



Beyond Belief: Two Thousand Years of Bad Faith in the Christian Church

James McDonald

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Starting from a neutral position, this book looks at claims made by Christian leaders over the centuries and analyses them in the light of modern scholarship. Erudite yet mischievous, the book's scope is wide, from early history to the present day, from America to China, and spanning many different disciplines. Many of the conclusions reached will shock devout believers, though all of them can be verified with reference to sympathetic works by biblical scholars and theologians. A recurring theme is that of open secrets – facts well known to historians and other academics in the Church, but kept from the faithful masses. These open secrets are not actively denied, just avoided so as not to cause offence to those who are familiar only with the Sunday-School version of events.

Many Christians see their system of belief as dating from the earliest times, but this idea becomes difficult to sustain in the light of when and how key doctrines were established. Many ordinary Christians would be shocked to discover, for example, the prominent role played by violence and forgery in developing and promoting Christian doctrine. Whatever one's own religious beliefs, the Christian Churches provide huge amounts of material for the enquiring mind. Repercussions from crusades that happened over 900 years ago are still in evidence today. The division of the Roman Empire in early Christian times also reverberates to the present day. To a large extent, the history of the Western World over the last 2,000 years is the history of the Christian Church. Without a proper understanding of the role of the Church, it is not possible to truly understand the history of Europe, the Middle East, or indeed the Americas.

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