

Francis J. Beckwith, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009. 144 pages.

When Francis J. Beckwith, a past-President of the Evangelical Theological Society and a Professor of Philosophy at Baylor University, revealed in 2007 that he had gone back to the Church of Rome, in which he had been raised, it caused quite a stir. For those who did not follow all of the press at the time, Beckwith has now released a memoir of his journey back to Rome: *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009). The book's release shortly before this year's annual Evangelical Theological Society meetings is bound to galvanize discussion among many of Beckwith's former comrades-in-arms.

Beckwith's prose is gracious and he clearly refuses to demonize the Evangelical fold that he has left behind (see his remarks in this regard on p.129). However, although there seems to be no intention to engage in apologetics under the guise of memoir, one chapter in particular sure reads that way—chapter 6, “Every Word a Little Branch.” Here Beckwith tackles the doctrine of justification, surely a dividing line between Catholic and Evangelical if there ever was one. He argues that forensic justification, what he calls “methodological Protestantism,” cannot really be found in the Scriptures and is shaped much more by medieval nominalism than biblical chapter and verse (p.96-113). This “revelation” along with his reading in the early Fathers, whom he came to see as being more in line with contemporary Roman Catholicism (p.114-115), convinced him of the “error” of Evangelicalism.

In his final chapter, Beckwith further admits that his return to Rome “had as much to do with a yearning for a deeper spiritual life as it did with theological reasoning” (p.129). Why he couldn't find such in Evangelicalism is a very important question that we who remain committed to Evangelical verities need to answer. On every hand, we see a shallowness in Evangelical life and piety that will not go away and needs to be addressed. Though, if the truth be told, nominal commitment in the Roman Church is equally problematic.

At the end of the book, I was left with a multitude of feelings. Sadness—for so much of Evangelicalism, which claims to be biblicistic, is failing to provide a deeply-enriching and satisfying experience of God. Amazement—if Evangelical Protestantism is wrong, why is Rome the only answer? Why not Constantinople or Moscow or any of the other varieties of Orthodoxy? Some of them are equally as old as Rome—actually older in my opinion. And amusement, for my good friend Carl Trueman is cited as a key “catalyst for reorienting” Beckwith's view about the “schism” that took place at the time of the Reformation (p.83)!

Finally, Beckwith's story makes for fascinating reading with which I can identify to some degree, for I too was baptized, raised, and confirmed in the Roman Church. But I must confess the book left me with a deeper conviction that the Reformers were right where they disagreed with Rome. And having studied the Fathers for over thirty years I am not convinced contemporary Roman Catholicism can be read back so easily into the Fathers as Beckwith believes.

But one thing I am glad about, namely, that we have gotten beyond burning adherents of our rival communions and can disagree more politely with pen and ink.

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