

The Prophetic Insights of Iginò Giordani

The Church: A People of Saints

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The desire for holiness that could be accessible to everyone was a thread running through the entire life of the Italian-born Iginò Giordani (Tivoli 1894 – Rocca di Papa 1980). His quest matured over time and was enriched and reached its pinnacle in his encounter with the charism of Chiara Lubich. Giordani's vision of holiness anticipated Vatican II and has a profound harmony with the magisterium of Pope Francis. His thought can be a light for the continuing realization of all that has not yet been fulfilled from Vatican II.

The author has worked for the Iginò Giordani Center in Rocca di Papa (Italy) since 2013. Her recent master's degree research centered around the concept of 'feminine genius' in the thought of Iginò Giordani.

'Can a politician be a saint? Can a saint be a politician? You can test out the answer to the question yourself as you become a politician.'¹

Giordani wrote this phrase in his diary on April 5, 1946, the eve of his election to the Italian Parliament. He would soon go on to become one of the Republic's 'constituent fathers' who laid out the ideal foundations of the Italian Republic. It concisely expresses his quest for a holiness lived in everyday life that is evident throughout his life and thought.

Giordani was a writer, journalist, politician, apologist, expert in the Fathers of the Church, husband and, father of four, an 'unassuming Christian,' as he called himself, and a cofounder with Chiara Lubich of the Focolare Movement.

Holiness beyond cloister walls

If we take a look at the key moments² in Iginò Giordani's life, in 1916 we find him reading the works of Blessed Contardo Ferrini³. During World War I, Giordano had been drafted in 1915 and subsequently wounded in a battle that earned him the silver medal. He would endure months of an extremely painful recovery at the Baggina military hospital in Milan, Italy. There, Sr. Giuseppina Maiocchi brought him the works of Contardo Ferrini after he had asked her for some spiritual reading. Giordani remained awestruck by Ferrini's writings and understood that 'holiness is not an archaic notion reserved for the cloister, but it can be a central truth of our life experience today'⁴. He began to savor a new Christianity. His faith had been weakened by the horrors of the war he experienced on the front lines and it now took on a new vigor. There, at the age of 22, emerged the first flourishes of what would later be his life quest: Holiness attainable for everyone 'outside the cloister', a holiness central to the life of every lay person immersed in the world of today.

At the school of St Catherine of Siena

The 1920's saw the development of a core element in Giordani's life: a love for Saint Catherine, the renowned 14th century mystic.

Giordani considered her his teacher in the face of the political struggles and in his ecclesial and spiritual journey. One aspect especially attracted him. He reflected on the fact that this Italian saint from Siena had not lived in a convent but rather had been a 'tertiary' of the Dominican order. Known as 'the mantled one', she wore a long black mantel over her white tunic while living with her family. She traveled freely around the city and went on apostolic journeys to places as far away as Avignon and Rome.

It's a modern-day intuition, a modern mission. [...] Look at St Catherine who brought holiness into the streets and spoke of this to statesmen, workers, housewives, priests, friars, and everyone.

It's a new intuition. Catherine wanted each person to remain where they were – for the Head of State to remain as Head of State – but all carried out as souls consecrated to God. 'All of us, all are called', she said. 'We all have a vocation, we should make use of it! Let us remember that we belong to God!'⁵

... and the Fathers of the Church

Fascinated by St Catherine, Giordani joined the Third Order of the Dominicans and sought to live his Christianity in a radical way, and paid a personal price for his many counter-cultural choices. In the Italian Parliament he never lost opportunities to emphasize that one's faith should not be left outside the door of Montecitorio (the lower house of Parliament), and that Christianity should not be hung on the coatrack like an old coat.

This was not easy, however, and his aspirations seemed an unobtainable dream.

I was in love with all the Fathers of the Church, like Chrysostom and Augustine, who struck me very much. Chrysostom wanted a society of Christians living like monks, including lay and married people too. This seemed a far out, absurd idea to me. Like other married people, I had a kind of inferiority complex because laity, and especially those who were married, seemed to belong to a lower caste... These lofty ideals seemed a part of the early times of the Church, and instead today we needed to be happy with only scraps. We seemed to belong to the spiritual proletariat. That is how it appeared and for this reason I loved to escape a bit into the glories of the past.⁶

Laity and Mystical Life

Giordani met Chiara Lubich on September 17, 1948. He recounts that first meeting:

The young woman started speaking. I was sure I'd hear sentimental propaganda about some charitable utopia. Instead, from her very first words I sensed something new... Without fully realizing it, it was a voice that I had been waiting for. She saw holiness as being for everyone and removed all the barriers barring laity from living a mystical life. She displayed the treasures of the hidden castle for all to see. She brought God near, allowing God to be experienced as Father, as brother, as friend, one close to all of humanity.⁷

A collective, 'socialized' holiness was reborn (using two adjectives that would later become popular with the Second Vatican Council). It went beyond the individualism by which one sought holiness for himself or herself by meticulously grooming and endlessly analyzing one's own soul rather than setting it aside. Here instead was a piety and interior life that emerged from the fortresses of religious structures . . . that would pour out into public squares, stores, offices, homes, fields, as well as in convents and the Catholic Action groups. In meeting others everywhere, one met a candidate called to perfection.⁸

Christ in our brothers and sisters

Giordani seemed to have found what he'd sought since his youth: a holiness that was not a fruit of exhausting asceticism, but rather one attainable by all Christians. It was finding that which Jesus spoke of when he told us to be perfect as our Father is perfect. It was meant for all the laity, married or not, politicians, housewives, workers and intellectuals...

At this point Giordani's life underwent a profound change:

I was a fairly well-known polemicist at that time, and my writings and articles were now turned upside down. The first transformation was to not view people primarily as adversaries, but first and foremost as human beings. We often forgot that we were always dealing with human beings, with brothers. Perhaps we spoke of that in our statements but when we were actually facing a communist, someone from another party, we were instead raw, closed, enemies.

Chiara's teachings, which taught us that we needed to see Christ in everyone and we were all brothers and sisters, transformed politics. It was a matter of seeking right over wrong, seeking collaboration not opposition.⁹

Giordani also acquired a new sensitivity towards deeper dialogue. Particularly memorable was a Parliamentary speech in support of Italy joining the Atlantic Pact¹⁰ [NATO]. He saw it as an instrument of peace and unity rather than just in terms of military defense. His speech was applauded from all sectors, from the far right to the far left, with unanimous agreement. His efforts towards harmony and communion among peoples led him to promote, together with a fellow colleague, the first bill of law for conscientious objection, and to support a 'Parliamentary Understanding for Peace' with other deputies from different parties.

From Cloisters and Churches . . . to Homes and Laboratories

His full participation as a married person in Focolare community life, which until then was composed only of celibate Focolarine, was a concrete answer to his yearnings. It opened a new way of holiness for a great number of married people and was something unprecedented in the Church at that time.

Below are a few short excerpts from his book, *Laicato e sacerdozio* (Laity and Priesthood), that demonstrates the maturation of Giordani's thoughts on holiness through his contact with Chiara Lubich's charism:

If the aim of the human person is his or her perfection...one normally attains it by perfectly fulfilling his or her state in life...The first monks were consecrated lay people: workers who sanctified themselves through work and prayer...However, if in an agrarian culture ancient monasticism withdrew from the world in order to preserve the worship of God . . . in modern industrial society we feel the need to penetrate into the world's thundering cities. One withdraws into the cell of oneself to continuously connect with God yet one continues to transmit the divine in the clamor of streets, shops, businesses, meetings, wherever creatures gather together...¹¹

Thus lay people 'transfer' holiness from cloisters to laboratories and from churches to houses, in order to form workers, entrepreneurs, and scholars as custodians of the Holy Spirit. They bring God – even without speaking of him – into cafés, into meeting places . . . For Giordani, there was no doubt that the calling and vocation of the laity, of the Church, and of all the People of God, is to be a people of saints.¹²

1 I. Giordani, *Diary of Fire* (London: New City, 1981), p. 24.

2 For an Italian biography of Igino Giordani see: A. Lo Presti, *Igino Giordani, un eroe disarmato*, Città Nuova, Rome 2021.

3 Contardo Ferrini (1859-1902), an Italian academic and legal scholar is venerated as Blessed by the Catholic Church.

4 I. Giordani, *Preface to Contardo Ferrini: un santo fra noi* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1949), p. vi.

5 *Ibid.*, 'La vocazione dei focolarini,' transcription from an audio recording, Grottaferrata (Rome), December 8, 1961, in Archivio Igino Giordani (AIG)-II, without signature.

6 I. Giordani, *Memorie d'un cristiano ingenuo*, Città Nuova, Rome (1981) 20054, pp. 146-147.

7 *Ibid.*, pg. 148.

8 *Ibid.*, pgs. 152-153.

9 I. Giordani, *La sua esperienza politica*, conversation at a Focolare Movement meeting, May 1, 1977, in AIG-II s.s.

10 A. Lo Presti, *Igino Giordani, un eroe disarmato*, cit., pgs. 106-112.

11 I. Giordani, *Laicato e sacerdozio* (Rome: Città Nuova. 1964), pgs.82-87 and 124-126.

12 On April 18, 1980 Igino Giordani ended his earthly journey at Rocca di Papa. Chiara Lubich and those who were close to him in his last thirty years, saw him as 'the man of the beatitudes.' His cause for beatification was opened in the cathedral of Frascati (Rome) in 2004, the diocese where he spent his last days. The closing session of the diocesan inquiry was carried out in the presence of Bishop Raffaello Martinelli, at the headquarters of the Focolare at Rocca di Papa (Rome), on September 27, 2009, and now in its second phase at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.