

THE DEATH OF METROPOLITAN NIKODIM OF LENINGRAD IN THE PRESENCE OF POPE JOHN PAUL I IN THE WORDS OF THE FOUR EYEWITNESSES



THE FOUR EYEWITNESSES

Pope John Paul I: Elected Pope on August 26, 1978; inaugurated on September 3, 1978; died of an apparent heart attack at the age of 65 on September 28, 1978; beatified on September 4, 2022. **See pages 2 and 17.**

Cardinal Johannes Willebrands: Born in the Netherlands in 1909; Secretary of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, 1960-1988; President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1988-1989; died in the Netherlands in 2006 at the age of 96. **See page 3.**

Archimandrite Lev (Tserpitsky): Born near Minsk USSR in 1946; served in the Soviet army, 1966-1969; entered the Leningrad Theological Seminary in 1969; in 1971 he was tonsured a monk and ordained a priest; beginning in 1972 he served as a personal secretary to Metropolitan Nikodom; he graduated from the Leningrad Theological Academy in 1975; attended the Gregorian University in Rome, 1975-1978; given the rank of archimandrite on August 8, 1978; he was 32 years old when Metropolitan Nikodim died; he subsequently served in Petrozavodsk, Rabat (Morocco), Moscow, and Vyborg; bishop of Tashkent, 1987-1990; appointed bishop of Novgorod and Starorussky in 1990; he is presently Metropolitan of Novgorod and Starorussky. **See page 13.**

Father Miguel Arranz, S.J.: Born in Guadalajara, Spain in 1930; attended the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome beginning in 1949; ordained a priest in 1954; between 1969 and 1975 he lectured on the subject of liturgics at the Leningrad Theological Academy; between 1975 and 1979 he taught at the Academy as a professor appointed by Patriarch Pimen; he became vice-rector of the Russicum in Rome; between 1996 and 2001 he taught for various periods of time in Moscow and St. Petersburg; he was a renowned expert in the Eastern liturgy at the Pontifical Oriental Institute with a special interest in the Studite Typicon and wrote many major works; he died in 2008 in Rome at the age of 78; after his death the St. Petersburg Orthodox diocese stated: "Father Michael is remembered with warmth and gratitude." **See pages 9 and 13.**

EXCERPT FROM THE REMARKS OF POPE JOHN PAUL I TO THE ROMAN CLERGY ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1978

The transcription below was made from an audio recording of the actual address. The audio recording was obtained from the archives of Vatican Radio. The bold type denotes the words which were said by the Pope at the time and which are not in the official text published at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-i/it/speeches/documents/hf_jp-i_spe_07091978_roman-clergy.html.

Original in Italian

Lo so: non è facile amare il posto e rimanervi quando le cose non vanno bene, quando si ha l'impressione di non essere compresi o incoraggiati, quando inevitabili confronti con il posto dato ad altri ci spingerebbero a farci mesti e scoraggiati. **Ma non lavoriamo per il Signore? Non lavoriamo per la Chiesa?**

Due giorni fa è morto tra le mie braccia il metropolita Nikodim di Leningrado. Io stavo parlando lì, rispondendo al suo indirizzo. Vi assicuro, che mai in vita mia avevo sentito parole così belle per la Chiesa, come quelle che lui aveva pronunciato. Non posso ripeterle, resta un segreto. Veramente son stato colpito. Ortodosso, ma guarda come ama la Chiesa. Io credo che abbia sofferto molto per la Chiesa, facendo moltissimo per l'unione. Allora, ma non lavoriamo per il Signore? **Non lavoriamo per la Chiesa?** L'ascetica insegna: guarda non a chi obbedisci, ma per Chi obbedisci. Soccorre poi la riflessione....

English translation

It is not easy, I know, to love one's job and stick to it when things are not going right, when one has the impression that one is not understood or encouraged, when inevitable comparisons with the job given to others would drive us to become sad and discouraged. **But are we not working for the Lord? Are we not working for the Church?**

Two days ago Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad died in my arms. I was talking there, responding to his address. I assure you, never in my life had I heard such beautiful words for the Church as those he had spoken. I can't repeat them, it remains a secret. I was really impressed. Orthodox, but look how he loves the Church. I believe that he suffered a lot for the Church, doing a lot for unity.

So, are we not working for the Lord? **Are we not working for the Church?** Ascetical theology teaches: do not look *at whom* you obey, but *for Whom* you obey. Reflection helps too....

**ADDRESS OF CARDINAL JOHANNES WILLIBRANDS AT THE FUNERAL FOR
METROPOLITAN NIKODIM AT LENINGRAD, SEPTEMBER 10, 1978**

The full text of the address is found in Russian at pages 42-45 in the book “Человек Церкви (Man of the Church),” published in Moscow in 1998 on the 20th anniversary of the death of Metropolitan Nikodim.

English translation

Your Holiness, venerable fellow bishops and priests, brothers and sisters in Christ!

We are here primarily to express our condolences and testify to our sympathy for His Holiness Patriarch Pimen, for the entire Russian Orthodox Church, and especially for the Church located in Leningrad and Novgorod, whose worthy and zealous pastor was Metropolitan Nikodim.

We express these condolences on behalf of the entire Catholic Church, beginning with His Holiness Pope John Paul I, on behalf of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which has maintained relations with your Church for many years through the ecumenical work of Metropolitan Nikodim.

But we are here also in the name of that brotherly friendship that bound us to the one whom we mourn with you.

Metropolitan Nikodim came to Rome a month ago to fulfill before the Catholic Church on the occasion of the death of Pope Paul VI the duty of fraternal sympathy that we are fulfilling today.

From Wednesday, August 9, he was in Rome, praying before the body of the late Pope, and on Thursday, August 10, in St. Peter's Basilica, he celebrated the service for the deceased Pope. He was in the first row of church delegations present on Saturday evening, August 12, at the Liturgy celebrated in St. Peter's Square.

He felt weary—for the climate in Rome is very hard in summer—and so he accepted the fraternal hospitality offered to him by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus in the hills overlooking Rome, where the climate is healthier. And indeed, he felt better there, as I witnessed myself.

He wished to be present at the Mass of the Holy Spirit, which was attended by all the cardinals on the opening day of the conclave.

After the election of the new Pope John Paul I, he took part in the divine services on the occasion of the beginning of the new pontificate. So on Sunday, September 3, he was in the first row of delegations of churches that came to attend this solemn Liturgy.

On Tuesday, September 5, the Pope received some of the delegations. The first of those who were to be received was Metropolitan Nikodim at 9:30 am. I myself met him in the Vatican and took him to the Pope's personal library. The Metropolitan was tired, all morning, and before entering the Pope, he took medicine. Archimandrite Lev helped him in this in a filial way. The

Pope and the Metropolitan greeted each other and fraternally embraced each other. The Metropolitan expressed his wishes on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Pimen, on behalf of the Holy Synod and the entire Russian Orthodox Church of a long pontificate, blessed by the Lord, for the benefit of the Church and the whole world. Then he expressed the hope that the rapprochement between our Churches, which had begun so well during the reigns of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, would continue and bear fruit so that we, by the will of our Lord and His grace, would come to that unity. that perfect fellowship for which Christ prayed before His death. And may the love of the Lord and His Church, to which we are so devoted, move us towards this cause of Christian unity.

The Pope thanked the Metropolitan for his wishes and, for his part, asked the Metropolitan to convey his best wishes for health and fruitful work to His Holiness Patriarch Pimen for the benefit of the entire Russian Orthodox Church. He said that he did not personally know the Patriarch and was not previously acquainted with Metropolitan Nikodim, but that he had always followed the development of the ecumenical movement with all his heart. He expressed the hope that this work would continue successfully, by the grace of God, and further so that the Lord's prayer would come true.

After the words of the Pope, the Metropolitan and the Pope sat down. At that moment, Archimandrite Lev entered and was introduced by the Metropolitan to the Pope. The Pope said a few words to him, which the Metropolitan listened to with a smile. As soon as this short conversation ended, I saw that the Metropolitan's face turned pale, then he began to slide from his chair onto the carpet, letting out a deep sigh. The Pope and I, both shocked, approached him. The Pope called the doctor. We put the metropolitan in a more comfortable position, placing a pillow under his head. Archimandrite Lev, who came running, checked his pulse and began to listen to the heartbeat with a stethoscope. The Metropolitan gave two more deep, painless sighs. The doctor came in, he did a cardiac massage and an injection. Then the Pope, myself, Archimandrite Lev and the interpreter Father Arranz knelt down, and the Pope began to read the prayers for the dying, to which we answered. The Pope also read a prayer for the remission of sins. The doctor, having finished the last massage and monitoring, could only state death. It was cardiac arrest. They called paramedics with stretchers. After the prayers, the Pope went to another room to receive other delegations.

Immediately the cardinal, the secretary of state, came, he prayed over the body and gave orders for the transfer of the mortal remains to the parish church of the Vatican City in the name of St. Anne. Archimandrite Lev, suppressing his pain, took all the necessary orders and began to dress the body in liturgical robes, in accordance with the rules of the Orthodox Church, to place the body in the middle of the temple.

In the afternoon, many cardinals came to pray before the body of the deceased, including the elders of the Sacred College of Cardinals, and other bishops and prelates.

At 6 pm, Archimandrite Lev served a memorial service. I was present along with my staff of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity. There were delegations from the Romanian and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches, as well as numerous Catholic archbishops and bishops, among whom were His Excellency Monsignor Agostino Casaroli and Vicar General of the Vatican City His Excellency Monsignor Petrus Canisius van Lierde. Also present were the Lithuanian bishops and their priests, who had come to Rome at the same time as Vladyka Nikodim, and many

prelates of the Roman Curia and nuns who were acquaintances of the Metropolitan.

The circumstances of our life and our death are not the result of any accident, they are the will of Providence. And we have to recognize and perceive their deep and mysterious meaning.

The press responded widely to this death, calling the Metropolitan one of the greatest historical personalities of modern ecumenism. And I can confirm this, personally knowing the Metropolitan and as a result of the Christian friendship that bound us. His love for Christ and the Church motivated him to strive for unity. He made tireless efforts to acquaint us Catholics with the theological, spiritual and historical riches of the Orthodox Church and, in particular, the Russian Orthodox Church, of which he was always a faithful and loving son and minister. The problems connected with the unity of all believers in Christ are beyond our understanding. The unity of the Church depends on her mystery. Here we follow the path of our Lord, who prepared for His suffering and His death through prayer, and through prayer for unity. The Metropolitan died while fulfilling the mission of unity.

He not only introduced us to his Church, but because he deeply loved his Motherland, he introduced us even more to the Russian people and their soul.

The Church is the people of the Resurrected. We know the words of the Lord: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." After the death of Christ, death is no longer the taking of life, but rather its change, its transformation, through which we participate in the glory of the Risen Lord, in the Kingdom of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Amen.

Original in Russian

Ваше Святейшество, досточтимые собраты по епископату и священнослужению, братья и сестры во Христе!

Мы находимся здесь прежде всего для того, чтобы выразить наши соболезнования и засвидетельствовать наше сочувствие Его Святейшеству Патриарху Пимену, всей Русской Православной Церкви и особенно Церкви, находящейся в Ленинграде и Новгороде, достойным и ревностным пастырем которой был митрополит Никодим.

Эти соболезнования мы выражаем от имени всей Католической церкви, начиная с Его Святейшества Папы Иоанна Павла I, от имени Секретариата по содействию христианскому единству, который на протяжении долгих лет поддерживал отношения с вашей Церковью через экуменическую деятельность митрополита Никодима.

Но мы находимся здесь также во имя той братской дружбы, которая связывала нас с тем, кого мы оплакиваем вместе с вами.

Митрополит Никодим приехал в Рим месяц тому назад для того, чтобы исполнить перед Католической церковью по случаю кончины Папы Павла VI тот долг братского сочувствия, который мы исполняем сегодня.

Со среды, 9 августа, он был в Риме, молясь перед телом покойного Папы, а в четверг, 10 августа, в соборе святого Петра он совершил богослужение по почившем Папе. Он находился в первом ряду делегаций церквей, присутствовавших в субботу вечером 12 августа на Литургии, совершенной на площади святого Петра.

Он чувствовал себя утомленным — так как климат в Риме бывает очень тяжел летом — и поэтому он принял братское гостеприимство, предложенное ему генеральным настоятелем Общества Иисуса, на холмах, возвышающихся над Римом, где климат более полезен для здоровья. И действительно, он чувствовал себя там лучше, свидетелем чего я был сам.

Он пожелал присутствовать на мессе Духу Святому, на которой сослужили все кардиналы в день открытия конклава.

После избрания нового Папы Иоанна Павла I он принял участие в богослужениях по случаю начала нового понтификата. Так что в воскресенье 3 сентября он был в первом ряду делегаций церквей, приехавших для присутствия на этой торжественной Литургии.

Во вторник, 5 сентября, Папа принимал некоторые из делегаций. Первым из тех, кого должны были принять, был в 9 часов 30 минут утра митрополит Никодим. Я сам встретил его в Ватикане и проводил в личную библиотеку Папы. Митрополит был усталым, все утро и перед тем, как войти к Папе, он принимал лекарства. В этом ему по-сыновнему помогал архимандрит Лев. Папа и митрополит приветствовали друг друга и по-братски заключили друг друга в объятия. Митрополит выразил пожелания от имени Его Святейшества Патриарха Пимена, от имени Священного Синода и всей Русской Православной Церкви долгого понтификата, благословенного Господом, на благо Церкви и всего мира. Затем он выразил надежду, чтобы сближение между нашими Церквями, так хорошо начавшееся во время правления Пап Иоанна XXIII и Павла VI, продолжалось и приносило плоды для того, чтобы мы по воле Господа нашего и Его благодати пришли к тому единению, тому совершенному общению, о котором молился Христос перед Своей смертью. И пусть любовь Господа и Его Церкви, которой так преданы мы, пусть она двигает нас к этому делу единства христиан.

Папа поблагодарил митрополита за его пожелания и, со своей стороны, попросил митрополита передать его наилучшие пожелания здоровья и плодотворных трудов Его Святейшеству Патриарху Пимену на благо всей Русской Православной Церкви. Он сказал, что он не знаком лично с Патриархом и не был знаком ранее с митрополитом Никодимом, но что он всегда всем сердцем следил за развитием экуменического движения. Он выразил надежду, что это дело продолжится успешно по благодати Божией и дальше с тем, чтобы осуществилась молитва Господня.

После слов Папы митрополит и Папа сели. В этот момент вошел архимандрит Лев и был представлен митрополитом Папе. Папа сказал ему несколько слов, которые митрополит слушал улыбаясь. Едва закончилась эта короткая беседа, как я увидел, что лицо митрополита побледнело, затем он стал сползать со своего кресла на ковер, испустив

глубокий вздох. Папа и я, оба потрясенные, приблизились к нему. Папа вызвал врача. Мы положили митрополита в более удобное положение, подложив под его голову подушку. Прибежавший архимандрит Лев проверил пульс и стал выслушивать стетоскопом биение сердца. Митрополит еще два раза испустил глубокий, безболезненный вздох. Вошел врач, он сделал массаж сердца и укол. Тогда Папа, я, архимандрит Лев и переводчик отец Арранц опустились на колени, и Папа стал читать отходные молитвы, на которые мы отвечали. Папа также прочитал молитву об отпущении грехов. Врач, закончив последний массаж и контроль, смог лишь констатировать смерть. Это была остановка сердечной деятельности.

Позвали санитаров с носилками. После молитв Папа пошел в другое помещение принимать другие делегации.

Немедленно пришел кардинал, государственный секретарь, он помолился над телом и дал распоряжения о перенесении смертных останков в приходской храм Града Ватикана во имя святой Анны. Архимандрит Лев, подавляя свою боль, предпринял все необходимые распоряжения и занялся облачением тела в богослужебные одеяния, согласно правилам Православной Церкви, для помещения тела посреди храма.

Во второй половине дня к телу почившего пришли помолиться многие кардиналы, в том числе и старейшина Священной коллегии кардиналов, и другие епископы и прелаты.

В 6 часов вечера совершил панихиду архимандрит Лев. Я присутствовал на ней вместе с моими сотрудниками Секретариата по содействию христианскому единству. Присутствовали делегации Румынской и Болгарской Православных Церквей, а также многочисленные католические архиепископы и епископы, среди которых находились Его Высокопреосвященство монсиньор Августин Казароли и генеральный викарий Града Ватикана Его Высокопреосвященство монсиньор Пьетро Канизио ван Лиерде. Присутствовали также литовские епископы и их священники, приехавшие в Рим одновременно с владыкой Никодимом, и многие прелаты Римской курии и монахини, бывшие знакомыми с митрополитом.

Обстоятельства нашей жизни и нашей смерти не являются результатом какого-либо случая, они являются волей Провидения. И нам предстоит распознать и воспринять их глубокое и таинственное значение.

Печать широко откликнулась на эту кончину, называя митрополита одним из величайших исторических личностей современного экуменизма. И это я могу подтвердить, лично зная митрополита и в результате той христианской дружбы, которая связывала нас. Его любовь ко Христу и Церкви побуждала его к стремлению к единству. Он прилагал неутомимые усилия для того, чтобы познакомить нас, католиков, с богословскими, духовными и историческими богатствами Православной Церкви и, в частности, Русской Православной Церкви, верным и любящим сыном и служителем которой он был всегда. Проблемы, связанные с единством всех верующих во Христа, стоят превыше нашего понимания. Единство Церкви зависит от ее тайны. Здесь мы следуем пути Господа нашего, готовившегося к Своим страданиям и Своей смерти через молитву, и через молитву к

единству. Митрополит скончался, исполняя миссию единства.

Он не только познакомил нас со своей Церковью, но, поскольку он глубоко любил свою Родину, он познакомил нас еще больше с русским народом и его душой.

Церковь является народом Воскресшего. Нам известны слова Господа: “Я есмь Воскресение и Жизнь”. После смерти Христа смерть является уже не отнятием жизни, а, скорее, ее изменением, ее преображением, через которое мы принимаем участие в славе Господа Воскресшего, в Царствии Бога, Отца, Сына и Святого Духа.

Блаженны миротворцы, ибо они будут наречены сынами Божиими. Аминь.

**INTERVIEW OF FATHER MIGUEL ARRANZ, S.J., BY THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC
MAGAZINE 30 GIORNI [30 DAYS] AND PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2006**

The entire article may be read at http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_10590_11.htm (Italian) and http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_10642_13.htm (English). The article is the most detailed account available of the events surrounding the death of Metropolitan Nikodim. The article is in question-and-answer format. Below, the answers of Father Arranz have been cut and pasted to relate the events in chronological order. Brackets have been used to include information from the questions or to provide additional explanations. There is an error in the article with respect to the first photo. The photo purports to show Nikodim meeting Pope John Paul I. The Orthodox bishop in the photo is definitely not Nikodim. The *30 Days* interview was conducted by Stefania Falasca. She is presently vice president of the Fondazione Vaticana Giovanni Paolo I.

Answers by Father Miguel Arranz, S.J., vice-rector of the Russicum (Pontifical Russian College) and translator for the Pope:

Nikodim had come to Rome for the funeral of Paul VI [held on August 12, 1978]. And afterwards he celebrated in St Peter's Basilica a funeral office attended by many representatives of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. I told him that the Father General of the Jesuits, Father Arrupe, would like to offer him hospitality at Villa Cavalletti in Frascati [35 km from the Vatican], where he would be his personal guest. So Nikodim stayed at Villa Cavalletti for the whole month of August up to the election of the new pontiff.

He [Nikodim] was not present [in Rome] at that moment [when Cardinal Luciani was elected pope on Saturday, August 26, 1978]. He came to Rome the day following, 27 August, and I accompanied him to the first Sunday address, preceding the Angelus, by the new Pope.... We went on and arrived in St Peter's Square and pushed our way through almost under the balcony. When Pope Luciani appeared at the window, I began to translate what he was saying to Nikodim.

In the two days that followed he decided to go to Turin to venerate the Holy Shroud. [Beginning on 27 August, the Shroud was exposed for public veneration for the first time since 1933.] When he returned, he asked me to accompany him to visit Casaroli. [He wanted to meet him in order] to ask for an audience with the new Pontiff. Monsignor [Bishop] Agostino Casaroli, at that time, was president of the Commission for Russia. Yes [an audience for the Eastern delegations was already planned for 5 September]. But according to protocol that was one of the ordinary visits to pay respects and take farewell that each delegation must offer to the new Pontiff after his taking of the throne. Private conversations with the delegations were not planned for that occasion.

Metropolitan Nikodim wanted instead to speak with the Pope in confidential fashion. He was asking for an audience outside of protocol, taking advantage of the meeting with the delegations. And he insisted a lot with Casaroli to get the chance. He told Casaroli that the need was urgent. Nikodim received confirmation that he would be allowed to speak with the Pope the day after Luciani took the throne, Monday 4 September. [Namely, he was informed by Casaroli on

September 4] [So on 4 September Nikodim moved to the Russicum College and stayed the night there, since the following morning he was to see the Pope...] Exactly. I remember that in the afternoon he went to see Cardinal Slipyi [head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church released from the gulags in 1963]. He then retired early to his room knowing that an intense and important day was awaiting him.

He planned to leave the Russicum for the papal audience at 8:20. However, when I arrived at the College in the early morning, I found Nikodim very upset. He told me he hadn't slept. It had been hot and stuffy in the house... he'd felt himself drowning. His secretary, Archimandrite Lev, had measured his blood pressure at seven o'clock. He had immediately taken nitroglycerine since he had problems with his heart. Furthermore, the car that had been lent him to go to the Vatican had been stolen during the night. That fact had shaken him. I tried to relax him a little. Leaving the Russicum he said: "Father Miguel, when a day begins very badly it finishes well...."

From the Russicum [located near the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore] we went to the House of the Clergy [located on Via della Traspontina near the Vatican] , where the ecclesiastical delegations going to the papal audience were to gather. Nikodim had difficulty getting out of the car. When the Jesuit priest John Long [head of the eastern churches section at the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity] wondered whether he needed help, he only asked for less hurry. But there again there was another moment that caused upset and worry. At nine Father Long gave out to the delegations the numbers of the cars in the order they were to enter the Vatican. Nikodim, Archimandrite Lev and myself headed for the car detailed to us. It was pouring down [rain]. There was some mix-up and the result was that all three found ourselves in different cars. Nikodim finished up in the one taking the Bulgarian delegation. Imagine his worry... Would he find us again in time? Knowing that he had the privilege of being first to meet the Pope ...

Yes, luckily [we managed to find each other]. There was still time before the audience and so they led us to a waiting-room. I remember saying something to him about the room we were in and the paintings hanging there, but clearly his mind was busy in that moment on other thoughts. Archbishop Martin, Prefect of the Pontifical Household, came in to accompany us to the Library Room, where the audience was to take place. Before entering Nikodim passed me the phial with nitroglycerine and told me: "Keep it open, it may be useful."

Cardinal Willebrands and myself [were present at the meeting.] On entering John Paul I smiled immediately and approached the Metropolitan. He greeted him with great cordiality. Nikodim offered the head of the Roman Catholic Church the best wishes of the Patriarch of Moscow, Pimen, of the Synod and of all the Russian Orthodox Church, wishing the new Pope many years of pontificate. He expressed the great hope that the fraternal relations between the two Churches, begun so well in the time of the pontificate of John XXIII and continued with Paul VI, might go on to ever deeper mutual understanding, in the common efforts of the two Churches to encourage peace. The Pope thanked him for the greetings and the wishes and asked the Metropolitan to pass on to Patriarch Pimen his hope for fruitful work for the good of the Russian Orthodox Church. He told him that he had always followed his ecumenic work with great interest and also expressed the wish that the work be continued.

After those exchanges they sat down for a confidential discussion. It [the private conversation]

lasted about a quarter of an hour. That [what Nikodim said to the Pope] can't be spoken of, it's secret. But his words came from a feeling of total trust. As one goes to one's father. I also remember that he spoke in a low voice to Pope Luciani; indeed, at certain moments, he lowered the tone even more, as if to evade indiscreet ears. He didn't want anybody overhearing.... Nikodim had not come to give advice to the Pope. He had a strong sense of each person's place in the Church. Nikodim spoke of the Church, as a whole, with great intensity... a new vision, Pope Luciani did not draw back. Even more, his was a gesture of lack of fear and at the same time of openness and simplicity... that a Pope acknowledges that a non-Catholic might teach him something and that he affirm so in that moment, with that disarming spontaneity, even publicly: "I assure you that I had never heard such fine things in my life...."

When the conversation finished Archimandrite Lev was invited in. Nikodim introduced him to the Pope. I told the Holy Father that Lev was studying in Rome, at the Gregorian, and that he spoke Italian. The Pope then, standing, began a conversation with the Archimandrite about his studies. Nikodim was also standing close to him. At a certain point, when the conversation with Lev was coming to an end, Nikodim sat down without saying a word and, as he sat down, he bent forward, in a composed, elegant fashion, as if bowing, a deep bow... so much so that there and then I was astonished; knowing how much he held to protocol, I thought it a gesture of respect... He collapsed at the feet of the Pope. We tried to lift him up. Even the Pope bent over him trying to prop him up. In that frantic moment Pope Luciani did not immediately realize what was happening. I told him of the heart trouble, while Archimandrite Lev, running back in with the briefcase with the medicines, tried to give him an injection of heart stimulant, without success. Nikodim's eyes were still slightly open. So I murmured to the Holy Father: «Give him absolution...». The Pope knelt and, in Latin, gave him absolution. The doctor who came in shortly after could do nothing other than declare Nikodim dead.

He [the Pope] was stunned... "My God, my God, even this has to happen to me," he repeated, and he was so lost at that moment that as the doctor arrived, with Nikodim stretched on the floor, he picked up the grains of nitroglycerine that I had dropped in the confusion. He set them on the palm of my hand... I said: "Your Holiness, they're of no further use now...."

The Pope left the library to go and receive the other delegations that were waiting in line. But after Nikodim's body was moved to another room, I was again called to act as interpreter for the Bulgarian delegation. So I found myself once again close to Pope Luciani. The Bulgarian bishop should have immediately presented his best wishes, but the elderly Orthodox prelate and the Pope were unable to say anything. So I then started to read the text of the speech that I had been given the task of translating into Italian. And I went on reading. While they wept, in silence. Both of them. Without saying a word.

Two days later, 7 September, when I accompanied the papal audience of the Russian delegation [Metropolitan Yuvenaly, Metropolitan Anthony of Minsk, Archbishop (now Patriarch) Kirill, and two priests] come to Rome to take home the body of the Metropolitan. The Russian delegation was received in the same room where Nikodim had died two days earlier. Before the audience I exchanged some words with Monsignor Magee. He told me that the Holy Father hadn't slept for two nights, that he had been deeply stricken by the death. The Pope told the members of the delegation of Nikodim's last minutes alive, and also referred to the words

spoken.

[It is known that Nikodim never wanted to be treated in a hospital, he did so only before his visit to Rome, in Czechoslovakia, and after the treatment his condition worsened.] He'd already had five heart attacks. What killed him that day was his sixth heart attack.

[With respect to the Pope's words to the Roman clergy on September 7] It was a moment of grace that passed. That the Church missed.



Archbishop (now Patriarch) Kirill with Pope Luciani
on September 7, 1978

VIDEO OF ARCHBISHOP LEV AND FATHER MIGUEL ARRANZ

This video may be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf34bPqXInA> . It appears that the video is part of a program produced by SPAS TV, a television channel, which is owned by the Moscow Patriarchate and which started broadcasting in 2005. Father Arranz died on July 16, 2008, so the program must have been produced between 2005 and 2008. At that time Lev was an archbishop. The video was posted by an individual in 2016.

English translation

Archbishop Lev: There is one more memorable object in this house that is very close to my heart and that is connected to the last days of Vladyka [“Master” – word of respect for an Orthodox bishop] Nikodim, and that is his crosier. On September 5, when an audience with the newly elected pope was scheduled, Vladyka Nikodim arrived at the papal palace in all his special attire—the metropolitan's white headdress, cassock, and crosier. With this staff he took the last steps of his earthly life.

Commentator: And here begins the last tale of Vladyka Nikodim, the tale of his death. Vladyka sometimes said he wanted to die in Jerusalem, at the Lord's tomb, or in Rome, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter. According to a rumor, Metropolitan Nikodim was poisoned during an audience with Pope John Paul I, and the Pope himself was poisoned thirty-three days later. But why? No one knows what the Russian metropolitan talked about with the Pope, and the one who was there at the time, the Vatican interpreter Father Miguel, has vowed to keep quiet.

Fr. Miguel Arranz SJ: Nikodim went to the Pope's office, he was very pale and pale. I spoke to him and explained a certain painting to him, but he was no longer interested. Otherwise, he always wanted to know everything: the painter, where from, why? He was not interested. Nikodim went into the Pope's office, they sat down, and at that moment life somehow came back to him. He became, the color remained the same, had very beautiful skin, bright skin. During that quarter of an hour, he began to speak to the Pope, after which they stood up. They invited in Nikodim's secretary, Lev, and introduced him to the Pope. Lev said he is a student at Gregorian University. Then [the Pope]: Well, then you speak Italian - and they continued the conversation in Italian. Nikodim watched the scene with pleasure, seeing that his man was speaking directly to the Pope in the Pope's language. And so I myself turned my eyes to Nikodim, and at that moment Nikodim sat down on the armchair. That wasn't protocol, because the Pope was standing and why did the Metropolitan have to sit? And suddenly Nikodim fell in front of the Pope, and he fell very beautifully, as if it were a bow. What was that? Had he lost his mind? I went and tried to help him up like [?], but he wasn't alive.

Commentator: Did Vladyka kneel before the Pope? Archbishop Lev, an eyewitness to this death, gives the answer.

Lev: Here stood the Pope, here [next to] Father Miguel, the interpreter, and here [next to] the Metropolitan's chair [each pointing to a place with his hands]. To Vladyka's right was just me.

As soon as I stood next to him, Vladyka suddenly sagged to the left. Father Miguel raised him up. Vladyka, being held from the left, suddenly began to sag to my side. I straightened him up, but I was confused. What was that? As you could see, the person was ill, or what? And as we held him, he began to slide to the ground. The Pope stood over him and asked, "What happened? What is this?" He was confused. Father Miguel Arranz said: As far as he knows, this is not Vladyka's first heart attack. And he [the Pope] say something like this, "Could he die?" Father Miguel replied: "Yes, anything can happen." He [the Pope] was frightened and got down on his knees with us and whispered something in Vladyka's ear. As later became known, he gave him the last forgiveness of sins for the dying. Yes, it then appeared in the press that it had been a mistake: coffee had been served during the audience and the cups had been mixed up. The cup intended for the Pope was handed to Nikodim, as they wrote in *Novoe Vremya* and other newspapers. But there was neither coffee nor tea, because it was an official protocol meeting, as is customary for such occasions.

Commentator: And yet Father Michael reveals the secret of Vladyka Nikodim's last words.

Arranz: Three days after the death of Nikodim, the Pope spoke to the clergy of Rome: "Three days ago the Orthodox Metropolitan of Leningrad died in my arms. How many beautiful things he told me about the church." Much. Through his life, example and words, he convinced us that the Russian Church deserves love and understanding, that the communists, of course, do not let her breathe, but help and we will [inaudible]. Nikodim spread love for Orthodoxy.

Commentator: He spread the love of Orthodoxy. St. Anne's Church in the Vatican, where the body of the late Metropolitan Nikodim was laid out, became Orthodox for the duration of the mourning ceremonies. Thousands of people came here to say goodbye to the Russian Vladyka whom they knew in Rome, feared but loved. And in the Motherland, Vladyka was loved, but also feared. When the sealed zinc coffin was brought to Leningrad, some doubted that the late metropolitan was in the coffin; it seemed as if he would not return from Rome. But those who knew and loved Vladyka rushed to his coffin to see him still on earth and to mourn his early death.

Original in Russian

Лев: Есть еще одна памятная вещь, здесь в этом доме, связанная очень дорогая мне и связанная с последними днями Владыки Никодима - это его жезл. Пятого сентября, когда была назначена аудиенция уже у нового избранного папы, Владыка Никодим во всем своим специальным облики: белый митрополичий клобук, ряса и архиерейским посохом. Владыка приехал в папский дворец вот и вот с этим посохом он проделал последние свои шаги, своей земной жизни.

Диктор: И здесь начинается последняя легенда о Владыки Никодиме, легенда его смерти. Владыка иногда говорил, что хотел бы умереть в Иерусалиме, у гроба Господня или в Риме, у гроба апостола Петра. Молва говорит о том, что митрополит Никодим был отравлен на аудиенцию у Папы Иоанна Павла I, а спустя тридцать три дня был отравлен и сам Папа. За что? Ведь то, о чем говорил русский митрополит с Папой, не знает никто, а тот, кто был тогда рядом, а именно ватиканский переводчик отец Михаил, поклялся

хранить молчание.

Арранц: Никодим прошел в кабинет Папы, всё бледный - бледный ходил, я с ним разговаривал, объяснял, вот картина какая-то, уже никакого интереса нету, а иначе, он все хотел знать: автор, откуда, почему? Не интересовался. Пошел в кабинет Папы, сели и тогда ему как-то жизнь возвратилась. Он стал, цвет остался один, у него была очень красивая кожа, светлая кожа. И он стал рассказывать Папе Римскому вот за эти четверть часа, после этого они встали и тогда пригласили секретаря Никодима и тогда вот они представили Папе своего секретаря Льва. И сказал Лев, что я ученик Григорианского университета, а тогда вы говорите по итальянски, ну да! И они стали опять говорить по итальянски, а Никодим на эту сцену смотрел, значит с таким удовольствием, видя что свой человек уже разговаривает прямо с Папой на языке Папы. И вот я сам очи обратил на Никодима, а в это время Никодим сел на кресло то, что ясно вне всякого протокола, Папа Римский стоит, а ему что сидеть? А сразу он упал перед Папой, но упал очень красиво, как-будто поклон бьет. Вот что такое! С ума сошел?! А я пошел его поднять как [?], уже не живой.

Диктор: «Падал ли Владыка на колени перед Папой?» отвечает архиепископ Лев, очевидец этой кончины.

Лев: Так значит вот Папа, стал отец Михаил переводчик и Владыкино кресло. Вот и по правую руку от Владыки дальше стал я и только. И только стал я рядом с ним, и Владыка вдруг раз и накренился влево и отец Михаил его подхватил, потом, значит, Владыка как-то так поддерживаем слева, значит, он его вдруг раз стал падать в мою сторону. Я его подхватил, и я сам растерялся, что такое!?

То есть видно, что человеку было плохо или что?! И он стал, как бы вот мы его держим, а он как бы сползает. Папа стоит над нами и говорит - что такое произошло? Что это такое? Он растерялся. И ему значит, отец Михаил Арранц говорит, что у Владыки уже не первый инфаркт и вот так и он как-то так говорит: так что может умереть? Отец Михаил говорит – да, все может быть, и он как-то испугался и тоже опустился вместе с нами на колени и Владыке что-то как-будто на ухо шепчет, а оказалось Папа отходное ему, последнее отпущение давал. Да, потом в прессе появилось почему-то что вот там получилась ошибка, там, так сказать во время его аудиенции подавали кофе, перепутали чашечки, там чашка одна Папе должна была, а она попала Никодиму. Вот так писали и в нашем «Новом времени» и в других этих самых...никого кофе не было никакого чая не было, потому что была официальная протокольная встреча, какая бывает в таких случаях.

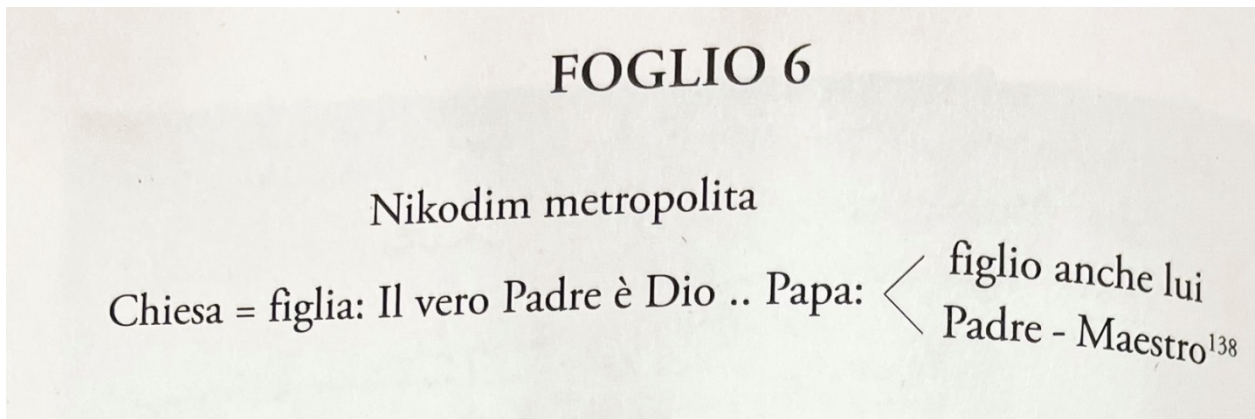
Диктор: И все-таки, отец Михаил приоткрывает тайну последних слов Владыки Никодима.

Арранц: Три дня после смерти Никодима, Папа Римский говорил духовенству Рима, “третьего дня скончался в моих объятиях митрополит православный, Ленинграда, какие прекрасные вещи он мне о Церкви рассказывал.” Много. Своей жизнью, своим примером, своими словами, он нас убедил, что Русская церковь заслуживает любовь и понимание, что конечно, коммунисты не дают дышать ей, но помогите и будем [не слышимо]. И вот Никодим раздовал вот эту любовь к православию.

Диктор: Он раздавал любовь к православию. Церковь святой Анны в Ватикане, где было положено тело почившего митрополита Никодима, на время траурных церемоний стала православной. Сюда пришли тысячи людей, чтобы проститься с русским Владыкой, которого в Риме знали, боялись, но любили. И на Родине любили, но и боялись Владыку. Когда запаянный цинковый гроб привезли в Ленинград, некоторые усомнились, что в гробу покойный митрополит, казалось, что он не вернется из Рима, но те, кто знал и любил Владыку, спешили к его гробу, чтобы застать его еще на земле и оплакать его безвременную кончину.

EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK, *IL MAGISTERO. TESTI E DOCUMENTI DEL PONTIFICATO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO I*

This book was released by the Fondazione Vaticana Giovanni Paolo I in May 2022. Below are photocopies of a portion of page 426 of the book. Stefania Falasca, who did the *30 Days* interview and who is now vice-postulator for the cause of Pope John Paul I, performed the editorial coordination of the book. The first photo shows a typed version of cryptic notes by Pope John Paul I. It is not known whether the words below “Nikodim metropolita” are the thoughts of Nikodim or the Pope’s own thoughts in response to Nikodim. The second photo shows footnote 138 at the bottom of page 426.



¹³⁸ Le prime righe: da «Nikodim» a «Maestro» si riferiscono ancora alla conversazione con il clero della diocesi di Roma del 7 settembre. Il 5 settembre era morto improvvisamente durante l'incontro con Giovanni Paolo I il Metropolita della Chiesa ortodossa russa Nikodim (1929-1978), una delle personalità più significative della storia dell'ecumenismo. L'appunto verosimilmente rimanda a quanto espresso nel corso della conversazione privata avuta con il metropolita Nikodim della quale non è stato mai rivelato il contenuto. Queste frasi appuntate non sono pronunciate nel discorso al clero dove il Papa afferma che restano un segreto, cfr Documento 18.

¹³⁹ Qui fino a «Noi = umiltà = S. Ag. [Sant'Agostino] ...

English translation

FOLIO 6

Nikodim metropolitan

son also he

Church = daughter: The true Father is God..Pope:

Father – Master \138

\138 The first lines: from “Nikodim” to “Maestro” again refer to the conversation with the clergy of the diocese of Rome on 7 September. On 5 September, Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church Nikodim (1929-1978), one of the most significant personalities in the history of ecumenism, died suddenly during his meeting with John Paul I. The note probably refers to what was expressed in the course of the private conversation that he had with Metropolitan Nikodim, the content of which was never revealed. These pointed phrases are not pronounced in the address to the clergy where the Pope affirms that they remain a secret, cf Document 18.

This document was prepared by Peter Anderson of Seattle USA on the occasion of the beatification of Pope John Paul I. Special gratitude is expressed to Professor Barbara Hallensleben of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, for providing a transcript of the Lev-Arranz video and a digital copy of the printed address of Cardinal Willebrands as well as a helping with the translation of these documents.