

Brendan Hoban's Warning

An item on the BBC News website this morning (23rd August 2018),¹ caught my eye. Calling it up, I found it contained a quote from Brendan Hoban. The more I thought about what Hoban said, the more I came to see that his words raised a whole bundle of issues, all of them important, issues about which I feel very strongly. Hence this little article.

Brendan Hoban is an Irish Catholic priest in the Killala diocese, a columnist and an author of a number of books. I will not give him the title he likes to use – ‘Father’ – since Christ directly forbids all such:

You are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father’, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher’, for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matt. 23:8-12).

I confess that I do not see how Christ could have expressed himself more clearly. No titles in the church of God. Full stop! No titles here, then.

Brendan Hoban, deploring the decline in the number of Roman Catholic priests in Ireland, has, in his terms, issued a stern, if not sad, warning to all Catholics: ‘If you have no priest, then you have no Mass, and if you have no Mass, then you have no Church’. He was speaking, of course, of having no Romanist-ordained cleric. He was telling Catholics: ‘If you have no cleric, no priest, you have no man qualified to offer Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass. As a consequence, you have no Church’; no Roman Catholic Church is what he meant, it goes without saying. And outside the Roman Catholic Church – so Hoban must believe, as Rome teaches –

¹ ‘Ireland between Popes’.

there is no salvation. In short, no consecrated Roman priest, no Church, no salvation.

The Catholic Catechism, following the Fathers with their oft-repeated mantra ‘Outside the Church there is no salvation’, certainly reinforces this claim:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition,² the Council teaches that the [Roman] Church... is necessary for salvation.

Of course, as with so many Confessions and Catechisms (not only Roman),³ there are inbuilt contradictions supported by the double-speak of theologians. As the Roman Catechism goes on:

Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it... Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.

Not only does this involve double-speak, but it compounds the problem because it teaches salvation by works. And this is expressly denied in Scripture:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation [the one who would appease the wrath of God] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By

² Note the capital.

³ As for the Reformed, see, for instance, my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Rom. 3:21-28).

And, of course, this rules out any attempt at salvation by our own works. Paul, writing to the believers at Ephesus was categorical:

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Getting back to the Catholic Catechism, let us never forget, it's what people think, or like to think – not the hair-splitting metaphysics and wire-drawn nuances of the theologians – that they take to heart; more disastrous still, it is what they cling to as they plunge into eternity. Now from a Roman Catholic point of view, Hoban is right. In the Roman Catholic Church, the priest is the kingpin. No priest, no Mass. No Mass, no Church. No Church, no salvation. This is what Catholics believe.

And they are wrong. Badly so.

First, all man-made priests are, not to put too fine a word on it, a blasphemous nonsense. All men must have a priest, I know, for the Bible shows that it is so, but no man-made priest will do the job. The only effective priest for sinners is the Lord Jesus Christ. I will not set out my arguments in full here, having done so in detail in my *Priesthood: Our Need, God's Provision*, but if, reader, you are in any doubt, I urge you to weigh what I have said in that volume.

Let me hasten to add that what I am dismissing spreads far wider than Catholics. The cults, of course, each of them in particular, have their 'man of God'. Moreover, many evangelicals and Reformed get uncomfortably close to it with their love of the sacerdotal minister.⁴ Not only that, they show

⁴ See my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?* See also 'Appendix 4: J.C.Ryle on "Prove All Things"' in my *Sowed Much, Reaped Little: Why?: The Sermon: The Gap between the Claim and the Result*.

the same trait with their adulation – I use the word advisedly – of making a shibboleth⁵ of a virtually-infallible Confession (or system of theology) drawn up for a specific purpose by long-since dead men – good men, in their day, no doubt, but men just the same.⁶ As J.C.Ryle observed:

Human nature would always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ.⁷

All man-made priests (whatever name they travel under) are a cheat, a scam. There is no sacrifice offered by any man that God will accept. Indeed, there is no further sacrifice to be offered since Christ completed the work the Father gave him to do (John 19:30) – culminating in his perfect sacrifice of himself at Calvary.⁸ His one offering has put an end to all sacrifice for sin, for by that one offering he has perfected for ever all those who trust him as their Saviour and Lord:

It was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests [of the old covenant], to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all [time] when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:26-27).

When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy place, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

⁵ That is, a cultural marker. I use the word with the added sense of a cultural marker which is beyond challenge.

⁶ See my ‘A Thanksgiving Day Thought’; ‘“No Confession? Nothing to Debate!”’

⁷ J.C.Ryle: *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels (Matthew)*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd., London, 1954, pp299-300.

⁸ Hear my sermon ‘Tetelestai’.

offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:11-15).

Christ has entered... into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf... [not] to offer himself repeatedly... But... he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb. 9:24-28).

Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:11-14).

Has the penny dropped? Notice how, in this vital matter of salvation, Scripture speaks not of the Church but Christ. Hoban fears the lack of his Church. What he should dread is the lack of Christ – the scriptural Christ, that is. He should dread dying without trusting Christ, and trusting Christ alone.

So, while Hoban grieves over the decline of Papist priests and what that will mean for Catholics in their erroneous view of salvation, he – and his readers – should come to their senses at once. They should jettison their blasphemous delusion, and start thinking scripturally.

What all Catholics, including Hoban, and everybody else, too, should know is that without the Lord Jesus Christ men and women have nothing, and have nothing to look forward to but eternal damnation. So... for their salvation, they should call upon Christ, trusting him and his finished work, trusting him alone, and do it now.

Out of love for your soul, reader, let me bring this home as close as I can. Without the Lord Jesus Christ you have nothing, and have nothing to look forward to but eternal damnation. So... for your salvation, call upon Christ, trusting him and his finished work, trusting him alone, and do it now.