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The Inner Process of Catholic Conversion from the Perspective of an Educated Man Living in a Protestant Nation

CATHOLIC PERSUASION

The Individual Desire to Find the Truth in Religion

by Joshua Huntington

A man raised as a Protestant Congregationalist is repelled by what he considers his religion's bigotry, narrowness, superstition, and revivalism. He breaks away to find the truth in religion, and finds it in the Roman Catholic Church. However, after joining that Church, and subsequently writing about his journey of faith, he meets with unfair criticism and denial. **CATHOLIC PERSUASION**, by Joshua Huntington, is an outstanding record forgotten account of the inner workings of conversion. His work promises to shed "light in many dark places" in the hearts of those who are struggling with their faith, and are having doubts and questions concerning the nature of religion. It is indeed an outstanding record of someone who was a Protestant going over to the "enemy", that is, the Roman Catholic Church.

Joshua Huntington (1812-1900) was from New England, descended from ancestors who, from the first settlement of the colonies, had been distinguished in church and state. He was educated in the tradition of the pilgrim fathers, and was a pupil of very capable teachers at Yale, Princeton, and Andover. Yet, his doubts about Protestantism grew, and he began to educate himself about the history and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Huntington's book could be said to describe the interior history of a mind traveling from Puritanism to the Catholic Church over a long and circuitous route. Despite this intensely personal revelation, Huntington is always sincere and earnest in his disposition, and therefore a competent witness regarding those things which he observed.

In excellent detail, Huntington in his book gives the reasons why he began to question his faith, and why he thought that the Catholic Church was superior. He would clearly have rejected the idea put forward by one writer that "It is the glory of Protestant Christianity, that it can learn wisdom by its own mistakes, that perceiving they are such, it can abandon and outgrow them." Huntington asserts that Protestantism fails to tell people what they must believe or what they must do in order to be a true follower of Christ and child of God. Thus, Protestant theology is defective in that it furnishes no certain or exact criterion of doctrine, and also that it gives no sufficient rule of action. From this, he infers that there is a conflicting predisposition in Protestantism, on one side to scepticism, on the other hand to a return to the bosom of "Catholic unity". It is the latter force that might lead the individual toward a new and more vigorous life, a process that Huntington hopes will be animated and guided by his book.

Huntington's book stirred up a great deal of criticism amongst many reviewers, some of whom saw his statements as unfair attacks on Protestant churches. It is true, however, Huntington made a special effort to encourage Protestants to reflect on the excesses and imperfections of their own system. Moreover, the reviews of the original edition clearly show the discomfort that Protestants had for this form of personal confession, as there was a fear that too many others would join Huntington in leaving their denominations. While acknowledging that certain "sects" might have erroneous doctrines, these writers objected to having all of Protestantism tainted with the same brush.

Ultimately, Huntington believes Protestant churches have failed to give people guidance, and this has produced a general intuition that perhaps there is no positive religion revealed by God, but that, if there is one, it is the religion taught by the Catholic Church. This intuition should not be denied, but should be faced directly, as the questions addressed by Huntington do not constitute only an individual viewpoint, but are representative of a large class of people, completely disappointed by Protestant theology, and yearning for a satisfactory doctrine. **CATHOLIC PERSUASION** allows us to witness a process of spiritual growth and liberation, achieved by courageously confronting some of the most difficult issues that face both Protestantism and Catholicism.

Paul Dennis Sporer (editor) is the author of *The Dimensions of Companionship; Liberating Love; The Concept of Family; and Equal but Different*. He has also served as editor on more than 30 culturally and historically significant books, including *Painting Explained*, by Thomas Gullick; *Is Secession Treason?*, by Albert Bledsoe; *The Heart of Aryavarta*, by Lawrence Dundas; *Beauty and Art*, by Aldam Heaton; *The French at Home*, by Albert Rhodes; *From Slave Cabin to Pulpit*, by Peter Randolph; *Newer Ideals of Peace*, by Jane Addams; *Views of Old Europe*, by Bayard Taylor; *Gentle Measures*, by Jacob Abbott; *Parental Influences*, William Bacon; *Finding a Way Out*, by Robert Moton; *The New Birth*, by Austin Phelps; *Tupelo*, by John Hill Aughey; *An Incident of Travel*, Arthur Jerome Eddy; *End of an Era*, by John Sergeant Wise; *The Missionary*, by Samuel Mazzuchelli; *Half a Century*, by Jane Swisshelm; *Born Three Times*, by Thomas L. Johnson; *Dark Hollow*, by Anna Katharine Green; and *1492: Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, by Mary Johnston.

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CATHOLIC PERSUASION, by Joshua Huntington

Revised and enhanced edition, with new preface and index

Publication date: TBA; Pages: 130

ISBN: 978-1-932490-53-4 (sc); Price: \$11.95