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## A Pioneering Catholic Ecumenist: Igino Giordani

*Thomas J. Norris*

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Igino Giordani (1894-1980), the great Italian writer, theologian and politician, was also a passionate ecumenist. As a writer, he produced almost one hundred books: he has been called ‘the Chesterton of Italy’. As a theologian, he was enamoured of the Fathers of the early Church, in whom he discerned the diarists of the undivided Church’s youth. As a politician, he was in contact with the forces that were shaping the cultural and political map of Europe: returning from active service in World War I, decorated for bravery and badly wounded, he saw the need for politics in its classical form as the noble ideal of the sincere service of the good of the human community. But it is arguable that it was his involvement in ecumenical endeavour that gave his life its direction and *élan*. And it seems strangely appropriate that the principal biographer of this ecumenist from the South hails from the North, in fact, from Scotland. His name is Edwin Robertson and he is a Baptist Pastor: his biography of Giordani, *The Fire of Love*,<sup>1</sup> has proven to be a best seller.

In this article, I wish to focus on Giordani’s ecumenical vocation. To that end I will outline, in a first section, the story of his conversion to work for unity and rapprochement between the followers of Jesus Christ in pre-war America and Italy. In a second section, I will deal with his discovery of the spirituality that fired and drove his ecumenism, the spirituality of Chiara Lubich and the focolare movement. In a third and final section, I will exegete some of the scriptural passages underpinning this surprisingly ecumenical

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Robertson, *The Fire of Love*, London: New City, 1989. He is well known for his translation and editing of the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He has been a director of the World Association of Christian Broadcasting and Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC.

spirituality of unity that continues to grow in its capacity to energize the noble enterprise of uniting all Christians.

## **I. The Story of a Vocation to build the Unity of Christians**

The modern ecumenical movement began within the Protestant Churches and communities. The immediate stimulus of the movement, as surprising as it was fascinating, seems to have been the experience of the missionaries who found themselves preaching a divided Christ. They felt acutely the chastisement of St Paul to the Corinthian Christians: 'Has Christ been parcelled out?' (I Cor 1:12). They realized that the holy cause of preaching the Gospel of Christ, who came 'to gather together the scattered children of God' (Jn 11:52), was deeply hindered, if not actually undermined, by the unpalatable phenomenon of divided followers of his Gospel of Unity. They realized, further, that this contradicted directly the will of Christ, and scandalized the men and women of good will to whom they wanted to bring the Gospel. 'How can we believe you Christians? You are all divided', was a comment that pained more than a few Christian missionaries in faraway continents.

Iginio Giordani's ecumenical vocation had similar beginnings. Between August 1927 and May 1928, Giordani made a significant sojourn in the United States. There he encountered at first hand the phenomenon of Protestantism. It was different to the Protestantism that he knew from his knowledge of its 'homeland' in Europe. It was in fact the Reformation as transported to and re-planted in the New World. The tearing of Christ's seamless Robe had been put on display, as it were, in another Continent.

Upon returning to Italy, he took up a post in the Vatican Library. He began to read the Fathers of the Church. They put him in contact with the call of the Gospel in a way that seemed remarkably fresh. In particular, he encountered the ardour with which they cultivated the vivid awareness of the unity of Christians and the Church. He read, for example, in Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258) that the Church was "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit”<sup>2</sup>: to be divided was to sully the very image of the Godhead! He read the long treatises of Ambrose and Augustine and Chrysostom until there rose up before him the pristine image of a dynamic Christianity that anathematized heresy, condemned disunity, and drove out the dividers in each age. He now understood better the reasons for his pain at the fracturing of Christendom that seemed to have gone into the whole world.

Shortly after this, in 1932, he was appointed editor of *Fides*, a review of a theological nature published in the Vatican. The appointment was a providential opportunity to arouse in Catholics the realization that ecclesial unity was of the utmost importance in order to correspond to the dying wish of the Lord, ‘May they all be one’ (Jn 17:21). Catholics could not stand back from doing their part in removing the obstacles to an effective evangelization of a Europe increasingly in need of hearing the living word of Christ. Giordani’s was a new and influential voice.

As a pioneer of ecumenism in the Catholic milieu, however, he was not alone: already there was the Abbé Paul Couturier in France and Fr Max Pribilla in Germany, personages that were like beacons of ecumenical light for Catholics. An early commentator once listed Giordani in the company of the two just mentioned, calling him, erroneously, a “Jesuit Father”: it pointed to the rarity in those days of Catholic laymen studying theology or editing theological reviews! In the pages of the monthly review, *Fides*, which he was destined to direct for thirty years, he had the opportunity to promulgate and advance the ecumenical imperative, beginning in Italy but expanding far beyond.<sup>3</sup> In 1939, he published a volume on the unity of the Church, *The Protestant Crisis and the Unity of the Church*. A reviewer in Chicago wrote that the work was evidence of the rise of an ecumenical interest among Catholics in Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> St Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*, PL 4, col. 553.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive list of his contributions to *Fides*, consult Tommaso Soggi, *Giordani. Segni di tempi nuovi*, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1994, 184-6.

His style in ecumenism at this time was more confrontational than dialogical. A reviewer of his translation of the *Apologeticum* of Tertullian (c. 160-220) commented that the text of Tertullian sounded irenic by comparison with the polemical tone of Giordani's *Introduction* to the translation! Someone reading today his vigorous and theologically acute articles in the pages of *Fides* would be likely to find their tone and style somewhat polemical and unyielding. However, by the eve of World War II, the impact of *Fides* was felt not only in Italy, but well beyond. Its articles, which were lively in form and solid in substance, enjoyed a resonance particularly in the ecumenical field.

## **II. A transforming Encounter: Giordani meets Chiara Lubich and the *Focolare***

In September 1948, Giordani, then a member of parliament, met Chiara Lubich and a number of friends who had come to meet the learned editor of *Fides*, whose ideas they had noticed. The little group impressed Giordani. What struck him most was their unity: although they came from many different backgrounds and represented different states of life in the Church, an atmosphere of harmony seemed to obtain between them. He could feel this. They were in fact a kind of microcosm of that unity of mind and heart that the Christians of the *Acts of the Apostles* exemplified (Acts 4:32), the communion that distinguished the first Christians and attracted new members daily (Acts 2:47). He realized that Chiara Lubich and her friends had discovered that the practical daily living of the words of the Gospel was the way of life. In particular, they had discovered the ideal of Jesus, 'May they all be one. Father, as you and I are one may they be one in us so that the world will believe' (Jn 17: 21).

Chiara Lubich, who had been a schoolteacher, discovered during the height of the War in 1943, in her native Trent, that only God remains. Everything else passes away: it is vanity of vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The prevalence of death enabled Chiara and a number of her young friends to put God in the first place in their lives, to choose him as the ideal of their lives. In 1943 there were air-raids on Trent every day, sometimes as many as five or six times, since Trent was the railhead of German supplies for their

forces in Italy. Chiara and her companions had to run to the air-raided shelters as often as six times some days. The only book they brought with them was a copy of the Gospels. They opened it and read sentences like: "Give, and there will be gifts for you" (Lk 6:38); "You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:39; Lev 19:18; Jm 2:8); "I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25:36). They received a grace to understand and, more importantly, to put these words into practice at once. They put the words into practice, and they worked! The sentences of the Gospel seemed made for the appalling situations around them, a true antidote to the mutual hatred of the war. The Holy Spirit and the situation conspired together to underline these living words highlighting those dealing with love towards God and others.

Two such texts struck them with force. They were: "I give you a new commandment that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another/ This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34; 15:12) and: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). The first, Jesus described as "the new commandment" and particularly "his own". The second describes the summit of his suffering in both Matthew and Mark: because Jesus is the Son of God, he is love, but too much love made him feel forsaken, and in this he appeared merely a man, indeed, a worm and no man (Ps 22:6). The little group began to notice a close connection between the two evangelical sentences that initially seemed far apart. The connection came via the little word, 'as' (καθώς) in the New Commandment. Jesus had loved us all the way to the cross of Golgotha and the God-forsakenness that he experiences at this summit moment of his love for the Father when he gives his life as ransom for humanity (Mk 10:45). The little word 'as' identified a love that was a love without measure. One day, Chiara Lubich and her young friends realized that the New Commandment represented the deepest desire of the Saviour's heart *and* that he had lived it in regard to sinful humanity to the point of the abandonment by the Father on Calvary. The realization prompted them to make a pact of unity to be ready to die for each other: the new commandment of Jesus required nothing less! If they lived it, they would be one mind and one heart (Acts 4:32), and the world would believe (Jn 13:35;

17:21).

The hostilities of war ceased in the Summer of 1945. The little group around Chiara had grown vastly in number. Their evangelical life began to attract many new people, young and old, lay and clerical. Within a few months of the end of the war, there were hundreds of people in Trent and its environs who wanted to live by the words of the Gospel. They aimed at a spiritual and material sharing of goods. They attracted others by a certain quality of unity and presence; later, they realized the secret of this presence. Jesus had promised that where two or three are united in his name, he should be in their midst (Mt 18:20). He had made good his promise. Living among the children of men, would he not do again those extraordinary things that he had done and had promised to do in the days of his flesh? The ever-enlarging group was soon nicknamed by those who knew them, 'the *focolare*', which is the Italian word for the fireplace or hearth. The symbol seemed strangely appropriate since the hearth is the place where friends feel drawn together by a warmth in their midst. And is it not the delight of God to live among his own and so continue the pitching of his tent among us (Jn 1:14)?

An early episode highlights the explosive ecumenical potential of such a Gospel-based way of life. In 1961, a number of pastors of the Lutheran Church in Germany heard of these young people in sunnier climates south of the Alps. These pastors decided to investigate. They went to meet Chiara Lubich. After the encounter, they were amazed and exclaimed: 'What? Catholics living the Gospel?' They expressed at once the desire that the spirituality of the *focolare* would spread into the Lutheran Church. Ecumenical contacts with Anglicans, the Reformed, and the Orthodox were soon to follow.

This was the way of life that Igino Giordani met on the fateful day in parliament buildings in Rome in September 1948. He was drawn at once to live out his faith in this evangelical fashion. The emerging spirituality's emphasis on unity, on life before theory, on mutual love, on the dominical desire that 'all be one' won his allegiance and fired his will to action. Now he had found a spirituality that opened up vistas undreamed of for his ardent spirit. He saw in Chiara and her companions the DNA of a spirituality that

was as ecumenical as it was evangelical. He had found the motor to drive the ecumenism that had already claimed the allegiance of his mind and heart. Chiara gave him a new name, 'Foco', which is close to the Italian word for fire. The fire of Jesus present in the midst of those united in his name was being cast on the earth as Jesus wanted. The adventure of the Gospel was there for all, for Catholic and Anglican, for Reformed and Lutheran, for Orthodox and Free Church. And now there was a precise spirituality in existence with which to drive and guide it.

In the early sixties, the *Centro Uno* was set up in Rome by the Focolare Movement in order to facilitate the rapidly expanding ecumenical contacts between the Movement and the various branches of Christendom. Giordani was appointed its first Director. It seemed altogether appropriate for him to be in that post because of his competence, his experience in the ecumenical world, and now especially because of his committed living out of the spirituality of a movement whose daily passion was the Lord's prayer and dying wish: 'May they all be one' (Jn 17:21). Giordani was to work in the *Centro Uno* for fully fifteen years. There, the ever-increasing ecumenical contacts of the young movement found their focus and co-ordination. There, the wisdom and geniality of Giordani, coupled with his dry humour, found impressive expression.

From 1961, the *Centro Uno* organized thirty-seven ecumenical congresses. Giordani normally took part, delivering papers. The participants came from Europe, the Middle East, and the USA. He continued to write articles on the unity of Christians in such papers and reviews as *Oikumenikon*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, *New City* and others. He always aimed at the collective memory in order to sensitise it to the duty of unity.

### **III. *Per Litteram ad Spiritum*: an Exegesis of Key New Testament Passages**

In our account of the gradual discovery and development of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, certain key texts stand out as the pillars that support that spirituality. These texts, in the main, were in St John together with the cry of forsakenness in Mark and Matthew. It is now time to look at these texts exegetically. We will



set off with those of St John.

In John, the only Son, who is turned towards the Father's heart, has 'exegeted' the Father (1:18). The point is that no one has ever seen the Father. Nothing infra-divine is able to communicate or bear the weight of the divine glory. The eternal Son, whose being consists in 'being towards the heart of the Father', is high enough to reveal and communicate him. This is why he becomes 'flesh' of our flesh to enable us creatures of flesh (3:6) to see his glory (1:14; 2:11). After the 'enfleshment', when he pitches his tent in our flesh, we can see his glory (1:14) which is the radiance of the love of the Father and the Son for each other and for us.

This gives us a lead into the Book of Signs, that sequence of seven 'miracle-signs' that serve to radiate the glory of the eternal Son into this world of violence and unlove. Thus, the first of the miracles, the changing of the water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana (2:1-12), had the effect of 'letting his glory be seen. His disciples believed in him [εἰς αὐτόν]' (2:11). The last of the great signs of Jesus was that of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). But, far from this sign calling forth the faith of the Pharisees and the Chief Priests, it only provoked their rage. Caiaphas makes the fateful proposal that Jesus ought to die in order to prevent possible Roman repression. John sees in the High Priest's suggestion a deeper sense: 'He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not only for the nation only but to gather into one the dispersed children of God' (11:51-2). This suggestion by the high priest is paradoxically a clear statement of the mission of Jesus, as well as of the means he will use to achieve his mission. The purpose of his coming is to gather together into one the scattered children of God so that 'there will be one flock, one shepherd' (Jn 10:16). The means that he will employ is the Cross: here one notices the significance of the central Johannine category of 'the hour' (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). The cross will be the focal point, the epitome of his whole life.

This linking of 'gathering' and 'the hour' needs a little unpacking. The tragic effect of sin had been the scattering of the human family and the distancing of the human family from the Creator. Chapter

three of Genesis and subsequent chapters describe in dramatic fashion that splintering and scattering in both its vertical and horizontal modes. The history of the Old Covenant is a history of the divine interventions that seek to reverse this scattering. God intends to introduce a counterforce to this very movement. This force would be released by Jesus' self-delivery on the Cross: 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself' (12:32). The scene is set for the Book of Glory and its 'Farewell Discourses' (chapters 13-17). There Jesus will draw out the blueprint for 'the Israel of God' (Gal 5:16). The components of this blueprint are the new commandment, the cross, unity as the first effect of the new commandment when lived, and an effective witness to the outside world that will lead it to faith in Jesus and in the Father who has sent him. It is imperative to look at each element in turn.

### **The New Commandment**

Joachim Jeremias has ably demonstrated that Jesus in the Gospels always addresses God in prayer as 'Abba'.<sup>4</sup> There is only one exception, that of the cry of forsakenness in the Synoptics (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46), texts to which we will be turning our attention in due course. When one remembers the profound respect of Jews for the Divine Name, it becomes obvious that Jesus enjoys a unique consciousness of his filial relationship to God. Furthermore, Jesus calls God 'my Father' no less than twenty-eight times, and 'the Father' as often as seventy-five times in John. Jesus for his part is 'the Son' no fewer than fourteen times in John.<sup>5</sup> This observation shows the nature of the wonder that the eternal Son has brought into human history on becoming flesh. It is this wonder that constitutes the core of the Farewell Discourse. There we are invited to join with the disciples as they eavesdrop on a conversation between 'the Son' and 'his Father'. This is the living matrix for appreciating the full meaning of the New Commandment.

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<sup>4</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

The commandment is new, not only because it is not present in the old covenant, but especially because it belongs to the new era which Jesus is bringing about by his going to the Father in his Passover. He is the fulfilment of the new covenant foretold powerfully in Jeremiah (31:31-33). The new covenant requires a new law. Jesus returns to this new law in 15:12: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another'. He has called this commandment 'new'; now he calls it 'his'. It is uniquely his, since it is the very law of his life with the Father. This law he now transposes to earth in order to root it in the hearts of his disciples. As an immigrant entering a strange new culture must both adapt to his new environment and still bring with him the life of his homeland, so too the eternal Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, adapts to his new milieu, on becoming man, but brings with him the life of his homeland. That life is nothing less than the life of love between divine Persons, indeed the very life of love between the Father and the Son.

This explains the mutuality or reciprocity that is a distinguishing characteristic of the New Commandment. Since 'the Father loves the Son' (5:20; 10:17) and the food of Jesus is to do the will of the one who sent him (4:34), the law that Jesus gives as primary and indispensable must underline the characteristic of reciprocity. The disciples of Jesus are called to love others. However, this is not enough. Their love, for which the New Testament uses the precise word, ἀγάπη, must be grounded in mutual giving and receiving and desiring unity. It is a love that is reminiscent of Aristotle's friendship-love (φιλία) when considered from the point of view of structure.<sup>6</sup> It is lifted up, however, to a higher level which we will soon consider in the section on unity. One notices how John develops a theme by a 'spiral' mode of thinking, 'like a winding staircase always revolving around the same centre, always returning to the same topics, but at a higher level.'<sup>7</sup> This fact is a key to the

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX. The philosopher shows how friendship has three essential components, namely, at least two people, who wish each other well, and are conscious of doing so.

<sup>7</sup> I. de la Potterie, *Adnotationes in Exegesis Primae Epistolae S. Johannis*, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1967, 8.

exegesis of the individual themes that are to follow, namely, the Cross, the unity of the disciples, and effective witness to Christ in the world.

### **The Cross is the Measure**

In the opening verse of the Book of Glory, John underlines the measure of Jesus' love: 'he loved them to the end – εἰς τέλος (13:1). The love of Jesus for them is an absolute: it is not only an unconditional love; it is, above all, the love of the Son of the Father made flesh. The measure of the mutual love demanded of the disciples is stated in the same breath as the New Commandment: '...*Even as* I have loved you, that you also love one another' (13:34); 'love one another *as* I have loved you' (15:12). What is the measure of Jesus' love? It is a measure without measure, and is demonstrated on the Cross in 'the hour', which is the omega point of Jesus' ministry, the moment when he will draw all to himself (12:32). The 'as' (καθώς) in both verses indicates not only likeness, but also prolongation or assimilation to the love of Jesus. Authentic disciples are invited to love each other to the point that they are ready and willing to die for each other. 'Jesus loved them '*avec tendresse mais sans attendrissement*', and this is the standard or example they are now being asked to emulate (see 12:32; 15:13).'<sup>8</sup>

### **The unity of Jesus' Disciples (17:11, 21-4, 26)**

Following the staircase higher, one discovers the first effect of this mutual love: a singular unity of the disciples results. The precise shape of this unity is drawn out twice over, in verses 21 to 24. It is possible to discern a fivefold parallel between 21a-22a and 22b-24ab. It is enough to articulate the text to make the point.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Norris, 'The Marriage of Christians', in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, I (1985) 41.

21a 'That all may be one,  
21b as you, Father, in me and I in you,  
21c that they also may be in us,  
21d that the world may believe you have sent  
me.  
22a And I have given them the glory you  
have given me.'

22b 'That they may be one,  
22c as we are one:  
23ab I in them and you in me,  
that they become perfectly one,  
23cd that the world may know  
you have sent me  
and have loved them  
as you have loved me.  
24ab Father, I want those  
you have given me  
to be with me where I am,  
so that they may always see  
the glory you have given me.'

The spiralling staircase has reached its topmost rung. Jesus turns from the mode of direct speech to the mode of prayer. The unity that is to be the result of the New Commandment when put into practice, is of such importance and is so central to the mission of Jesus (Jesus in fact has lived his whole mission in the full awareness of being under a 'command' from the Father, 10:18), that he does not entrust it directly to the disciples, but, rather, to his Father, in prayer. Address becomes prayer, as it were.

What is the nature of the unity for which he prays? The answer is given at once: 'as the Father and Jesus are one.' The 'one-ness' of the disciples, however, is going to be much more than mere resemblance. It is in fact going to be a participation in the relationship that obtains between the Father and Jesus: 'that they may be in us' (21c) and: 'I in them and you in me' (23a). In that

way, the disciples are invited and enabled to become a 'we' that participate in the eternal 'We' of the Father and Jesus, his incarnate Son.

### **Effective Witness to all (13:35; 17:21d, 23c).**

If unity, that exceptional and gifted unity, is the first effect of the living out of the New Commandment, then all men will know that the disciples are the authentic followers of Jesus (13:35: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'). Furthermore, the world will recognize the very mission of Jesus from the Father (17:21d, '...that the world may believe that you have sent me'). Nowhere else in the whole of the New Testament is there such a clear identification of the effective key to the apostolate. The mission of the disciples will be fruitful if their 'we' participates in the 'We' of the Father and the Son. Their unity will be the convincing sign of the presence of God the holy Trinity in the world and in history. And it is striking to realize that such witness will be effective also in relation to those who are really outside – the word 'world' (the 'cosmos') does not refer simply to those who will listen but to all, even those who are opposed to Jesus but who are vulnerable to the witness of genuine mutual love among Christians. In 17:21-4 Jesus describes a way of life for his followers that will have the power of persuading even a hostile humanity.

### **The Cry of Forsakenness (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46)**

It is highly significant that the cry of abandonment is the only 'word from the cross' in Mark and Matthew. It is also highly significant that Mark gives it in Aramaic, Jesus' mother tongue: '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*'. The history of its exegesis, however, has been content, generally speaking, to see nothing in it beyond Jesus praying Psalm 22. This canon of interpretation, however, has been challenged effectively since roughly the end of World War II. It is as if the horrors of that 'difficult century' have made it more difficult to talk about God *without this central icon of the Gospel*. In any case, this text has been a major point of convergence for

Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic theologians since the end of World War II.<sup>9</sup>

The true significance of the cry resides not so much in its historical nature as in its theological value. It is a revelatory word of God on the death of Christ. Walter Kasper remarks perceptively: 'If as he was dying he cries out for God, then he cries not only for the God of the Old Testament but for the God whom he called his Father in an exclusive sense and to whom he knew himself to be bound in a unique way.'<sup>10</sup> Mark, in fact, locates the cry in the unique rapport of Jesus with God. That rapport was revealed in its depth when Jesus only hours earlier in the Garden had called this same God, 'Abba' (Mk 14:36). In Gethsemane, Jesus accepted that he had to drink the chalice of suffering to the end. Now it begins to emerge that, over and above the sequence of rapid events unfolding during the dramatic journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, there unfolds another story that is hidden from the eyes of flesh, the story of love between the Son and the Father. This means that the cry is in perfect harmony with the central thrust of Mark, a fact confirmed by the phenomenon of the centurion providing the first complete act of faith: 'Truly this man was God's Son' (Mk 15:39).

According to Rossé, the cry is to be interpreted as expressing the depth of God's saving love.<sup>11</sup> It does this in three ways. It addresses, firstly, the human condition of suffering and abandonment. Next, it speaks to a modern godless world. Finally, it is the revelation, measure and source of Christian love *par excellence*.

The cry expresses a 'why?' question. Now there is a 'why?' in every heart, sometimes very great, sometimes minuscule. In this moment, Jesus is one with every man and woman, not only in an ontological

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<sup>9</sup> One could mention Sergei Bulgakov, Jurgen Moltmann and Hans Urs von Balthasar as Orthodox, Lutheran and Catholic instances, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> W. Kasper, *Jesus der Christus*, Mainz, 1974, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard Ross, *The cry of Jesus on the Cross: a Biblical and Theological Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) chapter 7, 115-128.

way but also existentially and concretely. Henceforth there is no pain, no sorrow, no lostness, no darkness, no forsakenness that is not entered and appropriated by the Son of God. 'Every cry of abandonment involves the Trinity, every 'why?' belongs to the very Mystery of divinity.'<sup>12</sup>This surely is 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*' (Mk 1:1) in the sense that it is first in importance in the good news. We have been found in all our abandonment and distance from God. We are no longer beyond the love of the crucified and forsaken Redeemer. The abandoned Son has re-located god-forsaken humanity between himself and his 'Abba'.

The forsaken Christ is also the God for modern atheists. He is without the sensation of his Father's presence, just as atheists are without God and feel far from him. Contemporary atheism is a face of the forsaken Christ. Finally, this Christ is the source and the measure of Christian love. Since he is God he is love. Too much love, however, made him feel forsaken, and in this he appears to be only a man. He teaches an art of loving which is to be one with the other 'to the end'. To love the other in that way requires one to be truly poor in spirit (Mt 5:3; II Cor 8:9). This abandoned Christ loses everything for love, except love.

It is time to conclude this all too brief account of an exceptional ecumenical vocation and mission. Iginò Giordani, whose life spanned most of the last century, was, from his early years, drawn to study, pray and work for the restoration of unity among Christians. It was the biblical and patristic witness of the early centuries that inspired him initially in his apostolate of writing and research, as well as in his professional calling as a politician. The encounter, however, with Chiara Lubich and the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement in 1948 was a kind of second springtime in his professional and ecumenical life. He now had a spirituality that could drive and inspire the work of finding unity among Christians so 'that the world will believe'. Since the cry of forsakenness and the New Commandment were connected in this

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.



spirituality, not only as two sides of one and the same coin, but also as cause to effect, it was appropriate to look exegetically at these two Gospel texts. Perhaps the life of Igino Giordani bears witness to the riches of these texts as they are enfolded in the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement and in the Movement's continuing work for the unity of all Christians.

Thomas J. Norris,  
Maynooth.