

DEBUNKING POPULAR ANTI-CATHOLIC LIES

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Gerard Verschuuren, Ph.D., *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies: A Myth-Busting Apologist Sets The Record Straight* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2018)

“There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church,” Bishop Fulton J. Sheen famously said, “but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be.”

As we at the Catholic League know, today there are many in America who do hate the Catholic Church, primarily for certain of its teachings—on marriage and family, human sexuality, the sanctity of life—that conflict with the materialism and hedonism of our age. But here too, those who hate the Church are guilty of falsely caricaturing its teachings, practices and history, in order to discredit its voice.

Today more than ever, it is necessary for Catholics to refute the many popular lies told about our faith. To do so, Catholics must first understand the truths about our faith.

Enter Gerard Verschuuren, with *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies*. A human biologist who also holds a doctorate in the philosophy of science, Verschuuren is a prolific writer and speaker on science and religion, faith and reason; and *Forty Anti-Catholic Lies* is the latest in a series of works he has authored debunking popular anti-Catholic myths.

The book is organized simply, the forty anti-Catholic lies broken down into seven categories: Catholicism and the Bible; Catholicism and its Controversies; Catholicism and its Uniqueness; Catholicism and Other Religions; Catholicism and

its History; Catholicism and Science; and Catholicism and Society.

In *Catholicism and the Bible*, Verschuuren takes on what has been a Protestant mischaracterization, ever since the Reformation, of the Catholic Church's approach to Scripture.

Martin Luther, Verschuuren explains, taught a doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)—that “Scripture is the supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.” As Catholicism rejects that doctrine, critics hold that “most Catholics live a life of *sine Scriptura* (without Scripture).” This is demonstrably false; as Verschuuren points out, Catholics “can’t go to Mass without hearing Scripture readings over and over again.”

But Catholics believe that sacred Tradition, along with sacred Scripture, is essential to transmitting the faith. It cannot be Scripture alone, Verschuuren concludes, quoting St. Thomas More, because “The Church was gathered and the faith was believed before any part of the New Testament was put in writing.”

“St. Paul did not walk around with a copy of the New Testament in his pocket,” Verschuuren writes, “because there was no New Testament yet.” Instead, St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians attested to the complementarity of Tradition and Scripture: “Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.”

Catholics do not *reject* the teaching authority of Scripture. Rather, we join it to the equally authoritative teachings of sacred Tradition.

Within the category of Catholicism and its Controversies falls the lie that “Catholics think salvation can be earned.” This is the age-old argument about whether salvation is achieved through God’s grace or through good works. Critics of Catholicism make this an “either-or” proposition, in which

Catholics, because they encourage good works in the name of the Lord, are guilty of elevating “works” over “grace” as the means to salvation.

In truth, the Catholic Church has always taught that we are saved by Christ’s redemptive suffering and death. “Salvation ultimately comes from God’s grace,” writes Verschuuren, “not from our doings. Even when we do ‘good works,’ on our side, they are always a fruit of grace, coming from God’s side first.”

Yet critical to Catholic teaching about salvation is our power to reject it through acts (or omissions) of our free will. God’s grace must be “preserved, nourished, and cherished” throughout our lifetimes, Verschuuren explains. Good works help us to do that. But when we “(put) our work in opposition to God’s grace” we reject that grace, and with it God’s gift of salvation.

Catholicism and its Uniqueness covers a number of the most oft-repeated lies about Catholic beliefs and practices, including our veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is claimed that Catholics venerate Mary as a goddess, on a par with Jesus as Redeemer. The claim is false, but so widely held that this may be the most important topic Verschuuren addresses.

He begins by noting the important role Mary plays in the Bible and the early life of the Church, demonstrating how vital Mary’s “Yes” to God was to our redemption. This was the meaning of Mother Teresa’s words, “No Mary, no Jesus.” “God chose to bring His Son into the world through the cooperation of Mary,” Verschuuren explains. “Without her cooperation there would have been no Incarnation, and therefore no Redemption.”

This is not the same as elevating Mary to the level of Christ the Redeemer. “Even in the great Marian churches of the world,” Verschuuren emphasizes, “the central act of worship is

the Mass—the Lord’s Supper, the bloodless reenactment of his sacrifice on Calvary. The focus of worship is the altar, Cross and tabernacle. Christ alone is the center of Catholic Faith.”

He quotes St. John Paul II: “The text of St. Paul’s letter to Timothy [“There is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ”] excludes any other parallel mediation, *but not subordinate mediation.*” (my emphasis) And that subordinate mediation is the role of Mary.

Verschuuren reminds us that in the Hail Mary, Catholics ask Mary to pray for sinners, not to redeem sinners. “She brings them to her Son” and He redeems us. That is what Catholics believe about our Blessed Mother and her intercessory role.

Catholicism and Other Religions deals with the claim that “Catholics think Heaven is only for them.” The basis for this contention is the teaching that “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” It is a widely misunderstood teaching that the Church in recent years has sought to clarify. As Verschuuren explains, it derives from the understanding that “all salvation comes from Christ.” But this is contingent on first knowing Christ. Such knowledge comes through the Church, which is Christ’s body; and that is how salvation comes through the Church.

Ultimately, Verschuuren makes clear, it is God who decides who goes to Heaven and who does not. One does not have to be Catholic to be saved; but if one knows and willfully rejects Christ and his Church, they reject salvation. “Depending on *our* choices, God makes *His* choices.”

Catholicism and its History tackles some of the favorite lies of anti-Catholics: those that vilify the Church unfairly for the Crusades and the Inquisition, and that advance the calumny against Pope Pius XII as “Hitler’s Pope.” This book debunks all of them.

With regard to Pius XII, Verschuuren points out that Pius

always had to weigh the moral imperative of speaking out against the probability that it would only increase Nazi persecutions. Yet he did speak out, beginning with his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, that deplored the Nazi invasion of Poland and reiterated Church teaching against racial persecution. He acted aggressively, at great risk to himself and the Church, to protect Jews in Rome. And he was widely praised, by media and Jewish leaders, during and after the war and upon his death in 1958. His 1942 Christmas address prompted the *New York Times* to proclaim him “a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent.”

What then accounts for the “Hitler’s Pope” defamation? Verschuuren pinpoints it. The phrase was first used by Radio Moscow in June 1945. Pope Pius, with his consistent opposition to totalitarian oppression, was an obstacle to Stalin’s communists, as he had been to Hitler’s Nazis. He had to be discredited. Thus, when German playwright Rolf Hochhuth—who had been a junior member of the Hitler Youth!—issued his play *The Deputy*, defaming Pius XII, it was produced and given wide circulation by Erwin Piscator, a German communist who had worked for Soviet intelligence in Moscow during World War II.

Verschuuren further reports that General Ion Pacepa, a former high-ranking official in Romania’s communist government—and the highest ranking official ever to defect from the Soviet Union—revealed the anti-Pius disinformation campaign, and his own role in it.

Among the most widely accepted of anti-Catholic lies is that the Church is “anti-science.” Verschuuren demolishes this one. He begins by citing the Church’s historic commitment to “Faith and Reason (*Fides et Ratio*),” tracing it from Augustine to Aquinas to St. John Paul II, who proclaimed faith and reason as “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”

Verschuuren shows that, far from being opposed by the Church,

“science was born in the Catholic cradle of the Middle Ages.” During the so-called “Dark Ages,” it was the Catholic Church that provided schooling, preserved educational research, and promoted scientific inquiry.

“Had it not been for the Catholic Church,” Verschuuren argues, “the scientific revolution would most likely never have happened.” The first universities in the world, which arose during the Middle Ages, “were Catholic universities,” and they “were the hotbed for a period of great technological and scientific advancements, as well as achievements in nearly all other fields of knowledge.”

The author also debunks Exhibit A for the “Catholics are anti-science” lie: the Galileo affair. Besides exposing the flaws in Galileo’s research and personal character, he also refutes the myths that Galileo was imprisoned, tortured, even burned at the stake by the Church. Voltaire’s claim that Galileo “groaned away his days in the dungeons of the Inquisition,” was “a complete fabrication made up by an anti-Catholic.” That’s an apt description for many of the anti-Catholic lies exposed in this book.

Among the lies Verschuuren takes on in *Catholicism and Society* is the assertion that Catholics use religion to discriminate. He shows that in fact the opposite is true: Today’s secularists, led by groups like the ACLU, blatantly discriminate against religion, Catholicism in particular. They do so, he explains, by defining secular values—i.e., abortion, same sex “marriage”—as “rights,” while relegating religious values to “beliefs” that cannot be imposed on others in a pluralist society. But as he notes, secular values “are far from neutral—they are usually pro-abortion, pro-euthanasia, and pro-homosexual activity.”

Thus, while we are told that “religion cannot impose its values on secular society,” secular society is accorded “the right to impose its values on religion.” This is the very

definition of discrimination, and it is practiced today *against* the Church, not by the Church.

Forty Anti-Catholic Lies is easy reading, accessible to readers from all walks of life, all levels of education, and all degrees of faith commitment. All Catholics, and anyone interested in the truth about Catholicism, should read it.