

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

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It is difficult to know where to start in a subject so large and profound as the change of one's faith, and the process by which that change came about. I will endeavour to trace the beginnings from which were evolved eventually five conclusions which led me to the Catholic Church.

I must premise that I was brought up as a Low Church Anglican, but that a very little serious thought brought me to what is known as Tractarianism, as distinguished from Evangelicalism on the one side and Ritualism on the other, with neither of which I had any sympathy. I thought the one narrow-minded and illogical, and the other illogical and dishonest; and I think so now. I very soon began to be disturbed and unsettled by the confusion worse confounded of Anglicanism. I asked myself, "Can Almighty God be the author of this confusion? Can our Divine Saviour's promise be fulfilled 'that the gates of hell shall not pre-

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vail against His Church,' or His prayer be answered, 'that they may be all one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me'?"¹ I could neither explain the difficulty nor get it explained. As yet the Catholic and Roman Church, for whatever reason, never entered into my thoughts. These early troubles were the beginning of what I may truly call my ten years' agony. For it took me all that time—that is, from 1862 to 1872—to find my way from darkness to light.

It was not very long before it dawned upon me that every Anglican, of whatever school, was in reality a law to himself, and that he acted on his own authority; and then it was that the question of *authority* became to me the "*articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ*," and ever afterwards. I asked every one I met, "By what authority dost thou believe, and doest thou these things?" Sometimes, on my inquiry of this or that divine, I was referred to the Prayer-book as my authority, sometimes to the Fathers of the Church, sometimes to the Primitive Church. It took me some years to discover the fallacy of such appeals to authority; why, I cannot think. But that is always the way when one becomes a Catholic. One is sure to feel and say, "How could it have taken so long to discover what a moment's serious thought and the exercise of a little common sense ought to have revealed? How is it that every Anglican cannot see it?" The answer, of course, is that they have not the gift of faith. They even might see it—that is to say, might be intellectually convinced of the fallacy of such

¹ St. John xvii. 21.

appeals, and moreover of the logical standpoint of the Catholic Church; and yet, for all that, they will not, and cannot become Catholics. For—and here I must be pardoned for making a considerable digression—intellectual conviction is not faith. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon at this present moment (January, 1901). There are thousands and tens of thousands to-day who are intellectually convinced that of all bodies of men calling themselves Christians, the Catholic Church alone is logical and unassailable in its credentials. But they do not, and will not, ever become Catholics because they have not faith.

Let me give an illustration of the difference between intellectual conviction and faith. For several years the astronomers Adams and Leverrier were intellectually convinced of the existence of the planet Neptune. It was not till 1846 that M. Galle, of Berlin, actually saw it. This similitude explains itself.

God alone can give the faculty of seeing as well in the order of grace as in that of nature; and until He gives it, no man can attain to it by any process of scientific inference. And here, let me observe, many of the so-called apostasies of our days are to be explained. They are not really apostasies. It is simply this, that certain men have reasoned themselves into the Church and then have reasoned themselves out again. They were merely intellectually convinced, and were received on the strength of this conviction by priests who possibly took too much for granted, and who neglected to satisfy themselves about the faith of their neophytes, accounting such precautions as superfluous in the case of educated men or members of the Universities. But these

people are not apostates, for they never had the faith. When a man has once the real gift of faith—that is to say, the gift of God's grace, which elevates his reason above his natural powers and attainments, so that it rises and passes from intellectual conviction into faith, which is an act of the reason but different in *kind* as well as degree from intellectual consent—when, I say, a man once has this great gift of God, it is impossible for him, so I think, to lose it, and to relapse into any form of Protestantism. He may lose it by wilfully and persistently sinning against the faith, and, being punished by judicial blindness, become an infidel. This, of course, is true in the abstract. But, in the concrete, it may well be doubted whether this or that person among the exceedingly few apostates of to-day has really lost the faith. For myself, I do not believe they have.

But to return to my subject. At length I saw through the fallacy of any appeal to the Prayer-book, or the Fathers, or the Primitive Church, or the Church of the Ritualists. To begin with the last. A Ritualist has always seemed to me to be one who forms for himself his own theory of the Church, and then religiously obeys, not the Church, but his own theory of it. He is as much a law to himself as the extremest Evangelical. His is merely a case of obedience to self once removed. All Anglicans likewise form their own theory of the Prayer-book, their own commentary on the Fathers of the Church, their own account of the Primitive Church. They are simply a law to themselves, and the slaves of a self-imposed obedience. This conviction of my mind was, I know not why, very slow in its growth, but it came at last, and was indeed a disillusionment! But, besides this, it occurred to me to

inquire of what practical use is the dead letter of any book, whether Prayer-book, or Patristic writings, or even the Bible itself. For any practical purpose, what is wanted is the living voice of authority to determine infallibly what the book means or does not mean in the cause of Holy Writ ; and what is true or false doctrine in the pages of all other writers, even those of the Fathers of the Church, all of whom—with the solitary exception of St. Gregory Nazianzen—we as Catholics know have more or less committed themselves, here and there, to false doctrine. Where is the living voice among Anglicans ? Echo answers, “Where ?” It is quite past my comprehension how such men as Lord Halifax fail to see what is so obvious, and keep on appealing with wearisome monotony to what the Prayer - book teaches, or the Church of England teaches, when the fact must be patent to him, as it is to all the world, that there is no living authorized interpreter of either, and never can be, unless it be the Crown, which of course they repudiate. Here I find I must relinquish the continuous narrative of the process of my conversion for want of space. I will proceed to notice one or two of the chief difficulties which occurred to me on the march to the Catholic Church, and the solution of them which satisfied me, but may not, I am perfectly aware, satisfy everybody.

The first difficulty occurred to me in the condemnation of Private Judgement by the Catholic Church. Catholic teaching on this point seemed to me inconsistent with itself ; because at one moment it insists on the use of Private Judgement, and in the next it absolutely forbids it. The answer, however, is very simple ; though it was

some time in coming home to me. Of course, a man must use his reason to examine the credentials of the Catholic Church. When he is satisfied with them, and has found the true Church, he gives up his Private Judgement and submits to the judgement of the Church. As Cardinal Newman writes, in his own inimitable style, "Those who are external to the Church must begin with Private Judgement: they use it in order to ultimately supersede it; as a man out of doors uses a lamp on a dark night, and puts it out when he gets home. What would be thought of his bringing it into the drawing-room?"^x

I was puzzled for a time with another plausible contention. It occurred to me that it might be said, "You admit that by Private Judgement a man finds out the Catholic Church. Well, then, although he subsequently lays it aside, yet what was Private Judgement in the first instance must always be Private Judgement. By Private Judgement he began; Private Judgement, therefore, is the real foundation of his subsequent belief." But I saw before long that this objection proves a great deal too much. It seems to imply, at least to me, that, in the last resort, truth is nothing more to a man than what seems to him to be truth. A most dangerous doctrine, truly, as well as utterly false! It spells Idealism in Philosophy, Licentiousness in Morals, and Anarchy in Politics. Surely truth is not dependent for its being on Private Judgement. By Private Judgement we attain to it, but the truth was there before we discovered it, and no matter what we think about it; and, the moment we arrive at it, we rest upon the truth, not upon the Private

^x *Loss and Gain*, p. 203.

Judgement which brought us to it. By Private Judgement, at some time of my life, I apprehended the authority of the English Crown; the moment I did so, I gave my intelligent allegiance to it. Henceforth, I rested upon the authority of the Crown, not upon my mental apprehension of it. I am now a British subject, not because mentally I have come to that conclusion, but because of the *fact*. Or, to adopt another illustration: by means of a ladder I mount a platform; I am then standing on the platform, and not on the ladder which is left down below. By Private Judgement, then, a man must find out the Catholic Church. When he finds it, it is a huge *objective fact*. All men must be agreed about it as a gigantic organization, which has existed these nineteen hundred years. For all that time—the name and date of every Pope being historical facts—it has become a chief factor in the history of Europe. All that time it has taught with the living voice, and ruled with an incomparable discipline. There it is to-day, as of old, independent altogether of what men may think about it, a stubborn, undeniable, unmistakable fact. Whether it be true or false in its doctrine is beside the mark: there it is, and there it will be; that is all we are maintaining.

Well, then, a man discovers this Church; he makes his allegiance to it, and is formally accepted by it. Henceforth he rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church, not upon his mental apprehension of it. He is a Catholic, not because he thinks he is, but because of the fact of his formal reception into the Catholic Church: whereas an Anglican rests, not in facts, but

in his theory of facts. Not one of the objects of his religious allegiance really exists except in his imagination. He will say, "Surely the Prayer-book is a fact." To which I reply, "Well, of course it is; but not the Catholic interpretation of it; for all men are not agreed about that; indeed, the great majority are violently opposed to it. As long as there is a Broad Church interpretation of it, or an Evangelical, so long the High Church interpretation of it must be a theory and not a fact." The same with the Fathers of the Church or the Primitive Church. These things are, of course, facts in themselves, but not to the Anglican, only the Anglican interpretation of them, which is a very different thing. From beginning to end, therefore, the Anglican is a creature of Private Judgement, not a child of faith; and from the extreme Ritualist down to the most rabid Evangelical, he is a Protestant pure and simple.

But all this is reasoning in the mere natural order of things. Let us go to the supernatural. By Private Judgement, then, aided by grace—for without that he can do nothing—a man finds out the Catholic Church; then Private Judgement is superseded by Faith, which, as has been already said, elevates and sustains the reason above the level of its own natural powers. It is on that platform that he stands ever afterwards, and Private Judgement is the ladder by which he reached it and is of no further use.

Upon this, another objection occurred to me, which may be worded thus: "That is a convenient way of getting out of a difficulty by appealing to faith which is not cognizable by any human sense. It may be or it

may not be as you say, but that is not argument after all." To this I reply: "Quite so; to every one but a Catholic it is, I grant, inconclusive. But, then, must it not of its very nature be so? I cannot show anybody my faith, as I can show him a bunch of keys taken from my pocket. All I know is that I have it, and that the non-Catholic has it not, and that that great gift of God is my foundation, and no longer Private Judgement, which is, *ipso facto*, driven out by faith just as darkness is by light."

I do not remember any other serious intellectual difficulty, or one that detained me for long. Bad popes and bad priests never troubled me for a moment. The office and the man are so obviously distinct, that the mind must be addled that does not see it at a glance. A policeman may be an immoral man, but the bus-drivers and the cabmen will obey him, and rein in their horses at his bidding, because he is a policeman. The sentence of an immoral judge will avail to hang a guilty murderer, because it is the official act of a judge; it is not invalid because the judge is a bad man.

But, before I formulate my five conclusions, I must here declare my greatest obstacle to my conversion, which was not intellectual but moral. I loved the English Church intensely. It was associated with everybody and everything dear to me from the first dawn of consciousness. From a worldly point of view, to change my faith was to lose everything dear to me and to gain nothing. It meant the wreck of one's life, shattered nerves, and, for all I knew, absolute destitution. Can it be wondered that I felt reluctant to take

the step? Whilst I cannot accuse myself positively of bad faith, yet I must own that the terrible prospect before me made me dilatory in the work of finding out the truth. I have always accounted it as nothing short of a signal miracle of God's grace by which a conversion such as mine was brought about. For ever and for ever blessed be His Holy Name, and the intercession of His Blessed Mother!

I come then, finally, to the five conclusions already alluded to, which pointed, unmistakably—in the reputed language of Lord Macaulay after one of Cardinal Wiseman's famous lectures—to "*either the Catholic Church or Babel.*"

POINT I.—*If my soul is to be saved, God must show me the way. It is not for me to choose my own way, and offer that to God.* These words may seem a truism, but they are not really so; on the contrary, they are most useful as hitting off the Catholic and Protestant position exactly. The Ritualist, the High Churchman, the Broad Churchman, the Evangelical, the Nonconformist, all alike formulate their own views of religion, and offer them for God's acceptance as their account of salvation. The Catholic calls that putting the cart before the horse. The Catholic standpoint is this: that it is for God to reveal His own way of salvation, and all that man has to do is to find out where that is and to obey it. Further, that God *has* revealed it, and has committed this revelation to a competent authority upon earth, to guard it from error and to enforce its observance. It is the duty of man to find out where this oracle of truth is, and submit mind and heart to it.

POINT II.—*When God does reveal the way of salvation, it will and must be ONE—*

(1) One in *number*.

(2) One in *unity*.

(1) One in *number*, *i.e.*, "ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM" (Eph. iv. 5). Nowhere does Scripture give a hint as to more than one Church. When St. John writes to the Seven Churches of Asia, he is, of course, writing to seven hierarchies of the one only Church. And so historians sometimes speak of the English Church or French Church, meaning the Catholic Church in England or France. But mere common sense postulates oneness in number. It is impossible to imagine more than one way of salvation. Of course, it is conceivable that Almighty God could make many ways of salvation, because He can do all things; but it is not conceivable how confusion worse confounded would be avoided if He did. Supposing there was one way for Europe, another for Asia, another for Africa, another for America, a man would have to change his religion four times in a voyage round the world; and where could he tell where his good ship passed from one way of salvation into that of another? Some spiritual Trinity House would have to mark the supremely important boundaries of buoys. I know this is fooling; but then, the theory I am trying to gibbet is fooling too.

(2) Next, if the revelation is one in number it will be one in *unity* too; that is to say, the earthly teachers of it will be one, and the taught will be one. Why? Because it is the truth. Truth is one: one in the teacher, and one in the taught of its very nature. For instance, London is a city on the Thames. That

is truth ; and so all schoolmasters are one in teaching it, and all scholars one in learning it. Why? Because it is true. About God's way of salvation, then, wherever located on the earth—and located it must be somewhere—there will be unity in the teacher and unity in the taught. If I do not find unity in the teacher and unity in the taught, then I shall know that the truth is not there, from the very fact that there is not unity about it. Let us be quite sure about this. The following proposition is undeniable. Wherever the truth is, there must be unity of the teacher and unity of the taught about it, because it is true. But the proposition, "Wherever there is unity in the teacher and unity in the taught there is truth," cannot, of course, be maintained as it stands ; because teachers and scholars may conceivably be agreed upon what is false. Yet, observe, in religious argument, even this last proposition is undeniable. For, as a matter of fact, no religious system of human opinion has ever succeeded in maintaining unity, and for this reason : because the moment you depart from the Divine rule of faith, wherever it may be, you are landed, *ipso facto*, in human opinion. There is no intermediate position possible. Now, human opinion must of its very nature be variable, because the human mind has been created by God as variable as the human face. When Dr. Benson, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, ordered prayers for unity of belief among his flock, I remember saying that he might just as usefully pray for *unity of countenance* among them. Therefore, in point of fact, though not perhaps in logic, the religious inquirer may be quite sure that where there is not unity in the teacher and unity in the taught, there cannot be truth ; and that,

conversely, wherever there is unity in the teacher and unity in the taught, there, *ipso facto*, is Divine truth.

POINT III.—*If God does make a revelation of the way by which the soul is to be saved, that revelation will be infallible.*

A. Infallible in its SUBJECT MATTER—

(1) Because Almighty God delivers it. How can it be otherwise?

(2) Because my soul wants nothing less. I cannot trifle with eternity. I cannot afford to make a mistake about it, which it is impossible to put right after death.

B. Infallible in its EARTHLY MOUTHPIECE—

(1) For of what practical use would be infallible truth with a fallible mouthpiece?

(2) How can Almighty God punish me for ever, if I refuse to believe a teacher who may mislead me? It is my solemn duty to refuse belief in such an one. Remember, we have to give an account of our faith as well as of our morals, and of faith before morals. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be condemned" (St. Mark xvi. 16). How can God punish me eternally for want of faith, unless he gives me an infallible teacher, whereby I can secure infallible truth? An infallible teacher of salvation is the most pressing of all the needs of the soul, and yet the very mention of an infallible teacher makes the average Englishman shiver in his shoes. This is indeed astounding. Well, then, somewhere on earth, and in some authoritative body of men, or in the office of one man, must be placed by Almighty God the infallible oracle of truth. The way of salvation, then, is reduced to great simplicity by this time. All a man has to do is.

to find out where the oracle is, and then believe what it teaches, and do what it commands.

POINT IV.—*This way of salvation will be exclusive.* That is to say, it will be the only one; and every other way of salvation will be false. This means that the true Church, wherever it is, will not only be the best of all Churches, but the *only* one. This point seems to require no further remark; and yet I remember a catechumen once saying to me when teaching it, "Oh, Father, that is a tall order and no mistake!"

POINT V.—*To accept when once seen or wilfully to reject this way of salvation is a matter of life or death eternal.* This seems obvious from the words of Scripture already quoted. To see it not, *by* a man's own fault, is likewise to be lost. Once the solid conviction has crossed a man's brain, that if he inquired honestly into the credentials of the Catholic Church he would be convinced of the truth of it, and bound to submit to it in mind and will—that man must go on in his inquiry, otherwise he will be lost. To see it not, *not* by a man's fault—that is to say, in a case where it has never occurred to a man's mind that his own religion is false or that any other religion can be true—then, not to believe in the Catholic Church will not, of course, entail eternal loss on that account. All this was self-evident to me, but it may not be so to others. With that I have nothing to do.

My task is nearly done. Only a few words are needed to show that the Catholic and Roman Church alone can satisfy these five points or conclusions. Let the religious inquirer examine any system of religion other than that of the Catholic Church, he will find that it breaks down on one or more of these five points. Ask the

Ritualist first, who is in many ways nearer to the truth (and yet of him I say, "thou art so near and yet so far"), is he one with his brother Anglicans in faith? And what must he answer if he speaks the truth? Is he infallible, or the Church of his invention? Is the *Church Times* infallible? No; he breaks down hopelessly, and all his fellow-Protestants when submitted to the test of my five points. But ask next the Catholic Church if it can satisfy these same points, and you will soon see how perfectly she can stand the test.

POINT I.—This point, as we have already seen, is the Catholic standpoint *par excellence*.

POINT II.—Is the Catholic and Roman Church one? Yes; absolutely one in number and in unity all over the world, in every climate, in every race of men: one in the teachers and one in the taught. It is this marvellous fact that in point of fact converted me. I have always considered this unity of nineteen hundred years as God's greatest miracle.

POINT III.—Is the Catholic Church infallible? Yes; and it has always claimed to be, and has acted as the infallible Divine teacher of truth from the time of Christ. The Catholic Church alone of all religious bodies claims infallibility. The very claim sufficiently proved its truth to me.

POINT IV.—Is the Catholic Church exclusive? Yes it says, "I, and I only am the one true religion. All others are false, and not to be accounted religions at all."

POINT V.—Is it a matter of life or death eternal to accept when seen or wilfully reject the Catholic Church? The Catholic Church replies "Yes." She alone teaches

this; no other system of Christianity has dared to teach it.

Here I conclude the history of my conversion. I do not pretend to do anything more than show what led me to the Catholic Church. I do not lay down any law for others. All I know is that I have the faith, and in the profession and peace of it I have lived twenty-nine years. Not a shadow of a doubt in it has ever crossed my mind during that long time. In this faith I still live, and in this faith I hope to die. Amen.