



General

The Last Pope

David Osborn

Sourcebooks

978-1-4022-0244-5

(February 29, 2004)

Sex, scandal, drugs, and the Pope—these are central themes of this new novel about the death of a pope and the process of replacing him. The book is a turn from the author's previous best-selling suspense and mystery novels, but it still offers plenty of interesting twists. Osborn brings the reader back and forth in time to show events before and after the pope's death, revealing some of the church's many flaws.

The novel depicts a battle among three characters—one who wants to change the church radically to the left, one radically to the right, and one who has the same vision as the pope before him. The uncompassionate Cardinal Agosto Mancini wants to become pope to make the church as it was before Vatican II. Cardinal Ignatius Heriot is a humble priest haunted by dreams, not even sure if he wants to be pope, but desiring improvement in the church like the pontiff before him. In the midst of these quests comes Father John Zacharias, a priest touring the United States preaching to large crowds about church corruption, recommending radical reforms such as letting priests marry and permitting women to become priests.

Osborn is the author of nine published novels, including the best-selling *Open Season: Heads and Murder on Martha's Vineyard*, and twenty-four screenplays, including *The Trap*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. In this novel, he takes readers inside the Catholic Church, following the lives of the three characters and revealing how the papal electoral process takes place, what politics are involved, and how divided the church is with cardinals wanting extreme change in both directions. The author is very careful not to try and force his opinion of church reform.

The novel is well written, although there are a few times when the reader might feel things have been sexed up for the sake of shocking. Clearly Osborn does this to show how God purifies the lives of the characters, but there are scenes where he exaggerates, as in the story of a former drug-addicted borderline hooker whose life is cleansed after meeting Zacharias.

This novel is sure to spark anger in some Catholics, as it does not present a puritanical view of the church. The novel also has scenes of foul language, sex, and drug use. Readers expecting a purely religious novel should read with caution. There are few things pure about this religious novel, but ultimately it is a refreshing and redeeming read.

Scott La Counte