

Editorial

Mark Elliott

One common theme that emerges from the articles of Henri Blocher and that by Pietro Bolognesi (and not absent from the one by Guus Labooy) is: how should evangelicals define themselves? (once again!) Are they...anti-Roman Catholic, anti-hypercalvinist, anti-liberal, neither fundamentalist nor modernist, those who unite the charismatic and the reformed or... what are they? Who are we? Who are we not? There was even a conference recently at King's College, London with the title 'Evangelical Identities' and many lively papers on offer....But note the title: 'identities' in the plural. Whether or not we are happy with the idea that there is more than one species of the genus 'evangelical'; there seems nothing wrong in a bit of healthy diversity that allows for disagreement.

I am pretty much in agreement with what Professor Blocher has to say on the worth of the Apocrypha, although I admit that I do not think that it is terribly wrong to call them deuterocanonical, providing these are printed in bibles after the protocanonical ones, and then seen as a second collection, not as a second rule for faith. The term 'apocrypha' perhaps is not fitting; we do not wish, and Henri Blocher does not wish that they be 'hidden books'. So perhaps 'deuterocanonical' will do just fine. We may prefer the arguments of Jerome and Leibniz over those of Augustine and Bossuet, but there is some doubt about the question of the closedness of the canon at the time of Jesus and the apostles such that we may speak only in terms of probabilities.

Pietro Bolognesi, rightly in my view, insists that we work towards a better ecclesiology, an area where often evangelical systematic theologians have relied very much on Catholic initiatives (I think of the work by Avery Dulles.) Yet there is nothing surely per se wrong about agreeing with Roman Catholics on many ethical issues: even in the case of 'contraception' where we might disagree, we might still share part of the motivation which drives the Catholic refusal: an opposition to society's permissiveness as a rule. On the whole our Catholic 'brothers and sisters' share our theology: the creed is a common inheritance. Where

there are disagreements such as the mass, the place of faith, the authority of the church, these would likely have some bearing on our approach to ethical issues, but perhaps not a considerable one. In any case are we fighting flesh and blood opponents or spiritual powers? And even if we cannot help but oppose those 'clearly in the wrong' (Peter of course in Gal 2:11 NIV!), are we really to think that our enemies are all types of Catholics? Are our enemies really more those Catholics who look down on Protestantism because it recalls them to the bible alone and less those liberal Catholics who are nice to evangelicals because they see that we too often have little idea of what we do believe? From the Catholic viewpoint it is the Protestant sola scriptura principle that has ushered in a thousand Protestant denominations and then either fundamentalism or uncontrolled liberal Protestant biblical criticism. And while there could be some Catholics who have and do think that the magisterium is higher than Scripture and the apostles, this is only an abuse of a valid notion that the church needs to give a lead on scriptural interpretation.

The difference here might be one of the 'sociology of knowledge', the conditions under which European evangelicals operate. I do not live in a country where the Catholic Church is the majority 'big brother'. I can see a certain confidence also among German evangelicals where keeping the head and the heart together is the lesson learned from 400 years or more of combining Protestant theology with spirituality. My issues here in Britain are more with liberal 'Do-It-Yourself' ('bricoleur') theology which tries to keep the bible and the church's confessions apart in various ways. However even in acknowledging as much I wonder whether the Lord's way is to spend so much time focussing on my 'enemies' – like some football manager who knows all about the opposition but none about the strengths or weaknesses of his own 'team'. Evangelicals will have to be self-critical, but of course only in the light of the Word, in fact only from hearing from God can we see ourselves as we are, *simul iusti et peccatores*: a 'positive dialectic' perhaps.