

CHURCHinHISTORY INFORMATION CENTRE

The Catholic Church professes to uphold the dignity of man, and encourage the pursuit of scientific knowledge and social reform. She claims to be a sign of Christ's presence in the world.

Yet much of the literature in English-speaking countries depicts the Church, the Pope and individual Catholics as 'the baddies' in historical dramas. The cumulative effect is to characterise Catholicism as a force opposed to freedom, scientific exploration and social reform.

There is an obvious reason for this situation. From 1534 until about 1800 (with two very short interludes) government policy in England was relentlessly anti-Catholic. All events were reported and presented in ways calculated to discredit the Catholic Church and the Pope. The main opinion-forming organs continued this tradition for more than a further century. In more recent times, anti-religious political movements and religious sects have repeated falsehoods from the past and added myths of their own. This tradition exerts a powerful influence in contemporary history books, novels, plays, films and video productions. The authors and producers drink from the poisoned wells of anti-Catholic bias and stereotyping and, often unwittingly, help to perpetuate the tradition for a further generation.

Ecumenical dialogue should not be retarded by fears, suspicions or distrust based on false historical premises. Although much bias in the English-speaking world is against Catholics, inaccurate historical images needing correction also exist in the popular mind regarding other minorities and even the established Anglican Church itself.

OBJECTIVITY

Admittedly, there could be a temptation to whitewash the actions of particular Popes and individuals. We trust, however, that the quality of our publications, when presenting factual material, will assure readers of our ultimate aims: reliability and trustworthiness.

CHURCHinHISTORY endorses two excerpts from 'Curriculum 11-16', a paper produced by Her Majesty's School inspectorate (HMI) and published in December 1977.

"Moral judgments...lurk in the very vocabulary of history; 'execution', 'Reformation', 'reform', 'conqueror', 'crusade'. All historical events have a moral interpretation and our reactions to them are inescapably subjective. We unavoidably, if covertly, praise or deplore when we come across a death, a victory or a reform."

“So our relationship with the past is inescapably subjective. It is not the task of history to eliminate this, *but to increase the knowledge on which we base these subjective reactions* (our emphasis). It also reminds us that our moral estimate of human behaviour must be based, as are all historical statements, inescapably on evidence.”

MODERN TRENDS

Modern historical research is leading to a truer picture of the place of the Church in history, but not many have the time, interest or education to acquaint themselves with it. The increased need for specialisation when studying for a career, can leave highly intelligent and otherwise learned men and women relatively uninformed about history concerning the Church. This can also be true of those dedicating their lives to Christ and His Church; the modern emphasis on pastoral training often leaves little time for in-depth historical study.

Catholics absorb much of their attitude to historical events from the national tradition. This can lead to a schizophrenic attitude towards their Faith; combining a deep love for Bible, Sacraments and moral idealism, with a vague sense of shame (and even guilt) regarding the Church's impact on history. Instead of experiencing a proper pride in the past, many live in a state of tension, which affects judgments of modern religious events.

English is increasingly used as the common language of much of mankind. Historians in many countries, when writing books in their own language, often find it convenient to draw from English language historical sources. In this manner anti-Catholic bias is introduced into their own cultures.

WE ENDEAVOUR TO MAKE INFORMATION REGARDING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHURCH IN HISTORY MORE EASILY AVAILABLE

We recognise that the scope of our undertaking is immense. It will require much effort over a long period. But popular views of the Church are themselves formed from a myriad of small items, individually perhaps of little importance, but collectively projecting a powerful image.

A DISTINCTION

CHURCH IN HISTORY is to be distinguished from CHURCH HISTORY. The latter recounts the story of the community of believers per se, while CHURCH IN HISTORY is concerned with the effect of that specific community on the culture of mankind in general.

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