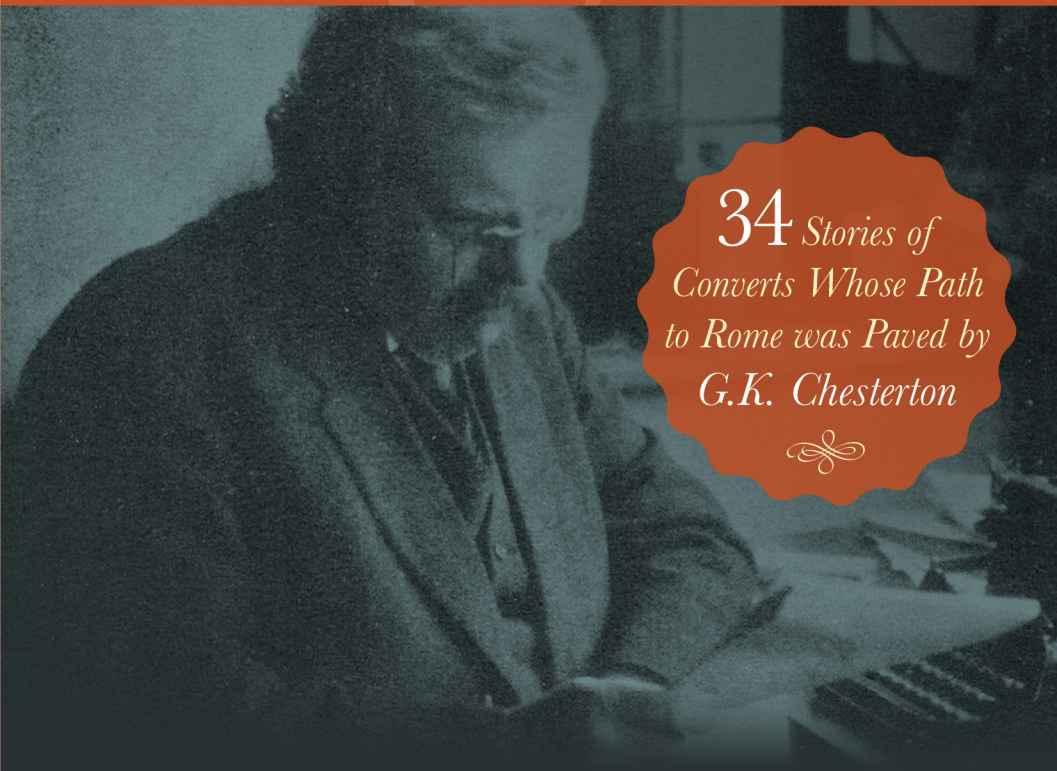




*My Name is*  
**LAZARUS**

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DALE AHLQUIST



**34** *Stories of  
Converts Whose Path  
to Rome was Paved by  
G.K. Chesterton*



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*34 Stories of Converts  
Whose Path to Rome was  
Paved by G.K. Chesterton*



# THE CONVERT

*By G.K. Chesterton*

After one moment when I bowed my head  
And the whole world turned over and came upright,  
And I came out where the old road shone white,  
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,  
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,  
Being not unlovable but strange and light;  
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite  
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give  
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,  
They rattle reason out through many a sieve  
That stores the dust and lets the gold go free:  
And all these things are less than dust to me  
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

Written the day he was received into  
the Catholic Church, July 30, 1922

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## INTRODUCTION

“Will a Man Take This Road or That?”

*By Dale Ahlquist*

PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT READ THE BOOK *The Path to Rome* usually assume it is a book about conversion. But it's not. It's Hilaire Belloc's amusing account of actually walking from France to Rome. The book ends when he gets there.

Belloc was a close friend of G.K. Chesterton's and part of a circle of early 20<sup>th</sup> century English literary stars, almost all of whom were Catholic converts. The only one in the group who was a cradle Catholic was Belloc. A fearless defender of the Catholic Church and an unabashed critic of Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Atheists, and any other non-Catholics, Belloc was not exactly a maker of converts. As a matter of fact, he never thought Chesterton would become a Catholic. He was stunned, along with much of the rest of the world, when Gilbert

Keith Chesterton took the figurative path that Belloc tread literally.

We will let Chesterton tell the story of his conversion in his own words in the opening chapter of this book, but the point is that when Chesterton reached Rome it was the beginning, not the conclusion, of the story. He arrived bringing others with him. Both inside and outside that literary circle there was a group that was not moved by Belloc but *was* moved by Chesterton, and there was a ripple effect. The ripple continues to be felt over eighty years after Chesterton's death. People who encounter his writings are drawn to his faith. They want what he has.

This is a book that easily could have been two thousand pages long with hundreds of personal testimonies. Consider first this list:

- ✦ Oxford chaplain Msgr. Ronald Knox, an Anglican clergyman who became a Catholic priest, translated the entire Bible, was a fellow author of detective fiction with Chesterton, and preached the panegyric at Chesterton's Requiem Mass.
- ✦ The social critic H. Marshall McLuhan, who gave the world the term "The medium is the message." He called Chesterton "a practical mystic" with "an unflinching sense of relevance."
- ✦ The great Catholic historian Christopher Dawson.
- ✦ Evelyn Waugh, the author of *Brideshead Revisited*, who called Chesterton "a lovable and much loved man, abounding in charity and humility."
- ✦ The sculptor and print artist, Eric Gill, who called Chesterton "a holy man, beyond all his contemporaries. Thanks be to God he also loved and befriended me." Also, Gill's brother Cecil, who had been an Anglican clergyman.



- ✦ The poet Alfred Noyes, who wrote “The Highwayman,” and was one of the last Englishmen in history who actually made a living from writing poetry.
- ✦ Novelist Graham Greene, who found in Chesterton his first real hero.
- ✦ Writer and skier Arnold Lunn, who first wrote a book criticizing Chesterton and other “Roman Converts” before writing a book, *Now I See*, crediting Chesterton for helping show him the way to the Catholic Church.
- ✦ Iconic actor Alec Guinness, who once played Chesterton’s famous priest detective Father Brown, which led to him investigate the Catholic faith.
- ✦ E.F. Schumacher, of *Small is Beautiful* fame.
- ✦ Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset.
- ✦ Author and Jewish convert Gladys Bronwen Stern.
- ✦ Author and diplomat Sir Shane Leslie, cousin of Winston Churchill.
- ✦ Two writers with similar names but of no relation to each other: Wyndham Lewis and D.B. Wyndham Lewis.
- ✦ Two scholars with very different names who were husband and wife: Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe.
- ✦ American novelist Francis Parkinson Keyes.
- ✦ John Moody, financial analyst and founder of the *Wall Street Journal*.
- ✦ Poet and professor Theodore Maynard, who wrote: “The effect of Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* has been enormously powerful upon the young men of this generation. For one of these young men I can speak. I was sliding, at the age of nineteen, from the Calvinist theology in which I had been brought up, into a vague humanitarian scepticism, when I read *Orthodoxy*, and that book began in me a reaction which,

by the grace of God, three years later carried me into the Catholic Church.”

☛ Aurel Kolnai, a Jewish philosopher from Hungary, who wrote: “Like so many other converts of my time, I was won for Catholicism largely, if not chiefly, by the wisdom and wit of Gilbert Keith Chesterton. One of my prevailing moods in these years could be phrased thus, ‘Not to share Chesterton’s faith is, after all, a thing of rank absurdity.’”

That is only a sampling of Chesterton’s well-known contemporaries, who were drawn by him into the Catholic Church. Some of them (Knox, Dawson, Maynard, et al) even arrived before he did. Chesterton once observed that he was standing at the door of the Church, ushering others in without having entered himself.

For obvious reasons, we have only a few names of lesser known personalities, such as Guy L. Cooper, who first heard Chesterton talking on the radio in 1930 about Prohibition; H.W.J. Edwards, a former Quaker who met GKC in 1930s, got involved in the Distributist League, and attended Chesterton’s funeral; Cecil Botting, who taught at St. Paul’s School, Chesterton’s alma mater; a Franciscan friar named Leo Rowlands; a former Episcopalian priest named Michael Chapman; and Joan Lamplugh of Birmingham, England, who is known only for the fact that she wrote a letter to Chesterton’s widow, which is preserved among Chesterton’s papers in the British Library. Most of the names and certainly the numbers of Chesterton’s other contemporaries who would have credited him with playing a key role in their conversion will never be known, and they are no longer around to testify.

After Chesterton’s death in 1936, his star faded and his influence waned for a bit, but with the recent revival of interest in his writings has come a new wave of conversions. Consider now this list:

- ✚ The late Stratford Caldecott, editor of *Second Spring*.
- ✚ Two former editors of *Touchstone* magazine, Leon Podles and David Mills.
- ✚ Former editor of *Chronicles*, Thomas Fleming.
- ✚ Former editor of the *Social Justice Review*, Tom Hoover.
- ✚ Dawn Eden Goldstein, who went from writing about rock-and-roll to writing about chastity and teaching theology at a Catholic seminary.
- ✚ Walter Hooper, who was secretary to C.S. Lewis.
- ✚ Mark Shea, author of several books on Catholic apologetics.
- ✚ Radio personality Laura Ingraham.
- ✚ David Moss, Founder of the Association of Hebrew Catholics.
- ✚ Msgr. Stuart Swetland, President of Donnelly College.
- ✚ Mark Brumley, President of Ignatius Press.
- ✚ Science fiction writer John C. Wright.
- ✚ Bestselling novelist Dean Koontz.
- ✚ Publisher Conrad Black.
- ✚ Marjorie Dannenfelser, President of Susan B. Anthony's List.
- ✚ *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat.
- ✚ Pro-life activist Lila Rose.
- ✚ The late Regina Derieva, acclaimed dissident Soviet poet who was a Jewish Atheist.
- ✚ William Oddie, a former Anglican priest, who is now a columnist for the *Catholic Herald*, and who wrote an article over twenty years ago calling for Chesterton's canonization.

Converts all. And escorted to Rome by G.K. Chesterton.

I have been maintaining a list with hundreds of names of converts on it—former Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Anglicans, Unitarians, Pentecostals, Eastern Orthodox, Quakers, Mormons, Muslims, Atheists and Agnostics. Jewish converts, too. And one gentlemen approached me after a talk I gave and told me that he was a convert because he'd read Chesterton. I asked him what he was before that. He answered, "A golfer."

For some Protestants, it was Chesterton's classic apologetics—arguments from reason, from history, from lucid analogy—the same kind of arguments with which C.S. Lewis once thrilled them to "mere Christianity," but with which G.K. Chesterton took them to something further: to the historic Church. For some it was social justice, the clear alternative offered by Chesterton's Distributism where other social and political and economic theories were incomplete, incoherent, and unsatisfactory. For some it was a poem. For some it was simply beauty. For all, it was goodness.

LeRoy Smith went to a priest and told him he wanted to become Catholic. The priest asked him if he knew any Catholics who could sponsor him. Mr. Smith replied, with complete sincerity, that he knew only one Catholic: G.K. Chesterton, who was the reason he wanted to join the Church. He now runs a local Chesterton Society in Arizona.

Some were happily cornered by truth. At a certain point they felt an almost whimsical inevitability to their decision. A 22-year-old woman from Texas, closing the book *The Everlasting Man* with a sigh of resignation, used a coarse word, and said: "Now I have to become Catholic." Whereas a 70-year-old woman from New Mexico read just one passage in *Orthodoxy* and knew she had to become Catholic. Sam Guzman, a former

Evangelical from Milwaukee, said to me: “I had been reading Chesterton, I was thinking about becoming Catholic, but I avoided reading *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, because I knew that would be too easy. I didn’t want to convert simply because Chesterton did. When I was about 99% sure that I wanted to become Catholic, I read it. It was the final nail in the coffin.” And speaking of coffins (and inevitability), add to the list Marcus Daly, who is a coffin-maker on Vashon Island in the Puget Sound.

For some the road was longer and harder and more painful. And costly. If they were Protestant ministers, it meant losing their jobs. In some cases, they lost their spouse. The road to Rome is not easy. And some are still on it. Chesterton is their companion.

And many Catholics have experienced what they call a “deeper conversion” after encountering Chesterton. One life-long Catholic told me: “You know that sword in Mary’s heart? I had a sword in my heart, too, but Chesterton pulled it out, and now I am healed.”

A woman in Spain came up to me and said, “Chesterton saved my life.” Another woman who suffered the pain of being abandoned by her husband told that what saved her sanity and calmed her soul was reading G.K. Chesterton.

And some men, both converts and cradle Catholics, have found that Chesterton played a role in their vocations. Fr. Andrew Luczak, from Illinois, read *Orthodoxy* and *Everlasting Man* in the 1960s, and said the books were instrumental in him making his decision to become a priest. He still reads the author now because, he says, “Chesterton makes me feel young.”

I once spoke at a conference and was followed at the podium by Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J., who began his talk by saying, “Chesterton was the catalyst for my vocation to the Jesuits. I was

a child of the culture, and G.K. Chesterton awakened me out of my dogmatic slumber.”

So what is it about Chesterton and the Catholic Church? That is what this book proposes to explore through a wide variety of personal stories. Chesterton says that the Church is a house with a hundred gates; and no two men enter at exactly the same angle. Here are over thirty different angles. As I say, the book could have been much bigger.

Not included are the fascinating stories that I know only bits and pieces of. One gentleman told me that Chesterton saved him from Buddhism. Another had been involved in the occult. Another told me that his entire Baptist family converted. And one told me that his entire Episcopalian church converted. There are, of course, many other stories I don't know about.

And then there is the intriguing story of former chess champion Bobby Fischer. Chesterton said that poets don't go mad but chess players do. Bobby Fischer might be a good example of that. The young genius once took the chess world by storm, winning the World Chess Championship in 1972 but eventually relinquishing the crown by refusing to defend it, and then alienating the whole world with eccentric behavior that included bizarre conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic rants that were especially weird considering the fact that Fischer was Jewish. He became a fugitive from the law when he defied a presidential order in 1992 forbidding him travel to Belgrade to play a rematch with his old opponent Boris Spassky in the former republic of Yugoslavia. In 2004, he was arrested in Japan for attempting to travel with an expired passport. An American attorney, Robert Vattuone, acted as Fischer's counsel and helped negotiate an agreement whereby Fischer could live in exile in Iceland, the site of his famous victory over Spassky in 1972. Mr. Vattuone, a Catholic, when he met with Fischer in

Japan, gave him copy of my book *G.K. Chesterton – The Apostle of Common Sense*, and the two of them discussed religion. And Fischer went off to Iceland. After that we don't quite know what happened. Except this: Just before he died in 2008, he arranged for a private Catholic funeral. Vattuone wondered if this was "Bobby's final brilliant move—to the chagrin of his detractors?" His detractors might say it was his final act of madness. Others would say it was a final act of sanity.

Chesterton says:

All Christianity concentrates on the man at the cross-roads. The vast and shallow philosophies, the huge syntheses of humbug, all talk about ages and evolution and ultimate developments. The true philosophy is concerned with the instant. Will a man take this road or that? —that is the only thing to think about, if you enjoy thinking. The aeons are easy enough to think about, any one can think about them. The instant is really awful: and it is because our religion has intensely felt the instant, that it has in literature dealt much with battle and in theology dealt much with hell. It is full of *danger*, like a boy's book: it is at an immortal crisis. There is a great deal of real similarity between popular fiction and the religion of the western people. If you say that popular fiction is vulgar and tawdry, you only say what the dreary and well-informed say also about the images in the Catholic churches. Life (according to the faith) is very like a serial story in a magazine: life ends with the promise (or menace) "to be continued in our next." Also, with a noble vulgarity, life imitates the serial and leaves off at the exciting moment. For death is distinctly an exciting moment.



# THE CHIEF EVENT OF MY LIFE

By G.K. Chesterton

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD, my youngest years, that can only be described as a white light. The very opposite of a dream. The world had a greater reality, a greater solidity, than at anytime in my adult years. It was not merely a material reality, but a spiritual reality as well. A complete reality. And part of this reality, this real world, was the world of imagination. Imagination is the opposite of illusion. Imagination is a thing of images, and we, after all, are made in the image of God. And my childhood was filled with images. One of my most vivid and fondest memories is of a toy theatre which was built for me by my father. I liked the toy theatre even

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Editor's note: Chesterton refers to his conversion as "the chief event of my life" in the preface to *The Everlasting Man*. The present essay, however, is a composite that I put together drawing from his *Autobiography*, *Orthodoxy*, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, *The Thing*, *The Well and the Shallows*, the essay "Why I am a Catholic," and a few other uncollected sources. I used this same text for the basis of an "interview" with Chesterton by Marcus Grodi for a special edition of *The Journey Home* on the Eternal Word Television Network.



when I knew it was a toy theatre. I liked the cardboard figures, even when I found they were made of cardboard. I never felt tricked. The white light of wonder shone on the whole thing. The figures of wood and of cardboard gave me glorious glimpses into the possibilities of existence. Perhaps my appreciation of the toy theatre was in part an appreciation of the carpenter who built it, which ultimately helped me appreciate another Carpenter.

At the same time, you must not imagine that I had a completely comfortable childhood or that I passed it in complete contentment. I was often unhappy in childhood like other children. I was very often naughty in childhood like other children; and I never doubted for a moment the moral of all the moral tales; that, as a general principle, people ought to be unhappy when they have been naughty. But I wanted to mention how terribly important my childhood was to the rest of my life. I have had many experiences. Without giving myself any airs of being a globe-trotter, I may say I have seen something of the world; I have travelled in interesting places and talked to interesting men; I have been in the major political quarrels of my country; I have talked to statesmen in the hour of the destiny of states; I have met most of the great poets and prose writers of my time; I have travelled in the track of some of the earthquakes in the ends of the earth; I have lived in houses burned down in the tragic wars of Ireland; I have walked through the ruins of Polish palaces left behind by the Red Armies; I have heard talk of the secret signals of the Ku Klux Klan upon the borders of Texas; I have seen the fanatical Arabs come up from the desert to attack the Jews in Jerusalem. There are many journalists who have seen more of such things than I; but I have been a journalist and I have seen such things; but none of those things are as real to me as the cardboard figures in that toy theatre of my childhood. Because I was subconsciously certain then, as I am

consciously certain now, that there was a white and solid road, a worthy beginning of the life of man; and the man afterwards darkens it. He goes astray from it in self-deception. It is only the grown man who lives a life of make-believe and pretending; and it is he who has his head in a cloud. I knew that morning light. I did not know that it could be lost. I knew even less if it could be recovered. And I did lose it, and I did recover it.

What surprises me in looking back on youth, is how quickly a young man can think his way back to fundamental things; and even to the denial of fundamental things. I had thought my way back to thought itself. It is a very dreadful thing to do; for it may lead to thinking that there is nothing but thought. At this time I did not very clearly distinguish between dreaming and waking; not only as a mood but as a metaphysical doubt, I felt as if everything might be a dream. It was as if I had myself projected the universe from within, with its trees and stars, as if I were their creator. As if I were... God. These, of course, are the thoughts of a madman. Yet I was not mad, in any medical or physical sense; I was simply carrying the scepticism of my time as far as it would go. And I soon found it would go a great deal further than most of the sceptics went. While dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment, suspecting that there was nothing but mind. I have always felt that there was something third-rate about materialists and materialism ever since. The atheist told me so pompously that he did not believe there was any God; and there were moments when I did not even believe there was any atheist.

I could imagine the maddest crime, when I had never committed even the mildest crime.

I was going through a kind of spiritual suicide. I had never heard of Confession in those days; but that is what is really

needed in such cases. And I fancy they are not uncommon cases. I dug quite low, low enough to discover the devil. I knew the reality of evil and the reality of sin.

When I had been for some time in these dark depths, I had a strong inward impulse to revolt; to throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift mystical theory of my own. It was substantially this: that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting. Anything was magnificent as compared with nothing.

There were writers who helped me find my way out of this darkness, even though they were not religious writers, per se. Charles Dickens with his endless hope. Robert Louis Stevenson with his "belief in the ultimate decency of things." The poet Robert Browning, who wrote "God must be glad one loves his world so much," The poet Walt Whitman was a hospitable giant who delivered me from the decadent cynicism that swept away so many young men of my time. And there was another poet who attracted me. A poet whose whole life was a poem. St. Francis of Assisi. He was never a stranger to me. I was drawn to St. Francis very early, when I had no more idea of becoming a Catholic than becoming a Cannibal.

When an enthusiast discovers through experience and sympathy that there is another half of the truth that he has not been told, then there is presented to him a perilous alternative. If he goes on to the whole truth, he will become more wise, but he will also become more ordinary, which means the acceptance of an order. The people who do not accept an order are left with chaos. Those are the only two choices, though modern people try to avoid making the choice. In most modern people there is a battle between the new opinions, which they do not

follow out to their end, and the old traditions, which they do not trace back to their beginning. If they followed the new notions forward, it would lead them to Bedlam, to Madness. If they followed the better instincts backward it would lead them to Rome, to the Catholic Church. And so what they try to do instead is remain suspended between two logical alternatives, trying to tell themselves that they are merely avoiding two extremes.

I went to art school and failed entirely to learn how to paint or draw, but I met a fellow student named Ernest Hodder-Williams. He and I often talked about literature, and he conceived a fixed notion that I could write; a delusion which he retained to the day of his death. He gave me some books on art to review for a magazine called the *Bookman*, which was published by his family. I tossed off some criticisms of the weaker points and misdirected talents of some great artists, and I found I had discovered the easiest of all professions; which I pursued ever since.

I am a journalist and so am vastly ignorant of many things, but because I am a journalist I write and talk about them all. If you are writing an article you can say anything that comes into your head. I would sooner call myself a journalist than an author; because a journalist is a journeyman.

The ultimate goal of any journey is to get home. But I have had a very jolly time as a journalist, and never asked to be anything better. The definition of journalism, as I have said, and as I have good reason to know, is writing badly. I really am forever conscious of how badly and clumsily I am using the English language in writing and speaking except when I am at the white heat of controversy, and at the hammer and tongs stage I get the illusion that I am doing things rather well. It's the best fun in life, this argument business, and what makes

being a journalist really worth while.

I never realized the great common sense of the Christian creed until the anti-Christian writers pointed it out to me. I was not defending any particular theological points, I was merely defending plain old human morals. I was defending Responsibility, which is sometimes called the question of Free Will. It was not that I began by believing in supernormal things. It was that the unbelievers began by disbelieving even in normal things. It was the secularists who drove me to theological ethics, by themselves destroying any sane or rational possibility of secular ethics. It was the Scientific Determinist who told me, at the top of his voice, that I could not be responsible at all. And as I rather like being treated as a responsible being, and not as a lunatic let out for the day, I began to look around for some spiritual asylum that was not merely a lunatic asylum. On that day, in short, I escaped from an error, which still entangles many better men than myself. There is still a notion that the agnostic can be content with knowledge about worldly things and never settle the questions about "other worldly" things. But it is not true. The questions of the sceptic strike direct at the heart of our human life; they disturb this world, quite apart from the other world; and it is exactly common sense that they disturb most. There could not be a better example than this determinist shouting to a mob of millions that no man ought to be blamed for anything he did, because it was all heredity and environment. Logically, that would stop a man in the act of saying "Thank you" to somebody for passing the mustard. For how could he be praised for passing the mustard, if he could not be blamed for not passing the mustard?

I met Fr. John O'Connor when I gave a lecture in Yorkshire. He was a small man with an elfish expression. I was struck by the tact and humour with which he mingled with his very

Protestant company; and I soon found out that they appreciated him, even though I suppose they really thought that he had his house fitted up with all the torture engines of the Spanish Inquisition. I liked him very much; but if you had told me that ten years afterwards I should be a Mormon Missionary in the Cannibal Islands, I should not have been more surprised than at the suggestion that, fully fifteen years afterwards, I should be making to him my General Confession and being received into the Roman Catholic Church.

It has been pointed out that my fictional detective Father Brown was based on Father O'Connor. Well, Father Brown's chief feature was to be featureless. The point of him was to appear pointless; and one might say that his conspicuous quality was not being conspicuous. His commonplace exterior was meant to contrast with his unsuspected vigilance and intelligence; and that being so, of course I made his appearance shabby and shapeless, his face round and expressionless, his manners clumsy, and so on. My friend, Father John O'Connor, as a matter of fact, did not have any of these external qualities. He was not shabby, but rather neat; he was not clumsy, but very delicate and dexterous; he not only was amusing but looked amused. He was a sensitive and quick-witted Irishman. My Father Brown was deliberately described as a Suffolk dumpling from East Anglia.

And yet, there is a very real sense in which Father O'Connor was the intellectual inspiration of these stories; and of much more important things as well. I never knew a man who could turn with more ease than he from one topic to another, or who had more unexpected stores of information, often purely technical information, upon all. But I was also surprised to find out what else he knew. He knew about evil. I had imagined for myself any amount of iniquity; and it was a curious experience

to find that this quiet and pleasant celibate had plumbed those abysses far deeper than I. After talking to him, I learned of horrors that I could not have imagined. If he had been a professional novelist broadcasting such filth on all the bookstalls for boys and babies to pick up, of course he would have been a great creative artist of the modern world. But he told me these things reluctantly, in strict privacy, as a practical necessity to prevent me from error.

Afterwards we fell into special conversation with two hearty and healthy young Cambridge undergraduates. They began to discuss music and landscape with my friend Father O'Connor. The talk soon deepened into a discussion on matters more philosophical and moral and, when the priest had left the room, there fell a curious reflective silence, at the end of which one of the undergraduates suddenly burst out, "All the same, I don't believe his sort of life is the right one. It's all very well to like religious music and so on, when you're all shut up in a sort of cloister and don't know anything about the real evil in the world. But I believe in a fellow coming out into the world, and facing the evil that's in it, and knowing something about the dangers and all that. It's a very beautiful thing to be innocent and ignorant, but I think it's a much finer thing not to be afraid of knowledge."

To me, still almost shivering with the appallingly practical facts of which the priest had warned me, this comment came with such a colossal and crushing irony, that I nearly burst into a loud harsh laugh in the drawing-room. For I knew perfectly well that, as regards all the solid Satanism which the priest knew and warred with all his life, these two Cambridge gentlemen (luckily for them) knew about as much of real evil as two babies in the same perambulator.

But the incident of the Cambridge undergraduates, and their

breezy contempt for the cloistered virtue of a parish priest, stood for much more serious things in my life than the heap of corpses that littered my detective stories. It brought me face to face once more with those morbid problems of the soul, the problems I alluded to earlier. It gave me a great and growing sense that I had not found any real spiritual solution to those problems. I had this sudden glimpse of the pit that is at all our feet. I was surprised at my own surprise. It was easy to believe that the Catholic Church knew more about good than I did. But that she knew more about evil than I did seemed incredible.

When people ask me, "Why did you join the Church of Rome?" the first essential answer is, "To get rid of my sins." For there is no other religious system that does *really* profess to get rid of people's sins. It is confirmed by the logic, which to many seems startling, by which the Church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned. And this brings me back to what I said earlier about the innocence of childhood, that strange daylight, which was something more than the light of common day, that still shines in my memory. Well, when a Catholic comes from Confession, he does truly, by definition, step out again into that dawn of his own beginning and look with new eyes across the world. In that brief ritual, God has really remade him in His own image. He is now a new experiment of the Creator. He is as much a new experiment as he was when he was really only five years old. He stands, as I said, in the white light at the worthy beginning of the life of a man. The accumulations of time can no longer terrify. He may be grey and gouty; but he is only five minutes old.

The Sacrament of Penance and the equally staggering doctrine of the Divine love for man, these doctrines seem to link up my whole life from the beginning, as no other doctrines could



do; and especially to settle simultaneously the two problems of my childish happiness and my boyish brooding. And they specially affected one idea; which I hope it is not pompous to call the chief idea of my life. I will not say it is the doctrine I have always taught, but it is the doctrine I should always have liked to teach: the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted. Thanks are the highest form of thought. We should be thankful for life, but we should be even more thankful for *new* life. The Sacrament of Penance gives new life. It reconciles a man to God, and to all the living, but it does not do it as the optimists and the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do it. The gift is given at a price, and is conditioned by a confession. In other words, the name of the price is Truth, which may also be called Reality; but it is facing the reality about oneself.

The sins of Christianity is one of the doctrines of Christianity. And the Church is not justified when her children do not sin, but when they do. The world really pays the supreme compliment to the Catholic Church in being intolerant of her tolerating even the appearance of the evils which it tolerates in everything else.

The difficulty of explaining “why I am a Catholic” is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true. And the difficulty of treating the matter personally and describing my own conversion is that I have a strong feeling that this makes the business look much smaller than it really is. Numbers of much better men have sincerely converted to much worse religions. But what I can say about the Catholic Church that cannot be said of any of its rivals is that it is catholic, that is, it is universal. It is not only larger than me, but larger than anything in the world; it is indeed larger than the world.

One of the notions that Catholics have to be continually refuting is the accusation that the Catholic Church is always the enemy of new ideas. Indeed, those who complain that Catholicism cannot say anything new, seldom think it necessary to say anything new about Catholicism. As a matter of fact, a real study of history will show it to be curiously contrary to the fact. In so far as ideas really are new ideas, Catholics have continually suffered through supporting them when they were really new; when they were much too new to find any other support. For instance, nearly two hundred years before the Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution, in an age devoted to the pride and praise of princes, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine laid down lucidly the whole theory of real democracy. But in that age of Divine Right he only produced the impression of creeping about with a dagger to murder the king. Again, the Casuists of the Catholic schools said all that can really be said for the problem plays and problem novels of our own time, two hundred years before they were written. They said that there really are problems of moral conduct; but they had the misfortune to say it two hundred years too soon. They merely got themselves called liars and shufflers for being psychologists before psychology was the fashion. It would be easy to give any number of other examples down to the present day, and the case of ideas that are still too new to be understood. There are passages in Pope Leo's Encyclical on Labor, *Rerum Novarum*, which are only now beginning to be used as hints for social movements much newer than socialism. And when Mr. Belloc wrote about the Servile State, he advanced an economic theory so original that hardly anybody has yet realized what it is. A few centuries hence, other people will probably repeat it, and repeat it wrong. And then, if Catholics object, their protest will be easily explained by the well-known fact that Catholics

never care for new ideas. Nevertheless, the man who made that remark about Catholics meant something. What he meant was that, in the modern world, the Catholic Church is in fact the enemy of many influential fashions; most of which still claim to be new, though many of them are beginning to be a little stale. A new philosophy in general means the praise of some old vice. In so far as he means that the Church often attacks what the world at any given moment supports, he is perfectly right. The Church does often set herself against the fashion of this world that passes away; and she has experience enough to know how very rapidly it does pass away. The Catholic Church is the only thing that frees a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age.

The Catholic Church is more fundamental than Fundamentalism. It knows where the Bible came from. It knows there were many other Gospels besides the Four Gospels, and that the others were only eliminated by the authority of the Catholic Church. It does not, in the conventional phrase, believe what the Bible says, for the simple reason that the Bible does not say anything. You cannot put a book in the witness-box and ask it what it really means. The Fundamentalist controversy itself destroys Fundamentalism. The Bible by itself cannot be a basis of agreement when it is a cause of disagreement; it cannot be the common ground of Christians when some take it allegorically and some literally. Protestants appealed from priests to the Bible, and did not realize that the Bible also could be questioned. There is no end to the dissolution of ideas, the destruction of all tests of truth, that has become possible since men abandoned the attempt to keep a central and civilized Truth, to contain all truths and trace out and refute all errors. Since then, each group has taken one truth at a time and spent the time in turning it into a falsehood. But in all probability, all

that is best in Protestantism will survive only in Catholicism.

I grew up in a Protestant world, but I was lucky that among my own family and friends there was none of that strange mania against Mariolatry. There was none of that mad vigilance that watches for the first faint signs of the cult of Mary as for the spots of a plague. No one ever presumed that she was encroaching upon Christ. My family and friends knew nothing about the Catholic Church; but they did know something about this sacred figure, that she represented an idea that was noble and beautiful. In England we called her the Madonna, instead of "Our Lady," an expression which reveals the English instinct for compromise, so as to avoid both reverence and irreverence!

I may still say that my personal case was a little curious. Mary and my conversion are the most personal of topics, because conversion is something personal. But also the cult of Mary is in a rather peculiar sense a personal cult. God is God, Maker of all things visible and invisible; the Mother of God is in a rather special sense connected with things visible; since she is of this earth, and through her bodily being God was revealed to the senses. In the presence of God, we must remember what is invisible, what is intellectual; the abstractions and the absolute laws of thought; the love of truth, reason and logic. But with Our Lady, we are reminded of God Incarnate. She gathers up the elements of the heart and the higher instincts. They do, in a sense, cut through reason. They are the legitimate short cuts to the love of God. And they can only be experienced personally. At least that is how I experienced them. And I hope I am not misunderstood when I describe my personal experience. I don't know if it was a special favour of heaven, but the fact is, I always had a curious longing for this particular tradition, even in a world where it was regarded as a legend. I was always haunted by the idea. In fact, I can scarcely remember a time when the

image of Our Lady did not stand up in my mind quite definitely, at the mention or the thought of all the things which are considered Catholic. I was quite distant from these things, and then doubtful about these things; and then disputing with the world for them, and with myself against them; for that is the condition before conversion. But whether the figure was distant, or was dark and mysterious, or was a scandal to my contemporaries, or was a challenge to myself—I never doubted that this figure was the figure of the Faith. She was only human, but she was a complete human being, and she embodied everything that the Catholic faith had to say to the world. The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered her; when I tried to forget the Catholic Church, I tried to forget her; when I finally faced the freest and the hardest of all my acts of freedom, that final decision that no one else could make for me, it was in front of a gilded and very gaudy little image of her in the port of Brindisi. And it was there that I promised that I would become a Catholic, if I returned to my own land.

Before arriving at Catholicism I passed through different stages and was a long time struggling. The various stages are hard to explain in detail. After much study and reflection, I came to the conclusion that the ills from which England is suffering: Capitalism, crude Imperialism, Industrialism, Wrongful Rich, Wreckage of the Family, are the result of England not being Catholic. The Anglo-Catholic position takes for granted that England remained Catholic in spite of the Reformation or even because of it. After my conclusions, it seemed unreasonable to affirm that England is Catholic. So I had to turn to the sole Catholicism, the Roman. Before my conversion I had a lot of Catholic ideas, and my point of view in fact had but little altered.

Catholicism gives us a doctrine, puts logic into our life. It is

not merely a Church Authority, it is a base which steadies the judgment. For instance, here everyone is writing about fashion, discussing short skirts, undressed women, but criticisms from no fixed standpoint. I'll tell you why: they don't know the meaning of chastity, whereas a Catholic does know, and so he knows why he condemns the fashions of to-day. To be a Catholic is to be all at rest! To own an irrefragable metaphysic on which to base all one's judgments, to be the touchstone of our ideas and our life, to which one can bring everything home.

The change I have made is from being an Anglo-Catholic to being a Roman Catholic. I have always believed, at least for twenty years, in the Catholic view of Christianity. Unless the Church of England was a branch of the Catholic Church I had no use for it. If it were a Protestant Church I did not believe in it in any case. The question always was whether the Church of England can claim to be in direct descent from the mediæval Catholic Church. That is the question with every Anglo-Catholic or Higher Churchman.

It appears to me quite clear that any church claiming to be authoritative, must be able to answer quite definitely when great questions of public morals are put. Can I go in for cannibalism, or murder babies to reduce the population, or any similar scientific and progressive reform? Any Church with authority to teach must be able to say whether it can be done. But Protestant churches are in utter bewilderment on these moral questions—for example on birth control, on divorce, and on Spiritualism.

The point is that the Church of England does not speak strongly. It has no united action. I have no use for a Church which is not a Church militant, which cannot order battle and fall in line and march in the same direction.

I ought to say first that, saving the grace of God, my own

conversion to Catholicism was entirely rational; and certainly not at all ritualistic. I was received in a tin shed at the back of a railway hotel. I accepted it because it *did* afford conviction to my analytical mind. But people can see the ritual and are seldom allowed to hear of the philosophy.

The great temptation of the Catholic in the modern world is the temptation to intellectual pride. It is so obvious that most of his critics are talking without in the least knowing what they are talking about, that he is sometimes a little provoked towards the very unchristian logic of answering a fool according to his folly. But we must never despair of explaining the truth, nor is it so very difficult to explain.