

BOOK REVIEW

The Seven Big Myths about the Catholic Church: Distinguishing Fact from Fiction about Catholicism. By Christopher Kaczor. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012. 164 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 978-1-5861-7791-1.

History shows that there have always been myths about the Catholic Church that distort people's impressions of her and make her mission of incorporating all humanity into the Body of Christ more difficult. Our present times are no exception, and Christopher Kaczor, professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University, has selected what he considers to be the seven most pervasive and controversial modern myths about the Church and responds to each one in an impressive feat of apologetics. His purpose for doing so is simple – to draw souls to communion with God through the Catholic Church.

There are many explanations for why people have misconceptions about the Church and fail to see the necessity of her to achieve union with God. Kaczor believes the biggest obstacle for people in realizing their need for the Church, and a cause for many misconceptions about her, is the sins of Catholics themselves. As the Bride of Christ, the Church shares in the holiness, indefectibility, and infallibility of her divine Spouse; however, members of the Church can and do commit serious sins that are often sources of scandal. This important distinction and the mysterious reality of the Church as both sinless yet having sinful members is normally lost on her enemies and critics; but Kaczor offers a wise perspective: "Christianity is properly measured not by its great sinners but by its great saints, for it is the saints who have lived out the Gospel message, not the great sinners" (12). Throughout the book, he admits to the sins of Catholics with honesty and sincerity, while still demonstrating that these sins do not warrant anyone's separation from the Church.

Each of the seven myths is addressed within its own chapter, and begins with a brief look at where the myth comes from and the major problems it presents that must be addressed. In responding to the myths, Kaczor draws copiously from Sacred Scripture, magisterial teachings, and the writings of great theologians, as well as philosophical, psychological, historical, and sociological sources. He frequently provides concrete examples and statistical data to support his arguments, which is usually quite effective in engaging a modern audience. Every myth is disproven with such tact and charity toward the Church's enemies that the book has the potential to disarm even the most hostile myth-holder.

The first myth is that the Church opposes science. The mentality that religion and science cannot go together is rooted in the more fundamental error of seeing faith and reason to be at odds. Kaczor explains the true harmony between faith and reason, and thus the compatibility of religion and science. Ample evidence is given to show that the Church, over the centuries, has been and continues to be interested in scientific discovery as one of the, if not the chief, patrons of science.

The second myth is that the Church opposes freedom and happiness. Myths about the Church often center on her teachings, which tend to be seen by non-Catholics (and even many Catholics) as a list of “thou shalt not’s” that take away personal freedom and the possibility of a happy existence. Kaczor clarifies that the Church does not oppose happiness. She does oppose false happiness, however, which sacrifices the possibility of the greatest happiness of loving and serving God for the sake of attaining a lesser happiness that is improperly ordered. Similarly, the Church is not opposed to true freedom, only the false notion of freedom that fails to have man’s true good as its aim.

The third myth is that the Church hates women. This myth originates mainly in the misreading of Scripture and the Church Fathers, as well as a misunderstanding of the Church’s perennial teachings on contraception and abortion (69). Kaczor brings much-needed lucidity into the fray and does an excellent job of proving that the Church has always been the supreme advocate for the dignity of women. The fourth myth is that the Church banned contraception out of indifference to love. The chapter focuses on the true nature of erotic love and makes clear how such love finds fulfillment only in the openness to new life. Of particular value in this chapter is the refutation of the popular argument that Natural Family Planning is just another form of contraception.

The fifth myth is that the Church hates homosexuals. It is explained how the Church actually embraces homosexual persons as children of God, distinguishing carefully between sexual orientation and actions. The sixth myth, that the Church opposes same-sex “marriage” out of bigotry, is closely related to the previous myth. The logical arguments put forth in this chapter are invaluable. Together, these two chapters are a *tour de force* defense of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality, which is becoming increasingly difficult to discuss in the present social climate, though it has never been more needed.

The seventh myth is that priestly celibacy caused the crisis of sexual abuse of minors. The abuse scandals of recent decades caused a painful wound that will not fully heal any time soon. The grievous sin of sexual abuse, magnified by the perpetrators being priests and the subsequent cover-ups, provided much material for myths to form. Kaczor presents an eloquent defense of priestly

celibacy and argues that those who committed abuse did so not because of celibacy but out of a lack of fidelity to their vocation. Proof is also provided that sexual abuse of minors was never a bigger problem in the Church than other places, and in fact, children today are far safer in a Catholic institution than they are in the public school system (159-160).

The second chapter on happiness and freedom is the lengthiest, yet deals with the least popular of the seven myths, in this reviewer's experience. In comparison, the final chapter on the abuse scandal, which is one of the biggest and most delicate issues facing Catholic apologists today, is relatively short. The second chapter could stand to be shortened, and the last chapter could be strengthened by additional discussion. Furthermore, chapters five and six, which both treat issues regarding homosexuality, could be woven into a single chapter because of their interrelatedness. In spite of these minor criticisms, *The Seven Big Myths about the Catholic Church* is an outstanding book. Kaczor brings refreshing logic and clarity to tough issues and refutes each myth with the faithfulness and charity of a true Catholic apologist.

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