



'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 Paradoxes of Christmas

by Karl Schmude

While the cultural meaning of Christmas is now about the offering of gifts and the celebration of family gatherings, its religious essence rests on an ancient tradition that abounds in paradoxes.

A paradox is the expression of two truths that are apparently contradictory but, when affirmed together and held in balance, provide a deeper and fuller understanding of reality.

Chesterton was especially alive to the paradoxes of Christmas. From his earliest years he saw the Incarnation as a stunningly unique event. It was the personal involvement of God in history as a little child who formed an intimate part of a human family.

The first paradox highlighted by Chesterton was that Christmas combines two contrasting realities – those of supremacy and vulnerability. He explained this paradox in the great work of his maturity, *The Everlasting Man* (1925):

"Any agnostic or atheist whose childhood has known a real Christmas has ever afterwards, whether he likes it or not, an association in his mind between two ideas that most of mankind must regard as remote from each other; the idea of a baby and the idea of unknown strength that sustains the stars.

"His instincts and imagination can still connect them, when his reason can no longer see the need of the connection; for him there will always be some savour of religion about the mere picture of a mother and a baby; some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God."



In his picture of reality, Chesterton linked these two seemingly unconnected, even opposing, ideas – God and a child, divinity and infancy, omnipotence and vulnerability, creation and helplessness.

"Bethlehem," noted Chesterton, "is emphatically a place where extremes meet." It is the birthplace of a child, at once divine and human, at once all-powerful and powerless.

In one of his final poems, "Gloria in Profundis," Chesterton captured the power of God the Father yielding to the powerlessness of His Son as a child in a manger: "Glory to God in the Lowest."

This paradoxical truth becomes clearer as we think about the sharply different realities that can excite our interest and inspire our love – on the one hand, the experience of awe at the created universe, such as a vision of the stars twinkling in the night sky; and on the other, the response of affection as we gaze upon the most delicate creation, a child in the crib, utterly dependent on those who have brought it into being and care unconditionally for it.

The British theologian John Milbank has pointed out that Christian teaching reverses the traditional approach to pedagogy. It proposes the *child* as the *teacher of the adult*. God becomes incarnate as a child - and then as a child, he instructs the learned, beginning with the Elders in the Temple.

The Gospels reveal again and again the singular importance and value that Christ attached to childhood. On the occasion, for

example, when children were brought to Him but then turned away by the disciples, Christ called them back:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke, 18: 15-17)

Childlike, not childish

Such teachings point to a second paradox about Christmas that Chesterton perceived – that is, the innocence of childhood.

This is not the innocence readily associated with naivety and a lack of experience – or, as St Augustine once put it, a lack of opportunity. It refers, instead, to the condition of spiritual childhood and creaturely dependence with which we began our lives, and are continually called to recover as an adult.

The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar explored the meaning of Christ’s call that we become like little children. It is the experience of *childlikeness*, he believed, not of childishness. It is a realisation that adulthood, which we can so easily equate with earthly success and status and self-sufficiency, is often at odds with our fundamental life as a child – a creature dependent on God.

Childlikeness endows us with wisdom about the pathways to eternal life. It places in perspective our earthly attainments which will wash away. It confronts us with a challenge - rely on God’s wisdom and mercy rather than our own abilities and ambitions.

What are the spiritual qualities of childhood which Christ exalted as a model for those aspiring to Heaven, and which gave rise to the paradoxical insights of Chesterton?

They are such things as a sense of wonder at creation – and its impenetrable mysteries; a natural honesty and innocence (children have not yet learned to dissemble – to be one way and to act another); a simplicity of spirit and humility of heart; a deep and untroubled sense of dependence; and a capacity to live acceptingly in the present.

These are among the most vital qualities of childhood, and they tend to fade as the years pass and the trials and betrayals of life take their toll. Yet they reflect, as Chesterton and other Catholic writers have made clear (such as the French novelist Georges Bernanos and poet Charles Péguy), an instinctive right relationship to God.

Certainly this can be seen as a romantic nostalgia about child-

hood – a desire to live in a past childhood. But it is, finally, about a past childhood living in us.

Christ’s statements make clear that the qualities of a child are an image of our supernatural condition and calling, and that upon a *childlike* attitude – preserving it in adult life, or recovering it to the extent it is lost – rests our salvation as adults.

In present-day culture, it is childishness, not childlikeness, that tends to be fostered and indulged. A film critic for the *New York Times*, A.O. Scott, observed that contemporary movies and TV shows mark “the death of adulthood”, since they promote “an essentially juvenile vision of the world”. As a result, “nobody knows how to be a grown-up anymore”.

Citing a TV period drama, *Mad Men*, about the characters in a New York City advertising agency in the 1960s, Scott noted the collapse of male authority in our culture – and a declining respect for the best qualities of masculinity. These changes have effectively “killed off all the grown-ups” - and had an infantilising effect on our culture.

Images of fatherhood to inspire boys

While the softening of an assertive masculinity is now presented as being of social benefit, it has had the effect of leading to a diminished appreciation of traditional male qualities – such as physical courage, a willingness to take risks, and a spirit of staunchness between friends (in Australian terms, “mateship”). Is our culture capable of projecting images of fatherhood and male responsibility that will inspire boys?

There is a spiritual interdependence between fatherhood and childhood. The paradox of Christmas is that of a Father sending His Son to save the world. This has a profound resonance for all of us. As Chesterton put it:

“Christianity seeks after God with the most elementary passion it can find – the craving for a father, the hunger that is as old as the hills. It turns the whole cry of a lost universe into the cry of a lost child.” ■



Chesterton receives the gift of a dandelion from a small child

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Stuart McCullough reading *The Defendant* on a train in Paris, which he and family visited last September

The Chesterton Pilgrimage in England – An Australian Connection

by *Stuart McCullough*

*Stuart McCullough is the founder of England's Catholic GK Chesterton Society (www.CatholicGKChestertonSociety.co.uk), which seeks to promote knowledge of GKC and the cause for his canonisation. He contributed a chapter to the book edited by Dale Ahlquist, *My Name Is Lazarus: 34 Stories of Converts Whose Path to Rome Was Paved* by G. K. Chesterton. He has long served as the Director of Fundraising for *The Good Counsel Network*, a Catholic Pregnancy Centre in London.*

*In this article for *The Defendant*, **Stuart McCullough** reports on the annual Chesterton Walking Pilgrimage in England, which he has organised for some years. He reveals some intriguing Australian connections.*

On Saturday, July 27, 2019, twelve-year-old William and his father from Australia arrived outside Saint George's Church in Notting Hill, London, at 7:15 am. Having said the prayer for the Beatification of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, and listened to somebody read the first paragraph of Chesterton's autobiography, they set off walking west along the Uxbridge Road.

They then spent the rest of the day walking, more or less in a westerly direction, passing Pinewood Studios where the Marvel films and James Bond are produced. They stopped at a local convent for Mass and headed onto the small market town of Beaconsfield before popping into the pub for a drink.

But why did they do this? Well, fast forward back(!) to June 14, 2011, and you'll find that my wife Clare, our son Nathanael, my mother-in-law Rita and myself hopped in a car, drove to the grave of Gilbert Keith Chesterton in Beaconsfield where we said the Chesterton prayer, went into St Teresa's Parish Church, and promptly called this the first Annual GK Chesterton Pilgrimage.

A short report was written and published on the internet. A slightly tongue-in-cheek comment at the end of the report suggested that next year we would all walk from Campden Hill, where GKC was born and baptized.

A young Englishman, Paul Smeaton, having seen this, came forward and said he would be joining the walking pilgrimage. It turned out that he was a graduate of Campion College in Sydney. My wife then pointed out that, having announced the pilgrimage, I should organize it - and so we did.

A number of strange things intervened, toothache, antibiotics - and GK Chesterton himself - to move the date of the second pilgrimage from the anniversary of GKC's death (14th June) to the nearest Saturday to the date of his Conversion to Catholicism (30th July). This continues to be when we walk.

So now, many years later, I can say that hundreds of people of many different races and nationalities and age groups have walked from Saint George's Church in Notting Hill, 27 miles to Chesterton's grave in Shepherd's Lane, Beaconsfield.

It is not just for Catholics. We have had a small number of other Christians join us.

One of the most common reasons for people attending the pilgrimage, is that they have prayed to GKC for the conversion of family members or friends, and they have come on the Pilgrimage in thanksgiving when they have received answers to these prayers.

The decision to open or not to open the Cause for the Beatification of Gilbert Keith Chesterton rests with the Bishop of Northampton, as Beaconsfield is in that Diocese. The previous Bishop of Northampton said that he would not be opening the Cause. His lordship gave a number of reasons for this. I did not agree with those reasons, but that was his prerogative.

Of his three reasons for not opening the Cause at that time, the one that he said was of the most importance to him was that there was "no local cult of GK Chesterton". Considering the number of people who have now joined the Annual GK Chesterton Walking Pilgrimage over the last 14 years, and considering the 50 to 60 thousand prayer cards distributed in the UK calling for the Beatification and Canonization of GK Chesterton, I think we now find this hard to believe. The fact that you will find the GKC prayer on our website in over twenty languages is also an indication of the worldwide interest in GKC.

I'm pleased to say that we now have a new Bishop in Northampton, the right Reverend David Oakley, who came to the 13th Annual GK Chesterton Pilgrimage on the last Saturday of July in 2023, to deliver the Homily at the Mass which was offered by Father Neil Brett, in thanksgiving for the Conversion of GK Chesterton. ■

Australian Chesterton Conference 2024



Dale Ahlquist



Karl Schmude



Stephen McInerney



Garrick Small



Panel discussion of the main conference speakers



Our American guest, Dale Ahlquist, enjoying an Australian memento of his visit

The Australian Chesterton Society's 2024 conference at Campion College on November 2, marked the 150th anniversary of Chesterton's birth.

Attracting more than 70 people, including regular attendees and new participants, it focused on the theme, "The Rebirth of G.K. Chesterton – Insight and Foresight". The various speakers explored his insights that had proved remarkably enduring, particularly in the areas of education and social and economic organisation.

A keynote speaker was the President of the Chesterton Society in America, **Dale Ahlquist**. He delivered a paper on the Chesterton Schools Network, a new educational movement that has led to the establishment of more than 60 schools throughout America teaching a Catholic and classical curriculum.

This was followed by a panel discussion that reflected on the Australian experience in Catholic liberal arts schooling. Chaired by Dr David Daintree, it comprised representatives of three schools, two of which are in operation (the Augustine Academy in the NSW Southern Highlands and Hartford College in Sydney) and a third that is soon to open (St John Henry Newman College in Brisbane).

The panel also included two Campion graduates, Mary Winkels (Brisbane) and Fenelle McLaurin (Sydney), who are interested in starting or accessing Catholic liberal arts schools for their families. Fenelle's remarks are published after this report.

Other speakers at the conference were:

- **Stephen McInerney**, Dean of Studies at Campion College, who highlighted the pioneering influence of John Senior and his development of an Integrated Humanities Program in America;
- **Garrick Small**, a property economist and university professor, who discussed the silent alliance uniting big business and big government in modern society; and

- **Karl Schmude**, President of the Australian Chesterton Society, who revisited Chesterton's prophetic insights in various areas, such as human reasoning, economic structures, and sexual freedom.

At the conference dinner, **Dale Ahlquist** was the occasional speaker. He reported on the worldwide development of Chesterton societies and centres in America, but more recently extending to countries as different as Italy, Croatia, and Sierra Leone in Africa.

The papers were recorded and are available for viewing on the Australian Chesterton website - <https://chestertonaustralia.com/past-conferences/> The text of the papers will soon be available on the website. ■

The Value of Catholic Liberal Arts Schools – A Parent's Perspective

by Fenelle McLaurin

During a panel discussion at the 2024 Conference, following Dale Ahlquist's presentation on the Chesterton Schools, **Fenelle McLaurin**, a Campion College graduate, reflected on the value of a Catholic liberal arts education and why she would like this educational opportunity for her children. This is an edited version of her remarks.

I am a mother of four children, ages 8, 6, 4 and 2, and I am working with other parents in Western Sydney to explore the possibility of establishing a school in the Catholic liberal arts tradition in this area.

So why does a liberal arts education appeal to me as an educational possibility for my children? The answer is simple enough - because I have been and continue to be a beneficiary of an education in the liberal arts.

As a graduate of Campion, my own experience is that barely a day will go by where I don't draw upon the intellectual inheritance of Western civilization in some way or another. It fuels my mind intellectually; it guides my decision making; it influences how I raise my children, what I teach them, the stories I share; and it is deeply embedded in how I perceive my life, how I choose to live, and what I consider worth doing.

Yet there is a further question. Is it chance that the liberal arts have been so valuable to me, or is there something inherent in them (or in us) that explains why studying "the best that has been thought and said" has the potential to transform the lives of those who do so?

I contend that it is the latter, and that an argument for this can be found within the tradition itself.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle teases out what it is about the human person which is unique to them, in the hope that whatever is unique to humans will tell us something about their function (what it is that humans do). When we know their function, then we can know what happiness or flourishing looks like because it will be them doing that thing really well, or as Aristotle would say, performing their function to an excellent degree.

So Aristotle takes us through some contenders for the function of the human person. The first he considers is the life of nutrition and growth. We eat and we grow, that's pretty cool, could that be the function of humankind? If we just eat and grow really well, would we be flourishing? Well no, Aristotle says, because plants do as much, so it's not unique to humans. We do more.

Next he considers the life of perception. We can perceive things in a way, it seems, that plants cannot. Well again, no, Aristotle says, because animals do as much, they can see you and I in a way plants cannot, so perception is not unique to humans. We do more.

Finally, Aristotle proposes the 'rational principle': **the capacity of humans to reason**. Essentially Aristotle says yes. The unique function of the human person is to reason, so the ultimate end of a human is to reason well - to use our minds excellently. This, I believe, is what the liberal arts seek to aid.

Reason human and Godlike

It also ties in very beautifully with the Christian view that man is made in the image and likeness of God, and that it is precisely man's ability to reason which resembles God's own likeness.

The Christian understands that we do not value reasoning for its own sake, but because it is our capacity to reason which both reflects God and which enables us to pursue Him. As St John Paul II said, the rational capacity of humans is our capacity to know and choose what is true and good.



Conference panel discussion of the Australian educational experience - following Dale Ahlquist's presentation of the Chesterton Schools in America

Three school founders and two Campion College graduates. From left: standing - David Daintree (panel chairman), sitting - Sam Wilmot (Augustine Academy), Ken Crowther (St John Henry Newman College), Tim Mitchell (Hartford College), Fenelle McLaurin (holding microphone), and Mary Winkels.

This is key: **by our reason we come to know and choose what is true and good.**

And so now we arrive at why the liberal arts are so valuable. Because when we study the best that has been thought and said, we are doing what we were made to do: we are using our rational capacity well to apprehend and choose what is true and what is good.

When we are fulfilling our telos, our ultimate end and purpose, we are flourishing, we are expressing our humanity more fully, and in that sense we are expressing our freedom.

After all, the term 'liberal arts' mean the 'free arts', as distinct from the servile arts or tasks of necessity. In this liberal space of reasoning not for work or for productivity or for sustenance, but for truth and goodness, we are expressing ourselves most freely in a way creatures bound to a life of necessity could never do.

When we use our reason to pursue ideas of goodness and truth, we are doing more than just surviving. You might say, it is when we are most human, or as the Christian could put it, our most Godlike.

Now these ideas have a tendency to sometimes sound faraway, airy fairy, or excessively conceptual. But like so many before me, I have experienced the reality of what the liberal arts have to offer the human person. The fruits of this are concrete. They are there for the taking.

I believe God made us in His image to pursue Him, and the liberal arts tradition is one expression of this wondrous capacity we have. It is a living expression of the rational capacity of mankind which has been continually engaged with, and which continues to offer relevance and value to us today.

In essence, the liberal arts help me pursue what is true and good. They liberate me from an existence limited to utility, survival, or God forbid, mere productivity. They help me strive to live in a way which authentically and freely expresses my humanity - and this is something I very much desire to give to my own children. ■

Catholic Culture at a Book Club

by Garry Nieuwkamp

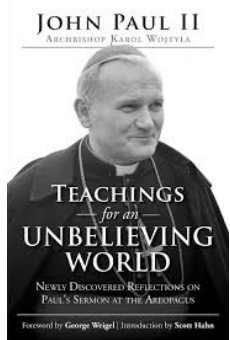
How do you run a book club? What books do you choose? How do you gain access to them for the book club members? A long-time Chesterton Society member and contributor to The Defendant, **Garry Nieuwkamp**, offers some responses to these questions based on his recent experience.



During the period of uncertainty that descended on us as a plague, my local parish started a book club. It was my response to our parish priest, Fr Vince, calling for anyone with ideas that might tap into the 'new evangelisation' to have a go.

In the back of my mind was Chesterton's teenage enthusiasm for debating and learning. There is something appealing about a society of readers meeting to exchange ideas. Think of the Inklings or the Apostles or the Bloomsbury group or the Algonquin round table.

The last Friday of every month is earmarked for the club. It is held in the late afternoon for 90 minutes in the local parish offices. The last 10 minutes or so are devoted to a discussion about future reading.



To avoid the problem of a delay in starting (while waiting to obtain books), our very first session was devoted to Catholic poetry. At the end of that session (in February 2021) we decided to read *Teachings for an Unbelieving World: Newly Discovered Reflections on Paul's Sermon at the Areopagus* by Archbishop Karol Wojtyła.

Factors in choosing books

A few problems became obvious from the beginning. The price of the chosen book had to be a consideration. And so, books that were in the public domain and available at Archive or Gutenberg were attractive as options.

To circumvent delays in obtaining books, our reading list in those early meetings was set at least a couple of months in advance, giving us plenty of time to access the books. After those first few meetings, with interruptions from a certain virus working its way through the Greek alphabet, our group settled into a routine.

Choosing what books to read can be tricky. It doesn't help to make a recommendation only to find that the book is no longer available, or is difficult to find. Research prior to the recommendation is a prerequisite.

As we have fallen organically into the pattern of one book a month, there has been a tendency to pick books of a certain length, such that those members of the book club working full time could easily complete the reading task without its becoming a chore. There have been exceptions. One was

Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. We divided that book into two parts, and so read it over two months. The other was Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

Availability has meant that those authors who have been popular over the years and have never been out of print make easy choices.

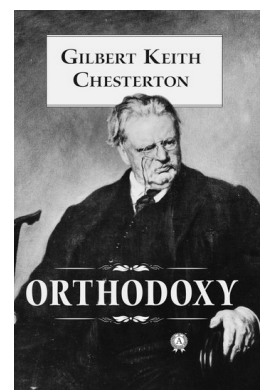
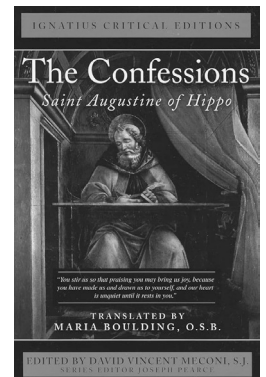
Soon after starting the book club we tackled Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*. The feedback was predictable. It's a difficult book to read, but once you learn to 'speak Chesterton', which takes about the first four chapters of *Orthodoxy*, it becomes easier. All agreed it was a significant book and worth the effort. A year later we read Chesterton's *Heretics*.

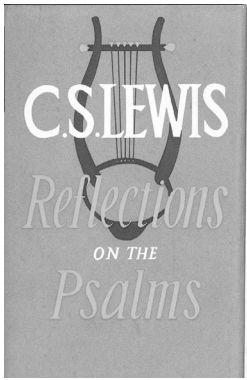
Borrowing books from the local library was rarely an option. Only on one occasion were we able to access the books we needed when we borrowed all copies of *The Minister and the Murderer* by Stuart Kelly. A true story, when a convinced murderer who had completed his sentence wanted to become an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland. The book's title alone sparked an interest.

Fiction versus non-fiction is a natural divide. We have mostly stuck with non-fiction, but very early on we read *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh. Picking out the themes of a work of fiction requires sifting through the narrative. Online resources here can be a help.

Fr Robert Lauder's online lecture series on the Catholic novel have been useful, not only for the analysis of various novels, but as a source of inspiration for future reading. We have read three works of fiction in the last year that have featured in this lecture series: *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene, *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Willa Cather.

Apart from Chesterton, a number of other authors have been revisited in our book club. C.S. Lewis is a reader's



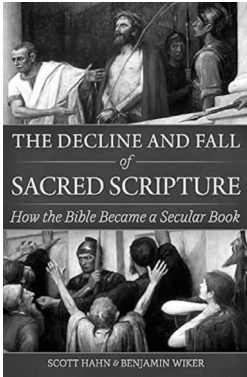


delight. *The Screwtape Letters* was our introduction to Lewis. We have subsequently read *The Great Divorce*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *Reflections on the Psalms*. Compared to Chesterton, reading C.S. Lewis is a walk in the park.

Sally Read has been a great find. Her conversion story *Night's Bright Darkness* was read in our first year. It was so beautifully written that it was a no brainer that we would tackle *Annunciation*,

her second book. Sally Read is a poet and has recently edited an edition of Catholic poems for Word on Fire.

There is something magical about poets who write prose. Their choice of words is refracted through a poetic lens. Think of Les Murray.



Scott Hahn is another author we have visited more than once. Initially we read *Evangelising Catholics*, and about a year later we read the book he wrote with Benjamin Wiker, *The Decline and Fall of Sacred Scripture - How the Bible Became a Secular Book*. The latter book provided the bookend to our reading the year before *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* by Russell Shaw.

Chesterton wrote in *What's Wrong With the World* that "Our political vagueness divides men, it does not fuse them. Men will walk along the edge of a chasm in clear weather, but they will edge miles away from it in a fog." The same can be said of some aspects of academia; it does not fuse but divides. This is one of the many messages of Hahn's book.

One of the more beautiful works we read was Elizabeth Lev's volume *How Catholic Art Saved the Faith*. A publication of Sophia Institute Press, it is literally bursting with glorious images beautifully analysed by Lev.

Medieval artists were transferring gospel words into images, according to Lev, so that an illiterate public surrounded by art could equally reflect on the good news in visual form. In serving this purpose they created some of the most beautiful works of art.

Navid Kermani's book *Wonder Beyond Belief - On Christianity* is also beautifully illustrated. "What happens when one of Germany's most important writers, himself a Muslim,

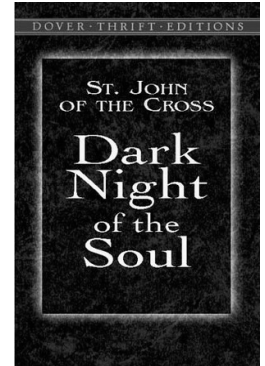
immerses himself in the world of Christian" art, asks the publisher of this beautifully illustrated book. Good question. While a personal favourite, it is one of the few times that a recommendation for the book club missed its mark.

Books vast and varied

The subject matter for a Catholic readership can be vast and varied. It helps then to preserve variety by picking reading material from different natural categories: Church History, Apologetics, Scripture, Church Documents, Prayer and Spirituality, Lives of the Saints, Conversion stories, etc.

On one occasion we decided to read *Lumen Gentium*, the reader's equivalent of a good dose of castor oil. As things turned out, not only was it easy to read, it generated an interesting discussion about ecumenism.

Dark Night of the Soul by St John of the Cross was an inspired choice. It is only after reading *Dark Night* that you become aware of its extraordinary influence. The following year we were hearing echoes in Merton. *Angels - A Visible and Invisible History* by Peter Stanford ticked a number of boxes. *God is Good for You* by Greg Sheridan was a surprisingly good book. It wasn't the first time we touched on apologetics.



In the first year of the book club we read Bishop Barron's *Arguing Religion*. It is based on talks he gave at Google and Facebook and is essentially a "how to guide" in having a religious argument. *Faith Maps* by Michael Paul Gallagher was a brilliant little book. He distils the writings of ten religious thinkers, and asks how they point us in the direction of Christian faith. A superlative overview of theology.

The Persistence of Faith - Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age by Rabbi Jonathon Sacks is a collection of essays delivered as the Reith Lectures in 1990. One of the many books that might be described as crisisology. Sacks is a beautiful writer and argues for a return to tradition.

And finally, last month we discussed Christopher West's book *Theology of the Body for Beginners*. Nothing is more likely to generate passionate conversation than a discussion of eros; that persistent longing as described by St John Paul II, and St Augustine before him.

I wonder what Chesterton's little debating club would have made of that? ■

"Suppose at some time some medieval man had only three medieval books. And suppose those three were, first, some version of the works 'of Aristotle and his philosophy'; second, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante; and third, the *Summa* of St Thomas Aquinas. This is not to possess books but to possess worlds.

"They are three universes of thoughts and things; or rather three aspects of the same universe; the one positive and rationalist; the other imaginative and pictorial; the third moral and mystical, but still inherently logical. A man might own a whole Circulating Library of modern novels and minor poets, without having anything like such a cosmic conspectus, or complete consideration of all sides of the real world."

G.K. Chesterton, Chaucer (1932)

A Newly Published Chesterton Essay – Ripe for a Detective Writer

by Karl Schmude

Last September, a Chesterton essay written in the 1930s, which had long remained hidden in library archives in England and America, was finally published.

The essay, "The Historical Detective Story", was printed in *Strand Magazine*, and reported on by Martin Pengelly in *The Guardian* and Hillel Italie of Associated Press (20 September 2024).

Chesterton argued that "the detective tale is almost the only decently moral tale that is still being told" because "it is only in blood and thunder stories that there is anything so Christian as blood crying out for justice to the thunder of the judgment."

But, he thought, writers of detective fiction should search for fresh sources, to escape what even a century ago was the cliché of the country house murder. This would provide "some new liberties, as well as some new limitations."

Chesterton proposed that an unsolved murder from the past might form the inspiration of a new novel that would explore how that person had met their death. Might one possibility be the mysterious death of a 17th century London magistrate, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey? Could this be the ultimate historical whodunit?

"I suggest," Chesterton wrote, "that we try to do a little more with what may be called the historical detective story. Godfrey was found in a ditch in Hyde Park, if I remember right, with the marks of throttling by a rope, but also with his own sword thrust through his body."

"Now that," wrote the creator of Father Brown, "is a model complication, or contradiction, for a detective to resolve."

As it happened, no one picked up on the idea - presumably because the essay was never published and no evidence has been found of any response to it.

In a brief foreword to its publication in *Strand Magazine*, Dale Ahlquist described the Chesterton essay's long journey to publication as its own kind of mystery.

One copy was found in the rare books division of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana (USA), while another was included among Chesterton's papers that are now in the British Library in London. As Dale pondered, given Chesterton's vast output not only of books but of essays that number at least 8,000, scholars may well have presumed it had already been published.

Detection Club – and an essay calling for a detective

The essay that has now appeared is linked to Chesterton's



membership of the Detection Club. Dale called the Club a "secret society of mystery writers . . . who met regularly in a private room at L'Escargot", a restaurant in Soho in central London. They would exchange ideas and even work on books together.

Chesterton was elected as its first President, and founding members included Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ronald Knox, and A.A. Milne. More recent members have included John le Carré, Ruth Rendell, and P.D. James.

The Club planned an annual magazine, for which Chesterton's essay may have been intended, but the publication never materialised.

The copy of the essay in the British Library, presumably the archival copy, was found with a note from Chesterton's long-serving secretary, Dorothy Collins. It said that the essay had been sent on to *the Detective Club Magazine*. But there was no magazine of that precise name. She probably meant 'Detection Club'.

Whoever received that initial copy may have held on to it until, at some stage, it found its way - perhaps via a private collector - to the University of Notre Dame.

"A real detective," as Dale concludes, "would track all this down!"

Chesterton himself might have been wryly amused by this episode – that he should have written an essay which would mysteriously remain unpublished in his lifetime, and that it should have been on, of all subjects, "the Historical Detective Story"! ■