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Main content

Article Preview :

KEEPERS OF THE KEYS OF HEAVEN: A HISTORY OF THE PAPACY

by Roger Collins

Basic Books, 566 pages, \$35

At the beginning of his preface, Roger Collins, a medievalist and Honorary Fellow of Edinburgh University, admits that a one-volume history of the papacy is "probably far too ambitious an undertaking." Collins is right, and, despite its virtues, *Keepers of the Keys* proves the point. The book is instructive in its rendering of the complexities and chaos of the medieval papacy, where Collins is playing on his home pitch; but when we get to the past two hundred years or so, both the narrative and the judgments become uneven. The necessary brevity imposed by the one-volume format (and, perhaps, an uncritical deference to the Whig theory of modern history) yield a treatment of the papacy from the French Revolution to the present in which two of Rome's greatest accomplishments--securing the Church's independence against the assaults of the modern state and preserving the deposit of faith while developing Catholic social doctrine as a comprehensive vision of human goods--go unnoticed and unremarked.

Collins' sketches of...

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