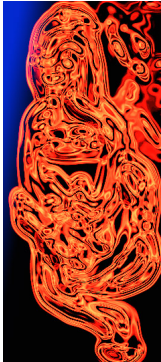


### Jaroslav Bednarik

***“Humans produce children  
so that death would not die out.”***

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Wooden houses of a small village in the middle of Europe, which are weighed down by a vexing blanket of snow each winter, would rather say the heck with it all and leave for warm countries, somewhere on a sea coast, but they cannot since their foundations are firmly bound by rocky soil where they are built. The soil does not yield its inhabitants sufficient subsistence, and so about three hundred residents have to do shopping at a store that is the only one in the village and open just from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. On top of it, it is only open when the female shop assistants are not drunk. From 4:00 pm on, only a tavern, a former manor house, is open. In the narrow tap room, however, where about twenty locals squeeze in during evenings, only two or three kinds of canned food and some dried up biscuits can be bought besides beer and hard booze. In other words, the life is hard here, but people are not complaining. They got used to their lot, only if there were not those little houses that constantly keep on creaking together about the sea.

During the last two centuries, religion has crystallized into the Catholic one. Particularly in the past five years, the God fearing residents have been happy with a young priest, who keeps all necessary customs while being successful in refreshing the strict Catholic traditions by playing a guitar in the church and singing his own religious songs, which at first was met by a certain incomprehension of the congregation, especially those in the lines of elders. On the other hand, the rhythmic beating on the crooked wood brought a few young people into the church, who have recently grown up around here, and already are in danger that the modern times will make them forget about reverently looking at heavens and the Crucified.

Fortunately, this has not happened, and the Father has become a favorite also in other parishes and even among the high ranking clergy through his unconventionally conventional manners. His very successful idea was persuading men to cut down a few trees on the high mountain next to the village so that a

skiing

course could be made. He succeeded in slyly getting his superiors to contribute to a ski lift. When the road in the mountains is negotiable, skiers from wide around come into the village. This is the beginning of a new development for the village, and the Father hopes that the village will profit from tourism in the future. He gets a lot of useful help from a church keeper, who is of the same age and somewhat weak, but because the latter is single, he can devote himself to various activities.

Some imbibers claim that the church keeper does not do all that for free. In his youth, they say, there were indications of his homosexual tendencies, and that during the Mass he sometimes looks at the Father with affection. Maybe these are just speculations, and I think that he would never dare to have anything of this sort with the Father – he had too much of respect for the Father to tarnish their relationship with sex. To us it is unimportant, and besides, it is their thing and none of our business. If by all means we wanted to find the reasons for the church keeper's assumed personal interest, we would need to redirect our thoughts in a different direction and consider that with the influx of new faces into the village there would also arise new opportunities for him. Do you think that faggots do not ski? So what that he likes to look at the Father during the Mass. The whole village looks at him too, because the Father speaks eloquently, without interruptions and movingly, and his homilies are full of imagery.

The Father also ably uses his gift of speaking during conversations with his fellow priests. Chatting over a church wine, he has persuaded many, especially the younger ones, to come and enjoy the beauty of skiing, and, indeed, many came not feeling sorry they did, and kept coming back again. So you could see about five or ten priests frolicking on skis over the mountain slope, and you could marvel how well they were doing.

Now, during the time between Christmas and the end of the year, there came an especially important and pleasant visit to the parish. The Diocesan Bishop, neither too young nor too old, had let himself be persuaded to come and ski there. In his youth, he used to devote himself to all kinds of sports, and so it seemed convenient to him to rest a little in a beautiful environment far away from the dirty snow of a city. On the third day after his arrival, the Good Lord opened up the blanket of snow and kept on pouring it and pouring it. The snow lost its skiing quality, and

even though the Father has been singing to the Bishop until the dawn in an attempt to convince him not to go skiing, that it was dangerous, and that the Father himself would not have gone (although the Father really skis like a devil), the Bishop did not let himself be convinced and went up the mountain over thousand feet high anyway. Was it a mistake or fate? What went on up there no one knows, but what is certain is that when His Excellency was not coming down, the Father and church keeper set off to the top of the ski slope where the sight of the half-dead Bishop did not make them happy at all. The Bishop was helplessly lying under a tree, obviously knocked out. They started taking the unconscious Bishop down, but as the wind was getting stronger, they could not even hear their own words, and so we could only laugh at any assumptions that the Bishop was telling them some secrets. The church keeper was so shaken up and tense that you could not fit a hair in his asshole, and when he had to put on a fire that went out in the tile stove, his hands were shaking so much that he scattered the wood all over the rectory's yard.

One could expect that the Father and his helper would call for a doctor, but in a village cut off from the rest of the world by a two-yard drift of powder snow and blizzard it is not so simple. And like a curse the phone stopped working. Hardly anything would flabbergast the Father, and the long stay in this hole in the middle of nowhere has taught him lots of things. Like for example folk medicine and different kinds of psychic healing.

The pale church keeper brewed for himself and Bishop some invigorating tea from dried herbs. It did him well, but in the meantime he broke the only tea kettle he had, so he had to brew the tea again in a pot. Who knows why he was so shaken up?

Meanwhile, the Father tucked the Bishop under a feather quilt and manually measured his aura, id est the bio-field around the human body. The aura was so weak that the Father thought his own psychic ability to energetically strengthen weaker organisms in order to help his fellow humans has been extinguished by the shock. But that was not true. The Father's worn out bloodied brain was working at full speed.

After a while the Bishop opened his eyes, but did not say a thing. The Father remembered that he has a healing painting put away up in the attic, which were given to him as a gift one day by a classmate during his studies. He ran upstairs to get them, and then he was holding them for half an hour in front of the Bishop's expressionless and rolled up eyes. When the careless church keeper finally succeeded in brewing the tea and they poured some into the Bishop's mouth, both tired they sat down on a manually engraved wooden strongbox. The lawless wailing Melusine behind the window seemed as if laughing at their vain attempts to revive the Bishop. The wailing behind was rising, and at one instant they both realized that it was not the

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noise of a strong wind but also of a howling car hopelessly trying to get up the slope a few blockhouses away on the way to a cottage used by the county town's doctor as a vacation home.

Like a miracle, the doctor really came, an internal specialist who did not help them much. Even he could not resuscitate the Bishop. Meanwhile, it got dark and since even electricity went out, all were sitting by a petrol lamp and thinking about the meaning of life. About 11 pm the Bishop's condition got even worse, which manifested itself by hard breathing and wheezing. It was obvious that he was breathing his last. The attending doctor confirmed it too.

"There's nothing we can do for him anymore," he said slowly and prudently while he was putting his medical equipment into his briefcase, as if he had just buried a corpse.

"Do you really think there's life after death?" the church keeper mumbled in a surprisingly insidious manner. The question remained hanging in the air like an uncertain death. The eyes of the living, deepened by the plastic light of the kerosene lamp, became uncertain too. Face to face with the disintegrating components of the Bishop's bio-field it was not easy to find the right answer.

"Your Eminence, are you still here?" asked the Father to see if the Bishop would respond. The Bishop opened his eyes.

"I don't have my files backed up," he said. Who said that? He did?

The Father got lost in thought: "You see, when you speak with a human being, you never know whether you speak 'a Dios' or you say 'Adios'!"

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