

**Introduction to the book "Filiberto Guala" 1907 – 2000  
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**The Vocational Journey of God's Businessman**

*"To this day I am still paying for those two years at the RAI. The journalists come and they ask me questions about TV and then I see headlines like "From Power to the Priory", as if in an organization the size of the RAI, I actually counted for something!"*

**Father Filiberto Guala jovially confided this several years ago, having already been a trappist monk for several years.**

**The life of this monk, who died in the Roman monastery of Frattocchie on the 24<sup>th</sup> December 2000, is well-known above all for his past as a high-level manager in Italian public administration which also saw him founder and first director of the RAI (Italian Radio and Television)**

**Engineer Guala organized and managed many initiatives to rebuild our country after the catastrophe that was WWII. Rather than remember his career, I would prefer to remember his spiritual journey as a human being which was ninety-three years long.**

## **PROFESSION AND VOCATION COINCIDE**

**Born in Turin on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1907, he grew up in a Catholic environment, fuelled by the saintly examples of Pier Giorgio Frassati. *"After the death of Pier Giorgio Frassati, a group of friends was formed in Turin. They were militants in the FUCI (Italian Catholic Federation of University Students) from many different regions of Italy. Their wish was to live the spirituality of Pier Giorgio. They met up three times a year"*, Guala remembers (Letter from 20<sup>th</sup> September 1998)**

**It was an exceptional group of brotherly friends who would later become well-known "characters": Roberto Enaudi, Domenico Garelli, Carlo Carretto and Enrico di Rovasenda to name but a few. The life of this group owes much to the "vocational style" of Filiberto Guala. He was humanly strong, deeply spiritual, apostolically enterprising, knowingly ecclesiastical and socially and conversationally open. In the FUCI's spiritual and apostolic environment, Guala found Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope VI. He was a friend and a point of reference because of his commitment to international christian sanctification and he was always present and active doing good.**

***"At twenty years old Montini told us students, "You must be aware that those who are privileged to go to university and grow in the Church, also have the obligation to become an enterprising layman. You are a Christian engaged in serving your neighbours as an engineer; you must become a great engineer."***

**These words made an enormous impression on the young Guala who stated:**

***"Actually, Monsignor Montini was my spiritual father. I always kept in touch with him and whenever I went to Rome, I went to him to confess. "You should become a good engineer and not a priest" he told me. "The Church needs laymen to occupy the crucial positions in the structure of this country."***

**Obviously Guala knew perfectly well that a Christian life is "vocation" and strictly speaking, also that of a layman. And so this was his decision.**

***"Yes, I shall be an engineer who provides work. In this way I shall serve the Church without becoming a priest but I shall be a consecrated layman."***

**He lived his layman's vocation with enterprising intelligence and efficiency, nourishing himself with prayer and the passion for salvation.**

**In Turin he had a qualified professional occupation at RIV (a ball-bearing factory). After some time he became the manager for the doubling project of the coal-wagons, which transported coal from the port of Savona to Piedmont.**

***"I became part of a prayer group where I got to know Franco Costa very well, the lawyer who would then become Monsignor Costa, the successor of Montini in the FUCI. He got me involved in Stella Maris, which provides religious assistance to passing seafarers."***

**Maritime "spreading the word" captivated and moved him.**

***"In Savona when I was thirty we went onto the merchant ships and invited the sailors to come to mass in the port. One day I overheard an engineer from Puglia comment to his friend, 'Do you know that nobody pays them!'"***

## **MEETING DON ORIONE**

**Meeting Don Luigi Orione was an important step in Guala's vocational journey. Don Orione was an already famously holy priest and founder of religious congregations, dedicated to spreading the word to the working classes. In 1938, *"at thirty-one I met Don Orione who had just returned from America and he took me under his wing."* The resulting friendship was extremely spiritual and apostolic.**

*"Don Orione went to Genova every Thursday. I made the journey with him from Genova to Tortona because I was living in Saronno and working in Savona. We travelled together chatting and praying, then we would spend the evening together. Every Thursday. Meeting Don Orione is surely the most important thing to happen in my life: He helped me understand life as a union with God....probably above all else, he helped me to have faith."*

**What he drew from Don Orione was above all the devoted openness towards Divine Providence which is the driving force of life. Guala always remembered one of his speeches:**

*"You have taken a vow of celibacy but you shall go into the world until the Lord asks you for more." "I remember - Guala continues - his insistence on being willing to face any undertaking. One day he said to me: "You will do great things in your life and I ask of only one commitment from you. When you are asked to do something very difficult, and everyone says not to do it and they also say that nobody else can do it, then in all conscience you must be the one to do it."*

## **MANAGER AND APOSTLE**

**Filiberto Guala's courageous enterprising approach permitted him to become planning supervisor of Savona and responsible for Drinking Water of Turin, owned by the Frassati Group. In his hometown of Turin, he could then develop his apostolistic impulses dealing with entertainment and the coordination of charitable initiatives. He was held in high esteem by Cardinal Maurilio Fossati.**

*"I found myself doing many civil and social things in Turin. The workers in the factories were in need of someone to provide them with religious assistance. I was pointed in the direction of don Giuseppe Pollarolo who lived in Milan and was a well known preacher. So don Pollarolo came to Turin and we began the work in the factories together. It was don Pollarolo who had organized all this but I was the head of Caritas in Piedmont and so we were one and the same. We were always together. Don Pollarolo was a wonderful person. He had all of Turin under his spell.*

**Setting up pastoral working-class organizations in Turin and Italy immediately after the end of the second world war was yet another feather in the cap of engineer Guala.**

**The Italian government launched an impressive project to help rebuild the country at the end of the disastrous second world war and Guala was called to Rome. He became the technical director of the INA-Casa construction plan, also known as the Fanfani plan which would construct residential housing across Italy.**

**When the time came to choose the C.E.O. of the RAI (Italian Radio and Television), his expertise, honesty and managerial skills drew attention from the political sector.**

*"At a certain point, I was asked to assume managerial control of the RAI which was a new and arduous undertaking. They had no idea who to ask so they decided to ask me. The Right Honorable Scelba called me and we chatted a little and I said, "Look, you know as well as I do that I don't think I'm ready to do this...." And he answered, "There is nobody else with Catholic connections that we can ask!" On hearing this, the words of Don Orione immediately came back to me and so I accepted."*

**His vocation seemed well-defined and stable: A modern, well-educated, competent Christian who was brilliant in social and civil undertakings with pastoral sensibilities and way of working. And yet, at a certain point, this burning desire to intimately commune with God which had always been present in his exuberant activism, suddenly exploded onto the scene.**

## **THE CHOICE OF MONASTERY**

His choice came as a surprise to everyone. But he explained that the decision had roots deep in his past.

*"I had taken on managerial positions to make my friends happy when they asked me or sent for me. But I secretly wasn't really happy – he recognized years later – When Don Orione died I started visiting Tortona and the Theological Institute and I felt really at home there. It was full of clerics and so I felt attracted to the whole thing but I let everyone else get on with it as I really still hadn't made up my mind yet. Don Orione never once asked me to leave the world to go with him, but he considered me one of his: he told me once that he could see me as a priest in the future. (Letter from 9<sup>th</sup> November 1963)*

Many years full of various public enterprises passed from that moment on.

*"Then something curious happened to me. I received a phone call from The Superior General of The Orionine Fathers (The Sons of Divine Providence), don Carlo Pensa. He explained "Your friend don Ignazio Terzi wants to become a monk. I would like you to go with him to a monastery so he can decide if that's what he should really do."*

They went together to Citeaux Abbey in Dijon. France. Don Terzi decided against joining. Guala, however, was captivated.

*"At that moment I asked myself "Is this the until-the-Lord-asks-you-for-more moment that Don Orione spoke about and was it about to come to fruition?" So much so that the following year I took myself off to Taimé in Savoia, France and started thinking that this really was my true path in life."*

And so it was *"Another year passed and I found myself there again for another wonderful week of retreat in Taimé Abbey in Savoia. And there I decided to become a monk.*

All that remained to be done was to set the wheels in motion by removing himself from his many public engagements and to choose a monastery which would become his new home. There was also another determining factor in the choice of monastery. While he was accompanying his friend don Pollarolo to the monastery of Frattocchie in Rome, Guala took the opportunity to let the Abbot

know his intentions.

*"He told me I was too old: "You have no idea what becoming a brother means. It means that you not only have to accept and say everything is fine wherever you go but you also have to believe this is the case too." I decided to join there. It was 1960."*

In reality he still had to extricate himself from some administrative responsibilities, among which that of the Project Manager of the International World Fair "Italia 61".

Guala's soul friend Renato Marchetti confirmed that "for him, his entry into the monastery was a way of disappearing and entering into an intimate space with God. We discussed this a lot in March 1960". One of the first people that Guala told about his decision was don Carlo Pensa:

*"I want you to be one of the first to know about my decision to join the order because even though it was Don Orione who was my first inspiration, you have also had a hand in helping me reach this conclusion."*

He went on to explain: *"I am sure that he (Don Orione) was the one who gave me the bug for the contemplative life, even though I'm sure he meant an active life, heavily emphasised by the duty of prayer and cultivation of one's inner life."*

Now he had only one worry left. What would his friend Monsignor Montini, who was now Cardinal of Milan, think about it all.

*"When he found out about my decision – Guala explains – he had a few reservations which he let me know about in a letter at Christmas 1960."*

*"It's too soon to give up on the responsibilities that you have devoted yourself to." At the beginning of the Council, Montini came to visit me at Frattocchie and reiterated his friendship to me. "All our friends say that you were ready for this choice and so I accept your decision." I was pardoned. This was the peak of his fatherly kindness which he had guided me with for thirty years. I was uplifted and able to overcome any discomfort because he had presented me with this unfaltering love."*

On the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1960, the second part of Guala's life as a trappist monk began. He entered the novitiate and took his vows in



**1962. He became a priest on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1967.**

**Paradoxically, the second part of Guala's life is characterised by an animated spiritual journey continually in evolution which is present in the many letters and meetings with the souls that he appealed to for grace and advice. The stability of the monastic environment would have been expected to remove any such matters from the narrative.**

## **SAN BIAGIO DI MONDOVI**

Externally, the most relevant initiative was the physical and spiritual restoration of the Monastery of San Biagio di Morozzo, near Mondovi in Piedmont.

*"A few benefactors from Piedmont had offered some land to the bishop of Mondovi, who wanted to create a spiritual centre modelled on the one created by don Gasparino from Cuneo. Monsignor Franco Costa presented the project to Pope Paul VI and it was subsequently approved."*

*And so, in 1972, "at the age of 66, I arrived in Mondovi to live a hermitic life in an old monastery. There was a building next door where we offered a prayer school. Once again I was on the verge of a new undertaking and once again fortune was on my side in the form of a sweet and restful image of Maria sculpted by the inspiration of Beppe Viada. The faithful would know to gather in prayer for Jesus. We gave her the name of The Madonna of Faith and this became the symbol of our welcome."*

*It was a humbling, tiring life in poor conditions, but offered many relationships with all kinds of people. His desire was to open a pathway towards "monasticism serving man and offering more than just an external cult but offering a deeply human and Godly experience too".*

*Deeply rooted in the monastic tradition, it became a place of spirituality to face the new challenges and problems of the world. In a letter to Beppe Viada, his artist friend from Cuneo, he wrote;*

*"You artists and we who pray have a common goal. We wish to go beyond the material but to get there we need the gift of joy from God, which you call inspiration."*

## **"IN OLD AGE THEY SHALL STILL BEAR FRUIT"**

This expression taken from Psalm 91, fits our Father Filiberto to a tee. He lived in the Madonna of Faith monastery in Morozzo until 1984 when at the age of seventy-seven, he was forced to return to Frattocchie for health reasons.

Highly prized as a confessor, using old and new understandings he tended to a rather large apostolate also through the *Letters to my nieces and nephews*, which he sent periodically to many people, containing memories, advice and flashes of spiritual light.

*"I'm finding that with the advancing of the years, the gift of memory is growing. I'm reliving many experiences and meetings more deeply than before."*

Father Filiberto was filled with new impulses and topics. Prayer had become his life's work and always more necessary.

*"As an old man I often reflect on the job of a monk. Little by little I have understood that Magnificat and Miserere together are the essence of christian life and we must lead by example to all those who arrive at the Monastery for their spiritual growth"*

Never one to rest on his laurels, be it as a civilian or a monk, the engineer and then Father Filiberto Guala always was an "entrepreneur", in the real etymological sense of the word. Even at ninety years of age, he still had projects in mind.

*"I wish to inform you that at this moment in time there may be a change of direction for this aging ninety-year old. The Lord is changing the type of person that comes to confide in us. Day by day, more and more new faces come to open up their world of pain and problems and I realise that they have no idea that their misery is caused by their own personal stories. And here is the turning point....I have grasped that there is more misery than I have ever experienced and so I feel called to 1) dedicate more time to these "miseries" 2) mobilize my friends, such as yourself, to support this "world" with prayer".*

And he began a prayer crusade "to support the world".

Constantly in evolution, he wrote a letter to his artist friend in Cuneo saying,

***"A year ago I thought I still had another step to take towards God. I will be prepared to adore him, to understand him, to adore his splendor and majesty face to face."***

**Along with Saint John of the Cross, the entrepreneur had understood that "When you have given everything to God, there is still much more to do which means let yourself be taken totally by Him".**