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Pope Francis reveals how he was so 'dazzled' by a girl when he was a young man that he struggled to pray - and nearly gave up plans to be a priest

- The Argentine revealed the information in his new autobiography
- He also asked Diego Maradona which hand was 'guilty' following the World Cup

By CAMERON ROY

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Pope Francis has revealed how he was so 'dazzled' by a girl when he was a young man that he struggled to pray and nearly gave up on his plans to be a priest.

His desire for the young woman could have deprived the Roman Catholic Church of its first leader from the Americas.

He makes the claim in his new autobiography, titled Life: My Story Through History, which will be published next week.

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The Argentine also devotes an entire chapter to his countryman **Diego Maradona**, whose infamous 'hand of god' goal against England in the Quarter Finals helped his team eventually lift the trophy in 1986.

The 87-year-old football enthusiast reveals how years after it happened he asked the star who was visiting the Vatican: 'So, which is the guilty hand?'.



Pope Francis has revealed how he was so 'dazzled' by a girl when he was a young man that he struggled to pray and nearly gave up on his plans to be a priest. Pictured: The leader embracing a child on March 16, 2024



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Pictured: Pope Francis hugs a child during a special audience with managers and staff of the Children's Hospital 'Bambino Gesù' at Paul VI Hall, Vatican City



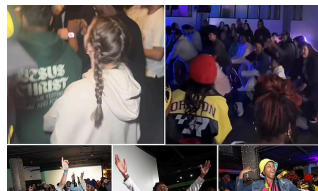
He Pope has revealed more information about his life his new autobiography, titled Life: My Story Through History, which will be published next week

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Elsewhere in the book he writes he first met the girl he would become infatuated with at his uncle's wedding.

He writes she was 'so beautiful and intelligent' it caused him, known only as Jorge Bergoglio then, to 'turn his head'.

When the devout Catholic, who was already studying to become a priest, tried to pray for the next week he found himself unable to as the girl's image was floating around his head.

But he writes it 'fortunately' passed and he was then able to dedicate his soul and body to his work.

The leader of the powerful religion previously revealed his teenage infatuation in an interview in 2012 where he said he was 'bowled over' by her beauty and intelligence.

After the wedding, he returned to his priestly studies but admitted: 'I kept thinking and thinking about her.'

'When I returned to the seminary after the wedding, I could not pray for over a week because when I tried to do so, the girl appeared in my head. I had to rethink what I was doing.'

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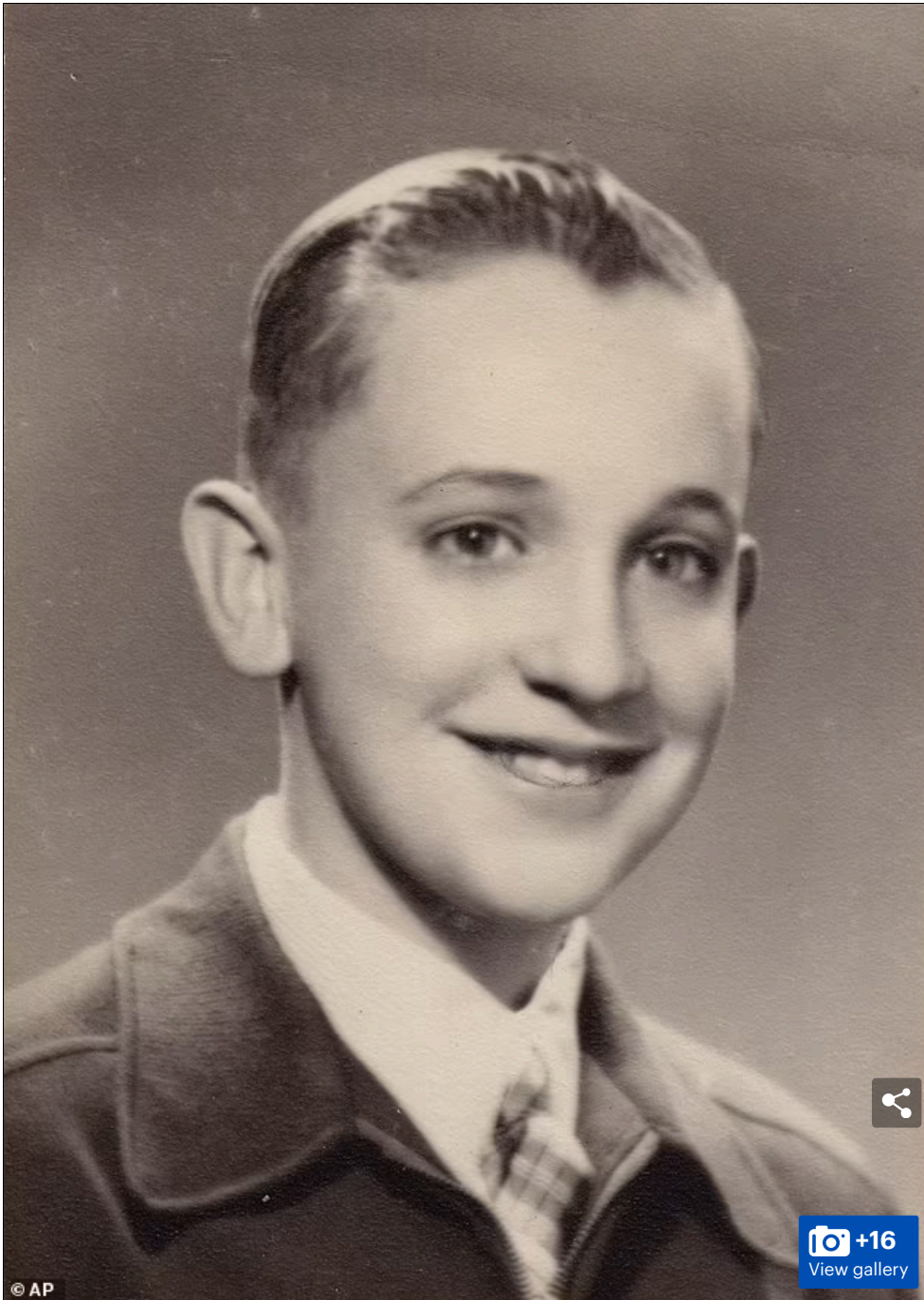
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Ready for her close up! Cat Deeley makes sure



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Portrait shots are often forced, but a young Jorge Mario Bergoglio looks relaxed and cheery here



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Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, second from left in back row, poses for a picture with his family before he became pope and took the name Francis

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Pope Francis meets Argentinian player Diego Armando Maradona in a private audience at the Vatican in 2014

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An advertisement for Moon Palace Cancun. At the top, it says 'MOON PALACE® CANCUN AWE-INCLUSIVE™'. Below that, it reads '¡OFERTA DE LA SUERTE!' and 'Venta del Día de San Patricio' in a green script font. Further down, it says 'HASTA 45% DE DTO.' and 'Traslado de aeropuerto gratis'. The central image shows a glass of a citrus drink with ice, lemons, and mint, with a four-leaf clover on the side. At the bottom, there is a dark blue button that says 'ABRIR TESORO' and the website 'moonpalace.com'.



© AFP/Getty Images

The Argentine presented a personalised Argentina jersey to Pope Francis during a meeting with organisers, players and guests of the inter-religious match for peace football game that was played in Rome's Olympic Stadium

'I was still free because I was a seminarian, so I could have gone back home and that was it. I had to think about my choice again. I chose again – or let myself be chosen by – the religious path.

'It would be abnormal for this kind of thing not to happen.'

However, despite his youthful romance, the Pope remains convinced about the value of mandatory celibacy for Catholic priests.

He had in the past proposed reviewing the thousand-year-old practice of celibacy, arguing the ban was only 'temporary' and there was also 'no contradiction' for a

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priest to marry.

Celibacy was made a requirement by the Catholic Church in the 11th century for financial reasons, as clergy without children were more likely to leave their wealth to the church.

But despite calls for reform the pope has retained the long-held practice.

The memoir, which is written with Italian journalist Fabio Marchese Ragona, allows Francis to trace key moments in his life, including the Second World War, Argentina's military dictatorship, the Cold War and the September 11 attacks.

It covers a broad range of topics, from the leader's childhood in Buenos Aires to the challenges he has faced while managing the Vatican.



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Jorge Mario Bergoglio (centre) at the Procession of Mary Help of Christians in 1949

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Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio before he became Pope

The pontiff is considered one of the most progressive leaders of the Catholic Church in centuries, and has made several proclamations that have raised eyebrows among more conservative members of the faith.

In December he **formally allowed priests to bless same-sex couples**, while reaffirming that marriage is between a man and a woman.

A new document explaining the radical change in Vatican policy insisted worshippers seeking God's love and mercy should not be subject to 'an exhaustive moral analysis' to receive it.

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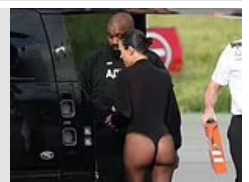
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He has also pushed for the church to become a more welcoming place, including for 'traditional sinners', which has riled many conservative Catholics.

In the book, he also writes about how the Vatican is 'one of the last absolute monarchies in Europe', and it needs to change.

He also shrugs off accusations that he is 'destroying the papacy'.



Argentina's Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio giving a mass outside San Cayetano church in Buenos Aires in 2009



Pope Francis is now often seen in a wheelchair due to his failing health. Pictured in March 2024

'If I had to follow everything that people say about me, I would need to consult a psychologist once a week' he writes.

The religious leader also writes about how he would only resign if he became physically or mentally unable to continue doing the job.

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His predecessor Benedict XVI's decision to resign at the age of 85 due to 'lack of strength' shocked the world as he became the first pope to step down without external pressure since 1294.

Despite recent health scares Pope Francis believes his resignation is only a 'remote hypothesis'.

Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, underwent an abdominal operation in 2023 and suffered from repeated cases of bronchitis in recent months.

The leader, who was **elected to the role in 2013**, undergoes a gruelling schedule in his role as Pope, including a long trip to Asia planned at the end of the summer.

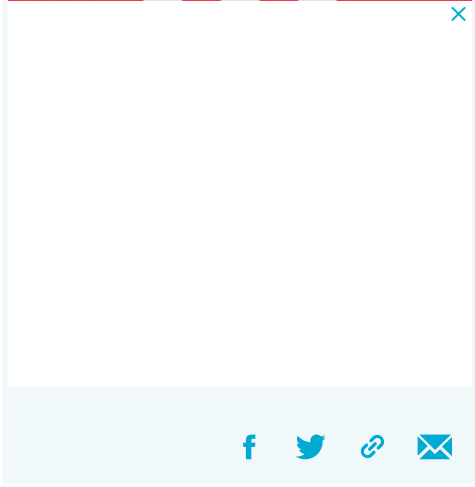
Some of his recent speeches have required an aide to read out due to Francis not having the lung capacity.

He writes: 'Some people may have hoped that sooner or later, perhaps after a stay in the hospital, I might make an announcement of that kind, but there is no risk of it: Thanks be to God, I enjoy good health, and as I have said, there are many projects to bring to fruition, God willing.'



Pope Francis appearing on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after being elected by the conclave of cardinals, at the Vatican, March 13, 2013

health problems over the years: From a lung operation aged 22 to sciatica, colon surgery and knee ligament pain that left him wheelchair-bound



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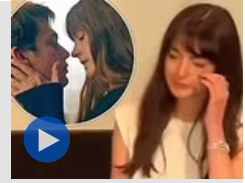
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Evident delight of the crowd at St Peter's Square, Vatican as the faithful cheer him as their newly elected leader

The 223 page book, which will cost £20 on Amazon, is described on the website as: 'An extraordinary personal and historical journey, Life is the story of a man and a world in dramatic change.

'Pope Francis recalls his life through memories and observations of the most significant occurrences of the past eight decades, from the Holocaust to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Videla's coup in Argentina to the moon landing in 1969, and even the 1986 World Cup in which Maradona scored the unforgettable 'hand of God' goal.

'Here are the frank assessments and intimate insights of a pastor reflecting on the Nazi extermination of the Jews, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the 2001 terrorist attack on America and the collapse of the Twin Towers, the great economic recession of 2008, the Covid-19 pandemic, the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI, and the subsequent conclave that elected him Pontiff.

'The "pope callejero" recounts these world-changing moments with the candor and compassion that distinguishes him, and offers important messages on major crises confronting us now, including social inequalities, climate change, international war, atomic weapons, racial discrimination, and the battles over social and cultural issues.'



The 232 page book will be released next week

The recent revelation about young Francis' infatuation with a girl comes after his more recent comments about sex.

In January he told attendees of his General Audience in the Vatican that **sexual pleasure was a gift from God** that should be cherished.

He also reaffirmed his support for civil unions but ruled out gay marriage.

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