

Book Review

March 2006

Title: *Catholicism: East of Eden (insights into Catholicism for the 21st Century)*
Author: Richard Bennett
Publisher: Berean Beacon Press
Format: Paperback, 340 pages

Some books are so well-done and generally useful they become regarded as standard treatments of their topic and gain a wide readership, like Lorraine Boettner's *Roman Catholicism* (1962). Whether Bennett's book will become so recognized awaits to be seen, but it stands in this great tradition and its merit is unquestionable. In fact, *Catholicism: East of Eden* (CEE) is superior in several respects.

First, CEE is born of an intimate and first-hand knowledge of its topic, for Richard Bennett was himself a Roman Catholic priest for 22 years, representing the very errors he now exposes. Beginning with his testimony of being delivered by Christ from Roman apostasy, Mr. Bennett's book is rendered more interesting throughout by this personal touch. His deep compassion for Roman Catholics in general and sympathy with those agonizing between loyalty to Roman Catholicism and Scripture is palpable and winsome.

Second, CEE is even more focused and concentrated than Boettner's classic, and therefore more succinct and readable. Mr. Bennett clearly discerns the crux of the vital spiritual and theological issues between Roman Catholicism and biblical Christianity, and addresses it forthrightly, without giving this weighty matter short shrift. Beginning with a chapter on the unique authority of Scripture, Mr. Bennett skillfully views through a biblical lens the topics of the Roman Catholic priesthood, the papacy, the sacraments (especially the mass), mysticism, iconographic idolatry, and Mariolatry. These are his core concerns. He also includes very helpful treatments of the Roman Catholic doctrine of marriage with its disturbing implications for non-Catholics, and the unstable life of nuns in convents.

Third, CEE is more convincingly authoritative. Mr. Bennett constantly appeals to Scripture for truth. Further, he documents profusely Roman Catholicism's tenets and history with primary sources. Checking many of these revealed them to be accurate and fair. Boettner's book suffers from the lack of primary source citations. Therefore, the reader is left to wonder whether his serious charges are really true in all cases, and this has been disputed by antagonists. Mr. Bennett leaves Romanists no place to hide, scrutinizing their own words in the light of Scripture.

Fourth, CEE is up-to-date. Important documents like *Vatican Council II* (1965), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* statements (starting in 1994), and other contemporary books and articles are woven into the fabric of his discussion, including official Vatican documents now available online. Bennett reviews the clergy sex abuse scandal with its implications, writes much of Pope John Paul II, and some of Pope Benedict XVI. Obviously Boettner did not have access to these things, and modern readers may imagine that his accusations are dated and irrelevant. Bennett shows this is not the case; to some degree Roman Catholicism is truly and tragically 'semper eadem' (always the same).

Fifth, CEE is strongly applicatory in evangelism, reformation, and confirmation. Toward Roman Catholics, Bennett frequently makes earnest appeals to forsake Roman Catholicism and

come in true faith to Christ the only Mediator between God and men, and to trust in His finished work on the cross. Bennett also calls worldly, compromising evangelicals to hearty repentance and a high, biblical standard of faith and practice. Finally, this book challenges committed biblical Christians to imitate its bold and compassionate testimony to the Savior and His doctrines. We are exhorted to hold the gospel banner high for the rescue of sinners, the instruction of saints, and the promotion of God's glory.

Catholicism: East of Eden is a worthy successor to Boettner's venerable work. Bennett's book may well be the very best we can recommend on this topic to the general reader. Information about ordering the book can be found at: <http://www.helpforCatholics.com>

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