

MILAN EVENT

## "Dear Brother Masons": Archbishop of Milan takes his turn

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CULTURE

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The Archbishop of Milan, Monsignor Mario Delpini, wants to dialogue with the Freemasonry, but only if the audience is restricted and the press banned. A sign that the Masonic spirit of secrecy has already infected the summit of the Ambrosian Church. This

is what emerges from investigating the seminar that will take place tomorrow afternoon - 16 February - in Milan, on the premises of the Ambrosianum Cultural Foundation, dedicated precisely to "The Catholic Church and Freemasonry". A meeting that the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy (GOI), Stefano Bisi, defines as "historic". And he has good reason: it is in fact the first time that the three Grand Masters of the three Italian lodges - in addition to the GOI, the Grand Lodge of Italy of the ALAM and the Grand Regular Lodge of Italy - are together with eminent representatives of the Church: in addition to Delpini, Bishop Antonio Staglianò, President of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio and Father Zbigniew Suchecki, a Franciscan theologian and expert on Freemasonry.

**Obviously, a meeting of this kind ignites the curiosity of the public and the press,** especially because for some years now exponents of Freemasonry have been punctually appearing in Catholic circles, especially since exactly eight years ago, on 14 February 2016, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi published an article with the eloquent title: Dear Brother Freemasons in the Italian daily, *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Since then, the occasions for meetings, promoted by Freemasonry or by some dioceses, have multiplied, and are constantly growing, as the Milan initiative testifies, even though this one is organised by a third protagonist, the GRIS association. Born in Bologna in 1987 as a Group for Research and Information on Sects, in 2001 GRIS broadened its horizon by changing its name to Gruppo di Ricerca e Informazione Socio-religiosa. As explained on their website, GRIS is a private association of Catholics, whose statutes, however, are approved by the Italian Bishops' Conference. GRIS has been concerned with Freemasonry for some time, ever since its interest was limited to sects, and has already organised several meetings in various parts of Italy with the declared aim of mutual acquaintance, well before Cardinal Ravasi's intervention.

**That is why it sounds even stranger that a meeting of this level should be barred to the press.** 'It is Archbishop Delpini who does not want journalists to attend,' a female voice answers me on the GRIS phone when I ask about the possibility of an accreditation for the *Daily Compass*, after receiving a flyer (see bottom of article) advertising this 'seminar by invitation' with an indication of e-mail and telephone for bookings. I then turned to the head of the Social Communications Office of the archdiocese of Milan, Dr Stefano Femminis, who tried to correct the situation: 'The archbishop is the guest, not the organiser, and at the beginning it was presented as a closed-door meeting; now, even if someone has spread the news and it has come out in the newspapers, the archbishop has asked that the original decision be respected'. That Monsignor Delpini is merely a guest is, however, a little hard to believe even though,

according to the programme, he is only due to make an introduction. Not for nothing is the venue of the event, the Ambrosianeum Foundation, a cultural institution closely linked to the archdiocese.

**So we return to GRIS, and this time we speak to Giuseppe Ferrari**, national secretary and speaker at the seminar: 'I confirm that closed doors are the wishes of Archbishop Delpini. We thought of organising this high-level meeting in Milan, but the condition was the assent and involvement of the archbishop. He gave his consensus but on this precise condition, that it be a moment of study and in-depth analysis with a limited public presence and without the press. I would have invited the press, but we wanted the archbishop and this was the condition, so I adapted'. And Grand Master Bisi indirectly confirms: 'I know nothing about these organisational aspects,' he says when questioned by the *Daily Compass*. Moreover, Ferrari continues, a 100-seat hall was made available and the invitations were "allotted": "Twenty places for each Masonic obedience and 40 for the GRIS".

**The condition set by Delpini did not change** even after the news of the seminar became public knowledge, thanks to the fact that the presentation flyer has been circulating freely for days and is also prominently displayed on the GRIS website.

**The question remains as to the meaning of these meetings if it is true** that the Church's condemnation of Freemasonry is well known (since the 18th century there have been almost 600 magisterial documents to this effect), and reaffirmed even last November with a reply from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith confirming the prohibition for Catholics to join Masonic lodges. And Ferrari himself confirms that it emerges once again "that there is an objective impediment to the Church having a softer relationship with Freemasonry, namely rites and rituals that cannot be accepted by the Church. Either Freemasonry eliminates these rites and rituals or nothing changes. But at least we say it to each other'.

**But how many times does it have to be said for it to be clear?** It may well be true that there is substantial ignorance on the subject of Freemasonry, as is also written in a book that another GRIS exponent, Tullio Di Fiore, dedicated in 2013 to "Freemasonry and the Catholic Church" (lower-case "c" in the title), but it is hard to understand why there is a need to multiply the meetings in which to tell each other how incompatible we are.

**The truth is that gestures are worth much more than words**, and this is why Masonic lodges, GOI in the lead, are very interested in this dialogue: they have

everything to gain because the impression given to public opinion is that after centuries of condemnations, there is not only the possibility of a confrontation but also that of sharing certain values (think of the misunderstandings around the theme of "universal brotherhood"). And moreover, inviting its face into public events 'cleanses' the image of a secret sect Freemasonry.

**And the Church? It gives the classic idea of 'I would like to, but I cannot',** the pursuit of an open but still impossible collaboration given the rules of entry into Masonic lodges. A position that, however, forgets a fundamental issue: the Church has always been open to confrontation, with anyone, it is "giving reason to the hope that is in you", as St. Peter explained. On the contrary, it is Freemasonry that has always regarded the Church with hostility and understands every form of dialogue as an attempt to neutralise that claim to Truth that the Church proclaims. It is therefore not surprising that these possibilities for confrontation are multiplying in this period when relativism has taken root even among many pastors of the Church. And it is not enough to leave journalists outside the door to hide this reality.