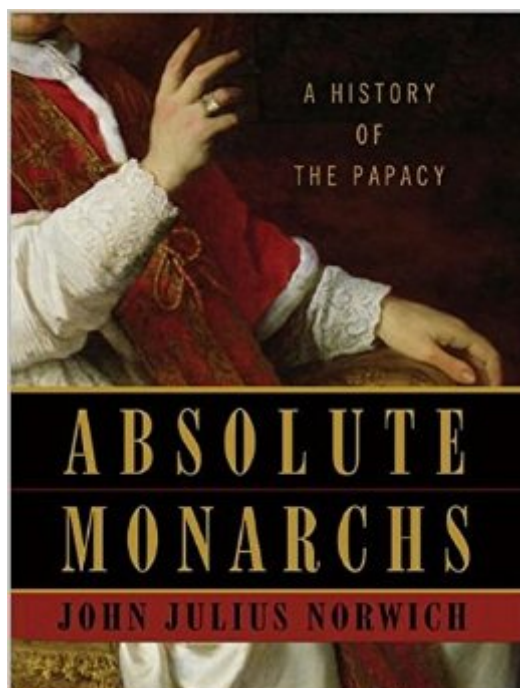


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Absolute Monarchs: A History Of The Papacy



Synopsis

With the papacy embattled in recent years, it is essential to have the perspective of one of the world's most accomplished historians. In *Absolute Monarchs*, John Julius Norwich captures nearly two thousand years of inspiration and devotion, intrigue and scandal. The men (and maybe one woman) who have held this position of infallible power over millions have ranged from heroes to rogues, admirably wise to utterly decadent. Norwich, who knew two popes and had private audiences with two others, recounts in riveting detail the histories of the most significant popes and what they meant politically, culturally, and socially to Rome and to the world. Norwich presents such brave popes as Innocent I, who in the fifth century successfully negotiated with Alaric the Goth, an invader civil authorities could not defeat, and Leo I, who two decades later tamed (and perhaps paid off) Atilla the Hun. Here, too, are the scandalous figures: Pope Joan, the mythic woman said (without any substantiation) to have been elected in 855, and the infamous "pornocracy," the five libertines who were descendants or lovers of Marozia, debauched daughter of one of Rome's most powerful families. *Absolute Monarchs* brilliantly portrays such reformers as Pope Paul III, "the greatest pontiff of the sixteenth century," who reinterpreted the Church's teaching and discipline, and John XXIII, who in five short years starting in 1958 "opened the church to the twentieth century," instituting reforms that led to Vatican II. Norwich brings the story to the present day with Benedict XVI, who is coping with a global priest sex scandal. Epic and compelling, *Absolute Monarchs* is the astonishing story of some of history's most revered and reviled figures, men who still cast light and shadows on the vatican and the world today.

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Customer Reviews

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, although as some reviewers have noted, the subject matter is too broad for thorough treatment in a popular work. However, the author manages to delve deeply into certain papal reigns, resulting in an informative and entertaining book. Unfortunately, one of the reigns he focuses on is that of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). As a self-described "agnostic Protestant", the author betrays himself as an unabashed liberal when he arrived at the modern Popes. He slanders Pope Pius XII with all the usual blather about anti-Semitism and his supposed omissions when it came to the Holocaust. Such nonsense has been so well debunked time and again, that the author's position can only be attributed to invincible ignorance or pure malice. When dealing with Pius' successors, the author naturally is greatly enthusiastic about the changes introduced by Second Vatican Council and expresses his frustration with the Church for not going further, by allowing abortion, contraception, female priests, blessing homosexuality and all the rest of the panoply of liberal demands. It is for these reasons that I cannot whole-heartedly recommend this book. In addition, there were some rather curious errors, some of which were: *...that St. Jerome was Italian. In fact, although he was born in a Roman province, he was from Dalmatia, in modern Eastern Europe. *...he declared that the Copernican system, as reflected in the Galileo affair, contradicted the Book of Genesis. I could be wrong, but I'm fairly sure that Genesis doesn't deal with the movement of the solar system. I believe that Galileo got in trouble because the theory of the heliocentric universe contradicted the Book of Joshua as well as several verses in Psalms. *...

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