

There's a well-known story—probably untrue—about a U.S. Senate race in a Southern state some years ago. One candidate realized that he would have difficulty winning if he took the high road, so he decided to employ the confusion factor.

In the cities, his campaigning was unobjectionable, but he thought he could fool the folks in the countryside. When he made a speech in a small town (and when he was sure no journalists were around), he would refer to his opponent and his opponent's family using words chosen to mislead—for example, saying his opponent's sister was a "thespian" (actress) and that his brother was an acknowledged *homo sapiens* (human being). To the inattentive ear he seemed to be accusing his opponent and his relatives of all sorts of perversions. Although everything the candidate said was accurate, the impression he gave was wrong.

Depending on which version of the story one hears, this man either won the election by a whisker or was revealed to be the scoundrel that he was.

THE CONFUSION FACTOR AGAIN

Similar posturing comes from the mouths and pens of some professional anti-Catholics. Much of what they accuse the Catholic Church of believing or doing is accurate, but is tainted by innuendo.

The impression is that there must be something seriously wrong with the Catholic Church if so many of its individual beliefs or practices are made to seem unusual. Of course, there are also accusations that simply misrepresent the Catholic Church's position, and when these are mixed with the true-but-misleading statements, the Church comes away looking quite strange.

Does this matter? Of course it does, because so much of this kind of thing has been going on over the last few years that many non-Catholics have come to believe it, and many anti-Catholics have become confirmed in their antagonism toward the Church. Further, Catholics who lack a good grounding in their own religion find they cannot answer accusations to their own satisfaction and may fall away

from the practice of the faith or abandon the Church entirely and sign up elsewhere. Non-Catholics who have always been uneasy about the Catholic Church find their doubts made stronger, even when they recognize that many of the anti-Catholic claims are made by people who are careless in their research and biased in their writing.

THE ANTI-CATHOLIC BIBLE

Let's look at a few examples of misleading charges. These are taken from Loraine Boettner's book, *Roman Catholicism*, which might be called the "Bible" of the anti-Catholic movement. First published in 1962 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company of Philadelphia, and reprinted many times since, this fat book is the source most anti-Catholic organizations rely on for information about the Church. Most borrow uncritically from Boettner, seldom giving him credit and never checking his sources. It must be admitted, though, that Boettner lists almost no sources for his claims, so the lack of documentation is not completely the responsibility of the people who have picked up his words.

Early in the book Boettner lists what he terms "Some Roman Catholic Heresies and Inventions." These consist of beliefs that were supposedly made up centuries after the New Testament era and practices or customs that bear little similarity to those mentioned in the Bible. The reader of these several dozen charges is supposed to turn from them in such despair that he will abandon the Catholic Church (if he is a Catholic) or will actively fight it (if he is a non-Catholic). Here are a few of the "inventions."

Item: "The Latin language, used in prayer and worship, imposed by [Pope] Gregory I [A.D.] 600."

It is true that Latin was used in worship in the year 600. The Church spread from the Greek-speaking East to the Latin-speaking West (for example, to Rome) during apostolic times. One of Paul's letters was written to the Christians in Rome. More than one of his letters was written from Rome. And there

were Christians in Caesar's household in Paul's day (Phil. 4:22). Worship, not surprisingly, was undertaken in the vernacular language, which was Greek in much of the East and Latin in the West (though at the beginning, Greek was used even in the West because it was then the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire).

Latin was used in worship far earlier than 600. So what is Boettner trying to say here? Since Latin became the Catholic Church's official language (and, in fact, it still is—all Vatican documents of any importance are issued in authoritative Latin versions), perhaps we are to conclude that there is some mystery about it? Well, there probably is, to people who do not read Latin, just as there is mystery in French to those who know only English. So what is Boettner trying to do with this "invention"? Perhaps he is attempting to heighten suspicion, even if it is directed at nothing in particular.

One can make any adoption of an official language sound sinister. All one has to do is say the language was "imposed"—implying that it was opposed or forced upon people against their will, no matter how untrue this may be. Boettner is simply using a cheap rhetorical device.

Item: "Baptism of bells instituted by Pope John XIII . . . [A.D.] 965."

What is the reader supposed to make of this? Most non-Catholics realize that Catholics baptize infants, but bells? If Catholics think they can baptize bells, why not baptize automobiles or any other inanimate object? The charge, if true, does make the Church look silly. But what happened was not what Boettner implies. There was indeed a "baptism of bells," but it was not a baptism in the sacramental sense of the word. When a church received new bells for its bell tower, the bells were blessed, usually by the local bishop. Any object can be blessed, a blessing being a dedication of a thing to a sacred purpose. The ceremony used in the blessing of the bells was reminiscent in some ways of the ceremony used in baptism, so in popular usage it came to be called the "baptism of bells," though no one thought the bells were actually receiving a sacrament. The phrase is

innocent, but when anti-Catholics refer to it in just a few words, it looks particularly bad.

NEW WORD, OLD BELIEF

Item: "Transubstantiation proclaimed by Pope Innocent III . . . [A.D.] 1215."

The implication of this is that transubstantiation was not believed until 1215—that it was, indeed, an invention. The facts are otherwise. Transubstantiation is the technical term used to describe what happens when the bread and wine used at Mass are turned into Christ's actual body and blood. The belief that this occurs has been held from the earliest times. It stems from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the biblical accounts of the Last Supper. As centuries passed, theologians exercised their reason on the belief to understand more completely how such a thing could happen and what its happening would imply. It was seen that more precise terminology was needed to insure the belief's integrity. The word "transubstantiation" was finally chosen because it eliminated certain unorthodox interpretations of the doctrine, and the term was formally defined at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. So the use of the technical term was new, but not the doctrine.

Fundamentalists can't have a problem with using a new word for an old belief since they use the term "Trinity" to express the belief that God is one being in three persons, though this word is not found in the Bible. Theophilus of Antioch first used it in A.D. 181 (in his letter *Ad Autolyicum*), though Christians believed in the doctrine from apostolic times.

In the three items mentioned, Boettner has ascribed the actions to popes. However, he has provided no sources showing that popes did these things, and at least one of them is demonstrably inaccurate. (It was the Fourth Lateran Council, not the pope reigning at the time, that for the first time made official, magisterial use of the theological term "transubstantiation.") A suspicion is created that, in order to make these developments look like "inventions," Boettner wanted to name a particular "in-

ventor" and looked up whoever was pope in the years he wanted to cite.

Not all items in his list refer to popes, however. Some do refer to councils:

Item: "Bible forbidden to laymen, placed on the Index of Forbidden Books by the Council of Valencia . . . [A.D.] 1229."

This looks rather damaging, but Boettner has his history completely wrong. The first thing to note is that the Index of Forbidden Books was established in 1559, so a council held in 1229 could hardly have listed a book on it.

The second point is that there apparently has never been any Church council in Valencia, Spain. If there had been one, it could not have taken place in 1229 because Muslim Moors then controlled the city. It is inconceivable that Muslims, who were at war with Spanish Christians, and had been off and on for five centuries, would allow Catholic bishops to hold a council in one of their cities. The Christian armies did not liberate Valencia from Moorish rule until nine years later, 1238. So Valencia is out.

But there is another possibility, and that is Toulouse, France, where a council was held in 1229. And, yes, that council dealt with the Bible. It was organized in reaction to the Albigensian or Catharist heresy, which held that there are two gods and that marriage is evil because all matter (and thus physical flesh) is evil. From this the heretics concluded that fornication could be no sin, and they even encouraged suicide among their members. In order to promulgate their sect, the Albigensians published an inaccurate translation of the Bible in the vernacular language (rather like the Jehovah's Witnesses of today publishing their severely flawed *New World Translation* of the Bible, which has been deliberately mistranslated to support the sect's claims). Had it been an accurate translation, the Church would not have been concerned. Vernacular versions had been appearing for centuries. But what came from the hands of the Albigensians was an adulterated Bible. The bishops at Toulouse forbade the reading of it because it was inaccurate. In this they were caring for their flocks, just as a Protestant minister of today

might tell his flock not to read the Jehovah's Witnesses' *New World Translation*.

A REASONABLE REASON

Item: "The cup forbidden to the people at Communion by Council of Constance [A.D.] 1414."

The implication here is that bishops and priests were trying to keep from laymen something they should have had by rights. But the real situation is not hard to understand. The Catholic position has always been that, after the consecration of the elements, the entire body and blood of Christ are contained in the smallest particle from the host and in the tiniest drop from the cup. One does not receive only the body in the host and only the blood from the cup. If that were so, then for a complete Communion one indeed *would* need to partake of both. But if the entire body and blood are contained in both, then the communicant needs to receive only one—if there are good reasons for such a restriction, and in 1414 there certainly seemed to be.

The first reason was that many people misunderstood the Eucharist and thought it had to be received under both forms for the Communion to be complete. By restricting communicants to the host only, the Church would emphasize the true doctrine. The other reason was a practical one. In giving the cup to the laity, there was a chance the contents would be spilled, so out of respect for Christ, the restriction was imposed.

These five "inventions" are representative of the forty-five listed by Boettner. He refers to a few of them again later in *Roman Catholicism*, but most make one appearance here and then disappear. No effort is made to give sources, and little effort is made to say what the significance of them might be. He suggests that any belief or practice not explicitly found in the New Testament in plain words must be spurious and must have been instituted for some nefarious purpose.

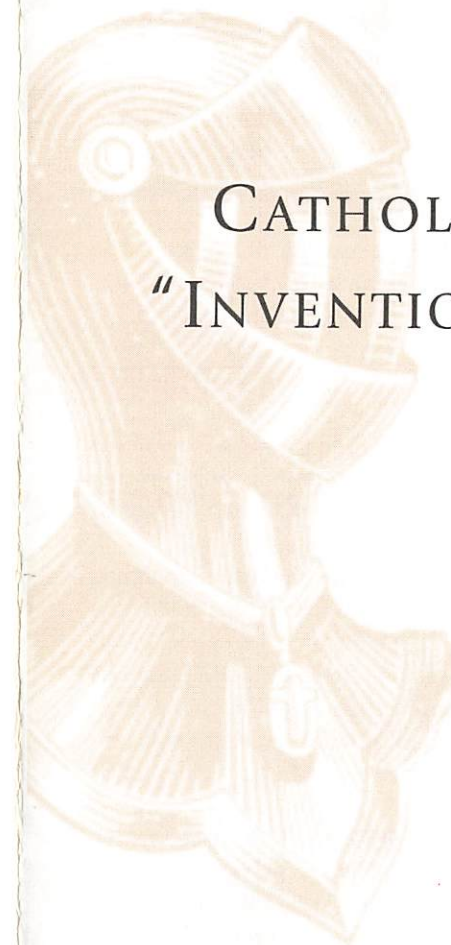
What Boettner does not point out is that modern Fundamentalism has beliefs and customs that are not found in the Bible, either. Many Fundamentalist

churches, for example, forbid the drinking of wine as sinful, yet Christ not only drank wine (he was accused of being a drunkard; Luke 7:34), he transformed water into wine (this being a biblical example of a form of transubstantiation since the substance of water became the substance of wine, though the species changed, too, in this case) as his first public miracle, hardly something he would have done had he disapproved of wine (John 2:1-11). Boettner also notes that priests came to dress differently from laymen, without noticing that Fundamentalist ministers, who may wear expensive three-piece business suits or choir robes while conducting services, also dress differently from their congregants.

The examples could be multiplied, but the fact is, no church looks exactly the same as that of the New Testament era. Since Christ founded a living Church, one should expect it, like any living thing, to grow and mature, changing in appearance while maintaining identity in substance, holding on to the original deposit of faith, while coming to understand it more deeply and to apply it to new cultural situations. The real question is why anyone would think that the Church should have arrested its development and fossilized in one, immutable form at the end of the first century.

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

Anti-Catholicism



CATHOLIC "INVENTIONS"