

(English translation)

Tivoli, September 28, 1984

Chiara speaks of Igino Giordani

Ladies, Gentlemen,

Distinguished Authorities of Tivoli,

Family and Friends of Igino Giordani, who have also come a distance to remember him today in this his native city which was so close to his heart and to which he remains forever bound,

First of all I would like to thank the city of Tivoli and in particular, May Veroli and the entire administrative staff of the municipality. Thank you for the idea of this "Award" which will keep alive the memory of the Honourable Igino Giordani, your illustrious fellow citizen. I would also like to thank you for the honour you wished to grant me as a sign and acknowledgement of the one ideal which closely united Igino Giordani to the Focolare Movement.

Special thanks also to the Honourable Tommaso Sorgi for his presence here and for his words.

As we know and as we have just heard, Igino Giordani was an eminent personality in the Italian Catholic world, a versatile figure who always coupled his political commitment with an intense and fruitful cultural activity, as journalist and writer, apologist and biographer, hagiographer and famous scholar of the Church Fathers and of Christian social doctrine.

We could speak at length about this great man under each one of these different aspects which have made him famous. Allow me, however, to say a few words about him solely as a Christian, although I feel uneasy about such an undertaking. Igino Giordani was, in fact, such a rich and noble person, so exceptionally refined and extraordinary that we would need to have his pen to give just an idea in this regard.

Once someone said that if, by chance, all the Gospels disappeared from the earth, Christians should be such that, just by looking at their lives, the Gospel could be rewritten.

Igino Giordani was one of these Christians. On the day of his funeral (thousands of people from all over the world were present), the Gospel passage which speaks of the Beatitudes was read. All of those who had known Igino Giordani well, were unanimous in affirming that he had lived them all.

He was exceptionally "pure of heart." It was this purity which provoked him to define our earthly existence, since it is always followed by the providential love of God (for better or, as they say, for worse), as a divine adventure.

This purity of heart strengthened his most sacred sentiments at the same time that it purified them. He loved his wife very much and it was both striking and touching to see the intensity of his love for his four children and his grandchildren. He was a perfect father and grandfather and, at the same time, a man belonging entirely to God.

He was also "poor in spirit," completely detached not only from all that he possessed, but above all, from all that he was. He was full of mercy. Even the most wretched sinner felt that he had been forgiven when he was with him and the poorest person felt like a king.

One of his most outstanding characteristics (as is evident from the record of his political career)

was that of being a "peacemaker."

He was so meek as to make one understand why the Gospel says that those who live this virtue will possess the earth. His extraordinary kindness, his special way of dealing with others, and his way of finding the right word for each person, won over everyone with whom he came in contact. He treated everyone with respect, making all feel at ease with him. Even young people were able to relate to him as equals. Especially in the last years of his life it was common to hear people say that something supernatural radiated from his eyes when he spoke.

"Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus said. During the course of his life he suffered both physically and spiritually and experienced also this beatitude. As he was well rooted in the mystery of the cross he knew how to transform suffering into love, as if for a divine alchemy, as he used to say.

His "hunger and thirst for justice" led him to struggle for it throughout his entire life.

He was "persecuted" for the sake of God's name, and we, therefore, believe that he possesses God's kingdom today.

Truly one could read the Gospel in him also when it comes to becoming like little children.

He had been an excellent Christian, a scholar, an apologist, an apostle. Yet when he encountered a genuine spring of water which flowed from the Church, he "sold everything" in order to follow Jesus who was calling him to quench his thirst with this water. He recognized that this was a new sign that the Holy Spirit is always alive and active within the Church.

He also lived the Gospel of humility. If he thought that someone in the Movement wanted to give him special honour because of his past accomplishments, he begged to be treated just like all the others.

Perhaps, however, what stood out most in him was the Gospel of love.

He had had a great thirst for God ever since he was a child, but feeling that he was called to live in the midst of the world he had discovered a way to reach that which is eternal. It was perhaps the surest possible way. He described it as consisting of three steps, almost three points of a triangle - I, my neighbour, God. He was convinced that he would have reached God by loving his neighbour, by serving every neighbour he came in contact with throughout the day.

And this is what he did, and his soul reached great heights because the more he loved his neighbour the greater was his union with God.

And vice versa: the more he was united with God, the more his love of neighbour grew strong and delicate.

This is another reason why he was truly a great Christian - he had focused in on the Gospel law of love which in a sense summarizes all the others: love of neighbour.

Igino Giordani was, however, a very special kind of Christian. In fact, God called him to be a co-founder of a new Movement within the Church to which he gave a unique contribution in the last thirty-two years of his life.

He had longed to find a way to fulfil his desire for a total consecration to God as a married person. In 1948 he met the Focolare Movement, just five years after its birth.

He was the one who opened the doors of the Focolare (the women's and men's focolare centres then were made up entirely of people who chose a celibate state of life) to married people. They followed him in his desire for sanctity and consecration. In this way, something which had at first been only vaguely foreseen became a reality - virgins and married people could follow, insofar as it is possible in their state of life, the same way, living after the model of the family of Nazareth.

He was the one who gave an exceptional impulse to the birth of those groups in this Movement which are the mass movements such as the New Family Movement in which married, couples make of their family nucleus a small, living Church, or the New Humanity Movement which strives to animate the worlds of work, art, medicine, education, politics and so on with a true Christian spirit.

He personified one of the most important goals of this Movement: to contribute to the unity of Christians.

Above all he was the one who helped the Movement to plant its roots so well in the Church that even during his lifetime he saw its branches expand to all the continents, reaching over 140 nations with all the good that necessarily accompanies it if you consider its Gospel spirit which underlines universal brotherhood, respect and mutual love, unity among all people—all so very timely for a world anguished by tension, discrimination, divisions and wars.

Giordani has been one of the greatest gifts that heaven ever gave the Focolare Movement.

He generously gave the greater part of his life to this new Movement in the Church which also has another name, the Work of Mary. It is the "Work of Mary," because we all feel that here too, as in other times and places, it is above all Mary, the Virgin, the Mother of the Church and of humanity who is at work.

And we think that it was Mary whom he loved so much who rewarded him by making of him one of her chosen children, almost a mystic.

St. Louis Grignon di Montfort, speaking of those people whom the Virgin Mary chooses, says, "The primary gift that these souls acquire is the life of Mary in the soul, here on earth, so that it is no longer the soul which lives but Mary living within it. In other words, the soul of Mary becomes their own, if we can use these words."¹

In 1957, after having probed the mystery of Mary's desolation at the foot of the cross, Igino Giordani wrote something in his diary which is stupendous, one of the most beautiful and important pieces, speaking from a spiritual point of view, that he ever wrote:

"I was meditating on this mystery, on such reality of suffering, on the evening of the First of October, a month sacred to Mary. After prayers, all of a sudden my soul was cleared of human things and persons and in their place Mary entered, together with Jesus, drained of his blood, and the whole abode of my soul was filled by her figure of suffering and of love. And with her in me I grasped the frivolity of my attachment to transient things. For twenty-four hours. She was there, like an altar holding the victim: *Virgo altare Christi*. My soul was her abode, her temple. But at the end of twenty-four hours, sharing in her anguish and love for her brought about a unity between her and my soul: she was no longer my guest, but I was her guest, so that I could say: 'It is no longer I who live but Mary who lives in me.'

"Her presence had, as it were, virginized my soul, marianized my person. My ego seemed to be dead, and in its place Mary was born so that I no longer felt the need to raise my eyes to the street shrines or to statues of the Madonna; it was enough and it is enough for me to turn the gaze of my soul within myself, to discern in the place of the usual grimy and grotesque idol of myself, the All Beautiful One, the Mother of the Fair Love. And even this poor, suffering body seems to me to have become a sort of cathedral, where Mary, with the lifeless Jesus, summons the Bridegroom, who assembles the Trinity.

"Unless I am the most utter scoundrel I must become a Saint, to be in harmony with this reality."²

We think that, among the many achievements of his life, most probably there is also that of sanctity because this too was Igino Giordani: a true follower of Christ, a man of God.

¹. Louis Grignon de Montfort, "True Devotion," no. 217.

². *Diary of Fire*, New City Press, New York.