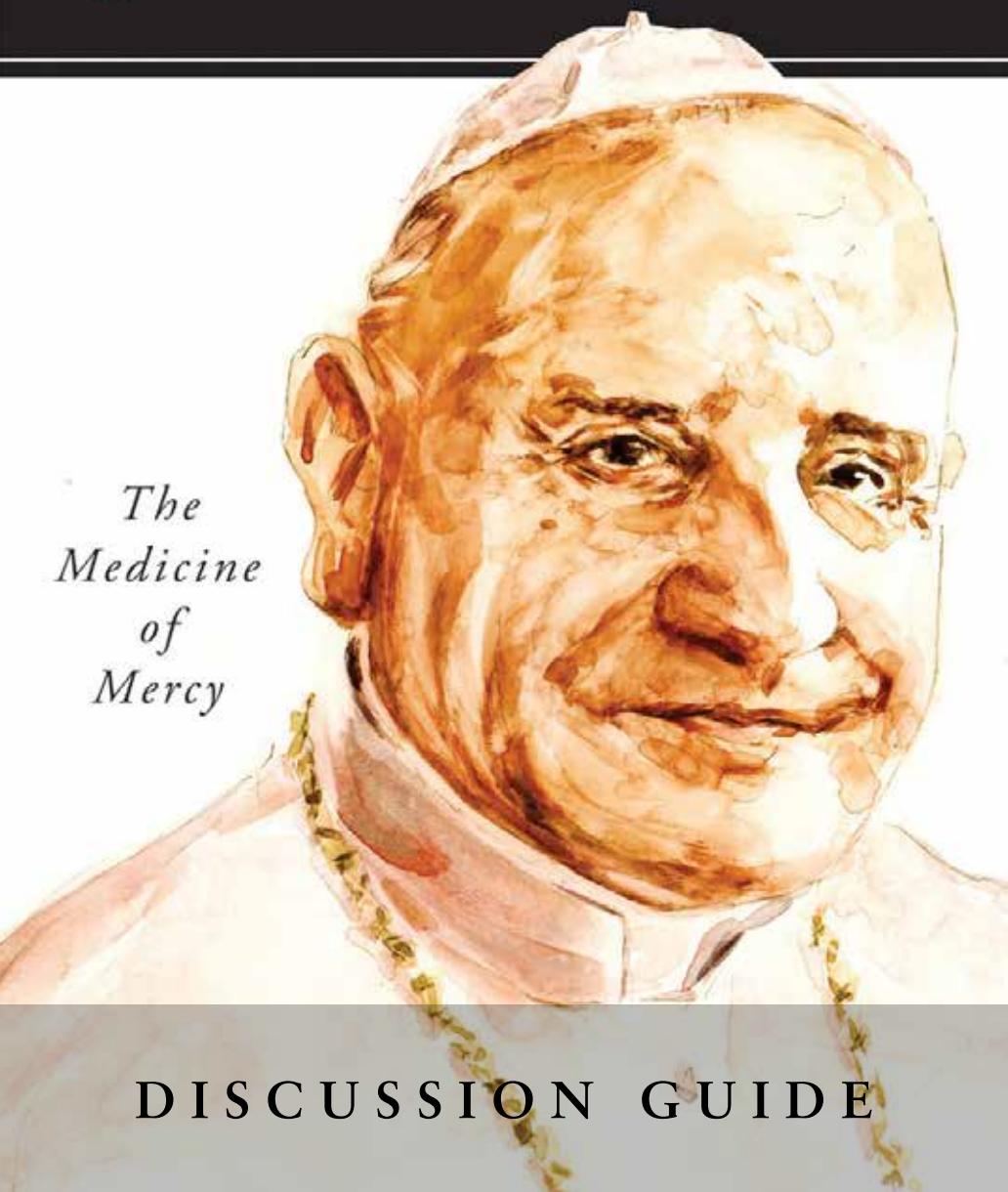


MASSIMO FAGGIOLI

JOHN XXIII

*The
Medicine
of
Mercy*



DISCUSSION GUIDE

About the Book

The canonization of Pope John XXIII and the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II call for a fresh look at this remarkable man. Now highly regarded Vatican II historian Massimo Faggioli offers a rich and insightful portrait. His sources include the complete edition of the private diaries of the future John XXIII, published recently in ten volumes, much of which is unavailable in English. Faggioli's use of this treasure of personal notes of the future pope means this biography offers a more complete and nuanced understanding of Angelo Roncalli than is available anywhere else in English today. The result is both unforgettable and inspiring.

About the Author

Massimo Faggioli is assistant professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has written extensively on modern Church history and on *Vatican II*. He is the author of *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Paulist, 2012) and *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Liturgical Press, 2012).



Discussion Guide

Introduction

1. The author writes of “the ‘shadow canonization’ effect.” What about Pope John’s life and ministry brought about his prior “canonization” in popular opinion? Can you think of other saints for whom this is true? Are there people for whom official canonization has not yet caught up to a real, prior canonization in the minds and hearts of everyday people?
2. The author offers Kenneth Woodward’s list of reasons why “papal causes [for canonization] present special problems.” What do you think of this list? Is the canonization of a pope a bad idea?
3. Why is the canonization of a pope such a strongly political act? Is it really more so than in the case of other, “normal” saints?
4. Why might the author suggest that Pope Francis’s act of proclaiming popes as saints is difficult to reconcile with his “clear view of the papacy as a humble ministry serving the church”? Is there such a difficulty? Why or why not?
5. The author quotes Italian scholar Alberto Melloni: “The fame of sanctity of Roncalli [John XXIII] resembles that of Wojtyla [John Paul II] for its timeliness, but not for its content.” How does the holiness of John XXIII differ from that of John Paul II? How are they very much alike?
6. Was Hannah Arendt right to call John XXIII a uniquely “Christian pope”?

Chapter One

1. What aspects of Angelo Roncalli's childhood are most interesting to you? How do you see their impact in his eventual life and ministry as a pope?
2. How and why might poverty have been, as the author suggests, "a gate for better understanding God in his life"?
3. What are your impressions and reactions to reading about Roncalli's early spiritual life? What was most important and valuable about it? And what in it might be troublesome or not so helpful? What do you make of the way it developed around 1902?
4. Roncalli wrote, "From the virtues of the saints, I must take the substance and not the details." What does he mean? Is he right?
5. As a young man, how did Angelo Roncalli negotiate the differences between his intellectual curiosity and the church's repression of the historical-critical approach then going on?

Chapter Two

1. How do you suppose Father Roncalli's earliest experiences as a priest impacted the rest of his life and his papal ministry?
2. What did Roncalli admire most about St. Charles Borromeo?
3. The author notes that Roncalli had contact with the lay Catholic Giuseppe Toniolo. A fascinating figure, Toniolo was beatified in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI. Consider some research. Why is he considered a great apostle of Catholic social teaching?
4. During this period, how did Roncalli understand the relationship between the church and the times in which it existed?
5. What did Roncalli mean when he wrote, "I do not want to become a saint disfiguring the decent original I am and to become an unhappy copy of others who have a nature that is markedly different from mine"?
6. What might be most important about Roncalli's wartime experiences?

Chapter Three

1. The author writes: “Roncalli had a clear perception of the role his experience in Bulgaria and Turkey played on his life.” After reading *John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy* (or at least this far into it), how would you summarize this role?
2. Upon his consecration as a bishop, Roncalli took the words *Oboedientia et Pax* (“obedience and peace”) as his episcopal motto, writing in his journal, “these words represent a little my story and my life.” With the hindsight of history, how is this true? In what ways is this a valuable motto for anyone? Would you be willing to take it as yours? Why or why not?
3. What stands out to you about the difficulties Roncalli experienced in Bulgaria and his responses to them?
4. What are some ways that Roncalli might have responded to the circumstances and challenges of his diplomatic work in Bulgaria, other than the ways he did respond?
5. How might Roncalli’s prayer, as reflected in his journal notes during a retreat with the Passionist fathers, serve as a model for other Christians?
6. How did Roncalli’s work in Turkey (including, but not only, in the moment that the author calls Roncalli’s “masterpiece”) anticipate the ecumenical and interreligious developments that came with and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council?

Chapter Four

1. What are your impressions of the spirit with which Roncalli approached old age?
2. During his time in Paris, what were Bishop Roncalli's impressions of the modern developments in French Catholic theology, liturgy, pastoral work, and architecture? Why is this worth noting?
3. What was the appointment that compelled Roncalli to write "Now I am in full," and why did he feel this way about this appointment? What does it say about his own sense of his life and ministry?
4. Cardinal Roncalli's introduction of himself to the people of Venice is notable on several counts. What most catches your own attention there?
5. Roncalli inaugurated the first parish in Italy with the name "Jesus the Worker." What would the existence of a parish by such a name offer to local believers?
6. Faggioli has subtitled his book *The Medicine of Mercy*. How do you see Roncalli "prescribing" such medicine during his ministry in France?

Chapter Five

1. What was Roncalli's "different way of being pope"? What were its strengths? Its weaknesses?
2. What did Cardinal Lercaro mean by speaking of the "institutional loneliness" of John XXIII?
3. How did the pontificate of John XXIII, in the final years of his life, reflect the motto he chose for himself when he was first made a bishop?
4. John XXIII wrote that the date of his trip to Loretto and Assisi was "written with golden color in my life." Why do you suppose he would feel it had such significance for him?
5. Have we been in danger more recently of becoming a Church that "believes its task is exhausted by the act of condemning things"? Why or why not?
6. "Some say the pope is too optimistic," John XXIII himself acknowledged. Was he?

Conclusion

1. How is Roncalli/John XXIII a “teacher for our interior life”?
2. How might the church today “spread a balsamic oil of sweetness over the wounds of humanity”?
3. How can John XXIII help us understand the church of today?
4. Many have compared the teaching, the ministry, and the style of Pope Francis to John XXIII. Why? Do you agree?