



THE LAST CONFESSION

BY ROGER CRANE



DRAMATISTS
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THE LAST CONFESSION was first performed on April 27, 2007 at Chichester Festival Theatre (Jonathan Church, Artistic Director; Alan Finch, Executive Director) in Chichester, West Sussex, England.

THE LAST CONFESSION was subsequently produced in the West End at the Theatre Royal Haymarket by Duncan C. Weldon and Paul Elliott for Triumph Entertainment Ltd. and Theatre Royal Haymarket Productions. It was directed by David Jones; the set design was by William Dudley; the costume design was by Fotini Dimou; the lighting design was by Peter Mumford; the original music was by Dominic Muldowney; the production manager was Paul Hennessy; and the stage manager was Xenia Lewis. The cast was as follows:

CARDINAL GIOVANNI BENELLI	David Suchet
THE CONFESSOR	Michael Jayston
CARDINAL LUCIANI/ POPE JOHN PAUL I.....	Richard O'Callaghan
CARDINAL VILLOT	Bernard Lloyd
BISHOP MARCINKUS.....	Stuart Milligan
POPE PAUL VI.....	Clifford Rose
CARDINAL FELICI	Charles Kay
CARDINAL OTTAVIANI	John Franklyn-Robbins
CARDINAL BAGGIO	Bruce Purchase
CARDINAL GANTIN.....	Joseph Mydell
CARDINAL SUENENS.....	Michael Cronin
CARDINAL LORSCHIEDER.....	Joseph Long
MONSIGNOR MAGEE.....	Roger May
FATHER LORENZI	Paul Foster
DR. BUZZONETTI/ THOMAS	Christopher Mellows
SISTER VINCENZA	Maroussia Frank

CHARACTERS

CARDINAL GIOVANNI BENELLI: At the time of his confession, he is the Cardinal of Florence. When the action of the play begins, five years earlier, he is an archbishop holding the number-two position in the office of the Secretary of State in the Vatican. Because of his close relationship with Pope Paul VI, he is the second most powerful figure in the Church.

THE CONFESSOR: A priest, approximately sixty years old. He has come to hear Cardinal Benelli's confession.

CARDINAL ALBINO LUCIANI: The Cardinal of Venice. He becomes Pope John Paul I.

CARDINAL JEAN VILLOT: The Secretary of State of the Vatican.

BISHOP PAUL MARCINKUS: The highest ranking American in the Vatican. He is the head of the Vatican Bank and reports directly to Pope Paul VI.

POPE PAUL VI: He is in the last few months of his pontificate.

CARDINAL PERICLE FELICI: Head of the Vatican Supreme Court. An arch-conservative who has consistently opposed the liberal policies of the Second Vatican Council.

CARDINAL ALFREDO OTTAVIANI: Over eighty, he is still one of the principal leaders of the conservative element in the Church. He was one of the cardinals responsible for convincing Paul VI to reject any form of artificial birth control.

CARDINAL SEBASTIANO BAGGIO: Prefect of the Second Congregation of Bishops, he is in charge of the Church's bishops throughout the world.

CARDINAL BERNARDIN GANTIN: Born in Africa, he is presently stationed in the Vatican because of a conflict between himself and a repressive government in the Republic of Benin.

CARDINAL LEO SUENENS: Cardinal of Belgium, he is one of the great liberal figures of the Church. He was instrumental in electing Paul VI, and then dared to criticize him publicly for being too conservative.

CARDINAL ALOISIO LORSCHIEDER: Cardinal of Rio de Janeiro, he is a liberal and one of the leaders of the Church in South America.

MONSIGNOR JOHN MAGEE: Secretary to Pope Paul VI and then to Pope John Paul I.

FATHER DIEGO LORENZI: Also one of Pope John Paul's secretaries.

DR. RENATO BUZZONETTI: The head of the Vatican Health Service.

SISTER VINCENZA: Cardinal Luciani's housekeeper for over twenty years; Pope John Paul I's housekeeper when Luciani is elected to the papacy.

THOMAS: A Vatican gardener.

THE LAST CONFESSION

ACT ONE

It is night. The room is a study. A priest about sixty years old is writing at a small table. He is of middle height. He is Cardinal Benelli. He is seriously ill, and his movements at the beginning of the scene reflect this. A priest enters.

LORENZI. You have a visitor, Your Eminence.

BENELLI. Yes. *(A grim smile of satisfaction.)* Send him in. *(Lorenzi hesitates for a moment, then leaves. Benelli stands up; he seems to gain a little strength and stands taller. The Confessor enters. He is dressed very simply. He is short but strongly built.)* You are late.

CONFESSOR. At least I am here. *(Benelli stares for a moment then nods in acknowledgment.)*

BENELLI. How is Rome?

CONFESSOR. Eternal.

BENELLI. That is what we were taught.

CONFESSOR. Do you doubt it?

BENELLI. I have many doubts.

CONFESSOR. I was told you were ill.

BENELLI. I am dying.

CONFESSOR. *(Unmoved.)* Do you wish to confess?

BENELLI. What I wish for is peace.

CONFESSOR. Then confess and find peace.

BENELLI. I have. There. *(He points to a manuscript.)*

CONFESSOR. They told me you had written a confession and were considering publishing it.

BENELLI. Yes.

CONFESSOR. *(Disdainfully.)* Public confession is no longer in vogue in the Church. I have come to hear your private confession.

BENELLI. You have come because you had no other choice.

CONFESSOR. We have always had choices. Neither one of us has ever been afraid to make them.

BENELLI. The Church needs a public confession.

CONFESSOR. The Church needs only God.

BENELLI. And where do God's plans end and man's begin? Where is the line between divine providence and human intervention? Have you forgotten Luciani?

CONFESSOR. Yes.

BENELLI. (*Reading from the first page of the manuscript.*) "I, Giovanni Benelli, Patriarch of Florence and Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, do hereby state that this is my Last Will and Testament, my final confession." (*Turning to the Confessor.*) Luciani was without doubts.

CONFESSOR. I didn't come here to talk about Luciani.

BENELLI. Then leave ... (*The Confessor starts to exit.*) and I will publish my confession. (*The Confessor stops and looks at Benelli for a moment.*) It begins with Luciani, it begins five years ago. (*The Confessor walks to a chair and sits down. He puts a stole around his neck and blesses himself. Benelli also blesses himself.*) Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I have killed the Emissary of God. (*The stage comes alive with priests and cardinals, hurrying about their business. Amongst them is a small, short man. He is dressed as a priest but wears a gold chain and crucifix. He looks lost. A priest stops for a minute. It is Monsignor Magee.*)

MAGEE. Can I help?

LUCIANI. I was looking for Archbishop Benelli.

MAGEE. Do you have an appointment?

LUCIANI. No.

MAGEE. The Archbishop may be busy ...

LUCIANI. I can wait ...

MAGEE. Who shall I say?

LUCIANI. Luciani, Cardinal Luciani.

MAGEE. Of course, Your Eminence, I will ... (*Benelli moves across the stage to join them. As he moves he appears five years younger, vigorous and in excellent health.*)

BENELLI. Albino, it's good to see you. I enjoyed your book.

LUCIANI. You did? Thank you. It was just some letters.

BENELLI. Yes (*Smiling.*) but to Charles Dickens, Jules Verne ... very illustrious. What brings you to Rome?

LUCIANI. I came to see His Holiness, but he is too busy. (*To Magee with a warm smile.*) Thank you. (*Magee exits.*) It must be a terrible thing to be Pope.

BENELLI. For some men.

LUCIANI. It is bad enough being a cardinal.

BENELLI. Patriarch of Venice. A beautiful city.

LUCIANI. My parishioners wanted me to have my own boat and gondolier. Can you imagine a private boat just waiting for me?

BENELLI. I've seen your car. You could do with a boat ... What do you do when you need one?

LUCIANI. Call the fire brigade. They lend me one of theirs.

BENELLI. And if there is a fire?

LUCIANI. (*Smiling.*) Sometimes even God has to wait. (*Pause. Simply.*) I need help. Bishop Marcinkus is selling the Catholic Bank of Venice.

BENELLI. Yes, I know. For far less than it is worth. Have you discussed this with our Secretary of State?

LUCIANI. I did. He said he could do nothing.

BENELLI. Then Cardinal Villot is wiser than I thought.

LUCIANI. You run the Church for His Holiness, not Villot.

BENELLI. (*Enjoying the comment.*) Not many cardinals in the Curia would enjoy hearing that.

LUCIANI. You are the Pope's friend.

BENELLI. Marcinkus is his banker.

LUCIANI. And what about the poor of Venice? The Church is their banker.

BENELLI. The poor are always with us.

LUCIANI. When the Pope sent me to Venice, the churches were empty, but the streets were filled with prostitutes, with the mentally ill, with the handicapped. The city had shut its doors. I opened mine. I will not abandon them.

BENELLI. (*Assessing him.*) Marcinkus has dangerous friends.

LUCIANI. Are you afraid of him?

BENELLI. (*Amused.*) No.

LUCIANI. Then help us.

BENELLI. You want me to fight him over some little bank in Venice?

LUCIANI. Yes.

BENELLI. Marcinkus will hold this against you. He has used the power of the Vatican Bank to break people, even cardinals.

LUCIANI. One cardinal less, (*Smiling.*) especially a small one, doesn't matter. Will you help?

BENELLI. (*Pause.*) Perhaps it is time I had a talk with Marcinkus. I will try.

LUCIANI. Thank you. (*Luciani exits.*)

CONFESSOR. I had forgotten how persistent he could be.

BENELLI. He was right.

CONFESSOR. He was naïve.

BENELLI. No ... He was innocent ... I met with Villot and Marcinkus, just as he had asked. (*Benelli's office in the Vatican. Cardinal Villot enters. He is a tall, thin man. He has strong, angular features and looks every inch the cardinal. He has a slight French accent. Benelli joins Villot.*)

VILLOT. I hope this is necessary.

BENELLI. Marcinkus is selling the Catholic Bank of Venice.

VILLOT. It has nothing to do with us.

BENELLI. He is selling it for far less than it is worth. Why?

VILLOT. (*Dismissively.*) He's an American ... from Chicago. (*Turns to leave.*)

BENELLI. Cicero, to be precise. The home of the gangster Al Capone. (*Villot stops to look at Benelli.*)

VILLOT. If you want to discuss Marcinkus, draft an agenda and contact my secretary. We will discuss it then.

BENELLI. We need to do something now.

VILLOT. Marcinkus has the confidence of His Holiness.

BENELLI. I thought you did, too.

VILLOT. Twice on trips Marcinkus has saved the Pope's life. You can wrestle with the Pope's gorilla if you want to. I have better things to do. (*Bishop Marcinkus enters. He is tall — six feet, three inches — and powerfully built. His features are rough, and he would look like a construction worker except he is dressed like a parish priest. He wears nothing that would indicate a higher office.*)

MARCINKUS. (*To Villot, with a hint of condescension.*) Cardinal Villot. (*Looking at Benelli.*) I didn't realize that we were going to have a formal meeting. (*To Villot.*) You should have sent me an agenda.

VILLOT. There isn't a meeting.

BENELLI. Luciani visited me today. He had some questions about the Catholic Bank of Venice.

MARCINKUS. He should have come to see me. I always enjoy the visits of cardinals.

VILLOT. (*Dryly.*) You enjoy cardinals begging for money.
MARCINKUS. Cardinals do not beg; they command. But sometimes I have to say no ... (*Smiling.*) It is a terrible job.
BENELLI. Not many can say no to a cardinal.
MARCINKUS. I hear Archbishop Benelli does — often. (*To Villot.*) Isn't that correct, Your Eminence?
BENELLI. (*Smiling.*) I say what the Pope tells me.
MARCINKUS. I thought you reported to His Eminence, the Secretary of State.
BENELLI. In the end, we must all answer to His Holiness ...
MARCINKUS. And Pope Paul has placed me in charge of the Vatican Bank.
VILLOT. To lend money to religious organizations in need.
MARCINKUS. I ... the Bank can't help everyone, but the ones we do help are always so grateful ... even cardinals.
VILLOT. What do you mean by that?
MARCINKUS. How much I am consoled by the gratitude of so many cardinals.
BENELLI. Selling religious banks is not a purpose of the Vatican Bank that I am aware of.
MARCINKUS. Raising money is.
BENELLI. I hear the price Calvi is paying ... is somewhat low.
MARCINKUS. These things are always so difficult to determine. Calvi is a very astute businessman. The Bank relies on him frequently.
BENELLI. Calvi is in the business of high-risk finance ... or that is what he calls it ... That is not the business of the Vatican Bank.
MARCINKUS. Calvi has the complete confidence of myself ... and, of course, His Holiness.
VILLOT. (*Unable to help himself.*) So did Sindona, his predecessor.
BENELLI. (*More a statement than a question.*) And where is Sindona now?
MARCINKUS. I hear he is in a cell.
VILLOT. A jail cell.
BENELLI. No doubt saying his prayers.
VILLOT. It will take more than prayers.
MARCINKUS. (*To Villot.*) Perhaps you would like to point out to His Holiness his error in trusting his friend Sindona?
BENELLI. Since you were placed in charge of the Vatican Bank its principal advisor has been jailed and the bank accused of participating in a multi-million-dollar bond fraud.

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16M, 1W

In 1978, a little-known country priest is inaugurated as Pope John Paul I. Promising liberal reforms and progress for the Church, the new Pope warns three power-drunk cardinals that they will be removed from the Vatican. Thirty-three days after his election, he is found dead, and no autopsy is performed. But that's only the beginning of the story ...

A gripping mystery, inspired by the true-life event of Pope John Paul I's death and the conspiracies surrounding it, pitting power against faith in a battle for the ultimate truth.

"What a treat ... A conspiracy thriller and murder mystery that manages the rare feat of being as intelligent as it is entertaining."

—**The Daily Telegraph (London)**

"On the face of it, Roger Crane's play is a thriller ... [but Crane] has bigger fish to fry. This is a play about God and power. The church is about power ... if you can guide people's souls, don't you, like Jesus, have power over them? And is everything everyone does, including murder, the will of God?"

—**The Times (London)**

"If the Vatican's steel-shuttered archives were ever made public, the world would reel with astonishment ... This exciting play is like watching a can be opened and seeing a huge Vatican worm crawl out that must be smothered in the 'name of the Church.' Roger Crane has written a powerful work that raises many questions about the morality of the Vatican and its obsession with secrecy and lust for power."

—**Daily Express (London)**

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