

THE VEXED QUESTION OF FREEMASONRY AND THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITION

Peter Bannister

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As you will soon see if you start studying the material on this website, one of the major themes in the writings of the Christian mystics when it comes to a reading of current world events is the question of the role of Freemasonry, not only in influencing socio-political institutions on an international level, but also undermining the Catholic Church from within. Put simply, Freemasonry stands accused by a whole slew of mystics over the centuries of steering global events in an attempt to bring to fruition a long-term plan to alter society in a direction opposite to that willed by God.

This is a notion which has been a consistent trope for Catholic seers at least since Blessed Anne-Catherine Emmerich's famous visions of 1820 concerning a "secret sect"¹, and has been paralleled by multiple Vatican condemnations of Freemasonry over the centuries. The latter, climaxing in Pope Leo XIII's Encyclicals *Humanus Genus*² (1884) and *Inimica Vis*³ (1892), were at least partly impelled by the seizure by Rome of the *Permanent Instruction of the Alta Vendita*⁴, a document of the Italian Carbonari (close to Masonry)

¹ See Rev. Carl E. Schmöger C.S.S.R., *The Life and Revelations of Anne-Catherine Emmerich*, 2 vols. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1976), downloadable at <https://ia800608.us.archive.org/16/items/TheLifeAndRevelationsOfAnneCatherineEmmerichComplete/TheLifeAndRevelationsOfAnneCatherineEmmerich.pdf> (consulted March 25, 2020).

² Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Humanum Genus*, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18840420_humanum-genus.html

³ Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical *Inimica Vis*, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_08121892_inimica-vis.html

⁴ First published in English in Msgr. George F. Dillon, *The War of Antichrist with the Church and Christian Civilization* (Dublin: Gill & Son, 1885). Reprinted online at [http://www.u.arizona.edu/~aversa/modernism/War%20of%20Anti-Christ%20with%20the%20Church%20and%20Christian%20Civilization%20\(Msgr.%20Dillon\).pdf](http://www.u.arizona.edu/~aversa/modernism/War%20of%20Anti-Christ%20with%20the%20Church%20and%20Christian%20Civilization%20(Msgr.%20Dillon).pdf) (consulted March 25, 2020).

outlining a plan for the undermining of Catholicism, a document which Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII subsequently wished to have disseminated.

Given the long history of conflict between the Masonic Lodges and the Catholic Church, skeptics may well regard the multiple references to Freemasonry in the supposed prophetic messages on the present website as mere “writing from a tradition”. According to such a reading, this material is simply coming from religious imaginations stoked by Catholic anti-Masonic propaganda, perhaps combined with popular conspiracy theories circulating recently about a New World Order and One World Government. Such speculative hypotheses, the critic might argue, have simply been projected onto Jesus or the Virgin Mary and then taken (perhaps in good faith, but mistakenly) for supernatural communications rather than the result of the workings of the human unconscious. This at first sight seems not unreasonable as an explanation, being at least psychologically credible; in trying to discern whether this alleged prophetic material has a genuine supernatural component, the question therefore needs to be asked as to whether there is any *concrete evidence* from non-Catholic sources to suggest that what is being said here is more than the recycling of old anti-Masonic propaganda. The purpose of the present article is to attempt to answer such critiques by examining such sources and consequently affirming that - unfortunately for the world - there is indeed a great deal of hard evidence indicating that

i) Freemasonry has an influence in the higher échelons of global power structure that is completely disproportionate to the number of Masons as a percentage of society as a whole. This in itself is a phenomenon with serious anti-democratic implications. In its more anti-clerical forms (it needs to be stressed that the historical evolution of Freemasonry is complex and riven with inner conflicts), it has a clearly defined social and ideological project for society that is antithetical to Christianity. Freemasonry is intent on implementing this long-term project via the “ideological colonization” (to use a term of Pope Francis⁵) of legislative bodies and other prestigious social institutions wherever possible.

⁵ It is significant that Pope Francis should have illustrated this term by referring to the apocalyptic novel of Msgr Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (1907), in which the Antichrist is Julian Felsenburgh, a senator from Vermont who is enthroned (and effectively deified) as Lord

ii) Despite the public perception of much “Continental” Freemasonry as militantly secular and opposed to all religion, in the upper grades of several Masonic obediences (grades about which most lower-ranking Masons know next to nothing because of the deliberately opaque manner in which Masonry is structured) Freemasonry itself has the character of a neo-religious system. In this conceptual framework, “Lucifer” often is reassessed positively, assuming a prominent role in some sense equal to that of the Judeo-Christian God, or being an integral part of a deity that is both good and evil. This esoteric/occult doctrine and other gnostic beliefs are consistent with the historic roots of Freemasonry. Roots which, contrary to the prevailing historical narrative told by modern Masons, have very little to do with the builders of the medieval Cathedrals and much to do with the hermetic secret societies of the 16th and 17th centuries, such as the Rosicrucians.

iii) Tragically, Freemasonry has infiltrated institutional Christianity from the time of its official foundation in 1717 by the Presbyterian Pastor James Anderson and Anglican priest Jean Desaguliers. In some cases this influence is overt, as within Lutheranism and the Anglican Church, while in the case of the Catholic Church it can only be *covert*, given that membership of Masonic organizations is officially prohibited for Catholics. Given the clear differences between the worldviews of Freemasonry and Catholicism, the increasing number of calls from within the Catholic Church for this prohibition to be relaxed raise questions which as yet remain unanswered.

The evidence that I would like to set out in support of these assertions is partly drawn from years of research (of which I can only point to a fraction in the present article), but also partly from personal experience in talking with Masons here in France, both former and present. It needs to be emphasized that in writing this, my purpose is absolutely *not* to denigrate individual Freemasons, many of whom are doubtless sincerely seeking the truth and convinced that they are acting for the common good within an organization that they genuinely regard as benevolent. It is rather my conviction that such individuals are naïve about their affiliation to the Lodge, often having been deliberately manipulated by higher-grade Masons and their good faith cynically utilized to mask the core aims of Freemasonry at upper levels. Aims which, if they were disclosed to lower-level Masons, might well provoke mass defections.

of the world during a Masonic ceremony in Westminster Abbey in London. Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1907). Downloadable online in various formats at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14021> (consulted March 25, 2020).

Let us consider these three points individually:

I. THE DISPROPORTIONATE INFLUENCE OF FREEMASONRY AND THE “IDEOLOGICAL COLONIZATION” OF LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES

Freemasonry has an influence in the higher échelons of global power structure that is completely disproportionate to the number of Masons as a percentage of society as a whole. This in itself is a phenomenon with serious anti-democratic implications. In its more anti-clerical forms (it needs to be stressed that the historical evolution of Freemasonry is complex and riven with inner conflicts), it has a clearly defined social and ideological project for society that is antithetical to Christianity. Freemasonry is intent on implementing this long-term project via the “ideological colonization” (to use a term of Pope Francis⁶) of legislative bodies and other prestigious social institutions wherever possible.

This statement may sound like an exaggeration to Anglo-Saxon readers, but it should come as no surprise to anyone living in the Latin nations and especially in France, where the role of Masonry in government has been an open secret to all, irrespective of religious or philosophical persuasion, since the time of the Third Republic (1871-1914). This era in French political life was one during which Masonic influence reached its apex, being instrumental in the separation of Church and State (1905) as well as the expulsion of all religious orders from France (1880, 1903 under Jules Ferry and Emile Combes respectively). However, the influence of Freemasonry in French politics is far from being past history. The importance with which Masonic Lodges are treated by contemporary politicians was demonstrated just two days ago when President Macron held an audioconference on the subject of Covid-19 with representatives of “religious and moral authorities”, including Freemasons (intriguingly, the result of this meeting was for public ceremonies of all religions to be suspended at least until Easter/Passover).⁷ Under the presidency of Macron’s predecessor François Hollande, at least 9 governmental ministers were said to belong to Masonic lodges or ideologically similar groups claiming

⁶ It is significant that Pope Francis should have illustrated this term by referring to the apocalyptic novel of Msgr Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (1907), in which the Antichrist is Julian Felsenburgh, a senator from Vermont who is enthroned (and effectively deified) as Lord of the world during a Masonic ceremony in Westminster Abbey in London. Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1907). Downloadable online in various formats at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14021> (consulted March 25, 2020).

⁷ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/coronavirus-le-gouvernement-se-prepare-a-prolonger-le-confinement-20200323>

derivation from the aggressively secular French Enlightenment. A good example of the second category of “fellow travellers” under Hollande is philosopher Vincent Peillon, Minister of Education and author of the book *La Révolution n’est pas terminée* (*The Revolution is not finished*) (Paris: Seuil 2008), in which he argued forcefully for the establishment of secularism via the school system as a “religion” to unify France, thereby completing the societal project of 1789. The fact that the publication of this philosophical manifesto preceded his appointment to the Ministry of Education can hardly be regarded as insignificant. Peillon is not himself a Freemason, but he nonetheless gave a speech at the Grand Orient de France in November 2012 that earned him the accolade of being a “mason without an apron” (“*maçon sans tablier*”).⁸

Extensive inside information about French Freemasonry has recently been provided by Serge Abad-Gallardo, an architect and civil servant in the southern French city of Narbonne who was a member of the *Droit Humain* Masonic lodge for 24 years, rising to the 14th grade, before converting to Catholicism, since when he has authored a series of highly informative books on Freemasonry (I had the privilege of conducting an extended interview in French with him at Lyon Catholic University in 2017 which can be found online⁹). Abad-Gallardo has been particularly forthright in underscoring the role of the Masonic *fraternelle* in the French parliament, which groups together 400 members comprising Freemasons in the upper and lower chambers *across party lines* (implying a dual allegiance which has serious implications for due democratic process and brings into question the degree to which they are truly representative of the French electorate), as well as high-ranking civil servants. According to Abad-Gallardo, a little under 20% of French parliamentarians belong to the *fraternelle*, which is remarkable considering that the estimated 175 000 Freemasons in France (2014) make up less than 0.3% of society as a whole. Predictably, Masonic groups are particularly vocal in the domains of legislation

⁸ Vincent Nouzille, « Le nouveau pouvoir des francs-maçons », *Le Figaro*, December 7, 2012 (available online at <https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/12/07/01016-20121207ARTFIG00492-le-nouveau-pouvoir-des-francs-macons.php>, consulted March 25, 2012).

⁹ <https://youtu.be/DcTyVp8RFX8>

concerning the family and bioethics, areas in which Abad-Gallardo has repeatedly stated that the texts of parliamentary bills are first drawn up in the Lodges and then submitted to the House.¹⁰

This accusation that a statistically unwarranted importance is accorded to Masonic opinion in the French legislative process is borne out by the fact that during consultations in August 2019 concerning medically-assisted procréation (PMA in French), the bioethical commission of the French parliament first heard the views of three invited religious representatives (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish), then those of *five* Masonic organizations.¹¹ It is hard not to see this as clear evidence of precisely the type of “ideological colonization” mentioned by Pope Francis, i.e. the deliberate subversion of democratic structures by an organization that has somehow acquired a prestige totally incommensurate with the number of its members relative to the national population. An organization that, as a *secret* society, is blatantly lacking in transparency but whose actions over time have been remarkably consistent in the pursuit of a well-defined ideological vision for the world.

¹⁰ See Dorian de Meeûs, interview with Serge Abad-Gallardo, “Le secret ultime de la franc-maçonnerie est une arnaque commerciale”, *La Libre*, August 22, 2015, published online at <https://www.lalibre.be/international/le-secret-ultime-de-la-franc-maconnerie-est-une-arnaque-commerciale-55d5aaff3570b546535d75b1> (consulted March 25, 2020)

¹¹ Gauthier Vaillant, “Bioéthique : à l’Assemblée, les francs-maçons soutiennent la PMA”, *La Croix*, August 30, 2019, published online at <https://www.la-croix.com/Sciences-et-ethique/Ethique/Bioethique-lAssemblee-francs-macons-soutiennent-PMA-2019-08-30-1201044209> (consulted March 25, 2020)

II. FREEMASONRY AND ESOTERICISM

Despite the public perception of much “Continental” Freemasonry as militantly secular and opposed to all religion, in the upper grades of several Masonic obediences (grades about which most lower-ranking Masons know next to nothing because of the deliberately opaque manner in which Masonry is structured) Freemasonry itself has the character of a neo-religious system. In this conceptual framework, “Lucifer” often is reassessed positively, assuming a prominent role in some sense equal to that of the Judeo-Christian God, or being an integral part of a deity that is both good and evil. This esoteric/occult doctrine and other gnostic beliefs are consistent with the historic roots of Freemasonry. Roots which, contrary to the prevailing historical narrative told by modern Masons, have very little to do with the builders of the medieval Cathedrals and much to do with the hermetic secret societies of the 16th and 17th centuries such as the Rosicrucians.

The question of the philosophical/metaphysical underpinnings of Freemasonry is the point on which there would appear to be the greatest confusion on the part of the general public. This is at least in part because of the internal divisions within Masonry between obediences which present themselves as atheistic (e.g. the Grand Orient¹²) and those which are deistic or even theistic (such as the French Grande Loge Nationale Française, the only Masonic organization regarded as “regular” by the United Grand Lodge of England). Freemasons themselves often ridicule what they see as Catholic anti-Masonic caricatures,¹³ according to which all Masons are demon-worshippers engaged in dark rituals even extending to child sacrifice, and it has to be admitted that many of the Christian critiques of Freemasonry are indeed crude and lacking both in documentation and in any kind of nuance. However, historical research has made it plain that the roots of Masonry lie in the esoteric movements that began to flourish in

¹² Historically, the French Grand Orient broke with the United Grand Lodge of England in 1877 when it rescinded the requirement for its members to believe in the existence of a supreme being and the immortality of the soul.

¹³ Controversy still rages about the sensational “revelations” of supposed ex-Freemason Léo Taxil (real name Marie Joseph Gabriel Antoine Jogand-Pagès) concerning the occult nature of Freemasonry, especially in *Le Diable au XIX^e siècle*, disclosed in the confessions of a supposed “Diana Vaughan”. Taxil, who was both anti-clerical and anti-Masonic, eventually revealed that she was a pure literary invention in what was a spectacularly successful literary hoax, but the Dominican specialist on Freemasonry Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire has stated that certain Masons nonetheless contacted Taxil out of an interest in the Satanic masonry that he described. <https://www.yhwh.fr/jerome-rousse-lacordaire-dominicain> (consulted March 25, 2020).

Europe at the time of the Renaissance, particularly the Rosicrucians.¹⁴ This may seem to be a strange statement, given that there is no immediately apparent reason why such secret societies should have adopted the foundational myth of being the inheritors of the medieval masons' guilds, the builders of the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages. However, it is precisely this fusion during the 17th century which seems to have marked the transition from "operative" masonry (i.e. the association of professional stone masons) to its "speculative" variety with the admission of members unconnected with operative masonry and the incorporation of various esoteric legends and rituals.

Ex-Masons such as Serge Abad-Gallardo have made it abundantly plain that the esoteric dimension of Freemasonry is not a creation of Catholic conspiracy theories, but is an aspect of Masonry that grows increasingly explicit in Masonic ritual as the Mason advances from grade to grade. This can in some respects be regarded as public knowledge given that many Freemasons, proud of their esoteric credentials, have recently taken to publishing online their presentations made in lodges (presentations that would formerly have remained secret), in which they make no bones about their fascination with what most people would term the occult. And as for the allegation that Freemasonry is some sense "Luciferian", this is not at all far-fetched to the extent that texts freely available in Masonic lodges by writers such as Albert Pike or Manly P. Hall do seem at times to call for a gnostic reinterpretation of the Christian narrative that would either cast "Lucifer" in a positive light or else argue, somewhat like Manichaenism or Carl Jung in his theory of the "shadow side" of God, that *both* Adonai - the God of the Hebrew Scriptures - and Lucifer are divine.

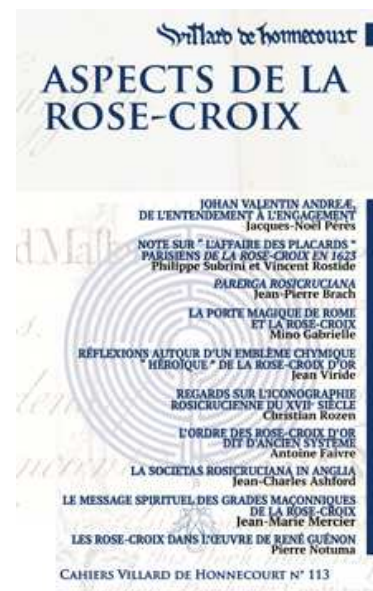
A Masonic internet site pulled up at random via a web search engine provides a classic example of this gnostic line of thought whose incompatibility with Christianity (from

¹⁴ See for example Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). Yates points to the initiation of Elias Ashmole (a founder member of the Royal Society, a pivotal institution in the history of early modern science) into a masonic lodge in 1646; Ashmole had previously copied out Rosicrucian manifestos and asked to join them. Yates also quotes a letter from 1750 stating that "English Freemasons have copied some ceremonies from Rosicrucians and say they are derived from them and are the same with them" (p. 268).

which its symbolism is nonetheless evidently derived) ought to be immediately obvious, given that for Christians it is a foundational belief that “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5):

God and LUCIFER, light and darkness are the two aspects of this single supreme reality. LUCIFER is the reflection of God within us, the shadow of our own Divine Being. The influx of Lucifer is a force without which the Earth could not have pursued its evolution. [...] LUCIFER and CHRIST are complementary, they are Darkness and Light, the downward-pointing Pentagram evoking transcendental Knowledge which refers for LUCIFER to the quest for immortality and the absolute, and points upwards for CHRIST whose redemption allows him access to the Divine.¹⁵

Such a text may seem totally bizarre to the unsuspecting reader, but it should be emphasized that such literature is far from marginal: the gnostic/esoteric dimension of Freemasonry is even present in a prestigious Masonic journal such as the *Cahiers Villard Honnecourt* (whose contributors include some well-known names in French philosophy and theology), whose n°s 112 and 113 are for example respectively dedicated to the Alchemy and the Rosicrucians.



¹⁵ <https://www.ledifice.net/7364-1.html>. Translation PB. See Serge Abad-Gallardo, *Je servais Lucifer sans le savoir (I was serving Lucifer without knowing it)* (Paris: Téqui, 2016), particularly pp. 103-142 which gives detailed information regarding positive references to Lucifer in Masonic rituals and literature.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF FREEMASONRY AND CHRISTIANITY

Tragically, Freemasonry has infiltrated institutional Christianity from the time of its official foundation in 1717 by the Presbyterian Pastor James Anderson and Anglican priest Jean Desaguliers. In some cases this influence is overt, as within Lutheranism and the Anglican Church, while in the case of the Catholic Church it can only be covert, given that membership of Masonic organizations is officially prohibited for Catholics. Given the clear differences between the worldviews of Freemasonry and Catholicism, the increasing number of calls from within the Catholic Church for this prohibition to be relaxed raise questions which as yet remain unanswered.

Given what has just been outlined regarding the esoteric dimension of Freemasonry, it might reasonably be expected to have evolved in polar opposition and hostility to Christian orthodoxy. The story of their relationship, however, is considerably more complex; the *Cahiers Villard de Honnecourt* discussed above are published by the Grande Loge Nationale Française (GLNF), a theistic branch of Freemasonry that even claims to base its doctrine on the teaching of the Church Fathers - although on closer inspection, what is meant by this is actually marginal figures from the Patristic era whose teaching was *rejected* by the Catholic Church and resuscitated by esoteric writers in the 18th century. I have been informed by one of its members that this strand of Freemasonry is at war with other, anti-clerical branches such as the Grand Orient and the Droit Humain, with whom it seriously disagrees, notably over questions of bioethics. I was even told that in recent years there was a power struggle between the Masonic lodges, but that unfortunately, the theistic party *lost*.

So far, you might think that, from an orthodox Catholic perspective, this theistic branch of Freemasonry might actually be a useful ally in the socio-political sphere. Sadly however, closer acquaintance with the views and interests of the GLNF confirm the theological reason for such prohibitions from the standpoint of classical Christianity. Alongside their interest in Rosicrucianism and Alchemy, their publicized events include sessions on the “50 pillars of esotericism”, as well as introductions to the Kabbalah and

Tarot.¹⁶ And as for their supposed relationship to early “Christian Tradition”, it becomes evident that what they are trying to resuscitate is the Gnosticism of the early centuries that was staunchly combatted by figures such as St Irenaeus of Lyon.

In this attempt to reinvigorate Gnostic Christianity, legitimacy is sought by an attempt to trace it back to the Gospel of John, albeit in extremely convoluted fashion. The Grande Loge Nationale Française member known to me, who presents himself with great conviction as “100% Catholic, 100% Gnostic” (despite the official Church position regarding the impossibility of such a dual affiliation), himself published in the journal of the GLNF an article entitled “The Gospel of John – initiation, Christianity and Freemasonry”, and he unsuccessfully tried to persuade me at length that it is an esoteric reading of John's Gospel which represents true Christianity, against the false institutional version spread by the successors of the twelve Apostles. Crucial to this kind of blanket revisionism (not far removed from the Dan Brown view of Church history) is the belief that John's Gospel was not written by John, son of Zebedee, but by another John from outside the circle of the Twelve, the *real* “Beloved Disciple” whose memory the nascent Church subsequently suppressed.¹⁷ It is precisely this sort of dubious theological manoeuvring that cannot but reinforce the conviction that ultimately, even in the case of a Masonic lodge as anxious to appear congenial to Christianity as the GLNF, its underlying views are irreconcilable with those of the Catholic faith.

Despite this fundamental incompatibility, as repeatedly stated by the Catholic Magisterium, it would be naïve in the extreme to believe that Freemasonry has exerted no *covert* influence on Catholicism. But before discussing the nature and extent of this influence, it needs to be said that in many of the other Christian denominations the

¹⁶ See <https://www.glnf.fr/archives.php> (consulted March 25, 2020).

¹⁷ This viewpoint, for which there is no historical evidence of any sort, was recently presented at an international colloquium in a Catholic church in a major European city, with participants even including a retired Catholic Bishop who has publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the Vatican's position on Freemasonry.

relationship between altar and lodge is completely *overt*. This is notably the case in the Lutheran Church in Scandinavia, where many Bishops are also Freemasons, in the French Reformed Church, and in the Church of England, whose former leader Archbishop Rowan Williams was pressured to apologize for publicly critiquing Masonry, and whose mother church Canterbury Cathedral hosted a ceremony in 2017 celebrating the 300th anniversary of the foundation of Freemasonry.¹⁸ This event certainly raised eyebrows in some theological quarters, but it does have a certain historical logic to it given that the constitutions of "regular" Freemasonry were drawn up by a Presbyterian pastor, James Anderson, and a French Huguenot refugee turned Anglican priest, Jean Desaguliers, who very interestingly was also a distinguished scientist and the demonstrator for Sir Isaac Newton.

It is sometimes alleged that, because Freemasonry has historically been the bogeyman of much Catholic literature at least since the 19th century, some Catholics have a tendency to see Freemasonic infiltration everywhere, including the Church, taking at face value the more sensationalist accounts of writers such as Malachi Martin, or in some extreme cases, regarding the Second Vatican Council itself as the work of Freemasonry and the whole of post-Conciliar Catholicism as invalid. This was of course famously the position of the breakaway Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, and something akin to a revised version of his narrative, now targeted against Pope Francis, seems to be being promoted on a wider level by popular authors, bloggers and YouTube activists such as Dr Taylor Marshall in his recent book *Infiltration*, or Michael Voris (*The Vortex*). Closer examination however reveals that such a view is not however upheld by rigorous and unbiased study of the historical sources, but is highly reliant on shrill rhetoric, hearsay, poorly documented and tendentious or frankly uncharitable interpretation of official Church texts.

¹⁸ See <https://www.lawandreligionuk.com/2017/02/28/canterbury-cathedral-freemasons-service/> (consulted March 25, 2020).

In particular, much has been written – particularly in *über*-traditionalist circles – concerning the allegations of mass Masonic affiliation among leading Catholic prelates that surfaced in the 1970s in connection with the “rogue” Masonic *Propaganda Due* (P2) lodge in Italy, heavily involved with the Mafia. It is certainly true that the famous list of 120 supposed ecclesiastical Freemasons drawn up by Mino Pecorelli in 1976 contained the names of many of the most important figures in the Catholic hierarchy of the time, going all the way up to the Secretary of State. As it is however impossible to know how much credence, if any, should be given to this document (Pecorelli himself belonging to P2), speculation on the subject is at best unprovable, at worst scurrilous.¹⁹

It does nonetheless need to be said that the fact that an increasing number of Catholic voices are currently calling for a change to the Church’s attitude to Freemasonry does beg certain questions. The Austrian Fr Michael Heinrich Weninger, a member of the Vatican Council for Interreligious Dialogue and author of the newly-published book *Loge und Altar (Lodge and Altar)* (Löcker Verlag, 2020), is only the latest of several figures to have argued publicly in favour of a relaxation of the Catholic prohibition on membership of “regular” Masonic lodges²⁰; in 2016 none other than Cardinal Ravasi, head of the Pontifical Council for Culture appeared to advocate something of a rapprochement with Freemasonry in an open letter entitled “Dear Brother Masons”.²¹ Given the extremely small numbers of individuals involved in Masonic organizations, just why is this rapprochement considered so important by these Churchmen? What do the proponents of “dialogue” intend to achieve, especially when the theological differences between Masonry and Catholicism have if anything become more rather than less clear thanks to the disclosures of ex-Masons (and indeed a new openness of

¹⁹ The classic investigative account of the relationship between Italian organized crime, Freemasonry and the Catholic Church during the 1970s and early 1980s is David Yallop’s, *In God’s Name* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984). Yallop focuses particularly on the question of the sudden death of Pope John Paul I in 1978.

²⁰ See <https://freemasonrymatters.co.uk/latest-news-freemasonry/vatican-cleric-claims-catholics-can-be-freemasons/> (consulted March 25, 2020).

²¹ <https://www.corrispondenzaromana.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Cari-fratelli-massoni.pdf> (consulted March 25, 2020).

certain Masons themselves about their esoteric views, even to a point approaching a certain bravado)? And why has an important European episcopate recently promoted to a leading position a priest (who is not himself a bishop) who has written three articles in a highly-regarded Freemasonic research publication? This man is someone I have met, but I do not wish to reveal his identity out of respect for his truly brilliant academic achievements and considerable contributions to his country's intellectual, cultural and spiritual life. In the light of the severity of the multiple warnings with regard to Freemasonry both in official Church teaching and in the Catholic mystical tradition, past and present, as represented on this website, I nonetheless pray for his own sake that he would revise his stance with regard to the Lodge. *For the simple reason that there is much to suggest that, even if his intentions and those of others like him to seek "dialogue" and "openness" may be laudable, in this case he may well be playing not only with fire but with sulphur.*