

A nice review of my new book *The Papacy: What the Pope Does and Why it Matters* was written by John M. Grondelski and published by National Catholic Review on March 30, 2019.

Below and I think Grondelski for his review and respond to a few of his comments.

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# An Introduction to the History of the Pope as the Vicar of Christ

BOOK PICK: *The Papacy*

John M. Grondelski

<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/an-introduction-to-the-history-of-the-pope-as-the-vicar-of-christ>

THE PAPACY: WHAT THE POPE DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS

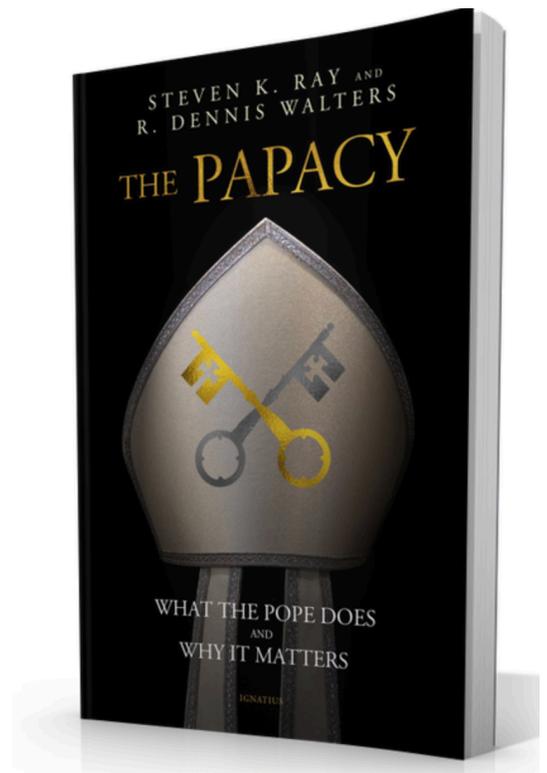
By Stephen K. Ray & R. Dennis Walters

Ignatius, 2018

164 pages, \$15.95

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The book's subtitle captures its focus: what the pope does and why that's important. While the book examines history — ours is, after all, a faith that is



incarnate in time — its attention is not so much history as the role of the pope as Vicar of Christ.

Divided into eight chapters, the book discusses the pope's mission of governing, teaching and sanctifying. Other chapters treat a potpourri of subjects, such as how the process of picking a pope has evolved or 10 common myths voiced against the papacy. The chapter "The Pope as Gift to the Church and the World" provides brief sketches of eight popes, including 20th-century popes Pius X, John XXIII and John Paul II. The pope's role in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is the subject of another chapter. A final chapter summarizes the pope's significance for Catholics as a sign of unity whose role is to anchor the Church's faith and morals in truth. Brief appendices list all 266 popes and offer a short glossary of terms relevant to the papacy (like "cardinal" or "encyclical").

Catholicism is a sacramental religion, and the papacy has the quality of a sacramental, continuing in the Church today the tri-part teaching, governing and sanctifying office that Christ gave Peter as his vicar. The authors repeatedly return to Peter as he who sets the "pattern" for his successors:

"Imagine Jesus spending all night in prayer, and then announcing his vicar, the man who would carry the keys of his kingdom. Which would you choose if you were in his place? Would you choose the brash and reckless bumbler, the one who speaks too soon, puts his foot in his mouth, and makes promises he can't keep, who lies to protect himself when he's in trouble? Or would you choose the natural leader, the successful businessman? The one everybody mentions first? The one who speaks for the others and, if he speaks wrongly, is willing to take the consequences? The one who risks what the others are

afraid to? The one who can admit his own sinfulness and, when he falls, get up again? The one who's willing to ask you for help and to exercise the authority you gave him to cast out demons and heal the sick? The one that, in the long run, is faithful and would leave his family, home and business to follow you? You might choose No. 2, but in reality the two alternatives are two sides of the same man, Simon Bar-Jona. He was the one Jesus picked and then nicknamed 'Rock.'”

Similar sentiments can be said of his successors.

Readers wanting an overview of why the Church needs the papacy would do well with this book, which offers a basic, up-to-date and sympathetic treatment for today's Catholics about the purpose and significance of the papacy.

The book is clearly a starting point, which means it's limited. The authors could have included something about how the Church teaches infallibly not just in the extraordinary but in the *ordinary* magisterium (see *Lumen Gentium*, 25). The authors rightly note the infallibility question is an essential part of the Church's mission of bearing truthful witness to God's will. Since that's the case, the conditions for the infallibility of the ordinary magisterium merit discussion: The question of infallibility is imbalanced when primary attention is given to its extraordinary exercise. The discussion of the lives of but a handful of popes, while representative of different moments in Church history, is basic, and the prominence afforded the incumbent pontiff, Francis, is surprisingly and curiously limited. As a point of departure, however, this book usefully treats the chair of Peter and its occupants.

*John M. Grondelski, Ph.D., writes from Falls Church, Virginia.*

*All views are exclusively his.*

## MY RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW:

First, I would like to thank John Grondelski for taking the time to read and to write this astute and excellent review of our new book on the Papacy. My first book on this subject is entitled "Upon this Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church" which is also published by Ignatius Press. John gives, what I think is a very fair and balanced summary and review.

Second, however, I would like to comment on a few things. First, the matter of infallibility was by Grondelski with these words, "The question of infallibility is imbalanced when primary attention is given to its extraordinary exercise." I would suggest that this topic was addressed quite adequately considering the scope of the book . On pages 57-63, under the heading "What it Means when the Pope Teaches Infallibly" we do explain the issue of infallibility with all the various aspects covered.

For example, on page 58 we state, "Infallibility is a gift not for Peter alone nor for the Twelve personally, nor even for their successors, but for the Church as a whole. The pope participates in that infallibility in a special way. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a marvelous summary of infallibility in paragraph 891."

The review also suggests that we did not give adequate coverage of the current pope. There are three reasons we did not address Pope Francis in any detail. First, this pontificate is unusual and has been ripe with controversy. We did not feel this book was the place to open a hot topic that we would not be able to cover adequately considering the scope of our book. That is left for others with full book-length coverage.

Second, it would date the book and we want this book to have a long life of explaining the papacy in general without tying it specifically to the current papacy, especially while still in the flux of time. Third, we wanted this book to transcend any particular papacy and present what might be called a "job description" of the papacy and not be about any particular pope.

Having said this, I again want to thank Mr. Grondelski for his excellent review and for his service to the Church and the wider world. Thanks to National Catholic Register for carrying the review and for all the good work they do.