

# President of the Missionary Union of the Clergy

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Bishop Conforti's concern for the Church entrusted to him never distracted him from the “concern for those parts of the world where the Word of God had not yet been proclaimed.” He was convinced that the proclamation of the Gospel “*ad gentes*” (to the nations), was the most effective way of re-evangelizing his own people. He was untiring, therefore, in his commitment to mission evangelization and promotion, both through the work of his own missionary family, as well as supporting every missionary animation initiative in Italy and throughout the world.

He was particularly committed to assisting in the foundation and spreading of the Pontifical Missionary Union of the Clergy of which he was the first president. In fact, in 1916 Guido Conforti got together with Fr Paolo Manna of the Pontifical Institute of Milan Missionary Society. The idea was to mobilize priests around the world to reawaken their awareness of having been ordained for the whole world and encourage them to heighten their people's commitment to spreading the Gospel. It was to be another legacy to the mission of the Church.

The Bishop of Parma was almost like a magnet to those who felt the urgency of missionary formation of the people of God. The missionary heart of Fr. Manna, founder of PIME missionaries, had the intuition that only through the personal conversion of priests and bishops to the universal mission of the church, he could hope for a missionary re-launching. Bishop Conforti joined wholeheartedly the Missionary Union of the Clergy and helped organize and attended Mission Congresses throughout Italy: in Bergamo (1919, 1923), Rome (1920), Naples (1922), Modena (1923), and in particular in Palermo (1924) when he gave the key-note address on “*The Eucharist and the Missions.*”

When Conforti retired from the Missionary Union of Clergy in 1927 as its first national president, the association was present in 44 Italian dioceses alone. It formed a cultural magazine Missionary Studies that had great success. Bishop Conforti constantly asked the Pope for an encyclical that dealt with the mission of the Church and just after the First World War Benedict XV produced “*Maximum Illud*” that called for local clergy and re-awakened missionary awareness and collaboration.

“It was providential that Fr. Paolo Manna had the support of the holy Bishop Conforti at the time of the foundation of the Missionary Union of the Clergy. Conforti not only offered valuable advice and help to

the Union in its infancy stages; he also used his authority to ensure that it gained papal approval” (Paul VI).

## Bishop of Parma, but Missionary to the World

*"I find everywhere the holy enthusiasm to spread the Gospel"*

If the activities of Bishop Conforti were seen carefully by many people and bishops of Italy. What most impressed everyone was his ability to balance his total service to his local church and his passionate spirit for the universal church.

Bishop Conforti was sure that the Church needed to renew itself in order to bring more concrete answers to its ministry and its mission in the world. He even wrote to Pope Pius XI with the request of declaring a Council of the Church. In his letter, Bishop Conforti notes the motivations for a gathering of this magnitude, prophetic ideas for those times: *"There are questions of moral, social and international aspects to be answered. There is the necessity to look into the status of the Eastern Churches, who see opportune to come back to the center of the Catholic unity. And I find everywhere the holy enthusiasm in clergy and laity to spread the Gospel..."*



Guido Conforti, Bishop of Parma:  
*"I now vow to die on the Cross"*

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Among these, a newly ordained priest, who sought the guidance of Bishop Conforti. His name was *Giuseppe Roncalli*, in the future *Pope John XXIII*. *"I sought the advice of Bishop Guido Maria Conforti — he once said as a Pope — for he was the most illuminating bishop in Italy of that missionary movement, which had started after the encyclical of Pope Benedict XV, "Maximum Illud." I sought Bishop Conforti for in*



The future Pope John XXIII



*"I find everywhere the holy enthusiasm to spread the Gospel"*

*him I found a person who brought together the sacred ministry of caring for souls found in bishops and missionaries: Bishop of Parma, but Missionary for the world."*

Even though he was founder of his Congregation, Bishop Conforti saw himself as a useless servant. Learning from Jesus on the Cross, he vowed to live his life as a faith journey. He was called to love, to suffer, to work with Christ and for Christ. The Xaverian community had to become a living monument of Redeeming Christ, and so call all Christians to their missionary duty.

Knowing how important was the press and the advent of cinema in society, Bishop Conforti wished that his missionaries would use these means for their ministry and apostolate. He established a missionary periodical called *"Faith and Civilization"* which expressed his human Christianity.

Today, we would talk about *"evangelization and human development."*