

THE MURDER  
OF  
POPE JOHN  
PAUL I

BY VANCE FERRELL



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*The Murder of Pope John Paul I*

*by Vance Ferrell*

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In Florence, when Cardinal Benelli came out of his room at 9 a.m., he was surrounded by reporters. Tears flooding from his eyes, he said, "The Church has lost the right man for the right moment. We are very distressed. We are left frightened."

When Pope Paul VI died, little emotion had been expressed. But when John Paul I died, the entire city was up in arms. Men and women wept openly everywhere. When his body was shown, people passing it were heard to shout, "Who has done this to you? Who has murdered you?"

Within two days, the public and the press were loudly demanding an autopsy. But the Vatican was determined that no autopsy be performed, for that might have revealed something new about the cause of death.

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# PREFACE

After a careful reading of the lives and work of both popes, it would appear that the difference between John XXIII and John Paul I was that John made his October 28, 1958, announcement to convene Vatican II without telling anyone ahead of time; John Paul I made the mistake of confiding the night before in his closest adviser (Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican Secretary of State), regarding what he intended to begin doing the next day; and then he handed him a list of appointments, resignations, transfers, as well as plans to begin an investigation into the Vatican Bank and the practices of its president, Paul Marcinkus. That was the evening of September 28, 1978. Although suspecting such far-reaching plans, it was without prior warning that Villot had been told of them.

John Paul I retired for the night, and Villot sat in his office, with the papers before him, mulling over the conversation. He looked at the telephone on his desk. Early the next morning Albino Luciani, who had become Pope John Paul I, a man in almost perfect health, was found dead in bed, only 33 days after his election as pope. Very early that same morning he was embalmed, thus ensuring that an autopsy would not reveal the chemicals in his blood.

By special request, we have been asked to tell the complete story of Pope John Paul I. The history in former ages of the Roman Catholic Church fills many pages of the book, *Great Controversy*. In the present study, we will primarily focus on 10 years of its recent history (1968-1978).

Here is that story:

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## BIRTH AND YOUTH

Giovanni Luciani was a young widower with two daughters. After remarrying, on October 17, 1912, his second wife, Bortola, gave birth to a son, whom they named Albino. Poverty was a way of life for this family, and young Albino tasted it to the full. Much of the time his father was away elsewhere in France or on the Italian peninsula, working various jobs to support the family. The small, ill-heated shack was barely large enough for the family; and, at a young age, Albino was sent out in wooden clogs, with extra nails banged into the soles to help them last longer, to cut grass on the mountainsides. The grass would then be sold for a pittance, and the money used to buy a little more food.

As Albino entered his teen years, at the school he attended he spent as much time reading as he could. A quiet, modest demeanor marked his entire life, and many around him did not realize he had a brilliant mind. He had a near-photographic memory; and, throughout his youth and adulthood, he poured through as many books as he could find on a wide variety of issues,—but especially bearing on social and economic problems. Unbeknown to all, Albino was training himself for an important work later in life.

As a faithful Roman Catholic, young Albino, with the full encouragement of his mother and the local parish priest, decided to enter the priesthood. His father, a dedicated socialist, upon learning of it gave his consent

also.

In 1923, at the age of 11, young Albino went to a seminary at Feltre. There he first learned of the remarkable network of control that leaders in the church exercised over their own workers. Not content merely to send Jesuit agents into other denominations, Vatican headquarters was closely monitoring the lives of its own priests, workers, and officials. This Catholic KGB-like operation got its start with Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864, in which Pius IX (1846-1878) denounced modern ideas and began the publication of a frequently updated book, the *Syllabus*, listing publications which the faithful were forbidden to read. Vatican I, in 1870 when Pope Pius IX forced that council to declare himself infallible and condemn democracy and religious liberty, only added to the controversy. (His positions are still held by many; as evidence of it, certain admiring Catholic leaders today are trying to get Pius IX canonized as a "saint.")

Leo XIII (1878-1903) was followed by Pius X (1903-1914). With his blessing and financial support, an Italian prelate, Umberto Benigni, instituted an entire system of informers among Catholic workers. The Inquisition was not dead! Those found reading or discussing the wrong writings were eliminated from the church. Yet, as in earlier centuries, this latest Inquisition was also deftly used to destroy church rivals who were quite faithful to the cause.

For his part, Benigni did his task well. Thousands of Catholic workers were driven out of the church. His spy ring was not disbanded until 1921, at which time he went to Mussolini and offered his services. Recognizing this as a terrific opportunity, Benito Mussolini hired him on the spot.

Albino Luciani entered Feltre Seminary two years after Benigni's project had been closed down, but the effects of the mental suppression thereby imposed were

still evident throughout the church. But Luciani continued to read and think. Each summer, Albino would return home and help his family as they worked in the fields planting and bringing in the harvest.

“The candidate was Albino Luciani, the sixty-six-year-old patriarch of Venice, born the son of a socialist migrant worker on the Street of the Half Moon in the village of Forno di Canale; a priest at twenty-three, a bishop at forty-six, a cardinal at sixty; an outspoken opponent of Communism (although always on good terms with local Communist bosses), a humanist of some distinction, a conservative theologian, conversant with but not overly enthusiastic about ecumenists and their dreams.”—*Malachi Martin, The Keys of this Blood, p. 610.*

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## PRIEST AND BISHOP

Graduating from Feltre, Luciani went on to the still-larger seminary at Belluno. On July 7, 1935, he was ordained to the priesthood and sent to the small town of Forno di Canale, near his childhood home. Albino was delighted, and so were his parents. His father was now working not far away near Venice.

In 1937, he was appointed vice-rector of his old seminary in Belluno; and, in 1941, he decided to obtain a doctorate in theology, which he obtained at the *Gregoriana* (the Gregorian University in Rome), the Papal Gregorian University, the oldest Jesuit school in the world.

And then came World War II, and Luciani was busy learning German, finishing up his doctorate for the *Gregoriana*, as he heard confession from Hitler's troops and hid Italian partisans from their enemies. After defending his thesis in 1946, it was published in April 1950; and Albino became a doctor of theology, having received his degree "with highest honors" (*magna cum laude*).

In 1947, Luciani was appointed pro-vicar-general of the diocese of Belluno. Amid all his duties, he continued to read books, think, observe the problems in the church and the world, and ponder solutions.

Albino was an unusual cleric. He was a simple man with a happy, warm smile, who cared about people and their problems. Frankly, every evidence indicates that,

like many others before his time, he was a Christian who just had never discovered the deeper truths of Protestantism. According to the light he had, Albino was a genuinely good man.

In 1958, Pius XII died and Angelo Roncalli became Pope John XXIII. Like Luciani, Roncalli had been a spiritual leader of another Italian city; and he was well-acquainted with Luciani for a special reason: Their views were very much alike. When told that a bishop was needed for Viterrio Veneto and the name of Luciani was mentioned, John smiled and exclaimed, "I know him; I know him! He will do me fine!"

Albino was ordained bishop by Pope John in St. Peter's Basilica on December 27, 1958. He was 46 years old. The 400 priests, now under his authority, quickly found him to be an extraordinary man. Anyone could come and discuss problems; and, in order to solve them, he would frequently let the priests hold a meeting and make a majority decision which he would ratify, even though he sometimes did not agree with it.

He refused a splendidly furnished apartment in town, but chose to live in humbler quarters. Instead of the garments of a bishop, Luciani dressed in the clothes of a priest and spent part of his time going about town visiting hospitals, prisons, and finding poor people that needed help.

Less than three weeks after Luciani became a bishop, Pope John announced to the world that he was going to convene a worldwide council. It would be held in Rome and would be called *Vatican II*. As a bishop, it was Luciani's duty to attend every meeting. At Vatican II, Albino learned the remarkable new doctrine of "religious liberty." Prior to this time, canon law specified that religious liberty meant the right to believe Catholicism, and nothing else. But, at Vatican II, non-catholics were told they could believe some other things instead!

At the Council, which began on October 11, 1962,

2,381 bishops from around the world gathered as John opened the Second Vatican Council. During its three sessions (which finally ended on December 8, 1965), Luciani had the opportunity to personally meet and talk with bishops from various parts of the world. These contacts were later to prove invaluable. Kindred minds from Europe and other continents were discovered.

John XXIII literally gave his life for his beloved project. He refused to have an operation which might have prolonged his life. Instead, he said he must remain in attendance with the First Session of Vatican II, lest hard-line conservatives destroy it. He died after completion of that session; but his successor, Paul VI, determined to continue it on.

An incident occurred in August 1962, a few months before the start of the Second Session of Vatican II, which reveals the integrity of Albino. He learned that two priests in his diocese had become involved in a property transaction which involved a loss to the diocese of more than 2 million lire. Normally, church leaders handled such problems in a very simple manner; they refused to pay and innocent people suffered as a result. (That, apparently, was the Roman Catholic equivalent of filing bankruptcy: Just don't pay your bills.) But Luciani called all his priests together and told them that the diocese would sell ecclesiastical treasure and one of its buildings—and pay every lira that was owed. Throughout Italy, there were those in the church who ridiculed the naïveté of such honest scruples.

Albino Luciani carefully read through the liberalizing Vatican II documents, and immediately implemented them. In Luciani's thinking, he was personally free to think as he pleased; but, when the pope made a statement, Luciani would fully back it. He had been taught that the pope and the councils must unquestionably be obeyed when either speaks. We have a different view of the matter, but we must remember that Albino had a

different background. When not bound about by church edicts, Luciani was known to make very fair, good decisions. Because of his obedience to the pope, he continued to rise in the church.

After Vatican II ended, Paul VI had to face the birth-control crisis. A commission was appointed to study the matter. Of the 68 members of the commission from all over the world, only four favored the traditional Catholic view (Pius XII, 1951) of “no birth control other than the rhythm method.” It was well-known that the vast majority of Catholic priests, church members, and medical doctors opposed Pius’ view and instead favored birth control. The 68 favored this liberal view also. After they made their decision on April 23, 1966, they submitted their report, went home, and awaited the forthcoming announcement by the pope ratifying their decision favoring birth control. But a small clique in the Vatican determined to maintain the old position. Without going into the details, they arranged matters carefully and then put immense pressure on the pope to accede to their demands.

Paul VI finally caved in on July 25, 1968, when he published his decretal, *Humanae Vitae*. The Catholic world was astounded, and so was Luciani. He had personally sent a well-written paper on the subject to the pope; but, as soon as Paul VI’s decision was announced, Luciani backed it anyway. Paul liked that; and, when the patriarch of Venice died in September 1969, Luciani was offered the job. Surprisingly, he turned it down. He was quite content to minister to the needy in Vittorio Veneto. The pope wavered until December 15, 1969, and then told Luciani he had to take the job anyway.

Albino Luciani was now a leading Roman Catholic official. But, except for official meetings demanding the dress of a bishop, he continued to dress like the common priests. This was not some self-imposed humility, but his simple, economical way of doing things. In fact,

he would not even purchase a new robe very often, but would get others to sew on those he had.

Paul VI told his undersecretary of state, Giovanni Benelli, to make friends with Luciani and learn what he was like. Benelli did so, and a close friendship followed.

On February 8, 1970, Albino Luciani entered Venice as its new patriarch. But Venice hardly knew what to make of him. He refused the customary entrance grand procession, lived simply, and spent his time helping priests and people, and visiting the sick. The populace learned that—at any time—they could come unannounced to his office and find help. Soon he was besieged, and many folk were helped.

In 1971, Paul VI asked him to attend the World Synod of Bishops. While there, he suggested that all the wealthier local churches in the world should pay one percent of their income to help the poorer churches. Many bishops were shocked at the thought, and the idea came to nothing.

“Sindona continued to operate with the aid of the Vatican. Like when, for instance, the head of the IOR [the Vatican’s Institute for Religious Works], Bishop Marcinkus, suggested to him that he should buy the Vatican’s interest in La Centrale Finanziaria Generale and resell it to the Banco Ambrosiano of Milan, the focus of an impending scandal of the eighties.

“Or when Marcinkus convinced the pope to compel the Patriarch of Venice to sell his controlling interest in the Banca Cattolica del Veneto, a local Venitian bank, to Sindona who then resold it to the Banco Ambrosiano, where the Vatican had already substantial shares to partially control it.

“These, and similar operations, impressed not only the Head of Economic Affairs for the Vatican, but also the pope himself. The latter was so satisfied with Sindona, that in one of his rare moments of enthusiasm he called Sindona his ‘very own financial little fox.’ ”—*Avro Manhattan, The Vatican Billions*, pp. 218-219.

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## LUCIANI DISCOVERS VATICAN BANK

Matters became more ominous in mid-1972. There was a bank in Venice called “the priest’s bank.” Church workers could there obtain low-interest loans; and, because the priests had confidence in it, many of the people put their money in that bank also. Over the years it had helped the priests and was making a profit. Many workers as well as the public had shares in its stock that they could sell when they became older.

But suddenly Luciani was besieged by priests and people who had lost their investments—and often most of their life savings—through a bank swindle operation which involved selling their bank to an outside party, at immense loss on their part.

What had happened? Luciani began investigating and learned this: Since 1946, the *Vatican Bank* held a majority share (51 percent) in this bank in Venice (the *Banca Cattolica del Veneto*). This bank, which had been doing well financially, had only recently been secretly sold by Paul Marcinkus, president of the Vatican Bank, to Roberto Calvi, of the *Banco Ambrosiano*, in Milan.

(The official name of this financial structure is the *Istituto per Opere di Religione* [*The Institute for Religious Works*], or the IOR. But, in order to simplify this presentation, we will refer to it by its more common

name: the Vatican Bank.)

But this operation involved still more. Marcinkus not only secretly sold the bank without informing any of the Venetian shareholders, but the profit was almost entirely divided between his Vatican Bank and a couple other men (Calvi and Sindona; more on them later).

Luciani kept probing and learned far more. It was clear that, somehow, Marcinkus had gained an almost-hypnotic control over Paul VI. Whatever Marcinkus wanted to do he went ahead and did, unhindered by the pope or Vatican officials. What was happening down in Rome? Were high-level kickbacks being distributed throughout Vatican officialdom?

It was to his close friend, Cardinal Benelli, that Luciani went for his best information. Benelli was second only to Cardinal Villot in the Vatican Secretariat of State, and openly opposed to Marcinkus. (In 1977, Benelli was to be maneuvered out of the Vatican, by his enemies, and made cardinal of Florence.)

Paul Marcinkus, Roberto Calvi, and Michele Sindona seemed to be at the heart of the problem. Regarding that bank in Venice, the three of them had worked out an arrangement whereby Marcinkus quietly sold the bank to Calvi at a deliberately low price of 27 billion lire (US \$46.5 million), and later profits from its resale were split by Sindona, Calvi, and Marcinkus on behalf of the Vatican Bank.

Benelli also told Luciani of Pacchetti (a company which was purchased by Sindona, then rigged so its stock on the Milan exchange was criminally inflated and then sold to Calvi) who then dumped the stock, making immense profits which were shared with Sindona and Marcinkus. That and other illegal business transactions were successfully carried out only because Marcinkus had let them use his Vatican Bank facilities to mask the transactions. Italian banking officials could not easily check into Vatican Bank transactions, since a special

deal, worked out between Mussolini and the pope in 1929 (the Treaty of the Lateran), made the Vatican a separate nation.

Benelli counseled Luciani to have patience, since workers such as themselves did not have the authority to stop these criminal activities—and Pope Pius VI refused to do so. It was Benelli's hope that eventually Italian banking officials would catch and convict Marcinkus and his associates.

The fact that Albino did not start an insurrection in Venice over the matter pleased the pope; and, in March 1973, Paul VI made him a cardinal.

Two months later, in May, representatives of the FBI and U.S. Department of Justice went to Rome.

It all started back in New York City when a routine investigation uncovered something very unusual. A network of Mafia dons in the United States had produced a package of \$14.5 million in counterfeit American bonds. These had been sent to Rome in July 1971. The evidence was clear enough that this package went to the Vatican Bank. Someone in the Vatican had ordered millions in fake bonds to be sent to them!

Because this was an international operation, both the FBI and Justice Department became involved in what began as an investigation by New York City police.

Checking it out carefully, several more facts were uncovered: (1) The \$14.5 million shipment was only the down payment on what would eventually total \$950 million in counterfeit bonds! (2) The shipment was ordered by Bishop Paul Marcinkus, head of the Vatican Bank.

At that point in the investigation, Mario Foligni was arrested and he confessed and told the investigators even more. He revealed this: (1) Earlier in Rome, he had avoided arrest because of his Vatican connections. In one instance, the police opened his safe and found a signed blessing from Pope Paul VI, addressed to Foligni. Upon

reading it, the Italian police apologized and immediately departed. (2) Foligni was the go-between that got Leopold Ledl, an Austrian, in contact with Marcinkus. Working with the Mafia, Ledl arranged with Marcinkus for the \$950 million bond purchase. (3) The plan was for the Vatican Bank to work through intermediaries to sell the worthless bonds, with the profits being divided: \$485 million going to the Mafia, a “commission” of \$150 million going to the Vatican, and the profits from the bond also going to the Vatican. These sale profits would be extensive, since the bonds had a face value of nearly \$1 billion! (4) The American Mafia could not believe that the Vatican was willing to work with them on criminal financial operations, until Ledl showed them signed letters from the Vatican with *Sacra Congregazione Dei Religiosi* on the letterhead. It was when some of those documents got into New York City police hands that Washington, D.C. was called in on the case. (5) Leaders in the Mafia were thrilled. Because the Vatican was an independent nation inside another, it could pull off jobs that no one else could do! All paper trails would stop at the gates of the Vatican. No government, no police in the world had the power to penetrate those gates—without declaring war on the Vatican! (6) In order to be sure that the procedure would work all right, Marcinkus arranged for two trial bond sales to be carried out; the first, in July 1971, for \$1.5 million to the *Handelsbank* in Zurich and the second, in September, for \$2.5 million at the *Banco di Roma*. Both sales went well.

Everything was going exactly as planned! The supposed U.S. bonds had been successfully processed by European banks! Now it was time for the immense \$950 million swindle operation to be carried out.

But at this juncture a problem developed. Both the Zurich and Rome banks had sent samples of the bonds to the Banker’s Association in New York City for routine examination. The falsity of the bonds was quickly recog-

nized.

That brings us back to our story. On April 25, 1973, William Lynch, chief of the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section of the U.S. Department of Justice (and himself a dedicated Roman Catholic); William Aronwald, Assistant Strike Force Chief of the Southern District of New York; and two FBI agents (Biamonte and Tammaro) arrived in the Vatican and asked to speak with Cardinal Benelli in the offices of the Vatican Secretariat of State.

Benelli referred them to two of his aides, with whom they discussed the entire problem, showing them the letterhead and some of the bonds. The next day they spoke briefly with Marcinkus himself. But, beyond that, they accomplished nothing. The Vatican was an age-old stone wall and, because it was a totally separate foreign nation, there was no way they could penetrate beyond the conversation level.

Theirs had been a delicate assignment, and they approached it with care. They had hoped for some response, indicating the matter would immediately be dealt with. But they received only "we'll pass the news along," on the first day, and only unconcerned denials on the second.

They did, however, learn from Marcinkus himself, as he sat before them puffing on a large cigar, that he had sole and complete control of the Vatican Bank, directed all its activities, and was answerable only to the pope himself as to how he handled all financial matters. He gave them that information, only as an introduction to his defense that he "had enemies" in the Vatican who wanted to get him out, and they had probably set this thing up to get him in trouble. New York and Washington authorities had too many facts to buy that. By this time, Ledl had also been arrested and he had confirmed everything that Foligni said. In addition, there were those Vatican documents and related data.

Foligni had also told the investigators that Marcinkus

needed the fake bonds so he and Sindona could purchase *Bastogi*, a giant Italian chemical, mining, and property corporation, based in Milan where Sindona had his offices.

In addition, the American investigators learned that Marcinkus personally held massive amounts of money in private numbered accounts in the Bahamas, to which he made deposits when he went on frequent vacation trips. Since 1971 he had been on the board of directors of *Banco Ambrosiano Overseas* in Nassau (Bahamas), invited there by Sindona and Calvi. Because they could use Marcinkus' name and Vatican Bank cover, both men had made so much money on business deals that, in gratitude, they gave Marcinkus and the Vatican Bank 2.5 percent of the Nassau bank stock. This was later raised to 8 percent. Marcinkus was personally worth millions.

Back in Venice, Luciani continued to work with the people, trying to help them. On one occasion, a group of young priests banded together in order to cause trouble over a Vatican-edicted doctrine. Luciani solved it by discharging the two priests in the heart of it. The entire group immediately fell apart. This was one of Luciani's methods: Eliminate a troublesome group by getting rid of the key men in it. He was later to try to use that same method in the Vatican—but, unfortunately, he was to tell someone about 18 hours too soon.

In 1974, Michele Sindona's financial empire crashed; and with it several banks failed in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. Large numbers of people lost their life savings because of Sindona. The Italian press reported that the Vatican Bank itself lost over \$100 million. Having fled Europe, the Italian authorities sentenced him *in absentia* to prison; yet, at that time and thereafter, Sindona continued on as a key figure in Vatican Bank transactions.

From the best that we can tell, earlier in his life when he was Archbishop Montini in Milan, Paul VI had met

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Michele Sindona, who had done something for him—gifts of money or something similar—which, through threat of blackmail, had brought him under Sindona's control. When he became pope, Sindona came into the Vatican as financial adviser; and Marcinkus, Paul's personal aide, was placed in charge of the Vatican Bank. The rest is history.

Among knowledgeable Vatican observers, Paul Marcinkus was known as the "Gorilla," and Michele Sindona the "shark." Both got their start in the Vatican in 1968, the same year that Paul VI decreed *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical which turned most of the world church against him.

Back in Venice, Luciani was trying to raise money for a school for handicapped youth that he had supported for several years. All Venice was shocked when he announced that he was going to sell the treasures in the Venetian Cardinal's office and put the money into the handicapped school. This included diamonds, the bejeweled cross and gold chain of Pius XII which Pope John gave Luciani when he made him a bishop. He also intended to sell a chest cross and gold chain and ring belonging to Pope John, which Paul VI had given him.

With his thoughts on what was happening inside the Vatican, Luciani concluded that particular letter of announcement with this quotation from Sandhu Singh:

"One day I was sitting on the banks of a river. I took from the sand a round stone and I broke it. Inside, it was perfectly dry. That stone had been lying in the water for a very long time but the water had not penetrated it. Then I thought that the same thing happened to men in Europe. For centuries they have been surrounded by Christianity but Christianity has not penetrated, does not live within them."

Luciani knew what so many other people in the Catholic Church did not know; he was biding his time . . . waiting.

“Being a candidate in a papal election is perhaps the most unusual thing that can happen to a leader . . . The fundamental rule is to stay out of the spotlight. Everything has to be said in velvety, allusive language, molded by centuries of diplomacy. People feel each other out in an arcane *pas de deux* where they never mention the issues. Hyacinth Thiandoum, the cardinal of Dakar, has described the meeting he had in a Roman Convent with the Patriarch of Venice, Albino Luciani, just one day before the opening of the August conclave.

“ ‘My Patriarch,’ Thiandoum said when supper was over and the nuns were bringing in the coffee.

“ ‘I am the patriarch of Venice,’ Luciani replied.

“ ‘We’re waiting for you,’ the African cardinal insisted.

“ ‘That’s none of my business,’ the future pope concluded.”—*Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time, pp. 157-158.*

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## THE CONCLAVE

At 9:40 a.m. on Sunday, August 6, 1978, Pope Paul VI died.

Hard-lined traditionalists in the Vatican had, during Paul's reign, done everything they could to stonewall his efforts to carry out the liberalization decreed in the Vatican II documents. Upon his death, they were determined to get a hard-liner into office as the next pope. This minority in the Roman Curia, in one early meeting with only 32 cardinals present, managed to get a maximum time delay approved. It was agreed that the 111 cardinals from around the world would not go into conclave to elect the next pope until August 25, a delay of 21 days—one day short of the maximum possible. During that time, they hoped to win as many cardinals as possible over to their side. But they found this much harder to do than they had at first expected.

During that interval, the press around the world speculated on who would probably be the next pope. But the guesses did not include Albino Luciani. The demand in Italy was for an "Italian pope," but the cardinals outside of Europe were more interested in finding someone who was both kindly and more liberal,—and they did not expect to find him in Italy. Before leaving Venice for the conclave, Luciani had decided he would vote for Cardinal Lorscheider, Archbishop of Fortaleza, Brazil, whom he had spoken to at length several times in earlier years. Lorscheider was brilliant and deeply cared for the poor in

the church. Unknown to Luciani, Lorscheider was determined to gather votes to put Luciani into the papal throne.

During those 21 days, a number of cardinals used the most interesting devices to attract attention to themselves as the ones deserving the grand election. For his part, Luciani had a different concern. His old car had developed engine trouble; and he told the priest, who was his personal secretary, to be sure and get it fixed as quickly as possible. As soon as the conclave was over, he wanted to get back to Venice right away, for there was much to be done there.

On August 25, he wrote his niece, Pia, "Fortunately, I am out of danger." Thankful he would not have to be the next pope, the next day Luciani went to the Pauline Chapel in the Vatican. While there, the assembled 111 cardinals held a mass and then followed the Sistine Chapel choir as it sang a hymn to the Holy Spirit. Walking through the Sala Ducale, they entered the Sistine Chapel. All the choir members, media, and other non-cardinals were then asked to leave. The immense doors slowly swung shut and the conclave began.

There just happened to be a heat wave in town, which was not surprising; for it was mid-August in Rome. Unfortunately the room the 111 men were in was sealed, and they roasted. Having learned much during his pontificate about Vatican subterfuge and deception several years before, Pope Paul VI had decreed three rules about forthcoming conclaves: (1) The room the cardinals would be in must be totally sealed. (2) Men must be stationed outside guarding the grounds lest someone, somehow, hear what was going on inside or send messages in or out. (3) No cardinal over 80 could be in the conclave to vote for the next pope.

During preliminary meetings before the conclave began, an angry attack on the over-80 rule was led by several older conservatives—all of which were hard-

liners, but the cardinals voted to let stand Paul's rules. Another problem was how the balloting paper would be folded during the conclave. Over one hour of discussion and debate was given over to whether the piece of paper should be folded once or twice. They finally voted that it need be folded only once.

One hundred and eleven men, most of whom were either politicking for this man or that man, or trying to decide whose bandwagon to get on. It was more than amusing; it was vicious as well. Exalting the name of one man while verbally cutting down his possible rivals. On and on it went.

As for Luciani from Venice, when mentioned at all, the conservatives said he didn't amount to anything. Just a cardinal who had never traveled anywhere, knew no foreign languages, and didn't know very much. In reality Albino Luciani was fluent in German, French, Portuguese, and English. He had many friends among cardinals around the world, and had traveled overseas. He was a close friend of Phillip Potter, secretary of the World Council of Churches, and also with Hans Kung, the notorious Catholic liberal theologian who spent his time telling the Vatican what was wrong with the Church. (Fortunately for him, few knew about his Kung friendship.)

The conclave had begun. It was Saturday morning, August 26, 1978, and time for the first ballot.

It is of interest that Wojtyla of Poland (later to become Pope John Paul II) received a few votes on the first ballot. But what was astounding—especially to Luciani—was that he himself had received the second highest number of votes—and on the first ballot! (Siri 25, Luciani 23, Pignedoli 18, Lorscheider 12, Baggio 9, etc.).

Benelli, Suenens, Marty, and others had quietly networked cardinals from all over the world to vote for Luciani. And yet, up to the counting of the first ballot, Luciani knew nothing of it. Even Wojtyla, of Cracow, was

in the Luciani voting caucus.

The second ballot was Siri 35, Luciani 30, Pignedoli 15, Lorscheider 12, with the rest mixed here and there.

The voting cards from the first two ballots were then burned. The smoke went up the chimney; but, since it had not been cleaned for years, the smoke went back down into the sealed room—and the choking men had to throw open the doors and rush out into the temporary canteen while outside doors were opened to clear the air inside the Sistine Chapel. Paul VI would have been unhappy; his rule was being violated.

It was now time for lunch, and Luciani only picked at his food. He was worried. But he was also thinking. During the two-hour lunch break, the cardinals were busy holding caucuses, buttonholing fellow cardinals and winning them over. The foreigners wanted an overseas pope, but knew they could not get one; it was not likely they would vote in Lorscheider. All the possibilities were considered, and it was clear that Luciani was the best solution.

In contrast, the rightists saw they could not get Siri elected, so they decided that Luciani would be best because they could probably control him after he became pope. He seemed like such a simple, modest soul. But there were those who objected. They said that Luciani was more like Pope John than anyone else! Those men were right.

Luciani himself went to his room and prayed. His thoughts now were what he should do if he were elected. All he had ever wanted was to be a parish priest, and he was on the verge of becoming the most powerful man in the Roman Catholic Church.

It works that way sometimes. The electors fear the men who want the job and search for the man more concerned for upholding principles than holding on to any job.

At 4 p.m., the cardinals went back to the Sistine

Chapel. The smoke was gone, and the beautiful paintings by Michelangelo did not look too smudged. It was time for the third ballot:

Luciani 68, Siri 15, Pignedoli 10. The remaining 18 votes were scattered. That was it. Albino Luciani was within 7 votes of the papacy.

Tension arose as the fourth ballot was taken:

Luciani 99, Siri 11, Lorscheider 1 (Luciani's vote). It was 6:05 p.m. Immense applause filled the room. A chapel door opened and Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican Secretary of State, entered. Walking over to Luciani, he spoke in a tone to be heard throughout the room: "Do you accept your canonical election as supreme pontiff?"

"He chose his own papal name, John Paul, in honor of John XXIII, who made him bishop, and Paul VI, who made him cardinal . . . The "Smiling Pope," as he was called, offended nobody but was nobody's man, apparently. The perfect compromise [between contending papal factions]."—*Malachi Martin, The Keys of this Blood, p. 610.*

"The almost instant election of Pope John Paul I on August 26 seemed a genuine miracle, though it had backstage assistance from the powerful curial Cardinals Sebastiano Baggio and Pericle Felici. In barely four ballots a compromise had been worked out between the most reform-minded cardinals, who wanted a 'pastoral' pope unfettered by the curial power structure, and more tradition-inclined cardinals, who demanded absolute guarantees of orthodoxy. Albino Luciani, the patriarch of Venice, had been the ideal man for such a trade-off."—*Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time, p. 155.*

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## A NEW POPE

Luciani did accept. When asked what his new name would be, he smiled and said, "John Paul the First."

From this point onward, everything that the new pope did seemed to be different. Never before in papal history had a pope chosen two names, and never had one called himself "the first." He apparently wished to combine the best traits of both Pope John XXIII and Paul VI, and perhaps those of the Biblical John and Paul as well.

Now the burning of the ballots must take place and a chemical was added which would turn the smoke white, indicating to the waiting crowd in the square of St. Peter's Church nearby that a new pope had been chosen. By now the chimney had been cleaned, but the chemical did not work right. White smoke came out, which quickly turned dark, and then a dull gray. Everyone outside was puzzled. At 7:18 p.m., the new pope appeared on the balcony. The loudspeakers sounded everywhere: "I bring you news of great joy! We have a Pope!"

Most of the people did not recognize him, but they saw that kindly smile and were deeply impressed by it.

It was Saturday, August 26, 1978.

The next morning, August 27, marked the first day of his reign. The new pope gathered the cardinals together for a thanksgiving mass. Villot, the Secretary of State, and one of the old guard at the Vatican had thoughtfully brought a prepared speech for the new puppet pope to intone. But, as he would do throughout his papacy,

Luciani waved it aside and gave his own. With no notes, he said that he would stand by the teachings of Vatican II, that he wanted to share power with the bishops, revise the two codes of canon law, and pursue union with other denominations. —All that in one speech, and only the first day of his pontificate! A shudder went through the old guard.

At noon the new pope went out on the balcony of the basilica, as he had done the day before. Below him were 200,000 people in St. Peter's square. He spoke to them as a smiling, warm friend.

That evening he had supper with Cardinal Jean Villot and asked him to continue, at least for a while, as secretary of state. He had also decided to keep all the old Vatican officials in office for a time. That decision regarding Villot and his Vatican henchmen was to become the biggest mistake of Albino Luciani's life.

That same evening, he instructed Villot to immediately begin an investigation into the *Vatican Bank* and the entire financial operations of the Vatican. That was to be another mistake; frankly, an even bigger one! Luciani should have waited until the old guard were out and new men—his men—were in power in the Vatican.

Thus ended his first day.

On the fifth day of his reign (August 31), Italy's leading economic journal, *Il Mondo*, published an open letter to the new pope, which discussed the scandals about the Vatican Bank, so well-known in Rome, and asked whether he was going to do anything about it.

One can hardly grasp the immensity of the problem that Luciani faced. He was willing to take on—frankly, single-handedly to begin with—the corruption within the Vatican. That corruption was massive, many-headed, and thoroughly entrenched.

But most dangerous of all was the financial corruption. To simplify matters, we will here only overview the financial wheeling and dealing. Only the briefest of out-

lines can be given. To say much more would require a small book of detailed analyses. Entire books have been written on this subject, and we would refer you to them for more information. Avro Manhattan's books are excellent, also David Yallop's landmark, *In God's Name*. (Bantam Books, 1984).

In order to properly evaluate the great danger in which Luciani was placing his life by his determination to investigate fully and clean up Vatican finances, we should be aware of at least a bare minimum of facts. In the next chapter, we will consider these.

“It seems likely that, apart from the transfer of funds to aid Solidarity and other Vatican ventures such as those in El Salvador and Nicaragua, also emerging [in the Italian Government financial investigations] will be the Vatican Bank's close dealings with the Mafia, centering around the colorful former drugs racketeer, Michele Sindona, close friend of Pope Paul VI, and with the *P2 Masonic Lodge Grand Master Lucio Gelli*. The P2 Lodge connection is deeply embarrassing to the Roman Church. The influential P2, regarded by mainstream Freemasonry as something of a renegade, was expelled from Italian Masonry three years before the scandal broke. How was it then that the Vatican was so deeply involved with it?”—*Michael de Semlyen, All Roads Lead to Rome? p. 72.*

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## THE VATICAN FINANCIERS

When Mussolini and the pope signed the Lateran Treaty in 1929, giving 108.7 acres of land to the papacy as a separate nation (Vatican City), Mussolini also gave the pope 750 million lire and millions in Italian State bonds. At that time worth \$81 million, it would today be worth closer to \$500 million.

Mussolini did all this to ensure full cooperation by the Vatican with his fascist programs. Four years later, in 1933, the Vatican concluded a second major treaty, this one with Hitler. As a result, money flowed to the Vatican through the German "church tax" (*Kirchensteuer*, which the German government continues to pay today). That second treaty assured quiet Catholic support to Hitler's Nazi Party activities. Both rulers solemnly assured Pope Pius XI that, by the extension of their borders, they would bring all Europe under Catholic control. It is of interest that no pope ever excommunicated either of the Church's two sons, Hitler and Mussolini. (Even Hitler's invasion of Catholic Poland was never condemned.)

The Vatican put this inflow of money into a wide variety of investments, which produced large profits. Part of the profit came from the fact that the Church cared not what the investments might be: stocks in munition

factories or birth-control devices; Protestant, Muslim, or atheist business firms. All that mattered was profit. Millions in gold bars were purchased from the U.S. at \$35 an ounce and then re-sold overseas for enormous profits.

But, to avoid paying taxes on those profits, it was invested by the Vatican through new, tax-exempt “ecclesiastical corporations.” In 1942, the Mussolini’s Italian government confirmed that such a tax-exempt status would apply to Vatican stock dividends. The Vatican had become the biggest tax shelter in Italy! Properties and corporations all over the world invested in it.

But, after Mussolini’s time, the Italian government gradually tried to begin taxing Vatican profits. Disputes about this continued on for years with, at one point (June 1964), the Vatican threatening to dump all its stock shares all at once onto the Italian market—which would bankrupt the nation! This separate government was using the investment and banking system of all Italy to rake in huge profits which were carried into the Vatican State. Yet it wanted to pay the Italian government nothing in taxes. This finally brought the Vatican to something of a crisis in 1969, when it was clear that the Vatican had lost the battle to avoid paying Italian taxes for what it was doing in Italy.

It was seen that money and holdings needed to be moved out of Italy, even though such a massive exodus of funds might ruin the country. The Vatican cared not for the welfare of the citizens of its parent nation; it was the money it was after.

There is an organization which, the Bible says, seeks to change the laws of God. History reveals that it cares not for the laws of men either.

Someone was needed in the Vatican to oversee these and other problems, and Paul Marcinkus was selected as the man to lead out in doing it. A Chicago boy, Marcinkus was to become the most powerful American

in the Vatican. Six-foot-three, with great physical strength, the young priest had been sent to Rome by Cardinal Stritch, since Marcinkus was fluent in three languages: English, Spanish, and Italian. Stritch thought he could be of help to the Vatican. The short, thin little Pope Paul VI was impressed with him, and Marcinkus became his personal translator and bodyguard.

“The involvement of leading members of the Roman Curia in secret societies, including P2 and the other Masonic Lodges, was revealed to Pope John Paul I, by the Italian newsagency *L-Osservatore Politico*, shortly before his untimely and mysterious death in September 1978.”—*Michael de Semlyen, All Roads Lead to Rome? p. 73.*

“According to the *Sunday Observer*, it [the Banco Ambrosiano fraud trial] will throw light on how a staggering 800 million lire vanished leading to the worst bank crash in post-war Europe: ‘How deeply was the Holy See and its Polish Pope [John Paul II] involved, and why State investigators now believe that nearly 100 million lire was smuggled into Warsaw to help the Solidarity struggle and this is certain to be raised at the trial.’ ”—*Michael de Semlyen, All Roads Lead to Rome? p. 72.*

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## INVESTMENTS BY THE HOLY DAY

Casting about for someone to manage their gigantic bank, the cigar-chewing Marcinkus was placed in charge of the Vatican Bank by Paul VI In 1967, even though he protestingly admitted, "I know absolutely nothing about banking!" Fortunately, the pope gave him friends to teach him.

Throughout his life, Giovanni Montini was the type to rely heavily on his friends to solve his problems. If you remember that sentence, you can understand Paul VI. Before becoming Pope Paul VI, Montini had been archbishop of Milan. While in Milan he made a number of new friends; and, when he was elected pope, he took a sizeable group of them to Rome, there to become financial advisers and workers in the Vatican Bank and leaders in the Curia. (The quietly expressed nickname they were to acquire among knowledgeable Romans was "the Milan Mafia." As we shall soon learn, the term had a lot of substance to it.)

One was a priest, *Pasquale Macchi*. Macchi thereafter worked in the Vatican Banks and, although his name does not surface very often, he was one of the men supervising the large number of illegal business transactions that later occurred.

Another man was *Michele Sindona*. Born in Sicily, Sindona had three special qualities: (1) An excellent

ability to work with, and shuffle around, numbers and money. (2) Close friends in the Mafia (the real Mafia! Sindona was Sicilian as they were; this made for close working relationships). (3) A remarkable capacity for inventing new types of financial crime.

In 1959, Sindona gave Montini some money to help on a church project. (The money is now known to have come from a Mafia fund.) From that time onward, Montini leaned on him as a key financial assistant. When Montini became Pope Paul VI, he continued to look to Sindona as the man who could suggest solutions to those in charge of the Vatican Bank.

A third man was *Roberto Calvi*. He had been introduced to Marcinkus by Sindona in 1971. These two men became the primary tutors of the man who had admitted his ignorance of banking procedures.

Three others were *Massimo Spada*, administrative secretary to the Vatican Bank; *Luigi Mennini*, secretary-inspector of the Vatican Bank; and *Carlo Bordani*.

These were the *uomini di fiducia* (men of trust) selected by Paul VI, to advise and manage the affairs of the Vatican Bank.

One other man who would soon after enter the picture was *Licio Gelli*. Introduced through Cardinal Bertoli, Gelli became good friends with Marcinkus and had a number of audiences with Paul VI. Gelli was a master of blackmail; and, through a secret society which he organized, called *P2*, he gained control over 2,500 top business, political, and church leaders in Italy alone and thousands more throughout Europe and South America. He used his contacts to aid him in a number of unsavory objectives.

As soon as Marcinkus was placed in charge of the Vatican Bank, the pope, conferring with the now Cardinal Sergio Guerri, decided to unload from the Italian portfolio a major asset: the Vatican's share in the giant *Societa General Immobiliare*, which was the largest concrete and

construction firm in Italy. But that was only to be a start; much more activity was needed.

They sent for Sindona; it was felt that only he could solve their financial puzzles and give wise counsel as to how best the Vatican Bank should invest its monies. So Michele Sindona, already head of a Mafia-infested network of criminal business operations in Italy and Switzerland, kindly offered to solve their problems.

Here is a quick, quick glance at some of what followed. To say too much would be to write a book, to say too little would be confusing to understand. The problem in the following presentation will be to say just enough to give you an indication of all that was far deeper: a criminal financial operation that spread its tentacles worldwide! And all of it was possible only because Marcinkus and his associates would permit the Vatican Bank to be used as a cover. Any financial deal worked through the Vatican Bank instantly became safe, since Vatican State was an independent nation and no investigators anywhere could penetrate financial crime in another nation without that nation's governmental permission.

Yes, it is true that investigators might be sent to prowl around through another country in the hope of ferreting out facts,—but how do you do it when the nation is only 108.7 acres in size, guarded by gates and walls on all sides, and the smallest independent state in the world!

Using his connections with the Vatican Bank to impress businessmen and financiers, Sindona borrowed money and bought banks. Why banks? *It is an intriguing fact that the easiest way to rob a bank is to buy it.* That is the great truth that the crooks in America in the 1980s learned in the 1960s and 1970s from the Vatican.

Then, after buying it, use the bank for a variety of criminal activities. Associates of the Vatican Bank did this so flagrantly—and successfully—in nearly a dozen nations from the late 1960s onward, that Americans finally caught on to the same techniques. The S&L (Sav-

ings and Loans) and bank scandals of the 1980s followed. The Vatican techniques had been learned well.

Working through Spada and Marcinkus at the Vatican Bank, Sindona was soon sitting on the boards of 21 banks and companies. His initial co-sponsors and co-owners included the Gambino and Inzerillo families in the Mafia. The CIA file on Sindona was later to reveal that, through his Gambino connections, Sindona was involved with four other Mafia families: Colombo, Bonanno, Lucchese, and Genovese. But, without Vatican Bank cover for his operations he could not have had the success he had. The Vatican Bank needed him because of his genius with numbers; the Mafia needed him because of Paul VI's dependent relationship to him.

In February 1965, Sindona started an international brokerage house, *Moneyrex*. The records were rewritten so that most of the profits were not reported for tax purposes. In Sindona's banks, massive theft occurred. The staff transferred money from the depositors, without their knowledge, into the Vatican Bank. None of this could have been done without Vatican awareness of what was taking place. More than mere knowledge, we have here active cooperation! The Vatican Bank took out 15 percent commission on the money passing through, and then transferred the money back to Sindona's account at his *Finabank* in Geneva.

Gigantic stock market speculations were carried on; the profits went to Sindona through Vatican Bank and the losses to the depositors of *Liberfinco*, another Sindona Swiss bank.

In those instances in which the sickening process seemed too much for Sindona's assistants, blackmail was applied and they would be threatened with exposure and arrest if they tried to get out. The few who did not henceforth give their hearty cooperation were rubbed out.

Sindona was a genius at solving problems. His solu-

tions involved complex financial manipulations which are difficult to grasp, yet were generally successful, always criminal, and usually involved Vatican Bank cover at some point in the transactions.

Vatican Bank became a wonderful wringer washer. Documents, purchases, sales, invoices, contracts, and deeds could be sent into Vatican State, and then come back out freshly laundered. Washed, ironed, and folded, they were ready for Sindona and Mafia use again.

Sindona operated a network for the illegal flight of currency from his Italian banks, through the Vatican Bank to Swiss banks they jointly owned.

From 1968 onward, the Vatican Bank's partners, Sindona and Calvi, so controlled the *Milan Stock Exchange* that they regularly drove the stock prices up and down at will, so they could collect through the buying and selling of shares.

It was through Sindona, Calvi, Spada, and Marcinkus working together that the *Banca Cattolica del Veneto* (the "priest's bank" in Venice, mentioned earlier) was sold to Calvi for \$46.5 million. At the same time, the Milan stock market was conveniently moved around so the sale price of that bank would be unrealistic. So much profit was made on that particular deal that Sindona paid Calvi and Marcinkus an illegal kickback of \$6.5 million, which they shared 50-50. Yet, through Sindona's magic ways with numbers, it all looked like a sales loss so the Venetian stockholders would be on the losing end.

Another Sindona/Vatican Bank criminal technique was double invoicing. Goods exported out of Italy would be invoiced at costs far below what they really were. A copy of this bogus invoice would be given to the Bank of Italy, which would pass it on to Italian Department of Revenue, which would then charge Sindona/Vatican Bank a very low export tax. Profits from this were large, although not as immense as the bank raids and stock and bond swindles.

Imported items were given false invoices showing much higher costs than the actual figure. Payment of the inflated amount would be made to the foreign company which sent the excess amount to a bank in Switzerland, owned by Sindona/Vatican Bank. In this way, extra money could be gotten out of Italy.

On all these illegal transactions, large kickback “commissions” were regularly paid to the Vatican Bank. Why? Because the transactions were illegal! If they had been legal, Sindona would not have needed to carry them out through the Vatican Bank. Ironically, if the man had been honest he could have become a millionaire honestly! But instead, he enjoyed the excitement of crime.

May the same be said for the men leading out in the Vatican Bank?

Another Sindona/Vatican Bank technique was bribery carried on by Sindona. He called bribes “investments,” and leading political officials throughout Italy were bribed to look the other way. Sindona boasted that he “financed” the ruling Italian party, the *Christian Democrats*. At the same time, money was given to keep on the good side of the *Italian Communist Party*, in case it might someday win a national election!

We earlier mentioned the \$1 billion counterfeit securities deal, worked out by Marcinkus and Sindona, which the U.S. government investigated and ended in April 1973; so we will again discuss them here.

Illegal dealings on the New York and American Stock Exchanges were carried on, as well as operations in several of the major European exchanges. Sindona’s team would carry it out, with kickbacks to the Vatican Bank, through whom it was covered.

In the U.S., Sindona bought the *Franklin National Bank*, the 20th largest bank in the nation. He immediately applied his numbers wizardry to its deposits. Franklin National was to become the first U.S. bank since the 1930s depression to collapse (which it did on

October 8, 1974). It was the biggest bank failure in U.S. history up to that time. Before it went down, over \$2 billion in federal funds from the National Reserve was dumped into it, in a last-ditch effort to save it.

From October 1974 to January 1975, four Sindona-controlled or linked banks in Switzerland or Germany failed.

Calvi, introduced to Marcinkus by Sindona in 1971, joined the select group of Vatican Bank *uomini di fiducia* (men of trust). Also using the Vatican Bank as a cover, Calvi formed a shell company in Luxembourg, called *Compendium*, and then conned over 250 banks worldwide into lending money to it. Over \$450 million was to flow through it.

Soon Calvi owned two important banks used to launder money obtained illegally: a bank in Lugano, Switzerland (*Banca del Gottardo*), and *Banco Ambrosiano Overseas*, in Nassau, Bahamas. From the beginning, Paul Marcinkus sat on its board of directors. Marcinkus regularly flew there for vacations and deposited large amounts of money into private-numbered accounts in that bank. This Nassau bank became very important and became the final resting place for billions of dollars, illegally acquired for the personal savings of certain men.

Throughout all this time, Calvi's *Banco Ambrosiano* in Milan, Italy, and the Vatican Bank had interlocking directorates. Many of the biggest operations were jointly conducted, to provide Vatican cover for criminal activities.

Using the Vatican Bank to cover for him, Calvi would buy stock shares, resell them to themselves at different prices, and sell them again on the open market. Immense profits were realized which could not be traced beyond the outer walls of Vatican City. Italian bank inspectors could not penetrate those walls.

In 1975 it appeared that Calvi's bank, in Milan, might soon go under. But creditor-confidence was quickly

restored by the fact that a certain finance house (*Teclefin*) showed such confidence in Calvi's *Banco Ambrosiano* (*Bank of St. Ambrose*), that for four years (1975-1978) it repeatedly bought shares in that bank—\$50 million worth, or 15 percent of the bank. Surely, if one upstanding finance house should have that much confidence in it, then everyone else ought to be able to also. *Teclefin* apparently knew something they didn't.

In reality, *Teclefin* was owned by two Liechtenstein companies, which were owned by the Vatican Bank. What was really happening was that Calvi was making a show of confidence by giving money to himself! This Vatican Bank-assisted deceit helped restore creditor confidence for a time, but ultimately the investors lost all they had when the bank collapsed. If they had only known it, those Catholic investors had the Vatican Bank to thank for their miseries.

But, by 1978, Calvi was having a difficult time trying to save that Milan bank while satisfying the Vatican Bank, his Mafia associates, and Gelli's P2 accounts.

In January 1975, authorities in the *U.S. Department of Justice* wanted to extradite Sindona to America to stand trial for fraudulent activities. A routine inquiry for additional information was sent to Milan, which provided a 200-page report on Sindona. It was sent on to the *Ministry of Justice*, in Rome, which refused to send it to the United States. Although having one of the largest translation departments in Italy, they said they did not have time or enough staff to translate it into English! Gelli's P2 blackmail connections were paying off.

Sindona and Calvi were supporting them all, Vatican Bank was providing cover, the Mafia gave the seed money, and Gelli blackmailed the officials.

But not all the officials were dishonest. In April 1978, officers from the *Bank of Italy* began an investigation into Calvi's fraudulent *Banco Ambrosiano* activities. This caused its bank shares to drop in value. A solution was

needed quickly, or Vatican Bank involvement in Calvi's dishonest practices would be exposed. Sindona, in New York, was also deeply involved. Only Marcinkus could save them now. He conveniently gave them a letter to place in the bank's files, dated several years earlier, which indicated that a South American company was responsible.

Relieved, Calvi went to South America on a vacation. Later, on January 29, 1979, Emilio Alessandrini, a Milan magistrate was murdered soon after he opened a new investigation into Calvi's *Banco Ambrosiano*.

Earlier, in 1974, a Lugano bank (*Banca del Gottardo*) with majority shares owned by the Vatican Bank, showed indications of mismanagement and misuse of investor funds. Bank officials conveniently blamed the Deputy Manager, Mario Tronconi. Shortly afterward he was found "suicided."

In order to protect the Vatican Bank, more murders would follow in later years.

"The Milan verdict has brought blunt accusations of complicity in Calvi's murder leveled at Marcinkus by Calvi's widow, who claims that her husband had told her shortly before his death: 'The priests want me dead.' Marcinkus resigned as head of the Vatican Bank, but remained under the pope's [John Paul II's] protection and enjoyed Vatican immunity. Attempts by the Italian authorities to put him on trial with the others accused of fraud were brushed aside by the Vatican; the Pope simply refused to hand him over."—*Michael de Semlyen, All Roads Lead to Rome? p. 72.*

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## THE THIRTY-THREE DAYS BEGIN

It was now Sunday, August 27, 1978, the first day of his papacy, Albino Luciani set to work. He instructed Cardinal Villot, Vatican Secretary of State, to begin an immediate investigation of every financial operation of the Vatican. Nothing was to be excluded.

In addition, he was hinting at major reforms on a number of other issues—both doctrines and practices—in the Roman Catholic Church.

There was no doubt that he was the only person in the world able to do it. The problem was that there was only one thing his enemies could do to stop him.

When Pope John Paul I decided to reform the Vatican finances, it should be understood that it had two banks, not one. We have discussed the Vatican Bank. The other one was *APSA (the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See)* and its president, Cardinal Villot.

Funds flowed into this second bank from “Peter’s Pence” (money from around the world to ostensibly help the impoverished pope and the Vatican staff) and other donations from the faithful.

This second bank had two departments: the *Ordinary* and *Extraordinary Sections*. The *Ordinary Section* managed the real estate of the papacy and its donation income. Did you know that the Roman Catholic Church

is the biggest real estate owner in the world?

The *Extraordinary Section* poured money into stock market speculations, and regularly made and lost millions. Specializing in the currency market, it worked closely with *Credit Suisse* and the *Societe de Banque Suisse*. Irregularities found during the forthcoming mandated investigation of this second bank would be directly chargeable to Cardinal Villot.

The *Vatican Bank* itself (officially called the *Istituto per le Opere di Religione* [the *Institute for Religious Works*] or *IOR*) had over 11,000 separate accounts. But for what purposes was that money used? Not much of it went for “religious works.” Here are the facts: Only about one out of eleven of those accounts actually were used for the church. The rest formed one gigantic slush fund for a variety of individuals! Out of 11,000 accounts, 1,047 belonged to religious orders and institutes, 312 to parishes, and 290 to dioceses. All the rest—totaling 9,351—belonged to Catholic officials, privileged people such as political figures and men who, for one reason or the other, were considered important. This included Sindona, Calvi, Gelli, and similar personalities. Members of the inner Mafia may well have been represented in those accounts. One also wonders whether the incoming money was equally divided among all the accounts.

We have seen where the corrupt money came from, and now we have discovered where it was going to.

But now, the 33 days had begun! We must get on with our story:

On August 28, 1978 (Day Two), this new pope announced to the world that he would not be coronated! He refused to have the papal crown placed on his head! In fact, the papal chair used to bring a new pope to the place of coronation would not be used either! This strange new pope refused to become the king of the Catholics! No ostrich feathers; no six-hour ceremony; what did it all mean? Vatican City was in turmoil. Four

long hours officials of the Curia pled with him to change his mind, but he was too strong-minded—too principled—to change.

Too many poor people were outside the gates suffering, for Albino Luciani to have a gold crown put on his head. Instead, he simply walked up to the place where he was officially made Pope John Paul I.

He who will walk on his own two feet, refuse the applause, and stand for principle because it is right will the more likely continue to stand for it thereafter. But such noble characteristics will make him hated by those too fearful of men to live the same way.

When men permit others to applaud them, they are becoming captive to their applauders; for they are accustoming themselves to give those people that which will continue to receive more of that adulation. When men climb onto the *sedia gestatoria*, or *palanquin*, and permit others to carry them about on their shoulders, they become indebted to do that which will keep them borne about by men.

On that occasion, in a statement made to diplomats from all over the world who had been delegated to represent their nations at the Vatican, the new pope spoke as if his church was a humble organization and would not be interfering in the affairs of nations, but would be respectfully subservient to other governments!

“We have no temporal goods to exchange, no economic interests to discuss. Our possibilities for intervention are specific and limited and of a special character. They do not interfere with purely temporal, technical, and political affairs, which are matters for your governments.

“In this way, our diplomatic missions to your highest civil authorities, far from being a survival of the past, are a witness to our deep-seated respect for lawful temporal power, and to our lively interest in the humane causes that the temporal power is intended to advance.”

(1) He had told the diplomatic corps that the Vatican renounced all claims to temporal power.

(2) The Roman Curia had about 3,000 people working in it. It wielded great power, but the new pope stated that the power of the papacy should be shared by the pope with the bishops throughout the world, and that the Curia should only carry out their combined decisions.

For both decisions he was hated by the hard-liners.

Earlier in his career, Albino Luciani had written statements which did not agree with official Roman teaching. The Curia quietly sent men to the *Gregorian University* where he earlier studied and to *Venice, Vittorio Veneto*, and *Bulluno* where he worked; and they removed all notes and papers he had produced which were out-of-line with official teachings. They probably hoped to control his future statements in the Vatican, and they wanted to eliminate anything contrary to that written elsewhere.

Each Wednesday, the new pope gave a speech, which was recorded. In addition, he spoke with various groups on special occasions. Luciani's speeches during his reign followed this pattern: The Vatican would carefully write each one, then hand him a copy the day before it was to be given. He would ignore the copy and give a spontaneous speech, generally without notes. The copy written by the Vatican would then be published in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano (The Roman Observer)*, as the speech which he had delivered. The *L'Osservatore Romano* was guilty of publishing "lying reports." The objective was to carefully censor everything Luciani said and did, so the world would only receive the staid, formal Vatican position. His speeches received similar treatment over *Vatican Radio*.

They wanted him to be a prisoner of the Vatican Curia, the condition that Pope Paul VI had rapidly degenerated into. But, although modest in his bearing and simple in his habits, Luciani had a keen intellect, an

unusual grasp of church and world affairs, and a powerful will.

He also brought no entourage with him into the Vatican, as Paul VI did when he came from Milan, accompanied by Mafia agents and other hangers-on. Luciani came alone, and the task he faced was not an easy one. In his work he would have to withstand nearly the whole Curia until he could get the old guard moved out and fresh, new helpers moved in. But would the Curia be willing to patiently wait till they were kicked out?

Who can have the wisdom to have solved Luciani's problems? They were legion. Yet the present writer will dare to suggest one solution: Luciani should have discussed his plans with no one until he had placed his own picked confidants in power. Not until then should he have started his reform-minded comments and investigations.

In clear-cut statements made to friends, Albino Luciani stated his conviction that he must emulate the "first hundred days" of the reign of John XXIII. Sweeping reforms must be instituted, and they must all begin rapidly within little more than three months' time. John's announcement to call Vatican II into session was made only 89 days after his election.

A major problem faced by the entrenched was the variety of doctrinal changes that the new pope clearly intended to make. One was birth control. Paul VI had decided against it in his *Humanae Vitae*. To Roman Catholics this has been a topic of crucial importance. Luciani clearly stated his intention to reverse Paul VI's position on the subject.

On Tuesday, September 19 (Luciani's 24th day), he detailed his reasons why this change must be made, in a 45-minute conversation with Villot.

He had already accepted an invitation to meet in the Vatican on October 24 with a delegation from the U.S. government on population control. That appointment

frightened the Curia deeply. Why did the U.S. government want to confer with the new pope? The Roman Catholic Church controlled the minds of over 18 percent of the world population; and, under the old plan of the Church, that 18 percent needed to keep expanding, since it was nearly the sole means by which the church seemed able to enlarge itself. But what would be the position of the new pope on this important matter?

Soon a gambling lottery got started within the offices of Vatican workers. Someone was sure to make money on this one. The wager turned on this question: "On what day would Marcinkus be formally removed from office?" Money was being placed, and events were being watched closely.

But the more ominous question was not being wagered: When will it be my turn next? This was a real problem, for so many were implicated in activities the new pope wanted to change.

Cardinal Giovanni Benelli had consistently been on Luciani's side, and he knew much that had been going on. Personal calls from the pope's office phone to Benelli and a select few others by the new pope yielded much information. The present writer cannot help wondering whether his line was bugged. It would not have been difficult to do, and there were men in the Vatican who would not have hesitated to do such a thing.

It is known that members of the secret organization, P2, kept Licio Gelli in Buenos Aires informed of developments in the Vatican. Through him Roberto Calvi, also traveling overseas "for his health," learned of Luciani's rock-hard determination to clean up the papacy.

On Tuesday, September 12 (the 17th day), Albino Luciani found some sheets of paper laid in his apartment for his inspection. A disgruntled former P2 member, Mino Pecorelli, had begun a limited-circulation newsletter with highly sensitive information, which time generally revealed to be very accurate. On these latest papers,

was to be found a list of 121 members of Masonic Lodges. Most of those on that list were cardinals, bishops, and members of the Curia! To a Protestant, such information would matter little; but, to a conservative Catholic, it would indicate men who placed their own objectives before Catholic creedal ones. Alerted, Luciani set to work to verify the list, and 14 days later his checking was completed.

For example, the Masonic name and data on Cardinal Villot was *Jeanni, lodge number 041/3, enrolled in a Zurich lodge on August 6, 1966*. Similar data was available for Marcinkus and a surprisingly wide range of other leading Catholic officials throughout Italy, Europe, and elsewhere.

On their junket through the large cities of South America, Calvi and Gelli discussed each new item of information fed them by associates in the Curia. Calvi had already stolen over \$400 million. Gelli and Sindona were deeply involved also. In New York City, Sindona was receiving reports also. He had been in a four-year battle to fight extradition to Italy, and was paying lawyers millions to keep fighting the extradition papers filed against him. All three men would be in serious trouble if Luciani's plans were carried out.

When the foreign minister, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, came to the new pope with seven questions concerning the Church's relationship with various Eastern European countries, Luciani immediately told him what to do on five of them, and said he needed a little time to think about the rest. Gasaroli went away astounded. When asked, "Were they the correct solutions?" the prelate replied, "In my view, totally. It would have taken me a year to get those responses from Paul."

At this point, it is well to note a key point here: Over 800 million people, nearly one-fifth of the world's population looked to one man's mind to make their most important decisions for them. Not a committee of

10,000, or even 10, but one man. To do such a thing would be to treat him as though he were a god. This is the worship of man. Yet it makes the entire organization and its people very weak. We have here an organization in which the oddities, foibles, imaginings, and errors of one man rule one-fifth of the world!

A long-standing controversy had raged over *Cardinal John Cody*, who for years had mismanaged one of the wealthiest archdioceses in the world: Chicago, with its 2.4 million Catholics. He mistreated the workers—so much so that the priests had formed a “labor union” (the *Association of Chicago Priests*) to oppose him! He fraudulently misused, misapplied, and diverted funds,—which was easy to do since he permitted no one else to have the say over how an annual revenue of \$300 million was to be spent. On each yearly trip to Rome, he would lavishly bribe various officials in the Curia—and the pope himself,—in order to maintain his position in Chicago. Lastly, he had given millions to a woman, Helen Wilson, whom he was frequently seen with. Her son, David Wilson, was made the sole insurance agent for the Chicago archdiocese’s more than 1 billion in assets.

Paul VI dared not oppose him. Why not? The reason probably was blackmail. Cody knew all about the Vatican Bank and hundreds of other potential scandals hidden in the church. Cody openly boasted that no one dared to oust him, including the pope.

But now Luciani was being told of the “Cody problem,” and he asked that further information be given him. In Chicago, Cody at last was becoming worried.

In the midst of his pressing duties, Luciani decided he must continue on with his habit of visiting the needy, the hospitals, and the prisons. Not only was he the Pope, he was also the official “bishop of Rome.” Rome had a Catholic population of 2.5 million, yet it was so secular that it only produced six new candidates for the priesthood yearly. Only about 3 percent of the Catholics in

town went to church. Luciani wanted to help strengthen the faith of his people.

But the Curia said Absolutely no! Their position was that it was impossible; it could not be done. It had never been done before, and he could not now break the long-standing precedent! The pope never helped the poor or visited the sick or those in prison!

This controversy continued on for days. There was probably more here than meets the eye. They probably were afraid what people “out there” might tell the pope. They would also be ashamed to have him out there doing the kind of things they ought to be doing.

One day, a third of the way through September, Pia, Luciani’s sister ate lunch with him—and listened wide-eyed with amazement as, over the phone, an official loudly denounced the idea and said the pope could not visit in Rome outside Vatican City. Soft-toned and relaxed, the pope smiled and responded that it pleased him to do it anyway. He had the iron will, and he knew he had the authority to press it through.

On Saturday, September 23 (the 28th day), Luciani left the Vatican for the first time. It was an official visit to a Roman cathedral to be installed as the bishop of Rome. Giulio Argon, the communist mayor of Rome, shook hands with him and the two gave speeches. A mass was then conducted; and, with a majority of the Curia present, he mentioned in his speech a number of the problems he intended to deal with. None of his words were quoted in the official Catholic media.

Partway through the speech, he turned; and, looking directly at the men managing the Vatican Bank, he said:

“[The priest] should, with compassion, be close to each one who is subject to him: forgetful of his rank he should consider himself on a level with the good subjects, but he should not fear to exercise the rights of his authority against the wicked.”

Few in the vast audience understood the deeper

meaning of these words. All those in the Curia did.

Throughout Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Europe, incriminating records against Marcinkus, Calvi, Gelli, and Sindona were being stifled, mislaid, or removed. Officials were being bribed, and some were being murdered. Perhaps those four men and their associates would survive the investigations. But they surely would not survive one, instituted by the pope, into Vatican Bank!

“Vatican scandals involving large-scale fraud and corruption and complicity in a cover-up have simply been shrugged off. Archbishop Marcinkus, who was at the center of it all, was protected by the Pope [John Paul II] for more than seven years and the Italian state authorities somehow rendered helpless . . . Roman Catholic Oxford Professor of Logic, Michael Dummett, accused the Pope of complicity in a cover-up to protect Marcinkus. *The Sunday Telegraph* 15th March, 1987, reporting from the Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*, said that Prof. Dummett spoke of ‘the Vatican Bank entangled with complicated practices from which the most pungent stink of corruption arises. These practices involved other banks, the Mafia and the seamiest type of Freemasonry, culminating in what was possibly the bizarre suicide, but more probably the grotesque murder of an Italian banker in London.’ ”—*Michael de Semlyen, All Roads Lead to Rome? p. 71.*

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## THE LAST DAY

Thursday, September 28, 1978, dawned. It was the 33rd day.

After a light breakfast, Luciani was at his desk before 8 a.m. All his life he had been a very light eater, and it is of interest that he was one of the few in the Vatican who took no wine with his meals. This helped give him a clearer mind than others around him.

As usual, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., he met with visitors; “audiences” these were called. But this morning, they were concluded with a talk with Cardinal Baggio. As well as being an identified Mason, Baggio was known to be a problem in other ways as well. The time-honored Church way of solving any problem was to move the man to a post somewhere else (never to fire him, even if adultery and the vilest lust might be involved). Luciani offered to make him the patriarch of Venice; but, at this, Baggio flatly refused and shouted his refusal in Luciani’s face! (Baggio had been a leader at the recent election in trying to sell the cardinals on giving him—Baggio—the papal throne.)

After his usual 12:30-1:30 lunch and 1:30-2:00 rest, Luciani made two telephone calls to friends at 3:30 p.m. (Felici, in Padua, and Benelli in Florence). He discussed the Baggio affair, and everything he planned to tell Villot that afternoon.

Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican Secretary of State, had been the closest associate of Pope Paul VI. He deeply

admired Paul for his conservative ways, his non-interference with the Vatican financial circus, although he had wished that Paul could make a few decisions once in a while! Now he was confronted with a pope who was liberal—more like John XXIII,—and who made decisions so frequently and so fast it was somewhat astounding. At the rate things were going, the Vatican might soon be changed from an old-cronies' country club into a reform-minded international church headquarters. A man like Luciani could be the ruination of the leadership.

But the biggest shock of all for poor Villot was to come this afternoon of the 27th. After completing those two telephone calls, Luciani called in Villot. They sat down to chamomile tea, and then Luciani brought out some papers.

Albino Luciani told Villot what he was planning to do over the next several days, and much of it was to be done the very next morning!

Luciani still had in mind a large number of changes he wanted to be started within his first hundred days in office, just as John XXIII his beloved role model had done before him. Already a third of that hundred days had passed. Luciani was settled in office, he was now well-acquainted with the situation on many fronts. It was time to get the wheels of change turning in Vatican City.

Luciani began with the Vatican Bank, the so-called "Institute for Religious Works." Luciani wanted the IOR—the Vatican Bank—to do what its name said it was doing: Spend its money on religious works.

By his 33rd day in office, Luciani had a large amount of detailed information on the Vatican Bank. A portion of it had come from Villot. Luciani told Villot that Marcinkus must be moved out of the Vatican Bank the very next day. More than that, he must be shipped to America and made an auxiliary bishop in Chicago, as soon as the problem with Cardinal Cody, head of the Chicago archdiocese, had been settled. Giovanni Abbo

was to take his place.

As for Cody, the next day steps must be taken to eliminate him. The papal nuncio in Washington, D.C. should be consulted for a worthwhile successor to replace Cody. On this one item, Villot expressed approval; on every other item he was silent. Luciani then spoke about Baggio, the man who had shouted refusals in his face a few hours before. Luciani told Villot that Baggio was to be sent to Florence whether he liked it or not. But, even as he said it, his tone was his normal patient, cheerful one. Luciani's careful diet, self-control, wide-ranging knowledge, and careful but rapid thinking consistently kept him one step ahead in his work. Two men whom Luciani had come to highly trust were next mentioned. Cardinal Pericle Felici was to become vicar of Rome, replacing Cardinal Ugo Poletti, who would become archbishop of Florence. The man now in that post, Cardinal Benelli, was to return to Rome to become secretary of state, taking Villot's job.

Villot was now 72 years old, seriously ill, and a two-pack-a-day smoker. In August, before the election, he had made it clear he wanted to retire soon. But now it was coming sooner than he thought: within a few days. And his replacement was Benelli, a man whose views he did not like.

When the pope was finished, he waited for some sign of agreement, but there was only silence. When urged for a comment, Villot said that many in the Vatican would feel betrayed by what Luciani was about to do.

It was now 7:30 p.m. and the end of nearly 2 hours of conversation. Villot left the room. From there he returned to his own office, sat down, and reviewed the list of changes to be implemented the next day. Then Villot pulled another list out of the drawer and compared the two. All the Masons were to be removed from power in the Vatican, including himself, and non-Masons were to take their place. The Vatican was to become Catholic

again.

Pecorelli, the man who had published that list was not to gain much for his efforts. Within a couple months he would be shot to death as he sat in his car. The *Italian solution* was to be applied repeatedly.

Glancing down, Villot saw a note on his desk. It was from a staff member confirming that the U.S. group wishing to speak with the pope about population problems would definitely meet with the pope on October 24. They were hoping that the new pope would give his approval to the birth-control pill. Villot knew that when Luciani's reversal of Paul's *Humanae Vitae* decree on birth control was released, it would be a disaster to Catholic conservatism.

Finally Villot left his desk, departing hurriedly, and carelessly leaving all those significant papers scattered across the top of his desk for others to read—something he would not normally do.

After the 7:30 p.m. conclusion of his conversation with Villot, Luciani tried unsuccessfully to reach someone by phone (Columbo), spoke for a time with the two friends who were his assistants (Diego Lorenzi and John Magee), and then ate supper with them at 7:50 p.m. After the meal, Luciani returned to his study to look over his notes for the earlier Villot meeting. At 8:45 p.m. he was able to reach Cardinal Colombo in Milan by phone, and he discussed relevant points with him. Colombo—like everyone else who had spoken with Luciani during the preceding month—attested that Luciani was in excellent health. Luciani's assistant (Lorenzi) noted that the Columbo call ended at 9:15. Luciani then glanced over the speech he was to make to the Jesuits three days later on the 30th.

Walking out the door, he said good night to his two assistants, "*Buona notte. A domani. Se Dio vuole.*" ("Good night. Until tomorrow. If God wishes.")

Two hours after the meeting with Villot ended, at a

little past 9:30 p.m., Albino Luciani entered his bedroom and closed the door. He had spoken his last words.

The *Italian solution* was to be applied.

“Cardinal Wojtyla [the future John Paul II] was in the adjoining room, seated at a long, narrow table, discussing the day’s agenda with his closest aides.

“He had just finished celebrating mass in his chapel and was taking his short morning break. He regularly ate breakfast not in the palace’s historic apartments on the second floor, but on the ground floor next to the kitchen.

“Mucha tried to persuade one of the nuns working in the kitchen to bring the news to the cardinal.

“ ‘You have to go tell him the pope has died in Rome!’

“ ‘But he died a month ago.’ The nun’s expression was dazed.

“ ‘No, the new one.’

“ ‘I can’t tell him that. If you want to, tell him yourself.’

“Irritated, Mucha poked his head into the food delivery passageway and asked the cardinal’s secretary, Stanislaw Dziwisz, ‘Have you heard that John Paul I is dead?’

“Wojtyla had just spooned the sugar into his tea-cup. He froze and turned pale, his right hand still raised. In the silence the only sound to be heard was the spoon dropping onto the table.

“ ‘No,’ Wojtyla murmured.”—*Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time, p. 153.*

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HOW  
DID IT HAPPEN?

One acquainted with European history cannot help but recall a similar earlier incident. Pope Adrian VI (1522-1523) came to the papacy from Holland only five years after Martin Luther nailed his theses to the door of the Wittenberg church. Adrian recognized that the solution to the “*Protestant problem*” was not warfare against the rebels, but a thorough reformation of the church—a reformation which must begin at the Vatican. But his principled honesty, careful economy, and efforts to change headquarters led to his undoing. Historians believe his brief reign was ended by poisoning.

(An earlier pope regularly practiced the same *solution* on his friends. He would invite one to dinner and arrange for the glass of wine set at the friend’s place to be poisoned. One day, hot from the chase, this hunter-pope strode early into the banquet room sweaty and in his hunting clothes. Slumping into a chair, he called for wine to quench his thirst. A servant, unacquainted with Vatican Palace procedures, took one of the wine glasses set around the table and handed it to him. He was dead within half an hour.)

At 4:30 a.m. on Friday morning, September 29, Vincenza, the nun who had prepared Luciani’s meals for many years, brought him his morning coffee. As usual, she knocked and called out, “Good morning.” But there

was no reply this time. She left and returned at 4:45. The coffee was untouched. She entered the room and found that he was dead. He was sitting up and his teeth were clenched. He had suddenly died in agony. No marks were on him at all; something inside his body had produced death, yet his heart had always been known to be in good condition. The notes of the meeting with Villot were clenched in his hand and his bedside light was on. (It was later to be reported by Villot that a copy of the book, *The Imitation of Christ*, had been found in his hand.)

(Interviews with the embalmers later revealed their estimate that Luciani had died about 5 a.m. Apparently, he awakened just before 4:30 a.m., and switched on the bed-table light [which night-watchmen Swiss guards on the lane below said had been off all night], reached for the notes,—and then his strong heart gave out. It had withstood the poison all night! When Vincenza knocked at 4:30, she saw the light coming from under the door. Entering at 4:45 a.m., she nearly fainted when she saw him, then checked his pulse. Just then his old alarm clock, always set for 4:45, went off and she reached over and pushed it off. So Luciani died just before—or as—she first knocked on the door.)

A number of details could be mentioned here, but we would do well to focus on but seven of them:

(1) It was well-known to Villot and certain others, that, each night before he retired, Luciani reached for a small bottle from a table by his old battered alarm clock, and took a small amount. It was *Effortil*, a liquid medicine to alleviate low-blood pressure.

(2) A fatal dose would be taken if a small amount of digitalis, or a similar substance, had been added to the bottle. Digitalis would bring death within two to six hours.

(3) Extra bottles of that medicine would either be on hand or could easily be procured. A bottle could be

prepared for the fatal night a week or two ahead of time, and then substituted for the one in his bedroom when the crisis of his papacy warranted such an extreme measure. Luciani's conversation with Villot the night before clearly showed that the crisis had arrived. Whatever was going to be done—had to be done before the next day dawned. Delay of even one more day would be too late.

(4) The Vatican has 10,000 rooms and halls and 997 stairways, 30 of which are secret. One of these little-known and unused stairways was close to the pope's bedroom. At its entrance and throughout its length, it was unguarded, as well as the hallway outside the pope's bedroom. The pope's bedroom was never locked. (Interestingly enough, prior to Pope John XXIII Swiss guards patrolled that hallway day and night. But John had banned them.)

(5) Villot's meeting with the pope ended at 7:30 p.m. and the pope went to bed, exactly on schedule as usual and not before then, at 9:30 p.m. That provided someone with two hours to enter that room.

(6) It would appear that, either Villot switched bottles himself or, because of what he told others on the phone that evening, another person in the Vatican carried out the assignment.

(7) Not only what happened that night—but what occurred the next morning—was extremely important. That bottle had to be removed! It is known that, when Villot entered the bedroom at 5 a.m., he slipped that bottle into his pocket. That is an extremely incriminating fact. If he did not give Luciani the poisoned bottle the night before, *he knew enough to remove it the next morning! If he had not known the plot, he could not have known to take the bottle.* He also removed from the room Luciani's copy of the very incriminating notes from the meeting with Villot the night before.

(8) Villot instructed Vincenza, and those she had

already told, to be absolutely quiet about the matter. Then, with extremely remarkable presence of mind, Villot made some phone calls. One of the very first was to Ernesto and Arnaldo Signoracci, the papal embalmers. They were told to come immediately to embalm someone. Such early embalming after death was not done, and the two Signoracci brothers had never embalmed anyone that early in the morning before. But, this time, quick embalming was urgent before the authorities or medical doctors arrived! It had to be done even before a hospital resuscitation team could work on the pope in an attempt to restore him to life! There could only be one reason for this strange, apparently well-thought-out timetable: to eliminate the evidence of the poison in Luciani's bloodstream. (Embalming removes the blood, and replaces it with embalming fluid to help preserve the tissues.) The Vatican Institute of Medicine was told to get the embalmers over immediately. The Signoracci brothers arrived in a Vatican car at 5 a.m. The medical doctor (Renato Buzzonetti) arrived at 6 a.m. and examined him, and said it was "sudden death that could be related to acute myocardial infarction [a heart attack]."

(9) Cardinal Villot had been in charge of the Vatican during the interim between the death of Paul VI and the election of John Paul I. Now, again in charge of the Vatican, he did not let the public know of the death of the pope until 7:27 a.m., two hours after it had been discovered. By that time, all that needed to be done had been completed.

(10) The embalmers were delayed for a short time from doing it, because of angry disputes by certain Vatican staff who recognized why it was being demanded so quickly. Indeed, Italian law required that no embalming could be done for 24 hours, except with a magistrate's permission. What were Villot and his associates trying to hide? It was well-known by medical and criminal experts that embalming greatly lessened the

likelihood of identifying death by poisoning.

(11) When the embalming was finally done, the strange order was given that the fluid had to be put into the body while the blood remained! The problem here was that if the blood were drained out first (as is normally done), some of that blood might be saved by someone and later examined. Therefore Villot ordered that the fluid be put into the veins and arteries with the blood still there. This made the task much more difficult for the two brothers.

(12) To ensure that nothing incriminating could be found anywhere in the papal apartments, everything belonging to Luciani was boxed and removed. It was as if he had never existed. By 6 p.m. on that same day, the 19-room apartment was sealed by Villot, not to be opened until the next election was completed.

“The Roman Church now presents a fair front to the world, covering with apologies her record of horrible cruelties. She has clothed herself in Christlike garments; but she is unchanged. Every principle of the papacy that existed in past ages exists today. The doctrines devised in the darkest ages are still held. Let none deceive themselves. The papacy that Protestants are now so ready to honor is the same that ruled the world in the days of the Reformation, when men of God stood up, at the peril of their lives, to expose her iniquity.”—*Great Controversy*, 571.

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## THE AFTERMATH

In Florence, when Cardinal Benelli came out of his room at 9 a.m., he was surrounded by reporters. Tears flooding from his eyes, he said, "The Church has lost the right man for the right moment. We are very distressed. We are left frightened."

When Pope Paul VI died, little emotion had been expressed. But when John Paul I died, the entire city was up in arms. Men and women wept openly everywhere. When his body was shown, people passing it were heard to shout, "Who has done this to you? Who has murdered you?"

Within two days, the public and the press were loudly demanding an autopsy. But the Vatican was determined that no autopsy be performed, for that might have revealed something new about the cause of death.

It was also decided that a quick burial must occur; and, at the earliest possible date, another papal election must be held. It was obviously hoped that a quick burial and the immediate convening of the cardinals for the election process would give the media something else to think about: Who would be the next pope?

Before concluding, it is worth noting that an earlier specialist who had worked with him, later commented that Luciani had low-blood pressure of 120/80. Low-blood pressure was confirmed by 23 doctors as being

“the best possible condition for increased life expectancy.”

Diego Lorenzi, Luciani's youthful personal attendant, later said that Luciani had an excellent heart; and, that together, they would climb mountains at a rapid pace for exercise. He also said that Luciani had numerous ECGs which showed that he had a strong heart.

A surprising number of irregularities in the Vatican story of Luciani's earlier history, health, personality, mental and physical capabilities, beliefs, and death could be related. They were very willing to publish lying reports about the man they had laid in the grave.

The best man to take the place of Luciani was his close friend, Giovanni Benelli. But he fell nine votes short, and Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Poland became the next pope (Pope John Paul II). Wojtyla appears to be a nice man, and he also smiles. But, whereas Luciani was determined to cleanse the Vatican temple, Wojtyla has been very willing to let all the evil remain. (He probably fears for his life, after what obviously happened to his predecessor.) Not a single reform of the Vatican was made. Marcinkus remained in power; all the Vatican Bank cover-ups and illegal activities continued on. To this day, the Vatican remains a sinkhole of corruption.

As for the Milan investigation, that was conveniently stopped. The *Italian solution* was applied again. On the morning of January 29, 1979, another incorruptible man died: Judge Emilio Alessandrini. As he stopped at a red light on his way to work, five men approached the car and began firing bullets into it. The investigation of Calvi's bank stopped.

But then, in February 1979, the Bank of Italy started a new investigation; and, this time, it appeared likely that Calvi would be apprehended. To avoid letting him tell anything, he was “suicided” in London in 1982. In Rome, a few hours earlier, his personal secretary, Graziella, was “suicided” by being thrown out her fourth-

floor office window of Calvi's headquarter's bank, Banco Ambrosiano.

Several more deaths also occurred (Mino Pecorelli, Georgio Ambrosoli, Boris Giuliano, and Roberto Rosone).

And whatever happened to Sindona, Gelli, and Marcinkus?

Michele Sindona is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence in the U.S. on American bank fraud charges, in which Vatican Bank involvement was not referred to.

Licio Gelli was wanted by the Italian authorities and was lured into a trap on September 13, 1982. Arrested by Swiss police when he arrived from Argentina, he was confined in the maximum security prison, *Champ Dollon*. On August 10, 1983, with the help of P2, he "escaped," and made his way back to Argentina where he has since remained.

Paul Marcinkus continued on as head of the Vatican Bank, at least until the late 1980s. He may still be there, if not now retired. No one would dare transfer him out of his position as president of Vatican Bank; and, for his part, never since the mid-1970s has he dared leave Vatican City. To do so would mean immediate arrest by the Italian police.

So that is the story of Pope John Paul I. You might wonder why we told it. The book, *Great Controversy*, contains the previous history of the church for over a thousand years. It is well that you be made aware of some recent history. It might enable you to better understand coming events. At least it will make chapter 35 much more believable. Just now, open the book to page 563 and read it again.

## - APPENDIX - CHRONOLOGY OF THE POPES

It is difficult for a non-Catholic to comprehend how fully the Roman Catholic Church is centered around the pope. It is for this reason that it has been said that the Catholic Church is the “worship of man.”

“The Pope is the Roman Pontiff who, by divine law, has supreme jurisdiction over the universal Church. He is the superior of all religious. The pope may act alone or with a council in defining doctrine for the universal Church or in making laws. He is addressed as His Holiness the Pope. By title and right he is: Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman province, and Sovereign of the State of Vatican City.”—*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, page 479.

The *Annuario Pontificio* is the official Vatican list of all the popes. It includes both the popes and, what the Vatican considers to be, the “anti-popes.” In the following list, the antipopes are italicized. It is of interest that some of them were canonized by the church! (See “217 *St. Hippolytus*,” below). The year of his ascendancy (when he took office) is given before each pope’s official name.

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE POPES

65

St. Peter	355 <i>Felix II</i>
67 St. Linus	366 St. Damasus I
76 St. Anacletus or Cletus	366 Ursinus
88 St. Clement I	384 St. Siricius
97 St. Evaristus	399 St. Anastasius I
105 St. Alexander I	401 St. Innocent I
115 St. Sixtus I	417 St. Zosimus
125 St. Telesphorus	418 St. Boniface I
136 St. Hyginus	418 <i>Eulalius</i>
140 St. Pius I	422 St. Celestine I
155 St. Anicetus	432 St. Sixtus III
166 St. Soter	440 St. Leo I
175 St. Eleutherius	461 St. Hilary
189 St. Victor I	468 St. Simplicius
199 St. Zephyrinus	483 St. Felix III (II)
217 St. Callistus I	492 St. Gelasius I
217 St. <i>Hippolytus</i>	496 Anastasius II
222 St. Urban I	498 St. Symmachus
230 St. Pontian	498 <i>Lawrence (501-505)</i>
235 St. Anterus	514 St. Hormisdas
236 St. Fabian	523 St. John I, Martyr
251 St. Cornelius	526 St. Felix IV (III)
251 <i>Novatian</i>	530 Boniface II
253 St. Lucius I	530 <i>Dioscorus</i>
254 St. Stephen I	533 John II
257 St. Sixtus II	535 St. Agapitus I
259 St. Dionysius	536 St. Silverius, Martyr
269 St. Felix I	537 Vigilius
275 St. Eutychian	556 Pelagius I
283 St. Caius	581 John III
296 St. Marcellinus	575 Benedict I
308 St. Marcellus I	579 Pelagius II
309 St. Eusebius	590 St. Gregory I
311 St. Melchiades	604 Sabinian
314 St. Sylvester I	607 Boniface III
336 St. Marcus	608 St. Boniface IV
337 St. Julius I	815 St. Deusdedit
352 Liberius	or Adeodatus

- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 819 Boniface V           | 844 Sergius II          |
| 625 Honorius I           | 847 St. Leo IV          |
| 640 Severinus            | 855 Benedict III        |
| 640 John IV              | <i>855 Anastasius</i>   |
| 642 Theodore I           | 858 St. Nicholas I      |
| 649 St. Martin I, Martyr | 867 Adrian II           |
| 654 St. Eugene I         | 872 John VIII           |
| 657 St. Vitalian         | 882 Marinus I           |
| 672 Adeodatus II         | 884 St. Adrian III      |
| 676 Donus                | 885 Stephen V (VI)      |
| 678 St. Agatho           | 891 Formosus            |
| 682 St. Leo II           | 896 Boniface VI         |
| 684 St. Benedict II      | 896 Stephen VI (VII)    |
| 685 John V               | 897 Romanus             |
| 686 Conon                | 897 Theodore II         |
| <i>687 Theodore</i>      | 898 John IX             |
| <i>687 Paschal</i>       | 900 Benedict IV         |
| 687 St. Sergius I        | 903 Leo V               |
| 701 John VI              | <i>903 Christopher</i>  |
| 705 John VII             | 904 Sergius III         |
| 708 Sisinnius            | 911 Anastasius III      |
| 708 Constantine          | 913 Landus              |
| 715 St. Gregory II       | 914 John X              |
| 731 St. Gregory III      | 928 Leo VI              |
| 741 St. Zachary          | 928 Stephen VII (VIII)  |
| 752 Stephen II (III)     | 931 John XI             |
| 757 St. Paul I           | 936 Leo VII             |
| <i>767 Constantine</i>   | 939 Stephen VIII (IX)   |
| <i>768 Philip</i>        | 942 Marinus II          |
| 768 Stephen III (IV)     | 946 Agapitus II         |
| 772 Adrian I             | 955 John XII            |
| 795 St. Leo III          | 963 Leo VIII            |
| 816 Stephen IV (V)       | 964 Benedict V          |
| 817 St. Paschal I        | 965 John XIII           |
| 824 Eugene II            | 973 Benedict VI         |
| 827 Valentine            | <i>974 Boniface VII</i> |
| 827 Gregory IV           | 974 Benedict VII        |
| <i>844 John</i>          | 983 John XIV            |

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE POPES

67

965 John XV	1130 Anacletus II
996 Gregory V	1138 Victor IV
997 John XVI	1143 Celestine II
999 Sylvester II	1144 Lucius II
1003 John XVII	1145 Bl. Eugene III
1004 John XVIII	1153 Anastasius IV
1009 Sergius IV	1154 Adrian IV
1012 Benedict VIII	1159 Alexander III
1012 Gregory	1159 Victor IV
1024 John XIX	1164 Paschal III
1032 Benedict IX	1168 Callistus III
1045 Sylvester III	1179 Innocent III
1045 Benedict IX	1181 Lucius III
1045 Gregory VI	1185 Urban III
1046 Clement II	1187 Gregory VIII
1047 Benedict IX	1187 Clement III
1048 Damasus II	1191 Celestine III
1049 St. Leo IX	1198 Innocent III
1055 Victor II	1216 Hononus III
1057 Stephen IX (X)	1227 Gregory IX
1058 Benedict X	1241 Celestine IV
1059 Nicholas II	1243 Innocent IV
1061 Alexander II	1254 Alexander IV
1061 Honorius II	1261 Urban IV
1073 St. Gregory VII	1265 Clement IV
1080 Clement III	1271 Bl. Gregory X
1086 Bl. Victor III	1276 Bl. Innocent V
1088 Bl. Urban II	1276 Adrian V
1099 Paschal II	1276 John XXI
1100 Theodoric	1277 Nicholas III
1102 Albert	1281 Martin IV
1105 Sylvester IV	1285 Honorius IV
1118 Gelasius II	1288 Nicholas IV
1118 Gregory VIII	1294 St. Celestine V
1119 Callistus II	1294 Boniface VIII
1124 Honorius II	1303 Bl. Benedict XI
1124 Celestine II	1305 Clement V
1130 Innocent II	1316 John XXII

1328 <i>Nicholas V</i>	1590 Urban VII
1334 Benedict XII	1590 Gregory XIV
1342 Clement VI	1591 Innocent IX
1352 Innocent VI	1592 Clement VIII
1362 Bl. Urban V	1605 Leo XI
1370 Gregory XI	1605 Paul V
1378 Urban VI	1621 Gregory XV
1378 <i>Clement VII</i>	1623 Urban VIII
1369 Boniface IX	1644 Innocent X
1394 <i>Benedict XIII</i>	1655 Alexander VII
1404 Innocent VII	1687 Clement IX
1406 Gregory XII	1670 Clement X
1409 <i>Alexander V</i>	1676 Bl. Innocent XI
1410 <i>John XXIII</i>	1689 Alexander VIII
1417 Martin V	1691 Innocent XII
1431 Eugene IV	1700 Clement XI
1439 <i>Felix V</i>	1721 Innocent XIII
1447 Nicholas V	1724 Benedict XIII
1455 Callistus III	1730 Clement XII
1458 Pius II	1740 Benedict XIV
1464 Paul II	1758 Clement XIII
1471 Sixtus IV	1769 Clement XIV
1484 Innocent VIII	1775 Pius VI
1492 Alexander VI	1800 Pius VII
1503 Pius III	1823 Leo XII
1503 Julius II	1829 Pius VIII
1513 Leo X	1831 Gregory XVI
1522 Adrian VI	1846 Pius IX
1523 Clement VII	1878 Leo XIII
1534 Paul III	1903 St. Pius X
1550 Julius III	1914 Benedict XV
1555 Marcellus II	1922 Pius XI
1555 Paul IV	1939 Pius XII
1559 Pius IV	1958 John XXIII
1566 St. Pius V	1983 Paul VI
1572 Gregory XIII	1978 John Paul I
1585 Sixtus V	1978 John Paul II

## THE MURDER OF POPE JOHN PAUL I

Casting about for someone to manage their gigantic bank, the cigar-chewing Marcinkus was placed in charge of the Vatican Bank by Paul VI In 1967, even though he protestingly admitted, "I know absolutely nothing about banking!" Fortunately, the pope gave him friends to teach him.

Another man was Michele Sindona. Born in Sicily, Sindona had three special qualities: (1) A powerful ability to work with, and shuffle around, numbers and money. (2) Close friends in the Mafia (the real Mafia! Sindona was Sicilian as they were; this made for close working relationships). (3) A remarkable capacity for inventing new types of financial crime.

Using his connections with the Vatican Bank to impress businessmen and financiers, Sindona borrowed money and bought banks. Why banks? It is an intriguing fact that the easiest way to rob a bank is to buy it. That is the great truth that the crooks in America in the 1980s learned in the 1960s and 1970s from the Vatican.

Then, after buying it, use the bank for a variety of criminal activities. Associates of the Vatican Bank did this so flagrantly—and successfully—in nearly a dozen nations from the late 1960s onward, that Americans finally caught on to the same techniques. The S&L and bank scandals of the 1980s followed. The Vatican techniques had been learned well.

*The Murder of  
Pope John Paul I*