

Fundamentalist critics of the Catholic Church no longer restrict themselves to books and tracts. Today's anti-Catholic polemicists use the latest media. An example is *Catholicism: Crisis of Faith*, a slick, 54-minute video featuring interviews with former Catholics—several of whom were priests and nuns—who now claim their one-time co-religionists are not Christian.

The group responsible for this anti-Catholic video is "Lumen Productions" of San Leandro, California, an organization run by James McCarthy, a disgruntled former Catholic who left the Church in 1977. Today he is a Fundamentalist minister who describes the Catholic Church and its teachings as "an insult to the finished work of Christ."

Catholicism: Crisis of Faith is cunningly packaged to look like a Catholic video—and for a good reason. Its producers want to get it into the hands of unsuspecting Catholics.

The front of the slipcase shows a stained glass window with an illustration of priestly hands raising a host and chalice, apparently at the moment of consecration during Mass.

On the back of the slipcase is a photograph of a giant statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The words surrounding the statue are deceptively neutral: "Follow the journey of devout Catholic clergy and laity who courageously faced the crisis of faith and emerged with a life changing experience of Jesus Christ." Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Think again.

There is no hint in the text on the slipcase that the video is an *attack* on Catholicism and features interviews with some of the most sharp-tongued anti-Catholics in America.

DECEPTIVE PRODUCERS

McCarthy interviewed a lot of people for his video. But as is typical of Protestant anti-Catholic tactics, more than a few of these interviews were manipulated and misrepresented. Among them is the interview with Fr. Richard Chilson, author of eight books, including *Catholic Christianity* (Paulist, 1987).

Chilson told Catholic Answers, "McCarthy approached me saying that they were doing a video to help Christians understand the Catholic Church. He was all sweetness and ecumenism. I spend a lot of my ministry fighting Fundamentalists, and I must admit to having been duped by this. I figured they were Evangelical Christians rather than Fundamentalists, and so agreed to cooperate in the interview. There was no preparation for the interview other than that I knew they wanted me to speak about the current state of Catholicism."

Chilson explains that the interview lasted an hour and a half, and covered a wide range of subjects, including "the crisis in the Church today, the shortage of priests, and dissent."

After the interview, Chilson asked to see the finished video. He was never sent a copy and never had a chance to review his edited interview. No theatrical release was given to him to sign, but some months later he received a check for \$125.00 (McCarthy claims that all interviewees signed releases.) Chilson had forgotten about the video entirely until, when at a convention, "some women approached me and asked if I were the priest in this video. They told me that it was pretty biased and suggested I go down to Hayward [California] where they would show it to me."

DECEPTIVE EDITING

Much of what McCarthy used of the Chilson interview concerned the Mass as a sacrifice. "The first extended quote they have from me in the video is part of that explanation, but it is not easy to give the Catholic understanding of Eucharistic sacrifice in a sound bite. That discussion went on for at least fifteen minutes, and McCarthy kept coming back to the idea of sacrifice."

Then comes a blatantly deceptive piece of editing. In voice-over, the narrator says, "Other Christian denominations celebrate that the sacrifice is finished. We asked Fr. Chilson why the Catholic Church chooses to focus on it continuing. Why not leave it finished?" The visuals show Chilson leaning

back in his chair and passing his hand across his head, as though searching for an answer. He looks weary and replies, "I don't know if I can answer that. I am sorry, I know that's—that's a real issue between Protestants and Catholics, but I don't know if I can answer it in any better way than I've already kind of stumbled on."

The video cuts to Frank Eberhardt, once a Catholic seminarian and now a Fundamentalist who's made anti-Catholicism his full-time business. He says, "The Catholic priest cannot really explain how the finished work of Christ on the cross is continued today in the Mass."

Chilson explains why the editing was deceptive: "They, of course, made it look like I had nothing to say, whereas I had been trying to explain the issue for a good quarter hour. I would stand by what I said in the first shot [they used], although, taken out of context, it does not stand well on its own. The second shot is dirty pool. Indeed, I was suspicious that my response there may not even have been to that exact question. But even if it was, this was not lack of an answer on my part but frustration and exhaustion at going over the same ground again and again."

Chilson notes wryly that in the interview, as much time was spent on salvation as on the Eucharist, but "none of that was used because I gave them the gospel answer of salvation through Jesus Christ. Certainly, biased sampling was at work. If you fit their stereotype of a Catholic, you were on the screen. If you presented the gospel, you were ignored. I have to deal with this continually from Fundamentalists. The response is invariably that you are an exceptional Catholic" if you present the Catholic understanding of salvation as it really is—not as Fundamentalists think it is. "You become an exception that proves the rule."

There was a very good reason why McCarthy did not want to show Chilson expounding on salvation by grace alone through Christ alone. McCarthy wanted to set the viewer up for another segment of video in which a group of anonymous Catholics were interviewed outside of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Having a Catholic priest give a bib-

lical exposition of the doctrine of salvation would have destroyed the force of the upcoming "man on the street" video by showing that those who understand the Catholic position have a biblical view of salvation.

Neither the video nor the transcript indicates the total number of Catholics interviewed. Most likely only those giving the "juiciest" answers (for the Fundamentalists' purposes) ended up featured in the video. The goal was to make the Catholic Church look silly and to feature only Catholics who had a confused or insufficient understanding of the Church's teaching on salvation. The inference drawn is that *all* Catholics believe the things these folks were saying.

All the viewer sees is the narrator asking nine lay Catholics how they think they can get to heaven. Here are some responses:

"Well, you know, by being a good Catholic and being nice to one another," replies one woman.

"As a woman you have to follow Mary's way to go to Christ," says another passer-by. (Including this comment was no doubt calculated to confirm Protestant viewers' worst suspicions about Catholic "Mariolatry.")

One man answers that he will go to heaven "by treating people properly. Be fair to everyone."

"I don't know. Just behaving myself," says another fellow, who admits he doesn't have a good answer.

An equally confused man replies, "By trying to live a clean and decent life, I guess."

Not one of these is a good answer, though each contains a partial truth (see Matt. 19:16–17; Matt. 25:31–46; Rom. 2:5–8). These people are easy foils for Fundamentalists. What makes this sort of subterfuge all the more obvious and deceitful is that McCarthy did not balance it with a similar selection of "random" responses from Protestants on the street.

DECEPTIVE NARRATION

Chilson, whose doctoral work has been in Mahayana Buddhism, with a specialty in Tibetan Buddhism, said he selected this area of study because Buddhism

“seemed to be as contrary to Christianity as it was possible to be.”

The video quotes him as saying that, although Buddhists do not believe in God or the soul, behind their myths is a reality that corresponds to the reality addressed by Christianity. In this, Chilson, properly understood, is correct. Since all people face the same reality around them, even those without access to authentic revelation are able to grasp certain elements of that reality accurately—while misconstruing others. Even Buddhists (not to mention Muslims, Mormons, and Protestants) get some things right, for, as Paul taught, creation itself teaches us about God (Rom. 1:20), and the laws of God are written on the hearts of men (Rom. 2:14–16).

But the narrator’s comments before and after Chilson’s brief remarks on Buddhism lead the viewer to believe that Chilson in particular and the Catholic Church in general are working toward some kind of syncretistic amalgamation of Catholicism and Buddhism, something not even remotely implied in Chilson’s remarks.

MARY CRUCIFIED?

The original release of *Catholicism: Crisis Of Faith* showed a statue depicting a woman on a crucifix. The statue was said to be located in the cathedral of Quito, Ecuador. The narrator explained that Catholics have so confused the role of Mary in redemption, equating her work with her Son’s, that they believe she, too, suffered for their sins.

But the confusion resides not in the Catholic Church but in the minds of McCarthy and the video’s producers. The Most Rev. Antonio Arregui, Auxiliary Bishop of Quito, certified that the statue in question is not in the city’s cathedral but in a monastery in Quito. More important, the woman depicted is not Mary but a young woman martyr, Santa Liberata. She is said to have been the daughter of a Portuguese prince. “Her father wished to marry her to a non-Christian and corrupt prince,” explains Bishop Arregui. “When she refused, her father ordered that she be crucified.” McCarthy was made aware of this

grotesque blunder, but he admits it was still in the video as late as 21 months after its initial release.

The fact that such an outlandish claim—that Mary, too, was crucified—appeared in the original version at all shows McCarthy’s sloppy scholarship.

DECEPTIVE STUDY MATERIALS

To maximize his video’s impact, McCarthy produced a transcript and study guide to go with it. This allows it to be used for “Bible studies” in Protestant churches. Unfortunately, McCarthy isn’t confining his sloppy scholarship and deceptive tactics just to Catholics. He has put them in the study material for Fundamentalists, as an examination of the footnotes shows. Footnotes in the transcript flesh out the on-screen arguments, but often disingenuously. In one scene, the narrator claims that “Catholicism has continued to add new doctrines to the Catholic faith from the traditions of men. The belief that the nature of the bread changed at the Mass was not added to official doctrine until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This was the first time the Church sanctioned the theory of transubstantiation.”

The footnote to this part of the transcript gives a lengthy quotation (from *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*) that gives the reader the impression that the Real Presence was a doctrine “invented” shortly before the Fourth Lateran Council and that belief in the doctrine is identical with belief in transubstantiation.

But as one would expect, the footnote quotes the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* selectively. The encyclopedia does *not* say that the doctrine was “invented” at that time. If the footnote had quoted the second paragraph of the encyclopedia’s article on transubstantiation, one would have read, “The *scriptural evidence* requires that the bread cease to exist and that Christ’s body be made present” (emphasis added).

Further paragraphs in the encyclopedia demonstrate that the Church Fathers taught the Real Presence, even though the technical term “transubstantiation” was not used until the medieval period. The encyclopedia does not say or imply that the doc-

trine was invented in 1215. It simply says that at that council, the term “transubstantiation” became the *official* way to express the ancient Christian doctrine concerning Christ’s presence in the Eucharist.

In the footnotes to his transcript, McCarthy implies that, since the term “transubstantiation” was not officially used until the Fourth Lateran Council, the doctrine must have been invented around then. This is the same tactic the Jehovah’s Witnesses use when they argue that since the word *homoousios* (“one in substance”) was not used by an ecumenical council to describe Christ’s relationship with the Father that Christ’s divinity was not believed until then.

This fallacy is obvious. The fact that a belief is expressed using different terms at different times does not prove that it is not the same belief. Language changes over time, and new questions are raised that necessitate new theological terms to express more precisely “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

But if clear thinking and balanced presentations of the evidence were the norm, anti-Catholicism in the form shown in *Catholicism: Crisis of Faith* would have died out long ago, this video never would have been produced and, if produced, would have no impact whatsoever.

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.
Bernadeane Carr, STL, 10 August 2004

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+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, 10 August 2004

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2020 Gillespie Way, El Cajon, CA 92020
Toll free order line: (888) 291-8000
Web: www.catholic.com

Anti-Catholicism

EXPOSING CATHOLICISM: CRISIS OF FAITH