

Francesco Maria Tarugi

The Brilliant Orator, Loyal Follower of Filippo Neri

Francesco Maria Tarugi, the most "brilliant" among the Oratorians of the first generation—known as the "dux verbi" or prince of the word, as described by Cesare Baronio—was born in Montepulciano on August 25, 1525, to Tarugio and Giulia Pucci. Boasting a relationship with Giulio III and Marcello II and given his father's connections—as a jurist, extensively involved in political and administrative roles on behalf of the Holy See, and appointed senator—after receiving a solid education in literature and law, he moved to Rome to embark on a meteoric career.

As a chamberlain to Pope Julius III, after the pope's death, he participated in the 1555 conclave that elected Marcello II Cervini, serving as secretary to Cardinal Roberto de' Nobili. In the same year, during the Jubilee organized by Paul IV, he first encountered Filippo Neri, who desired him among his penitents, introducing him to mental prayer, sermons, spiritual exercises, including privations and corporal austerities. Tarugi joined the household of Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese, where he stayed until 1565 when he decided to be part of the group of priests to whom Filippo entrusted the care of the church of San Giovanni de' Fiorentini.

He deepened his study of Scriptures, Scholasticism, and Moral Theology without neglecting works of piety, hospital visits, soliciting alms for the needy, and consoling the sick and infirm. Pope Pius V appointed him assistant to his nephew, the Alexandrian Michele Bonelli, assigning him difficult tasks and important missions. In 1586, he moved to Naples, where he facilitated the establishment of the Oratory to restore "that life that was lived in the primitive Church." His relentless apostolic work earned him the esteem of the clergy and the people who wished him to become an archbishop. He achieved this in 1592 at the See of Avignon, where, in the spirit of the Tridentine Council, he introduced community life into his palace and stimulated the spiritual life of the diocese, as evidenced by the *Constitutiones et decreta provincialis concilii Avenionensis* of 1594.

His ideal of an "apostolic man" led him to spread the Tridentine reform in Spain, France, the Flanders, and Germany. Pope Clement VIII created him a cardinal on June 4, 1596, alongside Baronio, and the following year transferred him to the archbishopric of Siena, where he worked intensively for several years. In Siena, like in Avignon, Tarugi dedicated himself to the care of souls and the organization of a provincial synod, the results of which were recorded in the *Constitutiones et decreta condita in provinciali Synodo Senensi* (1601). He imposed the training of parish clergy on discipline and respect for the sacred, and endeavored to bring the faithful closer to the Church. Moreover, he accepted the proposal from the Balìa to be appointed as a deputy for peace, aiming to limit rivalries and conflicts between factions.

Archbishopric appointments did not exempt him from his work of disseminating the customs and spirituality of the Oratory. After the death of Filippo Neri, conflicts emerged regarding the nature of his Congregation. This led to a definitive separation in 1612 between the Roman fathers, to whom Tarugi offered delicate mediation but did not prevent the split. As a cardinal, he was called in 1597 to restore peace between the Farnese and the Gonzaga, with the assistance of relatives Sallustio and Bernardino. Even in his later years, he loved to say, "For the space of over fifty years and more, I have been a novice of blessed Filippo." He possessed the gift of combining active and contemplative life, works of piety with the organization of the emerging Congregation, for which he is credited with the first rule outlining essential norms for community life. He deeply loved this community—which owes him canonical recognition and the entrance of the Tarugi family into the Curia—and never concealed his aspiration to see it propagated in many places as one of the most effective instruments for the reform of the Church, not always in perfect harmony with the mind of Father Filippo but always obedient.

His life, like Baronio's, is so intertwined with the history of the Congregation that one cannot be examined without reference to the other. Tarugi's day was dense, filled with a mixture of acts of piety, pastoral and charitable works. He participated in the two conclaves of 1605, unsuccessfully trying to converge the votes towards Baronio, who faced the unconditional veto of the Spaniards. Now elderly, having recovered from a severe illness, he obtained from Pope Paul V—just as had happened for Baronio—the privilege to end his days in the beloved Vallicella, where he died on June 11, 1608, kissing the crown and crucifix of Father Filippo. In his will, he wrote that he wanted to be buried "without any pomp" and designated his nephew Tarugio Tarugi, also an Oratorian, as the universal heir, allocating only a small portion of his assets to the Congregation. His remains rest beneath the main altar of the church of Vallicella, next to those of Baronio.

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