

# FOREWORD TO THE ITALIAN VERSION

By Dr. Roberto de Mattei

I found this book, *Murder in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree*, a fascinating read. Its author, Father Charles Murr, is an American priest who lived, studied, and worked in Rome from 1972 to 1979. These decisive Roman years of his life enabled him to write a wonderful account of many major events that unfolded before his eyes. It is not just the pleasant and engaging narrative style that makes his book so compelling, but the accurate description of the characters and, above all, the disturbing story itself, that of the [1975-1979] investigation into Freemasonry within the Vatican itself, carried out by a highly exemplary prelate. I know some of the facts and knew some of the main characters described in Don Murr's book and can confirm the absolute historical accuracy of the events the author himself witnessed. His is not just a memoir, but a precious historical contribution to better understand the complex reality that is the Roman Curia.

Father Charles Theodore Murr, born in Saint Paul, Minnesota in 1950, was ordained a priest in Rome on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1977. It is between 1977 and 1979 that his story unfolds, through fifteen chapters that correspond to memorable meetings and dialogues between the protagonists: Monsignor Mario Marini [1936-2009], Archbishop Giovanni Benelli [1921-1982], Canadian Archbishop Eduoard Gagnon [1918-2007], and the three Popes who succeeded one another in 1978, the year that saw the tumultuous transition from Paul VI's pontificate [1963-1978] to that of

John Paul II [1978-2005], with the brief, one month reign of John Paul I [1978].

Between 1972 and 1974, two prominent cardinals, Dino Staffa and Silvio Oddi, went to Pope Paul VI and formally accused Archbishop Annibale Bugnini (Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship) and Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio (Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops) of being active Freemasons. At Archbishop Benelli's recommendation, Pope Paul VI entrusted the investigation into the Roman Curia to Archbishop Gagnon, the Rector of the Canadian College, who dedicated himself to the assignment with the seriousness and determination that distinguished him.

On May 16, 1978, a memorable meeting took place between Paul VI, still deeply affected by the assassination of Aldo Moro, and Archbishop Gagnon, who handed him the results of his investigation into the Roman Curia, warning him about the dire seriousness of the situation. The Pope, tired and suffering, asked Gagnon to keep the papers and hand them over to his successor. Pope Paul VI died several months later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1978. There were two more meetings, both unsuccessful, between the Apostolic Visitor [Gagnon] and the next two pontiffs.

Father Murr's narrative ends with Archbishop Gagnon's audience with Pope John Paul II in 1979. It was in that same year that I met Doctor Wanda Poltawska, from Krakow, and, through her, in 1980, Monsignor Mario Marini. Poltawska was a very dear friend of the new Pope. She had been miraculously healed from cancer through the prayers of Padre Pio, and it was Father Karol Wojtyla who brought her petition to Padre Pio's attention. It was through Doctor Poltawska that I had the opportunity to meet Pope John Paul II, but above all, to meet the Pope's young personal secretary, Monsignor Stanislaus Dziwisz. Doctor Poltawska told me of the great esteem and admiration Pope John Paul had for Archbishop Gagnon. His esteem was such

that, after the assassination attempt on his life, the Pope called Gagnon back to Rome, appointed him President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and created him a cardinal. When, together with the Marquis Luigi Coda Nunziante, we formed the *Famiglia Domani Association*, we found in him a friend and a supporter. Cardinal Gagnon died on August 25, 2007, and must be regarded as a great defender of the Church, which Father Murr represents well in his book.

In one of the many conversations I had with him, Monsignor Mario Marini told me that when Gagnon went to give John Paul II the results of his Vatican investigation, he made one fatal mistake. Describing the dramatic situation of the Church, Gagnon could not hold back his tears, thus confirming the image that the Secretary of State [Cardinal Jean Villot] had given of him to the Pope: a man in crisis, depressed, deranged, ultimately unreliable. John Paul II listened to Gagnon but would not intervene. After Cardinal Villot's death, Monsignor Marini watched with grave concern as key Vatican positions were given to those thriving in the shadow of John Paul II's new Secretary of State, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli. Marini explained to me, in detail, the existence of what he called a "Mafia", surrounding the Polish Pope. When using the word "Mafia", he always made it clear that the Holy Church remained divine and indefectible, even with Churchmen who serve and betray her.

According to Msgr. Marini, to understand what was happening in the Vatican, one had to go back to the death of Paul VI [August 6, 1978] when two strong regional groups or "clans" were contending for power in the City of the Popes. Marini called them the Lombard-Piedmontese "Family" and the Romagna "Family", attributing to the word "Family" what the Mafia means by "*cosche*", clans or groups in control of a territory.

Upon the death of Paul VI, the two "Families" entered

a “pact of steel” for control of the Vatican. The director of this agreement was Archbishop Achille Silvestrini, shadow and alter ego of Cardinal Casaroli, whom he had succeeded in 1973 in the secretariat office of Council for Public Affairs of the Church. Silvestrini himself – as Julia Meloni, in an excellent reconstruction of history, presents him to us – is the “mastermind” of the St. Gallen Mafia [The St. Gallen Mafia, Tan, 2021, tr. en., The St. Gallen Mafia, Faith and Culture, 2022]. “Every morning at nine – explained Msgr. Marini – the political group that runs the Vatican, composed of these characters, meets, and prepares its reports for the Pope, but the real decisions have already been made by a hidden “director” which effectively controls all information, stored in inaccessible archives, and suitably filtered for the purposes of maneuvering choices and proposing appointments under apparently obvious pretexts.” These revelations were published under the pseudonym Romanus, in three articles in the monthly [February, March and April, 1980] issues of *Impact Suisse* magazine. I brought them up in *Corrispondenza Romana*, November 3 and 17, and December 21, 2021.

Msgr. Mario Marini was highly esteemed by subsequent Popes. John Paul II named him a Canon of the Vatican Basilica and Undersecretary of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship; Benedict XVI made him Secretary of the Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei*. Like Cardinal Gagnon, Marini was an authentic priest in an era of confusion and apostasy. He did not want to talk further about Gagnon’s dossier, sections of which have been lost, leaving many crucial questions regarding Freemasonry within the Vatican.

Regarding my own awareness of this subject, I remember that in early July of 1978 I received a phone call from Princess Eliane Radziwill (1919-2006) who asked to meet me with my friend Agostino Sanfratello to discuss a sensitive matter. Eliane Radziwill was a deaconess, but

energetic and active woman, for many years, national secretary of the “*Una Voce Italia*” Association, to which she had contributed space in her splendid home on the Via Giulia. To us who had received confidentially a dossier containing the names of some Vatican ecclesiastics and laity allegedly affiliated with Freemasonry, the princess voiced her doubts about the authenticity of the documents. She wanted our opinion on the matter.

We carefully examined the papers she gave us (copies of which I have kept). They contained an alphabetical list of prelates and laity, some of whom held positions in the Vatican. Among them were the names of Cardinal Jean Villot, Secretary of State, Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, Pio Laghi, Nuncio to Argentina, Annibale Bugnini, Nuncio to Iran, Paul Marcinkus, President of the Works of Religion [a.k.a., the Vatican Bank], Cardinals Ugo Poletti and Leo Suenens, Franco Biffi, Rector of the Lateran University, Don Virgilio Levi, Director of the *Osservatore Romano*, and numerous bishops of various Italian dioceses. In addition to the names, the serial numbers and dates of initiation into Freemasonry were indicated. Bishop Bugnini’s initiation date was listed as April 23, 1963, his code number 1365/75, and his code name BUAN.

The documents struck us as extremely amateurish. The letters were all typed, without headings, with clearly apocryphal signatures. An alleged letter to Bugnini, dated July 14, 1964, gave him the task of creating a new religion and spreading de-Christianization “within a decade”, with a “fixed salary of 500,000 lire per month which may be increased”. No serious conspirators would have expressed themselves in the clumsy manner found in these letters. What to conclude? I had the impression of an operation carried out by Freemasonry itself, or from parties close to it. In my opinion, the papers of which the princess had come into possession, and which were then spread to

various circles, were fakes, meant to discredit the serious investigation conducted in the Vatican by Archbishop Edouard Gagnon. On September 12, 1978, the weekly OP [*Osservatore Politico*] directed by journalist Carmine (“Mino”) Pecorelli, published an article entitled *La Grande Loggia Vaticana*, a list of 121 names of Vatican officials and high-ranking prelates claiming them as Freemason affiliates. The name of Pecorelli – murdered in Rome on March 20, 1979 – later appeared in the alphabetical list of 962 alleged members of the P2 Lodge of Freemasonry, seized on March 17, 1982, from the “Grand Master” Licio Gelli. The document’s source was therefore Masonic, or at least from a branch of Freemasonry.

Masonic infiltrations of the Church are a reality, as real as KGB infiltrations were in the years of the Second Vatican Council. Nonetheless, it is a typical strategy of secret movements to ridicule their adversaries by spreading disinformation or documents that are both true *and* false; documents interwoven in such a way as to muddy the waters. This is why we must treat these matters with caution and balance, without falling into a “conspiracy” mentality which is often a trap set by the secret movements themselves. It is clear from Father Murr’s account that such a mentality was completely foreign to Archbishop Gagnon, who approached his delicate mission with tact, integrity, and a commitment to the truth.

The issues raised here are truly grave, but the tone of Father Murr’s book is wise and at times even jovial. Although the picture of the Roman Curia that he paints is unsparing, his pages are impregnated with a strong supernatural love for the Church and an authentic “Roman spirit”. So, yes, we want our guides to be examples of virtue, we certainly want holy priests and bishops, but the Church, with over two thousand years of experience, can help us accept the tangled coil of virtue and vice that exists in the human heart. Man wants the best, but like

his Master, he must be satisfied with what is available. In this, he finds greater wisdom than anything our “cancel culture” has to offer.

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