



KEEPERS OF THE SECRET

A MYSTERY PLAY
by JOHN McDONNELL TIERNEY

SCRIPT

Keepers of the Secret
John McDonnell Tierney, Playwright
Email: drjackmct@gmail.com
Tel: 413-337-4338
Mail: PO Box 97, Shelburne Falls, MA

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Sister Clara de Leon

An aging nun is Abbess of the Convent of St. Agnus, Dublin, Ireland.

Katheryn of Dublin

An 20 year old postulant.

Brittyn of Dublin

Katheryn's longtime friend, another postulant.

Brother Bertrand

Librarian at St. Agnus Cathedral.

Francisco Cisneros

A Cardinal at the Vatican.

Tomás Torquemada

Agent of Cardinal Cisneros and new Bishop at St. Agnus.

SYNOPSIS

Based on Judeo-Christian tradition and mythology, *Keepers of the Secret* focuses on Katheryn, a young postulant preparing for Holy Orders. Katheryn is informed by Sister Clara, Abbess of the Convent of St. Agnus in Dublin, that she had been "chosen" to reveal an ancient secret to the world, a secret that cannot be told, only discovered. Katheryn enlists the aid of Brittyn, her childhood friend and fellow postulant and Brother Bertrand, the Librarian at St. Agnus. Together they set off to discover the ancient secret, but there are forces that will do anything to prevent them from succeeding. Cardinal Francisco Cisneros, Protector of the Faith at the Vatican has searched his whole life for an ancient parchment believed to be given to Jesus of Nazareth by an angel, a messenger from God, 2000 years before in the Garden of Gethsemane. Cisneros has tracked the parchment to the Cathedral of St. Agnus where it was hidden by a Keeper of the Secret many years ago. Believing that what is written on that parchment could destroy the church, he sends his "Investigator," Tomás Torquemada, to Dublin as the new Bishop with instructions to find the parchment before Katheryn and her allies do "no matter what it takes." Torquemada will stop at nothing, including murder, to keep Katheryn from discovering the parchment and the ancient secret that could, indeed, destroy the church or change it forever. One thing is certain, tradition and mythology will never be the same again.

**KEEPERS OF THE SECRET
A MYSTERY PLAY**

SCENE I

*The year is 1933. The setting is the Chapel
at the Convent of St. Agnus in Dublin, Ireland.
An aging nun, SISTER CLARA DE LEON, is seen at prayer.
There is a knock at the door. CLARA crosses herself and rises.*

CLARA

Enter.

*KATHERYN, a postulant preparing to be admitted
as a novice into the religious community of St. Agnus
enters stage left and kneels before CLARA.
Her head bowed, she is nervous and a little fearful.*

CLARA

Welcome, my Daughter.
Do you know who I am?

KATHERYN

I do, Mother...you are Sister Clara de Leon and you are well known among postulants.

CLARA

Really? What, pray tell, is well known?

KATHERYN

That you came here at age 20 from France as a postulant yourself and that you have served the church and God for nigh on fifty years, some 20 of them as Abbess here at the Convent of St. Agnus. They say you are the oldest sister of our order.

CLARA

Hmmm...you have been well informed...I am indeed an old woman, but not the oldest Sister of St Agnus. I am, however, the oldest active Abbess.

KATHERYN

(fearing that she has offended)

Oh, Holy Mother, I did not mean to imply...

*Clara beckons KATHERYN to rise.
She extends her hands to KATHERYN. Holding her hands, she gently speaks.*

CLARA

Quiet now, Child...you did not offend...I know how old I am. Very soon I will celebrate my seventy-first year on this Earth. But there is something about me you that your sister postulants do not know... I am a keeper of a great secret.

KATHRYN

A secret?

CLARA

Yes Child...a very ancient secret passed down to me by generations of Keepers and it is my sacred obligation to pass it on once again.

KATHERYN

I don't know what to say, Mother...I...I...

CLARA

You are fine, Child...I know how easy it is to assume that old people are... how shall I put it...losing it?

KATHERYN (*horrified*)

Oh, no...Mother...I don't think...

CLARA

Be calm, child...time and experience will tell you whether the things I say to you today are the workings of a lucid mind. I will only ask you to consider the possibility that it is.

KATHERYN

Of course, Mother.

CLARA

Can you tell me why you are here.

KATHERYN

I am here at St. Agnus that I may be admitted into this ancient community...

CLARA (*interrupts*)

No, child, not here at St. Agnus, but here on this Earth.
Why are you here? Why are you alive? Why do you exist?

KATHERYN

I have always been taught, Holy Mother...that I am here,
that I am alive, and that I exist to serve God.

CLARA

Then you are mistaken, my daughter...
You exist, you are alive, and you are here because you have been chosen.

KATHERYN

I don't understand, Mother.
Chosen? Chosen by whom and for what?

CLARA

You were chosen nineteen-hundred years ago in the Garden of Gethsemane, as was I,
and as were hundreds of other Keepers of the Secret who came before me.

KATHERYN (*alarmed*)

Mother!
Please do not tell me that I have been chosen to be the next Keeper of the Secret.

CLARA

Quite the contrary, my dear child.
You have not been chosen to be the next keeper, for I am the last.

KATHERYN

Then, what...?

CLARA

You, Katheryn of Dublin, you have been chosen to reveal that secret to the world.

KATHERYN

But, Mother...you have not said...what is the great secret?

CLARA

That, my dear Daughter...that you must discover for yourself.
Now go, I must return to my prayers and you would do well to reflect
on all that has been said here today.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE II

A hallway at St. Agnus outside the chapel.

There is a small table center stage.

On the table are a globe and a 1933 period telephone.

Another postulant, BRITTYN, Katheryn's long-time friend waits for her pacing anxiously.

KATHERYN enters from stage right.

Brittyn bombards her with questions.

BRITTYN

What? What!?

Tell me, Katheryn...what did she want?

What did she say to you?

BRITTYN continues to excitedly adlib the questioning for a few moments until KATHERYN finally speaks.

KATHERYN

Enough! Quiet and I will tell you.

You know that Sister Clara is very old?

BRITTYN

In her seventieth year...I hear.

KATHERYN

And you know that sometimes elderly people experience, shall we say, "a diminishing of mental capacities."

BRITTYN

You think she's looney!?

KATHERYN

No, not looney...but perhaps...I don't know...losing it?

BRITTYN

What exactly did she say that makes you think Sister Clara is "losing it?"

KATHERYN

She spoke nonsense...things that cannot be.

BRITTYN

Tell me...anyway.

KATHERYN

She said I had been chosen...

BRITTYN

Chosen? Chosen for...?

KATHERYN

It does not matter...it was the ranting of an old woman.

BRITTYN

Tell me! Com'on! Com'on!

KATHERYN

Okay, okay!

She said...I was chosen 1900 years ago to reveal a secret.

BRITTYN

Nineteen hundred years ago!

Its 1933 now...so Sister Clara thinks you, Katheryn of Dublin were specifically chosen for some mysterious reason in the year...33AD!?

KATHERYN

Yes! That's it! Her exact words were, "I –meaning her- am a keeper of a great secret and you – meaning me - have been chosen to reveal that secret to the world."

BRITTYN

Now you must tell me!

We tell each other all our secrets, do we not?

So, Kate! What's the big secret?

KATHERYN

I would tell you if I could. Sister Clara did not say what it was...she said I must discover it and then I must reveal it to the world.

BRITTYN

That's it?

She gave no guidance...no hint.

KATHERYN

No...she gave no guidance...no hint...

She pauses, remembering...

But she did say something that was most curious.

BRITTYN

Then tell me that a least.

KATHERYN

She said that I had been chosen in a garden.

BRITTYN

A garden?
What garden?

KATHERYN

This is going to sound crazy!

BRITTYN

Tell me, Kate...you can be so annoying!

KATHERYN

Alright, alright!

It was Gethsemane...In Jerusalem where Jesus underwent the agony in the olive garden and was arrested the night before his crucifixion.

BRITTYN

(kind of to herself)

If the Gospels are to be believed.

KATHERYN

What did you say, Brit?
“If” the Gospels are to be believed?!!

BRITTYN

It was just a figure of speech...
of course they are to be believed...but...

KATHERYN

But?

BRITTYN

But...still...
I have these... (*hesitating*)...

KATHERYN

Out with it...you have these...?

BRITTYN

...these doubts! (*sighs*)
I have...doubts (*almost sadly*)
We came here together, Kate...friends forever because we believed the gospels...
“The Good News!”

KATHERYN

Yes...and...?

BRITTYN

And how old were we when we came to believe this good news...who told us...Mathew?
Mark? Luke? John? No! It was Father McMurphy in the basement of Holy Cross church.
And we believed his story just as we believed that Santa Clause brought us toys at
Christmas and the Easter Bunny delivered baskets of chocolate...we were children who
never questioned.

KATHERYN

And now you question?

BRITTYN

I'm not questioning...I'm just...

KATHERYN

Just what?

BRITTYN

I'm just...just troubled...by it all. I mean it was forty-years after the crucifixion that
Mathew wrote the first Gospel. And, it was several more years before Mark and Luke
and John got around to telling the story. And almost 2000 years have passed since.
I just can't help wondering if in centuries of telling and re-telling, translating and re-
translating, printing and re-printing...someone got it wrong!

Silence for a brief while until KATHERYN speaks quietly.

KATHERYN

Me too.

BRITTYN

What...what did you say, Kate?

KATHERYN (*louder*)

I said, “me too.” I am also troubled... I have had these thoughts...these...doubts...like you. Can such things be put away, dismissed, disregarded when they return again and again?

BRITTYN

No...They cannot. I have tried...I have prayed...I have told myself it is the voice of the devil I hear...that I may never speak of these evil thoughts...and yet...

KATHERYN

And yet they remain.

BRITTYN

Yes, they remain, unspoken...even among us true friends who tell all our secrets... this secret we have tolerated in silence...never spoken aloud until this moment. (*pause*) Perhaps this is a key to “The Secret” we must discover

KATHERYN

“*We!*?” When did this become “we?”
Sister Clara said *I* was “chosen.”

BRITTYN

But, don’t we always do everything together...from when we were neigh on six or seven years old in the children’s home? The nuns were kind, they did their best, but there were so many of us they could not take care of us all. We always needed to depend on each other and *we’re not going to stop now!*

KATHERYN

You’re right...even though we fought all the time, we always came together when we needed support!

BRITTYN

You know the old Irish saying,
“An Irish family will argue and fight, but let a shout come from without...”

KATHERYN & BRITTYN

(in unison)

...and see them unite!”

KATHERYN

So it’s decided...we do it together!

As I see it, there are two possibilities: the first is that Sister Clara is lucid; the second is that she is not. If the latter is true, Sister Clara lives in a reality all her own and we can just humor her and get on with our lives.

BRITTYN

But, what if the former is true?

That Sister Clara somehow possesses some great knowledge, a profound understanding, a deep connection to... *(she hesitates)*...to God?

They pause, reflecting on the implications of that thought.

BRITTYN

Think of it as a mystery...a “call to adventure”
to be lived out in real time right here at St. Aggies!

KATHERYN

So...how does one go about solving a mystery?
I mean, what do we know?
We’re only twenty years old; I think we’re going to need help.

BRITTYN

You’re right! We need someone who knows what’s going on,
hmmm....someone with a history...

*They pause, each trying to think of whom to recruit when,
all at once, they blurt out the same name!*

KATHERYN & BRITTYN

(at the same time)

“Friar Bertrand!”

Lights down

End-of-Scene

SCENE III

*The Library at St. Agnus Cathedral.
There is small table to one side of the stage
with a globe (same) and a period telephone on it.
In the rear is a back-lit stained-glass window.
On the back wall is a 1933 Calendar
with the date clearly visible to the audience.
There is a desk, center stage, piled high
with books so that FRIAR BERTRAND
sitting behind it cannot be immediately seen.
He hears the KATHERYN and BRITTYN calling from off-stage!*

KATHERYN & BRITTYN (*ad lib!*)

Friar Bertrand...Friar Bertrand??

*They enter, still calling for him when he pops up!
He is clearly an aged fellow but seemingly full of energy.*

BERTRAND

Yes! Yes! Yes! Come in.. come in...Ah (*seeing who they are*)...
Brittyn, and Katheryn! I've been expecting you.

KATHERYN

Expecting us!? How could you be expecting us when we, ourselves,
did not know we were coming here until moments ago?

BERTRAND

Let's just say...I had a feeling.

KATHERYN

So...if you were expecting us, do you know why we've come?

BERTRAND

This is a library. You came because you need to know more than you now know...you
have a problem to be solved or a question to be answered and, I, the librarian of this
library...I am here to answer your questions and help you solve your problem.

BRITTYN

It's a "mystery!"

BERTRAND

Better yet...a mystery...what fun!

BRITTYN

So...where do we begin?

BERTRAND

At the beginning...tell me everything Katheryn, leave nothing out.

KATHERYN

Very well...Early this morning I was summoned to Chapel. I did not know why, but when summed by Mother Abbess...you go. I was surprised... shocked really...to find myself all alone with Sister Clara. She told me that I had been chosen to reveal a secret, but she did not tell me what the secret is!

BERTRAND

What do think it might be?

*They look a little uncomfortable...hesitating to say
...but then Katheryn speaks up...*

KATHERYN

Well...it seems the two of us have just discovered that we've been keeping kind of a secret from each other.

BRITTYN

We don't do that!
We've always shared our secrets.

KATHERYN

But we did...we kept this secret, not wanting to disappoint each other I think.

BERTRAND

Is this a secret that cannot be told to your librarian?

They look at one another wondering if they should tell.

BERTRAND

Come now...it is Friar Bertrand asking...I have kept many secrets for many years.

KATHERYN

One word... “doubt.”

BERTRAND

Doubt?

BRITTYN

We have discovered that each of us harbor secret doubts.

BERTRAND

Ah! I see. Well, this much I can tell you...you are not alone...we’ve all had doubts: you, me, Mother Abbess...even the Apostle Thomas had doubts. You’ve heard of “Doubting Thomas?”

KATHERYN

Is that what we are then...like the Apostle Thomas who refused to believe the Jesus had arisen until he could see and feel His crucifixion wounds?

BERTRAND

You know your Gospels...but no...I do not see you as Doubting Thomas’s... I see you as ordinary young women just trying to make sense of the world.

KATHERYN

We don’t need or want to make sense of the whole world, Brother; we just want to make sense of these persistent doubts and questions that pop in at the worst possible moments!

BERTRAND

Fair enough! You’ve come to the right place. So...look around you...what do you see?

KATHERYN

Where, Bertrand?

BERTRAND

Here...in this library...what do you see?

BRITTYN

I see books! Many books!

KATHERYN

Books stacked to the ceilings, overflowing the shelves, I see books.

BERTRAND

Books by *doubters!*
Look here...on my desk...pick up any book.

*KATHERYN does as she is told and reads
the title aloud struggling with the Latin.*

KATHERYN

“De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium”

BERTRAND

Ah! One of my favorites by Nicolaus Copernicus written in 1543 if memory serves.
How’s your Latin, Katheryn; can you translate that title?

KATHERYN

Nay, Brother...my Latin is not that good.

BERTRAND

Well mine is and I will translate for you....“On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres.”
You see, Copernicus doubted the church belief that Earth was at the center of the
universe with the other planets, moons and stars revolving around the Earth.

BRITTYN

Here’s an interesting book.
Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems by Galileo Galilei.

BERTRAND

Yes; another favorite by another doubter! In 1632 Galileo wrote about Copernicus's new,
sun-centered view of the solar system as a conversation between three characters; a
supporter of Copernicus, an educated layman, and a dull thinker named Simplicio who
represented the church position, and Galileo was soon standing before the Inquisition.

KATHERYN

And then there’s Charles Darwin. Do you have Darwin here in this library?

BERTRAND

Indeed we do. Look here! (*He takes a book from a nearby shelf*) The Origin of Species,
his theory of evolution by natural selection.

BRITTYN

I know about that! Darwin doubted the Church’s view that species had existed in their
current form since the moment of divine creation and that humans were privileged, above
and apart from nature.

KATHERYN

And he got in a lot of trouble for that, didn’t he!

BERTRAND

He did...in fact, he kept his ideas secret for almost two decades.
So...do not worry about your secret doubts...focus on the mystery.

KATHERYN

“The Secret” I must discover.

BRITTYN (*correcting Katheryn*)

The secret *we* must discover!

KATHERYN

Right...*we* must discover.

BERTRAND

Yes...do this together... “Two people shorten the road,” as we Irish like to say.
So... pursue this with an open mind and a spirit of adventure, but be forewarned,
with every discovery there will be those who will say “nay.” You will not face the
Inquisition; but you will face opposition, perhaps *violent* opposition.

KATHERYN

Sister Clara did not mention anything about violence...that this discovery may be
dangerous. I say we assume Sister Clara is just old and...

BRITTYN

Stop right there, Kate! I know what you are going to say. You are refusing this call to
adventure...well, it’s too late! You can try, but the questions will keep coming back.
“What was the great secret Sister Clara had called upon me to discover?”

KATHERYN

You’re right! If I do not go on I will always wonder what I have missed.

BRITTYN

So then...the adventure begins!

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE IV

*The Vatican, Rome.
The office of Cardinal Francisco Cisneros.
The CARDINAL is busy at his desk
when there is a knock at the door.
It is BISHOP TOMÁS TORQUEMADA.*

CARDINAL

Enter!

*The BISHOP enters. The CARDINAL offers his hand.
The BISHOP kneels and kisses the CARDINAL's ring.
He remains kneeling until given leave to stand.*

CARDINAL

Up! Up, Tomás.
This is a great day for you!
You have been called to a great adventure...a mission really.

BISHOP

A mission, your Eminence?

CARDINAL

Tomás, Tomás...it is just the two of us here, call me Francisco.

BISHOP

Thank you, your ex... (catches himself) Thank you, Francisco.
You spoke of a mission?

CARDINAL

Yes...yes...a mission of the greatest importance; a mission that will save our Holy Mother Church from a dark force that at this moment raises its ugly head.

BISHOP

I was not aware that our Holy Mother Church needed saving.

CARDINAL

I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me tell you why you are here.

BISHOP

Please...I am greatly curious.

*The CARDINAL opens up a thick dossier
and begins to flip through the pages.*

CARDINAL

What do you think this is, Tomás?

BISHOP

I know what that is...I've assembled many such...it is a dossier that tells all about those whom I have...shall we say... "investigated?" But, I can tell even from here that this is not my work.

CARDINAL

Yes! Yes...a good way to describe it...an "investigation," but who is the subject of this?

BISHOP

Again, Eminence, I do not know.

CARDINAL

This is the dossier of a Friar Tomás Torquemada.

BISHOP

I don't understand...what...why...?

CARDINAL

I have been...well, better said "observing" you for some time, watching you from afar... it's all in here...your whole life...your family history, your friends...

BISHOP

I have no friends.

CARDINAL

Oh? I am hurt, Tomás!

BISHOP

I have no friends...save you, Francisco.

CARDINAL

Ah, I am comforted that you regard me as a friend...but why is it that a man in his fortieth decade has no other friends than this ancient Cardinal.

BISHOP

Friends disappoint...sooner or later you discover their...their...their inabilities.

CARDINAL

Hmmm...and what would those “inabilities” be?

BISHOP

I am sorry, Eminence...I have already spoken out of turn...forgive me.

CARDINAL

You do need forgiveness for speaking the truth.

Yes...I know you have no friends...no true friends and I know why.

BISHOP

They disappoint me?

CARDINAL

Oh, my boy...much more than that...disappointment is part of every life...friends, or those that might be, have more than disappointed you...they have disenchanted, disillusioned, dissatisfied, and displeased you...and the emotions you feel toward them are, shall we say, not friendly.

BISHOP

It is true...over and over again I have seen weakness, doubt, uncertainty and even disbelief hemorrhage from the mouths of those who should be certain.

Doubt is the enemy of truth!

CARDINAL

And what is the truth?

BISHOP

Eminence...I would not deem to instruct you...

CARDINAL

Humor me, Tomás. Pretend I am no more than a child...an innocent soul in need of hearing the truth.

BISHOP

Very well...the truth is really quite simple... There is one true God and He has revealed himself as having always existed without any outside cause bringing Him into being. He is the creator of heaven and earth and the one who saves mankind from sin.

CARDINAL

And how do you know such things?

BISHOP

Scripture, my Lord...the Holy Bible. The Bible is the inspired Word of God, the Scriptures are God's revelation of Himself to mankind; they are infallible, never wrong.

CARDINAL

And what of those who doubt the truth? Those who doubt scripture...those who say, "The Bible is not 'never' wrong!"

BISHOP

They blaspheme against the Holy Spirit...an unforgivable sin!

CARDINAL

Very good...anticipated, but still quite good.
So now, Tomás, it is my turn to tell you a story; one that did not make it into the Bible, a story that has only been closely kept secret for nineteen-hundred years. But...if you choose to hear my tale, you must be willing to accept and carry out the mission.

BISHOP

But, Eminence...you have not told me what the mission is to be.

CARDINAL

Patience, Friar Tomás. Come to me here again...later tonight after midnight Mass and I will speak to you of the mission. But go now, my friend, pray for guidance, strength, perseverance in whatever tasks you may be given, never forgetting that what you do is for "the greater good."

And, Tomás...speak to no one of this.

*The BISHOP speaks not a word but kneels at
the CARDINAL's feet to kiss his ring.
Lights down as the BISHOP exits.*

End-of-Scene

SCENE V

*The Chapel at St. Agnus. SISTER CLARA is seen.
We hear FRIAR BERTRAND'S voice off stage.*

BERTRAND

Clara, it's me, Bertrand! *(entering)*
Reverend Mother...so good to see you looking well and so young!

CLARA

You know, Bertie...it's a sin to lie?

BERTRAND

Nonsense, Clara...we Irish have a saying, "*The older the fiddle, the sweeter the tune.*"

CLARA

Enough of that.
So...she came to you?

BERTRAND

As you predicted...and not alone.

CLARA

Brittyn?

BERTRAND

As you predicted.

CLARA

And you, Bertie?

BERTRAND

Mentor, guide, confidant, confessor...whatever they need.

CLARA

We do not have much time...
Bishop Godfrey has heard from the Vatican and I have heard from him.

BERTRAND

A message from the Vatican?
Did he say from whom?

CLARA

Cisneros.

BERTRAND

Cardinal Cisneros! That scoundrel?

CLARA

That's what Bishop Godfrey called him...and a lot worse!
They are sending someone to replace him here at St. Agnus.

BERTRAND

Replace Godfrey?
But why?

CLARA

He did not say why. Godfrey is to return to Rome and the new Bishop,
Tomás Torquemada will be here soon!

BERTRAND

(alarmed to hear that name!)

Torquemada!?
The scoundrel's dog!

CLARA

You see now why there is not much time? The Grand Inquisitor has returned many times,
each time in the body of one who shares his evil with one purpose.

BERTRAND

To prevent "The Secret" from being rediscovered.
Then the postulants are in grave danger.
Be assured, Torquemada will not hesitate to...

CLARA

Say no more...the walls have ears.
Katheryn and Brittny need to know.

BERTRAND

I will speak to them later in the Library; there only God's ears will overhear my story.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE VI

The Library.

KATHERYN, BERTRAND, BRITTYN off-stage.

They enter as they speak their lines.

KATHERYN

Friar Bertrand?

Friar Bertrand...its Katheryn and Brittyn!

BRITTYN

You wanted to see us!

BERTRAND

Yes...yes...indeed I do want to see you.

There is something you need to know.

KATHERYN

We're listening, Friar.

BERTRAND

But, first...let me ask you both...

Do you know the story of the Garden of Gethsemane?

KATHERYN

Yes, we do, we know it well.

BRITTYN

Everyone knows the story of Gethsemane, Friar Bertrand.

BERTRAND

Tell me the story.

KATHERYN

But Friar...why are we to tell you a story you already know?

BERTRAND

Because, Katheryn, I have asked you to.

KATHERYN

Well, as you know, there are four versions: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18. But the core story goes like this...

BRITTYN

(picking up where KATHERYN left off)

After the Last Supper, Jesus led His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. When they got there, Jesus drew Peter, James, and John aside and asked them to stay with Him “To the point of death; remain here and keep watch with me” is how Mathew put it as I recall.

KATHERYN

(picking up where BRITTYN left off)

But Peter, James, and John did not keep watch with Jesus, they fell asleep and, while they slept, an Angel appeared to Jesus...

BERTRAND *(interrupting)*

Excellent...stop right there where the angel appears. That is where my story begins, with the angel. What you are about to hear is a story suppressed for centuries... But be forewarned...once you hear it you cannot unhear it.

KATHERYN

Oh, Friar Bertrand...perhaps we should not be hearing...

BRITTYN *(interrupting)*

Be quiet, Kate!

Go on, Friar...tell us the story, please!

BERTRAND

When Jesus found his closest disciples, Peter, James, and John sleeping among the Olive Trees, He woke them and told them that he had been visited by the Angel.

BRITTYN *(impatient)*

Yes, Friar, we know the story.

God sent an angel to comfort our Lord in his time of agony.

CARDINAL

What you do not know, Brittny and Katheryn is what the angel said to Jesus to comfort Him.

KATHERYN

How could we know what cannot be known? Jesus did not tell Peter, James or John the comforting words that were spoken, at least they did not tell others or surely they would have appeared in at least one of the Gospels.

BERTRAND

Unless... Jesus instructed them not to. What if Jesus told Peter, James and John that it was a secret...a secret that they might only share with one other human being?

KATHERYN

One other...who else knew the secret?

BERTRAND

I have a friend, Friar Toby, my counterpart in the Vatican Library. He has been at his post for more than fifty years. There is little that transpires at the Vatican without Toby's knowledge...he specializes in secrets.

KATHERYN

And your friend, Toby...does he know "the secret."

BERTRAND

Alas, no...but he has informed me that there are forces at work connected to the secret that may be a grave danger to you both.

BRITTYN

What forces?!!

KATHERYN

What danger?!!

BERTRAND

Not now...later...I will summon you again when I know more. There is, for the present moment, nothing to fear. Go now to your duties and your prayers...God be with you.

KATHERYN & BRITTYN
And with you, Friar Bertrand.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE VII

The Cardinal's office.

They are engaged in conversation as lights go up.

BISHOP

So...Francisco...I am still in the dark; still not understanding what my mission is to be

CARDINAL

Yes...yes...I know...I do understand and I will tell you more, but first, you must assure me that you are ready.

BISHOP

Eminence...Francisco...for many years now you have given me tasks, tasks that others might have balked at, yet I have never hesitated, never questioned the righteousness. Nor do I hesitate now and my only question is for clarity. What would you have me do?

CARDINAL

You have heard of “The Lost Gospel?”

BISHOP

Rumors...nothing more! The supposed “lost” Gospel is the source of the evil rumors that Jesus married the prostitute Mary Magdalene.

CARDINAL

No, my son, not Magdalene.

BISHOP

Then who?

CARDINAL

There was discovered a few years ago an ancient document in the vaults of the Vatican library. This 1,500 year old manuscript written on scitta paper and translated from the Aramaic reveals that Jesus married a virgin named Mary.

BISHOP (*Shocked and alarmed*)

Jesus married The Virgin Mary!??

CARDINAL

Not *“the”* Virgin Mary; *“a”* virgin named Mary.
And from this union came a child whose name was...

BISHOP (*Interrupting*)

Judah! That's no secret...all part of the rumors.
Jesus did not have a son...I'm sure of it.

CARDINAL

And you can be sure of it.
Mary, the wife of Jesus, gave birth to a daughter!

BISHOP

A daughter?! A daughter named Judah...a male child's name?

CARDINAL

No, not Judah...Judith.

BISHOP

Francisco! Let us assume for the sake of argument that you are correct, that Jesus married a virgin named Mary who gave birth to a daughter. Then why would the rumor-makers believe it was a male child named Judah?

CARDINAL

I have asked myself that question many times. I have discussed and debated with...
(*he hesitates*)...with knowledgeable others.

BISHOP

And what did you and these "knowledgeable others" conclude.

CARDINAL

You asked about the "rumor makers..."
We think that the maker of this Judah rumor was Jesus himself.

BISHOP

Jesus! Jesus? But why?

CARDINAL

Jesus knew his fate, that he would be arrested, found guilty of plotting against the rule of Rome, and that he would die on the cross. And, He also knew that the Romans would go after his son, lest- the "Son of" the Son of God should carry on his Father's earthly mission.

BISHOP

Ah! I see...the Romans would not be looking for a girl child as long as the rumors spoke of a boy child...a boy named Judah.

CARDINAL

And, the strategy worked...the daughter, Judith, lived a long and fruitful life full of the Holy Spirit and, perhaps more significantly to your mission Tomás, is that before she died she passed on that Spirit, Jesus's Spirit!

BISHOP

Passed it on? How...how is that possible?

CARDINAL

Since when has "possible" been a consideration? We believe Jesus's Mother was a virgin. We believe Joshua made the Sun cease to move in the sky. We believe hundreds of people rose from the dead! We believe many impossibilities and never ask how is that possible. So, why now? Jesus was God. God is omnipotent; He can do anything. And if Jesus wanted his Spirit to continue to live within a human body forever, then He could, would, and, we think, did do it!

BISHOP

Forever!?! Are you saying there may be someone alive today is...I dare not say it...

CARDINAL

Then I will say it for you. We believe there is a human being alive today who is Jesus, The Christ returned as promised?

BISHOP

If it became known...it...it would change everything!

CARDINAL

And that is your mission, Tomás...to ensure that this story is never made known, that it is *kept* a secret.

BISHOP

But how would it become known now if not already?

CARDINAL

A good question...one that brings us back to the Garden of Gethsemane nineteen-hundred years ago.

BISHOP

You mean when God sent an Angel to comfort our Lord in his hour of agony in the olive garden?

CARDINAL

Yes, exactly...the document purports that the Angel comforted Jesus with the knowledge that, though He Himself would perish, his Spirit would live forever. And with that, the Angel gave unto him a parchment with the names of all those, as yet unborn, who would carry on; vessels of the Holy Spirit until it was time for him to return.

BISHOP

My God!

CARDINAL

Precisely; but you have not heard the rest of it.

BISHOP

There's more?

CARDINAL

Much more...the 1,500 year old manuscript that was discovered also revealed that this Gethsemane Parchment with the names of hundreds of women was spirited out of the Middle East sometime in the 3rd century. It then made its way around the world many times.

BISHOP (*startled*)

Wait...wait...you said hundreds of *women*?!

CARDINAL

Yes...women! The first name on the list, we believe, was Judith of Nazareth, but the rest are as yet unknown, but we do believe that it was to be only women carrying the Holy Spirit as if it were a unborn child waiting to be born.

BISHOP

So then, where is this Gethsemane Parchment...this list of women...has it been found?

CARDINAL

The exact location of the parchment has been hidden for centuries. It has been moved from place to place time and time again whenever it was suspected that investigators were on to it.

BISHOP

But, Francisco...you know more now...I can hear it in your voice.
Where is the parchment?

CARDINAL

Ah, Tomás...you are very astute. Recently, we have come to believe that the original parchment is hidden in the Library at the Cathedral of St. Agnus in Dublin. The secret has been kept for years now by a Sister Clara de Leon. But Clara is now very old and she knows that it must be passed on soon to the next Keeper.

BISHOP

And who is the next Keeper...do we know?

CARDINAL

We do not. It will be your mission to go to Ireland, to St. Agnus and discover who the next Keeper of the Secret is to be and see to it that she never discovers the ancient parchment, never learns the truth.

BISHOP

And, if I am too late to prevent this discovery?

CARDINAL

Then see to it that she and anyone else that she speaks to comes to spend eternity at the right hand of God...sooner than later.

BISHOP

You would have me break a commandment?

CARDINAL

Remember “the Greater Good,” Tomás. Go now...they are expecting a new Bishop...you, Tomás Torquemada...you are the new Bishop of the Cathedral of St. Agnus. You leave for Dublin tonight!

BISHOP

Tonight!? But Francisco, I do not have the vestments of a Bishop...a cassock, a mitre, pectoral cross, ecclesiastical ring and zucchetto. I have only this simple Friar’s robe.

CARDINAL

There is no time...you will receive your Bishop’s vestments in a few days.
In the meantime; you dress as you are. Now, go with the Grace of God.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE VIII

*The next day.
The hallway with the table, globe and telephone.
KATHERYN & BRITTYN enter carrying
flowers that they place on the table.
They are getting ready to receive the Bishop.*

BRITTYN

This is so exciting...a new Bishop sent from the Vatican.

KATHERYN

I shall miss Godfrey.

BRITTYN

Yes, me too...but they say this Bishop is a very handsome man...

KATHERYN *(mock disapproval)*

Brittyn! What matters is that he be a very holy man.

BRITTYN

Holy and handsome!

*BERTRAND enters pushing CLARA in her wheelchair.
BRITTYN and KATHERYN kneel for
CLARA's blessing then they fade back.*

CLARA

So, Berti...has he arrived?

BERTRAND

Yes indeed...late last night...in a storm.

CLARA

How fitting...thunder and lightning all night...I heard it.
So, have you told them? *(indicating Brittyn and Katheryn)*

BERTRAND

Told them?

CLARA

About Bishop Tomás Torquemada, namesake and direct descendent of Tomás de Torquemada the first Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition.

BERTRAND

Heavens no, Clara...I saw no need to alarm them...yet.

CLARA

Yet?

BERTRAND

We do not know Torquemada's intentions. If they are malevolent, he will reveal himself.

*There is a loud knock on the door. The BISHOP enters.
BERTRAND immediately goes to greet him, kneeling and kissing his ring.*

BERTRAND *(speaking as he rises)*

Your Eminence! Welcome to St. Agnus. I am Friar Bertrand.

BISHOP

Yes, Brother...your good work in the Library is well known. I am so pleased to finally meet you. You must show me all your books. I'm especially interested in the ancient texts...there is so much wisdom to be gained.

BERTRAND

I shall look forward to that, your Grace.

But now, allow me to introduce Sister Clara de Leon, Mother Abbess here at St Agnus.

*CLARA leans forward expecting to be offered the ring
but surprisingly, the BISHOP goes to her and kneels at her feet.*

BISHOP

Bless me, Mother...my heart beats with heavenly joy to meet you.

CLARA

You are very charming, your Grace.

BISHOP

Please, Mother...call me Tomás. *(noticing Kathryn and Brittyn)*
And who do we have here? *(extending the ring)*

KATHERYN (*kissing the ring*)

I am Katheryn, your grace and this is my friend Brittyn.

BRITTYN (*kissing the ring*)

Your Grace.

BISHOP

Up...up, my children. I am so looking forward to getting to know you all well, you are the future of the church. Don't you agree, Mother Abbess...perhaps one of these young people will carry on for you someday.

CLARA

Someday, Tomás, but not today.

I have much yet to do in this life and I have no plans to leave it soon.

BISHOP

Of, course Mother...you are an inspiration to us all, yet I find myself reminded of what our Hebrew brethren are wont to say at such times as these...“Mensch tracht un Gott lacht.” ...But, now, dear friends, I have a lot of unpacking and praying to do, so if you will excuse me...

BERTRAND

Of course, your Grace. (*Beckons the postulants*)

Come...Katheryn, Brittyn...say good day to Bishop Torquemada.

They all kiss his ring and the BISHOP exits.

They stand in silence for a moment, and then KATHERYN speaks.

KATHERYN

Sister Clara, what was it he said when you said you had no plans to leave this world?

CLARA

He said, “Mensch tracht un Gott lacht;” it is a Yiddish expression... it means “Man plans and God laughs.”

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE IX

*The Library. FRIAR BERTRAND is busy behind his desk.
KATHERYN and BRITTYN enter somewhat excited.*

KATHERYN

Friar Bertrand?
Come out, come out wherever you are...

BERTRAND

Here! Here, my Children!

BRITTYN

Tell us, Brother...why the urgency?

KATHERYN

Your message, "Come at once!" was most curious.

BERTRAND

I am sorry if I alarmed you, but yes this is a matter of urgency.

KATHERYN

We are here, Brother...tell us all.

BERTRAND (*hesitating*)

Alas...I cannot tell you "all," for most of the "all" is a secret, and I've already told you I'm good at keeping secrets...yours and others.

BRITTYN

Then, just tell us what you need, Brother.

BERTRAND

I need you to sit and listen.

POSTULANTS sit. They are very curious.

It's about Bishop Torquemada; he is not what he seems to be.

KATHERYN

He seemed quite charming, as Sister Clara said.

BRITTYN

And handsome...(*Katheryn elbows Brittn*)...er, holy...he seemed quite holy.

BERTRAND

Handsome? If you say so, but "holy?" He is no angel.

KATHERYN

What do you mean, Brother?

BERTRAND

I have a friend, Friar Toby, my counterpart in the Vatican Library. He has been at his post for more than fifty years. There is little that transpires at the Vatican without Toby's knowledge...he specializes in secrets.

KATHERYN

More secrets?

BERTRAND

Many more...Toby has communicated to me the activities of a certain person... a Cardinal Francisco Cisneros. His title is Protector of the Faith but what he really protects is the story.

BRITTYN

What story?

BERTRAND

The story... you know Mathew, Mark, Luke and John...the "story." More to the point, he protects a particular interpretation of the story...a very strict 15th Century interpretation of the story and he regards anyone who doubts or questions as an enemy of the church. It is he who sent your handsome Bishop who will do whatever he has been tasked to do.

KATHERYN

And what is his task...what is he here to do if not the duties of Bishop?

BRITTYN

You would think he'd have time for little else. Bishop Godfrey was the busiest person I've ever known...you know..."bishopsing."

KATHERYN

I ask again.

BERTRAND

Toby was not sure if he got the whole of it but it seems Torquemada is looking for a very ancient document written on parchment. All we know is that whatever it is only recently came to light for Cardinal Cisneros and even more recently for our new Bishop, something to do with a manuscript that was recently found in the Vatican Library, that's how Toby knew about it. It mentions the parchment but does not say what is written there.

KATHERYN

Another mystery?

BERTRAND

Or the same mystery?!!

KATHERYN

You think this is somehow connected to the secret...you know, the "big" secret?

BERTRAND

If I've learned anything in my seventy-six years on this earth, it that everything connects, so we should assume that what Katheryn is out to discover, Torquemada is out to locate. I'm guessing he will find his way to our library here soon.

KATHERYN

Yes, I recall him saying he wanted to visit and that he was particularly interested in ancient texts.

BRITTYN

"So much wisdom to be gained," I think is what he said.

BERTRAND

And that's why I said urgent, we urgently need to find that document...so, let's start looking. It won't be on this level, I know every book and piece of paper up here, but it's been a while since I've been down in the cellars and crypts. So...off-we go!

*BERTRAND and the postulants exit.
There is a brief pause then we hear The BISHOP as he enters.*

BISHOP

Hello...Friar Bertrand are you here? Its Bishop Torquemada come to see the library.

*Getting no response, The Bishop looks around a bit,
taking books from shelves, looking in cabinets...searching.
He notices the telephone on the table with the globe.
He goes to the phone and makes a call.*

BISHOP

Hello! Is this Friar Antonio answering? Oh, hello Anthony...it's Tomás calling from Dublin for Cardinal Cisneros. Yes, of course...I can wait.

The BISHOP absentmindedly spins the globe as he waits, then suddenly perks up.

BISHOP

Your Eminence! Its Tomás calling from Dublin.

I'm here and I've met the old lady... she seems very astute for her age, and I've met Friar Bertrand, the librarian... *(pause)* "a scoundrel?"...why do you say that?

(pause) Ah...I see...well do not worry, I know how to handle scoundrels!

I'm in the Cathedral Library as we speak...I have found nothing yet... there must be more to this...another level up or down...I will keep looking. But, Francisco, here's what I called to tell you. I've met two young women, postulants at St. Agnes. Either of them could be the one, the chosen one. *(pause)*

We hear voices off stage.

BERTRAND and the POSTULANTS are returning.

BISHOP

I need to hang up...someone's coming. Yes, yes...and bless you too.

As the BISHOP hangs up the phone,

BERTRAND and the POSTULANTS enter.

They stop in their tracks when they see the BISHOP.

BISHOP

Ah! Friar Bertrand! I was hoping to find you.

The BISHOP extends the ring but BERTRAND ignores it.

And look who's with you!

Let's see if I remember...*(he points to each incorrectly)*...Katheryn and Brittyn?

BRITTYN

No, your Grace...I'm Brittyn...this is Katheryn.

They both kneel to kiss the BISHOP's ring as he extends his hand to them.

BISHOP

Ah...of course...Katheryn and Brittyn.

BERTRAND

(interrupting the Bishop and addressing postulants)

So, my children, we shall continue the book cataloging later tonight perhaps or after Mass in the morning. I give you leave to pursue your prayers and other duties.

*POSTULANTS adlib good-byes and exit
leaving BERTRAND and BISHOP alone.*

BISHOP *(watching them leave)*

Fine young women, Bertrand, tell me about them.

BERTRAND

Not much to tell, your Grace, I'm sure there are many other things about St. Agnus's that you'll need to know...I am privy to most everything that happens here.

BISHOP

Actually, I'd like to hear more about Katheryn and Brittyn; they are, after all, the future of Holy Mother Church.

BERTRAND

Very well...the three came to us as orphans raised by the Sisters at The Home for Unwed Mothers and Children in Galway. They have never known anything but the religious life so it was no surprise when they chose to continue that life as Sisters of St. Agnus themselves.

BISHOP

And their birth mothers?

BERTRAND

They never knew their birth mothers, the sisters were their mothers from infancy.

BISHOP

Records?

BERTRAND

We have none...we don't even have family names...sur names. In fact, the names Katheryn and Brittyn were given to them by the sisters as babies.

BISHOP

Tell me; in the time you've known them, has either one in particular stood out.

BERTRAND

Stood out? How do you mean?

BISHOP

You know...more capable, independent...mmm...more intelligent than the other?

BERTRAND

Your Grace, I have not observed significant differences between them...
(suspiciously) ...but why do you ask?

BISHOP

As I have said, the future of the church.

*BERTRAND pauses in thought for a moment
then decides to change tactics*

BERTRAND

Enough of this charade, Torquemada, I know why you are here.

BISHOP

You would speak to your Bishop thusly!?

BERTRAND

You are no Bishop! I see no purple! You are a priest as am I. I speak to you as an equal and in doing that I afford you more courtesy than you deserve for, in truth, I see you as no more than the attack dog of that scoundrel Cisneros!

BISHOP

“Scoundrel” you say, Priest.
He calls you “scoundrel” as well.

BERTRAND

It matters naught to me what he calls me.
We do have a history, your Cardinal and I, so it is no surprise.

BISHOP

So, we understand each other then...but we need not be adversaries.

BERTRAND

How so?

BISHOP

We are both servants of the Lord.
We both care deeply about Holy Mother Church, do we not?

BERTRAND

That is perhaps the one thing share, we *do* care, but we do not, I think, share a view on how *to* care for Holy Mother Church. You would have us live in the time of your ancestor and infamous namesake notorious for the severity of his judgments and punishments. He was responsible for more than 2000 burnings!

BISHOP

Of heretics! Burning of heretics! But Brother...that was my ancestor many generations removed...I am not he!

BERTRAND

Fair enough...so, what do you want?

BISHOP

I want to know what you and the postulants were doing before I came in, certainly not “cataloguing” books. I think you were searching for something...something you were never meant to find. I am sure that your spy in the Vatican Library has been keeping you informed. That will not happen again I assure you.

BERTRAND

What are you saying?

BISHOP

Sad news, I’m afraid. It seems that Friar Toby was suffering from a weak heart. The Lord called him home the day I left for Ireland...I am sorry to have missed the funeral.

BERTRAND (*shocked and upset*)

I’ve known Toby for more than half a century...he was as strong as a bull!
Did you have anything to do with his sudden demise?

BISHOP

Brother...you offend your Bishop again? Should you not now mourn the loss of your friend?

BERTRAND

I will mourn Toby in time, priest, but know now that I am your enemy and I will do anything necessary to protect Brittyn and Katheryn.

BISHOP

So be it...if you choose to do the work of the devil then you are indeed my enemy!

BERTRAND

We shall see who does the work of the devil, but for now be gone from this library!
You are not welcome here.

BISHOP

Cardinal Cisneros will hear of this. You may claim I am not your Bishop, but he is
undisputedly your Cardinal; you must obey him.

BERTRAND

Enough! I will deal with Cisneros. Now out! Out!
"Go n-ithe an cat thú is go n-ithe an diabhal an cat!"

BISHOP

I do not speak your Gaelic gibberish, Irishman.

BERTRAND

Then I will translate for you, Spaniard... it's an old Irish curse...
"May the cat eat you and may the Devil eat the cat!"

BISHOP

I'm going, Bertrand...but I have just one question for you before I go.

BERTRAND

Speak it!

BISHOP

How's your heart, Friar?

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE X

*The hallway at the Convent of St. Agnus.
The POSTULANTS are in a heated conversation!*

KATHERYN

I wish we had not listened at the door.
Friar Bertrand told us to attend to our duties and prayers.

BRITTYN

But we did listen, and we heard what the Bishop said there at the end.

KATHERYN

We heard more than that! And the problem is once we've heard we cannot unhear.

BRITTYN

I thought that name was familiar, Torquemada, but I could not place it, but when the Spanish Inquisition came up!

KATHERYN

That's when it hit me too. Our Bishop is the great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson of Tomás de Torquemada.

BRITTYN

Thirteen "greats!" Thirteen generations of Torquemadas! That name has been synonymous with religious bigotry and cruel fanaticism ever since the Inquisition.

KATHERYN

And it would seem our Bishop may be inclined to carry on the family tradition.

BRITTYN

But is he really our Bishop?
Friar Bertrand does not seem to think so.

KATHERYN

Bishop or priest, it matters naught. We've already heard him threaten Friar Bertrand, "How's your heart, Brother?"

BRITTYN

Yes, that's just what he said, after telling him that his friend Toby had suddenly died from a weak heart!

KATHERYN

And what was that banter between Torquemada and Sister Clara...when she said that she did not plan to die soon, “Mensch tracht un Gott lacht?”

BRITTYN & KATHERYN *(at the same time)*

“Man plans and God laughs!”

They pause, reflecting on the implications of the Bishop’s threats.

BRITTYN

We’ve got to do something, but what?
We have no power over a Bishop.

KATHERYN

This all connects to the Parchment... “everything connects” Friar Bertrand said. Friar Bertrand told me that an angel gave Jesus a parchment in the Garden of Gethsemane. Sister Clara told me I was chosen in the Garden of Gethsemane. We find this Gethsemane parchment; we have the power. *(pause)*
Tonight, when the convent is asleep, we return to the Library!

BRITTYN

But we searched all the cellars and crypts below the Library already.

KATHERYN

Double-searched! I know. But there was one place we did not search...the Library itself!

BRITTYN

As I recall, Friar Bertrand was sure it was not in the Library; he should know.

KATHERYN

Yes, he said he knew every book and piece of paper...he did not say parchment. What if it’s there, hidden in plain sight?

BRITTYN

Then, it’s settled...tonight we search the library.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE XI

*The Library at the Cathedral of St. Agnus.
There are open drawers, books strewn about, and stacks of papers.
We see the POSTULANTS. They have been searching all night.
The now sit/lay on the floor exhausted.
Lights are low...it is pre-dawn.*

BRITTYN
Kate?

KATHERYN
Uh-huh?

BRITTYN
Are you sleeping?

KATHERYN
No...thinking.

BRITTYN
Something deep and profound, no doubt?

KATHERYN
We've been over it, before.

BRITTYN
Give me a hint.

KATHERYN
You just said it..."doubt."

BRITTYN
Oh, that.

KATHERYN
Yeah, that. It just feels like Friar Bertrand brushed it off...
everyone has doubts so it's no big deal.

BRITTYN

Actually, he said it's no big secret.

KATHERYN

Well it was *my* secret...and to me it was a big deal...it's still is a big deal.

BRITTYN

So, what are your doubts? They no longer need to be a secret...from me.

KATHERYN

It's not that my core beliefs are in doubt...

I'm mean I do not doubt there is a God in Heaven.

BRITTYN

But?

KATHERYN

But, I am having doubts about God's representatives here on earth. I mean, we are about to commit ourselves to a lifetime of obedience.

BRITTYN

We've always been obedient...or we'd get our wrists whacked by Sister Cruella.

KATHERYN

Don't you ever feel like just saying NO?

BRITTYN

No! I don't want to be told when to go to bed.

KATHERYN

When to get up.

BRITTYN

When to pray.

KATHERYN

What to eat...or what not eat.

KATHERYN

No meat on Friday...what's that about?

I mean...did God ever say "Thou shalt not eat meat on Friday?"

BRITTYN

I don't think its mentioned in the Bible, but it's never going to change...a hundred years from now people will still be eating fish on Fridays...no doubt about that.

KATHERYN

But that's the point...I do doubt. Who knows? "God's representatives" might just decide one day that it's ok to eat meat on Fridays and what we believe to be true now will no longer be true!

BRITTYN

I have a confession to make.

KATHERYN

To me? I'm not a priest...you should talk to Friar Bernard.

BRITTYN

You are the only one I can say this to.
I have bigger doubts than when to pray or when to eat.

KATHERYN

And they are...?

BRITTYN

Okay...I'll just come right out and say it. *(She hesitates)*

KATHERYN

Well...what are you waiting for...say it.

BRITTYN

You're always rushing me...this is not easy.

KATHERYN

Sorry...I know I do that...take your time, Brit.

BRITTYN

Okay, here goes...
Kate...I don't want to be a nun!

KATHERYN

What?! That's been our whole goal since we turned twelve!

BRITTYN

Well...I'm not twelve anymore...and...

KATHERYN

And...

BRITTYN

I've been having...I don't know...certain feelings.

KATHERYN

Feelings?

BRITTYN

Feelings inconsistent with being a nun.

KATHERYN

What inconsistencies?

BRITTYN

Do I have to spell it out for you?

KATHERYN (*after thinking about it*)

Feeling inconsistent with being a *celibate* nun?

BRITTYN

I want a life! I don't want to dress in a bag tied by a rope until I'm ninety.

Brittyn indicates her postulant's dress and twirls the rope.

KATHERYN

What do you want? Romance...sex?

BRITTYN

I want a family...children...someone to love...someone to love me.

KATHERYN (*pause*)

I love you.

BRITTYN

And I love you...dear Kate...but you know that's not the kind of love I'm talking about.

KATHERYN (*long pause*)

So...our paths diverge...like in Robert Frost's new poem?

BRITTYN

Yeah...I guess...but perhaps I'll be taking the path *most* traveled by. I don't know....these are recent feelings...I need to work it out.

KATHERYN

Fair enough...we'll work it out together.

BRITTYN

Thank you, but shouldn't we be getting back to looking for the parchment?

KATHERYN

Yes...we should...the sun will be up soon!

BRITTYN

Back to work!

They commence searching, crawling around on the floor, lifting books and papers.

KATHERYN

Anything?

BRITTYN

Nothing that we've not looked at many times.

KATHERYN

I just have this feeling that we're missing something, like its right under our noses.

They continue searching.

BRITTYN (*exasperated*)

Where on earth can it be?

As the words are spoken the sun rises and it is dawn. With the sunrise, a beam of light comes through the stained-glass window and shines directly on the Globe of the Earth.

KATHERYN

What did you say, Brittyn?

BRITTYN

Just muttering. I said, "Where on earth can it be?"

*They look at one another then
look toward the globe bathed in light.*

*They jump up and go to the globe when suddenly
the BISHOP enters! The POSTULANTS freeze!*

BISHOP

Looking for something, my children?

Quite a mess you've made here, Friar Bertrand will not be pleased. Speak up!

What are you two doing here at dawn...and, do not lie to me; I will know if you lie.

The POSTULANTS are clearly nervous and fearful.

BRITTYN

Your Grace...we were just...ah...we...(stammering)

KATHERYN

We were helping Friar Bertrand. He's lost an important document, we promised to help him find it...that's all.

BISHOP

Indeed, it must be a very important document because, from the looks of things, you've been here all night.

BRITTYN

We did not want to disappoint Friar Bertrand.

BISHOP

And you should not want to disappoint me either.

I am your Bishop; you need to remember that.

*The BISHOP holds out his ring for them to kiss.
BRITTYN immediately bows low and kisses the ring. KATHERYN hesitates.*

BISHOP (menacingly)

Katheryn?

*KATHERYN bows and kisses the ring never taking her eyes off The BISHOP.
She rises then holds hands with BRITTYN somewhat fearfully.*

BISHOP (smiling...change in tone)

My children, you are afraid.

No need...no need. I know I can be a bit...oh, shall we say, “gruffy?”

Yes, that’s it. I can be gruffy at times. I have little experience with...with...you know...

BRITTYN

With women?

BISHOP

With postulants. I’ve been at the Vatican for too long. Very few postulants there. But here we are now...you young ladies and gruffy old me.

Now...please...sit down...let me tell you a story and then we can look for Friar Bertrand’s document together.

*The POSTULANTS sit facing
The BISHOP who stays standing.
As he speaks, he moves around on the stage.*

BISHOP

Let me tell you about the “document” that is such importance to Friar Bertrand and indeed to me and our Holy Mother Church. It is a very ancient parchment believed to have been given to Jesus by an Angel of God in the Garden of Gethsemane. We believe that it was a list of names.

KATHERYN

Names, your Grace?

BRITTYN

Bertrand’s name!?

BISHOP

No, not Bertrand...poor simple Bertrand. I doubt he would merit mention on a message from God. The Gethsemane Parchment contains a list of enemies of Christ born and as yet to be born for the next 2000 years. These are Satan’s minions and their Master has managed to hide the list and therefore the identities of the named individuals for all these many centuries.

KATHERYN

Are you telling us that Satan hid the parchment? Satan...the Prince of Evil who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven before the creation of humankind? That Satan?

BISHOP (becoming impatient)

Yes...of course...that Satan...there’s only one...(pause)...but here I am being gruffy again. Now...please, bear with me and I will tell you why it is so important that we learn the names on that parchment.

KATHERYN

But, your Grace, you said it is a list of names, from the first century, of those born and yet to be born for the next 1900 years. Well, the 1900 years are almost up and all of the humans on that list must surely be dead by now.

*As The BISHOP delivers the following lines ,
he stands behind the table with the globe.
He absent-mindedly spins the globe as he speaks.*

BISHOP

All but one! The last name on the list is of a person alive today; a profoundly evil being who only purpose is to destroy the church and profane our lord Jesus Christ. When we learn the name, we can find this devil and...well, you know.

KATHERYN

Kill him?

BISHOP

Her! The names are all women...she-devils!
Now... help me find that parchment.

*The POSTULANTS automatically look towards
the globe when the parchment is mentioned. The BISHOP notices.*

BISHOP

What's this!?! Ah...I see...you have found it haven't you, or you know where it is...

*The BISHOP looks down at the globe when
KATHERYN springs from her seat and snatches
it from his hands and passes it to BRITTYN.
What follows is a keep-away game with the BISHOP
awkwardly chasing after the faster more agile postulants.*

*The BISHOP finally intercepts and catches the
globe but KATHERYN, who has removed the rope
belt on her gown, throws the rope over the
BISHOP to restrain him. BRITTYN follows suit and
soon the BISHOP is tied to a chair and protesting loudly.*

BISHOP

What do think you're doing? Untie me you wretched women. I am your Bishop!
(Continue protest adlib)

*The POSTULANTS stand in front of The BISHOP's chair
so he cannot be seen from the doorway.
FRIAR BERTRAND pushing SISTER CLARA
(in her wheelchair) suddenly enters!*

BERTRAND

What is going here! Who disturbs the quiet of a Library!

*The POSTULANTS look a bit guilty as they
spread out revealing the tied-up BISHOP.*

BISHOP (*angrily*)

Bertrand! Bertrand you scoundrel; look at what your minions have done!

BERTRAND

I see! I see!

(*to Clara*) Sister Clara, look what our postulants have done!

CLARA

Oh my goodness, Berti, is that Tomás tied to his chair and fuming smoke from his ears?

BERTRAND

Indeed Clara...it is he, tied and fuming!

BISHOP

And what are you going to do about it?

I insist you do something...I am your Bishop! (*continues adlib*)

CLARA

I suggest you shut him up, Berti.

BERTRAND

Excellent suggestion, Clara. Katheryn, if you don't mind doing the honors,
you'll find a roll of rather strong tape in my desk drawer.

KATHERYN

I don't mind at all, Brother.

Brittyn...hold him still.

*BRITTYN holds BISHOP'S arms
while KATHERYN tapes his mouth shut.*

BISHOP

Wait...wait...don't you dare...I will excommun...mmmm (mouth is taped).

*KATHERYN takes the globe from the BISHOP who is still clutching it.
She brings it to BERTRAND.*

KATHERYN

We think what you seek may be hidden inside.

*BERTRAND plays with the globe a bit and
discovers it will open into two halves.
He opens the globe a looks inside as everyone holds their breath.
Finally, BERTRAND speaks.*

BERTRAND

It's here...we've found it...I dare not touch it... a 1900 year old parchment could crumble in my hands.

CLARA

That is wise, Berti...we'll call on experts to remove it from its hiding place...people who can preserve it... we could not read it anyway, it's in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke.

BERTRAND

Of course, so what do we do now?

CLARA

I know an ancient document restorer who also reads Aramaic. Sister Maria, one of St. Joe's...she works at the Dublin Museum, she'll know how to handle our parchment. And, best of all...she can keep a secret. She can be here in the morning

BERTRAND (still holding the globe)

What do we do with it in the meantime?

CLARA

Just put it back in the globe as it was.
It's been safe there for a long time, one more night will not matter.

*BERTRAND reassembles the globe
and carefully returns it to its stand.*

BERTRAND

And, this one? (*indicating Bishop*) What do we do with him?

CLARA

I will let the Vatican deal with him.

BERTRAND

Cardinal Cisneros? You can't trust him.

CLARA

No, not Cisneros...you don't serve as Abbess to the largest Community of St. Agnus in Ireland for forty years without getting know a Cardinal or two. I have many friends in Rome, Berti...friends in red robes who can be trusted.

BISHOP (still muted)

Mmmmm...mmmm....

*CLARA, with some difficulty, rises out of her wheelchair and goes to
The BISHOP who is still seated and tied to his chair.
She stands over him with a sense of authority.*

CLARA

Tomás Torquemada...you will listen to me now and you will pay attention. Whatever your purpose is here, it is clear it is not the Bishopric of St. Agnus. I will be in touch with the Vatican and we will see what your mission here is. In the meantime, we will untie you if you agree to be confined to your chamber until we settle this business. Do you agree?

BISHOP

(still muted, shaking his head "no")

Mmmmm...mmmm....!!!!

CLARA

As you wish...stay as you are.

BISHOP

(still muted, shaking his head "yes")

Mmmmm...mmmm....

CLARA

Very well. Katheryn please untie Friar Torquemada.

BISHOP

(stands up angry, rips the tape from his mouth)

Mmmmm...mmmm...!!!!“Bishop!” You will address me as your Bishop!
And I demand to see that parchment.

CLARA

You are in no position to make demands, Tomás.
Friar Bertrand, would you please escort Friar Torquemada to his chamber.

BERTRAND

With pleasure, Sister, with pleasure.

*BERTRAND manhandles the BISHOP
to take him away. The BISHOP objects.*

BISHOP

Take your hands off of me, scoundrel. I’m going...I’m going.
All of you...all of you...you will be sorry to have treated a prince of the church
thusly...very sorry.

*The BISHOP exits in a huff.
The POSTULANTS reach out to each other.*

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE XII

*This is a dual scene suggesting the Library at St. Angus' and the Cardinal's office at the Vatican.
Stage right is the table with the globe and telephone from the library.
Stage left is the Cardinals' desk.
We begin with lights up stage left.
The BISHOP enters still in a huff.*

BISHOP (*muttering to himself*)

Confined to chambers...indeed! Fools, all of them, especially that simian Bertrand.
La mona aunque se vista de seda, mona se queda!
Well...the monkey will soon regret his foolery.

*BISHOP picks up a telephone.
He dials, waits a moment or two.*

*The telephone on the Cardinal's desk rings.
The CARDINAL is very busy and annoyed to be interrupted.*

CARDINAL

(Answers in Italian)

Questo è il cardinale Francisco Cisneros... chi sta chiamando?
Pronto! Who is calling?

BISHOP

Francisco! It's me... Tomás, calling from Dublin!

CARDINAL

Tomás! Tomás, my friend! I've been anxious to hear from you!
Have you found it...the Gethsemane Parchment...do you have it?

BISHOP (*hesitating*)

Yes and no. I have found it...ah...but...ah...I don't have it.

CARDINAL

What are you saying...spit it out.

BISHOP

It was hidden inside a globe in the library.
Those meddlesome postulants figured out where it was and they led me right to it.

CARDINAL

Then you do have it?

BISHOP

I had it right in my hands when, out of nowhere, Bertrand snuck up behind me and subdued me with ropes and muzzled me with tape. He's a quite a big fellow, you know.

CARDINAL

You let a 76 year old librarian get the best of you Torquemada!

BISHOP

He surprised me...that's all, Francisco.

CARDINAL

Its "Your Eminence!" Friar Torquemada. It is only my friends who may call me Francisco...my friends do not disappoint me.

BISHOP

Forgive me, your Eminence...let me make it right...I have a plan.

CARDINAL

Your plans have not worked so well thus far Friar.

BISHOP

I overheard Bertrand taking with Sister Clara. They could not read the parchment but they have summoned someone who can...a Maria with the Sisters of St. Joseph Order. She arrives in the morning. The parchment is hidden in an old globe. I will sneak into the library tonight and steal it.

CARDINAL

They will suspect you when they find it gone.

BISHOP

No...there is a globe in the hallway...the same thing...I will replace the globe containing the Gethsemane Parchment with the hall globe. Won't Bertrand be surprised when he can't open it? By the time he figures it out, I can on a plane back to Rome.

CARDINAL

No...the parchment is very delicate...it must not travel... Hide it until I get there.
I can catch a flight out tonight and be in Dublin in the morning.

BISHOP

Your, Eminence! There is no need for you to come all the way to Dublin.
I can handle things here... I will have that globe in my hands before anyone gets there in
the morning! I remind you...I have a plan.

CARDINAL

And, I remind you... "Mensch tracht un Gott lacht!"

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE XIII

*Later that night in The Library. Lights are low.
The BISHOP enters stealthily with a flashlight...
he is carrying the replacement globe.
He carefully removes the globe on the table and replaces it
with the one he brought when he hears voices.
He panics and hides the globe behind
a large bookcase then quickly exits.
After a moment or two, we see the POSTULANTS
emerge from behind Bertrand's big desk.*

KATHERYN

Bother Bertrand was right!

BRITTYN

Just what he said the Bishop would do!

KATHERYN

Listen! Someone's coming...hide!

*The POSTULANTS scramble behind the desk again.
BERTRAND and CLARA enter.*

CLARA

Katheryn? Brittyn? It's Sister Clara and Friar Bertrand...come out!

*POSTULANTS pop up from behind the desk.
BERTRAND turns on the lights.*

KATHERYN

We're here, Mother. *(popping up)*

BRITTYN

You were right, Mother...The Bishop came just before dawn and took the globe;
the one that we switched for the real globe with the parchment.

KATHERYN

And your timing was perfect...he hid it behind that bookcase without examining it.

BERTRAND

Excellent...and where is the real globe?

KATHERYN goes behind Bertrand's desk and emerges with the globe.

KATHERYN

Here Brother!

*KATHERYN hands the globe to BERTRAND.
A doorbell rings loudly.*

BERTRAND

That will be Sister Maria come to translate the Gethsemane Parchment.

CLARA

I've instructed her to go to directly to the chapel. Bertrand...take the globe to her now and bring it back the moment she is done. I will wait here with our dear postulants.

*BERTRAND exits with the globe.
Lights dim as we watch the POSTULANTS pacing waiting.
Lights go up again indicating some time has passed.*

KATHERYN

Sister Clara, it's been four hours!

CLARA

Patience, my child. It is not an easy task translating from the ancient Aramaic, even for Sister Maria who is an expert.

BRITTYN

I am bursting with curiosity!
Can you imagine hearing the actual word of God?

KATHERYN

Literally the words of God, not some story-teller's years or centuries later!

The doorbell rings again, then there is a pounding and more ringing/pounding.

CLARA

Now, who could that be...pounding like that?
Brittyn...see who it is.

BRITTYN exits quickly.

KATHERYN

It must be an emergency from the way they're pounding on the door!

CLARA

Look out the window...what do you see!

KATHERYN hurries to the window.

KATHERYN

It is a man, Mother, in a black cape and hood.
Wait, wait...I see a red robe underneath...a Cardinal's red robe.

CLARA

That would be Cisneros...I thought he might show up
...not trusting his dog to fetch as told.

The CARDINAL bursts in, throws off his cape.

CLARA

I thought we might be seeing you, Francisco

CARDINAL

Is that how you address a Prince of the Church, Sister?

CLARA

That is how I address you, Francisco...I've known you since you were a simple Friar and I the Abbess of the greatest cathedral in Erie. And, by the way, you will address me as Mother Abbess; you are not in the Vatican now. ...So, Francisco...why are you here?

CARDINAL

You know why I'm here...for the Globe!

CLARA

(pointing to the table with the switched globe)

Why didn't you say so...there it is.

BISHOP

No, your Eminence, that is not the globe containing the parchment you seek.
I have it here...the true Gethsemane Parchment.

*The BISHOP takes the globe from its hiding place,
removes the globe and tries to take it apart.*

BISHOP (*struggling*)

The parchment is hidden inside...it opens...I saw them open it.

*BERTRAND enters carrying the real globe.
He stops short when he sees the CARDINAL.*

CARDINAL

Three globes?!!
Torquemada, you fool, they pulled a double-switch.

BERTRAND

Indeed...and this, Your Eminence, is what you came for.

CARDINAL

Give it here, Priest!

BERTRAND

Of course, your Eminence...as you wish. It is all yours.
The Cardinal grabs the globe and tears it open.

CARDINAL

It's empty!
Where is the Gethsemane Parchment...where is it?!!

BERTRAND

Oh...the parchment?
You mean the one with a long list of names.

CARDINAL

Do not play with me, Brother!
You know I mean the parchment with the names.

BERTRAND

Oh, that parchment, with the names, and much more actually...quite a lot more.
It is the hands of one who can read it...a lovely sister of St. Joseph.

CARDINAL

Tomás, quickly, find her and get the Parchment.

The Bishop starts to leave but Bertrand stops him.

BERTRAND

I don't think so, Friar Torquemada...this is a very large Convent and by the time you find Sister Maria she will be done translating and copying. She has been instructed to leave it in the Chapel, in a secret hiding place known only to Sister Clara.

CLARA

Indeed, that was the plan and, this time, God did not laugh for the plan worked.
Now, all of you, listen...you may join me in the Chapel in one hour. There Friar Bertrand will read the word of God as given to his Son...
and what is written...shall be done...

KATHERYN & BRITTYN

(Crossing themselves)

...on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Lights down.

End-of-Scene

SCENE XIV

*The chapel. All but BERTRAND are assembled.
Clara and the Postulants are chatting separately
from the BISHOP and CARDINAL.
BERTRAND enters carrying a large envelope.
He stands before the altar.*

BERTRAND

Please be seated.

*CARDINAL and BISHOP remain standing.
POSTULANTS sit.*

CARDINAL

Dispense with the formalities, Brother...what do you have to tell us!

CLARA

Dispense with the rudeness, Cardinal...Friar Bertrand will conduct this as he sees fit.
Now sit!

They sit begrudgingly.

BERTRAND

In nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti...

BISHOP

This is not a Mass, Bertrand; this is a meeting!

BERTRAND

You are quite right, Friar Torquemada, this is a meeting...a meeting with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and it is in the name of this Holy Trinity that I begin this holiest of meetings. *(pause...takes a deep breath)*

I hold here in my trembling hands an envelope delivered to me moments ago by Sister Maria of the St. Joseph order. Maria is a renowned expert in ancient texts and languages. She is able to read Aramaic. She bids me tell you that all translations are subject to interpretations and error including the Scriptures none of which were written in the languages we speak. With that said...it is Sister Maria's belief that she has understood and conveyed to us the essential story, the pertinent facts, and the core messages contained therein. In others words...we can believe this to be the word of God delivered unto his only begotten Son, Jesus by an Angel in the Garden of Gethsemane some 2000 years ago. If anyone present is unwilling to hear this, leave now and forever hold your tongue.

*The BISHOP stands up to leave but
the CARDINAL pulls him back down.
The POSTULANTS kneel and cross themselves.*

BERTRAND

So be it. *(he opens the envelop and reads)*

The Gethsemane Parchment: Translation and Analysis Report
By Maria of Dublin, Sister of St. Joseph

I hesitate... feeling unworthy to read such sacred words.

CARDINAL *(standing up)*

Damn it, man! Give it to me...I will read!

CLARA

No! It will be Bertrand, perhaps the most worthy of all among us.
Go ahead Brother, the Lord is with thee.

BERTRAND *(deep breath, hands shaking)*

There were two parts to the parchment...a list of names as we anticipated, but also a message...a love note from a father to a son. I shall read the note first.

“Beloved...because we are One, you understand why you do what you must do. Soon you shall sit at my right hand in heaven until it is time for you to return to the earth renewed and reborn. The time of your return shall be an enduring mystery, a secret known only to those I have chosen to be the Keepers of the Secret. And, although 2000 years will ensue, true knowledge of Thy Spirit, that is My Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, shall be known only to thy daughter Judith born of Mary and then her daughter, her daughter’s daughter and her daughter’s daughter’s daughters, grand and great.”

CARDINAL *(interrupting!)*

The names...get to the names...who are the “Keepers of the Secret?”

BERTRAND

Patience...please...there is more.

CLARA

Read on, Friar Bertrand.

BERTRAND

Just one more sentence...“And when 1900 years have passed, she who is lastly named...

BRITTYN *(in awe)*

...shall reveal the secret to the world.

BERTRAND

“...shall reveal the secret to the world.”

CARDINAL

Enough speculation...read the name...the last name on the list!

BERTRAND

No...it is not for me to do that...

*BERTRAND walks to CLARA who reads silently.
CLARA goes to KATHERYN and hands the list to her.*

CLARA

Read the name, Child...the name that follow mine.

KATHERYN reads the name silently then bursts out.

KATHERYN

No! This is not right! This is a mistake!

CLARA

No, my daughter. You are the secret...you, Katheryn of Dublin; you are the Messiah returned to the world as promised.

*With that BRITTYN and BERTRAND fall to their knees.
BISHOP and the CARDINAL jump to their feet outraged!*

CARDINAL

Outrageous!

BISHOP

Preposterous!

CARDINAL

Ludicrous! That Jesus should return as a woman!?

BISHOP

It is written that "...the Son of Man will come in His Father's glory with His angels."
You see that Mathew says clearly "the son of man," not the daughter of man!

*In the following sequence the Cardinal and the
Bishop becomes increasingly more agitated.*

CARDINAL

It's not just Mathew, you fools, in every version of the Bible it is "the son of man."

BISHOP

The New International Version, "the son of man!"

CARDINAL

The English Standard Version, "the son of man!"

BISHOP

The New King James Version, "the son of man!"

CARDINAL

Even the New American Standard Bible, says "the son of man!"

BISHOP (*screaming*)

Every single valid translation says "the son of man!"
It cannot be a woman! It cannot! It cannot!

*The CARDINAL goes to BRITTYN and BERTRAN
Still kneeling and looking up at KATHERYN.
He forces BRITTYN to get up.*

CARDINAL

Off your knees, blasphemer...you worship the golden calf!

CLARA

Unhand her!

BERTRAND

And you, Friar...be quiet in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

*What follows is a screaming match ad lib
between CLARA and BERTRAND and BISHOP and CARDINAL.
BRITTYN is noticeably frightened and
shocked to witness this battle of the clerics.
KATHERYN, on the other hand has remained
calm and serene throughout until at last she speaks.*

KATHERYN (*very loudly*)

Enough!

All suddenly stop and look toward Katheryn.

KATHERYN (*softly*)

Enough. I know it! I know the secret!

I do not know how or why, but I know the secret I was chosen to discover.

CLARA

Then, my child, my dearest daughter in Christ, now is the appointed hour...speak.

KATHERYN waits a moment, then speaks slowly and calmly.

KATHERYN

The secret, Mother Clara; the secret, Friar Bertrand; the secret, Cardinal and Bishop, and the secret my beloved Brittyn is not a secret at all. It is knowledge that lives in the hearts and minds of all those who, in their daily lives, choose kindness over cruelty, tolerance over bigotry, compassion over callousness, sympathy over apathy, and love over hatred.
(*pause*)

And I must also tell you this...I deeply and fully doubt that, I, Katheryn of Dublin am the living Christ returned to save the world. I doubt that this so-called Gethsemane Parchment was given to Jesus by an angel. I doubt that physical objects can be transported from the supernatural world to the natural world at all. But, with all that said, if I, Katheryn of Dublin am the living Christ, then so are you my precious Brittyn; and so you Mother and Brother...and even you Tomas Torquemada and you Francisco Cisneros, if you'd only allow the true Spirit of Jesus to light your path. We, and millions like us, are collectively the sons *and* daughters not of man...but of God.

*Lights down as Bertrand and Clara embrace the Postulants
and the Bishop and Cardinal fall to their knees defeated.
Lights down.*

End-of-Play