

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 3)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic.

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-The Deceitful Allure of Mysticism-

Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Clarkson Community Church
by
Tony A. Bartolucci on April 5, 2009

As we continue in our series, which has been a break out of the letter of 1 Peter, I'm going to continue reading in the book of Galatians. In Parts 1 and 2, we read Galatians, chapter one and Galatians, chapter two. I want you to open your Bibles, if you would, to Galatians, *chapter three*, and stand out of respect for the hearing of God's Word as we read this chapter together. Galatians, chapter three.

Here we have the Apostle Paul writing, picking it up in verse 1:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed, it was in vain? Does He, then, Who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? Even so, Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, All the nations shall be blessed in you. So, then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

For, as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them. Now, that no one is justified by the law before God is evident, for the righteous man shall live by faith. However the law is not of faith, on the contrary, he who practices them shall live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree, in order that, in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations. Even though it is only a man's covenant, yet, when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "and to seeds," as referring to many, but rather, to One, "and to your Seed," that is Christ. What I'm saying is this, the law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified

by God so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise. But God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. Why the law, then? It was added because of our transgressions, having been ordained through angels, by the agency of a mediator, until the Seed should come to Whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one. Is the law, then, contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would, indeed, have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith, which was later to be revealed. Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor, for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither female nor male, but you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.¹

May God add His blessing to the reading of His Word. [Opening Prayer]

It was two months ago, February 1st to be exact, that we started this series entitled, "Drowning in the Tiber: Responding to Francis Beckwith's book, *Return to Rome, Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*." Had I not been away for most of the month of March, we might be about looking toward the finish line. But, alas, here it is April 5th, and we are embarking on Part 3. Really, the difficult part in that is that it's been well over a month since we were in Part 2. And while a month is a short time in one sense, it's an eternity in another sense, that is my expectation that you might remember much of what we've covered before. I hate to be redundant, but if you weren't around for the first two messages, I would exhort, admonish, plead, beg, command—about anything short of bribe—you to get Parts 1 and 2.

For what it's worth, in Part 1, I gave you an overview of the issue. The issue being the rather recent phenomenon of professed Evangelicals becoming Roman Catholic. Then I introduced you to Francis Beckwith, who in 2007, while serving as President of the Evangelical Theological Society (which is a scholarly society of theologians, pastors and scholars, a society of which I'm a member) he resigned his position, because he did just that: he converted back to the Roman Catholicism of his youth. And with that conversion, he has become, perhaps, the most significant convert to Romanism in recent history. The book that he wrote, published this year, has been loudly applauded by Roman Catholics around the world and will be used—I have no doubt about that—will be used to lead many souls astray.

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Bible citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

In Part 2, I gave you an overview of the book itself, and at the conclusion of that message, I summed the book up with the following observations:

- Francis Beckwith appears never to have really left Roman Catholicism.
- He's always been ecumenically-minded, very open to accepting various forms of Christianity as having their own legitimacy.
- Experiences and mysticism have been a key influence on him, including the Roman Catholic Charismatic Movement.
- His work in the area of church history is simplistic and decidedly one-sided.
- His work as a theologian and exegete is lacking. And I would add, especially his understanding of reformed theology.
- He gives, really, no evidence of having wrestled with both sides of the issues he raises.
- He views his move to Roman Catholicism sort of like a major lateral move, a major denominational shift, like someone moving from Wesleyanism to Presbyterianism, and then, lastly,
- He refuses to face the fact that the Roman Catholic Church itself, anathematizes, or assigns to condemnation, his "Evangelical Christian friends", whom he is very willing to affirm as being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Well, my goal is to address each of these observations in one way or another over the next couple of weeks. And I want to start today by taking a look at one of the issues—and they're kind of piggy-backed together, but we won't get to the second one this morning—so one of the issues related to my eight observations, mysticism or experience, and then next time, ecumenism. I really wanted to cover both of them this morning, but we've got the Lord's Table and lots going on, so I decided to cut it short. But we're going to sort of look at those 2 issues together, although not at the same time, if that makes sense. They sort of follow a pattern; they do link together, and for the sake of outlining, we can use two "E"s: *Experientialism*, and that relates to our subjective personal experience, and *Ecumenism*, the belief that all who profess Christ, regardless of doctrinal differences are true Christians. Before we go to ecumenism, I want to address the experientialism and mysticism that is evident throughout the book, and really, dove-tails right into Roman Catholic history. But first of all, let's define our terms.

What do I mean by *experientialism* or *mysticism*? Here's a simple definition that I came up with:

It is a belief and a practice; a *belief* that personal experience confirms truth, note this, rather than truth confirming experience, and a *practice* by which a person attempts to draw closer to God by doing certain things that promote those experiences.

This is something that has been historically associated with Roman Catholicism, mysticism, experiences, supposed miracles. Now this might surprise you, we tend today to associate claims of miracles and mystic experience with *charismania*, the extreme elements of Pentecostalism. But before a televangelist with a bad hair-do wearing a Rolex watch ever offered a blessed piece of cloth

guaranteed to heal you of your disease, or a small vial of water from the Jordan River guaranteed to give you financial success (all for a price, of course) there was within Roman Catholicism a litany of relics that were collected and adored and associated with promises of the miraculous. The veneration of these things was said to begin after Bishop Ambrose of Milan displayed two relics of two martyrs in his church in the late 4th century. By the Middle Ages, these things came into full bloom and the Roman Catholic Church believed that holy relics held miraculous power and could increase the faith of those who adored them. So, hordes of peasants in the Middle Ages gathered to see splinters from the true cross of Christ, along with fragments from the table where Jesus presided over the last supper. Back then, you could see thorns from Jesus' crown, the head of John the Baptist on display. The problem was there were as many as *five of those heads* circulating in Europe at any given time. Fourteen churches claimed to possess—blush—the foreskin of the baby Jesus! These things were often sold with the promise of time off in purgatory. The great reformer, Martin Luther, commented that the amount of bits of wood from the cross that were sold was enough to rebuild Noah's ark. And he also said that there were enough servings of milk from holy Mary to sail the ark upon. Wherever the relics went miracles followed, or so the church claimed.

In the *Schmalkald Articles*, Luther wrote that relics were tomfoolery and that “even the devil has laughed at such rascalities.” The veneration of relics, he said, ought to be condemned, because such practices were not contained within Scripture. They were “an entirely unnecessary and useless thing.” Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism* that relics were “lifeless dead things that can make no man holy.” Luther's political protector, Frederick, the Elector, of Germany, displayed relics, claiming that those who viewed all of them would escape the suffering of purgatory 127,800 years early.

The different orders within Roman Catholicism claimed miracles and relics as a way to compete against one another. Whoever had the most and greatest claimed the greatest notoriety. An example of that comes from the year 1507 when a young man named John Jetzer joined the Dominican order. On the eve of the festival of St. Matthias, he was startled awake in the night to find an apparition standing at the foot of his bed claiming to be a soul from purgatory. Well, the phantom exhorted the frightened young man to scourge himself for eight days, to do so until he bled, and then lie prostrate on the floor of the chapel of St. John. News soon spread that a soul from purgatory had come to the Dominicans, and it had come for deliverance. Well, crowds gathered to watch Jetzer complete his penance while the popularity of the Dominican order soared, as you might expect. The soul from purgatory said he would return in eight days, and return he did, this time with two attendants. And this time, the messenger said that he had a message: *The Franciscan originator of the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception, Duns Scotus, was himself suffering in purgatory!* You can make the connection, here are the Dominicans saying, "Well, here's one of the best of the Franciscans, he's suffering in purgatory. You don't want to associate with the Franciscans; you want to associate with the Dominicans." And, not only that, but the personage himself promised a visit from the virgin Mary, named an appointed day, and on that day, she appeared and handed to Jetzer three of Jesus' tears, three drops of His blood, a crucifix, and a letter addressed to Pope Julius II who, the spirit claimed, was appointed by God to abolish the false doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Then Jetzer's hand was pierced with a nail wrapped with a cloth, he was told that the cloth was worn by

Jesus at the time of His flight to Egypt; and to show the greatness of the Dominican glory, Jetzer was to have the five wounds of Christ and St. Frances. Jetzer was then put on display where the crowds watched him gesticulate and spread out his arms showing his wounds. Meanwhile, the Dominicans boasted about how God had glorified their order, and that He had even sent the holy virgin as a sign of His blessing upon them. Well, once again, the virgin Mary appeared to Jetzer, this time Jetzer recognized the voice. It's the voice of the local priest. He declared that and the virgin suddenly disappeared, came back shortly afterward, and this time, the voice had changed, but he also recognized it, it was the voice of the prior! In the end, the Dominicans were caught in their lie, and they actually tried to protect themselves by poisoning Jetzer. It was such a scandal that Rome investigated the matter and condemned four Dominicans to die. And on May 1, 1509, they were burned to death before 30,000 spectators.²

We could turn the clock forward to some more well-known visitations. On February 11th, 1858, a fourteen-year-old girl named Bernadette claimed that a beautiful lady appeared to her in a remote grotto in Lourdes, France. The lady later identified herself as “the Immaculate Conception.” She was said to have appeared eighteen times, and by 1859, thousands of pilgrims were visiting Lourdes. Ever since, Lourdes has become one of the world's leading Catholic Marian shrines. The late Pope John Paul II visited the shrine twice. And then in 2007, our current Pope Benedict XVI authorized a special indulgence to mark the 150th anniversary of Our Lady of Lourdes. If you go there today, you will find no shortage of glitzy relics for sale by local merchants in neon-emblazoned gift shops overflowing with what Malcolm Muggeridge called “*tawdry relics, the bric-a-brac of piety.*”

Almost thirty years after Lourdes, in 1917, in Fatima, Portugal, the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared before three shepherd children. And there she specifically identified herself as the Lady of the Rosary. One of the three children, a girl named Lucia, described her as *brighter than the sun shedding rays of light clearer and stronger than a crystal ball filled with the most sparkling water and pierced by the burning rays of the sun.* According to the story, the virgin Mary gave the three children three secrets. They're called the *Three Secrets of Fatima*, and she told them to do penance and make sacrifices to save sinners, and pointed them in the direction of self-flagellation. The children tied tight cords around their waists that caused pain. They abstained from drinking water on hot days; they performed other works of penance. And Lucia said that the lady asked them to say the rosary every day and that doing so would be the key to world peace. Now this was 1917. Many young Portuguese men were then fighting in World War I. Thousands flocked to the sight, drawn by reports of visions and miracles. It became such an irritating issue to government officials that they actually arrested these three young kids and imprisoned them, and even threatened them that they would be burned alive in hot oil, if they would not tell the truth. But they would not change their story, they held fast to it.

In July, the virgin promised a miracle for her final appearance. This event has been known as the *Miracle of the Sun.* On October 13, 1917, a crowd, believed to be between 70,000 and 100,000,

²J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), The Swiss – 1484-1522: Book VIII, Chapter 2.

including skeptics, newspaper reporters and photographers, gathered; this was the appointed day. The account says that it had been raining, and the rain cleared up and there was a dull haze, a thin layer of clouds that permitted one to look at the sun with the naked eye. Lucia, one of the little children, called out to the crowd to look at the sun, and while she pointed upwards, the sun appeared to change colors and rotate like a fire wheel. For some, the sun appeared to fall from the sky before retreating. For others, it began to zigzag. And this was witnessed by the crowd and even by others some forty miles away. Here's a word for word account that I found on an online encyclopedia:

Columnist Avelino de Almeida of O Século (Portugal's most influential newspaper, which was pro-government in policy and avowedly anti-clerical),[1] reported the following: "Before the astonished eyes of the crowd, whose aspect was biblical as they stood bare-headed, eagerly searching the sky, the sun trembled, made sudden incredible movements outside all cosmic laws - the sun 'danced' according to the typical expression of the people." [6] Eye specialist Dr. Domingos Pinto Coelho, writing for the newspaper Ordem reported "The sun, at one moment surrounded with scarlet flame, at another aureoled in yellow and deep purple, seemed to be in an exceeding fast and whirling movement, at times appearing to be loosened from the sky and to be approaching the earth, strongly radiating heat". [7] The special reporter for the October 17, 1917 edition of the Lisbon daily, O Dia, reported the following, "...the silver sun, enveloped in the same gauzy grey light, was seen to whirl and turn in the circle of broken clouds...The light turned a beautiful blue, as if it had come through the stained-glass windows of a cathedral, and spread itself over the people who knelt with outstretched hands...people wept and prayed with uncovered heads, in the presence of a miracle they had awaited. The seconds seemed like hours, so vivid were they."³

Do I believe that that really happened? I don't know. *Something happened.* There were some spectators that did report to seeing nothing, but something must have happened to cause thousands to see it. But here's the point: Should this change anything for us as it relates to the Gospel? Remember, I said that mysticism is the belief that personal experience confirms truth, rather than truth confirming experience. What did Paul say? Galatians, chapter one, verses 8 and 9:

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

Friends, this is the bottom line, is it not? We're told that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. We're warned that it is possible, even likely, that the miraculous might accompany a false gospel in order to substantiate it before the unsuspecting. Compare Paul's words as to the Gospel, and what you know of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the second of the three secret messages that the Lady gave to the three children. Here's the first part of that secret message: "You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go." That was the first secret. She was said to reveal hell to them:

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Fatima.

"You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish, in the world, devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace."⁴

Is that the Gospel that Paul preached? To save sinners by establishing in the world *devotion to the immaculate heart of Mary*? In 1 Corinthians, chapter fifteen, Paul said:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁵

What is the Gospel? It's centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ, not world-devotion to the "immaculate heart" of Mary.

Even in day-to-day life, mysticism plays a key role in the process of salvation for Roman Catholics, as one writer notes:

In Catholic orthodoxy prevenient grace is necessary to begin the salvific process,⁶ but the whole of the Christianity life is seen as a mystical ascent or return of the soul to union with God. Salvation is not God's declaration of undeserved righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ but the outcome of a long process of purification and illumination in which the soul prepares itself for final union with God.⁷

So we have *candles*, we have *rosaries*, we have *incense*, we have *images* and *prayers* to dead people, all in an effort to reach out to the Divine in the ultimate hope of self-glorification.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Verses 1-5.

⁶Note this. It is, in Roman Catholicism, *a process*. The "journey of justification" is what Beckwith calls it . . . So it's a process. You climb up the ladder, you sin, you fall back down, you climb up the ladder, you sin, you fall back down, you've got to keep going over and over and over again.

⁷Donald G. Bloesch, "Is Spirituality Enough?" in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelicals Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 149.

Now, as it relates to Francis Beckwith, on page 129, toward the end, he writes what is perhaps the most telling statement in the entire book. He writes:

Although it may be difficult to detect from much of what I have written in this book, my return to the Catholic Church had as much to do with a yearning for a deeper spiritual life as it did with theological reasoning.⁸

Yearning for a deeper spiritual life. What kind of deeper spiritual life? Well, he writes about that as well. He says:

Since becoming Catholic, I have become much more prayerful, I read the Bible far more often, and I am increasingly more aware and appreciative of the grace God has given me to live a virtuous life. I sometimes find myself silently praying a 'Hail Mary' or an 'Our Father' while driving or working out. I am not averse to asking particular saints to pray for me, or to recite the prayers of some of my favorite saints, such as Thomas Aquinas. When doing this I gain a greater sense of that of which I am a part, the wonderful Body of Christ that transcends time, space and death itself. Since becoming Catholic I have participated in such practices as praying the rosary and praying the Stations of the Cross. These practices are rich and good, *but the sacrament of reconciliation (or confession) has been the most liberating aspect of my Catholic experience so far.* Although many Catholics acquire a deeper walk with God through the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, I have found confession to be the place in which I experience the gratuitous charity of our Lord at its fullest.⁹

Now, *how do you argue against experience?* In one sense, you can't. If somebody says, they had an experience, they had an experience. I mean, who am I to judge whether they've had an experience? And experiences themselves can be good, bad, or neutral. The question is, what is the experience based upon? Or what is it trying to prove? And that's why I often say Christianity is objective truth and subjective experience based on that truth. In other words, we're not *mere creedalists*. Just giving assent to some facts and having an orthodox understanding of doctrine does not necessarily make you a Christian. As D. James Kennedy once said, *all that does is qualify you to be a demon!* Demons are orthodox at heart (James 2:19). They believe in the objective facts of Who God is. You see, there also has to be a personal appropriation of those facts.

In theology, we talk about three aspects of saving faith. There's knowledge, there's assent, and there's trust, or *notitia, assensus, and fiducia*. There must be *knowledge*, you have to know certain things about the Gospel. You have to know that God exists, that there's one God who is Triune in nature, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Himself God, that He came to live a perfect life, died for sin, was resurrected the third day in victory over sin and death. You have to know these certain

⁸Francis J. Beckwith, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 129.

⁹Ibid. Emphasis mine.

facts, but not just know them, believe they're true. That's the *assent* part. And not only know them and believe that they're true, but the *trust* part—to know and believe that it's true for me and in my case. So those things have to be there.

You can have a religionist who says, I was a drunken bum. But one day I saw this vision of the pantheon of the gods, and one of them told me, "You will one day be a god yourself. Focus on the good; help others into the light." "And ever since that day," he says, "my life has been different." So what? I can say, "Well, maybe you've had that experience, but that experience doesn't prove anything." And you can have another religionist who says, "I've memorized the Apostles' Creed. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for my sins." Yet that person shows no evidence of ever having appropriated that into his or her life, no repentance, no change of heart. And then you have a third person who says, "Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ. He died for me that I might live. I'm a bankrupt sinner whose only hope is in Him, and Him alone, and the life I live I now live by faith in He Who died for me." That's experiential, yes, but based on objective truth. And it evidences truth. And, by the way, that third testimony that I just cited is absent as one reads through Francis Beckwith's journey. No sense of ever having really affirmed the truth of the Gospel.

So the question isn't one of judging the validity of an experience, Beckwith's or anyone else's, for that matter. He can do as he pleases and what he does is what he did. But we can judge someone's experience *on the basis of objective truth*, because that does not change. And that's why Paul says, in short, "Hey, I don't care what kind of experience you had, or what kind of experience you may have. Judge that against the objective truth of God in His Word, the objective truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

But for Dr. Beckwith, the mystical experiences came early. He was baptized Roman Catholic as an infant, subsequently, was confirmed as a teenager in 1973, and soon afterward, he says, he became fascinated with the person of Jesus. And he describes a dream he had of Jesus sitting there talking with him:

Over thirty years later, I cannot honestly recall the words he uttered. But I do remember waking up the next morning with the sense that I had experienced a reality that was unlike any dream I had ever had.¹⁰

He states that, coincidentally, it was at this time that his father was visited by a friend who was involved in the Catholic Charismatic Movement. The friend left a copy of *Good News for Modern Man* and Beckwith read it with great interest, not even knowing it was a Bible.

Now the Catholic Charismatic Movement brings the two "E"s together. Remember, I said *Experientialism* and *Ecumenicism*. The Catholic Charismatic Movement brings these together. And I'm going to tie this in a nice knot, so pay attention. I need to introduce you to a man by the name of David du Plessis. He was a South African-born Pentecostal minister who is considered one of the

¹⁰Ibid., 33.

main founders of the Charismatic Movement. In the 1950s, du Plessis became a big advocate of ecumenicism and he set as his goal spreading the Pentecostal sign gifts, particularly what was called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," to mainline churches, and especially to Roman Catholics. Du Plessis was a staff member of the World Council of Churches. He was invited to serve, interestingly, as Pentecostal representative at the second Vatican Council. He entitled his autobiography *The Spirit Bade Me Go* and in that book he writes about his meeting with twenty four ecumenical church leaders in Connecticut. And he says:

I could remember days when I had wished I could have set my eyes upon such men to denounce their theology and pray the judgment of God upon them for what I considered their heresies and false doctrines. . . . After a few introductory words I suddenly felt a warm glow come over me. I knew this was the Holy Spirit taking over, but what was He doing to me? Instead of the old harsh spirit of criticism and condemnation in my heart, I now felt such love and compassion for these ecclesiastical leaders that I would rather have died for them than pass sentence upon them.

So he brings the charismatic message trans-denominationally into different churches and groups, trans-religiously influencing the Roman Catholic Church. This movement spreads, and where there's an *evidence* of people speaking in tongues, the thought is that "they've got the gift." But as a direct result of this movement, many evangelicals ceased to look at Roman Catholics as religionists in need of the Gospel. The thought became, "Well, they're reading their Bibles, they're evidencing the gifts of the Spirit, therefore they must be brothers and sisters in Christ." You see that? That's what mysticism does. The doctrinal stuff doesn't really matter. So what if they think they're saved in part by their works? So what if they think the little piece of bread literally becomes Jesus Christ in His divinity and body and blood, and they have to eat that in order to be saved? So what if they pray the rosary and confess sins to a priest? *They spoke in tongues, they have to be saved!*

Here's Francis Beckwith, about 14 years old, and he has a visionary dream and shortly after that he's introduced to the Roman Catholic Charismatic Movement. And as he continues in life, he remains very much experience and ecumenically- oriented. He writes on page 38 of his book:

Looking back, I believe that the Catholic Church's weakness was presenting the renewal movements like the charismatic movement as something new and not part of the Church's theological traditions.¹¹

In other words, "Hey, it's an experience; God must be doing it, so why not sanction it and bring it under the umbrella of sacred tradition?"

I mentioned Vatican II a moment ago. My friend, Richard Bennett, a former Dominican priest, now a minister of the Gospel, came to saving faith at the age, I believe, of forty-eight. Now in his later sixties, he ministers the Gospel around the world. He writes:

¹¹Ibid., 38.

For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has assimilated into herself the mystery elements of pagan religions. However, in 1965, at the time of Vatican Council II, Papal Rome officially joined itself with pagan religion and their practice of seeking to know God by direct experience. Some of the exact words of approval of these practices are still in the Vatican Council II documents. For example, Papal Rome states [he quotes Vatican II]: ". . . . In Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practice, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which man can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own or by the aid of divine help. . . . The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions."

That's a direct quote out of Vatican II. This isn't quoting Father Flannery over a drink at the local bar. This is a quote of one of the official, inspired, if you will, documents of Rome, unchangeable, infallible. So my friend, Richard, concludes:

Thus, Papal Rome officially accepts in Hinduism, that, with confidence and love, one may seek release from the trial of the present life by ascetical practices and profound meditation. Similarly, in Buddhism, one may attain a state of perfect liberation and supreme illumination, either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help. Such an authorized approval of pagan practices has now become quite apparent in modern day Catholicism.¹²

Well, more experiences follow for Dr. Beckwith. About five years after his vision of Jesus as a young man, he has another experience that accompanies what he calls a recommitment of his life to God. He tells a story; I'll read it directly:

During one afternoon in February 1978 I knelt down next to my bed and asked God to help me in my apparent unbelief. On my dresser behind me an FM radio blared a classic rock song. (I was, after all, a seventeen year old.) All of a sudden, moments after I had made my petition to God, the music on the radio seemed slowly to turn into white noise. As the white noise faded into the background I began to hear the voice of a disk jockey on the local Christian radio station. He was saying something about committing one's life to Christ. This was really spooky to me. So, I walked over to the radio to see what was going on. It was indeed tuned to the rock station, but the Christian station was overtaking the rock station, with white noise subtly fading in and out. I later learned from a friend that what happened to my FM radio is a naturally explicable phenomenon that sometimes occurs. But given the timing and content of my prayer, the radio stations, involved, and the DJ's message, I have

¹²Richard Bennett, "Catholic Mysticism and its Influences on Christians." Unpublished manuscript of audio lecture (<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=61007155520>).

never ceased to think of that incident as a gentle tap on my shoulder from the Lord who knew that I had never really stopped believing in him.¹³

Eight years later, 1986, Beckwith has the privilege of meeting Mrs. Edith Schaeffer, the widow of the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, the well-known Christian philosopher and apologist. She was at a book-signing event in midtown Manhattan. Beckwith arrives (the crowds had dissipated); he found her alone at a table and he says he approached her there:

I introduced myself to her and told her about her late husband's influence on me. She seemed sincerely interested in my story. She then kindly asked if I wanted her to sign one of her books. I said, 'yes,' and handed her a copy of *Common Sense Christian Living*. She then opened up the book to the first blank page and proceeded to draw a sketch of the Swiss Alps, with birds flying between the mountains and a small flower at the base. (For years, she and her husband lived in Switzerland where they founded the ministry L'Abri). She then wrote in large letters:

April 29, 1986

To Francis with love, Edith Schaeffer. I've written many notes to another Francis—I do pray your life may be as significant in History.

He writes"

It was only when I reread Mrs. Schaeffer's inscription while writing this book that I realized that the day of her written prayer for me is the same day that in 2007 I was publicly received back into the Catholic Church, April 29. This is one of those 'coincidences' that really spooks me, but in a good way.¹⁴

Does he not know that if Francis Schaeffer were alive today, he would be among the first to cry out that Francis Beckwith has committed an act of apostasy?

Well, later on there were more signs that for him confirmed his decision to convert to Rome. This last one also relates to his wife's distress over her father's death. I think I shared that during the second part; the fact that his wife, grieving over her father's death and the fact that his wife knew that her father wanted to become Roman Catholic, but didn't out of concern, I think it was, for his (the father's) wife. So he never did, but he wanted to. Well, shortly, after Beckwith's reversion to Roman Catholicism, he is traveling, and his wife— (this is recent, this is 2007, now he's joined full communion into the Roman Catholic Church)—so he's traveling and his wife is 700 miles away. It's Saturday, September 22, 2007. His wife attends, back home, a six o'clock mass in Texas. As the

¹³Beckwith, *Return to Rome*, 41.

¹⁴Ibid., 55-56.

people are beginning to receive communion, she sits back, she closes her eyes and she sees this vision of Jesus at the table with His disciples at the Last Supper. But this was not *The Last Supper*, Da Vinci's painting.

He writes in the book:

In Frankie's vision, Jesus was in motion. She saw him talking and moving. Then all of a sudden, his beard and his features became bright and expanded over the image in her mind's eye until everything was a bright white light.¹⁵

She has this vision, then, immediately afterwards, she has an image type thought of her dad as a man in his fifties or sixties teeing off at a golf course, putting all of these hidden messages together.

And then she was flooded with a series of rapid thoughts, the realization, the clear impression, that the reason her Dad never went to the Protestant church with her Mom (and their four little girls) was because if he was going to go to church, it was going to be the Catholic Church or no place at all.¹⁶

Now he doesn't stop there, okay? That same evening, Beckwith is in Alabama at a—note this—*Catholic Charismatic conference* and he's speaking at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in the city of Homewood, speaking on his return to Rome, and after his last lecture, he sat down in the church library around 6:40 PM. A woman, a deacon's wife, whom he had met earlier in the day, comes into the library, asking him if he would like a piece of *blessed bread*. And he asks her, "What's *blessed bread*?" and she replies, in her Eastern Rite Catholic Church, the priest leaves a portion of the loaf unconsecrated and then just blesses it for later consumption. So he says, "Sure." He takes the piece of bread and eats it. And then he begins to share with the woman about his wife's concern for her father's soul, how her father had wanted to become Catholic in the late 1940s. And at this point the lady's eyes welled up with tears and she says that she believed that because God is good and merciful, He would honor his father-in-law's desire.

I'll let him, again, tell the rest of this last story:

About an hour later, my wife and I talked on the cell phone. She told me about the vision that she had at St. Jerome's that evening. She told me that the images were vivid and the message was clear. Seeing the deacons' wife in the church parking lot heading for her car, I stopped her and shared with her what my wife had just told me over the phone. She again began to well up with tears and told me that above the altar where the bread was blessed at her church is a huge mural of the Last Supper, the same image seen in my wife's vision. So, while my wife had a vision of the Last Supper followed by vivid images of her father that conveyed to

¹⁵Ibid., 70.

¹⁶Ibid.

her a clear message of his desire to become Catholic, I had partaken of the very bread that had been blessed under the mural of the Last Supper which was followed by the assurance of a deacon's wife that God would honor my father-in-laws' desire. I cannot help but believe that this provides us with hope that there is truly a communion of saints that includes my father-in-law.¹⁷

*But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. . . .*¹⁸

1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

How do we test the spirits? By the plumb-line of God's inspired, inerrant Word. Jude exhorts us in his little epistle in verse 3, "Contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

That faith is the summation of the Gospel; Jesus Christ sacrificed for sinners. That when one in repentance believes in Him who died, Christ's righteousness is credited to that person, that person's sin credited to Christ, that person is a new creation. It's all about Jesus Christ, not about Mary, not about some church, not about praying the rosary or having an experience. It's the simplicity of the Gospel applied sovereignly by the Holy Spirit of God. That is the hill, my friends that we must live on and die on.

[Closing Prayer]

¹⁷Ibid., 71.

¹⁸Galatians 1:8.