, there was his vocation to the priestly life, and to the missionary apostolate. At first, this was not vividly outlined, but later on, while reading a small biography of St. Francis Xavier, as the mustard seed sown in his heart, it grew in a constant crescendo in the intimacy of his spirit. Ever since these days, the Saint's picture was to be clearly impressed in his mind.

As a matter of fact, since third year Latin, the mustard seed in Guido Maria Conforti was mysteriously working toward a complete transformation of his pure, innocent soul. The young student felt an irresistible attraction toward two ways of spending his priestly life. The ordinary pastoral ministry in his native diocese and the particular apostolate in the foreign missions were both callings of some uncertainty, and of mild conflict.

The "Our Father," which as a youth he knew so well, points out the most radiant facets of his spiritual growth: the Name, the Kingdom, and the Will of the Heavenly Father. Yet they are so interlocked that the pursuit of either the first or the second cannot stand without the third, namely the Divine Will.

His submission to the Divine Will was always an unaltered sentiment which never faded throughout his entire life.

Moreover, he held for certain that he ought to become a priest, and his angelic preparation was positive evidence of this fact.

long his way, the horizon might have been better defined. Guido Maria Conforti's love for the missions was an interior flame always kept burning with the greatest concern.

## A Perfect Seminarian

---

**Guido Maria Conforti excelled as a perfect seminarian.** Faithful to the rules, devoted to study, he was always the first in his class throughout his courses of Latin, philosophy and theology. However, he was far from advertising his successes, though he well deserved them on account of the penetration of his intellect and the constant, strong application of his energies. For twelve consecutive years he was rated as "excellent" or "eminent," and was awarded the highest honor. Later on, Guido Maria Conforti was to

go to Rome to take the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology as a deserved honor bestowed on him by Providence.

More than his lively intelligence and learning, Guido Maria Conforti's distinct personality radiated meekness and discretion. Without imposing on anyone, yet obviously superior to all, he was universally esteemed and cherished.

Along the way disappointment because of ill health put a cross on his shoulders. However, the painful procrastination of his priestly ordination did not upset his spiritual serenity.

When Guido Maria Conforti's classmates joyfully left the seminary to exercise their priesthood, he remained on the seminary premises, entrusted with the delicate tasks of prefect, vice-rector, and professor.

It was a great privilege in those years of formation, like a stem growing close to a sturdy tree whose vital sap and beneficial shadow contribute, providentially, for better maturation, to be guided in his early priestly years. I allude to Canon Andrea Ferrari who, through ways both mysterious and simple, was developing natural and spiritual energies to be utilized later as the saintly Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. This remembrance affects my heart, as it fills with joyful pride the heart of every good Parma resident. [...]

In Parma, let us put together the figures of these two great churchmen, Andrea Ferrari and Guido Conforti: both inflamed with the same spirit, imbued with the same zeal for Christ's cause, for the salvation of souls, and for the universal Church.

If we follow them during the years they lived at the seminary, the first as rector, and the latter as vice-rector, it is easy to understand the workings of grace and sanctification, of which both were later to be extraordinary messengers and ministers.

## The Foreign Missions

---

**The strong interest of Father Guido Maria Conforti in the foreign missions was controlled by discipline.**

The acceptance of the third petition of the "Our Father" was confirmed by the young priest's attitude. He felt for certain that his time had not yet come. Years later, Bishop Conforti presaged that the route of the seas did not refer to him. However, Divine Grace would grant assistance that he might point out the overseas lands to others.

In the exercise of his ministry, Bishop Conforti was always a source of edification, both to the clergy and the laity. The extraordinary intuition of the austere Bishop Magani, Bishop of Parma, elevated Bishop Conforti to the highest positions in the ecclesiastical government of the diocese.

Bishop Magani, so different in temperament, used to call Father Conforti his David, or the Vicar of graces. He appreciated his fidelity, wisdom, and cooperation which redounded to the consistency of an organization implying serious responsibilities so as to protect it and sponsor it in conformity to the exigencies of times, places, and circumstances.

Truly, the early years of Bishop Conforti were blessed by God and by human beings.

Furthermore, what seems astonishing in retrospect, and is recognized today as a happy event, is the fact that the young priest Conforti was able to concretize his hopes and ambitions with the establishment of a missionary society. His dreams were as seeds in a state of fecundation by constant prayers and sacrifices, but eventually germinated in the sun of an exulting spring.

Bishop Conforti had learned how to wait, and during the years of hope and expectation, he worked. Since his ordination in 1888, and since he received no answer when he knocked at the door of the Jesuits and Salesians, he worked along. Bishop Magani understood the situation and let him proceed, on the condition he would remain as cooperator in the diocesan government.

In 1894 and 1895, as Cardinal Ferrari assumed the responsibility of the Milanese Archdiocese, the young vice-rector of previous years, sharing the same spirit and forged in the same fire, opened his Institute. He dedicated it on Dec. 3 1895, so as to draw its name and inspiration from St. Francis Xavier.

Therefore, far more courageous than the rich young man of the Gospel, Guido Maria Conforti, in Jesus' imitation, made a perfect response, indeed.

Using his family inheritance, along with his own meager savings and the help of a benefactress, the Founder opened a comfortable house as a haven ready to shelter his first pupils. The house was located at Borgo del Leon d'oro, not too far from the Cathedral and the diocesan Major Seminary. It was in the very heart of the city and the diocese of Parma. Inside its modest rooms serious work was carried on: study, prayer, and the proper training necessary for helping the sheep which belong to Christ, but are afar off. Though afar, they too must hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, to make with him "One fold and one Shepherd."

## Archbishop of Ravenna

---

**This was the spiritual apostolic early life of the Servant of God, Guido Maria Conforti.** What about his maturity? It may be measured from May 1902 to November 1931 – thirty years. Then followed his passing away, to the heavenly life.

Bishop Conforti's mature years began with a great sacrifice, similar to that of Abraham, - namely, a generous act of obedience to the will of the elderly Pope Leo XIII. Unmoved by Bishop Conforti's prayers and tears, the Holy Father designated him Archbishop of Ravenna.

Bishop Conforti to the amazement of many, was then only thirty-seven years old.

Card. Parrocchi, after Bishop Conforti's consecration at the Basilica of St. Paul in Rome, was enraptured, and gazing at the imposing majesty of the new Archbishop's pontifical appearance, exclaimed, "What a vision!"

Bishop Maffi, later famous as the Cardinal of Pisa, and appointed at this same time Bishop Conforti's Auxiliary in Ravenna, honored Bishop Conforti with these words: "The Lord has visited His people, and has sent a great prophet to them."

As a true prophet, Archbishop Conforti dedicated himself to his Archdiocese. While discharging his duties, he underwent protracted sufferings for twenty-two months. When the new Pope, St. Pius X, lightened his burdens, fearful that he would lose his life, Archbishop Conforti had already secured the gratitude of the clergy and of the people who were witnesses to his inexhaustible patience and endless charity.

## Shepherd of Souls

---

**The remarkable pastoral activity of Archbishop Conforti in the diocese of Parma prompts us to be edified, and must be compared to the stupendous undertakings of those illustrious prelates who, in modern times and even in our century, honored the most famous Episcopal sees of Italy.**

Concerned, as Archbishop Conforti was, about his Missionary Society, he might have run the risk of neglecting the formation of the diocesan clergy for lack of personal vigilance concerning discipline, piety, study and care of material things. This is not so.

It is evident then, that Archbishop Conforti took to heart the material and spiritual welfare of two sons, both dearly beloved and fraternally united in spirit and understanding. All things worked well toward the realization of the one fold, and Parma came to symbolize the maternal anxieties of the Universal Church.

The mustard seed, sown in the young heart of Guido Maria Conforti during his brief and mysterious colloquies with the Crucifix in the Church of Peace, was fostered by him as a seminarian, priest and bishop, and finally germinated generously.

The smallest of the seeds, vigorously growing, will extend its branches so as to offer shade and shelter to the birds of the air.

The pastoral horizon which reflects the work of Archbishop Conforti in Parma includes a period of thirty years. Here he epitomized the evangelical beauty of the pastoral life. He preferred the country to long office hours. In summer and in winter, under the sun or in the snow, on foot, on horseback, by carriage or by car, he reached all the parishes in his diocese five times. This was his duty, and hence, his joy.

He alleviated the material needs of people by generous donations which almost completely absorbed his revenues. He reduced the standard of his personal life as a bishop to an extreme poverty and to an evangelical simplicity. This was all the more remarkable in a man who, as a youth, was reared in the comforts of his father's house.

As we recall the date of November 5 1931, when Guido Maria Conforti was born to the eternal life, we cannot but think of the words of the Prophet: "O Lord, they shall rejoice before you, as they that rejoice in the harvest." (Is. 9:3)

Certainly this was the intense joy of the pious worker when he presented himself and his sons to the Divine Shepherd! All through his later years Archbishop Guido Maria Conforti had cherished his beloved

sons of Parma, and as his loving and yet veiled eyes gazed at the far-off missions of his Institute, that vision was, for him, a foretaste of heaven.

## His Life in God

---

**Without anticipating the judgment of our Holy Mother the Church, we may think of the eternal rest of Archbishop Conforti as the culmination of God's love.** It is made evident by his ardent charity, through the desire of the accomplishment of the first three petitions of the "Our Father": the glory and the veneration of the Lord's Name, the Kingdom, and the Will of God.

Moreover, we should not overlook the sufferings of his apostolic life, endured for God's sake, which spiritually united him with Jesus crucified, our glorious Savior.

How fitting are the words of the liturgy, employed in honoring the Saints, particularly the Martyrs and Confessors:

"Thy Saints, o Lord, have followed a wonderful path, keeping Thy Commandments so as to pass unharmed through mighty waters: dry land appeared, and the Red Sea is crossed without hindrance. Because they walked in the footsteps of Christ who clothed them with His bloody garment, they rejoice with Him forever."

## Legacy in Us in Imitating his Example

---

**Bishop Conforti's example to the clergy and the faithful are connected with the teaching and the action of his missionary cooperation.** The forceful warning of St. John Chrysostom will properly awaken our responsibilities in regard to the missionary apostolate. They sound very appropriate to all of us, be we bishops, priests, or common faithful.

According to St. John Chrysostom, we are not only responsible for our individual salvation, but we must also give an account in regard to the universal world. "I did not send you to two, or ten, or twenty cities, or just to one country, as I sent the Prophets of old, but to all the continents and seas, and to the entire world." And again: "You, says the Lord, shall not be teachers of Palestine, but of all the earth; you shall be not only doctors, but indefatigable doctors."

These impressive and forceful words expound the task of both Catholic bishops and priests, and vibrate as an incitement to every good Christian.

It is again the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, which points out our duty of seeking the far-off and strayed sheep, or the ignorant ones, that they may be united to the one, true fold. This means that the missionary problem is basic for anyone who intends to enact fully his role as a Catholic.

Forty years have elapsed since the end of the First World War. It was Pope Benedict XV first, and then Pius XI who again stressed the need for an active interest in Catholic Missions on the part of the hierarchy, clergy, religious and laity.

Their Encyclicals are beacons which point the way to our people for a better understanding of the mission apostolate. As a consequence, missionaries not only were sought for far-off missions but, in order to provide them with a better preparation and material means, a series of well-coordinated programs were activated. It is with joy that I recall these things, having given my cooperation as a modest laborer in that first hour.

## The Missionary Union of the Clergy

---

**The Missionary Union of the Clergy sprang from the heart of an intrepid apostle, Father Paolo Manna of the Pontifical Institute for the Foreign Mission of Milan.** Archbishop Conforti was the prelate who gave the final touch to this timely project, and for ten years held the leadership of the Sodality which gained recognition far beyond all expectation.

I heartily wish that the survival of his great spirit might be, from heaven, an efficacious stimulus to exhort every priest and all the faithful to consider the primary questions which belong to history and life in general. These concern Jesus, the Savior of the world, the needs of humanity, and the glory of God's people.

May the heart and the blessings of Archbishop Conforti be always alive as a pledge of endless heavenly graces upon the people of Parma, upon our beloved Italy, and upon the Church of Christ: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

## After twenty-five Years

---

**We are gathered around Archbishop Conforti's tomb, twenty-five years after his death.** The Lord, by His merciful Will through Archbishop Conforti's remains, can work miracles for the glory of the elect.

Meanwhile, without anticipating the judgment of the Church, we silently pray and wait.

From pole to pole there echoes the same outstanding motto: "One fold and one Shepherd."

May Archbishop Guido Maria Conforti, Servant of God and of Our Holy Church, grow in honor always.

While imitating his example, may we be the recipients of his blessings, encouraged not to fail in attaining our destiny.