THE ORDER OF THE CROWN OF THORNS (OCT):
RELIGIOUS AND ECCLESIASTICAL

About the OCT, our website, you will notice, does not refer to an Abbey-Principality of San Luigi, nor to the prerogatives of a Prince-Abbot of San Luigi. We operate in the manner defined by the Canada-Revue of January 1, 1894, in reference to the original Statutes of 1893:1 "the OCT has no relations with the orders distributed almost always indiscriminately by kings and heads of state. It was intended to be and remain religious and ecclesiastical."

Of course, there are reasons for not referring to San Luigi and I explained them in the revised edition of my book on Bishop Vilatte, published this year (2012), by Apocryphile Press. I invite those interested in the subject to read Chapter 3, especially pages 149-151.

A key document mentioned in this revised edition is a statement of 1957, by Louis-François Girardot who is at the origin of San Luigi. It is reproduced in extenso in the pages that follow. It vindicates our Board of Directors to have, through Resolution No. 48 (1998), asked the Church to abide by the Statutes of 1893 in conducting the affairs of the OCT. Thank you Lord to make the light of Your Truth shine upon us.

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1 Statutes of the OCT, Fort Howard, Wisconsin, 1893, p. 5, 8 & 9.
STATEMENT BY LOUIS-FRANÇOIS GIRARDOT REGARDING THE ABBEY-PRINCIPALITY OF SAN LUIGI AND ITS ORDER OF THE CROWN OF THORNS, SAID OF THE LION AND BLACK CROSS MADE ON AUGUST 14 AND OCTOBER 11, 1957 AND PUBLISHED IN L’INVENTAIRE DES CHERCHEURS ET CURIEUX, PARIS, VOLUME 21, SEPTEMBER 1971, PAGES 820 TO 822

Edited with annotations by Rt Rev. Serge A. Theriault, Ph.D., Th.D.
Saint Louis Day 2012

The Abbey-Principality of San Luigi and its Order of the Crown of Thorns, said of the Lion and Black Cross, never existed in the desert of Tripoli-Fezzan. No killing either of the supposed founders. No survivors who took refuge with the king Kabalega in his kingdom of Bunyoro (a British protectorate), nor epidemic that put an end to it and forced a return to Europe.

The story, fully imagined, of this colonial adventure is a mystification by students, written on stamped paper by one of them, who lived in Neuilly-sur-Seine. He signed it and had his signature legalized by the mayor of the town.  

This legalization authenticated nothing of the joke, that responded at the time to the claims of a man named Leon Laforge, without definite situation, known as Prince of Vitanval. He had created a chivalric order of St. Leon and had refused membership in it to mutual friends. Some were of the


3 Jean-François Henrion-Bertier (1817-1901) was Mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine from 1888 to 1901.

4 On 18 November 1898, one Louis Leon Laforge, born in Honfleur in 1873, created the Ordre Princier des Chevaliers de Saint Léon. Our Honfleur citizen then became "Dom Leon Laforge, Prince of Vitanval." According to the statutes of the Order, goals were meritorious: "to honor those who are outstanding in the fields of art, science and literature. "Distinguishing himself first, Louis Leon self-proclaimed "Grand Master of the Order." Harold E. Gillingham, "Ephemeral Decorations "in Numismatic Notes and Monographs, No. 66, The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1935. "We know what Léon Laforge’s Knights of St. Leon are worth” can we read in the French Gotha, Paris, 1903, p. 3.
opinion to respond with another hoax even more original. But none of them being "prince", it was necessary to resolve this situation. They decided in common the creation of an imaginary "abbey-principality of San Luigi" in the African desert! But an "abbey-principality" founded by whom? The father of one of the hoaxers had a job with a painting contractor from Italy, which had many Italian employees. To help the contractor get around in Paris, he was provided with a daily list of sites with the names of fellow painters working there, as follows: 15 Malesherbes Blvd: Boni, Contini, etc.; 2 Duphot Street: Julien, Grazzano, etc.. It is from one of these lists that were taken the supposed names of the founders of San Luigi: fellow painters Pacomez, Piantini, Mendoza, Arrighi, Ferratera, Volupi, Asveda, who never set foot in Africa, nor in the nonexistent Abbey-Principality of San Luigi. They were supposedly the creators of the Crown of Thorns, said of the Lion and Black Cross. There remained the question of the grand mastership. None of the hoaxers claimed it, and in 1897 fate decreed that it was to be Girardot!

Some patents were printed and distributed for free, while Vitanval himself, charged chancery fees.\(^5\) It is these patents that revealed to the entourage of Bishop Vilatte of Canada, the existence of an order of the Crown of Thorns namesake of the one existing in his diocese and of which he was Grand Master. Communication was given to the bishop of the history written on stamped paper with notarized signature of J. Abriaux.

On the courteous invitation of Abbé Julio Houssay, who was combining the functions of vicar general and chancellor of the order of the bishop,\(^6\) the students ceased to grant patents and crosses of the Order; bowed to the episcopal authority of Bishop Vilatte, and in 1899, agreed to merge the two orders.

Commander Mathieu and explorer of J.B. Attanoux,\(^7\) who were familiar with Africa, and the circumstances of origin of the hoax, did not let Grand Master Vilatte ignore this. Hence the discreet silence he observed throughout his life on the pseudo-imaginary principality and the title of "Prince-Abbot of San Luigi", that impostors have usurped after his death,\(^8\) perpetuating the hoax of 1897 students, which we were.

\(^5\) He charged 20 to 80 francs the ribbon of the Order and even a thousand francs for a decoration or a diploma .. In a trial that was held in Paris May 2, 1901, Laforge was sentenced to six months in prison for fraud and illegal carrying of decoration. That was the end of the "Ordre Princier des Chevaliers de Saint-Léon." H.E. Gillingham, op. cit.

\(^6\) Bishop Vilatte ministered here in Canada, under the aegis of the OCT, as detailed by the Chancellor Houssay in the journal L'Étincelle published in Paris, more specifically the July-August 1902 issue. Jean Bromond, recruited in Paris for the Mission of St. Joseph Island (Ontario) in 1900, was a member of the OLCN.

\(^7\) Author of many writings, including "Tripoli et les voies commerciales du Soudan" in Annales de géographie, 1896, Vol. 5, No. 20, p. 193-201.

\(^8\) One John Barwell-Walker, a clergyman in La Porte, Indiana, proclaimed himself successor to Bishop Vilatte as Grand Master of the OCT in 1929, based on documents whose authenticity we refute for reasons given on pages 4-8.
Appendix I

DOCUMENTS USED BY J. BARWELL-WALKER TO CLAIM THAT HE SUCCEEDED MGR. RENE VILATTE AS GRAND MASTER OF THE ORDER OF THE CROWN OF THORNS: THEIR AUTHENTICITY REFUTED

Orders appeared called *San Luigi Orders*, which claimed to descend from the Rev. John Barwell-Walker, a clergyman in La Porte, Indiana. He proclaimed himself successor to Bishop Vilatte as Grand Master of the Order of the Crown of Thorns (OCT) in 1929, based on the following document.

We refute the authenticity of this document. What we see is an imitation of Bishop Vilatte’s signature.
Such a process is called a **simulation** and the document thus forged is called a false document.\(^9\) Let’s examine closely the signature that appears on the above document.

![Signature](image)

Two of the most common indicators of forgery are seen: **waverin\[g] or tremors** and **static pressure**.\(^10\)

Because the creation of most forms of non-genuine signatures are little more than drawings, the pen is moving so slowly that small, sometimes microscopic changes in direction take place in what should be a fluid-looking line. The resultant line is not smooth, but reflects the **shaking pen**. And because the pen is moving slowly rather than with the dynamic movement associated with most genuine writings, the ink line remains constant in **thickness**, resulting from the same constant pressure exerted on a slowly moving pen.\(^11\)

**Letterhead**

There is also an inconsistency between the letterhead on Barwell-Walker document and the letterhead used by Bishop Vilatte as shown in the Appendix, page 8. It is a letter that he wrote on July 20, 1924, one year later, to Bishop Jean Bricaud of Lyon. The inscriptions “**Grand Master – The Most Rev. Mar Timotheus I, D.D., D.C.**” and “**Grand Chancellor General – The Rt Rev. Mgr F.J. Edmond, D.D., D.C.**” do not appear on the letterhead used by Bishop Vilatte.

**Notary Public**

Another inconsistency is the use of a Notary Public (here it is Fred Williams\(^12\)) not seen elsewhere on church documents, except on Barwell-Walker’s certificate of consecration which is reproduced on page 5. On this certificate is the letterhead of the church Chancellor (Rev. Edgar Sneed at the time). Why do we see the signature of a Notary Public on a certificate of consecration that has church Chancellor’s letterhead? Many times with false documents all the signatures are forgeries including the notary's.\(^13\)

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\(^10\) Conclusive indicators of forgery are mentioned on internet sites: [http://catchathief.com](http://catchathief.com) and [http://forgeryfraud.com/detect-forgery-fraud](http://forgeryfraud.com/detect-forgery-fraud)

\(^11\) [http://questioneddocuments.com](http://questioneddocuments.com)

\(^12\) According to the Office of the Illinois Secretary of State, contacted some years ago on the subject, there was no approved Notary Public by the name Fred Williams practicing in the State of Illinois in those years.

\(^13\) [http://forgeryfraud.com/important-notary-info/](http://forgeryfraud.com/important-notary-info/)
Supposed certificate of consecration of Barwell-Walker, 1923.06.01

Below is reproduced a certificate of consecration that follows the procedure in use in those years. It is the certificate of consecration of Dr. George A. McGuire by Bishop Vilatte (1921). There was a documented process of certification led by the Church Chancellor (Rev. Edgar Sneed).
A note of interest. Dr. McGuire's certificate bears the signatures of Bishops (then Fathers) Casimir F. Durand and William E. Robertson who acted as witnesses and were to succeed their Ordinary, one in 1926 for French-speaking parishes (see statement below), the other in 1934, for African American parishes.
Claiming succession to someone based on a line of imposition of hands is not enough. It needs to be confirmed by the Church. See the official announcement re: Rt Rev. Durand and other bishops (for Germans, Italians, Poles, Swedes) in the official church publication The Antiochean of April 1928.
Appendix II

Letterhead Used by Bishop Grand Master Vilatte