

Padre Pio: The True Story Study Guide

Padre Pio: The True Story by C. Bernard Ruffin

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Plot Summary

Padre Pio: The True Story is a biography of Francesco Forgione (1887-1968) who becomes the world famous Roman Catholic Saint and Capuchin Friar, Padre Pio. Within Roman Catholicism, Pio has the greatest following of any other human being save the Virgin Mary. Beatified by the Roman Catholic Church in 2002, Pio's life is said to be a model of great virtue and love for others. Born in Pietrelcina, a farming town in Southern Italy, most of Pio's life is spent in a friary in San Giovanni Rotondo. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit him, one hundred thousand people attend his funeral and three hundred thousand attend his beatification.

Pio is widely regarded by his followers as having possessed extraordinary supernatural powers. Most famously, Pio always wears gloves to cover his stigmata, holes in his hands (along with his feet and side) that constantly ooze blood. Many claim that Pio miraculously heals them of all number of ailments, knows the sins of his confessors before they tell him and survives on four hours of sleep and four hundred calories a day despite being overweight and spry in his old age. Pio is even believed to have "bilocated" or to be seen in two places at once. During World War II, several American and Italian fighter pilots claim to have seen Padre Pio in the sky.

Bernard Ruffin, the author and a Lutheran historian, approaches these fantastic claims as the subject of rational investigation. While the book is a biography, it is also an attempt to evaluate the evidence for Pio's miracles and to assess criticisms made of him and those around him. Ruffin admits at the end of the book to be a "believer" in Pio, though not in everything claimed for him. For Ruffin, there were simply too many miraculous claims made by too many people, even Protestants and skeptics, for none of them to be true. By all credible accounts, Pio had a heroic character and few faults, according to Ruffin. This verdict will understandably make readers skeptical, but by the end of the book, the reader will nonetheless be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of claims made about Pio's character and supernatural abilities.

The revised version of Padre Pio: The True Story is nearly five hundred pages. It contains thirty-five chapters that are largely arranged chronologically. Chapter 1 introduces the Forgione family and explains the social and historical setting of Pio's birth and youth. The subsequent chapters follow Pio through his childhood, adolescence, novitiate as a Capuchin Friar, ordination, spiritual trials, acquisition of the stigmata, investigation by Church authorities, restrictions on his priestly authority, the spread of his fame, his many miracles, the building of the hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo and finally Pio's death. Several chapters towards the end focus on the specific claims of miracles attributed to Pio. Some of the final chapters focus on the process and significance of Pio's beatification.



Chapter 1, The

Chapter 1, The Summary and Analysis

The story of Padre Pio begins in Pietrelcina, a village of four thousand, forty miles northeast of Naples, Italy. As a town in Southern Italy, it is economically and socially depressed. Most inhabitants in the late 19th century are poor peasant sharecroppers with no land of their own. People are malnourished and many died of malaria, tuberculosis and cholera. Almost everyone is Roman Catholic but the people are highly superstitious.

Padre Pio's family, the Forgiones, comes from Abruzzi. Grazio Maria Forgione, Pio's father, is born October 22nd, 1860, called Orazio and spends years working in America. He can read and write. He marries Maria Giuseppa De Nunzio; they call each other "Gra" and "Beppa." Gra spends much more time at church than most men in his day. He constantly prays the rosary and is full of joy. Maria is born March 29th, 1859 from a "good family." She is devout as well and refuses to gossip or criticize others behind their backs. They are devoted to each other and their family.

Gra and Beppa have eight children; the fourth child (Padre Pio) is named Francesco Forigone II, born May 25th, 1887. Their family runs a small, five-acre farm and Pio has happy memories of it as a child. Christ is at the center of their family and many call them the "God-Is-Everything" family. They are in church every day. They are most focused on Mary, the Madonna, and the saints, who are practically members of the family.

Chapter 2. While Padre Pio is later regarded as a saint, no one records much about his childhood. Many claim unbelievable things about him. Little is known about his thoughts or his relation to his siblings. Some work after his death to interview those who knew Pio as a boy but it is not clear how reliable they are. However, many say he was a beautiful boy in appearance and temperament, called Il bello Francesco or Beautiful Francis. Contrary to the beliefs of many, Francis is largely healthy as a child, though he has typhoid.

Francesco is an eager student and his spiritual maturity shows itself early on, though his parents raise them to be saints. He also wants to be in church and is always aware of sin, though neighbors report that he never prays around them and nothing is outstanding about him. However, others report that he is always good and always preaching. He is not unique among his siblings, however; they are all raised the same way.

At eight, Francis and his father visit the shrine of St. Pellegrino the Martyr, a sixth century bishop where they witness the healing of a mentally and physically disabled child. Pio claims that he has witnessed God before, speaking regularly to Jesus, Mary and his guardian angel. Pio's father always believes him.



Pio always wants to be a friar and decides that he wants to join the Capuchin Order. His parents prefer that he become a parish priest, but they relent. The Order is willing to accept him, but only if he is educated at a private school. Grazio decides to go to America to earn money for his son's education.

In 1898, Francesco goes to private school, changing teachers once. His second teacher, Don Angelo, is harsh. Over time, Francesco grows into his teenage years, fending off the advances of women and adopting ascetic practices. Before completing the requirements to join the Capuchin Order, he nearly has cold feet, for he has trouble renouncing the legitimate joys of life. He appears to have been totally celibate prior to joining the Order.

In 1903, as Pio is preparing to enter the order, he has an intellectual vision where a beautiful guide teaches him to fight a demon. On January 6th, 1903, Francesco boards a train to go to Morcone to start his novitiate, crying as he leaves his family.



Chapter 3,

Chapter 3, Summary and Analysis

Padre Pio becomes a mendicant friar in the Capuchin order, the most conservative offshoot of the Franciscans. Pio's order strictly observes the Rule of St. Francis, a behavioral code that forbids, among other things, shaving their faces and wearing shoes. This order does much to eliminate church abuses and provide charitable services.

Becoming a friar involves studying community life and preparation for the priesthood. In the former, Pio goes through a novitiate, temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and solemn vows, making the previous ones permanent. Francesco's new name will be "Pio" which comes from a sixteenth-century pope. Pio's novitiate is led by Master Tommaso, who is severe and rigorous. The novitiate involves learning the prayer schedule, the lives of the saints (especially those of the Order) and the memorization of the Rule. The author then describes their daily schedule, which is one of great austerity. Pio embraces it and grows in love of God. The order emphasizes meditation as well.

On January 22nd, 1904, Pio makes his temporary vows and in 1905 he is sent to a friary at San Marco la Catola to study philosophy. In 1907 he takes his permanent vows but continues to study. Pio is a diligent student and is influenced by philosophers St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure and mystics St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Through his study, Pio embraces commitment and suffering. He comes to believe that living a life of suffering is a powerful witness to Christ.

Chapter 4. Pio always claims to hear voices and have visions. These experiences are essential to who he is. He separates bodily, imaginative and intellectual visions. Pio often conceives of these visions as "locutions" or supernatural conversations. His visions inspire him to write and give him profound peace. He is reluctant to share his "heavenly secrets."

When he shares with his superiors, he is assigned a spiritual guide, Padre Benedetto Nardella of San Marco, a young professor of philosophy and physics. He is something of a mystic as well. Benedetto is a bit harsh, as Pio describes him, but Pio always treats him with respect. Pio also develops a relationship with another teacher, Padre Agostino of San Marco, who is his theology teacher. However, he is not a mystic, though they share great affection. Only Benedetto knows of Pio's experiences until 1911; Agostino only learns then.

The author then reviews some questionable counterexamples from testimony. Some claim that Pio bilocates—that he appears to them when other sources show that he is elsewhere. Pio once claims to one of those who says that she sees him in a bilocation that he had been there and that she was to entrust her soul to him. Giovanna Rizzani remains devoted to him throughout her life.



Chapter 5. Padre Pio has many physical ailments, such as vomiting, violent coughing and high temperature. Medical doctors cannot generate a satisfactory diagnosis. Pio's ordination is delayed by illness. Pio sometimes worries that his sickness is due to unconfessed sin. Nonetheless, Padre Benedetto arranges for Pio to be ordained on August 10th, 1910. He can administer the sacrament but never receives his teaching license. He then continues to serve for a time in a regular church in Piana Romana. Pio reports frequent assaults from the devil and confesses a constant terror of God for his sins. Benedetto counsels him to use his suffering to grow in Christ. In times of consolation, Pio experiences great exultation. He thus experiences a cycling of great highs and lows characteristic of mystics.

Despite his piety, Pio never feels wholly sure of his salvation, even to his death, though the fear lessens over time. He starts to offer his suffering not only as a path towards closeness with Christ but as merit to be offered to others to help them through Purgatory. In fact, he decides to ask for more suffering as a result. On September 7th, 1910, Pio reports that Jesus and Mary appear to him and give him hand wounds. Pio tries to conceal the wounds, as he wants his suffering to be in secret and the wounds go away for a time. When Padre Benedetto hears about the wounds, he aims to have him returned to community life at all costs.



Chapter 6, Between Heaven and Hell, Chapter 7, The Double Exile, Chapter 8, The Dark Night of the Soul

Chapter 6, Between Heaven and Hell, Chapter 7, The Double Exile, Chapter 8, The Dark Night of the Soul Summary and Analysis

While Benedetto wants Pio to return to a friary, Pio is not sure and resists. Benedetto is furious and orders Pio to return. Pio apologizes and submits and Benedetto sends him to doctors in Naples where he is declared terminally ill (it is not clear with what) and that it does not matter where he spends his last days. So Pio goes to the friary of San Nicandro in Venafro. Pio arrives on October 28th, 1911, and tends to his duties but eventually he can only leave his bed for Mass, the bread and wine of which he can hold down without vomiting.

One day Padre Agostino goes to pray for Pio but his mind wanders to what he will say at his funeral. Somehow Pio knows. Others observe unusual things as well. Among them are Pio's entering into a state of divine ecstasy or "immersion" in God. He converses with demons. Agostino records some of the conversations. Those with Jesus and Mary involve prayers for conversions; he expresses fear of the devil and a desire to bear the cross. Some of the transcripts are printed and analyzed. During one ecstasy, God tells Pio that he must return to Pietrelcina.

On a few occasions, a Dr. Lombardi observes these trances. Sometimes Pio is told in his trances to pray for people he does not know. Dr. Lombardi judges that the experiences are moments of "true ecstasy." Everything said in the ecstasies is coherent, selfless and not sensational. Another doctor judges his physical sufferings to be psychosomatic, which the author claims is because of Pio's desire to share in Christ's sufferings. By December 7th, Benedetto consents to allow Pio to return to Pietrelcina, along with Agostino. When Pio returns, he is well.

Chapter 7. Padre Pio's ministry follows three stages in which his reputation for holiness is known in (a) his hometown, (b) Italy, and (c) the world. The years between 1911 and 1916 are his "double exile" as he is separated from his religious community and heaven but in these years he gains his pious reputation. Pio's family is having troubles during this period, though it is not clear exactly what is going on. Perhaps his letters refer to his sister Pellegrina's out-of-wedlock pregnancy. She is the "black sheep" of the family. Pio's experiences in church are complex socially for a number of petty reasons.

Despite these trials, the people of Pietrelcina see Padre Pio as special, often referring to him as the "mad monk." Many start to desert his masses due to his long pauses to



converse with heavenly beings. Many priests do not understand his ecstasies. Nonetheless, he slowly gains the respect and love of the townspeople. He is always of great help and encouragement, though he is quick to point out sin. Many of his demands are unusual, such as demanding no work on the Sabbath. Those who stay throughout his masses feel a special presence of God and many small, unusual events occur around town. Many maintain that demons appear around him to interfere with his prayer and meditation. The author maintains that some phenomena associated with Pio cannot be easily dismissed; their documentation shows that they cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Chapter 8. Pio's inner life is the most important thing about him, as it dominates his life. Prayer is not a one way conversation for him. He has a continual thought of God and is enriched by supernatural grace. Some find mystical experience incomprehensible but the experiences have a pattern. They typically have five stages: (i) awakening of the self, (ii) purification of the self, (iii) the illumination, (iv) passive purgation, and (v) deification or spiritual marriage. The process often results in a desire to serve humanity. Pio's life follows this pattern to a some degree. The author then tries to document evidence of the stages in Pio's writings.

Between 1912 and 1916, Pio experiences the illumination of God's presence and the oscillating desolation and joy of passive purgation. Pio begins to feel a deep longing to leave this world for the next one. Throughout this time, Pio is constantly visited by demons, his guardian angel, Jesus and Mary. The author emphasizes that Pio's spiritual life is accompanied by phenomena that others can see and hear and that the supersensible communication usually produces kindness and concern. All of Pio's life is directed at raising the spiritually dead.



Chapter 9, Return to the Friary, Chapter 10, San Giovanni Rotondo, Chapter 11, The Spiritual Director, Chapter 12, The Stigmata

Chapter 9, Return to the Friary, Chapter 10, San Giovanni Rotondo, Chapter 11, The Spiritual Director, Chapter 12, The Stigmata Summary and Analysis

As time progresses, Benedetto and Agostino starts to look for Pio for spiritual wisdom. Pio also spiritually counsels Benedetto's and Agostino's parishioners without talking to them. He takes on several female students as well. He has some tension with Benedetto, who wants him to return to the friary. Pio thinks he will only be a burden. At one point, Benedetto becomes so angry he will not write Pio for six months. Nonetheless, Agostino receives permission from Rome for Pio to stay in Pietrelcina until his illness ends.

When World War I begins, June 28th, 1914, Pio says that war is due to man's unbelief. Pio is saddened when Italy enters the war on the Allied side in spring 1915. He wants Europe to embrace love rather than war. The bloodbath of war nearly drives him mad, though he hopes the war will be a "health-giving purge." During this time, Italian clergy start to be drafted and Pio is eventually drafted. Private Francesco Forgione becomes a member of the 10th Company of the Italian Medical Corps in Naples where he serves as a janitor. There he vomits constantly. He is given a year's leave soon thereafter.

Since Pio survives several weeks in the army, Benedetto is adamant that Pio return to the cloister. Yet Pio still resists, until a woman offers herself as a victim to God to die so that Pio can return. Pio eventually leaves to console the woman before she dies. The author sees this period of exile as one necessary for Pio to discern who he is in relation to God before embarking on his true mission.

Chapter 10. After Raffaelina dies, Pio desperately wants to die and is ill. She dies at Foggia and Pio stays there for a time quickly becoming the center of a spiritual movement that will give rise to prayer groups all over the world. In July 1916, Pio leaves to visit Padre Paolino at San Giovanni Rotondo where he then receives permission to stay. The town has twelve thousand people, most of whom are poor and full of disease. When Pio reaches the town, there are seven people in his friary. In his early years, Pio teaches in the seminary but is not very good. He is often unprepared and lax.

Pio quickly has an active group of disciples. Pio reads the Bible to the group and answers spiritual correspondences in other towns. Pio's health problems continue. In



1917, Pio takes the longest trip of his life when he goes with his sister to Rome. After a second six-month leave of absence from the army, Pio is not recalled until August but he is placed in a Naples hospital for observation. He is declared fit for noncombat duty and Pio is miserable. In 1918 Pio undergoes a military medical exam and is discharged in March as a result. Afterwards he visits Pietrelcina for a few days and then leaves to San Giovanni Rotando, never to return.

Chapter 11. Oddly, nearly all of Pio's first spiritual children are women, though the culture places religious duties with women at that time. In 1917 Pio is given the authority to hear confessions and then starts to listen to men. He usually resists taking on disciples whom the Lord has not spoken to him about. Pio has five rules for spiritual growth: weekly confession, daily Communion, spiritual reading, meditation and examination of conscience. Pio, however, prescribes other rules and often becomes more severe with his disciples as they grew.

Pio's advice can be summarized in ten points: (i) trust Christ as Savior; (ii), realize that you have no righteousness of your own; (iii) remember good works come from Christ alone; (iv) believe in the devil; (v) always tell God "Thy will be done"; (vi) love the cross; (vii) offer all actions to God; (viii) never worry; (ix) aspire to the heavenly prize; (x) rejoice in the Lord. Pio discourages great curiosity in the miraculous and extraordinary and advises living by both faith and love.

Chapter 12. After the war, in 1918, Pio continues to teach high school boys. More miracles are attributed to him as his reputation grows. Most are fakes but many are well-documented; two such cases come when souls appear to Pio from purgatory to ask for aid. Padre Paolino performs a number of tests on Pio's abilities that he passes. While Pio's health has improved, he still has periods of celestial highs and lows. Eventually he feels deprived of spiritual light to follow God and relies totally on Benedetto and Agostino. One night on August 5th, 1918, Pio has a vision of Jesus hurling a massive fiery, steel blade into his body that he claims later produced an actual physical wound in his side, though he claims he wholly concealed it. He only tells Benedetto and Agostino of the incident.

That same year, Pio and Paolino are charged with administering flu shots to some young boys when both men spill carbolic acid on themselves, leaving red spots on Pio's hands. However, the wounds do not heal and become the stigmata which he initially tries to hide. Pio will have the stigmata for the rest of his life until the very end. It starts on September 20th, 1918. The wounds ooze and have to be cleaned. They are also painful. When discovered the stigmata do not become an immediate sensation. Many are too sick with the Spanish "flu" to travel. When the epidemic is over, word spreads quickly. By 1919 word is spreading to the wider world.



Chapter 13, Holiness or Hysteria?, Chapter 14, The Rumor of Sanctity, Chapter 15, The Friar and the Archbishop

Chapter 13, Holiness or Hysteria?, Chapter 14, The Rumor of Sanctity, Chapter 15, The Friar and the Archbishop Summary and Analysis

No instances of the stigmata appear before the thirteenth century, until St. Francis of Assisi, who bears the wounds for two years until his death. St. Francis has a side wound on his right, like Jesus, though Pio's is on the left. Francis's piercings seem to be from nails, but not Pio's. For the next seven hundred years, four hundred people, nearly all Roman Catholic, female and Italian claim to have it. Pio has several stigmatic contemporaries, such as a Bavarian laywoman named Therese Neumann who also experiences bilocations, visions and the like. The author then reviews other cases.

There is no doubt that Pio's hands bleed for fifty years. Thousands of people see them. Several doctors examine them exhaustively in 1919 and 1920. However, later few examinations are allowed. When Pio dies, the wounds are gone entirely. The wounds are apparently horrible to look at. Even during treatment in the 1950s, no blood anomalies are found. The wound has clearly defined edges, unusual for an old wound. It is not clear how deep the wounds are or how much blood comes from them. Pio also suffers real pain and the stigmata have a fragrant aroma.

Scientific explanations for the stigmata are elusive. Some attribute the persistence of the wounds to psychosomatic sources, while others maintain it is due to the use of chemicals. One doctor who thinks Pio is neurotic is contradicted by the author who says that there is no evidence that Pio has neuroses. Everyone finds him well-balanced. All of Pio's other wounds heal normally and the stigmata disappear spontaneously shortly before he dies without a scar. That said, Pio's wounds are on his hands, rather than on his wrists, which is where most people's arms are nailed to crosses.

Chapter 14. By 1919, Pio's ministry grows dramatically. The utopian vision of secular philosophers lies in ruins after World War I. The news of the stigmata finds fertile soil. Papers report on Pio and people line up to confess to him. The secular clergy of San Giovanni are hostile as many leave the secular churches. A priest, Don Giovanni Miscio, is one of Pio's earliest critics. He argues that the Capuchins are using Pio to make money. Civil authorities are also hostile. Nonetheless, Pio has freedom to practice. Rumors of miracles continue to spread, some of which are recounted. Many lives are radically transformed and many convert to Christianity.



In the fall of 1919, Dr. Amico Bignami of the University of Rome, is sent to examine Pio by the Vatican. He has Pio stop the use of iodine for eight days and the wounds show no sign of healing. Two more doctors examine Pio within the next year. The Capuchin Order also replaces Padre Benedetto with Padre Pietro of Ischitella. Padre Paolino is transferred to another friary, replaced by Padre Lorenzo of San Marco.

Pio is visited in 1920 by Gerardo Agostino Gemelli, a distinguished priest, physician, psychologist and theologian who is founder and president of Milan's Catholic University. Gemelli claims to have examined Pio's stigmata, but this is almost certainly false. Instead, Pio refuses to allow the examination because Gemelli does not have permission. Nonetheless, Gemelli writes a report which is given to the Holy Office but never released. Some who read it say that it paints a far more negative image of Pio than his supporters do. Nonetheless, other Vatican officials are sent with official authorizations and are persuaded. Pope Benedict XV becomes convinced that Pio is the real deal and protects him against his enemies for his whole life.

Chapter 15. Pio tries to ignore the controversy surrounding him between 1919 and 1922. He works a nineteen-hour day anyway. However, his spiritual life intensifies. Pio is troubled about how to use the money handed to him. He only accepts donations for people in need. Benedetto and Agostino are not wholly relying on Pio. The result of the requests and money are not known. Friary life is too hectic. The secular clergy continue to complain about Pio to the Vatican. Archpriest Don Giuseppe Prencipe starts confessing to Padre Pio and thinks he is blessed.

In 1920, Italian socialism and fascism are on the rise. In San Giovanni Rotondo, the election of 1920 is disputed by the fascists and violence is in the air. Despite the mayor's efforts, on October 14th violence breaks out, socialists versus fascists and several people are killed. Afterwards, Pio helps the mayor design a plan to quiet the violence, including increased democratic participation. The Capuchins are still blamed for the massacre.

The center of hostility to Pio comes from the Archbishop of Manfredonia, Monsignor Pasquale Gagliardi. Little is known about him, save that he is highly educated and very intelligent. However, he comes to be accused of neglecting duty and personal immorality. The two men only meet on two occasions, and while the meetings go well, Gagliardi has negative reports about them. He then makes war on Pio through attacks and claims that he saw Pio perfume himself. Gagliardi becomes increasingly hated by the people, however. Eventually a mob attacks him and beats him to the point where he is bedridden for a month.

Chapter 16. When Pope Benedict dies in 1922, Pio's circumstances change. The short, stocky, awe-inspiring Pope Pius XI replaces him. He resists claims of the preternatural and is more concerned with the rise of totalitarian regimes. What he knows of Pio he knows only through Gemelli and Gagliardi. Gagliardi maintains that he is not merely a backwoods friar but a demoniac and makes other accusations against him. Criticism of Pio floods the Papal Office due to Gagliardi's efforts.



In 1922, the Vatican sends someone to investigate. Pio's activities are restricted during the investigation and he is transferred from Foggia and is barred from writing to his "spiritual children." Benedetto is forbidden to communicate with Pio and they will never again meet.

In May 1923, the Holy Office declares that it cannot confirm the supernatural character of Pio's witness. Pio is not a saint and should not be venerated. However, the directive has the opposite effect. Mayor Morcaldi leads five thousand people in a popular demonstration and threatens Pio's superiors. The hierarchy wants to remove him, however; although he may be a holy man, they do not want him in the middle of aggressive, fanatical crowds. Morcaldi's group, now the People's Association, is determined to stop Pio's transfer. For a time, it appears that they fail, as the decision to transfer Pio is handed down in July. However, in August, an investigator, Dr. Carmelo Camilleri, finds that only Gagliardi and his associates oppose Pio. Tension rises around the transfer and on August 17th it is canceled.



Chapter 17, The Miracle-Worker, Chapter 18, 'L'Americana', Chapter 19, Continued Sorrows, Chapter 20, The Imprisonment

Chapter 17, The Miracle-Worker, Chapter 18, 'L'Americana', Chapter 19, Continued Sorrows, Chapter 20, The Imprisonment Summary and Analysis

Pio's frame becomes more robust in his mid-thirties. He becomes meeker and serene, less sickly. Pio's ministry expands. Many, many miracles are attributed to him, miracles that the author covers in detail. Pio appears to many and many others are healed. The author reviews the most credible stories, some involving doctor's examinations. Miracles are also associated with Pio's hearing of confessions and he is said to know the penitents' sins before they speak them. He is also known to involuntarily become impatient with penitents and yell at them. At this time many start to settle in San Giovanni to be around Padre Pio.

Chapter 18. In 1922, Pio conceives of the idea of building a hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, which he raises the funds for by 1925. St. Francis Hospital is the beginning of his vision that will not come to full flower for two more decades. Several of Pio's spiritual children help, such as Adelia "Maria" McAlpin Pyle who had converted from Protestantism and moved to Italy to aid Pio. The author reviews Pyle's familiar background in detail.

Pyle comes to work under Pio in the 1920s after looking for a spiritual director, along with her friend, Rina Caterinici. When they find him, they immediately become his disciples. Maria is so convinced that she never wears anything other than a Capuchin habit for the rest of her life. The people in town call her "L'Americana." Maria's mother comes to Italy to convince her to leave but Pio befriends her. Maria endears herself to all she meets, organizes a choir and uses her allowance to feed, clothe and heal people. Maria finances a friary and a seminary at Pietrelcina, though construction is delayed.

Chapter 19. In the absence of Benedetto, Pio finds it hard to talk about his spiritual state, even to Agostino. Padre Pietro has a heart-attack in 1924 and dies and the Cardinal replaces him with Padre Bernardo who is to constrain Pio. During this time, Pio also is alienated from his family, giving more of his time to his spiritual daughters. In the meanwhile, the Forgiones are drawn into controversy surrounding Pio when a family member is blackmailed into paying to prevent a book attacking Pio from being published.



Gagliardi also brings charges against Pio to Bernardo who deeply upsets Pio by asking him about them, though Gagliardi's reputation is falling apart at the time. Pio's enemies in the church are investigated but only receive slaps on the wrist. The author relates a story, though, about Pio converting an atheist doctor who is friends with Gagliardi. On his deathbed with cancer, Pio supposedly heals Dr. Ricciardi and he recovers. However, his mother dies at the same time, with him by her side, and she is not healed. Pio is shattered and wails.

Chapter 20. On October 1st, 1929, Gagliardi is deposed and replaced by Andrea Cesarano. However, Pio still has enemies in Rome, though his allies sometimes try to fight back. The author describes some of the intrigue. Due to misunderstandings, Pio is stripped of all his priestly powers save the ability to celebrate Mass in private in the friary. Pio is devastated and enters two years he calls his "imprisonment," his sacrifice to God for the needs of the unsaved.

Many still come to see him, though they cannot meet with him; his friends organize a letter-writing campaign on his behalf. Controversy starts to surround even his friends, however, such as L'Americana.

A particular scandal surrounds an attempt by his friends, such as Mayor Mordalci and Brunatto, to publish a book documenting the crimes and misdeeds of Pio's opponents. Pio is investigated again in 1933 after his friends are able to regroup and continue to lobby for Pio. The investigation raises the issue of the book, which Pio tries to stop from being published. Brunatto threatens to publish unless the ban on Pio is released and on July 14th, 1933 the ban is reversed. The threat was probably not the primary cause, however; rather, it is probably the investigation. Restrictions remain on Pio but he can now celebrate mass publicly, though he cannot hear confessions until March 25th, 1934.



Chapter 21, 'My Earthly Work Has Now Begun', Chapter 22, 'The Lord Is Not Moved to Pity', Chapter 23, Padre Pio and the GIs, Chapter 24, The World for a Parish

Chapter 21, 'My Earthly Work Has Now Begun', Chapter 22, 'The Lord Is Not Moved to Pity', Chapter 23, Padre Pio and the GIs, Chapter 24, The World for a Parish Summary and Analysis

As Pio ages, he grows stouter despite eating less. He also sleeps less and less, taking a two hour nap in the afternoon and two hours sleep at night. Yet Pio always worries about pleasing God. In 1937 Pio is again in spiritual darkness. In this time he writes his meditation on The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It expounds on his view of co-redemption, arguing that salvation requires sharing Christ's grief and pain. Christ himself needs comforting. During this time, the Capuchin minister general gives Pio his preaching license, though he is never very impressive.

Nonetheless, his ministry expands. Padre Bernardo dies in 1937 and is replaced by Padre Agostino himself. Other official replacements serve Pio's cause as well. The new Pope, Pius XII, is a supporter of Pio's as well. Many make pilgrimages to see him, though Pio dislikes it. Fanatics often cause troubles, however, engaging in acts of excessive devotion. Adelaide dies in late 1937, leaving a trust to Maria. The author then reports rumors of paranormal events, cures and conversions. The author emphasizes along the way that Pio's life is not a carnival of the supernatural; many see him as a normal human being otherwise. He also becomes intent on building the hospital, The House for the Relief of Suffering, which comes closer to fruition. However, World War II stands in its way.

Chapter 22. Pio initially supports Mussolini but quickly turns against him. Pio fears Hitler. World War II depresses him. When Hitler invades Russia, Pio is convinced that the Axis will be defeated. Maria is arrested. Foggia is bombed during the war. Pio prophesies that San Giovanni Rotondo will be spared, and it is. Some say he intervenes supernaturally to bring this about by appearing in the air in front of American planes. Many pilots are said to have seen him. There are concerns about the accuracy of the stories however, as they admit of inconsistencies. Other miracles are proclaimed and the author recounts them. Pio's family is not all spared, however; his wayward sister Pellegrina, is mortally wounded during a bombing.



Chapter 23. Due to World War II, Pio's ministry is spread to the world by American and British soldiers, many of whom come to his masses. A number of famous people come as well, such as Irving Berlin and Bill Carrigan. Pio has a good influence on American military disciplinary problems as well. Carrigan sees no mystical charisms around Pio, seeing him as very normal, though he has some counterevidence. The author relays a number of American reports about Pio that testify to his character and abilities, though they vary with respect to his supernatural powers. While many Protestants visit his masses, and while Pio has probably never met a Protestant (save Adelaide Pyle) until World War II (they are still considered heretics in Pio's part of Italy), he never presses them to convert and are always kind to them.

Chapter 24. All of Pio's immediate family have come to San Giovanni. His father lives at Maria's, where he eventually dies. Pio becomes more political at this time as he is worried about the alarming gains of Communism across Europe and in Italy. He opposes the monarchy and urges his disciples to vote for the Christian Democrats, who beat the Communists. Today many attribute Italy's resistance to Communism to Padre Pio. Pio also fights against the spread of Jehovah's Witnesses in Pietrelcina. Pio's celebrity spreads even further, and to America via Maria Pyle who returns in 1948. Mail floods to him. Pio needs a secretary, an English-speaking priest, and finds one in Father Dominic Meyer. The author explains Meyer's background and duties. Famous people continue to call on Pio for aid.



Chapter 25, 'A Magnificent Work of Charity', Chapter 26, A Day With Padre Pio, Chapter 27, The Charismatic, Chapter 28, Extraordinary Traveler, Chapter 29, The Doctor

Chapter 25, 'A Magnificent Work of Charity', Chapter 26, A Day With Padre Pio, Chapter 27, The Charismatic, Chapter 28, Extraordinary Traveler, Chapter 29, The Doctor Summary and Analysis

After the war, hospital construction begins in earnest. On May 19th, 1947, ground is broken. Angelo Lupi is the builder and eccentric architect. Monetary funds are unstable, but Pio never loses his resolve and approves numerous fundraisers. "Prayer Groups" arise in conjunction with the hospital which are encouraged by Casa, the hospital's new magazine. This "Prayer Army" spreads rapidly and lasts past Pio's death. Troubles plague the construction as several prominent directors of construction die. Yet on May 5th, 1956, construction is complete. It is among the best equipped hospitals in all of Italy and, after a rough start, quickly fills with patients.

After a year, Pio announces that he will lead the creation of a medical and religious center that will succor both body and soul. Many think the hospital is Pio's greatest miracle. Pope Pius XII gives Pio control, though Pio leaves decisions to directors. A new church is built in 1959. Pio becomes an international celebrity, running a weekly radio program. His spiritual life remains intense.

Chapter 26. Pio's weight increases but he still eats very little. He also has little exercise. However, Pio's health is good during his fifties and sixties. The author then describes the schedule of Pio's day, which begins at 3:30 am. He daily leads a Mass which many see as miraculous. He then hears confessions five to eight hours a day. Lines to confess become very long and it is hard to keep one's place from day to day. Pio reacts angrily to those who selfishly cut in line, so angrily that his superiors condemn him. Sometimes Pio displays the ability to understand and speak in languages he does not know.

Pio probably hears two million confessions over fifty-one years. Sometimes he displays supernatural intuition which is well-testified to. Pio is often harsh, however, sometimes telling people they are going to hell. Again, he never presses Protestants to convert. He also does not recommend his austerities to his spiritual children.



Pio usually eats a small lunch around 1 pm and briefly socializes and the author discusses some notable incidents from this period. After recreation, Pio sometimes takes a nap and otherwise prays the Rosary. Pio then reads and replies to letters. After afternoon Vespers and benediction, he has brief recreation but avoids supper, instead reading and praying in his room. Evening often consists in hospital business, but at other times he gives lectures. In the evening, Pio joins the community for Compline and then Pio goes to bed, though he often spends several hours praying and reading Scripture, often going to sleep at 1:30 am.

Chapter 27. Rumors of miracles continue to spread after World War II, though many who know him think of him as basically an ordinary, kind man. Carrigan is extremely skeptical of Pio's reputation as a miracle-worker. Nonetheless, Pio appears gifted by supernatural charismata, since, in the author's view, everything cannot be a tall tale. The author then reviews the evidence that Pio performs miracles through the intervention of God after explaining the concept of a miracle. The tradition of miracles in Roman Catholicism remains strong, despite waning in Protestantism. At least, however, he was a "charismatic" in the Biblical sense by bringing renewal to the Christian church.

Pio's miracles are unusually frequent, however; and he resists even speaking about his supernatural encounters. Not all of Pio's prophecies come true and he cannot always see into the heart. His assessments are often wrong. His "aroma" varies according to those who smell it.

Chapter 28. Pio's most unusual "charism" is bilocation. Many claim to have witnessed it, however; the author then reviews the cases. Even Protestants testify to it, along with many other reputable people. Many stories, however, are subjective and circumstantial though they usually relate to concrete reality.

Chapter 29. The Doctor. Few surrounding Pio see a physical healing, though many hear about them. Nonetheless, there are many recorded testimonies. Again the author reviews them. Some even claim that a man's sight is restored; one man even claims he had no pupils and that they are restored. Many medical men are convinced, not just Pio's followers. Pio rarely admits to miracles; he prefers to be thought of as a poor sinner and attributes all healing to God.



Chapter 30, The Greatest Cross, Chapter 31, Just in Time for My Golden Jubilee, Chapter 32, I Cannot Bear My Cross Anymore, Chapter 33, 'Give Me the Obedience to Die!', Chapter 34, Padre Pio Lives!, Chapter 35, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Epilogue, An Imitato

Chapter 30, The Greatest Cross, Chapter 31, Just in Time for My Golden Jubilee, Chapter 32, I Cannot Bear My Cross Anymore, Chapter 33, 'Give Me the Obedience to Die!', Chapter 34, Padre Pio Lives!, Chapter 35, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Epilogue, An Imitator of Christ Summary and Analysis

Chapter 30 opens in the 1950s, when Italy is in a period of prosperity. Pio lives in a larger house of worship and the town of San Giovanni Rotundo has grown. The hospital expands in 1958. Pio ages, slowing a bit as he reaches seventy. Pio also starts to become sick again, with ailments like kidney stones and bronchial pneumonia. He is even diagnosed with cancer. Pio becomes bedridden and is deathly ill. While being transported to another hospital, Pio feels that he is healed. He attributes his healing to the Virgin Mary and quickly resumes his duties.

Chapter 31. Pio is aggrieved when Pius XII dies in 1958 and is pleased when John XXIII is elected. Yet John XXIII orders another investigation of Pio in 1960 on the fiftieth anniversary of Pio's ordination. Rumors circulate that the Pope wants to put to rest; the author then reviews the investigation and the rumors. Pio, apparently, has been bugged and Casa has been mismanaged. The author does not know how much there is to the charges. While Pio is exonerated, the church acts to stamp out a cult from forming around him through a number of policies. Pio's followers resents them and Pio laments that the restrictions come on the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination.

Chapter 32. Pio's pains increase. While he is ill, he is contacted by Karol Wojtyla, a Polish Catholic priest, later to become Pope John Paul II. Pio is able to heal those for whom Wojtyla contacts him. When Pope John dies, Pope Paul VI reduces the restrictions on Pio. Despite this, the 60s are sad for Pio as his health declines and his



friends and associates die. For instance, Agostino dies on May 14th, 1963. The situation of the world also saddens Pio. He apparently does not care much for Vatican II and continues to practice the Latin Mass. He also regrets the decline in vocations. Pio's demonic assaults also return and he is depressed when his sister leaves the Brigittine Order, though she leaves due to her objections to Vatican II.

Chapter 33. Pio is dying and depressed in 1965, receiving few of his requests. He asks Jesus to take him and wants his superior to command him to die. Pio becomes silent and withdrawn though he still receives his ecstasies. Pio still celebrates Mass, though he does so in a wheelchair; he continues to hear confessions. The stigmata is disappearing; only scabs are left. Sometimes he doubts whether he is in a state of grace. September 20th, 1968 comes, the fiftieth anniversary of Pio's stigmata but he cannot participate in the festivities. Pio dies soon thereafter on September 23rd, 1968. The funeral is, not surprisingly, packed with people from all over the world, over one hundred thousand.

Chapter 34. San Giovanni Rotondo does not dry up after Pio dies; the number of pilgrims increases each year into the 1990s. The hospital expands and his fame only increases. The author then reports rumors and claims of appearances of Pio after his death, mostly in the 1970s. The author claims that some are credible testimonies, though others are not. However, when the book is written it is not time to prove the miracles because the Pope has yet to declare Pio "Venerable" and place him on the path to sainthood.

Chapter 35. In this chapter, the author discusses the process of making a saint, explaining it in detail. After Pio dies many pushed for a rapid elevation but the case stands still. The delay ends in 1983 as John Paul II breaks the impasse. In 1997, a council determines that Pio practiced great theological and cardinal virtues. Then miracles need to be proved; three are needed. The Pope validates the first miracle in 1998. Pio is beatified on May 2nd, 1999, rising to the rank of Blessed. On December 20th, 2001, the third miracle was certified, qualifying Pio for sainthood. On June 16th, 2002, three hundred thousand people gather in St. Peter's Square to hear the Pope make Pio a saint.

Epilogue. The author concludes that Padre Pio is important not because he performed supernatural works but because of his humanitarian works, his interest to history and parapsychology, his example of devotion to his faith and his great degree of virtue. He always directed his followers away from himself and towards Christ. The author acknowledges that many will question his partiality and also admits that nearly all the recollections of Pio are adulatory so finding fault in his character is difficult. Though the author discusses some suggested vices, he finds the evidence for them questionable. The author argues that no other human being has made God so near to him as Padre Pio.



Characters

Francesco Forgione/Padre Pio

Otherwise known as St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Francesco Forgione is the main character of the book, as he is the subject of the biography. Forgione was born into the large Southern Italian Forgione family in 1887 in Southern Italy. His early family life was full of religion and his parents insisted on bringing up all of their children to be devout Roman Catholics. Forgione displayed an intense interest in religion from an early age and developed a desire to join the Franciscans soon thereafter. Pio's early life as a friar in training or novitiate was characterized by intense struggle and suffering under brutal authorities. Yet Pio was always totally obedient and eventually became ordained, despite long-term illness.

Pio's extraordinary virtue quickly became apparent to all those around him. Many found his eyes mesmerizing, and thought they represented a soul with such deep love and virtue that he could know the sufferings of others. Pio also began to display supernatural gifts. Most famously, he claimed to have the stigmata for fifty years. However, he also fell into states of "ecstasy" during which he enjoyed the presence of heaven. Pio also had conversations with Jesus Christ, Mary and his guardian angel along with a number of demons.

While almost all the accounts of Pio's character are adulatory, Pio did seem to be excessively lax with students, often harsh and mean to confessees, and easily annoyed. Nonetheless, many felt that to be in Pio's presence was to be in the presence of a living saint.

Padre Benedetto Nardella of San Marco

When Pio was a priest in training he was assigned a spiritual guide to help him develop. This person was to be one he confided in about his spiritual trials and whose authority over him was absolute. The spiritual guide could advise Pio on how to behave but if he needed to, he could order Pio to act as he wished. Pio's primary spiritual guide was Padre Benedetto Nardella of San Marco. Benedetto had studied philosophy and physics along with becoming a friar. He was something of a mystic himself, though he displayed none of the supernatural abilities attributed to Pio.

At first, Benedetto was harsh with Pio, demanding that he return to his friary when sickness led him to return home. He also constantly encouraged Pio to endure his suffering gladly and to be thankful that God had given him the opportunity to suffer for others. Nonetheless, Pio claimed that Benedetto always treated him with respect. He was also Pio's confidant and the first to know about Pio's stigmata. Pio felt comfortable sharing his spiritual trials with Benedetto and would tell him things that he could tell no one else.



Over time, as Pio grew spiritually, Benedetto and Pio became more like friends, though Benedetto still had authority over Pio. Eventually, Benedetto was relying on Pio for spiritual advice and aid. The friendship and connection lasted until Benedetto died many years later. However, due to an investigation into Pio by the Vatican, the two men were eventually not allowed to see one another.

Gra and Beppa

"Gra" and "Beppa" are the affectionate nicknames that the people of Pietrelcina had for Padre Pio's parents. Gra and Beppa were devout parents and raised their children to be saints as best they could.

Padre Agostino of San Marco

Padre Agostino was perhaps Pio's best friend over almost his entire life. They lived in the same friary and Agostino was eventually assigned to look out for Pio and watch over him during his spiritual trials and future fame. He also made extensive records of Pio's conversations and ecstasies.

Physicians

Many physicians were sent to examine Padre Pio's wounds. According to the author, none concluded that Pio's wounds were obviously fraudulent.

Supernatural Beings

Supernatural beings like God, Jesus, Mary, angels, Pio's guardian angel, demons, Satan, departed saints, and regular souls, appeared to Pio throughout his life. He spoke to them, saw them in his mind's eye and in person and received messages from them.

Padre Paolino

Due to the controversy surrounding Pio, Padre Agostino was replaced by Padre Paolino who was initially sent to monitor Pio, though they became friends later.

Gerardo Agostonio Gemelli

A highly renowned priest who was one of Pio's greatest skeptics. He was an acclaimed physician, psychologist and theologian who pressed the Vatican to have Pio investigated on several occasions.



Monsignor Pasquale Gagliardi

Undoubtedly Pio's biggest enemy, Gagliardi, the Archbishop of Manfredonia, was responsible for innumerable accusations against Pio, some of which he made directly to a number of Popes. Gagliardi's credibility was undermined due to various immoral acts, however.

Mayor Morcaldi

The Mayor of San Giovanni Rotondo who became a fierce ally and defender of Pio's.

Maria Pyle, L'Americana

The most prominent of Pio's "spiritual children," Maria was a devotee of Pio who used her wealth to promote his causes.

Adelaide Pyle

Maria's mother who also became an admirer of Pio's.

Popes

A number of Popes make appearances throughout the book, from Benedict XV (Pope from 1914-22) to Pope Paul VI (Pope from 1963 to 1978). Even Pope John Paul II makes an appearance prior to becoming Pope in 1978.



Objects/Places

Pietrelcina, Italy

Pio's hometown in Southern Italy.

San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy

A larger town in Southern Italy on the eastern coastline, Pio settled here and spent nearly his entire life up until his death here.

The Home to Relieve Suffering

Pio founded a grand hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, one of the finest in Italy in its day.

Pio's Friary

Pio's modest friary was located in San Giovanni Rotondo.

The Capuchin Order

An order of friars in the Catholic Church, an important, conservative offshoot of the Franciscans.

The Stigmata

The appearance of wounds on a person similar to those Jesus Christ received during his crucifixion, nails through the hands/wrists, nails in the feet and a pierced side. Pio claimed to have the stigmata for fifty years. Pio was more famous for having the stigmata than almost anything else.

Pio's Gloves

Pio famously wore gloves to cover his stigmata, which he was ashamed of.

Bilocation

Pio was said to be able to miraculously appear in two places at once.



Mind-Reading

Pio was said to have the ability to peer into the souls of others and know their sins without them telling him.

Investigations

Due to all the controversy surrounding Pio, he was investigated by the Vatican on several occasions.

Restrictions

Many of these investigations resulted in restrictions on Pio's priestly abilities, restrictions that pained him greatly.

Poor Health

At many times in his life, Pio had many serious health problems.

Beatification

Pio was put on the fast-track to sainthood by Pope John Paul II. Pio was made a saint or "beatified" in 2002.



Themes

A Holy Victim

Padre Pio often prayed to suffer. For many, this will seem perverse; but before rendering a final judgment on Pio's wishes, the reader must understand why Pio would wish suffering upon himself. According to Padre Pio, his greatest goal in this life and the next was to imitate Christ. This meant that to become like Christ one also needed to suffer as he did. However, the ordinary human must not only suffer to share in Christ's suffering but to purge himself of sin and wickedness in order to be fully redeemed. Thus, one reason Pio prayed to suffer was to become more like Christ because he believed that in becoming like Christ perfect happiness could be achieved.

Yet Pio asked for even more suffering. Pio asked to be a "holy victim" so that he could prevent the suffering of others. For instance, when someone Pio knew was sick or suffering, Pio would often pray for God to shift the pain onto him; on other occasions he would "offer up" his suffering on behalf of others to prevent them from enduring something terrible. To be a "holy victim" is to be one God punishes in the stead of others who deserve it, just as God punished Christ for the sins of the world.

In fact, it appears that Pio got his wish. Pio's early adulthood was characterized by intense physical illness in the form of pneumonia, vomiting, bronchitis and a number of other ailments. His stigmata, which lasted for fifty years, was incredibly painful the entire time. He was often persecuted by those who despised him.

Supernatural Powers

Perhaps the most notable feature of Padre Pio's life is his sensational set of supernatural powers. Pio is most famous for having the stigmata, a set of five wounds (two in the palms, two in the feet and one in the side) that mimic the wounds of Jesus Christ during his crucifixion. Pio received these wounds in the late 1910s and only lost them in the late 1960s. Even St. Francis of Assisi himself is said to have possessed the stigmata for only two years until his death. While it may sound incredible, the author describes many physicians' examination of Pio's wounds and the fact that they were unable to find anything clearly fraudulent about them.

Pio's powers do not stop there, however. A seeming superfriar, Pio could read minds, as demonstrated in the confession booth when he would know the sins of his confessee before they were revealed. He was said to have the ability to know the future and would sometimes make pronouncements about it. Pio was thought to communicate directly with Jesus, Mary and even his guardian angel and entered into periods of intense spiritual ecstasy during which he would lose track of time.

Perhaps the most spectacular of Pio's powers was his ability to bilocate or to appear in more than one place at the same time. Many claimed that Pio appeared to them from



hundreds of miles away and even after his death. Some Italian and American fighter pilots even claimed that Pio appeared to them in the sky! While Pio himself downplayed the importance of these miracles and attributed them always to God, the miracles made him famous.

Controversy

Pio's combination of extreme personal piety built around individual suffering and the supernatural powers attributed to him brought him increasingly large amounts of attention. Originally a diminutive little friar from Southern Italy, Pio became an international celebrity over the course of his life. However, Pio's rise to sainthood did not come without challenges. When Pio first started to be noticed, the secular (non-monastic) clergy immediately felt threatened as their parishioners were going to Pio's masses rather than theirs. So they started to complain to church authorities.

These complaints led to the first investigations of Padre Pio by local bishops, archbishops and even the Vatican. Pio was investigated numerous times due to many accusations and a new investigation often came with each new Papal administration. Pio typically passed his tests but not without suffering from restrictions. In many cases, Pio was forbidden from engaging in any priestly activities other than performing the Mass and in some cases even his masses had to be performed privately.

Pio also had two major challengers, both of whom were prominent administrators in the Catholic Church in Italy: Father Gemelli and Archbishop Gagliardi. Gemelli was a reputable priest, psychologist and theologian who was skeptical of Padre Pio's ability and had the Pope's ear. Archbishop Gagliardi had the Pope's ear as well, though accusations of immorality against him ultimately led to his downfall. Other controversies surrounded Pio's management of his hospital, among other things.



Style

Perspective

Bernard Ruffin, the author of *Padre Pio: The True Story*, is a non-fiction author and an assistant pastor at a Lutheran Church in Washington, D.C. He has written a number of books concerning historical and religious matters and teaches history at a high school in Virginia. Ruffin's book indicates a number of biases readers should be aware of. First, many readers will doubt that miracles happen at all. Those readers should know that as a Christian minister, Ruffin strongly disagrees. While he acknowledges that strong evidence is needed to justify belief in the miraculous, he clearly thinks such evidence is already available.

However, Ruffin is comfortable with the miraculous to a degree that exceeds the comfort level of even devout Christians. While admitting that he may have biases, Ruffin seems to accept most of the miraculous claims of Pio's followers, which amounts to a belief that the laws of nature were broken hundreds of times within the life of a single man. That said, Ruffin's research is extensive. His main argument for belief in Pio's miracles is that there were so many claims to have witnessed miraculous events surrounding Pio made by people with no interest in lying that it seems incredible to him that none of them could be true.

Ruffin claims to have been as impartial as he could, though he is sensitive to the fact that his membership in the Christian religion may bias his partiality. He also displays an idiosyncratic interest in emphasizing that Pio did not seem to think Protestants were heretics or pressure them to convert. Ruffin even analogizes Pio to Luther on several occasions and goes out of his way to argue that Pio did not believe that he could earn his way into heaven, both indications of Ruffin's Lutheran background.

Tone

The tone of *Padre Pio: The True Story* is what one would expect of a biography. It is full of clearly outlined details; it tells a chronological story and is not afraid to be dry in order to communicate a wealth of information appropriate for a biography. Nonetheless, given the extraordinary claims made about Pio, one might have expected a different tone. Perhaps the author might have been even more adulatory in tone or much more critical. Instead, Ruffin aims to be as even-handed in his tone as he can be. He is often cautious, pointing out stories that are untrue but carefully backing up some stories of Pio's supernatural abilities with as much evidence as he can compile.

Often Ruffin quotes long stretches of text from testimonies concerning Padre Pio. Many of these extended accounts are full of adulatory remarks about Pio. In fact, basically everyone whose words concerning Padre Pio are printed in the book is positive towards him, in part because there were so few negative reports according to the author.



Towards the end of the book, Ruffin's tone becomes a bit defensive, while remaining humble, because he recognizes that many will find claims about Pio's powers unbelievable. Three of the last chapters are developed to recapitulating the evidence for Pio's stigmata, bilocations, and healings and so on.

The tone does have an air of impartiality, though this is somewhat inconsistent with the tone of excitement and approval of Pio that pervades the book.

Structure

Padre Pio: The True Story is structured like a standard biography. The book begins with a prologue introducing the basic features of Padre Pio's life and character and explaining why Pio is a figure of importance. Following the prologue are thirty-five brief chapters that extend for over four hundred pages. The first chapters, unsurprisingly, cover Pio's parents, his hometown of Pietrelcina and his siblings. Pio was raised in a devoutly Catholic household and the next few chapters describe his upbringing in the Forgione family. Eventually when Pio reaches adolescence, the chapters turn to Pio's increasing interests in religion, his decision to become a Capuchin friar, his difficult novitiate and his early struggles with his health. It also introduces his intense spiritual struggles, conversations with heavenly and demonic beings and so on.

By Chapter 10, Pio has moved to San Giovanni Rotondo. At this point Pio receives his famous stigmata and his fame begins to spread as a result. Rumors of miracles continue to spread around him and this raises the hackles of other church clergy who press for investigations against him. Ruffin also explores stories about miraculous healing due to Pio and discusses his most prominent followers like L'Americana.

In Chapter 20, Pio undergoes his most stressful and difficult restriction on his priestly abilities due to an investigation. Chapter 23 discusses Pio's World War II experience and the bilocations associated with that time. The post-war period brings increasing prominence to Pio and the establishment of the Home for Relief of Suffering. Chapters 32 and 33 explain the deterioration of Pio's health and his death, whereas Chapters 34 and 35 explain claims of miracles attributed to Pio following his death and the process that led to his beatification. The book ends with an epilogue where the author defends his approach to writing Pio's biography.



Quotes

"Christ was at the center of the Forgione family, who were so pious that neighbors sometimes called them the 'God-Is-Everything Family.'" (Chapter 1, 28)

"Neighbors referred to him as 'il bello Francesco' ('beautiful Francis'), as much for his temperament as his appearance." (Chapter 2, 29)

"I, Fra Pio of Pietreclcina, vow and promise to the Omnipotent God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Francis, and to all the saints, and to you, Father, to observe for three years the Rule of the Friars Minor, confirmed by Pope Honorius, living in obedience, without property, and in chastity." (Chapter 3, 54)

"The modern reader ... may tend to be somewhat skeptical about alleged visions and supernatural voices, preferring to pass over this aspect of Padre Pio's life. One cannot do this and still understand Pio, since his contact with the invisible world was an essential aspect of his existence." (Chapter 4, 61)

"A souvenir of my first Mass. Jesus, my life and my breath, today I timorously raise Thee in a mystery of love. With Thee may I be for the world the way, the truth and the life, and, through Thee, a holy priest, a perfect victim." (Chapter 5, 74)

"It is indisputable that there were phenomena associated with Padre Pio that could not readily be explained. Because of the extensive documentation, they cannot be dismissed out of hand as legends." (Chapter 7, 102)

"After my poor little soul has sighed for the moment of departure, after it has come several times to the limit of life, after it has relished the sweetness of death and has suffered all the struggle and torment that come from nature reclaiming its rights; after my soul has left my body, even to the extent of losing sight of this world below, and after I have almost touched the portals of the heavenly Jerusalem with my hand, I reawaken in this place of exile, becoming once more a pilgrim, always capable of being lost, and a new kind of agony seizes me that is worse than death itself and worse than any kind of martyrdom." (Chapter 8, 110)

"When a man confided to him, 'I don't believe in God,' Pio smiled and said, 'But God believes in you!'" (Chapter 10, 145)

"When the ecstasy ended, Pio was on the floor, his hands, feet, and side dripping blood." (Chapter 12, 155)

"I haven't a moment free. All my time is spent in freeing my brethren from the bonds of Satan." (Chapter 14, 168)

"I think I have to answer to God for having authorized Padre Pio to hear confessions." (Chapter 16, 189)



"Padre Pio is to be stripped of all the faculties of his priestly ministry except the faculty to celebrate the Holy Mass, which he may continue to do provided it is done in private, within the walls of the friary, in the inner chapel, and not publicly in church." (Chapter 20, 231)

"It would be a serious mistake to assume that life with Padre Pio was a carnival of the supernatural and paranormal." (Chapter 21, 245)

"This is what Providence created with your help. Admire it and bless it together in the name of God." (Chapter 25, 286)

"Miracles only occur when human intervention cannot achieve the purpose." (Chapter 29, 342)

"Just in time for my Golden Jubilee." (Chapter 31, 359)

"I cannot bear my cross anymore!" (Chapter 32, 370)

"In honor of the most Holy Trinity, for the exaltation of the Christian faith, with the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and ours, after long consideration, having invoked often divine assistance and having listened to the opinion of many of our brothers in the Episcopate, we declare and define Blessed Padre Pio of Pietrelcina a saint." (Chapter 35, 399)

"I cannot say that Padre Pio was closer to God than many other individuals, both prominent and obscure, who led godly lives. But I can affirm that the life of no one else has made God so near to me as that of Padre Pio." (Epilogue, 406)



Topics for Discussion

When did Pio receive the stigmata? How long did it last? What are some of the arguments the author gives on behalf of its legitimacy? What are some of the arguments against it?

Why did Pio become so popular? Did it have anything to do with the period of time and place in which he lived?

How did Pio's fame spread internationally?

Discuss two of the investigations of Pio; include a discussion of why the investigation was initiated, who examined Pio, who made the accusations, and how the investigation, when completed, impacted Pio's life.

What were the three miracles that were certified by the Catholic Church on behalf of Pio's beatification?

Supposing that you believe miracles are possible, how credible do you find the claims of Padre Pio's supernatural powers? How credible is Ruffin's defense?

In your view, did Pio display extraordinary virtue? Or do you think, like many of his critics, that he was mentally unstable, a huckster and had serious vices? Defend your answer.