



The Catholic Church and Conversion

G.K. Chesterton

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In this book, Chesterton's brilliance as a writer and thinker again shine through as he explains his understanding of Catholicism and the Catholic Church and how its appeal to reason and truth eventually won him over. For Chesterton, two essentials lay at the heart of conversion, and without these, a man misses the point of it all. He describes these in his own words: "One is that he believes it to be solid objective truth, which is true whether he likes it or not; and the other is that he seeks liberation from his sins." That is why Chesterton became a Catholic, and what he describes in his unique and colorful way in this book.

The Catholic Church and Conversion Details

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Ben De Bono says

I'm convinced that if I read nothing but Chesterton for the rest of my life I would die a happy reader indeed. This volume in particular resonated with me. Chesterton makes it clear that it is a deeply personal work for him, and given my own recent decision to convert to Catholicism it was for me a deeply personal read. Few books I've read have so perfectly transcended the gap between author and reader as this one did for me.

The "Apostle of Common Sense" lays out the claim for Catholicism in his own particular style. All his wit and intellectual prowess are on display here. This is a volume I'll be revisiting often and has instantly earned a place among my favorite books.

Erik says

Recommended by James Schall in Another Sort of Learning, Bibliography.

Brian says

Of course he's a sophist. More Chesterton lovers should read this book so they know exactly how Chesterton appeals to one's prejudice instead of to one's reason.

Chesterton: Argument 1: Catholicism is both old and new, attracting the young just as much as any fad.

Sed contra: Um, because it feels cool and pagan.

Argument 2: Why use the Scriptures to judge Church Tradition? It's all part of one great big procession.

Sed contra: Aw, come on, G.K.

Argument 3: What's the big deal with Priests? Why would you be so bad if you took vows?

Sed contra: It's when you claim to have your ex cathedra infallible head doing those sorts of things that really bugs me. Also the celibacy--didn't Peter and the others have wives?

Argument 4: You make also sorts of false accusations: "Any manual would tell him that there is no sin "for which there is no absolution"; not disobeying the priest; not assassinating the Pope."

Sed contra: Um, my grandparents grew up thinking it was mortal sin not to go to Church every Sunday.

Sheesh, the fact that "mortal sin" is a well-known term tells you something.

Argument 4.5: The Protestant attacks are contradictory, now this, now that.

Sed contra: dangerous argument. One might say the Catholic church offers all sorts of contradictory arguments. Oh, but they're paradoxes of course! Hooker could pull this off because he quoted and footnoted his opponents; Chesterton does it with broadstrokes.

Chesterton then stops arguing against Catholicism--except for some depreciating remarks about how Calvinists think God wants to damn people. Okay, one score: "There was indeed a brief period when a small minority did some hard thinking on the heathen or heretical side. It barely lasted from the time of Voltaire to the time of Huxley. It has now entirely disappeared."

Also some wise words about not choosing your own religion, but being compelled where you are wrong.

Sorry, does that sound too Calvinistic?

Argument 6: We were socialists and spiritualists, realized it didn't work and saw that the Pope had got to our watered-down version first. Bleh.

More good thoughts on how Christianity is a compromise, not an ideal or a denial of our ideals entirely. Some nuggets are in here, but the broadsides are really, really broad.

Daniel says

Bleh. Chesterton says the first stage of a convert is to do justice to Catholicism, yet he doesn't seem to follow his own advice when critiquing Protestants.

R.D. Brown says

This is a very interesting look at the reasons why Chesterton converted to Anglicanism then to Roman Catholicism. It is almost a sequel to Orthodoxy. Where in Orthodoxy he argues for the claims of Christianity, here he argues that the only Christianity that exists is Roman. While I might disagree with that statement, in that Catholicism is the Church. I disagree that Rome has an exclusive claim, though an ancient one for sure.

Michelle says

Chesterton articulates much of my own internal experiences, as a convert. He effortlessly formulates thoughts for essences I merely sensed. I experienced this book as; "Ahh. I DO get it!"

Christopher Waugh says

At times brilliant, at others terribly partisan; Chesterton carries on that great Catholic assumption that history is on the side of Rome, but neglects the greater doctrinal differences which truly distinguished the Reformation in the history of the Church.

Christopher Pokorny says

Simple logic, witty writing style, and you can probably finish the whole text in a day off. :-)

Kazango says

A great book describing conversion. Converts to the Catholic Church are, in my experience, often misunderstood. I say this as one myself. Chesterton goes a long way towards explaining how we come to be what we become. To be honest I am not very fond of his use of paradox, but he puts it to good use here and there are a number of pithy and trenchant observations of the world to be found in the book which are no less relevant today than a century ago. Very highly recommended.

Joe Walls says

Oh boy . . .

Katherine says

Four stars 'cause Chesterton's awesome. Three stars to my reading ability, 'cause he's writing for a audience 100 years ago...and some of it just goes right over my head. But when he's good...he is SO good.

Noel says

The Catholic Church and Conversion, by G.K. Chesterton. A quick and easier read than other Chesterton works, but as timeless as the rest. Chesterton has an amazing knack of putting into words that which is hard to say. It followed so closely the undercurrents of my own conversion, it was as if I was reading my own story written a hundred years before my time. A fantastic book for anyone looking to understand the process of conversion to The Catholic Faith.

Gonzaga Escauriaza says

Supongo que será maravilloso pero es muy difícil de entender para mi.
No sé si incluso sería difícil de entender en español.
No tenía que haber sido tan osado.
