

**2. Fred Brenk, a Man, a Scholar, a Jesuit (Professor Frederick E. Brenk, July 18, 1929 - December 3, 2022. In memoriam)\*.**

Prof. Frederick E. Brenk, SJ, whom friends in Italy, where he spent more than thirty years of his wandering life, used to call “Padre Brenk”, or simply and confidentially “Fred”, passed away on December 3, 2022 at Froedert Hospital in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a part of the Milwaukee metropolitan area. He was 93 years old. May he rest in peace, or *sit tibi terra levis*, a Latin funeral formula that he would have probably appreciated.

Fred was born in Milwaukee, the most populous city in Wisconsin located on Lake Michigan’s shores, on July 18, 1929. He graduated from Marquette University High School (1947) and earned a bachelor’s degree in Classics from Marquette University before entering the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus on August 18, 1951. He became a member of the Wisconsin Province when it was formed in 1955. While in the Society, Fred earned a master’s degree in Classics (1959) and a licentiate degree in Philosophy from Saint Louis University (1959). Subsequently, Fred earned a licentiate degree in Theology from St. Mary’s College in Kansas (1965). After

clerical ordination, he earned a master’s degree in Classics from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> (1970) and a doctorate in Ancient History from the University of Kentucky (1971).

During that period of postgraduate studies, Fred taught Latin and Greek at Creighton Preparatory School (1957-1960). For a decade after earning his doctorate, Fred taught and researched at Marquette University (1971-1980) and other top-ranked universities, some Catholic, in the Jesuit tradition, and some Protestant or secular (Harvard University, Fordham University, Tufts University, and Boston College) before being missioned to the world’s foremost Jesuit institution of higher education, the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, in 1982. Except for a few sabbaticals, he was a professor for the Greek and Roman background of the Old and New Testament at the PBI (PIB in Italian, the language in which he gave most of his courses after some initial experiments in English) for almost three decades (1982-2011).

After a few months of permanence in the capital of Catholicism as a retired professor, at the end of 2011, Fred returned (with some bitterness and disappointment: *personal communication*) to his home-

\* **EDITOR’S NOTE:** When this volume was already composed, about to be sent to press, GIOVANNI CASADIO reported to us the death of one of the most important figures of the International Plutarchists, Professor Frederick E. Brenk. We all affirm the words of this note with the respect, affection and feeling with which it has been written.

<sup>1</sup> His supervisor was Francis Henry SANDBACH (1903 - 1991), a British classicist, fellow of Trinity College, renowned specialist of Plutarch, Menander and the Stoics.

town Milwaukee, having been missioned to Arrupe House, the place where he wrote, performed scholarly research, and engaged in pastoral ministry, while continuing to travel up and down the world for conferences, in particular in Italy and in Germany, the land of his paternal ancestors, in which he had a number of relatives very dear to him.

Fred was a faith-filled Jesuit and a devoted priest. Despite his very secular appearance and his manner devoid of any sanctimonious attitude, he was an active celebrant at Masses, first in Rome and later at St. Bernadette's Parish in Milwaukee and in several retirement communities. To mention a case that I have personally and deeply experienced, Fred (without having any duty to do so) in June 2000 celebrated the funeral mass and delivered the funeral speech and public eulogy of Gabriella, who had been my partner in the eighties before ending her days in a tragic manner. In his late life in Wisconsin he used to direct the prayer of the parishioners often in public intercessions during community Masses. Fred exemplified human personal care for everyone he encountered. An example: while active in Rome, Fred went out of his way to be a generous, gracious, and hospitable person to any Jesuit new to the Eternal City. He was similarly hospitable to any junior scholars he had the occasion to meet in Rome, a long list of whom I have in my mind.

Fred was a meticulous scholar and an accomplished academic, an inter-

nationally leading expert on Plutarch and several other topics connected with Greek religion and philosophy. In total, he authored five books, mostly collections, and over 100 articles, which is not quantitatively a record compared to that of other more prolific scholars in his branch. This is because his research was very profound and refined, using the infinite resources of a few Roman libraries where it was usual to meet him (apart from the two Jesuit libraries at Piazza della Pilotta, the libraries of the American Academy on the Gianicolo and the Deutsches Archaeologisches Institut at Via Sardegna). And especially because, besides participating often with a key role in international conferences on Plutarch (I point out this notable sequence: Rome, Ferrara, Athens, Palermo, Ravello, Bocca di Magra, Pontignano (Siena), Fisciano-Paestum (Salerno), and several other locations in Spain, England, the USA, and the Netherlands) and teaching about the Hellenistic background to the New Testament, Fred's scholarly thought and production involved continual exchange and communication with a network of scholars from across the globe who became also long-time friends.

In his academic field – a field where *Altertumswissenschaft* encroaches with *Religionswissenschaft* – filled with a variety of peculiar characters, Fred stood out as a “character” of a unique sort. In the countless events to which I had the opportunity to witness along with him, from the first in 1982, in the *École Française de Rome* at Piazza Navona, dedicated to the cult of Dionysus-Bacchus

until the last in 2019, dedicated to him and taking place in his Pontificio Istituto Biblico, I, like so many others, got the impression that his questions/comments or answers to questions following the presentations of papers usually began so far from the explicit theme that it would seem that he hadn't paid attention to the gist and the details of the papers or heard the query. He had, but the questions and answers entered places in his mind whose link to what had been asked only eventually became explicit.

Fred, who already in November before facing a particularly virulent chemotherapy knew the state of his heart and the fate he would meet, had expressed a desire to donate his body to the Medical College of Wisconsin. In relation to this act of altruism and collegiality, I am pleased to quote the testimony of one of his confreres, Fr. Tom Hughson, SJ, who immediately after his decease had this to say about Fred:

I don't recall in the more than four decades I've known Fred that he ever spoke a sharp or hurtful word to a community member, though he received some. Fred read the New York Times front to back. His conversations on a given day usually included references to international and national news. He was a Packers and Badgers football fan. He also was a fan of Marquette University athletics,

especially the men's basketball team. Fred and I usually watched CNN and MSNBC after the evening meal for a while. The BBC Father Brown TV series was a favorite of his. Fred and I went cross-country skiing together on trails in the Kettle Moraine State Forest that had challenging segments. His declining strength and my failing knee limited us in the last couple of years more often to Brown Deer Park. Only last winter we went out at least two or three times. He retained athletic ability into his nineties<sup>2</sup>.

His Roman friends knew that during every winter vacation, until the last years of his stay in Rome, he was used to taking his skis and leaving for the winter resort on Monte Terminillo or in the mountains of Abruzzo for a so-called "white week". During the other seasons of the year his favorite sport was photography. He owned and always kept a professional camera on his shoulder during trips and breaks from conferences. I keep, printed or filed on my PC, dozens of photos that marked various events in his life and mine, not just academic. I remember the deep impression and emotion that the news of the accident that happened to him on the occasion of one of his last almost annual returns to Rome, in 2016 or 2017, caused in my daughter and me. Arriving at the Ostiense station, a scoundrel snatched his backpack and

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.jesuitsmidwest.org/memoriambrenk-frederick-e-father/>. Accessed last time Dec. 20, 2022.

precious camera from his hand (he didn't use the suitcase with the trolley). Without any hesitation and fear, he, a man of nearly ninety, ran after the reckless young thief and confronted him. We knew from mutual friends, before going to visit him at the Biblico, that he had managed to recover the stolen goods but had also received a tremendous blow to the head.

Fred, in fact, was a close colleague and, starting at a certain moment of our lives a (family) friend, precisely for forty years since 1982, the year of the "call" – in quite different academic roles (he as Associate Professor at the PIB, me as a postgraduate researcher in history of religions and unofficial assistant to my teacher Ugo Bianchi (1922-1995)) – of both of us to Rome. Besides his beloved Plutarch studies, for which he did so much and played a key role in international – especially American and Italian – organization, he was a full fledged scholar of Classics and History of religions of a rare, sophisticated skill. Translated into secular terms, his professorship of the Greek and Roman background of the Old and New Testaments encompassed the entire field of Ancient Mediterranean religions. He gave prominent contributions to the study of (Classical) Greek and Roman religion, Middle and Neoplatonism, Hellenistic religions, Demonology, Mystery cults and Syncretism (especially Isis and Herakles-Ninurta), and several other, often peculiar, topics. See the monograph *In Mist Apparelled. Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moralia and Lives*. Mnemosyne Supplement 48 (Brill, Leiden

1977), and the miscellaneous volumes *Relighting the Souls. Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Franz Steiner, Stuttgart 1998), *Clothed in Purple Light. Studies in Vergil and in Latin Literature, Including Aspects of Philosophy, Religion, Magic, Judaism, and the New Testament Background* (Franz Steiner, Stuttgart 1999), and *With Unperfumed Voice. Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Franz Steiner, Stuttgart 2007). For a detailed bibliography updated until 2016, one can visit: <https://www.biblico.it/professori/Brenk-CV.pdf>. For more information on the scholar and his work it is useful to refer to *Frederick E. Brenk on Plutarch, Religious Thinker and Biographer "The Religious Spirit of Plutarch of Chaironeia" and "The Life of Mark Antony"* (Brill's Plutarch Studies, Volume: 1), ed. by Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, Leiden 2017. Several papers are available at <https://independent.academia.edu/FrederickBrenk>.

To come to my particular field, Fred participated in numberless events organized by the SBL, AAR, IAHR, EASR, SISR, and was particularly supportive to the activities of my own Department, first the DISCANT (Dipartimento di Scienze delle Antichità), then the DIPSUM (Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici) in the University of Salerno, being a close collaborator and friend of his founder Prof. Italo Gallo (1921-2016) and several of his disciples or colleagues.

As a personal note, let me add that Fred – as can be already evident – played an important role in decisive moments of my life, encountering and carefully interacting with persons who have been very dear to me, including my daughter and my deceased partner<sup>3</sup>. During our frequent encounters, at conferences, in Salerno University, and especially in my visits to him at the Biblico residence (sometimes invited to share the Jesuit dinner), in later times always in the company of my daughter or friends (women in most cases), in addition to exchanges on scholarly subjects, he used to give me admonitions or life advice, always with the good-natured and ironic tone that was peculiar to him.

At this point, instead of proceeding to a critical evaluation of his vast and varied scientific production, a task that would require more time and space than can be reserved for a memory<sup>4</sup> – and certainly also greater expertise in certain fields that I have not sufficiently

cultivated – I am pleased to quote here excerpts of the reactions that I received after having drafted an initial report of his passing – in the original Italian language, except one. I offer these (mostly feminine) voices to him, like a kind of funeral *corolla* that he would have appreciated – in these memoirs the profound openness to the other, the gentle humanity of Fred stands out, as a scholar, a man, and a Jesuit.

**Silvia Chiodi** (a CNR researcher in history of religions):

... Dal suo arrivo a Roma nel 1982, si stabilì da subito un legame con Ugo Bianchi, al quale era probabilmente già noto per i suoi, di Brenk, studi su Plutarco. Non a caso tre anni dopo, nel 1985, presso il Biblico, si tenne il I Convegno di Studi su Plutarco organizzato dalla neonata Sezione italiana della International Plutarch Society che per lunghi anni fu diretta da Italo Gallo. Convegno a cui partecipò Bian-

- <sup>3</sup> Browsing his bibliography, I realize that he kept for years a close scholarly relationship with a leading Plutarchan scholar that played a certain role in my life during and after the conference on Plutarch and the sciences (Genova-Bocca di Magra, April, 22–25, 1991). Cf. Plutarch, *Amatorius* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, Imperial Writers), Cambridge University Press) with ARISTOULA GEORGIADOU, unfortunately still forthcoming. The *Erotikos* was, perhaps, Fred's favourite Plutarchaeon moral treatise, like Mark Antony his favourite hero, and Isis his favourite goddess: cf., e.g., "Great Royal Spouse Who Protects Her Brother Osiris", in GIOVANNI CASADIO & PATRICIA A. JOHNSTON, eds., *Mystic Cults in Magna Graecia* (University of Texas Press, Austin 2009), 217-234, a work edited by the present writer.
- <sup>4</sup> However, I cannot refrain from mentioning two reviews (in a rather remarkable location) which marked my reflection on key themes of his and my own research, in confrontation with two key works by two scholars who were and still are mentors and fellow travelers: the review of JAN BREMMER, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983), in *Gnomon*, 56 (1984), 1-4; and that of WALTER BURKERT, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass. 1987), in *Gnomon*, 61 (1989), 289-292.

chi, affrontando una tematica a lui cara, “Plutarco e il dualismo”, e la sottoscritta che brevemente presentò i risultati della tesi di laurea, tesi precedentemente sottoposta a Frederick Brenk. Ricordo ancora con affetto le pagine e pagine da lui scritte in cui analizzava criticamente i diversi capitoli e passaggi del mio lavoro. Brenk rientrò, con grande sofferenza e fatica, negli Stati Uniti nel 2011. Per lui Roma era e restava una delle città culturalmente tra le più interessanti e vivaci del mondo. Qui lasciava amici e colleghi con cui aveva condiviso gli anni più importanti della sua vita, scientifica, umana e pastorale. A molti di noi mancheranno, oltre alla sua nota attività scientifica, le sue telefonate e le missive che giungevano sempre con puntualità per le più importanti festività – ad ogni Natale giungeva un suo scritto in cui raccontava a tutti cosa aveva fatto di rilevante in quell’anno. Rapporto che quest’anno non riceveremo. Mancheranno le sue fotografie che documentavano la sua e nostra vita quotidiana. Mancheranno le sue lettere che non esitava di inviare nei momenti più delicati della vita, nostra e dei nostri familiari. Mancheranno gli articoli del NY Times, che spesso spediva per aprire un nuovo dibattito o per farti capire che non si era dimenticato dell’Italia e dei suoi amici. Mancherà la sua energia vitale. A lui, studioso del mondo classico, mi inchino per aver scelto con co-

raggio di non avere una tomba o un luogo in cui riposare. Da quanto si apprende ha donato il suo corpo al Medical College of Wisconsin.

**Giuseppina Capriotti** (a CNR researcher in egyptology):

Fred è stato per me un amico e un collega molto importante, e ha fatto parte della mia famiglia durante il suo periodo romano. Una gran bella persona e una grande perdita. Spero ci sia l’opportunità di partecipare ad iniziative di commemorazione.

**Mihaela Timus** (a researcher in Iranian studies and History of religions at the Academia Romana affiliated Institute for the History of Religions, Bucharest):

May his soul rest in peace! I remember him in your Roman apartment that October 2003 after Ravenna, a very friendly, warm presence. I sensed how important he was for you and your daughter at a time when may have been dealing with some difficulty with the role of a single father. It might be a difficult time for you to know him gone, lots of strength!

**Paola Ceccarelli** (a Professor of Greek History at the University College, London):

Ho appena visto la notizia che hai fatto circolare, con quelle bellissime foto... Mi dispiace. Speravo che sarei riuscita a vederlo ancora una volta. Immagino quanto possa essere duro per te e per Carmen...

ti ricordi quel viaggio in treno, eravamo in uno scompartimento tu, Fred, e io, ed è stato proprio allora che hai raccontato di Carmen [March 1996: Carmen F. Casadio came to Italy in June 1999, after a long and laborious procedure in which Fred's influential intermediation played a key role]

**Paolo Esposito** (a Professor of Latin Literature in Salerno University);

... si tratta della perdita di un grande studioso, che ha frequentato spesso la nostra Università, onorandola con la sua presenza.

**Angelo Meriani** (a Professor of Greek Literature in Salerno University):

Con lui se ne va anche una parte di me. Ci siamo voluti molto bene.

Domani lo ricorderò nel consiglio del Dipartimento.

... Brenk ha lasciato in tutti/e noi ricordi indelebili, a ciascuno/a donando pensieri, affetto, amicizia.

... cercherò di dire brevemente qualcosa di lui, nel corso della riunione del Consiglio del nostro Dipartimento, soprattutto a beneficio, spero, di quanti non l'hanno incontrato.

**Giovanna Pace** (a Professor of Greek Literature in Salerno University):

Ci ha lasciati un grande studioso e una splendida persona. Frederick Brenk ha avuto rapporti molto forti con l'ex Dipartimento di Scienze dell'antichità, fin dai tempi (come ricorda giustamente Giovanni) di Italo Gallo.

**Marina Polito** (an Associate Professor of Greek History at Salerno University)

Lo ricordo bene, dai tempi del dottorato, e ne ho una grande stima. I suoi lineamenti nella fotografia in abiti borghesi ... è l'immagine precisa che ho nella memoria.

Le caratteristiche umane le hanno già sottolineate in tanti ...

Non sta a me scrivere sul grande valore dei suoi studi, ma rendergli il giusto omaggio sicuramente.

A Salerno veniva spesso ed eravamo abituati alla sua presenza, amichevole e seria ad un tempo, ad ogni occasione plutarchea.

A lui il mio e credo nostro grazie per quanto ha fatto per gli studi plutarchei a cui, chi per una via chi per un'altra, siamo tutti legati.

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### ***Proyecto Plutarco* (Πλ). Universidad de Córdoba.**

#### *1. Importancia del Proyecto*

La obra de Plutarco supone en ocasiones nuestra única fuente para determinados hechos, anécdotas y detalles de la historia de Grecia y Roma. Esto ha hecho de Plutarco una fuente histórica muy valiosa. Junto con su valor literario, la descripción de los caracteres morales de sus biografados en las *Vidas Paralelas* convierte a Plutarco en un autor de gran interés que fue tomado como modelo en la composición de