

Chapter Eight

June 2, 2015.

The State of Vatican City, Inside Rome, Italy.

Part A. Vatican Gardens. Tuesday Afternoon.

It was late afternoon on a brilliant June day in Rome, and Pope Nicholas was enjoying a solitary walk in the enclosed Vatican gardens. Swiss Guards, ready to protect at any moment, stood by at a discreet distance. Birds sang merrily, bees buzzed in the sweet-scented blossoms, and a light breeze sifted through the rustling leaves, blending symphonically with the tinkling waters of two nearby fountains. As he walked, Nicholas looked down at his red shoes, and thought of the terrible responsibility they represented: to be shepherd for the whole world, and one day to answer to Christ for the use he had made of his time in the Chair of Peter the Apostle.

Today, Tuesday, was Nicholas' eighty-fifth birthday. People said he had aged well, and perhaps still had several important years left to rule. His mind was clear, his health was stable, and his energy was remarkable for a man of his age. His full head of snow-white hair, which had never receded, evoked a certain youthfulness in his visage.

Nicholas often sensed that it wasn't how much time one had to spend on earth, but how much real difference one dared to make, that mattered. While the world hurried on unawares, the Church was engaged in a final battle with the devil for the salvation of souls. The modern world was all too comfortable with convenient abstractions, always talking about "peoples" or ethnic "communities," simply new variants on the tired old Marxist fiction of "the people." In reality, only individual souls existed. It was the eternal destiny of each individual soul that, in the end, mattered. Yes, individuals could form communities and nations, and such entities were also bound collectively by the law of God. But to heal a nation spiritually, it was necessary to bring about the conversion of a great majority of the individual souls comprising that nation. That was precisely why Nicholas found it so difficult to imagine that the nation of Russia – or any other modern nation, for that matter – would ever actually convert. Truly, a miraculous intervention by Heaven would be required.

Nicholas thought about the powerful forces entrenched within the Vatican itself that were opposed to Heaven's plan for world peace through the salvation of individual souls on a vast scale. Some of these opponents were slaves to their pride, and wanted the world to think highly of them as intelligent men in tune with these progressive times. They wanted the Catholic Faith to gradually meld into the emerging universal religion of man. They tended not to really believe in the immortality of the soul, eternal judgment, or the life of the world to come. To them the Church was useful as a powerful existing organization, and they were content to enjoy their privileges and the human respect of their positions.

Other highly placed churchmen were slaves to their passions. A few

were womanizers, or lived as if married despite their vow of celibacy. A great many more, it seemed, were afflicted with the disorder of same-sex attraction, which, according to timeless Tradition, should have barred them from holy orders. Most of them had been profoundly wounded through abuse in their own childhood, or had been denied the normal psychological formation of manhood because of isolation and neglect. They should have pursued quiet lives of holiness and chastity in the lay state, accepting their particular cross of unnatural temptation, and carrying it as best they could. But they should not have sought the honor and dignity of the priesthood, which was to be reserved only for normal men of outstanding character. The damage inflicted upon the Church by the infiltration of those who had been unwilling to bow to these age-old ecclesiastical restrictions was incalculable.

Still other men in the Vatican were conscious political infiltrators. He recalled how the former attorney for the Communist Party of America, after her late-life conversion to the Catholic Faith, testified that she had helped place more than one thousand exceptionally talented agents in Catholic seminaries back in the mid-Twentieth Century, and many of them were now at the zenith of their ecclesiastical careers. Such men never did believe in Christ, but only mocked Him by pretending to believe through long years of rapid ascent, due to their exceptional human abilities, into the top echelons of the Church hierarchy. They were saboteurs, all the while waiting for opportunities to undermine the Church's reputation, influence, and clarity of teaching. Nicholas thought of numerous prominent bishops, recently retired, who had been major irritants to him throughout his entire career, and who had persistently flaunted the wishes of their Catholic faithful in the most obnoxious and self-righteous manner. They had stripped magnificent church buildings bare in an iconoclastic fury, promoted subversive sex education programs, and had disciplined none except those few brave clergy still leading lives of holiness and accurately teaching undiluted Catholic doctrine, the Faith once delivered to the saints.

Nicholas remembered how Jesus Himself had chosen twelve, and one of them turned out to be a traitor. Still, he found encouragement in the growing numbers of "traditional Catholics," including many young people, who professed firm and uncompromising belief in what the Church had always held and taught. Many of them had been subjected to decades of unjust persecution within the Church, suffering repressive tactics reminiscent of those used against "refuseniks" in the former Soviet Union. Nicholas was glad that, in recent years, the liberation of the old Tridentine Mass, and the ongoing theological discussions between Vatican officials and certain traditionalist groups, had brought traditional Catholics into wider if still tentative acceptance as a part of the Catholic Church. Nicholas understood that traditionalists had never really been schismatic, since they never denied one tenet of the Faith nor did they ever deny the authority of the Pope. They had simply engaged in the equivalent of civil disobedience against the unjust imposition of certain new rules, such as

the *de facto* banning of the ancient Mass, rules that were not logically reconcilable with Tradition.

As he walked, Nicholas came upon a garden statue of Our Lady of Fatima. This reminded him of the millions of Rosaries which had been presented to him annually beginning in 2010, as a spiritual bouquet, for the intention that the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary might be done in the precise manner requested at Fatima. The first year, the traditionalists had tallied more than nineteen million Rosaries, and in subsequent years the annual total had never been less than twelve million.

Nicholas had the disconcerting sense that, each year, it was becoming even more clear to him that the prophetic message of Fatima was not all in the past. He knew that the Vatican Secretary of State's document, released in 2000, in which he had been complicit but with reservations, had contained the vision granted to the children at Fatima, but did not include the verbatim words of Our Lady explaining its meaning. Each of his predecessors had found those actual words of Our Lady too terrible to release, because they seemed to foretell a disaster for the Church and the world. They had warned of a great apostasy from the Faith, a diabolical disorientation beginning within the Church and beginning at the top levels, following a confusing, non-doctrinal "pastoral" council that would take place after 1960. Our Lady's words had clearly indicated the unspeakable shame of the widespread molestation of innocent children by consecrated souls. She had also warned of the coming annihilation of many nations.

He remembered how Sister Lucy experienced a visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1929 at Tuy, Spain, where Mary told her to inform the Holy Father that it was now time to proceed with the consecration of Russia, exactly as first indicated on July 13, 1917 at Fatima. Then in 1931, Sister Lucy experienced a visitation of the Lord Jesus in Rianjo, Spain, at which time He warned that the Popes would suffer like the Kings of France, because they tarried too long in carrying out the request of Heaven through His Mother. Nicholas recalled how on June 17, 1689 Jesus had asked the King of France (and his successors) to consecrate their kingdom to His Sacred Heart, but they delayed until June 17, 1789, when Louis XVI was stripped of his legislative powers and could no longer order it to be done precisely as Heaven had requested. Louis XVI tried to do it in desperation from his prison cell, where the French Revolution had put him. But in that place, he could not do the consecration of France with the requested solemnity this ceremony needed.

Nicholas stopped, and performed some mental arithmetic. The consecration of Russia had first been mentioned in 1917, and the request to do it had come in 1929. It was now 2015, ninety-eight years after the Fatima apparitions, and only fourteen years before 2029, the hundred-year deadline of the specific request at Tuy. If not Nicholas, certainly the next Pope would have to obey.

Then Nicholas reminded himself of the little-recognized diminishment of the power of the Holy Father that had followed Vatican II. Prior to the council, the Pope was clearly a monarch, and the heads of all Vatican Congregations reported directly to him. After the council, the Vatican

http://www.russiansunrise.com/book_pdf/RS_Chapter8_p.pdf

Secretary of State became a *de facto* prime minister, and all the heads of Vatican Congregations reported to him. He in turn, alone, reported to the Holy Father. It had often seemed to Pope Nicholas that the Vatican Secretary of State actually held the real power, and that he, the Pope, was merely a figurehead who could be disobeyed with impunity just as long as the Secretary of State was complicit in the disobedience. For this reason, the Pope was probably powerless to command a fulfillment of the Fatima request for the consecration of Russia, even if he wished to do so. Perhaps he was already in a hopeless position analogous to Louis XVI after 1789, who from his prison cell was unable to solemnly and publicly consecrate France as Heaven had requested. Nicholas believed that many of his subordinates, the Catholic bishops of the world, would now simply refuse to obey the Holy Father's order to publicly consecrate Russia, and then the Pope would be made to appear foolish and impotent in the eyes of the world. It would become known that he had no real power, and then the world would stop listening to him altogether. He would become irrelevant, a one-time monarch who no longer ruled even his own household. He liked to console himself with the idea that, under these circumstances, surely Heaven could not hold him personally responsible for not consecrating Russia.

A bell in a small campanile sounded, signaling the Holy Father that his time for exercise was ending, and that he must move on to his next obligation. A group of music students from Russia had come to play classical music for him in the reception hall of the Apostolic Palace, in honor of his birthday. Therefore he needed to have an early supper and then get ready to greet them.

Part B. Reception Hall in the Apostolic Palace. Tuesday Evening.

George Peterson and his wife Katarina Fyodovsky had flown back to Moscow on Monday, where the De Boni Artes foundation had arranged a dress rehearsal at the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Their trip had proved to be uneventful, and they spent one night back at the comfortable and secure Moscow Hilton Leningradskaya. Father Popov visited them there, late at night, and entrusted them with the letter which they were to deliver in person to the Pope.

However, their recent time back home in Detroit had not been uneventful. While going about their daily routines at work, George and Katarina had each experienced several occasions when, unmistakably, they were being shadowed by evasive men who neither spoke nor clearly showed their faces. Three days before their flight back to Moscow, they had returned after work to their downtown Detroit condominium to find it ransacked. Drawers were emptied on the floor, furniture and rugs were overturned, and mattresses and framed pictures were cut open. Packaged foods were spilled everywhere. Since the entire house had been torn apart, there was reason to believe the intruders did not find what they were

seeking. And the rage expressed by certain “messages” seemed to confirm this conclusion: on the stove, a photo of Katarina was partially incinerated on a burner. Adjacent to this was a twelve-inch hand-carved wooden male figure – of “The Man of La Mancha,” brought to them from Spain by a friend – which had both its legs broken below the knees. In the middle of the entrance foyer was a 1962 Roman Missal, lying open on the floor in a pile of human excrement, with a large kitchen knife thrust through it. All their crucifixes and religious statues had been piled in the fireplace and partially burned. On the walls and window shades, scatological, obscene, and blasphemous words and phrases were spray-painted in black. Metropolitan Filaret had warned them that dark forces might come seeking the letter, so that it was better kept locked in his hidden wall safe at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior until their return to Moscow. As they surveyed their ruined home with sadness, they remembered his warning that, by agreeing to deliver the Russian leaders’ letter of private pleading to the Pope, they would be declaring war on hell itself.

From Moscow, with George and Katarina as chaperones, six of the Russian students who had won high honors in piano and organ in the *Soli Deo Gloria* competition would now travel as a group to Rome, where they would play piano for the Pope’s birthday. Since the pipe organ has never been part of the Orthodox Church’s musical tradition, four of the students were Catholic and planning to take part in the restoration of traditional Catholic liturgy in Russia. Two were Orthodox, and planned to use their organ skills in secular settings. But all were talented pianists, and all were honored to be playing for the Pope.

The group had arrived in Rome at noon by air nonstop from Moscow, and had been transported directly to a music conservatory not far from the Vatican, where several grand pianos were made available for the students to practice. Because it was summer semester, spare dormitory rooms were available for the night, and they had supper in the school cafeteria before the short drive to the Apostolic Palace for their performance. It was now seven o’clock in the evening, and George and Katarina and the six students sat nervously in the reception hall, awaiting the entrance of the Holy Father. None of them had ever met a Pope before, or even seen one in person. As Katarina remembered that the musical performance in honor of the Pope’s birthday was not the main reason why she and George had come, her anxiety increased. They were going to be meeting the Pope in person in private, and were going to deliver to him a letter from Russia which might be exceedingly troubling to him. Everyone who knew anything about Fatima knew that this Pope had long ago been complicit, as a Cardinal, in the Vatican Secretary of State’s 2000 document implying that Fatima was now all in the past.

Suddenly two Swiss Guards appeared through huge double doors, and one announced, in military manner, the arrival of the Pope.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please rise for His Holiness Pope Nicholas VI, reigning monarch of the State of Vatican City, Pontifex Maximus, and Servant of the Servants of God.”

Immediately, Pope Nicholas strode through the doors, his bright red shoes gleaming beneath his white cassock. His face beaming, he stopped before each of the eight guests, beginning with George and Katarina, greeting them in person. Those who were Catholic knelt to kiss his apostolic ring, thus making a public display of their submission to his supreme authority in spiritual matters. Then he raised each one up by grasping both hands, smiling and thanking them for coming to honor him on this special personal day. He then signaled for them all to be seated, while a guard brought up a chair for him, so that he could face the group at an intimate but comfortable distance. The Steinway concert grand piano, which had been a gift to the Apostolic Palace from a group of famous symphony conductors, had been strategically positioned so that the entire group, including the Pope, would be able to enjoy an unobstructed view of the keyboard.

“A few short years ago, students, when I was about your age,” he chuckled, “I fancied myself to be a future concert pianist. My dear brother Frederick and I spent several years studying together at the top music conservatory in our home state of Bavaria. But God had other plans for both of us, and instead we found our way to the seminary where we both became priests. Still, music has always held a special place in my life, and still serves to calm my soul when the pressures of work weigh down upon me. I like to think that those who already know how to make beautiful music will have a bit of a head start if they should someday make it to Heaven, where the angels and saints ever sing to God. So it is a great joy to me, tonight, that some of Russia’s most talented young musicians will grace this wonderful concert grand piano with the youthful passion of their refined playing.”

“And then will you play for us, too, Your Holiness?” asked one nervous but eager student.

“Rumor has it that the Holy Father himself may play a note or two, at the conclusion, but only if you have not played *too* well.” Then he laughed, and his octogenarian eyes sparkled. “Please begin.”

Katarina arose first, went to the piano, and launched into a complex classical rendition of “Happy Birthday,” while the students all sang to His Holiness, in four-part harmony, first in Russian, then in German, then in Italian, and finally in Latin. At the conclusion the Holy Father beamed, and said:

“Thank you, students! Some people will claim that I am fluent in each of those languages. But when I hear Latin then I truly feel at home, for it has been the universal language of the Church since its founding. As we grow old, we find ourselves less impressed by whatever is new, and instead we find ourselves comforted by that which does not change.”

The first performer now arose and moved to the piano bench, as Katarina returned to her seat. His flawless rendition of a Tchaikovsky piano sonata was followed by other students performing works by Beethoven, Liszt, Rheinberger, Rachmaninoff, and, finally, a little-known composer

named Kiril Romanov, performed by Mariya Peterson. The Pope was delighted with the whole program.

“Many thanks to all of you fine young people,” said the Pope, “for sharing your well-developed talent with an aging Pope tonight. Each of the first five composers are among my favorites. Now, the final work was majestic yet hauntingly beautiful, capturing the very soul of Russian music. But I have to confess that its composer is unknown to me. Who was this Kiril Romanov? Perhaps a relative of the Russian royal family?”

“Holy Father,” answered Mariya, “I also have something to confess. Unlike the other performers here tonight, I am Russian, but not really from Russia. My mother was born there, but I have grown up in Detroit, in the United States. And there in Detroit we have a humble and holy priest named Father Kiril Romanov, who is a very talented pianist and composer. It was he who wrote the work you just heard.”

“It was delightful,” responded Nicholas. “You know, I have a personal assistant, Father John Herald, who is from Detroit. We are nearly the same age, and have lived to see many changes. My predecessor released Father Herald from his vows as a member of the Society of Jesus, and now Father Herald spends part of each year here in Rome, assisting me with special projects, and providing spiritual direction to some very prominent religious, people who are probable saints in the making. The rest of the time he stays in Detroit, where he teaches the real Catholic Faith, without compromise, both through live lectures and recordings. He has often mentioned that his parish there has exquisite music, with a Gregorian Chant schola, a very talented young organist, and a Latin Choir offering periodic orchestral Masses by the great Catholic polyphonic composers. I have been impressed to hear that these Masses are offered in the Traditional Roman Rite, for which they were intended. Let me see ... I believe the parish name ... has something to do with Fatima.”

“Yes! That is my home parish, ‘Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church,’ often known as the ‘Cova’. Father Romanov is both our pastor and our music director.”

“Ah, yes. That is exactly where Father Herald stays. He has often spoken of the parish’s wonderful replica of the little chapel at the Cova da Iria, the very spot where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to the little shepherds in Portugal. I believe he said it is out in the back of the parish cemetery, right in the middle of the City of Detroit. Father Herald often feels that it is the same to pray there, as if he were at the original shrine in Portugal. And if I were not a virtual prisoner in this ancient palace, being bossed around by the Secretary of State and the other Cardinals, I myself would like to go there someday for a visit – incognito, mind you, like a little church mouse in the corner – and hear one of those orchestral Masses and to pray at that Cova.”

“Holy Father,” asked one of the young Russians, “may we have the privilege now of hearing you play for us?”

“Well, I would be justified in refusing, you know, because I warned

you that if you played *too* well, I would reserve the right not to follow. But, one is permitted a greater number of wrong notes at my age. Some people try to say a Pope should not play concert piano music. But for me, performing on the piano is my human passion, it is what I thought I wanted to do before God called me to the priesthood. And a little bit of it, every now and then, helps to keep an old Pope sane – if that is possible. Now my predecessor used to ski the Alps, during the first few years that he was Pope, and people also frowned on that, one cartoonist even calling it ‘The Schuss of the Fisherman.’ But that was his way of renewing himself athletically and psychologically. In Europe, nearly everyone skis, and it does not have any connotation of being a sport just for the rich. Perhaps these things are not unlike the times when Saint Peter would go fishing again when he was in despair, or when Saint Paul would continue his former craft of making tents even while he was traveling to preach the gospel.”

With that, the Holy Father arose, moved to the piano, and seated himself on the bench. The bright red “Shoes of the Fisherman” gleamed beneath his white cassock, as his right foot found the sustain pedal and the left foot depressed the sostenuto pedal, hinting at a thundering bass beginning. Immediately the students heard a masterful performance of Rachmaninoff’s Piano Sonata Number One in F Sharp Minor, in three movements, lasting altogether almost forty minutes, performed entirely from memory. By the time the Holy Father had finished, various Cardinals, priests, seminarians, and nuns had crept into the back of the room, about fifty in all, so that a thunderous applause and shouts of “Bravo!” erupted after the final chord fell silent.

“Happy birthday, Holy Father!” they all cheered. “Ni-Cho-Las is the Pope for us!”

His Holiness smiled, and nodded to the gathered crowd humbly, and then greeted each of the students again, one by one, thanking them for their special trip to honor him. He invited them to attend Mass the next morning in his private chapel, noting that the Tridentine Mass was his ordinary daily Mass. Finally, he came to George and Katarina, and invited them to come with him into his private office for a personal visit.

Part C. Papal Private Office, Apostolic Palace. Tuesday Late Evening.

The Pope’s private office had two large windows overlooking Saint Peter’s Square. Glassed-in bookshelves occupied a second wall, a marble fireplace graced a third wall, and the fourth wall was covered with a huge mural, dating from the Renaissance, depicting biblical scenes of Saint Peter. In one scene Christ was handing Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; in another scene He glanced in sorrow at Peter, just as a cock crowed; in yet another scene Peter was shown hearing the confession of a penitent; and, lastly, Peter was seen baptizing a Roman soldier and his household. A huge desk of intricate inlaid wood stood before the mural. Out in front of the desk was a comfortable seating area of upholstered

chairs, end tables with lamps, and small ottoman footstools, designed for relaxed conversation in a circle. The Holy Father motioned for George and Katarina to be seated in two of the chairs, facing each other, and he then sat between them, putting his red shoes up on the small ottoman. He rang a small hand bell, and two sisters in full religious habit entered, bringing coffee and a light dessert. Nicholas smiled warmly at his nervous guests, and then began.

“This is the way a private audience works for people whom the Pope feels he already knows, even if we have not met before. You are from Father Herald’s ‘Cova’ parish in Detroit, and your daughter plays wonderfully and speaks Russian like a native. I have two of your organ compact discs, Katarina, and I even heard you perform live once in Rome, at the wonderfully restored pipe organ in the Academic Hall of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music. Back then I was still a Cardinal, and could go to such things without a lot of hoopla. And you, George, have quite a reputation with the Archbishop of Detroit, for helping him with difficult cases of emotional disturbance in souls pursuing holiness. I am aware of several cases where you helped clear the way for much-needed exorcisms. Quite remarkable for a scientist who, I am told, was once a stubborn agnostic.”

George blushed. But he decided against scowling at his dear wife, who must have somehow spoken of his better-forgotten past to someone, who knew someone, who knew the Pope. Father Herald, no doubt, he decided.

“It is a joy to see how you are working with the youth of Russia to revive and foster great Western music,” said the Pope. “Catholics in Russia have a hard time of it, because the Orthodox are so afraid we are going to steal souls away from them. The Orthodox priests think they have it so hard there, because most Russians do not practice any religion. But it has become just as bad for Catholic priests in formerly Catholic Europe, where hardly anyone goes to church, and those who do are openly mocked at social gatherings. It is not so much that Catholics and Orthodox are competing with each other. It is that the world, the flesh, and the devil are actively competing with the flame of faith in souls.”

“Holy Father,” began George, “Katarina and I have something special to present to you tonight. It is a letter to Your Holiness, from two prominent Russians: Filaret III, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and Vasily Polzin, the President of the Russian Federation.”

“But this is awkward. Why could they not send it through the usual diplomatic couriers?”

“Your Holiness, the Patriarch explained to us in person that he was afraid to send you this communication through any of the official channels, for fear that it would be intercepted, either in Russia or in the Vatican, by men opposed to the idea it presents. So he asked us to promise to personally deliver it to you this evening.”

Katarina opened her purse, withdrew a sealed envelope bearing the

official seal of the Russian Federation, and handed it to Nicholas. For the first time in this long evening, Katarina thought she detected a slight tremor in the Holy Father's hand as he reached out to grasp the document.

"Judging from the method of delivery, I can predict that this communication will not be consistent with current international politics. So I can assume it will not be consistent with the Church's official policy of Ostpolitik, seeking to build bridges through dialog with the Orthodox Churches."

"Nevertheless we took it to be very good, Your Holiness."

"So you have read it, then?"

"Yes, at the request of Patriarch Filaret, before it was sealed in this envelope in our presence."

"Well, then, you won't mind if you have to wait a few moments while the Pope tries to get up to speed with all you Russians!" Nicholas chuckled.

George and Katarina sat silently while the Pope opened the envelope and read the unsettling letter of supplication inside. When the Pope had finished reading, he sat in silence for several minutes, head bowed, praying.

"Some will say this is the best birthday gift any Pope could wish for. But I am terrified, and a sense of dread is enveloping me. Others will say it is a cruel curse to inflict on an old man of eighty-five. Do you have any idea what this will mean?"

"We suppose it will change the world, Your Holiness."

"Let us hope so. Because if it does not, publicly acting upon this letter could bring great ridicule and scorn down upon the Church and the papacy. I will have to pray fervently to determine if this is still the will of Heaven, after all these decades of delay. The risks of acting as requested in this letter are incalculable."

"Father Gottschalk, who runs the Fatima Herald apostolate in Detroit, says the risks of *not* doing the consecration are incalculable," retorted George.

"Yes, I know quite a bit about Father Gottschalk. He is a holy priest and a good man. Father John Herald speaks well of him. But however well intentioned he might be, for decades he has been a big thorn in the side of the Vatican. Because of him, we have never enjoyed complete peace about our Ostpolitik, or about our project for Christian unity through ecumenical dialog. Father Gottschalk has kept traditional Catholics stirred up, believing the consecration of Russia is the only viable path to world peace, because it is Heaven's mandate. I have to tell you that enormous pressures have been brought upon me, by the Secretary of State and a number of other Cardinals, to defrock him. But he has done nothing wrong. I sometimes wonder if he may actually be the Holy Father's best friend, even though my advisors tell me he is my worst enemy."

"Truth can never be the enemy, can it, Your Holiness?" asked Katarina.

The Pope winced, and then almost groaned with weariness.

"Holy Father," said George, "we know it is getting late, and you must be very tired already. Let us take our leave, so that you will have time to

reflect upon the Russian request.”

The Holy Father nodded, smiling with apparent relief.

“‘The Russian Request,’ you say? Perhaps that is how this unprecedented and unforeseen document will come to be called in the annals of Church history.”

“We will see you at Mass in the morning, and if there is already any private message to take back to Moscow, you can give it to us afterward.”

George and Katarina knelt, and Nicholas blessed them, and then bid them good night.

Part D. Papal Private Chapel, Apostolic Palace. Late Tuesday Night / Early Wednesday Morning.

Pope Nicholas made his way to his private chapel, suddenly feeling very alone and acutely aware of the weight of the world on his aging frame. He knelt before the Lord Jesus, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament reserved on the altar, to begin to implore Heaven’s guidance. He prayed a *Pater Noster*, an *Ave Maria*, and a *Gloria Patri*. He became aware that he was no longer alone, and he began to adore the Sacred Presence. He thought of how, after Christ’s spiritual agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, angels came and ministered to Him. Nicholas invoked Saint Michael the Archangel, and prayed that the Holy Angels might also be with him in this terrible hour – when Satan must surely be seething with rage and planning to unleash all the powers of hell against this Russian Request. Nicholas scanned through the letter, to collect his thoughts and to prepare to pray more fervently:

Your Holiness: Please accept this private communication ...there are numerous powerful forces surrounding us and surrounding you, who would stop at nothing to prevent the fulfillment of this communication... We have been moved by Heaven’s grace to understand and believe the message of Our Lady of Fatima... the popes since 1929 have seen fit to delay... Russia has not converted, and the errors of Russia continue to spread throughout the world... practical atheism, secular government, dishonest monetary and military policies (the end justifies the means), oppressive government regulation and taxes, social engineering (survival of the fittest), attacks on Christian family life (contraception, abortion, euthanasia, easy divorce, legalized homosexuality and pre-marital cohabitation, secular government-controlled education, plunging real wages pushing many women into the workplace and children into daycare), and the enforced toleration of all religious traditions except Christianity... the world is engaged in a great spiritual battle, and human efforts to reunite the Christian Churches through politics and dialog have not been fruitful... Holy Father, we implore you, for the sake of Your Self, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and all humanity:

please do not delay any longer! Please consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in a public ceremony in union with all the bishops of the world... as soon as possible... This is Heaven's call for you to sit gloriously upon the Throne of Peter and to show forth the power of the Keys of the Kingdom, given to you alone by Christ... We Orthodox bishops are powerless against the world, because we lack the leadership of the Vicar of Christ and we do not hold the Keys of the Kingdom... Just as the Apostle Peter denied Christ three times... so you may have denied the relevance of the Third Secret of Fatima in your youth and middle age. But now, in the fullness of your days, you will, please God, cooperate with Heaven's request, ignoring human criticism... You may think that to perform such a consecration of Russia will offend the Russians... Through the message of Fatima, Heaven has offered to Russia a unique blessing: the opportunity to become the first modern nation to be restored to Christianity, to become once again a Christian Confessional State, and to lead the world, by example, back from the abyss of demonic disorientation and toward the glory of a restored Christendom and consequent world peace. How could any true Russian patriot, apprised of the facts, ever take offense at this?... Once the miracle of Russia's true national conversion unfolds, the wrath of the Orthodox will be turned into rejoicing... "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"... please know that we are fervently praying for you, and would ask that you also pray for us... Yours in Jesus Our Lord... Patriarch Filaret III of Moscow and All Russia... Vasily Alexandrovich Polzin, President of the Russian Federation.

As Nicholas knelt in silent adoration, light flooded into his soul, as if the sun were rising upon a new day, dispelling the darkness. Cobwebs in the deep recesses of his mind were being swept away, and his limbs seemed to be reinvigorated with the manly urge to fight. From his prodigious memory he recited the familiar call to arms in Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians,⁵² concerning the very sort of spiritual warfare that was now being set in motion:

Brethren, be strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of his power. Put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and power, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.

Nicholas then considered the necessary preparation for such a battle:

⁵² Ephesians 6:10-20, DRV.

Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).

Lastly, he was reminded of the need to have others praying for him, the Church Militant on earth invoking the aid of the saints, the Church Triumphant in Heaven, to join in interceding with God for help in the spiritual battle:

By all prayer and supplication praying at all times in the spirit; and in the same watching with all instance and supplication for all the saints: And for me, that speech may be given me, that I may open my mouth with confidence, to make known the mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador in a chain, so that therein I may be bold to speak according as I ought.

The Pope thought about how, just as Saint Paul had been a prisoner in chains while awaiting his Roman citizen's right to appeal to Caesar, so Nicholas was essentially a prisoner in the Vatican, not in physical chains but surrounded and in many ways controlled by powerful men who would not believe in or approve of "The Russian Request". The powerful Vatican bureaucracy largely controlled the Pope's public ability to act. Nicholas would need the special grace of office, as the Vicar of Christ, in order to boldly proclaim what Heaven seemed to be asking now. He realized that it would be exceedingly dangerous to plunge ahead alone, as no man, not even a Pope, is any match for the devil. Competent and trustworthy spiritual direction was urgently needed. No doubt it was due to the Providence of Almighty God that Nicholas' most reliable advisor, Father John Herald, was currently in residence in the Vatican. He resolved to rouse him from sleep, if necessary – though Father Herald was accustomed to praying and writing into the wee hours of the morning, often while in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Nicholas had no doubt that Father Herald's prodigious output of solidly traditional Catholic books and study guides was the product of his accustomed intimacy with the Divine Presence.

Pope Nicholas left his chapel and walked down the quiet corridor of the Apostolic Palace, to the station where two Swiss Guards stood, military-style, at attention.

"At ease, lads," said Pope Nicholas, their Commander-in-Chief.

Both guards, trim and muscular and bursting with the vigor and beauty of disciplined young manhood, knelt at once to display their profound reverence for the Vicar of Christ, whose very life they had vowed to defend

with their own. The Pope blessed them each by name, for he knew them well, and greeted their parents and siblings several times each year at the quarterly picnics held for all the guards.

“Michel, although it is late, the Pope urgently needs to speak face to face with Father Herald. Can you and Jacques please locate him for me, and tell him the Holy Father has need of him, at once, in the Papal Chapel?”

“As you wish, Your Holiness,” they both replied in unison.

They resumed their usual military stance, but one of them spoke to the Swiss Guard central command through a concealed microphone and earpiece mounted in his shiny steel helmet. The Holy Father returned to the chapel, and resumed his agonized prayer, prostrating himself before the Lord Jesus Christ Who was truly present there, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, under the appearance of consecrated bread, reserved in the Tabernacle on the altar.

In just a few minutes, Nicholas’ troubled heart was gladdened by the familiar voice of his trusted advisor. Father John Herald was eighty-six years old, tall, lean, and bald except for white hair at his temples. He had piercing brown eyes and spoke with a soft tenor voice now having the characteristic tone of an elderly man. There was a slight shuffle in his gait, but his mind was as sharp as in his youth.

“Holy Father, I came as quickly as I could. But neither one of us is getting any younger, and I was all the way over in Saint Peter’s, down in the Confessio, praying at the very tomb of the Blessed Apostle Peter. I had felt strongly moved today that the special intercession of Christ’s first Vicar, for Your Holiness, was going to be needed very soon.”

Nicholas often marveled at how deeply spiritual men, such as Father Herald, seemed to live in a special realm somewhere between Heaven and earth, with continual communication flowing both ways. Often they would foresee important spiritual events. And often they could “read souls” in the confessional, so that habitual sinners would be mercifully delivered from the bad habit of making insincere confessions. But then, wasn’t that sort of supernatural insight simply the reality of the “communion of saints,” mentioned in both the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds? The two men sat side by side in the back pew of the chapel, as it was not fitting to converse in closer proximity to Christ on the altar.

“My dear Father Herald,” Nicholas began, “an event has transpired this evening which will likely prove to be momentous. I am deeply troubled, but not because I oppose the will of Heaven made resoundingly clear to me. Rather, I sense that an epic battle with the powers of darkness has been enjoined this evening, and I am afraid. Like Peter, I do not know if I can face the mockery and the scorn.”

“You cannot serve God and please this world. All those who are not with Christ are against Him. The Lord Jesus said ‘Blessed are ye, when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very

great in Heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you.”⁵³

“Today is my birthday, and marks still another year spent on the Throne of Peter without achieving world peace through Christian unity. Naturally I have been praying fervently for such peace. And today my prayer seems to have been answered, but in a manner I least expected.”

“But didn’t you always expect world peace to come through the Immaculate Heart of Mary?”

Again, Nicholas was amazed by Father Herald’s supernatural insight.

“But can you imagine that those whom I supposed were most against Christian unity have come to me pleading to help them convert?”

“There were Russians here tonight. I managed to sneak into the back of the Reception Hall for part of their performance. Do you mean the Russians?”

“Yes. Not the students who were here. It was their chaperones, an American couple from Detroit who have deep roots in former Imperial Russia. They came to me tonight as personal secret emissaries from Patriarch Filaret of Moscow and President Polzin of Russia.”

“Really! Can you possibly mean George and Katarina? I know them. They sing in Father Romanov’s choir at the ‘Cova.’”

“Yes. They brought me a personal letter from the Russian leaders, pleading with me to please fulfill the request of Our Lady of Fatima and consecrate Russia to Her Immaculate Heart in union with all the Catholic bishops in the world – and to please do so as soon as possible.”

“Mother of God, the angels shall sing your praise forever!” exclaimed Father Herald. “The Blessed Virgin told Sister Lucy that in the end the Holy Father would do it, but it would be late. She did not say exactly what it would be that would move the Holy Father to finally act in accordance with her request. But, I think now we know.”

“Please read this letter, Father, and then join me in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I need you to watch with me one hour. And then I will need your spiritual direction. The devil is going to try to trip me up any and every way he can.”

It was midnight when Father Herald took his place on the kneeler next to the Holy Father. To a church mouse in the back corner, it would have appeared that nothing much happened for the next hour, as the two men, one in a white cassock and one in a black cassock, knelt in silent prayer before the Tabernacle. But in the heart of each man, a tempest was raging, as the powers of hell unleashed their fury of rage and hatred against the All-Immaculate Mother of God and these Her faithful sons. When the hour was ended, both were resigned to the immediate storm which was about to come upon the world. And both could see beyond it, to the magnificent Russian sunrise that was expected to follow. They retreated from the chapel to the Pope’s private office, where they settled into comfortable chairs, removed their shoes, and put their weary feet up

⁵³ Matthew 5:11-12, DRV.

on the little ottomans. The Pope had obtained a bottle of cold water for each of them, from a small refrigerator behind his desk.

“You have to get away from here for a spiritual retreat, Holy Father. You are going to do battle against spiritual wickedness in high places. And there is no higher place in the Church than Vatican City. If you stay here, you will be targeted – spiritually at least, and possibly physically. It may be that the whole world will need to know of your intention to do the consecration before you can safely return to Rome.”

“But where could I go? The Holy Father cannot go anywhere without creating a spectacle, which in itself becomes a spiritual distraction.”

“To me the answer is obvious. You must come with me to the Cova in Detroit. You will travel in disguise, of course. Only a handful of holy and trustworthy people will know your identity. The great men of the world will never think of looking for the Holy Father in the midst of the tragic urban wasteland of inner city Detroit. At the Cova, you can pray in peace, and be as close to Our Lady of Fatima as if you went to the shrine in Portugal. Probably even closer, since the shrine at Fatima has been co-opted by modernists in the Church as an ecumenical meeting place for all the world’s religions.”⁵⁴

“But Father Herald, it takes months, even years, to plan a papal trip. We do not have the time.”

“Do not worry, Your Holiness. I have many connections in Detroit, and I will be able to have it all arranged in two days. But I will need your help in arranging a decoy, to keep the press at bay. You will need to call your identical twin brother, Father Frederick. Tell him to prepare to come to Rome at once, as quietly as possible, and with absolutely no public announcement. I will arrange private transportation for him, so he will not be noticed by the paparazzi.”

Father Herald seemed inspired. He had known of “The Russian Request” for only an hour, and yet he was taking charge as if he had spent months working out a complex plan covering every contingency. Most likely he *was* being inspired, by saints and angels who so freely communicated with him from the realms of glory.

“Holy Father, we will announce to the world that you are going on a spiritual retreat for several days to an undisclosed location outside of Rome. In reality, we will dress Father Frederick in your papal cassock – you are of course the same size – and send him off to a quiet abbey in the mountains, where there is a trustworthy and holy abbot. Father Frederick will spend his days alone in a private wing, where only the abbot will have any personal contact with him. The press will be told the Pope is going to one of six or seven such abbeys and monasteries, so they will keep themselves busy for a while figuring out which one is the Pope’s true destination. Then, once they spot Father Frederick through their telescopes, they will think they have “beaten the system” and will be satisfied. They will publish exclusive stories in the tabloids that they have found the Holy Father’s secret location. The “Pope” will be seen to

⁵⁴ Maehlmann *et. al.* article. See Bibliography.

exercise daily, in the private walled garden, and the paparazzi will publish “exclusive” and “secret” telephoto pictures of him. The Secretary of State will be beside himself with joy because he will be able to run things in your absence, and pretend he is Pope.”

“He pretends that every day anyway,” chuckled Nicholas. “But what about transportation? How do you smuggle a Pope out of this place?”

“I have a good friend in Detroit, a holy and devout man who is a wealthy Catholic businessman. He is completely trustworthy, and will rejoice at an opportunity to be of service to Your Holiness. If I tell you his story, then you will understand why this plan can work. Don Brown is a self-made billionaire. He grew up poor in Washington, D.C., but was a gifted athlete who starred in college basketball and went on to become the number-one draft pick in the American NBA.

“He came to Detroit to play for the Pistons and used his earnings to found a manufacturing firm in the decaying inner city of Detroit, that gave honest employment to many desperate young men. The firm developed a tuition-free in-house private school to help young men from the inner city complete high school, develop trade skills, and most importantly learn how to be responsible husbands and fathers. In just a few years, the Brown Group was the major supplier of custom auto parts to the Big Three automakers in Detroit, and Don Brown became a billionaire. But he did not rest.

“When the mayor of Detroit was charged with fiscal and moral corruption and was run out of office in disgrace, Don Brown was selected by the city council to step in and complete the remainder of the mayor’s term in office. His competent and benevolent leadership won him a resounding victory at the next election, and he stayed in office for two more terms. Now he is retired from being mayor, has subordinates to run his auto parts business, and spends his time developing a system of tuition-free private Catholic schools in strategic locations throughout inner city Detroit.”

“Was he always Catholic?” asked Nicholas. “I have the impression that most African-Americans are Protestant.”

“They are, but Don Brown’s good work is rapidly changing that in Detroit, where many are converting to the Catholic Faith.”

“Well, was this Don Brown blessed to be a cradle Catholic?”

“No. Don Brown was nominally Baptist in his youth. When he was in college at Georgetown, his roommate and fellow basketball star was a devout young Catholic boy who had been homeschooled, and for many years had served as an altar boy at Old Saint Mary’s parish in Washington, D.C.”

“I know that parish! That’s where two of the United States Supreme Court Justices used to attend the Tridentine Mass every week, and thereby infuriate the liberal bishop – though of course the bishop knew better than to complain about it to me. I thanked God when the opportunity to replace him came along.”

Father Herald smiled knowingly.

“Anyway, Don Brown was converted through his four-year friendship with the Catholic boy, and by the end of college Don was also serving as an altar boy at Old Saint Mary’s. He underwent a profound conversion, and as much as possible has been a daily communicant who avails himself of frequent confession, and spends his spare time joyfully carrying out spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

“He has understood his unusual success in professional sports, business, and politics, as gifts from God to be used in the service of others. He has a character of natural nobility, and is not ashamed to live well but to also share his gracious lifestyle with as many others as possible.”

“Such a noble character,” said Nicholas, “calls to mind the writings of Brazil’s devoutly Catholic philosopher and social crusader, Professor Corrêa de Oliveira. In his book *Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites*, which I used to require my university students to read, the learned professor demonstrated that in every society there are natural nobles, men and women who rise to the top of society and become leaders because of their God-given gifts of exceptional character and ability.

“He therefore argued that traditional societies, with their ruling nobility, simply reflected the natural hierarchy that God put into His creation. When I hear the story of a man like Don Brown, I am inclined to believe that the professor was correct.”

“I would agree, Your Holiness. Don Brown lives in a stately mansion on Belle Isle in the Detroit River, where he employs many domestic servants whom he treats with the utmost respect and dignity. They reciprocate with true loyalty, and most of them, like Don, are parishioners at the Cova. He owns by far the largest yacht in Detroit, but uses it mainly to entertain those whom he needs to lobby for the good of his business and charitable enterprises. He also uses it to reward those who have shown dedicated and selfless service to the Church or to the City of Detroit, sending them on romantic cruises around the Great Lakes.

“It is named the ‘Standart,’ and was inspired by the royal yacht of the same name designed and sailed by Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. Some say the Standart, like its Russian namesake that no longer exists, is the greatest private yacht ever launched. Don also owns a private jet, which he keeps at the Detroit City Airport, just a short distance down Gratiot Avenue from the Cova.

“He has his own private staff of pilots, flight attendants, and mechanics. Since he routinely trusts his life and the lives of his family to these flight crews, they are of impeccable quality and character. They are the very sort of people we can trust to fly the Holy Father in secret from Rome to Detroit. And on their way to Rome to meet us, they will stop off in Munich and fly the Pope’s twin brother to Rome.”

“But how many can travel in a private jet? Can I take my guards?”

“The jet will hold six persons, plus the two pilots and one flight attendant. Our party will include Your Holiness, myself, and four Swiss Guards. You will be dressed as a simple parish priest, and the guards will wear civilian clothing for the journey. During the trip, and whenever

you are in public at the Cova, you will wear a wig and a false beard and mustache, so that Your Holiness will not be recognized. Do you have any preferences regarding the Swiss Guards?”

“Well, of course I would select Michel and Jacques, my palace guards, and ask them to select the two others. But – will that be sufficient security – in Detroit?”

“Don Brown has a large contingent of professional security guards who are accustomed to Detroit, and they will provide all the security you will need. They will know how to stay out of the way, and blend in so that people do not suspect a world leader is in their midst.”

“And where will we stay?”

“The Cova has a large brick rectory of three stories, built solidly in old-world fashion, and has several extra bedrooms. Visiting priests commonly come and go, because the parish has a wide reputation among tradition-oriented priests.

“No one will think it unusual for a European priest to be visiting for a week. You and Father Romanov are both outstanding musicians and will enjoy each other’s company. He has two grand pianos in the rectory and you can play music together. The guards will sleep in shifts in the rectory basement.”

“This is to be a retreat, to ponder the future of the Church and the world. What about quiet places to pray?”

“There is a private chapel in the rectory, of course, and a public adoration chapel in the convent across the grounds. The main church has to be locked at night, so you could have it to yourself with guards posted all around. Finally, there is the cemetery, with outdoor stations of the cross, a replica of the chapel at Cova da Iria in Fatima, and, on the rear hill, is a Calvary. All these will be suitable places for you to pray, Holy Father.”

Pope Nicholas felt a sense of peace about these plans. This was not an ordinary way for the Pope to conduct his business, but neither was there anything ordinary about “The Russian Request”. As his long birthday drew to a close, Nicholas decided that a birthday was a good time to be reborn, in the sense of starting a new trajectory in life.

In his youth he had been an avant-garde expert at Vatican II; in his middle age he had remained the same while the Church and the world kept moving further and further away from all that was traditional. And now, in the twilight of his years, he would be decisive. Ostpolitik and ecumenism had borne no good fruit, and much that was bad. It was time to listen to Heaven after all, and to boldly obey, trusting Heaven for a miracle. But any failure of the miracle to materialize as promised, would bring down unimaginable ridicule and scorn upon both the Pope and the Church.