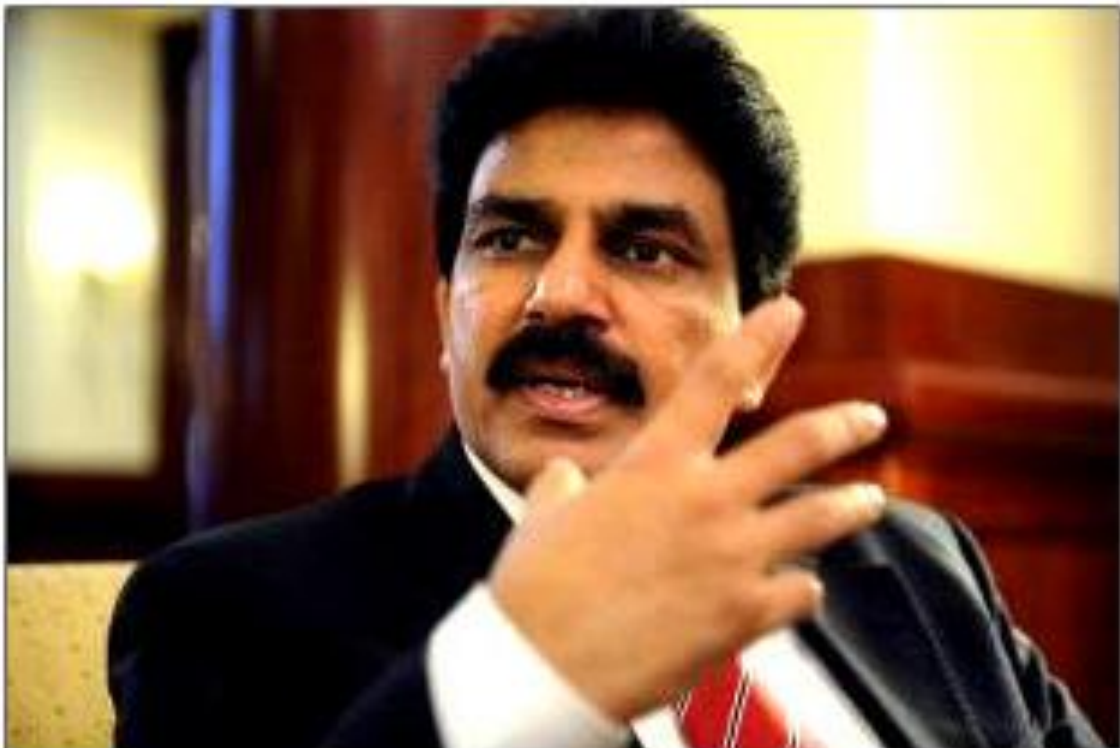


MODERN MARTYRS



SHAHBAZ BHATTI

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Blessed Pino Puglisi (1937-1993)

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

"I have been expecting you!" is what Fr. Pino said to his executioners the day he was shot dead by the Mafia hit men. It was September 15, 1993, Fr. Pino's 56th birthday. Parish priest in the rough Palermo neighborhood of Brancaccio, he openly challenged the criminal group that was dominating the population by organizing the youth away from robbing, drug dealing and contraband. Fr. Puglisi's murder shocked the world. He is the first Mafia victim to be crowned with glory by the Church, but Fr. Pino is, first and foremost, the champion of the youth who look at the future. His beatification took place in Palermo itself, in front of a large crowd, on April 25, and marks the commitment of the leadership of the Church, from the pope downwards, in the fight against organized crime.

In the second part of XIX century, in the wake of the conquest of Sicily by the Italian national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, the traditional landowners who did not want to keep loyalty to the new united Italy, started a muted resistance which little by little became organized crime, although still maintaining the unique combination of family ties and Catholic exterior religious observance. It was the Mafia and it passed to the United States of America with the immigrants and was glamorized by the numerous Hollywood godfathers.

"In Sicily, there were churchmen who colluded with the Mafia but then there were those, like the new Blessed Fr. Giuseppe (Pino) Puglisi, who fought against it" said Palermo mayor Leoluca Orlando. The proponent of Fr. Puglisi's beatification, archbishop Vincenzo Bertolone, said: "The Mafia is a religion and not just a criminal phenomenon and it does not allow other

faiths. Fr. Puglisi's martyrdom was a signal of the irreparable and definitive rupture between the Bible and the Mafia and other similar criminal syndicates."

From now on, the banner with the image of the new Blessed will march in front of the processions once dominated by the Mafia bosses who used to hang dollar bills to the statues of the Patron Saints. It is the way Fr. Pino continues his anti-Mafia campaign from heaven.

Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, who ordained Fr. Puglisi to the priesthood, still regarded Communism as a greater threat than the Mafia. He once questioned the Mafia's very existence: to a journalist asking "What is the Mafia?" he responded: "So far as I know, it could be a brand of detergent." This denial persuaded Fr. Pino Puglisi of the need to challenge church authorities. "We can, we must criticize the church when we feel it doesn't respond to our expectations, because it's absolutely right to seek to improve it" he said. With his trademark humor, Fr. Puglisi added: "But we should always criticize the Church like a mother, never a mother-in-law!"

In the beginning of the 1990s, two courageous judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, were beginning to expose the Mafia for the evil organization it was. The Mafia managed to kill Falcone in May 1992, and Borsellino a few months later, both with large bombs made of plastic explosives. Today the Palermo airport bears the names of these two heroes. In the wake of the Maxi Trial that followed at Palermo and the Pizza Connection trials in New York, there were still those who took the position that the Mafia did not actually exist or that its prevalence was exaggerated to "defame" Sicilians, or Italians generally. In fact, politicians at the highest levels of Italy's national government were protecting the Mafia.

Fr. Puglisi happened to be with some school children from his parish when he learned of Borsellino's death. He was deeply upset but after a moment he turned to the children and said: "We must be able to forgive the authors of this tragedy and to invite them to conversion." The kids were incredulous. Fr. Pino then asked them, "If Judge Borsellino had been in your family, would you forgive his killers?" The youth, raised on the centuries-old Sicilian tradition of the *vendetta*, said no. "Then we have a long way yet to go" he said. "It is the road of Christian forgiveness, seeking justice and not

revenge.” Now, it is pope Francis, because of Fr. Pino’s heroic witness, who asks the Mafiosi to convert.

“To do something”

Giuseppe "Pino" Puglisi was born in Brancaccio, a working-class neighborhood of Palermo in Sicily, into a family of modest means, on September 15, 1937. His father was a shoemaker and his mother a dressmaker. He entered the seminary at age sixteen. Fr. Puglisi was ordained as a priest in 1960. By all accounts a witty, resourceful pastor, Fr. Puglisi dedicated his life to the task of convincing the youth in his crime-infested island that there are ways forward other than the mob and of shaping a civil society in Sicily that challenged the Mafia's political influence.

His journey started as a young pastor in Godrano, in the hills twenty five miles outside Palermo. When Fr. Pino, as he was commonly known, arrived, there had been fifteen recent murders in this village of scarcely more than one hundred people, all related to a feud between two rival Mafia clans. Fr. Pino started going door-to-door, reading the Gospel with the people and talking about forgiveness. He encouraged small groups to pray and to read the Bible, at first once a month, then every two weeks.

Eventually, one of the women hosting a group said she couldn't carry on until she had forgiven the mother of her son's assassin. Fr. Pino arranged the reconciliation between the two women, which endured despite strong disapproval from many in the village. By itself, this outcome did not cancel the feud, but it was a start."Peace" Fr. Pino said, "is like bread: it must be shared or it loses its flavor."

In 1990, Fr. Puglisi returned to his old quarter of Brancaccio and became the parish priest of San Gaetano's Parish. He spoke out against the Mafia who controlled the area and opened a shelter for underprivileged children. Fr. Puglisi had been offered other parishes by the local curia, in less troublesome Palermo neighborhoods, but he opted for San Gaetano.

With little support from the Palermo archdiocese, Fr. Puglisi tried to change his parishioners' mentality, which was conditioned by fear, passivity and *omertà* – imposed silence. In his sermons, he pleaded to give leads to authorities about the Mafia's illicit activities in Brancaccio, even if they could not actually name names. He refused the money of the Mafia bosses

when offered for the traditional feast day celebrations, and would not allow the Mafia "men of honor" to march at the head of religious processions.

His main concern was the youth. He tried to discourage the children from dropping out of school, robbing, drug dealing and selling contraband cigarettes. To underscore this anti-Mafia conviction, Don Pino composed a parody of the Our Father in the Sicilian dialect: "O godfather to me and my family, You are a man of honor and worth. Your name must be respected. Everyone must obey you. Everyone must do what you say for this is the law of those who do not wish to die. You give us bread, work; who wrongs you, pays. Do not pardon; it is an infamy. Those who speak are spies. I put my trust in you, godfather. Free me from the police and the law."

Fr. Pino ignored a series of warnings. "If God is with us, who will be against us! I am not afraid of dying if what I say is the truth," he said in one of his homilies. He declined to award a contract to a construction firm which had been "indicated" to him by the Mafia for the restoration of the church, where the roof was collapsing. To those parishioners that made attempts to reform matters were sent strong messages. A small group who had organized themselves in order to promote social improvement found the doors of their houses torched, their phones receiving threats, and their families put on notice that worse things lay in store.

On September 15, 1993—Fr. Puglisi's 56th birthday—he was killed in front of his parish church by a single bullet shot at point-blank range. He was taken unconscious to a local hospital, where surgeons could not revive him. The murder was ordered by the local Mafia. One of the hit men who killed Fr. Pino later confessed and revealed the priest's last words as his killers approached: "I've been expecting you." Visitors to Brancaccio today can find his favorite saying scrawled all over its walls: "And what if somebody did something?"

Funeral and beyond

There was an immediate call by eight priests in Palermo for the pope to travel to Palermo to be present at the funeral of Fr. Pino, but John Paul II was scheduled to be in Tuscany on that date and did not attend the memorial service. At the funeral Mass, the archbishop of Palermo, Cardinal Salvatore Pappalardo, still carefully avoided indicating the Mafia as the suspects in Puglisi's murder, although many had no doubt about it. Pope John Paul II

however, during his visit to Sicily in November 1994, praised Fr. Puglisi as a "courageous exponent of the Gospel." He urged Sicilians not to allow the priest's death to have been in vain and warned that silence and passivity about the Mafia was tantamount to complicity. He also was the first pope to invite the Mafiosi to convert.

On April 14, 1998, the four hit men materially responsible for the killing of Fr. Puglisi received life sentences. The Graviano brothers also received life sentences for ordering the killing. Two of the perpetrators later turned against the mafia and became key witnesses in trials that put dozens of gangsters behind bars. One of the two is now a devout Catholic and the second, the trigger man, told investigators he has been haunted by Fr. Puglisi's smile ever since.

In 1999, the Cardinal of Palermo started the beatification process, proclaiming Fr. Puglisi a Servant of God. On June 28, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI signed a decree acknowledging that Fr. Puglisi had been killed "in hatred of the faith", meaning that he could be beatified – the last step before sainthood – without a miracle being attributed to his intercession with God.

The Beatification of Fr. Puglisi, took place on May 25, 2013, during an open-air Mass that was held at the Foro Italico 'Umberto I', a large green area of Palermo which revived memories of the high-profile mafia killings and bomb attacks of the early 1990s. On that day it was packed with more than fifty thousand people. The cardinal emeritus of Palermo, Salvatore De Giorgi, presided at the beatification with dozens of priests and officials in attendance -- in contrast to when Fr. Puglisi's pleas for help were ignored by many religious and political leaders. "Puglisi's beatification is an eagerly awaited gift from God for Sicily and beyond. Twenty years after his murder, Fr. Puglisi is speaking again and louder than ever," he said.

At Sunday's Angelus, the day after the beatification, Pope Francis paid tribute to the priest who was murdered by the Sicilian Mafia. "I think of the great pain suffered by men, women and even children, exploited by such cruel people. Behind this exploitation and slavery are the Mafias," the Pope said. "Let us pray that these Mafiosi convert to God," the pope said. "Fr. Puglisi was an exemplary priest and a man devoted especially to youth ministry. Educating young people according to the Gospel, he took them away from organized crime, and thus the Mafia tried to defeat him by killing

him,” he added. “But it was he who defeated them, with the Risen Christ. Let us praise the Lord for his luminous testimony and let us treasure his example.”

Multi-faceted Martyrdom

John Allen Jr. wrote: “Make no mistake: Fr. Puglisi is not only a terrific story, but his beatification marks a profound evolution in the Catholic understanding of martyrdom and "anti-Christian" persecution generally. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, approximately 100,000 Christians around the world have been killed "in a situation of witness" each year in the past decade.

The rise of this new generation of martyrs is the most important Christian story of our time, and Fr. Puglisi is an ideal patron saint for making the defense of believers at risk a transcendent Christian cause. Entirely on his own, Fr. Puglisi is deserving of the honor. However, his beatification also represents a powerful impulse to reframe how Catholics perceive a wide variety of contemporary situations in which Christians are at risk.

The Puglisi beatification points to a martyrdom that potentially could accommodate many other similar situations. To take just one example, the Puglisi beatification sets a precedent for the well known martyr, bishop Oscar Romero, too.

But this beatification has other important aspects. The influential Catholic weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* wrote: “Don Puglisi is the living demonstration of how much fear a zealous priestly activity (education, youth catechesis, apostolate in the parish, the example and the recalling of authentic Gospel values) can put into the Mafia. The parish priest of Brancaccio was snatching hundred of youth from the street, traditional hotbed of the Mafia. Fr. Pino was disassembling and making fun of the Mafia culture of indifference and imposed silence (*omertà*)”.

“He had funded a center for home coaching for poor children who were naturally earmarked for possible failure and vulnerable to be subjected to Mafia bosses. Not by chance the assassin who killed him had only completed Primary Five. We cannot understand his holiness, if we do not envisage his model of priesthood. Fr. Pino’s holiness now shines over the

difficult city of Palermo, and reminds us that, even in the darkest moments, the light of the Gospel and the example of an authentic way of life will never abandon us”.

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Father Fausto Tentorio (1952-2011)

MURDER IN PARADISE

The Italian missionary, who was affectionately known by the people of his parish as “Tatay Pops”, was gunned down by an assassin in Arakan Valley, North Cotabato (Mindanao), less than two years ago. He was a gentle man, evangelically simple and prudent but fiercely courageous in his advocacy for the Indigenous People and for the integrity of creation. His killing represents the tip of the iceberg of dozens of other extrajudicial victims in that land which can be described as beautiful and fertile but is also an ethnic, religious and political “fault line”. It is common opinion that the militia organized by the military is responsible for his murder. This may be the reason why, as to this day, nobody has been tried and condemned for his killing.

Arakan Valley, in North Cotabato, in the island of Mindanao, is a place of immense beauty and natural wealth. Traversing fertile land from Cotabato to the boundaries of Bukidnon and Davao City, Arakan and its adjacent areas

of sloping hills and steep mountains have contributed to making Mindanao the Land of Promise for migrant settlers and wealth-seekers.

The Manobo tribesmen have lived since time immemorial in Arakan and its lush forests. They worshiped Manama, their supreme deity. Their shamans had guardian spirits and offered rituals to the spirit world. Their warriors fought battles to defend their communities, which is why the Manobo honor their tradition of tribal struggles. Across this landscape are signposts to remind them of important events in the lives of their heroes. These events are incorporated in their epic "*Ulahingan*," which continues to be chanted today, and which depicts a brave people resisting any attempt to dominate them.

But while the Manobo were fierce, harmony and mutuality were maintained in the tribe through customs and laws. The pre-colonial period allowed them to establish their sense of identity vis-à-vis the neighboring tribes. When the colonization set in, however, the Manobo life-world drastically changed. In the 1950s, peasants began arriving in Arakan hoping to own a piece of land they could till. They sought ways to get the Manobo to allow them to take over small plots in exchange for sardines, cigarettes and other goods from the lowlands.

An increasing number of the Manobo started retreating to the hinterlands. But they soon found out that there were no more forests, and many were forced to live in peaceful coexistence with the settlers. As more Christian Ilonggo reached Arakan, religious congregations sent missionaries to minister to them. The first to reach Arakan belonged to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, then the members of the Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions (PIME), coming from Italy, took charge of the pastoral needs of the area, in the midst of the tensions between tribal farmers, ranchers and miners.

In the morning of October 17, 2011, at about 7.30, Fr. Fausto Tentorio, an Italian missionary belonging to the PIME group and Parish Priest of the Catholic community of Arakan, was about to board his car to attend a meeting of the clergy in the capital city of Kidapawan, thirty kilometers away, when a lone assassin with a gun equipped with a silencer appeared out of the blue and shot him eight times. Fr. Fausto collapsed on the ground and the gunman, wearing a crush helmet, casually walked to a motorcycle

waiting near the Mother of Perpetual Help church compound and sped away with a companion.

“I rushed to where he was and I saw him on the ground, blood oozing from his body” Leonardo Reovoca, a former parish worker and now a Councilor for Arakan testified. Fr. Tentorio, 59 years old, was declared dead at the hospital, the third Italian priest and the third member of the PIME who paid with his life the faithfulness to the people and to a mission threatened by contrasting interests and ridden with violence.

In what can be seen as a premonition of his pre-mature death, Fr. Fausto had written down in his Last Will, in February 2004: “...If I were to die in Arakan, my body is to be laid into a coffin built with the wood of the mahogany tree which I have planted here in Arakan”. Then he added: “If it will be possible, on my grave, the following words are to be inscribed: ‘You have been told, o mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God’”. And in Cebuano language he wrote: “Your dreams are my dreams, your struggles are my struggles; you and I are one as partners in building God’s Kingdom”. To those who remarked: “But you are not going to die yet, Father. You are still strong”, Fr. Fausto replied: “I won’t die of sickness. I’m going to die of bullets”.

Hippie priest

Fr. Fausto Tentorio was born on January 7, 1952 in St. Mary of Rovagnate, Lecco, Italy. He was ordained to the Priesthood in 1977 and left for the Philippines the following year. He worked with Christian, Muslim and indigenous communities in Columbio, Sultan Kudarat, before transferring to the mission in Arakan in 1980.

Fr. Fausto, who came to be fondly called “Father Pops” by the indigenous people, when he arrived in the Philippines, struck an unusual figure with his sharp eyes, shoulder-length hair, and simple wardrobe : T-shirt, faded jeans, rubber slippers. He was a hippie Jesus look-alike. He was only 26 when he landed in the Philippines, a new type of missionary, who had gone through the 1968 Students’ Revolution and had found his identity in his vocation to the missions.

One was easily drawn to him. He was gentle, soft-spoken, unobtrusive, and insisted on staying in the background. He worked hard on the language and was very interested to know about the Philippines, particularly Mindanao, the people's culture, the evils of martial rule, and the people's resistance. At first meeting, one knew he was a progressive churchman with militant views on justice and the burning social issues of the day. But he was no rabble-rouser; he did not make radical speeches and fiery sermons. He listened intently to what people had to say and was very supportive of lay people.

At the time of his arrival in Arakan, the valley was seething with the Manobo's frustration as the arable land in their control quickly dwindled. Life was not rosy either for most of the migrant settlers, although they were a little better off than the indigenous people. But businessmen from the lowlands and local government bureaucrats aligned with the Marcos dictatorship—all well-protected by the military—continued to find ways to grab more fertile land.

Fr. Fausto initially assisted his confreres in building and strengthening the Basic Christian Communities, but soon decided to work full-time for the Manobo as part of the Tribal Filipino Apostolate. He stayed in this apostolate for the rest of his life along with another confrere, Fr. Peter Geremia. Fr. Fausto decided to address the plight of the Manobo who, like many of the indigenous people in Mindanao, are the most neglected in terms of government services and even the ministrations of the churches.

He trained his staff in order to set up literacy classes, health centers, and farms and other livelihood projects to provide the Manobo with the skills they needed to improve their lives. Hundreds of Manobo families benefited from these projects. But the most pressing task was to stop the encroachment of outsiders on the remaining Manobo ancestral domain. Fr. Fausto and his staff realized that empowerment was imperative. Thus the massive organizing work in all the Manobo settlements, which led to the birth of the Manobo Lumadnong Panaghiusa (MALUPA).

At risk of his life

Through the sheer force of unity and backed by the social capital of the Church, the Manobo struggled for self-determination. There were skirmishes with the military and its militia, but the indigenous people were somehow

able to advance their interests. Fr. Fausto never took center stage in all these. With the Manobo empowered to take leadership, he took on the role of inspiring, supporting and affirming them.

But the PIME missionaries experienced harassment, and eventually two of them were shot dead for their commitment to the poor of Mindanao—Fr. Tullio Favali in Cotabato on April 11, 1985, and Fr. Salvatore Carzedda in Zamboanga on March 20, 1992.

Fr. Fausto knew that he, too, was at risk.

In 2003, eight years before his death, Fr. Fausto had survived a threat of abduction by an anti-communist paramilitary group called “Baganis”, when he went to a remote village in Kataotao, Bukidnon. After two hours of riding on motorcycles and horses, he and his team arrived at Kabalantian where people told him that armed men were lying in wait for him a bit further on. Despite the threat, Fr. Tentorio and his people walked on foot to Sitio Malinao and again the people told him that the Bagani wanted to cut his head, roast his ears and eat them.

Fr. Fausto spent the night with them. They hid him in a small bamboo cabinet. In the morning the Baganis arrived but the people who had gathered to protect the father were many and the paramilitary group did not insist in searching. Then people of another village invited the Baganis to their place to eat a pig that they had slaughtered. It was after the Baganis had gone to eat the pig, heeding the astute invitation of Fr. Fausto’s friends that he and his companions were able to leave their hiding place.

The Bagani tribal force is one of several paramilitary groups, composed of indigenous people, organized by the Army of the Philippines in order to fight the communist guerillas of NPA (New People’s Army). According to the common conviction, they are the same people who eventually caught up with Fr. Fausto and killed him. Two of them have recently been indicted but, as to this day, nobody has been tried and condemned for the murder of Fr. Fausto, confirming the impression of the atmosphere of impunity that prevails not only in Mindanao, but in the Philippines as a whole.

Fr. Fausto had made a clear choice. Like the Man from Nazareth whom he followed all the way to Arakan, he chose to be on the side of the most abandoned. He was fearless. Not once, not even in the worst of times, did he

ever harbored fear in his heart. He lived simply in the company of the Manobo, at peace in the land that he loved.

With his death, Fr. Fausto has become a martyr.

The funeral was a plebiscite

The extraordinary display of love of the Filipino people for Fr. Fausto Tentorio somewhat lightened the grief of his family members present during the final rites that celebrated his life of dedication to the poor and abandoned. The slain Italian missionary was escorted to his final resting place by an estimated ten thousand mourners, mostly Lumad (indigenous people) and peasants demanding justice for his killing.

Fr. Tentorio's brother Felice and other family members, 88 priests and bishops, Italian Ambassador Luca Fornari, North Cotabato Governor Emmylou Mendoza, and Fr. Gian Battista Zanchi, the PIME superior general, attended the funeral Mass at Our Lady Mediatrix of All Graces Cathedral packed to capacity. The funeral procession wound its way for more than four kilometers to the compound of the Bishop's Residence in Balindog, where Fr. Tentorio was buried in a tree-shaded lot next to Fr. Tulio Favali.

At the Mass, ambassador Fornari, who had defied his own advisory banning Italian nationals from traveling to Mindanao, expressed indignation over Fr. Tentorio's killing and the prevailing climate of impunity in the Philippines that, he said, allowed the murder of the missionary and indigenous peoples. He demanded that the government go after and punish Fr. Tentorio's killers, saying: "Only then will the memory of Fr. Fausto be honored, only then can we continue to serve the indigenous peoples, only then can the quest for equality not be lost but shared with the generations to come."

In a message read before the Mass, Zanchi also condemned Fr. Tentorio's killing and called for justice. He said that the diocese was "now soaked with the blood of Fr. Fausto and Fr. Tullio." Bishop Romulo dela Cruz of Arakan added: "Even when peace and justice will finally arrive in Arakan, their memory and martyrdom shall not be forgotten." The archbishop of Cotabato, Orlando Quevedo said that Fr. Tentorio was "a worthy member of the noble line of martyrs in the Church in Mindanao".

Bishop Quevedo said that the missionary had “a soft, easy smile and a voice that invited conversation. The only enemies he could make are those who wanted to silence his voice appealing for justice and peace for the indigenous peoples and for God’s creation”. He added: “If the perpetrators think that his murder would silence priests, religious and bishops from proclaiming the justice of God’s kingdom, they are wrong. The blood of martyrs like Fr. Fausto fans the daring and courage of those who care about peace and justice enough to sacrifice themselves while traveling the road of active non-violence”.

Fr. Peter Geremia, Fr. Fausto’s confrere, spoke in these terms of his martyred colleague: “Fr. Pops represents the dreams of our people in the Arakan area, all over the diocese of Kidapawan, and all over Mindanao, whom we call the PDOMES-Poor-Deprived-Oppressed-Marginalized-Exploited-Struggling masses. The assassins tried to kill our dreams but they only added life to Pops. They expanded his presence and his influence. Now he is a much larger figure and his death touched the heart of many more people.

He used to be a low profile, shy type, avoiding publicity, allergic to interviews and statements, a very simple and active servant of the people, as a priest, as a friend, as a companion. He has become now a new sign of the times, the bearer of the dreams of many victims and of other dreamers who continue serving the people in their struggles”.

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Fr. Titus Brandsma

## **JOURNALIST AND MARTYR**

*Nicknamed "Shorty" because of his small stature, Fr. Titus Brandsma (1881-1942) was a Dutch priest, educator, journalist and modern mystic who has much to say to us, XXI century Christians. Labeled "dangerous little friar" by his enemies, the frail, bookish clergyman with the big cigar, was able to perform heroic acts of endurance, marked by forgiveness. His joyful countenance in the face of torture and death at the hands of the Nazis was the way he fought his battle for Christ. He wrote: "He who wants to win the world for Christ must have the courage to come in conflict with it."*

Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. By that time he had already set in motion the forces of political fanaticism, racial hatred and rigid party discipline that produced the Nazi dictatorship in Germany and prepared it for expansion into Austria, Czechoslovakia, the Scandinavian countries, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

German tanks bearing the swastika and flying red war banners burst across the Dutch frontier on May 10, 1940, spearheading a blitzkrieg that rapidly crushed all organized military resistance. With armed forces in command and Nazi officials and collaborators in political control, the repression of freedom became the target in Holland. Accordingly, objectors to the occupation were deemed traitors, organized religion came under attack, and Jews were victimized as they had already been in Germany. Catholics came under strict regulation and straitened circumstances.

Fr. Titus Brandsma, a Dutch Carmelite priest, university professor of philosophy and journalist, with sadness and foreboding, had observed and correctly interpreted the ominous development of Nazism. In classroom, lecture hall and the press, he had warned the Dutch against Hitler's tyranny. "The Nazi movement is a black lie," he proclaimed, "It is pagan." As early as 1935, Titus had joined other Dutch intellectuals in a public denunciation



of the Nazi persecution of Jews. His critique of the Nazi movement in Germany and its counterpart in Holland did not escape the notice of the Dutch National Socialist Party. He had already become a marked man.

On January 26, 1941, The Dutch bishops announced that the sacraments were to be refused to the Catholics who were known to be supporting the National-Socialist movement. The bishops' letter annoyed the military governor of the Netherlands and made him intensify the persecution against both Jews and Catholics. The Nazi public relations bureau informed Dutch newspapers and journals that they had to accept advertisements and press releases emanating from official sources.

Shortly after this memorandum, Archbishop De Jong summoned Fr. Titus to his chancery. "We will respond to them," he said. "Our answer must be 'No!' ". He commissioned Fr. Titus, in his capacity as spiritual adviser of Catholic journalists, to convey the bishops' response personally to all Catholic editors in the Netherlands. As he traveled from city to city, Fr. Titus was well aware that he was being shadowed by the Gestapo.

He managed to visit 14 editors before the Gestapo arrested him on Monday, January 19, 1942. He knelt and received the blessing of his superior. Leaving, he proudly wore in the lapel of his black clergy suit the insignia which he had received from Queen Wilhemina in August 1939. The officer who arrested him told him: "Life in your cell cannot be too difficult for you since you are a monk." He even allowed him to have his pipe. During his years of intense apostolic activity, Fr. Titus had yearned for an opportunity to spend more time in prayer. The Nazis unwittingly gave him his heart's desire.

### *Naked in the freezing rain*

Fr. Titus spent seven weeks in prison at Scheveningen. Alone in his cell, he organized his day to the last minute. He wrote poetry, started a biography of St. Teresa of Avila, composed a series of meditations, wrote two booklets (*My Cell, Letters From Prison*), read his breviary and knelt in silent prayer often during the day. He even smoked his pipe on schedule—until January 29, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron of Catholic journalists, when the guards peremptorily took away his pipe and tobacco. Imperturbable as always, Fr. Titus struck smoking time from his daily schedule.

On March 12, he was transported in a convoy with about one hundred other prisoners to the notorious penal depot at Amersfoort. They arrived there at night and the guards ordered the prisoners to stand naked in the freezing rain. After several hours, the drenched and shivering men were herded into barracks, handed prison uniforms and allowed to dress.

Fr. Titus, Number 58, was assigned to a work gang hacking out a shooting range in the forest surrounding Amersfoort. The prisoners, poorly equipped for the job of cutting trees, removing stumps and clearing ground, often dropped exhausted in their tracks. Disease, dysentery and despair were prevalent throughout the camp. When the hospital became overcrowded, the sick were taken on truck rides from which they never returned.

Released prisoners spoke of Fr. Titus' good spirits, courage and generosity. "He frequently gives up a portion of his meager rations," they reported, "to help other starving prisoners. Particularly touching was his care and concern for the Jews." The guards strictly prohibited any priest or minister from giving spiritual counsel, and viciously punished violators. Jailers beat transgressors to death or left them maimed for life.

Fr. Titus quietly and coolly defied the ruling. On the days preceding Good Friday, he gathered groups of prisoners and led them through meditations on Christ's passion and the Stations of the Cross. Prisoners came to him every morning and night to ask for his blessing. He managed to hear confessions and even visited the sick and dying in the hospital. Fr. Titus urged prisoners who could hardly bring themselves to forgive their brutal captors to "pray for them." But then he was taken to the infamous Dachau concentration camp and that was the end.

### *Shorty's happiness*

His name was Anno Brandsma. He was born in Friesland, a province in the northwest corner of the Netherlands on February 23, 1881. Anno's ancestors scooped their land from the sea, first with bare hands and later with primitive tools. Living with their faces to the sea and their feet on fertile farmland wrested from the waters, the Frisians are an enterprising and quietly determined people, a distinct and colorful minority in the densely populated Netherlands. Physically strong, they appreciate decency of life and foster all the qualities that have made the Dutch famous: cleanliness, order, intelligence and discipline.

Anno's father, Titus, a sober and creative man, deeply loved his people and his Catholic faith. He promoted and developed the Frisian cooperative dairy system and immersed himself in local politics. He and his wife Tjitsje had six children, four girls and two boys, whom they reared in an atmosphere of piety, hard work and joy on their large farm. With the exception of one daughter, all of their children entered religious Orders.

Anno completed high school studies with the Franciscans before entering the Carmelite monastery in Boxmeer in September of 1898, where he adopted his father's name, Titus, as his religious name. His outgoing personality made him a favorite with professors and students. His classmates called him "de Punt," a nickname meaning "Shorty." During the early years as a Carmelite he showed interest in journalism and writing, two activities which would occupy much of his time later on in life.

Titus professed his first vows as a Carmelite in October, 1899, was ordained on June 17, 1905, and after further studies at the Roman Gregorian University, graduated on October 25, 1909 with a doctorate in philosophy. Fr. Titus' entire priestly life was spent in education, although always with a keen pastoral sense of people's needs. He joined the faculty of the newly founded Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1923, and served as *Rector Magnificus*, or President, of the University in 1932-33. After this time he resumed his teaching duties, and in 1935 made a lecture tour of the Carmelite foundations in the United States.

Busy Fr. Titus always had time for people. The more unfortunate they were, the more time he gave them. When he met people who were hungry, he fed them. If he had no money to give, he brought them to his home. He provided clothing, rent, money and consolation without stint to all who came his way. Once he took the blanket off his own bed to warm a poor person.

Kneeling in prayer by the hour, leaning over his desk while preparing his lectures, listening patiently to the words of a suffering human being, counseling a student, sitting at his typewriter with his head concealed by billows of blue smoke from the cigar clenched in his teeth, Fr. Titus Brandsma was a happy man. And he brought happiness with everything he did and to everyone he met.

In 1935, shortly before Titus left for the United States, Archbishop De Jong appointed him spiritual advisor to the mostly lay staff members of the more

than 30 Catholic newspapers in the country. The purpose of the appointment was to strengthen relations between the hierarchy and the working Catholic press. It was in this capacity that he was arrested by the German occupation forces.

### *The dark tunnel*

Dachau, one of Germany's oldest concentration camps, held over one hundred thousand prisoners from the time of its founding in the early 1930s. Eighty thousand prisoners died there. Three barracks in Dachau were reserved for about 1600 clergymen. "You will be in hell," a Dachau veteran told Fr. Titus when he was assigned to one of the barracks. "There," the prisoner added, "men die like rats." Of two thousand Polish priests imprisoned there, almost half died before the war's end.

From the very moment Fr. Titus entered the camp, his calmness and gentleness infuriated his captors. They beat him mercilessly with fists, clubs and boards. They kicked, punched and gouged him, drawing blood and oftentimes leaving him nearly unconscious in the mud. The camp had a Catholic chapel where priests celebrated Mass every day. Prisoners were not allowed to attend, but intrepid inmates somehow were able to get and smuggle sacred hosts out to other prisoners.

One time Fr. Titus received the host in a tobacco pouch. Shortly after he got the pouch, he was clubbed and kicked mercilessly by a guard. During the beating he kept one arm clenched tightly to his body. Finally he managed to crawl away from the enraged assailant and dragged himself to his bunk. A fellow Carmelite prisoner came to comfort him. "Thank you, Brother," Fr. Titus said, "but don't have pity on me. I had Jesus with me in the Eucharist."

The prisoners' day began at 4 a.m. All day long guards chased them, exacted extra hours of labor, cut their miserable rations, harassed, hounded, beat and bludgeoned them. Work began at 5:30 a.m. and continued until 7 p.m., with a lunch break.

Fr. Titus soon contracted a severe foot infection. The open sandals which prisoners wore caused his feet to blister and eventually suppurate. At the end of the workday, fellow prisoners often carried him to the barracks. Father

Urbanski, a Polish prisoner, who more than once carried him, remembered: “So even-tempered and approachable was he, so cheerful in the midst of disaster which was threatening us from all sides, that he deeply touched our hearts”.

Fr. Titus continuously exhorted his fellow prisoners: “Do not yield to hatred. Be patient. We are here in a dark tunnel but we have to go on. At the end, the eternal light is shining for us.” In his very last letter home, Fr. Titus, broken in body, full of infection, bruised, and with hardly a sound spot within or without, wrote: “With me, everything is fine. You have to get used to new situations. With God’s help, this is working out all right. Don’t worry too much about me. Yours in Christ, Anno”.

Fr. Titus, although he knew his days were numbered, always refused to enter Dachau’s hospital. In that hellish place, doctors used prisoners for medical experimentation. Many human guinea pigs suffered frightfully before dying indescribable deaths. The few survivors were ruined for life.

Finally Fr. Titus had no choice. He entered the hospital and immediately he too became a subject for medical experimentation. In the afternoon of Sunday, July 26, 1942, the doctor in charge of his case ordered him injected with a deadly drug. Within ten minutes Fr. Titus Brandsma, who brought happiness wherever he went on this earth—even to Dachau—was dead. He was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II, on November 1985. Since then, the promotion of his cause for sainthood has been in progress.

### *A Cardinal and a Queen*

The following are some statements of people who knew Fr. Titus Brandsma, especially fellow prisoners: “*Probamur dum amamur*: we are tested because we are loved: this we can fairly accurately retain as his life’s motto. He has sealed it with his death.” “As long as I shall live I will always have before my eyes the figure of Father Brandsma, with whom I have so often spoken during the war years and whom I have always admired for his courage and clear insights. Repeatedly have I asked his advice. I regard him as a martyr.(Cardinal Jan de Jong)

“This great and sincere patriot, with those who would ask his advice, never hesitated to present, clearly and right from the start, the religious and patriotic options open to them. The inner, spiritual power of his writings

represents a testimony held by many in high esteem, then and still today”(*Queen Wilhelmina*).

“Though being a Lutheran myself, I must say that during my entire life I have met few people who made such an impression on me as Fr. Titus Brandsma. He knew how to make everyone his friend. Especially impressive was his spiritual unassailability. I felt immediately that I was in the presence of someone who in his ordinary life must have been far above the rest.”

“Professor Brandsma was always cheerful and he also knew how to suffuse his environment with this cheerfulness. He was interested in all possible kinds of problems, and he was not in the least impressed by the methodical terrorism by which they were trying to break us, mentally and physically.”

“His spirit could simply not be broken. Any thought of revenge was far from him: thus he could say his Our Father in silence while in the presence of his attackers.”  
“Simple and unobtrusive among the more than one thousand priests of Dachau, he showed a perpetual smile, filled with patience and inner calm, a smile of mystical serenity in the midst of all the suffering he had to undergo.”

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Extraordinary people: Fr. Rhoel Gallardo

## **A NEW FILIPINO SAINT**

*The young Claretian priest Fr. Rhoel (1965-2000), missionary to the dangerous periphery of the archipelago, was conscious of the possibility of a violent death, but he would never abandon his people. His martyrdom, when it came, was a real sacrifice, an omen of heroic faithfulness for the new millennium.*

The recent conclusion of the war against the ISIS in Marawi City, Mindanao, may give the impression that it was the end of the notorious terrorist group Abu Sayyaf which had a leading part in the rebellion, but, because of past experience, we can be certain that its ugly head will rise again in others unexpected circumstances and places.

Abu Sayyaf has been a Jihadist militant group for more than twenty years. It was based in and around Jolo and Basilan islands in the south-western part of the Philippines, where for more than four decades, Moro groups have been engaged in an insurgency for an independent province in the country.

As part of its kidnap-for-ransom operations, the Abu Sayyaf have executed some of their male hostages if ransom demands were not being met. The group has also beheaded Christian civilians and other non-believers of Islam without raising any ransoms for their release. That is what happened with Fr. Rhoel Gallardo.

### ***The sacrifice of the Shepherd***

Father Rhoel Gallardo was a young Filipino Claretian priest. He had volunteered to go to Mindanao when the assigned priest there fell ill in June

1999. He served as the director of the Claret School of Tumahubong in Basilan and as a parish priest.

On March 20, 2000, the Abu Sayyaf group assailed the Claret School of Tumahubong and burned it. Fr. Gallardo, and 52 others, including teachers and school children, were captured and held hostage for six weeks. In April, some of the hostages were released. When the long negotiations between the rebels and the bishop did not come to an agreement, the Philippine Army was forced to attack the formers' camp in the forest to rescue the hostages.

They found the body of Fr. Gallardo, who was assassinated on May 3, 2000, with several bullet wounds and other signs of torture. His nails were plucked out from his hands and feet a few days before he was shot at close range. The group also killed three teachers and five children.

### *Personal Qualities*

Fr. Rhoel was the eldest son of Dominador Gallardo and Raquel Dayap. He was born on November 29, 1965 in Olongapo City, Zambales. He was the second among a brood of five. Fr. Rhoel was a rather reserved type, but once you got to know him, he could be always grinning and clowning around. His High School classmates remember him as a witty but quiet fellow who was ever ready to give advice.

"Little Claret" was how Fr. Rhoel was jokingly called by his fellow seminarians when he was still under formation because of his diminutive size and saintly countenance which made him resemble the founder of the Claretian Missionaries.

He had special concern for the "little ones". A blind woman remembers how Fr. Rhoel would come to her aid. She said: "I knew a lot of priests but nobody ever washed my hands except Fr. Rhoel. He would tell the cook in the convent that she knew that I was blind, so why did she have to put the plate far from me".

The Abu Sayyaf rebels, however, did not appreciate this concern for others. Mr. Reynaldo Rubio, the principal of Claret School of Tumahubong and Fr. Rhoel's constant companion during their captivity, revealed the reason of the beating Fr. Rhoel got from four Abu Sayyaf members. This happened when



he repeatedly inquired about the whereabouts of a Claret School teacher who was missing for several days in the kidnappers' camp.

Irritated by his inquiries, the Abu Sayyaf punched and kicked him until he was badly bruised. During the kidnapping, amidst the tension, the optimistic and prayerful Fr. Rhoel used to calm his companions. During those trying moments, he acted like a "Good Shepherd."

### ***Never to abandon his flock***

Fr. Rhoel completed his pastoral year in Maluso, Basilan. In his application for the perpetual profession, he wrote, "My pastoral immersion in Basilan last year made me experience concretely our witnessing and evangelizing life and mission to the poor as well as our Community's presence in the dialogue of life and faith with our Muslim brothers and sisters... These experience as a whole have become a real challenge to me to be a committed missionary and active witness to God's liberating love for humanity". Fr. Rhoel made his perpetual profession and was ordained to the Priesthood in 1994.

Few years after his ordination, Fr. Rhoel volunteered to go to the most dangerous mission of the Claretians in the Philippines, Tumahubong as Parish Priest of San Vicente Ferrer Parish and Director of Claret School. This is where he reached the apex of his short missionary career.

Fr. Rhoel initially had difficulties in his new assignment. Months before his kidnapping however, he exhibited a significant change. He became more appreciative of the people around him. The seriousness of his role as pastor of the Christian community troubled by the Muslim extremists had marked a profound impression in him as a missionary. He vowed never to leave his flock no matter what. He was ready for any eventuality. Soon God asked him the supreme sacrifice.

### ***A new Filipino Saint***

A requiem Mass for Fr. Gallardo was celebrated by Cardinal Sin on May 9, 2000, at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Manila. His body was laid to rest in a cemetery near the Claretian Formation Center.



Asia Bibi is a citizen of Pakistan, a humble peasant woman, a 45-year-old mother of five, who was sentenced to death by hanging in November of 2010 because of the notorious anti-blasphemy law of that country and is currently awaiting an appeal ruling. She was accused by other women of her village who were working with her in the fields of having offended the Prophet Mohammed, when a quarrel broke out over the use of water. The case of Asia Bibi provoked an uproar in the world media and consequently the execution of the sentence was suspended. Even if she is exonerated or pardoned, Asia will not feel safe, because various Muslim figures have made death threats against her.

On March 8, on the occasion of the International Women's Day, the Pakistani Catholic Church and Indian Christians launched the latest in a series of appeals for the liberation of Asia Bibi, who is in danger of being killed in prison. Moreover, they affirmed that this woman symbolizes all the others who are behind bars or in apparent freedom, oppressed by disparity, intolerance and violence because of their sex or the faith they profess.

In Pakistan, out of a population of 185 million inhabitants, Christians are 2 percent, one million of them Catholic. But among the Muslims as well there are minorities in danger: Shiites, Sufis, Ismaili, Ahmadi. The law against blasphemy is a weapon used against the minorities. It was introduced by the English in 1927, and kept in effect in 1947, after Pakistan's independence and separation from India. But beginning in 1977, after the military coup by Zia-ul-Haq, Islamization has been increasing and the law against blasphemy – brought back into vogue with a vengeance – has been joined by other norms based on Sharia Law.

The Justice and Peace commission of the Catholic bishops of Pakistan has estimated that from 1987 to 2009, 1,032 persons have been unjustly punished using the law against blasphemy. For blaspheming Mohammed, the death penalty has been introduced, and for profanation of the Qur'an, a life sentence. Charges of blasphemy are based on the word of the accuser, who, however, must not report the precise content of the offense in order to avoid being charged with the same crime. The judges, in turn, are afraid of being killed, as has happened on occasion, if they exonerate a defendant. So they often tend to delay the verdict, but without granting bail.

It was for having called for the liberation of Asia Bibi and for the modification of the blasphemy law that Shahbaz Bhatti, Catholic minister of the Religious Minorities paid with his life. A short while before him, Salmaan Taseer, the Muslim Governor of Punjab had met the same destiny

for the same reason. The degree of Muslim fanaticism in Pakistan was proved recently when the sanctuary of Osama Bin Laden was discovered at a short distance from Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city.

### ***Massacred by thirty gunshots***

Khushpur, the birthplace of Shahbaz Bhatti, in the fertile plains of Punjab, was founded by Catholic missionaries a century ago, and almost all of its five thousand inhabitants are baptized. The village is clean, industrious, welcoming. Its schools have good attendance. There is equality between men and women. It bears witness to the good quality of life of the Pakistan's Christian community.

Shahbaz Bhatti was born there on September 9 1968. He came from a fervent Catholic family. His father, a retired teacher, and his mother, a housewife, raised him according to Christian values and the teachings of the Bible. Since he was a child, he was accustomed to going to church and finding profound inspiration in the teachings, the sacrifice, and the crucifixion of Jesus. It was Jesus' love that led him to offer his service to the Church. He entered politics and was a member of the main governing party, the PPP, the Pakistan People's Party. His aim was to promote the freedom and equality of the religious minorities, especially the Christians.

He decided not to get married in order to consecrate himself to his mission. He did not choose the priesthood "because he wanted to be among the people, in direct contact with persons and their difficulties, something that priests are often unable to do in his country." Eventually, Shahbaz Bhatti became Federal Minister of Religious Minorities. He was assassinated on March 2 by an extremist brigade in the capital of Islamabad. A few weeks earlier, he had asked: "Pray for me. I am a man who has burned his ships behind him: I cannot and I do not want to turn back in this effort. I will combat extremism and I will fight in defense of the Christians to the death."

On March 2, the minister was with his driver and a nephew in an official vehicle, which had not been armored in spite of requests. The terrorist brigade dragged Bhatti out of the car and massacred him with thirty gunshots. The assassination is attributed to the Pakistani Taliban of Punjab. They worked without interference, and left at the scene of the crime some fliers signed Tehrik-e-Taliban-Punjab. The minister had not wanted an escort, mindful that his friend and fellow party member Taseer had been

killed precisely by a member of his escort, without his other bodyguards intervening. This had taken place two months earlier, on January 4. And his assassin has been turned into a hero, with lawyers competing to defend him free of charge.

### *From his Spiritual Testament*

After Shahbaz Bhatti's supreme sacrifice, his Spiritual Testament was published and it reveals the stature of a saint. These are some excerpts from it. "The frightening conditions into which the Christians of Pakistan have fallen disturb me. I remember one Good Friday when I was just thirteen years old: I heard a homily on the sacrifice of Jesus for our redemption and for the salvation of the world. And I thought of responding to his love by giving love to my brothers and sisters, placing myself at the service of Christians, especially of the poor, the needy, and the persecuted who live in this Islamic country.

"I have been asked to put an end to my battle, but I have always refused, even at the risk of my own life. My response has always been the same. I do not want popularity, I do not want positions of power. I only want a place at the feet of Jesus. I want my life, my character, my actions to speak of me and say that I am following Jesus Christ. This desire is so strong in me that I consider myself privileged whenever – in my combative effort to help the needy, the poor, the persecuted Christians of Pakistan – Jesus should wish to accept the sacrifice of my life. I want to live for Christ and it is for Him that I want to die.

"I do not feel any fear in this country. Many times the extremists have wanted to kill me, imprison me; they have threatened me, persecuted me, and terrorized my family. I say that, as long as I am alive, until the last breath, I will continue to serve Jesus and this poor, suffering humanity, the Christians, the needy, the poor. I believe that the Christians of the world who have reached out to the Muslims hit by the tragedy of the earthquake of 2005 have built bridges of solidarity, of love, of comprehension, and of tolerance between the two religions.

"If these efforts continue, I am convinced that we will succeed in winning the hearts and minds of the extremists. This will produce a change for the better: the people will not hate, will not kill in the name of religion, but will love each other, will bring harmony, will cultivate peace and

comprehension in this region.

"I believe that the needy, the poor, the orphans, whatever their religion, must be considered above all as human beings. I think that these persons are part of my body in Christ, that they are the persecuted and needy part of the body of Christ. If we bring this mission to its conclusion, then we will have won a place at the feet of Jesus, and I will be able to look at him without feeling shame."

### *After the funeral*

After the state funeral in the capital, the "martyr" Bhatti was buried, in the presence of ten thousand people of every creed, in Khushpur near Faisalabad, in Punjab. After the Angelus, on March 6, pope Benedict issued this appeal to comfort the Pakistani Catholics traumatized by the murder: "I ask the Lord Jesus that the touching sacrifice of Pakistani minister Shahbaz Bhatti's life may awaken in consciences the courage and commitment to protect the religious freedom of all people and, in this way, to promote their equal dignity."

Confronted with this crime, the Pakistani bishops immediately declared and confirmed that "this is a perfectly tragic example of the unsustainable climate of intolerance in which we live in Pakistan. We call on the government, the institutions, the whole country to recognize and take decisions about these issues, because there must be an end to this situation, where violence prevails." They also sent a request to the Holy See that Bhatti be proclaimed a martyr, killed "*in odium fidei* (In hatred towards the faith)". The imam of the Badshahi mosque in Lahore himself, Khabior Mohammad Azad, shaken by the death of his "good friend" Bhatti, charged that "the people no longer have the right to express their opinions" and that "those who have claimed responsibility for the assassination are not Muslims, nor human beings," because "Islam is a religion of peace, which teaches respect for minorities."

One month later, at the end of the general audience on Wednesday, April 6, Benedict XVI received his brother, Paul Bhatti, a doctor who lived in Italy for many years but returned to his country precisely in order to continue his brother's mission, and has been appointed a special adviser on religious minorities to the Prime Minister of Pakistan. With Paul, the pope also met the grand imam of Lahore, Khabior Azad, a personal friend of Shahbaz. The Bible that Shahbaz always had with him is now in Rome in

the memorial for the martyrs of the past century, in the basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Isola Tiberina.

A day of prayer for Asia Bibi, Arif Masih and all the other persons arrested for the same accusation was celebrated on April 20, Wednesday of Holy Week, in Pakistan and other countries. In Rome, in the chapel of the Italian parliament, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran celebrated a Mass in memory of Shahbaz Bhatti. A huge banner with Bhatti's image and name was hanged outside of the Italian foreign ministry on March 5, to commemorate the man and his sacrifice.

Pakistan's Government has abolished the cabinet-level Federal Ministry for Religious Minorities, eliminating the post of Minister of State for Religious Minorities, the post once held by Catholic politician Shahbaz Bhatti. This ministry is one of seven cabinet offices closed in a decentralization program approved by parliament.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, announced the creation of a new federal department focusing on interfaith harmony and human rights. He tried to dispel the concern of minority leaders present by stressing that "the work of protection and development of religious minorities will continue". Paul Bhatti, brother of Shahbaz and special adviser to the Prime Minister for Minority Affairs, who had occupied Shahbaz's post after his martyrdom, attended the meeting and expressed satisfaction with the new structure. He also reported on investigations into Shahbaz's murder. Evidence points to an al-Qaeda brigade led by one of the Pakistani Taliban, he said, and "now we are waiting for the capture of the perpetrators of the crime, who are in Dubai".

Meanwhile petitions urging greater safety for Christians in Pakistan, signed by more than six thousand people, were recently handed in at the Pakistani High Commission in London and at Downing Street, the British Prime Minister's office. They were delivered at the start and end of a two-mile march by around 300 people, highlighting human rights violations in Pakistan. The march was organized by the British-Pakistani Christian Association and supported by the Aid of the Church in Need. The struggle is still going on and it will be very long indeed. The sacrifice of Shahbaz Bhatti will not have happened in vain.

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Vittorio Bachelet

# **SEVEN BULLETS FOR THE PROFESSOR**

*Professor Vittorio Bachelet was the ideal figure of lay person who has assumed full responsibility in the Church of Vatican II. A successful scholar, husband and father, he consistently served his whole life in the Lay Apostolate and contributed validly to the new comprehension of the Laity's place in a renewed Church. God called him to the supreme sacrifice of blood. His family became model of a forgiveness which more than anything else broke the power of the Red Brigades and contributed to their downfall.*

It is 10am of February 12, 1980. Professor Vittorio Bachelet crosses the threshold of “La Sapienza” University in Rome, as he is used to do. He moves at his usual tranquil pace. He is a tall, bulky man, wearing lenses because he is short-sighted, the expression of his face meek and slightly absent- minded. For him it is a working day as any other...

The lesson over, at 11.30 the professor goes away, climbing the steps from the ground floor to the huge entrance lobby invaded by the warm sun. It is a glorious morning, notwithstanding the winter season. Close to him walks his female assistant, miss Rosy Bindi. Few students complete the party. Suddenly, a young woman comes from behind the professor, puts a hand on his shoulder and turns him roughly around. At the same time, she shoots him trice in the abdomen.

After her, a very young hit man looks down on the dying man and explodes other four bullets, the last one through the brain. At the same time a voice



shouts: "There is a bomb, all run!". While everybody is moving away in panic and confusion, the assassins board a car and disappear. After a little while, exactly at noon, the body of professor Bachelet is covered by a sheet at the foot of the huge glass window of the lobby... Already the news has spread like lightening and people start streaming to see the victim.

The first to arrive is the President of the Italian Republic, Sandro Pertini, a dignified old man, the face now carved in stone because of sorrow and indignation. The crowd clap their hands almost with fury, overcome by emotion. Then journalists and photographers arrive and are kept outside the glass barrier until the victim's daughter, Maria Grazia, arrives, disheveled, followed after a little while by the wife, Maria Teresa, dismayed and in tears. She bends over the lifeless body of the husband and caresses his face smeared in blood.

At 14.30 hours, a cold and matter-of-fact voice dictates this message to the main daily newspapers: "Listen carefully: here the Red Brigades. We are the ones who have executed Bachelet".

### *The anguish of pope Paul VI*

The Red Brigades was a communist rebel group, based in Italy, responsible for numerous violent incidents during the so-called "Lead Years". Formed in 1970, the organization sought to create a "revolutionary" state through armed struggle, and to remove Italy from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Red Brigades attained notoriety in the 1970s and early 1980s with their violent attempts to destabilize Italy by acts of sabotage, bank robberies, kidnappings and assassinations. Models for the Red Brigades were the Latin American urban guerrilla movements.

The group's most infamous act took place in 1978, when they kidnapped the former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Aldo Moro, a very peaceful man and a well-known champion of dialogue. The kidnappers also killed five members of Moro's entourage. After holding Moro for 54 days, the Brigades realized that the Government would not negotiate and, fearful of being discovered, decided to kill their prisoner. They placed him in a car and told him to cover himself with a blanket. Their leader then shot him eleven times in the chest. Moro's body was left in the trunk of a car in the center of Rome. In vain was the open letter that pope Paul VI wrote to the Red Brigades themselves. In great anguish, the pope celebrated Moro's funeral and after a short time died himself.

Aldo Moro's assassination caused a strong reaction against the Red Brigades by the Italian people at large. Professor Bachelet's assassination came when the rebel group already felt isolated and hopeless. Few years later it disintegrated: most of the members were captured and many of them repented.

### *A meek person*

Vittorio Bachelet was born at Rome on February 20, 1926, the last of the nine children of Giovanni and Maria Bosio. His father was a military officer. The family was very religious. Vittorio since his childhood enrolled in the ranks of the Catholic Action, a lay apostolate group he will be faithful to for his whole life, climbing, in different periods of his career, the different rungs of the movement's hierarchical ladder.

During his university studies, Bachelet worked with the FUCI (Federation of the Italian Catholic University Students) and after his graduation in 1947, while pursuing research activity at the university, he continued to collaborate to the cultural elaboration of de FUCI through the association magazines. In 1951 he married Maria Teresa De Januario from whom he had two children: Maria Grazia and Giovanni. He was called by pope Saint John XXIII to assume the charge of National President of the Italian Catholic Action in 1964.

It was then that he led the structural reform of the Association so that it might be more in line with the model of Church as it was outlined by the Second Vatican Council. He concluded his mandate in 1973 and after three years, he was elected to the public administration of Rome and later he was chosen by the Parliament to the Superior Magistracy Council. In the meantime he was continuing his teaching profession in the faculty of Political Science of the "La Sapienza" University where he eventually consumed his supreme sacrifice.

Vittorio Bachelet was a meek person who used to take note of everything, listen to everybody; he was not in a hurry to reach a conclusion: he was the promoter of a patient dialogue in order to take into account everybody's reasons: his was a real lesson in democracy. In the end, decisions were always taken at the unanimity. His style was exemplary as the one of a lay person able to permeate the dynamism of history in order to allow the seeds of the Word to sprout in the social fabric of the community.

### *The Mission of the Laity*

Bachelet links the very existence of Catholic Action to the plan of being an advanced laboratory for the building up of a Christian community capable of accepting the novelty of the Council. In this way, the professor shows his understanding of the role of the laity in the life and destiny of the Church: not a marginal, subordinate position, but a central protagonism, according to the renewed understanding of the Church as People of God.

He wrote: “The council offers to the laity a global commitment in the life of the Church which doesn’t limit itself to the witness in society and in temporal life, but is a commitment which shares in the very construction of church-life and is co-responsible in its evangelizing and sanctifying mission. It is the extraordinary and exciting adventure of studying, assimilating, spreading, explaining and eventually putting into practice the decrees and the whole outlook of the Council. The task is that of embodying the prophecy of Vatican II.”

“It seems to me that our task in this field is both direct and indirect. Direct in as much as to form agents who are spiritually and technically prepared to assume their responsibilities as Christians in the social arena. Indirectly, it is our duty to feed these agents’ action with the study of the values and principles of the Church’s Social Doctrine as well as a spirituality which may strengthen them in the wear and tear of their daily life and witness.

Moreover, it is the mission of the Laity to be present every time an aspect of the life of the community touches fundamental spiritual values and problems and basic human rights”

### *The “Religious Option”*

In a famous interview, Vittorio Bachelet revealed what was his guiding principle in his task of renewing the Catholic Action and bringing it to the level of Vatican II: the “Religious Option”. He said: “The “Religious Option” is this: to re-discover the centrality of Christ’s announcement, the faith proclamation from which all the rest acquires meaning. When I reflected on these realities and made efforts to express them, spontaneously I referred to Saint Benedict’s experience who, during another period of cultural transition, found out the seed for changing the world in the centrality of the Liturgy, of prayer and of culture. He understood that he wanted to

keep whatever was valid in the ancient civilization and graft it as a seed of hope into the new era. This is the “Religious Option”.

It implies the commitment to re-discover those points of reference for one’s life and for one’s commitment in the civil and political arena that so much go against the prevailing worldly mentality. “Religious Option” is there to help Christians to live out their faith in their concrete life circumstances; to be “the soul of the world” i.e. leaven, seed for the ultimate salvation, but loving service as well in the construction of a society where less people are hungry, poor and oppressed. Then the “Religious Option” teaches the faithful that their witness of charity becomes for them also civil and political commitment which they cannot simply leave to the ecclesial community, but from this community they have to draw it and be formed to it.

The best warranty of the seriousness of this ideal comes directly from Vittorio Bachelet’s very life: it was he who had made long before and in the most varied contexts, the “Religious Option”; who had decided to model his existence and all his actions on God.

### ***“Value your own time”***

This is a constant commitment for Bachelet: to value our own time. He wrote: “We should learn to know better our own time, to discover the expectations of good, even the wounds, even what is rotten, in order to be able to communicate the fruits and the richness of the Vatican Council. This our time is as complex as the human heart: a mixture of goodness and corruption. One of its main characteristics is the disproportion between the increased power of humanity (technology, science, arms, media, etc.) and the authentic growth of spirituality.

Thus, we human beings who once again proudly thought of making ourselves God by dominating the world or even the universe, find ourselves daily under the scaring domination of the things we have created like the “button” which can start the atomic war and humanity’s destruction. But it exactly here that a spiritual renewal and a fresh thrust of Christianity can give present day humanity its supplement of ideal, the religious wealth which is lacking and which alone can give back to us our dignity and the right link with our Creator and consequently with all our brothers and sisters”.

