

NIKITARONCALLI

*Counterlife of a
Pope*

Franco Bellegrandi

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To Anita, for her quiet, unflagging, precious help

Author's Note

Once again to take in hand the manuscript of a book that was never published, open it, leaf through those pages written so many years before, is like stepping into a long-closed house. A house that was once our home, in which we lived, suffered, and loved.

The dusty windows are, once again, thrust open, and as the morning light stirs, the rooms from the darkness one after the other, the eye makes out the ancient layout of the furnishings concealed by the coverings, of the objects, of the books once familiar.

And approaching the walls and pushing aside with emotion the drape which shrouds a portrait, one encounters the gaze of a person well known and loved who has continued to live for all those years, in the dimness of the closed house, with the very same expression in her look, with the same fettered ability to move you in the splendor of those eyes, in the grace of her face, in the elegant and delicate posture of her figure.

Much time has passed, and yet all has remained in its place in the house where year after year not a piece has resounded anymore, nor voice has uttered another word.

However for this very reason those ancient emotions indissolubly tied to those rooms, to those décors, to that

rich furnishing, to those veiled portraits, appear unscathed by time.

No irksome hand has violated that seclusion nor moved anything.

Thus time has stood still in those rooms like the subdued beat of the old pendulum on the console, in the stillness and in the shadows in the “physical” absence of life, all the spirituality, all the ideals, all the delusions and all the heightened or consuming passions that breathed so many years before within those walls. As, once again we enter that house, we find them still powerful, intact, pitiless, and punctual in “their” actuality having survived time and events.

So it was with the manuscript of this book. Which ought to have been published many years ago, when the facts narrated had just taken place. The draft had been completed effortlessly, without halting reflections, with the voices of the protagonists still resounding in my ears, and the echo of the emotions still stirring in my heart.

For many narrated facts I witnessed in person, with the awareness of moving in a world and amidst personages on which the curtain would be forever lowered. Where are they today? Somewhere they exist, and are living their own life. Yet erased from History, which, in spite of them, has turned the page. Confined into silence and lost in the swarming of the anonymous throng. Power has its proscenium and its actors. That is the “sanctioned

actuality” continuously proposed. And so today one is led into thinking that a nation is represented by this unicum of plebeians in shirt and tie, with no trait of nobility in their face. And it is these, and always these, in power today. And yet those others, when death has yet to call an end to their days, are still alive. But they no longer “exist.” Their gold-embroidered uniforms, when not consigned to the junk dealer, lay at the bottom of a closet. Their talents produced books that today’s power has relegated into oblivion. Their code of honor called for a duel, to wipe the insult, or for a shot in one’s own head, in the disgraceful instance. People used to saying, watching them at ceremonies, “How noble, what a grand signor!” And yet some would take the streetcar to get to those ceremonies, the greatcoat buttoned up to conceal tailcoat and decorations, and born their destitution with dignity and decorum.

But they are forever gone.

The last of that rare stock with whom I lived, and befriended under the gilded vaults of the Vatican palace, furnished me with documents and precious information for my book, and encouraged me to write it:

May my gratitude and admiration for their courage be with them wherever they are.

Preface

One could entitle these indispensable lines that introduce the pages that follow, Preface to the preface. The subject of this book is not frozen in time, but rather moves on with time. It flows like the sand in the grand inflexible merciless hourglass of History, arresting its moment is impossible.

Only memory can immobilize them in its boundless archive upon which time can however do much, with its fog and its amnesias, more or less controlled by man. For the personal use, these amnesias, of the undemanding *humanae gentis*.

Perhaps never like the present, a present encased in the swift passing of seasons, the political reality of the contemporary world has been devastated by a tremor as macroscopic as unpredictable, which has upset the political geography of half of our globe, and uncovered pots in which were brewing hallucinogenic schemes.

The Soviet macrocosm has disintegrated piece by piece.

All of its quasi-centenary monolithic order has been run through by cracks and clefts whence with the swiftness of an otherworldly nightmare have detached and flown away, obedient to a mysterious centrifugal force, vital fragments of its empire, which seemed unassailable and indissoluble.

Communism, in an instant has disintegrated. It no longer exists. And Soviet Russia with hat in hand asks mercy of the dollar so as to feed herself.

The last great ideology of the twentieth century to which, willingly or not, millions of men have given their intellect and sacrificed their lives, is sinking in a jubilation of shame.

The ship is sinking and the rats are abandoning the ship in droves. All precipitously distance themselves, those who professed their beliefs in Communism in order to dunk in the doughnut of their avidity, and are now crying out the anathema.

But this their distancing themselves, this their ostentatious outrage cannot annul facts and documents, cannot wipe out inescapable responsibilities, and cannot erase with a snap of a finger heavy and very uncomfortable accounts/scores.

Regrettably for that multitude of “ex,” with tragicomic punctuality the sins are starting to catch up. And so this manuscript, recounting the approach between Church and Marxism, blossomed amidst the lights and shadows of the Giovannean pontificate, lived by the author in full, a step away from the pontifical throne, bestirs at the breeze of an actuality unimagined at the time of its draft. The distance of those days has been increased hundredfold by the forward flight of History.

Days sanctified in the liturgy of the proletariat and strict

political and social realities, solemnly affirmed and apparently indestructible. Days in which these pages yellowed by the years were written with a solid – if callow – faith in the fairness and legitimacy and honesty of the intent. Pages rather quite documental than literary, and thus designated by the intent – or vain ambitions? – of the author to a future which then seemed well beyond the discernible horizon of a lifetime, yet with equally solid uncertainty as to the if, how, and when, they would be consigned to the printing press.

Indeed, these pages on which intermingle diary, chronicle, and history mostly unknown to most, are blotted by the original sin of a guilt, at that time deserving of the most passionate blame: having dared, against every opportunistic logic, to trace a “counter-life” of John XXIII that would underscore the revolutionary commitment of that Pope, which earned him the name of “Pope of the communists.”

The sudden fall of Soviet communism has triggered a centrifugal jumble within the muddled ranks that used to be the party of the sickle and the hammer. No one has ever soiled his hands with the Bolsheviks; no one has pocketed ready rubles; no one, by George! has ever compromised himself with Moscow. And in the meantime, as in a Biblical scourge, from the half-closed archives of the Kremlin are darting out, as deadly thunderbolts incinerating the fake, irrefutable documents corroborating the closest – and logical – cooperation of these individuals with the Soviet “Mamuska” (mother).

Most of the media, which follow the stream, are hunting down the comrades lost. Every man for himself. Yet entire generations did embrace communism. And many still carry it in their hearts. In the West and East alike. Especially in the East, the feast over, after the first bitter taste of the new reality.

Even on the night of the coup, of that 19 August 1991, there was no counting of the ante-march comrades who wept and laughed, glued to the TV broadcasting the martial sequences of that ephemeral coup d'état. Here now, finally, comes Stalin's red army, taker of Berlin, to reestablish the inviolable power of the State Party against the treachery of the little bourgeois, whom Uncle Sam has bought by the pound. In the depths of the mausoleum of the Red Square, the mummy of Lenin has aroused and calls out to the revival.

Those spirits, pure no matter what, respectable flag-bearers of faithfulness, lived in their exalted fancy the night of the coup. They beheld in the courtyards of the barracks, cut by the beams of the spotlights, the officers standing on the tanks, haranguing the troops; beheld the invincible blood-hued flag kissed by the commanders. They perceived the cry of the engines and the rattling of the caterpillars.

But the exaltation was short-lived. As bitter, the reawakening. Many are now fleeing the old beloved party, which diligent hands have castrated of its historical, chrismatic emblem.

The news hounds are after the comrades compromised with deeds and actions. But when the exciting lead creeps under the Bronze Door, an imperious whistle freezes up their race. How long is this dormant “omertà,” this official silence upon a Vatican policy and an ecclesial course responsible and commendable for such a long season of fat years of the communist parties of our time, yet to last? Today that the lid has blown off the Eastern pot, and the uncovered Marxist light broth has caused noses to turn up the world wide, the threshold of the Leonine City and of its policy compromised with communism are rigidly precluded to the media. Oh yes, because the witnessed denunciation of all the corruption and bloodthirsty ferocity in which those regimes prospered, made cocky by the Vatican “Ostpolitik,” renders all the more momentous with responsibility and moral guilt the opening to that communism by the Catholic Church and the Vatican, wanted by Pope Roncalli and carried on to its close by Pope Montini.

From the standpoint of the clergymen involved, this silence imposed with the ancient authority is understandable: that preaching and pursuing the antagonistic union between Catholicism and Marxism, that carrying forward so complacent a policy toward the Communist regimes of the East – as so well knows cardinal Agostino Casaroli, then monsignor, and Vatican’s chargé d’affaires, who in those crimson government palaces was one of the family – on the skin of the Church of Silence, today can but arise bewilderment and meditated condemnation.

The iron curtain has been torn to pieces, and the eye of the world has been able to wander over the countries of the European East, inviolate satellites of the Soviet planet. Horror, condemnation, and indignation have come back to haunt the doped affluence of the Western consumer, and the many who were in cahoots with those regimes for flaunted open-mindedness or aimed political opportunism, have rushed, as the saying is, to distance themselves. Although their words hailing those regimes and the men of those regimes, and, what is worse, the political steps, sometimes ominous, undertaken and undersigned with those regimes, still mark the trail of their hastened retreat.

Comes to mind what Giancarlo Vigorelli wrote not long ago: “I have known three great peasants, Mao Ze Dong, Ceausescu, and John XXIII”. I doubt that pen, dipped in opportunistic ink, today would write that wanton praise, after the slaughter of Tienanmen square and the unmasked, witnessed thuggish ferocity of the “great Rumanian peasant.” And the author of that historical tirade could hardly ever fancy to be making, putting together the three characters, a singular matching loaded with prophetic significance and inescapable coincidences, which only a few years later would stir shuddering reflections.

And that is what lies behind this “counter life” of John XXIII, the Pope from Sotto il Monte responsible for that turn in a Marxist key, ecumenical and not ecumenical, which set in motion the opening of the Church and of the Vatican to communism. Of an all-new Vatican that with Giovanni Battista Montini would achieve the inconceivable

goals of closing agreements, secrets and not, with the regimes of the East. Starting with the liquidation of the Church of Silence and of her most important representative, cardinal Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary. Of a Vatican that welcomes politicized “priests of the peace,” invented by those regimes that would impose their approval upon the election of the new bishops. And so bishops – potential cardinals – bearing the DOC official label (Denominazione di Origine Controllata; or Certified Origin, originally limited to first-rate wines) of the communist approval have come to mark the Episcopal grape-harvest of those years.

But today’s man has a poor memory. The fast pace of the events, the violence exerted with growingly sophisticated sapience by the mass media on the opinion, have made man unable to experience but a “mesmerized” present, and to retain even the most recent past. True, it would be sufficient to remember, to debunk, ridicule, nail to silence so many “mosche cocchiere,” (fly riding on the back of a horse, as though steering the larger animal) delegated by most to the helm of the nations.

Will History ever get the better of these Two-Faced Januses?

The genuine memory, the noble memory, the non-polluted memory “ad usum delfini,” is the backbone of History. It should be the duty of anyone in the know, to consign to her archives, precious for humanity, without reticence, without false respects, even for purple and Tirierno (Papal Tiara), the name and the actions of those

who with those regimes have come to terms, deeming them invincible. The actions and policy of raw models at the head of great masses of humanity, such as those Roman Pontiffs who that communism have promptly accepted and for long years encouraged, with which they have entered into pacts in flagrant contradiction with the principles and religion they personified, and whose atheist and materialistic doctrine have permitted, with their dormancy and stunning collaboration, to proliferate in those years amongst the masses of the West, cannot and must not be erased. What is more, that communist penetration amongst the Catholics had been checked by an uncongenial predecessor of theirs, without mincing words, with excommunication.

Fortunately for our descendants, History has neither face nor political hue, and could not care less whether in her truths are caught up untouchable personages. Only, it is often so terribly vexing and unpopular, with the eyes fastened onto History, as onto the peremptory hand of an infallible compass, to write the truth one has lived, if from minimal angles, when such truth involves and overwhelms untouchable personages holding in their hands the blazing thunderbolts of power.

Challenging those thunderbolts, in the conviction of doing something coherent with my principles, I have handed my manuscript over to the publisher. For it would have seemed to me unworthy, precisely in light of my deep-rooted principles, to subtract the tessera of a personal experience, singular and unrepeatable, to the great mosaic

of memory, and, who knows? of history.

CHAPTER I

“The only real struggle in History is that either for or
against the Church of Christ.” *St. John Bosco*

“Never, perhaps, did a Pope render the spirit in a human concept more unanimous...” With these words, “L’Osservatore Romano” of Monday-Tuesday, June 3-4, 1963, opened, on the front page of a special bereavement edition, with the news of the death of John XXIII, that occurred on Monday June 3, at 19:49 hours.

That statement by the Vatican newspaper had stricken me, and had caused me to reflect as, in the late morning of Tuesday, June 4, I was walking up to the papal apartment, to pay homage, as a dignitary of the Pontifical Court, to the body of the deceased Pope. Due to my responsibilities (Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape of His Holiness.)

and my long-standing position as a journalist for “L’Osservatore Romano”, I had lived, day in and day out, behind the scenes, throughout the pontificate of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. A startling, amazing pontificate, and today we may add, fatal, for the survival of the Church and the fate of all of mankind. I quickly began to have an inkling of what a formidable reforming and progressive

will was hiding behind the kindly and humble countenance of Pope Roncalli, as well as his authentic personality, oozing with abilities and diplomatic shrewdness, of his perfect knowledge of human psychology, of irony and sympathy with which he spiced up his relationships with his fellow man and with his direct collaborators. In the course of his brief pontificate, that was to last less than five years, yet so explosive as to unsettle twenty centuries of the Church, I had spoken with cardinals and bishops startled with lightning-quick papal resolutions, I had witnessed the desperation of old and venerable men of the Church who foresaw in that supreme expression of the reforming will of John XXIII which was the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, the beginning of the disintegration of that monolithic block which had been the Church up to Pius XII. Today as I am writing these pages, the painful foresight of those old men sounds prophetic.

An American Jesuit resident in Rome, hiding behind the pseudonym of Xavier Rynne, revealed in the "New Yorker" of the second week of July, 1963, that when Cardinal Domenico Tardini, Secretary of State and, amongst the cardinals, one of the most informed on the situation of the Church in the world, learned of the intention of John XXIII to summon a Council, as a good, forthright Roman, he confided to those close to him that he considered that the Pope had "temporarily gone mad." The Ecumenical Council had immediately proved an explosive instrument upon which the Marxist dynamite was promptly triggered.

It will suffice to consider that, following the promulgation of the encyclical “Pacem in Terris”, in which Pope Roncalli proclaimed that “... There can, and should be cooperation between the Catholics and the Communist regimes on the social and political level...” in the April 28, 1963 Italian elections the communists gained one million more votes than in the previous elections, five years earlier. This first clamorous success of the Italian Communist party (PCI) was unanimously attributed to the policy of John XXIII; they called it “Ecclesiastical Leftism”, when he was still alive, or “Giovannismo” which they did after his death.

The statements by the Secretary General of the Italian Communist party, Palmiro Togliatti, given to the Florence’s daily “La Nazione”, in an interview of August 26, 1963, are of a lapidary eloquence: “In fifty years? I may be wrong, but the world will be dominated by us and by the Catholics, and it is certain that we shall find the groundwork for a reciprocal collaboration... We’ll never get to know a time of perfect “Civitas Dei”: Marxism’s well aware of it. Perhaps the most intelligent Catholics know these things as well as knowing where the world is headed, but are nonetheless afraid. They fear, for example, to examine in depth that great phenomenon that has been the “Giovannean Pontificate.” (John’s pontificate). It’s not just a matter of peace-now, but of a superior human understanding, of a mutual rapprochement that we’ll be able to achieve. As to the present, moreover, the “Giovannean” phenomenon, has been that of creating a responsible Catholicism in politics. They are the premises for a transformation of the world...”

Twelve days before these statements by the Italian communist leader, and precisely seventy-two days following John XXIII's death, on August 14, 1963 the Soviet magazine "Nauka i Religia" published a script by Anatoli Krassikov, in which the author, after stating that "...The Ecumenical Council, which is to resume its work on September 29, has already shown that within the ecclesiastical hierarchies there exists a strong tendency rejecting the old methods of Pius XII..." recognizing in the deceased Pontiff qualities of "...wise and farsighted politician, who saw realistically the changes coming about in the world and knew how to value the imperatives of the time..." Then, commenting on the encyclical "Pacem in Terris," the Russian columnist wrote that John XXIII "...puts forward for the first time in an official document the issue of a possible cooperation between Catholics and non-Catholics toward the achievement of a scope that is of interest to all humanity. He writes explicitly that the reconciliation, which only yesterday was or seemed impossible, is necessary today or could become so tomorrow..."

Certainly the desired "reconciliation" has turned out to be unexpectedly advantageous to the Marxists. It has alienated, on the other hand, a considerable mass of believers who no longer recognize their own Church in the post-Conciliar Church. I carry in my memory and in my heart the words spoken to me by Cardinal Mindszenty in Vienna on October 18, 1974. I had asked the Primate of Hungary, twice nailed onto the cross of his martyrdom, first by the fierce fury of the Marxist bailiffs, subsequently by

the cold callousness of Papa Montini: “Which is the True Church, that official one that now, in the world, fraternizes with Marxist atheism, or else the one abandoned by Rome because it remained faithful to Tradition.” The old Magyar bishop had directly replied to me, “The one abandoned by Rome.”

It will be historically proven how important “the reconciliation” had been to Communism, for its affirmation in the world, the Vatican of John XXIII and Paul VI. French bishop Marcel Lefebvre responded on the pages of the daily “Vita” of February 27, 1977, to those who asked him what he thought of the relations between the Vatican and the communist countries: “Just look at the outcome; that is, the worldwide communist advance on every front. The Vatican deserves the gratitude of the Soviets for the extraordinary help it is contributing to their victory. We may see soon how the gratitude of the communists will manifest itself.”

The Council, therefore, had obliterated in an unimaginable conflagration the solidity of the entire ecclesial body, and gave rise to disorientation, dispute, and hostility amongst the peoples.

Such were my cogitations on that late June 4, 1963 morning, as I was walking up to the papal apartment. I had chosen not to use the elevator to avoid the queue of personalities from the diplomatic corps and clergy that continuously formed in the small lobby that opens onto the St. Damaso’s Courtyard, bustling with an incessant coming

and going of big black automobiles. Above all, that reference to the “Enhanced human accord” caused me to give a start for the evident contrast with the reality, and bitterly to smile to myself. The silence, along those ancient solitary stairs of the Apostolic Palace, was at a peak. That ascent across the courtyards, the immensely high walls bathed in history, the hundred halls of the palace of the “Supreme Sovereign,” as always, overwhelmed me. It seemed as though I was climbing step after step toward a mystical height. It seemed as though, as I was climbing that ancient flight of stairs immersed in the shade. I could perceive the heart-beat of that venerable and notable edifice of the Bramante, which for centuries had been holding in its walls the breath, the thoughts, the life of the Popes. It seemed to me as though I had left down below, in a St. Peter’s square darkened with a mass of silent people, all the reality, all the bitter and desecrated history of our time, all the tangled and disquieting questions for the imminent future, my very human identity, with its capacity of detached observation, with its analytical and critical spirit, with its disenchanting cynicism in evaluating the events, with all its boundless and conscious and, perhaps, resigned disillusionment. And now I was climbing toward that room that had been visited by the Angel of Death, with trepidation. And as I was coming to the end of the ascent, an obscure disquietude was invading my soul. An obscure disquietude and a heartfelt anguish and sadness, and a poignant melancholy. I heard my footsteps resound, step after step, under the fourth century vaults and, in a moment, the sense of that anxious, earnest melancholy realized itself in me, lunar, painful, and distant: the memory, with a silent

fluttering of wings, flew toward me from above, from the stairs that faded in the shadow and brought me, like a breath and a caress in my heart, the lake-setting of Castel Gandolfo and the poignant sadness of the fall night when, on the shores of that lake, Pius XII passed away. I stood a moment, and I breathed that unreal silence in the deepest and most secret intimacy of the Apostolic Palace, evocative of ghosts and memories of times that a mysterious, yet most powerful will, had imposed on everyone, in the Vatican and in the outer world, to forget.

* * *

It had seemed a premonition: the last great Pope in History wanted to die immersed in the magical quiet of those woods that had been sacred to the Romans, away from a Vatican that was now enemy to him.

A few months after the passing of Pope Pacelli, I met at Palazzo Farnese, blazing for a reception by the ambassador of France, Cardinal Eugenio Tisserant, who honored me with his confidence. The aged cardinal who had maintained under the purple the courage and the openness of the old officer of the Spahis, told me, indignant, pacing hastily beneath the gilded ceilings of Rome's most beautiful Renaissance palace, how in the last weeks of Pius XII's illness some representatives of the Vatican echelon had begun to disobey openly. And he then told me, grinding that Gallic Italian of his, pronounced with military ease, in the great white beard that descended to rub the pectoral cross, as the German nun detailed to the person of the Pope,

the unforgettable Suor Pasqualina, originally Josephine Lenhart of Einsberg, was to suffer the extreme affront by Pacelli's foes. Pius XII was agonizing. The nun, who had dashed to the Vatican to fetch some linen for the Pope, was denied the service-car to return directly to Castel Gandolfo, to the bedside of the dying Pontiff. The most erudite French cardinal, Dean of the Sacred College, Librarian and Archivist of Santa Romana Chiesa, distinguished himself amongst the cardinals, as a "man of integrity". He was respected and feared in the Vatican for two precise reasons: his crude and resolute boldness, which brought him to expose clearly his opinions in front of anyone, and the awareness of knowing a quantity of "uncomfortable" secrets, tied to the past of many Vatican personalities. The former officer French cardinal possessed, indeed, an archive of his own, vast and continually updated and enriched, containing documents of great historical value and often of shattering consequence, put together, with competence and method, in nearly half a century of activity at the service of the Holy See. This most eminent cardinal with the great beard knew, therefore, one by one, the foes of Pius XII and of the "Pacellism." In that archive was documented, for example, the Marxist "credo" of the then monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, substitute of Pius XII's Secretary of State. Montini, in 1945, had befriended the secretary of Italy's Communist party, Palmiro Togliatti, who had just returned to Italy from the Soviet Union. The uninformed monsignor Giuseppe De Luca, an eminent Latinist, intimate friend to the Marxist leader with whom he shared a love of the Italian Classics, had godfathered that hazardous friendship that for Togliatti was the first,

unhoped-for success, conquered without moving a finger, on the Italian soil, with Fascism scarcely out of the way. Soon, that most secret union between devil and holy water had borne its fruits. Through Protestant circles of the University of Uppsala and their ties with the Russian orthodoxy, the Substitute of Pius XII's Secretary of State let the Kremlin know that "...Not all the Church and not all the Vatican approved of the political directions of Pope Pacelli for the future." These most secret initiatives by Giovanni Battista Montini, however, did not escape the then monsignor Tardini. Not by chance the two prelates, distinguished by opposite temperaments – so rationally ambiguous the former, as open and assertive the latter – never had a good relationship. And in cardinal Tisserant's archives, together with other important documents on the delicate "affaire", ended up the secret relations by the Archbishop of Riga and Pius XII, in which are described, with a wealth of documentation, the contacts that Giovanni Battista Montini had, unbeknownst to the Pope, with emissaries of the Soviet Union and of satellite States', and the sensitive outcome of the secret investigation that Pius XII had immediately entrusted to an officer of the French Secret Service. The agent had laid his hands on a collection of letters attributed to Montini that signaled to the K.G.B. – the Soviet political police – the names and the movements of the priests, largely Jesuits, who, in those years, exercised clandestinely their ministry amongst the populations of the communist countries, oppressed by religious persecution.

That officer would later relate to French writer Pierre Virion that "...I was dumbfounded when I laid my eyes on

those accusatory letters, written on Segreteria di Stato di Sua Santità's letterhead" (2).

(2) Pierre Virion will confide the episode to Vaticanist Gabriella de Montemayor, met in Rome in June 1974, who will receive confirmation from a high ranking Roman justice, dottor Giulio Lenti, who had received the information from mons. Domenico Tardini, to whom he was bound by a long-standing friendship. Indeed, Pope Pacelli, distraught by that revelation, had immediately summoned mons. Tardini.

Cardinal Tisserant's secretary, monsignor Georges Roche, annotates the episode in his book "Pie XII devant l'histoire", published by Laffont of Parigi.

Pius XII collapsed immediately upon reading those papers. Forced into bed for many days, he disposed the immediate departure of Montini for Milan, the first vacant diocese that in that moment of terrible anguish was at hand. The future Paul VI, who at that time was de facto Secretary of State, thus departed at moment's notice his office at the Vatican. In fact, Pius XII had left that office vacant, after the death, in 1944, of cardinal Maglione.

Montini departed Rome and the great pain caused to the heart of the Pontiff, and reached Milan in conformity with that ancient Vatican norm "promoveatur ut removeatur" ("promote to remove"). It was the late autumn of 1954. In order to obtain the much sought-after "Galero" (cardinalitial hat), the Hamletic monsignor from Concesio would have to wait, from that day on, for the election to the See of Peter of his "precursor" Roncalli (3).

(3) Thirty years later will write Antonio Spinoso in “Pius XII, The Last Pope” (le Scie Mondadori, October 1992, p. 357, 358):

“At the close of that same year 1954, the Pope appointed Montini archbishop of Milan. Had he wanted to distance himself from him? In August had died in the Lombard capital the Benedictine cardinal Schuster, head of the Ambrosian Archdiocese, and by the beginning of the following November the Pontiff had already replaced him with Montini. He broke the news to the main exponents of the Uomini di Azione Cattolica gathered before his residence at Castel Gandolfo. “You’ve never disappointed me, said he to those present, turning in particular to Gedda, Father Lombardi, and to the Association’s assistant monsignor Fiorenzo Angelini. “And I’m glad of it”. Then he added: “I must now give you some news: His excellency mons. Giovan Battista Montini is the new Archbishop of Milan.” Heartfelt and lengthy was the applause of those present, but the buzz had it that many failed to grasp the hidden significance of the appointment...Montini was not happy, rather, he appeared as though bewildered to a friend, Camaldolese father Anselmo Giabbani, who met him in those days. “His countenance,” witnessed the friar, “had changed. Even the tone of his voice was different, and his gestures less expressive.”

It was spoken of a true exile inflicted upon the monsignor who had dared to “betray” - the term was very strong – Pacelli’s anti-Socialist, and anti-communist battle. Suor Pasqualina had seen the Pope weep, disappointed by Montini’s receptive approach. The monsignor had already drawn the attention of the pro-secretary of the Sant' Uffizio (Holy Office), cardinal Ottaviani, a front-liner, with Gedda, of those who accused Montini of plotting with Fanfani and of aspiring to a Christian Democrat party autonomous of the Vatican. It was also alleged that the monsignor had even been present at certain black masses. It was father Lombardi who broke the news to the Pope.

The Vatican of the new direction, attempted by whatever means, naturally, to get hold of that collection of documents. Now forced into a corner, cardinal Tisserant had to give up his prized archive, but not, however, prior to having his secretary, abbot Georges Roche, photocopy the whole lot. For years, after the death of Tisserant, the Vatican pursued in vain Roche and the niece of the deceased cardinal in order to acquire, at any price, that inconvenient double that was abroad.

At length, cement-businessman Carlo Pesenti, who had managed to acquire from Roche for 450 million lire (\$750,000) the precious archive, gave it to the Vatican, in the person of monsignor Benelli, in exchange for a facilitated loan of 50 billion Swiss Francs. In fact Pesenti was in need, at the time, for his banking group and for the acquisition of two banks at Munich and Monte Carlo, of foreign currency loans from the Istituto per le Opere di Religione (Monsignor Marcinkus, monsignor De Bonis, doctor Strobel).

Pesenti's interest was that of being able to use that Vatican institute both as a guarantor or co-guarantor of this credit, and to profit on the spread between the official exchange rate and the "black market" rate.

So, the anti-Pacellian front, progressive and advocate of the "dialogue" and of the "openings," was already a solid, disconcerting reality, some years prior to Pius XII's death.

The agitators of the new times despised Pius XII. They

considered him the most anti-democratic Pope of the modern Church, with his only two Consistories of 1946 and 1952, and with that fulminating hand-grenade launched between the legs of Marxism, which was the excommunication of the communists. And the Italian Republic born of the Resistance could not forgive Pope Pacelli his excessive love for the German-speaking peoples, from 1914 to 1945.

In observance, expectedly, of the teachings of the “Soviet Encyclopedia,” at the voice of “Catholicism” (Vol. 20, p. 379) wherein Pius XII is presented as Germanophile.

His enemies lay in wait for Eugenio Pacelli’s death. It was necessary to debunk the figure of Pius XII, of the “Pastor Angelicus” and of his twenty-year-old pontificate. It was imperative to render it miserably human to the eyes of the masses. So it was started, that terrifying direction, that transformed the death of a Pope into a grotesque tragedy, to feed the vulgar, voracious and inextinguishable curiosity of the man of the consumer world. Unscrupulous editors spared no efforts to buy Pontifical Archiatra (Pope’s personal physician) Riccardo Galeazzi Lisi, called “The crow with the Leica,” whom with his camera searched and fixed on celluloid, with callous coldness and precision, moment after moment, the face of Eugenio Pacelli devastated by agony. So, in full standing, on the front pages of the newspapers, the image of a dying Pius XII, supine on the pillows, the gaunt face darkened by the growth of days, the eyes closed and sunken, the mouth open in the rattle of death, sold like hot cakes amongst the throngs famished

with desecration, traveled despoiled on coffee-shop tables, between empty “cappuccino” cups and cigarettes stumps, hanged for days at newsstands amidst pin-up girl magazines and tabloids, finally ending up in trash-bins.

Even the television had its jackal-share in that fierce tearing to pieces of a myth. So that the agony of Pius XII, complete with its hallucinating details, entered the Italian homes, was observed from behind the set tables, between a “forchettata” (forkful) and another of spaghetti, between a glass of wine and another. The most reserved Pope in modern history — when he walked in the Vatican gardens the guards on detail were ordered to conceal themselves behind the trees; and no one, other than Suor Pasqualina, ever violated the intimacy of his apartments, of his work desk, of his papers — was thrown, dying, to the world. All the dramatic intimacy of his agonizing humanity, of his bed muddled by the starts of death, all was meticulously and pitilessly and despicably tossed to the public feeding frenzy of prying eyes.

The recollection of that death overwhelmed me, as I had slowly started up the sounding stony steps and was approaching this other Papal death. And yet what an abyss divided them. The “Pastor Angelicus” had died in a climate of Greek-tragedy. Concluding or wrapping up a chapter of the history of the Church and humanity that spanned much longer than the twenty years of his pontificate. He had lived and operated luminous, as a sun of spirituality. That new world that was about to appear on the scene of History had transformed his human death, with studied measure, into an

iconoclastic slaughter. John XXIII, reformer and progressive, responsible, with the Council, for the doubts and obscure destinies toward which were plunging the entire Church and humanity, had passed away in an atmosphere oozing serenity, optimism, almost happiness; loved or flattered by his own people, in the Vatican. Exploited as no other Pope ever was, in the world; applauded by the Marxists to whom he had unexpectedly opened the doors of the Christian citadel.

Only a few years had passed since the passing of Pius XII. As I now recalled it, in that my solitary ascending to the papal apartment, it seemed to me as though a century had gone by. I recalled with blinding lucidity that afternoon of waiting on the Church yard at St. John's basilica. The squad of the Noble Guard drawn up before the gates, with the sun flashing on the gilded helmets and the scarlet coats. I recalled, next to that line up of Roman aristocracy, the aspect irremediably "petit-bourgeois" of the representatives of the Italian State. There were, naturally, the Christian Democrats in full ranks. Precisely all those who, years later, would take the historical leap into the arms of the communists. "The verbose pigmies " of Italy's politics, as general De Gaulle, jokingly, defined them, crowded as schoolboys, in their brand new tailcoats, holding their top hats behind their backs, visibly uneasy amidst so much nobility at arms. Then the arrival of the coffin from Castel Gandolfo, and the winding of the long funeral cortege through the streets of old Rome, amidst the dull rumbling of the bells and two overflowing wings of silent crowd: clapping the dead became popular only later. The Roman

Pope was returning, dead, to Rome among his children. The Pope of my youth, the Pope of the war, who had risen like a white apparition through the smoke and the rubble of San Lorenzo devastated by the American bombs, when the rumble of the “liberators” still vibrated in the azure Roman sky, with his arms open in an embrace toward his people lashed by iron and fire, that squeezed him from all sides, pressing about him to touch him, dusty and bloodstained, as the white tunic of the Pope crimsoned itself with that blood.

But in what a state was he coming back! The embalming process had gone wrong, and so the body borne on shoulder by the “sediari” in their costumes of scarlet brocade, before the horrified gazes of the cardinals of the Court, appeared unrecognizable, swollen, bluish, and fetid with putrefaction. We were a small group, around the Confession, in a St. Peter deserted and immersed in the shade. Night had descended. The great doors of the Basilica had been shut onto the piazza illuminated by the blazing flares of the mute and solemn crowd. In that atmosphere loaded with death and eternity, we paid the last respect to the transfigured remains of Pius XII, clothed with the sumptuous pontifical dresses, escorted by the Swiss halberdiers and by the dignitaries of the Court to the three traditional biers in wait, wide open, beneath the Berninian bronze canopy. The cardinals paraded before their defunct Pope bestowing their benediction, before those features, with no remnant of the ascetic countenance of Pius XII, would disappear forever under the first, heavy cover.

The sharp heel clicking of the Swiss on detail at the landing of the papal apartment stirred me from my melancholy recollections. I started for the Pope's rooms amidst the coming and going of prelates and secular in dark apparel, crossed the hallway, walked through a threshold and, at the center of the hall with the windows on St. Peter's square, very luminous in the summer noon, I beheld, on a bed, the body of John XXIII. I joined the tail end of the personages who were slowly filing toward the feet of the dead Pope, stood a few moments in meditation, and walked away contrite, on tiptoes. Preceding me was the old French ambassador to the Holy See. I gazed at his white hair combed backward, and I made out the expression on his face, so familiar to me, always courteous and serene, slightly bowed forward. He held in his left hand, scrawny and gemmed, the handle of his walking stick, and now and again, with his right hand, brought to himself a scented handkerchief, and I could also feel that fragrance, in my nostrils. Without noticing it I found myself, in turn, before the soles spread out of the dead. I raised my eyes and looked at him. He was still and always Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli: the broad, good-natured and keen face, the gently closed eyes, the gloved hands conjoined on his mighty breast, all of his rural corpulence appareled in the pontifical habit.

Roncalli dead seemed placidly asleep in a serene and satisfied doze. Nay, the quasi-merry expression of the dead Pope, contrasted with the severe faces framed by the helmets, of the Guardie Nobili di Fazione (Pontifical Noble Guard), with unsheathed swords, at either side of the bed.

The Pope seemed thus to have died satisfied. And all those, around that body, some more and others less, seemed pervaded by that sense of ineffable serenity. Certainly, I thought, the device of the exchange had worked wonders, and the bandwagon of the Church had taken, with a big shake, the desired track, which was no longer the one that ran straight and glistening toward the horizon, but thrust itself, taking a perfect turn, implacably to the left, forcefully headed into the gloom of a tunnel, whose exit was an insoluble and frightening question mark.

Perhaps, for the first time in the modern history of the Church, it had punctually come about, as anticipated, the rapid, unsettling shifting of the pieces on the board of a game by secular tradition very prudent and hermetic. In the Vatican's high spheres it was indeed no secret that after Pius XII, the coming Conclave would elect Venice's patriarch Roncalli, who, in turn, would "bring" on the See of Peter Giovanni Battista Montini. From Milan, the Brescian bishop with the owl-gaze, whom in Rome they nicknamed "Hamlet," or the "Cat," was pulling the strings of a colossal game, with the precious help of a group of powerful prelates among which distinguished themselves Belgian cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens, Dutch Bernard Jan Alfrinck, and German Agostino Bea, with the secretive support of international Marxism. That colossal game that would upturn the contents and the aspect of the Church, of Italy, of Europe, and of the whole world with all its established checks and balances, needed, to get in motion and develop, a formidable "battering ram." This "battering ram" that hit with irresistible violence against the bi-

millenarian walls of the Church, shattering their inviolate compactness, was Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. Behind him the fury of the “New Course” would burst into the vanquished citadel. All had long been predisposed, with precision, so that the cardinal from Sotto il Monte would become a breaking Pope. The College of Cardinals was so well guided and oriented that today, years after that Conclave, it has even been given a more credible version of the little mystery of the three “fumate,” white, black and then again white, which came, in brief sequence, out of the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, causing confusion within the packed crowd with their nose in the air in St. Peter’s square. In spite of the plans, the Armenian cardinal Agagianian, was elected on the last ballot – Hence the first “fumata bianca.” Directly followed by the black smoke, as the elect, giving in to immediate pressures, would decline the appointment, clearing the way for Roncalli, announced by the ultimate white smoke.

I accompanied, in that Conclave, cardinal Federico Tedeschini, Datano di Sua Santità and Arciprete della Patriarcale Basilica Vaticana, who much loved me, and to whom I was sincerely and affectionately bound. In the quiet of his study, loaded with brocades and crowded with portraits, in the old palace of Via della Dateria, by the Quirinale that handsome cardinal, tall and aristocratic in his venerable oldness, by the pale and delicate face on which his gray-blue eyes shone luminous, had told me, sadly, of those, unfortunately, authentic forecasts and had guided by hand my bewilderment in that intricate maze of political interests, personal ambitions, of rivalries, of conflicts

between power groups, which intertwined, so thickly, in the ante-chamber of that Conclave and that would have borne, beneath the vaults of the Sistine packed with the crying throngs of Michelangelo, that result that had been established and that the unknowing Catholics would attribute to the Holy Spirit's intervention. And I felt like laughing, as I watched the disheveled and sweating and frantic rushing of the journalists hunting for indiscretions and rash forecasts and the hermetic faces and indefinite grins with which the most eminent princes of the Church resisted, or eluded, their assaults. There was, however, a German journalist, Elisabeth Gerstner, who smelled the truth in the air and, risking accusations of insanity, wrote it and hit the mark. In an article titled "Zur Todesstunde Pius XII" appeared on the "General Anzeiger für den Niederrhein" by mid-October 1958, Gerstner wrote in detail, that the Conclave would elect Venice's patriarch Roncalli, who would open the door to the future Paul VI (4).

4) Emblematic the letter by cardinal Eugenio Tisserant dated March 12, 1970 at the third paragraph where it says that "The election of the present Sovereign Pontiff (Paul VI, note by the aut.) having been done rapidly. It is the previous one, that of John XXIII that could have been open to dispute, the sessions having been so numerous. Besides, I do not see how anyone could ever provide any accounts on the ballots after the Conclave, as a strict secrecy had been imposed with major precision. It is ridiculous in any case to say that any other cardinal had been elected. You will understand that I cannot say anything more."

The cardinals entered in groups in the “Recinto” of the Conclave where, for each one of them, had been set up the customary “cell”. The bell that would command the “extra omnes” to clear the “Recinto” of the extraneous before the heavy bolt would be closed shut by the “Marshall of the Conclave,” isolating from the world the most eminent, was about to ring, when I learned that the patriarch of Venice had been assigned as a “cell” the room of the commander of the Noble Guards, who had a plate on the door that read “the Commander.” I almost started. And I liked to think that someone had probably already thought of captivating, in advance, the sympathy of the future Pontiff. To all of this I was going back with my memory, as I watched John XXIII asleep in death. And in a moment it occurred to me as if the dead had just lifted the lid of an eye and was winking about, as in Nikolai Gogol’s short story “Il Vij,” the beautiful dead daughter of the old Cossack Centurian-leader; but with a flash of irony and witticism, in that pupil’s slit that I seemed to discern, in the soft play of lights and shadows that the crackling splendor of the candles, at the sides of the bed, barely moved upon the face.

The Pope seemed to make fun, with amiability, even in death, of the Spanish etiquette of old that surrounded his ultimate sleep. The little flames of the candles reflected palpitating on the glistening blades of the swords of the Pontifical Noble Guard. Only a few years later, happily reigning, Paul VI, “begotten” by John XXIII of venerated memory, those silver hilted swords would suddenly be torn away from the hands of those gentlemen and tossed afar;

that military Body which for centuries watched in arms over the safety of the Pontiff would, by a stroke of the pen, be forever dismantled. The same end would befall the ancient Court devoted and faithful to the papacy; the Vatican would be stripped of its incalculable exterior splendor and of all its ghosts, and would be transformed by the iconoclastic frenzy of the “New Course” into a gigantic, vulgar, soulless Hilton. In the Catholic world the dispute would flare out, the clergy would be disoriented and divided, the de-spiritualization of Christendom would disperse the vocations, and the lightning of the schism would pelt down, from that dim and tempestuous sky, to split the old tree of Christendom. The Church of Silence would be betrayed and abandoned under the iron boot of the Godless, and official Rome would shake the bloody hand of Marxist atheism which would soon lift its victorious banner upon the Roman Campidoglio, a stone’s throw from St. Peter’s cupola. Then I recalled the words that someone, who had stood watch by the Pope’s door, swore to have heard from Roncalli as he approached his death: “...What did I do, my God, what did I do!” (Letter by cardinal Eugenio Tisserant with the meaningful allusion to John XXIII’s election)

CHAPTER II

Almost everyone, in Italy, is acquainted with the official biography of John XXIII, as it has been divulged by those centers of the new power that, in the Vatican and in Italy, are working so that the figure of Roncalli become the pillar on which to lay the new temples of Communism, or rather, as they say today, of “Euro-communism.”

Sotto il Monte, the birthplace of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, has for years been transformed into a sort of permanent country-fair wherein the boundaries between religion and superstition are kept blurred by the new post-Conciliar clergy, who have everything to gain from the fanaticism of the masses. The “Pope of the Communists” is certainly the only Pontiff in the two thousand years of the Church, who has so triumphantly entered – the term is indexed in the post-Conciliar ecclesiastical vocabulary – into the popularity of the masses.

This is the first, undisputable victory that must be acknowledged to John XXIII’s ability. His portrait, in Italy, is everywhere. On trucks’ windshields, at post offices, lottery kiosks, tobacconists, prostitutes’ sublet rooms and

robbers' wallets, government offices, communists' houses, next to the faces of Lenin and Berlinguer. The "Papa buono" (The good Pope), the Pope of the dialogue with the Marxists, the Pope of the Council, has had a place of great esteem in the textbooks of the Italian republic. In these history books, which are a singular testimony of how nowadays, mischievous cunning old devils with the soiled conscience, will fail to teach the truth to the upcoming generations.

Roncalli's exaltation has as a counter altar the reappraisal of Pius XII, the Pope who "dared excommunicate the communists." In these times when almost everyone minds, with tenacious absolutism, his own wallet and his personal outcome and is ready, for that "one and one add up to two," to change opinion, political faith and color of his own skin, very few have taken pains to pay any attention to the other face of that hagiography constructed to serve a one-sided ideology. It would then have come out, a "Giovanna" biography filled with premonitory signs of that which that seminarian, that priest, that bishop, and then that cardinal, would have become, one day, wearing on his head the heavy pontifical Triregno (Papal Tiara).

We know that in 1900, Angelo Roncalli was sent to the Seminary of Rome, to complete the studies he had commenced in Bergamo. He was born in 1881. He was thus nineteen years old, and arrived in Rome, the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy, in a year that was not just another year, as its end marked the beginning of a new century.

So the young provincial seminarian suddenly found himself immersed in that progressive delirium with which the secular establishment, official and non-official, openly anti-clerical in those years, celebrated the dawn of these new times.

So much so that the Latin verses composed by humanist Leo XIII, in honor of the new century, were, perhaps, the only poetical voice not to show traces of the magniloquent progressivism, hopeful and naïve. Yet certainly those archaic by the orthodox contents, by the slender Pontiff remaining anchored to tradition, who, appareled as an equestrian, loved to hunt through the centuries-old woods of Ariccia, would not stir lengthy reflections in the young lad from Sotto il Monte, who opened his peasant gaze onto that modernist jubilation, remaining charmed by it.

After all, seminarian Roncalli bore within himself, in his blood, the germ of a modernist fighting spirit, when it came to Catholicism, that was emblematic of his Bergamascan homeland. In the series, historically remarkable, of the Bergamascan bishops must be remembered monsignor Camillo Guindani, who can be credited with preparing the times for his successor, famous in the annals of that diocese for his progressive convictions: bishop Radini Tedeschi. In a period in which the Kingdom of Italy, completing its unity by the shelling of Porta Pia, made life difficult for both clergy and Catholics, that bishop formed in Bergamo, a free land wherein the social reality, the “Real Italy,” as they said, contrasted with the “Official Italy” of the rulers of Rome.

Count Stanislao Medolago-Albani, in 1877 assumes the chair of the Diocesan Committee controlling the entire Catholic movement based on the three hundred and sixty-six parochial committees. Professor Niccolò Rezzara was appointed as its vice-president. In addition to the Committee, of a general organizational nature, the same year saw the establishment of the Diocesan Union of the Catholic Social Institutions that toward 1884 began to assume such an influence as amply to overcome the Diocesan Committee. Count Medolago-Albani was one of many Italian nobles, in those years straddling the nineteenth and twentieth century, who earned themselves the name of “Social Counts,” for tying their name to social struggles in favor of the Catholic working class. The typically Italian phenomenon of the “Social Aristocrats,” will reach its apex one century later, when a crowned Sardinian landlord, marquis Enrico Berlinguer, would hold with lordly mastership, the crimson scepter of the Italian Communist party.

Professor Niccolò Rezzara, instead, a secondary school teacher and a journalist (founder of the “Campanone” and director of “L'eco di Bergamo”), was a bold organizer of labor rallies and a trade unionist. Among others, he invented and conducted the strike of 1909, from whose solution emerged the affirmation of the worker’s right to his own union activity . (Cfr. G. Bellotti, Don Angelo Roncalli and Catholic Bergamo, “L'Osservatore Romano,” November 6, 1958).

Bergamo, as can be seen, had anticipated phenomenon

and issues, which in the rest of Italy would not come about for another twenty years.

All such ferment seminarian Roncalli felt flowing in his veins, with the rustic violence of his nineteen years, when he began his attendance at the Roman Seminary. Later, he would rummage through any archive that would come to hand, the unpublished documents, ancient and modern, attesting to these very particular and unsuspected peculiarities of the Bergamascan land. Once the Rome Seminary period was concluded, fate awaited Angelo Roncalli, ordained priest, at his first appointment of responsibility.

He was in fact summoned to Bergamo, to act as a secretary to that bishop, Giacomo Radini-Tedeschi, the aristocratic “aperturista” prelate, as they would call him today, for his advanced sociological convictions, who with his own example would contribute considerably to Roncalli’s early modernist and progressive formation.

With difficulty could the portly priest from Sotto il Monte have lent his services, at that juncture, to a bishop that seemed cut out to fit Don Roncalli’s political and social convictions. Inaugurating, as we have said, that Italian tradition, which sees the offspring of ancient and titled families to roll around for all their life, for calculation or faith, in the red bog of Marxism, that bishop was a count and nurtured within himself an uncontrollable progressive movement.

Thus the youngster Roncalli could not have found a better harbor than the one that was so casually provided to him.

That meeting and collaboration was decisive to him. It taught him the Machiavellian and Renaissance art of pursuing the thread of one's own revolutionary ideas, while giving others the impression of marching in step and covered, instead, with the most traditional orthodoxy.

In those years of activity, always at the side, as though he were the shadow, of the modernist-count-bishop, Roncalli was initiated into the subtle art of pretending that he had achieved an etymological dignity of his own in the respectable definition of "diplomacy." He added to it that natural charge of communicational joviality and a few tidbits of the sharpness that was inborn in his Bergamascan temperament, and, in the chancery of the Episcopal palace of Bergamo he began to appear, to move, to assert himself, in "nuce" that John XXIII who would one day actuate the ambitious dream of that ancient mathematician who said, "Give me a lever and I will lift the world." Wherein as irresistible lever, Roncalli would have one day his Ecumenical Council.

From what is known, monsignor Radini-Tedeschi did not oppress with work his secretary, who was rather a precious collaborator in finding, as they would say today, a position "committed to the left," for the bishop's pastoral action.

In spite of the most careful concealment of that unusual commitment, not to say scandalous, in those times, for a

Pope's representative in the Kingdom of Italy, in which still echoed the shelling of Porta Pia, when priests and clerics had been pricked on their buttocks with the bayonets of the "bersaglieri," some clamorous implication of that political commitment leaked out and even made it into the newspapers, and left tracks in the offices of the police constables.

After all, the socialist-count-bishop was well known for his stands, in the Vatican as well as Italy. He had uttered a loud and clear no, to the Pope, who had designated him for a diplomatic mission in Belgium, replying, as he looked the Roman Pontiff straight in the eyes, that the "subtleties of diplomacy were repellent to his Christian consciousness." (Cfr. Angelo Roncalli: "In memory of Monsignor Giacomo M. Radini-Tedeschi, bishop of Bergamo," Bergamo 1916, p. 19-20). The strong personality of that bishop, whose effects will still glint, many years later, in the granite-like resoluteness of John XXIII, is witnessed in some passages of a 1911 letter in which bishop Radini-Tedeschi had to clear himself with the Pope for not being sufficiently realistic: for having been too "rosy" in the face of the events. And so he wrote about it on November 26: "Rosy view, Holy Father, that has earned me the public accusation of autocrat, intransigent, rigid, Czarist: that has earned me a mention by the District Attorney of Brescia's Court of Appeal in his judicial season inaugural speech... That from the Justice Ministry has deserved me harsh blame and threat to strip me of my temporality." (Cfr. Roncalli, title above, p. 185). "There was in his soul" – would later write Roncalli, who in those years was close to him daily, on

every occasion, and in that experience was strengthening his character – “There was in his soul everything of the military spirit: a love and transport for the struggle... He was not fond of the war by pin pricks: if war it had to be, he’d rather fight it with a cannon...” (Cfr. Roncalli, title above, p. 134). After fifteen years of work and social struggle as organizer and a driving force, having come to Bergamo, as a bishop of that diocese, the first occasion of contrasts presented itself to him, and he exploited it fully, on the visit to that city of the Queen Mother, Margherita di Savoia.

More blazing were the polemics when in 19?? the count bishop, of whom marquis Berlinguer would have been fond, took side with the striking workers. Don Angelo Roncalli, who lived that episode as a protagonist (making himself welcome by the militants barricaded in the factories, loaded with food supplies and vehement encouragements to stand firm in the struggle, he, in his priests’ habit, in competition with the Socialist ring leaders), he thus recalled: “When the Ranica strike burst out, which it was much spoken of, the name of the bishop who had remained, publicly, in a dignified reserve during the preceding agrarian unrest, appeared among the first and the most generous underwriters for the bread to the workers who had folded their arms. From many parts they cried out to the scandal; information in a less than benevolent tone was sent even high up.

Several also amongst the good ones, thought that a cause lost its right to be sustained, only because in the use of

certain means one could run the risk of some intemperance.

Monsignor Radini did not follow that philosophy. At Ranica it wasn't a particular question of salary or persons at play, but a principle: the fundamental principle of the liberty of the powerful capitalist organization. For him to side resolutely with the striker, in that case, was to fulfill a deed of justice, of charity, of social peace. He disregarded the outcries and continued in tranquility upon his path of lively interest for the strikers, even though lamenting, excusing, correcting the inevitable inconveniences of things and persons that had to be expected in a struggle of that nature, that was to last fifty days (Cfr. Roncalli, mentioned title, p. 90 ss.)

Behind the relaxed assessment of the episode can be divined the "total" participation of Roncalli in those turbulent events.

It is known that he was personally in the thick of it, and that his bishop was barely able to save him from the reaction of the police.

The words written by his own hand on those facts are an impressive document confirming his precise progressive opinions, well rooted in the experience of 1909. The indulgent approach toward the possible "intemperance" and the inevitable inconveniences... That had to be expected in a struggle of that nature... is the approach of the post-Conciliar Church, half a century later, toward the Marxist

violence. It must not be forgotten that monsignor Radini Tedeschi, Roncalli's direct superior and teacher, had held in Rome, in his youth, the professorship of Christian Sociology, which was the first, official, in those times regarded with great suspicion by many clerical circles, because full, as it can easily be imagined, of badly curbed centrifugal forces. He continued to pursue that discipline, for the rest of his life, with passion and exaltation. Thus sociology was the connection between young Roncalli and his bishop, and at that Episcopal table, the priest from Sotto il Monte, ate of it, as if it were his daily bread. Managing with his big peasant-hands, that matter, so explosive to a clergyman, the vision of a new Christianity and of a new Church was shaping up in his sharp and programmatic mind. A new Christianity in a sociological and anthropologic key and a new Church conceived to serve that new Christianity. Perhaps in those years of formation the first, very first, exalting idea, in embryonic form, of a revolutionary Ecumenical Council, entered the mind of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli.

After all those years of true political apprenticeship, in the shadow of the social-count-bishop, were what best History could ever offer a priest with revolutionary ideas, such as young Don Roncalli was, so that he could exercise without concessions the practice of his convictions. In those years, in fact, the Italian Catholics were committing themselves to a true political battle, within a nation that had achieved its unity at the expense of the Pope, in order to obtain from the new super-secular and priest-eater Italian state, a say in the running of the public polity. Indeed, the

Italian Catholics were officially emarginated from the national public life.

They were excluded from a career in the judiciary, teaching, or public office. As a consequence, they found themselves to be subjects, rather than citizens of the Kingdom of Italy.

While a part of them had remained faithful to the temporal conception of the papacy, shattered by the shells of 1870, another, more open to the new times, struggled to have its say in the handling of the Italian nation, upholding the Catholic point of view in the solution of the most burdensome political and social problems.

Naturally, the political space more at hand to them was not that dominated by the Risorgimento political class, totally secular and mostly tied to the Sabaud King who had dared have his army shoot at the troops of the Pope, but that managed by the progressive groups which, naturally, saw in the monarchy and its entourage, a powerful obstacle to their plans. No one in those years of tireless clerical commitment to mend the weft of the Catholic organizations disrupted by the sword of Victor Emmanuel II, would ever suspect of progressive or Socialist tendencies, a priest who committed himself to that program.

It was certainly in those years that Roncalli learned and assimilated that way of doing things, that actual strategy, made of smile and sudden and decisive surprise actions, that, many years later, from the Vatican, allowed him to

fulfill his revolutionary program within the Church and the entire world, in only a four and a half year pontificate.

In those preparatory and active years, young Roncalli enjoyed the greatest personal freedom, disconcerting for the secretary of the bishop of a city such as Bergamo. Even though monsignor Radini-Tedeschi had entrusted him with the teaching, in that seminary, of Patristic, Apologetic and Ecclesiastical History, don Roncalli had all the time to nurture his almost daily contacts with the political representatives, Catholics and progressive, who struggled on the same front to wrestle from the government of Rome larger and larger chunks of power. It will suffice to consider that his direct superior “loaned” him, to help in the political fight, to that professor Rezzara, organizer of the early labor unions and the driving force of that Ranica strike that saw Roncalli an active protagonist.

And yet, he found the way to distinguish himself even in that secondary teaching activity, using for his lectures to the seminarians, Duchesse’s text “History of the Ancient Church,” which for its vision, was considered by the Sanfedist circles stuffed with “modernist” ideas, so much so that shortly afterward it was put on the Index, despite an earlier imprimatur.

A fresh testimony on the Roncalli of those years comes to us from the Carte Cavalcanti (Cavalcanti Papers). Don Alessandro Cavalcanti (1879-1917) was director of the Sanfedist daily “L'unità Cattolica” (The Catholic Unity), in the heated years of the modernist crisis at the beginning of

the century, and as such, tied to certain Vatican high figures. In that important collection of documents are five long letters written by the canonical Giambattista Mazzoleni (1835-1931) between May and September 1911, in which are analyzed some conferences held by the then professor Roncalli. In the first letter, Mazzoleni concludes: "...I was expecting that he would expand on the concept of Christian life, but to me his conference had too strong a flavor of occultism. It also seemed to me to be missing a basis, which is the abneget semetipsum, disinterested as he was to the evangelical counsels, to begin with.

And that calling matrimony 'sanctification of the sexual pleasure' seems to me a true impropriety to say the least."

The appointment of professor Roncalli to the chair of Ecclesiastical History at the Roman Seminary was vetoed in 1912, having been indicated of "dubious orthodoxy."

It must be remembered, at this juncture, the clamorous and forgotten episode of an intervention of the Holy Office against professor Don Roncalli that put an abrupt end to the teaching by the future John XXIII even at the Bergamo Seminary. It had been discovered that Roncalli, in defiance of the Encyclical "Pascendi" by his co-regional Pope Sarto, Pius X, not only acted as a modernist, but corresponded with the excommunicated priest Ernesto Buonaiuti. This priest and historian of the religions was amongst the major exponents of Modernism in Italy, and was excommunicated in 1926 for his progressive activity and his open insubordination to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. To get a

precise idea of Buonaiuti, and of the ideas that he professed and advertised, it would suffice to go through the following letter written by the modernist priest, in October 1906, to the historian and French sociologist Albert Houtin, also a priest, who ended up abandoning the priesthood and the Church.

A known representative of Italian Modernism, just expelled by a decision of Pius X from the Collegio Apollinare, thus wrote to his French friend: "... Here, at the very center of Medieval theocracy, I wish to fulfill a work of tenacious corrosion... There are many of us friends, here in Rome, now, determined to operate in the critical field, to prepare the ultimate fall of the whole old carcass of Medieval orthodoxy. The trouble is that the laity does not favor us for now, as it ignores, nay, it tends to shift once again toward the Vatican in order to sustain the Monarchy. But I do hope that the example set by France, the very fatality of the historical evolution will soon also give to us an anti-clerical parliament and, with it, a radical ministry. Then our hour will have come." The letter is self explanatory, and it is the most enlightened presentation of its author. Around such a rebel gathered a group of modernist priests that put so much effort into the propagation of their theories that Pius X believed it appropriate to condemn the movement with the Encyclical "Pascendi," promulgated in 1907, which severely condemned Modernism. The same Pope set up in the Vatican a special section, the "Sodalitium Pianum," into whose chair he placed monsignor Benigni, in order to single out and hit, one after the other, the suspects with severe sanctions. The group of the modernists was

disrupted and dispersed. Buonaiuti, with his collaborator, Turchi, left for Ireland; the other priest followers, among whom Pioli, who left the habit, Rossi, who became an Evangelical pastor, Hagan, who retired in hermitic solitude, De Stefano, who also dropped the habit, Balducci and Perella who, shifted to the secular state, went underground.

It comes as no surprise that Roncalli would come into contact with such a champion of modernism. Evidently, the “Sodalitium Pianum” had been informed and had conveyed to the Holy Office a detailed denunciation. The conviction and immediate suspension fell on the large head of the teacher from Sotto il Monte, despite the cautious defense by the bishop. That denunciation, and the consequent intervention by the Holy Office, as was the custom, were archived in a special section of the Secret Vatican Archive. In the dusty shadow of that gigantic archive, among mountains of papers perfectly recorded and organized, they lay forgotten for nearly half a century. Until one afternoon, after office hours, a heavy, slightly shuffled footstep paced those arcades and those rooms in the half-light, and stood before a metal cabinet inside of which, so many years earlier, they had been locked up. The key turned in the lock and the doors were opened. Two large hands rummaged for some time through the numbered files, full of yellowed documents. The competence of the researcher in the matter of archives soon prevailed in that ocean of documents rigorously organized.

In his large right hand ornate with the “Anello Piscatorio” (Fisherman’s ring) stopped some old rustling papers. In the

high stillness of the deserted archive John XXIII examined, for a time, smiling to himself, that ancient condemnation. He then shut the doors again and, with those papers in his hand, he returned to his apartment with the ermine trimmed Camauro (white fur-trimmed red bonnet associated with Medieval popes) lowered onto his eyes, while the shadows of the night descended upon the eleven-thousand deserted rooms of the Vatican, watched by the unhurried, equal pacing of the Swiss Guards.

That night, unconsciously, John XXIII inaugurated, with that, his secret tampering in the Vatican Archives, that which would later become, with Paul VI, a pattern to the detriment of History: that of making compromising documents regarding the person of the Pontiff and his closest entourage vanish.

Having become Pope, Roncalli did not refrain from commenting, as was his style, on that misadventure of youth and would say, one day, in the course of an audience, "...For, as you can see, even a priest placed under "observation" by the Holy Office can, on occasion, become Pope!" Revealing, in the joke, his deep-rooted scorn toward the institutions of the traditional Church.

But let us resume our story. Don Roncalli also had the opportunity, in those years at Bergamo, of spending a long time studying ancient and rare documents recovered in Milan's archbishopric archive, all attesting, not a casual detail, to the antiquity of the social deeds by the Bergamascan Catholics and their achievements, on the road

to “modernism,” already realized some century earlier.

”I was going to Milan,” he recounted, “to accompany my bishop and signore in the occasion of the gatherings of the preparatory commission of the VIII provincial council. These were held in the archbishopric around the Metropolitan cardinal A.C. Ferrari. Only a few clergy took part in it. Nothing more interesting for me, in those hours of idle waiting, than to call on the very rich archbishopric archive, which so many as yet unexplored treasures holds for the history of the Milanese archdioceses, and not only that. It struck me immediately the collection of the thirty-nine parchment volumes, bearing on the spine ‘Spiritual Archives – Bergamo.’ I explored them: I went back to see them in subsequent visits. What a pleasant surprise to my spirit! To meet, all gathered together, documents so copious and interesting: The Church of Bergamo in the most characteristic age for the renovation of its religious life, just after the Tridentino (Council), in the most heated fervor of the Catholic Counter Reformation!”

It is not difficult to suppose that Don Roncalli was stricken, leafing through that huge mass of yellowed pages, by the precursory modernity that characterized the action of the Bergamascan Church since those remote times. And he was influenced by it to a point as to obtain from his bishop the permit to devote time and studies to the critical revision of those ancient papers.

That great work will beget a full-bodied scientific publication, titled “Atti della visita apostolica di San Carlo

Borromeo a Bergamo (1575),” published with the “Fontes Ambrosiani” by the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, (ed. Olschi, Firenze).

Today, measuring the entity of the earthquake impressed on the Church by the action of Roncalli as Pope, we can well understand the passionate interest that confused the soul and the intellect of the young secretary of the bishop. First of all, the “modernity” of the Church of Bergamo.

That word which identifies itself with the more compelling and dangerous “progressivism,” has always had upon Roncalli a magnetic hold. It is sufficient to consider what the Vatican II Ecumenical Council has come to, in the matter of “overcoming” the contrasts between Catholics and Protestants, to account easily for the feverish interest of young Roncalli to frame, penetrate, and examine in depth that subject in all of its components.

The months and years of that life so thick with diverse experiences passed for Roncalli, constructing him, refining him, developing him in his already considerable natural structures of commitment and, above all, convictions. With the passing of those years the Catholic formation had reinforced itself and, naturally, the situation of an “Official Italy unlike the real Italy,” was sooner or later due to fade before the evidence of the facts.

Already in 1911, on the occasion of the Libyan campaign, the Italian government sought, for the first time to approach the Catholic circles.

Then came the fatal 1914. Fatal for the survival of Europe. Fatal for Don Roncalli, who saw the death of his bishop and great mentor, just on August 22 of that year, and stood alone waiting for events which did not take long, to thrust him from the quiet of the bishopric to the resounding din of the barracks.

CHAPTER III

In 1915, we find Angelo Roncalli in gray-green uniform.

He is a sergeant with the Royal Italian army's medical corps, committed, as a priest ahead of his times can be, to involving himself in a conflict in which the stake is the overthrow of the Central Empires, with the consequent Europe-wide reversal of the ancient balances.

It is Roncalli's "military" choice, as he didn't stop a moment to consider the possibility of being a priest among the soldiers, and only afterwards, by authority, will he be a chaplain. It is perhaps the earliest "official" indication in his life, of the lucid and perfect coherence between his thoughts and his acts.

Already in 1902, cutting short his studies in Rome, he had done his military service, at Bergamo, as a "one-year volunteer" with the 73d foot regiment, "Lombardia" brigade, discharged with the stripes of sergeant sown on his sleeves. Those stripes are now an asset to him, in the army's medical corps, along with his priestly status and his

title of Seminary professor, well known to his superiors. And so he can cut out some autonomous space for himself, within the inflexible machinery of the military apparatus, and make inroads, authoritatively, amongst the Secular and the “non-interventionist” Socialists that clutter the battalions, as a priest who, refusing any favorable treatment owed to his habit, had rather mingled with the fighting masses, proletarian amongst the proletarians, to plunge himself all the way into his social and progressive credo.

In spite of the open secularist avowal by 1915's Italy – be it kept in mind that the Italian government in London, while assuring France and Britain of Italy's intervention at the side of the new allies, demanded and imposed, as a secret return, that no post-war call be forwarded to Italy demanding the settlement of the Roman Question (the antagonism between Church and Italian state after 1870, which only later will be composed through the Concordat of Benito Mussolini) – the great majority of the Italian Catholics responded with unanimous participation to the call of the nation. “Those Catholics who for over half a century,” wrote “L'Osservatore Romano” fifty years after 1918, “had been pushed and confined into the official shadow by the exponents of the united Italy, did not refuse the call to duty, once the Nation was committed, even when they hadn't been in favor of the intervention. And they heroically faced death in combat. First among so many, as if to offer an example to those who acclaimed him and chose him as their leader, was Count Giuseppe Dalla Torre of Sanguinetto, later, for over forty years director of our newspaper, then president of the Azione Cattolica Italiana.

He volunteered. And with him set out not a few young executives, to attest with blood and life their loyalty, their civil commitment, their love for the Homeland. The Italian Catholics, these “Second class citizens,” in those terrible moments proved themselves as soldiers. No other Secularist Association was ever able to put together in those tragic years as many military decorations for gallantry as the Società della Gioventù Cattolica Italiana: one hundred gold medals, thousands of silver and bronze ones, war crosses, field mentions: ten thousand dead and wounded.” (Cfr. F. Bellegrandi, “La testimonianza nel sacrificio dei cattolici italiani” in “L'Osservatore Romano,” November 22, 1968).

At this juncture we must, however, turn the page and consider the flip side of the luminous façade. At a mass level, the 1914-1918 war was not a globally “felt” conflict. This is attested by the historiography that is not as publicized, obviously, by the interested parties, where it shows the high number of desertions that occurred within the units, where it lists the interventions by the war tribunals and execution squads, where it lists the episodes of insubordination, sometimes concluded with the killing of officers.

We must not forget, in fact, the Italian reality of those war years. If on the one hand, a certain national elite galvanized by Gabriele D'Annunzio, fought that conflict that had seen Italy turn its back on the old allies, in light of a romanticism that would, the war over, soon make way to the most bitter disillusionment – be it recalled Fiume's

occupation by D'Annunzio and his Legionnaires, in contempt of the provisions of the Versailles Pact – on the other, that very conflict marked, for the fighting Italian masses, a new awareness of their social consistence, of their numerical power, of their rights and future claims. Those very masses, demobilized, claimed in the streets their contribution of blood to a victory they had no interest in. And Italy was a step away from communism, had it not imposed itself, against all expectations (first of all those of Moscow's Bolsheviks), the Fascist movement of Benito Mussolini.

Roncalli, in those years, quenched his thirst at the socialist brook that snaked amidst the soldiers. Few times a coarse military cap did shield from the cold a head so rich of foresight and intuition. Those who had the easy venture of meeting in those times, which marked the death sentence of the old Europe, sergeant Roncalli, will still recall the amiability of that stocky non-commissioned officer from medical corps by the thick black moustache, of whom many privates ignored the true identity of priest, amiability that won you over immediately, and opened to intimacy.

But those who knew him more closely will still recall that his revolutionary conception of the near and not so near future, angelically simple, yet stubborn, absolute and bold, that he never stopped preaching. That obstinate digging in that made him stand fast, even when facing an infuriated general. Roncalli paid great attention, in the rear lines of the great massacres of World War I, to the wounded soldiers who packed the medication posts and the hospitals

where he lent his service. Sometimes he found, stretched out before him in a stretcher on the floor, a socialist cell-head. For the portentous ability of the sergeant-priest it was child's play to conquer the trust of that poor devil in need of medical attention.

The friendship would be a matter of days, and in the wards the buzz had it that sergeant Roncalli, "that big Veneto with the mustache," was a "comrade" that could be trusted. With great amiability he was able to win over the officers, whose benevolence was to him of the essence, so as to enjoy a certain autonomy and gratify of special treatment his Socialist comrades. Looking back, today, to the human swarming that moved, agitated, and contorted itself on the battle fields of that dusk of a world, one wonders to be meeting on the same scene men and ideas that would be protagonists, afterwards, of grandiose, apocalyptic, at times, big shakes in the history of humanity.

While the future John XXIII refined himself at that atypical school of progressivism, soiled with blood and mud, in those very days, in another sector of the war front, a stretcher carried to the rear lines a wounded Socialist, who a few years later would give plenty of trouble to his former party comrades: "bersagliere" Benito Mussolini. He who, then, took a peep a little farther due Northwest, would have stumbled into a young mustached lad from Braunau; name: Adolph, surname Hitler, hobbling along, with his Mauser on his shoulder, amidst the rubble of the French villages pounded by the artilleries, in the iron boots of a

Bavarian foot regiment.

World War I has rocked in its arms of iron and fire the first cries of the biggest and often ill-omened shakers of the modern world. But, probably, that big priest dressed as a medical corps sergeant of the Royal Italian army, went way past even the most celebrated of those personages.

That Lenin fellow whom in March 1917 imperial Germany had the brilliant idea of shipping back to Russia, in a sealed train compartment, to unleash Bolshevism and ignite that fearsome fuse that is still ominously blazing, under the bottom of the whole world.

It escapes my pen here, and I set it down integrally, a caustic judgment by the most famous Italian Vaticanist, Roman count Fabrizio Sarazani, on John XXIII's pontificate and its consequences. When I first heard it, from his own voice, in his Roman study in the Viale Parioli, it impressed me and made me reflect for a time. It is a judgment that reflects, in its crudeness, the evaluation of that famed scholar of Vatican things as to the extent of the catastrophe set in motion by the stocky priest from Sotto il Monte. Sarzani told me "...The mark left by Roncalli in the history of humanity goes far beyond Lenin's and Stalin's. In fact, if those have liquidated a few million human lives, John XXIII has liquidated two thousand years of Catholic Church."

All the experience accumulated in those four years of military life, in contact with peasants and workers in

uniform, Roncalli carried along with him after laying down the gray-green and taking up the habit once again. And it did soon rise, in the tumultuous post-war times, when strikes and unrests turned the country into a great bobbling organism, with the cavalry in the streets and the barricades, and the rallies blazing with red banners and gunshots and bombs and dead and wounded.

The demobbed masses fluctuated in the streets plunging slowly into unemployment, into discontent, into violence. Don Roncalli, now back at Bergamo, with no longer the protection of his old bishop, deprived, following that police report, of the professorship at the Seminary, had obtained from the new bishop the post of “spiritual director” of the clerics, scarcely back from the war and reinstated on their priesthood path. It was a task, as it can be seen, that did not allow a direct and influential take upon the students. The spiritual director operated mostly in the presence of the teaching body, confined to delivering sermons, spiritual exercises at Lent, and confessions.

By taking teaching away from him, they thought, in Rome, they had cropped the claws to the modernist rebel. But they were mistaken.

Indeed, Roncalli managed to keep awake amongst those clerics, made more restless by the taste of secular life they had experienced at the time of the war, the flame of progressivism, and to continue to “doing politics” covertly, now, always siding with those who uncobbled the streets to play target shooting with the “carabinieri” and the royal

guards. No one, however, this time was there to cover his back, and one day from Rome came a curt letter that transferred him without a moment's notice to that town, to work, well organized with other collaborators, at the reorganization of the missionary activity. It was December 1920. Pius X had died on the eve of the war, had been succeeded by Benedict XV and the next Pope, Pius XI, found Roncalli recently transferred to Propaganda Fide.

The information as to his “modernist” and “progressive” persona, received in the Vatican through the famous charges dating back to the times of the Bergamascan Seminary, had followed the priest from Sotto il Monte as a conspicuous label, throughout the pontificate of three Popes. In Rome, a more mature and experienced Roncalli grew extra careful, extra cautious, infinitely shrewder, and began to disguise himself, and organize, in order to map out a well-planned path for himself.

He checked his instincts and began to deploy his formidable will and his extraordinary brain. Sweetening the whole thing with the overflowing sympathy and simple-mindedness distinctive of his hide of Veneto countryman. His perfectly timed “change-of-skin” makes it possible for Roncalli, in that atmosphere swelled with social climbing, envy, double play that is the Roman Curia, to maneuver with surprising tact. Galvanizing, around his bulky person, as if it were a prodigious magnet, an ever-growing number of friends and sympathizers. The times when he wore out his big shoes running tirelessly from place to place in a Bergamascan province shaken by social ferments, slip

farther and farther on the horizon of Angelo Roncalli, who is now much more watchful and has learned from the Rome's monsignors to be unapproachable, to smudge his stands, to smile indulgently, when, inside, the pachyderm violence of his disposition is surging and bursting. His self-assurance bears, in due time, its first fruits. He is ordered as Apostolic Visitor to Bulgaria. A timid spring smiles upon Rome. It is March 1925.

On the 19 of that month, St. Joseph's day, in the Lombard Church of San Carlo al Corso, in Rome, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli is ordained bishop by cardinal Tacci, secretary of the Oriental Congregation.

The new bishop sets out for his mission. The Orient opens in front of him. The Orient with the violence of its colors, the contradictions of its history, the impenetrable smile of its thousand religions, welcomes Roncalli and envelopes him in its charming splendor. Here, destiny is awaiting the priest from Sotto il Monte. Beneath the sparkling phosphorescence of those "One thousand and one Night" skies, the road that will lead Roncalli to climb the steps of the See of Peter will indeed be marked out.

With the title of Archbishop of Aeropoli, Roncalli arrives in Bulgaria, emerged from the Treaty of Neuilly, to gather a sense as to the real situation of the Catholics, both Latin and Oriental, and reorganize their ranks. He travels to every corner of the country, by automobile, and, when the roads do not allow it, on donkey's back, to get to know and penetrate the reality of that people, hard to comprehend and

win over. The contacts with the Christian communities scattered all over the Bulgarian territory are difficult to establish. Finally, in 1927, at the end of a most careful and patient diplomatic work, he is able to meet the Metropolitan of the Armenians, Stepanosse Hovegnimian.

In Roncalli's life this meeting can be defined as the first step on the road of that ecumenism that will be the pivotal point upon which will beat, without shifting a single degree, the magnetic hand of the policy of the man who revolutionized the contemporary world, in only five years of pontificate.

Monsignor Roncalli's residence in Bulgaria marks the first success of his portentous personality. First and foremost he is acting on his own. He is free to undertake, that is, within the boundaries of his diplomatic action, all those decisions that he deems material to the fulfillment of his mandate. He does not respond, immediately, to anyone, of his initiatives. In addition, he is working in a country that, although amongst the most hospitable yet in the civilized world – the only country that allocated in the state budget a significant sum for the Armenian and Russian refugees –, due to its host of religions and ethnic groups, would constitute a great problem for a diplomat of the Holy See who had proceeded along the lines of a traditional diplomatic approach. Thus an ideal terrain to a Roncalli who contrives a diplomacy of his own, made of informal, direct contacts, and concrete, expeditious human relationships.

Personages from all political and religious faiths are invited to his table, so long as they can serve his ends. And the table of the Pope's envoy will not so easily be forgotten, by those who have the venture to lunch or dine at it. It is, perhaps, Roncalli's only "weakness," the good cuisine and good wine. His table will always be full of succulent food and his good appetite will never falter. It will always be remarkable, throughout the rest of his life. With the exception of the latter months, when the anguish of repentance will fall onto his shoulders, along with the illness, crushing him.

In 1931, the Holy See disposes that Roncalli's temporary mission become a permanent one, and the bishop from Sotto il Monte is appointed Apostolic Delegate. The first Vatican ever in Bulgaria. He will remain in that country three more years, until at the end of 1934, he is ordered from Sophia to Istanbul, as well as Athens, with the title of Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece, as archbishop of Mesembria.

That is to say, to leave a country that has become your own home, for another, rather, two others, wherein resentments and contrasts are pumping up a dangerous tension that could burst out at any moment. In Athens, in fact, it has not been forgotten that following the intervention by the League of Nations, they had to swallow the invasion of Petric, occupied militarily in October 1925. Moreover, Bulgaria is likely to be strengthened by the personal involvement of King Boris into national politics: from the suppression of ORIM to the formation of the

Kiosseivanof's cabinet, to the military alliance with Italy.

As a consequence, in February 1934 it had been shaping up, to Bulgaria's detriment that Balkan Understanding devised by Paris as a continuation of the Little Understanding. In this state of affairs, the transfer of the representative of Rome from Sophia none other than to Athens, causes a certain degree of alarm throughout the Greek world. Worse still, Roncalli is sent off as Apostolic Delegate not only to Athens, but also to Istanbul, capital of the forthcoming Turkish republic, at a time when the paragraphs of the Locarno Treaty, are being hammered out, as well as Ankara's. With the result that a million Greeks were forced to leave Turkey, and half a million Turks forced to leave Greece. With all the imaginable political and religious implications and repercussions, when one considers that amongst the repatriated from Istanbul and Anatolia is a large group of Catholic Greeks who for generations had gotten used to living in Turkey, obeying the institutions of the Ottoman Empire rather than their own bishop. This Catholic autonomy reinstated after generations into the compact Greek Orthodox block, will not fail to cause problems of a certain import. In this simmering reality is grafted the action of the Pope's envoy. His life takes on immediately dramatic tones. He will be under the constant watch of official authorities and religious and political sects that breathe deeply the ancient and bloody rivalry between the Greek and Turkish worlds, and the exasperated diffidence, at that juncture, all Balkan, of the two countries toward Bulgaria, whose pungent odor the bishop from Sotto il Monte carries with him, clotted

between the creases of his Episcopal habit. So Roncalli would have to get used to moving about in civilian clothes, to sit up at night, abruptly awakened by sudden gunshots exploded by strangers near his home, to dodge, in the streets, the victims of unknown hands, and in that atmosphere of suspect and violence, mend and carry forward his difficult diplomatic mission. Those who knew him in those years recall the Apostolic Delegate, in simulated clothes, as they say, mostly dark, with a cloth-hat lowered onto his forehead. Very reserved, with the concern and at times fear that transpired behind that smile of his, always the same and reassuring. It is known for certain that at that time Roncalli, to survive as a Pope's emissary, had to come to terms with the local environment.

He had numerous secret meetings with figures and personalities – at the time influential – that guaranteed him, sometimes decisively, the good outcome of his initiatives.

And it is precisely in that gloomy Balkan period that his Masonic initiation is historically placed.

CHAPTER IV

In the book “Le profezie di papa Giovanni” (The Prophecies of Pope John), printed in 1976 by Edizioni Mediterranee, the author, Pier Carpi, recounts the story of that initiation.

The year is 1935. Freemasonry reaches out to the archbishop of Masembria, Apostolic Delegate in Turkey, in the most difficult moment of his diplomatic activity. Roncalli joins the secret sect as a “Rose Cross,” states the author, and takes on the name of Johannes. He, a priest, knows well the value of that name. The significance and the carrying charm of that name that carried along, in history, the movement of the “Followers of the light,” the “Giovanniti,” that is. In the Masonic sect of which he is now part, priest Roncalli knows his way around, and recognizes, beyond the vetoes and the inflexible condemnation of the Church, the leading threads to him, a priest, familiar. As that St. John’s Gospel, laid down in the Lodge, to witness the devotion of those affiliated to the “Enlightenment” Evangelist. The Masonic hand timely

“rescues” Roncalli and his mission from the quicksands in which they are slowly sinking. The action of that powerful hand fulfils, at that moment, with a single gesture, a rescue and a choice. From that point on, in fact, the life of Roncalli is mapped out. Until the day of his death. Not by chance, twenty-three years later, coming out of the Sistine Chapel as a Pope, he will choose the name of Johannes, taken there, on the Bosphorus, upon his Masonic initiation. And he will love to shock the informed, calling himself like that other John XXIII, the schismatic. And he will raise his own coat of arms, with a tower and two lilies standing out, to which not few experts of Freemasonry will attribute a significance at all emblematic: The tower of the Masonic temple, flanked by two knights, “Reason” and “Instinct.” Naturally, the Vatican denied it. But they were brief denials, of no import. Uttered by persons bound body and soul to the destiny of John XXIII. It has never enlarged, instead, upon whatever has hitherto been written in detail on the issue. Moreover, that Freemasonry had always looked at the Catholic Church with close attention is a fact that does not escape the informed. Listings of the most eminent affiliated were published, and today is no mystery to the great Magisterium that the echelons of the Church are present amongst the Freemason brothers. I am relating here two Masonic judgments on the Church, expressed during the VI Initiatory Convent of Strasburg:

“And we are certain that much of the esoteric knowledge we believed to be lost to our initiatory orders, are jealously kept and seriously administered in two esoteric institutions, the Catholic Church and Islam. It is time to acknowledge

the wishes of our masters.” (From Friar Aldhiran’s address). And: “...As for the Opus Dei, this organization that unites mystic to initiation, it is no case that its founder, monsignor Escrivà, one of the most enlightened men of this century, had closed at 999 and not another number, the maxims of his work, Camino, that has conquered millions of consciences and a spiritual reawakening. 999 is the maximum initiatory number, that of the triumph upon the Beast in John’s Apocalypse.” (From Friar Manothés’s address).

At least in Rome, in well-informed circles, the names of the Freemason cardinals are no secret.

A priest friend of mine, Don Enrico Pompilio, military chaplain with the rank of major of the “carabinieri,” confided to me to have received from a French monsignor, a renowned lecturer met at a congress, a most grave revelation about the sudden and tragic and scandalous death of cardinal Jean Danielou. As it will be remembered, that cardinal from France, famous for his erudition, was found dead in Paris, in the apartment of a young female dancer. The circumstances of that death were never ascertained. Well, that French monsignor revealed to Don Pompilio, to whom he was bound by an old friendship, that cardinal Danielou had been destroyed, physically and morally, by Freemasonry because he was about to publicize the list of all the most eminent cardinals affiliated to the sect.

To Freemasonry, Roncalli was to be a means, a pawn. It is no case that two years after his election to the pontificate,

in 1960, he would promote a series of studies on the esoteric and initiatory societies and their relationship with the Church, initiating that process that would bring about the overriding of the excommunication of Freemasonry.

Some events, known and not so known, lend credibility to the premise of a Roncalli-mason. For example, the fact that the election of the patriarch of Venice at the Conclave of 1958 was known in advance. Today, ten years after that Conclave, before the progressive loosening of the millenary structures of the Church impressed by the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, someone has decided to reveal important and corroborating documents. One of these is the letter by cardinal Eugenio Tisserant to an abbot professor of Canon Law, in which the French cardinal declares illegal the election of John XXIII, because “wanted” and “arranged” by forces “extraneous” of the Holy Spirit. (Cfr. “Vita” of September 18, 1977 pg. 4 “Le profezie sui papi nell'elenco di San Malachia”, by “Il Minutante”).

Hither and thither, in the long itinerary of Roncalli's, should we say, pre-papal activity, transpire at times enlightening reflexes, which make Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli appear to us as the “Rose Cross” pawn of the Freemason brothers.

In 1941, for example. One further step on the path of ecumenism is incredibly “set forward” by the delegate of the Pope. At Sophia, where he is on a call, a meeting is arranged for Roncalli, in an elevator! with the Orthodox Metropolitane Stefan, and on that itinerant and neutral

territory, pretending fortuity, he hugs him. Roncalli knows perfectly the hazard of that meeting, and the risks he is exposing himself to, toward the conservative forces of the Church. But that meeting is a necessary tessera in the construction of the great mosaic that, one day, would be the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, and had to be put in place. Thus the pawn let itself be moved on the chessboard, the move was successful, and the game went on. Meanwhile World War II breaks out and rages. Roncalli is amidst the rubbles of Greece, in the thick of a countrywide battle. Then, when least expected, the pawn suffers an abrupt shift. A ciphered telegram turns up in his hands: “284145 stop 416564 stop 855003 stop 641100 stop...” The cipherer translates laconic: “Report immediately stop. Transferred nuncio Paris stop. Tardini.”

In 1944 a big problem had arisen between the liberated France and the Holy See. General De Gaulle wanted to carry out a tough purge among the prelates compromised with Petain’s collaborationist regime.

In that state of things, in the afternoon of December 30, 1944, there arrived at Ville Combè the new Paris nuncio Roncalli. The official appointment was dated 23, but he presented his credentials to general De Gaulle only on the morning of January 1, 1945. The ceremony, at 9.45 sharp, was quick. Minister Bidault and ambassador Lozè accompanied De Gaulle. Presently a little episode took place that today we might call a premonition. Immediately after monsignor Roncalli’s credentials, at 10.30 sharp, the diplomats present at Paris would present, as customary, the

new-year wishes to the French president. Dean of the diplomats in France was, at that moment, the Soviet ambassador, who was due to deliver the inaugural address. The Russian diplomat had already positioned himself at the head of the ambassadors and plenipotentiaries, with the sheets of the address in his hands, when, moments before 10.30, contemporarily, almost, to De Gaulle, the new nuncio Roncalli, by force of international rule, now, the new Dean, rushed to place himself before the bewildered Soviet ambassador and began to deliver the official address. It was 10:30 of the first day of 1945. Thirteen years later Roncalli, now John XXIII, would rush to place himself, with just five years of pontificate, ahead of the Soviet Union with his revolutionary and progressive policy, which opened the Church to the dialogue with the communists and the acceptance of Marxism, “So long as that doctrine can help in solving the problems of society.”

Even in his new mission, success smiled at the priest from Sotto il Monte. He succeeds in his intent of not satisfying entirely the French government, without upsetting it too much. His home hosts meetings with unpredictable personalities, nurtures personal and frequent relations with exponents of the left, and makes friends with figures and ministers belonging to Freemasonry.

Of that French period is an incident, unknown to most, which raises for a moment the curtain on the alleged Roncalli membership in the Masonic sect. His most eminent highness, prince Chigi Albani della Rovere, then Great Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, had

received in the Gran Magistero's Rome office a letter from cardinal Canali, heavy as a massive boulder: Pius XII, protector of the Order, had just learned, with great pain, that the minister of the Order of Malta in Paris was a freemason. They hastened, in the Magistral palace of the Via dei Condotti, to rummage through the file of baron Marsaudon, recently appointed in place of count Pierredon, who had been retired. It was discovered, with a certain relief, that he had been made "Grand Cross of Magistral Grace" at the suggestion of his predecessor and, above all, appointed minister on recommendation by the nuncio in Paris, Roncalli.

The outcome of that first investigation was immediately reported to the Vatican, to cardinal Canali, who was heard crying:

"Poor Roncalli! I'm sorry I have to embarrass him and I hope that this would not cost him the cardinalial galero..." The Vatican arranged in the strictest reserve that the Order send a trusted person to Paris at once, to carry out in depth the delicate discovery. The Great Magisterium was in an awkward situation. All three personages involved in the story had indeed to be treated with regard. The nuncio, for his precious contribution to the Order of Malta in the closing of certain business deals in Argentina; count Pierredon for his lengthy services, first at Bucharest, and then at Paris; Baron Marsaudon himself for his meritorious commitment in order to obtain the official recognition of the Order by the French government. After a careful and accurate selection was named "Magistral Visitor" a

chaplain professed of the Order, monsignor Rossi Stockalper, who was also canonic of Santa Maria Maggiore and thus in Vatican's hands. He left for Paris at once. He had been advised to begin his discovery with father Berteloot, of the Company of Jesus, and an expert in Masonic issues. The Jesuit, consulted in the strictest discretion, confirmed to him that baron Marsaudon not only was a Freemason, but "thirty-third level" of Masonry and life-member of the Council of the Great Lodge of the Scottish Rite. Monsignor Rossi Stockalper continued his tour. He learned very little from the archbishop of Paris monsignor Feltin, who sent him instead to his general vicar, monsignor Bohan, "who knew the baron more closely." Here, for the envoy from Rome, was another surprise: the general vicar had pulled out of a safe and scattered over the table a series of incontrovertible documents, among which an issue of the "Journal Officiel de l'Etat francais," published in Vichy during the (German) occupation, in which Yves Marie Marsaudon was indicated among the followers of Freemasonry; three or four copies of the Masonic magazine "Le Temple" containing a few of his articles, and an informative profile of the subject. No document existed relating to an abjuration. The Magistral Visitor, with his heart in pain, dragged on to 10, avenue President Wilson, residence of the nuncio. He asked Roncalli, tactfully, for circumstantial information about the mason-baron. The sturdy priest from Sotto il Monte, between a smile and a joke, sent the chaplain of the Order of Malta back to the secretary of the nunciature, monsignor Bruno Heim. This priest, today the "apostolic legate" in Great Britain, ended up startling the envoy from Rome,

first with his clergy-man and the smoking pipe in his teeth, then with his amazing statements on Freemasonry, defined as “One of the last forces of social conservation in today’s world, and, therefore, a force of religious conservation,” and with an enthusiastic judgment on baron Marsaudon who had the merit of making the nunciature grasp the transcendent value of Freemasonry. Precisely for this his merit, the Nuncio of Paris, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, had sustained and approved his appointment to minister of the Order of Malta in Paris. Monsignor Stockalper at that turn had remained dumbfounded, and received the ultimate blow when, protesting that Canon 2335 of the Canon Law calls for the excommunication for the affiliated to Freemasonry, he was told by his interlocutor, between a puff and another at the scented smoke of his big pipe, that “the nunciature of Paris was working in great secret to reconcile the Catholic Church with Freemasonry.” It was *1950!* This episode seems to expose the connivance of Roncalli with Freemasonry. The post-conciliar Church will indeed reconcile with the secret sect. I wish to wrap up this subject, reporting a revelation made to me a while ago, by count Paolo Sella of Monteluce. This figure, an economist, politician, writer and journalist, who was a close friend of Umberto of Savoy, and who boasts a direct descent from the founder of the Italian Historical Right, senator Quintino Sella of Biella, shared with me, in the quiet of his Roman home on the slopes of Monte Mario, the evidence in his possession, of the assault by Freemasonry on the Catholic Church. I had found in his drawing room Vaticanist Gabriella di Montemayor, who had been the go-between for our encounter. Count Sella was reorganizing some

papers on the low table in front of him. The sunset burst in from Monte Mario and gilded the shelves loaded with ancient volumes with their spine of parchment, and the reddish beams of the sun, filtering through the curtains barely moved by the evening breeze, enlivened the portraits of the ancestors watching severely from the walls that learned descendant of theirs, sitting in an armchair before me. Then the count, raising his face and staring at me, began to speak: "... In September 1958, about seven or eight days before the Conclave, I was at the Sanctuary of Oropo, attending one of the usual dinners at Attilio Botto's, a Biellese industrialist who fancied gathering around him competent from various branches, to discuss the different issues. That day had been invited a character I knew as a high Masonic authority in contact with the Vatican. He told me, driving me home, that "...The next Pope would not be Siri, as it was murmured in some Roman circles, because he was too authoritarian a cardinal. They would elect a Pope of conciliation. The choice has already fallen on the patriarch of Venice Roncalli. "Chosen by whom?" I rejoined surprised. "By our Masonic representatives in the Conclave," responded placidly my kind escort. And then it escaped me:

"There are freemasons in the Conclave?" "Certainly," was the reply, "the Church is in our hands." I rejoined perplexed: "Who, then, is in charge in the Church?" After a brief pause, the voice of my escort uttered precisely: "No one can say where the upper echelons are. The echelons are occult."

The following day, Count Sella transcribed in an official document, now kept in the safe of a notary, the full name of that character and his stunning statement complete with the year, month, day, and hour. Which, days later, would turn out absolutely exact.

CHAPTER V

But let us go back to Paris, at 10, Avenue President Wilson. Roncalli, nuncio in France, is more and more his own self. With respect to the Balkan, Bulgarian, and later Greek and Turkish period, to him who observed with aloofness his political action and his pastoral work, he seems to have mastered more confidence, authority, and determination. The France of those years endures anguishing crisis. The labor world is in turmoil. As always, in the events that see Roncalli as a protagonist, the stake is the same: the overthrow of the old world and the promotion of new times, revolutionized and revolutionary. Chain-strikes paralyze the France in which the priest from Sotto il Monte represents the Pope.

Violence takes hold of the masses. Proletariat and gendarmerie are clashing in the streets of Paris, in the suburbs, throughout the province. To the nuncio, it is but a re-enactment of the far-off days when Bolshevism attempted to seize power in Italy. It is like going back to the Ranica days, when with his bishop, Radini-Tedeschi, he had sided with impetuous imprudence with the violent. Yet this time, by George! he, Roncalli, is the nuncio. To put it

differently, he is the Pope in France. The game has therefore changed.

All the aces are in his sleeve. And his action unfolds directly, powerful, in the light of day. The nuncio will side with the strikers. And with him, behind him, all of the French clergy.

To the priests, in those years, open dissent was still a meaningless word.

Roncalli hauls with him, in organizing ready-Francis-support and in pronouncing resounding exhortation to resistance, the bishops of Nice, Clermont-Ferrand, Tarbes Lourdes, and the archbishop of Carthage. Aware of the unpopularity his stand is drawing upon himself in government circles, he is now seldom seen at the Foreign Ministry. In those years, numerous episodes portray a Roncalli “ready” for the pontificate that is awaiting him. He sides with the worker-priests, that movement that, to be sure, numbered a few samples of authentic pastoral experience, yet was mostly the easy expedient of bad priests who defied hierarchy, and, mingling with the secular, served as forerunners to those defrocked priests who today live totally integrated in the world, and celebrate Mass at night, in the kitchen, with their woman by their side. Beneath the vaults of the nunciature there walked, stood chattering, and sipped at excellent iced Pernods, the most blatant atheism that enlightenment Paris could then account for, throughout its legendary districts. A frequent guest at the nunciature, amongst other “founders” of French

atheist progressivism, was in those years Radical professor Edoardo Herriot. Roncalli kept a set table every day of the week, for the endless procession of guests who in turn sat before him, at lunch or dinner, in the most absolute discretion. A bottle of good aged wine, more often than not Italian – the cellar of the nunciature, with Roncalli, was abundantly stocked – represented to the nuncio, who knew well whom he was dealing with, the safest and most infallible connecting link, to establish “impossible” relations with the cream of French anti-clericalism. Which sooner or later would serve the scope of the nuncio and then, who knows? of the Pope.

The French soil, with all its revolutionary and enlightenment tradition, represented the ideal territory for a man like Roncalli. It was certainly the last important chapter of his preparation toward the “breakaway” pontificate.

He completed this preparation in a superlative way. So much so that the cardinalitial purple would arrive punctually in spite of cardinal Canali’s perplexities at the time of the Marsaudon scandal. On January 15, 1953, he receives the cap at the Elysee, from the hand of president Vincent Auriol. A socialist, ultra-progressive misbeliever. And a long-standing friend. So close as to indulge Roncalli’s weakness to let a group of his Bergamascan acquaintances attend the ceremony. Although on the cushion of Charles X, Roncalli, as the ceremonial calls for, must bend his knees and bow down before the socialist atheist Auriol, who at that time is representing the Pontiff.

A singular game of contrasts that might excite reflection. And that singular game of contrasts seems cut out for the priest from Sotto il Monte. Roncalli galvanized the French episcopate, dragging it into a leftward race that at times surprised and overtook the communists themselves. To the point that in the first statement by the assembly of cardinals and archbishops – while the deputies of the Constituent Assembly were elaborating the fundamental law of the new State emerged from World War II – those bishops, worked up by Roncalli, thought well to put down in a shattering document, the following condemnations, expressed and articulated with Episcopal aptitude: 1) “Of the proletarian condition. Of the state of uncertainty, economic dependence and often misery, that deprives numerous workers of any authentically human living; 2) of the supremacy of money, when the quest for profit and return is put ahead of the just concern for the human person of the worker; 3) of the degenerated business that becomes a means of exploitation toward private ends and interests, whereas it should constitute a service rendered to the community; 4) of the opposition of the classes, that are instead mutually united by essential communal interests, and must be intended for the common benefit of the profession; 5) of materialism, which has sacrificed to the excesses of a soulless competition and to the lust for money, the rights of the human being.” Moreover, the text looks forward to: “The progressive access of every worker to private property; the progressive participation of the worker in the organization of labor, business, profession, and society; the realization of a professional organization with trade unions, business committee and mixed panels.”

This document, a double-edged weapon masterly sharpened, printed in thousands and thousands of copies care of the nunciature, was distributed to the striking masses. It was the hammer that swooped down on the primed charge of subversion, setting it off.

The absolute “unsuspectingness” of the signatories of those five condemnations - in those years the Pacellian Church was truly above suspicion and firmly anti-Marxists, - surprised and won over the French proletariat in turmoil. It took the prefectures aback, enraged some members of the government. Those sheets with the “five condemnations” printed with the monies of the nunciature, marched in the streets, creased in the pockets and sacks of the violent, between packs of Gauloise cigarettes and Molotov cocktails destined for the gendarmerie. The crafty smile of the Bergamascan nuncio glittered at the bonfires of the urban guerrilla, while the ancient structures of the State were being progressively dismantled, heralding the new age of the Western world.

Roncalli’s career continues, carried forward, it seems to some, by a mysterious hand. The cardinalitial purple is followed by the appointment as patriarch of Venice, with the immediate transfer to the “Serenissima” city on the lagoon. Once again the pawn on the great chessboard has been moved. Brought closer to Rome, prepared for Rome. The ailing Pius XII, is no longer himself. While his government action is gradually losing its drive, around his throne the power of his foes keeps growing. Roncalli, in Venice, is amidst his own folks. He feels at home. His

secretary, carefully picked in the pack of those open to Marxism, is a frail, neurotic-looking priest, a certain Don Loris Capovilla, whose scarcely known credential is a brother, a communist cell-head from Mestre, right there, a stone's throw from Venice. Therefore warmly recommended to Roncalli directly by the PCI (Italian Communist party). This priest, consumed by progressive fanaticism, will be made bishop by Paul VI. His way of running the diocese of Chieti, of which he is put in charge, embitters that clergy to the point that he will soon have to be transferred to Loreto. Here, the former secretary of John XXIII finds this ancient Sanctuary too triumphalist – the Italian Lourdes – to his progressive taste, and thus he orders that the decors be dismantled, starting with the precious glowing lamps that crowned the high altar, which he has sawed up, to make room for the little table-altar of the novel liturgy, leaving not even the window of the House of Mary untouched. But someone files a claim with the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti (Italy's art works conservation agency), and the hand of the iconoclast is fortunately stopped on time.

The pawn, Roncalli, now plays, in addition, the small game of the Italian Communist party. The secretary of the patriarch of Venice, up to his neck in a murky past of red violence tied to the 1944-45 civil war in northern Italy, is in fact the black guardian angel of Roncalli. He will warily influence him, guiding his steps, until the last moment of his life.

The funds of the patriarch of Venice are now made

available to the local communist chapters. The Communist party's manifests are printed with the monies of the patriarch.

It will cause sensation at the time, the not completely hushed up Lourdes' episode. When Roncalli, Legate of the Pope, goes to consecrate that underground Basilica, to the French authorities who wish to offer a "contribution" for the return trip and ask for the amount to be made out on the check, the patriarch of Venice replies, smiling, "One million Francs." The check is made out to him, not prior, however, to being photocopied. All that snarl of business and covert political activities passes through the hands of Don Capovilla. Cardinal Roncalli, meanwhile, from time to time betrays the signs of an incipient arteriosclerosis. He will be treated by professor Togni, brother of Christian democrat congressman Giuseppe Togni, who will be minister of state in future governments several times.

It is in this period that Roncalli begins to develop a keen interest for Soviet Russia, and that brand of communism.

Soon that interest, fomented with skilful cleverness by Don Loris Capovilla, makes way to a genuine fondness, to an emotional predilection. The dream of a rapprochement between the Church and the Holy See and the country of the greatest social revolution in history is now born.

The meeting of John XXIII with Khrushchev's son-in-law, Adzhubei, is born at that time, in Venice, between the silent glistening of the canals in which the ancient palaces are

reflected, in the odor of the “calli” greened with moulds, where the echo of the cries of the gondoliers dies out.

Once Auriol is passing through Venice, and Roncalli goes out to hug him publicly, in the lobby of his hotel. He takes him to the Patriarchio, shows him Pius X’s room, humble as a parish priest’s. And says he promptly, to his close French socialist friend, “He was also a son of poor folks. Like me. We make do with little.” With Cardinal Wyszinsky, finally free to travel to the Vatican, when he stops in Venice on his way to Rome, Roncalli is more cautious. He refrains from speaking his mind. All he does is guide him around.

He knows that to the Polish, populist discourses are like smoke in the eyes. And that Wyszinsky learned the hard way not to love Soviet Russia and the communists at large. Instead, when cardinal Felin, archbishop of Paris, drops by in Venice, he escorts him to San Marco. It just happens to be the patron saint day. April 25, 1955. In Italy, according to the new republican calendar, this date marks the most sacred day of the year, that of the 1945 partisan insurrection against the Nazi-fascists. A mere coincidence? Emerging from the Basilica arm in arm with his French colleague, he asks a band playing in the piazza to perform the “Marseillaise.” The cross-reference to the French revolution, by the patriarch of Venice, on the day elevated to the splendor of foremost festivity, all and absolutely Marxist, in Italy, ignites the souls of the Veneto region’s politicians. Roncalli’s popularity is at a zenith.

In that Venetian stretch the priest from Sotto il Monte traveled a lot. In Italy and abroad. Yet incognito, he traveled far and wide, by car, only in Germany. To “get a hunch of that inconceivable reality that was the ‘German miracle’.” Of this period is the “rapprochement” between Roncalli and Giovanni Battista Montini. Or, more precisely, the rapprochement between Giovanni Battista Montini and Roncalli. Indeed, ever since the times of the “affair” Marsaudon, that shook the foundations of the Order of Malta, some prelates from Pius XII’s Secretary of State reported the evident satisfaction of the Brescian monsignor in seeing Roncalli exposed to a possible Papal reprimand. Then, when Roncalli was made cardinal, and Montini was obstinately denied the purple by Pius XII, the monsignor with the owl-eyes suddenly changed course. And from Milan, he set out to work relentlessly, in unison with the two cardinals, Belgian Jozef Suenens and Dutch Bernard Jan Alfrink, to prepare Roncalli’s election.

The earliest Montinian “intuition” of that Delfinato in the shadow of Roncalli, that in a few years will bring the Bergamascan monsignor to the coronation in St. Peter, is placed in those years.

It is Montini, for the record, who rushes to escort to Rome the brothers of Roncalli when the patriarch of Venice is elected Pope, passing, with deliberate contempt, over the head of the bishop of Bergamo, to whom the pleasant duty would pertain. This expedient “exploit” will be Montini’s first act, of John XXIII’s reign, on the path of his ascent to the See of Peter.

In Rome, after the death of the Pope, the world of Pius XII is dissolving like snow in the sun. As it was being predicted in close well-informed circles, as it had been established long, long before Eugenio Pacelli would expire on the shores of lake Castelgandolfo, Roncalli comes out elected by the Conclave. Now, at length, he will be the renovator. The first sensational act, which will leave the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church breathless, is the choice of his name. But what had John XXIII meant in the history of the Papacy?

We find the answer in Ferdinando Gregorovius's "Storia della città di Roma nel Medioevo" (History of Medieval Rome), which introduces to us Baldassare Cossa, the anti-Pope and history's first John XXIII. The German historian wrote that "...Baldassare Cossa was born of a noble Neapolitan family, and it was said that in his youth he had practiced, with his brothers, the lucrative trade of the pirate. He was earlier an excellent soldier; then he studied at Bologna, in that university, and therein led a dissolute life; and Boniface IX had there elected him archdeacon, and then had taken him to Rome as his attendant. In the Curia, where the fortunes often arrive exceedingly abundant, he had used his position for profit, selling indulgences and lending money at usury. He had become cardinal of St. Eustachio, and had finally returned as a Legate to Bologna, where he spared no boldness in order to preserve the Signoria of Romagna. His contemporaries are agreed that he was a man adept in worldly trades, as ignorant and inept in religious things. Neither lacking were cries of indignation for the exaltation of this man, who had not

distinguished himself for any merit, but had rather made himself famous for many crimes, whose guilty past and the suspicion that he had killed two Popes berated the office that had been conferred on him...”

The famous German historian, who spoke his mind and was not bound, by interest, to any conspiracy of silence, continues on that tenor of extreme clearness, recounting that this man, energetic and shrewd, cardinal since 1402, achieved a great power under the weak Alexander V, whom he succeeded in 1410. Like his homonymous five and a half centuries later, he summoned an Ecumenical Council in Rome, for the reformation of the Church. But unlike his homonymous of our times, his Council, despite the dreadful reputation of the promulgator, represented no cataclysm to the Church of the time. In fact, it did not go beyond a condemnation of Wycliffe’s heresy.

Flying from Rome before Ladislao, King of Naples, against whom he had supported Louis of Angiò, hoping to get the better of the legitimate Pope Gregory XII and of the Avignon’s Pope Benedict XIII, he allowed Sigismund, king of the Romans, to summon that Council of Constanza that would depose him as a Simoniac, in 1415. He was at last elected cardinal, Bishop of Frascati by Martin V, to whom he submitted in 1419, the year of his death. Gregory concludes his portrait of John XXIII with these words, “...this Cossa, most iniquitous representative of the old Church, a tyrant falling under the burden of his own crimes; this Cossa who makes himself the judge of John Hus, enthusiast of the moral idea of humanity; this Cossa is

a profile deserving of contempt, so that the eye will not endure the sight of him.”

This was the model Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli based himself upon, resurrecting that “taboo” name for himself. It was the first resounding slap to Tradition by the priest from Sotto il Monte, who was just minutes into holding in his hands the fate of the Church. It was his challenge to the world. When the Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, with a shudder, hollered from the Loggia delle Benedizioni to the Roman people gathered in St. Peter’s Square, that name for centuries unuttered in the Vatican, many old cardinals secretly crossed themselves, and the cries of the ghosts resounded in the eleven thousand rooms of the small state.

CHAPTER VI

The anecdotic of John XXIII is probably the most copious the life of a Pope can boast, in relation, that is, to its brevity. And, reading between the lines, it turns out to be a surprising and reliable guide for the identification of the person, in his most unexpected realities. The composite personality of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, with its wealth of implications and quick-tempered nuances, had an essential part in the revolutionary program of his policy. An assertive human nature that had a perfect grip on his fellow man and his ideas, essentially thanks to that unalterable semblance of simplicity and amiability that always characterized John XXIII, and that indeed concealed, with the ease that naturally came with his personality, an unyielding and inflexible disposition, comparable, in consistency, to the bulky proportions of his peasant build.

That he had been conscious as to the how and whys the Conclave had placed the Pontifical Triregno (Tiara) on his head, it may be inferred from the fact that he more than hinted to everyone that his successor should be Giovanni Battista Montini, that same Montini who, as we have seen, not by chance, as Roncalli is elected Pope, rushes to

accompany to Rome the brothers of the new Pontiff. He noted it in his diary. And he could not wait to tell him in person, when, as a newly made Pope, he met the bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference. "On that occasion," recalls monsignor Arrigo Pintonello, at the time Military Ordinary for Italy, "we bishops were lined up along the walls of the vast hall. John XXIII stood before each one of us, exchanging a greeting, a word. When he was before me, he came to attention, and, saluting militarily, he introduced himself as Sergeant Angelo Roncalli." I still remember my embarrassment and that of the bishops present, in seeing the Pope play around like that. Then, as he stood before Montini, he stared at him for a time, smiling, held his hands, and cried, "It was you that should have been elected, not I. I've been elected by mistake!" Indeed, Montini will be the favorite of John XXIII. Topping the list of the new cardinals created in 1958, Montini works at the draft of Roncalli's most important addresses, and during the first session of the Council he is hosted in special apartments, in the Vatican, that the Pope had had personally appointed for him.

As, on the one hand, John XXIII pursued point after point his progressive policy, dismissing the advice and suggestions of the College of Cardinals and of the episcopate, on the other his diplomatic ability and his subtle knowledge of man suggested to him that nothing should be changed, of the Vatican's exterior, that could alarm the public opinion, poorly or badly informed on secret things. Thus, for example, the Court and Court-life remained the same. Indeed, some positions that in the latter years of Pius

XII's pontificate had remained vacant or had been neglected and abolished, were reinstated. Notable, for the singularity of the all but formal procedure, was the restoration in his position of the old Master of the House, "commendatore" Pio Manzia. This dignitary, in advanced old age and the archetype of the old "Black" Roman gentleman, that is, by family tradition bound to the Pontiff and to the clerical circles, as soon as Pope-elect Roncalli, after blessing the people from the Lodge of St. Peter had retired to take refreshment in a specially appointed room, had the nerve to knock on that door and, as the Pope invited him in, he introduced himself and explained that for over fifty years he had filled the abolished position of "Master of the House of His Holiness." Roncalli cut him short and reinstated him in the position on the spot. Then he poured the wine that was before him on the table, into two glasses, and drank with the aged gentleman in tears, wishing him a long and happy life. The papal apartment, at the Apostolic Palace, and the villa of Castelgandolfo remained as they were, as unchanged remained the pomp of the ancient ritual. The Pope appeared at St. Peter on the Sedia Gestatoria (portable throne), surrounded by the religious and secular Court in full ranks, with the silver trumpets playing Silveri's Triumphal March, from the wide-open stained-glass windows, within the Basilica. He continued to wear the ancient sacred vestments and to respect the ancient traditions. To be sure, he often wore the "Camauro" (white fur-trimmed red bonnet) of the Sixteenth Century Popes, and I never did see a wristwatch on his wrist. "Apparently," everything remained unchanged. Yet living next to the Pope, one could see that, from the time of Pius

XII, something fundamental, in the Vatican, had changed. Although respectful of the ancient protocol, John XXIII signaled to his inner circle that he found that protocol quite burdensome and, at times, he came to disregard it, making fun of it, as it was in his nature. To some very private weaknesses, to be sure, the priest from Sotto il Monte become Pope had given in.

For example, he had the St. John's Tower, an old tower that rises in the heart of the Vatican gardens, transformed into a Pharaonic summer residence. The exact cost of the huge, useless work, was never known – John XXIII never dwelled in the tower that hosted, instead, for a few days, Athenagoras, on a visit to the Pope, and, later on, Paul VI reigning, it was the gilded prison of cardinal Mindszenty, in his brief, bitter Vatican sojourn-isolation – but the buzz has it that into the bottomless well of that enterprise, were thrown between three and four billion lire of the time. The ancient building had to be reinforced with substantial foundation works; the inside had to be “emptied” and reconstructed according to the latest building codes. Elevators were installed, as well as a thorough air-conditioning system. The apartment, developed with extreme conceptual grandiosity by its height, was equipped with very expensive services and bathrooms, which those who had the venture to see them, defined as “Pharaonic.” The magnificent furnishing stood against a backdrop of precious tapestries and paintings. That tower was long spoken of in the Vatican as of a “thousand and one nights” dream. Such is the costly preciousness contained in that circular construction, complete with ample covered and

open terraces, which however has maintained on the outside the original aspect of a severe fortress-tower.

A few stone steps climb to the entrance door, almost monastic in its simplicity, surmounted by the bronze coat of arms of Pope Roncalli. That “weakness,” alas! of *nouveau riche*, to which Roncalli abandoned himself and yet, to be sure, does not even begin to compare with the triumph of bad taste that burst out and imposed itself in the Vatican with his successor, Paul VI, which was labeled by the Pacellian the “Caprice of the Nabob.”

Living next to him, and following the disconcerting and ruthless development of his policy of “overture” to the Marxist new times, one could easily perceive the contradiction between the packaging and the content, and measure, at times, how burdensome it was to Roncalli’s progressive and reforming mentality, to pay respect to those customs that proclaimed for all times the Pontifical Court, the first amongst any others in the world.

More than once did I realize that the Pope was absent-minded, bored, or even vexed by certain aspects of the ceremonial. And at times, when he was particularly weary, those around him could read the annoyance on his face. I remember the visit for the presentation of the credentials of a new South-American ambassador. We were in the Throne Hall. The Pope was sitting on the little throne with the two Noble Guards at his sides. The participating monsignor “*di settimana*” (on weekly detail), whom on that day happened to be my friend Del Gallo of Roccagiovine, had introduced

the ambassador. I, with the other Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape on weekly detail was in front of the throne, next to a gilded console on which towered two enormous Chinese vases. So that when the diplomat began to read the letter to the Pontiff, I saw his shoulders, while regarding the Pope in the face. That letter soon appeared excessively long. The emphatic voice of the ambassador seemed to be reciting a Spanish Madrigal. Del Gallo of Roccagiovine, close to the Pope, looked at me and covered his mouth with his hand as he felt like laughing. I also felt like laughing, and at that moment I realized that John XXIII was clearly signaling his vexation. He dangled his feet, which would not reach down to the red-velvet cushion, continuously opened and closed his leg looking-glasses, which he was holding in his hands, and raised his eyes gazing at the ceiling, and looking us standing in front of him in the face. Thank God the reading came to an end, and with but three hastened and colorless words, Roncalli excused the verbose South American. He got out of the throne. The other Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape on weekly duty and I opened the small procession which, as a rule, would escort the Pope to his apartments. Behind us, the slippers of the Pope shuffled on the floor the heavy pace of John XXIII, and I could hear him mumbling something in the Veneto idiom. We started for the usual dark corridor, when all of a sudden Roncalli's shuffling stopped. We looked back and paused. The Pope was gone! We looked for him everywhere. Nothing. We consulted each another perplexed. At last the old sergeant of the Swiss Guard that was with us resolved the puzzle. In the wall of the long, shaded corridor opened a secret little door, concealed in the

tapestry, which led to the Pope's apartments in no time. Roncalli had learned of it and now and again he used it to sneak away, leaving his retinue in the lurch. That's how John XXIII was.

He had taken and imposed onto anyone, in the Vatican and abroad, his most particular habit (downright reckless for a Pope) of leaving the Vatican incognito, at every hour of the day and night.

Suddenly it was discovered that the Pope had disappeared. Anxious searches throughout the Vatican, with the men of the Gendarmerie going mad of aimless zeal. Then the notification to the Italian police that would search Rome and its neighborhoods after that impossible track. Most of the times Roncalli and his driver would furtively return to the Vatican, and the Pope would explain smiling to his dismayed collaborators that he had felt like a walk incognito through Rome, or that he had suddenly felt the urge to call on an old friend, without the snarls of the ceremonial.

It sometimes happened that the Italian police would locate the Pope at someone's house. Then the officers would stand in wait by the door for hours and hours. Meanwhile the voice would spread. Some personalities arrived hastily from the Vatican, a small crowd of onlookers would gather on the sidewalk. A few hours later an unknowing John XXIII, after chatting and sometimes dining with his host, emerging through that door, dressed as a priest, had the annoying experience of finding himself

surrounded by policemen, by the applause of the people and, in the morning, the Papal escapade would make news on all the newspapers.

Roncalli had always somebody at his table. Mostly prelates and acquaintances passing through Rome would invariably receive the invitation of the Pope. And often the sisters working in the kitchen were advised of the number of the table guests at a moment's notice, and soon had to master to perfection a great number of dishes, opulent and spicy, of the most sophisticated international cuisine, as Roncalli proved immediately to be that great "fork" and even better "glass" that he was.

Every Saturday, after the last audience, John XXIII maintained the old papal habit of receiving, for thanksgiving, all the components of the Court that had fulfilled their "weekly" service. We lined up around the damasked walls of his library, and then the Pope walked in. Standing, at the center of the carpet, he addressed us with his thanks and voiced his "embarrassment" for the "confusion" and the trouble that his modest person was causing us. Then we would depart, kissing his ring as we knelt down. When we wore our uniform or the magnificent Spanish costume, only before the Pope were we expected to bend our knee, and only to him did we owe the kissing of the ring. In fact, our rank designated us as Gentlemen of the Pope, and exclusively his. As, also, the Noble Guard, which presented the sword only to the Pope, while saluting all the others, including the cardinals, merely standing at attention. But most of the "careerists" belonging to the Court, who

could well smell the turn of the times, whenever they came across Giovanni Battista Montini, for example, directly made cardinal by John XXIII, would prostrate themselves at his feet, seeking and holding his hand and deluging it with kisses.

One morning, just before cardinal Tedeschini passed away, I accepted his invitation to escort him to a private audience with the Pope. After the cardinal had spent nearly half an hour alone with John XXIII, the door of the Pope's study opened, and I was invited inside. Roncalli, in his white habit, sat behind his desk, crowded with papers. On the desk, along with an antique clock, an artsy inkpot and a little vase, with a thick forest of pens, nibs in the air.

Cardinal Tedeschini introduced me with that unmatched gentlemanly style that distinguished him, and John XXIII asked after me, and my activity. He told me that he had read some of my writings on "L'Osservatore Romano," and for a moment, but only for a moment, by a flash that passed in his amiable and cordial gaze, I had the impression that within himself he was saying to me, "And I also know, dear friend, that we are not exactly agreed." Knowing that I was an editor, he told me of the importance of information in the modern world, wherein all the men are protagonists, each by his own degree, of the transformation of the times. "See," said he to me at a certain point, "I read many newspapers every day," and he pointed with his hand with the big "anello piscatorio" (fisherman's ring), a wad of dailies heaped on a corner of the desk, under a heavy paperweight. I gazed mechanically at those broadsheets,

and my heartbeat increased. At the very top, sat “L'Unità”, the newspaper of the Italian Communist party, with red marks on a title’s margin. “The world today goes very fast,” continued the Pope. “We Catholics must keep abreast with the times, and should not be caught off-guard by the great changes that are in the works with the proactive contribution of all the men of good will. You are young enough to see the world change, and that new world will bring a better humanity, I know it will.”

An exchange of witty remarks followed, and the audience came to a close. In walking out of the Pope’s study I stumbled, almost, onto a priest who entered in haste, wrapped in a black cape that left uncovered only a pair of large dark-looking glasses and a shaven head. I leapt to one side and monsignor Capovilla vanished behind the door, which was closed behind him with an iced gust of air.

Two Sediari (chair bearers) in the ancient dress of red brocade, with the Ante-chamber Dean, lay on the lean shoulders of cardinal Tedeschini his great cape. The cardinal’s secretary, the good Passionist father Ridolfi, stood three steps away, with the leather briefcase in his right hand.

I watched in admiration and emotion my Cardinal, tall and handsome in the sumptuous vest of Prince of the Church. In spite of the abyssal difference in age that separated me from him, I felt I did belong, body and soul, to his world to that world that with a great gleam of light was inexorably sinking into the dusk. And we left the papal

apartment, in silence, walking past the Swiss Guards who rendered, still, the military honors.

CHAPTER VII

The election of Roncalli to the pontificate sets in motion, on the face of the Church, the hands that will punctually mark, one after the other, those decisive hours that in four years will disrupt Christianity and will reverse the political balance of the West. Today we can look at those events in perspective, with composure and detachment, and we can but wonder in observing how that program perfectly studied and analyzed “outside the Vatican,” would fulfill itself in its entirety, attaining all of the objectives of that integral subversion that was to be the conclusive point of the combined action of two Pontiffs, that of Roncalli, and, afterwards, that of Montini.

We have written, at the outset of this book, that a German newspaper, the “General Anzeiger für den Nieder-Rhein,” had the fortune of printing the incredible prediction only days after the passing of Pius XII that the imminent Conclave would elect the patriarch of Venice, the predetermined forerunner of Giovanni Battista Montini. That newspaper has unwillingly entered into history. Not as a random fortune-teller who chanced to guess an impossible prophecy, but as a newscaster scrupulous toward its own readers.

This program had been fine-tuned for years “outside the Vatican,” and, as we have said, it promptly began to unfold, springing forward, as soon as the priest from Sotto il Monte, become John XXIII, looked out of St. Peter’s Lodge, in the white habit of the Pope, to bless the hailing faithful.

That very night, at Termini railways station, Giovanni Battista Montini alights from the train from Bergamo, pushing ahead the brothers of Roncalli, in their country clothes, awed and confused under the flashes of the paparazzi.

The quarantine of the Brescian monsignor is drawing to a close. His appearance in Rome, that night, with the brothers of the new Pope, is to be intended, for him who can read between the lines of Vatican’s “symbolism,” as the public affirmation of that “Delfinato” that will bind, from that moment on, Montini to John XXIII.

Indeed, without delay, just twenty days after that moment, Roncalli names Montini cardinal. Never mind if he had fallen into disgrace under Pius XII, because of his political schemes, which, once discovered, had cost him the immediate ostracism from Rome and the longed-for cardinalial galero!

Defying the Pacellian, a scarcely elected John XXIII lays his large peasant hand upon the pale baldness of the monsignor from Concesio in whose blue veins, it is no secret, flows the blood of the stock of Sion.

And suddenly, in the new Vatican, all of Montini's weighty, "uncomfortable" baggage will rigorously be "taboo". All must be forgotten: his private "weaknesses," his secret political initiatives. His ideological credo that has brought him, among others, to hate the Germans and Germany, to an extent that would lead him to share in the outbreak of the hostilities, in 1939, advising Poland to open fire against the German army.

Historian Louis Marschalko, in his book "The World Conquerors" (the real war criminals) thus writes about it, on page 276: "On April 21st, 1939, Monsignor Montini, the papal legate to Poland at that time, told Count Szembeck that according to the official view-point of the Vatican, should Poland decide on war, it would be a just and rightful war. (Count Jean Szembeck, one of the leading officials of the Polish Foreign Office, published his diary in France under the title "Journal 1933-1939")".

But who is this "Delfino" of Roncalli's, whom joint forces without the Vatican have already designated, for years now, to succeed the priest from Sotto il Monte? Let us look at him, for a moment, under the magnifying lens.

He was born in Concesio, in the Brescia province, on September 26, 1897. Progenitor of the family is a Bartolomeo, or Bartolino De Benedictis, called Montino. De Benedetti (Benedictis) is a Jewish name.

Not by chance it will be discovered that Montini, become Paul VI, has the audacity to wear the "Ephod" of the

Hebrew Supreme Priest, on the pontifical habit. To break the sensational news to the world is the abbot Georges de Nantes, who in October 1970, on issue 37 of his monthly “Contre Reforme Catholique,” launches a cry of alarm, with an article titled “The Amulet of the Pope.” In “Paris Match” of August 29, Roberto Serrou’s column “Will the Next Pope be a Frenchman?” Is illustrated by a large photograph of the Pope and of cardinal Villot. I gaze at those two closed faces dissembling the fate of the Church... But, what is this, over here, on Paul VI’s breast, beneath the pectoral cross? A curious jewel I cannot recall seeing on any other Pope! The object must be made of gold, of a square shape, ornate with twelve precious stones set on four lines, three by three. It is hanging in a very particular way from a cord running around alongside that bearing the Cross of the Christ.

I am afraid to understand. All doubts are thus possible.

To describe the object, artlessly, I used the very words that, in ch. XXVIII of the “Exodus,” describe the Ephod of the Hebrew Supreme Priest!

Here then, on the Pope’s heart, hanging from his neck, is the “Pectoral of Judgment” that the Supreme Priest Aaron and his successors must wear as a ritual ornament to signify the twelve tribes of Israel, “to recall them incessantly in the presence of Jahve” (Ex. 28,29.)

Paul VI has been bearing the emblem of Caiphas... Who knows for how long, why, and from whom did he get it?

Would the Pope be signaling that he is the direct legatee of Levitic priesthood, as the Pontiff of a Church turned into the new and sole Israel of God? Or is he rather preparing a restoration of Judaism as the religion of pure Monotheism, of the most sacred Book, of the universal Alliance? The Abbot of Nantes continues in his writing:

”At the Katholikentag, this year, there was a Sabbath Hebrew cult, and at Brussels, cardinal Suenens has anticipated an upcoming Council, a Council of “reconciliation” which is to be held in Jerusalem. Now, B’nai-B’rith and Freemasonry alike dream to erect there, too, as well as in New York, a “Temple of Understanding” of which a model has been presented to the Pope as a sign of wide ecumenism. It is all coming together!

Who is to inform us, humble believers, of that pectoral and on all the obscure points of distant, dark schemes? Who among us has the right to know whether the Pope, bearing the Ephod of Caiphas, intends to take up the Ancient Hebrew cult in the Church without fearing the rage of Israel according to the flesh, or whether his design is to bring back the Christian churches to universal Judaism and restore in Jerusalem the Levitic Priesthood? Ambiguity of the gaze and of the gesture, of the word or of the amulet... hitherto, the Crucifix had never borne the competition of any other symbol of cult. Is it, without a sound, without a word, soon to disappear from the heart of the Pope? Then in the Vatican, a rooster will crow one last time.”

I, too, have seen the Ephod on the white habit of Paul VI.

It was stitched to the stole, and the gold chain with a tassel at the end reached almost to his knees. I remember asking what it meant of some “participant” Monsignors. Some had no idea. Others said it must have been a gift from a group of foreign pilgrims. There exist many pictures of Montini with the Ephod. The first of those pictures of the Pope with the “amulet” on his breast dates back to 1964. Sometimes the pectoral Cross is not to be seen at all. In some, it is concealed under the mozzetta (short cape worn by prelates in solemn functions). In only one occasion the stole appears without the mozzetta: in a photograph taken in India, wherein the Pope appears sitting and surrounded by Hindu children. In his calls on holy places, or sanctuaries, the Ephod is never wanting.

So it was on his visit to Fumone, when he called on the grave of Celestine V, at Santa Sabina, on Ash Wednesday, wherein they sing the renewed litanies of the Saints, starting with Sancte Abraham... At the feet of the Immaculate on the 8 of December, in Rome, etcetera, wherever he is wearing mozzetta and stole.

Naturally, the “novelty” aroused the curiosity of the journalists, who began to ask more and more insistently for explanations.

To the extent that professor Federico Alessandrini, director of the Vatican Press Office, was ordered to respond, in the course of a press-conference, that that jewel was none other than a “clasp” to hold the stole together. Yet no Pontiff had ever worn that clasp prior to Paul VI, as witnessed in the

portraits and pictures of all his predecessors.

Montini, moreover, it is murmured in Rome and in all of Italy, is a homosexual. Hence subject to blackmail. Hence in the hand of those who intend to maneuver him to their own ends.

In Milan, as archbishop, he was often stopped, at night, by the police, in plain clothes and in dubious company. For years he has been tied by a particular friendship to an actor who paints his hair red, and who makes no mystery of his relations with the future Pope. The relationship would continue for years, staunch and constant. It was confided to me by an official of the Vatican security service that this favorite of Montini's had been granted authorization to enter or exit the papal chambers as he pleased.

So much so that often they would see him arrive in the elevator in the middle of the night!

The 'banana skin' on which he, Paul VI, slipped, provoking the official end to this open secret (reference to his homosexuality), was the homily that he delivered in January of 1976 on "sexual ethics," peppered with many points regarding homosexuality, thus provoking the reaction of the French writer Roger Peyrefitte.

In fact the weekly "Il Tempo," issue no. 13 of April 4, 1976, published an interview with the literary writer (Roger Peyrefitte), who describes himself as "the most liberal man

of all of France,” in which this celebrated homosexual sharpens his pen, and rebukes the Pope with the Pope’s own homosexuality, and thus denies him the right of holding himself up as a censor. Paul VI acknowledges officially the wound of this rapier thrust.

A day of prayer was called to “make reparation for the affront made against the Pope,” but all of Italy laughed long over this episode. The English television interviewed Peyrefitte who aggravated the situation still further by declaring himself surprised at having obtained so much un hoped-for publicity, at such a good price.

The first blackmail will clutch Montini by the throat as he climbs the See of Peter. When freemasonry will promptly obtain the abolition of the excommunication with which the Church hits those in favor of cremation, threatening to reveal the secret meetings between Montini, archbishop of Milan, and “his” actor, in a hotel of Sion, in the Swiss Valais Canton. Later in Paris, the behind-the-scene-activity relating to that first, clamorous papal act of Paul VI, and to the activity of a gendarme, patient collector of the incontrovertible evidence, will be made known.

But let us return to that 1958. In his quarantine at Milan, Montini is certainly aware of his predestination. And he awaits the death of Pius XII. From that moment he will re-enter the scene as a more or less occult protagonist, yet one with a sure future. It can be said that he directly participates in Roncalli’s Pontificate, collaborating with the Pope in the drafting of the most important pontifical documents.

Toward the second half of the five-year Roncallian government of Church, the archbishop of Milan becomes the leading brain of John XXIII's policy. Monsignor Capovilla is shuttling between Rome and Milan. The uninterrupted connection is leaked out in the Vatican. And those who wish to know the reasons, and question the pope with extreme caution, are led to believe that Montini will be the next pope, and so he might as well prepare for the succession.

Montini's ability, in this period of preparation for his imminent Pontificate, unfolds entirely into getting John XXIII to predispose the track on which to proceed expeditiously ahead. He must guard, in the Vatican, from a great ancient enemy of his: cardinal Domenico Tardini, whom the astute Roncalli has refrained from removing from the Secretary of State. That same Tardini who, years before, discovered Montini's secret contacts with the Kremlin. That same Tardini who forced Pius XII's intervention in the matter, and the banishment from Rome of the dangerous plotter. But in 1961 Tardini dies, and John XXIII appoints as secretary of state the bland cardinal Amleto Cicognani. Some do not discount the hand of the archbishop of Milan in Roncalli's choice. It is a fact that, from that moment on, Montini's influence upon the policy of John XXIII grows, sometimes in the open.

His political action within the limited circle of his Milanese diocese plays along the lines of John XXIII's great progressive policy. Modernism, at times deemed quaint by the faithful, characterizes Montini's introvert and

unpredictable personality. His homosexual nature prevails, in the quest at all costs of novelty and eccentricity. He appears in public, at a ceremony at Milan's Velodrome, wearing a cyclist cap; another time, at a construction site, he is photographed with a carpenter's helmet on his head. It is his exhibitionist mania at play, one that one day, as a Pope, will lead him to opt for that super-modern tiara that, resembling a missile – and thus the insolent Romans promptly baptized it – was placed on his head on coronation day. And his fever of the grotesque and novelty, would lead him to wear, during an audience with the Native Americans of Gaylord (Michigan), a Chief's headdress, and in that state pose before the camera. That ANSA photograph went round the world in no time, to give the exact measure of a temperament that for a Pope was rather curious, to say the least.

That very frenzy for the new, that Montinian iconoclast fever, hits the Vatican of Paul VI turning it into a Hilton of dubious taste.

That hysterical fury will drive him to wipe out every ancient remnant, within the Vatican, abolishing the Court and the ancient armed Corps, erasing in a moment century-old traditions and customs that no Pope in history had ever dared to alter, passing down to their successors, as the rule calls for, what they had received from their predecessors, intact and sound.

Thus Montini, in Milan, misses no chance of acting as a progressive.

He goes as far as to authorize lawyer Mario Mazzucchelli to read, transcribe, and publish in a book the classified files, held in the archbishopric's Archive, of a celebrated and scandalous seventeenth century trial of a nun, the Lady of Monza, guilty of having turned her convent, whose mother superior she was, into a pleasure house for her male lover. The book, "La Monaca di Monza" (Dall' Oglio, Editore – Milan, 1961), is a masterpiece of refined pornography. Naturally, the crafty author of that best-selling book carefully forgot to include a copy of the letter by which Montini had authorized him to read and publish the embarrassing documentation of that ancient trial.

Moreover, Montini is in constant contact with John XXIII. When he is in Rome, the Pope has some rooms near his apartment always appointed for him. And he sees him often informally. On those Vatican calls, Montini almost betrays the awareness of his approaching future. And he studies closely John XXIII's men, to get a personal hunch of their worth. With some he is cold and discomfiting. With others he affects benevolence and protection.

He has his men in the Vatican, priests and secular, working for him, informing him of everything that goes on under the sun, about the Pope, round the clock. One of his brothers is a Christian democrat representative, who has a private secretary. No sooner is Montini made Pope, than he appoints his brother's secretary Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape. I would get to meet him myself. We will share many an hour in honor details and diplomatic missions. Never have I met a busier man than that secretary

of senator Montini's. He is the direct thread between the Christian Democrat party and Paul VI. And he has given up his personality. And his private life. He has learned at his own expense, what to be a tool in the hands of the Montinis is like. His parliamentarian boss, when speaking with someone, never looks the interlocutor in the eyes. When I mentioned it with him, in our Vatican encounters, he, who was his secretary and must abstain from speaking out his mind, raised his eyes to the sky. An eloquent answer, for a Roman.

The Confindustria (Industrialists' trade association) regards the archbishop of Milan with suspicion. They dislike his ambiguous attitude of never taking a clear stand. And the management is well informed as to Montini's cordial relationships with labor's representatives.

Unlike Roncalli, clear, genuine, stalwart in his revolutionary convictions, Montini would not commit himself. He can heap his future within himself, build it piece after piece, without giving away a hint that might reveal his future plans. He can keep rancor and benevolence at bay. Even those who know him well will say that he has an arid and manipulative temperament. And unloyal.

I can admit to have followed closely some of the Montinian "misdeeds." One example for all: the betrayal of the Primate of Hungary. Cardinal Mindszenty has learned at his expense the two faces of Paul VI. And he was greatly hurt. But he stood tall against that betrayal with all his pride

and dignity of prince of the Church and Primate of Hungary. In October 1974, at Vienna, I knelt down before that great cardinal. And I wanted to write in its entirety the story of how he was betrayed, by Giovanni Battista Montini (1).

So well has the archbishop of Milan staked out his route, under the massive shadow of the priest from Sotto il Monte, that when his turn came to sit on the papal throne, all of the objectives prefixed outside the Vatican, are happily achieved. The overruling of the excommunication of freemasonry, the rapprochement with the Jewish world, the acceptance of Marxism, the involvement of Christianity with Protestantism, the de-spiritualization of Christianity.

No pope “elected by the Holy Spirit” would have succeeded, in such a few years, as it happened with Roncalli and Montini, to transform the bi-millennial face of the Church and upturn the equilibriums of the world, in accordance with the design of occult forces, interested in this colossal and dramatic revolution. Montini knew that the points of that program had been firmly established. That is why, when upon John XXIII’s death he arrives in the Vatican and enters the Conclave, he will carry in his suitcase a well-pressed, elegant papal habit made by the most prestigious tailor in Rome.

(1) See Franco Bellegrandi’s “Il portone di piombo,” Sugarco

edizioni, Milan, March 1975.

CHAPTER VIII

Another change that did not escape the close circle of those who spent, because of rank and service, most of their day in the Apostolic Palace, was the sudden appearance of homosexual figures in posts of prestige and responsibility close to the Pope. The sore that in Paul VI's time will submerge and transform the Vatican, devastating it, began to show its first evident symptoms, well hidden between the baroque creases of the ancient Court, yet sadly alive and real. The long hand of the archbishop of Milan, afflicted by his weaknesses, was already arranging, with discretion, one after the other, the personages of his game and heart, on the chessboard of the eleven-thousand-room State.

Naturally, the new protagonists affected by the "illness," in turn brought along some minor figures, bound to them by the same solitary fate. And so, slowly yet with growing insistence, voices and indiscretions began circulating in the Vatican, unfortunately followed by most grave events. These figures, because of their office, were often in our midst, especially when monarchs and heads of state were visiting the Pope.

And they did have their favorites. Effeminate young men in close-fitting uniforms who powdered their cheeks "to hide the dark of the growth." With extreme care we Chamberlains of the Sword and the Cape steered clear of

their smiles and affability, limiting ourselves to saluting from a distance with the standard heel click. Naturally, even within the undergrowth of the officials began to spring up the “recommended” of the archbishop of Milan, and, at times, here and there erupted small and big scandals, so much so that the Pontifical Gendarmerie had its work cut out in steering, as the saying is, amidst all those vagrant mines, and closing an eye, and not seldom both, and hushing up reports, and discouraging a diligent editor or two.

I underwent such an experience myself. With a branch director of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena bank, emeritus member of the emeritus Circolo di San Pietro. The banks, starting with the Santo Spirito bank chaired by Marquis Giovan Battista Sacchetti, are swarming with Vatican lower ranks. Offspring with no skills or trade, getting by until retirement, dealing cash over the counter and giving up their yearly bonuses to afford themselves a membership in the Hunting Club.

Often, representatives of lesser nobility, hanging around nights at Palazzo Borghese, taking advantage of the free newspapers and ordering a glass of mineral water of the liveried waiter.

This director, a middle-aged man with the macho look, bald and hairy, had the guts to approach me with queer propositions, as I chanced by the agency after business hours. Playing dumb, I politely got away. I later learned that that character that looked like a little Fascist official

was a great cordon of the sovereign militant order of the “faggots.”

Suddenly, old and worthy employees of offices depending from the “Governatorato,” were, with no apparent reason, retired or transferred, and on the resulting vacant seats rested their tender buttocks the newly arrived, each with Montini’s recommendation letter in pocket. Meanwhile the ancient Vatican protocol was being moth-balled. Repeated and more frequent breaches in the century-old and hitherto unbroken fabric of the severe Spanish etiquette in the course of the solemn ceremonies appeared evident to us of the Court. The Court detail, during the solemn functions at the basilica, was supervised by the Monsignor Maggiordomo’s secretary, the passionate “commendatore” Giovanni Giovannini. This constantly excited and panting man, knew his difficult job to the dot, and had been carrying on his shoulders always clad in a fluttering tail-coat, glistening with a myriad of ephemeral decorations, the responsibility of commanding with extreme tact the Court’s secular members, all or most representatives of the finest Italian aristocracy. Obviously, sometimes some of these gentlemen, who never in their lives had even dreamed of obeying anyone, according to their momentary mood, gave the “commendatore” a flat refusal, and he had to make the best of things.

After the early years of John XXIII’s pontificate, for “commendatore” Giovannini things took a sudden turn. The crushing blow of the Council had produced its effects even upon the customs of the ancient Pontifical Court. Ancient

privileges had gone to the dickens, and authentic and venerable gentlemen were treated, as they say in Rome, as “fish in the face” (like dirt), right in St Peter’s basilica swarming with people, with the Patriciate and the Diplomatic Corps in full ranks.

I recall, for I witnessed them, a couple of meaningful episodes regarding this change in the name of Giovannean progressivism. Once, during a Papal Chapel, the mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta arrived at St. Peter a few minutes late, to find that its place on the gallery had been taken by another foreign mission. The four or five knights of Malta, all stiff as a ramrod in their scarlet uniforms, haughtily asked the intruders to vacate their seats, but these refused to do so. There arose a subdued altercation. “Commendatore” Giovannini was on the spot in a flash, and ordered the Maltese to find themselves another place commenting in a loud voice that it was high time to put an end to privileges become ridiculous in the light of the new times. These, red in the face, conceited in their useless, humbled uniforms, were forced to retreat announcing ominous reprisals to the “commendatore,” who walked away with the greatest contempt.

An Order of Malta’s friend of mine told me that the Great Magisterium wrote a bombastic letter of protest, which the Vatican left unanswered. One other time, always during a solemn function at St. Peter’s, an old friend of mine, count Franco Ceccopieri Maruffi, also a Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape of his Holiness, a bigot and a fraud, only because he had let an acquaintance of his take

someone else's seat, was confronted by Giovannini, seized by the arm and brought away by the detail. Patricians, diplomats and populace enjoyed the unusual show of a gentleman, solemn in his magnificent Spanish costume complete with sword and decorations, dragged outside by a bourgeoisie in tailcoat, transfigured by anger.

With the more and more massive introduction into the small state's staff of elements at all unreliable, yet powerfully protected by the personages of the "new course," the very general tone of morality, once exemplar beyond the Bronze Door, went slowly deteriorating, and, at length, irreparably contaminating. Small groups of ruthless, covetous, vicious usurers sprang up, helped by bottom-level employees who often were but mere ushers, who also smuggled goods out into Italy – mostly cigarettes and liquors – purchased at a low cost in the Vatican and re-sold very advantageously across the border. Some of these speculators became involved in real financial dealings, lending money at usury to unfortunate in need that fell into their claws. Most of the times, other than from their illegal trafficking, the loaned money came from avid and complacent loftier anonymous figures. Many in the Vatican, among these secular and some clergy, were literally ruined by these vultures, some of whom had felt no embarrassment in using that soiled and sizable income to set up real estate and trading businesses of remarkable relevance, right here in Rome. And so it passed that a simple usher, or humble Vatican receptionist, once beyond the border with Italy, would suddenly turn into an industrial executive or a wealthy landlord.

The strictest “omertà” (conspiracy of silence) protected the ill doings of these ugly people, in the Giovannean Vatican, and even though the Gendarmerie came to know, at times, of the existence of these rogues, it could never step in as it always found an important figure in monsignor habit that prevented the conclusion of the inquiry, and clearly discouraged the investigators. So much so that, when into the net of that rabble fell a young gentleman who held a lofty position in the Pontifical Court and was induced into suicide, the whole thing was hushed up and the shameful scandal that would have swept away, as they say in Rome, small and big fry, was averted by authority.

We dignitaries of the Court knew this unfortunate quite well. He was “commendatore” Aurelio Catalano, affable and efficient young secretary of the Master of the Chamber of His Holiness, monsignor Nasalli Rocca. On the occasion of his appointment as Pope’s Chamberlain of the Sword and the Cape, we all had presented him with the heavy, gold-plated silver necklace, emblem of the rank, and entertained with him a genuine and open friendship. He came from a family that had lost its fortune in former Italian Africa, when the estates of the Italians of the colonies were confiscated, at the end of the war, by the newly independent countries. He was awaiting the modest reimbursement that the Italian government, with habitual sluggishness, sparingly handed out to those unfortunate who, one day, had staked all of their capitals and their very existence to make, as they said, greater and more respected the Homeland.

None of us ever did get a hint of his destitution, politely concealed behind a smiling and immutable joviality. Indeed, his salary did not provide for his taxing family situation. When one considers that the salaries of the Holy See were, at the time, proverbially meager. But the straitened circumstances of their superior did not escape his subordinates, who lived daily at his side, in his sumptuous office above the St. Damaso's Courtyard. And so they talked him into accepting, with subdued insistence, a "very convenient" loan. Within one year and a half, the "very convenient" loan became the soapy rope of a gallows, and, while the government compensation was irreparably wanting, the passive interests demanded via post-dated checks by those lone sharks soared to one hundred per cent of the loaned sum. Those subordinates of his that had laid him the trap became, month after month, fierce dogs, and when he was brutally threatened of a scandal, the poor man preferred to hang himself to a beam, in his Roman home, in a still August night, when everybody, even his fierce assassins, had left town on summer vacations.

The tragedy caused sensation at the Vatican top. But it was all hushed up. I remember replying with indignation to the personality that, with hypocritical solicitude, appealed to my sympathetic discretion, invoking the good name of the Pontifical Family. And at times I still see before me the good and smiling face of my poor friend Catalano, as I had seen it at the Caffè Rosati, in the Via Veneto, a few weeks before the tragedy, and he had seemed to me sad and dejected, as if already aware of his long trip without return.

Along with such negative phenomenon there awakened, for the first time in the Vatican's history, in the early months of John XXIII's government, a "class consciousness" in the workers (a few hundreds) who worked in the offices and workshops of the small state. As a new wind was blowing, this category that passed on from father to son their Vatican job, was immediately stirred by the Italian labor unions. The gap between the pay and the benefits of the Italian workers and the Vatican's was, in those years, disconcerting indeed. The first claims were put forward, attempting a convergence toward the Italian levels. Despite the already mounting progressivism in those early days of the Giovannean pontificate, the claims were dismissed and the clergyman, as they say in Rome, stood once more by himself. At the right time, that is, feudal and authoritarian, in spite of all promises and smiles. There came consequently the first acts of "passive" rebellion and challenge. Some of these acts were however clamorous and dramatic, and, although they never did make it past the boundaries of the Vatican City, they remain unedited and meaningful chronicles of the changes in the mentality of the employees of the Holy See, awakened by the trumpets of the Council, from a sweet lethargy of centuries. Personally, I was accidental witness of three of these clamorous episodes.

The first, chronologically, was a feigned suicide attempt of an employee of the Annona Vaticana, the great stores that sell, to the Vatican citizens and to those having access with a special card, consumer goods that flow into them weekly, from all over Europe, at a price inferior to that

applied in Italy. The category had been on strike because of promised and always postponed salary improvements. One morning, as I was reaching “L'Osservatore Romano's” editorial office, inside the Vatican, whose entrance is in the Via del Pellegrino, just across from the back of the Annona building, together with an editor, the Florentine Paoline Father Carlo Gasbarri, some cries and entreaties caused us to raise our eyes upon the windows opening about six or seven meters from the ground, in the Annona building. Some people were looking out and hollering to a fellow in a white coat hanging in the air, holding on to the window's sill. As in a nightmare, we saw that figure part from the window and plummet, with the white gown lifted in the air, on the pavement below. We rushed to help and Father Gasbarri knelt by the fallen, lifeless on the cobblestones, and signed him with the cross. Other people rushed by, and the poor wretch was hoisted hastily into a car and taken to the hospital. I later learned that he had survived the little jump, and that his demonstrative act had resolved the impasse and earned the salary improvements to the category.

Another episode, which, on the other hand, ended up badly, was that of an aged monsignor official of the Curia Romana, who considered the order that, without a moment's notice, deprived him of his office, forcing him into premature retirement, utterly unfair. He actuated a silent and dramatic protest. For over a year he spent his regular working hours, rain or shine, all dressed up and briefcase in hands, standing at the center of St. Peter's square, his eyes fastened onto the window of the Pope.

Many, in the Vatican and outside, witnessed the solitary tragedy of the poor monsignor. Perhaps the Pope himself, from behind the panes of his window, had been troubled by that small dark figure of a priest with his nose up in the air, still, all alone in the middle of St. Peter's square, on the very same spot, day in and day out and for all those endless hours. But he did not intervene. And in the end, the old priest went out of his mind.

The third episode, the most clamorous as it was punctuated by gunshots, took place on Wednesday April 8, 1959, shortly after 2.00 p.m. I was walking out the St. Anne's gate with Andrea Lazzarini, director of "L'Osservatore Romano's" third page, when cries and gunshots pierced the air. The Swiss on detail vanished inside the door of the guard-post. What in the world would ever come to shatter the olden quiet of the quarter of the Swiss? The guard Adolfo Ruckert, deeming unjust his removal from the corps decreed by the commander, Colonel Roberto Nunlist, had stormed into the apartment of the officer, just above the St. Anne's gate, and had unloaded his gun into him, wounding him on his buttocks, fatally exposed in the precipitous flight. The young man was arrested, and forced to spend some time in a psychiatric clinic near the town of Tivoli, before heading for the other side of the Alps. The gigantic colonel, instead, had to lay with great circumspection, on well-upholstered chairs, that bottom of his that had had such an inglorious baptism of fire.

CHAPTER IX

Roncalli's witty public attitude exposes him to speculations of a particular gravity. It was no secret that the patriarch of Venice had been affected for years by a form of arteriosclerosis, and was being treated at Pisa by a specialist of that town, the brother, as we have said, of the Christian Democrat minister of Industry and Trade. From Venice cardinal Roncalli traveled periodically to the Tuscan provincial capital, and, for years, underwent the treatment this physician administered to him. When professor Togni learned from the radio of the election of his illustrious patient, they saw him bringing his hands to his hair.

The thesis of John XXIII's recurrent arteriosclerosis episodes kept accurately hidden to the outside world, which would create in his government action recurring crisis and memory lapses, would explain the importance of the frequent journeys to Milan by the Pope's secretary, Loris Capovilla, who, said those in the know in the Vatican, in his continuous encounters with Montini, archbishop of that town, received by the latter guidance and instructions upon which to carry on the progressive policy of the reforming Pope. It is a fact that the Pope's Marxist secretary installed himself in the Lombard capital as in a very personal and well disguised political office of his own. My uncle Enrico Pozzani, president of the "Cavalieri del Lavoro" (knighted for services to industry), more than once manifested to me his apprehensions as to the amazing growth that the

Lombard labor movement was experiencing toward a policy almost exclusively directed to foiling the initiative of the private industry. He often told me, on those occasions, that well informed sources connected to such large industrial concerns as Pirelli, Alfa Romeo, and Fiat, had ascertained a direct influence of Capovilla upon the action of the unions and upon the widespread subversive activity within the workers of major factories in northern Italy. My uncle, who had frequent contacts with the most representative personalities of Italy's big business, at the time examined a report he had been handed by professor Valletta, FIAT managing director, in which, after the documented account of the involvement of the Pope's secretary in the "communization" and in the labor struggle of the metal workers of the North, the perplexities of the company's management impotent to counter so dangerous an action, as it was impossible to counter, were expressed. I recall that meeting, in which I participated as a "Vaticanist" for the Federazione Nazionale dei Cavalieri del Lavoro's press office, at Rome's EUR district, nicknamed the "Square Coliseum," because of the six galleries overlapping from the floor to the terrace, about its marbled square massive shape. The small figure of professor Valletta, in dark, almost faded clothes, within the lofty polished marble walls of that presidency on which stood out, in bronze letters, the names of those newly elected "Cavalieri del Lavoro" who had donated large sums to the Federation, and the amount of the donation. But that little southerner exuding so much will power and intelligence was indeed a giant in the history of the industrial recovery in post-war Italy. FIAT and the Agnelli family owe it to

Valletta if the Turin automobile industry has become what it is today.

Sunk into his yellow leather armchair, Valletta had pulled out of his briefcase a wad of typed papers and placed them before my uncle, as a singular “solitaire” on the crystal desktop of the monumental presidential desk. I sat before the managing director, and I had set out, as I knew them, some viewpoints and assessments as to Pope Roncalli’s policy and the outcome of such policy, through various influential figures, and, in that case, monsignor Loris Capovilla, upon Italy’s life and affairs.

Then, Pozzani had begun to leaf through the typed report. And when his voice began to spell out some passages, here and there, my attention grew.

Those typed sheets were a confidential report for the managing director, compiled by the company’s security service, directed at the time by a former high ranking officer of the carabinieri. From the report, filled with names, dates, and facts, took shape the political action of John XXIII’s secretary, through the labor unions and the Italian Communist party, within the workers of the most important industries, mainly mechanical, of the north of Italy. After a personal profile detailing an old involvement with the Italian communists at the time of the civil war in northern Italy, in which Capovilla’s name was linked to summary executions of fascists by communist bands; and a profile of a brother of his, a Mestre communist ringleader, the report spoke of how Capovilla, in his confidential

contacts with politicians, activists, labor union representatives, underscored that he was speaking on behalf of the Pope, as an interpreter of his precise political course. Moreover, there were described his relations with the cardinal of Milan, Montini, who, in the far-reaching scheme for the political control of the Country, was responsible for the total “communization” of the large working masses of Lombardy, and the animator of Marxist-bent evangelical preaching.

The information profile concluded that the regular and frequent meeting between Capovilla and Montini were proof that the latter had an influential voice in the political progressive direction of the Vatican policy.

I recall that a few months after Valletta’s visit to my uncle, in the course of an audience John XXIII granted to a FIAT delegation led by “avvocato” Agnelli and professor Valletta, I unexpectedly met the likely editor of that dossier. The Pope was sitting on his small throne and monsignor Capovilla, in his violet ceremonial habit, the gaunt bald head and the large dark-framed spectacles, was introducing to him, smiling and solicitous, those FIAT personages, all in dark and excited.

As I was on my “week detail” I kept slightly aside, buttoned up in my diplomatic uniform, when all of a sudden a tall, gray-haired gentleman, with a little mustache and a pair of golden spectacles on his nose approached me, and in a subdued voice introduced to me the chief of FIAT security service. Shortly after, pointing to Capovilla, taken

up with the introductions to the Pope, he asked me whether I knew him well and was familiar with his political preferences. Upon my affirmative response, that man who seemed to me visibly tense, unburdened himself with me, right there and then, in close propinquity to the Pope, recounting into my ears how he, former officer of the carabinieri, had known Capovilla well, and knew what he had done during the civil war, that he had on his conscience several killings, and that he would have gone out of his way to strangle him with his own hands. I looked that man in the face, solemn in his dark double breast as only some old soldiers can be in civilian attire, and from the emotion I caught in it, I realized that he must have been informed, if not altogether the witness, of tremendous facts linked to the priest with the neurotic countenance that now, just steps away, was stooping from behind Pope Roncalli's shoulders, to follow with that icy smile of his, the words that the FIAT men offered in response to the queries and jokes of the Pope. The audience ended, and that gentleman excused himself, and I never met him anymore. But I have never forgotten that singular confession, which in time helped me to open my eyes, when things in the Vatican and in Italy began to change and the figure of that small, frail priest with the neurotic look, with the pale and scrawny face, somewhat dismal, with those large dark-rimmed spectacles, began to have a major standing of his own, in the process of "communization" of the Italian nation from the "opening to the left" onward, and in the leftward shifting of the whole European Western block.

CHAPTER X

It is amazing, when one beholds the things of the Vatican from a distance, or through an ill-informed press, more or less controlled by Rome, the punctuality with which the communists come knocking on the Bronze Door, as soon as Roncalli becomes John XXIII. And likewise perplexing, is the swiftness with which those doors are flung open before the wolf disguised as a lamb that has awaited with well-planned patience that great appointment with History.

Our “home-groomed” communists know the score. They know who Roncalli is, and know that next to Roncalli lives and works his trustworthy personal secretary. The Italian multitude, scarcely cultured and superstitiously bound for centuries to the Catholic religion, continues to follow the Pope. Even if the Pope is now Roncalli, with his revolution. The Kremlin is more cautious. The Church is the ancient enemy that must be brought down. It has been officially and bloodily persecuted hitherto. Yet perhaps, for this very reason, it could never be wiped out. Now, with the advent of John XXIII, the great turn is here, long awaited and carefully engineered. Now the Church can offer her defenseless nape to the ultimate blow. But this requires a different strategy; the new Pope must be presented with an “apparent” situation that is different from the former. An “apparent” situation that would smother, rather than excite, the indignation of the civilized world, so prone to futile rebellion, and so easily slanting back into a forgetful doze. Having assessed the impossibility of bending by force the

resistance of the ecclesiastical hierarchies, the Marxist chiefs decide a tactical change, and embrace the encircling action of the “divide et impera,” (divide and rule) and of the hollowing out, from inside, of the ecclesiastical institutions. The “Red Book of the Persecuted Church,” written by an historian, prelate of the Secretariat of State hiding behind the pseudonym of Albert Galter reads, on the subject, “The main device the communists have deployed to undermine the efficiency of the clergy and weaken its resistance, is that of fostering the division amongst the clergymen. Once a sympathetic approach toward the regime is aroused in a number of them, they constitute “priests’ associations,” which they often give innocuous names, even pious, sometimes, but actually operate as a fifth column within the Church, with the task of destroying it through internal contrasts (to be intended in a Marxist sense)... And thus the communists set up: the Union of the National Priests in Czechoslovakia; the Union of the Catholic Priests for the Peace, or “Priests of the Peace,” in Hungary; the Union of the Saints Cirillus and Methodio, in Croatia, and similar associations in the other federated republics of Yugoslavia; the Movement of the Partisan Clergy, in Rumania; the Association of the Patriot Priests adhering to the movement of the Triple Autonomy, in China, etc. Parallel to this effort directed to splitting the clergy, is the attempt to control the seminaries for the education of priests. In some countries the communists have even founded “state seminaries.”

At this point I wish to report in its entirety an interview I did, some years ago, Paul VI reigning, at Munich’s English

Garten, with an Hungarian “priest of the peace,” professor of Theological Philosophy at a communist university that has requested not to be named, lecturer and columnist, from which transpire the “Iron-curtain” view of the Roncallian “détente,” and a precise portrait of Montini as the “predestined” carrier of the Giovannean revolution.

Question: “What do you think of the figure of the Pope, today, in your countries?”

Answer: “The Pope, as the spiritual head of the Church has lost credibility with the Catholics, let us say “conventional” and “traditionalists,” to take on more and more the physiognomy of a “political” head of certain masses of humanity. John XXIII’s pontificate has decisively and meticulously dismantled and torn to pieces that Pacellian scheme of the Church inaccessible to any transformations, fixed as a sun within a system of minor planets in the absolutistic light of its spirituality. And with ecumenism, he has set off a decisive turn: finally Christianity aligns itself with those doctrines and philosophies derived by the desire of humanity to better itself. Paul VI seems to have grasped the significance and the importance of this historical turn for the Church of Rome, placing the figure of the Pope on a realistic plane that would allow him to lead the Christian masses toward social evolutions that would deliver humanity of its eternal sours, that would deliver it of the exploitation of the richer upon the poorer, that would ensure a more equitable distribution of the wealth amongst all of the social categories and contribute to the achievement of that

equality among the peoples, preached by the Christ. And it is only by descending from his mystical pedestal that the Pope could obtain his first breakthroughs in this policy of renovation of the Church that has brought the Vatican, for the first time in the history of modern papacy, to align itself with the progressive policy of the most advanced socialist and anti-capitalist countries in the world. Thus to us, today, the Pope is essentially an interpreter of Marxism in a Christian key. Or, better yet: an interpreter and implementer of Christianity in a Marxist key.”

Question: “But haven’t Marxism and Religion always been irreducibly opposed?”

Answer: “That was true until yesterday. For the Christian religion had always been preached in the right sense, yet applied as a “Feudal” religion, in the absolute respect of the hierarchies, in the famous “infallibility” of the Pope. Today Paul VI has understood that Marxism is definitely acceptable to the Catholics, so long as it concurs with the well-being of humanity. And that he is separating the term “Atheism” from the term “Marxism” is demonstrated by the fact that he has approved and confirmed our birth and our active presence. We “priests of the peace” say that the Catholics can and “must” collaborate with the Marxists to “humanize the Socialist society.” And Montini has opened his arms to the East, lamenting the misunderstanding that ruled until yesterday, and alimented intentionally by that reactionary Church whose ultimate personalization has been Pius XII’s, and which he has been renouncing.

Question: “How do you Priests of the Peace today consider the Vatican?”

Answer: “We are essentially at the service of our countries and our masses. We are perfectly aware of our origin: a formally bi-lateral agreement, yet an actually unilateral one, realized solely thanks to the strong pressure exerted by our governments upon the Vatican. Usually, the agreement on the affairs of the Catholic Church in our countries is made up of two documents, undersigned by the parties. The one that remains in the hands of the Holy See and relates to our commitments toward the Catholic Church, the priests, etcetera, is almost always one and the same for all of the Socialist republics, and it is so general that it could not be named a “protocol,” and so we called it by the more appropriate name of “agreement;” while the one concerned with the Vatican commitments toward us, is exhaustive in all of the possible voices, features a great quantity of paragraphs, and is appropriately defined as “protocol.” You will understand that as things stand now, the treaties are indeed unilateral, and any initiative is in the hands of our governments. Pope Montini and monsignor Casaroli know well how to deal with us, now, although at times there has been a little crisis; acclimatization, should we say.”

Question: “Could you give me an example?”

Answer: “For example, in the Mindszenty matter. When Paul VI was postponing the removal of the cardinal as a Primate of Hungary, thus violating the precise

commitments he had made with the signing of the first agreements with our country, our government had to enjoin to the Pope to respect the agreements, or the same would be voided with the consequent resumption of a harsh policy toward the Catholics. And so Montini realized that we were serious, and immediately removed Mindszenty as the Primate of Hungary.”

Question: “What is, father, your opinion of Paul VI?”

Answer: “Pardon me, but you can call me professor. Montini was the most suitable man to be the Pope today. On the other hand, the Soviet Union knew since 1945, from the reports on the Italian affairs coordinated by the secretary of the Italian Communist party, Palmiro Togliatti, that the then monsignor Montini of the Secretariate of State was a person surely sympathizing with Socialism, and had had more than a meeting with the Italian communist chief. And at Moscow they also learned of Montini’s part in the liquidation of the Italian monarchy, in 1946, and they began to hope and work to clear the way for him. Today we can say that thirty years ago Togliatti had a good nose.”

Question: “Do you believe that with the traditional interference of the Vatican in the Italian things, communism would have had such a great leap in Italy, if on the “Cathedra” of St. Peter were to sit a Pope other than Montini? We must remember that Pius XII’s excommunication of the communists marked for communism, whatever it has been said, and especially for Italian communism, a moment of undisputable crisis. And

it was a dangerous stop for the PCI (Italian Communist Party) along its path to power.”

Answer: “True. Paul VI has an ambiguous personality of his own, Machiavellian, introvert. But the agreements he undersigns are spelled out very clearly by our government, and after all, a glance around to the East is sufficient testimony of it.”

This excerpt from the interview sheds some light, in prospective, onto the upcoming thriving times for the communists of the East, in Paul VI’s reign, prepared by the Roncallian policy and by the Roncallian Vatican II Ecumenical Council.

The Marxist governments are indeed looking forward to stipulating a “modus vivendi” (way of life) with the Church that would mean, from China to Albania, from Bulgaria to Rumania, authentic attempts on the unity of the Church.

Marxism is somehow attempting to clear the way for the swift and resolute steps of the new revolutionary Pope, John XXIII. And it shifts its tactics. It no longer wants a “Church of the Catacombs,” a “Church of Silence” that is to it a double edged sword, but a Church “in silence.” Poland’s Primate, cardinal Wyszynski, will bitterly say some years later, “Today we are like fish in an aquarium. At the time of Stalin they tried to destroy us with martyrdom, fishing hither and thither and pulling out the designated victim, or victims. Today they pursue an action apparently not so violent, and altogether legal: they are

draining the pond.”

Roncalli, in his impetuous rush to clasp the hand that the chief of the new Soviet Russia, the “good” Nikita Khrushchev is holding out to him, falls ruinously into the net of this new policy, so opportunely concocted by the Moscow communists. That same Khrushchev who just the day before the opening of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, has no doubts in declaring:

”What is wanted is an elaborated and integral system of scientific-atheist education that might reach all layers and groups of the population, that would prevent the diffusion of religious ideas, particularly among children and adolescents.”

But what does he do! In the course of the Council, firmly bridled in the large hand of Roncalli, when it comes to the “Church of Silence” the password is “hold-your-tongue.” Certain things, unpleasant and irritating to the “conciliatory” at all costs, must not be uttered. So that the men of the West believe in the communist “good will,” even toward religion. Therefore, the directive in the Council is to keep quiet, if not smile, before the incredible evolution of that communism in respectable disguise that now claims to be ready to deal with the Vatican.

Writes an Eastern bishop, during the Council, “The true Church of Silence is not we, for we witness every day, and our voice calls out to Heaven. But it is the Church of the Free Countries, that is a Church of Silence, when the

faithful, accepting it all, remain silent before the great tragedy...” In this same period, a clergyman, from another Iron-curtain country, leaves on record, before returning East:

”For ten years I’ve been dreaming the freedom of the West, I’ve been dreaming of a free Church. Why, I’ve been here a month and it’s been plenty for me to decide to go back to the Church of Silence, for the suffering of the Church of Silence is to me less painful than the silence of the Free Church.

But Roncalli is secretly dealing with the Soviet Union already, and looks forward to the historical meeting with the chief of world Marxism, and spends long hours, in the utmost discretion, with emissaries of the Botteghe Oscure, (Via delle Botteghe Oscure, Rome; Italian Communist Party HQ) and has ordered the most absolute silence, in the Council, upon the uncomfortable issue of his policy. And so those bishops who have managed to wring permission to participate in the works of the Ecumenical Assembly from the communist authorities, and have rushed to Rome to launch in St. Peter the high cry for help of the martyr Church of the East, are hushed up by the inflexible hand of a political calculation that now awes them.

Another testimony is that of the Jesuit father Domenico Chianella, future director of the Exhibition of the Martyr Church, who writes, challenging the new Giovannean course, the dialogue and the reconciliation between Christianity and Marxism, “...Besides the ignorance of the

issue of the Church of Silence, there is the confusion of the minds, which is a worse and more dangerous thing. The Marxist tactic and dialectic have by now challenged even the mentality of the Catholics, pretending, for example, that speaking of the preservation of the faith and of the Church from communism, or caring for our persecuted brothers in the atheist countries, be tantamount to playing politics, siding with reaction, lending a hand to the political speculators, and so on. There are even those who say that speaking of the suffering of the Catholics under communism, all we achieve is to aggravate their fate. We had better hold our tongue! Apart from the fact that communism can do no more than it has already done and is still doing to the Church, there is the earnest, unanimous call by the Iron-curtain bishops and priests asking that we speak up on their behalf; stressing that we, and not they, are the true Church of Silence, whenever we choose to do nothing for them; that speaking and showing to the whole world what communism has been doing to religion is, after prayer, the only way to help them out, to induce the governments to leave them a scrap of freedom. There is nothing that these regimes fear as much as the truth. These atheist and dictatorial governments have no fear of God, whom they disbelieve, they fear not weapons: all they fear is world public opinion. They very much rely on the silence of the West...

An authentic Christian cannot falter before communism. Communism is an ideology, a new religion, a new thorough conception of life and man, and a materialist and atheist doctrine that openly wishes to annihilate the religious faith

of the peoples, which it considers a superstition. According to Lenin, this annihilation is indeed the ABC of Marxism. To endorse its development and its diffusion even only indirectly, it is to counter the Kingdom of God, the apostolic mission of the Church. Certainly! For the communists as individuals, next to us in our every-day life, we must have the same love that Christ has for them as single persons. When it comes to their doctrine, to their party, to their tactics (and here is the secret of their great success!), however, we must be able to grasp the peril they constitute to Faith and liberty. Peace, reconciliation, softening, coexistence... Are all fine words that are used by the enemies of God to spread confusion and gain ground. Communism will change basically nothing so long as it remains the ideology that it is and intends to be today. These are the concepts I heard so many times from those who have seen communism in the face...

The political events that will upset the equilibriums of the West, exposing it to communism, sink their roots into the Roncallian planning of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, and it is in it that must be sought the pressures that will soon lead to an alignment to the left of nearly the entire free European world.

The causes that would bring about in Italy the Center-left governments, first, and then the s.c. Historical Compromise with the PCI (Italian Communist Party); that will cause the sprouting in Federal Germany of the Brandt phenomenon with the transfer of German territories to Communist Poland, anticipating the epilogue of Salazar's Portugal, the

dusk of Francoism in Spain, the occurrence of that Marxist terrorism whose violence is but blind bloodthirstiness and arrogance, are multiplying, inasmuch as tolerance, alarm, and complicity are now widespread in the Western democracies “open” to the dialogue and to reconciliation.

In the first weeks of the Council, on the desk of the new Pope pour entreaties, reports, and letters from every corner of the globe, imploring John XXIII to take a stand against the persecutors of the Church. The new Pope reads on, receives messengers, and lingers with the bishops, talking the dialect of his Veneto region, gentle, melodic. He smiles. Reassures. Then goes on as he pleases.

To the Secretary of State, who after reading in a manuscript of his some “made up” words and dared observe, “Your Holiness, but these words do not exist, they aren’t even quoted in the Palazzi dictionary...” Roncalli responds, briefly, “Well, we’ll have to reform many things. We’ll have to do something about this Palazzi, too.”

While in the latter years of Pius XII’s pontificate, the Italian communists maintained with the Vatican indirect relations, promoted, coordinated and followed by Giovanni Battista Montini, and through the mediation of some prelates well dissembled in the complex bureaucratic apparatus of the Holy See, now, for the first time, the Italian Communist party has a direct link with the Pope. The party’s secretary, Togliatti, is frequently seen, semi-incognito, in the elevators of the Pope’s apartment. His visits are not logged in the table of the audiences. Inside the

Vatican he is accompanied hastily and with no ceremonies to the study of the Pope. But some among the gendarmes on detail, and the elevators attendants, recognize him and exchange with him a witty word or two.

His Holiness' Master of the House, Pio Manzia, told me that John XXIII had hosted Togliatti at his table more than once. Even though, according to that quick-witted "commendatore," the appetite of the Communist did not measure up to that of his august table companion.

The Communist secretary carried with him a great quantity of papers. A Master of Ceremonies, the old memorable and very Roman monsignor Capoferri, told me that one afternoon, one of those "confidential" meetings lasted two hours and three quarters, watch in hand.

Once, I was on "week duty," as I stepped out of the elevator, in the St. Damaso's Courtyard, I saw walking toward me a Pope's Master of Ceremonies, in simple clergyman, and that politician I knew so well. They hurried to the elevator, while the blue FIAT that had transported them, with a young lad in a sweater at the wheel, parked in the neighborhood. I was in uniform, and I did not turn to look. But as I boarded the service car that was to drive me home, I felt sincerely and unbearably uneasy. No one, then, in the Pontifical Court, fancied what was in the works, day after day, behind the façade of the Apostolic Palace. We continued our service, respectful of the ancient, unchanged ritual, with our gold embroidered uniforms and our sumptuous Spanish costumes. The Swiss Guards continued

to click their heels and present their halberds. The silver trumpets played Silveri's Triumphal March, when the Pope, in full apparel, descended into St. Peter's escorted by the Noble Guards. Behind that unchanged outward appearance, however, something fundamental was rapidly growing and would soon, very soon, bear its fruit.

These contacts with the Italian Communist party, as a first result, obtain to the communists the scrapping of the excommunication, of Pacellian memory. (Decree of condemnation of communism.) In this way that red electorate, held back at the polling station by the problem of conscience, will rush to swell the Italian Communist Party's votes. Especially women's. In most Italian families, the women are those who felt the most the bridle of Pius XII's excommunication, and have remained, due to ancestral complexes, aligned and covered with the directives of their parish. John XXIII has promptly consented to Palmiro Togliatti's well-calculated request. It will be seen in the tremendous advance of the Italian Communist party in subsequent elections, and in that leftist policy that will bring Italy to the reality of today. And a grateful Italian communism makes itself readily available to the Giovannean policy. The Italian Communist party will precede His Holiness' Secretary of State in paving the way for the historical dialogue between the Vatican and the Socialist countries of the East, starting with Soviet Russia. Roncalli implements his revolution without upsetting public opinion. He operates, in politics, so that his left hand ignores what his right hand does. While on the one hand, in bland little speeches of circumstance he voices his grief for

the Church of Silence and condemns the persecutors, on the other he pushes relentlessly the coupling operation with the Iron Curtain's political world. When it comes to taking a stand, against Marxism, with the Council, he would let down the Catholics languishing under the Marxist yoke, and impose silence on the bishop on the issue. Slowly, yet progressively, the public opinion loses interest in the fate of those millions of souls in helpless despair. The official information, in fact, speaks of concessions, of "dialogue" that is beginning to develop, timidly at first, and then faster and faster, between Christianity and Marxism. The Pope has taken the habit, continued by Paul VI, of chatting with the people from the window of the Apostolic Palace. The Italian Communist party, with its remarkable organization, sends a few coaches filled with members to St. Peter's Square. These mingle with the small Sunday crowd with their wine flasks and homemade sandwiches, littering the place with the wraps. When Roncalli appears, bulky, in the dark rectangle of the window, they applaud him; give him the clenched-fist salute, wave, sometimes, their red banners. Roncalli wants to be the "people's Pope." He has an unpretentious eloquence, accessible to all. Especially to the blue-collar. Well spiced with expressions that easily stir the easy emotion of the man of the street. And sometimes he uses, amused, his unpretentious eloquence to startle and fluster the formal impassiveness of his Court and diplomatic corps. Roncalli does not neglect, in his window chats to the people, to reassure them about the communist danger. His famous exhortation... "You must love Khrushchev. God loves him" speaks for itself. Meanwhile, the visit to the Vatican of the dictator's

daughter, and her husband, the journalist Adzhubei, is fast approaching.

CHAPTER XI

“Last night I had a dream: a voice was urging me to call a great Council. A universal Council of the Church. An Ecumenical Council. And I shall do this Council...” Thus, one morning, John XXIII addressed his secretary of state, Cardinal Domenico Tardini, as he entered the Pope’s study, with his briefcase of confidential papers under his arm. The prelate stood startled for a moment. And he himself, as he was to confess to his closest aides, believed for a moment that Roncalli, as was his custom, was only joking. But it became almost immediately evident that this was no laughing matter. The Pope was speaking seriously, and the cardinal had no doubts that something in the head of John XXIII was not properly functioning. That he was, that is, as he would remark some days later, gone “temporarily mad.”

With the tale of his dreamlike little adventure, speaking simply, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli informs his closest aides on his decision to convene Vatican II. Naturally, for the very few unaware that come and go from the room of the Pope, the surprise is indescribable. The others, those in the know, do not bat an eyelid. Rather, they give the announcement the significance of a divine inspiration. The true bomb will go off at the official announcement, at St. Paul’s Basilica Outside the Wall. For most of the Cardinalitial College, far from being consulted, as the rule

calls for, has been kept in the dark. And so the Pope, in one go, breaks the news to journalists, cardinals, and people, placing on the same level princes of the Church, journalists, bourgeois, and plebeians. It is the “summit” of the Roncallian strategy: to put forward the inescapability of the *fait accompli*. This time, the victims are the Church, her millions of faithful and the two thousand years of her history. No sooner had the solemn black automobiles of the cardinals left St. Paul’s basilica and driven the most eminent cardinals back to the quiet of their apartments, than the phones become red-hot. Bewilderment and consternation, bitterness and accents of impotent indignation run through the lines in the young hours of the Roman night. But that obedience that imposes upon the cardinals, in the grandeur of their purple, to bow down before the throne of the elected Pope – so fascinating a scene, that of the Cardinalitial College, with the scarlet caudate habits, prone, their forehead on the ground, at the feet of the Pope, which I will forever cherish – inflexibly hushes the Pope’s electors, and prevents them from expressing any emotions.

The world, from the morning of the following day, begins to take in the idea of the Council. That word, in the years to come, will be the most bloated in the domestic and foreign policy of all the countries in the world. It will be the justification and legalization of all the errors, speculations, disputes, baseness, and uproars, of the surprising and well-calculated human presumptions that will burst out, from that moment on, within the Church.

While in the Vatican John XXIII eagerly begins the preparatory work, in the rest of the world, and, especially in some North European countries, they are sharpening the weapons that in Rome will flash under the gilded ceilings of a St. Peter's Basilica reduced into Council Chamber, to slash with deadly aptitude the organism of a Church they wish at all costs to liquidate, in the name of the ecumenical ideals that are to beget a diverse Church, one in which mysticism and spirituality must give way to a sociological and anthropological vision of Christianity.

The Pope appears serene, in great mood, and, above all, determined. In those months of preparation of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, Roncalli is at his best. The way is clear. In the Church, he can **now** do as he pleases. The subversive and the progressive worship him. The conservative despise him. His way of addressing century-old issues with the ease of the naïve is infinitely vexing to some.

Roncalli, now, has less and less time for his little escapades outside the Vatican. He works keenly at the organization of his Council, under the growing pressure of the most powerful anti-Christian and anti-Traditionalist centers of the world. He has started the work for which, years before, he has been selected among many, followed month after month and carried forward, directly and indirectly, with infinite attention and patience, up to the day of the Conclave when the little canopy on his seat, in the Sistine Chapel, remained to crown with august papal shade his formidable head. His commitment was multiplied by

the growing encouragement coming to him daily from the non-Catholic Christians, although their official institutions, at the announcement of the ecumenical character of the great ecclesial assembly, at first take on a wait-and-see approach, if generally favorable.

The World Council of the Churches, in the meeting of August 1959 at Rhodes, had determined that "...The leaders of the ecumenical movement could not be indifferent before an event (the Council) that cannot not have repercussions on the relations between the Churches."

Naturally, that conference would not completely express their views. They first wanted to see what actual development would ecumenism be taking during the early phases of the Council. But certainly, they were not caught off guard by the events. And they worked with intelligence to place the ecumenical program of the Vatican II in safe hands, those safe hands of cardinal Agostino Bea (a name derived from the other, Semite, Behar), who comes punctually forward to propose to John XXIII the creation of a special organism, within the Council, in charge of the issue of the reunification of the separated Catholics. Roncalli, who seems as if he had been expecting it, promptly welcomes the proposal.

Bea writes in his book "Ecumenism in the Council," "...After an in-depth study and a more accurate elaboration of the proposal of a commission for the union of the Christians, I transmitted it to John XXIII, on March 11,

1960. Only two days later, on March 13, through a phone call of his personal secretary the Pope advised me of his overall concurrence and of his wish to discuss it in detail, which we did during the audience he granted me the same day. The swiftness of his decision appears indicative of how the Pope, perhaps since the announcement of the Council, had been seeking a way to actuate the ecumenical aim he had set for the Council, and had therefore seen in my proposal of instituting an ad hoc organ, the providential path toward this goal. A few weeks later, after a gathering of the Congregation of the Rites, held in his presence, the Pope called me to tell me that the new organ should be called secretariat, rather than commission; in this way, added he, it could move more freely within the assigned jurisdiction, which was rather new and unusual. And so with the motu proprio “Superno Dei motu” of 5 June 1960, holiday of Pentecost, the Secretariat of the Union of the Christians was instituted, beside the eleven Council’s preparatory commissions. Its task was thus “outlined” and, we should add, “camouflaged,” “To show in a special manner our love and our benevolence toward those who bear the name of Christ, but are separated from this Apostolic See, and in order for them to attend to the works of the Council and find more easily the way to attain that unity that Jesus Christ has implored from the Celestial Father with ardent entreaty, we have instituted a special office, or secretariat.” (Cfr. AAS 52, 1960, 436).

Bea continues, in his book, “...The creation of the secretariat for the union was received with great interest and sincere joy by both the Catholics and our non-Catholic

brothers, and also by the public opinion worldwide, which has shown great interest from the very first days. When my appointment to the chair of the secretariat was announced, I happened to be in New York. I was immediately requested a press conference upon the aim of the secretariat, and the various aspects of the ecumenical issue. The conference aroused a vast echo, and the interest has been growing ever since. As for the interest of our non-Catholic brothers, it will suffice to quote the reaction of the central committee of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, which, just two months after the institution of the secretariat, in its meeting of August 1960, at St. Andrews, (Scotland) declared:

”The fact that now a dialogue with the Catholic Church becomes possible must be warmly welcomed. This chance for a dialogue must be exploited; it means that the true issues are coming to light.” And it added that the World Council of the Churches would be seizing the occasion to bring to the attention of the new secretariat some fundamental principles, sponsored by the general assemblies or by the central committee of the Council itself; for example, those on religious freedom, on the social activity of the Christians, and such like.” (Cfr. Agostino Bea: “Ecumenism in the Council”, Bompiani, May 1968, p. 31-32).

Today, the particulars tied to the creation of the secretariat recommended to Roncalli by cardinal Bea, its future president, all carry precise significance and features. The swiftness with which Roncalli agrees to Bea’s proposal. The presence, not casual, of Bea in New York,

one of the political centers, with the UN, of world Judaism, at the moment of his appointment to the chair of the secretariat. The immediate, enthusiastic assent of the World Council of the Churches, which hides in its bosom a concentration of powerful and well dissembled financial forces, when one considers that this very organization, as it is learned afterwards, has financed, among others, the Communist wars in Angola and Mozambique. (1)

(1) FRELIMO: Mozambican Liberation Front.

MPLA: Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

GRAE: Revolutionary Government in Exile of Angola.

AFIGC: African Party for the Liberation of New Guinea and Cape Verde.

The MPLA's president was Agostino Neto (one of the three anti-Portuguese guerrillas received in an audience by Paul VI July 2, 1971.)

The aforesaid movements received 340,000 US dollars from the COC: Ecumenical Council of the Churches. ("Libre Belgique" 25.11.1961).

Agostino Neto declared that the MPLA did not have to justify the important contributions granted by the COE, as the money had been paid out "without conditions".

The COE gathered at Sofia from 5 to 9 September, 1971, has donated the sum of 200,000 US dollars to nine revolutionary organizations of Africa fighting against the regimes of Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea Bissau (Portugal's overseas territories) and to six revolutionary organizations of North America.)

That "eagerness" of the World Council of the Churches of sharing with the new secretariat "Some fundamental

principles” which are, strangely enough, precisely those on “Religious freedom” and on the “social activity” of the Christians.

Precisely the two landmines, well stuffed with Marxist explosive, which, when they go off, will turn the ancient edifice of the Church into rubble.

The surprise action on the Council, the gravest and most crucial for the dismemberment of the Church, of its Christian and traditional essence, is a fait accompli. Roncalli, who knows well what he has done, once again in his motu proprio gives an inspired and evangelical significance to the all-political initiative. And Agostino Bea can now establish his contacts and dialogues in the light of day. The “Separated” enter the Vatican, seat in St. Peter in the Council assembly, I see them close by so many times as I seemed to be catching, echoing from the vaults of the basilica, the moans and the muffled thuds of the Popes tossing and turning in their tombs. And did I study those “observers!” Hermetic and reserved, they now feel at home. They chat with Bea, who carries with him, in his spectral countenance, elusive, so Semitic as to resemble a caricature, his origin and his vocation to occult machination. Those gentlemen in black who often hide their gazes, in the half-light of the Vatican basilica, behind impenetrable dark lenses, know that the game has been won. They have made it inside the citadel, without firing a shot, hiding in an

unhoped-for Trojan horse. Now it is only a matter of time,

little time, before the citadel capitulates. It would not be the Church to reabsorb the Separate, the Protestants. It would be the Protestants, to “phagocytize” the Church.

The Catholic Mass will soon become a Protestant rite. How did the post-Council Mass become Luther’s Mass? We can respond to this question with Lèon Cristian’s text, “From Lutheranism to Protestantism,” published in 1911, in one hand, and with the text of the “Novus Ordo,” the new rite of the post-Council Mass, in the other.

”When at the last Supper Jesus instituted priesthood, he instituted it for the sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Cross, for such sacrifice is to the Catholics the source of all merits, of all graces, of all Sacraments: it is the source of all the wealth of the Church. Therefore, it is the sacrifice of the Cross, which is repeated on the altars, and priesthood is intimately related to the sacrifice. There is no significance in priesthood without the sacrifice, for priesthood exists only

The FRELIMO’s leaders participated in the 240th Congress of the Communist party at Moscow, in 1971.

The subsidies are handed out by the COE under the form of aid to Third World developing countries...

Even the World Lutheran Federation subsidizes certain “liberation movements” among which the FRELIMO. The Swedish pastor AAKE Kasthund has stated that they act solely to ship bedcovers, clothing and drugs.

(C15E5. Traditionalist Bulletin: “Convulsions marxiste dans l’Eglise” by Andrè Laforge).

for sacrifice. We could also say: it is the incarnation of Jesus Christ throughout the centuries, “usque ad finem temporum,” as the texts say, the Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered. If Jesus Christ has wanted this sacrifice, He also wanted to be the Victim. To be the Victim, he must be present, actually present on the altar. If He is not present, if there is no real presence on the altar, there is no Victim, there is no priesthood. All is linked: Priesthood, Sacrifice, Victim, and Real Presence. That is: Transubstantiation. This is the “heart” of what of greatest, of richest Jesus Christ has given the Church and the entire humanity that in the Catholic Church recognizes itself. And thus we can understand how Luther, when he wanted to change these principles, began by attacking priesthood. And so do the modernists. For Luther knew well that if priesthood would disappear, there would no longer be the Sacrifice, there would no longer be the Victim, there would be nothing left in the Church, there would no longer be the source of the grace. Luther said, “There is no difference between the priests and the secular. Priesthood is universal... Every faithful has priesthood, together with the baptismal character...”

And so the “secularization” of the contemporary priests becomes clear: even on the exterior they reject any particular attire; they no longer wish to be distinguished from the faithful as they are all priests, and the faithful are to choose their priests and elect them.

A new book on the Sacraments has been printed in Paris, in January 1975, under the authority of the archbishop,

cardinal Marty: the authors have discovered “eight” sacraments, no longer seven, for the eighth Sacrament is the religious profession. In the book it is clearly stated that all the faithful are priests and that the character of the priest comes from the character of Baptism.

The authors had to read Luther, become to them a Father of the Church. Luther plainly states, “That the Mass is not a Sacrifice, but a Communion” (The miracle of Bolsena with the blood spurted by the host broken by the disbelieving officiator?). “It is possible to call the Mass Communion, Eucharist, anything, but Sacrifice; as a consequence, there no longer is a Victim, nor Real Presence, but only a spiritual presence, a memory or a Communion.” Luther called the Eucharist “Sacrament of the Bread.” We must acknowledge that today’s diocesan and parochial bulletins no longer speak of Sacrifice of the Mass, but of Eucharist, of Communion, of Supper. What a singular reconciliation with the theses of Luther! The very Luther who said that one of the ends of the Mass is to thank God, thus not a Sacrifice of expiation, but of worship, of Eucharist. And this is why the modern Protestants accept the new rite of the Mass, “because,” they say – and this was printed on a publication of the diocese of Strasburg reporting on a reunion of Protestants from the Confession of Augsburg – “now, with the new rite, it is possible to pray with the Catholics.” (From *L’Eglise en Alsace*”, 8.12.1973 and 1.1.1974).

”Indeed, with the current forms of Eucharist celebration by the Catholic Church and the theological convergences

present, many obstacles that could prevent a Protestant from participating in the Eucharist celebration are becoming a thing of the past, and it is now possible for a Protestant to acknowledge in the Catholic Eucharist celebration the Supper instituted by the Lord. “We hold in high regard the new Eucharist prayers, which have the advantage of blurring the theology of the Sacrifice.”

Already in 1974, in England, an Anglican bishop adopted the new Catholic rite throughout his diocese. He stated:

”This new rite conforms perfectly with our Protestant beliefs.”

One wonders, at this juncture, why the Protestant did not adopt the ancient rite. There is thus a difference between the new and the ancient, and this difference is essential; it is not an accidental difference to those who do not accept to celebrate the ancient rite with all the prayers that truly enlighten the aim of the Sacrifice: Propitiatory, Expiatory, Eucharistic and Latreutic. And this aim of the Sacrifice of the Catholic Mass, clear in the ancient rite, is no longer so in the new rite, as the Offertory is no longer there. And this is why Luther did not want the Offertory in his rite.

Luther performed the first Evangelical Mass, or, more precisely, Evangelical “function,” on the night from 24 to 25 December 1521. In this first Evangelical Mass, recount the texts, after the sermon on the Eucharist, the Communion is presented under the two kinds, as obligatory, and Confession as unnecessary, as Faith would

suffice. Then his follower Karlstadt, shows up on the altar in secular clothes, recites the Confiteor, commences the old Mass, but only up to the Gospel; in fact the Offertory and the Elevation have been abolished, and this demonstrates that all that signified the idea of Sacrifice has been done away with. Communion follows the Consecration, and many assistants eat and drink, even aquavit, before taking the Communion, and give out the Communion under the two kinds, holding bread in their hands. One of the hosts is dropped on the dress of a faithful. A priest picks it up; another is dropped on the floor and Karlstadt asks the secular to pick it up, and since these refuse to do so, out of respect or fear, he says, "Let it be where it is now, it does not matter, so long as no one steps on it." Numerous persons were happy about the change, and many came to attend this new Evangelical Mass as it was partly read in the German language, and they said they understood it better. Then the monasteries began to empty, and anarchy reigned amongst the priests. Everyone celebrated the Mass in his own way. Then the Council resolved to establish a new liturgy. The Mass was to be sequenced as follows: The Introibo, the Glory, the Epistola, the Gospel, and the Sanctus; and a sermon would then follow. The Offertory and the Canon were abolished, and the priest, become a shepherd, "Recited the institution of the Supper." He uttered it aloud, in German, and gave out the Communion under the two kinds. Then came the Agnus Dei and the Benedicamus Domino, in conclusion. The modifications of the Consecration made to the "Novus Ordo" are similar to those introduced by Luther: the essential words of the Consecration are no longer solely the words of the form, as

we have always known them, “Hoc est Corpus meum. Hic est calix Sanguinis mei.” And the words that follow. The essential words begin thus: “He took the bread” up to, after the Consecration of the wine, “Hoc facite in meam commemorationem,” Luther said the same thing. Why? Because the story of the Supper is told: It is a story, not an action, not a Sacrifice, not a Sacrificial action. It is a simple memoir. The innovators have therefore “copied” from Luther. Who again, says, “The Masses and the Eves are no longer.” The Office shall instead be maintained as well as the Matins, Hours, Vespers, and Compline, but only in the ferial Office. No Saint shall be celebrated that is not expressly named in the Scriptures.” He has thus, in addition, completely changed the Calendar, just like they did today. It may therefore be concluded that the current transformation is identical to Luther’s.

One last example is that of the words for the consecration of the bread: “Hoc est Corpus meum quod pro vobis tradetur”. Luther has also added these last words, because these words are precisely those of the Supper. He believed, in fact, that the Supper was not a Sacrifice, but a meal.

Now, the Council of Trent says explicitly, “He who affirms that the Supper is not a Sacrifice, be anathema (Session 22 of the Council of Trent of September 17, 1562.) The Supper “was” a Sacrifice. And our Mass is the continuation of the Supper, for the Supper “was a Sacrifice.” It is evident in it already the early separation of the Body and of the Blood of Jesus Christ. The Sacrifice was already signified in this separation, but Luther, in

opposition, states, “No, the Supper is not a Sacrifice,” and that is why only the words that our Lord uttered at the Supper, must be repeated. And these are, “Hoc est Corpus meum quod pro vobis tradetur,” which will be offered for you on the Cross.

Why imitate Luther so servilely in the new Mass? The only possible explanation is hidden behind the word “Ecumenism.” It is the aim and the result of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council: the dismemberment of the Church, through the mystification and the undermining of her basic principles. This reformation cannot be comprehended in any other way. It has absolutely neither theological nor pastoral value. No advantage, if not that of reconciling the Catholics and the Protestants. It can legitimately be thought that for this reason the Protestants have been invited in the Commission for the liturgical reformation, to let the reformists know whether they were satisfied or not, if there was something they did not like, if they could or not pray with the Catholics.

As we said at the beginning: They wanted, with the Council, to reconcile with the Protestants. But it is the Catholics that have become Protestants, and the Protestants that have become Catholics.

With this long premise, which, it seems to us, clarify the subtle, ambiguous dismantling operation of two thousand years of Church, many absurdities are explained which, when accidentally uncovered, aroused amazement and scandal, like the Mass co-celebrated in Rome, many years

ago already, between Catholics and Protestants, and afterwards, when the fruits of the Council would rapidly come to ripeness, meaningful episodes that took place under the sun, become clear, and now, between the indifference or near indifference of the Catholic masses, castrated of any reactive vigor by the intense and shrewd “Zusammenarbeit” of Marxists, and Vatican and progressive priests, like the fact, for example, of the participation of five cardinals and fifteen bishops in the “Youth Council” at Taizè, in the course of which some received the Communion by the Protestants, and others by the Catholics. And again, like the declaration of cardinal Willbrands, pronounced as envoy of the Holy See at the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, in Geneva: “We must rehabilitate Luther.”

The Giovannean Council has upset everything, in its subverting passion. Even Christening has been reformed! From the ritual formula has been abolished the “Ego te confirmo in nomine Patris...” (I confirm you in the name of the Father). And if these words are not pronounced, there can be no Sacrament. I gathered testimonies of parents, who were about to have their children christened. Many faithful fear that their children do not have the grace of the Christening, as they are doubtful of the validity of the Sacrament that nowadays is administered in the churches. No one knows whether or not it is a Sacrament anymore.

Naturally, many young priests look at this Babylonian confusion, and “organize” ritual things according to very personal interpretations. And so we see churches turned

into “Communes,” with people sitting on the floor, playing guitars and singing, and others dancing around the altar, during Mass, holding hands. Curious sermons are heard; the new rite of matrimony has become a little act. And matrimony, a lucrative industry for the new priests who lease out their churches -

- A wedding every forty-five minutes, and the nuptial parties in rowdy wait are called in from the square with repeated rings of electric bells.

The new priests and many old ones, obedient to the liturgical reform, from one day to the next changed the décor of their churches, replaced the altar with the little table, and sold out the ancient decors, to the extent that the warehouses of antiques dealers and ragmen are now bulging with objects of cult, often artworks, sold for vile cash, by avid and ruthless priests. And antique dealers sometimes found in the midst of chandeliers, crosses, and ostensories, reliquaries still containing the relic of the Saint! And that is what happened, in great style, inside the Vatican. International antiques dealers bought anything they wished, when Paul VI’s reformist and modernist mania cancelled the ancient splendor of the Vatican, turning it into a cold and rational ultra-modern complex. So much so that the new Audience Hall recalls one of those gargantuan stalls that in the East host the congress of the Communists parties. Inimitable and exceptionally rare art and historical “Pieces” left the Vatican forever.

This is the “separation” operated by the Council in the

Church. In its Scheme on “Religious freedom,” the contradiction springs into view, with aggressive arrogance. In the first part, it is said:

”Nothing has changed in Tradition.” And inside the Scheme all is contrary to Tradition. It is contrary and antithetic with what Gregory XVI, Pius IX, and Leo XIII have said. But how can so evident, so complete, so flagrant a contradiction be imposed upon an assembly of bishops, which is expected to be courageous, impartial, and in perfect good faith? Either one agrees with the Religious freedom of the Council and goes counter to what those Popes have said, or vice versa. There is no third alternative. And it is absolutely impossible to be in agreement with both. Freedom: Religious freedom; Fraternity: Ecumenism; Equality: Collegiality. Are not these precisely the three principles of the liberalism coming to us from the philosophers of the XVIIIth Century, and developed into the French Revolution? These are the ideas that have sustained the Council. And the Council fulfilled itself in all of its scheduled points, spelling the ruin of the Church. Its assault on the ancient Ecclesial structure has unfolded in two periods succeeding one another simultaneously, uninterruptedly. These two periods have had their two Popes. John XXIII, the battering ram that provided the collision and the breach, and Paul VI, the executor, in the continuation and conclusion of the work. In Montini’s tender and undecided hands, the Council has proceeded without a guide. Paul VI’s personality, intellectually far from that of his predecessor, characterized by uncertainties and fears, ill-concealed rancor, by a genuine exhibitionist

neurosis, one Sigmund Freud would indicate as characteristic of his particular nature, has greatly sustained the splintering process of the Church, causing the curdling, within the Council, of negative forces characterized by a dreadful erosive power.

Today, years after the conclusion of that Council whose consequences continue to play havoc in a Church more and more hollow for the crisis of the vocations, many focused and impartial observers are beginning to realize how and when the Vatican II had been “prefabricated.” Today, these observers speak openly of a “conspiracy” of cardinals. Four, to be exact, and all from central Europe: the French Liénart, the German Frings, the Belgian Suenens, and the Bavarian Doepfner. Not by chance these are the names that are being connected to the essential turns of the Church, from the death of Pius XII onward. Behind them, firm and avid of subversion, marches the progressive “wing” of the Council, which shortly will be joined by the Italian cardinal Lercaro.

The characteristic of this progressive wing has been that of outpacing Pope Roncalli, and later Montini, on the path of the radical transformation, in a modernist, sociological, para-Marxist sense, of the Catholic Church. Weighing in not only upon the decisions of the Pontiff, but even on the very Conciliar rulings. The spirit with which these rulings have been applied has done the rest.

Today we witness the occurrence of those collective phenomena of Catholic protests, which bring up again, in

the name of Tradition, the “Laws of the Church” of two thousand, sanctioned in over four years of keen, at times polemic, often elusive and nearly always conditioned debates. Conditioned by the imperative of the number. When a s.c. “Parliament of God” is convened, quantity prevails upon quality, and these hardly ever coincide. And that is how democracy entered the autocratic Church. However, as it usually happens in the secular world, the “Law of the Number” is born and grows not of autonomous force and in the light of day, but in the clefts forbidden to the majority, wherein an exiguous minority studies and predisposes the thesis on which, later on, it would find the consensus thanks to a careful persuasive action. This is, in the coarse democratic game, the “pressure groups” tactic.

And this was the tactic perfected and applied, within the Council, by that handful of cardinals who had their hands in the dough, up to their elbows, in the election of Roncalli and then Montini, and now went all out to ensure that the Council, the essential objective of those two predestined elections, would produce those traumatic and subversive effects of the ancient order that had been previously and accurately preordained. It is not yet possible to establish up to what point John XXIII realized this “forward departure” of the Council, from his forecasts and his plans. Neither whether he would be caught off guard by it. Be it as it may, his action did not betray the minimum repercussion at that explosion of vehemence. Was he in it together with the handful of the “assault cardinals”? Knowing his ability, we should perhaps not discount this possibility. For the very reason that the heated concurrence of the progressive was

so bold, that whoever had not followed a preordained script would have reacted promptly and severely.

In fact cardinal Liènart, on the morning of the outset of the works, rose at the desk of the presidency, and threw away the mask. He said, in fact, that all the schemes predisposed by the members of the preparatory Commission created by John XXIII on 5 June 1960 with criteria that we might still define traditional, would be rejected “a priori.” In that precise moment the ancient balances were shattered. The true face of the Council appeared in all its actuality, before the Church, before the Catholics, before the world.

Superimposing his crushing scheme to that predisposed by the unaware Pontifical Commissaries in over two years of work. And it preempted it in that very sorry “Law of the number” which, with careful strategy, had first been invoked and then applied in support of the surprise attack.

Why, the expression has again escaped our pen. How not to recognize Roncalli’s tactic? How not to presume, behind that astonishing and decisive action, the favorite mode of action of the priest from Sotto il Monte? Frankly, we had rather believe in another bold scheme of his, than in a defiant initiative that would catch off-guard the shrewd Pope of the Council.

Within the general framework of the Council, as we look back at it years later, that move was indispensable to push it swiftly toward its objectives. This time Roncalli is the

Pope. That is, he decides who is to act on his behalf. And the plunge is taken. In this way the Church is projected toward an utterly new and different dimension, antithetic to that in which it had remained, if with ups and downs, for nearly two thousand years. More than to follow the change of the world, as many inexperienced or in bad faith like to affirm, – and it is the men, who change the world, for the better or for the worse, Lenin said – the Church adapted to the archetypal future outlined by the progressive brains, for suicidal conviction or calculation, or because ensnared by powerful atheist and Marxist forces in the ecclesiastical establishment. More than to keep up to date to be closer and closer to the men of “our time,” the new “Conciliar Church” self-reformed itself in view of an uncertain and hazy future, subject to unpredictable changes that would render, perhaps within a generation, all of the adopted innovations lapsed and useless.

The Council proclaimed the advent of the Church of the “poor,” and hurled itself at the “institutional” Church.

The Catholics were getting used to hearing about a novel Jesus. A politically committed Christ, a “zealot” Christ who pursued the overthrow of Roman imperialism in Galilee, a Christ, that is, “tribune-of-the-people” who was being associated with heated passion with a Che Guevara. I recall my amazed disappointment in seeing priests from every station rushing to align themselves with the Conciliar course. Unsuspected, at times.

Obviously, the Italian television did not let the juicy

opportunity go by. And more than once, in such Easter broadcasts as, for example, “Waiting for Christ,” I had to hear with my own ears, as a television reporter, at that time, of the Religious Broadcasts, dissertations on the “political” nature of Jesus held by priests, as the Jesuit father Tucci, former director of “Civiltà Cattolica” magazine, who, fearing the label of reactionary, had rushed to accept the well-paid invitation, to speak their condescending word on the subject. And with these priests argued affably sociologists and historians who attributed the paternity of the Christ to a forward Roman centurion! These were, among others, the results of the Council. The systematic desecration of religion by the hand of its most eminent ministers.

In only four years the Vatican II Ecumenical Council reached and easily surpassed its three fundamental objectives: the Liturgical reform in the Protestant sense, the dialogue with the representatives of Dialectic and Historical Materialism, and the yielding on Religious freedom in a Masonic key.

With meditated impartiality, we must give Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli credit for his “technically” flawless job. The liquidation in less than five years of two thousand years of history. What is puzzling, is the guilty blind acceptance with which most of the clergy has suffered, when not an active participant, the action of John XXIII first, and Paul VI’s afterwards, in the liquidation of the ancient structure of the Church.

I know personally that many bishops were and are against it. All these gentlemen, who hold at heart the fate of the Church, shared with their close relations their dissent for the action of the Council. Inconceivably, however, none of them has voiced their concern, taking a stand. They have hidden behind the all too easy alibi of obedience. But what obedience? when the very Council which they, with their guilty silence sustained, dismantled the import of that vain term, hitting and annihilating, day after day, hierarchy and authority, in the name of a “collegiality” elevated to system? They feared and do fear the loss of their status and their prebends, and thus tighten their lips and ignore that two thousand years of Church are crying out their treason. One would holler in the livid faces of these pusillanimous or opportunist parades, the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, clear and resounding as trumpet’s blares: “*Illa virtus dicitur naturaliter prior quam obedientia, UT PATET DE FIDE*” [(If there be any virtue, whose object is prior to the precept) That virtue is said to be naturally prior to obedience. AS IS EVIDENT CONCERNING FAITH.] (Summa Theologica 11-11 question 104 art. 3); “*Quandoque praecepta praelatorum sunt contra Deum. Ergo non in omnibus, praelatis est obediendum*” [Whenever the commands of prelates are against God. Therefore not in all things must prelates be obeyed.] (11-11 question 104 art. 5) and “*Praelati sunt imitandi non omnibus, sed in his, quae sunt secundum regulam Christi*” [Prelates are not to be copied in all matters. But in these which are according to the prescription of Christ.] (Comment on the Epistle of St. Paul 2 to the Tess. 3,14).

But they preferred the comfortable “unexceptionable”

obedience, which is a flagrant disobedience to their duty of priests, of spreading and defending the Faith. And they did, and do, keep silent. ... The Conciliar reforms have contributed to demolish the Church, to ruin priesthood, to destroy the sacrifice and the sacraments, to wipe out religious life, to spread Naturalistic and Teilhardian teachings in the universities, in the seminars, in the catechesis, teachings derived from Liberalism and Protestantism, so many times condemned by the Supreme Magisterium of the Church.

Roncalli knew Montini in depth. He knew the push imparted to the Church on the slope of ruin would not be arrested, or diverted, or checked by the invertebrate hands of the monsignor nicknamed in the Vatican the “cat” and the “Hamlet.” He handed him a Church transfigured by the Council, reduced to a sort of chilling “Ecce Homo” as ever mind of faithful could envision. The Council, which not only carefully avoided the condemnation of Marxist materialism, but also became its authoritative guarantor, opened the Church to the atheist world. Which swarmed through her bi-millennial structures, infecting them with desecration. After the Council, the Catholic religion had split in two. On one side, the “familiar religion,” on the other, the “universal religion,” brand new, in secular habit. And now, the “official” religion.

With the “revolutionary brotherhood,” the arms are now wide open to all, the good and the bad. Religious freedom has opened the way to the freedom of thought and to the freedom of morals. The “adulterous” marriage between the

men of the Church and the men of the “revolution” has begotten bastard fruits. All is equivocal. As we have seen, the Protestants are now free to celebrate the new Mass, and Catechism has been affected. The caving in to Marxism has swept away all the ancient resistances, and the revolutionary ideas exploded like suns of blood, in the sky of the world. To the crisis of the Church, which is “monarchic,” and “hierarchic,” corresponds the ruin of the civil society. The representatives of the new Vatican, they themselves, you see? have confessed that “...It is impossible, today, to have a Catholic State,” and that “The social regality of Jesus Christ has lost every significance.”

One year after the end of the Council, the faith of a great number of Catholics was so shaken that cardinal Ottaviani felt it opportune to poll bishops and general superiors of Orders and Congregations worldwide, on the hazards incurred by certain fundamental truths of the faith.

The evil dwells mainly in a literature that sows confusion in the spirits with ambiguous descriptions, but under which a new religion is discovered. The present evil... manifests itself, currently, with an extreme confusion of ideas, with the disintegration of the institutions of the Church, religious institutions, seminaries, Catholic schools, of all that has represented the permanent support of the Church, but is no other than the logical continuation of the heresies and of the errors that have been undermining the Church for some centuries, especially in consequence of the Liberalism of the past century, which attempted at any cost to reconcile the Church and the ideas that developed into the

Revolution.

The Church has progressed insofar as it opposed such ideas, which go counter to the sound philosophy and theology; on the contrary, each compromise with these subversive ideas has determined an alignment of the Church to the common right, and the risk of enslaving it to the civil societies. Every time, moreover, that some groups of Catholics have been attracted by these myths, the Popes, courageously, have recalled them to order, enlightened them, and, when necessary, chastised them.

It would be denying the evidence, closing one's eyes, not to affirm courageously that the Council has allowed those who profess the errors and the tendencies condemned by the Popes, legitimately to believe that their doctrines are by now approved... That as general rule, when the Council has made some innovations, it has shaken the certainty of the truths taught by the authentic Magisterium of the Church, as definitely belonging to the treasure of Tradition.

It is about the transmission of the jurisdiction of the bishops, of the two sources of the Revelation, of the scriptural inspiration, of the necessity of Grace for justification, of the necessity of Catholic baptism, of the life of Grace amongst the heretic, the schismatic, and the pagan, of the ends of marriage, of religious freedom, of the ultimate ends, etc. On these fundamental points, the traditional doctrine was clear and taught unanimously in the Catholic universities. Now, many texts of the Council promote doubt in the life of the Church.

The doubts on the necessity of the Church and of the sacraments cause the disappearance of the priestly vocations.

The doubts on the necessity and nature of “conversion” of all the souls cause the disappearance of religious vocations, the ruin of traditional spirituality in the novitiate, and the uselessness of the missions.

The doubts on the legitimacy of the authority and the need for obedience caused by the exaltation of the human dignity, of the autonomy of conscience, of freedom, shake every society, beginning with the Church, the religious societies, the dioceses, the civil society, the family.

Pride has, as a logical consequence, all the lusts of the eyes and of the flesh. It is perhaps one of the most ominous observations of our age that of the moral decadence reached by most of the Catholic publications. They talk with no restraint of sexuality, of birth control by any means, of the legitimacy of divorce, of mixed education, of flirting, of dancing, as necessary means of Christian education, of the celibacy of the priests, etc.

The doubts on the necessity of Grace for salvation cause the loss of respect of the postponed baptism, the abandonment of the sacrament of Penance. It is on the other hand, most of all, about an approach of the priests, and not of the faithful. The same applies to the Real Presence: it is the priests that act as if they no longer believe, hiding the Holy Reserve, suppressing every sign of respect toward the

Holy Sacrament and all the ceremonies in its honor.

The doubts upon the necessity of the Church, sole source of salvation, upon the Catholic Church sole true Religion, stemming from the statements on Eucumenism and Religious Freedom, destroy the authority of the Magisterium of the Church.

Rome, in fact, is no longer “Magistra Veritatis,” sole and necessary.

We cannot but conclude that the Council has inconceivably favored diffusion of the Liberal errors. Faith, morals, and ecclesiastical discipline are shaken in their foundations, according to the predictions of all the Popes.

The demise of the Church advances swiftly. For conceding an exaggerated authority to the Episcopal conferences, the Supreme Pontiff had become impotent.”

Concluding these pages dedicated to the Vatican II, I now line up as soldiers, the words that Gregory XVI wrote in his encyclical: “Mirari vos”: “... For, to use the words of the Fathers of the Council of Trent, it is certain that the Church was instituted by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and that the Holy Spirit with his daily assistance never neglects to teach her every Truth, ‘it is the apex of absurdity and insult’ toward the Church to maintain that a restoration and a regeneration have become necessary toward ensuring her existence and her progress.”

CHAPTER XII

The quiet and severe times of Pius XII seemed in the Vatican so far removed as to appear almost unreal. At the explosion of the Council, the Vatican and Rome turned into an immense hotel of bishops and minor prelates pursued by a press avid of sensational news. In the morning, under the disconcerted baroque vaults caressed for centuries by the scent of the incense and by the powerful chords of the organ of St. Peter's, fluttered desecrating and revolutionary words. Which ended up, as succulent preys, in the whistling rotary presses of the broadsheets, and in those fierce reports and comments on the works of the Council, intoxicated with renewal and progressivism, dunked their bitter doughnut the enemy of tradition and the advocates of the new times. And at night, those bishops who in the morning had mauled the compactness of the Church and of her hierarchy plunged their ravenous fangs into the most delicious dishes that the kitchen of the best Roman restaurants could feature for their excellencies. And those gold crosses, now sideways on those fat, panting pectorals, under those wine-red, cigar-stunk large faces, cried out for vengeance before God.

A renowned beer hall near the Piazza di Spagna, had a room reserved on the upper floor for a pleasure-seeking party of bishops from northern Europe. Their excellencies were not in the least concerned to attract attention, and hollered and sang together with their drunken voices, and the stench of their cigars issued from their hall and flooded

the whole restaurant, causing the ladies to turn up their noses. I called often on that place, and every night I saw the reverend bishops keeping the wee hours, drinking and feasting. And once, one of them, corpulent as a fattened turkey, drank himself unconscious. I remember the embarrassment of the owner and the subdued jests of the waiters, as that big man in clericals was carried outside, with the Episcopal cross hanging down, and hoisted into a taxi, as a sack, to be driven back to his hotel.

In their conversation one could always hear a “John said this; John said that,” John being the Pope, the Pope of the dialogue, of renewal, of the new times. They felt, that is, the protagonists of the great turn of the Church. And for that turn the great majority of them had been carefully prepared, many years before the historical event of the Council, by their cardinals, who would then shine in Rome for their radically progressive ideas.

These “assault” bishops educated to assembly “stunts,” according to the most orthodox concepts of Marxist technique, stunned those unaware bishops, candid of ancient honesty, when at ballots that were crucial for the ditching of some of the pivotal principles of tradition in the structure of the Church, the Modernists rose in unison, stirred confusion, stalled with elaborated quibbles the course of the Council and the interventions of the conservatives, until their points would be approved. What with the helpless disdain and the indignation of those independent bishops who freely expressed their mind, and were in total disagreement with them. It was in those

assembly struggles, when the systems preached by Lenin upset – incredible! – the centuries-old ecclesial traditions, that the line of bishop Lefebvre [who signed most of the obnoxious conciliar documents] became apparent, as expressed in the will to resist with every means that colossal conspiracy that would subvert, in a few years, the very essence of the Church. In those months I was well posted on the progress of the Council. I was informed from time to time by cardinal Tedeschini, who was soon to pass away and was thus spared the pain of seeing that fine thing that was to be the post-Conciliar and Montinian Church, and by the indomitable cardinal Tisserant. On a level of more immediate confidences, I would hear the precious revelations of a holy priest, monsignor Luigi Favari, bishop of Tivoli, a hunter, Marxist-eater, and old friend.

I liked in that bishop the bold lucidity of his ideas. Once at city hall, during an official commemoration of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the communist mayor did not miss the occasion to turn the ritual speech into a pro-Marxist propagandistic production. And monsignor Favari, attending in mozzetta and gold cross amidst the authorities, sprang to his feet and left, leaving the assembly in dismay. There were lengthy after-effects to that standing up, but from that moment everyone, friend and foe, treated that bishop with greater attention and awed reverence. He was often my guest at dinner.

This most excellent guest would begin to talk to me about the Council. The many confidential reports of my bishop, good country neighbor who shot straight at the

woodcocks between a breviary and the other, left me breathless. The Church was running on the wrong path and the world, stupidly unaware or perfidiously in bad faith, ran along. Toward the abyss. A far-reaching organization, explained the bishop, was preparing the Conciliar fathers ahead of the decisive days. There existed in the Vatican a restricted and secret staff very close to the Pope, which suggested to the progressive bishops, from time to time, the strategy to be followed to defeat the resistance of the traditionalists. Right in those early sessions of the great Conciliar assembly, the various conflicting blocks began to take shape, and it did not escape the keenest observers the reality that some cardinals and many bishops, before boarding their train or airplane to Rome, had concerted an action to impose upon the works of the Council, in agreement with, if not downright inspired by, circles which had nothing to do with the Council, when not offshoots of the non-Catholic world, or altogether hostile to Catholicism. However, it was symptomatic that those programs by the accentuated progressive and revolutionary spin had all an equal, common objective: the demise of tradition in the Church. So as it had been contrived by Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the Council had to serve the revolutionary forces pressing beneath the ecclesial surface, continuously stirred and urged by covert propelling centers, yet perfectly functioning already in the latter years of Pius XII's pontificate, to spring out, now, into the light of day, and shake off the century-old hierarchical structure of the Church that for two thousand years had guaranteed the Church her survival.

CHAPTER XIII

I believe it essential to recall in this chapter, some aspects of the “resistance” of a certain Vatican circle to the Giovannean progressivism. This opposition grouped about its banner a maniple of first-rate men. A handful of brave who did not share the new directions of the Giovannean policy, whose disastrous and irreversible outcomes they forecasted, and felt compelled to act, within their sphere, to attempt to prop up the ancient gate of the citadel, exposed to the blows of the battering ram of the “new course.” They were, naturally, sporadic attempts, and disproportioned to the hopelessness of the disaster befalling the Church and the Italian and Western politics at large. It was as if attempting to stop an armoured division with a slingshot. They were inadequate attempts. But they did take place, and they would make History. Just like, although hopeless, would make History the Hungarian rocks against the Soviet “T34” in the streets of Budapest lit up by the insurrection.

A banner of the opposition to the Giovannean progressivism flew for a few years, and was a glorious “Little column” pierced by the raging shooting of the enemy, right in the editorial office of “L' Osservatore Romano,” hoisted precisely on the ancient nineteenth century desk, behind which thought and worked Andrea Lazzarini, viscount of Formigine, who was my mentor and to whom I was bound by a sincere friendship.

Andrea Lazzarini, chief-editor of the newspaper’s cultural page, for years the most celebrated “third-page,” they said,

in the whole world. He was, with the director of the time, count Giuseppe Dalla Torre of Sanguinetto, a personage who will forever remain bound to the history of the golden years of the Vatican newspaper, even though the dusk that was awaiting him never did match the heights of his earlier days.

Our personage, remarkably learned and a valiant archaeologist, came from an aristocratic Orvietan family, which at the time of Napoleon paid its devotion to the Pope at the price of disastrous confiscations and persecutions. In his youth he had been Pius XI's right-hand, and, later on, a man of Count Dalla Torre's, who wanted him with him in the editorial office of "L'Osservatore Romano."

Pallid, short, with a large Etruscan nose dominating a thick hedge of neglected gray-speckled mustache that covered his upper lip, perennially in gray and with a blue gem on his right hand little finger, Lazzarini brought with him, on the whole, something of outmoded and melancholy, so much so that the colleagues had nicknamed him the "pallid king."

The fact that he had been brought up, as the saying is, in the sleeve of the legendary count Dalla Torre, placed the "pallid king" in a privileged position within the editorial office, one that afforded him freedom of action and the precious function of director's personal counselor.

The office of this character opened onto the corridor of the editorial office, and was the third on the left, after count

Dalla Torre's and vice-director Federico Alessandrini's. Yet although separated but by a thin wall from the management's room, the "den" of the "pallid king" seemed far removed from the rest of the world, and animated by a life of its own that knew no business hours, nor routines.

In that room arrived and departed, in the course of the week, the best names of "off stream" literature and journalism of the time. These were men of great value and courageous coherence, holder of pens as sharp as blades. Ideas, news, and initiatives, came together on the wood-wormed nineteenth century desk of the "pallid king," who consulted, confronted positions, expressed opinions, traced lines of action, suggested columns shrewdly constructed to put a spoke in the wheels of the new Vatican course and the rising "aperturista" policy of the Italian nation.

The "pallid king" wrote his pieces filling sheet over sheet with a Medieval-monk neat handwriting, holding his gray Mont Blanc in the old fashion, between his medium and index fingers. And I will always remember the concentration of that suggestive face, on whose forehead, between the focused eyes, there formed and persisted a vertical furrow, the visible sign of creative thinking stirring behind the frowned eyebrows. And the decisive act of the pagination of "his" third page, on his feet, with the old measuring rope around his neck and the red-blue pencil in his right hand aligning the articles, as assault units, on the white sheet to be rushed to the head typographer in wait.

An archaic electric little stove would boost in winter the

heating of his room, to dry up his wet galosch, and in frosty days he wore a woolen beret, and would light up – he who did not smoke – a cigarette, to have between his fingers and beneath his mustache a little source of heat by the azure, scented volutes.

Almost daily, from nine to two p.m. (“L'Osservatore Romano” goes to press in the early hour of the afternoon to be distributed to the newsstands in the evening) the door of the third room on the left of the long corridor of the editorial office would be shut, and voices could be heard talking animatedly, overlapping, and, at times, the unmistakable voice of the holder of that room, in a slight falsetto, raise above the others with composed authority. For an old custom of the editorial office, at noon sharp (the signal came from the cannon blast on the near-by Gianicolo hill) an ecclesiastical editor of the newspaper, usually a Tuscan clergyman, the “Paulin” father Don Carlo Gasbarri, stepped out of his room, and, strongly clapping his hands, would summon out of their door the whole staff of the newspaper, from director to last usher, to recite aloud the “Angelus” all together. Of course, if the “pallid king” were in a meeting with his collaborators in his room, he would not stick his nose out the door, and the hollering in that room, which sometimes pitched into heated polemic, disturbed the dull psalmody of the editorial office gathered, bowed heads and joined hands, in the corridor.

No one ever contested to the chief editor of the third page his not so orthodox and vaguely provoking comportment. Count Dalla Torre, the only one that

commanded deference of the “pallid king,” gladly forgave him that eccentricity, which rather caused him to smile.

As we have said, upon the worn out top of the old desk of the “pallid king,” laid their hands and their papers, slammed their fists in earnest, emptied their hearts of all their frustrations and of all their hopes, the brightest exponents of anti-progressivism of the time. Some of these writers had fled the Iron curtain, hiding behind legendary pseudonyms, to avoid retribution toward their families back home and toward their battle, in the West, for the cause of freedom. Most were, of course, Italian and Roman. Among these roared Fabrizio Sarazani, one of the few acquaintances of mine that did not give in to the new times, as, instead, most of the others would do in the years that followed. And in that group I had my little space, as a novice journalist and Count of Formigine’s favorite. I was at his side for many years, and much loved him, until even my mentor was swallowed up in the decline of the new times.

So the position of the Vatican newspaper’s third page of those years, was constantly critical and in contrast with the increasingly leftist direction of Italian politics. So much so that the editorial production of that handful of indomitable rebels began to be followed with attention, concern, and evident irritation, by the Vatican progressive groups and by Italian politicians fully committed to their program of “overture to the left.”

But the ability of the “pallid king” managed to steer the

feared gunboat of the third page, unscathed, through all the boulders and obstacles that with deceptive and priestly duplicity the partisans of the new course were industriously disseminating upon its route.

But the times and the conscience of the men were swiftly changing. The Ecumenical Council had opened the arms of the Catholics to the embrace with the Marxists, the aged Count Dalla Torre had to relinquish the baton of command at “L'Osservatore Romano” to a new director, Raimondo Manzini, of a different mould from the old Venetian lion’s, and about the new director had sprung up, like mushrooms after the early October rains, little men, obedient instruments in the hands of the new progressive power. Life for the Resistance to the new course became difficult, if not downright impossible. And, as it usually happens in these cases, the “resistant” of “L'Osservatore Romano” closed their ranks, with more fervent steadfastness, around their animator, the brave flag-bearer of the third page. But their battle must now be carried forward with extreme caution, and, as the moment suggested, with audacity and swiftness. A sort of inflexible censorship clipped the claws of those polemic writings, thus draining of its more effectual contents that open struggle, conducted through red-hot “commentaries” or deadly pieces “back-to-back “ by the unyielding “pallid king.”

By degrees, in this way, the open-field war had to make way for guerrilla warfare. The little big man with the mustached nose, who, as editorial office secretary, held the key to the office, began to gather his collaborators in the

late afternoon, after business hours, and well into the night. While ensuring the maximum privacy, those evening gatherings in the heart of the Vatican soon took on the feature of secret meetings among conspirators. Even black habits began to rustle and disappear behind the door of the “pallid king,” in those nights of subdued consultations in the editorial office plunged into darkness, where only a thin thread of light filtered through the door of the director of the third page. They were Jesuits opposed to the new course and to ecumenism, who had placed their sagacity and their ancient intelligence under the fluttering banner of the “pallid king.” Those stealthy confabs gave way to dozens of initiatives that, as darts issuing from a most accurate bow, painfully pierced the flanks of progressivism, slowing down its race toward the seizure of power.

It dates back to those days the fusion of some Jesuits “resistant” from the Vatican radio, coordinated by a diabolical follower of St. Ignacio of Loyola, Father Farusi, with the maniple of men operating around the “pallid king.” These valorous disciples of the Company of Jesus used their broadcasts to convey skillfully ciphered messages to those priests operating covertly beyond the “Iron curtain.” It was especially the newcasts in the various Eastern languages that conveyed news, information, and warnings through the ether, camouflaged behind a conventional alphabet that was continuously changed. They flew out of the famous tower of the Vatican Radio, crossing simultaneously half of Europe, soaring past those borders bristling with barbed wire and machine guns fettering in their girdle of iron and fire the untouched possessions of

the red star, to reach the clandestine, and croak up their crude receiving radios.

In that period, I recorded at the Vatican Radio some conversations of mine on cultural-historical issues, and on one of my visits to the broadcasting station, I could observe the ability of those Jesuits using that powerful unsuspected media to carry on their struggle in defense of the Church and of the faith in the Sovietized territories of the East.

One Friday, July 14, 1961, at 11:30, I was in fact at the Vatican Radio, and, as I finished the registration, I lingered about the studios to greet father Pellegrino, the Pugliese clergy who then directed a section of the broadcasting station. So, through the crystals of a recording cabin, I recognized and watched one of those Jesuits I had met at the “pallid king’s,” as in extreme concentration and tranquility carried out his duty of “clandestine informer.” From what I could learn, one of the cipher systems consisted in placing at the beginning of pre-established lines, the words composing the secret message, spaced out by a certain number of lines including a certain number of words. The recipients of the message extracted from the text transcribed in shorthand and in accordance with the given pagination, the convened words, which, pieced back together, constructed the message, obviously ciphered. Out of every six or seven typed-sheet-transmission, the conventional messages scarcely occupied one, one sheet and a half. I realized, at the time, how precious a secret agent working with a national radio could be.

Indeed, the anti-progressive “resistance” in the Vatican radio survived for years. And, although silenced at times, it was never tracked down and blown off the waves, as evidenced in the clamorous episode that took place far after the facts of our narration. In October 1963, the Italian government was in a dire situation. On October 22, the Italian Communist party published a document denouncing the contradictions of the old Center-left majority, and invited the socialists to resist the attempt of the Christian democrats to impose a policy barred to whatever change. The socialists were not to give in to the Christian democrats’ tactic, but were to “reinforce the united action of the working classes.” The sense was clear: the Leone government was about to fall, and the communists wanted to deprive the Christian democrats of the support of the socialists. The Italian Episcopal Conference directed by the anti-progressive cardinal Siri had already prepared a statement by the bishops that was a very violent attack on communism, on all forms of Marxism, on any collaboration with Marxist or Socialist forces. Paul VI fought at length with the adamant Siri in order to tone down the document. On October 23, the Italian president Segni paid a visit to the Pope, and immediately after saw government premier Leone at the Quirinale. The ministerial crisis was hammered out. As the Italian bishops published a modified version of the document on communism, the Azione Cattolica would make itself available to the Christian Democrat party in the confused period that would ensue upon the resignation of the government. But on October 31, the Italian bishops published their letter to the Italian people on Marxism, as it had been conceived. Presently, the

text of a document to be aired through the Vatican radio was prepared under the guidance of Paul VI: “only” the general principles of the social and political conduct according to Christian ethics and theology were illustrated in the document. But the comment was never aired.

Another “political” text, reflecting the traditionalist and anti-Marxist ideas of Cardinal Siri and Ottaviani and of the conservative group, was instead taken to the offices of the Vatican radio and handed over to an “emissary,” who immediately aired it to the Italian people and to the world before anybody could prevent it.

The inquiry ordered by Pope Montini came up with nothing. What vexed Paul VI even more was the observation that certain passages of the original draft of the famous letter, which he had judged inappropriate or altogether rash, rather than being corrected or canceled, as he had ordered, had been included in the final draft.

”L'Osservatore Romano”, by now the instrument of the new course, commenting on the letter on November 2 tried to play it down, but some dailies such as the Catholic pro-Marxist “L'Avvenire d'Italia” of Bologna, abiding the will of Paul VI and cardinal Bea, criticized as “factious” the interpretation of the letter by the Vatican Radio.

These Jesuits managed to lend incalculable services to the Church of Silence, especially at the time when the Secretary of State was held by the anti-progressive Cardinal Domenico Tardini. Consigned to History is his poignant commemoration of Pius XII, held in the presence of Pope

Roncalli in an Aula delle Benedizioni filled with guests, on the morning of October 20, 1959. It was almost his moral testament. His permanence as the Secretary of State made it easier to the “resistant” to capture news of crucial importance regarding the implementation of John XXIII’s earliest decisions, in the program of that opening to communism that was to bring about, as an immediate consequence, the bitter and bloody betrayal on the part of Rome of the Church of Silence, relinquished into the hands of the godless.

Nowhere in the world the premature passing of that cardinal was mourned as long as amongst the Catholics of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

One of these exponents of the “Resistance” blossomed in the garden of the Company of Jesus, friend and apologist of the “pallid king,” was in constant contact with some prelates in charge of the “spiritual care” of the Quirinale. These two or three monsignors, continually besieged by senators and representatives avid of Vatican honors, found themselves in the happy condition of being able to barter St. Sylvester and St. Gregory Magnus’ crosses and plaques, with precious confidences, whispered by presumptuous political figures, glistening with metal junk of all size and colors, at official receptions, between a Martini and another, and a mouthful and another of caviar canapé. Obviously, the Italian politicians of the two major parties, Communist and Christian Democrat, in those years were already aligned to the new Vatican policy of Dialogue and Ecumenism. The communists, because, for the first time in

Italy, the Church placed itself unexpectedly at the service of Karl Marx. The Christian democrats, because, tied hands and feet to the Vatican directions, in order to hold on to power, had rushed to occupy those spaces that the revolutionary Giovannean policy had left half-open for the left. To the extent that Amintore Fanfani, strongly inspired by monsignor Loris Capovilla, had been encharged with developing the program of the “overture to the left,” tying indissolubly his name to the realization of that irreversible “Center-left” that would be sadly fatal to Italy’s health.

In this way, the Vatican Resistance thus projected itself, at times, into Italian things, causing here and there some considerable damage in the realization of the programs of the new Roman politics orchestrated by the Apostolic Palace. Some communication “channels” were created with Italian personalities opposed to the “overture to the left” and to the dialogue with the communists. Personalities well selected by the soldiers of St. Ignacio of Loyola, for their possible impact upon the opposition to the new progressive course that was asserting itself on either bank of the old, impassive Tiber.

Yet all of the action was focused on the assistance to those clergymen and Catholic figures from the East committed to maintaining the contacts with those lofty exponents of the Church who did not share Pope Roncalli’s embrace to the Marxists, on assuring their covert return into the territories of the Church of Silence, on slipping news and sometimes instructions into those countries, and in obstructing with an intelligent and relentless action the

Italian programs of the opening to the left.

From time to time we gathered in the house of some eminent cardinal, to make the point of the situation. The apartment of cardinal Tedeschini, in the Via della Dateria, was one of these reference and meeting points. We used to arrive a few at a time, at dusk, and we sat about the monumental chair that accommodated the transparent majesty of that prince of the Church.

The most unlikely characters, bound to one another by the same credo, often joined us. I recall some Latin American diplomats by the Holy See, the chaplain of the Quirinale, monsignor Poletti, the Christian democrat Angelilli, the chief-editor of “L'Osservatore Romano,” Mario Cinelli, a most worthy journalist of the Catholic newspaper “Il Quotidiano,” Lamberto De Camillis, my mate of the Sword and the Cape at the Pontifical Court.

In the stillness of the Roman night, barely pierced by the subdued roar of the near-by Trevi Fountain that sometimes, brought by the breeze, filtered through the brocade curtains of the cardinal's study, our voices seemed unreal and our concern for the events, keen and unswerving, had the tones of a restrained drama. I shall always remember those long nights with emotion. The cardinal would dismiss Domenico, his household attendant, who would retire to his room, and we stood about the grand old man, for a long time, to listen and to be listened to. In those months the “resistant” met, sometimes at the Vatican, with another “iron cardinal,” Cardinal Ottaviani, venerable and almost

blind yet lucid and eager, one of the last strongholds of tradition and anti-progressivism.

The most eminent was a column of the mythical Holy Office, whose secretariat he held for many years. What was the Holy Office, the inaccessible Congregation dissolved some years later by Paul VI? The constitution of the Roman Church, the s.c. Canon Law provided that the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office had a worldwide jurisdiction in the matter of faith and morals. But since faith and morals are part of every human action, the Holy Office exercised an actual control over the jurisdiction of the other congregations, could interfere, block or annul decisions, that is, decide. Its activity was highly secret. Its control extended over the five most powerful congregations: the Consistory, in charge of the appointment of the bishops and the management of the dioceses; the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, in charge of all the matters relating to the political-religious situation of the Church and of its members; the Congregation of the Council, in charge of the discipline of secular priests and laity; the Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, in charge of religious education, priest education, development of ecclesiastical studies, etc.; and the Secretary of State. The chairs of each of these congregations were in fact members of the Holy Office. As a consequence, no decision regarding bishops and dioceses, relations between the Holy See and foreign states, behavior of ordinary clergy or laity, educational programs of the Church, could be taken without the consent and the approval of the Holy Office.

With its open Roman accent – his father had been a baker in the central Trastevere district – cardinal Ottaviani gathered around him another handful of exponents of the anti-Conciliar resistance. A most authoritative man and endowed with an inflexible will, he incited his followers to fight and give everything in their power to thwart the opening to the left and the dialogue with the Marxists. He used to beat his fist on the table, when he got carried away, and the meek features of his face would suddenly harden, and a flush invade his forehead and his cheeks. There called frequently on his place a clergyman from Palestrina. He was a favorite of the cardinal, and, as I wrote in another chapter, a dear friend of mine, Don Enrico Pompilio, chaplain of the IV Brigade of the Carabinieri stationed in Rome. He had been on the Russian and Northern African fronts, and was also a “resistant” of the new course. He had experienced “live” communism, and would not hear of pulling down his pants before ecumenism, overture, or dialogue with the Marxists. He always told me that the then Rome’s Vicar, cardinal Traglia, had once told him loud and clear, “Don Enrico, today the Devil installed himself in the Vatican!” He was idolized by his soldiers, and when later the Christian democrats secretly allied themselves with the reds, and Italy became a country actually co-run with the communists, when his carabinieri took to the streets for public order during strikes and uproars, in spite of some fearful superior, aligned, for opportunism or career, with government complacency, don Enrico inflamed them with hated harangues, exhorting them to action and to respond with violence to violence.

This coarse priest who at official ceremonies carried around on his habit a fine array of medals for gallantry, for many years was the “watch-dog” of the new generations of military chaplains. And as long as the Ordinary for Italy was the ex-Alpine and anti-ecumenical bishop, monsignor Arrigo Pintonello – who years later would lose his epaulettes for his anti-Marxist credo, and for treading on Giulio Andreotti’s feet, then minister of defense and already a Moscow favorite – the military chaplains continued to celebrate field Masses before the drawn up troops presenting the arms to the Lord, while today’s unkempt and hippie soldiers attend to the rite lying on the ground and playing guitar, out of respect for the new liturgy wanted by the Council.

CHAPTER XIV

Toward the close of John XXIII's pontificate, the resistant of "L'Osservatore Romano" were contacted, with extreme caution, by a small group of Christian democrat dissidents who at that moment were struggling with all their forces against the Fanfanian Center-left government, and against the opening to the Communist party. That wee group of "disobedients" was led by a congressman from the Trentino region, Flaminio Piccoli, who had set up an association of Catholic journalists, the U.C.S.I. (Unione cattolica stampa italiana; or Catholic Union of the Italian Press), and kept in touch with the Vatican, chiefly with "L'Osservatore Romano," through the secretary of the director of this newspaper, Gianfranco Barberini.

The latter readily agreed to act as a go-between between the Trentino's representative and the Vatican resistant led by the "pallid king." From that moment, the genial initiatives of the little man with the big gray-speckled mustache would be targeted onto facts and events of Italian politics, from the most trivial to the most demanding. Congressman Flaminio Piccoli, who through U.C.S.I. controlled some newspapers from the north, among which the Adige of Trent, which he directed, thus found in his quiver deadly darts that suddenly began to hit the target and open gaps in the opponents' ranks.

The information and the strategic plans, elaborated in the Vatican, reached Piccoli's office at the Christian Democrat

headquarters, at piazza Don Sturzo, in the EUR district, through the diligent Barberini (nicknamed Barberone for his remarkable build). And through Piccoli, swooped down to sow chaos among the ministers, on the newspapers or in Parliament, in the shape of frustrating interrogations and interventions.

The years went by fast, one after the other. The Kennedian political winds blowing from overseas, and the stubborn pro-Marxism of John XXIII swelled the sails of the Italian left, which was speeding unchecked on its route to power, when, in the late spring of 1963, Piccoli shared with the “pallid king” his utmost concern for the Regional vote in the Valle d’Aosta region, which was to take place the following October, and appeared seriously difficult for the Christian Democrat party. Therefore, the inexhaustible brains of the group barricaded behind the Bronze Door, and always ready for battle, were called in to save the day, and all the necessary means to work out an effective contingency plan were made available to the resistant. Time was running short, and the experts gave for granted the victory of the left led by the Communist party, as a consequence of an unpredictable adhesion of a certain clergy to the Giovannean ecumenism, which had turned a good number of fervent priests into preachers of the dialogue with the Marxists; of a series of favorable contingencies in the labor union field; and of a thoroughgoing propaganda skillfully developed by the PCI (Italian Communist party.)

A plan of great effect that would suddenly reverse the

situation and avert the advent to power of the left in that traditionally Catholic region would thus be of the essence. We met in the evening stillness of “L'Osservatore Romano's” deserted editorial office, to debate and hammer out our plans. But of all the plans that accumulated on the ancient nineteenth century desk of the “pallid king,” and which were thoroughly examined and studied one after the other, none appeared to the little big mustached man as clamorous as to be able to resolve in less than no time the compromised situation of the Valle d'Aosta. In the end, one fine night, the “pallid king” welcomed us opening the heavy door of the editorial office, in an unusual good mood, and smiling. His fancy, limitless at the time, had thought out a plan worthy of the most shrewd, scornful, Machiavellian mind of the Italian Renaissance. He explained to us, sitting behind his old desk and continuously passing his hand on his big, gray-speckled mustache, that he wanted to replicate in the Valle d'Aosta, a few days before the vote, nothing less than a Communist coup, with all the bric-a-brac of the most orthodox Bolshevik revolutionary tradition. Obviously, it was to be but an act, without the tiniest harm, for the love of God! to the people, but one that would have such a psychological effect as to shake the public opinion abruptly and violently, in order to divert at the last moment the majority of the votes from the Communist to the Christian Democrat party.

We all found the idea remarkable, and the details of a Salgarian (Emilio Salgari, adventure writer) plan were readied in a few weeks. “Chinese communists” commandos

would be “invented,” descending from nearby France a few nights before the election, to devastate and torch religious shrines, votive chapels, a church door or two. Those boroughs would be flooded with leaflets threatening Herodian reprisals upon the clergy, if it dared stick their nose out of convents and parishes to go to the ballot; on the same night of action, Soviet weapons would be planted all over the area, just to give the impression of an imminent violent coup, hatched by Chinese communists beyond the French border.

The Catholic spirit of those peaceful mountain folks would surely be shaken by such events, and after that formidable collective electroshock, one could wager that those freshly won over to the communist cause would precipitously go back to the moderate and Christian positions, still preached in the region by the “crossed shield.” It must be kept in mind that at the time, in some outlying areas of the Christian Democrat party, the yielding of the top and the fatal opening to the left were not shared. Amongst these areas were the Valle d'Aosta and Trentino Alto Adige regions, in whose riding belonged congressman Flaminio Piccoli.

On the night when the details of the action were worked out, the room of the “pallid king” was all an echoing of roaring laughter and enthusiastic cries. The spirit of the Renaissance prank had taken hold of us, and we laughed till we cried, and the euphoria went sky-high when the man with the gray mustache concluded that to make the most out of the hoax, to wrap up the “brave night” we should

torch the very door of Aosta's Episcopal palace. In the chorus of laughter, the little mustached man was doubled up in his armchair, as we pictured the meek bishop of Aosta awakened in the dead of night, rushing in his night gown to a window and give a start at the glowing flames, and heard the cries of the old housemaid shuffling about her slippers, and then, at dawn, the fear grip the city, as the horrified people turned over in their hands those cyclostyled sheets spelling terrible threats, as news of night fires, of smashed saints on the highway, of Russian guns turned up from bushes and from under park benches hit the city from the surrounding valleys. We pictured the confusion of the political circles, the perplexity of the communists, baffled, furious for that incomprehensible, incredible, moronic action of an extremist group outside of their control, and what is more, organized abroad, which in a moment had upset their victorious plans.

That, for the resistant, was a memorable night. An iced bottle of champagne and a tray of glasses popped out of nowhere, and the sharp pop of the cork and the bubbling of the wine saluted the unanimous approval of the great hoax. Which in the following days was reported and illustrated to Piccoli, who approved it and made available to the "pallid king" a sum of money in order to get the organization work promptly started. And be ready at the designated time.

To cause the planned havoc in the Valle d'Aosta, the little man in gray chose three trustworthy collaborators. A brother of his, a living clone of an aging Emperor Francis Joseph, the intermediary of Piccoli, Barberini, and he who

wrote, and is still laughing, you must believe me, these pages. From accurate and interesting information that had been pouring in great secrecy onto the desk of the “pallid king,” gathered in Valle d'Aosta by efficient executives of the local Christian Democrat chapter, we discovered that a certain portion of the young clergy, sometimes in contrast with the bishop, had been implementing the ecumenical directions in a radical and quasi-scandalous way, not only tolerating Marxism, but encouraging its diffusion amongst the faithful.

In that preliminary stage of the Valle d’Aosta action and in the course of the same, I could perceive the commitment and the faith of excellent marginal exponents of the Christian Democrat party, who struggled for those ideals that constituted the tradition of their party. Ideals that were already systematically betrayed and reneged, more or less secretly, by the most prominent exponents, the very same that today have handed Italy over to the communists. I could also verify the perfect camouflage of the organization that the local executives of the Christian Democrat party put at our disposal, and today, many years after those experiences, today that the Italian situation has plummeted to levels of barbarian degeneration, in which the political adversaries and the “troublemakers” are killed without delay, in which almost daily bombs explode here and there in the Peninsula and the shots of the ambushes resound all over and blood flows in streams, I fully realize how a ruthless political power can hit with impunity for its own advantage, wearing on its face the crimson mask of the ultra-leftists, today, and the black one of right-extremism,

tomorrow.

While I cannot help smiling, recalling that Valle d'Aosta action, in all goliardic and Renaissance-like, flashing of mocking geniality, intelligent, linear, clean, bloodless, which achieved its success doing away with dramatic tones.

In the fervor of the preparation, summer came, and with it came the passing of John XXIII. At the death of Roncalli, the plan preparation was briefly stalled. The anti-Giovannean resistance was mobilized on a wide scale. The election of Giovanni Battista Montini, archbishop of Milan, creature of Roncalli and fearsome prosecutor of the progressive policy of the scarcely deceased Pope, was a strong possibility. His past was known, his secret friendship with the Kremlin and international Marxism, his ambiguity of personage constantly exposed to blackmail. The election punctually dealt the Church of Silence its first hard blow. And through the ciphered messages of the Vatican radio, and the abnegation of brave exiles from Eastern Europe who willingly shuttled, between their Viennese base and their home countries, the resistance slipped past the Iron curtain a series of messages to warn and prepare the Catholic populations oppressed by communism, for the worse, and instructions were imparted to the clandestine clergy operating in the East.

Immediately after, the work resumed with the highest caution. In fact, the "pallid king" had been in Montini's black list for years. The loyalty of the little mustached man

toward Eugenio Pacelli and his ancient friendship with Count Dalla Torre, who for decades had lent his face to the most integralist Vatican and Catholic traditionalism, were well known to the new Pope.

The plan of the resistant was perfected. In late September 1963, on a wet night filled with the odor of an incipient fall, the Russian weapons covertly entered the State of the Vatican City. They entered through the St. Anne's gate, dominated by the keys of St. Peter, accurately crated and locked in the trunk of an old, monumental green Cadillac, bearing Carinthian plates, and the private car of the "pallid king." At the wheel of the car, a welcome present of old of munificent America to a cardinal of the Curia, sat the little man in gray, on a pillow that allowed him to emerge with his large Etruscan mustached nose above the massive dashboard of the car, phosphorescent with gauges. I sat on his right. The Swiss Guard approached the window, as with studied sluggishness, quietly and tacking, the car made it past the Vatican gate. He recognized the occupant and clicking his heels he rendered honor to the car, to the secretary of "L'Osservatore Romano," to the dignitary of the Pontifical Court, and to the Soviet arms that certainly, in the darkness of the trunk and in the buzzing of the engine, started to sing in a low-voice, in the emphasis of the paradox, the solemn, atheist and revolutionary tune of the "Moscovia." The self-possessed "pallid king" had stepped his buckskin-shoed little foot on the gas, and the gigantic green car had leaped forward rustling on the tires, dashed down the Via del Pellegrino and now was coming to a halt, along the sidewalk, beside the closed street-door of

“L'Osservatore Romano.”

“Do you have any idea of the enormity of this thing?” said I softly, as if someone could be hearing us, as the little mustached man turned the key and killed the eight cylinders of the Cadillac. And I felt like laughing. “Of course I do. It’s all so incredible and fantastic,” rejoined the “pallid king.” And he broke into his falsetto laugh, and I laughed along, seized by an irrepressible intoxication, thinking that one day I would be writing this story, oh yes! It was all so flatly incredible and fine. And almost unthinkable. And all seemed to me again unreal, the contact with the film-maker and the story of the American collector, the choice of the pieces, the deal, the wad of cash, the acquisition, until I laid my hands on the hard, smooth and heavy consistency of those Soviet machine-guns and muskets, as I was taking them out of the crate, one after another, and placing them, in good view, on a large Persian rug that the little man in gray had pulled out and unrolled from a closet, muttering, sneering, that that rug had been put under the feet of Paul VI, on his recent visit to “L'Osservatore Romano,” as became the Pope. Presently, one of the coordinators of the Jesuit resistance, Father Farusi from the Vatican Radio, rang the conventional signal at the editorial office’s door, and was introduced, as a conjurer, to contemplate all those “devilish goodies” dished out on the rug consecrated by the papal soles, in the editorial office’s secretary. Jesuitically, the Jesuit did not bat an eyelid, behind his glasses, but stooped to take a closer look at the merchandise, quite unusual for a man of God, as I illustrated to him the pieces, all with the

trade marks well visible and made evident by skilful polishing. In the lot were Russian Parabellum machine guns, Hungarian-made Mannlicher muskets with sickle, hammer and red star branded on the butt, Nagant and Browning pistols.

The large Persian carpet that had borne the steps of Paul VI, held in its “ecumenical” embrace all those arms of the godless in a voluminous bundle, and the carpet with its content was locked up in a closet, whose key, from that moment on, always hung on the belt of the “pallid king.” At this point, we worked out the last details of the plan, which would unfold in three stages. First: acquisition in France of all the material necessary to direct the police investigation toward the intended lead; second: topographical survey of the selected region and selection of the targets; third: action. Torching and “destruction” of the objectives, launch of the threatening leaflets and conclusive scattering of the weapons in downtown Aosta. We would split in two groups; the “pallid king” and I were to develop the attack along the valley, from the French border to Aosta; “Barberone” and the “Augsburg” brother of the little mustached man, were to act within the city. Then, in the dead of the night, we would meet at a fixed point to storm downtown Aosta and “light up” the portal of the Bishop’s palace. At the end of the raid, a farmhouse in the near-by country would be ready to host us in great secrecy, until things would settle down and we could return, undisturbed, to Rome.

The night of Friday October 11, Barberone and I landed

at Paris' Orly airport. That night and the following day we filled our rooms at the Hotel "Louvre" with all that we had bought with frenetic precision in the department stores: mountain boots with an evident "made in France" on the soles, clearly French plastic containers, portable torches, cyclostyle paper, French road maps of the Valle d'Aosta and a chest to carry on the airplane all that material to Rome.

Back in Rome – a phone call from the Vatican had ensured immunity at the customs – a few days later, on the evening of October 15, the "pallid king" and I boarded the sleeping-car that the following morning would make a stop under the roof of Turin's railway station.

The "Augsburg" and Barberone would be reaching the "operation zone" a couple of days later, carrying with them the material in the famous trunk. At the last moment the "pallid king," responsible for the action, decided to abandon the idea of introducing the Russian weapons into Aosta: they would be an excessive risk for all of us, and, perhaps, the "credibility" of the whole action might have been compromised by such overkill.

Locked up in the closet of "L'Osservatore Romano," wrapped in the carpet of the Pope, the Kremlin's machine guns and muskets continued their tranquil doze, guarded by the unhurried tolls of St. Peter's cupola and by the monotonous to and fro pacing of the halberded Swiss sentinels at the three gates of the little State.

We took discrete contacts with a nice young man, and an executive of the local Christian Democrat party, who put at our disposal two fast party's FIATs, and explained to us that in case of trouble, if we were to be detained by the police, that is, we would be promptly released, with no consequence of any sort. This was, naturally, a deplorable hypothesis to be discarded a priori, as it would surely jeopardize the positive outcome of the vote. We set down accurately the whole plan, up and down the valley, with the Monte Bianco hooded in snow alternatively ahead or behind us, depending on whether we climbed toward the border, or descended toward Aosta. On the morning of October 18, arrived from Rome our two companions in adventure, and the action was set for the night of Saturday 19. The "pallid king" displayed unexpected secret-agent skills. The two groups apparently did not know one another, and when they had to speak, accosted the car in a city parking, and, pretending to be reading a newspaper, they spoke through the open windows without turning their head.

And so came the "longest night." As the "Augsburg" and Barberone marched on to their city targets, chapels and shrines of saints to set ablaze or raze to the ground, the "pallid king" and I drove up the valley, headlights on, with the hood full of jerry cans filled with gasoline, which we went laying beside the chosen targets.

So we reached the farthest point, when at the "x" hour we would be starting back, igniting the fuses. For the occurrence we had had prepared by a skilled manufacturer

of “firecrackers” and fireworks, a certain number of small fuses to be launched from a distance. They were little tubes filled with black powder and ending, on one extremity, with a sulfur head. Rubbing the sulfur on abrasive paper, the ignited tube would be tossed onto the gasoline-sprinkled target. The black powder, catching fire, would be blazing in the night. I was at the wheel, my pockets full of those jolly big matches, and the task of my mustached comrade was to dash onto the target and sprinkle it with gasoline, and mine that of lighting up the sticks and toss them, taking good aim, onto the target.

The “pallid king” clicked open his pocket Movado watch, looked up the hour, and “Let’s move,” said he. I cranked up the motor again, and soon we were on our first strategic objective: a terracotta little Madonna, in quasi natural scale, whose conjoined hands the people of the valley had filled with flowers, illumined by a nightlight, standing in a roadside shrine. I braked. The little mustached man sprang out of the car, dashed to the shrine holding out his hands and clasped the neck of the Madonna pulling toward him with all his strength. But the Madonna, which had been anchored to the shrine with a steel wire, resisted; a silent struggle presently ensued between the mustached iconoclast on a furious attack, and the Madonna with the flowered hands, who, smiling, would not give in. I was laughing out my guts, and at the end the most catholic chief-editor of “L'Osservatore Romano” clasped with all of his little weight the neck of the Madonna, and this came down and with a thud went to pieces on the asphalt. The panting wrestler quickly spread out in the shrine and on the

ground a handful of those leaflets cyclostyled in Rome by the innocuous “Barberone,” which promised “...Kicks in the butts, flying fists and a bullet to all those priests and nuns who would dare stick their nose out of the house on election day,” got back in the car and we drove toward our second objective: a big cross several meters high, dominating a little hill on the left hand side of the road. We had placed around it, coming in, a crown of containers full of gas and now the “pallid king” had unscrewed the cap of a jerry can he was holding between his legs, filled with gas to the rim, which he planned to empty on the others for a surer and more catastrophic blaze. I observed him out the corner of my eye, and saw him visibly excited. He looked ahead, in the night cut by the white beam of the headlights, and his large Etruscan nose would contract now and again on the thick hedge of his mustache. It was a man of learning and religion, Andrea Lazzarini, His Excellency, as I called him, affectionately. And he was an aristocrat, and an earnest papist, the old-fashioned type. The odd sensation of the violent action, risky and blasphemous had evidently surprised him, intoxicating him. “Damn!” cried he, when the car hopped on a hole I had not seen, and the gasoline in the open jerry can sprinkled between his legs, fouling the car with its odor. “It gave me a bidet! Oh God, does it burn!” I laughed the dickens to myself, in the night, and, on a bend, there rose before us, against the stars, the lofty and dark shape of the big cross on the hill. “Ready,” I said, as I pulled to the roadside and stopped the car. Lazzarini got out with the vessel in his arms, and I saw him starting up the slope, small and hindered by the weight, till he made the foot of the cross. He bowed down laboring, for a couple of

minutes, and I knew he had opened the caps of the other cans and was now emptying on them the gas he had carried with him, and then he ran down the slope toward me, yelling, breathless, “the light! The light!” I rushed by, and some twenty meters from the cross I rubbed the stick on the sandpaper, took aim and tossed it, and outlining a violet parabola in the air it dropped at the foot of the cross, on the gasoline tanks, and a hell of fire rose roaring against the sky. I rushed to the car as the heat radiated all about. The little mustached man, exhausted, lay in his car seat flooded with the stench of the gas emanating from his pants, and the reflection from the blaze illumined his happy smile in his big, disheveled mustache. The car now sped toward Aosta, and behind us the night was coming alight of a red, quivering glow. And thus we both knew that the big cross of the Valle d'Aosta had been irremediably destroyed by the terrible “Chinese communists enemies of God and of the Christian West.”

That fantastic Aurora Borealis continued for a time, palpitating, in the night. We drove toward Aosta, along the deserted road, punctuating from stretch to stretch our nightly journey with blazing lights. Even my Etruscan comrade, viscount of Formigine, novel furious Jupiter, launched his blazing darts hollering and laughing, as if soothed reminiscences of ancient feudal barbarities had been surfacing from the depth of his subconscious.

At the fixed hour, punctual as a train of other times, we reunited with the other pair of iconoclast-pyromaniacs in the name of faith and anti-subversion. The “Augsburg,”

whose name was Alessandro and carried in his veins the ancient Etruscan blood of the “pallid king,” dominated with his scornful self-assurance the growing perplexities of Barberone. The “pallid king” raised his gemmed hand beckoning us to move on, and we started for the bishop’s palace, trotting, as a cavalry squad, the two of us in the lead. We had to penetrate a courtyard with two exits flanking the bishop’s palace. On the right hand side of the edifice, the street door of the dwelling of the representative of the Pope. We passed and passed around the target, and, when the night security guard turned the corner and pedaled away, we stealthily slipped into the courtyard, one car after the other. We swiftly built a pyramid of jerry cans against the door panes, unscrewed the caps, placed the messages, and all four of us lit up and tossed the fuses. There was a hurricane of fire, and the courtyard was in full daylight. As the roaring blazes incinerated in a flash the base of the massive portal, we dashed through the exit, darted through the square and cut through the quickest route to make the countryside.

Twenty minutes later we were in the safety of the farmhouse and on the cars with the motor red-hot for the race, holed up in a hayloft, scratched about hens and chickens of the hospitable farmer.

In the morning, as the people of Aosta gathered by, benumbed by the surprise, before the profaned bishop’s palace and the knocked down shrines, handing around the threatening leaflets of Mao-Tse-Tung’s followers, and groups of violent clashed in the streets, the Turin’s daily

“La Stampa,” titling “Acts of Vandalism in Valle d’Aosta Trigger Incidents Between Communists and Christian Democrats,” published the photograph of the devastated portal, and a column pointing to “unknown vandals who call themselves sympathizers of the Chinese communists” as the authors of the outrageous acts.

Let them write what they please. The stone in the glass of the Marxists and of the ecumenical clergy supporting the Valle d’Aosta’s Communist Party had been right on the target. The crystal had been shattered and the larks had flown away.

A few days after, in fact, the same newspaper on October 29 proclaimed the victory of the Christian democrats in that important election.

And the uncomfortable bundle wrapped in the rug of the Pope? Some months later, one night, the famous and “unemployed” weapons from the Kremlin left the Vatican, as they had entered it, in the trunk of the Cadillac of the viscount of Formigine, saluted by the Swiss guard. They reached the Fiumicino shores in the night, and were consigned to the bottom of the Tyrrhenian Sea, to keep company, unrequested and perhaps unwelcome, with the fish.

CHAPTER XV

As a modernist-reformer, and, above all, as the progressive-revolutionary that he was, Roncalli knew perfectly that only a bold Ecumenical Council could unleash those forces that would wrestle the reins from the hands of traditional power, taking over that power. It was the old Marxist “coup d'état technique.” The thorough preparation, followed by the surprise action. John XXIII had not uttered a word to anyone of his intention to summon an Ecumenical Council. The astute progressive from Sotto il Monte knew perfectly that a good part of the Cardinalitial College would not share his enthusiasm and his intention. Many cardinals, faithful to those Pacellian structures that had preserved the Church intact through two decades dense with upset balances, knew what was brewing in the Church's pot, and had rather extinguished the fire under that boiling pot than raise the temperature until the lid blew off. It had been known for years, in the Vatican, and it was certainly known to Pius XII, that in some part of the world the Church was struggling oppressed by issues apparently irresolvable. That in certain far out regions of Latin America there were parish priests who had started a family, and carried on their priestly and parish duties, guaranteeing the unity of those parishes on the edge of civilization. The Pope knew of those most serious irregularities. But he had resolved to intervene with caution and discretion, without triggering a scandal. Taking into account the extraordinary needs of those human groups semi-abandoned to themselves. And, therefore, he worked

with understanding sensitivity to restore orthodoxy in those parishes. But he worked in absolute secrecy. The clergy at large and the ordinary man, unprepared and vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation, were not to share the knowledge of certain delicate issues of the Church, which they would fatally misconstrue or twist to their favor, so that the scandal would spread, sweeping away people, ideas, and institutions. Those isolated cases, emarginated in the farthest corners of the globe, would be regained one by one to normality. Made public, they would trigger that reaction which indeed was to be triggered with the Council. The masses, mostly ignorant and incapable of grasping many facets of ecclesial issues, coarsely maneuvered by the newspapers, felt in the right to meddle with the things of the Church. And so, in the case at issue, the celibacy of the priests became everybody's subject, and, expectedly, a great part of the public opinion, instigated by the progressive press and clergy, took side against celibacy. And presently appeared, on illustrated magazines, detailed stories and pictures publicizing clergymen in the act of celebrating the Mass in the kitchen, with their concubine at their side, between a pack of spaghetti and a flask of Chianti. Movie theaters countrywide began to give scandalous films on the licentious life of the reverends. All this soon determined a remarkable drop in the public respect of the clergy. Marxism blew out its lungs upon those dangerous embers, and the blaze started to flare up within the clergy's base, with increasingly frequent and open rebellions against those bishops who still dared attempt to contain those exploits.

Of the countless episodes, the rebellion of the parish priest of the Florence's Isolotto district, and that of St. Paul's abbot, don Franzoni, in Rome, are meaningful examples of how much storm did harvest him who sowed all that wind.

Those two rebels were naturally backed up by the respective parishioners, and press and television used up tons of paper and magnetic tape to turn two rows with the well calculated ends, into spontaneous manifestations of post-Conciliar "conscience taking." So that even the presumption of those revolutionary-mutineers – for calculation – was irresistibly stirred. Indeed, from the obscure clergymen that they were, from one day to the next they turned into arrogant and proud people-leaders who "made news" every day of the week.

Many cardinals of the old regime knew exactly how things would go if the lid, as they said, blew off the old pot of the Church, and the masses could now peep within at leisure. For this very reason the shrewd John XXIII shot out at point blank the idea of the Council, without consulting any of those cardinals.

That unforgettable Sunday of 25 January 1959, at St. Pauls's Basilica – right between those walls that only a few years later would be watching over one of the flowers blossomed from the ecumenical progressivism, John XXIII had announced the Council. After the Mass, having bestowed the blessing, the Pope with the procession had crossed the basilica and reached the adjoining monastery,

wherein he lingered with Cardinals Mimmi, Agagianian, Aloisi Masella, Pizzardo, Tedeschini, Tardini, Confalonieri, Valeri, Giobbe, Canali, Ottaviani, and Di Jorio, who had attended the papal solemn function. The Pope announced to those most eminent, the “cream” of the Cardinalitial College, in his usual good-natured Venetian diction, humble and quasi-incidental, a Synod for the diocese of Rome, and then, the celebration of an Ecumenical Council for the Universal Church and the revision of the Canon Law Code, to be preceded by the upcoming promulgation of the Oriental Law Code.

Cardinal Tedeschini told me that he and the other cardinals were petrified and alarmed for the surprise. For they knew those were the less auspicious years to call up a Council of that import, and, promptly, when still in their chairs before the Pope, apparently impassive but with a deluge of emotions in their soul, they resolved to exercise all of their influence to talk the Pope out of that enterprise. But the ultimate cold shower was to swoop down on the heads of those cardinals some ten minutes later. As they were being driven back to their residences, many of them learned from the radio that in the very moment the Pope was informing them, the world had been informed of the promulgation of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, by order of the Pope. John XXIII, in contempt of every custom, had simply gone over the Cardinalitial College, in taking such a terrible responsibility upon himself. The news had already been passed on to the press, unbeknownst to most of the Vatican top brass, and was now spreading frenetically throughout the world. Tedeschini’s house

assistant, Domenico, told me that that night the old cardinal could not fall asleep. The light kept burning in his study, and only at dawn did the prince of the Church lie in bed. Some days later I called on him at the Dateria, to learn that the Pope had told him he had been instructed in a dream to summon a great Council. Cardinal Tedeschini had the feeling the Pope was pushing him around. Knowing Roncalli, that would have been a sure bet. Monsignor Faveri, who, as I wrote, was fond of hanging around my country house, in the stillness of the Agro, told me, with aloofness, of the unpopularity he had been earning himself in the Council, week after week. In fact, he was one of the few, with monsignor Lefebvre, who methodically rose to his feet to respond to the preordained stances of the assembly on the most delicate themes of clerical progressivism. Some bishops, because of his intransigent and old-fashioned attitude, were now ignoring him. Listening to the confidences of my guest with the golden cross, I could thus obtain a measure of the resentment a bad priest, and only a bad priest, is capable of, when somebody stands in his way. Resentment far deeper in constancy, hypocrisy, and malevolence, than the worst secular's. My very guest, intolerant of any gags and therefore picked on with particular attention by the new regime installed by the Giovannean progressivism, was the protagonist of a clamorous reaction, when one bad morning, leaving the Council for the noon break, courteously yet firmly he was asked to surrender his briefcase full of papers and documents, to the inspection of the gendarmerie. The bishop refused, threatened a press scandal, thundered with cardinal Tisserant. The incident was hushed up, but it was

enough to create in the Council that gloomy atmosphere of conspiracy that would come to characterize it throughout its first term, under John XXIII's pontificate, and, even more drastically, throughout the catastrophic sequel undersigned by Roncalli's predestined successor.

But what was at the root of that unusual and disrespectful police measure evocative of late imperial times? Few know that since the inception of the Ecumenical Council that pointed its bow toward the tempestuous waters of the total reformation of the Church in light of sociological and Marxist theories, the Catholic world non-aligned to the revolutionary approach, which it judged disastrous for the future of Christianity, after the first moments of dejection and indignation regrouped to hinder in every way the pace of that steamroller that was crushing under its weight the traditional Church and all that with her identified. Catholics, since the very first weeks of the Council had closed ranks and begun to organize, to try and open the eyes of the Conciliar fathers to the truths that were concealed from them, and whose ignorance was turning them into instruments of religious subversion. Clandestine publications explaining with a wealth of names, dates, and facts the behind-the-scene activities and the hidden aims of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council began to reach the private residences of the most excellent bishops. In the first weeks of the Council, this proliferation of underground press, aimed at lifting the pitch shroud before the eyes of the bishops, was shrewdly kept hidden from the outside world. But those diligent bishops long conquered to the cause of progressivism and already gratified, for their

reforming zeal and their revolutionary credo, with promotions and prebends, promptly denounced that sort of fifth column, and the Conciliar fathers were invited to surrender daily all those brochures printed all over the world, and especially in North and Latin America, France, and Spain, which by degrees were heaping on the desks of their private apartments, delivered almost weekly by mail, or, sometimes, by mysterious couriers. But it was soon realized that not all of the bishops were obeying the invitation. So much so that some of these little volumes found their way outside the Vatican, and when a comprehensive publication arguing that the election of John XXIII was illegal as it had been masterminded by freemasonry, and indicating Roncalli as a member of that sect since the times of his nunciature in Turkey, ended up into watchful Episcopal hands and less cautious secular ones, the repression spared no corner of the Leonine City. It seems that the Pope, at that blow aimed straight at his person, just for once had lost his temper, ordering the search, as they exited St. Peter, of those bishops “more suspected” of opposing the new course. The pontifical Gendarmerie organized in great secret a small squad that began, with grace, to stick their nose into the briefcase of some most excellent bishop. Some put up with it. Some resisted, among these my friend Faveri.

That grave, inadmissible order injurious of Episcopal dignity, did not block the outflow of those much undesired publications, which continued, and more copiously, to circulate not only in Rome, but also in Italy and in the rest of the world. So much so that in a special issue of the

Vatican weekly “L'Osservatore della Domenica” (The Sunday Observer), printed on the occasion of the conclusion of the Council, titled “The Vatican II Ecumenical Council,” it was not possible to ignore that phenomenon which by now had become unofficially known to all. And in fact the director of the weekly, professor Enrico Zuppi, was ordered to publish a piece to attempt to play down and ridicule that flourishing of counter-information that lasted uninterrupted throughout the Council.

On page 154 of that special issue there appears, in fact, a three column article, “L'anonima letteratura anticonciliare” (The Anonymous Anti-Conciliar Literature), which, through the teeth, concedes the intense and uninterrupted actuality of the phenomenon, stating that “... As to the content, it may be added that many of these publications hide behind a suspicious concern for orthodoxy, from which they draw the pretext to attack inconsiderately Cardinals and Bishops, accusing them of wanting to introduce heresies, subvert the Church and sell it out to earthly interests...” and again, “...The first and more massive text published in August 1962... Has been launched under the pseudonym “Maurice Pinay” ...The presentation promised “tremendous revelations,” yet it is but a muddled jumble of gratuitous and illogical accusations against the Fathers of the Council who are “plotting to destroy” – as the appeal to the Reader reads – “the most sacred traditions, realizing bold and malevolent reforms, of the kind of Calvin’s, Zwingli’s, and other great heresiarchs’, all under the pretension of modernizing the

Church and bringing it up to date, yet with the covert purpose of opening the gates to communism, and accelerating the future ruin of Christianity.” And to follow, “...In some cyclostyled sheets from America (Caledonia, N. Y.) in August 1964, a Hugo Maria Kellner, after attacking “the devastating effects of secularism,” accuses the leaders of the Church of not making adequate efforts “to contain the catastrophic decadence of the inner qualities of Catholicism, that took place in the last decades.” For this author, many Conciliar Fathers would have “fallen victims to a satanic enticement suggesting the use, apparently praiseworthy, of the word of Christ, to ruin and destroy the Church.”

And again, “... The attacks, however, more consistent and harsh, have been those leveled against the “falsely converted Jews” and the “International Judaic-masonic organization B’nai B’rith.” Some authors of little brochures or circular letters, secretly delivered to the private addresses of the Fathers, have stated that, “Only the Hebrew is truly the deicide people,” for “Judaism, through freemasonry, communism, and all the subversive organizations it has created and directed, continues to fight Christ in an arrogant and implacable form.”

“... The campaign is not limited to Italy, but is now extended to the whole Latin world. The main culprits have been clearly indicated. Here are the “Heretical voices”: The German theologians, of the Hebrew race, Oesterreicher and Baum, who would have had the task to “Judaize the Christians”; Rev. Klyber, who has “brainwashed the

Catholics in favor of the Jews;” Cardinal Bea, who “in presenting his project for a decree in favor of the Jews and in opposition to the Gospels, has concealed from the Conciliar Fathers that he was repeating the thesis suggested to him by the masonic order of the B'nai B'rith.”

And, to conclude, not even the “Delfino” of Roncalli, Paul VI, has been spared from the deluge of attacks leveled against the Hierarchy in these heated years of the Council. In a small pamphlet printed in November 1965 in California, and signed Militant Servants of our Lady of Fatima, it is stated ... that “The Pope (Paul VI) has perpetrated a detestable crime, comparable with an apostasy, pronouncing a speech before atheist representatives of the United Nations,” and that October 4 – date of the pontifical visit to the UN – must be considered a day of darkness, second only to that of the crucifixion of Jesus, for on that date the Pontiff would have delivered the Mystical Body of Christ into the hands of the United Nations organism controlled by Jews, Freemasons, and Communists.”

Much could be said in the margin and in response to the three little columns printed by the Vatican magazine. With regard to the ridiculed alarmism of those concerned with the feared marriage with the protestants, the facts speak for themselves: Already in 1971, and precisely at Easter time, in the heart of Rome, in the ancient German church of the Anima, they concelebrated the Mass with the protestants, clandestinely yet in agreement, evidently, with the Vatican. The “Giornale d’Italia” in the issues of 9 and 10 April

1971, divulged the detailed news on the staging of that incredible “Zusammenarbeit.”

As for the attempted “rescue” of the Christians by Judaism, it should be remembered that Paul VI, in his visit to the UN, as it is visible in the photographs taken of him on that occasion, carried the “Ephod,” the Rational of Judgment, the insignia of the Hebrew Supreme Priest, which he had started exhibiting on his pontifical habit ever since the time of his visit to Palestine, stitched on his white habit. It is no secret among UN employees that most of the American officials use Yiddish in their chats.

It is symptomatic that in that article of the Vatican magazine commemorative of the Council, no hint of the accusation of freemason leveled against Roncalli, and the debated issue on the legitimacy of his election to the pontifical see, was ever made. The two very arrows in the flank that caused John XXIII to lose his traditional self-control. And no hint is made on what the underground press revealed later on, Paul VI reigning, upon the Jewish ancestry of Giovanni Battista Montini.

In light of the facts that followed in the years after the Council, it must be recognized that many of those writings, sometimes desperate, that reached the Conciliar Fathers, turned out to be prophetic. In my capacity of columnist of “L'Osservatore Romano,” the newspaper that throughout the pontificate of Pius XII had been among the most prestigious source of information in the world, I witnessed, with the mounting of Vatican progressivism as well as

Marxism in Italy, the gradual loss of any significance of the expression “freedom of press.” The Vatican newspaper was joined by a young priest of Jewish origin, Don Levi, who took the reins of the paper in his hands, depriving even the director, Raimondo Manzini, a meek man and a perfect go-getter, of his authority, and the newspaper became the obedient spokesman of the new regime, turning into a bulletin of clerical progressivism. Meanwhile, the word “journalist” in Italy lost rapidly its luster, as it now came to be identified with people who had sold out their conscience and their intellectual freedom to the regime in power.

In those years I was to witness shameful defections of qualified personages, whom I respected and considered incorruptible, and who, on the contrary, driven by huge salaries, gave up their good brains, prostituting soul and body to the market of the more indecorous politics. If one could read today, with attention, those underground booklets that scared the heck out of the Vatican, then, and that today are unobtainable, preserved as the prized documents that they are, by those lucky enough to own any, he would be struck by their accuracy.

But then, what was to happen afterwards was unthinkable. Beyond many of those predictions. The great ability of John XXIII had made it possible that the distant and absent-minded observer would fail to grasp the changes in the course that his large peasant hand, guided by a first rate mind, imparted to the helm of the Church. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli walked briskly on his program, but tried to raise the least immediate attention, or dangerous alarm.

The external aspect of the Vatican remained unchanged. The Court ritual remained the same, even if, as I have said, a certain inflation of new personages with the papers not exactly in order placed in key positions, would not escape the attentive eye. Some, in the Vatican, had defined John XXIII the “Ermete Zacconi” of the modern Church, for his innate ability of appearing under the most unlikely aspects. Roncalli, in fact, had two faces, which he dominated at will. The official one for all, amiable and humble, and the one that counted terribly, firm and resolute, stubborn and absolute. Occasionally, he who stood just a meter from him would catch a glimpse of the true face, behind his smiling public mask. In a remark, during a conversation, or in a gesture of his hands.

That glimpse, those remarks, those gestures, were the revelation of his disposition, which could be hard to the verge of callousness. An example ignored by most: Incited by his advisors, he denied the poor Padre Pio the apostolic blessing on the fiftieth anniversary of the monk’s priesthood, in the August of 1960, and prevented him from bestowing the papal blessing to the faithful gathered at San Giovanni Rotondo. The anti-communism of the Capuchin with the stigmata was no secret in the Vatican, and the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (House for the Relief of Suffering), the great hospital realized with the offerings from the whole world, whetted the burning greed of many clergymen.

After the “Pacem in Terris,” the visit of the Adzhubeis in the Vatican and the Italian election of 28 April 1963 that

saw the communists gain one million more votes than in the political election five years before, Pope John received a certain John McCone, who had flown to Rome from the US two days earlier. The audience was recorded on the official bulletin of the Holy See, but none of the Vatican observers paid any heed to it at the time. Some time afterwards, the close circle of the pontifical family identified that figure with a branch director of the “secret intelligence” of the United States, that is, a high-ranking official of the CIA.

When I learned of the identification of that mysterious American, another little empty space of the vast and multi-faceted Giovannean mosaic sketched out in the notes of my notebooks had finally its clarifying piece.

Indeed, in early May of 1963, if I recall correctly, at the end of a papal chapel, as I walked toward the lateral exit of the basilica together with Cardinal Tisserant, who was in the company of Cardinals Spellman and McIntyre, I heard Spellman express to the archbishop of Los Angeles his concerns for an urgent step the Pope had asked him to undertake with the White House, “... because after receiving that personality, the Pope had the impression he was being stalked by American cops, and he absolutely did not tolerate... .” Now that remark took on a significance of its own. As with hindsight, took a precise dimension of their own those tidbits of conversation between the Pope and monsignor Capovilla, which made me reflect for a time. The Pope spoke of Khrushchev. “We must love and help that man,” said he, “As perhaps he is the connecting

link we have been waiting for so long between Communism and Christianity... Jesus Christ, in his own way was a true communist, too... And he was a victim of Roman imperialism... How many analogies with our time... Yes, we must pray the Lord for Khrushchev... We must get as close as possible to him... To him and to Soviet Russia, which will be the protagonist... of the future of the world...”

That day, at the end of my detail, as the black Chrysler of the Court was driving me home, I set down on my notebook, as was my habit, those words of John XXIII's unveiling an horizon which to me had been hitherto quite blurred, but whose outline I was now slowly making out with increasing astonishment. A few weeks after that Wednesday, Luciano Casimirri, director of the Vatican Press Service, informed me of the intention of the Pope to invite to the Vatican Khrushchev's son-in-law, Adzhubei. I immediately linked that breaking news with the words of John XXIII, on that general-audience Wednesday. Day followed day, and then the news of the reception of Adzhubei was given, and the Pope received Khrushchev's son-in-law. In those days, in one of his usual window speeches, John XXIII told the crowd in St. Peter's square waiting for the blessing, "...You must love Khrushchev, God loves him..." He was cheered by the ecstatic response of the communists of Italy.

Did John XXIII ever realize how the Italian Communist party exploited his work and his person? He certainly did. His policy studiously cleared the way for communism in

Italy, and to the leftist forces of the West. Indeed, it seems evident that Roncalli calculated with absolute sense of timing every action, every word, and every gesture, so that the communists could use them to their own ends, and to the extreme consequences. In the latter part of his reign, Roncalli had probably moments of critical atonement for his revolutionary and pro-communist policy. Perhaps the illness that undermined him in his last months weakened his iron will, and sentiment had sometimes the upper hand.

In the very last days of his pontificate, brief yet devastating as an earthquake, predicted by the naïve as a “pontificate of transition,” the habits of John XXIII changed. He withdrew into himself. There were no more guests sitting at his table, his traditional good appetite had suddenly worn out and he appeared different, taciturn, absorbed. To the Household Master, “Commendatore” Pio Manzia, suggesting, as usual, the tasting of precious wines, he would rejoin unhappily, “...The good times are gone, “commendatore” dear. I feel oppressed, almost crushed by these years in which I have been a Pope...”

The change was attributed to the early worsening of the illness that was afflicting him. But, perhaps, the causes were others. Perhaps Roncalli had looked back and considered, for the first time, his work from the angle of the man from Sotto il Monte, cast in a genuine peasant mould, not from that of John XXIII, personage-tool that had been instrumental to the disruption of the history of the Church and humanity, directing it toward an obscure course.

CHAPTER XVI

Analyzing the facts that occurred during the brief, revolutionary pontificate of John XXIII, it seems as if History had set up a date with Roncalli, clearing the way, in the great whole of the international political game, to the realization of his own program.

In the United States of America, president Kennedy had no criticisms for the program his “eggheads” had hammered out for Italy. To them it did not seem just that Italy, liberated also at the cost of American blood from fascism, should continue to be run by a party, the Christian Democrat of the time, characterized by a solid center-right approach steadily anchored to Vatican conservatism. And had suggested to the young and enthusiastic president, the exportation, to Italy, of that center-left formula that, upsetting their plans, would clear the way to the advent of communism in the power zone of that Country. The formula, studied in every possible detail by the White House’s experts, was shipped well packed out to Italy. And it arrived in the nick of time, when John XXIII was beginning to “open” to Marxism, and the words “reconciliation” and “dialogue” seemed the magic recipes indispensable to resolve every contrast and issue with the communist East. The Italian Christian Democrat party, which had been in power ever since the fall of fascism, sensing the new directions of the wind, across the Atlantic and across the Tiber, and most of all concerned, as is customary with all the political parties of nearly all the

“vague” democracies cheering up the modern man, with maintaining at all costs its hegemony, promptly adopted that formula simply inconceivable for the Italy of the time. The Vatican had chosen Amintore Fanfani, deemed the most suitable politician to realize the “opening” to the left. The choice had been the fruit of a cautious and very shrewd work of persuasion exerted by Loris Capovilla’s “clever monsignors,” and by the “secular nuncios” of Florence’s “visionary” mayor, La Pira.

Why does the contemporary man so easily forget? Why does the man of the street not take another peep through the newspaper collections? How many lies would turn out and how many politicians would deserve the label of counterfeiter.

I have a perfect memory of those times. When the Center-left option began to be debated, in all of the most reliable circles of the nation the realization of such an eventuality was simply considered a folly. It was even laughed at. Yet behind the scenes, away from the gaze of public opinion, it was work-in-progress to impose the new formula. The United States had naively given the “go.” The Roncallian Vatican, as it was obvious, backed with all its considerable weight the political initiative. Communists and socialists – the latter would be sharing power with the Christian democrats, becoming the vanguard of the Communist party in the government, and pushed with their utmost strength in that direction. And one morning the Italians awakened to a Center-left in full swing. Fanfani had fathered, on the Christian democrat side, the historical brainchild, tying his

name to the political initiative that would bring Italy to her present decline, and Capovilla maneuvered with him and with another close entourage of Italian Catholic Marxists to pull out, with the forceps, that sorry and ill-born experiment of an Italy which had nonetheless been capable of that economic miracle that had amazed the world. And that from that very moment began its inexorable sunset, upon a gloomy horizon of economic crisis, strikes, and violence. As it can be seen, no other historical moment would have been as propitious to Roncalli's revolutionary policy. Fanfani served Roncalli that historical moment, that long-fancied opportunity of establishing direct and friendly contacts with the official representatives of the godless, at last, on a silver platter.

Once again, strangely enough, the United States: in the early phases of the softening and rapprochement between the Vatican and the Soviet world, an important part had been played, among others, by Norman Cousins, a prominent American journalist, director of the "Saturday Review" and a personal friend of John Kennedy.

Cousins' mediating mission began at Andover, Maryland, in October 1962, during the Cuba missile crisis. The American town was the only place in the world hosting American and Soviet scientists gathered together for a congress. Kennedy instructed Cousins to mediate between a Catholic priest, father Felix Morlion, and the Soviet Shumeiko and Feodorov, friends of Khrushchev's. From the contact between the clergyman and the two Russians sparked John XXIII's peace message, which allegedly

caused the Soviet vessels en route to the Antilles with their guns ready to blast, to turn back. At this point Cousins had gotten into the game, and continued to act as a willing mediator between the Vatican and the Soviet Union.

He was in the Vatican in early September 1962. En route to Moscow, he asked monsignor Dell'Acqua and Igino Cardinale, whom with cardinal Cicognani, Bea, König, the nuncio in Turkey Lardone and then Casaroli, were amongst the closest collaborators of John XXIII in the conciliatory policy toward the East, which in their opinion would be the initiative that could be asked of Khrushchev to open up a dialogue. The two prelates, who were informed of the steps taken by cardinal Testa with Borovoi and Kotilarov at the Council, rejoined, "The release of archbishop Slipyi." On December 13, 1962, Norman Cousins walked into Khrushchev's study at the Kremlin. From the report Cousins later handed to Pope John, it is possible to reconstruct the meeting in detail. The conversation began on the thread of family memories and brief witticisms. Then Khrushchev said, "The Pope and I can have diverging opinions on many issues, but are united in the desire for the peace. What's most important is to live and let live. All the peoples wish to live and all the Nations have the right to live. Especially now that science can do a immense good and an immense evil." The colloquy went on for three hours. In the end, the substance was set out in five points:

"1) Russia favors the mediation of the Pope, and Khrushchev admits that not only it is a crisis-solving, last-minute mediation, but also the Pope's relentless work for

the peace; 2) Khrushchev wants a communication line through private contacts with the Holy See; 3) Khrushchev recognizes that the Church is respectful of the principle of separation between State and Church in different states; 4) Khrushchev recognizes that the Church serves all and every human being as to life's sacred values, and is not interested only in the Catholics; 5) Khrushchev recognizes that the Pope has shown great courage in his action, knowing that the Pope has problems within the Church, as Khrushchev has problems within the Soviet Union." Roncalli read the document, and scribbled in the margin, "Read by His Holiness in the night of 22-23/XII/962".

Volumes could be written to comment and confute, facts-on-hand, one by one, the words spoken by Khrushchev in that meeting with the American reporter. The total subservience of the Church of Silence to the Communist state, only a few years later, accepted and recognized by the Vatican, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact, the persecution of the Jews, of the dissidents thrown into mental homes and lagers, speak for themselves and cry out, "liar!" to Nikita Khrushchev.

From the day of that encounter a month went by. On January 25, 1963, at 9.00 p.m., the Soviet ambassador to Italy, Kozyrev, handed Fanfani a note from Khrushchev, with the prayer to forward the content to the Vatican. The note announced the release of archbishop Slipyi. But the Soviet required guarantees:

especially that that the returned bishop would not be

exploited toward anti-Soviet propaganda. When the Ukrainian bishop, whom the inhumane detention in the Soviet lager had turned into his own ghost, alighted from the train, at Rome's station, only Roncalli's secretary, the Marxist Loris Capovilla, was waiting for him on the platform.

As it happened years later, with the Primate of Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, tricked back to Rome to be removed by Montini. Loyal to the ultimatum of Kadar, that Ukrainian bishop was cast aside into silence. He lived removed in his little community on the Via Aurelia, on the outskirts of Rome. In some rooms of the Ukrainian College of Piazza degli Zingari, are preserved under glass the rags and the poor personal objects with which archbishop Slipyi lived and suffered his imprisonment in Siberia.

Nikita Khrushchev had cast the bait. The unknowing bait was that larva of a man by the name of Slipyi. Roncalli rose promptly to the bait. The Pope, using those "private contacts" encouraged by the Russian, invited to the Vatican the daughter of the Soviet premier, Rada, and her husband, the journalist Alexei Adzhubei and director of the "Izvestia." It was a straight blow in the style of a 1920's Roncalli. The most conservative part of the Vatican rose up and voiced the Pope their disapproval. Cardinal Ottaviani, in a dramatic one on one, expressed the Pope his dissent.

Roncalli played deaf and marched on with his resolution. In March of that year the Russian couple, directed by the long hand of the Kremlin, set foot in the Vatican. The

international Communism exults; the Italian Communist party is in seventh heaven.

The two guests saw the Pope, in his library, with no member of the Cardinalial College present. That visit will “pair up” with the other, some years later, when – on Corpus Domini day! – Paul VI would receive with open arms the Hungarian Kadar, and will clasp in his the bloody hands of the butcher of Budapest. For some days the polemic rages in the Vatican. In the end, the big hand of the priest from Sotto il Monte clobbers to silence the bravest voice. On 20 March 1963, Roncalli writes, “The absolute directness of my language, at first in public and then in my private library, deserves to be remarked and not artificially ignored. It must be said that the Pope needs no defense. I have said and reiterated to Dell'Acqua and Samorè that the note drafted by Father Kulic (the interpreter), sole witness of the audience granted to Rada and Alexei, be published. The first section would not hear of it, and I regret it.” When a Pope writes that he “regrets” something, it means that that thing has terribly vexed him. On November 22 of that year, at Dallas, a sniper had put an end to president Kennedy’s life. He had been succeeded by Lyndon Johnson, who had pulled on the reins bringing back to a trot the gallop of his predecessor, and his daredevil race in pursuit of an illusory new world policy. And, punctual, after the call of the Khrushchev’s family on Roncalli, the “Pacem in Terris,” and the Italian elections, the CIA, as we have said, walks through the Bronze Door.

But John XXIII does not stop. Nay, that American

attempt to put the bit, as on a horse that has gone out of hand, on the Pope, vexes Roncalli and causes him to race more precipitously on his way. He now wants to meet Nikita Khrushchev.

The meeting is prepared with a series of contacts placed under diplomatic secrecy and the strictest Vatican confidentiality. The two sons of peasants would be shaking hands on a memorable day of that summer of 1963.

Even this time, a German press agency picks up the “whisper” and breaks the news to the world, which arouses vast, and not always positive reactions. On 20 March 1963, the daily “Il Tempo” writes, “...Wonderment has been expressed in the Vatican circles as to the ‘tactical coexistence’ with which the German agency defines the scope of the meeting between John XXIII and Nikita Khrushchev. No common tactic,” it is remarked, “would be possible between the Vatican and Russia, as the coexistence is neither tactic nor strategic, but a mere acknowledgment of the reciprocal existence that may or may not be accompanied by contacts between the parties.”

And, on the same subject, the periodical of the American Jesuits, “America,” writes that there are no obstacles in principle to the establishment of relations between the Vatican and the Soviets: “The Pope and his aides, on the other side, feel acutely the necessities of the universal Church, and the special issues of the communist-dominated countries.

But the death, in the race with time and with the frenetic programs of John XXIII, was to win by various leagues. That memorable visit would never take place. Neither did it sit well with Nikita Khrushchev, who by now considered Roncalli a precious instrument for the “peaceful” expansion of communism in the Western world. So much so that in an interview granted to the American reporter Drew Pearson just after the signing of the nuclear agreement, and published on August 29, 1963, by the Düsseldorf daily “Mittag,” the Soviet premier said this about Roncalli: “The late Pope John was a man of whom it could be said, “He felt the pulse of the time. He was certainly wiser than his predecessor and understood the age in which we are living.” For a Soviet head of state, that is not a little!

But by now the revolutionary exaltation had taken the hand to Roncalli. On April 11, 1963, Holy Thursday, his encyclical “Pacem in Terris” is announced.

The Papal Encyclical will mark the fortune of the Italian Communist party. At the Botteghe Oscure, where some of the most delicate passages of the documents were already known, they read it in one go, in jubilation. At the Kremlin, they cannot believe their eyes, as they read the text immediately translated and divulged to the directions for “religious affairs.” The Italian Communist party has millions of copies printed and distributed at its own expense, of Chapter V of the Encyclical, addressed, for the first time in the history of these documents, not only to the Episcopate, the clergy and the faithful of the Church of Rome, but also to “all men of goodwill.”

The encyclical letter that will knock down the last diaphragm separating Christianity and Marxism marks, historically, the commencement of the intermingling of the two doctrines and of the great misunderstanding that will undermine the foundations of the Church. The invitation to the dialogue is explicit in the passages in which the Encyclical says, "...He who in a particular moment of his life is wanting clarity of faith, or is adhering to erroneous opinions, tomorrow can be illuminated and restored to the truth. The encounters and the agreements, in the various sectors of the temporal order, between believers and those who do not believe or do believe in an inadequate way, for adhering to errors, may constitute the occasion to discover the truth and render praise to it." And the minimization of the Marxist danger vibrates and soars wherein the Giovannean document explains with reassuring affability, that "...It must also be considered that philosophical doctrines on nature, origin and fate of the universe and man, cannot be identified with historical movements having economical, social, cultural, and political aims, even when these movements have been originated by those doctrines, and from these are still drawing inspiration. Since the doctrines, once elaborated and defined, remain always the same; while the said movements, operating on historical situations in relentless evolution, cannot avoid the influxes, and thus the even deep changes thereby."

Whereas Roncalli expresses the acknowledgment of the value of Marxism, insofar as it concurs to solving the problems of humanity, immediately after, wherein he writes, "Moreover, who can deny that in those movements,

inasmuch as they are conformant to the precepts of the just reason and interpret the just aspirations of the human person, are positive elements and deserving of approval?” And there follows, immediate, the explicit invitation to the meeting, to the dialogue, to the acceptance: “Therefore, it may be that a rapprochement or a practical meeting that only yesterday was deemed inopportune or not fecund, could be such today, or become such tomorrow.”

In that period, a parish priest so wrote to the periodical “Settimana del Clero,” “...The communists, in their appeals reaching every home have been repeating with great joy, “See, the Pope is with us. This, he has said in his last encyclical. And then, don’t you know? He has received the son-in-law and the daughter of Khrushchev, and the peace between Christianity and Communism is a sure thing. Vote for us, who will respect your feelings.”

Outside the churches, communist activists, with a solemn air, distributed a leaflet: “Catholics and Communists: ... all must be grateful to the enlightened work of this Pontiff.”

Crafty words, pronounced in the nick of time, by the old communist fox, who did not hesitate to write, revealing his authentic convictions, on “Momenti della Storia d'Italia,” (Moments of the History of Italy) of the collaboration between the secular State and the Catholic Church, “Aware of the new real danger threatening the capitalistic society, of the danger of the rebellion of the working masses, the Catholic Church, after assimilating a part of the liberal method, now assimilates a part of the socialist method, and

places itself... on the ground of the organization of the working masses, of mutuality, of economic defense, of social improvement... On this new level not only the relationship between State and Church take on a different shape, but the figure and the function of Church and papacy as forces fighting in defense of the capitalistic order, now on the forefront, now in the reserve, adopting a tactic, or another, as the circumstances and the particular situation of each country call for, now putting on a democratic mask, now showing openly a reactionary countenance. This, today, is the true temporal power of the Popes.”

Seventeen days after the promulgation of the Encyclical applauded by the Marxists, Italy went to the polls. The unequivocal response to the “Pacem in Terris” was a jump of a million votes for the Communist party, with respect to the political vote five years before. The reconciliation undertaken in the East, the audience of the Adzhubeis in the Vatican, the “Pacem in Terris” seventeen days before the political elections in Italy: three formidable blows of the Roncallian escalation that will upset the Italian political equilibrium reverberating throughout Europe as a first, long, roaring thunder, foreboding a tempest.

How not to think of an accurate scheme concocted and agreed in its minutest detail? That first result, that million votes “presented” with a blessing to the representatives of official atheism, along with that encyclical that would be the key to flinging open the inviolate door of the Christian citadel to the penetration of the godless, opens the eyes of those who still refuse to see the truth. To those who still

refuse to think and believe in a gradual and swift subversive program. Made of sudden actions. One different from the other. Yet all convergent onto the same objective:

The transformation of the Church into an essentially sociological organization, in line with the most advanced sociological and anthropological theories of our days.

When the results of the vote become known, throngs of hotheads waving red banners pack St. Peter's square acclaiming John XXIII. Another page of History had been turned, with a great rustle and a long, chilly gust of air. The Swiss Guards watched over, still, as down the centuries, on the Vatican borders, as the Berninian colonnade clasped in its stony arms the dismal clamor of that multitude. But ever since that night, their duty would be devoid of any significance. Behind their halberds, in fact, the ancient Church and Tradition had disappeared. From that night they had forever departed, ungreeted guests, the eleven thousand rooms of the little State.

Approximately nine months prior to these events, the Pope had been assailed by the illness that would bring him to the grave. The "Archiatra" (Pope's personal doctor) and his team of physicians, at a precise query of Roncalli's, had responded that he would have about one year to live.

The appointment with the death startles John XXIII. Indeed, a few months after that announcement, the outspoken Pope appears to his close aids growingly silent, not seldom lost in thoughts. The events set in motion by his

revolutionary determination, are falling all about him. The force unchained by his acquired policy accelerates on its own inertia, disrupting programs, and upsets the post-war framework of the European politics, established in over thirty years of patient and tormented work. The countdown to the day of his ultimate departure, stirs Roncalli from his life-long dream, and the reality that issued from his hand of peasant and inflexible reformer, now makes him shiver, and, perhaps, horrify. Some of those around him tell me of a secretly weeping Pope. He has grown taciturn. But Roncalli, as the Oriental saying is, is now astride the tiger, which, in spite of himself, drags him forward deaf to his likely second thoughts. In those last months of his life the illness has caught him by the throat. We all see it, around him. He is absent. Wearied. Yet the communists continue to maneuver that Pope become a puppet in their hands. The last “bitter tea” the priest from Sotto il Monte would have to swallow at the behest of Italian and international Marxism only twenty-five days before his death, is that turbid promotional invention of the left, the Balzan Peace Prize.

Roncalli would not hear about it, anymore. He tries to refuse, on the pretexts, dramatically valid, of his illness that has now brought him to the threshold of death. But the organization that he has created and wanted is now breathing around him, perfectly engineered and synchronized, at the service of international communism, freemasonry, and progressivism, and has the new Pope, Montini, sound and ready in its sleeve, and would not take his no for an answer. He is literally pulled out of bed,

dressed up with the papal vestments, carried bodily to the Sistine Chapel, for letting him down to St. Peter's in that state, would be tantamount to killing him. By chance that morning, Friday May 10, I was on duty, and thus escorted that condemned, that was my precise impression, along with the Noble Guards and all the magnificent retinue of the Court. He was pale and devastated by the illness. He stared into the emptiness. As he was seated on the throne, he shuddered for a long time, shaken by shivers. But there were the others, around that throne, to smile on his behalf. There were the representatives of that prize, set up with the money of the killed by the lead of the reds in 1945, there was the gloomy monsignor Capovilla with the glistening teeth under the large funereal spectacles, to smile to the paparazzi in lieu of the Pope. Who after returning to his apartment would not see anybody, anymore. Outside that bedroom, which in a few days would be visited by the Angel of Death, an ocean of printed paper submerged the world, publicizing to the four winds that event in which once more, the last, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, John XXIII, the Pope of the communists, had been precious and powerful instrument in the skilful hands of the Marxist puppeteer.

It is certain that on his deathbed Roncalli felt remorse. Some one, as I have written, swears to have heard his voice moaning in despair for what he had done.

Before breathing his last, he spelled out word after word his profession of faith to the Catholic religion, and had the strength and lucidity to give his dramatic version of his

death, with the words, “I’m dying sacrificed like the Lamb.” None of his predecessors, at death’s door, had felt compelled to voice such profession of faith, at least singular in a Pontiff, head of the Catholic Church and Vicar of Christ on the earth. And then, that “I’m dying sacrificed like the Lamb.” What was the dying Roncalli alluding to?

The answer was out there, in the Italian Communist party awaiting that death with its jaws wide-open. It seized it in fact in its ravenous grab, and made it its own. In Sicily, where the electoral campaign for the “Regional” vote was in full swing, they ordered the suspension of all party rallies in “sign of mourning;” factory labor committees ordered that work be suspended for some minutes, to remember John XXIII; at Livorno, the workers were lined up and taken to the port to watch a Soviet merchant vessel with the flag at half staff for the death of the Pontiff; at Genoa, and in the other major cities, the communist activists distributed leaflets door to door informing that “The immense work for the peace of John XXIII is exposed to all kinds of perils because of the capitalist push toward the war,” and underscoring that the work of the Pope had not been easy, for “He had not been spared more or less veiled attacks, even coming from high ecclesiastical hierarchies... opposed to the reconciliation, for they know it would represent their political and ideological defeat.”

Not even for the death of Joseph Stalin, did the rotary presses of the Italian Communist party work as hard as for John XXIII’s. The hour had come to fulfill the “miracle.” They were now clattering day and night to build on tons

and tons of printed paper the myth of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the Pope of the Marxists. Precipitously the Vatican began the process of beatification of the scarcely dead Pope. A process that in the last few years has inexplicably come to a stop. Why?

Here ends the yellowed manuscript that ought to have been published many years ago.