



Cecilian Vespers

Anne Emery

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Lawyer and bluesman Monty Collins is used to defending murderers, and occasionally investigating murders himself. But he can't round up the usual suspects this time. The blood-drenched body of Reinhold Schellenberg, a world-renowned German theologian, has been found on the altar of an old church in Halifax, Nova Scotia, during Vespers on Saint Cecilia's day. The man has nearly been decapitated. The controversial priest, once a top insider in the Vatican, was known to provoke strong feelings in Catholics of all ideological stripes. Now those feelings have overflowed with horrifying results. His friend Father Brennan Burke has just opened a choir school for priests, monks, nuns, and other Catholics devoted to the glorious music of the Church's past. So Monty has before him an international cast of suspects, including a flamboyant Sicilian priest who left the Vatican under a cloud of suspicion; an eccentric English monk who has penned scathing attacks on Schellenberg's actions during the Second Vatican Council; a disgruntled American ex-priest who can't quite let go; a church lady with a history of violence; a Vatican enforcer; and, most perplexing of all, a police officer from the former East Berlin. The case lifts the lid on fascinating episodes of Church history, thwarted ambitions, old grudges and long-simmering disputes. Monty and Brennan's investigation takes them on a road trip to Italy: to the corridors of power and the glittering museums of the Vatican, the elegant apartments of an operatic diva, and the cloistered grounds of medieval monasteries. Monty immerses himself in a world of ancient chants, votive candles, stained glass, incense, and the music of the spheres. The more he learns, the more questions he has. In the end, he finds himself turning to the saints for answers!

Cecilian Vespers Details

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From Reader Review Cecilian Vespers for online ebook

Suzanne says

Wow, a dense mystery full of intellectual discussions of church politics and music. Lots of interesting history. Not a quick read, but enjoyable. Loved the characters and will go back to read the first couple of books in this series eventually. A bit reminiscent of Andrew Greeley's early work (before he became trite and formulaic).

Diane says

I've enjoyed Anne Emery's previous books much more than this one. Good writing. Good settings. But I did not find the mystery or the multiple suspects particularly compelling to begin with, and the extensive research she has obviously done led to an awful lot of detail: lives of saints, Vatican this and that, choir rehearsals, musical history, all of which seemed way too much Catholic 'jibber jabber' to me.

Dorkette says

Way too much detail about Catholicism that could only be interesting to theologians. Very disappointing resolution to the mystery -- most of the book did nothing to advance the plot. I will not be reading any more books by this author.

Carol Lueck says

Good mystery. I liked the references to some of the Saints - interesting stuff. As a musician I could appreciate the tug and pull of the various church musicians at the music school, i.e. early church music or more modern choices for worship. This is so true in everyday life and in other churches besides the Catholic. But to murder someone over it ???

Judith says

A slow moving book recommended only to someone interested in Roman Catholic theology and concerns over Vatican II. There was an interesting trip to Rome but this book didn't really meet my idea of a mystery.

Lorraine says

A little too heavy on the Latin. Unless you had attended a seminary at some point this is far too complicated a plot for the lay person or someone not old enough to appreciate the church before the shake up. Some of the

background was needed to explain the plot but very involved and took more away than it gave.

Mike Bull says

This was a book I checked out of the library electronically (to my ebook--it's a great service) on a whim because it's set in Halifax, a city I know next to nothing about.

It surrounds a priest who is teaching a music course to Catholics from Canada, America, the UK and Europe, and an associated murder mystery with suspects among the attendees.

This is a "light" murder mystery with plenty of humor and sarcasm, particularly poking fun at both the liberal and conservative aspects of the church. I learned a few things too, which is always great.

On balance, this book isn't an eternal classic, but it's a fun read especially curled up in the cold of winter with a hot or strong drink.

Francis says

Sometimes a good author writes a bad book, would probably best summarize, my opinion of this book.

The best thing about this series is the character of Father Brennan Burke. Brennan is an Irish Catholic Priest who is both a bit of a renaissance man and a bit of a rouge. He is greatly tempted by all of the earthly delights but he is strongly committed to the traditional tenets of the church. He is not shy about sharing his opinions and often does using blunt, colorful and unfiltered language. He is also a fine figure of a man, who likes a drink and a cigarette after a long day of choir practice. And, needless to say, he is sometimes sought out by attractive ladies seeking companionship. So... all of this serves to create some inner tension which also serves well to propel story lines along.

However... not even Father Burke's character could manage to salvage this story. For me it was tedious and poorly structured, too many suspects, too many interviews, too many side stories, too many saints and too improbable.

The story ends with yet another ten page rehashing of what took place. I never like this approach because I often get the impression that the author ran out of ideas, realized the story wasn't going anywhere, decided to end it on a quick note and now needs to fill a couple more pages in an attempt to tie up all the loose ends that were left scattered about.

Did I mention that I didn't really care for this book? Well don't use it to judge the series which is actually quite good ..but you may want to consider skipping this one.

Sandra says

Not her best.

Laura says

My least favorite book in the series. The fact that one of the primary characters in the series is a Catholic priest actually makes the books more enjoyable. He is so flawed but seeks to be so good, that he has quickly become one of my favorite fictional characters. This book though spent far too much time in the minutia of Catholicism. It wasn't overtly religious or proselytizing, it just expected the reader to have a broader understanding of why and how the church changed in the last 75 years. It did provide quite a bit of detail but most of it wasn't that interesting.

Plus in this volume of the series Emery cheats the mystery reader. Part of the pleasure of reading mysteries is meeting all the suspects, learning about them and then deciding which person you think is guilty, before the big reveal. Readers can't do that in this book, because the murderer isn't a primary character in the book and he isn't even mentioned until the book is about 2/3 finished.

Carolyn says

I already read the first and seventh book in the Collins/Burke series and rated them both highly. The author has created strong, interesting characters and it is always great to revisit lawyer Monty Collins and his friend, Father Brennan Burke. This book was very complex, and a slow read for me. I felt to fully appreciate it I would need to know more about Catholic theology before and after Vatican Council 2, more about the history of the Roman Catholic Church and its hierarchy, something about the obscure saints mentioned and have some knowledge of the different types of religious music.

Father Burke has started a school for adults, to focus on Renaissance sacred music and Gregorian chants, all in Latin. He has about 60 students from Canada, United States, Europe and Japan. They are a mixed lot and from the first session he sees there are a lot of rivalries between those who want to perform the old music and those who want to sing modern English hymns or even compose new ones which Father Burke considers drivel. Some of the students have very strong opinions for and against modern church services and choir music. One leading theologian of the Church is brutally murdered. The police arrest a British monk who confesses to the crime, but Father Burke and Collins doubt his guilt.

There seems to be clues involving the suspects' devotion to certain saints, and the backgrounds of each suspect must be investigated. There are too many suspects, and to follow the plot the beliefs of each person, traditional or modern, should be remembered. Among the priests, ex priests, monks, nuns, etc. is a past East German policeman. Burke and Collins decide to go on a road trip in Europe to find information which might cast light on the motive for the murder. They interview a lot of people while not hanging out in taverns. Lots of drinking ensues. On returning to Halifax with the murder yet unsolved they are dismayed to learn that a High Vatican enforcer is coming to investigate the school and the killing.

A complicated plot with too many characters to keep in mind. Not as enjoyable as the two other books I have read, but certainly will read more in the series.

Tonya says

I liked this book. Love the series! The thing I liked best is that there were a lot of characters. The thing I liked the least was that there were so many characters! LOL!! It made it a bit difficult to keep up with who was who and who did what and so on.... but all in all, made the story interesting. I listened to the Audio Book and I feel that really added to the experience.

Susan says

Father Burke is running a schola (or school) for adults interested in traditional church music in Halifax, NS, when a controversial priest who is attending is found murdered. Only a few of the attendees lack alibis, and Burke and his best friend, lawyer Montague Collins, decide to help the police by interviewing the suspects, and--eventually--taking a trip to Italy. There's a lot about church music and church politics, but Emery keeps the discussions interesting.

ME says

Maybe it was because I had very few opportunities to sit with this one, and did most of the reading in snatches, but it was not my favorite Collins and Burke story. While it was informative and I learned a lot, it felt like the story took second fiddle to Emery's desire to educate her reader and delve into the Vatican II controversy. (From a Protestant perspective, it only solidified in the end the pointless superstition of praying to dead people who can't hear you nor help you and the desperation the decisions of MEN can create when they decide which dead guy is or is not able to help you based on some (obviously faulty) arbitrary set of man-made rules. Christ alone is the Intercessor between men and God. But I digress.) The story for me lacked Emery's usual depth and I felt like an outsider to Burke's struggle, more in this book than in others. I was also disappointed to find little satisfaction in Collins' seeming truce with McNeil after the emotional wreckage of the last book. This seemed far too quickly and easily resolved, though there are lingering questions and bridges to cross. Still, I'm looking forward to the next installment and hope that we see more of the dynamic we're used to between our protagonists.

Richard says

This book contains way too much information about the Catholic church that has nothing to do with the mystery. The information (I assume it is correct) itself was interesting, but did absolutely nothing to advance the story line.
