



"Drowning in the Tiber (Part 5)"
Responding to Francis Beckwith's *Return to Rome:*
Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic
tiber051709(5)
Selected Scriptures



Introduction:

I. The Voice of Church History

A. Church history is usually one of the key factors as it relates to Protestants converting to Rome

1. Beckwith's very brief (a few months) of study

B. The Issue of Church History

1. Beckwith's Claims

a. Quotes that he says could be interpreted to support Reformational theology:

(1) St. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140-ca. - 202 AD)

"Vain, too, is [the effort of] Marcion and his followers when they [seek to] exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to whom the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." [Against Heresies, taken from Beckwith's own citation, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103408.htm>]

(2) St. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 318-386 AD)

"For as a writing-reed or a dart has need of one to use it, so grace also has need of believing minds. . . . [I]t is God's to grant grace, but thine to receive and guard it. treasure it devoutly." [Catechetical Lecture 1, taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/310101.htm]

(3) St. John Chrysostom (inter AD 344/354-407 AD)

"But this he calls God's righteousness, that from faith, because it comes entirely from the grace from above, and because men are justified in this case, not by labors, but by the gift of God." [Homilies on Romans taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/210217.htm]

"In order then that the greatness of the benefits bestowed may not raise you too high, observe how he brings you down: "by grace you have been saved," says he, 'Through faith;' Then, that, on the other hand, our free-will be not impaired, he adds also our part in the work, and yet again cancels it, and adds, 'And that not of ourselves.'" [Homilies on Ephesians, taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/230104.htm]

That last quote was taken from Chrysostom's "Homilies on Ephesians." Compare what else Chrysostom had to say about Ephesians 2:

"And that not of ourselves." Neither is faith, he means, "of ourselves." Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? for "how," says he, "shall they believe, unless they hear?" (Rom. x. 14.) So that the work of faith itself is not our own.

"It is the gift," said he, "of God," it is "not of works." Was faith then, you will say, enough to save us? No; but God, says he, has required this, lest He should save us, barren and without work at all. His expression is, that faith saves, but it is because God so wills, that faith saves. Since, how, tell me, does faith save, without works? This itself is the gift of God.

Ver. 9. "That no man should glory." That he may excite in us proper feeling touching this gift of grace. "What then?" says a man, "Hath He Himself hindered our being justified by works?" By no means. But no one, he says, is justified by works, in order that the grace and loving-kindness of God may be shown. He did not reject us as having works, but as abandoned of works He has saved us by grace; so that no man henceforth may have whereof to boast. And then, lest when you hear that the whole work is accomplished not of works but by faith, you should become idle, observe how he continues,

Ver. 10. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." Observe the words he uses. He here alludes to the regeneration, which is in reality a second creation. We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we are now become, before, we were not. Truly then is this work a creation, yea, and more noble than the first; for from that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have, over and above, our well being.

(4) St. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354-430 AD)

"[Grace] is bestowed on us, not because we have done good works, but that we may be able to do them,- in other words, not because we have fulfilled the law, but in order that we may be able to fulfil the law." [Augustine, Retractions, taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/1502.htm]

Had Beckwith gone on to chapter 22 of Augustine's "Retractions" he would have found a much better quote:

"Now, having duly considered and weighed all these circumstances and testimonies, we conclude that a man is not justified by the precepts of a holy life, but by faith in Jesus Christ,- in a word, not by the law of works, but by the law of faith; not by the letter, but by the spirit; not by the merits of deeds, but by free grace."

b. Quotes by the Same Fathers that Beckwith Claims Demonstrates their Catholicity

(1) St. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 140-202 AD)

"This able wrestler, therefore, exhorts us to the struggle for immortality, that we may be crowned, and may deem the crown precious, namely, that which is acquired by our struggle, but which does not encircle us of its own accord. And the harder we strive, so much is it the more valuable; while so much the more valuable it is, so much the more should we esteem it. And indeed those things are not esteemed so highly which come spontaneously, as those which are reached by much anxious care." [Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103437.htm]

Beckwith should have gone on to note what Irenaeus says towards the end of the quote:

"God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God."

(2) St. Cyril of Jerusalem (318-886 AD)

"For as a writing-reed or a dart has need of one to use it, so grace also has need of believing minds. You are receiving not a perishable but a spiritual shield. Henceforth you are planted in the invisible Paradise. Thou receivest a new name, which you had not before. Heretofore you were a Catechumen, but now you will be called a Believer. You are transplanted henceforth among the spiritual olive-trees, being grafted from the wild into the good olive-tree from sins into righteousness, from pollutions into purity. You are made partaker of the Holy Vine. Well then, if thou abide in the Vine, you grow as a fruitful branch; but if thou abide not, you will be consumed by the fire. Let us therefore bear fruit worthily. God forbid that in us should be done what befell that barren fig-tree, that Jesus come not even now and curse us for our barrenness. But may all be able to use that other saying, But I am like a fruitful olive-tree in the house of God: I have trusted in the mercy of God for ever -an olive-tree not to be perceived by sense, but by the mind, and full of light. As then it is His part to plant and to water, so it is thine to bear fruit: it is God's to grant grace, but thine to receive and guard it. Despise not the grace because it is freely given, but receive and treasure it devoutly." [Taken from Beckwith's own citation, www.newadvent.org/fathers/3101/1.htm]

(3) He quotes John Chrysostom (344/354-407 AD) on praying for the dead

But it's clear that whatever some in the early church practiced as far as praying for those who died, it is not the same thing that the Roman Catholic Church has practiced since the middle ages. Chrysostom does appear to promote praying for the dead as a means to their final salvation, but he applies this to *all the dead*, even pagans. Chrysostom's view fits the Eastern Orthodox position which has no doctrine of purgatory but does pray for the dead because that's what their tradition upholds.

(4) St. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354-430 AD)

"We run, therefore, whenever we make advance; and our wholeness runs with us in our advance (just as a sore is said to run when the wound is in process of a sound and careful treatment), in order that we may be in every respect perfect, without any infirmity of sin whatever,- a result which God not only wishes, but even causes and helps us to accomplish. And this God's grace does, in co-operation with ourselves, through Jesus Christ our Lord, as well by commandments, sacraments, and examples, as by His Holy Spirit also; through whom there is hiddenly shed abroad in our hearts that love, 'which makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,' until wholeness and salvation be perfected in us, and God be manifested to us as He will be seen in His eternal truth. [Taken from Beckwith's source, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1504.htm>]

This quote again proves nothing for the Roman Church. The entire quote from Augustine that Beckwith gives is from his treatise: *On Man's Perfection in Righteousness* where Augustine writes to his "holy brethren and fellow-bishops" Eutropius and Paulus:

"No Man is Assisted Unless He Does Himself Also Work. Our Course is a Constant Progress. But what is the import of the last statement which he has made: "If any one say, 'May it possibly be that a man sin not even in word?' then the answer," says he, "which must be given is, 'Quite possible, if God so will; and God does so will, therefore it is possible.'" See how unwilling he was to say, "If God give His help, then it would be possible;" and yet the Psalmist thus addresses God: "Be Thou my helper, forsake me not;" where of course help is not sought for procuring bodily advantages and avoiding bodily evils, but for practising and fulfilling righteousness. Hence it is that we say: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:13 Now no man is assisted unless he also himself does something; assisted, however, he is, if he prays, if he believes, if he is "called according to God's purpose;" Romans 8:28 for "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Romans 8:29-30 We run, therefore, whenever we make advance; and our wholeness runs with us in our advance

(just as a sore is said to run when the wound is in process of a sound and careful treatment), in order that we may be in every respect perfect, without any infirmity of sin whatever,- a result which God not only wishes, but even causes and helps us to accomplish. And this God's grace does, in co-operation with ourselves, through Jesus Christ our Lord, as well by commandments, sacraments, and examples, as by His Holy Spirit also; through whom there is hiddenly shed abroad in our hearts that love, "which makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," until wholeness and salvation be perfected in us, and God be manifested to us as He will be seen in His eternal truth."

Again, this quote is not contradictory to a reformed understanding of perseverance, as Augustine's appeal to Romans 8:29-30 makes clear.

2. Beckwith cites this handful of Early Church Father's with the claim that this proves Roman Catholicism

"For a Catholic, these two sets of quotations from the Fathers are perfectly consistent with each other, since an inconsistency only arises if one first embraces a Reformed view of imputed righteousness as well as its distinction between justification and sanctification." [F. Beckwith, 90]

3. Beckwith really sums up his findings on church history by claiming:

"I found that the Church Fathers affirmed, very early on, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, infant baptism, penance and confession, an ordained priesthood, and an episcopal ecclesiology and apostolic succession (as well as other 'Catholic' doctrines including prayers for the dead and purgatory)." [114]

4. An examination of four of the issues Beckwith raises: (1) Eucharist; (2) Priesthood and an episcopal ecclesiology; (3) Purgatory; (4) Apostolic Succession

a. The Eucharist (John 6:48-58)

Some in the post-apostolic church held to a spiritual presence view that would be more like a Presbyterian view or perhaps a Lutheran one – but they didn't hold to transubstantiation.

The Didache (written between 70 and 140 A.D.) "And on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."

Eusebius (263-340 A.D.) "Having then received the memory of this sacrifice to celebrate upon the Table by means of the symbols of His body and His saving blood, according to the laws of the new covenant . . . Our Savior Jesus, the Christ of God, after the manner of Melchizedek still even now accomplishes by means of His ministers the rites of His priestly work among men. For as that priest of the Gentiles never seems to have used bodily sacrifices, but only wine and bread when He blessed Abraham, so our Savior and Lord Himself first, and then all the priests who in succession from Him are throughout all the nations, celebrating the spiritual priestly work in accordance with the laws of the Church, represent . . . with wine and bread the mysteries of His body and f saving blood."

Theodoret of Cyrus (393-466), commenting on Psalm 110:4: "Christ, sprung from Judah according to the flesh, now serves as priest, not himself offering anything but acting as head of the offerers: he calls the Church his body, and in it he as man serves as priest, and as God receives the offerings. The Church offers the symbols of his body and blood, sanctifying all the dough through the first fruits." [FC, Vol. 102, Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 73-150, Psalm 110 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. 212.]

Gelasius, Bishop of Rome (492-496): "Surely the sacrament we take of the Lord's body and blood is a divine thing, on account of which, and by the same we are made partakers of the divine nature; and yet the substance of the bread and wine does not cease to be. And certainly the image and similitude of Christ's body and blood are celebrated in the action of the mysteries." [See Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 3 Vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger and ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg: reprinted by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1992), Vol. 3, p. 479 (XVIII.xxvi.xx).]

In his "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (published on 6 October 1520) Martin Luther wrote:

"Therefore it is an absurd and unheard-of juggling with words, to understand "bread" to mean "the form, or accidents of bread," and "wine" to mean "the form, or accidents of wine." Why do they not also understand all other things to mean their forms, or accidents? Even if this might be done with all other things, it would yet not be right thus to emasculate the words of God and arbitrarily to empty them of their meaning. Moreover, the Church had the true faith for more than twelve hundred years, during which time the holy Fathers never once mentioned this transubstantiation - certainly, a monstrous word for a monstrous idea - until the pseudo-philosophy of Aristotle became rampant in the Church these last three hundred years." [A Prelude by Martin Luther on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 2:26 & 2:27]

b. What about the Priesthood and an episcopal ecclesiology? (cf. Titus 1:5)

J.N.D. Kelly writes that in the apostolic age the terms 'bishop' and 'presbyter' were synonymous, each church being governed by a committee of coequal presbyters. The emergence of the episcopate proper, he argues, was due, not to any ordinance of the Lord, but to ecclesiastical custom. [J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 147.]

Jerome (347-420): "Therefore, as we have shown, among the ancients presbyters were the same as bishops; but by degrees, that the plants of dissension might be rooted up, all responsibility was transferred to one person. Therefore, as the presbyters know that it is by the custom of the Church that they are to be subject to him who is placed over them so let the bishops know that they are above presbyters rather by custom than by Divine appointment, and ought to rule the Church in common, following the example of Moses, who, when he alone had power to preside over the people Israel, chose seventy, with the assistance of whom he might judge the people." [John Harrison, *Whose Are the Fathers?* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), p.488. See also Karl Von Hase, *Handbook to the Controversy with Rome*, trans. A. W. Streane, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. rev. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1909), p. 164.]

"A presbyter, therefore, is the same as a bishop, and before dissensions were introduced into religion by the instigation of the devil, and it was said among the peoples, 'I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas,' Churches were governed by a common council of presbyters; afterwards, when everyone thought that those whom he had baptised were his own, and not Christ's, it was decreed in the whole world that one chosen out of the presbyters should be placed over the rest, and to whom all care of the Church should belong, that the seeds of schisms might be plucked up. Whosoever thinks that there is no proof from Scripture, but that this is my opinion, that a presbyter and bishop are the same, and that one is a title of age, the other of office, let him read the words of the apostle to the Philippians, saying, 'Paul and Timotheus, servants of Christ to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons.'" [John Harrison, *Whose Are the Fathers?* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), p.488. See also Karl Von Hase, *Handbook to the Controversy with Rome*, trans. A. W. Streane, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. rev. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1909), p. 164.]

Francis Aloysius Sullivan, a Roman Catholic who teaches at Boston College, writes in his book, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church*:

"Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ.' [Polycarp 5:3c] Polycarp calls for obedience to the presbyters and the deacons as to God and Christ. One could hardly explain his not mentioning the bishop here if there were a bishop at Philippi at that time." [page 128]

"One can hardly avoid drawing the conclusion that the church of Philippi, at the time Polycarp wrote this letter, was being led by a group of presbyters, assisted by deacons, but without any bishop over the whole community. If the absence of a bishop were merely temporary, as it was at that time in Antioch, one could surely expect Polycarp to make some reference to this situation. Hence, it seems reasonable to conclude that in the second decade of the second century, the structure of ministry at Philippi resembles that of Corinth two decades earlier. From this we can also conclude that the development of the episcopate took place sooner in the churches of Syria and Asian Minor than in churches of Europe. We do not know when the churches of Corinth and Rome began to be led by a bishop, but we have good reason to believe that this did not happen there any sooner than it did in Philippi." [130]

c. Purgatory

(1) Beckwith's claim that purgatory is "an extension of the doctrine of sanctification"

(2) The study of Jacques Le Goff

Le Goff, in 1981 published a groundbreaking book entitled, *The Birth of Purgatory*. He engaged in an extensive study of the evolution of the doctrine from embryonic form in the earlier centuries to what it became at the time of the Reformation. Part Two of his book is entitled, "The Twelfth Century: The Birth of Purgatory." There he notes:

"I am convinced by my research and textual analysis that purgatory did not exist before 1170 at the earliest." [135]

(3) Purgatory and Indulgences

(4) "Patristic Consensus?"

"No means were spared to fill the mind with terror. The priests depicted in horrible colors the torments inflicted by this purifying fire on all who became its prey. In many Roman-catholic countries we may still see paintings exhibited in the churches and public places, wherein poor souls, from the midst of glowing flames, invoke with anguish some alleviation of their pain. Who could refuse the ransom which, falling into the treasury of Rome, would redeem the soul from such torments?" [Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, 16]

d. Apostolic Succession (to cover next time)

Conclusion: Quote by John Gill