

PROLOGUE

RESURRECTION

“I think that the eugenic dreams and biological perfectionist aspirations of the Nazis and others were hindered, in part, by their not having the science. Well, look out world: the science is coming!”

Arthur Caplan, Professor of Bioethics and director of the Centre for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, New York Times Magazine, 1996

Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta
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Rome – Italy

‘Reverend Monsignor, I must speak urgently with the *Cardinalis Patronus*, it is a matter of the utmost importance...’

The caller was interrupted in mid-flow.

‘Doctor Schröder, as you know, in the event of incapacity of His Most Reverend Eminence, as prelate I act as his interim Lieutenant in all matters concerning the works of *the Order*. Anything you wish to say to him, you may say to me, and I will relay the news swiftly to the *Cardinalis Patronus* of that you can be assured.’

The Order, the most ancient religious Catholic Order of the Knights of

Malta, also known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, headquartered in Rome and the world's oldest order of chivalry.

Appointed by the Supreme Pontiff, the prelate, His Eminence Reverend Monsignor Alessandro Bonaventura, Chaplain of the Grand Cross "Ad Honorem," was the ecclesiastical superior of the clergy of the Order and who assisted the *Cardinalis Patronus* in the exercise of his office with the Order.

'Monsignor I'm afraid that it is quite out of the question,' the Doctor replied in a lilting southern Bayerisch German accent of Bavarian dialect, 'the cardinal gave me a pontifical mandate not to reveal highly sensitive information pertaining to the church. I am under an oath-bound obligation to God Almighty, a solemn pledge to keep church secrets, unless of course, you are somehow able to countenance the violation of an oath taken to God Himself?'

Unseen by the prelate a sly smirk crossed the face of Schröder.

The prelate was vexed at his response, 'I see, well, now that you put it that way... I cannot promise anything other than to communicate your desire for an audience with His Most Reverend Eminence and that you wish to place before the *Cardinalis Patronus* a matter of vital importance to the Holy See. I cannot guarantee he will receive you but...' He paused briefly, 'Let me see what I can do, please hold the line a moment while I check with his office.' He responded in a frosty tone.

'Of course, Monsignor, I'm sure you appreciate that this is no trivial matter.'

The good Doctor might as well have stabbed him with a rusty dagger thought the prelate as he short dialled an internal number.

'Your Eminence. It is Doctor Schröder, I have explained that you are very busy but,' the prelate trailed off, 'he is insistent that his news is for the ears of the *Cardinalis Patronus* only.'

His Most Reverend Eminence, the venerable *Cardinalis Patronus* of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta was an imposing man, tall in stature and somewhat stout with a stern visage. As a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, he was vested with special authority having been personally appointed by the Pope as his representative to the Order.

In his role as *Cardinalis Patronus*, he was in charge of promoting the interests of the Order and maintaining relations between the Holy See and the Order.

He epitomised a Knight of Malta, possessing an iron will and an unerring

commitment to reaching spiritual perfection in the church. He was adept at instructing the members of the Sovereign Order in the fulfilment of the principles of *Tuitio Fidei e Obsequium Pauperum* – defence of the Faith and assistance to the poor and the suffering.

“Thank you, Monsignor. Is he on a secure line?” The Cardinal Patronus enquired and received confirmation before picking up the receiver, ‘Doctor Schröder, a pleasure as always...’ He greeted the caller in soothing tones.

The voice on the other end of the line was silent for a few moments then stammered a reply as he recognised the voice, ‘Your Most Reverend Eminence, please forgive the intrusion but there has been an amazing development...’ There was a short pause, and then the Doctor began to babble excitedly, barely able to contain himself with his good news. ‘Let me tell you, it is incredible, quite fantastical in fact, not only do the DNA samples from the *Shroud* and the *Sudarium* match but even after two thousand years the organic material has been preserved with no degradation of the DNA at all.’

‘It is not fragmentary.’ He continued, ‘I have recovered the complete genome, not only is the DNA perfectly preserved but incredibly the somatids are active! I actually saw the cells dividing before my very own eyes when I viewed them under an electron microscope. It is almost as if...’ His voice dropped to a barely audible whisper, ‘... As if a living body had preserved them, as if... As if this blood is alive?’

The incorruptible blood and body of Christ.

‘But there is something else, something very unique about the genetic structure of the chromosomes of the DNA molecules.’

The Doctor now had the full attention of the cardinal, ‘Please, continue Doctor.’ He encouraged him.

‘This blood only has 24 chromosomes!’ He exclaimed triumphantly.

The response was muted in reply, ‘Now I’m afraid you’ve lost me Herr Doctor.’

There was a brief silence as Schröder gave an inward groan to himself, ‘Of course, how could I expect you to understand.’ He said patronisingly, ‘Allow me to explain. Human cells have a specific number of chromosomes, 46 per cell to be precise, 23 pairs of chromosomes from each parent consisting of 22 autosomes and 1 pair of sex chromosomes. But these cells are unique in that they contain only 24 chromosomes, half a set of paternal chromosomes and

one additional sex-determining chromosome! There are 23 from one parent, the female and an additional “y” chromosome gene showing that the blood is from a human male.’

‘Are you quite sure about these findings Doctor?’

Schröder could barely disguise his irritation at the question, ‘Yes, yes, I am quite sure. Make no mistake this blood came from a man who had a mother but seemingly no human father, half the normal paternal chromosomes are missing!’

The Doctor lifted his glasses and rubbed his eyes as if he had a migraine still holding the telephone receiver with his other hand.

‘It is quite remarkable.’ He composed himself once again, ‘Of course there have been known cases of females born with only half of the normal chromosomes, but there has never been a recorded case in all scientific and medical history of a male human being with this chromosome count.’

‘So, what does it all mean Doctor?’

The Doctor spoke much more slowly, his accent a parody of what it was supposed to sound like and reminiscent of Anglophone comedy German, ‘Technically it is impossible for a person to have only one pair of chromosomes from his mother and nothing from the father. It suggests a miraculous birth. A human being born without the chromosomes of a human father is nothing short of... *A miracle!*’

The Virgin birth of Christ.

The cardinal laughed nervously and paused for a second before he spoke, ‘Doctor Schröder why don’t we agree to leave the business of science to you and you leave the business of miracles to us!’

Schröder’s tone was sharp and humourless, ‘The DNA data from the Shroud supports the hypothesis of a virgin birth. I am in no doubt that the Turin Shroud is genuine and this is the blood of the Messiah, this man is the second Adam. The mathematical probabilities against this are staggering. The lineage of Christ’s DNA has been carefully shepherded through many generations, from the ancestry of Mary who was of the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David. The Bible states clearly that He was born from the “seed of a woman” but makes no mention of the seed of a man, quite the contrary, in fact, it says that she conceived a child by the Holy

Spirit. His DNA was created directly by God the Father. Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God!'

Proof of the Immaculate Conception!

'Christ's blood is alive and unique, and we can return His divinity to the world.' Gunter Schröder continued, 'The DNA on its own is not enough, there is of course still the delicate matter of a surrogate mother for human oocyte cryopreservation, after all, I will need supplies of oocytes to facilitate cloning and...'

Human oocyte cryopreservation, a method by which a woman's eggs could be extracted, frozen and stored. Later the eggs could be thawed, fertilised, and then transferred back to the uterus as living embryos.

The cardinal interrupted him again, 'I am sure these details are wasted on me Doctor Schröder, but I will see to it personally that the Holy See is made aware of this significant breakthrough. In the meantime, I will ensure that you continue to have the required resources and of course the necessary funding to enable you to continue your research.'

Schröder knew not to labour the point, besides he had achieved his primary goal of a commitment for more funds to continue his research and development efforts.

The coveted Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine was within his grasp, it was so close he could almost touch it. The Medicine prize had yielded many important discoveries including penicillin, stem-cell breakthroughs and the like, to be awarded the Nobel Prize for a pair of landmark discoveries would be the pinnacle of his career.

He would be honoured of course for his pioneering work in genetic engineering but it would be the ground-breaking discovery, scientific proof beyond all reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ existed and that he was the divine Son of God, *that* revelation would see him lauded the world over!

He almost salivated at the thought.

The conversation finished, the cardinal replaced the telephone receiver and sat at his desk for a moment pondering the staggering enormity of what was happening. Cloning and stem cell research was controversial both on ethical and religious grounds, and the Vatican's instruction on bioethics had declared human cloning as immoral, in fact, the Pope had publicly condemned the cloning of human embryos.

Doctor Gunter Schröder was a brilliant scientist, but he was also a former member of the Nazi Party who had participated in the Nazi euthanasia program. The Knights of Malta had been responsible for helping the good Doctor, and thousands of other Nazi war criminals cheating the hangman's noose by escaping to freedom down the Vatican ratlines, a network of Nazi escape routes.

His work had been in the field of eugenics, the study of methods to improve the human race by controlling reproduction, to create a master race with more *desirable genetic characteristics*.

Schröder was zealous in his belief that eugenics was a religion. Through the advances of science and technology his research had encompassed genetics and cloning, this was his religion now, a religion of which he was the undisputed High Priest.

This was one report the cardinal would not be sending to the Holy See on the state and life of the Order.

He absently toyed with the signet ring on his finger with its symbol of the octopus as he contemplated what Doctor Schröder had said, the massive implications of such science were so mind-blowing that it was without human parallel. The consequences of these discoveries presented an interesting juxtaposition as to the ethical implications of using cloning, eugenics and the manipulation of DNA.

Were they using genetic engineering to circumvent God's plan or implementing God's blueprint for the future?

It sounded more like a Hollywood script for a sci-fi movie than a scientific reality, but he knew he must inform *the Brotherhood* immediately of recent developments.

