



Conservatism's Inevitable Conversion to Catholicism

Jessica Kramer

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Almost two centuries ago, Alexis de Tocqueville predicted that Americans would either totally abandon Christianity or convert to Catholicism, writing, “our descendants will tend increasingly to divide into only two parts, some leaving Christianity entirely and the others embracing the Church of Rome.”

He predicted a smaller Church—of which Pope Benedict XVI agrees—saying, “Nowadays, more than in previous times, we see Catholics losing their faith and Protestants converting to Catholicism.” He went on to write that in a post-Christian liberal democracy, Catholicism would be the only viable remaining option:

America is the most democratic country on earth while, at the same time, the country, where, according to reputable reports, the Catholic religion makes the most progress...Men who live in democratic times are, therefore, predisposed to slide away from all religious authority. But, if they agree to obey such an authority, they insist at least that it is unique and of one character for their intelligence has a natural abhorrence of religious powers which do not emanate from the same center and they find it almost as easy to imagine that there is no religion as several...

I think de Tocqueville’s prediction is coming to fruition. The Left has entirely abandoned Christianity and fully embraced secular liberalism. I believe the Right, though still deeply influenced by liberalism—*especially classical liberalism*—will more and more find its way toward the Tiber. This is at least what I have observed in the last three years since my own conversion to Catholicism and in the witness of conversion among my peers. My friends, including fellow graduates of Liberty University (the epicenter of American evangelicalism) and other Washington, D.C., conservatives, have either returned to the Catholic Church after going through a Protestant phase or are seriously flirting with the idea of converting to Catholicism themselves.

Even among conservative intellectuals, there is a growing trend toward Catholicism. Consider clinical psychologist and post-modern critic Jordan Peterson, who said, “Catholicism is as sane as people can get.” Though he’s not yet Catholic, some would argue he’s well on his way. Or consider the Catholic conversion of likely U.S. Senate candidate J.D. Vance, or even the extremely interesting theological evolution of U.S. Senator Marco Rubio.

But perhaps the most interesting prospect to Catholicism among those in conservative circles is Charlie Kirk, who in an interview with Church Militant admitted, “The world is a better place because of the Catholic Church, and that needs to be said more.” He went on to express that he has “so much respect for the Catholic Tradition and Church.”

When asked if he’s considered converting to Catholicism, he reveals “my friends try to convince me to become Catholic all the time.”

“Some of my greatest friends in the world are Catholic...I go to Catholic Mass every once in a while. I don’t take the Eucharist, don’t worry you don’t have to report me...The joke is that serious evangelicals become Catholic. And I’ve seen that happen. I’m open-minded, but I’m not there yet.”

There were two things that struck me in the Kirk interview. The first was my gut telling me that Kirk is well on his way to becoming Catholic (which is the True, the good, and the beautiful that he alludes to). The second was that by the nature of his answers, social conservatism needs Catholicism just as much as Christianity does.

Which brings me to my own prediction: conservatism, in its quest for identity post-Trump, will *eventually* convert to Catholicism and be deeply influenced by Catholic integralists. A political philosophy and ideology needs an intrinsic telos. It was Cardinal Manning who once said that “all human conflict is ultimately theological.” What then is conservatism but a commitment to *conserving* tradition? And what is Western tradition? Christianity, The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In the midst of his responses, Kirk reveals the weaknesses of Protestantism and conservatism. Protestants and conservatives share the same dilemma: They have competing traditions and interpretations, and are thus fractured and splintered in a way that harms their cause. They have no unified authority, and with a lack of consensus and ultimate source of Truth, debate inevitably devolves into personal interpretation and preference. The Catholic Church is the solution for both groups theologically and philosophically.

In a religious context, without an infallible Church (that gave us the infallible word of God) there is no final authority on its interpretation. Kirk makes this case, ironically, by his answer in regard to progressive Christianity, saying, “They’re misrepresenting the Gospel, they’re misrepresenting biblical truth and the biblical text—I guess they have a right to do that. I’m not going to disallow them from doing that obviously in a pluralistic society in that sense. However, I will say that a true interpretation of the Scriptures cannot possibly lead to the public policy decisions they’re coming to.”

But who decides which interpretation is correct? And why should they, or anyone, have a right to misrepresent the Truth? Error has no rights.

One practical example of division in the realm of social issue policy is birth control. Kirk admires the Church for its commitment to life and marriage, saying, “I love the uncompromising Catholic social teaching when it comes to abortion and marriage. I absolutely love it.” But, assuming he’s like most modern evangelicals, he will totally miss the boat on contraception as the obvious legal precursor to the “right to privacy” that gave way for abortion. Kirk has said he’s against the public funding of contraception because of rights to religious conscience, though

he is most likely fine with the legalization of it and the use of it within marriage (even though Protestants were against contraception too, until very recently).

While integralism will certainly not be the Republican Party platform for 2024, it will be the new libertarianism of the present-day Right, the thorn in the side of non-purists. But rather than champion a hyper-individualism, their focus will be on facilitating the common good and establishing a society ordered toward objective Truth that aids in human flourishing. The closest example modern conservatism has to anything “integral” is Catholic Senator Marco Rubio’s “Common Good Capitalism,” an address he gave at The Catholic University of America where he quoted Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, which ironically also speaks to the present-day dilemma of conservatism:

When a society is perishing, the wholesome advice to give to those who would restore it is to call it to the principles from which it sprang; for the purpose and perfection of an association is to aim at and to attain that for which it is formed, and its efforts should be put in motion and inspired by the end and object which originally gave it being. Hence, to fall away from its primal constitution implies disease; to go back to it, recovery. —Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum

Conservatism needs to heed de Tocqueville’s prophecy and take advantage of our post-Trump moment in an effort to redirect the Party toward its true end. Perhaps what is next needed is an institute for integralism—*much like libertarianism’s Cato Institute*—to further flesh out these ideas and reorient what we’re trying to conserve.