

In memory of Prof. Guglielmo Giordano

Prof. Guglielmo Giordano, noted Wood Science and Technology scholar, professor emeritus of the University of Florence, died in his home in Florence on February 4, 2000 at the age of 95. An important figure in research and teaching, he was a man of deep religious faith, known for his depth of thought and wisdom.

Born in Margarita (CN) on December 18, 1904, Professor Giordano graduated from the Polytechnic Institute of Torino in 1926 *summa cum laude*. Filling the post by open competition, he began working at the State Forest Service in 1927 and then graduated from the University of Florence in Forestry Science in 1928, where he ranked first in his course. As Inspector in the State Forest Service, he did field work first in the Piedmont Alps (1928–1936) and then in East Africa (1936–1938). From 1939 to 1943 he worked for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry as part of the Technical Services of the General Director of Forestry.

In 1943 he qualified as University Teacher (*Libera Docenza*) in Wood Technology and Forest Operations, and was sent to Germany for a period of specialization in Eberswalde and Stuttgart. During the war he was the Head of the Office of Timber Supplies for Industries. During the German occupation he resigned from State service, which he resumed in 1945, after working as a consultant for the timber industry.

He began his teaching career in 1945 at the Department of Agriculture of the University of Torino with an extracurricular course in Wood Technology; he was then assigned a course of Wood Technology and Forest Operations in the School of Forestry – Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Florence, an appointment which continued from the academic year 1946–47 until 1955–56.

In 1948 and 1949, he received two scholarships from CNR (Italian National Council for Research) which enabled him to participate in training courses concerning modern techniques of utilizing wood in Finland and the United States. Due to his *avant-garde* views in supporting quick-growth wood plantations, he was elected Section President at two World Forest Congresses in Helsinki (1949) and Dehra Dun (1954).

He won the competition for the position of Full Professor of Wood Technology and Forest Operations at the University of Florence in 1956, a post he kept until he reached retirement age in 1980.

In 1954 he founded the National Institute for Wood of CNR, later re-named Wood Institute (with offices in Florence and San Michele all'Adige, near Trento), where he remained Director until he reached retirement age in 1974.

He served as President of the FAO International Commission for Poplar for 9 years. He was President of the Wood Committee within UNI (Italian National Organization for Standardisation) for 15 years; Technical Consultant of Federlegno-Arredo (Italian Federation of Wood and Furnishing Industries); Technical Consultant and Expert of ATIBT (Association Technique Internationale des Bois Tropicaux). He carried out numerous official assignments on behalf of international organizations and governments.

He was member of the Forestry Academy of Finland (1950), the Agricultural Academy of France (1965), and various Italian Academies (Italian Forestry Science Academy, Georgofili Academy, Agricultural Academy of Torino), and *Honoris Causa Doctor* of the Forstliche Hochschule of Vienna (1967). After his “retirement” (a very inappropriate term in his case), he continued – by contract – his university teaching: three years at the University of Torino (from 1982 to 1985), and two years at the University of Trento – Faculty of Engineering (1986–1988), the latter specifically concerning timber constructions. He also taught seven updating courses concerning transformation of wood and wood-based materials at the University of Torino (from 1983 to 1989), five courses for foreign technicians on the rationalization of wood processing for UNIDO (based in Vienna) held in Milano from 1982 to 1986. In addition, he taught six courses for foreign technicians on the Restoration of Timber Structures, organized by the Tuscan College of Engineers (1984–89); after 1989 he presented various seminars on the same topic in Venice, Verona, Arezzo, Perugia, and Barcelona. Once again in 1996 he enthusiastically participated in a seminar on Constructions in Wood, given in Oporto, Portugal, reporting on “The Use of Wood in Architecture and Construction”.

Continuing to work intensely until his last years, Professor Giordano wrote and published numerous works, all characterized by scientific exactitude and clarity. His firstly published books were enlarged and reorganized in the monumental, encyclopedic text “Wood Technology,” in “Technique of Timber Construction,” in “Anthology of Wood.” Technical studies, various papers and investigations carried out for FAO, ECE, and the UN regarding forestry problems and the use of wood were joined by popular and application-oriented publications. His publications include more than 200 articles, papers and reports, published by journals and newspapers in the wood sector; articles of art history, nature; specialized contributions in encyclopedias, dictionaries and other collective works.

The roles of university teacher, researcher, and popular writer carried out by Professor Giordano in the course of his long and productive life, are manifested in many aspects of his extraordinary personality, which were recently reported by Prof. Roberto Zanuttini in the Italian Journal of Wood, Cellulose and Paper. With acumen and affection, Prof. Zanuttini outlines a significant profile of profound experience and encyclopedic knowledge of wood. He states, “his charisma together with his advanced age allowed him to express a rare wisdom, moderating the rigorousness and discipline that he required of himself and his collaborators ... a thoroughly upright man of profound Christian faith ... he was chagrined to note a growing loss of values and good rules of conduct ...” He was known for the use of his faithful typewriter; his distance from those who he referred to as “people hired for research” rather than “researchers”; his pleasure in a job well done; pleasant tales and rhymes (often in Piedmont dialect); knowledge of people and customs all over the world; untiring writing; enormous respect and consideration on the part of the industrial sector; remarkable capacity to be concise, to identify, understand and find

practical solutions to problems brought before him; a wide knowledge of technological and biological aspects of wood, deriving from his double degree in Engineering and Forestry Science; a rare and effective talent to describe in a clear and simple way even complex concepts; continuous incitement to know the past in order to understand the present and plan the future ...; the “mythical” figure of teacher for generations of forestry students.

Regarding this extraordinary man and the mark he made (on his loving and dedicated family, his students, the scientific community, the forestry and industrial worlds) one could say, report and comment still much more – and certainly it will be done. At this time, the best testimony seems the following text with which the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Florence proposed his nomination as Professor Emeritus, awarded him in 1996:

“Guglielmo Giordano is the founder of modern Wood Technology in Italy. A distinguished scholar, internationally recognized, he has made a fundamental contribution to the scientific knowledge and the rational utilization of forests and timber in both temperate and tropical countries.

Beginning in 1974 with modest means at this disposal from the State Agency for Forests, and later developing his work with the support of the CNR, the National Agency for Cellulose and Paper, as well as numerous other Organizations and Agencies, he directed and developed the study in various sectors concerning wood, including biological, technical and economical fields, effectively connecting basic and applied research. He has inspired and promoted training activities, both technical and popular, for technicians as well as for managers and other professionals or workers in the wood sector; he used to engaged himself at various levels – scientific, practical, and organizational – without backing away from his obligations, although demanding in terms of time and energy, and he also used to participate actively as a highly valued teacher.

Anyone who currently works in Italy in the field of Wood Science comes, directly or indirectly, from his school; his books, characterized by rigorous scientific approach, encyclopedic knowledge and practical experience, are a precious source for study and reference.

For his activity as a Scholar, Author and Master, which he still carries on with effectiveness and passion, the Faculty is honored to propose him for nomination as Professor Emeritus.”

As testimonial of the mark he left, his students and friends, gathered on December 18, 1994 to celebrate his 90th birthday, among his many words of wisdom gratefully remembered the following: “*in life no lasting achievement can be made without serious study, firm decision and obstinate perseverance*”.

Among many professor Giordano’s books and publications, at least the following should be mentioned:

- Il legno e le sue caratteristiche [Wood and its properties].* Hoepli, 1951.
- Il legno dalla foresta ai vari impieghi [Wood. From Forest to its Uses].* Hoepli, 1956.
- I Legnami del Mondo [The Woods of the World].* 2nd edition. Il Cerilo, 1980.
- Tecnologia del Legno [Wood Technology].* UTET, 1981–1986).
- Tecnica delle Costruzioni in Legno [Technique of Timber Construction].* 1st edition. Hoepli, 1947. 5th edition. Hoepli, 1999.
- Antologia del Legno [Anthology of Wood].* Consorzio Legnolegno, 1997.
- Logging Cableways.* FAO, 1970.
- Pilot study of Markets of High-value Tropical Timber Products in Italy.* FAO/ITTO, 1987.
- Manuale di cubatura dei legnami e dei soprassuoli boschivi [Handbook for Timber Mensuration],* 4th edition. Hoepli, 1987.
- Il Legno – Vademecum per gli Operatori [Wood – Vademecum for Woodworkers].* 6th edition. Il Cerilo, 1984. (including the leaflet “*Decalogo degli errori – Serie dei concetti errati e delle denominazioni improprie che più di frequente occorre di sentire nei discorsi degli operatori del legno [The ten most frequent wrong concepts and wrong names which may be heard among the woodworkers]*”)

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