



Dies Academicus 2026: On Conversion

I.

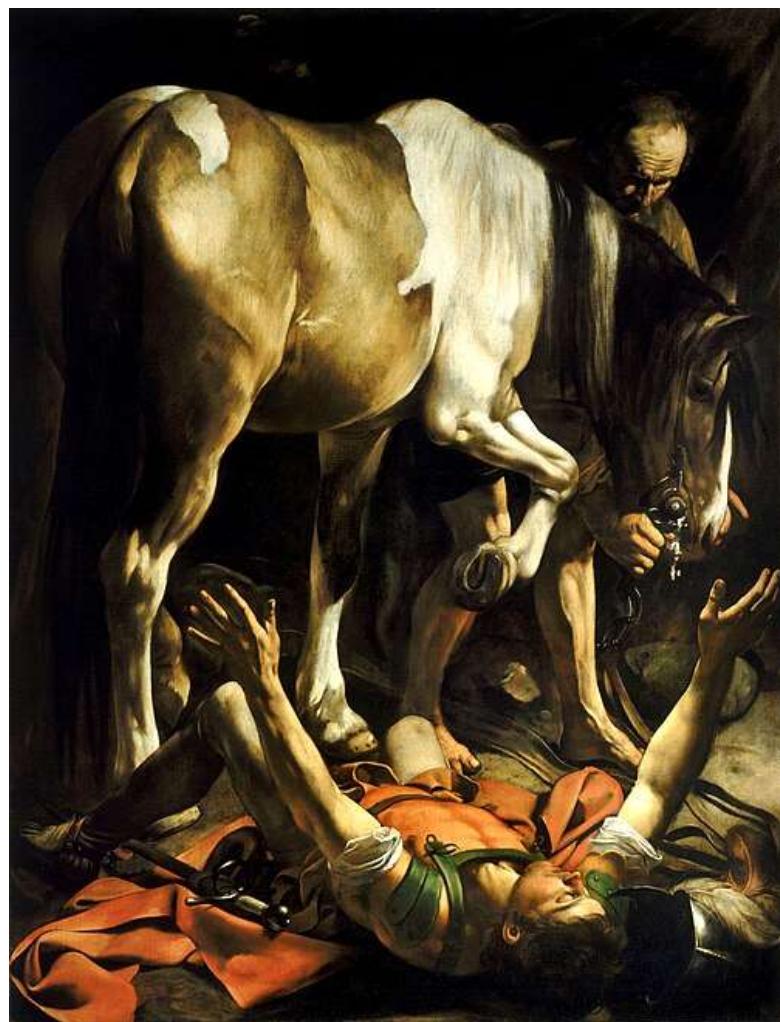
G.K. Chesterton, "The Convert" (1927)

After one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white.
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light;
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite
But softly, as men smile about the dead

The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

II.

Caravaggio, *The Conversion of St. Paul on the Road to Damascus*. 1601.
Oil on canvas (91 in x 69 in). Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Populi,
Rome.



III.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, q. 24, a.9, corp.

Whether charity is rightly distinguished into three degrees, beginning, progress, and perfection?

"The spiritual increase of charity may be considered in respect of a certain likeness to the growth of the human body. For although this latter growth may be divided into many parts, yet it has certain fixed divisions according to those particular actions or pursuits to which man is brought by this same growth. Thus we speak of a man being an infant until he has the use of reason, after which we distinguish another state of man wherein he begins to speak and to use his reason, while there is again a third state, that of puberty when he begins to acquire the power of generation, and so on until he arrives at perfection.

In like manner the divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different pursuits to which man is brought by the increase of charity. For at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed: in the second place man's chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: while man's third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who 'desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.'"