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The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University

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Kevin Roose; The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University.

(New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2009)

Reviewed by Jessica Rimmer

The Unlikely Disciple, authored by the Brown University undergraduate Kevin Roose, is quick to gain the reader's attention. His writing style is full of wit, sarcasm, and honest humor. Even the tongue-in-cheek title is designed to poke fun at the evangelical Christian sub-culture. *The Unlikely Disciple* is the story of a brave Brown University sophomore who chose to spend a semester 'abroad' at Liberty University in order to better understand a culture within America that he and his friends did not appreciate or know. The catch is, he is undercover. As best as he can, Roose poses as a new convert to Christianity. I expected to be offended by Roose's experiences, both by his perspective and by the conservative Liberty culture into which he was entering. Surprisingly, I was captivated by the openness of Roose's retelling of his experience at Liberty University. I walked away with compassion for Roose and respect for Liberty that I did not know before I read this book.

It is important for the reader to understand the point of view of the author. Roose comes from an eclectic and decidedly liberal background. Therefore, his perspective on the Liberty student culture was humorous and consciously from the outside. His experience at Liberty University could be likened to that of most Americans traveling to a foreign culture for the first time. Occasionally, Roose's lack of experience with theology hampers his ability to understand his fellow Liberty students. Insider language and traditions that could be considered the norm for students who have grown up 'churched' become amusing and at times a little sad.

The Unlikely Disciple is an easy read for a general audience. Those who naturally read from the author's own perspective would have a much different experience with the book than those who identify with the Liberty University culture, or at least understand it. What is remarkable from both sides is how much Roose was able to take an authentic journey in a culture to which he is not native. Though the passage may have been made under a guise, the ways in which it seemed that Roose was affected were genuine. As a reader, it was easy to become endeared to Roose and his trip through a foreign land.

This book is an important work for any Christian to read. Rarely do you get to see an honest review of day in and day out conservative Christianity. For the Christian reader, this book does pack that kind of value. Likewise, it is pertinent to those of us who are working in higher education. Though our students may not be doing certified research about our universities, it reminds Christian professionals of the larger reality that people are looking at our encounters with Christ to see what we are all about. Roose unintentionally offers an important reminder that we are being watched by people who rightfully and sometimes incorrectly interpret our actions. This book was a veiled call to authenticity to all of us who are ourselves unlikely disciples.

I look forward to reading future books by Kevin Roose. I have a hope yet that his faith journey is not over.

Jessica Rimmer is the Dean of Student Life at Mid-America Christian University in Oklahoma City, OK.