

POWER STRUGGLES AND MURDERS IN THE VATICAN

Evidence surrounding the 1998 killing of the new commander of the Swiss Guard overturns the Vatican's official version of events and raises disturbing questions about Opus Dei and masonic influences in the Curia and the activities of Eastern European spy networks.

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A Link to the Attempted Assassination of Pope John Paul II

On Monday 4 May 1998, just after 9.00 pm, 43-year-old Swiss Guard Alois Estermann was found shot dead along with his wife, Gladys Meza Romero, and another Swiss Guard, 23-year-old lance corporal (or vice-corporal) Cédric Tornay. It is extremely rare that murder occurs within the walls of the Vatican. However, what makes these deaths rather poignant is that, just hours before the murders, Estermann was appointed commandant of the Swiss Guard by Pope John Paul II.

Within hours of the crimes, Tornay was identified as the man who "in a moment of madness" had killed the commandant and his wife before turning the gun on himself. The Vatican said that "the recruit" appeared to have a personal grudge against his commandant and previously had complained about a lack of recognition within the Swiss Guard. And that, it seemed, explained it all. Or did it?

In the immediate aftermath of the crimes, it was reported that Estermann, almost two decades before, had shielded the pope during the 1981 assassination attempt—an incorrect news item that would continue to circulate for some time. But according to Ferdinando Imposimato, the Italian prosecutor in charge of the investigation of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, both he and Mehmet Ali Ağca, the Turk who failed to kill the pope on 13 May 1981, are convinced of a link between the assassination attempt and the 1998 murder of Estermann.

Imposimato claims that, during private conversations held between 1997 and 2000, Ağca confirmed that the Russian KGB and the Bulgarian secret service had been involved in the 1981 assassination attempt on the pope. Imposimato alleges a connection with the 1998 murder through a link with the East German secret police, the Stasi. Though the Vatican and many Church apologists did not want to hear it, it is a fact that Markus Wolf, the former number two of the Stasi, declared that in 1979 Estermann had been recruited as a Stasi agent. Whether or not Wolf told the truth is a different matter, of course, but Wolf's credibility has never been questioned—except in this instance. The question therefore is: if Estermann was still a Stasi asset by 1998, by which time communism had long collapsed and East Germany had folded back into Germany, could this explain the 1998 murders?

Opus Dei versus Freemasons and Propaganda Due

A year after the murders, a group of disaffected priests inside the Vatican claimed that Estermann had been the victim of a Vatican power struggle. The priests suggested that evidence in the murder investigation had been tampered with in order to fit the hypothesis that the killing of Estermann was the result of a moment of madness on the part of Tornay. The claims were published in 1999 in the book *Blood Lies in the Vatican*, printed by a small Milanese publisher. The Vatican still wields tremendous power in Italy...

The anonymous authors claim that Estermann was the victim of a struggle for control of the Swiss Guard between the secretive, traditionalist Catholic movement Opus Dei and a Masonic power faction ensconced in the Curia. This "Masonic power" should be read as the likes of P2—Propaganda Due—while the plot of the book seems to have been taken out of Dan Brown's *Angels & Demons*. Indeed, it seems that Estermann's murder may have been worked into *Angels & Demons*.

"In the Vatican, there are those who maintain that vice-corporal Tornay was attacked after coming off duty and dragged into a cellar," it is argued in *Blood Lies in the Vatican* (<http://tinyurl.com/5t9kowz>). Tornay was then "suicided" with a silenced 7-mm pistol, and his duty revolver was used to kill the Estermanns in their Vatican apartment. Following that, Tornay's body was dumped in their flat so that the triple killing would look like murder-suicide.

As to a motive, it is alleged in the book that both Estermann and his wife, who worked at the Venezuelan Embassy to the Holy See, were engaged in secret international financial deals for the benefit of Opus Dei. It is also alleged that the power vacuum at the head of the Swiss Guard had been because of opposition to Estermann's appointment. Is it just a coincidence that nine hours after the announcement of the Vatican's choice, the new commander was dead?

That the Vatican went into a protective mode immediately after the discovery of the bodies is a fact. It is also a fact that the "murder-suicide" scenario in "a moment of madness" is a conclusion reached within hours of the crime—though, it has to be said, the crime scene definitely suggested the likelihood of this scenario. But *Blood Lies in the Vatican* underlines that the official scenario was offered by the Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro-Valls, MD, himself a member of Opus Dei.

Within minutes of the murder, Dr Navarro-Valls had sealed the Estermanns's apartment. No one—including the Italian police—was allowed near the crime scene. Within three hours and before any autopsies were conducted, Navarro-Valls had issued the statement that a "fit of madness" made Tornay commit a double murder (John Follain, *City of Secrets: The Truth Behind the Murders at the Vatican*, William Morrow, 2003, pp. 14-15). Autopsies were performed the next day by Vatican doctors, who were sworn to secrecy and kept no written reports of their conclusions, thus largely defeating the purpose of the autopsies.

People have queried how Navarro-Valls was able to discern so quickly that Tornay, a man he had never met, had performed this act in a fit of madness.

Furthermore, the evening following the murders, Cardinal Alfons Stickler described Tornay as "an individual suffering from the psychological disorder of paranoia" (Follain, 2003, p. 17)—another intriguing diagnosis from someone who had never met Tornay and was not qualified to reach such a diagnosis.

The Doctored Official Report

Interestingly, according to the official report (*Bollettino* 55/99), the "fit of madness" had physical rather than purely psychological reasons, which means that Navarro-Valls's conclusion is wrong as no autopsy had been performed at the time of his statement. The report mentions traces of a cannabis metabolite present in the urine, though not in the blood. However, the amount itself was far too small to indicate cannabis addiction. Furthermore, cannabis is known to calm aggressive impulses, not to provoke them. So rather than clear anything up, the report poses more questions.

The pathologists also exaggerated the significance of a benign tumour in Tornay's brain. They had found a "benign subarachnoid cyst", 4.0 by 2.5 centimetres, which had "depressed and deformed the anterior part of the left frontal cerebral lobe, partially eroding the bone". Though most experts agree that this would have had no effect at all on Tornay's behaviour, the pathologists argued that it "was responsible

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for impairment of cognitive [thought] function...and... disinhibition of behaviour". However, during a second autopsy that would later be performed in Switzerland, it was shown that no such tumour was present in Tornay's brain at all—suggesting, once again, that the Vatican's official version of the events is seriously flawed, if not doctored, if not a total lie.

It was left to Cardinal Secretary of State Angelo Sodano to perform the Requiem Mass for Estermann and his wife at St Peter's Basilica. That in itself was a rare honour for laypeople. At the same time, on the border of Vatican City in the small Church of St Anne, a private funeral mass was said for Cédric Tornay. Inside, a Swiss Guard line allowed a gap for the space where Tornay usually stood.

The Second Autopsy and a Forged Suicide Letter

Since his death, Tornay's mother, Muguette Baudat, has frequently expressed her dissatisfaction with the way the Vatican has handled the case. She does not accept the official scenario. Baudat, herself a Protestant, was told immediately after her son's death that his body was rotting, that his head had been ripped off, and that all the hotels in Rome were full so she

should not come to Rome. She did, of course, and when she reached Rome she discovered that none of the claims made by the Vatican about the state of her son's body was true. Muguetta Baudat wrote twice to the pope, questioning the Vatican's version of Tornay's death, but did not receive a reply.

When Tornay's body was flown back to Switzerland, before the funeral Baudat literally stole the body from a Swiss morgue to have a second autopsy performed by Dr Thomas Krompecher, professor of forensic medicine at the University of Lausanne. Based on his conclusions, Baudat retained the services of two high-profile lawyers, Luc Brossollet and Jacques Vergès.

The lawyers, authors of *Murdered in the Vatican* (*Assassinati in Vaticano*, Kaos, 2002), claim that the second autopsy contradicts the Vatican's conclusions on several key points. Tornay's service pistol used 9-mm bullets, but the exit wound in his skull measured seven millimetres. Tornay apparently suffered a fracture of a cranial bone which was not on the bullet's trajectory. His lungs contained a large amount of blood and saliva which could not have been caused by suicide, but could have been caused by internal bleeding due to blows to the head before he died. The forensic report also notes that Tornay's front teeth were broken off, as if a gun had been forced into his mouth.

Finally, graphologists and psychologists who examined Tornay's final letter to his mother conclude that it is a forgery—also an allegation of Tornay's mother. Why? First, the letter is dated "4.05.98", but Tornay always wrote the month in full and never used a zero to delineate the first nine months of the year. He refers to Estermann as "Lieutenant Colonel", whereas he knew that Estermann was now a colonel. More importantly, he called his sister "Melinda", whereas he always referred to her as "Dada". He refers to the "Pope", rather than his usual reference of the "Holy Father".

The suicide letter states, "Tell Melinda, Sarah and Papa that I love you all"—but Tornay was also very fond of his step-brothers Yvan and Joel, and all his friends and family members believe that he would have mentioned them in a suicide note...if he had written one. His mother claims that the non-inclusion of his step-brothers is because the forger used only the Vatican's official files to create this letter and hence was unaware of their existence. Equally, the letter is

addressed to "Mme Chamorel", but Tornay always used his mother's maiden name, Baudat—not the surname of her second husband. The Vatican registers list Tornay's mother's surname as "Chamorel". With such evidence, it should not come as a total surprise that the handwriting experts engaged by Baudat confirm that her son did not write this letter.

A "Terrible Truth" Concealed

In his book *City of Secrets*, Vatican reporter John Follain underlines that though Tornay was depicted by Navarro-Valls as a "recruit", he had served in the Swiss Guard for over three years. Tornay's responsibilities as lance corporal included being in charge of all the guards deployed at the Apostolic Palace, the residence of the

pope, and monitoring St Anne's Gate, the key entry point into Vatican territory. Tornay, in short, was a distinguished member of the Swiss Guard—not entry level.

Follain asked a Vatican monsignor why Alois Jehle, chaplain to the Swiss Guard, allegedly told Tornay's mother that her son's head had been ripped off his body. Why would he say such a thing? "Because he was told to," the monsignor answered, "by my boss." (Follain, 2003, p. 65) That boss was Angelo Sodano, who also prevented Muguetta Baudat from gaining access to the completed Vatican inquiry.

"Reasons of state appear to reign at the head of the church, and I think this is the origin of the great effort made by the heads of the Roman Curia to prevent a terrible truth being revealed to the world," Tornay's mother wrote (<http://tinyurl.com/5t9kowz>). With this statement, Baudat echoes the conclusions of *Blood Lies in the Vatican*, that the Banco

Ambrosiano affair was part of a power struggle between Freemasons and Opus Dei that would cost Estermann his life. Indeed, whereas the struggle of Freemasons and Opus Dei is often depicted as occurring in the early 1980s, it appears that around the close of the millennium that battle was still raging inside the walls of the Vatican!

The Estermann affair might have been covered up if it had not been for Muguetta Baudat, who refused to be silent. According to Baudat, the Vatican even sent an envoy to Switzerland to threaten her: "He wanted to find out how much I knew and what I planned to do about it. He gave me a rosary, but he also threatened me in the name of his superiors, telling me I should

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stop asking about Tornay's death and think of my surviving children. He said he was sure I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to them. That's a threat, isn't it?" (Follain, 2003, p. 175)

What did she know? Baudat states that a year before he died, her son confided to her that he and two other Swiss Guards were investigating Opus Dei. "The less you know about it, the better," he told her. "Later," said Baudat, "I found out from some friends of Tornay that Estermann was close to Opus Dei and had tried to recruit guards into it." (Follain, 2003, p. 47) The question is whether Tornay was carrying out this investigation on his own, or whether he was asked to carry it out—and if so, by whom.

The answer to that question might be Yvon Bertorello, a member of Vatican intelligence, who claims that one of his assignments was to spy on the Swiss Guard to gauge the extent to which Opus Dei had infiltrated it. There is no reason to doubt that someone indeed wanted to know such facts. Bertorello befriended Tornay, and Tornay became an intelligence-gatherer. Tornay himself, in speaking to his mother, claimed that he was not the only Swiss Guard in this intelligence-gathering exercise. As to who ordered Bertorello: according to author Gérard de Villiers, the assignment was given by an unnamed Vatican prelate.

It is generally accepted that Estermann was close to, if not involved with, Opus Dei. In fact, according to some, his very involvement with Opus Dei was the primary reason why his promotion to commander of the Swiss Guard was blocked for several months, no doubt while the Vatican tried to find out the extent of Estermann's involvement with the organisation or to decide whether it would be a good idea to have an Opus Dei member as head of the Swiss Guard. But this fact has been buried in so many lies and rumours that few have focused on it. Instead, most headlines have fancied the notion that Estermann and Tornay had a homosexual affair.

Sexual Intrigue in the Swiss Guard

The official version as released by the Vatican is that Tornay had a personal grudge against Estermann. When Estermann was confirmed as commander, Tornay was supposedly also in line for a recommendation but did not receive the honour, allegedly because Estermann himself had blocked it.

Therefore, in a rage, Tornay took his gun, entered the Estermann home and killed Estermann and his wife before turning the gun on himself.

The relationship between Tornay and Estermann is said to have been complex. First of all, members of the Swiss Guard are all Swiss—as the name indicates. But as Switzerland is internally divided, there are both language and cultural barriers between the German and French Swiss. Estermann was German, Tornay French. All the French Swiss Guard members apparently frequently complained of harassment by their German-speaking countrymen and Estermann in particular.

After the murders, members of the Swiss Guard were formally forbidden to discuss Estermann, Tornay or the

murders with anyone. Hence, reporters have been able to interview only ex-guards. One such ex-guard said to Follain: "Tornay was a victim. He wasn't [of] a violent nature, but he was the victim of bullying for three years...for the Swiss Germans he was the devil in person." (Follain, 2003, pp. 219-20; Mark Fellows, "The Smell of Death", *Catholic Family News*, 3 November 2003)

Indeed, Estermann was the only officer to vote against Tornay's promotion to lance corporal, but what the Vatican's official version underplays is that he was overruled. So even though Tornay might have carried a grudge against Estermann, Tornay had his promotion—making it less likely that he would have had this mad rage against Estermann.

As mentioned, according to some sources Estermann and Tornay had a homosexual relationship. Professor Massimo Lacchei, in his book *Verbum Dei et*

Verbum Gay ("God's Word and Gay Word", Libreria Croce, Rome, 1999), claims that homosexuality is widespread within the walls of the Vatican. He writes: "I see the Swiss Guard as a kind of hot-house, whose flowers are picked by homosexual bishops and cardinals. People in the Vatican tell me the Guards supplement their tiny wages that way." In Lacchei's book, Estermann and Tornay are featured, though under pseudonyms. Equally, Follain claims that Estermann and Tornay had a homosexual relationship: it lasted for two years, and ended when Tornay caught his superior with another man. It is believed that when their relationship ended, Estermann went on to bully Tornay and began a personal vendetta for whatever specific reason. If true, no doubt only the two of them knew.

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So, on the one hand, we have a story of personal rivalry, born from a lovers' dispute, while on the other hand we are told that this is a conspiracy in which Tornay was an innocent victim because he had been researching ties that Estermann and his wife had with Opus Dei. Of course, both are not mutually exclusive, as Tornay could have been selected to spy on Estermann specifically because of their personal relationship. But why is this all so important?

It is a fact that Opus Dei had largely taken control of the Vatican by 1998, and the promotion of an Opus Dei member to commander of the Swiss Guard was in itself nothing out of the ordinary except further evidence of its ever-growing influence. Even though there was an alleged power struggle between "the Masons" and Opus Dei over control of the Vatican, whispers go that the true reason why the Vatican hesitated over Estermann's promotion is due to rumours of his homosexuality. This is also the opinion of "Vatican spymaster" Yvon Bertorello, who claims that Estermann had homosexual relationships with various other Swiss Guard members. Bertorello adds that Estermann and Tornay indeed had a homosexual relationship, even though Tornay, unmarried, was heterosexual. Bertorello notes that even the pope knew, and that it was indeed the pope who blocked the promotion: "But Cardinal Sodano lobbied and lobbied until he finally got what he wanted." (Follain, 2003, pp. 170-71)

Another Possible Scenario

The evidence suggests that Estermann and Tornay had a homosexual relationship. But other evidence—the second autopsy and the suicide note—also suggests that Tornay did not commit suicide, which suggests he did not kill Estermann and that Tornay was asked to spy on Estermann because of the latter's involvement with Opus Dei.

When asked about a motive for Estermann's murder, Monsignor Vladimir Felzmann, an ex-Opus Dei member, stated: "Estermann would be of great interest to Opus Dei... With Estermann in its grip, Opus Dei would be able to find out how the pope was, and who[m] he saw from day to day. [He] would be privy to quite a few secrets about the cardinals, their health, that kind of thing. And among the cardinals is John Paul's successor. Never forget that for Opus Dei knowledge is power. It would be able to get anyone into the Vatican; the guards wouldn't breathe a word. You have access, you have freedom." (Follain, 2003, p. 107)

Felzmann was also asked if Pope John Paul II was involved with Opus Dei. He replied: "Of course he is. In all sorts of ways... We used to bank with Banco Ambrosiano; I used to deposit money in our account

there. When the pope had to find two hundred million dollars that Calvi, 'God's Banker', owed the Vatican in 1982, Opus Dei came up with it. And at that time Opus Dei was made personal prelate. When the pope wanted a new spokesman, Opus Dei gave him Navarro-Valls. And all the time there is Opus Dei's hidden agenda, to grow and grow and grow. There are people in the Vatican who can't stand it, but that hasn't stopped Opus Dei from getting more and more powerful. Of course it would love an Opus Dei pope." (Follain, 2003, p. 110)

In an attempt to uncover the truth, we need to return to the prosecutor Ferdinando Imposimato. He argues that Estermann was instrumental in the 1981 assassination attempt, not because he allegedly protected the pope from dying but because he took part in its planning. Imposimato and Agca claim that the KGB was responsible for the assassination attempt, and that the KGB left it to its satellite states' intelligence agencies to work out the detail. Though the Bulgarians have often been singled out, it is clear that such an attempt would have involved rallying together all the assets which the

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Soviet Bloc had in and near the Vatican. This would have included Estermann, who was on the Stasi's list of assets. Imposimato refers to Estermann as a "precious pawn" in the preparatory phase of the 13 May 1981 assassination attempt. If true, it puts Estermann's murder in a totally different framework and may also explain why Pope John Paul II blocked his promotion. Equally, it is

reported—and accepted—that Estermann's office had been burgled on a number of occasions. Each time, some files were removed but valuables were left in place. Estermann also apparently complained of being under surveillance; he had CCTV installed in all areas that fell under Swiss Guard control...and, if anything, it would be interesting to find out what precisely was recorded on the night of 4 May 1998.

The central question is whether Tornay found material about the Estermanns—not necessarily though possibly to do with Opus Dei—and that, as a result of this, all three had to be silenced so that "something" would not come out. If so, that "something" remains likely buried forever. But what has now become clear is that "murder-suicide" in the Vatican is far more interesting and important than the official version has led us to believe. Bringing it back to St Peter's Square and 13 May 1981, we can—and should—ask the question as to whether the Swiss Guard—or at least some or one of its members, like Estermann—"stood down" and, by doing so, enabled

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Ağca to fire a salvo of bullets so that all of them could reach the pope rather than a Swiss Guard throwing himself in their flight path. It would bring great irony to the "error" made by Navarro-Valls in saying that Estermann had shielded the pope, whereas he might actually have left the pope exposed to the bullets.

Critics of this line of reasoning point out that it nevertheless does not make any sense that a guilty Estermann would be promoted to commandant of the Swiss Guard. But the fact of the matter is that no one within the Vatican would have known that Estermann had stood down. The only people who would know this would be people who knew that Estermann was a Stasi asset and perhaps had even been told to stand down, or people like Tornay who had investigated Estermann.

To use up our quota of questions without firm answers, we fire our final salvo by asking whether Estermann was killed by someone who knew what had really happened on 13 May 1981 and decided that enough was enough. Though a firm answer cannot be given to the question posed, it can be pointed out that it is specifically Ağca who claims that Estermann's murder is connected with the papal assassination attempt—and no one can doubt his credentials on *that* subject.

Equally, in his briefing, Ağca would have been told whether or not members of the Swiss Guard would stand down—knowledge which would have allowed him to shoot the pope more easily.

Today, the murder of Alois Estermann continues to be the subject of intense intrigue and speculation. For the Vatican, it is officially a crime of passion. It is known that Tornay had investigated the new head of the Swiss Guard as part of an inquiry into the power of Opus Dei within the walls of the Vatican. As soon as Estermann was promoted, he, his wife and Tornay were dead. Is it possible that Tornay discovered something about Estermann which had to be kept still at all costs—but which, with Estermann in his new position, would soon rise to the surface? If so, it meant that someone went to the remarkable extent of committing three murders in the Vatican. As the evidence shows, that someone was not Tornay. ∞

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