

Chapter Two

Tuesday, May 5, 2015.

Rectory, Church of Our Lady of Fatima (“Cova”), on Gratiot Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

Driving down Gratiot Avenue in near eastside Detroit, after passing block upon block of burned out, abandoned houses and commercial buildings, one suddenly comes upon a green oasis, a large parcel filled with manicured lawns and mature trees. The property, fronting on Gratiot Avenue with a stone fence divided by a large wrought-iron archway over the driveway, is identified in letters across the archway as “Fatima Cova.” A huge neo-gothic gray limestone church with a slate roof stands just inside. At night its brilliant stained-glass windows shine with dazzling colors. A Michigan Historical Site sign, denoting the listing of this venerable church on the National Register of Historic Places, gives the formal name of the church: Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church (“Cova”).⁹ Prior to 1929, a previous church building on the same site had been known as Saint Mary’s Roman Catholic Church. But upon completion of the new church building, the name was changed to commemorate the 1917 apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima, Portugal. A rectory and convent, both of red brick and boasting three stories with dormer-pierced roofs of slate, flank the church on either side. A modern two-story school building, built in the 1960’s but now used only as a parish center, stands adjacent to the convent.

Behind all these buildings, inside yet another wrought-iron fence, is Our Lady of Fatima Cemetery. A vast expanse of wooded lawn and park-like peace, surrounded by half-abandoned blocks of inner-city urban wasteland, the cemetery rises gently uphill as one walks back through it, along a brick path lined by outdoor Stations of the Cross, until one reaches a replica of the little chapel at the Cova da Iria in Fatima, Portugal. That original Cova chapel was built on the very site where the Blessed Virgin Mary made a series of appearances in 1917 to three young shepherd children. The “Cova” shrine at the Detroit parish had been completed in the early 1930’s after the existing church was built. Behind the Cova shrine, a much steeper hill rises up to a Calvary, a carved stone replica of the three crosses on Golgotha, with representations of Jesus and the two thieves on the crosses, and statues of Mary and John at the foot of the Cross of Christ. The Calvary, originally reached by a stone stairway up the hillside, dates back to the 1880’s. An outdoor kneeler remains in place for those wishing to pray and meditate there, but the stone stairway has fallen into disrepair.

The “Cova” (as the parish is now commonly called) is the oldest parish in Detroit, having been founded in the early 1800’s. In its cemetery

⁹ The Fatima Cova parish bears many similarities to, but is not the same as, Assumption Grotto Church, www.assumptiongrotto.com.

lie the remains of many faithful Catholics, including not a small number of priests, bishops, and even an Archbishop. Some of the graves date back to the early 1800's, when the original church building was just a log cabin.

The Cova's current youthful pastor, Father Kiril Romanov, grew up in the parish after age fourteen, and now, at age thirty-three, had for several years been the successor to a long series of illustrious godly priests who, in their time, faithfully and courageously shepherded generations of Catholics through their earthly pilgrimages toward their Heavenly home. At age fourteen Father Kiril had been a convert, with his parents and five siblings, from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. A talented musician, his undergraduate dual degree was in both composition and piano performance. His parish was well known for its regular performances, on high feast days, of elegant orchestral Masses by the great polyphonic composers of Christendom, sung by the acclaimed Cova Latin Mass Choir and accompanied by members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. But Father Romanov was also known for his strictly orthodox Catholic theology, preaching, and practice. In many ways, his parish was a "magnet" parish for those yearning for the solid, clear teaching and dignified liturgy that typified the Catholic Church in Western nations prior to the revolutionary changes that followed the Second Vatican Council.

Father Kiril Romanov stood just shy of six feet tall, with dark brown hair and green eyes. His face was handsome and clean-shaven, and his physique was somewhat muscular and trim but not svelte. Whether on the parish grounds or out in the community at large, he always wore a black shirt and Roman collar, sometimes with black pants but most often a black cassock. The only exceptions were when he performed yard work on the parish grounds, or when he donned athletic wear in the early morning to work out in the parish gymnasium.

Mary Moretti, the rectory housekeeper and cook, smiled as she worked, and for a moment almost twirled like a ballerina, despite being "well over seventy." Mary was "eighty-five going on sixty," causing most people who guessed her age to underestimate her years by at least two decades. In her youth she had been a ravishing redhead, and a hint of her former beauty still shone in her countenance. Tonight would be a special dinner for her pastor, Father Romanov, and two visiting clergymen, and she was preparing her best Italian fare. The rectory kitchen, just off the parlor, was alive with the joyful strains of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite, in a transcription for piano four hands, wafting in from the parlor. There, Father Kiril sat playing on his Steinway concert grand piano. Beside him on the bench, providing the other pair of hands, was Father Vasily Soloviev, the fifty-some year old bearded pastor of Holy Archangels Russian Orthodox Church in Detroit. Father Vasily, a black-haired Russian giant with a waist-length full beard, had an aging face with dark brown eyes that still retained a hint of a handsome youth. He was tall, large in frame, and had an imposing physical presence. When he laughed, his deep Russian voice almost thundered.

Both talented musicians and composers, the two priests were preparing

a joint performance as part of the annual “Music by Candlelight” wine and dinner fundraiser, a volunteer classical music talent show that drew upon talented parishioners from both their congregations, and was staged annually, on successive weekends, once at each of their parishes. They laughed heartily as the music drew to a rousing close, and agreed it was time for a pre-prandial imbibition. As if on cue, Mary glided through the door from the kitchen, carrying a tray bearing two tall glasses.

“Russian Sunrise, Fathers?” she smiled. “A good bit of healthful orange juice, plus real fruit-based grenadine and a touch of Jagermeister herbal liqueur.”

“Thank you, my dear” said Vasily, bowing in the old-world manner of respect and acknowledgement of a kind service. As he and Kiril raised their glasses together, Vasily toasted first: “За нашу дружбу! (To our friendship!)”

“За встречу! (To our meeting!)” seconded Kiril. “We have just a few minutes before Father Kelleher should be here. I want to pick your brain, if I may, about something I have been pondering.”

“Let me guess – you want to know why the Orthodox Churches obstinately refuse to reconcile with the Chair of Peter?”

“I wasn’t going to be quite that blunt, Vasily. But it is something along that line, I suppose.”

Father Romanov led the way into his study, a high-ceilinged room lined with tall bookshelves on two walls, and numerous religious icons and works of art on a third wall. The fourth wall was graced with a large window looking out across the parish cemetery, a park-like peaceful green space in the midst of the surrounding urban wasteland. The upper third of the window was antique stained-glass depicting an ancient Galilean fishing boat and nets.

As the two priests settled into two worn but comfortable upholstered chairs in the rectory study, the window rattled momentarily due to the repetitive “ka-boom! ka-boom!” of a massively overpowered stereo system, passing by on Gratiot Avenue in a dilapidated minivan.

“Alas, while the world tumbles into a culture of pagan degeneracy,” sighed Vasily, “we still struggle with the splitting asunder of Christendom. We Christians have circled the wagons in self-defense, but we have turned our weapons inward upon each other.”

“Have you read Vladimir Soloviev?” asked Kiril. “The great Russian Orthodox theologian and philosopher of the latter Nineteenth Century? Perhaps a distant relative?”

“I’m not aware of any close family connection. In Orthodox seminary, the professors mostly emphasized that he supposedly recanted from his Catholic conversion on his deathbed, and died back in the grace of the Orthodox Faith. However, I’ve always been skeptical about that, since the priest who supposedly heard his recantation would have been breaking the seal of the confessional in revealing it. And such a disavowal would have been inconsistent with the whole thrust of Soloviev’s later life and work.”

“But did you Orthodox seminarians also study Soloviev’s arguments? About how the universal Church on earth *must* have a visible head in the Pope? I am wondering what you really think about that issue, my friend.”

“Kiril, we’ve been friends for years. And you were Orthodox yourself until this very parish drew you and your late parents and your brothers and sisters away from us into the Catholic Church. How old were you – thirteen?”

“I was fourteen, my brother Mikhail was sixteen, and our younger brother Vladimir was twelve. Our sisters are older and keep their ages secret. Our father had made an extensive study of Soloviev, and of Filaret of Moscow and Saint John Chrysostom – and he concluded they were right, that to be truly Orthodox one must acknowledge the primacy of Peter over all the Church. And so the usual reasons given – the uncertainty about procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, and the uncertainty about the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary – these are red herrings, not part of ancient Orthodox belief. Soloviev pointed out that the Orthodox always believed the same as Catholics about these things, and these Catholic doctrines are clearly reflected in the ancient Orthodox liturgical prayers, such as the Mass of Saint John Chrysostom. He argues that they were just used as excuses, to justify separation from the authority of a Western foreign power in Rome.”

“I have long felt that the division between the two main branches of Christendom – Catholic and Orthodox – is due to politics and not really due to theology,” volunteered Vasily.

“That’s exactly what Soloviev was arguing, back in the latter Nineteenth Century.”

“We Orthodox don’t deny the procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son, and we don’t deny the Immaculate Conception – we simply say that we don’t know for certain; we can’t say they are dogmas, because these things were defined by Catholic councils that took place after the schism.”

“Will you read this little book of Soloviev’s writings, Vasily? It’s in paperback – *The Russian Church and the Papacy*¹⁰ – an abridgement of his large work *Russia and the Universal Church*. I want to know what you think of his arguments.”

“Yes, I’ll read it. You have my interest aroused, Kiril. But listen – I want to ask you something, too. You better have some more of your Russian Sunrise.”

Kiril raised his glass and drained the final delicious drops.

“Okay, shoot.”

“Well,” began Vasily, “it’s about Vatican II and its aftermath. Even as the Church in the countries of the former Soviet Union seems to be undergoing a hesitant rebirth, the Church in the Western nations seems to be dying out. Its once-vast influence has waned, and its reputation has been horribly tarnished. How do you account for this, Kiril? Wasn’t

¹⁰ Soloviev, Vladimir, *The Russian Church and the Papacy*. See Bibliography.

Vatican II supposed to usher in a ‘New Springtime’?”

“Vasily, it seems there are as many opinions about that as there are Catholics! What is clear in retrospect is that the Catholic Church lost its missionary zeal after Vatican II. It had become ashamed any longer to proclaim, with its former missionary zeal, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – there is one true Church, and ‘outside the Church there is no salvation.’ It started to deny that other Christian denominations needed to convert to the one true Church. Before the council, they had been called ‘heretics and schismatics.’ After the council, they became ‘separated brethren.’ The Mass changed: from the re-presentation to God of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary to a celebration of the community in the form of a ‘meal’ together. The faithful lost the sense of the supernatural and came to see the Church as a worldwide social-work agency. The priesthood was emasculated by the dumbing-down of the ritual and the increasing inclusion of the laity in functions once reserved to priests alone. The sanctuary – once the exclusive domain of males during the liturgy – was invaded by females. All these changes made the priesthood less attractive to manly men, and so the standards were lowered to fill the slots in seminaries. Rules excluding the unfit – those with marginal intellectual ability, those suffering from the disorder of same-sex attraction, and so forth – were ignored. Both the numbers of priests and their quality declined. Religious orders were decimated as real belief in the supernatural world and the life of self-sacrifice gave way to the ‘psycho-babble’ of ‘self-actualization’ in the here and now. The documents of Vatican II were cleverly crafted with extensive ambiguities, which could be used after the council to undermine the traditional doctrines and practices of the Faith.”

“Sounds exactly like a modernist revolution, planned and carried out with great skill,” Vasily observed.

“Cardinal Suenens, a Vatican II leader, said openly that Vatican II was ‘the French Revolution in the Church,’ ” replied Kiril. “Concern about proclaiming the rights of man replaced the defense of the rights of God. And Père Congar, another Vatican II expert, said that the Church had had its peaceful ‘October Revolution.’ He implied that changing the rite of the Mass really constituted the destruction of the Roman Rite.”

“The Russian Orthodox in Russia still have their Divine Liturgy in Old Slavonic, which is comparable to your pre-Vatican II Latin Mass. Old Slavonic, like Latin, is a dead language, so the meanings of things can’t be tinkered with through subtle mistranslations, such as creep in – or, more often, are intentionally inserted – with the vernacular.”

“The Society of Saint Pius X was a priestly fraternity founded by Archbishop Lefebvre in reaction to the doctrinal and liturgical changes which followed Vatican II. Basically, this order of priests simply kept on following standard Catholic practice that had been universal prior to Vatican II. They never denied anything the Church had always held and taught. They argued, correctly, that Vatican II was specifically a non-dogmatic council; therefore, it could define no new doctrine. They noted that it is a Catholic dogma that revelation ended with the death of the last

Apostle; therefore, the Faith can't change. The Society of Saint Pius X priests simply handed on what they had been taught from those who came before them. But they were vilified by the Church leadership, said to be 'schismatic,' and were persecuted mercilessly within the Church, while at the same time outrageous modern theologians threw out all sorts of 'new' ideas that had always been condemned as heresy, but they were left alone."

"Didn't the Pius X group finally get to negotiate with the Vatican?"

"Well, Vasily, as you may recall, in 2009 formal theological discussions got underway between Vatican theologians and Society of Saint Pius X theologians. These discussions, I believe, have had a profound effect on the current Pope over the past several years. They have forced Pope Nicholas to face the reality that one can't possibly reconcile everything in certain documents of Vatican II with the timeless teachings of the Catholic Church."

"Wasn't religious liberty one of their big issues?"

"Right. The Pius X group argued that the Church had condemned the idea – that separation of Church and state is a good thing – as a heresy. They were right, of course. This had been stated *ex cathedra* – that is, infallibly – by Pope Pius IX in 1864 in *Quanta Cura*, which condemned the following proposition: 'The Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church.'"

"But that's where we Orthodox get it right!" exclaimed Vasily. "We have a state Church in each Orthodox country, and we actively limit the freedom of false religions to proselytize inside our borders."

"Yes, but then you move to America and you become just like the rest of us – Americanists."

"Oh, you mean acting as if there should be no established religion? But where we are only a minority, it's better to have religious freedom."

"Maybe so in a country where Catholics or Orthodox are only a minority, but you can't act as if that is the ideal. Don't *you* believe America would be better off if it was officially an Orthodox state?"

"Of course, but you can't talk that way."

"Yes I can! At least in the privacy of this study, with you, my trusted friend. I believe America would be better off if it were a Roman Catholic Confessional State. But of course I can't talk that way in public. Still, if I don't believe that there is one religion that is true and therefore all others must contain error, I'm not really a Catholic; not if I really believe other religions are adequate alternate paths to God. If I believe one religion is as good as another, then I'm simply an indifferentist, and a heretic from my Faith."

"Or maybe a good modern Catholic in the 'spirit of Vatican II'?" quipped Vasily.

"Now you're understanding it, my friend!"

"Well, we both know America is not about to become either Catholic or Orthodox. We'll be lucky if she doesn't criminalize us both before long as bigots and hate-mongers."

"No, America and the other Western nations of former Christendom

don't seem close to becoming religious states anytime soon. But ... what about Russia?"

"Russia!?"

"Yes, Holy Mother Russia."

"You're joking, Kiril ..."

"Vasily, have you heard of Fatima?"

"Well, I know about the so-called 'Fatimists.' There's a Father Nicholas Gottschalk who has his 'Fatima Herald' organization based here in Detroit, and also across the river in Windsor, Canada. I've seen some of his publications, though they're not much to the liking of us Orthodox believers. He seems to feel the Orthodox nations need a miraculous intervention from Heaven in order for them to 'convert' to the Catholic Faith."

"Right. And these Fatima devotees claim that this miraculous conversion will not happen until the Pope, in union with all the Catholic Bishops in the world, performs a public consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. But in 2000 the Vatican issued a document¹¹ implying that the consecration of Russia has been done – insofar as possible, and to Heaven's satisfaction – and that Fatima is now a thing of the past."

"Well, we Orthodox were separated from Rome before the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was formally defined, and so we neither profess nor deny it as a dogma. Of course, all the ancient Fathers of the Church believed She was Immaculate, and our own ancient Orthodox liturgy reflects that belief. Still, you won't find any Orthodox Church named for the Immaculate Conception in Russia."

"Right, only our Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, in Moscow."

"But we Orthodox believe we have the true Faith and are already part of the universal Church. We even acknowledge a certain theoretical primacy for the Bishop of Rome. We certainly don't believe we need to convert!"

"So then Father Gottschalk would not be very popular among Orthodox leaders."

"True. But then, I hear he is not much in favor with the higher-ups in your Church, either. I've read that he has been unjustly persecuted by powerful forces in the Vatican curia. Those 'Fatimists' are a bit like the 'Lefebvrists,' I'd guess. An irritation to those engaged in mainstream contemporary Church politics."

"Well, first, I suppose, we would have to explore what it might really mean for Russia to 'convert' ..."

But then the doorbell rang, and Kiril sprang to his feet.

"That'll be my friend Father Kelleher, the Anglican Use Catholic priest. I think you'll find him quite interesting, Vasily."

The Reverend Father Michael S. Kelleher, the youthful thirty-

¹¹ "The Message of Fatima" from the Vatican, 2000. See text at www.vatican.va.

something pastor of Saint Luke's Anglican Use Catholic Church on Woodward Avenue in downtown Detroit, had much in common with Father Kiril. Both were talented musicians, both had large historic parishes celebrated for their fine traditional music programs, and both were now Catholics known for their unhesitatingly orthodox preaching. Father Kelleher, whose ancestors harked from the Anglican high society in the Irish capital of Dublin, himself looked a bit like a leprechaun. He was trim and short of stature, with green eyes and jet black hair that curled so tightly that his Detroit parishioners referred to it as his "fro." His skin was on the pale side, even in summer. An Irish tenor, his golden voice was magnificent. Completely American, he had no hint of an Irish brogue, and spoke teen slang as fluently as anyone in his parish youth groups. It was rumored that he "texted" so furiously that his cell phone occasionally emitted wisps of smoke.

Saint Luke's parish was previously known as Saint Luke Episcopal Church, and had been the flagship Episcopal Church in all of greater Detroit.¹² But the congregation and pastor had voted in 2010 to convert, as a parish, to the Anglican Use in the Catholic Church. Soon after the new Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus* was issued by Pope Nicholas VI in 2009, they grasped their opportunity to come into full communion with Rome while retaining their liturgical customs. In becoming a Catholic priest, Father Kelleher, a married man, had to agree not to remarry should he someday be widowed.

Father Kelleher had been invited on the pretext of discussing the upcoming "Music by Candlelight" fundraiser being planned by his colleagues, as he could foresee potentially expanding it into a three-parish project. But he was also intrigued to make the acquaintance of Detroit's most prominent Russian Orthodox priest.

"Welcome, Father Kelleher!" beamed Father Romanov at his guest, and motioned the way down the corridor to his study.

"Father Kelleher, I am Father Vasily Soloviev, pastor of Holy Archangels Russian Orthodox Church, just a few blocks up Woodward Avenue from Saint Luke's. Please call me Vasily."

"I'm honored to meet you, Father Vasily. I understand from Father Kiril that you are quite a musician."

"A kind exaggeration, to be sure. But we have been playing a bit of Tchaikovsky together on the piano, for our upcoming parish fund-raisers."

Several tones from a tabletop bell sounded from the dining room.

"Dinner is served, Fathers," warned Kiril. "We dare not keep Mary waiting long."

The other two priests mused quietly about how housekeepers, not pastors, run rectories.

The dining room, on the rear corner of the brick rectory building, had two outside walls with large windows looking across the park-like expanse of the cemetery in the rear, and onto a small private garden between the

¹² Inspired by, but not the same as, St. John's Episcopal Church, www.stjohnsdetroit.org.

rectory and the towering limestone wall of the neo-gothic church. Finely detailed woodwork, dating back almost a hundred years, graced the room with warmth. The table had been made small and was set for three, ideal for conversation.

Through an archway off the dining room was the parlor, where the two concert grand pianos stood side-by-side. One, a Steinway concert grand, was the personal property of Father Romanov. It had been inherited from his late father, Nicholas Alexandrovich,¹³ a piano professor at Wayne State University. As the three priests prepared to gather around the dining room table, Mark Szczypiorski¹⁴, a young man of the parish completing a Master's Degree in piano and organ performance at Wayne State University, took his place at the Steinway and prepared to provide soft background music for the dinner hour. But he would wait until the blessing was prayed.

The other piano, a Yamaha concert grand, had been bequeathed to the parish by the widow of Kiril's dear friend Ken Schultz, FAGO,¹⁵ a prominent Catholic organ scholar, whose untimely death had cut short a brilliant career of service to the Church. A devout traditional Catholic who formerly taught music at Detroit's Sacred Heart Seminary, Ken had become a refugee from the modernist iconoclasm and hatred of traditional music which had then infected a slight majority of the faculty. Ken had for his final few years – the best years of his life, he had insisted – served as composer-in-residence and instructor for advanced organ students at the Cova. Mark's organ skills, including classical improvisation, had progressed from very good to outstanding under Ken Schultz's rigorous tutelage, and Mark and Father Romanov both missed him sorely.

Mark was the oldest of six homeschooled children, having four brothers and a sister. His family lived in the farming country north of Detroit, and like many Cova parishioners commuted an hour each way to what was arguably the finest traditional Catholic parish in the archdiocese. A child prodigy, Mark could skillfully sight-read the most complex scores on piano or organ, and had made an impressive start as a composer. Though not quite six feet in stature, Mark appeared tall, slender, and strikingly handsome. A natural athlete, he had the physique of a long-distance runner, and preferred track and tennis over football or weightlifting. His dark curly hair was thick and obstinately unruly, and his fair complexion caused him to appear never-ever quite clean-shaven. Like all his brothers, his blue eyes were set wide apart in a symmetrical face of classic proportions, reflecting the dignity of the Szczypiorski family's ancestry in the Polish nobility. Mark's baritone voice was melodic, and he could have become a renowned vocal soloist except that he was always

¹³ Note that Russians commonly refer to others who are familiar to them by their first and middle names, omitting the last (or family) name, which is understood.

¹⁴ A Polish surname, pronounced "sh-chee-pyor-ski." A pronouncing guide to foreign names can be found at the back of the book.

¹⁵ Fellow of the American Guild of Organists, the ultimate organist's credential, which only a select few musicians ever manage to achieve.

chosen instead as the best available keyboardist. Mark was intelligent, but at heart he was a craftsman who loved to create music and to make things with his hands. For the past several years he had worked as an apprentice in the Detroit pipe organ shop of Vladimir Romanov. Recognizing that even highly trained musicians seldom receive a living wage in Catholic settings, he was considering organ building as a main career, especially if he hoped to marry and provide for a family. Having as his other mentor Vladimir's older brother Father Romanov – a similarly gifted musician who had become a priest – did make it impossible for Mark to completely ignore the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. But there was a wild streak in Mark that, at each stage of his life, would take time to tame.

When Mark had completed ninth grade in Catholic homeschooling, his parents, Karl and Diane Szczypiorski, had allowed their oldest child to enter tenth grade in a rural public high school, close by Father Kiril's former Saint Jude parish in a small farming town north of Detroit. Karl and Diane felt Mark had a firm grounding in his Catholic Faith, and should be able to successfully withstand the secular influence of a rural public high school. But Mark – basically an other-centered, emotionally stable, and intelligent young man (but not without a wild streak) – had been quickly adopted by the “in” crowd that valued outward good looks and athletic ability. Very soon, his parents found that Mark, Catholic altar boy though he was, could not adequately resist the manifold temptations of the secular-school world. Young women with no self-restraint were competing for his attention, and his formerly excellent grades were plummeting. Invitations to weekend parties, with rumors of alcohol and impure entertainments, became weekly events. After one disastrous year in public school, his parents put him back into homeschooling for the remainder of high school. For a year or more, Mark had sorely resented this, and had engaged in some passive-aggressive resistance to his school work to “punish” them for being so “narrow minded” and “old-fashioned.” But they held their ground until he matured into young manhood and won a coveted place as a protégé of Father Kiril Romanov, serving as an assistant organist at the renowned Cova. His longstanding close friendship with Mariya Peterson, a talented young Cova parishioner and Wayne State organ major, helped to rein in his wild side. Ultimately, Mark had blossomed into an outstanding example of Catholic young manhood. Mark's parents quietly rejoiced that, despite past struggles, their oldest son now served as an important role model and hero for many a young girl or boy in the Cova Parish.

The three priests were now all standing at the dining room table.

“Father Vasily,” said Kiril, “would you kindly offer thanks to our Lord according to the customary prayers of your Church?”

They all stood at their places, hands folded, and bowed their heads. Father Vasily began with the sign of the cross, and then prayed:

“The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise Him; their hearts shall live forever!

“Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

“Lord, have mercy!

“Christ, have mercy!

“Lord, have mercy!

“Christ God, bless the food and drink of Thy servants, for Thou art holy, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.”

“Please be seated, Fathers,” said Kiril. “While Mary serves, I will pour our wine.”

In the next room, the quiet piano music began with *Images* by Claude Debussy. Vasily, given the first small sample of red wine, swirled the glass to note the wine’s “legs,” deeply inhaled its aroma, took a small taste, and then nodded enthusiastic approval.

“Michael,” said Vasily, “I’m told that a few years ago you and your entire parish opted to leave the Anglican communion and become Catholic. Tell me about that.”

“Well, it wasn’t an impulsive decision. Saint Luke’s Episcopal Church had spent years developing a parish identity as a Traditional Anglican community, following the old doctrines and liturgical practices of the Anglican communion. It had systematically resisted each new modernizing change that swept through the worldwide Anglican communion after the 1960’s. Anglicans basically defined themselves by their differences from the Catholic Church, thinking themselves to be more pure than the decadent Catholics. Then, as the Catholic Church experienced a modernizing revolution, so did the Anglicans – but, for a time, always one step behind.”

“So then, what would be the point of returning to Rome?”

“Well, there came a point when the Anglicans began to surpass even the progressive Catholics in liberal anti-traditionalism. Contraception, easy divorce and remarriage, openly gay clergy, women as priests, and finally gay and female bishops – all led to an eventual rupture, as many in the Anglican communion could no longer accept the radical changes that were obviously contrary to the timeless doctrine and practice of the Church. Rome was now suddenly appearing to be *more* conservative than many Anglican parishes. But we still had a liturgical tradition that was not as modern as the typical New Mass among *novus ordo* Catholics. We wanted the solid rock of Rome, but not the ‘schlock’ of the New Mass. When Rome suggested that we could keep our liturgical traditions, as an Anglican Use within the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, we tradition-oriented Anglicans were very much attracted. We could come under the shelter of Peter’s authority without giving up our cultural treasures.”

“So why were certain Catholic Cardinals quite strongly opposed to the conversion of tens of thousands of Anglicans?”

“Because they knew we were traditionalists, both in liturgy and doctrine, and we would possibly cause a shift toward tradition within the Roman Church. They preferred to move toward a superficial unity within former Christendom, blending with the Protestants by gradually jettisoning everything Catholic to which Protestants might object. And

eventually, they planned on melding with all religions, as hinted in the previous pope's pan-religious prayer meetings at Assisi, or in the emerging identity of the ultramodern new basilica at the Fatima Shrine in Portugal as a pilgrim center for all world religions."¹⁶

"But what did you have to give up?"

"Well, of course we were more liberal on divorce, and we had married clergy. But mostly we gave up oppression by the liberal wing of the Anglican Church, which is now self-destructing at an accelerating pace."

As dinner progressed, Father Vasily noted that, theoretically, the Orthodox could follow a similar trajectory in coming back into formal union with Rome. They could keep their liturgical practices, and simply acknowledge the rule of Peter, the Pope, over all Christians. By the time the table had been cleared and coffee served, past political errors on all sides of sundered Christendom were acknowledged by all – Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican.

"But we Orthodox have certain traditional arguments which we like to use to justify our continued separation from Rome," continued Father Vasily. "We object to the statement that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son, instead of just from the Father. We claim to not know whether Mary was always Immaculate from the moment of Her conception. And we claim that the Pope in Rome does not have jurisdiction over our national churches. But we also know that our own theologians and our own liturgies contradict these arguments, and that they really represent not theology but a stubborn political separatism and nationalistic pride."

"Well, a similar nationalistic pride infected the Anglican Church," noted Father Kelleher. "Think of it: there was a law forbidding the British royal family to be Catholic or to marry Catholics, and the throne itself was forfeit for an infraction of that rule. The British mercilessly persecuted the Irish nation, imposing draconian Penal Laws on all who refused to attend Church of England services. England too was driven by national pride into spiritual blindness. But Fathers, I must be leaving now. I have an early Mass tomorrow, and much work to do to prepare for choir practice."

Father Kelleher took his leave, thanking both priests for their company and for the fellowship of exploring their differences, which caused their vast areas of theological closeness to come into better focus. Father Kiril and Father Vasily were just settling into a plan for an after-dinner drink, when suddenly a matronly figure appeared at the kitchen door. This was simply Mary Moretti's moment of evening departure, like hundreds before, but for some reason Father Kiril was particularly struck by the glory of her white hair, the purity of her visage, and the dignity of her soul, so devoted to serving Christ and His Church.

"Fathers, good evening," she smiled. "The dishes are done, and I'll be heading home for the night. Just leave your cups in the sink and I'll tend to them in the morning after Mass. And Father Kiril, I believe you know

¹⁶ Maehlmann and Fringeli article. See Bibliography.

where the after dinner drinks can be found.”

Father Kiril gave Mary his priestly blessing, and she went out the side door of the rectory. Mary always parked on the far side of wide Gratiot Avenue, in the church’s auxiliary lot, for fear that some late arrival for a Mass would not find a place to park. About ninety seconds after Mary left the rectory, both priests heard screeching tires, a sudden loud thud, and then a voice or two crying out in dismay.

All this came from the direction of seven-lane-broad and busy Gratiot Avenue, out in front of the rectory. Father Kiril jumped up and ran out the front door, and at once he saw a woman lying on the road, bleeding, and an old rattletrap car stopped a block down the street. As he approached the fallen figure, he wept. It was Mary Moretti, mortally wounded but still conscious. A few pedestrians were gathering around. So far, there was no sign of police or ambulance, but a passerby said she had just called the 911 emergency dispatcher. Moments later, Mark and Father Vasily also arrived.

“Mark, we have to offer dear Mary confession, last rites, and if possible Communion,” said Father Kiril. “There is no time to waste. I will hear her confession now. Please go to my private chapel and in the Tabernacle there I have a pyx with the Blessed Sacrament in it. I had it prepared for a sick call earlier today that was cancelled. The pyx is inside its leather pouch. Carry the pyx in its pouch and bring it to me as quickly as possible. Please also bring my holy oils.”

Mark, who had been an altar boy in the parish for many years, knew exactly how to swiftly fulfill Father’s request. Taking Mary’s hand, Father Kiril looked into her eyes and smiled through his tears.

“Mary, I am Father Romanov, your priest. I will hear your confession and give you absolution.”

Mary whispered her last confession to Father Kiril, who absolved her from her sins. She recited the Apostles’ Creed, while Father Kiril recited the Lord’s Prayer. Then Mark returned, and Father Kiril presented the Body of Christ before her, saying in Latin: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world.”¹⁷

She replied, in Latin, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. Speak but the word, and my soul shall be healed.”¹⁸

Father Kiril placed the Host on her tongue, saying in Latin, “May the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve your soul unto life everlasting. Amen.”¹⁹

He then anointed her with holy oil, and offered the traditional Latin prayers for Extreme Unction. Mary seemed to relax then, as if the pain in her disfigured and bleeding body had suddenly and substantially diminished.

Then Mary smiled, and exclaimed, “Oh, Father: see! Jesus and Mary

¹⁷“Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce Qui tollit peccata mundi.”

¹⁸“Dómine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum: sed tantum dic verbo, et sanábitur ánima mea.”

¹⁹“Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam. Amen.”

have come, with angels!”

Father Kiril knew, from long experience with the death of the faithful, that the end was nearing.

“And ... the Holy Father will come ... to you, Father ... to seek help... soon ...”

“May the Lord bless you, my daughter,” said Kiril, thinking to himself that she was now becoming quite confused mentally.

“Oh! And see how They smile at you, Father ...”

But then Mary breathed her last. The lifesaving ministrations of the Detroit City rescue squad, just arriving, would not be needed. Kiril slowly arose, in the glare of flashing red-and-blue lights, feeling a profound sadness in his soul. He saw the young driver, perhaps a hundred yards down the avenue, being loaded into a police car in handcuffs.

As he neared the curb, Kiril overheard the bystanders talking about the driver who had killed Mary. He lived in the neighborhood and was only a young man, but he had a revoked driver’s license due to multiple citations for reckless driving. So Kiril offered a silent prayer for him, too, that somehow, through this seemingly senseless accident, grace would reach deep into that young man’s heart and soul. Prompted by his shepherd’s heart, Kiril made a mental note to visit the young man in jail the next morning, and to seek to console him.

Mark, standing by, also saw the young driver being handcuffed and pushed into the back of a police car. “If only such young men could discover what a treasure of Faith and culture was here at the Cova, right in their own neighborhood,” he thought. He realized how profoundly blessed he had been by his strict Catholic upbringing and education.

Watching Father Romanov as he administered the Sacraments to a dying parishioner caused the world’s desperate need for many holy priests to tug at his wild heart. He feared that he might soon have to mention his thoughts about becoming a priest to his mentor, Father Romanov. But now it was night, and a tragedy had just taken place; and he was moved by the drama of it all. By tomorrow, his wild side would safely quench such outrageous thoughts – at least, for a while.

While Mark returned the holy oils to the sacristy, Kiril and Vasily intuitively went together, without speaking, into the quiet, dimly lit Church, and knelt to pray before the Blessed Sacrament which was reserved in the Tabernacle – front and center – on the high altar. The flickering red lamp, suspended above, served to assure all the faithful who might come here to pray that Jesus was indeed truly present – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – under the appearance of consecrated bread. The only difference in his Russian Orthodox parish, thought Vasily, was that a chalice of Jesus’ Precious Blood would also be reserved in the Tabernacle, and the Body and Blood thus reserved would be called the “Holy Mysteries.”

Both priests were deeply moved by the tragedy that had just transpired, and now sought solace from their Lord. Father Kiril recalled how good and faithful his dear housekeeper had been: a daily communicant; a calm,

uncomplaining, and completely dependable domestic servant to her parish priests; a holy woman; one of the many quiet saints, who live and die unnoticed by the world.

He felt a quiet peace about her soul. Possibly her time in purgatory would be brief. He recalled that Mary had probably obtained a plenary indulgence, only a few days before, when a newly ordained priest had offered his very first Mass at the Cova and then had given Mary his blessing. Father Kiril silently thanked God for the encouragement that such holy souls brought to him, particularly when he was weary in his burdens as a priest and shepherd for his flock.

But, in his heart, Kiril realized he was also troubled by Mary Moretti's last words. What ever could they mean? "The Holy Father ... coming soon ... to *me* ... to seek help?" He decided he should not concern himself with this. He would simply pray for Divine Assistance to help him to fulfill the Will of God, each day, as his daily duties and the needs of others were continually placed before him. It was not for him to know the future. It was for him to serve God, here and now – this day – faithfully and fervently.