

Enrique Torner

Minnesota State University, Mankato

The Death of Pope John Paul I: A Reappraisal

October 4, 2018, marked the 40th anniversary of Pope John Paul I's funeral. His funeral is one of the few events in his pontificate whose date, time, locations, organizers, participants, guests, attendants, and order of events, everybody agrees on. In contrast, as will be explained later, there is hardly anything related to his death on which scholars of all kinds, distinguished members of the Vatican ranging from daily assistants to the pope to cardinals, non-Catholic clerics from all over the world, politicians of all types and nations, journalists, family members, or even plain curious or interested world citizens can agree. His mysterious death after only 33 days of papacy has generated a great amount of bestselling novels in many languages, an award-winning best-selling investigative book on his supposed murder¹ as well as many other scholarly and journalistic books on his life and death, all kinds of television programs, documentaries, and even feature films, the most famous one being *The Godfather III*.² Stefania Falasca's *Papa Luciani, Cronaca di una Morte* (November 2017), claims to finally have laid to rest the subject of whether the pope was murdered or not. According to Falasca, Pope John Paul I was not

¹ David Yallop's *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I* (originally published in 1985, republished in 2007 with new, up-to-date evidence).

² The most famous novel based on the John Paul I's death is Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons* (2000), which was made into a movie in 2009. Dan Brown's novel inspired Spanish author Juan Gómez-Jurado's *El espía de Dios* (2009), which became a world's bestseller. Brazil's best-selling writer Luis Miguel Rocha also wrote a thriller about Luciani's death: *La muerte del Papa* (2009). There have been many non-fiction books published on this subject, and quite a few of them actually read like fiction. Part III of *Godfather* appeared in 1990. The novels raise the level of interest in the subject of the pope's death and offer some useful insight, but it's the scholarly books that help the most in discovering the truth.

murdered but died of a heart attack, and she claims – based on Vatican documents finally rescued from their secret archives- that her conclusion is irrefutable. After reading Stefania Falasca’s book, Catholic journalist Hannah Brockhaus states that Falasca provides “conclusive evidence that his death was the result of a heart attack” (“New book reveals details of John Paul I’s death”). However, this article will prove that there is no conclusive evidence that he died of a heart attack, and, in addition, the newly revealed “evidence” by Falasca and the Vatican provides further proof that several Vatican members were involved in intentional misdeeds, as well as in several cover-ups that followed over many years. All these actions done by members of the Vatican point towards their probable involvement in the pontiff’s murder.

The Funeral of Pope John Paul I

It rained during the whole funeral. It had been raining for four straight days as if it were a sign of God’s sorrow and people’s broken hearts for the sudden, shocking, and unexpected loss of Albino Luciani, who would come to be remembered as “the smiling pope”. It was Wednesday, October 4 of 1978, when, despite the rain and the discussions about whether the funeral should be postponed because of the showers, the ecclesiastical authorities resigned themselves to face the bad weather, and forged ahead with their original plan of holding the funeral mass outdoors (Greeley 181-182).

Pope John Paul I had died in his bedroom at the Papal Apartments in the "Palazzo Apostolico" on a date and at a time disputed by different sources. The official Vatican statement was and still is that he died around 11 pm on September 28, but there are many reasons to doubt the accuracy of this assessment. Sometime after the September 29 7:30 am announcement to the

world by Vatican Radio that the pope had died, his body, after having been prepared for viewing, was transferred to the “Sala Clementina” (a special room in the Vatican palace).

The following day, September 30, at 9:00 am, the bronze door near Bernini’s colonnade at St. Peter’s Square was opened to a multitude of over 6,000 mourners that had started a line (about 200 yards long) shortly after dawn, as Andrew Greeley explains (176). Greeley, an American priest, sociologist, journalist, and the author of the first book dealing with John Paul I’s death (*The Making of the Popes*, published in 1978, the same year John Paul I died), who was in Rome during those historic months of August, September, and October, and describes that historical period of time day by day, states that, after the pope’s death, many Italians believed he had been murdered. He reports seeing all kinds of people openly weeping over his death. He mentions a comment by an American TV reporter that impressed him deeply: “I am not a Catholic or even very religious, but that man made me feel peaceful and happy whenever I saw him” (177). Then, Greeley singles out some specific Romans that believed the pope had been poisoned: “Then, of course, there is the cynicism of the Romans over in the Trastevere section of the city who darkly hint at poison -an absurd charge which cannot be refuted because papal law prohibits autopsies” (177-178). Jesús López points out that, according to a survey done by *La Stampa* in 1991, 30% of Italians were convinced that the pope was murdered. It is not surprising, then, that Greeley, as he was watching the long line of people briefly stopping in front of the coffin to offer their respects to the dead, noticed that many of them stated out loud: “Who did this to you, Luciani?” (183).

At 6 in the evening of that day, the body of the pope was transferred to St. Peter’s Basilica, where it would be viewed by a million faithful till the end of October 3 (Falasca 144). What Falasca doesn’t mention (and she is the author of the last and, presumably, most

complete and authoritative biography of John Paul I) is that that evening, from 8:00 to 9:30 pm, the basilica was closed to the public so a team of physicians, accompanied by Vatican hierarchs, could perform a routine checkup of the body (Vatican version of the event). Jesús López Sáez describes this event in his book *Se pedirá cuenta* (40).³ López Sáez and other scholars believe that what took place at that time was a secret autopsy.

López Sáez quotes Rinaldo Andrich, at that time a priest in Canale d'Agordo, as he describes how he, together with a group of pilgrims from Belluno and his own (and Luciani's) town, were stopped in their tracks as they were walking inside the basilica after having endured a heavy downpour:

La tarde del martes nos esperaba una desagradable sorpresa. Todo había sido bien preparado por el director de la peregrinación, don Lorenzo dell'Andrea, para una vigilia de oración en la Basílica delante del cadaver del Papa a las 19'30.

Desgraciadamente, justo cuando estábamos entrando en la Basílica bajo un aguacero, se nos prohibía ver el cadaver, porque una comisión de medicos debía efectuar una normal revision del mismo. Sin embargo, a las 21'30 se volvían a abrir las puertas y a los de Belluno y Canale d'Agordo se nos facilitaba la entrada en la Basílica de San Pedro. (76) (In *Se pedirá cuenta* 40)⁴

On October 4, at 4:00, Pope John Paul I's funeral was celebrated by Cardinal Carlo Confalonieri, "who described him as a flashing comet who briefly lit up the church"

³ López Sáez is a Spanish priest who has published two books on Luciani, the last one (*Juan Pablo I, caso abierto*) in 2009, a very complete biography of the pope.

⁴ "On Tuesday evening we experienced an unpleasant surprise. Everything had been prearranged by the director of our pilgrimage, don Lorenzo dell'Andrea, for a prayer vigil in the basilica in front of the pope's body at 7:30 pm. Unfortunately, just as we were walking inside the church and out of the deluge, we were prohibited from seeing the corpse because a medical team had to conduct a normal checkup of it. However, at 9:30 pm, the doors to the basilica were reopened, and they allowed our pilgrimage group of Belluno and Canale d'Agordo to enter the Basilica of St. Peter." [My translation from Spanish; all translations are mine unless otherwise stated.]

(Wikipedia: Pope John Paul I). The New York Times, coincidentally, was on strike during the whole pontificate of Luciani, so missed out completely on his papacy, including his funeral. *The Washington Post*, who was on site, offered a great description of the event. Here are some excerpts from the text:

[The Pope] lay in a simple coffin placed on an oriental rug on the church steps. An open book of gospels was open atop the coffin, and a white candle, signifying eternal life, stood alongside.

The funeral, televised to 31 countries, marked the beginning of nine days of official mourning. As twilight settled over the city and bells of St. Peter's tolled, 12 black-suited pallbearers took the coffin to the Basilica of Saint Peter's.

The crowd in St. Peter's Square broke into long applause as the coffin was carried inside the church.

Walking down the central nave, followed only by the pontiff's immediate family and a half dozen cardinals, the pallbearers moved to the left of the main altar and slipped through the "door of death," sculpted hourglass in his left hand, down to the grottoes beneath the church.

Inside the grottoes, John Paul's cypress casket was placed in a lead liner weighing 880 pounds. This, in turn, was placed in a more massive oaken casket.

Both the lead and oak casket bore a bronze plaque with Latin inscriptions detailing the dates of John Paul's life and reign.

Embossed above the inscription was a cross with a skull and crossbones at its foot. Below that was John Paul's coat of arms—a shield with mountains, the winged lion of Venice's St. Mark's and the word "humilitas."

The coffin was then lowered into a marble sarcophagus and covered with a large stone slab. The tomb was only a few steps away from those of John XXIII and Paul VI, the two immediate preceding pontiffs from whom he took his name. Buried nearby are 144 other popes.

Most countries were represented by ambassadors accredited to the Holy See. There was a sprinkling of cabinet ministers but Italy was the only country to send its chiefs of state and government. The U.S. delegation was headed by Lillian Carter, the mother of President Carter. It also included Sen. Thomas Eagleton (D-Mo), Mayor Edward Koch of New York and Connecticut Gov. Ella Grasso (October 5, 1978).

The Discovery of Luciani's Body and the Reconstruction of the Events that Led to His Death

It is important to describe what happened inside the Apostolic Palace on those fateful dates of September 28 and 29, 1978 that surrounded the pope's death. Here is where hardly any facts are agreed upon by all the Vatican people involved, as well as by all the "scholars" on Luciani's death. This is the official report that appeared printed in a bulletin of the "Sala Stampa dell Santa Sede":

Stamane, 29 settembre 1978, verso le ore 5.30, il segretario particolare del Papa Rev. P. John Magee, entrava nella camera da letto di S. S. Giovanni Paolo I non avendolo visto nella cappella come di solito, e lo trovava morto nel suo letto, come persona intenta alla lettura; la luce della stanza era accesa. Il medico immediatamente accorso ne ha constatato il decesso, avvenuto presumibilmente verso le ore 23 di ieri, per “morte improvvisa riferibile a infarto miocardico acuto”.

La venerata selma verrà esposta nella Sala Clementina del Palazzo Apostolico (Falasca 192).⁵

It’s interesting that David Yallop, author of the most sold book on the pope’s death -but without a Works Cited section at its end, footnotes, or endnotes stating the source of all of his information- provides a slightly different initial official statement:

This morning, September 29, 1978, about five-thirty, the private secretary of the pope, not having found the holy father in the chapel of his private apartment -as was the usual custom-, looked for him in his room and found him dead in bed with the light on, like one who was intent on reading. The physician, Dr. Renato Buzzonetti, who hastened to the pope’s room, verified the death, which took place

⁵ The source of this quote is in Falasca’s book (107), who provides a copy of the original document in one of her appendices. The text translates as:

This morning, September 29, 1978, around 5:30, the private secretary of the pope, Rev. P. John Magee, walked into the bedroom of the Holy Father John Paul I because he had not seen him in the chapel -as was the usual custom-, and found him dead in bed with the light on, looking as if he were actually reading. The physician was called immediately, and he confirmed the pope’s death, which supposedly happened around 11 pm of the previous day, the cause having been “sudden death due to an acute myocardial infarction.” The body of the venerated pontiff will be exhibited in the Sala Clementina of the Apostolic Palace.

presumably toward eleven o'clock yesterday evening, as "sudden death that could be related to acute myocardial infarction (223).

Yallop subsequently explains that "[L]ater bulletins stated that the secretary in question was Father Magee, who according to the Vatican usually said Mass with the pope at 5:30 a.m., and that when he died the pope had been reading *The Imitation of Christ*, the fifteenth-century work usually attributed to Thomas à Kempis" (223). Indeed, there were several other announcements that memorable morning, offering different variations and causing suspicions among media reporters and others.

The initial statement would end up being a story hurriedly made-up by Cardinal Villot and the pope's secretaries to cover up the fact that it had been Sister Vincenza who had walked into the Pope's bedroom to find him dead. Vincenza used to lay the coffee tray outside the pope's bedroom. It was the fact that a nun had entered the pope's bedroom while he was sleeping that Villot and his secretaries found troubling. They wanted to prevent the scandal that such a revelation could have caused. To avoid the embarrassment of having to admit this inappropriate behavior, they decided to concoct a story that would allow them to save face. However, to accomplish that, Villot had to force all the people in the know to keep the truth secret, so he "imposed a vow of silence concerning Sister Vincenza's discovery and instructed the household that news of the death was to be suppressed until he indicated otherwise" (Yallop 220). However, Diego Lorenzi ignored the edict and called Luciani's personal physician (Dr. Giuseppe Da Ros) and the pope's niece, Pia, who was his closest relative (Yallop 221).

The news that a nun had entered the pope's private chambers and found him dead started spreading over the Vatican. That caused great distress on the people and, shortly after that, the

truth came out, and the Vatican had to rectify their initial announcement, admitting fault. However, even with this second statement, there were still several “facts” that have been disputed ever since:

1. The time the body was found.
2. The location of the body when it was first found.
3. What Pope John Paul I had been reading when he died and still was in his hands.
4. The time of death
5. The cause of death

A summary of the main views that have been proposed by different scholars over the years about these different subjects should be offered, but it would be most helpful to start with a table of events. The following offers a comparison of Yallop’s and Falasca’s description and timing of events:

Yallop	Falasca	
4:30 a.m.	5:00 a.m.	Sister Vincenza carries Luciani’s coffee to his study and knocked on his door.
4:45 a.m.	5:15 a.m.	Vincenza returns and, seeing the coffee was untouched, knocks on the door again, and, receiving no answer, walks in the pope’s bedroom and finds him dead. Vincenza finds the pope’s face still warm (according to her interview with Bassotto, as recalled by López Sáez in his review of Falasca’s <i>Biografía</i> [53]).

4:50-4:55 a.m. 5:25-5:30 a.m.

Diego Lorenzi, who temporarily slept near the pope's bedroom, sees Luciani's body next, after Vincenza wakes him up. He finds parts of his body warm. Slightly later, Magee shows up and finds his hands cold (Falasca claims Magee arrives before Lorenzi.) (Falasca, *Biografia* 811-812)

5:00 a.m. 6:00 a.m. Villot walks into Luciani's bedroom, sees him dead, and quickly collects his low blood pressure medicine, his notes, his last will (which was in the desk in his study), his glasses, and his slippers. Then, he imposes a vow of silence concerning Vincenza's discovery, and, after that, he starts making phone calls.

5:00 a.m. A Vatican car picks up the Signoracci brothers to take them to the Vatican so they can embalm Luciani's body. ANSA distributed the news.

6:00 a.m. 6:00 a.m. Soon after that, Dr. Buzzonetti arrives. (Falasca places Villot and Buzzonetti entering the pope's bedroom almost simultaneously at 6:00 a.m.) He finds rigidity and lividity in his body, as well as coldness in all of its parts, except those that were covered. (Falasca *Biografia* 813)

6:45 a.m. Sergeant Roggan bumps into Bishop Paul Marcinkus (the president of the Vatican Bank) in the courtyard near the bank. Roggan announces to him: "The pope is dead." Marcinkus just stared at the sergeant of the Swiss Guard. Roggan moved closer to

Marcinkus. 'Papa Luciani. He's dead. They found him in his bed.'"

(This is only in Yallop's book)

7:30 a.m. Vatican Radio announces Luciani's death.

8:15 Pia Luciani, the pope's niece, arrives at Luciani's bedroom.

8:15-9:00 Luciani is dressed with the appropriate pontifical vestments in preparation for the public showing of his body in Sala Clementina.

9:30 a.m. Italian television starts showing a series of special editions about Pope John Paul I.

11:00 a.m. The Signoracci brothers arrive at the Sala Clementina, where the pope's body is now resting. They and Mons. Noe find the body warm.

12:00 p.m. 5:00 p.m.-3:30 a.m. Cesare Gerin and the Signoracci brothers embalm the pope's body.

(Falasca *Biografia* 810-836 and Yallop 217-262)

The Time the Body was Found and its Location

David Yallop, who was able to interview Sister Vincenza Taffarel, describes in his 1984 bestselling book *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I* how she discovered the pope's body:

At 4:30 a.m. Friday, September 29, Sister Vincenza carried a flask of coffee to the study as usual. A few moments later she knocked on the Pope's bedroom door and called out, "Good morning, Holy Father." For once there was no reply. Vincenza waited for a moment, then padded away quietly. At 4:45 a.m. she

returned. The tray of coffee in the study was untouched. She had worked for Luciani since 1959 in Vittorio Veneto. Not once in eighteen years had he overslept. Anxiously she moved to the bedroom door and listened. There was no sound. She knocked on the door, timidly at first, then with greater force. Still nothing but silence. There was a light shining from under the door. She knocked again. Still there was no answer. Opening the door she saw Albino Luciani sitting up in bed. He was wearing his glasses, and gripped in his hands some sheets of paper. His head was turned to the right, and the lips were parted, showing his teeth. It was not the smiling face that had so impressed the millions but an expression of agony. She felt his pulse. Recently she recounted that moment to me. (*In God's Name, 1984* 204-205).

Sister Vincenza, after not hearing any response from the pope, instead of walking in, she should have followed protocol and call one of the pope's secretaries, but she did not. Rather than following protocol, she did not call any of her superiors after she discovered him dead in his bed, which was the cause of the whole trouble that succeeded. Also, Sister Vincenza, upon seeing the pope sitting up, with this glasses on, and holding some papers I his hands, she may have assumed he was still alive. That might account for her further step to walk in and check on him, since his face showed a painful expression.

According to Yallop, Sister Vincenza had discovered the body at 4:45 a.m. during her customary routine of bringing him coffee in the morning. She had been doing this for 18 years, and the interview must have taken place, at most, five years after the event, so it should be assumed that her recollection was, at most, fairly accurate. However, on May 12, 2009, as part of

the beatification process of Pope John Paul I, Sister Margherita Marin, who worked closely with Sister Vincenza in the care of the deceased pope, was formally questioned regarding different aspects of his short papacy. Her answers were fully and accurately documented, and Stefania Falasca includes her whole testimony in one of her appendices. One of the questions they ask her is at what time, how, and who found the pope dead. Here is her description:

Verso le 5.15 di quell matino, come ogni mattino, suor Vincenza aveva lasciato una tazzina di caffè per il Santo Padre in sacrestia subito fuori dell'appartamento del papa, davanti alla cappellina. Il Santo Padre uscendo dalla sua stanza era solito prendere il caffè in sacrestia prima di entrare nella cappella a pregare. Quella mattina però il caffè rimase lì. Passati circa dieci minuti, suor Vincenza disse: "Non è ancora uscito? Ma come mai?" Io ero lì in corridoio. Così ho visto che ha bussato una volta, ha bussato di nuovo, non ha risposto... Ancora silenzio, allora ha aperto la porta e poi è entrata. Io ero lì e mentre lei entrava rimasi fuori. Sentii che disse: "Santità, lei non dovrebbe fare di questi scherzi con me". Poi mi chiamò uscendo scioccata, entrai allora subito anch'io insieme a lei e lo vidi. Il Santo Padre era nel suo letto, la luce per leggere sopra la spalliera accesa. Stava con i suoi due cuscini dietro la schiena che lo tenevano un po' sollevato, le gambe distese, le braccia sopra le lenzuola, in pigiama, e tra le mani, appoggiate sul petto, stringeva alcuni fogli dattiloscritti, la testa era girata un po' verso destra con un leggero sorriso, gli occhiali messi sul naso, gli occhi semichiusi... sembrava proprio che dormisse. Toccai le sue mani, erano fredde, vidi e mi colpirono le unghie un po' scure. (170)⁶

⁶ Around 5:15 a.m., as every morning, sister Vincenza had left a cup of coffee for the Holy Father in the sacristy, just outside of the apartment of the pope, in front of the small chapel. The

Comparing both descriptions, the two most striking distinctions are the time of the discovery and the different impression that the dead pope's face gave to the two nuns: Vincenza saw an expression of agony in his face, while Marin saw a slight smile. It's also meaningful that Marin noticed the pope's hands were cold, implying that he had been dead for some time. Strangely enough, it was the smile that ended up being the final version of the pope's face when he was found dead, which is uncommon in someone who dies of a heart attack. However, the most meaningful and strange difference is the timing: even though both descriptions present the delivery of the coffee to the pope as a routine that had taken place on a daily basis for many years, Vincenza states it was 4:30, while Marin claims it was 5:15. Vincenza's statement is much closer to the original event: less than 6 years; Marin's deposition in 2009 took place about 31 years after the event, and, at that time, she was about 68 years of age. Jesús López Sáez, a Spanish priest who has published two printed books on the death of John Paul I and has continued researching it even until now -even against his own detriment-, includes a quote from Magee, who, ten years after the pope's death (1988), broke his silence about that tragic event:

Aproximadamente a las 5 de la mañana una monja muy agitada fue a despertarme.

El Papa ha muerto, me dijo. Preocupada porque el Pontífice no había tomado el

Holy Father used to drink his coffee in the sacristy as he walked out of his bedroom and before entering the chapel. However, that morning the coffee stayed there untouched. After ten more minutes or so, sister Vincenza said: "Hasn't he come out yet? How come?" I was there in the hall. Then I saw that she knocked once on his door, then again, but he didn't respond... There was still silence, so she opened the door and, afterwards, she walked in. I was there and, while she walked in, I stayed outside. I heard her say: "Your Holiness, you shouldn't play these kinds of jokes with me." Then, coming out, she called me, all shocked, so I quickly walked in with her, and I saw him. The Holy Father was in his bed, and the reading lamp on his headboard was on. He had two pillows behind his back that kept him slightly raised, his legs were stretched, his arms were over the bedsheets, he was in pajamas, and, with his hands, which were on his chest, he held some typewritten sheets of paper. His head was slightly turned to the right and showed a slight smile. He had his glasses on his nose, his eyes were semi-closed... he looked as if he were sleeping. I touched his hands, and they were cold, and it struck me noticing that his nails were a little dark. (my translation)

café, que las monjas le dejaban todos los días a las 4.30 delante de la puerta de su habitación, había entrado y visto el cuerpo inmóvil. Después había corrido hasta mi habitación para avisarme (*Caso abierto* 236).⁷

Spoken only ten years after the pope's death, Magee's statement carries more weight than Marin's. Other sources support the 4:30 a.m. time: Paul Spackman's 2008 biography of John Paul I also defends the 4:30 time, though his description differs in that he claims that Vincenza returned to the kitchen after leaving the coffee by the pope's bedroom, and it was at about 5:20 when Vincenza returned to collect the tray that she discovered the coffee was untouched (223). Another unique difference in Spackman's description is that some of the papers the pope had been holding "had fallen and scattered across the bed" (223). After Vincenza went to wake Magee up and came back to the pope's room with him (it was then 5:30), Magee noticed his hands were "cold and stiff" (223). However, it's important to notice that Spackman gathered this information from Cornwell's *A Thief in the Night*, which was the fruit of the Vatican asking him to write the "truth" about John Paul I's death. It's strange that Falasca doesn't address the time difference in her books, despite the fact that she claims to have the last and definitive word about the pope's death. Most of the sources consulted agree with a 4:30 a.m. finding (Yallop, López Sáez, Spackman, Paternoster) Thomas and Morgan-Witts claim it happened a little before 5 a.m. (255). Spackman claims it happened at 5:20 a.m. (223). What's the importance of a one-hour difference? One possible reason is that having one less hour to concoct a story to tell the world would make it harder to believe that Villot and the pope's secretaries had sat down to plot how to present the distorted news to the world. Other critics believe that timing is crucial to defend or

⁷ Around 5 a.m. a very upset nun came to wake me up. The Pope has died, she told me. Worried because the Holy Father had not drunk his coffee, that the nuns left for him every day at 4:30 in front of his bedroom door, she had walked in to see his motionless body. After that she had run to my bedroom to inform me about it.

dispute the “conspiracy theories” (Yallop, López Sáez). Regardless of the real timing of the events, what is most interesting and suspicious is the ferocity of many of the debates that have taken place over the years among the researchers of Luciani’s death over this point. This fact seems to emphasize that some of the scholars side with the Vatican’s side of the story, while others show biases against the; others, fortunately, fall on the neutral, objective side and offer helpful information.

It’s important to point out the background of the different authors that have written on John Paul I’s death. David Yallop, author of *In God’s Name*, who, coincidentally, died of a heart attack in August of 2018 (on the 23rd or the 31st, depending on the source), has sold over six million copies of this book and even had a second edition out in 2007 with supplementary information.⁸ He is a British journalist and author of several books about controversial historical events, which gave him a reputation as “a seeker of justice” (*In God’s Name* 2007). John Cornwell is another British journalist and author, besides a renown academic who has won many awards. He is the author of *Hitler’s Pope*, book that accuses Pope Pius XII of aiding Nazis escape from the Allies during WWII and of other misdeeds related to this war. Unlike Yallop and Cornwell, who had nothing to lose but a great deal to win from writing a best-selling book, Jesús López Sáez, being a priest in Avila, Spain, pursued the task of investigating the pope’s death and writing a book about it despite strong opposition from his superiors, ranging from the local bishop to higher up in the Catholic hierarchy. He literally risked his job, position, and reputation. His work is thus more trustworthy.

⁸ Yallop’s book “won the Crime Writers’ Gold Dagger Award for the best non-fiction book of the year in 1984.” (In the initial presentation to Yallop contained in *In God’s Name* 2007 n/p)

Another point in López Sáez's favor is that one of his main sources is Camilo Bassotto, a journalist from Venice who was a close friend of John Paul I and had an in-depth knowledge of the documents held in the Venetian archives about the pope. Bassotto has published two books on him: *Il mio cuore è ancora a Venezia* (1990), and *Io sono il ragazzo del mio Signore* (1998). López Sáez met Bassotto personally in Venice in May of 1987, establishing what seems to have been a long-standing friendship, in view of all the references López Sáez makes to him in his books. During their first conversation, Bassotto mentions a statement that he had overheard during the pope's burial from a priest to a group of Venetians that really caused a lasting impression on him: "We must do justice to John Paul I." (*Caso abierto* 14) López Sáez has spent many years of his life devoted to this goal, and has followed closely all the developments regarding the life and death of John Paul I. He has his own website inside the Comunidad de Ayala, which holds all kinds of documents and news updates, even including his take on Falasca's last book.

What Pope John Paul I Was Reading When He Died.

Newspapers around the world covered the story. The British *The Guardian*, on September 30 of 1978, states that "Father Magee, an Irishman, went to the Pope's bedroom door and knocked. There was no answer. Upon entering, he found the Pope lying in his bed, with a book opened beside him, and the reading light on". *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto's newspaper, on October 7, rectifies the previous announcement about the pope being found dead reading a book. This was their statement:

A Vatican broadcast said at first that Pope John Paul died while reading the fourteenth-century devotional classic, *Imitation of Christ* [sic] by Thomas a

Kempis. Later the Vatican radio station rectified its account, stating that at the moment of death the pope had been holding a few sheets of personal notes.

In addition, the Canadian newspaper also rectified the previous “misinformation” that stated that Magee had found the pope. The newspaper stated that “Thursday, the Italian news agency ANSA reported information from unidentified Vatican sources that the first person to discover the pope dead wasn’t his Irish secretary, but a nun of the order of St. Mary the Child, in charge of his personal household.” The Thursday here mentioned refers to October 5. After that announcement, “a Vatican spokesman denied this version as ‘completely unfounded’. However, the dead pope’s brother, Eduardo Luciani, yesterday [October 6] confirmed that Mother Vincenza, a nun, had first noticed around 5 a.m. that something was amiss, and had awakened Father Magee who in turn alerted senior Vatican prelates” These statements are closer to Yallop’s than to Falasca’s timing of the finding of the pope’s body.

Jesús López Sáez explains how the news came out about the pope being found dead reading the *Imitation of Christ*:

El Padre Farussi, entonces director de *Radiogiornale* en Radio Vaticana, difundió la noticia, que circulaba en los medios de comunicación la mañana del 29 de septiembre. Dice Farussi: “Yo lo confronté personalmente con don Diego Lorenzi. Él me dijo que era verdad”. Sin embargo, el 2 de octubre desmintió la noticia “por sugerencia de la Secretaría de Estado” [originally from Cornwell 63]. A este respecto, dice Germano Pattaro, ilustre sacerdote veneciano, llamado por Luciani a Roma como consejero:

Los apuntes que Luciani, muerto, tenía en las manos, eran unas notas sobre la conversación de dos horas que el Papa había tenido con el secretario de Estado Villot la tarde anterior...⁹ (Cornwell 64, in López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 35-36).

López Sáez quotes a Spanish newspaper article from *El País* written by Juan Arias - correspondent of the newspaper in Rome- based on “fuentes informativas de la mayor seriedad” (information sources of utmost reliability). Arias clarifies what the pope was holding:

¿Qué tenía entre las manos cuando murió? Unos folios en los cuales había tomado apuntes de una larga conversación de dos horas con el secretario de Estado, cardenal Villot, sobre una serie de cambios en la curia romana y en algunas diócesis de Italia (...) se pudo saber también que aquella tarde el Papa Luciani había tenido una discusión muy dura con algunos cardenales, probablemente en relación a estos cambios que deseaba hacer. Algunos empleados del Vaticano oyeron las voces desde los pasillos... ¿Cómo eran las relaciones del nuevo Papa con la curia? No eran amistosas. Se quejaban sus colaboradores que este Papa

⁹ Father Farussi, the then director of *Radiogiornale* in Vatican Radio, spread the news that was circulating in mass media on the morning of September 29. Farussi declared: “I discussed this personally with Don Diego Lorenzi. He told me that it was true.” However, on October 2 he denied the news “by suggestion of the State Secretary.” [Cornwell 63] Regarding this, Germano Pattaro, a distinguished Venetian priest who was called by Luciani to Rome to be his counselor:

The notes that dead Luciani had in his hands were some notes about the two-hour conversation that the Pope had held with the Secretary of State, Villot, the previous evening...

quería resolver todo en un mes y que no entendía de diplomacia¹⁰ (*El País* October 6, 1978).

According to this and other sources, the evening before, Pope John Paul I had had an animated discussion with Villot about possible destitutions and rearrangements in the Vatican, so it's not surprising that these notes ended up in the Vatican Secret Archives, which were at that time in the custody of cardinal Semoré, as well as other personal writings of Luciani, which could bring light to this whole matter (López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 35-36). However, nobody knows where those papers are now. Their finding is the key to the mystery of Luciani's death.

Renzo Paternoster, in an interesting article he published in 2004 about Luciani's death, reveals the truth regarding the material he was holding in his hands: he couldn't have been reading the *Imitation of Christ* because in the whole Vatican there was no single copy of this text, while Luciani's own copy remained back in Venice, at the patriarch's residence. So why would anybody want the world to think the pope was reading this devotional at his deathbed, instead of some typed notes? The only reasonable answer to this question is that somebody didn't want anybody to know about the content of the papers Luciani had in his hands. This was another attempt at concealing a fact that might have caused suspicions and trouble to the people involved in these outright lies. This might be the reason secretaries Magee and Buzzonetti kept everything secret for years until they finally went public with their recollections.

¹⁰ What did he have in his hands when he died? Some sheets on which he had taken notes about a long conversation of two hours that he had had with the Secretary of State, cardinal Villot, about a number of changes in the Roman curia and in some Italian dioceses (...) it was also found out that that afternoon Pope Luciani had held a very heated discussion with some cardinals, probably regarding these changes that he wanted to accomplish. Some Vatican employees heard the voices from the halls... What were the relationships of the new Pope with the curia like? They were not friendly. The curia complained that this Pope wanted to solve everything in one month and that he didn't understand diplomacy.

The papers that Luciani was holding have never reappeared. In 2003, the Vatican started the process of his beatification, which involved starting a thorough examination of his life and death that required the finding and disclosure of all the documents that had been kept in their Secret Archives, as well as interrogating key people in his life and death. Many documents were disclosed to the public for the first time when Stefania Falasca published her book on Luciani's death in 2017, but the papers that the pope were holding have yet to be "found" and identified. Meanwhile, the debate continues. Some claim he was holding some homilies, or sermons (Falasca and other Vatican members); others defend it was his personal notes on a heated conversation he had with Villot the night before he died (Cornwell); others claim he was holding the list of Vatican staff he was planning to fire (Yallop, López Sáez). Thomas and Morgan-Witts say "they are what Gianpaolo planned to read to Arrupe"¹¹ (260) the following morning. Among the several items that were in his bedroom right before he died, those papers form part of the very few that have not been accounted for. Why? Because Villot and the secretaries made sure nobody could see their content, which would implicate them in some way. That implies that the pope was not holding any sermons, but either a list of people to fire, or the notes he took on his conversation he had with Villot (which contained sensitive and threatening information), or a

¹¹ Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991) "was the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, leading the Society in the realities of serving the Church and people in the post-Vatican II world..." (Ignatianspirituality.com) and he spent his life defending the poor and the victims of all kinds. His life was so exemplary that his beatification process was started on February 6 of 2019 (<https://www.romereports.com/en/2019/02/06/beatification-process-opened-for-fr-pedro-arrupe-former-general-of-the-jesuits/>). He was born in the Basque country and received some years of medical training. In 1932, when the Spanish Republican government expelled the Jesuits from Spain, he moved to Belgium, Holland, and the United States, where he continued his studies. After being ordained, he was sent to Japan, where he would witness firsthand the bombing of Hiroshima. Unaware or ignoring the dangers of the consequences of nuclear exposure, he helped 150 victims of the bombing, only one of which died (Ignatianspirituality.com). On September 27 of 1978, his report on the status of the Society of Jesus was published, and it is assumed that Pope John Paul I was planning to respond to it, but his unexpected death prevented it. (Tripole 23)

combination of both. Given the fact that Villot was among the first people to see the pope dead, and that he was the one in charge, there is a high probability that he made those papers disappear to avoid any possible incrimination in the case, especially since he was in the list of staff to be discharged.

The Time of Death and Luciani's Death Certificate

As was seen earlier in this article, the first official statement regarding Luciani's death, printed by the "Sala Stampa dell Santa Sede," included Dr. Buzzonetti's declaration that the pope had died around 11 pm of the night before from a sudden myocardial infarction. However, as Yallop, López Sáez, Renzo Paternoster, and other scholars and journalists have mentioned, how could a physician assert the time and cause of death without a previous autopsy? In addition, Paternoster and López Sáez affirm that Buzzonetti's exam was brief, which makes his guess even more appalling. The death certificate was not disclosed to anybody for ten years, and was not put in print until Stefania Falasca included it in her *Cronaca di una morte* in preparation for the beatification of Pope Luciani. The author included it in one of the appendices of her book, which was published in November of 2017. The text of the certificate reads like this:

CERTIFICATO DI MORTE

Certifico che Sua Santità GIOVANNI PAOLO I, ALBINO LUCIANI, nato in Forno di Canale (Belluno) il 17 ottobre 1912, à deceduto nel Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano il 28 settembre 1978 alle ore 23 per "morte improvvisa – de infarto miocaridco [sic] acuto". Il deceso à stato constatato alle ore 6.00 del giorno 29 settembre 1978.

Città del Vaticano, 29 settembre 1978.

[Signature of Renato Buzzonetti]

(Dott. Renato Buzzonetti)

Visto il Direttore del Servizi Sanitari

(Prof. Mario Fontana)

[Mario Fontana's signature]¹² (191).

As can be seen, there is no doubt in the diagnosis of sudden death from acute myocardial infarction, despite the absence of an autopsy. This seems to point towards medical malpractice by Dr. Buzzonetti. However, it turns out that the absence of doubt in his death certificate is due to Vatican City legislation regarding the language of death certificates. López Sáez, in his review of Falasca's book, includes Dr. Buzzonetti's own justification for the absence of doubt in Luciani's death certificate:

Según escribe el Dr. Renato Buzzonetti (9-10-1978)

¹² Death Certificate: I certify that His Holiness John Paul I, Albino Luciani, born in Forno di Canale (Belluno) on October 17, 1912, has died at the Vatican Apostolic Palace on September 28, 1978, at 23:00 from "sudden death -from acute myocardial infarction". His death has been confirmed at 6:00 a.m. of September 29, 1978.

Vatican City, 29 September, 1978

[signature]
Dr. Renato Buzzonetti

Approved, Director of Health Services
(Prof. Mario Fontana)

“en forma del todo reservada”, dando cuenta al Substituto de la Secretaría de Estado Giuseppe Caprio, “la legislación vigente en el Estado de la Ciudad del Vaticano, conforme con la de muchísimos Estados, no permite formular la causa de muerte con anotaciones que expresen probabilidad, duda, reserva o sospecha, salvo que el médico no pida la autopsia. En los casos previstos por la ley, el cadáver debe ser puesto a disposición de la autoridad judicial. En este sentido, antes de escribir el diagnóstico de muerte, al que escribe le fue autoritariamente excluida la práctica posibilidad de pedir la autopsia por parte del abogado Trocchi. Por tanto, el diagnóstico y la causa de la muerte debían necesariamente evitar o no incluir la expresión de duda, reserva, sospecha, probabilidad. En base a las anteriores consideraciones, formulé el diagnóstico clínico de ‘muerte imprevista por infarto agudo de miocardio’ (59).¹³

Thanks to this letter from Dr. Buzzonetti to the substitute of the Secretary of State Giuseppe Caprio written on October 9, Falasca is able to offer Buzzonetti some justification for his diagnosing Luciani’s cause of death as a heart attack without the expression of any doubt: in the absence of a forthcoming autopsy (which he had actually petitioned from lawyer Vittorio Trocchi, but his request was categorically denied, according to Falasca), Vatican law didn’t allow him to include any expression of doubt in the death certificate (López Sáez, *Biografía del*

¹³ As Dr. Renato Buzzonetti writes (10/9/1978) “in extreme confidence”, informing the Substitute of the Secretary of State Giuseppe Caprio, the current legislation in Vatican City, like that of many other states, does not allow to state the cause of death with comments that express likelihood, doubt, reservation, or suspicion, unless the physician does not request an autopsy. In law-abiding cases, the body must be made available to the judicial authorities. In this sense, even before writing the death diagnosis, the one writing it was authoritatively precluded from the practical possibility of requesting the autopsy by lawyer Trocchi. Thus, the diagnosis and the cause of death necessarily has to avoid or not include any expression of doubt, reservation, suspicion, and probability. In view of the previous considerations, I issued the clinical diagnosis of “sudden death by acute myocardial infarction”.

Papa Luciani 63). That's why his diagnosis of the cause of the pope's death expresses certainty. Falasca also includes another interesting fact: according to her, Buzzonetti had telephoned Father Romeo Panciroli, Director of the Vatican Press Hall, to read to him Luciani's death certificate, but with some modifications, which are in italics: '...il decesso, *avvenuto presumibilmente verso le ore 23 di ieri, per morte improvvisa riferibile ad infarto miocardico acuto*' (*Biografia* 829, taken from López Sáez's online critical commentary of her biography [60]). According to this, the Vatican's official statement preceded Luciani's death certificate. López Sáez claims that Buzzonetti's document doesn't state this phone call of his, which causes one to wonder how many other statements of his are actually fabrications.

According to López Sáez -the Luciani scholar with the most medical sources, by far-, the circumstances of the pope's death would have warranted an autopsy if they had happened to anyone in just about any other country. He states that

... según los expertos, son muertes sujetas a investigación judicial y, en consecuencia, requieren autopsia médico-legal, entre otros, los casos en que las circunstancias de la muerte, la falta de antecedentes médicos o la rapidez del fallecimiento tras el inicio de los síntomas hagan sospechar la influencia de algún factor externo. (62)¹⁴

So, basically, the Vatican has been taking advantage of the autonomy and independence of its being an autonomous state to forestall the autopsy. Their lie that no autopsy has ever been allowed or performed on any pope is revealed by Spackman, who lists all the popes that had died under suspicions of murder, many of them of poison, and states that "at least *four* popes have had

¹⁴ According to the experts, the cases in which the circumstances of death, the absence of medical precedents, or the rapidity of the arrival of death after the initial symptoms raise suspicions of the influence of some external factor on its occurrence are subject to judicial investigation, and, consequently, require a medical-legal autopsy.

autopsies on them” (232). Spackman offers a brief historical explanation of all of them that are worthy of a close reading (231-233).

Other than this initial denial to perform an autopsy on John Paul I’s body, there have been many other requests ever since then. Some cardinals requested it a few days after the pope’s death, but the curia cardinals objected to their demands claiming that the current canon law forbade performing an autopsy on a pope. In July of 1989, the inhabitants of Canale de Agordo - where Luciani was born- formed a committee to formally request the Vatican to perform an autopsy on Luciani’s body (*El País* 1989). If it was ever performed, as Gennari claims, it was never disclosed.

Regarding the time of Luciani’s death, the official time of 11:00 p.m. on September 28 is highly disputable. In an interview that Camilo Bassotto held with Sister Vincenza not too long after Luciani’s death, she stated: “His death happened between 2 and 3 in the morning of September 29. The fact that the warmth I felt when I touched the pope’s face was also felt by Diego Lorenzi when he dressed him later could confirm it.” (translation from the original quote in *Il mio cuore à Venezia* 212; taken from López Sáez’s *Biografía...* 53). In *Juan Pablo I Caso abierto*, López Sáez quotes don Diego directly as saying: “I remember that I felt his still hot back as well as his feet” (239). An even later time of death was estimated by Ernesto and Renato Signoracci, the embalming technicians that Villot had already called by 5:15 a.m., according to Yallop (222). Yallop states that “the care and preservation of the body were the responsibility of Professor Cesare Gerin, but the actual embalming was performed by Professor Marreacino and Ernesto and Renato Signoracci.” After this preliminary statement, Yallop offers a very detailed description of how the embalmers examined Luciani’s body, and how they reached their conclusions:

When the two Signoracci brothers had examined the body before it had been moved to the Clementina, they had concluded from the lack of rigor mortis and the temperature of the body that death had taken place not at 11:00 p.m. on the twenty-eighth but between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. on the twenty-ninth. They were given independent confirmation of their conclusion by Monsignor Noe, who told them that the pope had died shortly before 5:00 a.m. I have interviewed both brothers at length on three separate occasions. They insist that death occurred between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. and that the pope's body was discovered within one hour of his death. If they are right, then either the pope was still alive when Sister Vincenza entered his bedroom, or he was barely dead. Only a full autopsy would have resolved this issue. (228)

Of course, there is no way Luciani was still alive when Vincenza discovered his body. She had even touched his body, and assessed him as dead, and Sister Marin (if we believe her story) had seen him too, and considered him "so" dead that, unlike Vincenza, Diego Lorenzi and the Signoracci brothers, she found his hands cold and even noticed that his nails were a little dark. Let's remember her description, given to Falasca on May 12, 2009, though she was 69 at this time, and her memory is questionable: "Toccai le sue mani, erano fredde, vidi e mi colpirono le unghie un po' scure." (*Cronaca* 170).

Marin's testimony, though offered during a formal proceeding to the "Curia provincializia della provincia del Triveneto" (*Cronaca* 161), differs from Vincenza's on several facts:

- 1) Vincenza described how she found the pope's body to several people on different occasions, and on none of them she ever mentions being with anybody else. Vincenza's

several declarations took place many years earlier than Marin's, and they are all consistent through the years, making them more reliable.

- 2) The time coffee was deposited right outside the pope's chambers is also different, as noticed earlier.
- 3) The place where the coffee tray was placed: Marin claims Vincenza set it in the sacristy; according to Yallop, Vincenza left it in his study, "as usual" (218). According to Spackman, who goes by Cornwell's book, Vincenza left it "on a small table outside the pope's bedroom door." (223) According to Ricci, Magee said that, every day, Vincenza left the coffee in front of Luciani's bedroom (López Sáez, *Se pedirá cuenta* 24).
However, when Cornwell interviewed Magee (his book was published one year after Ricci's article), the latter was not sure any more where Vincenza had left the coffee: "Cada mañana le dejaban el café a las cinco y veinte. Lo dejaban en la sacristía o fuera de la puerta del dormitorio, no estoy seguro."¹⁵ (López Sáez, *Biografía* 54). One really needs a map of the Papal apartments to put this puzzle together!
- 4) The pope's face: Marin sees a smile in his face, while Vincenza sees an agonizing expression, "no doubt about it". However, the smile is what most authors state he had in his face. Maybe because Luciani was called "Il Papa del sorriso" (the Pope of the smile)?

In conclusion, Marin's statement regarding John Paul I's hands, because of the length of time elapsed between the pope's death in 1978 and her testimony in 2009 (31 years), her age (she was 68 in 2009), and, above all, the fact that Vincenza, Lorenzi, the Signoracci brothers, and Monsignor Noe defend that Luciani's body was warm when they touched it, would seem to be

¹⁵ Every day they [the two sisters, so Magee thinks both Vincenza and Marin delivered the coffee] left the coffee for him at five twenty. They left it in the sacristy or right outside the bedroom door, I'm not sure.

less reliable than those of the other four witnesses of the body. However, the recent disclosure by Falasca in 2017 of a letter that Dr. Buzzonetti wrote to Father Giuseppe Caprio -Substitute of the Vatican Secretary of State, on October 9, 1978, offers a different picture. He wrote this letter in response to the Curia's request. Some of their members had express concerns regarding Luciani's manner and cause of death, and wanted Buzzonetti to write a more detailed report regarding his previous diagnosis. His letter offers an interesting twist to this mystery that deserves some attention, so some extracts are worth examining:

All'esame della salma, ho riscontrato un'intensa rigidità cadaverica sia alla mandibola che agli arti superiori ed inferiori. Dalla rigidità erano interessate le articolazioni [sic] delle dita delle mani e dei piedi tanto che fu necessario esercitare una certa forma di trazione per sfilare i fogli stretti tra le dita delle mani del Papa.

Erano presenti macchie ipostatiche alle regione posteriori del collo, del tronco, degli arti, delle spalle e delle regioni supero-anteriori del torace a so di mantellina.

Alla pressione digitale le macchie ipostatiche si attenuavano notevolmente.

I letti ungueali erano cianotici. Il volto non era cianotico. Al tatto le parti scoperta -volto e mani- erano nettamente fredde. Pure fredde, ma in misura minore, erano le parti coperte, specie gli arti inferiori.

Solo la regioni dorsali e lombare, poggianti direttamente sul piano del letto, mantenevano un lieve tepore.

Gli arti inferiori presentavano un edema uniforme in corrispondenza dei piedi e delle gambe e l'epidermide sovrastante era tesa e lucente, senza segni evidenti di flogosi.¹⁶ (*Cronaca* 195-198)

Upon considering these observations, Buzzonetti concluded that the diffuse and intense cadaveric rigidity of the body, its advanced but still progressing lividity, and the temperature of the skin (notably cold except for on the parts of the body that were covered) led him to place the time of the pope's death as 11:00 p.m. of September 28, 1978 (196). It's important to notice that this document is attached as an appendix to Falasca's *Cronaca*, and that Falasca took the effort to show it as a photocopy (or photograph) of the supposed original document, which had never been disclosed before. Given all the controversies that have transpired over all these years, and the extensive details of this document (and Falasca's book contains another document by Buzzonetti), it's hard to understand (and suspicious) why it had not been disclosed earlier.

¹⁶ During the examination of the body, I found an intense cadaveric stiffness of the jaw and the superior and inferior extremities. The joints of the fingers and of the toes were so stiff that it was necessary to apply some strength in order to slide out the papers from the pope's fingers.

There was lividity present on the back of the neck, the trunk, the limbs, the back, the upper front region of the thorax, and under his cape.

Under digital pressure, the lividity lessened noticeably.

The nail beds were cyanotic. The face was not cyanotic. The uncovered parts -face and hands- were significantly cold. The covered parts were also cold, but to a lesser extent, especially the lower extremities.

Only the dorsal and lumbar regions, being right on the bed, maintained a slight warmth.

The lower extremities presented a uniform edema that corresponded to that of the feet and legs, and their epidermis was stretched and shiny, without obvious signs of inflammation.

It is hard to understand how a body could go from warm to cold, livid, and rigid in one or one and a half hours. However, one has to take into account that many of the details included in the above time table come from statements that were given at least ten years after the pope's death, so the people giving them may have been suffering from memory lapses, or had intentionally lied. Also, regarding temperature changes after death, it's important to point out that, under normal conditions, the average heat loss of a body is 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit per hour ("Determining Time of Death"). Assuming everybody was telling the truth about the temperature of the body, it could be assumed that Luciani indeed died between 4 and 5 a.m., as Vincenzo, Monseignor Noé, and the Signoracci brothers state it happened. However, Dr. Buzzonetti's findings of rigidity contradict forensics science, which has established a timeline of changes observed in a body since time of death that doesn't match Dr. Buzzonetti's observations:

1-2 hours	Early signs of lividity
2-5 hours	Clear signs of lividity throughout body. Fixed in 6-10 hours.
5-7 hours	Rigor mortis begins in face.
8-12 hours	Rigor mortis established throughout the body, extending to arms and legs. ("Determining Time of Death")

Buzzonetti had found rigidity in Luciani's jaw, fingers, and toes, which, according to this timeline, does not appear until 8-12 hours since death. Since Buzzonetti had examined the body at 6:00 a.m., rigor mortis would place Luciani's death between 6 and 10 a.m (citation). However,

if that were the case, there is no way Vincenza, Lorenzi, the Signoracci brothers, and Monsignor Noe could have found any warmth in the pope's body. Could the five of them have lied, or had a misperception of the body's temperature occurred? The relationship among them is at most tenuous, so it is hard to believe they could have agreed on offering consistent statements. Or could Buzzonetti's assessment be wrong, or a false reconstruction? This difference of opinion regarding the time of death among the secretaries, the nuns, and Dr. Buzzonetti is only one of the many disagreements that will be considered. As a matter of fact, more startling than the discrepancy in the perception of Luciani's body temperature is the disparity that emerged between Fathers Magee and Lorenzi in reference to some supposed chest pains that the pope suffered the day before he died.

The Cause of Death

As mentioned earlier, the official death certificate signed by Dr. Buzzonetti offered as cause of death "morte improvvisa -da infarto miocardico acuto" (Falasca *Biografia* 841).¹⁷ This diagnosis was questioned in the following days after Luciani's death by all kinds of people, since rumors had been spreading that the pope had been murdered. The Secretary of State, feeling the pressure of public opinion and at the request of some cardinals, on October 11, sent Buzzonetti a note asking him to clarify several points of Luciani's death certificate. One of the questions posed was if the examination of the body excluded any traumatic lesions of any kind, to which Buzzonetti responded in the affirmative. The other questions regarded the meaning of "morte improvvisa". In answering them, Dr. Buzzonetti clarified that, in legal medical terminology, the expression "morte improvvisa" designates a "natural" death, in contrast to "violent" death. He also states that, in case of a very recent myocardial infarction, it is possible that an autopsy might not find any sign of it (Falasca *Biografia* 833).

¹⁷ Sudden death -from acute myocardial infarction.

Two days earlier, on October 9, the Substitute of the Secretary of State, mons. Giuseppe Caprio, requested a detailed medical report on the pope's death from Dr. Buzzonetti, and the physician complied quickly and sent it to him "in via assolutamente riservata" (Falasca *Biografia* 827). Like the death certificate, this document was not available to the public until 2017, when Falasca published her *Cronaca*. In this report, he justifies his diagnosis.

Dr. Buzzonetti offers 5 reasons for diagnosing Luciani's cause of death as myocardial infarction:

- 1) When sudden death is defined as instantaneous death and happens not later than one hour from the start of symptoms, in 80-90% of the cases, the cause is a circulatory arrest due to a cardiovascular disease. In men, an absolute prevalence (about 90%) of sudden death from cardiovascular causes is attributed to coronary heart disease. Since Buzzonetti considered Luciani's death as sudden, by stating that he implied that he died from heart disease, which is refuted by the pope's own physician, other physicians who had seen him earlier, and his own family.
- 2) Family history of sudden death (some members of Luciani's family had experienced this type of death, according to Falasca, though she acknowledges that "la notizia è generica", which means that there is no specific source of this).
- 3) A previous spasm (or thromboembolism) of the central artery of the retina of the left eye that happened years earlier, which forced Luciani to have to stay at the Ospedale di Mestre to recover from the episode.
- 4) The daily use of "gratusminal", an oral drug made with mild sedatives and a low dose of strophanthus (a karyokinetic).

- 5) The episode of pain localized on the third higher sternal region, suffered by the Holy Father around 7:30 p.m. on the day before his death, which lasted for about 5 minutes while he was seated praying with Father Magee, and which went away without any therapy. (828)

Buzzonetti uses Luciani's supposed chest pains that he had the day before his death as one of the factors for his heart attack diagnosis. The way he learned of this chest pains was from Father Magee, who told him about them as he was writing his medical report, which was not released to the public until 2017, when Falasca published it as an appendix to her *Papa Luciani. Cronaca di una morte*. Nobody ever mentioned this until Diego Lorenzi did it for the first time during an interview conducted on Italian television on October 2, 1987. The program was "Giallo", which was conducted by Enzo Tortora. During the interview, Lorenzi explained how the Holy Father had complained of chest pains at dinner time:

Verso le 20.00 ci mettemmo a cena, il Papa, io e mons. Magee. Quasi all'improvviso il Papa portò le mani al petto dicendo: "Sento delle fitte, ma stanno passando". Fu nostra reazione immediate de dire: "C'è un medico facilmente raggiungibile, lo chiamiamo". Rispose: "Sta passando, non ce n'è bisogno".

(Falasca *Biografia* 804)¹⁸

Lorenzi put this episode in writing in 2000 in his essay "Giovanni Paolo I nel ricordo di don Diego Lorenzi", in *Messaggi di don Orione* 3 (2000) 66 (Falasca *Biografia* 804).

¹⁸ Around 8:00 p.m., the Pope, I, and mons. Magee went to have dinner. Almost immediately, the Pope put his hand over his chest saying: "I am feeling sharp pain, but it's going away". Our immediate reaction was to say: "There is a doctor within easy reach, we will call him". He responded: "It's going away, it's not necessary"

Magee had kept this in secret until, probably forced by Lorenzi's public declaration, he finally admitted it in 1988 in an interview he granted to the international monthly bulletin *30 Giorni*. However, it was not until February 28, 2013 that some people found out when and where Magee had told Buzzonetti about Luciani's chest pains, and that took place because of the testimonies that were arranged during the beatification process of John Paul I. Dr. Buzzonetti, upon being questioned about those chest pains, declared:

“Il padre Magee, accanto al letto del defunto, mi riferì che verso le ore 19.30 il Santo Padre 1. portò ripetutamente la mano sul petto; 2. aveva lamentato un dolore retrosternale piuttosto forte; 3. non accompagnato da affanno; 4. protratto per oltre cinque minuti; 5. regredito senza terapia; 6. mentre era seduto, intent alla recita di Compieta insieme al segretario Magee. 7. Il Papa rifiutò il ricorso al medico della Guardia Medica vaticana, asserendo che si trattava di episodi dolorosi per lui non infrequenti e da catalogarsi come di “natura reumatica”.¹⁹
(Falasca *Biografia* 806)

Magee and Lorenzi's recollection of Luciani's chest pain differ therefore in time and context, putting their statements in question. Not only that: even the time and circumstances of the pope's chest pains given by Magee varies according to the source, because Cornwell claims that Magee told him that it was around 5:30 p.m. when Luciani suffered from a chest pain. At that time, the pope told Magee to call Vincenza, because she knew what to do when that

¹⁹ Father Magee, while we were at the side of the bed of the deceased, told me that around 7:30 p.m. the Holy Father 1. Repeatedly brought his hand to his chest; 2. Had complained of a pretty strong retrosternal pain; 3. Not accompanied with shortness of breath; 4. Lasted over 5 minutes; 5. Regressed without therapy; 6. While he was seated; 7. Trying to say his evening prayers with secretary Magee. 7. The pope declined the recourse of calling the physician of the Vatican Medical Guard, alleging that it was one of those painful episodes that were not infrequent in him, and that they were classified as of a “rheumatic nature”.

happened. The nun supposedly later told Magee that this had happened to him several times in the past (López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 49).

The secretaries' claims regarding Luciani's chest pains become even harder to believe if we add the fact that neither Vincenza nor Marin recall the Pope having any chest pains that day. In addition, that night, Dr. Da Ros called the Vatican and spoke with the nun and the pope, and neither one of them mentioned any of that. Around 9 p.m., Luciani had a phone conversation with cardinal Giovanni Colombo that lasted about 30 minutes, and the cardinal, recalling later that phone conversation, stated that the pope didn't mention having had any pain, and that, actually, he sounded very good (Falasca *Biografía* 807).

The statements made by Luciani's secretaries regarding his supposed chest pains are, in view of all these discrepancies, suspicious, to say the least. Buzzonetti's medical report is also suspicious. When Yallop debated Lorenzi on October 2 of 1987 on the Italian television program, and heard Luciani mention the pope's chest pains, he said "it's the first time I hear this". Hearing that "confirmed his conviction that John Paul I died from poison" (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I Caso abierto* 219). Camilo Bassotto believed that the whole chest pain episode was "an invention; inexplicable, unconceivable invention", and López Sáez agrees with him (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I. Caso abierto* 221). With so many discrepancies, even with Magee's statements alone, it's hard to believe the chest pains actually happened. The question is then: why would the secretaries invent them? The only way to understand this is that they wanted to make it look like Luciani actually had suffered a heart attack, in contrast to having been murdered, and that Magee must have collaborated with Buzonetti in fabricating his medical report on the the pope's death.

If the chest pain factor is discarded from the list of reasons Buzzonetti argued as justification for his diagnosis (and his chest pains could have even been caused by other health-related conditions, like rheumatism, as Luciani indicated, or as “pneumonia, hiatal hernia, chest angina, a cold, or simply gas” (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I. Caso abierto* 220), the next reason that can be argued is the pope’s “thromboembolism of the central artery of the retina of the left eye” (Falasca *Biografía* 828) that he had had in the fall of 1975. This episode happened during the pope’s return flight from Brazil, and was the consequence of the pressure associated with the plane altitude. Dr. Giovanni Rama, the director of the ophthalmology department of the Policlinico de Mestre who treated him after that incident and later on, diagnosed and treated him again, and, in Luciani’s medical history, wrote that the condition resolved shortly and positively, with full recovery of his eyesight and without any consequences (López Sáez 218-219). Luciani’s complete recovery is documented in his medical history: in March 1978, Dr. Rama writes that “repeated ophthalmologic controls confirm the complete functional recovery, in the ‘fundus’ there are no signs of the previous thrombotic episode” (López Sáez *Biografía* 56). This means that the thromboembolism that Luciani suffered in his left eye in 1975 could not have been a precursor to a heart attack.

Regarding myocardial infarction as cause of death, the main reason against it is that there was no fight against death or pain, as López Sáez argues, quoting several medical specialists (*Se pedirá cuenta* 32-35). Dr. Navarro Valls²⁰, director of the Holy See Press Office, talking to Cornwell, told him he disagreed with Buzzonetti’s diagnosis:

²⁰ Joaquín Navarro Valls was a Spanish physician and journalist who was the director of the Holy See Press Office from 1984 to 2006. According to Wikipedia, during the papacy of John Paul II, “his role as the press liaison between the Vatican ... and the world press corps gave him perhaps the highest visibility of any one person in the Vatican” except for the pope himself. He was a numerary member of the Opus Dei since 1970, and lived in its central headquarters with its founder, mons. José María Escrivá de Balaguer. He took post graduate studies at Harvard University. (Wikipedia: Joaquín Navarro Valls)

“Mire usted, la muerte fue instantánea y sin dolor. Tal forma de muerte no encaja con la teoría del infarto de miocardio... También sabemos que tenía los tobillos extraordinariamente hinchados... Lo que es más que probable es que sufriera una embolia pulmonar la noche en cuestión, y como resultado la muerte fue instantánea”²¹ (Cornwell 60, en López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 33).

The pulmonary embolism theory is based on the pope’s previous retina embolism and the fact that Luciani’s ankles were swollen. However, as stated previously, his retina embolism had completely cleared in March of that year. Regarding his ankles, Luciani’s personal physician, Dr. Giuseppe Da Ros, when, after 15 years of silence, he finally spoke up regarding Luciani’s health at the end of his life, he declared: “Para mí que no los tenía tan hinchados. Una persona que está todo el día sentada, que lleva una vida sedentaria, puede sufrir cierta disminución de las funciones del aparato circulatorio. Nos habíamos puesto de acuerdo para que todos los días diera un paseo por el jardín” (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I* 245-246).²² Dr. Da Ros’ statement seems to corroborate the idea that some people in the Vatican distorted Luciani’s health conditions in order to make him look sick, when actually he was in good health. The pulmonary embolism diagnosis is also refuted by Dr. R. Cabrera, forensic specialist from the “Instituto Nacional de Toxicología y Ciencias Forenses” in Seville, Spain, who asserted that “la embolia pulmonar es aún menos probable que el infarto, teniendo en cuenta los antecedentes y el cuadro encontrado: por ejemplo, no tenía espuma sanguinolenta en la boca” (López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 34).²³

²¹ Look, death was instantaneous and without pain. Such type of death does not match the theory of myocardial infarction... What is most probable is that he suffered a pulmonary embolism that night, and, as a result, death was instantaneous.”

²² López Sáez takes this quote from A. Tornielli, “Las nueve. El papa está bien”, in *30 Giorni* 72 (1993), 53-54.

²³ Pulmonary embolism is even less probable than infarction, taking into account the antecedents and the scene in question: for example, there was no bloody foam in his mouth.

So, what about the myocardial infarction official diagnosis? López Sáez, in his book *Se pedirá cuenta*, interviews four medical specialists and asks them their opinion regarding Luciani's official death diagnoses, and all of them, after having the description of the pope's body, reach the same conclusion: the position of the body, his smile, holding papers, reading... these elements do not match the characteristics present in somebody who had a heart attack. Dr. R. Cabrera, a forensic specialist at the Instituto Nacional de Toxicología of Seville, Spain, comments on Luciani's body:

la forma en que se encuentra el cadaver no responde de suyo al cuadro propio del infarto de miocardio: no ha habido lucha con la muerte. No existe otra sintomatología que lo delate. Es notoria la ausencia de varios factores de riesgo, como son hipertensión, tabaquismo, obesidad, gran arteriosclerosis, comidas copiosas... Sin descartar otras causas de muerte súbita, sin la realización de la autopsia no se puede tener la certeza sobre la causa de la muerte. Pudo ser natural, pero también pudo ser provocada. El cuadro encontrado podría responder mejor a una muerte provocada por sustancia depresora y acaecida en profundo sueño, siguiendo un proceso que ha podido durar toda la noche: primero el sueño, luego el coma y, finalmente, la muerte.”²⁴ (López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 34)

The absence of any signs of violence and of any fight against death seem to rule out a heart attack and point toward death caused by a drug that could be poison, a vasodilator, or a

²⁴ The position of the corpse does not match the typical manner of death by myocardial infarction: there has been no fight against death. There are no other symptoms showing it. The absence of other risk factors, like hypertension, tobacco consumption, obesity, high arteriosclerosis, large meals, etc. are worth noticing. Without first discarding other causes of sudden death, without an autopsy, one cannot be certain about the cause of death. It could have been natural, but it could have been caused as well. The given picture of the body points more toward a death that has been caused by a depressant and that happened in deep sleep, following a process that could have lasted all night: first, sleep; then, the coma; and, finally, death.

combination Dr. Villalaín, professor of legal medicine at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, corroborates this conclusion: “La causa parece ser debida a un desfallecimiento súbito cardíaco, probablemente secundario a una hipotensión aguda, natural o secundaria a la toma de vasodilatadores, si esto es cierto”²⁵ (López Sáez *Se pedirá cuenta* 35). Given the fact that Luciani suffered from low blood pressure, the consumption of a vasodilator could well have caused his death.

In addition to these four physicians that López Sáez quotes, David Yallop, in the second edition to *In God's Name* published in 2007, adds a postscript in which he gives an update about all the new developments that have occurred since his 1984 edition. In this postscript, he asserts that Buzzonetti's conclusion that the pope died of a myocardial infarction “has been dismissed not only by members of the medical profession in Italy, the US, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom but also by other Vatican doctors including the man who had co-signed Luciani's death certificate, the Head of the Vatican Medical Service Professor Mario Fontana who subsequently observed ‘If I had to certify under the same circumstances, the death of an ordinary, unimportant citizen, I would quite simply have refused to allow him to be buried’ (321)”. The conclusion seems to be overwhelming: Pope John Paul I did not die of a heart attack.

If, instead of a heart attack, Luciani died from consuming a drug, how could this have happened? Yallop provides his hypothesis: “The pope kept beside his bed, on the small table with his battered alarm clock, a bottle of Effortil, a liquid medicine that he had been taking for some years to alleviate low blood pressure. A fatal dose of digitalis, half a teaspoonful, would be undetectable if added to the medicine” (*In God's Name* 218). However, Lucien Gregoire dismisses this hypothesis, claiming that, even though 15 drops of digitalis will kill in 15 minutes,

²⁵ The cause [of death] seems due to a sudden cardiac arrest, probably secondary to an acute hypotension, natural or secondary to the use of vasodilators, if that is the case”

it causes “abdominal pain and violent vomiting”, and “vomiting is inconsistent with the position the body was found and none of those brought to his room mentioned it” (22). However, Gregoire claims that there are “hundreds of lethal toxins which would have done the job with far less visible evidence” (22). Therefore, though digitalis may not have been the drug of choice, poisoning the pope by adding a lethal drug to his Effortil bottle seems a very plausible murder method. It also would explain why one of the first things Villot did when entering Luciani’s bedroom was to collect, among other items, the bottle of medicine and the glass that were on the bedside table.

If adding a drug to the bottle of Effortil was the chosen method of murder, then the next question to ask would be if the person(s) responsible for the act had had the opportunity to enter the papal apartments. López Sáez mentions several incidents that provide light into this:

En septiembre de 1978 se produce en el Vaticano una serie de hechos que requieren mayor explicación: la destitución de los hermanos Gusso, camareros pontificios, a pesar de la oposición de Lorenzi; la instalación de timbres junto a la cama del Papa en la mañana anterior a su muerte; la extraña anécdota de un medico que, algún día antes de morir, le dijo al Papa: “Usted tiene el corazón destrozado” (el Papa no le hizo ningún caso); la irrupción de un desconocido en los aposentos papales al que se deja pasar, porque se espera al Dr. Da Ros; las amenazas de muerte que Luciani recibe desde los primeros días de su

pontificado; la muerte repentina de Nikodim²⁶, cuando hablaba con el Papa...²⁷

(*Se pedirá cuenta* 120)

These incidents alone demonstrate that there were several people who had access to the pope's bedroom just before his death: the technicians who installed the buzzers by Luciani's bed on the day before his death; the Gusso brothers, and a stranger. Cornwell stated that the Gusso brothers used to introduce photographers and other people in the pope's private apartment (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I Caso abierto* 253), and that's why Magee fired them. Cornwell reports that, one day after the pope's funeral, Magee had received a call from a news reporter who told him that there was a rumor that the pope had been murdered and that he was in the center of the plot. After he hang up, as he was crossing the yard of a convent, he saw a crowd of people with many school kids next to its entrance. Then they all started looking at him because they were listening to a person that was pointing directly at him. And he was saying: "There is the murderer"²⁸ (198). That person was one of the brothers, Paolo, clarifies López Sáez. No wonder Magee decided to dismiss the Gusso brothers. Given the atmosphere of suspicion toward Magee within the Vatican, Caprio recommended him to leave Italy. Magee then went to see Marcinkus, the Vatican banker, to ask him for help. Marcinkus, that same day, bought him a plane ticket for

²⁶ Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) of Leningrad and Novgorod was a hierarch of the Church of Russia from 1963 until his death on September 5, 1978, when he died during a personal audience he had with Pope John Paul I (Wikipedia). Several sources mentioned he died after drinking a cup of coffee that was meant for Luciani. However, Stefania Falasca, in her monumental biography, does not mention the cup at all.

²⁷ In September of 1978, a series of events happen at the Vatican that require a better explanation: the dismissal of the Gusso brothers, pontifical waiters, despite Lorenzi's opposition; the installation of buzzers by the pope's bed the morning before his death; the strange anecdote of a physician that, some days before the pope's death, told him: "Your heart is in terrible shape" (the pope ignored him completely); the sudden entrance of a stranger inside the papal apartments who is allowed to come in because they were expecting Dr. Da Ros; the death threats that Luciani receives since his first days as a pope; the sudden death of Nikodim when he was talking to the Pope...

²⁸ Quoted in López Sáez *Juan Pablo I* 252.

Manchester, England, near Liverpool, where a sister of his lived. There Magee stayed for ten days (López Sáez *Juan Pablo I* 253).

Besides the actual entrance of the buzzer installers, the Gusso brothers and a stranger inside the papal apartments, it is important to consider the possibility of anybody sneaking inside the building. Cornwell and Yallop interviewed Sergeant Hans Roggen of the Swiss Guard about the security inside the Vatican. Roggan told Cornwell that there are three entrances into the papal apartments, and they are always guarded. Roggan told Yallop that most people access the building using an elevator that required a key, which many people held, and that the elevator entrance was not guarded: “Any man dressed as a priest could enter and leave the papal apartments unchallenged” (259). Yallop mentions several interesting facts regarding the security of the building:

Further instances of the chaotic security within Vatican City abound.

Recently, since the death of Albino Luciani, a staircase near the papal apartments has been rediscovered. It was not hidden by later construction. Quite simply, no one knew of its existence. Or did they? Did someone perhaps know of it in September 1978?

Swiss Guard members who officially sleep on duty. Swiss Guard members who guard an entrance no one uses. A staircase that no one knew about. Even an amateur assassin would not have experienced any great difficulty, and whoever killed Albino Luciani was no amateur. To assist any would-be murderer, *L'Osservatore della Domenica* published a detailed plan, complete with photographs, of the papal apartments. Date of publication: September 3, 1978. (259)

The publication of the plan of the papal apartments less than one month before Luciani's death is certainly suspicious, and could have helped a would-be assassin. In sum, there were several people who had accessed the papal apartments just before Luciani's death, and, in addition, the lack of proper security could have allowed any stranger to enter the pope's bedroom and tamper with the bottle of Effortil that he kept by his bed.

Murder Motives

A main question that arises when considering the possible murder of Pope John Paul I is who would want to assassinate him and why. The answer to this question has generated a great number of articles, books, documentaries, and films. Luciani's desire to change the direction of the Catholic Church has been mentioned already: since Vatican II, he had promoted causes that were considered progressive, to say the least (birth control being the most fought against). Actually, it was during the Second Vatican Council that Albino Luciani first won himself a group of "enemies". John XXIII's diary reveals that, during the council, there was a clear atmosphere of opposition between two groups: a conservative faction, led by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (who controlled the Holy Office) and his "friends", and a more liberal crowd, led by Belgian cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens, composed by influential theologians that had been disciplined by the Holy Office during the last years of Pius XII. John supported the latter, and Luciani was one of the most active participants in it (Yallop 1997). Albino Luciani's group was called "liberal" because of their tolerance and openness toward other religions and ideas. These two groups would grow bigger in time, as well as more antagonistic toward each other, and would even play a pivotal role in the heated debate regarding Luciani's papal election. So, even

before Luciani became pope, he already had a staunch group of cardinals that defied his views on a regular basis (O'Malley 300).

This clear split of the Church is only the starting point on the list of possible reasons why anybody would want to keep Luciani from advancing his “liberal” agenda. There were actually stronger and darker forces that would want to remove from the papacy anybody who threatened their existence: a group of wealthy and powerful masons that became involved in one of the largest financial scandals in history. “The scandal centers on some \$1.4 billion in unsecured loans made in Latin America by Banco Ambrosiano, Italy's largest privately-owned banking group, and endorsed by the Vatican bank” (“Italy’s Mysterious, Deepening Bank Scandal”). Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts, David Yallop, Jesús López Sáez, Renzo Paternoster, and many others write about this scandal, devoting a great deal of attention to its main protagonists: Michele Sindona, Paul Marcinkus, Licio Gelli, and Roberto Calvi. Unfortunately, some authors have greatly distorted the reality behind the misdeeds of these fraudsters, creating, in the process, what some conservative members of the Vatican mistakenly, collectively, and pejoratively call “noir literature” (citation). So, whenever anything is published that threatens the integrity of the Vatican, the Holy See or any of its representatives discredits it by calling it noir, no matter the genre. Yallop has thus become a common representative of this type of “noir” literature and is the Vatican’s most despised author, despite the fact that many of his assertions have, overtime, been proved true (For further information on this subject, see Yallop’s second edition of *In God’s Name* and López Sáez’s *Juan Pablo I Caso abierto*). Yallop provides a very useful postscript in the second edition of his book, where he provides an update on the status of the criminal parties involved. Since this edition was published in 2007, some further updates need to be added at this point in time, which will prove the guilt of the culprits in question.

Michele Sindona and Roberto Calvi not only vindicated Yallop's initial claims before he published his second edition, but paid for their crimes with their lives. Yallop's update includes some significant facts:

In 1985, a Milan court found Sindona guilty of fraudulent bankruptcy and sentenced him to a term of 15 years' imprisonment. On March 18, 1986, another Milan court found Michele Sindona guilty of ordering the murder of Giorgio Ambrosoli and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Before he could commence either of these sentences he was due to be returned to the United States to serve the remainder of the initial 25-year prison sentence.

Confronted with the realization that he would undoubtedly die in prison... he intended to barter information concerning the circumstances surrounding the death of Albino Luciani. On Thursday, March 20, after drinking his breakfast coffee, he screamed, 'They have poisoned me!' Two days later, on Saturday, March 22, he was dead. The murder of Sindona was a classic example of the power of P2. Because of fears that an attempt might be made on his life, Sindona was being held in a maximum-security prison. He was subjected to constant 24-hour TV surveillance. There were never less than three guards with him and his food and drink came into the prison in sealed containers. (311-312)

Sindona's murder proves how powerful and resourceful the organization of P2 was. If they could accomplish this, they could much more easily have accessed Luciani's bedroom to tamper with his medicine and poison him.

Roberto Calvi, also called God's Banker, was the owner of Banco Ambrosiano, Italy's second largest bank, when "it collapsed in the spring of 1982 with almost \$1.3 billion missing

from its vaults” (Rupert Taylor). Calvi fled to London, where, on June 18, 1982, he was found dead:

A man walking to work saw a body hanging from a rope, tied to scaffolding, under Blackfriars Bridge in central London. It was Roberto Calvi, and, writes Nick Mathiason in *The Observer* (December 2003) he had “a length of orange rope woven into a lover’s knot around his neck. He was weighed down by bricks and found with £15,000 in cash in his pockets.” (Rupert Taylor)

Though initially considered a suicide, after an investigation was conducted in 1991 at the instigation of Calvi’s family, it was concluded that the banker had been murdered:

This assessment was confirmed when Italian police exhumed the banker’s remains and re-examined them; Bennetto points out the autopsy found that ‘Markings and damage to the vertebra in Calvi’s neck suggested there were two points of strangulation.’ (citation) First, he was garroted, and then strung up under the bridge. In 2007, five members of the mafia were tried and acquitted of Calvi’s hanging, but there is a strong belief that the mafia organization “Cosa nostra” committed the crime” (Rupert Taylor).

Archbishop Paul Marcinkus was, without a doubt, the luckiest of the accused. President of the Vatican Bank, his position at the Vatican afforded him immunity from prosecution for years and allowed him to end his life in Sun City, Arizona, on February 20, 2006 without having been convicted. However, his involvement in the financial crime of the century was so blatant that it was even mentioned in his memorial:

American Prelate, Vatican Financial Head. His eighteen year

stewardship of the Vatican Bank did enormous harm to the reputation of the Catholic Church and himself as well. Banco Ambrosiano was the largest private bank in Italy which had close ties to the Vatican. The head of Banco Ambrosiano funneled more than one billion dollars into dummy accounts set up in various foreign countries. Its Chairman, Roberto Calvi, was found hanging from a bridge in London. Investigation found Mafia connections although his death was ruled a suicide. The multi-billion dollar financial collapse led directly to Archbishop Paul Marcinkus and arrest warrants were issued by the Italian government charging accessory to fraudulent bankruptcy. He avoided arrest while refusing to answer questions citing diplomatic immunity. The Archbishop until his death denied wrongdoing, but his malfeasance put a vast dent in the Vatican treasury. The churches role was never officially determined but the Vatican denying involvement, paid \$240 million dollars to creditors of the Ambrosiano bank.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13445283/paul-marcinkus>

Licio Gelli very well could have been the head of the criminal band that conspired to kill Pope John Paul I and succeeded in doing so. The pope was murdered. The head master of the masonic group P2 and extremely wealthy, he and his accomplices were guilty of many atrocious crimes, including the bombing of Bologna railway station in 1980, “in which 85 people were murdered and 182 injured” (Yallop 315). Yallop, in his postscript, explains how Gelli and his partners were tried and found guilty: “P2 member General Pietro Musumeci the former head of the internal section of SISMI, the Italian military intelligence, has been arrested and subsequently charged with perpetrating a cover-up. Fellow P2 members Francesco Pazienza and Giuseppe Belmonte and the Puppet master himself, Licio Gelli, were also charged. After a series

of trials and appeals all four were finally found guilty and sentenced to terms of imprisonment” (315). Some online research shows that the “neo-fascist group NAR, and several members were convicted over the attack, but the investigation also uncovered murky links to organised crime groups and even possible ties to the Italian secret service”. Even as of August of 2019, there are still doubts regarding who authored the attack: “it's thought likely that some of those involved in planning the attack will never be brought to justice” (*The Local* 2 August 2019). Wikipedia's article on Bologna bombing states that Licio ended up being guilty of only defamation. It seems that Gelli knew how to, literally, get away with murder every time. After his death in December of 2015, an article in the English newspaper *The Guardian* (29 December) describes how he was able to escape justice every time he was condemned and sentenced to jail, which happened several times. The only imprisonment he suffered for a meaningful period of time occurred in his Italian villa under constant police surveillance (Yallop 315). This is even despite the fact that he was indicted for the murder of Roberto Calvi, of which Yallop accused him first in 1984: “When the case came to trial the indictment against Gelli had melted away leaving five defendants (315). However, he was able to live to the age of 96, even marrying a second time at the age of 85 to his Romanian carer, Gabriela Vasile, 38 years younger than him.”²⁹

Michele Sindona, Paul Marcinkus, Licio Gelli, and Roberto Calvi are, according to Yallop, the main culprits behind the murder of Pope John Paul I. However, it seems obvious that they were able to succeed in this task thanks to members of the Vatican who must have aided them in allowing access to the pope's building and private chamber. The camerlengo Jean Villot must have been a key to their success: not only did he quickly grab the possibly incriminating papers that Luciani was holding in his hands upon his death, but other important clues, like his

²⁹ The article may be found in this site: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/29/licio-gelli>

medicine, his glass of water, his will, and other personal items that might have held the key to unveiling the mystery of how he died, who killed him, and why. Fathers Magee and Lorenzi, together with Dr. Buzzonetti, with their invented stories regarding Pope John Paul I's chest pains, are also probable accomplices.

The involvement of the mafia is highly probable, given the number of members already mentioned. Even as recently as October 19 of 2019, a member of the Colombo mafia family, Anthony Raimondi, claimed to have helped poison Pope John Paul I. On the stated date, the London tabloid *The Daily Mail* published an article written by Lauren Edmonds in which Raimondi states that on the fateful eve of the pope's death Marcinkus had spiked his "nightly cup of tea with Valium." Raimondi "said: 'I stood in the hallway outside the Pope's quarters when the tea was served.'" After that, the pope retired to his bedroom, where he quickly fell asleep, allowing Marcinkus to easily force-feed him a fatal dose of cyanide. Raimondi describes the whole process:

'He measured it in the dropper, put the dropper in the Pope's mouth and squeezed. When it was done, he closed the door behind him and walked away,' Raimondi said.

At which point, Marcinkus and two other cardinals rushed into the bedroom and pretended to be horrified by what they saw.

Raimondi was asked by Marcinkus and others involved to testify before God that the Pope hadn't suffered.

Shortly after, a papal assistant reportedly checked on the Pope and screamed that 'the Pope was dying!' (Lauren Edmonds)

This confession is only adds another fictitious account to the ones we have mentioned earlier, but corroborates the still present interest in the subject of Pope John Paul I's death. There is no way this could have happened without any of the nuns hearing it, in which case, they would have mentioned it in their detailed accounts, unless, of course, they lied in their statements to the different authors, in which case they would become accomplices as well, which is not probable. The same could be said of the pope's secretaries, but, given the fact that they are among the suspects, they could have kept that secret. However, Raimondi's confession adds another source pointing towards Marcinkus as a main culprit in the pope's murder.

As just mentioned, secretaries Magee and Lorenzi are definitely suspect; so is Dr. Buzzonetti. The fact that the three of them hid for over ten years the supposed fact that the pope had suffered from chest pains the day before he died is very suspicious, let alone the fact that each secretary claims it happened at a different time. Given that Magee had supposedly told Buzzonetti about it the day he died, and that Buzonetti recorded it on the pope's death certificate, it is strange that the physician never revealed it to the public, especially when there had been so many accusations to the Church over the matter of the pope's death. On top of this, neither sister Vincenza nor sister Marin heard anything about Luciani's chest pains on that tragic day. This makes one believe that the chest pains stories, as Yallop, Bassotto, and Sáenz claim, were made up. If the Holy See was indeed innocent of any wrongdoings in this matter, they would have been more than happy to allow Luciani's body to be examined so they could be exonerated.

However, despite several demands over the decades, including Dr. Buzzonetti to begin with, some cardinals a few days a few days after Luciani's death, Luciani's own family, and, in July of 1989, the formal request by the inhabitants of Canale de Agordo, the town where Luciani came from, the Vatican never gave in. The reason offered that Canon Law doesn't allow it, or that no pope was ever autopsied, have both been proved a lie, as Innocent XII was autopsied in 1700, thereby confirming he had died of colon cancer,³⁰ as well as four others, as previously mentioned.

The Vatican continued refusal to allow an autopsy of Pope John Paul I, as well as to disclose the papers that the pope was holding at the time of this death, together with the different cover-ups mentioned, demonstrate that there is no evidence that the pope died from natural causes or a heart attack, as the Holy See claims (Falasca). The evidence points, on the contrary, that there are many reasons to believe he was murdered, and the fact that his death was never investigated by the proper authorities, but only by journalists and other authors, is incredible.

It seems clear that the process to beatify Pope John Paul I is being rushed in order to avoid controversies. Falasca and her team have quickly composed volumes of documentation trying to prove that the pope deserves sainthood and that the Vatican is innocent of any wrongdoing regarding his death. In the process, they have dismissed all the scholarly books that point towards the pope having been murdered. Falasca and others call these books, disrespectfully, noir literature, whether they are scholarly books or novels. In addition, in order to help his canonization, as recently as August 2 of 2019, Canale d'Agordo opened to visitors the childhood home of Pope John Paul I ("Pope John Paul I's childhood home open to visitors").

³⁰ The Vatican has a document that describes this microscopic autopsy of Innocent XII, as shown in [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31210-7.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(16)31210-7.pdf).

The Vatican should stop brushing off any author who accuses them of any wrongdoing regarding the death of Pope John Paul I, and allow and encourage a professional investigation of the pope's death before the few remaining witnesses pass away.

Works Cited

“Archbishop Paul Marcinkus” (Memorial), *Find a Grave*

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13445283/paul-marcinkus>.

Arias, Juan. “Los habitantes del pueblo natal de Juan Pablo I piden que se le haga la autopsia”, *El País*, July 31, 1989.

Brockhaus, Hannah. “New book reveals details of John Paul I’s death”, *Catholic News Agency*,

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/new-book-reveals-details-of-john-paul-is-death-33420>

Cornwell, John. *A Thief in the Night. Life and Death in the Vatican*. Viking, 1989.

“Determining Time of Death”, <https://coronertalk.com/28>

Edmonds, Lauren. “Mobster claims he helped POISON Pope John Paul I with cyanide

and threatened to kill Pope John Paul II because they both tried to expose a billion dollar stock fraud scam involving cardinals and gangsters in Vatican City.” *The Daily Mail*,

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7591789/Mobster-claimed-helped-POISON-Pope-John-Paul-cyanide-stock-fraud-scam.html>. Accessed 19 October 2019.

Falasca, Stefania. *Albino Luciani Giovanni Paolo I. Biografia “ex documentis”*. Dagli

atti del processo canonico. Tipografia Piave, 2018.

____. *Papa Luciani. Cronaca di una morte*. Piemme, 2017.

“The first recorded use of microscopy in medicine: Pope Innocent XII’s autopsy report”,

Website title, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS01406736\(16\)31210-7.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS01406736(16)31210-7.pdf)

Greeley, Andrew. *The Making of the Popes 1978: The Politics of Intrigue in the Vatican*. Kansas City, KS: Andrews and McMeel, 1979.

Gregoire, Lucien. *The Vatican Murders: The Life and Death of John Paul I*.
Bloomington, IN: Publisher, 2013.

The Globe and Mail, October 7, 1978

The Guardian 29 December, 2015

Lewis, Paul. “Italy’s Mysterious, Deepening Bank Scandal.”, *The New York Times*, July 28, 1982: <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/28/world/italy-s-mysterious-deepening-bank-scandal.html>

“Joaquín Navarro Valls”, *Wikipedia*,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaqu%C3%ADn_Navarro-Valls

Koven, Ronald, and Gilbert, Sari. “Pope Buried in Open-Air Ceremony.” *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1978,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/10/05/pope-buried-in-open-air-ceremony/518919c9-ebc4-42da-a36a-1de646f3ebf2/>

The Local 2 August 2019

López Sáez, Jesús. *Juan Pablo I, caso abierto*. Libros abiertos, 2009.

---. *Se pedirá cuenta: (muerte y figura de Juan Pablo I)*. Editorial Orígenes, 1991.

---. *Biografía del Papa Luciani. Aspectos, omisiones, apuros*.

<https://comayala.es/es/articulos/302-30articulos/1217-biografia-del-papa-luciani-aspectos-omisiones-apuros>

O'Malley, John. *What Happened at Vatican II*. Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2010.

Patronoster, Renzo. "La strana morte di Papa Luciani: un decesso all'italiana?":

<http://win.storiain.net/arret/num97/artic4.asp>

"Pope John Paul I", Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_John_Paul_I#Death

"Pope John Paul I Dies of Heart Attack", *The Guardian*, September 30, 1978,

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/sep/30/pope-john-paul-1-death-vatican>

"Pope John Paul I's childhood home open to visitors":

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-07/pope-john-paul-i-home-canale-dagordo.html>

Spackman, Paul. *God's Candidate: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul I*. City, State: Gracewing Publishing, 2008.

Taylor, Rupert. "Who Killed God's Banker?", <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/Who-Killed-Gods-Banker>

Thomas, Gordon, and Max Morgan-Witts. *Pontiff*. Doubleday, 1983.

Tripole, Martin R, S.J.

Promise Renewed: Jesuit Higher Education for a New Millennium.

Chicago: Loyola

Press, 1999.

Yallop, David. *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I*.

Corgi, 1997.

---. *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I.* Basic Books, 2007. (updated 2nd version of the first edition of this same book)