



## Pope Francis: Untying the Knots

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From his first appearance on a Vatican balcony Pope Francis proved himself a Pope of Surprises. With a series of potent gestures, history's first Jesuit pope declared a mission to restore authenticity and integrity to a Catholic Church bedevilled by sex abuse and secrecy, intrigue and in-fighting, ambition and arrogance. He declared it should be 'a poor Church, for the poor'.

But there is a hidden past to this modest man with the winning smile. Jorge Mario Bergoglio was previously a bitterly divisive figure. His decade as leader of Argentina's Jesuits left the religious order deeply split. And his behaviour during Argentina's Dirty War, when military death squads snatched innocent people from the streets, raised serious questions – on which this book casts new light.

Yet something dramatic then happened to Jorge Mario Bergoglio. He underwent an extraordinary transformation. After a time of exile he re-emerged having turned from a conservative authoritarian into a humble friend of the poor – and became Bishop of the Slums, making enemies among Argentina's political classes in the process.

For *Pope Francis – Untying the Knots*, Paul Vallely travelled to Argentina and Rome to meet Bergoglio's intimates over the last four decades. His book charts a remarkable journey. It reveals what changed the man who was to become Pope Francis – from a reactionary into the revolutionary who is unnerving Rome's clerical careerists with the extent of his behind-the-scenes changes. In this perceptive portrait Paul Vallely offers both new evidence and penetrating insights into the kind of pope Francis could become.

## **Pope Francis: Untying the Knots Details**

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# From Reader Review Pope Francis: Untying the Knots for online ebook

## Kirsten Hawkes says

I loved this book. This biography of Pope Francis shows how the arc of a man's life can be permanently changed by the power of the gospel of Christ and sincere repentance. Vallely unsparingly examines the young Jorge Mario Bergoglio, his call to the priesthood, his early rise in the Jesuit order, his rigid and authoritarian manner, and the catastrophic mistakes he made during Argentina's Dirty War. But Vallely also traces Bergoglio's spiritual journey of prayer, self-reflection, personal change, and a profound, all-encompassing devotion to God and the poorest of his children. This book is a fascinating read for anyone, but particularly for Christians who see Pope Francis's call to serve the poor as a Christian imperative. On the downside, the writing is a bit stiff and doesn't always flow well, but the book is still a good read.

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## Edwin Cacayorin says

"The only purpose of the Church is to go out to tell the world the good news about Jesus Christ. It needs to surge forth to the peripheries, not just geographically but to the existential peripheries where the people grappled with sin, pain, injustice, ignorance and indifference to religion." Said Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina during the conclave.

After reading the book, I now see the Pope to be more human, more fragile, but more endearing.... I now hope for change.

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## Zeb says

And now I want the sequel. How has he done in the five years since ? This book was published in 2013, soon after Jorge mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis. I find it very readable, and it has an overview at the back and direct thanks to the people who helped the author. Very well researched. Not like all the crap you get when you search online for "Pope Francis", as there seems to be a big propaganda machine trying to paint him as the devil's servant. I get the opposite impression. A good man worthy of the position, and bringing back the holy spirit into the church, hopefully.

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## Mary Ellen says

This was a quick read, published within the first year of Pope Francis's election. Although it traces Francis's life from childhood through the first months of his papacy, it centers on his work as the superior of all Jesuits in Argentina during the "Dirty War" and as Archbishop of Buenos Aires several years later. He was clearly a changed man from one period to the other, and although the author has no way of knowing "what changed Bergoglio" he reflects thoughtfully on the sources available that shed light on that question. He also treats the questions surrounding his actions and inactions in the Dirty War fairly and even-handedly.

Short as the book was, it could have been shorter; some of the repetition could have been cut with no loss to the reader's understanding.

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### **David W. Sandel says**

Paul Vallely has an international reputation as a commentator on religion, society and ethical issues. As a journalist he has produced award-winning reporting from 30 countries over three decades. He continues to write and is Visiting Professor of Public Ethics and Media at the University of Chester in Great Britain. He has been an adviser to the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. He lives in Manchester, England with his wife and son.

As Pope Francis takes the world by compassionate storm and becomes Time Magazine's Man of the Year for 2013, I want to know more about him. Reading the interview he gave last summer to America magazine and other Jesuit publications, and then falling in love with him as I read *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), I am tempted to put him on some pedestal he does not seek.

This book sought to describe his life with both candor and sympathy. The world events that swirled around Jorge Bergoglio in Argentina, at a time when he was unready for the authority vested in him, seem to have the beginning of a Godly humiliation that over time have changed the man who is now Pope Francis.

Franciscan teacher Father Richard Rohr says that he has often prayed to be shown "one good humiliation a day" to slow down his ego and open his eyes to the self-inflicted sabotage of God's good work in his life. Pope Francis seems to be cut from that same cloth.

Vallely's book is a best-seller. On the cover is a quote from The Tablet: "Read this book - forget the rest." I found it fascinating.

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### **Marie says**

A small insight into the mind of the Pope. Became slightly heavy going in the middle of the book but concluded with some sense of where this Pope is heading.

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### **David Jackson says**

Excellent introduction to life of Pope Francis so far - especially good on the influences which go to shape the man and help explain him and the emphases in his present stage of the journey. An atheist friend (former Catholic) summed him up: "He may just be someone who is trying to be a Christian". Good to realise his stress on the mercy of God springs from his own experience of the need for forgiveness. That his journey from authoritarian decision-maker to collegiate dialoguer has taught him a deal of political wisdom; that affirmation of cultural realities can go hand in hand with the need to critique the structures of economic injustices. Vallely covers all this ground with a nuanced and sure touch. Let's hope a second volume can tell how Francis broke clericalism, tamed the Curia, established a one tier Church and above all placed the poor at the centre of the Church's mission. Not a hagiography in any sense. Balanced, judicious and affirming the

good and the faults of the Church. Gives reasons for hoping Francis is given time to reform the Church.

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### **Diane says**

This biography of the pope looks at his career as a priest and bishop, archbishop, and cardinal in Argentina. It is a good introduction for someone who doesn't know much about Pope Francis before he became the pope, but the author doesn't provide a lot of insight into why his views changes on various topics, which weakens the author's overall argument.

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### **Brian says**

A must-read for anyone who wishes to understand Pope Francis and what he is about.

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### **Jenny says**

This is a dense book. It can be a very upsetting read at times - I had to set it aside often when reading of the atrocities during the Dirty War. Several times the author repeats things he has said in other chapters, making me think I had picked up the book in a previous spot.

However, Vallely is balanced and thoughtful in the way he lays out the life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Argentina and the process towards his election as Bishop of Rome. I came away with an appreciation for the very human man who is our current Pope and I think a better understanding of the dynamics within the church over Vatican II.

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### **Pascale says**

The subject was fascinating, but I feel like corrections and editing were expedited to allow the book to be published as soon as possible after the election of Pope Francis. Were it not for all the mistakes, repetitions and other problems of editing, this book would get 4 stars.

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### **Marie says**

<http://mariesbookgarden.blogspot.com/...>

I recently heard journalist Paul Vallely at the Search for Meaning Book Festival in Seattle; he gave the keynote address. Pope Francis: Untying the Knots is the first in-depth book on Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Vallely wrote it after traveling to Argentina to interview those who knew him well and investigate the claims that the Pope did nothing to prevent the kidnapping and torture of two priests during the Dirty War.

I'm fascinated with Pope Francis' transformation as a young man: he began as an arrogant, dictatorial leader

who was also extremely conservative.

Vallely gives great background and insights into the politics of Argentina and the Vatican. In his younger days, he spurned liberation theology (the attempt to interpret Scripture through the plight of the poor) and did indeed prevent the eventually kidnapped priests (who were working in the ghetto) from delivering communion. His detractors say this opened the door for the military junta to kidnap the priests. Vallely discovered that Francis worked valiantly to get them freed after they were kidnapped, and it seems that Francis now has regrets about what he did or did not do. And now not only has he embraced and celebrated liberation theology, but he has also made a huge step toward transparency: he's asked the Vatican to open up its archives on the Dirty War.

The key reason that Pope Francis is the first Jesuit to become Pope is that Jesuits are called to be servants, not leaders. The founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius of Loyola, didn't even want them to be bishops. So that explains why Pope Francis is tackling the job in such an unusual, servant-like way. Being the Pope is like being royalty!

He has spurned most of the trappings of Pope royalty, as we've heard since the Council of Cardinals elected him. From paying his own hotel, thinking that his Vatican apartments were way too big, and refusing to wear the fancy robes or read shoes, to washing the feet of the poor, female, and underprivileged, he prefers to be a servant rather than a Catholic king.

Francis views God in a clearly different way than previous popes and many priests...that God is grounded in mercy:

"Mercy, this word changes everything. It is the best word we can hear: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just... The Lord never gets tired of forgiving; it is we that get tired of asking forgiveness."

Vallely explores why Bergoglio chose the papal name of Francis.

"Francis is more than a name--it's a plan," said Leonardo Boff, founding father of liberation theology. "It's a plan for a poor Church, one that is close to the people, gospel-centred, loving and protective towards nature which is being devastated today. Saint Francis is the archetype of that type of Church."

In recent days, Pope Francis continues to promote justice, make waves, and anger conservatives by declaring the gender age gap "a scandal" and preparing to release an encyclical on climate change. Although today Frank Bruni wrote about the absurdity of the Pope's statement in the New York Times that the Vatican's "own kitchen is much too messy for them to call out the ketchup smudges in anybody else's."

Bruni went on, "He left out the part about women in the Roman Catholic Church not even getting a shot at equal work. Pay isn't the primary issue when you're barred from certain positions and profoundly underrepresented in others...For all the remarkable service that the Catholic Church performs, it is one of the world's dominant and most unshakable patriarchies, with tenets that don't abet equality."

But still, it's progress given the glacial pace of the Catholic church, and it's angering conservatives who would vastly prefer the church to remain frozen to any kind of progression.

Human rights lawyer Alicia Oliveira, Pope Francis' close friend for 40 years (who died in 2014), said about the Pope:

"He tells me he's having a great time. Every time I speak to him I tell him, 'Be careful Jorge, because the Borgias are still there in the Vatican.' He laughs and says he knows. But he's very, very, very happy. He's having fun with all the people in the Vatican telling him he can't do things--and then doing them."

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## **Tim Byron says**

(Taken from my review on the Thinking Faith website)

Benedict XVI's decision to resign the papacy in February 2013 meant that the world's introduction to Pope Francis took place in rather unusual circumstances. There was none of the respectful mourning that accompanies the death of a preceding pope to temper the frenzied speculation when Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio stepped out onto the balcony. News organisations immediately began scrambling to get up to speed on the Argentinian Jesuit, and there has since been a rush by publishing houses to release books about this formerly unknown cardinal (at least outside of South American circles) who was called to Rome from 'the ends of the earth'.

Of the new literature rushed out to capitalise on the great interest and the extraordinarily long honeymoon period that Francis is experiencing, Paul Vallely's *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* is perhaps the best in the English language. The only biographical account of Bergoglio published before the election, in any language, was *El Jesuita* by Sergio Rubin. This Spanish-language biography has the advantage over Vallely's book because its source material is firsthand, acquired through conversation with the then-Cardinal Bergoglio. Vallely's sources are secondary; the book was produced after a whistle-stop tour of Argentina, and perhaps is too reliant on a limited set of interviews with Jesuits and other companions of Bergoglio. Given the pressures of time, it is only to be expected that this would be a small pool, perhaps lacking the more prudent or cautious voices. However, working under considerable constraints, Vallely has done an impressive job.

The second part of the book's title – 'Untying the Knots' – is a stroke of genius. It expresses succinctly but also with a certain profundity the challenge at hand. It refers to an image of Our Lady that Jorge Bergoglio SJ brought back to Argentina from Germany, where he had been sent for further studies after his controversial stint as Provincial of the Argentinian Jesuits. According to Vallely, Bergoglio's time in Germany was unhappy; he missed his beloved country, especially his hometown of Buenos Aires. During this period of exile, he was struck by a painting of Our Lady Untier of Knots that he stumbled upon in Bavaria. The concept of Mary untying knots is derived from St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who presents a parallel between Eve and Mary, describing how, 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.' This would have resonated with Bergoglio, reflecting on his bruising time as a young provincial in a country divided by a brutal military regime and a murderous communist insurgency. Vallely, with great insight, posits that this painting in some way represents the enigma of Bergoglio: a former provincial with a complicated legacy, but also a man spiritual and humble enough to recognise his mistakes and learn from them.

So the book is divided into two main 'acts' of Bergoglio's life thus far: before and after Argentina's Dirty War. It is rather cursory about his childhood, and there is little discussion about the future of Pope Francis. The focus is on Bergoglio the Jesuit provincial, and then Bergoglio as bishop and cardinal. It is both challenging and illuminating. Perhaps with one eye on the commercial advantages of releasing instalments in other publications, Vallely has already allowed excerpts to appear in *The Tablet* and *The Times*. Instalments

demand headlines and a certain polemical tone, and I think Vallely may have sacrificed some impartiality to this requirement. The book perhaps is guilty of being overly critical of Bergoglio's behaviour in the Dirty War period, which is grist for the mill of The Times, who were ungenerous with their reporting at the time of the papal election. It is easy to paint the young provincial as out-of-step with the other Latin American provinces in the heady post-Vatican II days, but that does not fit comfortably with a fascinating detail which Vallely, to his credit, also includes. The iconic Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe trusted and sent Bergoglio to intercept an ultra-conservative Spanish splinter-group of Jesuits who were coming to Rome to make demands that could have given rise to a schism. They were persuaded by Bergoglio to turn around and go back to Spain, thus preserving the integrity of the order, which is a source of pride to many Jesuits.

Towards the end of the first part of the book, the author starts to bring out many of the quiet, courageous and heroic acts of Bergoglio the provincial. They do appear as an afterthought, though, which gives some sense of the book being unbalanced. Perhaps this is a result of the inevitable temptation – particularly when trying to exploit a timely and possibly fleeting gap in the market – to write a contemporary biography with the cadences of a film script, appealing to the modern attention span with crises and cliff-hangers. However, I may be being too sensitive – as a Jesuit, I have become quite protective of the first Jesuit pope and maybe I lack a certain objectivity.

The second part of the book turns the corner and launches 'the people's bishop': he leads a life of simplicity, poverty and integrity, and has the remorse and compassion of a humble man who is anchored in a daily rhythm of prayer. Now the dramatic arc of the screenplay of Bergoglio's life takes an upswing, and there are faint whiffs of hagiography as the saint-in-the-making begins his ascent through the ranks of the hierarchy. A favourite moment for me is the account of the general congregation that preceded the conclave at which Bergoglio was elected and his influential intervention there.

Vallely is an excellent, well-connected writer, and Pope Francis: Untying the Knots is an engaging and thoughtful read throughout. He turns out to be a good 'untier' of the knots – or at least what seem, at a rushed first glance, to be knots. However, I also look forward to a second edition in a few years' time, with a more nuanced tone at times and an updating of Pope Francis' legacy – which will, I hope, include accounts of deep reforms in the Church.

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## **Purple Tringite says**

This book was recommended by a visiting preacher to our church. I don't know very much about Catholicism or Argentina and I found this riveting - I read it in 2 days. It seems the jury is still out on if he is a very humble servant of God whose main aim is to help the poor but he seems to be a very different Pope to those before him

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## **Katie Marquette says**

This was a well-researched, balanced look at Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the man who we all now know as Pope Francis. Rumors about Bergoglio's behavior during the brutal Argentinian dictatorship and his troubled relationships with his fellow Jesuits have made some question the character of this charismatic new leader. Vallely sheds light on this morally ambiguous time of Bergoglio's life. Basically, what one learns is that this Pope is a man who has changed over the years and who has learned from his mistakes. Perhaps most



importantly, he has learned that humility is more of a discipline than an innate personality trait. He is a Pope of contradictions, with an authoritarian streak which accounts for some of his questionable behavior as head of the Jesuits in Argentina. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires he proved that he was capable of change and the man who once radically opposed Liberation Theology became known as 'the bishop of the slums,' preaching a gospel inspired by the needs of the poor. The most important lesson one learns from Francis is to put the PERSON before anything else. Although Pope Francis is traditional in his views - he does not support gay marriage (although he has petitioned for gay civil unions and equal gay rights) - he is able to befriend and earn the respect of homosexuals, atheists, and many others who have felt alienated and condemned by the Catholic Church in the past (a gay advocacy magazine named the Pope 'person of the year' for his tolerant and compassionate attitude). He befriended the widow of an excommunicated priest when no one else in the Church would acknowledge her. He counts atheists, human rights lawyers, rabbis, and protestants among his close friends. He does not support abortion but has admitted that when it comes to women who are victims of rape or incest, the decision is understandably difficult. His advice is simply to be with other people, to listen to their stories and to feel empathy for their struggles.. A theology based on compassion does not condemn anybody. I especially appreciated Bergoglio's consistent insistence on dialogue between Catholics and people of other faiths. He is quoted as saying, "Dialogue is born from a respectful attitude toward the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It supposes that we can make room in our hear for their point of view." A first rate biography - my only complaint being that the chapters are not very connected and can practically be read on their own (he repeats many facts and quotations numerous time, perhaps for emphasis, it's not clear). All in all though, this was a balanced, respectful analysis of one of today's most influential leaders. An important, engaging read for people from all walks of life.

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### **Alex Hobart says**

Book Level: 8.7

Book Summary: Pope Francis Untying the Knots tells the untold stories, and tries to answer the questions (though may leave more questions in its wake) of where this forgiving, inviting, understanding, and loving man came from. It is revealed that he has not always been this way and that he too had a "switch" that he changed his whole way of thinking. Pope Francis went from a conservative dictator within his standings, to a liberal understanding, compassionate leader.

Characteristics that Support the Genre: this book is told by someone else from accounts of other people's writings, and with his own encounters, of someone else's life.

Organization- though this text has a great deal of information about Pope Francis; specifically the beginning and the middle, there is not a sense of resolution that the author was hoping for, rather than a to be continued

Classroom Integration- This book would be important to integrate to a class that was being taught at a Catholic school (it would be important to have an idea of who was leading the Church {just as it is important to know who will be or who is leading the country}) It would also be a good text to read parts to the class (depending on the grade level and the content) but giving them a connection to this leader that is a part of the media.

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### **Joshua Taylor says**

This was a quick, insightful read that provided a solid background on the life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio before he assumed his position as Pope Francis. While I knew of the scandals associated with his younger

days as the head Jesuit in Argentina, I wasn't aware of the details. This book does a good job filling in those blanks. A chapter at the end also does a solid job of discussing the ways in which Francis has broken with Vatican convention since becoming Pope.

My problem with the book is that it is too repetitive, with certain passages appearing nearly verbatim 3-4 times or more in different chapters. For a book this short, repetition doesn't seem necessary.

If you're looking for a quick bio covering Francis, this one will serve you well.

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### **Tom says**

Since the 1970's I have grown increasingly upset with the Catholic Church's distancing itself from Christ's teachings and the reforms of Vatican II(1962-1965). This book gives a good account of Pope Francis' life and his plans for a return to reform and change. Elected Pope in 2013 he has already eliminated most, if not all, of the corruption with the Vatican Bank and has drastically reined in the controlling and corrupt practices of the Roman Curia and many Italian bishops. He would encourage the clergy to move from ambition and isolation to a more simple lifestyle that includes joining people in their communities.

With respect to the laity he has begun to institute an "all are welcome response" that calls for ordinary people's participation. Francis would adopt a structure and authority that would be less vertical and more horizontal. He encourages discussion on issues related to women's roles in the Church, the divorced receiving Communion, remarriage, openness to homosexuals, inclusion of non believers, Jews, Moslems, Hindi, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Buddhist et. al. As with Vatican II, Francis would support a return to discussions on right to life to include war, reform of economic systems that create inequality of income and living standards, capital punishment, euthanasia and abortion.

Francis seems to be a very intelligent, humble and loving individual who, by his own admission, recognizes that he's also made many mistakes. He asks for prayers and forgiveness. His executive skills, leadership, openness, shared decision making and humility are a rare combination.

I was inspired by the book. I was inspired by Francis and I like his understanding of Christ's message.

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### **Anne Reilly says**

Very interesting to learn about this pope.

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### **Dianne Landry says**

I have often said that if popes had been like this when I was younger I would still be Catholic. I found this a very interesting look at the life of Pope Francis and the influences that made him the man he is. I did not know that he came second to Pope Benedict in the last conclave and might have won had it not been for dirty tricks pulled by the Jesuits (his own order but then again they have always had the reputation of being the s.o.b.s of the church).

Learning about the things he did for the poor and weak in Argentina was really interesting. I hope that the College of Cardinals is learning and the from now on popes will all be in his image and not that of previous popes.

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