

There are, of course, associations, memories, and emotions still left in his mind—some of them very sacred and dear to his heart; he still is happy in numbering among his friends many persons who still find amongst those associations and memories a system which they believe to be the religion instituted by Jesus Christ; yet he himself can no longer see in them anything more than hints and fragments and aspirations detached from their center and reconstructed into a purely human edifice without foundation or solidity. Yet he is conscious of no bitterness at all—at the worst he experiences sometimes a touch of impatience merely at the thought of having been delayed so long by shadows from the possession of divine substance. He cannot, however, with justice, compare a dream with a reality. He has abandoned, therefore, the attempt—which lack of leisure in any case would make practically useless—to place side by side with his drowsy memories of Anglicanism the story of his vivid adventures under the sunlight of Eternal Truth.”

Orestes A. Brownson

Orestes A. Brownson was one of the keenest intellects that America has known. Before his conversion, which occurred in 1844, he wrote:

“We had wandered in darkness, stumbling from error to error, with downcast look and saddened heart, craving for freedom and finding only bondage.”

After his conversion he wrote:

“It is not easy to conceive the sense of freedom and relief one experiences in passing from Rationalism or any other form of Protestantism to Catholicity. The convert to the Church is the prisoner liberated from the Bastille; a weight is thrown from his shoulders, the manacles fall from his hands and the fetters from his feet; he feels as light and as free as the air, and he would chirp and sing as the bird. This world changes its hue in his eyes; and he runs and leaps under the blue sky of a boundless universe. His thought, his mind, his very soul, is lighted up, and revels in the freedom of universal truth. He feels that he has something whereon he can stand, that he has no longer to bear up the Church, but the Church can bear him up. He is conscious of an unfailing support and no longer fears that he is in danger every step he takes of having his footing give way and of falling through. His heart bounds with a sense of unlimited freedom, and with a joy unspeakable.”

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Pamphlet 123

Famous Converts

Why They Became Catholic

John Henry Cardinal Newman

John Henry was born in 1801. He is the most distinguished graduate of Oxford University. For twenty-four years he was a clergyman of the Church of England. In 1845 he became a Catholic

“From the time that I 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 have been in perfect peace and contentment. I never have had one doubt.

From the day I became a Catholic to this day, now close upon thirty years, I have never had a moment's misgiving that the communion of Rome is that Church which the Apostles set up at Pentecost, which alone has the adoption on the sons, and the glory, and the covenants, and the revealed law, and the service of God, and the Promises, and in which the Anglican communion, whatever its merits and demerits, whatever the great excellence of individuals in it, has, as such, no part. Never have I for a moment hesitated in my conviction, since 1845, that it was my clear duty to join the Catholic Church, as I did then join it, which in my own conscience I felt to be divine. Persons and places, incidents and circumstances of life, which belongs to my first forty-four years, are deeply lodged in my memory and my

affections; moreover, I have had more to try and afflict me in various ways as a Catholic than as an Anglican; but never for a moment have I wished myself back; never have I ceased to thank my Maker for His mercy in enabling me to make the great change and never has He let me feel forsaken by Him in distress, or in any kind of religious trouble.

I have not had one moment's wavering of trust in the Catholic Church ever since I was received into her fold. I hold, and have ever held, that her Sovereign Pontiff is the center of unity and the Vicar of Christ; and I ever have had, and have still, an unclouded faith in her creed and in all its articles; a supreme satisfaction in her worship, discipline, and teaching; and an eager longing, and a hope against hope, that the many dear friends whom I have left in Protestantism may be partakers of my happiness. ...Return to the Church of England! No! The net is broken and we are delivered. I should be a consummate fool (to use a mild term) if in my old age, I left the land flowing with milk and honey, for the city of confusion and the house of bondage."

Ronald A. Knox

Ronald Knox was the son of an Anglican Bishop of Manchester, England. He was born in 1888; was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford; became a clergyman of the Church of England, and was elected a fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, in 1910; he entered the Catholic Church in 1916.

"I suppose it is inevitable that after the question, 'Why did you become a Roman Catholic?' Anglicans and others should proceed to the question, 'What does it feel like?'"

In answer to this, I can register one impression at once, curiously inconsistent with my preconceived notions on the subject. I had been encouraged to suppose, and fully prepared to find, that the immediate result of submission to Rome would be the sense of having one's liberty cramped and restricted in a number of ways, necessary no doubt to the welfare of the Church at large, but galling to the individual. I have been overwhelmed with the feeling of liberty, the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It was not till I became Catholic that I became conscious of my former homelessness, my exile from the place that was my own. I now found ease and naturalness, and stretched myself like a man who has been sitting in a cramped position. I found harborage, the resting place which God has allowed to His people on earth."

Elizabeth Bayley Seaton

Elizabeth Bayley Seaton was the foundress of the Sisters of Charity. She was born in 1774 and became Catholic in 1805.

"On the 14th of March, 1805, I was admitted to the true Church of Jesus Christ, with a mind gratified and satisfied, as that of a poor ship-wrecked mariner on being restored to his home.

I seemed then to be admitted to a new life and to the peace which passeth all understanding; and with David I now say, 'Thou hast saved my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling;' and certainly I most earnestly desire to walk before Him in the land of the living, esteeming my privilege so great, and what He has done for me so far beyond my most lively hopes, that I can scarce realize my own happiness."

Robert Hugh Benson

Robert Hugh Benson was the son of Archbishop Benson of Canterbury, the ecclesiastical head of the Church of England. He was born in 1871, and was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, England. He served in the Anglican Ministry for nine years, and entered the Catholic Church in 1903.

"Cardinal Newman compares, somewhere, the sensations of a convert from Anglicanism to those of a man in a fairy story, who, after wandering all night in a city of enchantment, turns after sunrise to look back upon it, and finds to his astonishment that the buildings are no longer there; they have gone up like wraiths and mists under the light of the risen day. So the present writer has found. He no longer, as in the first months of his conversion, is capable of comparing the two systems of belief together, since that which he has left appears to him no longer a coherent system at all.