

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF IGINO GIORDANI (1894-1980)

By Alberto Lo Presti – Director of the Igino Giordani Center

Igino Giordani – writer, journalist, politician, ecumenist, patrologist, and co-founder of the Focolare Movement. He is one of the most representative figures of the 20th century, a multifaceted personality who left a deep imprint and opened prophetic prospects on the cultural, political, ecclesial, and social levels.

Born on September 24, 1894 in Tivoli, to a family of humble origins, he was the first of 6 children. In 1920, he married Mya Salviati. They had 4 children: Mario, Sergio, Brando and Bonizza. Since his elementary years, he helped in the construction works of his father, and for a year, he left school in order to devote himself to work. With the help of a certain person who was able to recognize his intellectual capacity, he took up his studies again – going to middle school in the seminary, then to high school in a public school – revealing himself as a brilliant student.

During the war – As soon as he graduated [from high school], at the outbreak of the First World War, he was called to the army and sent to the trenches in the Karst. Giordani never fired a single shot against their enemies in order not to kill “a brother”; he always believed in the supreme value of peace and defined war as “an act of madness against God and against human reason.” He was hit by an Austrian sniper and received severe wounds so that he had to remain three years in the hospital, undergo eleven operations, be awarded a medal of honor and... a meeting with God. The writings of a lay person, Contardo Ferrini (who later became a saint), helped him to discover that even if you are in the midst of the world, you can reach holiness.

Political and cultural commitments - In 1919, Luigi Sturzo’s appeal to the “Free and Strong” found its way to Igino Giordani who was lying in bed in a military hospital and who, in between surgical operations, would study for his college exams at the Arts Faculty of the Sapienza University of Rome. Giordani’s response was immediate: he was one of the first to join the newly formed Italian People’s Party and one of the first to work alongside the Sicilian priest in building the Party, in charge of the Press Office (where he would later become the director).

In the years of the Fascist regime, Giordani would take the often risky roads of denouncing violence and the atmosphere of intimidation which the Fascist government was spreading in the Italian society. His book *The Catholic Revolt* (1925) was the symbol of his opposition to the regime, followed (within twenty years) by: *Sign of Contradiction* (1933), *Catholicity* (1938), and *The Christian Society* (1942).

The police began to persecute him, followed him closely, and regularly impounded his publications. The Fascists wanted to punish him with violence and intern him, but Giordani was a wounded war veteran (this is the irony of his story, even more so if we think about his pacifism). Therefore, he was protected by the very same Fascist rhetoric which extolled the heroes of the Great War. He was, however, ousted from the official roster of journalists and was forced to give up teaching in public schools.

And so Giordani suffered what he called a “social and political internment.” Deprived of every opportunity to work, in 1927, Giordani left for the United States where he took a course in Library Science on behalf of the Holy See. There he came into contact with the Protestant world and deepened his knowledge of North American literature. Upon his return to Rome, he worked as

a manager at the Vatican Library: he renewed catalogues, initiated a library school, and help in the recruitment of De Gasperi.

After having started to work with *Fides* (the influential monthly magazine of the Pontifical Work for the Preservation of the Faith), in 1932 Giordani became its director – the first married lay person to hold such an important role in the Holy See. He continued his underground collaboration with former members of the Italian People's Party, and he met up with De Gasperi and Bonomi preparing for the rebirth of democracy in Italy.

In 1935, he published the first volume of his most famous work, *The Social Message of Christianity*, which he concluded in 1958. It would have numerous editions and translations, including Chinese. It is considered a milestone in Christian social thought.

At the fall of the Fascist regime, "*Il Quotidiano*" (the new Catholic Action's newspaper) was born, and Giordani – who by now was a leading figure of democratic Catholicism – was named as its director.

On June 2, 1946, he was **elected Member of Parliament** and became part of those "**constituent fathers**" who laid the ideal foundations of the Italian Republic. He was reelected in 1948, and in 1950 he became a **Member of the Council of the Peoples of Europe in Strasburg**.

Also in 1946, Giordani succeeded Guido Gonella as director of the newspaper "*Il Popolo*", only to resign a year later (he was tired of the frequent incursions from outsiders who wanted to condition his political choices and he also refused to become a "directed director").

Meeting with Chiara Lubich – Co-founder of the Focolare Movement – His meeting with Chiara Lubich took place in September 1948. Igino was 54 years old, a famous writer, active politician, hagiographer and director of newspapers, friend of bishops and a frequent visitor to Popes... yet, in front of a young lay woman (founder of a new spiritual communitarian movement) who was half his age, his life took a turn. He would say later on: "*All my studies, my ideals, and the very events in my life seemed to be directed towards this goal... I could say that before I was searching; now I have found.*"

He found the answer to his thirst for holiness with his full participation, despite being married, in the community life of the Focolare, which is composed of virgin focolarini. Being pure of heart and having a soul completely open to humanity, Giordani opened a new way of holiness to a multitude of married people which, at that time, was something unprecedented in the Church. He brought to Chiara all the patrimony of his intense political and professional life, as a husband, father, and man of culture immersed in the world and history with courage and passion. Chiara saw all of humanity represented in him, with all its sufferings and virtues and considered Giordani as the seed of all the branches which she would gradually establish by continually giving new developments to the Movement. Because of his very significant contribution in the realization of the design of unity imprinted in the founder's charisma, Chiara would consider Giordani as co-founder.

The new turn in his life produced such a profound change that – he wrote – "*it shocked all my friends.*" His polemical temperament transformed and Giordani acquired a new and marked sensibility for deeper dialogue. His 1949 parliamentary speech on Italy's adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty – which was seen as an instrument of unity and peace, not only as a key military defense instrument – was unforgettable (speech which was applauded by all sectors in the hall). His search for harmony and communion among peoples led him to foster – with the socialist Calosso – the first bill on conscientious objection and also to foster – together with Members of Parliament from different political parties – a "Parliamentary support in favor of peace."

In 1953, he was not reelected to the Chamber of Deputies. For Giordani, it was the occasion to devote himself full time to the Focolare Movement. In that same year, he published *The Divine Adventure*, the first systematic exposition of the spirituality of unity. After that, he took over the

management of *Città Nuova*, the Italian version of the Movement's magazine (on which he would write until 1979), and he worked at the "*Centro Uno*", the ecumenical secretariat of the Movement.

His publication of *Laity and Priesthood* (1964), shortly before the promulgation of *Lumen Gentium*, was significant. In it Giordani offers a lucid anticipation of conciliar themes on Catholic laity, bringing to end a research which, in reality, had occupied him for many years.

In 1974, after the death of his beloved wife Mya, Igino entered to become part of a focolare centre in Rocca di Papa at the then Mariapolis Center, in the heart of the governmental structure of the Movement.

On April 18, 1980 he concluded his earthly journey at Rocca di Papa. Chiara and all those who had been close to him in the last thirty years of his life regarded him as "*a person of the Beatitudes.*"

Process of Beatification – In 2004, Igino Giordani's Cause for Beatification was officially opened in the cathedral of Frascati, the diocese where he concluded his days on earth. The process was closed at the diocesan level on September 27, 2009 and is now on its second phase at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Rome, April 2014.