

Richard Bennett, *Catholicism: East of Eden, Insights into Catholicism for the 21st Century*, Berean Beacon Press, 2005 (ISBN 0-9774229-0-9).

At first sight this is a text-book on the errors of Roman Catholicism and today that is enough for numbers to pass it by. We live in an age when the contentions of Protestants and Catholics belong to the past. A friendly agreement to differ on 'non-essential' matters has largely replaced former controversies and this is commonly regarded as a happy resolution. Recent years have even seen professed evangelicals kneel beside the Pope. But to get into Richard Bennett's book is to find much more than a 'text book'. It is a powerful, and we think convincing, refutation of the modern thinking.

In the first instance, by careful documentation from the latest official Catholic sources (especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997). Bennett's work destroys any idea that the Roman Church has so moderated its beliefs that the old controversies are obsolete today. On the contrary, Roman teaching that once led Protestants to martyrdom rather than to consent, has in no part been repudiated. True, some Catholics have 're-stated' the doctrine of justification to accommodate evangelicals, but Bennett proves that the restatement makes no real change in the teaching. The fact is that an admission of the truth that justification is by faith *alone* would confound the whole system of grace through sacrament, priest and Church. Moreover, since the sixteenth century, Rome has added to the falsehoods that caused the Reformation: witness 'papal infallibility' (1870); the 'immaculate conception of Mary' (1854); and her bodily assumption to heaven (1950). In the words of the *Catechism* 'Taken up to heaven she [Mary] did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation'.

We do not understand how anyone could read this book without seeing that the old issue remains precisely where it was: it is Rome's denial of the sufficiency of Scripture by her placing tradition not only alongside but, in practice, above Scripture. This opens the door to a multitude of beliefs and practices profoundly contrary to biblical truth: 'Papal Rome professes to impart Christ by masses, and the Holy Spirit by sacraments. It claims to fortify the faithful with crucifixes, rosaries, statues, holy water and saints. It alleges that they can shorten the sufferings of souls in purgatory by indulgences. It professes to mediate between God and man; to hold the keys of heaven and hell; to forbid the marriage of priests, and to control lust and sexual scandals by the rule of celibacy ... In a word she has set up a system of unrighteousness and taken to herself the imaginary status of "our holy mother, the Church".' (p.305)

Bennett does not dispute that the Roman communion contains the 'pious' and the 'sincere' but this provides no justification for any to remain in a system that, as he shows, upholds both idolatry and blasphemy. 'The true Gospel demands separation from all who teach another Gospel.' (Gal.1:8-9) In this connection he writes not simply of the ecumenical movement but of the harm done by professed evangelicals who in 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' claim a basic unity for Protestant and Catholic. It might go towards a healing of division among evangelicals if a spokesman for ECT, such as Dr Packer, would reply to Mr. Bennett.

Numbers have dismissed the former Protestant/Roman debate on the grounds that the past can all be explained in terms of personal animosities. Bennett's work does not fit any such interpretation. Himself a Catholic priest for more than twenty years, he writes with sympathy and affection for former colleagues. He has a much higher purpose in view than any mere

winning of an argument. The issue for him is quite as serious as the collision between apostolic Christianity and the Pharisees. It is just because this book is written in a genuinely Christian spirit that it is necessarily controversial. It makes for moving and awakening reading and it is pitched at a level where all can follow.

Our hope is that this soul-stirring book may be a catalyst that the Lord will use in the restoration of the gospel of grace. A renewed faith in the Word of God is the first need of the hour and, as John Owen wrote, 'God hath yet the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and can pour it out when he pleases ... to revive and renew the spirit of faith'. (John Owens's Works, vol.9, p.514).

We can scarcely think of a title that more needed to be published at the present time.

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