



The DEFENDANT

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'I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea . . . ; therefore I have imagined that the main business of man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world - that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in the terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.'

G.K Chesterton, 'Introduction',
The Defendant (1901)

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The Advantages of being Absent-Minded

by Karl Schmude

Absent-mindedness can be a source of amusement or exasperation for many people.

While often associated with aging, it may now be more prevalent as a result of information overload in an electronic era. The more we have to absorb, the more likely we will forget or overlook it.

Chesterton's absent-mindedness assumed legendary proportions. Stories abounded, of which the most famous was probably his confusion over a speaking engagement when he found himself in the wrong town - and telegraphed his wife Frances:

"Am in Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?"

What became a lifelong habit was first evident in his schoolboy years. His sleepy indifference to what was happening in class led many to conclude that he was "backward". His first biographer, Maisie Ward, reveals that he talked little before the age of three and did not learn to read until he was eight years old.

He appeared so often to be dreaming. This was, in fact, an early clue to the hidden advantage of his absent-mindedness. His mind was active elsewhere.

He was attending to more pressing - and appealing - realities, the roamings of his imagination. As he put it in his *Autobiography* (1936), "my mind was



Above: The absent-minded look of a young Chesterton's 'presence of mind'

already occupied, though I myself was idle."

When he became a journalist, and a published book author, his reputation for absent-mindedness became a notable part of his public persona. He was once found standing in Fleet Street, in the midst of heavy traffic, absorbed in thought, while buses, taxis and lorries swirled about him - as if the most fruitful place for creative thought was the very epicentre of English journalism.

Absence of mind . . . Presence of mind

But deeper currents were at work. As Chesterton himself explained, absence of mind was, in fact, the presence of mind on something else. The ancient Greek philosopher, Thales, was depicted in a famous image as looking up to the stars, which, in Aristotle's words, 'enables one to see further' - when he was suddenly brought back to earth by falling into a well.

Near the end of his life, Chesterton suggested that his autobiography could have comprised a series of short stories similar to those about the life of Sherlock Holmes - "only that his were astonishing examples of observation,



Opposite: Thales, the ancient Greek philosopher who fell into a well while gazing at the stars

and mine astonishing examples of lack of observation. . . . concerned with my absence of mind, instead of his presence of mind."

When Chesterton created his detective character of Father Brown, he invested him with a certain clumsiness and absent-mindedness. This has a dual effect in the Father Brown stories. It tends to lead the other characters in the story to underrate the priest's

detecting ability, and it can give the criminal a false sense of security - that his responsibility for a crime has escaped notice.

Father Brown's "absence of mind" also fits in with his approach as a detective - that he finds the criminal by getting *inside his character*, and imagining how he felt when he committed the crime.

In "The Secret of Father Brown", a visiting American, Grandison Chace, suggests to Father Brown that his effectiveness is related to a difference of method from the normal detective - that, in fact, it reflects an absence of method. The priest is puzzled. He says to Mr Chace: "I beg your pardon. Yes. . . . Absence of method. . . . Absence of mind, too, I'm afraid."

By "absence of mind", Father Brown meant that he was less interested in the external details of the crime - focusing on the "outside" of the criminal, as it were, all of the overt clues. This allowed him to bestow a "presence of mind" on the "inside" of the suspected criminal.

"I don't try to get outside the man," he tells Grandison Chace. "I try to get inside the murderer."

By such concentration on the human character behind the crime, Father Brown could come to understand "in

what style or state of mind a man could really do it". When the priest had come to feel exactly like the murderer himself, he was able to identify who the criminal was.

Absent-minded professor

The absent-minded detective bears some similarities to the absent-minded professor, an archetype of the academic life.

Such a character has long showed a preoccupation with his higher interests and studies. He combined a neglect of practical details - such as whether his socks or shoes matched, or he had gravy stains on his tie, or he remembered to complete a requested form according to deadline - with an absorption in his academic subject.

The archetype is largely absent from the modern corporatized university. It hardly fits with a culture of managerial conformity and humourlessness.

The absent-minded professor was a stock character in literature. He featured in detective fiction, - for example, Agatha Christie's "Man in the Brown Suit", where the father of the main character, Anne Beddingfeld, is a famous archaeologist known for forgetting meals and being confused about money.

The character also featured in movies - such as *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961) and the British satire of university life, *Lucky Jim* (1957), which contained not one but *two* absent-minded professors, one of whom repeatedly muddled the main character's surname.

But perhaps these signs of confusion on the part of the absent-minded reflect an ultimate advantage. As in Chesterton's case, "absence of mind" can grant a certain aloofness from the trivial and the temporal that swamp our attention, day after day.

It can offer a detachment from the immediate and the current. It thereby opens up a new "presence of mind", allowing us to penetrate the permanent realities, and ponder the deeper truths, that we can easily tend to avoid or overlook. ■

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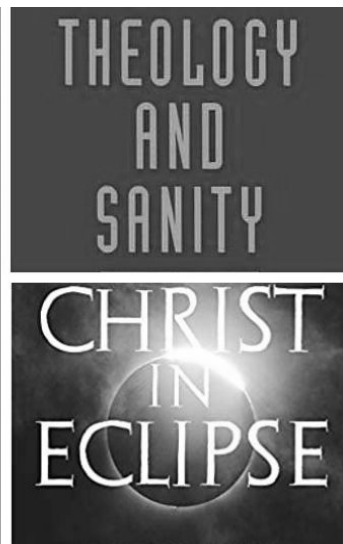
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Remembering Frank Sheed

by John Young

Frank Sheed (pictured) was a prominent Australian Catholic author who knew Chesterton well. Sheed published several of Chesterton's last works under the imprint of Sheed and Ward, the publishing firm he founded in 1926, in company with his wife Maisie Ward, Chesterton's first biographer.

John Young, a Melbourne-based philosopher and a frequent contributor to *The Defendant*, offers some personal recollections of Frank Sheed.



F.J. Sheed (1897-1981) published his masterpiece, *Theology and Sanity*, in 1947. I read it when I was about twenty, and was very impressed by it.

In 1958, I travelled overseas for the first time and attended meetings of the Catholic Evidence Guild in London. The Guild had been founded in London in 1918, and trained Catholics to teach and defend the Catholic Faith in Hyde Park and other venues, where “soapbox orators” presented a variety of views on a variety of subjects.

One evening I was introduced to Sheed. He started to talk to me about cricket in Australia. I didn’t know much about it, and I think he was disappointed. He never forgot that he was an Australian, though he spent most of his life in England.

He had an easy-going manner, and one might have assumed that he had a happy childhood, particularly because of his mother, a woman with a strong Catholic faith, who easily made friends.

In fact he had an unhappy childhood. His father was a Communist who talked Communism at mealtimes, and who physically abused Frank and his brother John. John died at the age of sixteen, and his mother thought he had died of a broken heart because of rejection by his father.

Frank seemed to survive unhurt, but a sign that he had not occurred in 1956. He fell from the platform in Hyde Park, London, as he was addressing a crowd at Speakers Corner. He hurt his head and seemed to hallucinate. It was as though traumatic memories which had been repressed now came to the surface.

He had studied law at Sydney University. He took a break from his studies to travel to England in 1926, where he became involved with the Catholic Evidence Guild. He had a real talent for “soapbox oratory”, but also a keen theological intellect and a remarkable ability to present difficult theological concepts in a clear and attractive way.

He returned to Sydney to complete his studies in law, and would no doubt have become an outstanding barrister; but God had other plans for him. He had fallen in love with a member of the Catholic Evidence Guild, Maisie Ward, and asked her to marry him. She couldn’t make up her mind, but after his return to Sydney she sent him a telegram accepting his proposal. She wrote it in Latin, hoping the post office people would be unable to read it.

Having done his final two years of law at Sydney University in one year, he returned to London. He had passed his exams but never practised law. He and Maisie married in 1926 and founded the publishing firm of Sheed and Ward, which went on to produce many influential books on theology and related subjects.

In 1956, Rome conferred a Doctorate in Theology on him for his writings, particularly *Theology and Sanity*, a work which shows how a knowledge of theology can transform one’s outlook on reality. True theology, enlightened by the virtue of faith, gives us a share in God’s own knowledge.

Sheed was writing and publishing at a time when there were many influential Catholic authors, including GK Chesterton and Ronald Knox, and he knew them personally. He also helped make European authors better known in England through translations of their books published by Sheed and Ward.

I happened to meet him in Sydney not long after his wife died (she died in 1975), and we spoke of people I had known in the Catholic Evidence Guild. By this time the Guild, which had been so vibrant, had all but disappeared. And his two children, Rosemary and Wilfred, had both given up their Catholic Faith.

He seemed rather lonely: he and Maisie had been very close. When he spoke to me of her, it was as though she was still present to him. Now they are together for eternity. ■

On By a Reactionary by a Comrade in Arms

by Trevor Bailey

Was Chesterton 'reactionary' – or even, a 'Reactionary'? He has at times been stigmatised in this way – by critics such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Ingrams.

Trevor Bailey, a criminal law barrister who has written previously for *The Defendant*, reflects on how the term might be applied to Chesterton.

G.K. Chesterton wrote about reaction – or, Reaction – in verse, but its philosophy informs his worldview, the journalism born of it, and indeed his Christian faith.

This small essay was conceived on Bastille Day in 2023, some three days after the death of Milan Kundera (the Czech communist who dared criticise communism), and some few weeks after Australian government plans to censor "misinformation and disinformation" were unveiled to growing public alarm.

My own reaction to this confluence of events put me in mind of Chesterton's poem. Despite the pejorative association of the term, like him - *because of him* - I too am pleased to bear the title 'reactionary'.

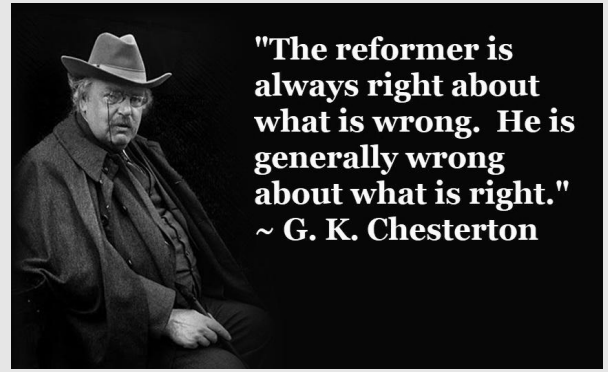
Some definitions. Volume XIII of the OED exhaustively examines the adjective and substantive. Relevant here is: "One who favours or inclines to reaction. *Also, in Marxist use, an opponent of communism.*"

In his *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (1982), Roger Scruton develops this theme:

"The idea of 'forces of reaction' which seek to arrest or reverse the achievements of revolution or reform was introduced into political thought by the philosophical radicals of the nineteenth century... A reactionary is anyone who opposes changes that the left desires, or who seeks to re-establish a political order that has been overthrown in the name of left-wing ideals.

"The implication is usually that such a one merely 'reacts' to change, and does not initiate change, so that he has no claim to be heard, being without serious recommendations." (Emphases added)

The Oxford Dictionary illustrates its definition by an excerpt from 'Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung' (1967): "*The reactionaries in all countries are fools... Their persecution of the revolutionary people only serves to accelerate the people's revolutions.*"



"Smoke rolls in stinking, suffocating wrack
On Shakespeare's land, turning the green one black;
The crowds that once to harvest home would come
Hope for no harvest and possess no home,
While poor old tramps that liked a little ale,
In natural procession pass to gaol;
Because the world must, like the tramp, move on,
There does not seem much else that can be done.
As Lord Vangelt said in the House of Peers:
"None of us want Reaction." (Tory cheers.)

"So doubtful doctors punch and prod and prick
A man thought dead; and when there's not a kick
Left in the corpse, no twitch or faint contraction,
The doctors say: 'See . . . there is no Reaction.' "

G.K. Chesterton, "By a Reactionary" (1927)

Poignantly, the Cultural Revolution was one year old when this quotation went to print. By the time it ended with Mao's death in 1976, it had claimed an untold number of lives, but estimates range between hundreds of thousands to millions. So much for "serious recommendations".

That communism murdered about 100 million people last century is no longer seriously contested. But what of left-wing revolutions other than communism? Is it all a question of degree?

'Progressive' is and long has been synonymous with 'left-wing ideals'. Traditionally set in opposition to conservatism, the political contest of ideas is one between future plan and present reality, between human perfectibility and Fallen Man, between the untested enthusiasm and the tested tradition.

Chesterton was not against change as such, for to be so opposed would be to take a set against the world and everything in it. Change is the *only* constant in nature, and ever since Heraclitus have we accepted that one can 'never step into the same river twice'. Rather, like other reactionaries, he was against unduly hasty, unconscionable, and unnecessary change.

Questioning Atheistic Evolution

by Gary Furnell

An important study of Darwinian evolution has recently been released by Connor Court Publishing - Philosophical Notes: The Evolution of Evolution, by George Mivart.

https://www.connorcourtpublishing.com.au/-THE-EVOLUTION-OF-EVOLUTION--St-George-Jackson-Mivart_p_542.html

Gary Furnell, a freelance writer who is Secretary-Treasurer of the Australian Chesterton Society, contributed the Introduction to the book. He has provided this adapted version for readers of The Defendant.

In 1895 George Mivart published, in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, a critique of atheistic evolution, and promoted a more reasonable alternative theory: theistic evolution.

Mivart—an Englishman—was active in the decades before Gilbert Chesterton's maturity. Like Chesterton, Mivart challenged the prevailing scientific fashion with evidence and logic.

His critique began with a brief, cogent outline of the changing circumstances and variations in thought that over centuries facilitated the development of naturalism and atheistic evolution.

This background is beneficial because each generation—enmeshed in the peculiar conditions of their own time—often neglects to explore the past cultural twists, oversights, discoveries and aberrations that led to today's assumptions and outlook.

Mivart also highlighted the internal contradictions that fractured naturalism, and he indicated some of the problems in the evidence used to support atheistic evolution. These fractures and variations of these evidential problems remain today.

St George Jackson Mivart (1827—1900) was an esteemed British naturalist, a Fellow of the Royal Society; vice-president (twice) of the Zoological Society and a Fellow of the Linnean Society. He was an early advocate of Darwinian evolution but parted company because its prominent proponents championed atheistic evolution. He thought *theistic* evolution made better sense of all the evidence.

Rather like G.K. Chesterton, Mivart was an ardent—some would say an argumentative—Catholic.

He wrote that atheistic evolution was a type of semantic oversight: evolution from what? It posited a process but neglected to explain the origin of the material exploited by the process. Was matter eternal, or did it inexplicably pop into existence from nothing? Theistic evolution had a positive and sufficient answer to this question and so—with its starting point established—could properly describe itself as an evolution.

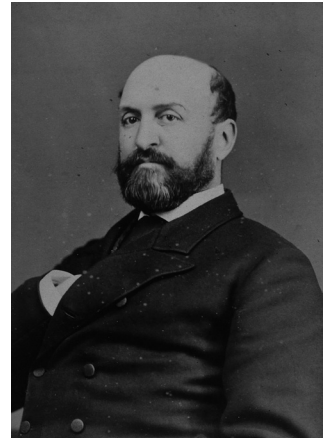
Mivart argued for the uniformity of natural causes in an *open* system and he opposed the contrary

presupposition: uniformity of natural causes in a *closed* system. He believed that reality could not be explained solely by the energies, entities and processes already existent.

Rather, the energies, entities and processes had an origin beyond themselves—a divine origin. Put simply, Mivart affirmed the Ultimate was Personal, not impersonal.

The nature of this Person wasn't addressed in his essay.

Mivart argued for theistic evolution without promoting his own religion. He aimed to highlight the logical and evidential superiority of theistic evolution over atheist evolution.



St. George Jackson Mivart

Mivart lectured in anatomy and saw stable biological patterns—obvious everywhere in nature including human biology—that resisted attempts at explanation along atheist evolutionary lines. The Linnean classification scheme, for example, is only possible because of these persisting patterns.

Rational exploration – Irrational explanation

He enjoyed the irony that atheist evolutionists continued their rational exploration of the universe while announcing that everything that existed was irrational: a product of time plus chance. Theistic evolutionists don't have this problem, believing a reasonable God made a reasonable (although largely puzzling) universe. Human reason, properly used, had its place—albeit limited by our common finitude.

Mivart argued that atheistic evolutionists had taken a helpful biological insight, limited in its effects—natural selection—and elevated its power beyond reasonable measure. Their theory developed into an all-encompassing ideology applicable to every sphere of biology, including all human activities.

Today, this imperialistic project continues. Spheres as diverse as economics, sociology, medicine, politics, sexuality, psychology, psychiatrics, linguistics, religion and ritual—every aspect of life in fact—are routinely

subjected to evolutionary analysis. Theistic evolution escapes this presumption because it doesn't need to explain everything through physical processes alone.

Instinct, for example, was an especially profound and precise faculty whose origins were satisfactorily explained by theistic evolution, but it defies satisfactory explanation by atheistic evolution.

Instinct works to incredible effect in the humblest of organisms. This effectiveness is illustrated by injured crabs breaking off a damaged limb exactly where re-growth could begin. Mivart could have easily multiplied examples. I would add the existence of the human conscience—persistent and universal in its nature, enigmatic in its activity—is likewise better explained by theistic evolution.

Mivart thought atheistic evolution was doomed to speedy obsolescence because of its inconsistencies and the contrary evidences. He wrote, in 1895, that it was unlikely atheistic evolution would last a few years more. He was confident that theistic evolution would supplant it. His prediction was wrong.

Although he doesn't use these terms, Mivart suggests that atheistic evolution is the favourite child of a favoured paradigm: the Enlightenment's truncating scientism. Predicting atheistic evolution's doom, he may have been better to say: When the paradigm changes—and this might be sudden—the favourite child might be abandoned.

It seems the paradigm is changing. In many universities the Enlightenment's central tenets—glorious human reason; the unequivocal benefits of science and technology; the easy correction of people's faults and follies through improved social conditions, health care and education—are being portrayed as power plays that justify their own activities, with many of these activities consequently exposed (correctly or incorrectly) as exploitative, destructive of the biosphere, or aggrandising.

If the Enlightenment is dismantled, it's likely Darwinism will not dominate as it does now. Theistic evolution may not dominate either. It's possible *any* idea might emerge and capture the imagination of restive people.

Darwinism is already being dismantled, but not by theists. Biochemists, amazed by the abundant cellular evidence of intricate, deliberate design, are questioning evolution.

If he were alive today, Mivart might exult in the examples of fastidious design coming from molecular biology. Remarkable nano-structures, all sensitive to their minute cellular environment, abound. Prime-movers hauling bundles of chemical energy along self-constructing carriage ways; drive-shafts complete with cams and universal joints; protein factories, turbines, propelling engines and more—all of staggering complexity—are being brought to our astonished apprehension.

Stunned wonder is one appropriate response. Reality is proving to be weirder than we imagined; it's likely to be weirder than we *can* imagine.

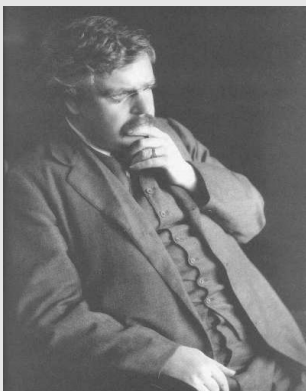
Theistic evolution remains a theory, amenable to change—it should not become a doctrine. How life came into being and changed may well continue to be mysterious, beyond human understanding.

Two hundred and fifty years before Mivart, Pascal wrote:

"Let man then contemplate the whole of nature in her full and lofty majesty, let him turn his gaze away from the lowly objects around him; let him behold the dazzling light set like an eternal lamp to light up the universe, let him see the earth as a mere speck compared to the vast orbit described by this star, and let him marvel at finding this vast orbit itself to be no more than the tiniest point compared to that described by the stars revolving in the firmament.

"But if our eyes stop there, let our imagination proceed further; it will grow weary of conceiving things before nature tires of producing them. The whole visible world is only an imperceptible dot in nature's ample bosom. No idea comes near it; it is no good inflating our conceptions beyond imaginable space, we only bring forth atoms compared to the reality of things.

"Nature is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference is nowhere. In short it is the greatest perceptible mark of God's omnipotence that our imagination should lose itself in that thought." ■



THE WISDOM OF CHESTERTON - on keeping faith

- In ages of faith all men who believe work together, and the result is common sense; in an age of doubt, the one man who believes has to work alone, and the result is an insane exaggeration. (*T.P.'S Weekly*, Christmas Number, 1907).
- I am not at all disturbed about the future of the Faith; but I am disturbed about the future of the doubters. ("The Rout of Reason," *Where Are the Dead?*, 1928)
- I keep my faith for the things of another world. About this world I am a complete agnostic. (*Illustrated London News*, Sept. 16, 1911)
- It is no disgrace to Christianity, it is no disgrace to any great religion, that its counsels of perfection have not made every single person perfect. If after centuries a disparity is still found between its ideal and its followers, it only means that the religion still maintains the ideal, and the followers still need it. (*Illustrated London News*, March 2, 1929)

These difficult-to-find quotations are gratefully reproduced from the September/October 2021 issue of *Gilbert*, the magazine of The Society for Gilbert Keith Chesterton.



Greg Sheridan

Chesterton and the Counter-Culture

Report on the 2023 Conference



Veronika Winkels

The theme of the 2023 Chesterton Conference, at Campion College on October 21, was “Chesterton and the Rise of a Counter-Culture”.

The conference attracted a larger-than-usual audience – of nearly 80 people, of varying ages, backgrounds and locations. There were more than 20 students, many studying at Campion College, but others at different universities.

A notable speaker was the Foreign Editor of *The Australian*, **Greg Sheridan**, who addressed the topic of ‘Chesterton is Good for You: Journalism and Books in the Counter-Culture’.

He discussed the surprisingly positive response to his two recent, best-selling books on Christianity – *God Is Good for You: A Defence of Christianity in Troubled Times* and *Christians: The Urgent Case for Jesus in Our World* – as well as to his many articles in *The Australian* and his various public addresses.

He emphasised the value of a positive approach to the presentation of Christianity in the public culture. This approach was exemplified by Chesterton’s own attitude of cheerful engagement, which he displayed in his Christian apologetics, and in the debates he had with opponents such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells.

Veronica Winkels, Founding Editor of the new magazine, *Mathilde*, spoke on “The Cultural Reclaiming of Feminism”. She discussed the development in feminism - in the current ‘cancel culture’, and for a Post-Pill generation - from an exclusive emphasis on work and career to a broader model, one that fostered a culture of life and care-giving, not simply economic participation; family-friendly rather than individual-centred, in which men and women are inter-dependent rather than independent.

The recent creation of Hartford College, a Catholic liberal arts school in Sydney, provided the focus of a joint paper by its CEO, **Michael Mendieta**, and teacher and student life officer, **Marie Yeo**. They revealed in detail the nature of the curriculum in each school year as the College develops, and the attention it gives to learning and the academic support of students as well as their spiritual development and growth of character.

Peter Fenwick, whose recent eye operation did not prevent his coming from Melbourne for the conference, addressed the topic of “Why Subsidiarity Matters”.

His theme of distributed responsibility and ownership was explored in relation to his own business experience in Melbourne, where he ran Fenwick Software for many years. As an employer he developed an employee shareholder scheme, which culminated in his selling the bulk of the business, on his retirement, to the key staff who had worked there.

In a final paper, **Karl Schmude** speculated on “Would Chesterton have created Campion College?” He noted that Chesterton’s imaginative vision and sense of possibilities had reinforced the educational ideas and proposals of the historian Christopher Dawson, and inspired the establishment of Campion in Sydney in 2006.

Videos of all the sessions are available for viewing on the website - <http://chestertonaustralia.com/past-conferences/>. The text of the papers is being prepared for publication in early 2024, as well as for reading on the website.

The 2023 Conference was the 17th held by the Australian Chesterton Society - and the 13th at Campion College. Moreover, it coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Society’s founding - in Western Australia by Tony Evans.



Michael Mendieta



Marie Yeo



Peter Fenwick



Karl Schmude