

Evangelical society president quits, returns to Catholicism

A Baylor University scholar serving this year as president of the Evangelical Theological Society shocked colleagues by returning to the Catholic faith of his youth and college years.

Francis Beckwith, associate professor of church-state studies at Baylor, announced last month on his Internet blog that he was resigning as president of the 4,100-member Evangelical Theological Society. He resigned as an ETS member two days later.

"My work in philosophy, ethics and theology has always been Catholic-friendly, but I would have never predicted that I would return to the church, for there seemed to me too many theological and ecclesiastical issues that appeared insurmountable," Beckwith wrote in the May 5 posting on his "Right Reason" blog.

In his announcement, Beckwith said he had recently read the writings of the early church fathers and found Christianity's roots to be "more Catholic than Protestant." He became convinced that he should reunite with the Catholic faith, in which he had been baptized and confirmed and received communion as a youth.

Beckwith, noted for his arguments against abortion and in favor of "intelligent design," has drawn protests from moderate Baptists for his questioning of church-state separation. He served as associate director of Baylor's J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies from 2003 to early 2007, despite opposition from descendants of the institute's namesake. His application for tenure at Baylor was first denied but granted on appeal.

The choice made by Beckwith, 46, took his academic colleagues by surprise in the theologically conservative organization. "It was not at all anticipated or expected," said Darrell Bock, a New Testament professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and a former ETS president. Bock and another ETS president, Craig Blaising, said that they consider Beckwith to be a friend but that it no longer makes the-

ological sense for him to be a member of the scholarly association.

Beckwith explained in his blog that both he and his wife, Frankie, a Presbyterian, decided in late March to join the Catholic Church. He had grappled with when to return to the church and "asked the Lord to provide to me clear direction."

In mid-April, his teenage nephew called and asked him to be his sponsor at his confirmation in mid-May. That prompted Beckwith to take the steps necessary for a public rejoining of the Catholic Church on April 28.

Prior to joining evangelical circles, Beckwith had attended Catholic elementary and high schools and received two advanced degrees from Fordham University, a Jesuit school in New York. —RNS

Poll says most Muslims assimilated, moderate

Most Muslim Americans are largely assimilated in the culture, happy with their lives and embracing the American dream, according to a comprehensive study released by the Pew Research Center, which the center called the first of its kind.

Conducted between January and April, the Pew study used a nationwide sample of 1,050 Muslim American adults, two-thirds of whom were born outside the U.S. Announced May 22, the findings revealed a Muslim-American population that is religious, diverse, socially conservative and politically liberal.

Nearly eight in 10 U.S. Muslims say they are either "very happy" (24 percent) or "pretty happy" (54 percent) with their lives, according to the survey.

Among the most important findings:

- American Muslims are more moderate than Muslim minorities in Western Europe.

- They have annual incomes and education levels that are comparable with the general public.

- They believe that Muslims coming to the U.S. should try to adopt American customs rather than separating from the larger society.

- Like many other immigrant

groups, they say hard work can lead to success in society.

On the basis of Pew surveys and Census Bureau data on nationalities, the U.S. Muslim population is estimated at 2.35 million, including children. Muslim organizations have claimed much higher numbers in the past, but the estimate of 2.35 million is believed compatible with previous Gallup poll analyses and the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey results on Muslim numbers in the U.S.

Support for religious extremism was lower among U.S. Muslims than among those abroad, said Amaney Jamal, who teaches politics at Princeton University. Only 1 percent of Muslim Americans say suicide bombings against civilian targets are "often" justified to defend Islam, and only 5 percent expressed "even somewhat favorable" opinions of al-Qaeda.

"This is a group living as most Americans live . . . a group aspiring to assimilate," said Andy Kohut, president of the Pew Research Center. Still, Kohut said, there are "pockets of sympathy for extremism," especially among young Muslim Americans under age 30 and among African-American Muslims.

Only 40 percent of American Muslims said they believe that Arabs carried out the attacks of September 11, 2001, which is similar to numbers worldwide. Muslim Americans overwhelmingly oppose the war in Iraq.

Nevertheless, Farid Sensai, director of research for the nonprofit Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, said Muslim Americans have become part of the nation's fabric. In Europe, he said, many Muslim populations are "ghettoized"—separated culturally and economically from the majority populations—which creates gaps in education and income and can lead to unrest.

Kohut credits the United States with doing a better job of assimilating immigrants and said the religiosity of the U.S., a nation with a Christian majority, appeals to Muslims. "It's a more inviting atmosphere than secular Europe," said Kohut.

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