In order to better understand the background of the P-2 Scandal, it would be helpful to review a brief history of Italian Freemasonry as it related to the Vatican and Italian politics. Freemasonry, as we know it, became formal institution with the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. The first lodge in Italy opened in Florence in 1733 and Masonry rapidly spread throughout the country. The Papal Authority was strong in France, and in 1737 Cardinal Fleury tried to get Louis XV to ban Freemasonry in that country. The next year Pope Clement XII issued a papal bull forbidding "Freyinacosn" and the ban has been repeated nearly 300 times by later popes or Vatican authorities.

In 1751, Pope Benedict XIV said that the Church feared Freemasonry because "such an association brings together men of all sects and religions which will bring great ruin to the purity of the Catholic faith." The Catholic Church incorporated into its edicts a ban on so-called "Secret Societies." In 1920, the Vatican's Holy Office publicly expressed its distrust of the YMCA and Boy Scouts and Catholics were warned not to join the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias and the Independent Order of Good Templars. Canon Law 2336 further stated that Catholics who joined the Masons "or other societies which machinate (conspire) against the Church" are ipso facto excommunicated. Any association over which the Church, or the local bishop, can exercise no control was suspect. As late as 1950, the Holy Office told Catholics to keep away from such groups "even if it is only suspected that they seek to escape the Church's control."

Ten years later, Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II Council which did not mention Freemasonry, but approved the principle of religious freedom in a plural society, and ecumenism. Pope John Paul I reportedly admired the Masons but Pope John Paul II supported Opus Dei, a "secret society" open only to Roman Catholics. In February 1981, the Vatican Doctrinal Office, the modern name for the Holy Office, sent a letter to the world's Catholic Bishop's reminding them that Canon Law 2336, with its ipso facto excommunication, was still valid.

In the Italian Parliament, three political parties, the Vatican controlled Christian Democratic Party, the Russian-controlled Communist Party and the Neo-Fascist Party have expressly declared that it is incompatible for its members to become Masons. In fact the Communist inspired "Red Brigade" has in recent years bombed and otherwise terrorized Masonic meeting places and individual Masons throughout Italy. There is some evidence that the Fascist groups have undertaken similar terrorist activities.

With the blessings of Italy's Grand Orient, a very particular lodge, called Propaganda-2 was set up and eventually placed in the hands of a Tuscan textile manufacturer named Licio Gelli. The lodge had no regular meeting place and its membership was so secret that the members never met one another, with few exceptions. The membership included politicians from every party, except Communists, industrialists, military leaders and opinion-makers in the media. The Venerable Master, Gelli, by phone or letter, could put one member in touch with another to fill virtually any request. In addition, Gelli is said to have obtained copies of files on about 30,000 people in public life, which the Italian Secret Service had illicitly compiled over the past 15 years, and which were supposed to have been destroyed. The purpose was to counter anti-Masonic legislation sought to be introduced in Parliament. Gelli's Masonic list included 953
names, many well known in the Itlaian Government, including members of the cabinet, Foschi and Sarti (Christian Democrats) and Manca (Socialist).

In the pre-election campaign of the Communist Party and other left-wing groups, in order to provoke the fall of the coalition government of Arnaldo Forlani (head of the Christian Democratic Party), they furnished information that Gelli was engaging in subversive activities and as a result the police raided his Arezzo Villa in March 1981 and seized his files. On May 21, 1981, the press threatened to publish a list of P-2 members, so the Prime Minister decided to beat them to it. The next day, acting on a suggestion from NATO Headquarters, one Italian admiral, three generals and a civilian coordinator of the secret services to which the other four belonged were advised to take 45 day vacations. The press campaign following was bitter and greatly damaged Italian Masonry. Forlani's Cabinet resigned after the Socialists refused to agree to the "reshuffle" proposed by eliminating the three named P-2 ministers and pushed for an election to form a new government, the 41st in Italy since World War II. In the administrative elections on June 21, 1981, the Italian electorate surprising took very marginal note of the anti-government press campaign carried on by the coalition of Communist, Fascist and Neo-Fascist Parties and elected Spandolini, a Republican candidate. This was the first time in 35 years the Christian Democrats did not elect a Prime Minister. The non-clerical parties (in which the Masonic presence is most prominent), the Socialist, Social Democrats, Republicans and Liberals gained votes in parliament at the expense of the other parties.

Realizing that P-2 Master Licio Gelli used his Masonic organization for personal gain in the political, economic and financial fields, the Grand Oriente of Italy ordered Gelli to surrender all lodge documents on December 14, 1974 to prevent contamination of the name and prestige of Masonry in Italy. However on May 9, 1975, Grand Master Salvini authorized Gelli to restructure P-1 to enlarge the functions of its members to accomplish political functions in combating anti-Masonic legislation. Cooperating in perpetuating the P-2 organization was Grand Secretary Mennini, who furnished financial backing, Grand Master Gambinerie, elected in November 11978, who falsely declared the dissolution of P-2 at the Conference of the Grand Masters of North America and his successor, Grand Master Battelli who likewise tolerated and encouraged the activities.

After the Italian Administrative election of June 21, 1981, under Article 18 of the Italian Constitution, the Government ruled that the P-2 Lodge was a "secret association" and ordered it disbanded. The Council of State issued a statement that established the rules and procedure whereby Masons (whether civil servants or military) are to be investigated for possible subversive or conflict of interest. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Gelli, Ortolani, Vezzier and others on grounds of anti-government subversion, treason and even murder. Gelli was also linked to the fake kidnapping of Michele Sindona, the convicted financier, who sought to avoid trial in New York by fleeing to Italy. The Prosecutor's Office in Rome issued a warrant for the confiscation of his files of the Grand Oriente of Italy on the ground of its conspiracy in the continuation of the P-2 organization after its orders for disbanding on December 14, 1974 and for the arrest of Gelli who fled to Argentina.

The council of the Order of the Grand Order of Italy met on June 7, 1981, and the Grand Master Battelli and Grand Secretary Mennini offered
to resign but the Giunto requested them to remain until the October meeting of the Grand Council of the Grand Oriente of Italy.

The Grand Master issued a message to all Masonic authorities around the world to inform them of the very serious situation. Other international organizations were also informed. A letter was sent to the President of the Republic of Italy to stress that the constituional guaranties be maintained regarding the freedom of Masonry which should not be damaged by a general criminal criticism caused by a few persons upon whom the magistrtes had already investigated on specific accusations.

The Supreme Council of Italy for the Scottish Rite of May 23, 1981, at the Conference of Sovereign Grand Inspector Generals at The Hague, Netherlands, published the first information on the situation crated by the confiscation and publication of the documents of the P-2 Lodge. On June 16, 1981, Sovereign Grand Commander Cecovini sent a letter to all the Supreme Councils of the Scottish Rite confirming the aforesaid information. On June 21, 1981, a letter was sent to all bodies of the Scottish Rite in Italy in which it was emphasized the principles which guide all members toward the betterment, the moral and material progress of humanity. Also stressed was the work done by Italian Masons to ensure freedom and democracy in Italy.

At the Grand Council meeting in October, Gelli and Past Grand Master Salvini were found guilty of unmasonic conduct and were forever barred from holding further Masonic offices. The Grand Council confirmed the dissolution of the P-2 Lodge but took no action on other persons at that time.

In conclusion, it is necessary for the Grand Oriene of Italy to "put its house in order" by reverting to the basic principle of Freemasonry as to non involvement in political activities. The scandal of P-2 organization and its toleration and encouragement by the Grand Oriente of Italy have implicated in the resulting Governmental investigation not only the specific criminals but all Italian Masonry.

There is a general feeling among the Italian Masonic Community that eventually regular masons will not be implicated in the criminal or parliamentary proceedings directed towards the P-2 Lodge members. Meanwhile, Masonic Lodges have been losing members and attendance has dropped off markedly. Masonic leaders valiantly hold on to keep the organization operating under greatly adverse circumstances.

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NOTE:

Roberto Calvi was found hanging from London's Blackfriars Bridge in June, 1982. It appeared he had been strangled. Four people were indicted for his murder, as reported in the Edmonton Journal, Tuesday, April, 19, 2005.