

Papa Luciani. Chronicle of a death

Preface by Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Secretary of State of His Holiness

I was happy to accept the invitation to write the preface to this volume. I have a particular devotion to John Paul I and admire the holiness of his earthly life. I too am from the Veneto region and remember with emotion when on the 26 August 1978 Cardinal Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, became John Paul I. Certainly the cardinals had not made this decision on the basis of political strategies but only taking into account decisive ecclesial criteria pertaining to the profile of a bishop: his quality as pastor.

His sudden and unexpected passing away, after a pontificate that lasted little more than a month triggered - over the decades since September 1978 - a myriad of theories, suspicions, suppositions. He died too soon and too hastily, leaving behind him the hoped for winds of change relating to a genuine evangelical novelty inspired by his humility. Albino Luciani, priest, bishop, patriarch and then Pope was and remains an irreplaceable point of reference in the history of the Italian and universal Church. His is the story of a bishop who witnessed the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and applied it. A man of sharp and broad minded intelligence. A pastor close to his holy people and faithful to God, rooted in the fundamentals of the faith and with an extraordinary cultural and social sensitivity. A man of the Church, meek yet firm in governance; learned yet with a capacity of expression accessible to all in its simplicity. A brilliant writer, both as a journalist and as an author as exemplified in his *Illustrissimi*, which he edited and had reprinted during his pontificate.

Proximity, humility, simplicity, insistence on the mercy and tenderness of God are the hallmarks of a petrine magisterium that were appealing forty years ago and are still more than relevant today.

Despite this his message has often been dimmed by theories and suspicions surrounding his death, which took place in the pontifical apartment on the night of the 28 September 1978. After many conjectures, numerous reconstructions founded on rumours devoid of proof, we can now affirm that we know precisely what took place in the final hours of the life of this Pope, whose importance - as suggested by his successor John Paul II - is inversely proportional to his all too brief pontificate: «Magis ostentus quam datus», more shown than given. We finally have a reconstruction carried out according to a method of rigorous historical research, based on exceptional documentation, undivulged until now. The result of which is presented herein by Stefania Falasca, vice postulator of the Postulation for the cause of beatification and canonisation of Albino Luciani. And here I'd like to shine the spotlight on the relevance of the primary work of research, of acquisition of sources and of processing implemented. Highlighting as well the importance this played from a point of view both of history and of historiography, given the lack of scientific contributions available on the life and works of Luciani. Work that had never before been carried out was undertaken with tenacious precision and conscience in a special way by Stefania Falasca, right from the start of the Roman phase of the Cause. It represents a due tribute to the memory of John Paul I, so his historical importance might be fully restored with the accuracy and commitment owed to him, allowing for new perspectives relating to the study of his work to emerge. Therefore a precious effort, carried out in a relatively brief time, when compared to the Causes of other pontiffs of the twentieth century, with the exception obviously for the Cause of John Paul II.

The summarised research to be found in this book, aimed at retracing the final hours of this pontiff from the Veneto region on the basis of the acquired documentation and available oral sources, has been conducted according to critical historical criteria, founded on documented proof and the precise and accurate confrontation with testimonial evidence. A process that has shed light on the epilogue of the life of 'Papa Luciani'. The obscure passages are finally taken out of limbo and clarified. Passages previously amplified and misrepresented both in the 'film noir' type representation of facts and by

those who denied the hypothesis of a plot.

Finally not to be forgotten is the value of the introduction to the book. In fact before beginning the story relating to Albino Luciani's final hours this introduction offers a synthetic but powerful description of his figure. And draws up some useful background information for those, who while wishing to be acquainted with hitherto unknown details regarding the death of 'Papa Luciani', know little about his life and magisterium.

His brief pontificate was not the passing of a meteor that disappears after a brief journey. The history of the Church, intent on its service to the world was not interrupted by his death, a chapter was not closed nor was it necessary to start anew. John Paul I may not have had the time to accomplish great gestures in the governance of the Church but he certainly contributed – *explevit tempora multa* - to the strengthening of the design of a conciliar Church close to the suffering of peoples and of their thirst for charity. Hardly a footnote, given this is the story of grace descending on earth, a story destined to go down in history.