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I want to begin with what you may think a piece of shameless self-indulgence: I want to read to you the end of a book which is very dear to my heart, because I wrote it. This is how I brought my recent book *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy* to what seemed to me, at the time, its inevitable conclusion; please be patient, I think you will see the point:

> The reason Chesterton delayed so long over his conversion to Rome is difficult to answer with final certainty.... By 1908, however, the intellectual journey was largely completed; and when he came into full communion with the Holy See fourteen years later, there was to be little or no further theological development from the position he had arrived at in his book *Orthodoxy*. There is a parallel here, perhaps, with the conversion of John Henry Newman, who in the *Apologia Pro vita Sua* famously wrote that from the time he became a Catholic,

> ….of course I have no further history of my religious opinions to narrate. In saying this, I do not mean to say that my mind has been idle, or that I have given up thinking on theological subjects; but that I have had no changes to record, and have had no anxiety of heart whatever…. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation….[1]

> Newman's intellectual journey had taken place, as did Chesterton's, within the Anglican Church. Like so many converts before and since, Chesterton's theological Odyssey was conducted with an Anglican compass and guided by post-Tractarian charts. …. Like Newman before him, Chesterton could have said that he 'was not conscious, on [his] conversion, of any inward difference of thought or of temper from what [he] had before.'

Now, the only excuse for this otherwise inexcusable piece of self-promotion for one of my own works (the paperback edition of which is now available from the OUP, a snip at $29.95), my only excuse is that re-reading this passage led

[1] Newman, John Henry, *Apologia pro Vita Sua,* ed. William Oddie (London: Everyman paperback, 1993), 273.

me on to ask a question which only occurred to me after the book had been published, a question which I would like to explore today for an audience which will certainly understand why I ask it: why is it that so many of the greatest apologists of the Catholic faith in the English language, including the two incomparably greatest, Chesterton and Newman, have been converts from Anglicanism? Firstly, we need to note that the place of converts in the English Catholic revival, seen simply as a period of cultural history, is very striking. In his book, The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961, Ian Ker looks particularly at the six most central figures in particular: Newman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh. It is surely very remarkable that of these six, only Belloc was a cradle Catholic: all the others are former Anglicans.

What do they all have in common, and in particular what do the two great apologists, Chesterton and Newman, have in common? Firstly, there is a quality they share with the other four names I have mentioned: a vivid literary imagination, that is, an imagination which operates most importantly as a means of perception. They both have, as well, a heightened

sense of the great internal drama that unfolds when confusion and doubt are clarified, when some great intellectual penetration of a hitherto impenetrable barrier to faith presents itself.

This means that they are able not only to understand their own faith and how they came to perceive its character: they are able, also, to capture the imagination of their readers as they expound it. Consider Chesterton's book *Orthodoxy*. It has never been out of print since it was published in 1908. In other words, hard-headed secular publishers have for over a century seen it as a viable commercial proposition. Etienne Gilson, the great medievalist, said that *Orthodoxy* was the best apologetic the 20th century had yet produced: that was in the 30s. Catholic instructors of potential converts have always seen it as a work to recommend to potential converts. And yet, it was written by an Anglican, who as I have said was not to become a Roman Catholic for another 14 years.

What does Chesterton have in common with Newman? Both are intensely concerned to explain how it is, in what Thomas Carlyle in the 1830s, was already calling an age of 'downpulling and disbelief', that they had come to the

conclusion that the dogmatic faith of the Catholic tradition was in fact definitively true. Both men have an intensely visual imagination which informs the way in which they convey what they both see as a great drama of faith. Chesterton describes the argument of his book *Orthodoxy* as a 'set of mental *pictures*': it is a sequence of almost theatrical scenes of intellectual life: it is a kind of one-man show; we can almost imagine it comprising a vehicle for one of the great stage actors of our time. Part of the book's very powerful appeal a century ago was precisely that it held the attention *as* a personal *drama*: as Newman's first biographer, Wilfrid Ward, put it, '…the *story* of one who was brought up without Christian faith… and had the earnestness and activity of mind to formulate for himself many of its underlying principles… makes us recognise [the primary sources of the life-giving power of our religion] explicitly…. To see [the great thoughts of Christianity] strike with all the force of youth on a gifted mind makes them young again to us'[2]

It is one of the primary aims of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* to show that Catholic dogma is the very opposite of a

[2] Wilfrid Ward, 6.

constriction of the human spirit, to set the Christian creeds flying in the wind like great banners above a conquering army of liberation. One of the book's most memorable and histrionic moments is the point at which Chesterton suddenly realises that the claims of Christian doctrine have an exact correspondence with the problems posed by the human condition. This realisation is presented, not as an intellectual conclusion but as a theatrical denouement; and the scene ends with an evocation of what he calls in his autobiography his childhood's 'sunrise of wonder' – this is a constant leitmotif in Chesterton's writings. This is how he describes how everything suddenly comes together in his mind:

> And then followed an experience impossible to describe. It was as if I had been blundering about since my birth with two huge and unmanageable machines, of different shapes and without apparent connection – the world and the Christian tradition. I had found this hole in the world: the fact that one must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it; somehow one must love the world without being worldly. I found this projecting feature of Christian theology, like a sort of hard spike, the dogmatic

> insistence that God was personal, and had made a world separate from Himself. The spike of dogma fitted exactly into the hole in the world – it had evidently been meant to go there – and then the strange thing began to happen. When once these two parts of the two machines had come together, one after another, all the other parts fitted and fell in with an eerie exactitude. I could hear bolt after bolt over all the machinery falling into its place with a kind of click of relief. Having got one part right, all the other parts were repeating that rectitude, as clock after clock strikes noon. Instinct after instinct was answered by doctrine after doctrine. Or, to vary the metaphor, I was like one who had advanced into a hostile country to take one high fortress. And when that fort had fallen the whole country surrendered and turned solid behind me. The whole land was lit up, as it were, back to the first fields of my childhood.[3]

We can see this extraordinary passage as being almost the equivalent for Chesterton of the passage in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* in which Newman recalls the dramatic moment when some words of Saint Augustine brought him to realise

[3] *Collected Works*, i, 282-283.

for the first time the falseness of his own position. He has long ago accepted the notion that Christianity must be a dogmatic faith: but he has until now believed, as I suppose *we* all did, that this dogmatic faith could be lived out within the *via media* of Anglicanism. The *Apologia* is a story of *Fides quaerens intellectum*, of a faith which has been already received—as it were before the action of the drama begins—a faith now searching for an authentic discernment of its own consequences. For Newman, the search takes the form of a particular question: *where*, amid the confused welter of holiness and corruption that is the history of Christendom, is to be found the true Church, the Church instituted by Christ and given the authority to speak in his name?

The intellectual excitement of the journey is at times intense. History is no dead study for Newman; the third century is as vivid to him as the nineteenth. He knows that somewhere the past contains the key that will unlock the secret of his quest. When the discovery comes it is a moment of high drama: we can imagine it, almost, made into an operatic *tour de force* by Verdi or Donizetti. The scene is Newman's study in Oxford. A friend has pointed out to him a passage from an article by Nicholas Wiseman in the *Dublin Review*,

comparing Anglicanism with the Donatist heresy. At first he is unimpressed. Then his friend points out a quotation from St Augustine:

> "Securus judicat orbis terrarum." He repeated these words again and again, and, when he was gone, they kept ringing in my ears. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum;" .... What a light was hereby thrown upon every controversy in the Church! not that, for the moment, the multitude may not falter in their judgment.... but that the deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a final sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede. Who can account for the impressions which are made on him? For a mere sentence, the words of St. Augustine, struck me with a power which I never had felt from any words before. To take a familiar instance, they were like the "Turn again Whittington" of the chime; or, to take a more serious one, they were like the "Tolle, lege, —Tolle , lege," of the child, which converted St. Augustine himself. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum!" By those great words of the ancient Father, the theory of the Via Media was absolutely pulverised.

So, here is Newman's great turning point: 'Securus judicat Orbis Terrarum': Newman's own translation was 'the Universal Church is in its judgments secure of truth': in other words, the settled judgment of the Universal Church rather than that of breakaway factions like the Anglican Church has authority in matters of faith and doctrine.

For both Chesterton and Newman, as I suppose it was for many of us, conversion to the Church of Rome was a question of authority and unity of belief, and not of our own personal opinion. We all knew that it was possible to hold Catholic beliefs and to pray in a Catholic way within Anglicanism: but how compatible were these beliefs with the way our own Church regarded the very nature of belief itself? We knew we were members of a Church which vaunted itself on its comprehensiveness, a Church which not merely tolerated *us* but was proud of itself for doing so: but did we actually want our beliefs to be merely *tolerated*? Did we not want them to be actually *required* as *necessary*? As Chesterton put it in his *Autobiography*, 'I do not want to be in a religion in which I am *allowed* to have a crucifix. I feel the same about the much more controversial question of the

honour paid to the Blessed Virgin. If people do not like that cult, they are quite right not to be Catholics. But in people who are Catholics, or call themselves Catholics, I want the idea not only liked but loved and loved ardently, and above all proudly proclaimed. I want it to be what the Protestants are perfectly right in calling it; the badge and sign of a Papist. I want to be allowed to be enthusiastic about the existence of the enthusiasm; not to have my chief enthusiasm coldly tolerated as an eccentricity of myself.'

So in the end, they both had to become Catholics, in the full sense of that word, that they had to come into full communion with the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman. Nevertheless, and I am beginning to get to the point, it had been within the Anglican Church that they became Catholics in the sense of being believers in the Catholic religion. Chesterton was calling himself a Catholic many years before he was actually received into the Catholic Church: just as, I suppose, many of us were doing. And his journalism not infrequently reflected this. He was received in 1922: but by 1907 fifteen years before that, he was already writing as a declared Catholic. For instance, in response to a Protestant campaign for religious instruction in schools to go

no further than a simple basic knowledge of the content of scripture he wrote, in his famous column in the *Daily News*, that he would agree to 'have simple Bible teaching in the schools if he [c]ould [also] have simple coloured statues of the Virgin and the Saints in school as well'. He was brought up as a kind of liberal Unitarian; but as early as 1903, at the age of 29, he had arrived, mostly by his own efforts, at something very like a Catholic ecclesiology: and he was already deploying it in a prolonged controversy in which he was pitted, in a variety of newspapers, against a sort of Edwardian Dawkins called Robert Blatchford. The point is—and here I suggest is the answer to the question of why so many of the greatest Catholic apologists are former Anglicans—the point is that like many an Anglican Catholic before him, he had had to arrive at this stage in his journey step by step, from first principles, without any intellectual confirmation or support from the institution of which he was a member. Here he is in full flight, in 1903, nearly two decades before he was received into the Church, again in the *Daily News*:

> The whole matter really at issue is one that my respected opponent does not ever really succeed even in getting near.

> It is simply this: Are there or are there not certain powers and experiences possible to the human mind which really occur when that mind is suitably disposed, but for which that mind, in our particular civilisation, is not suitably disposed? Is the religious history of mankind a chronicle of accidental lies, delusions and coincidences? Or is it a chronicle of real things, which we happen not to be able to do, and real visions, which we happen not to be able to see? If it is the latter, the list of all its popes, councils, persecutions, martyrdoms, cathedrals, sacraments, and massacres is no longer what it is in Mr. Blatchford's eye—a rococo and rather incredible fuss about nothing. It becomes a perfectly business-like and natural record of actions, good, bad, and indifferent, taken in connection with a quite intelligible aim; it becomes a thing like Egyptian research, or the Stock exchange.

I said just now that Chesterton had reached this point largely by his own efforts and without any help from the official teaching of the Anglican Church. But he did have help from other Anglicans: for just as he was beginning to make some sense of Christianity, he had the good fortune (and perhaps we should put it higher than that: surely a little divine

nudging was going on here) he had the good fortune to fall in with a group of distinctly interesting clergymen. ‘Little by little, he recalled later, ‘I shifted nearer and nearer to the orthodox side; and eventually found myself… in the very heart of a clerical group of canons and curates.’ This particular group was, in its colourful eccentricity, precisely calculated to appeal to Chesterton. It included the liturgist Percy Dearmer, who was, as Chesterton recalled, ‘in the habit of walking about in a cassock and biretta which he had carefully reconstructed as being of exactly the right pattern for an Anglican or Anglo-Catholic priest; and he was humorously grieved when its strictly traditional and national character was misunderstood by the little boys in the street. Somebody would call out, “No Popery,” or “To hell with the Pope,” or some other sentiment of larger and more liberal religion. And Percy Dearmer would sternly stop them and say, “Are you aware that this is the precise costume in which Latimer went to the stake?”’ The eccentricity of the Anglo-Catholic party Chesterton wrote; ‘really had a great deal to do with the beginning of the process by which Bohemian journalists, like my brother and myself, were drawn towards the serious consideration of the theory of a Church. I was considerably influenced by Conrad Noel [Conrad Noel, of

course, later became notorious for flying the red flag from the tower of his church] ….' The clergy in whose company Chesterton now often found himself included Canon Charles Gore, later Bishop of Birmingham and founder and first principal of Pusey House, Oxford — who was in many ways the movement's intellectual leader — and his closest friend Canon Henry Scott Holland. Scott Holland was a man of Chestertonian warmth. As one friend put it, '[t]he first impression Holland made on strangers was that of a man of exuberant vitality and joyousness. … the moment he entered a room he radiated joy into every corner without apparently knowing what he was doing.'

In short, at just the most crucial period of his intellectual development, he fell among the very cream of the intellectual and spiritual leadership of that Church within a Church sometimes known as the Anglo-Catholic movement. And it was fun, it was exciting, it was intellectually challenging: it was *nearly* everything the *Roman* Catholic Church should be, but perhaps just *sometimes* is not. It had nearly everything: but still it did not have that final thing the Church of God must have: the sure means of saving itself from the passing whims of the spirit of the age, the authority

with certainty to define and declare what Newman calls that 'deliberate judgment, in which the whole Church at length rests and acquiesces': *securus judicat orbis terrarum*: the one essential perception the denial of which is the very foundation of the Anglican mind.

That brings me to a subject which I could hardly, before such an audience and at such a time avoid [a subject which other speakers have of course addressed]: the present Holy Father's great and I believe most wonderful gift of an Apostolic Constitution for the establishment of Ordinariates inside which Catholic jurisdictions within the Anglican tradition may be erected.

It is instructive, perhaps, to note in passing the extreme hostility to what the Pope has done not simply and understandably from figures outside the Church like the Archbishop of Canterbury: but also from certain of those Roman Catholics who since the seventies have been defining for the rest of us something they call 'the Spirit of Vatican II'. Here is one of them, Professor Nicholas Lash, a theologian from Cambridge University (or what we call where I come from 'the other place'). He begins by grudgingly saying, as he

could hardly avoid, that of course he welcomes all the Anglicans who want to come. Then he says this: 'Nevertheless, in terms of the relations between Rome and the bishops' conferences affected, the way in which these ordinariates have been invented is disgraceful.' What he means, of course, is that this time, the Pope didn't give the English bishops the chance to torpedo the whole thing: he just went ahead and did it.

The point is that people like Professor Lash, who was writing in the English liberal Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, sometimes known as 'the bitter pill', people like Professor Lash simply loathe and abominate the whole thing: they object particularly to the reception of communities rather than individuals, not least because, numerically, potentially far more could come under this dispensation than under what now obtains: in other words special fast-track arrangements for clergy wanting reordination, but for the laity the old business of so-called "individual submission" and then off with them to some minimalist modern liturgy at the ghastly concrete Catholic barracks down the road: for many Anglican Catholics, who are used to a numinous and reverently conducted liturgy, it is not an inviting prospect. And in any

case, quite simply, the Spirit-of-Vatican-II boys *don't actually want these converts at all*, because they know that they are coming not for the English bishops, and certainly not for *The Tablet*, which they loathe and despise: they are coming above all for the Pope. *The Tablet* would like smaller numbers to come, one by one, in a way which provides the opportunity to acclimatise them into the kind of reductionist belief-system and minimalist liturgy which for some obscure reason they favour. Thus *The Tablet's* weaselly suggestion that

> They do have an alternative …. they could, as countless converts to Roman Catholicism have done before them including many former Anglo-Catholics, apply to enter into full communion through the normal processes. Nowadays that usually means enrolling in the parish-based scheme called the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults…. After a *journey of faith* [dread words] involving instruction from a parish catechist [who incidentally usually knows less than you do] …. A simple formula of doctrinal assent is required … far less elaborate than adherence to every one of the Catholic catechism's 2,865 paragraphs which the apostolic constitution envisages.

Well, there you have it: what *The Tablet* wants for all converts is the half-cock reduced and reprocessed seventies Catholicism you get in RCIA rather than the full-blooded total Catholicism of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (which many of them already know far better than most cradle Catholics).

But you can understand *The Tablet*'s hostility and confusion. The fact is that the whole thing has been an enormous shock: not only to those who hate it all but to those who are still glowing with delight, those for whom the words "personal ordinariate" induce not the slightest irritation at the usual graceless Vaticanese but on the contrary, sheer joy at the generous fulfilment the Pope has granted of their deepest hopes : these include many former Anglicans like myself and many more now preparing for the journey they have always longed to make, together with their whole immediate community of faith.

It's important to understand that what we are now able to call the apostolic constitution already existed as an ambition whose essentials had been fully worked out in the early

nineties. And this time I believe, the Pope was determined that those who had frustrated this ambition in the early nineties. would be left entirely out of the loop. The operation this time was put under the direct authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But why was it all done so suddenly? And why *when* it was—before the relevant document was even ready? I am sure that the answer is that the Pope was determined to pre-empt any political manoeuvreings that might get under way if the existence of the plan should leak, or even, if the usual notice were given, during the week's speculation that usually precedes Vatican Press conferences. He may even have heard that a leak had already taken place. So, I suspect, he acted quickly. He called a Press conference with less than 24 hours notice; and he presented the English bishops with a *fait accompli*.

I cannot resist quoting at this point what John Henry Newman once said about the decisiveness of the great Popes. Though they are conservative, Newman says, it is not in any bad sense: they are conservative because they are "detached from everything save the deposit of faith", which it is their special province to preserve and also to proclaim. And although "the Popes have been old men", says Newman, they

“have never been slow to venture out upon a new line, when it was necessary. And, thus independent of times and places, the Popes have never found any difficulty, when the proper moment came, of following out a new and daring line of policy … of leaving the old world to shift for itself and to disappear from the scene’.

Two weeks after the announcement of the Apostolic Constitution, I was present at the 125th anniversary of what is a kind of unofficial Anglo-Catholic chaplaincy to Oxford University, Pusey House, (where I was once one of the clergy). Oxford was where I discovered the Catholic faith in its Anglican manifestation, when I went up to be trained for the Anglican priesthood at St Stephen’s House, the most unambiguously papalist of the seminaries of the Church of England. It was the beginning of a sometimes difficult road. At the St Stephen’s House ordination retreat we were told that the greatest challenge we would have to face would be “to be faithful priests in an apostate Church”: and so it proved.

So when I saw the faces once again of so many with whom thirty years before, and in the decades that followed, I had

faced that challenge, so often bitterly embattled against the Establishment of my own Church, men from whom inevitably I had become separated on my own conversion to Rome; and when I saw their profound happiness at the pope's great and apostolic act, and their exhilaration at the prospect before them, I could not fail to remember once more a famous passage from the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, a passage which the agnostic George Eliot said she could not read without tears:

> … I gather up and bear in memory those familiar affectionate companions and counsellors, who in Oxford were given to me, one after another, to be my daily solace and relief; and all those others, of great name and high example, who were my thorough friends, and showed me true attachment in times long past….
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> And I earnestly pray for this whole company, with a hope against hope, that all of us, who once were so united, and so happy in our union, may even now be brought at length, by the Power of the Divine Will, into One Fold and under One Shepherd.

The miracle of the Apostolic Constitution is that for a later generation, that hope is no longer “against hope”. It is almost too much for the mind to absorb: but it *has happened*, it *is happening*. And for tens of thousands, life will never be the same again.