

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Thoughts on Roberto de Mattei's *A Cardinal for the Ages*¹

I say, as do all Christian men, that it is not fate but a divine purpose
that rules us.

King Alfred the Great²

Any event, no matter how trivial, may alter history but some events are pivotal, *cardinal*, to use the adjective in its original sense. One such was the death on February 26th, 1930 of Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val, Secretary of the Holy Office to Pius XI and to Benedict XV, Secretary of State to Pius X. He was 64 when he died on the operating table during a routine appendectomy performed by an eminent Italian surgeon, the result of an act or omission of anaesthetist, Dr Ernesto Boni. On the balance of probabilities, his death was homicide. More of this hereafter.

The doyen of Australia's theologians, Dr Austin Woodbury Ph.D, S.T.D. used to teach his students - against the views of a celebrated 19th century theologian - (in his homely manner) that 'God knows the wouldies': God knows *what would have happened*. He knows what would have happened had Cardinal Merry del Val not died so precipitately.

Let us speculate.

Rafael was born on October 10th, 1865 in the Spanish Embassy in London, the second son of the secretary to the Spanish legation, Spanish nobleman Rafael Carlos Merry del Val and Sofia Josefa de Zulueta, elder daughter of Jose de Zulueta, Count of Torre Diaz and his English wife, Sophia Anne, née Wilcox. The Merry family were originally from Ireland but moved to Seville in the eighteenth century to escape the Protestant persecutions. Rafael grew up in England and attended a Jesuit preparatory school in Bournemouth. He early informed his father that he desired to become a priest and began his studies at Ushaw in County Durham, a college affiliated with the seminary at Douai in France.

At the end of his seminary training, Bishop Vaughan of Salford suggested Rafael should complete his studies at the Scottish College in Rome. In autumn 1885, Rafael Carlos was appointed Spanish plenipotentiary minister in Vienna. He sought, and was granted, a private audience for himself and his seminarian son with Pope Leo XIII. The Pope recognised in the young man a talent that must be cossetted and reserved for higher things in the Church and he directed his father, over his delicately expressed opposition, to allow him to be formed thenceforth in the Pontifical Academy of Ecclesiastical Nobles. And so, it was done.

Rafael had illustrious professors, several of whom held important positions in the Roman Curia, including the eminent theologian, Fr Louis Billot SJ, afterwards a cardinal, with whom he would have a long association. He obtained doctorates in philosophy (1886) and theology (1890) and a license in canon law (1891). He received the sub-diaconate in Prague in 1887 at the hands of Cardinal Franziskus Schönborn, archbishop of that city and close friend of the Merry del Val family. In July 1887 Leo sent a pontifical mission to London to congratulate Queen Victoria on

¹ Roberto de Mattei, *A Cardinal for the Ages: Merry del Val and His Enduring Influence on The Church*, Manchester NH (Sophia Institute), 2026

² In a marginal note to his translation of Boëthius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Cited by G K Chesterton.

the fiftieth anniversary of her reign and directed that Rafael, as a native Englishman, should accompany the mission as secretary. He was 22. Leo nominated him as his supernumerary secret chamberlain and, though he was not yet a priest, elevated him to the rank of Monsignor.

In March 1888 Merry del Val attended Msgr. Luigi Galimberti, nuncio to Vienna, on a mission to Berlin. He shared with Msgr. Galimberti the view that the Vatican should prefer the royal Austrian regime over that of the republican and Masonic French, favoured by Leo's new Secretary of State, Mariano Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro. In May 1888 he received the Diaconate in Rome and, on December 30th, he was ordained a priest by Lucido Cardinal Parocchi, Vicar of Rome, in the Vicariate's private chapel with a dispensation from the canonical requirements in respect of the minimum age of ordination.

Fr Merry del Val's great passion was the restoration of the faith in England and had he not been hijacked, as it were, by Leo XIII he might have devoted his talents as a priest in England to that end. In retrospect, it might be said that the service for he performed for Leo XIII, for Pius X, for Benedict XV and for Pius XI over 45 years benefitted not only the Catholics of England but those of the whole world, for which we will forever be in his debt. What service did he perform? He stood as a rock against the devil's agents in the cult of Freemasonry and in the heresy of Modernism, agents who were not only outside the Church but within her precincts.

In 1884 the Pope had him consecrated bishop and, in June, 1893, made him a cardinal-priest.

His concern for the restoration of the faith in England drove Bishop Merry del Val to persuade the Pope to resolve the issue of Anglican orders whose alleged validity had been promoted for some time by agents pretending adhesion to Catholic principle. He helped draft *Apostolicae Curae*, Leo XIII's bull published on September 13th, 1896 confirming, for all time, their invalidity.

Leo XIII died on July 20th, 1903. The cardinal secretary of the conclave to elect his successor died shortly thereafter, precipitating a vote to replace him. Deadlocked, the cardinals chose Cardinal Merry del Val to solve the impasse. In the Conclave they elected the Patriarch of Venice, Giuseppe Cardinal Sarto, against his wishes, and he took the name Pius X. The new Pope put a number of episcopal noses out of joint when he elected the young cardinal who had managed the Conclave to be his Secretary of State. Pope and Secretary of State then embarked on a course of battle with the enemies of the Church.

One of the new Pope's first burdens was the state of the Church in France resulting from Leo XIII's misconceived policy - advanced by Cardinal Rampolla del Tindaro - of *ralliement*, or accommodation with, that country's secular, and Masonic, ruling elite. In dealings with the devil's emissaries in the French government, Merry del Val showed himself a consummate adversary, parrying their false charges and allegations with almost supernatural skill. He was the perfect instrument, pursuing with tranquility Pius X's policy towards the hateful and intransigent regime. And the Cardinal, as Secretary of State, had the perfect Pope to carry out his advice against their threats and actions which included the wholesale theft of the Church's property throughout the country. While this fight was going on, Merry del Val lent his aid to the Pope and his former teacher, Fr Louis Billot, and other theologians in drafting of the long and complex

encyclical condemning the Modernist heresy and its exponents, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which was promulgated in September 1907.³

Merry del Val's rigorous orthodoxy had alienated a number of the college of cardinals influenced by the liberals who adhered to the mindset of his predecessor in the office of Secretary of State, Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro. Rampolla died in 1913 but his influence continued among his acolytes. This ensured that on Pius X's death Merry del Val was overlooked as his successor. Giacomo Cardinal Della Chiesa, whom Rampolla had employed as his secretary during Leo XIII's reign, was elected as Pope Benedict XV and the new pope retained another of Rampolla's acolytes, Pietro Cardinal Gasparri, as his Secretary of State. He appointed Merry del Val secretary of the Holy Office. On the death of Benedict XV Merry del Val was again overlooked when Achille Cardinal Ratti, another of Rampolla's associates, was elected as Pope Pius XI. While generally orthodox Ratti proved to be a highly temperamental pontiff.

Cardinal Gasparri, who had long been at odds with Merry del Val, went out of his way to try and accommodate within the Church Modernists such as the liturgist, Lambert Beauduin, and Fr Ernesto Buonaiuti. In the battle over the latter, Merry del Val laboured to persuade the Pope to excommunicate Buonaiuti - for the second time - in March 1924 and, in 1926, to have all his writings condemned and placed on the Index. As we will see, Beauduin was to be involved in another issue which was only resolved with the encyclical *Mortalium Animos*.

In the 1920s a series of private meetings between Catholics and Anglicans took place with a view to setting in motion a 'reunification' movement. Its promoters were the English Anglican, Lord Halifax, and the French Lazarist priest, Fernand Portal. They secured support for the project in Désiré Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, who later informed Rome. Cardinal Gasparri agreed to it. Thereafter discussions, *the Conversations of Malines*, took place in the archbishop's house from 1920 and 1926. During the fourth such 'conversation' Archbishop Mercier read a paper by the renegade liturgist, Fr Beauduin, which proposed a 'reconciliation' with Rome to be understood not as absorption of the Church of England into the Church of Rome, but as union of the two under the primacy of the successor of Peter. The flaw in the proposal was the premise that the Anglican Church had once been united with Christ's Church. It never had.

The movement sought to get around Leo XIII's 1896 bull, *Apostolicae Curae*. Needless to say, the whole enterprise was opposed by Cardinal Merry del Val who communicated with the English theologian who had assisted in the drafting of Leo XIII's bull, Msgr. Moyes. He incited Francis Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, and the English bishops, to condemn the errors at the heart of the business and to insist that the determination in *Apostolicae Curae* was irreformable. Cardinal Bourne proved his orthodoxy and met Pius XI in Rome voicing his opposition to the 'ecumenical' meetings. In the flood of information, and opposition of the English episcopacy, the Pope found himself diverging from his Secretary of State on the question, a state of affairs which reflected what had occurred between Leo XIII and his Secretary of State, Rampolla, on the question of Anglican ordinations 30 years prior. In March 1927 a veto was imposed from Rome on any further 'conversations' at Malines. Less than a year later, with the assistance of Merry del Val, Pius XI published *Mortalium Animos* (January 6th, 1928). The

³ The Pope made Billot a Cardinal Priest in 1911, an office he was to resign in controversial circumstances 16 years later under the headstrong Pius XI.

encyclical rejected the Protestant understanding of Our Lord's expression *ut unum sint* in *John* 17: 22, and warned of the religious indifferentism at which misuse of the expression was aimed.

It hardly needs to be said that this is one of the innumerable errors adopted by the bishops of the ersatz 'ecumenical' council held between 1962 and 1965, nor that the bishops' adoption of that rooted misunderstanding of Our Lord's words assisted the triumph of the Modernist heresy in the Vatican whose effects the Catholic Church and the Catholic faithful suffer today.⁴ If the reader doubts the force of what has here been said, let him study Fr Luigi Vella's exposure of the true character of Angelo Guisepe Roncalli, Pope John XXIII, published on this website.⁵

Had Merry del Val survived he might, with his seniority, on Pius XI's death in 1939, have been elected pope instead of Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli. Had this not occurred, it is likely Pacelli would have retained him as Secretary of State or as senior advisor. (He would then, hypothetically, have been 74 years old.) Pacelli had begun his ecclesiastical career in the secretariat under Merry del Val and remained close to the Cardinal all his life. Possessed, as may be gathered from the foregoing, of a great power of discernment of souls Merry del Val was ever alive to the threats posed by Masons and Modernists. Whether as Pope, or as Secretary of State or advisor to Pacelli, he would have curtailed the careers of the malevolent individuals who came to dominate the curial scene during Pacelli's long pontificate. Moreover, he would have counselled against a certain emasculation of the sacred liturgy, on which Pacelli embarked, which facilitated the descent into liturgical chaos that eventuated some ten years later.

Merry del Val had been instrumental in Pius X's excommunication of Tyrell and Loisy. Can one imagine that he would not have seen that similar treatment was accorded Beauduin and those who followed him? He would, moreover, have seen things Pacelli did not see; the malevolent will of Bugnini, and the harm implicit in his liturgical advice; the faux religiosity of Jose-Maria Escrivà and the flawed foundation of his 'Opus Dei' movement with its focus on the laity and resurrection of features of the *Sillon* Pius X had condemned in *Notre Charge Apostolique*, as well as the facility the movement provided for a resurgence of the Modernist heresy.

Merry del Val was more astute than Pacelli; more battle hardened; more pragmatic. He would not have allowed himself to become hamstrung, as Pacelli did, by those busy in the episcopacy and college of cardinals conniving at the Church's harm.⁶ Without Roncalli, without Montini, without Escrivà, there would never have occurred the pretended ecumenical council that took place between 1962 and 1965; there would have been no vehicle for the invasion of the Church by the Modernist heresy or, at worst, the episcopacy as a whole would have been given warning of its imminence. We might have been free of the chaos in which the Church and the Catholic faithful have been immersed now for the best part of seventy years! And the millions who wandered away from the faith might have been retained and their salvation secured.

Yes. It is worth pondering on what might have been!

⁴ Pope Leo XIV vaunted the misused quote during the recent visit to the Vatican of King Charles and his consort.

⁵ Cf. https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/john-XXIII-beatified.pdf

⁶ The *Sillon* movement promoted egalitarianism in the Church against the rightful authority of the hierarchy, and encouraged lay autonomy. The apostolic letter *Notre Charge Apostolique* was issued on August 25th, 1910. The provision in the encyclical *Pascendi* (September 8th, 1907) condemning that "most pernicious doctrine that would make of the laity a factor of progress in the Church" is the all-important n. 27.

Members of the del Val family have maintained for more than ninety years that the scion of their noble family was assassinated on February 26th, 1930. They have repeatedly pressed the Vatican for an investigation, to no avail. When one looks at the event, not only through its effects but through its causes, they have every reason for their stand.

Ernesto Bonni, who had practised as an anaesthetist for some fifteen years, committed suicide not long after the death of the Cardinal. It was rumoured he had been influenced in his action by Masonic interests. These have never refrained from stooping to murder to achieve their ends.⁷ Had Bonni been forced to act by malevolent forces it is entirely likely that, like Judas, he despaired of his salvation.

The universal esteem in which Cardinal Merry del Val was held rendered it fitting that he should, as with innumerable of his peers, have ended his days surrounded by the blessings and the sacraments of the Church. His deprivation of such great goods is so indicative of injustice that it might reasonably be deduced that his death was no accident. It was essential for the success of his plans for invasion of Christ's Church that the constant foil of the devil's Masonic and Modernist instruments for 45 years, should be removed. It suited the devil's agenda, too, that the chief representative of European royalty in the Curia be removed (to make way for the appearance of a *democratic* ethos) and the salutary influence of Pius XI's 1925 encyclical *Quas Primas* celebrating the Universal Kingship of Christ be suppressed.

“God, since He is supremely good,” says St Augustine—

“in no wise would allow something of evil to be in His works were He not good and omnipotent even up to this point, as to bring forth good even from evil.” [*Enchiridion ad Laurentium* ch. xi]

The immense evils that have afflicted God's Holy Church since the death of Pius XII, where—

- each of the last seven Popes has been a Modernist;
- the current Pope behaves, hour by hour, as the worst of Modernist heretics;
- among the Church's five thousand six hundred odd bishops, one only, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, has showed himself to be an orthodox Catholic rather than a conservative Modernist—

have been allowed by the Almighty for ends which serve His Majesty. The great good that Merry del Val's death will produce is hidden from us now. It may be revealed with the passage of time: it will certainly be revealed on the Day of Judgement.

“We adore and bless His divine decrees,” says Mother Mary of St Peter, Foundress of the *Tyburn nuns*, “though they are mysterious to our minds, they are not so to our hearts which, through love, are attached to the Divine good pleasure.” God foresaw from all eternity the great Cardinal's precipitate death and the evils his removal would facilitate, and has allowed for it.⁸

Michael Baker

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⁷ Let the reader revisit the instance of the revelations to Pope John Paul in 1978 by Italian journalist, and former Mason, Carmine Pecorelli and note his subsequent fate.

⁸ There is one other observation that might be made. Had Merry del Val survived the malice of the Church's enemies, how could the prophecy which Our Blessed Lady made to the children at *La Salette* have been fulfilled, that the Church would be afflicted by two ‘worm-ridden’ popes?