

Literary Editor: Stav Sherez
Tel: 020 7448 3604
Fax: 020 7256 9728
Email: stav@catholicherald.co.uk

Francis's long journey through the wilderness

Luke Coppen hails a book that reveals the Pope's intense and lonely struggle to overcome his inflexible nature

Pope Francis: Untying the Knots
BY PAUL VALLELY
BLOOMSBURY, £12.99

One evening in 1986 someone was taking a stroll near a Bavarian airport when they saw a forlorn figure walking through a nearby cemetery. As they got closer they realised it was Fr Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the former leader of the Argentine Jesuits. The passerby asked Fr Bergoglio, who was studying for a doctorate in Germany, what he was doing among the tombstones. "I'm waving to the planes bound for Argentina," he replied. This was one of the unhappiest periods of the future Pope's life. He had just stepped down as rector of the prestigious Colegio Máximo in Buenos Aires and was searching fruitlessly for a PhD topic at a graduate school in Frankfurt. He returned to Argentina after just six months, with nothing to show for his efforts except a pile of photocopied essays.

His Jesuit superiors had no idea what to do with him. They decided, in the end, to send him to Córdoba, a city 400 miles from the Argentine capital. "The man who had been for almost 15 years the kingpin of the Jesuit province felt he had been sidelined and belittled," Paul Valley writes in this enlightening biography. "It was even suggested that the Jesuit superior general, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, had forbidden him from visiting other Jesuit communities."

When Fr Bergoglio left Córdoba a few years later he seemed a different man. What precisely happened there is one of the tightest biographical knots Valley has to untie. In last month's major interview with Jesuit journals, Pope Francis offered this brief, tantalising comment about his life in Argentina's second city: "I lived a time of great interior crisis when I was in Córdoba." Outwardly, he performed the normal priestly duties, celebrating Mass, hearing Confessions and serving as a spiritual director, but inwardly an astounding transformation was apparently taking place.



Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio prepares to celebrate Mass at Buenos Aires cathedral in February AP

Valley suggests that in Córdoba Fr Bergoglio reflected deeply on what, in some respects, was a disastrous six-year term as head of Argentina's Jesuits. He had been appointed provincial superior at 36, just three months after he took his final Jesuit vows – a decision the Pope recently described as "crazy". It was the equivalent of making a recent Sandhurst graduate head of the Armed Forces on the cusp of an all-out war.

When the Dirty War broke out Fr Bergoglio faced a series of life-and-death dilemmas that would have tested the leadership savvy of Abraham Lincoln. Valley sheds light on the most controversial case, that of Orlando Yorio and Franz Jalics. The two Jesuits were seized and tortured shortly after they fell out with Fr Bergoglio. Valley deals skillfully with the competing claims about the future Pope's actions. He acknowledges Fr Bergoglio's tactical mistakes, but sides with an Argentine liberation theologian who says: "His job was to protect the Jesuits,

and all the Jesuits made it through the period alive, which tells you he did his job."

In his recent major interview Pope Francis confirmed Valley's central thesis: that in his period of exile he felt deep remorse for his inflexible leadership style. That underlines this book's greatest strength: its acute insight into the mind of a man who, even now, remains somewhat mysterious.

Valley argues that the remorse was accompanied by an extraordinary inner change, rooted in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola. By the time Bergoglio was appointed Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998, he had conquered his nervous authoritarian tendencies and acted like the parish priest of the city's 2.8 million souls. He insisted that "the most important thing is the person in front of you" and his acts of charity became legendary. One story had him travelling 250 miles to nurse a lonely, sick priest. Another had him hanging photographs of recovered

addicts on his walls so he could pray for them more intensely.

This book was released less than six months after the Pope's election. So it's not surprising that the final section, on the prospects for the papacy, is the weakest. In explaining Francis's originality, Valley relies on a caricature of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as embittered conservatives seeking to reverse the reforms of Vatican II. But he is too sharp a reporter to allow this work to turn into an ideological essay. His ability to find a fresh angle on even the most storied events makes this the most valuable Pope Francis biography so far.

I've read many accounts of Francis's election, but Valley's is the only one to mention that, hours after he appeared on the balcony over St Peter's, Francis asked to be driven through the rainy streets of Rome. The new Pope, who at 76 now possessed a rare, hard-won self-knowledge, was beginning an unexpected new journey greater than any that had gone before.

Red and dead

The intrigues of Stalin's court were just as deadly of those of Henry VIII's, discovers **John Hinton**

One Night in Winter
BY SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE
CENTURY, £16.99

In London they danced in the fountains but in Moscow many were too shell-shocked, too exhausted and too battle-weary to manage such jinks. As the fight against Hitler's Germany ended, up to 30 million soldiers and civilians were dead, the Soviet Union had lost a third of its national wealth and cities such as Stalin-grad had been reduced to lunar landscapes.

That is not to say there was not euphoria. Searchlights illuminated a city that a few years earlier had almost fallen to the Germans. Cannon fire and fireworks exploded over the Kremlin, and relieved citizens crowded into Red Square and danced, kissed, sang and chatted excitedly as the tanks and troops went on parade. As one Soviet captain put it: "It's time to live."

But Joseph Stalin was not in celebratory mood and reportedly became annoyed when his then underling, Nikita Khrushchev, telephoned him to congratulate him on his victory. "Why are you bothering me?" he is reported to have snapped. "I am working."

Moscow in 1945 is the setting for an exciting new novel from Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of widely praised biographies *Young Stalin* and *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar*. He is also known for his historical novel about the Soviet elite, *Sashaenko*, which describes the stresses of family life during the relentless strain of the great purges.

In *One Night in Winter*, as the mercurial Stalin changes mood and he and his courtiers exultantly celebrate victory over Hitler, shots ring out. On a nearby bridge, a teenage boy and girl lie dead. Yet this is no ordinary tragedy and these are no ordinary teenagers, but the children of Russia's most important leaders who go through the Golden Gate to attend the most exclusive school in Moscow. Lovers of Alexan-



Lovers of Alexander Pushkin form a secret club

der Pushkin, some have set up the secret Fatal Romantics Club to re-enact the duel which killed their favourite poet. They call it the "Game", wearing costumes and reciting his poems in graveyards illuminated by candles. And Andrei, an outsider to the group who craves acceptance more than anything, very much wants to join the club and make friends with these children of some of the highest party leaders, however much their parents might disapprove of their belief that only love matters.

The author paints a vivid picture of young Andrei strolling through the war-battered streets of Moscow, his heart lifting as he sees rosy faces of passers-by, smiling in the sunshine at victory, pretty girls in skimpy dresses, American cars on the roads overlooked by the golden domes of the Kremlin.

But the "Game" has taken a serious turn. Duelling pistols are involved. But are they loaded, and by whom? The questions quickly begin to mount. Is it murder? A suicide pact? Or a conspiracy against the state?

Directed by Stalin himself, an investigation begins as children are arrested and forced to testify against their friends and parents. This terrifying witch-hunt soon unveils illicit love affairs and family secrets in a hidden world where the smallest mistakes will be punished with death.

The book roams through the last days of the Soviet march on Berlin, nightmarish drinking games at Stalin's country home, the magnificence of the Bolshoi Theatre, interrogations, communal apartments, snow, love-making and exile. It is an eminently readable, strangely affecting, and written with the brio of a storyteller who knows the scenes and the period like the back of his hand.

A number of historians have compared the distrust and fear in the Soviet inner circle to the paranoia and suspicion of England's Tudor court. Thanks to Sebag Montefiore, we can wonder if there were equivalent levels of lust, adultery and romance too, perhaps especially among the privileged young people who made up the new post-war Soviet elite.

THE CONVERSION OF MARIE-ALPHONSE RATISBONNE

A new translation, with Notes, Introduction and Appendices, of the 1842 second edition, by Norman Russell.



"She spoke not a word to me, but I understood all."

Read the absorbing account of the instantaneous conversion to the Catholic Faith of a young man-about-town after he saw a vision of Our Lady in the Church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte in Rome. With many notes, introduction and appendices, this is the first critical edition in English of this 1842 Catholic classic.

Published by Grosvenor House Publishing, and obtainable from Amazon.co.uk.

Hardback, 153 pages, illustrated. Amazon's price: £9.99

Norman Russell, a graduate of Oxford and London Universities, is an academic writer and novelist. He is a parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, Liverpool.

Books in brief

What a Wonderful World by Marcus Chown (Faber, £17.99)

Marcus Chown is emerging as our foremost writer on matters of cosmology and popular physics. So he is perhaps the perfect person to write this book. In 400 pages he tries to explain some of the biggest questions we ask ourselves. From respiration to sex, through geology and quantum theory, Chown provides a breezy but serious look at what our world is made of.

The Last Winter of Dani Lancing by PD Viner (Ebury, £12.99)

There are so many debut crime novels coming out nowadays that it's a nice surprise to read one which stands apart from the pack. Viner tells the story of a missing girl through several viewpoints. But this isn't a book about murder; it's about what murder does to those left behind. With an assured writing style, Viner creates an unforgettable kaleidoscope of grief and pain.

WikiLeaks by David Leigh and Luke Harding (Guardian Books, £7.99)

With Julian Assange still holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy and Benedict Cumberbatch about to play the blonde bombshell in a new big-budget film, the timing is perfect for the release of this expanded edition of Leigh and Harding's book. Updated to include coverage of the Edward Snowden affair, this is a comprehensive exploration of the WikiLeaks story.

The Cry by Helen Fitzgerald (Faber, £7.99)

Helen Fitzgerald's latest novel begins with something we're all familiar with: a baby is screaming on a long-haul flight and the mother can't calm him down. What follows is a nightmarish descent into parental hell. The couple exit the plane only to find their baby has died on board. *The Cry* is written in a fast, telegraphic style that perfectly suits the rushing paranoia of the plot.

Doctor Sleep by Stephen King (Hodder, £19.99)

Stephen King has spoken about his reluctance to write this book, ostensibly a sequel to *The Shining*. But none of that is evident in the final text. This is King going back to his roots, scaring you silly and making you care about his characters. Danny Torrance, the boy from *The Shining*, is now a middle-aged man still trying to cope with his father's alcoholism and destructive legacy.

Journey Through the Old Testament by Suzanne E Lier (Verlag, £23.65)

This read-aloud book is suitable for children aged five and over. The Old Testament offers a wealth of wonderful tales. The stories talk about people who are on a quest for God with all their heart and soul. This family storybook with masterpieces of art will introduce children to the Old Testament's beauty, while reminding adults of its cultural wisdom and its profound testimonies.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

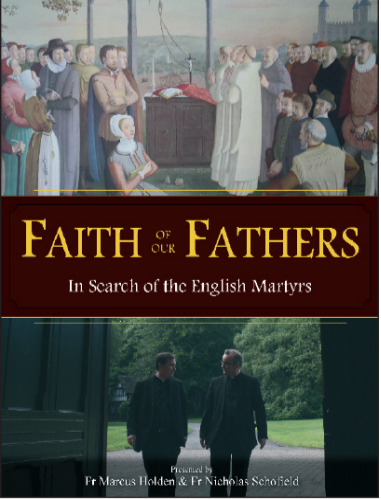
In Search of the English Martyrs

Presented by Fr Marcus Holden & Fr Nicholas Schofield



EXCITING NEW 2-PART DVD!

Including an interview with Archbishop Vincent Nichols



During the English Reformation, hundreds of brave men and women suffered all manner of persecution in order to cling to the Catholic faith that had been integral to the life of the nation for over a thousand years. Many were subject to heavy fines, exclusion, and prison sentences. For others, particularly priests, or anyone assisting a priest, a death sentence was the expected outcome. In this fascinating 2-part film, Fr Marcus Holden and Fr Nicholas Schofield lead you on a journey to discover more about some of these heroic figures, the times in which they lived and their significance for Catholics today. From the lives of well-known saints like Thomas More, Margaret Clitherow and Edmund Campion, to lesser known figures like Roger Wrenno and Francis Bell, the message of the English martyrs is re-presented for a contemporary audience. It is a message of great faith and profound courage.

Along the way, you'll discover places such as Stonor Park and Wardley Hall, Tyburn and Rievaulx Abbey. Interviews with Archbishop Vincent Nichols, Bishop Terence Brain, Lord Camoys, and many more help to re-tell the stories of these heroic figures who laid down their lives to preserve the 'Faith of Our Fathers.'

2 DVDs (114 minutes) £14.95

P&P add £1.50

ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY

Tel: 01834 812643 Online: www.saintant.com

Or by cheque/postal order to:

St Anthony Communications
Mount Carmel, St. Brides Lane, Saundersfoot
Pembrokeshire SA69 9HL

FREE CATALOGUE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST