THE CHINESE POPE

television series

ALAN NAFZGER
FADE IN

BEGIN TITLES

INT. PHILIPPINE TELEVISION STATION - DAY

NEWS READER
Religious repression has intensified across China since President Han Zheng took office in 2021. A warning – the video we are about to show might be shocking to young and especially sensitive viewers.

EXT. CHINA - DAY

Churches and mosques are being shuttered. Others are being bulldozed. Homes and especially, libraries are wrecked. Imams, rabis, and protestant ministers are being dragged from mosques, synagogues, churches, and homes. They are beaten and handcuffed and thrown into police vehicles.

In the background, Muslims and Christians are seen running from the scenes. Family members of the arrested ministers are traumatized and weep. They are beaten as well.

Flowers mysteriously appear every morning at the location of the razed churches. Communist officials are enraged and stomp on the flowers.

We see religious buildings that are allowed to exist and of course, on top is a Chinese flag.

NEWS READER (V.O.)
The brutal crackdown on minority Muslims in the northwestern region of Xinjiang – where mosques and madrasas are being demolished and more than 1 million Uighurs have been detained in re-education camps – has sparked international outrage. But the Communist Party's assault on faith is not limited to Islam.

(beat)
Authorities have used the world's distraction over the coronavirus
pandemic to accelerate an ongoing campaign against Christianity. Officially atheist, the party sees adherence to any faith, particularly those with foreign origins such as Christianity and Islam, as a threat to its dominance. So Xi has embarked on the "sinicization" of religious practice, ordering Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Christian leaders to integrate Chinese communist thought into their belief systems.

(beat)
Officially, the party wants people "to love the motherland and their faith." However, if you don’t love China first, the religious person will be brutalized. Sinicization has resulted in thousands of churches and mosques being shuttered and razed; those that remain fly Chinese flags.

(beat)
And to make matters worse, seven Chinese priests have disappeared in the last year. All have been underground Vatican-appointed ones.

(beat)
The problem is clearly growing and Chinese President Han seems to taking advantage of the Pope in Rome’s poor health. Han reneged on an agreement established years before. Han is now simply refusing to appoint new bishops for the Pope to approve or disapprove.

(beat)
And now to our correspondent from the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Rome with the latest on the Pope’s deteriorating condition.

END TITLES

INT. OFFICE - CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION – DAY

NUN #1 brings in papers and places them on CARDINAL ZEN’s desk. She looks at him admiringly.
Cardinal Zen has about four books out on this desk. He is reading and making notes and moving to the next book (google: “thomas jefferson rotating book stand”). He takes a bit from each and then writes.

NUN #1
Study, study. That’s all you do. That homily isn’t scheduled for another week. Don’t you need a break?

CARDINAL ZEN
No Sister, but thank you.

NUN #2 has been in the room. She is cleaning and dusting. She stops and looks at the books on his library shelves.

NUN #2
So many books on Thomas Jefferson. You wanna be like him?

CARDINAL ZEN
Well, I aspire to be like Christ, but love Thomas Jefferson.

NUN #2
He was a Catholic?

CARDINAL ZEN
(reluctant to say)
Well... he was... a Christian.

NUN #2
Oh.

CARDINAL ZEN
But he had really nice ideas.

NUN #2
I see. He was treated badly by the Communists too?

CARDINAL ZEN
Something like that. It’s complicated but, yes.

The conversation sparks something in Zen and he seems to be writing what the nun has suggested to him.
The People's Armed Police Force (PAP) AGENTS break down the office door.

NUN #1
(gasps)
Beijing!

NUN #2
Oh, no!!!

They strike both nuns and grab Cardial Zen. They haul him up from the desk and take a rifle butt to the book-stand and the wood is smashed to pieces.

Other agents go directly to the books they begin tossing them in the floor.

INT. HALLWAY – CATHEDRAL – DAY

A LEAD AGENT sees that Cardinal Zen is roughly hauled off. He’s kicked in the shins.

CARDINAL ZEN
Humbly may I ask what this is about?

PAP AGENT
The flag, idiot.
(beat)
Beijing told you to hoist the national flag.

CARDINAL ZEN
We don’t do that. We never have. It’s always been the Christian flag. Ever since the British...

PAP AGENT
This isn’t England. When are you Christians going to realize that?

INT. STAIRWELL – CATHEDRAL – DAY

The PAP agents are dragging him up the stairs to a bell tower.

PAP AGENT
Don’t play dumb.
(beat)
You’ve had a month to obey the order.

CARDINAL ZEN
You’re not going to throw me off are you? You killed James the brother of Jesus that way.

PAP AGENT
I’ve killed a lot of people, priests but I never left a mess on the sidewalk.

CARDINAL ZEN
So, you’re not going to throw me off?

PAP AGENT
No, you’re a local celebrity; we won’t do that.

CARDINAL ZEN
Then why all the theatrics?

PAP AGENT
YOU’RE going to put up this flag.

One of the agents reveals a neatly folded red flag.

CARDINAL ZEN
Well, you don’t need me for that. Just put it up yourself.
(beat)
I can’t promise to will be up tomorrow, but knock yourself out. I don’t really take care the actual church. We have sextons.

INT. BELL CHAMBER – CATHEDRAL – DAY

CARDINAL ZEN
I don’t even have a key.

Every door they encounter the PAP simple kicks in.

PAP AGENT
They only give you a Bible and books?
CARDINAL ZEN
Yes. That’s about right. But I won’t resist.

PAP AGENT
That’s not the message President Han wants to send.

CARDINAL ZEN
I see. You have cameras?

Zen looks down from the bell tower. There are hundreds of Chinese state-run media cameras on the sidewalk. All pointed up and ready to tape.

CARDINAL AGENT
Of course.

There is a final door with a lock and key. It’s the access door to the roof of the tower.

The PAP uses a rifle butt on the lock. The door is open and Zen is pushed outside.

INT. TOWER ROOF – CATHEDRAL – DAY

There is a ladder up to a flag pole.

PAP AGENT
Now, climb.

CARDINAL ZEN
I have arthritis?

PAP AGENT
Climb!

CARDINAL ZEN
I’m afraid of heights?

On the ground, the journalists have a sound directional dish and microphone. One journalist is repeating what he hears through his headset.
PAP AGENT
If you don’t do it, I’ll burn and then bulldoze this building and we’ll put up a parking lot.

CARDINAL ZEN
Really, I can’t help you.

The agent takes out a pistol. And puts it at Zen’s temple. Chinese camera’s on the ground zoom in for the money shot.

CARDINAL ZEN
I’m more afraid of your flag than any bullet to the brain. So, don’t let me be the reason you get in trouble.

PAP AGENT
Who is your second in command?

CARDINAL ZEN
I’m sure they’ve all fled. You aren’t the Red Cross you know.

There is a very long beat and the agent holsters his pistol.

PAP AGENT
You know; I’ve changed my mind.

The PAP agent moves to toss the old man off the roof. Trying to frighten Zen. Zen doesn’t flinch. Even the journalist gasp.

CARDINAL ZEN
Violence? It’s not working out for you?

PAP AGENT
President Han wouldn’t want that on tape.

CARDINAL ZEN
One of those cameras probably isn’t entirely loyal.

PAP AGENT
Seems like ten percent of what I do is on the BBC the next day. Cell phones you know.
CARDINAL ZEN
You’ve GOT to be more careful.

PAP AGENT
Yes, I know. It’s a problem.

CARDINAL ZEN
A man of action like you, it only takes one camera to ruin your day.

PAP AGENT
So you aren’t going to change the flag?
(beat)
You’re going to prison then.

CARDINAL ZEN
(pretending to be eager)
I’ll be able to suffer like Paul?

The PAP agent has no clue.

CARDINAL ZEN
And you’ll film it, I hope?

INT. STAIRWELL – CATHEDRAL – DAY
They descend the stairs. Zen is pushed a few times and must recover to avoid a deadly tumble.

INT. FIRST FLOOR – CATHEDRAL – DAY
They are about to exit the cathedral. The PAP agent halts things.

Zen isn’t beaten in public. Inside, he’s punched a few times in the gut.

LONG BEAT
When Zen has recovered...

EXT. CATHEDRAL SIDEWALK – DAY
The cardinal’s books are burning in a pile.
The PAP agent steps out and begins to handcuff Cardinal Zen. He’s slow and this angers the agent. The agent whispers in his ear.

PAP AGENT
(to Cardinal Zen)
Resist. Please resist. I would love for you to resist.

The cardinal is handcuffed and there is a perp walk in front of the press. Communists think this will play well on TV.

PAP AGENT
(to the Chinese press)
The man in black, the great leader of the god worshippers is afraid of heights.

CARDINAL ZEN
I have a pilot’s license. I refused on principle.

The journalists don’t know what to do, but write and tape the arrest. They are all, except one, drones of the Chinese government.

The PAP throw Zen in the back of a van and drive away.

Surreptitiously, the journalist holding the directional microphone hands a journalist an SD card.

INT. PHILIPPINE NEWS BROADCAST - DAY

NEWS READER
Violence returned to the streets of Hong Kong on Saturday, as the police fired tear gas and protesters threw stones and gasoline bombs, signaling the end of a period of relative calm in the city.

The television shows what looks like cell phone footage of the bell tower, with the agent trying to intimidate Zen, first with a pistol and then by threatening to throw him off.
NEWS READER (V.O.)
Just a day earlier, the Catholic Cardinal of China was arrested after refusing to display the Communist Chinese flag over the city’s cathedral. You saw the dramatic video footage.

They loop the tape and play it again.

NEWS READER (V.O.)
Not since the days of Tiananmen Square have we seen such brave resistance.

INT. STREETS OF HONG KONG – DAY

Two YOUNG MEN are moving to confronting the POLICE. One is throwing and one is carrying a crate full of Molotov cocktails.

PROTESTER #1
Come on, you have to keep up.

PROTESTER #2
What will we do without Zen?

PROTESTER #1
Not his real name. Security.

PROTESTER #2
He’s locked up.

PROTESTER #1
I doubt the Chinese even know the role he’s played. So, you maintain security. Okay?

PROTESTER #2
Okay, what will we do without the robed avenger?

PROTESTER #1
Same as always. You fill the bottles and I’ll toss them.

PROTESTER #2
Okay, he inspired some, but he’s just a man. Chinese prisons are full of men.
PROTESTER #1
Full of men who don’t want to be controlled; we want human rights. Maybe people in the mainland accept this, but people in Hong Kong will not.

Protester #1 has reached the front lines and maneuvers. He motivates himself with slogans before he throws.

PROTESTER #1
Free-markets and items on themselves.

He runs and throws a petrol bomb but it flies long.

PROTESTER #1
A bit too far.

PROTESTER #2
I can see that.

Protester #1 reaches into the crate and takes another.

PROTESTER #2
The tank, maybe.

PROTESTER #1
I can try, but that’s a good distance.

Protester #1 eyeballs the armored vehicle.

PROTESTER #1
Limited government and stay out of my head, Beijing!

He runs and launches. The PAP vehicle explodes into flames; the occupants rapidly abandon it. They are pelted with stones from other protesters.

The guards unexpectantly charge and Protester #1 throws the remaining four firebombs in rapid secession and builds a curtain of fire. They retreat.

INT. HONG KONG – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

Cardinal is in a holding cell.
CARDINAL ZEN
There isn’t a blanket or a mattress.

PRISONER
It’s temporary. They will give you a blanket tomorrow and in a week, you will have a bed. It’s all part of the treatment.

CARDINAL ZEN
And this is supposed to comply our compliance?

PRISONER
After a week sleeping on this hard concrete, you will be ready to comply.

FLASHBACK TO DECEMBER 1970
INT. TYPICAL CATHOLIC HOME - DAY

Zen (13) is a boy in British Hong Kong (the heart of Asian Capitalism). He’s learned about liberties and religious freedom in school. Zen sits listening to the radio as his mother makes dinner. Zen specifically remembers his family’s old time radio.

OLD TIME RADIO
Pope Paul VI is to spend three hours in Hongkong. About a quarter million local Catholics will welcome Pope Paul VI when he makes a three-hour visit to Hongkong on December 4 after visiting the Philippines and Australia. It will be the first time the Pontiff has visited Hongkong. A spokesman for the Catholic Church said that in Hong Kong, the pope would greet the largest single Chinese Catholic community in any city in the world.

Then later... we see Pope Paul VI greeting the crowds during his visit to Hong Kong. Parade.

OLD TIME RADIO (V.O.)
The pontiff has flown to Happy Valley from Kai Tak by helicopter before traveling to Government Stadium, in
Causeway Bay, to preach to most of Hong Kong’s Catholics in an open-air mass.

(beat)
I can see a least fifty local children on the stage with the Pope, disabled youngsters among them, they will receive holy communion from His Holiness. More than 225,000 Catholic pupils have been given the day off from school.

Zen is one of the young people on the stage. He’s in line and given Holy Communion. The boy next to the young Zen is crippled and Zen takes care to help him kneel and rise again. The Pope takes the time to bless Zen for helping.

Zen’s father is standing tall. His mother is crying from her seat far back in the stadium.

Then later, Pope Paul VI is on his way to the airport. Parade to the airport.

OLD TIME RADIO (V.O.)
At times, he stretched out his arms in a symbol of loving embrace, at others he blessed the crowds gathered to see him.

(beat)
It’s been a strenuous three hours for the 73-year-old Pontiff. Preaching to 50,000 people in Government Stadium his amplified voice sounded very tired, almost weak. There were, however, three words that he pronounced with heavy emphasis, every syllable distinct. The words came at the end of his sermon: “Christ is a teacher, a shepherd and a loving redeemer FOR CHINA TOO.”

END FLASHBACK

INT. PHILIPPINE NEWS BROADCAST - DAY

NEWS READER
The Chinese government announced today that Cardinal Zen will be released when
the Catholic Church in China hoists the flag.

(beat)
The question for the church is, will it capitulate to the demands of a despotic government.

(beat)
And we’ve also learned a little something about the conditions in which Cardinal Zen is being held. The Chinese prison allows one visitor per week, but the most indignant part of it all is the prison warden chooses the guest. All mail is heavily censored.

EXT. VISITOR'S WAITING AREA - STANLEY PRISON - DAY

Four CHINESE PRIESTS (with paper and pencil and books, and food) and a CHINESE BISHOP (with an official-looking letter) are lined up and a SMALL BOY with a toy. The Chinese guards watch them suspiciously. The warden emerges and in two seconds, points to the boy. Only the kid will be allowed to visit the cardinal.

INT. VISITATION - DAY

PROSTITUTES, ADDICTS, and all sorts of people are on both sides of the glass. As the boy looks at the curious people, the Cardinal Zen tries to distract him. He converses with the boy.

CARDINAL ZEN
In the beginning, there was nothing; everything was formless, and darkness covered the surface of everything. Only God existed. One day, God commanded that there should be light, and the light was created. On the first day of creation, God made night and day. On the second day, God created the sky to separate the waters.

FADE OUT then FADE IN

CARDINAL ZEN
God was pleased by all that He created, and on the seventh day, God rested.
But, in the end, the kid is looking around at the unsavory life (all a bad influence) the Cardinal plays tick-tack-toe with the boy.

EXT. STREET OF ROME - DAY

A hearse comes to the hospital to bring back the body of the previous pope. The streets are lined with mourners.

INT. CLEMENTINE HALL - VATICAN - DAY

CARDINAL CAMERLENGO is training his replacement to administer the property and revenues. The TRAINEE is taking very good notes.

The Camerlengo removes the Pope's ring from his hand, then ceremonially crushes it with the ceremonial silver hammer in the presence of members of the College of Cardinals.

CAMERLENGO
This was originally done to prevent the creation of forgeries, which would appear to have been worn by the late Pope.

INT. POPE’S PRIVATE RESIDENCE - VATICAN - DAY

The Camerlengo and trainee cordones off and places wax seals on the entrances to the Pope's private bedroom and study.

CAMERLENGO
This tradition originates from ruthless cardinals looting the papal chambers upon the death of past popes.

TRAINEE
But surely no one is going to steal at a time like this.

LONG BEAT

CAMERLENGO
Like I said, it is tradition.

INT. CLEMENTINE HALL - VATICAN - NIGHT
The Pope's formal death certificate is about to signed by the Vatican PHYSICIAN.

The Secretary of State, Cardinal VINCENT BARBERINI, is standing beside the doctor. We get the idea Barberini is a busy body and perhaps control hungry. Over the doctor's shoulder, he's reading over the death certificate.

BARBERINI  
(interrupts)  
Place of death. Shouldn’t it say Rome?

The doctor signs the document. He appears to maybe despise Barberini.

PHYSICIAN  
The Pope always dies in the Vatican.

BARBERINI  
It’s a matter of tradition?

PHYSICIAN  
It’s a matter of documents. Secrecy, maintenance, and accuracy.

BARBERINI  
And you think the government of Italy can’t be trusted with such responsibility?

PHYSICIAN  
They’re overrun with incompetent political bureaucrats too, but maybe not so much as here. Not quite.

Barberini is a bit shocked by the skepticism.

BARBERINI  
Well, I’m about to summon the cardinals to elect a new pope.

PHYSICIAN  
His dying words were, “Blessed...”

(beat)

Oh, never mind.
BARBERINI
No, please tell me.

PHYSICIAN
“Blessed are the persecuted.”

BARBERINI
What does that mean?

PHYSICIAN
I have no idea.

The physician is afraid to guess and moves to the edge of the room; perhaps, he is a bit depressed or tired.

Barberini’s UNDER-SECRETARY is standing only a few yards away and Barberini motions for him to come near.

Barberini whispers something to him and the Under-Secretary agrees and moves into action. On the way out of the room, the doctor looks like he wants a word with Barberini’s assistant. The Under-Secretary stops. They whisper.

PHYSICIAN
Presumably, your boss will be the next Pope.

UNDER-SECRETARY
(whispering)
Over my dead body.

PHYSICIAN
I’ll die with you.

The Under-Secretary leaves and uses the phone. A conclave is called. An election looms.

INT. HONG KONG – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

Via cameras. The EVIL PRISON GUARD observes a letter being passed from Cardinal Zen to another prisoner and from prisoner to prisoner. And then into the mail truck, bypassing the censorship room, where all the mail is read.

The evil guard pulls the alarm level and the prison is locked down. He runs to the truck but it’s just pulled out of the gate.
The prison is in lockdown, so it’s a time before he can give chase to the truck. Then, there is traffic.

The evil guard wants the letter back but he arrives at the airport just a minute late that the plane takes off.

INT. LUIGI’S DINER – NEAR VATICAN – NIGHT

The flawed Italian frontrunner, Barberini, has been introduced but given he’s one of the villains... he’s a soft villain. Not so obvious.

A group of a dozen Italian cardinals are in a room set aside for parties, receptions, and meetings. There is only a bit of privacy.

Barberini has piled up about three platefuls; the other cardinal’s plates are miserly. They have discipline and are eating wisely.

The waitress comes in and out with plates and drinks.

SICILIAN CARDINAL
Barberini. There are starving children in China.

BARBERINI
Yes, but my plate isn’t there and they are not here. And do you know the cost to transporting this much food to China? I believe I will eat.

WAITRESS
You guys discussing the next pope?

SICILIAN CARDINAL
No, should we?

WAITRESS
This room could use some paint but more popes have been chosen in this room than in the Sistine Chapel across the street.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Really?
WAITRESS
For hundreds of years, yes it’s true;
all the schemers and plotters, met here
in this room.

BARBERINI
Well, the food is better here.

WAITRESS
Hey, that’s why you leave the Vatican
and come here? For the food? Or for the
politics?

Everyone chuckles. They leave the Vatican for...

NEapolitan cardinal
We leave the Vatican for privacy.

WAITRESS
Oh. Touchy. Okay. I see. I’ll leave you
this pitcher and you can help
yourselves.

She leaves the pitcher of water and a bottle of wine. She leaves
and closes the door, all but an inch.

BARBERINI
So she’s right; we need a new pope.

There is a short grumbling and discussion among them.

BARBERINI
So, let’s give this some thought.
Please.

(beat)
Traditionally, the Secretary of State
is chosen next in line. That’s
historically and I think there are far
too many people in society today that
care nothing for our traditions and
institutions.

(beat)
My mother taught me from a very young
age; right here in Rome, she says to
me, “the Pope must always be Italian.”
And friends, we are all Italians, but
some are more Italian than others.
(beat)
You know me, I’m a Barberini. An old and venerated family that has produced eight popes.

It’s going to be a long persuasive speech from Barberini. The speech fades out but it is heard slightly in the background. His youth, his education, and his priesthood. His time as a Bishop. The other cardinals whisper among themselves as he shamelessly promotes himself.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
You better watch out for this one.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
He feels entitled because of his family?

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
He’s a reactionary.

SICILIAN CARDINAL
Is he antagonistic to gays?

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
I know he’s especially antagonistic to foreigners.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
But he is a good Italian. I mean look at his plate. And he knows all the teams.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
He’s something like the historical Cardinal Richelieu. Don’t you think?

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
Politically manipulative, cunning, and sly. For him, being Pope is personal!

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
He is a good administrator.

SICILIAN CARDINAL
Yes, I’ll grant you that.
There is a pause in the speech.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
You are a great administrator.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
Everything on your desk is so well organized.

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
So neat.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
The next pope should be healthy.

They all look at the food on Barberini’s plate.

BARBERINI
Don’t tell me that. The next pope must be a spiritual leader.

SICILIAN CARDINAL
Well, you suggest someone.

LONG BEAT.

Will Barberini throw a plate of food? Will he become violent? He swallows hard and continues.

BARBERINI
What have I been talking about the last five minutes? I think my time has come to be Pope.

(beat)
I can be a wonderful spiritual leader. And I’ve made a summary of my spirituality and I have a copy for each of you. In Italian and in English.

And Barberini reaches into a brief case and pulls out a dozen sheets of paper. Mostly clip art, but there are perhaps 200 words per page.

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
And this is it?
BARBERINI
Everything spiritual the church means to me. Yes.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
One page?

BARBERINI
Well, in the age of Twitter and Facebook. I believe it’s best to be brief, especially with the young people. They have so many things on their minds, you know.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
You’ve boiled our entire faith, the entire Bible into one page?

BARBERINI
Well, it’s a work in progress.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
A spiritual work in progress?

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
But you are such a good organizer.

SICILIAN CARDINAL
Yes, why do you want to leave the church in such a state of disarray?

BARBERINI
I will tell you what. There will be a new Secretary of State. I will take great care in appointing the most organized person in the entire Church, one of you perhaps.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
But it seems your talents...

BARBERINI
I will personally tutor him and make sure he’s always as organized as you think he should be.

(beat)
How is that?
The cardinals can’t speak. They smile politely and leave miserly tips, basically one Euro notes, and coins. But Barberini leaves her a nice twenty.

WAITRESS
(to a second waitress)
Boy, you can sure tell who wants to be pope around here! That fat ones’ generally the worse tipper.

EXT. STREET - ROME - NIGHT

The meal is over and they are returning to the Vatican, but Barberini is still talking himself up.

BARBERINI
As a pope, I’ll be different.
(beat)
I’ll not be organized, not in public. I’ll give fits to the television directors that give me instructions. I think people expect the pope to appear out of focus sometimes.
(beat)
And how about this, sometimes I’ll not turn on the microphone there on my robe. The people will like that, huh? Like a grandfather?
(beat)
I promise not to appear organized.
(beat)
Since that seems to be your only objection; I will not be overly organized.
(beat)
And, I’m very good at keeping things under 144 characters, like a modern pope should.

The men reach the apartments and disperse. The cardinals from Turin and Milan are living in the same hall and move off together.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
He’s is becoming increasingly obnoxious.
CARDINAL FROM TURIN
But he’s such a good administrator.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
I thought you were just saying that so he wouldn’t pursue the papacy.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
No. I think he should remain Secretary of State.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Oh, I do too. Can we see that, that happens?

The cardinal pauses… thinks.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
Sure. Good night.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Good night.

INT. MAIL ROOM – VATICAN – DAY

A mysterious letter from China is delivered to the Vatican mailroom. A shocked look comes to the MAILMAN’s face.

INT. BARBERINI’S OFFICE – VATICAN – DAY

Fortunately, he’s aware that it might be from Zen. It’s from a prison in Hong Kong.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Why is this in Chinese?

MAILMAN
Perhaps the prison requires it.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Why?

MAILMAN
Well, so they can censor it, if need be.
UNDER-SECRETARY
Have it translated, please.

INT. LANGUAGES OFFICE - VATICAN - DAY

The letter from Cardinal Zen is translated by an energetic but troubled young TRANSLATOR. He’s clearly enthralled by the words. Inspired even. He runs with the letter to the Secretary of State’s office.

SECURITY
There’s no running in the Vatican.

The translator doesn’t slow and he’s chased by security.

INT. PHILIPPINE NEWS BROADCAST - DAY

NEWS READER
All the Cardinals have arrived, except for the persecuted Cardinal of Hong Kong who has been in prison the last several weeks for refusing to fly the Chinese flag.

(beat)
In just a few minutes the Catholic cardinals will meet in a papal conclave, to select the 269th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Cardinals from around the world will be locked in and not allowed to communicate with the world.

INT. BARBERINI’S OFFICE - VATICAN - DAY

Barberini’s Under-Secretary greets the translator.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Barberini’s already gone. To the conclave.

TRANSLATOR
He needs to see this letter.

UNDER-SECRETARY
It’s important?
TRANSLATOR
It’s from Cardinal Zen.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I thought it might be.

TRANSLATOR
They will be closing the doors.
(beat)
Run?

The Under-Secretary doesn’t run but reads about the first paragraph of the letter. His jaw drops and he sprints out of the room.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL – VATICAN – DAY

The procession to fill the room has begun.

INT. HALLWAY – VATICAN – DAY

SECURITY
There’s no running in the Vatican.

The Under-Secretary doesn’t slow and now he is chased by security.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL – VATICAN – DAY

The door closes only a second before the Under-Secretary arrives.

The Under-Secretary is so moved by the letter that he bangs on the door and then collapses about the time the security arrives.

Inside, the DEAN OF CARDINALS is in charge and he approaches the door.

DEAN
Who is it? And why are you being so annoying?

UNDER-SECRETARY
I’m the Under-Secretary of State.

DEAN
Well, what is it?
Barberini shrugs.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I have a letter from Cardinal Zen.

BARBERINI
Is it important?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Possibly.

DEAN
That’s not good enough.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Probably.

DEAN
That’s better.
(beat)
Well, since Cardinal Zen can’t be here, I’m going to open the door and admit the letter. Without objection?

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Just have him slide it under the door.

DEAN
That would be against the rules.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
No objection.

The Cardinals all seem to agree.

Dean opens the door and the letter is admitted.

EXT. STREETS OF ROME - DAY

The translator leaves the Vatican and takes money from his bank account. He hands it out to the impoverished and homeless.
INT. SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN - DAY

The Dean of Cardinals reads the letter to himself. The letter puts a tranquil look on the Dean’s face. The letter has an almost life-altering effect.

But then, a certain logic kicks in. The Dean smiles and looks at Barberini. It’s more of a “this is going to be interesting” smile. Like the smile of a political scientist before an election. The Dean is neutral.

DEAN
Since such a fuse has been made about this letter and it does seem interesting and could be pertinent, I’m going to read the translation to you.

BARBERINI
Excuse me?

DEAN
Yes. Cardinal Barberini.

BARBERINI
Before the letter is read. Maybe we shouldn’t read it at all.

DEAN
No, in the interest of time...

BARBERINI
How do we know the letter is authentic?

DEAN
Well... here is the original and here is the translation.

BARBERINI
And the handwriting? Our brother is in a Chinese prison.

DEAN
Is there someone.

BARBERINI
And the stamp.
DEAN
The stamp?

BARBERINI
The Chinese are very tricky. I’ve been fighting them for decades.

DEAN
The contents of the letter don’t seem to be in the Chinese best interest. In fact, I’m relatively sure this letter was smuggled out of the prison without their knowledge.

BARBERINI
If it’s authentic...

DEAN
Cardinal Barberini has made an interesting point.
(beat)
Does anyone know Cardinal Zen’s writing?

There is silence. But after a long beat, a tiny CARDINAL FROM SINGAPORE (79) rises from his seat and inches his way to the front. It’ll take forever to reach the front at this age.

DEAN
Oh, Cardinal Tan.
(beat)
You are his neighbor, from Singapore. Of course, you know him and you speak Chinese.

Cardinal Tan makes an effort to raise his hand in agreement. He picks up the pace. No one minds the wait but Barberini, who is impatient.

Cardinal Tan reads the entire letter. Big religious bliss of a smile and then he faints. Barberini flips his pin in the air.

The doors are opened again and EMT workers enter and revive the Cardinal. They hook him up to an I.V. and put him on a stretcher.

The Dean of Cardinals approaches the EMT worker.
EMT
Dehydration. Exhaustion. He should be in the hospital.

DEAN
May I ask him just one question?

EMT
Yes.

Before Tan is wheeled out, the Dean approaches the stretcher. The Dean kneels down. Tan has an oxygen mask on but is conscious.

DEAN
Excuse me. Is the letter authentic?

Tan smiles religiously. And gives the thumbs up.

TAN
(raspy under the mask)
Yes. He’s a very eloquent writer.

There is a rumble in the room as the Cardinals confer with each other.

DEAN
Well, it’s decided. I will read the letter to the conclave.
(beat)
Dearest Cardinals...

DISSOLVE TO LATER

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL – VATICAN – DAY

There is a long long beat. Barberini spills his water and the glass hits the floor. The Dean of Cardinals emerges from a trance.

DEAN
Well, that done. Let’s get to business.
(beat)
Speeches?
The letter has left the conclave speechless. Everyone is still contemplating the content of the letter.

DEAN
Are there any speeches?
(beat)
Nominations.
(beat)
Endorsements?
(beat)
Nice things to say about each other?

The Cardinal from Turin is in a religious trance. Barberini makes a tiny paper ball and flicks it across the room and it hits the Cardinal from Turin in the forehead. He bounces from the trance. He looks at Barberini. Barberini gestures that NOW is the time for his speech.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
I would like to say a kind word about my friend and the Secretary of State, Cardinal Barberini. His family and his experience and his organizational skills. Especially his organizational skills.

Barberini grimaces at “organizational.” It wasn’t supposed to be part of the speech.

The speech causes the cardinals to discuss things.

Three Cardinals whisper.

CARDINAL FROM POLERMO
You can’t be serious.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
Are you going to vote for Barberini?

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
No, but he needs to feel appreciated. He has done good work as Secretary of State.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
It’s true. He didn’t say “nominate.”
CARDINAL FROM TURIN
I said, “a kind word or two.”

CARDINAL FROM POLERMO
Good. I’m glad.

DEAN
(out loud)
Well, are there more speeches?

Silence. The Dean appears worried.

RECORDING SECRETARY
(whispering)
Well, at least it will be a short conclave.

Barberini appears confident. He smiles toward the Cardinal from Turin thanking him for the speech.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN - DAY

The cardinals vote. Left to right, slowly and methodically they place their ballots. The Cardinal from Turin is the first to vote. Barberini is the last to vote.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN - DAY

The Dean counts the votes.

DEAN
Barberini
(beat)
Zen
(beat)
Zen
(beat)
Zen
(beat)
Zen

The cardinals now realize what is happening and they begin to discuss it. Barberini is comatose.

DEAN
(loudly)
Please. Do I really need to scold you like school children?

They calm and are silent.

BARBERINI
The next pope will be Chinese?

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
Maybe next time.

BARBERINI
Next time, I’ll be in heaven.

DEAN
Please keep the noise down. We are near the end.

DEAN
Zen
(beat)
Zen
(beat)
Zen
(beat)
Barberini

The balloting is finished. Long beat.

DEAN
The count is 128 for Cardinal Zen and 2 for Cardinal Barberini.

There is a huge private discussion. A din, even.

CARDINAL FROM POLERMO
(whispering)
You did vote for him.

The Cardinal from Turin shrugs.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
(whispering)
He’s my friend.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
(whispering)
And the Secretary of State always knows where the bodies are buried.

Everyone looks at Barberini. He’s not taking it well.

BARBERINI
I feel very embarrassed. I don’t know anything to do but resign effective immediately.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
No, no. Cardinal we all love you. You’ve made all our lives... interesting. We need you.

DEAN
Don’t be rash. It’s the responsibility of the new Pope to name the Secretary of State.

Everyone is speaking out of turn. But the Cardinal from Manila, David Ramos, raises his hand. Ramos is the most polite of all Cardinals. Calm and not political at all. But this is a unique situation that will, in the future, need his leadership.

DEAN
How polite. A cardinal who follows proper etiquette and raises his hand to be recognized. I call on Cardinal Ramos from Manila to speak.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I think we all agree, you should remain in your position until we have a Pope, here in Italy. This may take some time.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
His rightful place.

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
Let’s not forget. The church is under attack and I know you Barberini, you will not run away, not when the church needs you.

BARBERINI
You don’t need me.
CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Stop being such a baby! I’m your friend so I can say that.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
You’ve been effectively our leader since the Pope became ill. He’s gone and now you’re going as well?

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
Yes, don’t be so emotional. You are a grown man.

DEAN
And, you aren’t the first Cardinal not to be named pope.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Every man, Cardinal or not, has one shining moment to show the world who he really is. And I believe that moment for you is here and now.

Barberini feels everyone looking at him and he sits up in his chair. He’s beginning to recover from the loss.

BARBERINI
Very well.

All the cardinals nod to Barberini their appreciation.

BARBERINI
Wait.
(beat)
We don’t have a pope yet.

DEAN
He must agree.

BARBERINI
There’s never been a Pope named who wasn’t here.

DEAN
In modern times, that is true.
BARBERINI
Well, how...

DEAN
Is someone willing to travel to China and receive his agreement?

Silence. None of the Cardinals want also thrown into a Chinese prison.

OLDEST CARDINAL
(whispers to a neighbor)
I’m too old, or I would go.

NEighbor
I believe you would.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
Can’t we just email for it.

BARBERINI
No. H-E double hockey sticks. No!!! The Chinese will be one, this is like a rice cake. I’m sorry if that’s racist for a few of you.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes, look who we are dealing with.

CARDINAL FROM POLERMO
I’m glad you are still with us Barberini; we need someone just as sly and ruthless as they are.

Barberini pauses to think.

CARDINAL FROM POLERMO
I’m sorry I didn’t mean anything personally by that.

BARBERINI
I don’t take things personally. I live in a perpetual state of war and I don’t have the time for it.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
(whispering to a neighbor)
He’s right you know. My friend likes a good fight.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
It’s not a soccer match, you know.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
The Chinese they’ll wish it was.

BARBERINI
I was just thinking that Cardinal Zen is right under their thumb.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
Probably being coerced.

BARBERINI
The Chinese might decline for him, when he would accept.

CARDINAL RAMOS
To deny him power and deny us our selection.

BARBERINI
This will be a world crisis, if we’re not careful.

DEAN
Yes. Clearly.

BARBERINI
Or they might accept for him, when he would naturally decline. Logically, given his imprisonment, he would decline.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Because they control him.

BARBERINI
Think about it. The Communist Chinese, atheists, would control the most powerful man in Christendom.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
(whispering)
No one uses that term anymore.

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
(whispering)
You know what he means.

BARBERINI
I have a suggestion. Since I’m still
the acting Secretary of State for the
Vatican. And since this involves China,
it’s my responsibility to resolve it.
With your approval of course. I’ll have
the Under-Secretary send low-level but
promising priests, so as not to attract
suspicion. They will bring us an
answer, yes or no.

DEAN
Agreed?

The cardinals all agree, together say “yes” and they get up to
leave.

BARBERINI
(to the Dean)
Where are they going?

DEAN
Where are you going?

OLDEST CARDINAL
Home.

DEAN
No, the conclave doesn’t end until we
have a Pope.

NEAPOLITAN CARDINAL
So black smoke?

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
Gray.

BARBERINI
Certainly not white.
DEAN
Do I speak to the press?

BARBERINI
(to the Dean of Cardinals)
Absolutely not.
(to the Cardinals)
Leaving will only invite questions we can’t afford to answer right now.

CARDINAL FROM PALERMO
Afford?

CARDINAL FROM TURIN
He’s a very economical man, my friend.
Studied it; I’m sure.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
Like?

BARBERINI
Who is the new Pope?

There is confusion.

BARBERINI
If you leave, it will put the man’s life in danger.

DEAN
Absolute secrecy.
(beat)
No one leaves this room. Except to urinate.

OLDEST CARDINAL
I have to defecate.

CARDINAL FROM MILAN
And eventually, we will need to bathe.

DEAN
That will all be done, in time.
BARBERINI
Please help us. This sort of situation is the reason why we are secluded and have taken vows of silence.

DEAN
No one is to speak of this to anyone.

BARBERINI
As far as the outside world knows, we are still deliberating.

CARDINAL RAMOS
This might be the longest conclave ever.

BARBERINI
It’s not good in the age of the internet where people receive an answer to things in mili-seconds.

DEAN
The 1268–71 papal election (from November 1268 to September 1271), following the death of Pope Clement IV.

OLDEST CARDINAL
What?

DEAN
It was the longest papal election in the history of the Catholic Church. This was due primarily to political infighting between the Cardinals.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Outside, they might think that we’re fighting but inside here; we must now act as one. Our future Pope is in a Chinese prison.

BARBERINI
Our future Pope MIGHT be in a Chinese prison. It’s just as likely he’s in this very room.
DEAN
But we’re not fighting; let’s simply agree to not fight.

RAMOS
That’s right; the voting was 128 to two.

BARBERINI
I suggest we choose a date and if my priests can’t obtain an answer, then we’ll reconsider the issue. Let’s say, one month.

The Cardinals stand and applaud Barberini’s leadership.

BARBERINI
I’ll just leave and organize things.

DEAN
I’m sorry; I can’t allow that.

BARBERINI
But...

DEAN
You leaving it against the rules. And how will you explain it outside those door.

RAMOS
Yes, people will ask questions.

DEAN
You can have the Under-Secretary come here and you can give him instructions.

BARBERINI
What, so everyone can hear?

(beat)
Listen, I have certain skills. God given skills and I need some privacy.

DEAN
No, we will give you twenty or more feet of room.
BARBERINI
We’ll meet in the bathroom.

DEAN
I guess it’s black smoke?

All the cardinals agree and they pull out books. All sorts of books. American, African, Asian, European, Russian, Australian.

INT. BATHROOM - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY

The private bathrooms of the Sistine Chapel are ornate and contain flowers and even a porcelain vase, which Barberini promptly throws against the wall.

Cardinal Ramos enters and looks at the vase in pieces on the floor.

CARDINAL RAMOS
The Chinese have you rattled already?

BARBERINI
No, it was just a clumsy accident.

Ramos notices a shard of the vase on a window ledge and countertop. It’s not likely the vase just fell. Ramos and Barberini will be rivals.

INT. BATHROOM - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY

Barberini sits inside a stall on a toilet like it’s a chair. He’s in despair. But he’s also contemplating a plan, waiting for the Under-Secretary to arrive.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN - DAY

The Under-Secretary arrives and is very nervous. The Dean encourages him to enter. But he hesitates.

DEAN
Please come in.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Uh, I’m not a Cardinal and this is...
DEAN
No, but today you are much more important than any of us.

UNDER-SECRETARY
But you are choosing the next Pope?

DEAN
Yes. But still.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Uh, I don’t understand.

DEAN
You are the Under-Secretary of State for the Vatican.

UNDER-SECRETARY
And I’m being invited into a papal conclave?

DEAN
Yes.

UNDER-SECRETARY
May I ask why?

The Dean shows him the bathroom door. The Under-Secretary is about to enter.

DEAN
(serious warning)
Oh, wait. I know this is awkward, but can I remind you that a man’s life is at stake and perhaps the future of the church. AND, the souls of perhaps 2 billion people.

The Under-Secretary is now more afraid than ever and he shows it. He is actually physically shaking. The Dean feels maybe he was too negative so he compensates.

DEAN
(big smile)
Well, it’s okay. Have fun with it. But be responsible. And do the right thing.
INT. BATHROOM - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY

The Under-Secretary enters but the room seems empty.

BARBERINI
Is that you?

UNDER-SECRETARY
It’s me.

BARBERINI
Open the door.

The Under-Secretary hesitates.

BARBERINI
It’s not locked.

Barberini is comfortable sitting and he’s a large man and doesn’t want to move.

The Under-Secretary still hesitates.

Barberini leans forward and pulls open the door.

BARBERINI
Get in here.

UNDER-SECRETARY
What?

BARBERINI
What I have to say must be said in total privacy.

The Under-Secretary nervously enters the bathroom stall.

BARBERINI
We have a situation. Let me tell you what has happened and then I’ll tell you what I want you to do.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Okay.

BARBERINI
Okay. First...
DISOLVE TO:

INT. BATHROOM STALL - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY

The Under-Secretary has listened to the situation.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Okay. That IS a mess.

BARBERINI
Yes.

(beat)
But you can save the entire situation.

UNDER-SECRETARY
What do you want me to do?

BARBERINI
I want you to send the most incompetent priests you know and bring back an answer. Zen must accept the post or reject it.

(beat)
And it must be on tape.

UNDER-SECRETARY
On tape?

BARBERINI
So we know the Chinese aren’t interfering. Coercing him. Or so they don’t think I… you know. I like I wanna be Pope, because I don’t. See?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Shouldn’t a Cardinal go?

BARBERINI
First, we are all locked up in here and second, we called for volunteers and no one would do it.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I can understand that.
BARBERINI
And finally, what might even the most stupid Chinese official think if suddenly a Cardinal, who’s supposed to be in here, suddenly shows up at a Hong Kong prison?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Yes. I see.

BARBERINI
Communists are stupid but they aren’t that stupid. Even a Bishop would cause suspicion.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I understand. That’s why you want incompetent-looking priests?

BARBERINI
No, I didn’t say “incompetent-looking”; I said, “incompetent.”

UNDER-SECRETARY
But...

BARBERINI
(sly)
We can’t take any chances.

UNDER-SECRETARY
But where am I supposed to find...

BARBERINI
I don’t care, take your pick. But secrecy is EVERYTHING.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Of course. I understand.

BARBERINI
What if word leaks out and the Chinese find out they have a potential Pope?

UNDER-SECRETARY
I understand.
BARBERINI
What would his life be worth, if that happened?

UNDER-SECRETARY
I understand.

BARBERINI
Absolutely no suspicion must be allowed.

UNDER-SECRETARY
So, that’s my job?

BARBERINI
It’s the World Cup. Italy is down a goal. You have the ball and it’s your job not to fumble it away.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Okay, I never played futball, but I can do it. Thank you for your trust.

BARBERINI
Oh, Lord help us. I just gave the power to save the church to an Italian that never played futball.

UNDER-SECRETARY
It’s okay. I have this under control.

BARBERINI
Oh, and don’t send those conmen, extortionists, and card cheats I see you with. I’ve heard things about them. I mean, send incompetent men who will not stand out in a crowd of suspicious Chinese agents. Do you understand me?

INT. HALLWAY - VATICAN - DAY

The Under-Secretary leaves the chapel and walks rapidly back to his office. Of course, after leaving the conclave, he’s going to be followed by at least a dozen astute officials.
INT. UNDER-SECRETARY’S INNER OFFICE - VATICAN - DAY

Word has spread and four young priests are already in the Under-Secretary’s office waiting. They are something of a Vatican “rat pack” but clearly are the most “fun” priest.

FATHER JOHN O’RORKE is Irish and pious but his first inclination is to cajole everyone and get his adversary drunk.

FATHER MARK KIRCHCHOF is a Texas priest who is pious but his first inclination is bribery.

FATHER LUKE SWALES is an Australian priest who is pious but his first inclination is blackmailing his adversary.

FATHER MATHEW ANANSI is a Nigerian priest who is pious but a first-rate, African trained, computer hacker and confidence man.

UNDER-SECRETARY
You four how did you... the door was locked... Oh, never mind.

FATHER O’RORKE
I just brought you a little gift.

O’Rorke places a bottle of expensive liquor on the desk.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
How’s that performance bike working out for you; gotten any tickets yet?

Kirchchof nods to a photo on the wall of the Under-Secretary on a BMW high-performance motorcycle.

FATHER SWALES
Remember that night in London. Wow!

The Under-Secretary doesn’t like being blackmailed but he’s learning to live with it.

FATHER ANANSI
(cynically)
Hello, friend. I’m just here because I’m your friend and to protect you from these hyenas.

In many ways, Father Anansi is the worst of the group.
UNDER-SECRETARY
Funny you are all here. Now. Today.

FATHER O’RORKE
Nose to the grindstone.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Nose in the wind, you mean

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Well, you did just come from the Sistine Chapel.

UNDER-SECRETARY
And you know what that means?

FATHER O’RORKE
No.

FATHER SWALES
But we hope you’re going to tell us.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Okay, I will. I have no choice. It seems.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Oh, don’t be that way.

FATHER ANANSI
We like you.

The Under-Secretary appears forced into things... but after a long beat, a light bulb goes off in his head.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I like you too... for a job.

FATHER ANANSI
Oh, really. Me?

UNDER-SECRETARY
All of you.

FATHER O’RORKE
What sort of job?
UNDER-SECRETARY
A top-secret type of job.

FATHER SWALES
He’s putting us on boys. He’s angry at us for all we’ve put him through.

UNDER-SECRETARY
It’s a James Bond type of job.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Which of us is 007? I’ll give you this gas card (free petrol for a year) if it’s me.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I need each of you in a unique (perverted) way.

Everyone contemplates as best they can.

UNDER-SECRETARY
(looking at O’Rorke)
It might involve getting unsuspecting enemies of the church drunk. To get information or favors?

FATHER O’RORKE
Do we have a budget?

UNDER-SECRETARY
(looking at Kirchchof)
It might involve bribery.

FATHER ANANSI
Kirchchof, I knew the church would find a place for your only skill.

UNDER-SECRETARY
(looking at Swales)
It might involve blackmail.

FATHER SWALES
Hey, wasn’t personal. Not for me.
UNDER-SECRETARY
It’s nothing personal. It’s a situation. No time for personal.

FATHER SWALES
Thank you. I’m sorry.

UNDER-SECRETARY
(looking at Anansi cynically)
And it might involve... well Anansi you can go just because you’re my friend.

FATHER ANANSI
Don’t do me any favors.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Do you hate us?

FATHER SWALES
We were just having a bit of fun.

FATHER O’RORKE
How can you blame us? I mean you do work for the most powerful man in the Church.

FATHER ANANSI
Politics is not a sin.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Actually, Barberini isn’t the most powerful man in the Church.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
But there’s no Pope and Barberini’s Secretary of State. So he’s the most powerful man in the Church.

UNDER-SECRETARY
(carefully worded)
Barberini is the most powerful man IN the Vatican. There is a difference.

Long beat.
FATHER ANANSI
There’s a new Pope, outside the Vatican?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Not exactly. Not yet.
(beat)
Well, that’s just it. The most powerful man in the Catholic Church isn’t here IN the Vatican.
(beat)
Not presently. He’s in China.

The rowdy priests sit up and begin to look serious.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SECRETARY’S OUTER OFFICE – VATICAN – DAY

As the priests leave the office, the Under-Secretary looks suspicious. He looks at his secretary, SISTER MARIA.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Get them airline tickets and go with them. I want to know exactly what they do. And what they don’t do.

SISTER MARIA
You don’t trust them?

UNDER-SECRETARY
How big are you?

SISTER MARIA
I’m five foot two, and a half.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I trust them about as far as you can throw a pig.

Sister Maria picks up a phone.

INT. PHILIPPINE NEWS BROADCAST – DAY

Television.
NEWS READER
Black smoke again today. Clearly, a disappointment for the crowd that’s gathered at Vatican Square and for Catholics around the globe as they wait for the new Pope. (beat)
Some are taking it as bad news and evidence of infighting among cardinals; the cardinals have sent for over 200 books from the Vatican library and witnesses today saw a well-known Rome electronics store deliver four game stations and over 20 video games to the Vatican service entrance. We might be in for a long wait.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL – VATICAN – DAY
The Under-Secretary enters and is considerably less nervous this time in the Chapel. However, he does take pause of the party atmosphere around four game stations. A fourth of the Cardinals are playing games and there is even a tournament bracket on a poster on the wall. Two game-players are arguing in a rather animated but peaceful way.

There are all manner of books the Cardinals are reading.
Half of the Cardinals are sleeping.

INT. COMMERCIAL FLIGHT – ALITALIA AIRLINES – DAY
Before take-off, the passengers are all getting settled.

FATHER O’RORKE
I don’t understand why we can’t have a charter. The Pope when he travels gets a charter.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
And why would priests, especially priests like the four of us, have a charter into Hong Kong?

FATHER SWALES
Well, we could at least get first-class tickets.
FATHER ANANSI
Spies?

They look around and there are CHINESE looking at them. Probably not because the Chinese are spies (mothers with kids), but because the priests are socially awkward.

The FLIGHT ATTENDANT smiles.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Okay, gentlemen.

They all smile at the young woman.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
At least I hope you’re gentlemen, wearing those collars. This isn’t Halloween is it?

FATHER ANANSI
Hello, I’m Bond, James Bond.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Oh, I was hoping you weren’t a Catholic priest.

FATHER ANANSI
I am; Father James Bond.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Oh, it’s not a disguise? Too bad.

She runs her finger down to the first button on her blouse. She strikes a sexy pose.

FATHER ANANSI
Hey, fellas. We have a live one here. The lady likes to joke.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I wasn’t joking. Too bad.

INT. BATHROOM - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY

Barberini and his assistant are midway through a debriefing. In a bathroom stall, as before.
UNDER-SECRETARY
One is a heavy drinker, but he never drinks alone. Friendly Irish chap.

BARBERINI
Well, the Lord loves a drinking man. Anyone that can turn water into wine, he’s a good friend of mine.
(beat)
That’s what they say.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Another takes a camera with him everywhere.

BARBERINI
It’s a bit odd?

UNDER-SECRETARY
He says one never knows when a good photo will happen. One that he can use.

BARBERINI
Memories. Sure. I understand.

UNDER-SECRETARY
The third gives high-performance motorbikes to his enemies.

BARBERINI
What? That can get expensive.

UNDER-SECRETARY
But he only gives them to his enemies... fast... very fast.

BARBERINI
Oh. You mean.

The Cardinal makes a “crashing” sound effect.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Yes, sometimes I imagine there are accidents.
(beat)
And the last fellow is Black.
BARBERINI
Isn’t that racist?

UNDER-SECRETARY
He’s not incompetent. In fact, he’s very sharp.
(beat)
Others judge him to be incompetent.

BARBERINI
Because he’s Black?
(beat)
Oh, that’s smart of you.
(beat)
And they’re on their way now?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Should be leaving about now.

BARBERINI
Yes. I approve.

UNDER-SECRETARY
I thought you might.

INT. BATHROOM - SISTINE CHAPEL - DAY
Barberini sits and watches from a distance. When a Cardinal isn’t busy reading, sleeping, or playing a video game, Barberini approaches them.

BARBERINI
I have a corrected translation of Cardinal Zen’s letter.

SWEDISH CARDINAL
Oh?

BARBERINI
For the historical record. And in your native language.

SWEDISH CARDINAL
Thank you.
But the SWEDISH CARDINAL then folds it neatly into a bookmark for his book.

One Cardinal at a time Barberini approaches. Most refuse to read the new version.

**MEXICAN CARDINAL**

Thank you, but I like the original translation.

The MEXICAN CARDINAL goes back to playing his video game. Doesn’t read the translation. Sets it aside.

The GREEK CARDINAL takes it into the bathroom with him. He doesn’t emerge with it in his hands. Barberini runs into the bathroom and looks into the trash can; it’s empty. He looks into the toilets.

Several AMERICAN CARDINALS are playing basketball with a paper ball. When they are finished, Barberini digs in the trash and unrolls the paper ball. It’s his new translation.

Barberini approaches the CHILEAN CARDINAL.

**CARDINAL OF CHILE**

How did you get a new translation, when we are sequestered. And suffering.

**BARBERINI**

Special permission.

**CARDINAL OF PALERMO**

We are all equal here, it seems, but some are more equal than the others.

One last Cardinal, Ramos from Manila, takes the original translation and compares it to the new translation. He sits and studies it. He takes out a red pen. When he’s done he approaches Barberini.

**CARDINAL RAMOS**

This is seriously toned down and less inspiring. It’s like this second translation… is…

**BARBERINI**

More accurate?
CARDINAL RAMOS

More defamatory.

The Cardinal Ramos is ALWAYS very polite, and hands Barberini both copies. They are marked with red pin where the words have been altered. There are many red marks.

CARDINAL RAMOS

I’ve made some comparisons, please look. You’ve changed “splendid” to “nice” and there are twenty other examples. “Glorious” in your new translation is “admirable.” Really?

BARBERINI

Oh, it’s not me. It’s just a different translator. A little less of an exaggeration. That’s all.

CARDINAL RAMOS

Nice try however, Cardinal Barberini. You do have a flare for all of this politics, don’t you?

BARBERINI

Thank you. I try. But I don’t know what you are talking about.

Ramos reaches for the papers marked in red and Barberini gives it back to him.

CARDINAL RAMOS

Okay, two things. This could easily become an issue for you. An issue that you don’t need right now. Once Cardinal Zen accepts.

BARBERINI

If he accepts...

CARDINAL RAMOS

Okay if he accepts, you will declare the Honk Kong Cathedral a Vatican Embassy and you will announce to the world that we expect full respect for the premises under international law.
BARBERINI
I will?

CARDINAL RAMOS
You will.

BARBERINI
And who will guard it? The Swiss Army is the smallest in the world. And they are needed here.

CARDINAL RAMOS
That is my second demand. That you use the Philippine Marines to secure it.

BARBERINI
And what makes you think they will agree?

CARDINAL RAMOS
The President and I were confirmands together. Obviously, I’ve not spoken to him about it... I’m locked up here. But, he will.

BARBERINI
And that’s all?

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes. I think it’s an equitable exchange.

BARBERINI
And no one sees all those red marks?

CARDINAL RAMOS
I promise.

BARBERINI
Deal.

(beat)
May I have the document, it was printed in error. I’m such a fool.
CARDINAL RAMOS
No. I think I’ll just hang on to it, until we have a new Pope.

BARBERINI
I understand.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Thank you. Why don’t you join us for some ping-pong?

BARBERINI
Rome is burning and we’re playing table tennis?

Barberini scoffs and walks away.

CARDINAL RAMOS
We can’t all be heroes, like you Cardinal.

Barberini stops and returns.

BARBERINI
I’m sorry. I have a lot on my mind.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Come and sit down.

Barberini sits. Cardinal Ramos rubs Barberini’s neck.

BARBERINI
Wait, what are you doing?

CARDINAL RAMOS
I’m rubbing your neck.

BARBERINI
I never.

CARDINAL RAMOS
No one ever rubbed your neck and shoulders?

BARBERINI
No.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Well, no wonder you are so tense. It’s not the politics; it’s that you never stop.

BARBERINI
You aren’t embarrassed?

CARDINAL RAMOS
Not unless you are. Are you?

BARBERINI
I don’t know; men touching other men.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Oh, don’t think about it that way. It will only make you more tense. No one is even watching.

BARBERINI
That’s good.

CARDINAL RAMOS
The purpose is to relax and let your brain get some oxygen.

Barberini does begin to relax.

BARBERINI
Listen, can I tell you something? (beat)
You shouldn’t smile too much.

CARDINAL RAMOS
No?

BARBERINI
No. Not when you are making someone eat crow.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Oh, that. Back there. The translation?

BARBERINI
You made me feel like an idiot, but you smiled about it.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Yelling and screaming, that would have worked better?

BARBERINI
The way you did it. It’s unnerving.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I’m sorry. But, I’m passionate about politics too, you know.

BARBERINI
But, not like me.

CARDINAL RAMOS
No.

BARBERINI
Well, no hard feelings.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Maybe we can work together. Me from Asia and you here in the Vatican.

BARBERINI
Allies?

CARDINAL RAMOS
Uneasy allies.

BARBERINI
But still allies?

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes.

EXT. CATHEDRAL – HONG KONG – DAY

The four priests arrive in Hong Kong and take over the cathedral offices. The place is entirely empty.

Soon, there is a buzz of activity.

MONTAGUE to John Barry’s “007 Theme” music.

A van unloaded 24 cases of Jamison. A big American pickup truck arrives; it’s jacked up with kicker tens. Sophisticated
surveillance equipment with telephoto and listening devices. And computers.

Each of the priests take out their toys and play with them. O’Rorke counts his liquor bottles. Kirchchof drives around HK in the truck with loud music playing. Swales eavesdrops on little old ladies talking about their grand-children in the park. Anansi finds a wi-fi signal from McDonald's and sits down with his lap-top.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CATHEDRAL OFFICE - HONG KONG - DAY

In the office, there is a huge bulletin board with photos of the entire prison hierarchy in the shape of a triangle. At the top is the prison warden, then the assistant wardens and then the sergeants and lower-level guards.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
A pope must agree to the selection.

SISTER MARIA
Well, that’s the problem. That’s why we’re here.

FATHER O’RORKE
But the Chinese government has cut off all communication.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
It’s like they might know something.

FATHER SWALES
I’m certain the Cardinals are totally isolated. The room was swept for bugs.

FATHER ANANSI
Spies?

SISTER MARIA
No. That’s just the way communists are. Control. They don’t know anything.

FATHER SWALES
Maybe I should have a listen?
SISTER MARIA
Don’t get caught.

FATHER SWALES
I’ll try not to.

Maria’s jaw drops.

SECOND MONTAGUE

INT. BAR - NIGHT

FATHER O’RORKE gets the entire PRISON STAFF drunk but it doesn’t work. They are too drunk to talk or even remember the next day.

EXT. PRISON - NIGHT

Father Kirchhof tries to bribe prison WARDEN CHEN with a nice new Ford F-350 but the warden confiscates it and pulls inside the prison to be used as a personal concert hall. It has such nice speakers, the guards are allowed to use it to unwind during work after a long day. The bribery fails.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Father Swales takes advantage of the PRISON OFFICERS and hires prostitutes to pose for pictures with them, but the next day the officers are proud of their supposed “conquest” and show the photos around bragging. No shame. The blackmail fails.

END SECOND MONTAGUE

Father Anansi is trying to hack into the prison system computer.

SISTER MARIA
Phishing?

FATHER ANANSI
Oh, you know something about computers.

SISTER MARIA
Is it working?

FATHER ANANSI
Not yet.
SISTER MARIA
Some friendly advice. It may never work.
(beat)
Everyone is into that trick.

The computer pings.

FATHER ANANSI
(surprized)
It worked.

SISTER MARIA
It’s that ugly guard?

FATHER ANANSI
I’m reading his email.
(beat)
He’s catfishing this Russian girl on twoo.com

SISTER MARIA
How sad.
(beat)
Keep doing that. It’s good.

INT. STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

The four priests go through prison security. They each have their cell phones confiscated. O’Rorke has a small bottle of Jameson confiscated. Kirchhof has a gold ring that he offers a YOUNG GUARD in exchange for his cell phone.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
How about I give you this ring and you let me take this cell phone into my friend?

GUARD
I’m the youngest and newest guard here. Why do you want to bribe me? Besides...

The guard refuses but glances at the security camera. But that encourages Kirchhof.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
I’ll see you later? Maybe.
The young guard wants to take the bribe but is too afraid to respond. Maybe he can be bought later.

And Swales then is caught with a miniature camera built into his glasses.

With all their equipment taken from them, the four priests get in the line-up to be chosen. They each expect to receive the word from Zen that he accepts the office of Pope, but they have no way to record it. The same child from before is there to visit his new friend, Cardinal Zen.

However, Sister Maria has smuggled a knockout California “surfer girl” nun (SISTER KATHRINE) into the line-up. She’s wearing a sexy bikini and carrying a surf-board. It’s so bizarre something must be up.

The four priests are just as confused as the Chinese guards.

Warden Chen however sees an opportunity to create a scandal (propaganda is how one moves up), so he agrees to allow the surfer girl to visit Zen.

The young guard tries to take the surfboard from her. She resists.

An EVIL GUARD is at the prison’s video monitors.

YOUNG GUARD
You can have it back later.

SISTER KATHRINE
No, I don’t go anywhere without it.

PRISON WARDEN
(into radio)
I’m about to let this California dream into visitation. We will portray her in the media as the mistress of the Christian but I need plenty of video. Are all the cameras operating? Microphones?

EVIL GUARD
Yes. They all seem perfectly clear. She has something?
PRISON WARDEN
It’s a surfboard. Yes. It’s a very
decedent symbol from the West.
Capitalism, wild parties and free love.
It probably cost $75,000.

YOUNG GUARD
So... what do I do?

PRISON WARDEN
Yes. Let her keep it. We will vilify
them, like Mao and Alinsky teach.

The surfer girl and the board are searched again, not entirely
well, but where would she possibly conceal a camera in that
outfit? They don’t find the hidden camera in the board.

And she’s allowed in.

INT. VISITATION - DAY

She enters her side of the glass. She carefully positions the
surfboard.

Zen enters, sees the girl, and immediately turns to leave when
he sees the girl. He thinks it’s a communist honey trap.

SISTER KATHERINE
Cardinal. Cardinal. I’m sister
Katherine. I’m sorry about my
appearance.

CARDINAL ZEN
You’re a nun?

SISTER KATHERINE
I’m actually a kindergarden teacher,
but this is an emergency.

CARDINAL ZEN
Okay.

SISTER KATHERINE
This is a crazy ruse, but it’s working.
(beat)
Your brother is deaf?
CARDINAL ZEN
Yes.

SISTER KATHERINE
ALS?

Zen shakes his head, no.

SISTER KATHERINE
Can we sign using Exact English?

Zen nods, yes.

The surfboard blocks one Chinese camera. Sister Katherine positions her body to block the other camera from seeing her hands/signs. Subtitles the remainder of this scene.

SISTER KATHERINE
Quickly. Do you accept the position?

And Zen signs back.

CARDINAL ZEN
What position?

SISTER KATHERINE
You don’t know?

CARDINAL ZEN
No.

SISTER KATHERINE
I’m sorry. I should have said, Do you accept the position of Pope?

CARDINAL ZEN
Pope? The Bishop of Rome?

SISTER KATHERINE
Yes. The Cardinals have elected you.

The Cardinal is in shock.

SISTER KATHERINE
Think about it carefully.
CARDINAL ZEN
Okay, I am.

TWO SECOND FLASHBACK TO POPE PAUL VI IN 1970

CARDINAL ZEN
I will. I do accept.

She smiles uncontrollably.

SISTER KATHERINE
Congratulations.
(beat)
And what name will you take?

CARDINAL ZEN
Thomas Jefferson.

SISTER KATHERINE
Can you repeat it?
(beat)
Jefferson? Is that...

CARDINAL ZEN
No?

SISTER KATHERINE
Maybe we should make it just Thomas?
Thomas the First.

CARDINAL ZEN
Agreed.

EXT. SECURITY SURVEILLANCE ROOM - PRISON - DAY

PRISON WARDEN
What are they saying? I can’t hear.

EVIL GUARD
Nothing.

PRISON WARDEN
What do you mean?

EVIL GUARD
She’s deaf. He’s making signs.
PRISON WARDEN
Get someone to translate, quickly.

INT. VISITATION - DAY

Back to the visitation. The new Pope speaks.

POPE THOMAS
What am I supposed to do?

SISTER KATHERINE
Holy Father, I don’t know.

(beat)
Eventually, the Chinese will learn about it. And... well I don’t know.

(beat)
But I have to go. The world is waiting. Understand?

POPE THOMAS
Is this a joke?

SISTER KATHERINE
No.

POPE THOMAS
Thank you.

He blesses her and she leaves.

She leaves visitation.

She walks rapidly. She takes the SD card out of the surfboard and slips it into her bikini bottoms.

And she exits the prison. She gives the surfboard to some children who are playing and climbs into a fast sports car.

She’s gone, before Warden Chen and guards can stop her.

EXT. CATHEDRAL OFFICE - HONG KONG - DAY

Party. Champagne cork pops.

Sister Maria greets Sister Katherine as she emerges from another room. She’s now a demure kindergarten teacher.
SISTER KATHERINE  
(upset)  
The Pope saw me half-naked.

SISTER MARIA  
Oh, don’t worry about it. He’s a very  
smart man. He knows what you did was  
tremendously dangerous.

SISTER KATHERINE  
I’m just embarrassed.

SISTER MARIA  
Come over here and let’s get you a  
drink.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF  
You were great.

FATHER SWALES  
Congratulations.

FATHER ANANSI  
You did what hardly anyone could.

FATHER O’RORKE  
She’s a born spy.

O’Rorke gives her a glass of Champagne.

The cathedral’s OFFICE MANAGER, a Chinese lady, enters the room  
and she points to the television set.

OFFICE MANAGER  
You are on the news.

SISTER MARIA  
Guys, we’re on television.

The party goes silent.

CHINESE NEWS READER  
(translated by the staff member)  
And today in the news, the PAP revealed  
a security tape that is a complete and  
total shut down of the embarrassed weak  
church. The lofty Cardinal of all
Chinese Christians today was revealed to have a hot California Surfer Girl mistress that visited him at his Hong Kong prison. It’s like the decadent American song, “Surfer Girl.”

The Chinese television intended to play a snippet of the Beach Boy’s song, Surfer Girl. But they get it wrong. They play Surf City, “Two Girls for Every Boy” by Jan and Dean.

Communists can’t surf or “Charlie Doesn’t Surf.”

FATHER O’RORKE
Hey, I know American music and that’s not Surfer Girl. It’s some other song.

CHINESE NEWS READER
Chinese tabloids tomorrow will read, “Zen has Love Child with Hermosa Beach Surfer.”

SISTER MARIA
What ridiculous propaganda.

They all laugh uncontrollably, except sister Katherine who has a tear in her eye still.

EXT. SECURITY SURVEILLANCE ROOM – PRISON – DAY

There is a Chinese SIGN READER now in the prison. She explains what the prisoners is signing.

SIGN READER
Here the prisoner signs, his agreement. Essentially he says, “yes.”

PRISON WARDEN
But what has he agreed to?

SIGN READER
I don’t know. Show me her signs.

EVIL GUARD
Can’t, they are blocked by that thing.
PRISON WARDEN
Either she was very crafty or very lucky.

EVIL GUARD
We don’t know.

PRISON WARDEN
Well, what about the rest?

SIGN READER
Here he is saying his name is Thomas Jefferson. But she likes only Thomas.

EVIL GUARD
He’s catfished her.

PRISON WARDEN
What is that?

EVIL GUARD
Lure (someone) into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona.

PRISON WARDEN
Trust me for that priest to land a woman like that, he would need a fictional online persona.

SIGN READER
She doesn’t seem to mind.

PRISON WARDEN
Over the internet, he told her he wasn’t a priest to get sexual favors?

EVIL GUARD
Boss, this is better than your love child story. You can take this tape and make a great internet propaganda; how the priest prey on unsuspecting women.

SIGN READER
They are going to bang when he gets out.
PRISON WARDEN
He told her he was deaf to gain her sympathy.

SIGN READER
Here, he wants to know if it’s a joke. And she says no. Oh, you can hear that part.

EVIL GUARD
And she traveled 8,000 miles to meet a man she thought was Thomas Jefferson.

PRISON WARDEN
The propaganda machine will love it.

INT. SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN - DAY
The Cardinals turn off the video-games and watch the short video that Sister Katherine made. And they stand to applaud.

CARDINAL AT THE STOVE
The white smoke?
The Dean of Cardinals looks around and nods yes.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Wait, I understand the Chinese don’t even know he’s... the Pope.

DEAN
How many people know we have a new Pope?

BARBERINI
This room and a small handful in Hong Kong. We should pull them out and get them back here.

CARDINAL RAMOS
You can’t abandon Pope Thomas like that.

DEAN
What will they do when they find out?
BARBERINI
Well, how can we keep that from happening?

DEAN
We just announce it like it’s a new Pope. White smoke.

BARBERINI
A press conference.

CARDINAL RAMOS
And then he’ll have to tape a speech. The Chinese will not allow that.

BARBERINI
It won’t be an issue. He can make his first speech from here. They will be forced by world opinion to release him.

CARDINAL RAMOS
We can try but they don’t care about world opinion.

BARBERINI
They will have to release him.

CARDINAL RAMOS
They will not release him.

DEAN
Well, we remain in the enclave and play this game of cat and mouse politics (to which we are not suited) or we release the white smoke and get on with our religion.

Even Ramos agrees and the smoke is about to be released.

BARBERINI
Wait!

CARDINAL DEAN
What now?

BARBERINI
Can I have just another six hours?
DEAN
Why?

BARBERINI
I’m going to name the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception as a papal embassy. There might be retaliation against our people inside.

CARDINAL RAMOS
He’s going to use Philippine Marines.

DEAN
More cat and mouse politics?

BARBERINI
It’s our right under international law.

CARDINAL RAMOS
The Pope needs a staff, despite his predicament. The nearer the better.

BARBERINI
It’s been arranged.

CARDINAL RAMOS
And besides, if Pope Thomas were to be released he would need a safe place to rest before coming to Rome.

CARDINAL OF PALERMO
This sounds of schism. What if he remains in Hong Kong?

CARDINAL OF MILAN
What will happen to our...

BARBERINI
All power is fleeting?

Cardinal Ramos grabs Barberini and hugs him.

CARDINAL RAMOS
(to the Cardinal of Palermo)
You are having a nightmare; wake up friend. There won’t be a schism.
BARBERINI
Your power is safe. It’s mine that is gone.

BARBERINI is weary of being hugged again.

DEAN
Aren’t we getting ahead of ourselves? They might not let him out.

BARBERINI
International embassy protections are a sound policy. And we wait.

DEAN
(to everyone)
White smoke in six hours.

Without a vote or any formal deliberation... The video games are turned on again. Many recline for a nap and many cardinals pull out their books.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. APOSTOLIC PALACE BALCONY – VATICAN SQUARE – DAY

The crowd goes wild when Barberini appears. Cardinal Ramos is at one side and the Dean of Cardinals is on the other side. All the Italian cardinals who have speaking roles thus far are there on the balcony.

BARBERINI
I’m not the new Pope. I’m only the Secretary of State, Cardinal Barberini. Yes, I know you saw the white smoke and we do have a new Pope. But it’s not me. And you will have to wait a while to hear him. But patience is a virtue, especially in the age of Twitter and Facebook.

The crowd cheers.

YOUNG PERSON
(screams out)
You look like a Pope.
BARBERINI
You think I look like a Pope? I would have made a nice Pope; I’m very organized but I would never make a GREAT Pope. I’m here to announce to you we have a GREAT Pope!

The crowd cheers.

BARBERINI
So you are asking where is this great new Pope? Here it gets a little complicated. Anyone like to play Chess?

The crowd cheers.

BARBERINI
We have elected as Pope, Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong who is currently being held by the ruthless dictatorship in Beijing.

The crowd is shocked but gradually begins to cheer.

BARBERINI
Don’t be shocked, but I have to admit it is a historic event. But let me tell you that Pope Thomas the First...

The crowd hears the name for the first time... And cheers.

BARBERINI
Pope Thomas is in prison precisely because he is warm and compassionate and because he has MORAL CONVICTIONS. Many of you have seen the video of him standing on the bell tower railing unshakable with a pistol at his head! (beat)
Now I’m about to tell you what happened inside the conclave. Don’t worry, I have speical dispensation for what I’m about to tell you. Many Cardinals wanted to keep his identity a secret, a secret Pope, so he wouldn’t be harmed or killed.
(beat)
Before stepping out to deliver this message, I called thirteen world leaders, many of them not even Christians, and each promised me the fullest possible protections for our new Pope. Pope Thomas will not be harmed or there will be HELL to pay!

The crowd cheers. And it resonates with Barberini and the Cardinals on the balcony. Barberini turns and smiles at Ramos.

BARBERINI
Pope Thomas loves you. We love you, but we need your help.
(beat)
I call on every Catholic, and every Christian, and every Muslim, and every religious soul on this planet to phone, write, and email the President of China and demand the release of our duly elected Pope.
(beat)
The dictator of China is a man named Han Zheng, his phone number is... (cut to) his email is... (cut to) his Twitter is... (cut to) his Facebook is... (cut to) his mailing address is... (cut to) and his fax machine I’m told is already out of paper.

INT. CHINESE PRESIDENT HAN’S OFFICE - DAY

President Han is watching satellite television and throws a vase against a wall.

The SECURITY OFFICERS runs into the office, looks at the TV, and looks at the vase in pieces on the floor.

SECURITY
The Italians have you rattled already?

PRESIDENT HAN
No, it was just a clumsy accident.
Security notices a shard of the vase on a window ledge or countertop. It’s not likely the vase just fell. Han will never release Pope Thomas.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APOSTOLIC PALACE APARTMENT – VATICAN – DAY

BARBERINI
Thank you for the speech.

RAMOS
You’re welcome, my friend.

BARBERINI
I could never have written that. They loved it.

RAMOS
It was delivered masterfully.
(beat)
I couldn’t have spoken that well, and certainly not as forcefully as you.

BARBERINI
Thank you.

The pool camera zooms deep into the apartment. Barberini stretches his neck.

RAMOS
Your neck hurting you again?
(beat)
Here turn around.

Ramos rubs his friend’s neck on global television.

INT. STANLEY PRISON – HONG KONG – DAY

A crazy-looking and demonic PSYCHOPATH shapes a prison-made knife. He eats alone. He doesn’t have friends it seems. (I want to speak with the film’s art director about this character.) Western demonic tattoos. Asian demon tattoos. An angel warrior being killed by a demonic warrior. He’s Asian but let’s give him Nazi and Arian Brotherhood tats. Aztec facial tattoos.
INT. PHILIPPINE NEWS BROADCAST – DAY

Television.

NEWSREADER
The Chinese government has egg all over its face today. A propaganda piece carried yesterday on Chinese state television turned out to be quite embarrassing for the Communists in Beijing.

(beat)
The Chinese television broadcast a story that then Cardinal Zen had used the internet technique of “catfishing” to lure a beautiful California woman into a romantic relationship.

(beat)
But after yesterday’s shocking news of Cardinal Zen being elected Pope Thomas I, we now know that it was all part of a rather ingenious sting operation conducted by a group of undercover nuns. It was Sister Katherine, a California kindergarten teacher, who infiltrated the prison and obtained the famous tape.

INT. STANLEY PRISON – HONG KONG – DAY

Warden Chen is in the same holding cell Cardinal Zen was in earlier. With no blanket and sleeping on a cold concrete floor. There is a jailbird in the room with him.

JAILBIRD
Tomorrow they will give you a blanket.
In a week, you’ve have a mattress.

INT. ITALIAN TALK-SHOW BROADCAST – DAY

Barberini is treated like a celebrity. It’s a late-night talk-show.

HOST
Cardinal Barberini you were reluctant but forced into hastily announcing the selection?
BARBERINI
It might have been a bit hasty, we were struggling to get everything in place. This has never happened before.

HOST
You wanted to be Pope?

BARBERINI
Have you ever walked into a room with 128 men who ALL want to be Pope? Men, who’ve wanted to be Pope since they were eight?

HOST
I can’t imagine.

BARBERINI
Well, let me tell you. About ten seconds after you walk into the Sistine Chapel, you realize not everyone can be Pope.

HOST
But the rumor is you were runner-up in the election.

BARBERINI
We don’t talk about what happens inside the conclave.

HOST
And the reason for this is?

BARBERINI
Jealousies.

HOST
But you spoke about it in your speech from the balcony.

BARBERINI
I had the permission of the Dean.

HOST
And he gave it why?
BARBERINI
Well, we all felt that the Chinese Communists should be warned.

HOST
Warned?

BARBERINI
One, that we are adamant; we will have our Pope. And two that the entire world wants the religious persecution to end.

HOST
Do you think the announcement put the Pope’s life in danger.

BARBERINI
No, in fact, being named Pope probably saved his life. I believe they might have killed him. Seven priests, you know, have disappeared.

HOST
But not Cardinals.

BARBERINI
A Cardinal? All the better for them. They hate authority unless it’s their own, oppressive and controlling.

HOST
Are they really that bad? I mean it is only a flag.

BARBERINI
You have to realize who we are dealing with here. It’s not only about the flag; it’s about the repression of religion. Not just Catholics.

HOST
It’s a serious issue.

BARBERINI
The communists are so opposite of the church. It was Mao who said, “all power
comes from the barrel of a gun.” The Chinese Communists are not people who reject violence, they think it’s a tool.

HOST
You always say Chinese Communists and never just Chinese.

BARBERINI
Of course. There is a difference. The Chinese people are good, hard-working, and wholesome, religious people. Many different religions, but they are religious. We want the Chinese to be free, as God made them. The Chinese Communists however are leeches. My Filipino friend calls them leeches, so I will as well.

HOST
Why does he call them that?

BARBERINI
You would need to ask him that, but I suppose it’s because they suck the life out of everything - society, religious life, the economy, the intellectual community.

HOST
Cardinal Barberini, you seem a bit depressed. You’re not eating anymore?

BARBERINI
No. I’m not depressed. Oh, you’re joking. Ha ha.

HOST
But seriously, are you okay?

BARBERINI
I’m angry. Busy. I’m facing rather a full plate. Ha ha. Got you there, didn’t I? How about that, a “full plate”.

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HOST
They tell me you enjoy politics.

BARBERINI
I don’t run away from it.

HOST
Well, feast my friend. The people support you in your efforts to free the Pope.

INT. STANLEY PRISON – HONG KONG – DAY

The Pope is in the general population. He is sitting at a table writing a letter.

PRISONER #2
The prison is full of persecuted Christians. He’ll be okay. He always has people around him.

PRISONER #1
The men who surround him aren’t the suspicious type. Mostly fools. Look at them.

PRISONER #2
But it would take just one.

PRISONER #1
Why isn’t he in isolation?

PRISONER #2
I think the Chinese hope he’s killed.

Prisoner #1 gestures over to the Muslims.

PRISONER #1
The fastest way out of here for one of them would be to kill the Chinese problem.

PRISONER #2
They’ll be told it’s also a ticket to Heaven too.
PRISONER #2
Or them. I’m sure they want out.

Prisoner #2 gestures over to the hard-core career criminals.

PRISONER #1
Or even one of these. Someone close to him.

Prisoner #1 gestures over to the Pope and his followers.

Prisoner #1 has an idea.

PRISONER #1
You want to help me?

PRISONER #2
What?

PRISONER #1
Conduct a little experiment?

(beat)
Watch what happens. Make note of what they do?

PRISONER #2
Okay. I see.

Prisoner #1 circles around behind the Pope and walks up... clearly stalking him. Then he rapidly approaches without giving any warning, the Christians at the table pull weapons and they are about jump #1. They all step into the fray. All except ONE.

Prisoner #1 is surprised by the action.

The Pope gestures for them to put the weapons down.

They won’t drop their weapons.

Prisoner #2 arrives and speaks in Arabic. He’s looking directly at the one who didn’t react.

PRISONER #2
(in Arabic)
Get out of here and if you come within fifty feet, you will meet Allah.
Prisoner #2 guessed correctly. The ONE prisoner moseys over to where the Muslims are studying their Koran. His brothers look at him like he’s a fool. He’s disappointed. It was his chance to be famous or martyred.

POPE THOMAS
Oh, you are playing a game. I see.

The Pope welcomes Prisoners #1 and #2 to their table.

The Pope goes back to writing.

PRISONER #1
You all frightened me. We thought you were incompetents.

PRISONER #3
Well, you almost got yourself killed.

PRISONER #1
So, many knives and in a prison too. I’m Blaike.

PRISONER #2
And I’m Quon.

A vetted security team is established. Naturally, they look around at each other. Trying to judge.

BLAIKE
Yes, look around. Consider yourself vetted. Only this group comes near him. Everyone else is by appointment. He eats and drinks only after we do. Or we trade plates.

QUON
Understood?

PRISONER #3
Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, the other James, Thaddaeus, Simon and Judas.

POPE THOMAS
No, there will be none of that. (beat)
You can call yourselves the Outlaws, or the Jets or the Shark for all I care but not disciples.

PRISONER #2
That WAS petty.

POPE THOMAS
It was blasphemous.

Everyone looks unworthy. But the Pope doesn’t stay angry long.

POPE THOMAS
But I don’t mind the company.
(beat)
Can any of your desperados find me a newspaper?

EXT. SIDEWALK - ROME TV STUDIO - DAY

Chaos. Protestors on both sides. “FREE THE POPE” and “WE LOVE THOMAS” signs to the right. White T-shirts and flags. Wholesome people.

On the left, “ATHEISTS FOR PEACE” and “SOCIALIST REJECT RELIGION” and “RELIGION OUT OF POLITICS.” Red T-shirts and flags. Potentially violent thugs.

Security for Barberini isn’t adequate. There are only two security officials and one remains at the car. But hundreds of reporters and protestors have broken the police lines.

Barberini walks a gauntlet of photographers and journalists. He’s jostled along the way. It’s a media frenzy.

BARBERINI
(taunts the atheist left)
Atheists for Peace? There aren’t any Italians who are atheists! Who are you?

LENIN
We are strong and we are mighty!
Workers of the world unite!

A female reporter muscles her way next to Barberini.
JOURNALIST
Inside, you said you have a full plate... like... can you give us an example.

BARBERINI
Well, the impracticability of the choice.

JOURNALIST
Impractical?

BARBERINI
Well, it’s spiritual of course. But for a man like me who likes to organize things. It’s difficult.

JOURNALIST
How?

BARBERINI
The Chinese are very obstinate. His visits have been suspended. And his letters are prohibited. And at least one has been a forgery.

JOURNALIST
And the tape was edited.

BARBERINI
Well, we did that.

JOURNALIST
Why?

BARBERINI
For operational security.

JOURNALIST
Operational security?

BARBERINI
Yes, you like that? I heard it once on television from an American soldier. I’m just a priest. I’m not a professional politician or soldier. But, look what God is suddenly asking me to do.
JOURNALIST
The people love you.

A glass bottle is thrown from the socialist left and hits a male journalist in the head. He’s not injured seriously.

BARBERINI
Some of the people love me.

JOURNALIST
You’re doing okay.

BARBERINI
Well, thank you. Sometimes, unfortunately, I have to borrow words from soldiers.

JOURNALIST
What do you most fear?

BARBERINI
Chinese Communists they want to control our Pope.

JOURNALIST
What about the Italian Navy?

BARBERINI
What about it?

JOURNALIST
Ten minutes ago, the Italian government ordered the Navy to sail to the South China Sea.

BARBERINI
My Filipino friend, Cardinal Ramos, he says West Philippine Sea.

JOURNALIST
Okay. Are you in support of military action?

BARBERINI
Well, on that I WILL say, “render unto Caesar.”
JOURNALIST
About Caesar, Cardinal Barberini you are on tape, only a month ago, responding with “render unto Caesar” to questions about the flag, but now you have reversed course and are obstinate about it. You are now opposed.

BARBERINI
Well, it’s not up to me. Our new Pope is opposed and he is our spiritual leader. This Pope and the previous Pope were opposed.

JOURNALIST
The previous Pope?

BARBERINI
I don’t know if people are aware of this. His dying words were, “don’t cave to the atheists.”

JOURNALIST
Is this a spiritual issue, the flag?

BARBERINI
That is a good question. I believe the religious persecution in China is.

JOURNALIST
About the flag, if the church changes positions and the Hong Kong church flies the flag, then Pope Thomas will leave China and become the reigning Pope.

BARBERINI
Yes.

JOURNALIST
Are you leaving Pope Thomas in prison to preserve your personal power base?

BARBERINI
No. That’s silly.
JOURNALIST
If he’s released, it will diminish your power?

BARBERINI
Listen, I have a job to do. I will run the day-to-day operations of the Church until he’s released.

Barberini gets into the vehicle.

INT. STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

Pope Thomas’ followers sit with him for a meal. While the Pope says grace over the food, there is a mass exchanging of plates. One trades with the Pope but he seems too eager and then that plate is exchanged. By the time the Pope is finished with the thanksgiving, they don’t know which plate is which.

POPE TOMAS
Okay. What a wonderful meal, we have to give thanks for, huh gentlemen?

It doesn’t look that good but the Pope is clearly an optimist.

INT. UPPER ECHELON OFFICES - VATICAN - DAY

As Barberini walks to his office, it looks and sounds quiet. He’s joined by his Under-Secretary and they walk.

BARBERINI
Where is everyone?

Barberini looks into a few offices. The secretaries all look guilty.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Well, sir. Maybe we should get to your office.

BARBERINI
Just tell me where everyone is, please.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Halfway to Hong Kong by now, sir.

BARBERINI
What?
UNDER-SECRETARY
A large number of Vatican officials (mostly Africans, Latinos, and Anglos) have...

BARBERINI
The Pope has been released? And they went to greet him? I didn’t expect...

UNDER-SECRETARY
No, sir. They are going to be near the new Pope... they said.

BARBERINI
They defected?

UNDER-SECRETARY
They’ve gone to Hong Kong and set up a new church office.

Barberini is fuming mad.

BARBERINI
What are they calling this office? The Office of the Incarcerated Pope?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Paul was in prison also, sir.

Barberini gives the Under-Secretary a scowl.

BARBERINI
They are calling it the Eastern Vatican.

Barberini suddenly explodes with worry.

BARBERINI
The money!

UNDER-SECRETARY
Relax, it's still here.
(beat)
The accountants are gone, but the accounts are all secure.
BARBERINI
Oh, thank God.
(beat)
Can I ask you something?
(beat)
Why didn’t you go as well?

The Under-Secretary reluctantly shows him an airplane ticket.

BARBERINI
What is that?

UNDER-SECRETARY
A ticket for tonight.

BARBERINI
No, I forbid it. I need you here. We have all these positions to fill.
(beat)
Help me begin. Who is left?

The Under-Secretary has a puzzled look on his face.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Italians.

BARBERINI
That’s good.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Europeans.

BARBERINI
That’s good and bad.
(beat)
And?

UNDER-SECRETARY
Well...

BARBERINI
My God. They’ve set us back to the middle ages. One minor little Chinese Pope and we must rebuild from 1492!

UNDER-SECRETARY
I’m afraid that’s almost true.
INT. LUIGI’S DINER - NEAR VATICAN - NIGHT

Two waitresses are standing around at lunch. Only half the tables are being used. Two waitresses look across the street to the Vatican.

WAITRESS #1
The Vatican isn’t empty but it isn’t the bustling place it used to be.

WAITRESS #2
Do you think we’ll close?

WAITRESS #1
No. I don’t think so. Italians will still have to eat.

However, Waitress #1 looks a bit worried.

EXT. YARD - STANLEY PRISON - DAY

POPE THOMAS
What do we do about the eucharist?

ANDREW
What?

POPE THOMAS
You know; the Lord’s Supper.

JUDAS
Wine and bread?

MATTHEW
It’s prohibited.

The Pope looks like it might be manageable if they look into it.

EXT. OFFICE - CATHEDRAL - DAY

Two dozen Vatican officials are trying to fit into a tiny office area. There is some jostling and arguing.
INT. RECREATION ROOM – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

The prisoners make contraband wine. They have pilfered grape juice from the kitchen, sugar and yeast. They have rigged a basketball to serve as a container. They rigged an air pump to inject the concoction. It is hidden in plain sight.

BLAIKE
Only enough for communion. And no extra. No risky behavior.

SIMON
Don’t worry, we only have one basketball.

BLAIKE
Well, that volleyball had better have air in it the next time I come in here.

EXT. CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION – DAY

There are huge crowds of Chinese nationals. Many look like tourists, however. Gawking and pointing at the art, statuary, and architecture.

OFFICE MANAGER
The building has been here since 1883 and just now they notice it?

SISTER MARIA
Well, let them. Some, many are being baptized.

OFFICE MANAGER
But it seems all so commercial.

SISTER MARIA
There is a saying I learned while working in Rome. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.

The office manager contemplates that.

A Chinese tourist asks Sister Maria to take a photo of him and his family in front of the church. She kindly obliges.
The building is surrounded by Philippine Marines. Order is maintained but it is tenuous. There are just as many inside the lines as being held back outside.

Cardinal Ramos arrives and is greeted by the Cathedral’s office manager.

OFFICE MANAGER
We have a problem.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Who is in-charge here?

OFFICE MANAGER
You are. (beat)
You are the only Asian cardinal here. (beat)
Because of the controversy, perhaps because of the Holy Spirit.

She gestures to the chaos.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I can see.

Also, down the street four blocks Chinese police are trying to brake up a protest. Riots now.

CARDINAL RAMOS
What’s that smell?

OFFICE MANAGER
Tear gas. And the new Pope has called for protests.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I don’t think that’s true. We can’t even speak with him and haven’t received any word.

OFFICE MANAGER
Well, he has come to represent change.

CARDINAL RAMOS
We are only interested in peaceful protests.
OFFICE MANAGER
Well, that’s impossible there.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Why?

OFFICE MANAGER
Each peaceful protest is met with government violence.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Okay, we can’t control that.

OFFICE MANAGER
Yes, that problem is blocks away. The issue is here.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Can we call other priests from other cities?

OFFICE MANAGER
I did that.

(beat)
They can’t leave their parish because of the new interest in Catholicism. It’s not just Hong Kong, every Chinese city.

CARDINAL RAMOS
How are we managing things here.

OFFICE MANAGER
Here, there are only two priest. One is sleeping and one is ministering. It’s been that way for two days, since the announcement was made.

CARDINAL RAMOS
But baptisms are progressing?

There is a long line stretching from inside the cathedral outside.

OFFICE MANAGER
That is the line for baptism.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Well, I don’t understand how do you get inside to be baptized.

OFFICE MANAGER
They are teaching each other the Lord’s Prayer like it is a password.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Password?

OFFICE MANAGER
The marines? If the Chinese can say the Lord’s Prayer they are allowed in.

CARDINAL RAMOS
No, no that is wrong. We are open to baptize and educate everyone.

OFFICE MANAGER
But the order must be maintained. This is China, not Wyoming where you can let people be free because there aren’t any people. This is China!

CARDINAL RAMOS
I understand that.
(beat)
And these people speak English?

OFFICE MANAGER
Some.

Cardinal Ramos phones the offices.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I need you down here please. In fact, bring everyone.
(beat)
The Pope will have to wait.
(beat)
He will be okay. Trust me; he’s in a Chinese prison. There are probably more Christians inside than there are out here.
(beat)
They will take good care of him, I feel.

(beat)
We can’t even talk to him and we have an emergency down here. Please.
(beat)
Bishops and priests too; yes. Everyone.

The offices are emptied of everyone. Slowly they are making their way to the cathedral.

CARDINAL RAMOS
First, I need baptismal fonts.

OFFICE MANAGER
There is only one inside, but in anticipation…

She gestures to the side of the cathedral, where a dozen carpenters are producing fonts. And miraculously a restaurant supply truck arrives and delivers a dozen mixing bowl that can be used at containment vessels. The carpenters are measuring the bowls.

CARDINAL RAMOS
How many people live in China?

OFFICE MANAGER
About 1.4 billion.

Cardinal Ramos looks worried and then suddenly hopeful.

OFFICE MANAGER
It’s manageable… If, we use nuns.

INT. KITCHEN – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

The prisoners who work in the kitchen make unleavened bread right under the noses of the guards. The bread that simply doesn’t rise isn’t served at meals. It’s smuggled out of the kitchen.

INT. CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION – DAY

Ramos walks into the cathedral and the coin box is overflowing. Coins and currency are flowing out and onto the floor.
A CARDINAL TREASURER arrives at the box. He looks concerned about the money on the floor.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Oh, wonderful, the cardinal treasurer has arrived.
(to the marines)
You follow his orders about the money.

Marines gather and take the money into the offices.

The cardinals and the Eastern Vatican staff have arrived in the sanctuary and they are setting up new lines for baptism. Typically, a full cardinal is baptizing and a nun is taking down records. The priests are working the lines giving basic instructions. There are some language problem but it does seem to be working.

The Cardinal Treasurer instructs the carpenters to build a larger coin box. We see him giving hand gestures to the approximate size. They smile and move away to being work.

Cardinal Ramos brings chilled bottled water to hydrate each worker as they feverishly baptize.

Fathers Kirchchof, O’Rorke, Swales and Anansi relieve the older and exhausted Chinese Bishops and priests.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OFFICE – CATHEDRAL – NIGHT

Every phone in the office is ringing. No one is there to answer. Everyone is still downstairs baptizing the long lines.

INT. VATICAN – DAY

One phone is ringing and it is quickly answered.

The Vatican seems as empty as ever. Business is being conducted but the real action is in Hong Kong.

THIRD MONTAGUE

Three times. In Italian. Barberini closes a file and says to an Italian... subtitles.
BARBERINI
You’re hired. You can begin immediately. Your office is a few doors down.

END THIRD MONTAGUE

INT. THE POPE’S CELL – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

Pope Thomas gives Mass to the political prisoners. It is slow, too rapidly will attract the attention of the guards. There is a line but its informal and hardly noticeable.

INT/EXT. HONG KONG – DAY


There are confirmation classes meeting in every room of the church. Confirmation classes are meeting in the park. A confirmation class is being held at the McDonald’s.

INT. CHINESE PRESIDENT HAN’S OFFICE – DAY

Han meets with a political AIDE.

AIDE
Sir, the entire arrest of Zen has been counterproductive.
(beat)
In Hong Kong, there is chaos in the streets again. It was relatively quiet.

PRESIDENT HAN
Send more police.

AIDE
And sir. I must report plotting and backstabbing.
(beat)
Not only in Rome, but in Beijing also. Against you.

PRESIDENT HAN
You want me to release Zen?
AIDE
Perhap, you should consider it.
(beat)
Maybe he would be less harmful to us in Rome?

PRESIDENT HAN
Where he can make speech against use every day. Publish books. Use the internet.

AIDE
Will you consider it?

PRESIDENT HAN
Over my dead body!

AIDE
Don’t even joke about that, sir.

PRESIDENT HAN
To concede and giving in goes against everything I believe in.
(beat)
What would Lenin or Mao or Stalin do?

AIDE
They would have bulldozed the church long ago.

AIDE
I can’t now. They’ve declared it an embassy. And you talk about counterproductive.

INT. ROME RADIO STATION - DAY

Television news talk show.

RADIO HOST
Cardinal, many Catholics are worried. There is a dual administration. Each traditional position in the church is filled now filled by two individuals, one in Hong Kong and the other here in Rome. What are you doing to avoid a schism in the church?
INT. TRADITIONAL FILIPINO HOME - DAY

Traditional Filipinos gather around a radio.

BARBERINI (V.O.)
Things are stressful. But these are exciting times; I’m sure you’ve seen the lines of people being baptized and hundreds of millions are now being confirmed as Catholics. And not just in China, all over Asia.

HOST (V.O.)
But there are those that are concerned there will be an East and West split in the church.

INT. ROME RADIO STATION - DAY

BARBERINI
No, that’s impossible. My new best friend, Cardinal Ramos, is in Hong Kong. He’s personally taking care of the Pope and trying to facilitate his release. And I’m here taking care of the church.
(testy)
Will you let me do that?

INT. STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

Pope Thomas’ followers present him with a newspaper that headlines his appointment as Pope. He is delighted.

The Pope’s ad hoc security team eyeballs the crazy psychopath who keeps lurking about.

The Muslims are always watching. They are less obvious, but clearly a threat.

INT. PHILIPPINE TELEVISION STATION - DAY

NEWS READER
Good evening. The world-wide media fire-storm and controversy continues today as Vatican Secretary of State
Vincent Barberini not only denied a possible split in the church, but also announced he was opposed to U.S. intervention in the controversy. Your view?

ANALYST
Well, this falls outside of Vatican politics; American politics is a creature of its own. But it appears that Barberini opposes any and all U.S. intervention.

NEWS READER
What exactly did he say?

ANALYST
Barberini said it’s hardly an issue of territorial integrity or national security issue that is required by the NATO Treaty.

NEWS READER
I’m not sure the American president particularly cares what the treaty says. After all its’ just a piece of paper and he has an election coming up.

ANALYST
Yes, the cardinal said, “the American president wants a fight with China for his own political reasons.”

NEWS READER
And those reasons would be?

ANALYST
A White House aide, privately, said they are calculating about a million votes for every missile that flies.

NEWS READER
But would an American attack help or hurt the Pope’s chances of release? AND shouldn’t Cardinal Barberini welcome the American support.
ANALYST
Not if he thinks the Americans only weaken his negotiating position.

NEWS READER
How does Cardinal Ramos in Hong Kong enter into things?

ANALYST
Well, he meets with the press everyday, while Barberini does not. However, Cardinal Ramos is very polite, even soft, he’s a very patient man.

NEWS READER
But Barberini is more vitriolic.

ANALYST
Cardinal Ramos has to live next door to the Chinese. And it’s the Asian way to be patient and wait.

NEWS READER
Something Cardinal Barberini not yet mastered.

ANALYST
But aren’t they a team!

NEWS READER
Yes, they are. Thank you for your insight and analysis.

INT. OFFICES – CATHEDRAL – DAY

The Eastern Vatican, all the marines, Bishops and priests and the nuns all overcrowded in the rectory and cathedral offices.

EXT. STREETS – HK CATHEDRAL – DAY

The Hong Kong police are fighting their way toward the cathedral/embassy.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Please, in the interest of everyone, I’m going to ask that everyone put aside your lethal weapons.
The marines do store their rifles inside the rectory. But they stand with riot gear ready to do battle with the police if they try to enter the church.

Crowds outside the cathedral disappear, many elderly run inside the church; only the young, who are ready to fight, remain.

Ramos speaks to the young people.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Please don’t throw things. Be Christ-like, if possible. Jesus never threw a firebomb.

RADICAL YOUTH
(shouting from the back)
Jesus was not subject to Chinese oppression.

CARDINAL RAMOS
(shouting toward the back)
No. He was subjected to Roman oppression.

That calms the youth and they discuss among themselves.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Don’t they teach them anything in schools anymore?

OFFICE MANAGER
It is illegal for a teacher to mention a number of things. Even a history teacher.

Ramos blesses the soldiers, before the confrontation.

OFFICE MANAGER
These aren’t Hong Kong police.

There is about to be a clash between the Philippine Marines and People's Armed Police Force (PAP) sent from Beijing.

Ramos goes out to speak with the PAP MAJOR, but the soldier walks past the Cardinal and ignores his pleas.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Please, let’s talk about this.

PAP MAJOR
This is bull. Get those soldiers back.

A marine makes prompt use of his bean bag gun and it is fired at the Major. Unfortunately, it hits the PAP Major in the testicles.

All chaos breaks loose. Ramos helps the injured Major to an ambulance. Firebombs fly, tear gas canisters fly. Bricks.

A brick is thrown at the PAP. The PAP SOLDIER picks it up and throws it back. It’s heading directly for one of the cathedral’s stained glass windows, but a HONG KONG YOUTH (clearly a futball goalie) makes a diving save and knocks down the brick. The window is saved.

The EMT has noticed Ramos assisting the injured Major.

EMT
Are you going?

Ramos climbs into the ambulance.

The EMTs give the PAP Major an ice pack for his injury. The Major is in a great deal of pain.

PAP MAJOR
What are you trying to do? You can’t have your soldiers out on the sidewalk.

CARDINAL RAMOS
You won’t close the cathedral down?

PAP MAJOR
No, it’s an embassy. My orders are to push the soldiers inside.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Uh oh. Why didn’t you come to me and we could have talked?

PAP MAJOR
Don’t you know how this works? What embassy have you ever seen that makes a
show out of their guards like it’s a military occupation?

CARDINAL RAMOS
I’m sorry, I’m a theologian, this is all sort of new to me.

PAP MAJOR
Well, can you pull them off the streets?

CARDINAL RAMOS
So, the media will stop photographing them?

PAP MAJOR
That’s the idea.

CARDINAL RAMOS
How about if we make a deal?

PAP MAJOR
Okay. I’m listening.

CARDINAL RAMOS
The soldiers will stay inside, maybe at the Caritas House (soup kitchen).

PAP MAJOR
Nothing out in plain view?

CARDINAL RAMOS
And no photography inside either. Your bosses in Beijing will be okay with that?

PAP MAJOR
Deal.

CARDINAL RAMOS
So all that violence. I have to get back and stop it.

Ramos stands up, but the ambulance is moving.

The PAP leaders uses his radio.
PAP MAJOR
Pull back and maintain a substantial distance.
(beat)
Do you hear me?
(beat)
Cease hostilities. I have an agreement in place.

Ramos takes out his cell phone.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Move the marines inside, to the soup kitchen. No reporters. They are not to be photographed or to receive any exposure to the media.
(beat)
I have a deal in place.

PAP MAJOR
Now, I’m in a lot of pain but I would like to hear about your Jesus.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Well, certainly.

INT. PHILIPPINE TELEVISION STATION - DAY

Television news.

NEWS READER
In the news, a high ranking PAP officer was accidentally shot in the testicles with a non-lethal weapon and needed surgery to keep one of them.
(beat)
A warning, the following video might be disturbing to the male viewers.

The amateur phone footage is broadcast.

NEWS READER (V.O.)
The BBC in Asia today released this phone camera video showing a Filipino embassy guard shoot a PAP Major in the groin with a "less lethal" device while
defending the city’s cathedral against an unlawful intrusion.

(beat)
By the way, if you didn’t notice; that was our own Cardinal Ramos, from Manila, helping the PAP Major into the ambulance and even accompanying him to the hospital.

(beat)
The Major had to have emergency surgery or risk losing his right testicle entirely.

INT. CARITAS HOUSE - CATHEDRAL - DAY

The Eastern Vatican shows up at Caritas House (soup kitchen), with computers and office equipment.

There is more room but...

CARITAS HOUSE DIRECTOR
Yes, there is room but nothing is free, you will have to help with the day-to-day operations.

The marines, Bishops, and priests and the nuns are shown cooking, cleaning, teaching, and helping the homeless.

INT. OFFICE - CARITAS HOUSE - DAY

SISTER MARIA
The Pope is only allowed one visitor per week.

(beat)
Which we transcribe from notes brought back.

FATHER SWALES
How is he?

CARDINAL RAMOS
Well. He needs soap he said.

SISTER KATHERINE
I’ll take care of it.

She makes note of the request.
SISTER MARIA
And one letter per day.
(beat)
Which is published online, verbatim.

FATHER ANANSI
It’s not enough.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes, and that is... they, Rome is wrong.

FATHER SWALES
They want to wait it out?

FATHER O’RORKE
Soon, the Italian Navy will be here to complicate things.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Maybe we can work behind the scenes to help free the Pope.

FATHER O’RORKE
Before there’s a shooting war.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes, but I’m not going to regret this am I?

FATHER O’RORKE
Hope not.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I’ve made a new friend in the PAP, as you may have seen on TV.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Yes. That was unfortunate.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Well, for him yes. But he taught me a new phrase... plausible deniability.

The four priests chuckle. They are familiar with the concept.
SISTER MARIA
Okay. Meeting over.

The four priests leave the room. Sister Maria remains.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Go with them and keep an eye on things.

SISTER MARIA
Is there a budget? Should I see the Cardinal Treasurer?

CARDINAL RAMOS
I doubt we will free our Pope with a few coins.
(beat)
Send the bill to Rome.
(beat)
Oh, not to Barberini’s office.
(beat)
Send the bills to the Under-Secretary’s office.

SISTER MARIA
Gladly.

INT. STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

Pope Thomas’ followers present him with a new pair of prison shoes, dyed red. He is delighted.

INT. CHINA AIRLINES - DAY

First-class tickets. The priests make a trip to Beijing.

JAMES BOND MONTAGUE

INT. BAR - BEIJING - NIGHT

Father O’Rorke hosts a party in a bar for the half Politburo members. Large amounts of alcohol are consumed. O’Rorke tries to talk to them but they appear too drunk.

INT. PARKING LOT - GREAT HALL OF THE PEOPLE - DAY

The Politburo’s parking lot in Beijing is full of BMW automobiles and motorcycles, there are even three RVs and an
AirStream (polished aluminum) travel trailer behind a Chevy Suburban.

A member of the Politburo leaves a meeting and passes Father Kirchhof who is walking in. Kirchhof gestures, “what is happening?” And the Politburo member shrugs back. They have taken the bribes; still, the Pope is in prison. Kirchhof is frustrated.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – BEIJING – DAY

Swales is looking on the internet; it’s clogged with compromising photos of the Chinese Politburo with hookers. They are photos that Father Swales did not leak.

Sister Maria enters and has a puzzled look on her face.

SISTER MARIA
(teasing him)
How did you become a priest?
(beat)
No, never mind. I don’t wanna know.
(beat)
But just a simple note. If you post the pictures they’re not useful for blackmail anymore.

FATHER SWALES
I didn’t post them. The Politburo members themselves have done that. Bragerts.

SISTER MARIA
Men are such pigs.

FATHER SWALES
I have a theory. That’s how you move up in the communist party.

FATHER O’RORKE
Whoever nails the most hookers is the President?

FATHER SWALES
There’s a good argument to be made.
SISTER MARIA
I’m not going to enter into this conversation.

INT. UNDER-SECRETARY’S OFFICE – VATICAN – DAY

The ITALIAN CARDINAL TREASURER enters with a lot of papers.

CARDINAL TREASURER
Can I speak to you about all these requests you’ve put in?

UNDER-SECRETARY
From Beijing?

CARDINAL TREASURER
Well, yes.

The Under-Secretary glances at the paperwork and shuts the door to the office. Privacy.

INT. HOTEL – BEIJING – DAY

Sister Maria has a business dinner, a negotiation, with a Chinese POLITBURO MEMBER, or at least an important Chinese man in a nice suit. It seems cordial but he follows her into the bathroom. More than just creepy. The Chinese official has a security guard to watch the door. And then he attacks her. She sprays him with mace, kicks him in the balls, and then breaks a vase over his head. Once he’s on the ground, she kicks him a few times in the ribs. And then she steps on his eye-glasses on the way out.

SISTER MARIA
(to the security at the door)
Your boss, he slipped and fell.

She goes directly to the airport.

INT. STANLEY PRISON – HONG KONG – DAY

The only successful member of the Eastern Vatican is Sister Mary. She has returned to organize a female (nun) beach volleyball game outside the prison fence.
They say if you don’t learn from your mistakes, well… you’re an IDIOT. It’s a repeat of the surfer girl trick. Only this time, the girls are the “lure” and not the “dog.”

Sister Mary is the “hunting dog.” When the guards all watch the girls, Sister Mary flies a smartphone attached to a drone into the prison and it lands at Pope Thomas’ feet. The Pope doesn’t know what to do with it, but one of his followers, Peter, quickly conceals the phone. Maria flies the drone out of the area.

The only guard to notice the cell phone being delivered is the COMPASSIONATE GUARD. She is a secret believer and will not interfere. Later in the series, she will have a more significant role.

The followers inside the prison pass the phone from one to another until it reaches a secure location, the library. Top shelf behind the romance novels.

END JAMES BOND MONTAGUE

INT. MAIL ROOM – CARITA’S HOUSE – DAY

The Pope’s Caritas House staff publish his daily letters (which are sometimes confiscated by the Chinese).

SISTER MARIA
Where is today’s letter from the Pope?

SISTER KATRINA (KATHERINE?)
It wasn’t in the mail.

SISTER MARIA
What do you mean?

SISTER KATRINA
Sometimes that happens.

CUT TO: Guard in the prison throwing it in the garbage.

INT. OFFICE – CARITA’S HOUSE – DAY

The four priests, Sisters Maria and Katherine meet with Cardinal Ramos.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Okay, the phone is working. We are getting longer statements. One can even be viewed as a Homily. I’ve sent it to Rome.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
I hope they aren’t silly enough to release it.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I only sent the transcript.

FATHER O’RORKE
Yes, but they know what goes out in the mail. Once we use what comes to us over the phone...

FATHER SWALES
They’ll accuse us of making it up.

FATHER ANANSI
So, let them.
    (beat)
People have a brain.

SISTER MARIA
Some people have a brain.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Yes, I told them. Once any of this is broadcast. The Chinese will...

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
The phone, it’s supposed to be well hidden.

FATHER O’RORKE
Well, they will stop the visits and the letters whether they find it or not.
    (beat)
They might even move the Pope.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
Which would negate all our efforts to bribe the guards.
    (beat)
We’d have to start all over!

FATHER SWALES
You’ve bribed one guard. Don’t act like they are all in your pocket.

FATHER O’RORKE
(to Father Swales)
And how’s the blackmail working out? Zero.

Ramos looks concerned at the men bickering.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Actually, Sister Maria has made more progress than all of you put together. So, no one has a right to boast. Or bicker. Thank you, Sister.

They all congratulate her.

FATHER ANANSI
I say we do it. End of the match, pull the goalie. We’ll just give up the phone… in exchange for one big long speech.

FATHER O’RORKE
A speech so powerful they must release him!

FATHER SWALES
The people need to hear… see him.

FATHER KIRCHCHOF
What do we have to lose?

SISTER KATHRINE
Uh, the very Pope.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Sister Maria?
SISTER MARIA
Wouldn’t be prudent.

CARDINAL RAMOS
I’ll have to call Rome.

INT. SANCTUARY – HK CATHEDRAL – DAY

Father Anansi is giving a tour of the cathedral.

FATHER ANANSI
Late 19th-century English Gothic revival

CHINESE MAN
(to Father Anansi)
Are all Catholics in Africa black?

Father O’Rorke over-hears the conversation.

FATHER O’RORKE
What sort of question is that?

FATHER ANANSI
No, it’s okay. They don’t know. How are they supposed to know? I’ll answer it.
(smiling)
In Africa, there are Africans (blacks) and Afrikaners (whites). Many whites are Catholic. Many Blacks as well.

The Chinese man is fascinated and nods his thanks.

INT. OFFICE – CARITA’S HOUSE – DAY

They act as public relations staff and interpreters for the media.

SISTER KATHERINE
No, what the Pope is saying is this, “Be satisfied with what you have. Share the good things we have with others because God wants us to.”

CHINESE REPORTER
I don’t understand.
SISTER KATHERINE
The eighth beatitude is clear in every language. Look, here it is in Chinese, your language.

CHINESE REPORTER
It’s confusing.

SISTER KATHERINE
Really, what is so confusing?

INT. KITCHEN - CARITA’S HOUSE - DAY
And they minister and serve food to the homeless.

INT. SKYPE - HONG KONG TO ROME - DAY
Two priests have a discussion.

ROME
You have to be tough. You have to make them see they’re wrong. You have to hammer the facts into them. Never give any quarter. All of them—especially the former Catholics—are acting in bad faith anyway. They remain non-Catholics because they’re sinners, and they have to be told that.

HONG KONG
All the Pope is saying in this letter, is that you can argue to win and drive someone further from the Faith. Thus Rule No. 1: Never argue to win. Instead, argue to explain. Some Catholic’s problem isn’t that he likes to argue. Their problem is that they argue to win. It’s counterproductive.

ROME
The Pope said this?

HONG KONG
Yes. You should read the letter.
ROME
The Pope is incarcerated! And it sounds like Chinese propaganda to me.

The priest in Rome is clearly angry and pushes the “end call” button on his computer!

INT. MCDONALD’S – HONG KONG – DAY

Cardinal Ramos is quietly eating French fries. But he’s listening to some CHINESE PRIESTS at a table or two away.

One priest is easily dominant: tall, loud, finger stabbing the air, a lot of people around him.

PRIEST
Just leave me alone with any Italian Cardinal, and I’ll have him admitting in an hour that he’s a heretic.

SISTER KATHERINE
Yeah, right. Remind me not to enter a conversation with this guy.

SISTER MARIA
More zeal than prudence.

SISTER KATHERINE
Do you get the impression...

SISTER MARIA
Yes.

The Roman (old) and Chinese (new) church leaders sometimes work out their differences via Skype.

INT. ZOOM – HONG KONG TO ROME – DAY

Different priests.

EASTERN VATICAN
192,000 Bibles
(beat)
77, catechism.
WESTERN VATICAN
Shouldn’t we go electronic? Kindles and tablets.

EASTERN VATICAN
Maybe in Hong Kong, but we are converting the entire nation.

WESTERN VATICAN
Okay. You would know best.

EASTERN VATICAN
How fast?

WESTERN VATICAN
Well, as fast as I can get my hands on them.

EASTERN VATICAN
Thank you, brother.

WESTERN VATICAN
You are very welcome.

INT. STAIRWELL - VATICAN - DAY

Cardinal Barberini happens to walk by and he notices something.

LONG SHOT: dialogue nearly inaudible. TWO PRIESTS having a tug of war over a book.

PRIEST #1
Chinese trickery! It’s heresy!

PRIEST #2
It’s the Pope.

PRIEST #1
No, it’s NOT!!!

Before the Cardinal can get there to break it up; it’s not clear what happens. Either one priest releases the book or it slips out of his hands.

Like Paul and James (brother of Jesus) on the Temple steps...

One priest takes a tumble down the stairs and breaks his leg.

122
PRIEST #1
You’ve broken my leg, you heretic!

Barberini picks up the book, “The Prison Letters of Pope Thomas I.” Barberini realizes the problems that are arising. The Under-Secretary arrives and a dozen others.

Barberini looks very worried.

BARBERINI
This simply can’t continue.

UNDER-SECRETARY
Maybe a house divided speech?

BARBERINI
I’m not giving anymore speeches. That’s part of the problem. Too many speeches.

Barberini sends a WhatsApp text to Ramos: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;”

EXT. BELL TOWER - CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Cardinal Ramos climbs the stairs. Ramos is a bit surprised to find the door open and Father Anansi already there. Anansi is looking out over the city lights toward the prison.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Father Anansi. What are you doing up here?

FATHER ANANSI
Looking.

CARDINAL RAMOS
You were praying. Well, I’ll let you be.

FATHER ANANSI
I’m done.

CARDINAL RAMOS
It’s a good place. High up.

Anansi gestures to a particularly well lit area... the prison.
CARDINAL RAMOS
Oh, the Pope. Yes. The prison. I’ve noticed; it’s very well lit. Maybe their electric bill will persuade them to release him.

Ramos’ phone chimes.

CARDINAL RAMOS
That is Rome.

FATHER ANANSI
What do they want?

CARDINAL RAMOS
We’re on. The speech. The Pope will be encouraged to make his first speech to the faithful.

FATHER ANANSI
Aren’t you afraid the Chinese are reading your texts.

CARDINAL RAMOS
Let them.

He shows Anansi the text.

CARDINAL RAMOS
“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain.”

FATHER ANANSI
The sermon on the mount. You have a code. Genius.

CARDINAL RAMOS
No. Just prudent.

FATHER ANANSI
What if Rome didn’t agree?

CARDINAL RAMOS
“Be sober-minded; be watchful.”
FATHER ANANSI
1 Peter 5:8

EXT. YARD - STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

Pope Thomas writes feverishly.

The followers debate over the first speech.

BLAIKE
What about the B kitchen?

JAMES
That’s the worst one.
(beat)
They’ve been stealing rice and the guards... they are always in there. Watching.

BLAIKE
Too bad. Seems like good light with the windows.

ANDREW
What about the toilet?

BLAIKE
It’s the Pope’s first speech.

PETER
So?

BLAIKE
It can’t be taped in the lavatory.

ANDREW
What about the warden’s lavatory?

Judas has watch. He is supposed to be looking out but he’s distracted.

BLAIKE
Are you watching?

Judas snaps out of it and looks outward again.
QUON
His attention span...

BLAIKE
I know. Now what about...

ANDREW
(child-like)
The warden’s bathroom. We sneak in and make the movie and get out.

Blaike disagrees.

ANDREW
Well, you said the most secure location.

PHILIP
In a prison, that IS the most secure location. Keep thinking Andrew, you’re doing good.

BARTHOLOMEW
The closet, the one with the supplies.

QUON
It’s always locked.

BARTHOLOMEW
I have a key?

BLAIKE
A key?

MATTHEW
What are you in here for?

SIMON
Hey, you’re not a political prisoner. We’re all political prisoners.

THADDAEUS
Theft? He’s a thief probably.

POPE THOMAS
It doesn’t matter what he’s in here for.
They are all a bit shocked the Pope has been listening.

BLAIKE
You can get us in?

BARTHOLOMEW
We’ll lock them in there and there won’t be any interruption.

BLAIKE
I like that.

QUON
With rolls of toilet paper in the background?

BARTHOLOMEW
No. No. We turn him and we put the cleaning chemicals behind him.

POPE THOMAS
Okay, I’m done. I believe. Given any last-minute changes... world events, etc.
(beat)
I feel maybe I should try it out on you?
(beat)
Would you like to hear it?

BLAIKE
Of course.

The men sit at the table and the Pope stands at one end. Peter, the youngest of the men, stands at the opposite end of the table.

It doesn’t look out of place. It looks like what the Muslims are doing, listening to their religious leader at their table.

Peter is fiddling with something in his pocket.

The guards, the Muslims, and the career criminals are all watching but think little of it.
POPE THOMAS  
Our Venerable Brothers, beloved children of Holy Church, and all men of goodwill who listen to a humble prisoner!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. YARD - STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

The speech is over but the men are frozen, trying to grasp it all. It’s been a deep and moving speech. There are tears in most of the men’s eyes.

JOHN  
Wow. That was really excellent.

POPE THOMAS  
Thank God. Did you like it?

ANDREW  
You’re gonna be famous.

The men chuckle at Andrew’s naivete.

PHILIP  
(whispers to Andrew)  
He’s already famous.

The Pope is relieved and joyful. He looks up to the sky.

PHILIP  
You didn’t use your notes at all.

POPE THOMAS  
Well, I just wrote it. I didn’t have time to forget. Tomorrow, I’m sure I’ll need the pages to remember.

PETER  
Hey, you guys wanna watch it?

They all turn to look at Peter. Incredulity.

BLAIKE  
You just recorded it?
Peter has the phone in his hand.

PETER
Well, I thought practice you know. Lighting and sound. You know, play with the phone.

Long beat.

QUON
Why do you have it out of the library?

PETER
You told me my job is to keep it charged.

Long beat.

PETER
But it’s all good. Eighty-eight percent still. Plenty enough for tomorrow.

Everyone chuckles.

BLAIKE
And you just recorded that speech? Beginning to end?

Peter shows them how the phone fits in his shit pocket with the camera part just sticking out.

PETER
I put it here and pushed record. Yep got it.

Peter pushes play.

PETER
It’s a little shaky.

QUON
I think it looks okay.

BLAIKE
It looks perfect. Seems to me.
PETER
Tomorrow I’ll do better.

Laughter. They all are overjoyed and pat Peter on the back. He doesn’t know why.

The Pope hugs him.

POPE THOMAS
Blessed are the children.

PETER
Me? What’d I do?

POPE THOMAS
Can you please send it to this email please?

The Pope has a slip of paper.

PETER
Okay, or you want me to just post it.

BLAIKE
You can do that?

PETER
Sure. Ten minutes tops.

BLAIKE
When you are done, hide that phone where NO ONE will find it.

The guards finally realize something has happened out in the yard. They aren’t aware it’s out on the internet yet. But Peter is walking around in the yard with the phone; it’s relatively obvious.

It has two more minutes to upload. The guards will be there in one minute.

The Muslims, miraculously rush across the yard to fight the guards. Then the criminal class attack the guards. It’s mayhem.

The followers move The Pope out of the yard toward safety, the cafeteria.
ALI, the Muslim cleric approaches Peter. Peter is a kid and trembles. Ali has this giant beard and he look like he might probably have three knives on him and maybe an AK back home.

ALI
The phone, please?

Peter looks him in the eye. Peter might choose to fight (possibly die) rather than give the phone to anyone.

ALI
They will never expect me of holding it. Come on, please.
(long beat)
I will give it back to you tomorrow at breakfast. I need to call my mother in Pakistan, please.
(long beat)
We both worship the God of Abraham.
(long beat)
We share the same enemies.
(long beat)
The Pope and I are old friends.

Pope Thomas is being lead off but nods to Peter, that it’s okay.

Peter gives the phone over with one minute remaining for the upload. The Muslim leader slips it under his prison uniform and walks away.

The Pope reaches the cafeteria. Other Christians block the cafeteria door. It is a loud raucous Chinese prison riot. MUSIC: “Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting,” by Carl Douglas.

The guards arrive but the cleric has escaped. Peter is thrown to the ground and handcuffed. Searched and dragged away.

INT. OFFICE – HK CATHEDRAL – DAY

CARDINAL RAMOS
There is a great deal of maneuvering.

The Chinese government are getting grief over it and they may crack.

Cardinal Ramos gets a text. He looks at Father Anansi and shows him the phone.
FATHER ANANSI
Barberini has changed his mind.

FATHER O’RORKE
He’s now against it?

SISER KATHRINE
Now is this the Vatican or Barberini.

FATHER SWALES
What’s the difference these days?

SISER KATHERINE
And why? Does he say why?

Sister Maria gets a notification on her phone.

SISTER MARIA
Well, he’s too late. You are not going to believe this
www.youtube.com/popethomas-offical
(beat)
He’s done it.
(beat)
It’s out there.

Maria and Ramos pray.

EVERYONE pulls out their smartphones that streams the speech. No one has earbuds, so they scatter to all the private corners so they can hear.

INT. CAFETERIA – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

Ali, the Muslim cleric approaches the table carefully.

ALI
May I approach. I mean no harm.

POPE THOMAS

ALI
Fancy meeting you’re here. I heard about your promotion.
POPE THOMAS
Big promotion.

The pope chuckles and gestures to the prison and then to the food.

ALI
It certainly is a small world.

POPE THOMAS
Yes it is.
(beat)
So what brings you to our part of the world.

ALI
Oh, I have small gift. A copy of the Koran for my friend.
(beat)
This one is a true friend of Jesus. I thought he was going to kill me yesterday out in the yard.

POPE THOMAS
Well, I’m glad he didn’t.

ALI
But the look in his eyes...

The Muslim cleric hands the Koran to Peter. And begins to leave.

Peter has a bruised face and is too happy.

POPE THOMAS
Thank you, Ali. Go with God.

ALI
Alhamdulillah.

Ali leaves.

PETER
What do I want with a Koran?

POPE THOMAS
Open it.
Inside is a hollowed-out place with the Pope’s phone inside.

PETER
But they aren’t supposed to deface in any way the Koran. You go to Hell for that.

POPE THOMAS
Read it carefully.

PETER
Lonesome Dove?
(beat)
Oh. It’s just the cover. Hehehe.

POPE THOMAS
The library was searched this morning, before breakfast.

PETER
I think I’ll return this book.

INT. STANLEY PRISON – HONG KONG – DAY

Every inch of the prison is taken apart looking for the phone.

INT. THE POPE’S CELL – HONG KONG – DAY

When the guards come to the Pope’s cell, the Pope’s CELLMATE (6’5” and 250 lbs) and most brutish, tattooed criminal in the prison wants to fight. It’s clear to us but perhaps the Pope has missed the body language.

The Pope is sitting on his bed when the SMALL GUARD gestures for them to step outside,

SMALL GUARD
Okay, outside, guys. We’re going to search.

The Pope complies. The Pope steps outside but the cellmate refuses. When the Pope enters again, the cellmate and an equally LARGE GUARD are trying to break each other’s necks. The smaller guard is shouting into the radio and hitting the Pope’s cellmate with his baton. No effect.

Pope Thomas stands on a chair and gets right up in their faces.
POPE THOMAS
Gentlemen, please. This is got going to be fruitful. We can work it out if you will just stop.

They don’t stop.

POPE THOMAS
Lord, please give these two men the courage and grace they need to stand together as men and not hated enemies. And God, we pray in faith that you change these harmful attitudes and behaviors, inspire these two men to take a stand in ending prison violence. And please ultimately change their hearts and minds.

Slowly the two men release each other. The cellmate walks out into the hall with the Pope.

DISSOLVE TO:

As the guards exit the cell...

POPE THOMAS
No visitation?

The small guard chuckles and the large guard growls at the cellmate. They might fight again.

POPE THOMAS
No mail?

The entire cell has been thrown on the floor, books, mattresses, papers, pencils, clothes.

INT. YARD - STANLEY PRISON - HONG KONG - DAY

The Pope attempts to win the hearts of hardcore criminals. It is precarious, but then tries. The Pope walks away without his followers but it’s peaceful. The Pope is simply visiting and he’s talking to some very hardened criminals. But nothing happens.
However, the crazy deranged psychopath is stalking the Pope. But the Pope is speaking with some of the un-catholic professional criminals about weight-lifting. The psychopath doesn’t act.

The Pope returns to their table and he’s handed a newspaper. But he doesn’t have his reading glasses. The attention of the followers all drift away. Except for Andrew, who’s been a bit of a dolt.

The demonic psychopath follows the Pope inside. The Pope reaches his cell and grabs his glasses. The psychopath is there with his prison shank. He’s about to kill the Pope.

INT. THE POPE’S CELL – HONG KONG – DAY

TARANTINO-LIKE FIGHT SCENE

But Andrew (a large man) arrives. Andrew headbutts the psychopath, but the psychopath stabs Andrew in the stomach.

Andrew headbutts the psychopath again, but the psychopath stabs Andrew in the stomach again.

They trade twenty blows like this, until the psychopath falls to the floor dead.

The followers of the Pope arrive; there is so much blood on the floor Peter and Judas slip and fall. Laying on the floor in the blood, Peter looks over at the skull of the psychopath

PETER
His head. His skull is caved in.

JUDAS
And it’s true. Will you look at that?

JAMES
It’s that psychopath; his forehead is missing.

BARTHOLOMEW
He looks like a bloody anencephalic.

The assassination attempt fails. But the Pope is traumatized.

Andrew has lost so much blood he’s in shock. But he’s still standing.
BLAIKE
Okay, big guy. Let’s get you to the infirmary.

Andrew takes small steps, but he’s seriously injured. In the hall, half-way to the infirmary he collapses. The guards arrive.

GUARD
(into the radio)
We have a prisoner down. He’s not breathing and I don’t know what to do.

INT. INFERMORY/MORGUE – STANLEY PRISON – DAY

Andrew is laid out on a table, pale and lifeless. Pope Thomas arrives in a very fractured state. His walk is the shuffling of an old man.

POPE THOMAS
Doctor, can a dying person hear what’s being said?

DOCTOR
They might look unresponsive, but there is growing evidence that even in this unconscious state, people are aware of what’s being said, but they might think it’s a dream.

(beat)
But, I think he’s...

The Pope stops, zombie-like.

DOCTOR
No. You do what you were gonna do. I’ll wait.

The Pope administers the Last Rites. Its not done on those already dead. Something isn’t right. The Pope has aged 20 years in the last 30 minutes. He works diligently but he has NO expression at all on his face.

NEWS READER (V.O.)
After yesterday’s historic first glimpse of Pope Thomas I, tonight,
there is a serious concern for the safety of the new Pope.

(beat)
The Chinese Department of Criminal Justice today announced that one prisoner has been killed in rioting and that Catholic services have been granted. The prison is currently on security lockdown with no messages in or out.

BEGIN CREDITS

INTERRUPT CREDITS

INT. HARBOR – HONG KONG – DAY

The Italian Navy arrives in Hong Kong’s outer harbor. They simply anchor the ships and wait. The COMMANDERS use their optronic telescopes to study the city.

END CREDITS

FADE OUT