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Grading Pope Francis' first four months

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NCR Today

On Saturday, I was in New York for an interview on the CBS Saturday Morning show. I had been a guest on that show several times during the papal transition in the spring.

This time, Pope Francis created such a stir with his trip to Brazil and his press conference on the plane heading home that the media clamored for more.

"How new is this guy?" they seemed to be asking. "Is he for real?" And underneath it all was the big question: "Is he really a reformer? A revolutionary?"

Before the show, the producers told me I would be asked to "grade" Pope Francis on his first four months in office. I thought long and hard about my answer.

When the question finally came at the end of the interview, I said simply, "On style and tone and emphasis [on social justice], an A+. But on substance and all else, an 'incomplete.' "

If he is indeed a reformer or a revolutionary, we have yet to see it. Coming still are his appointments to the Curia (or reform of the curial structure) and the appointments of bishops in the United States and elsewhere. He has yet to seriously tackle the fallout from the sex abuse crisis, especially with the bishops who did nothing to stop it.

And of course, Pope Francis' understanding of issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and the role of women in the church has a long way to go. (I suggested on CBS that his contention that "the church has an inadequate theology of women" is certainly a true statement for the male hierarchy, and I might assign him some "homework": Begin reading the enormous body of feminist theology that has been enriching the church for decades.

Watch a clip of the interview.

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