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Freemasonry, Staglianò's doublespeak

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It took an article on the *Daily Compass* to force the publication of Monsignor Antonio Staglianò's full speech at the seminar on "Church and Freemasonry" organised by the GRIS (Group for Socio-Religious Research and Information) in Milan last 16 February. The *Daily Compass*' revelations about the ambiguities of Staglianò, who is president of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, must have caused someone a stomach ache in the

Vatican, so much so that it was advisable to take corrective action.

With a clever move, however: the posting online, on 26 February, of the full video of the speech was preceded on 24 February by a "commanded" interview with the Vatican media in which Staglianò explains why the Church and Freemasonry "are profoundly irreconcilable".

The evident aim is to show himself to be perfectly in tune with almost 300 years of the Church's Magisterium on Freemasonry and to refute what has been published by the *Daily Compass*, also counting on the fact that after reading the brief interview only very few will bother to listen to 46 minutes of recorded speech. But in the interview, Staglianò only repeats some of the concepts expressed in the Milan conference, leaving out the more questionable ones, some of which were reported by *Daily Compass* (anyone can verify the accuracy of our quotes).

The tactic is always the same: words say that doctrine does not change, but then there is life to consider, which is always greater than doctrine. This is exactly the sense of the Staglianò's speech in Milan.

Thus we find on the one hand the affirmation of the profound diversity between the Christian God and the Masonic conception of the Grand Architect, but on the other hand the overcoming of the doctrinal obstacle with the concept of love and mercy, which embraces all.

But above all, we must consider the context of Monsignor Staglianò's speech. He was speaking at a conference together with the Grand Masters of the three main Italian lodges, accompanied by dozens of other 'brothers'. The Freemason leaders, with different nuances, all said two things in particular: first, that there can be compatibility between the Church and Freemasonry; second, they made an explicit request to no longer consider membership of Freemasonry an impediment to accessing the sacraments; and as a first step (the Grand Master of the Grand Regular Lodge of Italy, Fabio Venzi, said this) a distinction must be made between Lodges, recognising at least those that are founded on Christian rites.

What was Staglianò's response? Well, on doctrine there is little to be done, the difference between Church and Freemasonry is too obvious. But then there is life and, above all, there is the Mercy of God, whose blessing "falls on the just and the unjust": it is then God who will ultimately judge how it has been received. There was a clear reason that the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy, Stefano Bisi, had referred to the

openness towards gay couples and remarried divorcees; and Staglianò used the example of Fiducia Supplicans with the blessing for gay couples to explain the issue of Mercy that applies to all.

It must be said that from a logical point of view, Bisi's discourse is perfectly legitimate: if we are all sinners and all must be welcomed into the Church with full rights, why are irregular couples yes and Freemasons no? As with gay unions, one could always say that it is not Freemasonry that is blessed but individual Freemasons. And in fact Staglianò does not defend this discrimination, rather he lays the groundwork to overcome it. Including the final invocation of a "healthy sapiential theology" that goes beyond the doctrinal approach that the latest document of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published last November is still steeped in.

If one has the patience - and the willingness to make a sacrifice - to listen to Monsignor Staglianò's entire speech and contextualise it, one will not fail to notice the important opening made, which culminated in Cardinal Coccopalmerio's proposal to create a "permanent table" Church-Masonry. In short, the now familiar pattern is repeated: gender ideology is condemned, but then organised groups of gays and trans people are made to feel at home in the Vatican; women's diaconate is rejected, but then commissions are set up to study it and no action is taken in those European countries where women also act as parish priests; the importance of maintaining priestly celibacy is upheld, but then it is agreed to discuss it. And so on.

Now it is the turn of Freemasonry. This is the matter on which Staglianò should give a convincing explanation: if he really believes that the Church and Freemasonry "are profoundly irreconcilable", why has he been engaged in this dialogue for years, which he would now even like to be raised to a higher level? What is the point of continuing to hold conferences and even a 'permanent table' to say that we are irreconcilable and that the Church is right in condemning Freemason

Photo: Staglianò (right) with Grand Master Bisi