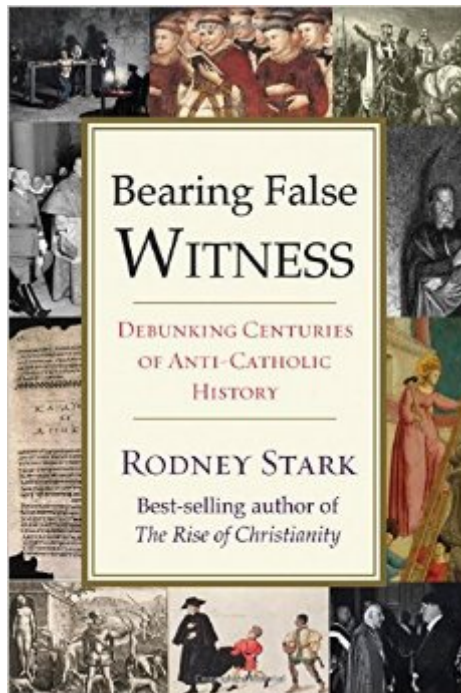


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Bearing False Witness: Debunking Centuries Of Anti-Catholic History



Synopsis

As we all know and as many of our well established textbooks have argued for decades, the Inquisition was one of the most frightening and bloody chapters in Western history, Pope Pius XII was anti-Semitic and rightfully called "Hitler's Pope," the Dark Ages were a stunting of the progress of knowledge to be redeemed only by the secular spirit of the Enlightenment, and the religious Crusades were an early example of the rapacious Western thirst for riches and power. But what if these long held beliefs were all wrong? In this stunning, powerful, and ultimately persuasive book, Rodney Stark, one of the most highly regarded sociologists of religion and bestselling author of *The Rise of Christianity* (HarperSanFrancisco 1997) argues that some of our most firmly held ideas about history, ideas that paint the Catholic Church in the least positive light are, in fact, fiction. Why have we held these wrongheaded ideas so strongly and for so long? And if our beliefs are wrong, what, in fact, is the truth? In each chapter, Stark takes on a well-established anti-Catholic myth, gives a fascinating history of how each myth became the conventional wisdom, and presents a startling picture of the real truth. For example, Instead of the Spanish Inquisition being an anomaly of torture and murder of innocent people persecuted for "imaginary" crimes such as witchcraft and blasphemy, Stark argues that not only did the Spanish Inquisition spill very little blood, but it was a major force in support of moderation and justice. Instead of Pope Pius XII being apathetic or even helpful to the Nazi movement, such as to merit the title, "Hitler's Pope," Stark shows that the campaign to link Pope Pius XII to Hitler was initiated by the Soviet Union, presumably in hopes of neutralizing the Vatican in post-World War II affairs. Pope Pius XII was widely praised for his vigorous and devoted efforts to saving Jewish lives during the war. Instead of the Dark Ages being understood as a millennium of ignorance and backwardness inspired by the Catholic Church's power, Stark argues that the whole notion of the "Dark Ages" was an act of pride perpetuated by anti-religious intellectuals who were determined to claim that theirs was the era of "Enlightenment." In the end, readers will not only have a more accurate history of the Catholic Church, they will come to understand why it became unfairly maligned for so long. *Bearing False Witness* is a compelling and sobering account of how egotism and ideology often work together to give us a false truth. Â Â Â

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Customer Reviews

Bearing False Witness by Rodney Stark TMve been addressing anti-Catholic tropes on the internet for the last twenty years. When I started, I honestly believed that these accusations were supported by fact, or, even, if not totally accurate, were substantially accurate. My particular forte of late has been the slander that the Catholic Church supported Hitler and the Nazis. By going past the books that everyone is reading into the books written by those involved in the "Church Struggle," I have established that the modern view is a total distortion of the facts. Germans, Europeans and the world knew that the Catholic Church was completely opposed to National Socialism for a variety of reasons, including its exaltation of nation and race over God as the supreme good. I have newspaper articles from the New York Times that demonstrate that the German Catholic bishops repeatedly condemned National Socialism from 1923 through 1945. The German Catholic Bishops excommunicated Nazi party members. Catholic electoral districts did not vote for the Nazis at anywhere near the rate of Protestant districts. The Nazis lumped "political Catholicism" in with international Bolshevism and international Judaism as one of its three great enemies. These points are not opinions or apologetics; they are facts. Yet, I repeatedly am shown pictures of purported Catholic priests "who are often Lutheran" performing the Hitler salute "which was required on penalty of imprisonment - and told that Catholics made National Socialism possible. Needless to say, my interlocutors are as ignorant as a box of rocks, and yet they are arrogant with the arrogance that only indoctrination into an unshakable belief can give. Weird and insidious.

"Nor does it matter at all to the dead whether they receive justice at the hands of succeeding generations. But to the living, to do justice, however belatedly, should matter."--Garrett Mattingly
This book is a welcome corrective to a number of false narratives, stories that most people accept as

common knowledge even though historians have long known them to be anti-Catholic myths. So, for example, centuries before Christopher Columbus was even born, all educated people knew that the earth was a globe. Likewise, the Catholic Church is not now, nor was it ever, anti-Semitic. And the apparent explosion of conversions in the fourth century was not brought about by Christians with political power persecuting rational, tolerant pagans. The Dark Ages if you look a little closer weren't so dark after all. The Spanish Inquisition was actually more fair and mild than the other courts of its day. It used none of the lurid tortures that we see in our movies and novels, and ironically, it SAVED many thousand lives by quickly investigating and shutting down the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries that went unchecked outside of Catholic Spain and Italy. All told, the Inquisition handed over about ten people a year to be executed. In the same period, about 750 people a year were hanged in Protestant England, many for petty theft. The Crusades were not greedy wars of conquest or the vanguard of European colonialism. The Church was a patron of science, not its enemy, and the historical Galileo (as opposed to the mythical one) never spent a day in jail. Far from condoning slavery, the Church worked to abolish it and to uphold the dignity of its victims in the meantime. The Catholic Church was never the friend of dictatorship.

I have long been aware of Rodney Stark's excellent work using facts and statistics to set the historical record straight. This might be the best part of the book, at the end of the introduction: "Finally, I am not a Roman Catholic, and I did not write this book in defense of the Church. I wrote it in defense of history." And we thank you. The fact that Stark isn't Catholic matters because it means he doesn't have a dog in this fight. Except, of course, as a historian who loves truth more than "what everyone knows." I was really surprised that every chapter had examples of current historians (who Stark calls "distinguished bigots") perpetuating untruths, usually despite clear evidence from modern historians who had disproven them. I really loved this book. Even in the cases where I knew a lot about anti-Catholic history I always learned new and surprising facts. Often this was the result of simply reorienting my thinking. For example, I knew the Church's inhumane behavior to thousands of people during the Inquisition was largely exaggerated, but I was totally unprepared for archival evidence to show that these claims are a pack of lies. Pack. Of. Lies. It's so ingrained to believe that there was at least some level of culpability that I realize it looks outrageous for me to say this. But it is true. As are the lies that have been perpetuated about motivating anti-Semitic medieval pogroms culminating in the Holocaust, precipitating the Dark Ages (which never existed, by the way), provoking the Crusades, burning witches, supporting slavery, and much more. I could go on, but you get the point. No wonder the Church has a hard time among moderns.

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