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Abstract Review of *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths and Misconceptions about the Papacy* (1999), by Patrick Madrid.

CLEARING UP MISCONCEPTIONS

Barry R. Bickmore

There are excellent reasons why Latter-day Saints would benefit from reading Patrick Madrid's new book, *Pope Fiction*.¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is expanding rapidly, particularly in some areas like Latin America, in which the dominant faith (at least nominally) is still Roman Catholic. Catholics are starting to take more notice of Latter-day Saints; indeed, I am aware of three Roman Catholic critiques of the Church of Jesus Christ recently published or slated for publication in the near future.² Conversations between Roman Catholics and Latter-day Saints are bound to turn to the subject of authority; that is, has authority been transmitted through the ages via the papacy, or was it lost and subsequently restored in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? It

1. Patrick Madrid is a well-known Roman Catholic apologist and editor in chief of *Envoy* magazine, a leading Catholic apologetics periodical.

2. Patrick Madrid is currently working on *I Will Not Leave You Orphans*, a critique of Mormon claims about a total apostasy. Isaiah Bennett, a former Catholic priest who joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and later returned to Catholicism, has written *Inside Mormonism* and *When Mormons Call*, which I review in this volume, pp. 201–81.

Review of Patrick Madrid. *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths and Misconceptions about the Papacy*. San Diego: Basilica, 1999. 338 pp. with appendix, bibliography, scripture and subject indexes. \$14.99.

would be preferable to avoid saying silly, poorly grounded, or inaccurate things about the popes when such subjects come up.

Think of it in terms of the Golden Rule. If you are like me, you are probably sick of having to deal with the kind of ignorant and malicious charges against the Church of Jesus Christ that our friends and neighbors cull from Protestant countercult literature. Would it not be nice if these people had read at least one Latter-day Saint book that addresses these charges? If this were the case, I think we would never hear about most of these again. And would it not be a relief to bypass all the distortions and focus on real issues? The fact is that many of the people we normally think of as anti-Mormons are also anti-Catholics, or, more precisely, “anti-everyone-but-themselves.” For instance, *Pope Fiction* answers anti-Catholic charges made by such luminaries as Dave Hunt (pp. 102–4) and James White (pp. 254–55).³ It turns out that Hunt and White use the same kinds of questionable tactics against the Catholics that they do against us. I suggest we follow the Golden Rule by disabusing ourselves of a few misconceptions about our Catholic friends before we undertake to have religious discussions with them. I imagine they will appreciate the effort just as much as we would.

Pope Fiction provides answers and explanations to thirty charges the author sees as “myths and misconceptions” about the papacy. Most of these originated with sectarian Protestant critics, but I am sad to report that I have seen several of them perpetuated within Latter-day Saint circles. For instance, a missionary companion once gave me an old typescript copy of an “exposé” in which it was revealed that the pope’s tiara is inscribed with one of his official titles, *Vicarius Filii Dei* (Vicar of the Son of God). If you add up the Roman numerals in the title, it adds up to . . . 666! However, the pope has no such official title, and, in fact, his tiara bears no inscription

3. Hunt and White are the authors, respectively, of *The God Makers* (with Ed Decker) and of *Letters to a Mormon Elder* and *Is the Mormon My Brother?* The latter two books have been examined in prior issues of this *Review*; see Russell C. McGregor with Kerry A. Shirts, review of *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, by James R. White, *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 90–298, and L. Ara Norwood, review of *Is the Mormon My Brother?* by James R. White, *FARMS Review of Books* 13/1 (2001): 133–63.

(pp. 89–99). His real title, *Vicarius Christi* (Vicar of Christ), only adds up (with a disappointing thud) to 214. An LDS friend also told me about “Pope Joan,” an exceptionally bright medieval woman who pretended to be a man and eventually rose through the ranks of the priesthood to be elected pope. (She was supposed to have been ousted when she gave birth to a baby and her gender was revealed.) Of course, there is a whopping four-hundred-year gap between when Joan is supposed to have lived and the first mention of her (pp. 167–77). In fact, there is no reliable historical information available to verify the existence of such a woman. Our Catholic friends will appreciate it if we never bring these red herrings up again.

Madrid also frankly acknowledges the existence of several “bad popes” who were involved in corruption, adultery, and even murder (pp. 130–33). To Catholics, the bad popes demonstrate only that God will not let anyone bring down his church—even the pope.

I am not saying that there are no decent arguments against the papacy or that *Pope Fiction* adequately neutralizes every charge it addresses.⁴ I am, however, insisting that, if we are likely to have genuine discussions with Roman Catholics, and if we can rescue these discussions from degenerating into mud-slinging contests by reading a medium-sized paperback book, we ought to.

4. For examples of arguments I feel can be legitimately leveled against the papacy, see a cordial debate I had with an ex-Mormon Roman Catholic, Steve Clifford, at www.geocities.com/afmjock/rc_dex.html. One more note might be useful for the reader. In my experience, the Latter-day Saints have too often been dependent on Protestant critiques of Catholicism when composing arguments for the restoration in opposition to Roman Catholic claims. While I believe some of the Protestant arguments have merit, long hours of checking references and comparing Catholic responses have made it clear to me that, all too often, the Protestant criticisms are worthless.