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A childhood trauma, disillusionment with religion and a family holiday combined to inspire general manager Cam Lavac to pen his first novel, a religious thriller. **MARJ BELESSIS reports.**

A STRANGE thing happened to Cam Lavac as he way to the publishers to deliver the final draft of his novel *Satan's Church*.

It was the morning of April 26, Sydney time, and Lavac had just switched on the car radio to listen to the news.

The lead item, that German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had just been elected Pope and had taken the name Benedict XVI, didn't quite send him into a spin, but caused him to consider a very different U-turn and hurry home to make some important amendments to his draft.

Lavac had chosen the same name for the fictional pope - whose supposed death hints at this confounding tale of satanic dealings and conspiracy in the highest echelons of the Catholic church.

Back home, Lavac deleted all references to Benedict XVI from his manuscript and substituted the name Leo Alexander for his fictional pope.

Satan's Church is a thriller with an ambitious plot for a first novel.

Its action spans the globe, with star players, an Australian Jesuit priest, Father Peter LeSarus, and his counterpart, the young nun Sister Christina Kelly, both under threat of excommunication, caught up in a battle with no less a figure than the Cardinal Secretary of State of the Vatican.

Cardinal Luca Morova will stop at nothing - even murder - to prevent public disclosure of the true message contained in the Third Secret of Fatima - a message which, it is widely believed, contains a warning for the church to mend its ways.

Along the way, the author aims the spotlight on issues that have plagued the church in recent history.

The book touches on the church's record of protecting pedophile clergy, making deals with arms makers and drug traffickers, and harbouring and assisting Nazi war criminals, a patch which, the author claims, has led to the Catholic Church losing any credibility it may be held as a provider of the weak, the downtrodden and the poor.

Author Cam Lavac's first book, *Satan's Church*, centres on a religious conspiracy.

devil becomes him

If you think *Satan's Church* is the work of a disillusioned Catholic, you are right.

Lavac's description of the trial of the pedophile lay teacher in which Fr Peter LeSarus (one of the main witnesses for the prosecution) is introduced to the reader is based on actual events which the author said he witnessed as a senior student at a Jesuit school.

"A fellow student was interloped with by one of the teachers," he said.

"Despite being confronted by the boy's parents and his psychiatrist, the school chose to slide with the teacher."

"The student was expelled and the teacher was transferred to another school."

"That started my disillusionment with the church."

Lavac says he is not alone in his alienation.

"I would lock myself away for two hours a day with my laptop, and when we came back home, I gave up watching TV and kept on writing."

"There are many issues confronting the Catholic Church," Lavac said.

"It's the single most wealthy and powerful organisation in the world, yet the church seems to be in total contradiction to Christ's teachings about love and poverty."

"A lot of people are becoming very disillusioned, and this is reflected in the fall-off in church attendance, and in religious vocations in the Western world."

Lavac's weekday job is as general manager of a firm which specialises in corporate publishing.

The new author lives at Beacon Hill with his second wife, Jill, and his stepson Lechman.

He admits that when he began writing the first draft of *Satan's Church*, his wife thought he was experiencing a mid-life crisis.

"We were on holiday up the north coast," he recalled.

"I would lock myself away for two hours a day with my laptop, and when we came back home, I gave up watching TV and kept on writing."



Disillusioned Catholic? Cam Lavac said his new conspiracy book is inspired by true events.

"When I finished the first draft, and Jill read what I'd done, she made me an offer: 'I'll move the lawn. You keep on writing.'"

It's not surprising that Lavac, like many authors, chose a subject with strong personal significance as the basis for his maiden work.

What has pleased him is the response the finished book has made, not just on

Jill, but on other members of his family, whom he describes as great readers.

"The book's release coincided with my mother's 80th birthday, and naturally I gave her a copy," he said.

If there was any trepidation on his part about how it would be received by the family matriarch, a regular churchgoer, this was soon dispelled.

"She loved it and agreed, somewhat reluctantly, with everything I had to say," he said.

Lavac is now well into writing his second book.

It's another "conspiratorial thriller" set in the Middle East and he has a third in the offing.

Satan's Church is published by New Holland Publishers (Australia). □