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Francis hails late Cardinal Carlo Martini

by Thomas C. Fox

The Francis Chronicles

On the eve of the first anniversary of the death of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini last week, Pope Francis called the late Jesuit and biblical scholar a "prophetic" figure and a "man of discernment and peace".

The late cardinal, who died Aug. 31 2012, at the age of 85, was "a father for the whole Church", and remembering one's fathers "is an act of justice", the pope said during a meeting with a group of Italian Jesuits.

Representatives of the Italian Jesuit province met the Francis last Friday to present the creation of the Carlo Maria Martini Foundation "a non-profit initiative aimed at promoting the late cardinal's writings and the study of his life and works. The foundation will work in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Milan, where Cardinal Martini served as archbishop from 1979 to 2002.

Francis' remarks about his fellow Jesuit take on a special significance in that just two weeks before Martini's death, in widely publicized interview, he said the church is "200 years out of date" and in need of a "radical transformation." "The church is tired," Martini said in an interview. Catholics lack confidence in the church, he said.

"Our culture has grown old, our churches are big and empty and the church bureaucracy rises up, our religious rites and the vestments we wear are pompous."

"Unless the church adopts a more generous attitude towards divorced persons, it will lose the allegiance of future generations," the cardinal added. The question, he said, is not whether divorced couples can receive Holy Communion, but how the church can help complex family situations.

"The child sex scandals oblige us to undertake a journey of transformation," Martini said, referring to the

child sex abuse that has plagued the church for several decades.

Martini at the time called for a "radical transformation, beginning with the Pope and his bishops".

Martini was a prolific author whose books were best sellers in Italy. During the 1980s and 1990s, Martini, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago and Cardinal Basil Hume, archbishop of Westminster, worked together closely and were considered among the leading pastoral prelates in the church.

Martini retired as archbishop of Milan in 2002.

At various times, he expressed openness to the possibility of allowing married Latin-rite priests under certain circumstances, ordaining women as deacons and allowing Communion for some divorced Catholics in subsequent marriages not approved by the church.

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During a special Synod of Bishops for Europe in 1999, he made waves when he proposed a new church wide council or assembly to unravel "doctrinal and disciplinary knots" such as the shortage of priests, the role of women, the role of laity and the discipline of marriage.

During the meeting with the Jesuits, Francis recounted his memories of the late Cardinal, in particular his address on faith and justice during the 1974 General Congregation of the Jesuits.

"We, at the ends of the world," said Francis, "received from him a great contribution to biblical knowledge, but also because of his spirituality and life of faith, were nourished by the Word of God."

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Links:

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/forward/join?clickSource=end-article>

[2] <https://www.ncronline.org/node/160616>