



From above: Prince Pedro with King Juan Carlos of Spain, a private family audience with Pope Francis and performing humanitarian aid work. Opposite: The Duke and Duchess of Castro arrive for Mass at Notre-Dame Immaculée Cathedral, Monaco



# Noble purpose

With rival Constantinian Orders, Prince Pedro, Duke of Calabria, sets out how his Spanish royal branch is renewing its mission and membership in Europe and America

When the *Herald* meets in London with Guy Sainty, British art dealer, historian and Vice Grand Chancellor of the Sacred Constantinian Order of Saint George (Spanish-Neapolitan branch), he is already at our Polish restaurant table and is checking his phone for breaking news of the election in Rome that day for the Grand Master of the Order of Malta. Sainty has written extensively on royal dynasties and orders of knighthood and has made a particular study of the Constantinian Order and the Bourbon dynasty, exemplified by his magnum opus, *The Constantinian Order of Saint George and the Angeli, Farnese and Bourbon Families which Governed It*.

Published in 2018 by the Boletín Oficial del Estado (the official gazette of the Kingdom of Spain), it explains that the supposed foundation of the order by Roman Emperor Constantine or the Byzantine Emperor Isaac II is a myth, invented in the 16th century when it first received papal support.

This bible of his branch of the Constantinian Order has a royal blue cover and is not for the faint-hearted when it comes to in-depth research into the origins of the order, the Balkan dynasties behind it, and the 1698 transfer (ie "sale") of the grand mastership from the Angeli to the Farnese family and inheritance by the Bourbons, who went on to rule Southern Italy and Sicily for 125 years in the 18th and 19th centuries. The book, which offers a scholarly analysis of the disputed claim to the grand mastership and headship of the royal house of the Two Sicilies, has sold out but can be read online in English or Spanish.

Today, 162 years after the kingdom was united with the new Italy in 1861, there are deep divisions between the two

rival claimants, Prince Pedro, Duke of Calabria, the 54-year-old son of an infante of Spain, who represents the Spanish royal side; and his 60-year-old cousin, Prince Carlo, Duke of Castro, married to jet-set heiress Princess Camilla who, living in Monaco, represents the cadet side. Camilla is the daughter of Italian actress Edy Vessel (whose films include *The Thief of Bagdad* (1961)) and wealthy but controversial Italian industrialist, the late Camillo Crociani, who died in Mexico in 1979.

Partly thanks to the Crociani family fortune, Carlo and Camilla are well-known in international society and celebrity circles as well as for charity work. Their two daughters carry the glamorous titles of Duchess of Calabria and Palermo and Duchess of Noto and Capri. Prince Pedro keeps a lower profile, running substantial agricultural estates in Spain and Austria. He is involved with many Spanish charitable and nobiliary organisations, serving also as president of the council of the historic orders of Santiago, Calatrava, Alcántara and Montesa, to which post he was appointed by the King of Spain.

As a result of this rumbling royal feud, there are (confusingly for many) also two Constantinian Orders, with rival grand masterships and different members, charisms and missions. For much of the last 60 years, the often bitter rivalry between these two orders has impacted their reputation in Catholic circles and influence in Church affairs.

Now, however, at a time when lay religious orders in the US, Britain and Europe are overshadowing the clergy in providing badly needed moral and public leadership in the Church, as well as humanitarian aid (such as the Order of Malta's refugee work in Ukraine), the Spanish-led Constantinian Order is reinventing itself in a bid to become more relevant and influential, while increasing its membership.

"The order is looking forward to a dynamic new chapter in its history as we increase members around the world, extend our charitable and hospitaller work, support the training of those preparing for the priesthood and use the charism of our order to help sustain the leadership of the Church in its eternal mission," Prince Pedro told the *Herald*, speaking exclusively. "I am confident that with past divisions behind us, the knights and dames will continue to serve the order with loyalty and dedication to its historic aims, confirmed in its ancient statutes."

There are fewer than 40 members in the Constantinian Order in the UK, but numbers are much higher in Europe with around 800 in Spain and 2,000 in Italy. The US is also growing its member base, with prominent members including Michael La Civita, vice president of the Catholic Media

“

I am confident that with past divisions behind us the knights and dames will continue to serve the order with loyalty and dedication to its historic aims, confirmed in its ancient statutes



Association, and financier philanthropist Vincenzo La Ruffa, who has set up the quietly influential Neumann Forum (run by George Gunning) as a Philadelphia-based Catholic think tank that "unites and engages faithful Catholics who are dedicated to preserving and protecting the Catholic faith". This fits with the charisma of the Spanish-led order which "is not going to take on the character of an NGO, because we don't want to be under secular rule. What we want is people with influence so we can motivate together to make a difference on issues that matter."

One of these issues is the subject of assisted suicide, which has already been legalised in some 30 countries and several US states, and is now the subject of committee hearings in the UK parliament. This is an important issue for the Church. There are opposing calls to further liberalise abortion laws in the UK after a woman was jailed in June for procuring an abortion at 32 weeks by lying to a provider which had sent her abortifacient drugs in the post.

The top priority for the leaders of the US and British royal commissions is to increase membership of the order and move away from the image of it consisting only of "elite Catholic nobles". On the rival Italian side, the order in Britain was also led for many years by aristocratic figures.

But simply having blue blood or "noble proofs" is not what the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George is now all about. The new idea on the Spanish side, at least, is to recruit a wider range of devout members, while not in any way reducing their calibre. Politicians, business leaders, soldiers, historians, authors, academics, entrepreneurs and philanthropists (donations certainly most welcome) are among those who may expect a tap on the shoulder. They want people not afraid to embrace their Catholic beliefs in the public square and speak out on subjects where more debate is needed. They are also keen not to simply replicate the membership of other orders, and include new names, not just the same old Catholic families.

The Spanish branch of the order is determined to become a force for Catholic leadership, not only in Italy and Spain where it is expanding its humanitarian and charitable activities. It is determined to put clear water between itself and the cadet (Franco-Monegasque) branch, whose British delegation suffered from colourful headlines of late. This involved a former UK and Irish delegate, Antony Bailey, who had been involved in controversial "exchanges of decorations" as well as obtaining the British title "Sir" through the Caribbean back door. In the 1980s, the response to an official inquiry by five of the highest institutions of the Spanish state that found in favour of Prince Pedro's father, was the production by the cadet side of a series of forged papal letters and Vatican documents supposedly showing papal support, which were then publicly denounced by the Holy See, leading to many resignations.

To be fair, the members of the Franco-Monegasque cadet branch of the order are probably not even aware of the Bailey saga and the scandal of the papal forgeries that were exposed 35 years ago. Both branches of the rival orders have many highly distinguished and devout members who like to buy their decorations at the workshop of Guccione in Rome, or the papal outfitters Gammarelli. While some join because their "friends" are members, there have also been defections, particularly in Italy. Bailey did recruit some notable British Catholics, including Lord Alton of Liverpool, Cardinal Vincent Nichols and the late Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, alongside an impressive list of US prelates, while persuading Prince Carlo to revive a long-extinct Neapolitan state merit award, the Royal Order of Francis I, as a way to recognise "inter-faith" dialogue.

Although originally founded to reward services to science, agriculture, the arts, industry and commerce in the kingdom (which ceased to exist in 1861), it was handed out to high-profile figures including Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and a former Yemeni president, later executed.

Against this backdrop, the Spanish branch is quietly re-purposing itself. The history of the rivalry between the two orders is long and complex. It was not until the main course arrived before we got past how the Holy Roman emperor and pope recognised the order and issued a papal bull giving it status as a "religion", after participating in the defence of Vienna in 1683 and supporting Christians in the Balkans in 1716-18. So far, so obscure.

But Sainty then makes an interesting point. "The order was originally founded as a response to the Reformation and the capture of Byzantium and the sense that Christianity, or Catholic Christianity, was threatened."

He believes the Constantinian Order has relevance today as a force for good in the trenches of the culture wars. The order's membership includes some dozen cardinals, notably Cardinal Gerhard Müller and Cardinal Dominique Mamberti, a frequent celebrant at its Masses, as well as members of the Spanish, Austrian, Brazilian and Orleans royal families.

In an increasingly secularised world where Christian or Catholic intellectuals such as George Weigel and Rodd Dreher are providing leadership, there may well be room for a new voice plated with 500 years of historical and religious pedigree. Unlike those orders which have to answer directly to the Vatican, Sainty says the appeal of the Constantinian Order is its independence. Whether this fresh call to arms for the order will come to influence the Church at this critical moment will depend on its new recruitment mission. CH

Visit [boe.es](http://boe.es) to read Guy Sainty's *The Constantinian Order of Saint George and the Angeli, Farnese and Bourbon Families which Governed It*

“

The order was originally founded as a response to the Reformation and the capture of Byzantium and the sense that Christianity, or Catholic Christianity, was threatened