

Pope John XXIV by John [Cogley](#), self-published through CreateSpace Publishing (South Carolina), 2012 (Paperback, also available as Kindle e-book)

The publicity material for this novel refers to the unexpected election of a panic stricken but ultimately revolutionary pope who rekindles the expectations of the Second Vatican Council, doing so at the expense of antagonising powerful interests, both inside and outside the Catholic Church. There is little doubt this novel would be much more widely spoken of had it been released by a major publishing house.

John Cogley was born in Liverpool England, and has lived in Europe, Asia, Africa and now Australia. His has been an officer in the British Army and currently works as a psychologist. He is a practising Catholic. *Pope John XXIV* is his first published novel.

Cogley has written a novel that remarkably anticipated the election of a reformist pope, published in 2012 before the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis.

Cogley has crafted a story of a bishop who is made Cardinal by a pope on his deathbed and unexpectedly elected pope soon after. Cogley's John XXIV is committed to a Christlike Church, and this story deals with the challenges that face the Church today and a pope who attempts to face those challenges. *Pope John XXIV* provides a very useful discussion of the grave issues facing the Church as the basis for the novel, an easy introduction to the theological, governance and doctrinal challenges actually facing the Church and Pope Francis.

Pope John XXIV reminded me a little of Morris West's *In the Shoes of the Fisherman* published some 50 years ago and which anticipated the hopes to be generated by Vatican II. West presented to the faithful in a fictional context the failures of the Church and the hopes for a Christlike Church. Cogley, I believe, has done the same in a modern context but reflecting the fact that too many of the failures remain the same.

Gogley tells a story as a means of identifying grave failings of the Church and means of addressing those failings. He has researched his subject very well. He uses the device of a credible story that has since been validated to some extent by the election of Pope Francis. Within that story, he has crafted situations, conversations, and commentaries by means of newspaper opinion pieces, to entertain and inform the reader relatively painlessly— a form of 'faction'.

This is a good and informative novel, particularly for those who value a knowledgeable discussion of both the difficulties and the hopes before the Church today (despite the distraction of too many errant apostrophes probably due to the editing challenges of self-publishing). I would recommend Cogley's *Pope John XXIV* for those who want a good read while developing or refreshing their understanding of the need to address urgently the dysfunctions of the Catholic Church, and also for those who are unconvinced of the need for renewal.

Peter Johnstone
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