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30

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Book details collaboration of Roncalli and his Venetian chancellor



A book published this month in Italian reveals the collaborative relationship between John XXIII, when he was Patriarch of Venice, and his chancellor at the time, Fr. Sergio Sambin.

"Roncalli did not consider Fr. Sambin only a priest whom he met every week because of his capacity in the diocesan curia. He above all deemed him a skilled collaborator, whom he often entrusted with making a bridge between the curia and the patriarch," wrote Marco Roncalli, a Church historian and great-nephew to John XXIII, in the forward of "Roncalli, padre e pastore: Il Patriarca Roncalli e il suo cancelliere don Sergio Sambin."

The book, rendered in English "Roncalli, father and pastor: Patriarch Roncalli and his chancellor Fr. Sergio Sambin," was authored by Sandro G. Franchini and published by Marcanum Press, and utilizes documents from Fr. Sambin's archives – including letters from Roncalli.

Franchini is himself chancellor of the Venetian Institute of Science, Letters, and the Arts, and worked on the book with Fr. Sambin, who is now 93. The book also includes letters and documents from John XXIII's archive.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was Patriarch of Venice from 1953, until his 1958 election as Bishop of Rome.

In the book, Fr. Sambin recounts meeting Patriarch Roncalli for the first time in March 1953.

"I was 33, and I was just back from Rome, where I graduated in canon law at the Gregorian University. I received a phone call from then-Fr. Capovilla, who was already Roncalli's secretary. He told me: 'Tomorrow do not go to work in the curia. Come directly to the patriarchal palace.'"

There he found Roncalli, who told him his chancellor had been moved to Rome, and asked him to take the post.

From then until 1958, Fr. Sambin met with Roncalli nearly daily for a half-hour at noon.

Their last meeting was at the Vatican, within weeks of Roncalli's election as Pope.

Fr. Sambin is among of the living memories of the soon-to-be Saint John XXIII. The documents he has published in Franchini's book help to better understand the late Pope's "complex, fascinating and surprising personality," the author says.

Franchini believes the documents help us "to better understand how the surprising decisions taken by John XXIII in his life were in fact the outcome of a long and deep cultural and spiritual preparation."

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