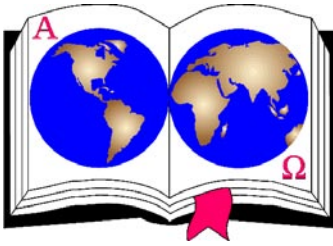




*Farewell to Franco who
loved Aurora*

January/February 2007
News and Prayer Letter



Reformation Christian Ministries

News & Prayer Letter

January/February 2007

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. Jeremiah 17:7-8

The verses above were used in an article Rev. Franco Maggiotto wrote in October 1998. Tribulation and difficulties were something to which Franco was no stranger. Prior to becoming a Christian, he lived a life that most in Italy would consider "blessed". He was born in 1937 to a family of high standing and was raised in the royal palace of the King in Turino, Italy. After becoming a priest, he rose rapidly through the ranks having served as a parish priest, an arch priest and even secretary to a cardinal in the Vatican. However, things began to change after his conversion to Christ. His "blessed" life in the eyes of men began to wane especially when he put Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as higher in authority than the Roman Catholic hierarchy.



Franco with former Jesuit priest March 2003, at Grace Presbyterian Church, Metairie, Louisiana.

Aside from coming to know Jesus Christ, the second most profound event in his life was his marriage to Aurora. She bore him two children (Tabitha and Alberto). He frequently said that he knew God loved him because He gave him Aurora. From early on, he began signing many of his letters "Franco, who loves Aurora." Aside from his strong affection for his wife, he also demonstrated this affection by showing that true love and respect could exist between a priest and a woman through marriage. This was part of his efforts at reformation in a country where women are regularly abused by Roman Catholic priests and demeaned as to their value in God's eyes.

Franco's being planted in Christ and his depth of knowledge of the Scriptures truly enabled his roots to drink of the Lord's Living Water. This became quite evident as he began the ministry of Reformation to which the Lord called him. It will be difficult to precisely measure the degree of impact he had on Italy, but it is clear that he brought to everyone in Italy with whom he met, a fresh respect for the Scriptures and their applicability to all of life, and their source of the final authority upon which salvation and eternal life is founded.

On December 20, 2006, the Lord took Franco home and his confidence has now been realized. Yet the Italy that Franco left behind has been stirred by his presence. Franco intentionally did not train any particular person to take over for him. He saw his ministry as unique to him and did not fail to remind those who knew him that God had ministries for them, each in their own callings. Through

them, the Holy Spirit would continue the reformation of Italy. The changing of a nation is as dependent upon the Lord as is the changing of a person through salvation. Franco's desire was not to leave a system or a hierarchy behind him, but rather a loyalty to Jesus Christ and a thirst for the Scriptures knowing this was what was necessary to break the bondage of the pope in Italy and lead it through the maze of circumstances and situations in which life in Italy takes place.

While his family and his colleagues ponder the future and what role God has for them, RCM remains committed to the on-going reformation of Italy through Italians. We will report on those efforts later, but dedicate this issue to our dear brother Franco whose long-awaited deliverance from this world into the presence of the Lord has now taken place. What a privilege it was to have known him.

Below is a tribute to Franco written by Rev. John Tallach, a Scottish minister and long-term friend of Franco's, followed by the letter sent forth at the very end of December as the official statement of the Maggiotto family on behalf of Franco.

Geoffrey Donnan

Letter from Scotland

Franco was born on the 7th of July, 1937, in Turin, Italy. From an early age, Franco had a deep hunger for God. For a time he followed a hard life in a monastery near Rome. After that he trained as a priest. His motive was always the same. He wanted to find God for himself. However, even though he spent time trying to overcome sin in himself and in speaking about God to others, he could not attain to that personal peace with God for which he longed.

That peace came suddenly and unexpectedly, when Franco was in charge of the Mass one day in a large church in Imperia. A student was reading a passage from Hebrews 10, and the words of verse ten came as a message from heaven to Franco: "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." For the first time he realised that what he had been seeking during all these years had been provided through the cross of Christ nearly two thousand years before. From that moment onwards, to the end of his life, Franco had a burning desire to share the gospel of Christ with others.

It was not easy to work with him. He was such an individualist that he found it difficult to be part of a team... He was extremely gifted. He was never content to find one spiritual formula and to apply it rigidly to the various situations which he met. He was constantly interacting with the gospel on a personal level, and was always seeing new ways in which the gospel could be applied to the problems with which he was confronted.

I remember being with him once at the home of a minister in Scotland who thought of himself as a great champion of the principles



Franco and grizzly bear in Smithers, British Columbia, March, 2003. The similarities between Franco and a grizzly bear are far greater than might meet the eye.



Franco Maggiotto as a Roman Catholic priest (c. late 1960s)

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of the Reformation. Franco responded to this man's comments to the following effect: "You are looking back to the Reformation. But you are not like the Reformers. They were looking forward. They were thinking hundreds of years ahead. They were not buried in the past. If we really want to be like them, we will not be controlled by the past but will look to the future, as they did." For once, that minister had nothing to say. That was one outstanding characteristic of Franco. He was a courageous little man. **He never said things to please people, to be popular with his hearers.**



That was one thing which he helped me to see, during the thirty years that I knew him. He had been disappointed by a church which sought to draw attention to itself. Once he had himself come to know Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, he had a very deep grasp of the church's duty to point people away from itself to Jesus.

I recall some of those to whom Franco ministered.

The depth and breadth of their understanding of the gospel testified to the high quality of his ministry. I remember a gracious and mature Christian lady who said to me, "Per me, Franco e stato un altro Paulo" (For me, Franco has been another Paul). This might seem like an exaggeration, but she was just expressing from her heart her sense of indebtedness to someone whom God had used to help her really grasp the gospel of God's grace. In keeping with this, at the funeral service when Franco's body was laid to rest in a Waldensian cemetery, a moving tribute was read from one of the churches which he was the means of founding.

Franco's ministry was realistic, facing up to the difficulties which ordinary people face. It was also charged with a hope born of the God of hope. Both these aspects of his ministry were reflected, in the meditation which he wrote on Romans 8:25 "But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience." This meditation accompanied the last Prayer Letter sent out on Franco's behalf before his death. We will give our hope to the hopeless, our joy to whoever is sad. To wait with perseverance and with patience means entering into conflict, into the sadness and defeats of the human race. But the Lord's promise accompanies us in our journey of faith and allows us to see, beyond the horizon of sadness, the light of his coming reign. And we say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

For Franco, after those years of searching, after those years of taking up the cross and following Christ in a ministry which was difficult but whose fruits will last, that prayer was answered just before midnight on the 20th of December, 2006.

Our love and prayers surround his precious wife Aurora, along with his daughter and his son, Tabitha and Alberto.

Rev. John Tallach, Minister of the Gospel in Scotland.

LETTER FROM MAGGIOTTO FAMILY

ALPIGNANO, December 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

The communication that I am sending you now is bringing sad news about Franco. As you know he has been seriously ill for the last year and a half. So it was that just before midnight on Wednesday, December 20, Franco's last reserve of strength was exhausted and the Lord took him. Aurora, Tabitha and Alberto were at his side, together with a few local members of the Alpignano fellowship who were in time to get to the hospital.

Complications and difficulties had been a necessary part of his treatment but he rallied more than once to overcome them. Mercifully, however, at the end, Franco was spared having to endure any further pain. Throughout his entire illness he was always present to conduct the Sunday Worship service, except on December 17 when he was too ill to be moved from his hospital bed.

Three days later he was buried in the Waldensian cemetery in Angrogna. It lies in the heart of the historically Protestant Waldensian Valleys. Angrogna was dear to him because of its mountainous beauty, but primarily on account of its associations. It was in Angrogna, now just a small village, that the poorly equipped Waldensian protestants took up defensive positions in whatever strongholds the mountains, their only protection, offered. It was there that they suffered their heaviest losses. It was there that they had to force a way underground in order to hold their meetings, since it was in total secrecy that their only hope of safety lay (the visitor may be shown these places even today). Alpignano, on the other hand is known to history



for being an area where politically enlisted mercenaries, and troops on the payroll of the Roman Catholic church, were mustered and trained before the long march to perpetrate the slaughter of their Waldensian compatriots ('Valdesi').

It takes an hour to reach the cemetery at Angrogna nowadays, nevertheless that morning, which began several degrees below zero (32° F), those who entered the cemetery outnumbered those at rest in it. There were many pastors in attendance, as well as the Mayor and local authorities. A brief service was conducted at the top of the sharp slope over the still sloping graveside. Franco's favorite hymn, Luther's "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" was played by Tabitha on the harp. All this above the slowly developing mist in the valley below. Many of those present were unaware that Franco also ministered outside Italy, however Presbyterian pastor Perry Huesmann brought this to our attention. The service opened with Franco Barbero, a pioneer of the Reformation movement in Italy through the work of the "Comunita di Base" (the Italian, non-hierarchical, Grass-roots Communities), and was brought to a close by the Senior Waldensian pastor and foremost University Professor of Waldensian History, Giorgio Tourn. There were also contributions from representatives of Franco's Communities including, of course, the fellowship at Finale Ligure.

Three hours later the nearby balconies were still crowded with people from all the walks of life which had been affected by Franco's ministry, a ministry which, in all its aspects, had lasted 43 years. The longer they stayed to talk and reminisce the brighter the sun shone until, well into the afternoon, everyone had departed. Only the mist that day never quite dispersed in the valley below.

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Chamberlain, on behalf of Aurora, Tabitha and Alberto Maggiotto

Franco would always include a meditation in his prayer letters, and, after the last Sunday service he held, he asked for the following text to be translated into English with this in mind:

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY: SOME IMPORTANT, BASIC TRUTHS

I am greatly puzzled that some elementary truths concerning the Christian faith that were stated simply in my communication on relations with Islam should have so astonished some pastors that they actually thought that they were printing errors. Some questions were raised, however, which must not be allowed to pass without reply: I will confine myself to five important points:

1) It is true that the Koran mentions Isd (Jesus) with respect. It states, though, that He is not Lord, nor the Messiah, nor the Son of God. He is only a prophet, who did not die on the cross and who therefore did not rise again. It also says that He actually announced the coming, after Him, of a prophet, by name, Ahmad or Muhammed. We can find all these references very clearly in the Koran. It is thus evident that beyond the formal homage, Jesus Christ is completely distorted in His Person and in His work of Salvation.

2) If the Koran states the contrary of what the Bible proclaims and Christians have always believed, it is, alas, "another Gospel" to be rejected (Galatians 1, 8-9). *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is an antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son* (1 John 2, 22). If we are to be coherent and sincere, we cannot delude ourselves: we must recognize with regret that Islam is a false religion since it denies the centre of faith: Jesus Christ.

3) Some pastors have found it hard to accept my statement that Islam represents the biggest obstacle to rise up against Christ in the world today. I can understand this, and it pains me too as, I think, it does all Christians. But do these pastors not know that it is a crime in many Islamic states not just to distribute Bibles but simply to possess one and to read it? Do they not know that official legislation in force in several Islamic states actually prescribes the death penalty for those who choose to follow Christ and leave Islam? Do they not know how many of our brothers and sisters are suffering, persecuted, driven from their homes, deprived of their children and of all their rights, only because they have believed in Christ? And they, like us, are members of the body of Christ: they are the ones who must rouse us from our indifference, be supported in prayer, and defended and given help in every possible way. Let us thank God for the many Christian initiatives operating in this field.

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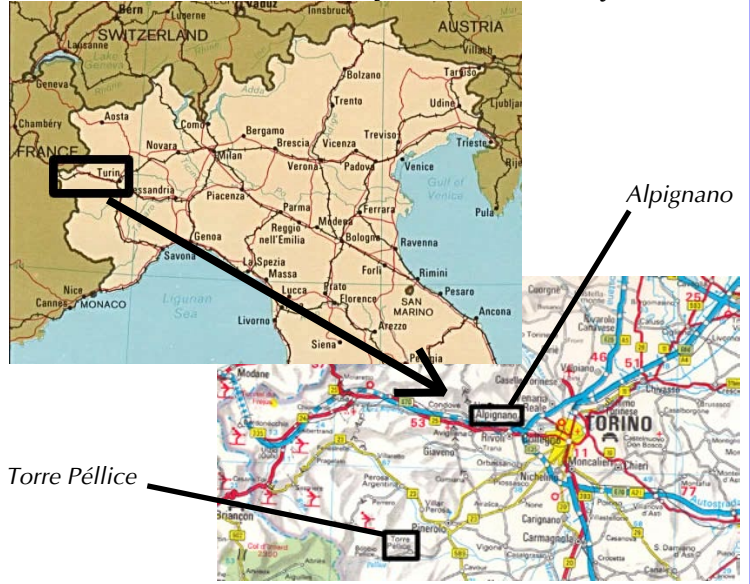
4) It is true that the Bible speaks of holy wars and of slaughtering the enemy but these are things of the past that refer to Israel alone and to the peculiar position she occupied in the history of those times. Christ brought us grace and made all things new. No Christian, not even the most sectarian, would ever dream of applying such dispositions. On the contrary, Islam, not knowing the grace of Christ, is bound to its remorseless laws and to holy wars against infidels, objectives which have the same strength of validity today as they had yesterday.

5) If it was really God's plan to leave all of us untroubled 'in the faith of the fathers', Jesus would have been deceiving himself in entrusting to us the Great Commission of taking the Gospel to every creature, and even the apostles together with the early church would have got it all wrong in devoting their lives to challenging the Jews to become disciples of Christ: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ* urged Peter (Acts 2,38). Why today should we no longer make the same appeal to the Jews who are alone able to make us understand the depth and immensity of His message and to whom we must point out what Jesus signifies for them, as well as for Muslims, and every other human creature? Is this not the task of the church of every age?

It gives me great joy to learn, after what I have written, that someone has proclaimed "Blessed be the Eternal One who has set me free in Christ." But even this precious liberation could not have happened if everyone had left this person to stew in his own juice and had not placed him before the Gospel of Christ, the only Lord and Saviour. The absolute priority that the church of Christ must discover once again so as to be faithful to her Lord, is, indeed, the evangelization of the whole world. But this great task must be carried out with great respect towards everyone, with great humility and great love which, we have to recognize, have so often been lacking in the past. Let us ask God that, through His Grace., they will not be lacking in the future.

Franco Maggiotto's Funeral

Saturday, December 23, 2006
Waldensian Cemetery, Torre Péllice, Italy



At 10:30 a.m., December 23, just three days after his death, Andrea Modolo reports "we have given Franco back to the Lord in a little Waldensian Cemetery in the Waldensian valley, nearby Torre Péllice." Torre Péllice, is a town to which Franco took every tour group to visit. It is nestled in an Alpine valley southwest of Torino (Turin). It was here that the Reformed Waldensians

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December 23, 2006 funeral gathering for burial of Rev. Franco Maggiotto at Torre Péllici cemetery.

Waldensians concluded the "Glorious Return" from Switzerland to their beloved valley and made the Covenant of Sibaud (1689) around which dispersed Waldensians would rally and likewise return. While Franco never joined the Waldensians of today because of their collaboration with Roman Catholicism and

liberals, he was a true Reformed Waldensian at heart.

The three speakers at Franco's funeral were: Rev. Franco Barbero, an American minister, and Waldensian theological professor Giorgio Tourn (best known for writing the introduction to the Italian translation of the Institutes by John Calvin).



Tabitha Maggiotto at harpsicord (view blocked) next to her unnamed violinist fiance, playing Franco's favorite hymn "A Mighty Fortress is our God", while Rev. Franco Barbero (left of violinist), Professor Tourn (partially pictured with back to camera on left) and Franco's American friend (center) stand amidst a crowd of attendees.

Speakers at Franco's funeral.



Theological professor of the Waldensians, Giorgio Tourn.



Rev. Franco Barbero (left), Franco Maggiotto (right) in Comunita de Base church in Pinorolo, Italy, November 2003. Franco Barbero is a married priest and broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, but not reformed as yet.

Andrea Modolo's words report the moment best: *Then we have buried Franco, saying all together the Apostolic Creed. It is very difficult to stay firm in these moments, but the word of God is our lamp and The Holy Spirit our comforter. We need your prayers.*



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