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BOOK REVIEW

Robert L. Plummer, ed. *Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. Pbk. 256 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0310331209.

Given the details of inter-denominational polemic that it addresses—a subject normally fraught with tension and ill-will—perhaps the most remarkable feature of this collection is the fact of its publication by Zondervan, a press that traditionally represents a fairly conservative evangelical constituency. It is striking that Zondervan has seen fit not only to chronicle conversions or migrations both towards and away from evangelical Protestantism, but to acknowledge them all as “journeys of faith.”

The book is divided into four sections, all similarly structured, framed by an introduction and conclusion from the hand of the editor. In each case, an individual who has moved from evangelical Protestantism into Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, or Anglicanism (or in one instance from Catholicism to evangelicalism), articulates the reasons for this change. Another author responds (in three of four instances defending the “evangelical” position), then the first writer offers a brief rejoinder. As might be expected, the individual contributions vary in quality, and some are more self-assured (even strident) than others.

Part 1 considers “A Journey to Eastern Orthodoxy” on the part of Wilbur Ellsworth, formerly a prominent Southern Baptist pastor and now an Orthodox priest, with a response from Craig Blasing, professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ellsworth describes his previous discontent with a kind of evangelical worship governed more by

cultural pragmatism than by theological insight, which was accompanied by a developing appreciation for sacramental and liturgical tradition. Personal friendship with an Orthodox priest opened up further theological vistas both for Ellsworth himself and for members of a new congregation he had founded. In retrospect, the most telling consideration in this process seems to have been acknowledging the unbroken ministry of the Spirit in the 2,000 year history of the church, which for Ellsworth comes to visible expression in the unbroken continuity of Eastern Orthodoxy's liturgical and theological heritage. Blaising's response focuses on the primacy of scriptural authority, particularly in relation to the use of icons, veneration of Mary, and sacramental theology; the rejoinder from Ellsworth makes a judicious and thoughtful appeal to patristic sources.

Part 2 delineates a somewhat more complex journey of faith, as Francis Beckwith was baptized and raised within the Roman Catholic church, came to an adult profession of faith as a non-denominational Protestant, then found himself increasingly drawn back to Catholicism in the course of his development as a Christian philosopher and ethicist. His story may be better known than some because he stepped down as President of the Evangelical Theological Society to be formally re-admitted into the Catholic communion. Aside from biographical details, Beckwith devotes the majority of his article to the distinction between righteousness as *imputed*, of which sanctification and good works are a necessary but separate consequence (the classic Reformed view), and righteousness as *infused*, with good works contributing to personal regeneration (as Catholic doctrine holds). Briefer treatments address the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, penance as a disciplined response to post-baptismal sin, and the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The response from Gregg Allison, professor of Christian Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is disappointing in that it simply recites major points of doctrinal contention between Protestants and Catholics, urging readers who might be contemplating change to "abandon such a move": "Stay the course on the journey of faith of Evangelical Protestantism" (p. 128). All the more so in his subsequent (and

remarkably gracious) rejoinder, it is clear that Beckwith is operating at a level of theological depth and insight that Allison simply fails to engage.

Chris Castaldo, now on staff with the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, takes a more personalized approach in Part 3, narrating the long spiritual quest that led him—by a very indirect route—from the Catholicism of his youth to Evangelical faith. For him the key issue is one of authority, in particular the Catholic claim that church structures and later teaching represent an extension of Jesus' own authority. This leads to an extended discussion of *sola scriptura*, which Castaldo expounds in relation to its Reformation context, on the one hand, and popular Catholic objections to it, on the other. This and the reply from Brad Gregory, Associate Professor of Early Modern European History at Notre Dame, represents by far the most irenic debate in the book, as the two writers exchange views on the intended scope and implications of claiming "Scripture alone" as the basis for Christian self-understanding. Gregory's introductory statement serves as a model for inter-denominational (if not also inter-faith) dialogue:

The principal arguments and tit-for-tat biblical proof texts were all well-known centuries ago and remain well-known now; there seems little point in rehashing them again. In themselves, they are unlikely to unseat faith commitments interwoven with the personal relationships and significant individual experiences that characterize virtually all serious religious believers, Christian or non-Christian, simply insofar as believers experience their lives meaningfully as members of their respective communities of faith (p. 165).

The final of four sections, somewhat shorter than those that precede it, addresses Lyle Dorsett's embrace of Anglican spirituality, with Robert Peterson offering a response. Dorsett is both a parish priest and Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Beeson Divinity School, while Peterson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Not unlike Castaldo, Dorsett recites a long journey of intermittent discovery and wandering, much of the time buffeted by internecine warfare amongst different Protestant camps. Yet it

was a longing for “something more” that led him and his wife to embrace the combination of Word and sacrament that characterizes evangelical, or “low church” Anglicanism. However, non-Anglicans might overlook the irony of Dorsett serving within the Anglican Mission in the Americas, a separate body associated with the ecclesiastical Province of Rwanda. The question for “Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail” (the title of Robert Webber’s 1989 study) is not simply one of conversion to Anglicanism in general, but rather (given the astonishing breadth of conviction that the Anglican communion has historically been able to tolerate), *which* Anglicanism one might seek to affirm. Dorsett’s own solution has been to embrace “diversity within the boundaries of historical Evangelical orthodoxy” (p. 209). Peterson, who describes himself as an evangelical Presbyterian, finds more to appreciate than to criticize within Anglicanism, although he confesses dismay at its latitude on matters of doctrine and sexual ethics alike. This too is a friendly and respectful airing of views.

Readers would be well-served to keep in mind two unacknowledged biases that operate throughout this series of exchanges. The first is that the primary contributors are, in each case, “converts.” As might be expected, the individuals in question offer a spirited (occasionally selective) defence of their newly chosen outlook. Yet it is not clear that people *transfer* denominational allegiance for the same or even similar reasons that motivate long-term continuity within a given tradition; hence the depiction of denominational or confessional “faithfulness” in these debates is to some extent skewed. To put the matter differently (second), the exchanges in this book typically focus on questions of intellectual coherence and “right doctrine,” or orthodoxy. While this is by no means a negligible factor, it must nonetheless be weighed against other, equally significant considerations that influence confessional choice, among them community affiliation, ethnic identity, marital allegiance, aesthetic preference, and missional orthopraxis. For post-moderns in particular, this last concern may even outweigh the kind of doctrinal interest that plays so large a role in these conversations.

On one level, this collection is fascinating in its own right, a

study in Christian biography, inter-confessional apologetics, and the surprising turns that pilgrimage may take. Yet its primary audience is those evangelicals who wish to remain true to their roots and are troubled by apparent “defections” from the fold. For this group, the exchanges offer an important message, like the proverbial “canary in the mine shaft.” Whatever the attractions, theological or otherwise, of other confessional traditions, these personal narratives highlight a series of critical flaws in contemporary North American evangelicalism: theological shallowness and the facile embrace of cultural norms; pragmatism as a dominant consideration in the development of Christian community; theological individualism that assumes every believer has the authority and ability to re-invent discipleship without reference to saints past; and endless fracturing of the Christian communion, with each new fragmentary subdivision claiming to represent the “true church.” If evangelicals hope to stem the flow of migration elsewhere, they will need to find an adequate response to such grave challenges.

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