

One of the key points of Loraine Boettner's magnum opus, *Roman Catholicism* (the main sourcebook for professional anti-Catholics) is that Catholicism must be untrue, because it differs in so many particulars from the Christianity of the New Testament. Over the centuries, Boettner says, the Catholic Church has added beliefs, rituals, and customs that contradict those in the Bible. He calls this "the melancholy evidence of Rome's steadily increasing departure from the simplicity of the gospel," and he claims that repeatedly "human inventions have been substituted for Bible truth and practice" (p. 9).

He argues that Catholicism cannot be the religion established by Christ because it has all these "extras," forty-five of which he lists under the title "Some Roman Catholic Heresies and Inventions" (pp. 7-9). A few of these he examines at length in the book, but most of them are only mentioned and then conveniently dropped.

Many anti-Catholic organizations have reprinted all or portions of Boettner's list of "inventions," usually in leaflets which are commonly distributed outside Catholic churches after Mass. Do they produce the intended results? Yes and no. It depends on the knowledge and sophistication of the reader. Some people laugh at the charges, knowing what the facts really are. Others are stumped for answers, but figure they can establish Catholicism's credentials if they have to prove the Church's legitimacy. Yet some people are taken in, thinking no one would go to the trouble of disseminating such information if it were false.

Catholics need to realize that professional anti-Catholics have dozens of charges like these up their sleeves, and they produce them whenever they think they can make an impression on people who know less than they. Bizarre allegations sow confusion in Catholic minds. After all, most Catholics are not conversant with the finer points of Church history and practice and are ripe targets for evangelistic Fundamentalists.

In the Catholic Answers tract *Catholic "Inventions"* we looked at five of Boettner's charges. Let's look at

a few more now that are particularly good examples of bad thinking. These are not really arguments, but mere statements intended to leave a bad impression. Throw forty-five of them together in a list, and readers may think there is more to anti-Catholic charges than meets the eye.

Item: "Making the sign of the cross . . . [A.D.] 300." That's it. That's the whole charge: that the sign of the cross was not "invented" until well into the Christian era. In reality, we can show that Christians were making the sign of the cross at a *much* earlier date. The theologian Tertullian, writing in A.D. 211, said that "In all our travels and movements in all our coming in and going out, in putting of our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupieth us, we [Christians] mark our foreheads with the sign [of the cross]" (*The Chaplet [Crown]* 3). Making the sign of the cross was already an old custom when he wrote. It may well have been common even while the apostles were alive.

But the mistake Boettner makes concerning the antiquity of the practice is not the important thing. The real question is: Why does he single out this practice at all? The answer: Because the sign of the cross is not mentioned in the New Testament. The reader is supposed to conclude that it must be contrary to Christian teaching. But that makes little sense and, in fact, this line of reasoning undermines Boettner's own Fundamentalism.

THE POT CALLING THE KETTLE BLACK

If Catholicism has changed matters of practice or customs over the centuries, Fundamentalism has done the same. Indeed, there were no altar calls and church steeples in the first century.

But the proper question is not whether Christ's Church today looks exactly as it did then—if that's the criterion for discerning the true Church from false ones, his Church cannot be found anywhere. Rather, what matters is whether his Church has kept the same beliefs as the early Church (which Catholi-

cism has, unlike Boettner and all Fundamentalists—not to mention Evangelicals).

Item: "Priests began to dress differently from laymen . . . [A.D.] 500." So what? This charge can be brought against Fundamentalist preachers who conduct services while dressed in choir robes. Furthermore, Boettner's statement is only a half-truth. The main vestment worn by priests during Mass is the chasuble, which is really nothing more than a stylized Roman overcoat. In the sixth century, while fashions changed around them, priests kept the same clothing they had used for liturgical purposes for some time. They did not adopt special dress for Mass; they just kept to the old styles, while everyday fashions changed, and over time their dress began to stand out.

BUT IT'S IN THE BIBLE!

Item: "Extreme Unction . . . [A.D.] 526." This single line is no doubt intended to make the reader believe the Catholic Church invented this sacrament (also known as the anointing of the sick) five centuries after Christ. But Boettner makes no effort to give the Church's explanation of its origin. Why? Because the origin is found in the New Testament itself: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas. 5:14-15). This scriptural practice dates from the very beginnings of the Church. If Boettner wants to say this sacrament was invented, he should have said it was invented while the apostles were still alive—but that would give the sacrament legitimacy.

Item: "Worship of the cross, images, and relics authorized in . . . [A.D.] 786." What's this? Do Catholics give slivers of wood, carvings of marble, and pieces of bone the kind of adoration they give God? That is the implication. What if a Catholic were to say to Boettner, "I saw you kneeling with your Bible in your hands the other day. Why do you worship a book?" He would rightly answer that he does not worship a

book. Rather, he uses the Bible as an aid to prayer. Likewise, Catholics do not worship the cross, images, or relics. They use these physical objects to help them focus their minds and hearts upon Christ and his friends, the saints in heaven.

The man who keeps a picture of his family in his wallet does not worship his wife and children; rather, he honors them. The woman who keeps her parents' picture on the mantle does not subscribe to ancestor worship; the picture just reminds her of them so that she may more readily honor them. (Remember Exodus 20:12: "Honor your father and your mother.") No one thinks these pictures are objects of worship.

The origin of Boettner's allegation is that in the Byzantine Empire there developed what was known as the Iconoclastic heresy, which held that all images (statues, paintings, mosaics) of saints and of Jesus must be destroyed because they would be worshipped. In 787, at the Second Council of Nicaea, this heresy was defeated, and the old custom (dating to the first century) of permitting artistic representations was again allowed. Boettner had this date almost right; he simply did not understand either the history or the doctrine.

FOLLOWING PAUL'S ADVICE

Item: "Celibacy of the priesthood, decreed by pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) . . . [A.D.] 1079." Anti-Catholics take considerable delight in noting that some of the apostles, including Peter, were married and that for centuries Catholic priests were allowed to marry.

Catholics do not deny that some of the early popes were married or that celibacy, for priests in the Western (Latin) Rite, did not become mandatory until the early Middle Ages. Anti-Catholic writers generally fail to note that even today many Catholic priests in the Eastern Rites are married, and that it has always been that way. Celibacy in the Latin Rite is purely a matter of discipline. It came to be thought that priests could better fulfill their duties if they remained unmarried.

Anti-Catholicism

MORE CATHOLIC "INVENTIONS"



Nor is this an unbiblical notion; it is Paul's advice. After saying he wished those to whom he was writing were, like he, unmarried (1 Cor. 7:7-9), Paul said he thought celibacy was the more perfect state (1 Cor 7:28b), noting that "[t]he unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife" (1 Cor. 7:32-33).

This applies specifically to ministers of the gospel. When Paul counseled Timothy about how to fulfill his ministry, he cautioned him: "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him" (2 Tim. 2:3-4). And Paul refers approvingly to an order of Christian celibate widows (first-century nuns), saying: "But refuse to enroll younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge" (1 Tim. 5:11-12).

So, the practice of clerical celibacy, even taking vows of celibacy, is thoroughly biblical. When a man becomes a priest in the Latin Rite he knows that he will not be able to marry. Marriage is a good thing (in fact, Catholics acknowledge that Christ elevated it to a sacrament), but it is something that priests are willing to forgo for the sake of being better priests.

No one is forced to be a priest (or a nun for that matter), so no Catholic is forced to be celibate. Those who want to take the vows of the religious life should not object to following the rules. That does not mean that the rules, as found at any one time, are ideal or cannot be modified—after all, they are not doctrines, but matters of discipline. However, it does mean that it is unfair to imply, as Boettner does, that the Catholic faith scorns marriage.

CHRIST'S OWN INSTRUCTION

Item: "Auricular confession of sins to a priest instead of to God, instituted by Pope Innocent III, in [the] Lateran Council . . . [A.D.] 1215."

Charges like this might make one doubt the good faith of professional anti-Catholics. It would have

taken little effort to discover the antiquity of auricular confession—and even less to learn that Catholics do not tell their sins to a priest "instead" of to God, but to God *through* a priest.

Origen, writing his *Homilies on Leviticus*, around 244, refers to the repentant sinner as one who "does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord." Cyprian of Carthage, writing seven years later in *The Lapsed*, says, "Finally, of how much greater faith and more salutary fear are they who . . . confess to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience." In the 300s, Aphraates offers this advice to priests: "If anyone uncovers his wound before you, give him the remedy of repentance. And he that is ashamed to make known his weakness, encourage him so that he will not hide it from you. And when he has revealed it to you, do not make it public" (*Treatises* 7:4; see the Catholic Answers tract *Confession* for additional quotations from the early Church Fathers).

These men, writing almost a thousand years before the Lateran Council of 1215, refer to a practice that was already well-established. In fact, it dates back to the time of Jesus, for Christ commissioned the apostles this way: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). The Lateran Council did not "invent" the practice; it merely reaffirmed it.

WHO ADDED WHAT?

Item: "Apocryphal books added to the Bible by the Council of Trent . . . [A.D.] 1546." This reminds one of a famous comment made by a writer (obviously not a Catholic) who said, in discussing the English Reformation, that "the pope and his minions then seceded from the Church of England." It was not the Council of Trent that "added" what Protestants call the apocryphal books to the Bible. Instead, the Protestant Reformers excised out of the Bible these books that had been in common use for centuries.

The Council of Trent, convened to reaffirm Catholic doctrines and to revitalize the Church, proclaimed that these books had always belonged to the

Bible and had to remain in it. After all, it was the Catholic Church, in the fourth century, at the councils of Rome, Hippo, and Carthage (A.D. 382, 393, 397, respectively), that officially decided which books belonged to the Bible and which did not. This had been reaffirmed by many popes and councils later, including the ecumenical Council of Florence. When the Council of Trent was convened, it merely formally restated the constant teaching of the Church.

A FINAL WORD

Bishop Fulton Sheen once said that few people in America hate the Catholic religion, but there are many who hate what they mistakenly believe is the Catholic religion—and that if what they hate really were the Catholic religion, Catholics would hate it too. Highly inaccurate and inflammatory lists, like the one published in Boettner's *Roman Catholicism*, have done much to foster this kind of hatred. Even worse, they have discouraged Fundamentalists from finding out what the Catholic religion really is, and that is a disservice both to Protestants and to Catholics.

Like others before him, Loraine Boettner found an enemy of his own fashioning. He castigated it, misrepresented it, and ridiculed it; but it was not the Catholic religion as it truly is, and the "history" he presented is not the history of the Catholic Church. Fundamentalists who are curious about the Catholic religion do themselves no favor by allowing themselves to be hoodwinked by such lists of "inventions." If they want to know what really happened, how Catholic beliefs and practices really arose, they will have to turn to more careful and better-informed writers.

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