

Chapter Twelve

Tuesday, June 16, 2015.

Worldwide Media Firestorm.

On Tuesday morning following the Monday evening papal proclamation, in the rectory at the Cova, Father Kiril Romanov had arisen at six o'clock to begin to review the reaction of the news media before the Pope would arrive for breakfast after his morning Mass. To prepare himself, Father Kiril poured fresh coffee from his timer-controlled brewer into a large "Summons to Holiness Conference 2014" mug. On the rectory dining room table he found a stack of six newspapers which, at Kiril's request, one of Don Brown's security men had brought from a twenty-four hour downtown news dealer at five-thirty. On top of the pile was the national edition of *The New York Times*, tired old "gray lady" of American journalism. The mindless headline screamed "Pope Attacks Russian Church!" but Father Kiril went straight to the opinion page, and began reading the lead editorial:

Russian Roulette

Last evening the world was shocked by the sudden strange and inexplicable proclamation, issued in the name of Pope Nicholas VI while the pontiff himself remained sequestered in an undisclosed location. Pope Nicholas had been previously viewed as the liturgically conservative but politically astute leader of the world's one billion Roman Catholics. Now, however, questions about his mental health and about his ability to read the political signs of the times in even the most elementary manner will be voiced in virtually every quarter.

The modern world, in all but the most backward nations, has long since moved beyond outdated religious superstitions based on a pre-scientific understanding of the cosmos. Today, most of mankind has progressed beyond the utterly provincial notion that one's own creed and its associated religious discipline could possibly be the one and only path to human fulfillment for all persons. Nicholas' predecessor Pope Leo Alexander II, for example, made giant strides toward reshaping the Roman Catholic Church into its only useful and realistic role in the modern world: a strong voice for world peace, and an advocate for justice for the oppressed. But Pope Nicholas has now shown the audacity to act – and moreover to require all the Catholic bishops in the world to act with him – in a public ceremony almost calculated to offend the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian people. Worse, the pontiff's reasoning is based entirely upon the bizarre imaginings of illiterate shepherd children back in 1917, a time when horses and buggies were still commonplace and automobiles and electric

lights had yet to find their way into rural hamlets of no importance, such as Fatima, Portugal.

Today the editors of this storied newspaper raise their voices in protest against a Pope seemingly gone mad, and in solidarity with believers of every non-Catholic religion which has enjoyed a historic role in Russia. Adherents to ancient faiths, including especially Russian Orthodoxy, Islam and Judaism, are now threatened with a campaign to try to convince the Russian government to limit their rights. For we can only presume that Pope Nicholas actually believes – incredible though it may seem to educated modern minds – that the public display of provincialism which he has ordered will actually have an effect on modern democratic Russia through supernatural intervention! We call upon all persons of goodwill to voice their opposition to the ill-advised Russian consecration before its scheduled completion in just five days, in hopes that the world can be turned back from an incredible act of stupidity and unnecessary offense toward all non-Catholic Russian people.

Father Romanov noted that there was no opposing view offered on the Op-Ed page, and laid *The Times* down on the dining room table. He took another sip of coffee, and felt profoundly saddened by the mindless *ad hominem* attack which, he knew, was typical for *The Times* whenever honestly arguing the truth of an issue would involve the risk of acknowledging something that was not currently politically correct. He thought about opening the CNN live feed on his laptop, but decided instead to read some more papers and be well prepared before Pope Nicholas arrived for breakfast after his Mass.

Next in the pile was *Ha'aretz* (“*The World*”) from Tel Aviv. Again, the headline was accusatory and inaccurate: “Pope Calls for Repression of Judaism in Russia.” But the lead editorial was always more informative, so Father Kiril began to read:

A New Russian Pogrom? Pope Calls for Renewed Suppression of Jews and Other Minorities in Russia

In a public spectacle of unprecedented Vatican *chutzpah*, Pope Nicholas VI issued a proclamation to the world last evening, ordering every Catholic bishop in the world to publicly pray for the conversion of Russia to the Roman Catholic religion. This outrageous Papal mandate is based on alleged apparitions of Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, way back in 1917. Supposedly Mary promised to convert the nation of Russia if public prayers were offered according to a precise set of conditions, involving all the Catholic bishops in the world. Perhaps the Pope could have argued, back in 1917 when the atheistic Bolsheviks were busy

outlawing all religious practice in the new Soviet Union, that such a concern might make some sense from a Catholic perspective. But today Russia is a modern democratic state with freedom of religion and without any established religion of state. While the Russian Orthodox Church is the “official” religion of Russia, simply because the majority of her citizens self-identify as being affiliated with that Church, several other religions, which also have ancient roots in Russia, are also officially recognized and have equal rights. These include Judaism and Islam, but do not include Roman Catholicism, since the Orthodox Church views the tiny Roman Catholic Church in Russia as its main competitor for Christian souls.

If Russia were to convert to the Roman Catholic religion, then we can only assume that these other official religions would somehow face increasing restrictions on their freedom in Russia. Recalling that Imperial Russia under the Tsars had a long history of suppressing the rights and freedoms of Jews, unless they converted to Christianity, we must voice our fear that a new wave of persecution against Jews would result from a conversion of Russia to the Roman Catholic religion.

Of course, the editors of *Ha'aretz*, being well-educated modern men, do not believe that a Pope forcing every Catholic bishop to demean himself – by public participation in such a folly as the requested consecration ceremony – would actually have any impact on Russia from some imaginary supernatural realm. Russia can handle herself, and Her Orthodox Church is hardly vulnerable to the tiny Catholic minority who live within her borders, estimated at no more than half a million persons. Rather, it is the very notion that a modern democratic nation could or should be converted to the Roman Catholic religion that is offensive. While we do not believe the Pope is specifically thinking about the suppression of Jews in Russia – but rather plans to pray for the suppression of all non-Catholic religious activity – nevertheless, any action which results in a potentially anti-Semitic outcome must be roundly condemned.

Father Kiril shook his head in dismay. Again, there was no opposing opinion offered. The news media were going to skewer Pope Nicholas because he was acting like a true Pope, instead of being an obedient lackey for global secular humanism. Next was *The Detroit Free Press*. Father Kiril expected it to be somewhat more moderate, and in fact the headline read “Pope Embroiled in Controversy,” and the sub-headline added “Detroit Archbishop Supports Pontiff.” Good, thought Kiril, the local newspaper was going to remain at least neutral, and would acknowledge that some leaders supported the Pope while others condemned him. Perhaps the days of actual news reporting (as opposed to public mind

control) were not entirely over yet, at least in Detroit. Kiril began to read the lead article, under the sub-headline:

Pope Embroiled in Controversy – Detroit Archbishop Supports Pontiff

On Monday evening Pope Nicholas VI, leader of the world's largest religion, issued a public statement calling upon all Catholic bishops in the world to pray for the conversion of Russia. While this request is based upon a specific request of Our Lady of Fatima in 1917, the Pope took care to note that all modern nations require conversion, since none are officially Catholic, and therefore Russia is not being singled out in any negative way. Rather, says the Holy Father, Heaven has been inviting Russia, ever since 1917, to be the first modern nation to get back on track as a Christian nation. While not everyone would agree with such an agenda, it must be said that if Roman Catholics take their Faith seriously, they will naturally pray – as the Catholic Church has always prayed – for the entire world to become united in the Faith of Jesus Christ ...

Father Kiril smiled. This was a very fair assessment for a secular news organization. As he read on, he noted that the writer had already conducted a telephone interview with the Archbishop of Detroit, a man who had been selected by Pope Nicholas himself, and who was known for his efforts to restore a more traditional form of liturgy and catechesis within the archdiocese. The opinion page offered a similarly balanced lead editorial, with a brief opposing opinion penned by the local chairman of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Now there was time for a few more sips of coffee, and a silent *Ave Maria* in thanksgiving for at least one just and fair mainstream news report. But there were six newspapers, and that was only the top three. Fourth in the pile was *Le Monde* from Paris, English edition. As expected, the headline was abrasive: "EU Leaders Voice Shock Over Papal Action." The lead article began thus:

EU Leaders Voice Shock Over Papal Action

During the night, key leaders of the European Union in Brussels seemed united in expressing shock over the latest Papal *faux-pas*. Requesting anonymity, one well-placed EU spokesperson said, "Europe has long since moved beyond the horrible old days when kings went to war over religion, and the Pope crowned temporal rulers as his servants. The Pope's proclamation reeks of the old triumphalism, when the Roman Catholic Church claimed rights over kings and emperors." Today, the modern world of democratic secular states no longer seeks to enforce a Christian moral code, and in fact rejoices to be free of benighted medieval ideas about unattainable chastity, impossibly large families, and cheerfully submitting to injustice now while hoping for better things in an

imaginary world to come. While the world moves on toward global integration, the Pope seems to be regressing rapidly into an outmoded worldview that cannot be permitted any place at the table where discussion of modern public policy takes place.

Kiril sighed, thinking to himself that one could not expect any other perspective from contemporary European leaders. The spiritual annihilation of once-Catholic, now-secular Europe had been long since accomplished. Indeed, he thought, only a miracle of divine intervention, such as the promised conversion of Russia, could possibly turn things back now.

Next on the pile, the fifth newspaper, was *The Moscow Times*, an English daily newspaper widely read in Detroit, where more than forty-thousand Russian expatriates made their home. The headline was predictably negative, but one sub-headline acknowledged that important opinions differed. Most interesting was the fact that both President Polzin and Patriarch Filaret of Moscow were quoted expressing a guardedly positive view of the Pope's proclamation.

Father Kiril noted that they sounded very much like *The Detroit Free Press*: if Catholics take their Faith seriously, then of course they are going to pray for all the world to become Catholic, just as we Russian Orthodox always pray for all the world to become Orthodox. Kiril noted, however, that no other Orthodox bishops were reported to voice anything positive, and many of them roundly condemned the Pope's audacity for wanting to interfere in the internal religious affairs of the Sovereign state of Russia.

Kiril was reminded of how the Russian Orthodox Church had long been accustomed to being the established church of the empire, and that fervent Russian nationalism had been the real root cause of a thousand years of refusal to reconcile the Orthodox Church with the apostolic authority of Peter in Rome.

The sixth and last newspaper was *Der Spiegel*, English edition, from Germany. The headline proclaimed "Leading Cardinals Decry Pope's Insensitivity." One elderly German Cardinal, elevated to the red hat at the very end of the pontificate of Nicholas' predecessor, and known around the world for his outspoken belief in ecumenism as the way of the future, was quoted extensively. There was in fact a sidebar, entitled "German Cardinal Speaks Out," containing his entirely predictable opinion:

Leading Cardinals Decry Pope's Insensitivity – German Cardinal Speaks Out

Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has moved beyond any expectation that Christian groups separated from the authority of the Bishop of Rome would come back to the fold by "converting." That is an entirely outmoded concept. It is offensive to intelligent ears, and flies in the face of all we have worked for during five long decades since the Council. So we don't care how

many Catholic Bishops knuckle under to this shocking pressure coming out of Rome. Even if they all participate to save their ecclesiastical skins, obviously it will be against their better judgment.

And anyway everybody knows Russia is not going to “convert.” No one converts any more. If people come to us and try to say, “We want to convert, we want to become Catholics,” we tell them “No, you must stay where you are and be better Lutherans, or better Jews, or better Buddhists.” Even that reactionary little group of Anglicans who wanted to be in formal union with the Bishop of Rome kept their own liturgy and their own customs when they “became Catholic,” so they didn’t really convert, you see. So I don’t know what the Pope can be thinking, maybe he is becoming senile, I really don’t know.

Kiril burst out laughing. The vacuousness of the Cardinal’s words could easily qualify him for television news sound bites, but not for serious intellectual discourse. Yet, sadly, the mainstream media continued to lap up this sort of pabulum, just so long as it served their editorial bent – which was always pro-secular-humanist and therefore always anti-Catholic.

Kiril decided to start his laptop computer and log onto CNN Headline News using headphones, so he would not awaken anyone, such as the Pope. The reporting on CNN, Fox News, and BBC News seemed entirely consistent with *The New York Times*, *Ha’aretz*, *Le Monde*, and *Der Spiegel*.