

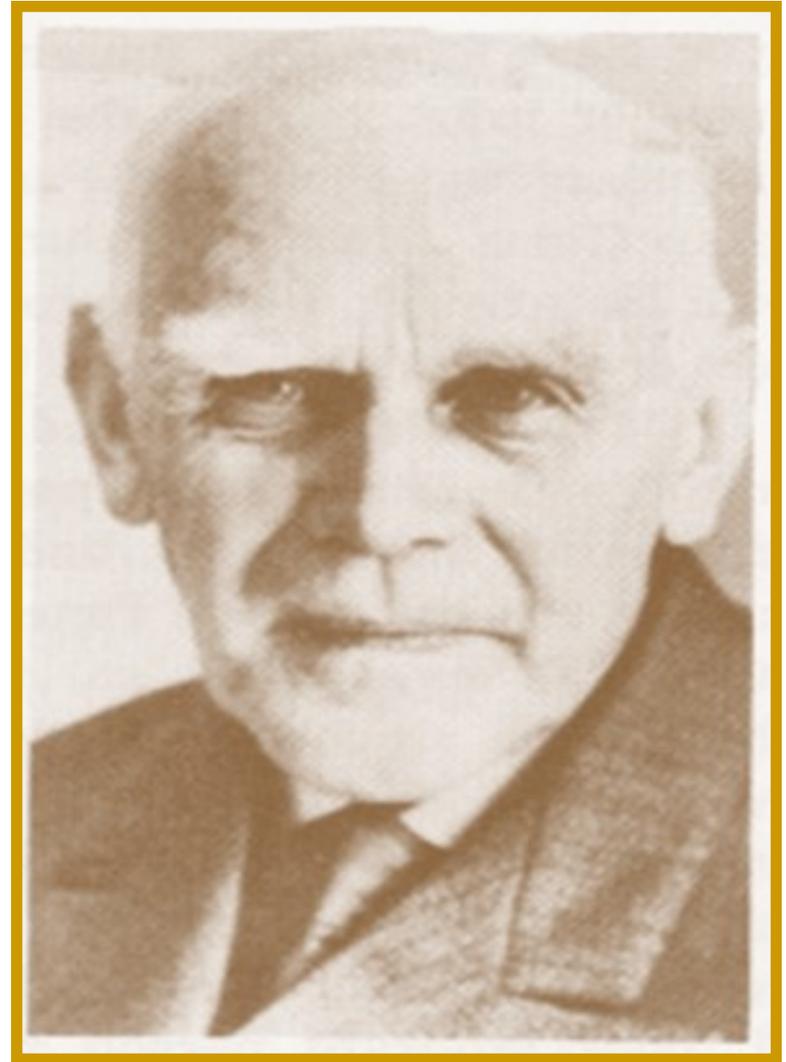
Friedrich had a great desire to be near Padre Pio. He and Amalia decided to move from their home in Bologna to San Giovanni Rotondo. There, they became active members of the Third Order of St. Francis. They were very happy living close to Padre Pio and participating in the spiritual life of the church of Our Lady of Grace.

One day, while in the church of Our Lady of Grace, Friedrich took some photographs of Padre Pio during the celebration of the Mass. He had not asked permission to do so. Much to Friedrich's surprise, the photos all turned out blank. The next time he wanted to take a photograph of Padre Pio, he asked for his permission. Padre Pio was strongly opposed to the idea and would not agree to it. But Friedrich was persistent. He asked the Capuchin superior for permission and he gave his consent. Padre Pio submitted out of obedience to his superior but he still resisted the idea. When Padre Pio was told that the photos were a consolation to many people, he finally became more accepting. Friedrich became Padre Pio's official photographer and left a number of exceptional photographs of him to posterity.

In honor of their spiritual father, when Amalia and Friedrich welcomed their newborn son into the world, they named him Pio. Both Friedrich and his son Pio, served Padre Pio's Mass on many occasions. Padre Pio predicted that Pio Abresch would one day become a priest and would have a high position in the Church. His prophecy came true. Pio Abresch was ordained to the priesthood in 1956. Monsignor Pio Abresch was sent to Rome and was assigned to work at the Congregation for Bishops at the Vatican. Friedrich Abresch died in August 1969, almost one year after the death of Padre Pio.

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Padre Pio and Friedrich Abresch



Mr. Friedrich Abresch

Padre Pio and Friedrich Abresch

German-born Friedrich Abresch lived in Bologna, Italy where he worked as a professional photographer. He converted to Catholicism in order to please his fiancé, Amalia, who was a Catholic. Friedrich was a Catholic in name only. He did not have faith in the teachings of the Church. He rarely went to Mass and as time passed he began to feel a great antipathy for anything that had to do with Catholicism. Later, he took up the study of spiritualism, occultism, and magic.

When Friedrich learned about Padre Pio, his curiosity was aroused. He was fascinated by the stories of the miracles and healings associated with Padre Pio and wanted to make a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo in order to meet him. In Friedrich's mind, the only negative factor was that Padre Pio was a Catholic. Could these obvious manifestations of God's power really be coming from a Catholic priest? Friedrich wondered how it could be possible.

Friedrich was finally able to make the trip to see Padre Pio in 1925. He was twenty-eight years old. When he arrived at the monastery of Our Lady of Grace, Padre Pio greeted him, but was by no means cordial. He only made a few rather cold remarks. Friedrich had traveled a long distance from Bologna to the little town of San Giovanni Rotondo and was somehow expecting a friendlier reception.

Later, when Friedrich made his confession to Padre Pio, Padre Pio told him that in his previous confessions, he had withheld serious sins from his confessor. His words, which were true, shocked Friedrich. He wondered how Padre Pio could have known. Padre Pio then asked Friedrich if his previous confessions had been made in good faith. He answered that they had not.

Friedrich told Padre Pio that he did not believe in the sacrament of confession. Although he felt that it was a useful psychological and social tool, he did not believe that it could impart grace. However, Friedrich had been deeply moved by his few moments with Padre Pio and by the fact that Padre Pio could see into the secret depth of his soul. "I did not believe in the sacrament of confession before," Friedrich said to Padre Pio. "But now suddenly, by talking with you, I believe in it," he added.

As though in great pain, Padre Pio told Friedrich that his beliefs were all heresies. He added that all of his past communions had been sacrilegious. "Make a good examination of conscience," Padre Pio said. "Try to remember when you last made a sincere confession. You must make a general confession." He told Friedrich that he would hear his confession later in the day. "Jesus has been more merciful to you than he was to Judas!" Padre Pio said. He then left Friedrich in the sacristy and went to hear the women's confessions.

Friedrich felt shaken to his roots by his contact with Padre Pio. He also felt dazed and confused. He tried to gather his thoughts together but he could not seem to concentrate. He made a supreme effort to recall the last time he made a sincere confession. Try as he might, he could not remember. He tried to focus his mind and make an examination of conscience so that he would be prepared to make a general confession.

Friedrich decided that he would tell Padre Pio that he had been a Lutheran before converting to Catholicism. He would explain that he had been conditionally baptized into the Catholic Church. At that time, all of his sins were forgiven. He would begin his confession by talking about his childhood.

When Friedrich knelt before Padre Pio once again in the confessional, before he could finish his first sentence, Padre Pio interrupted him. "When did you make your last good confession?" Padre Pio asked. Friedrich was not sure if he had ever made a good confession. He told Padre Pio that he could not remember. Padre Pio then reminded him of the time, adding some of the particulars of that confession. It took place shortly after Friedrich was married. That confession had long slipped from his memory but he realized that Padre Pio was right. "Begin your confession from the time I have just mentioned," Padre Pio said. Friedrich was astonished that Padre Pio had such detailed knowledge of the events of his past life. He realized that he had come in contact with the supernatural.

Padre Pio then enumerated all of Friedrich's mortal sins by asking him questions about those very sins. He was even able to state the number of times he had neglected to go to Mass. Everything was laid bare before Friedrich's eyes. He made Friedrich understand the gravity of the state of his soul. "You have launched a hymn to Satan, whereas Jesus, in his tremendous love, has broken himself for you," Padre Pio said. He then gave Friedrich a penance. When Padre Pio pronounced the words of absolution, Friedrich found it hard to breathe. He felt like he was suffocating. But after he left the confessional, his joy was so great that he could hardly contain himself.

From that day forward, Friedrich attended Mass every day. Friedrich later prepared a written testimony stating that he believed, not only in all of the dogmas and precepts of the Catholic Church, but also in all of the Church's traditions and ceremonies, even down to the smallest detail. He stated that his faith was so strong that no one would ever be able to shake it. He would prefer to lose his life rather than his faith.