



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)

The Little Town That Chesterton Loved

by Aidan Mackey

Though born in central London, Chesterton developed a deep love of the town of Beaconsfield, which is west of London and not far from Oxford. He and his wife Frances moved to Beaconsfield in 1922, and remained there until his death in 1936.

Aidan Mackey, a uniquely qualified authority on Chesterton, has a special knowledge of the significance of Beaconsfield in Chesterton's life. In 2003, he wrote an article for the journal, *Buckinghamshire Countryside*, which shed light on Chesterton's links with Beaconsfield and the ways in which it nourished his mind and imagination. It is reprinted in *The Defendant* with Mr Mackey's kind permission, in an edited form for space reasons.

In his autobiography Chesterton tells the story of how he and his wife Frances, then



Chesterton's home, Top Meadow, in Beaconsfield.

living in London in the early years of the 20th century, felt in need of a relaxed spell in the country.

The next train happened to be bound for Slough [a town west of London], which, Chesterton commented, 'may seem to be a singular taste, even for a train'. So there they went and walked – as was then possible – across the fields. They found themselves for the first time in Beaconsfield, where they stayed at the *White Hart* hotel.

The Little Town That Chesterton Loved (Aidan Mackey)

Pages 1-2

Farewell to Much-Loved Friends (Karl Schmude)

Page 3

Comedians Who Delighted in Chesterton

Pages 4-5

Chesterton and the Crocodile (Garry Nieuwkamp)

Page 6

Christopher Dawson Conferences

Page 7

Desert Island Chesterton (Siobhan Reeves)

Page 8

Save the Date



2018 Australian Chesterton Conference

The next Australian Chesterton conference will be held on **Saturday, October 20, 2018**, at Campion College in Sydney.

The theme will be 'Chesterton and the Child', and the focus will be on children and the family in the light of Chesterton's wisdom.

A keynote speaker will be the American author, Nancy Brown (pictured), who will give two papers – one on Frances Chesterton (of whom she has written a definitive biography, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*), the other on children's literature, notably the Father Brown stories, which she has adapted for younger readers.

The cost will be \$65 (including lunch), with a \$25 student concession rate. Enquiries may be directed to Karl Schmude – at kgschmude@gmail.com or by phone at: 0407 721 458.

The lovely little town captivated them, and they knew - and said to each other - that one day they would make their home there.

It was several years before they were able to do this, taking a lease on the house *Overroads* in Grove Road, opposite to what was then a meadow.

Later they bought the meadow and built on it a lovely huge studio with a low stage at one end and a minstrels' gallery at the other, and here they entertained their many friends, young and old. Rooms were added at various dates until the fine, somewhat eccentric house, *Top Meadow*, was completed.

Both Frances and Gilbert were much involved in local affairs and charities, with special regard for the convalescent home for children in the village. As well as financial support, they gave time to amuse staff and children there.

The Chestertons and Dorothy Collins (who was Gilbert's secretary but quickly became the daughter that Frances, despite an operation, was unable to have physically) were familiar figures at garden fetes, concerts and many local events.

In 1926 Chesterton was asked to write an introduction to the *Beaconsfield Official Handbook*, and in it he meditates on the differences between a town and a village:

'It demands the title of town though it is smaller than many a large village. The distinction, though vivid, is not readily defined.... A town is an inheritance built from the full Roman civilization. It is a thing with an agora, a central space which is not only for commerce, but for politics, not only for selling good eggs, but for throwing rotten ones.

'A village is a growth of the Dark Ages, before or after Rome; the huddling of houses together.... for common safety against elements or enemies. It is the business of villages to nestle. The most unscrupulous enemy of Beaconsfield cannot say that it nestles. It has the straight roads, the blocks of buildings, the civic and central clearings which are the marks of a town... For practical purposes we generally distinguish as a town, a place that has a town hall and a mayor, but there's the letter and not the spirit.

'Beaconsfield has not a hall or a mayor. I cannot conceive why. But obviously it has a place for a town hall; in that middle square one almost looks around for it. Beaconsfield is singularly picturesque...'

GKC travelled widely, lecturing and gathering material, visiting Canada and the United States, Poland, France, Spain and Italy, but leaving Beaconsfield was always a wrench, and he was happy to be home again.

In 1920, the London *Daily Telegraph* commissioned from him a series of articles on the Middle East, and these were later published as the book *The New Jerusalem*. But despite its subject, Chesterton starts and ends in his beloved Beaconsfield. His opening words are:

'It was in the season of Christmas that I came out of my little garden in that "field of the beeches" between the Chilterns and the Thames, and began to walk backwards through history to the place from which Christmas came. . . . I had said farewell to all my friends, or all those with my own limited number of legs; and nothing living remained but a dog and a donkey. (The donkey's shelter was until quite recently still to be seen in the garden of Top Meadow). . . . the dog did indeed seem to stand for home and everything I was leaving behind me, with reluctance.'

The closing words of the book are:

'The hop-fields of Kent seemed to me like outlying parts of my own kitchen garden; and London itself to be really situated at London End. London was perhaps the largest of the suburbs of Beaconsfield. By the time I came to Beaconsfield itself, dusk was dropping over the beechwoods and the white cross-roads. The distance seemed to grow deeper and richer with darkness as I went up the long lanes towards my home; and in that distance, as I grew nearer, I heard the barking of a dog.'

It should, then, surprise no one that the people of Beaconsfield returned the affection which GKC had for them and for that town. In the first of the major biographies of him, Maisie Ward records how very many people felt his death, in June 1936, as a personal loss:

'The day of the funeral was one of blazing sunshine.... The little church near the railway station was filled to overflowing by his friends from London, from all over England, from France and even from America. All Beaconsfield wanted to honour him, so the funeral procession, instead of taking the direct route, passed through the old town, where he had so often sat in the barber's shop and chatted with his fellow citizens.'

It is worth recording that, years later, when the barber's shop was refurbished, the chair in which he used to sit was given to the Chesterton Estate, and is now lodged at the Chesterton Institute in Oxford.

For me, an occasional visitor to Beaconsfield, it is a benediction that, despite unescapable growth and modernization, this historically rich little town has managed to retain much of its character and individuality. To one who knows of the vandalism of once-splendid towns such as Guildford and Horsham, this is no small achievement. Guard it. ■

Farewell to Much-Loved Friends

Members of the Australian Chesterton Society will be greatly saddened to learn of the recent deaths of **Tony Evans**, founding President of the Society, and **Fr Peter Milward SJ**, a long-time member and occasional contributor to *The Defendant*.

Tony Evans (1931-2018)



Left: Tony Evans speaking at the 2013 Australian Chesterton Conference held at Campion College in Sydney.

This tribute has been written by Karl Schmude and draws gratefully on details provided by members of the Evans family.

Tony Evans combined a long career of accomplishments as an ABC radio and television writer, reporter, presenter and producer with freelance writing and a range of cultural pursuits.

Of special importance for the Chesterton movement was his initiative in establishing our Australian Society, first in Western Australia in 1993, and then extending it into a national body in 2000.

As founder and inaugural President, Tony revealed his deep appreciation of cultural need, and of the role of a Chesterton society in addressing that need, as well as his personal qualities of calm perseverance, organizational resourcefulness, ready wit, and abiding courtesy and modesty.

Yet Tony had many other strings to his imaginative bow.

Early in his career in England, he became General Secretary of the Catholic Film Institute of London, which gave him the opportunity to venture into the world of intellectual entertainment – and Tony's heart was always in films and stories.

It was while he was at the Institute that he met a Western Australian girl, Claire Kelly, and they married in 1960. The following year they

moved to Claire's home town of Perth, where Tony began work with the ABC as a radio announcer, soon progressing to a position in TV current affairs. Tony was quick to respond to the changed approach to news reporting taking place in the early 1960s – the move towards in-depth analysis of news and current affairs, in contrast to the more formal presentation of traditional news broadcasting. Starting with the weekly *Four Corners* program, this change extended to *This Day Tonight*, and Tony was an early presenter of the Western Australian version of that program called *Today Tonight*.

In 1970 Tony was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to broaden his experience in TV broadcasting and he spent some months in London working at the BBC. On returning to Perth, he made several TV documentaries, after which he returned to ABC Radio, producing a range of shows that included radio plays on various topics, plus morning book readings.

Tony wrote several historical biographies, including his first work, *The Conscious Stone* (1984), on the priest-architect John Cyril Hawes, which won the Western Australian Premier's Literary Award in 1985, and his last work, *William Wardell: Building with Conviction* (2010), which traced the life of Australia's greatest church architect, engineer and man of faith.

His articles and reviews were much valued by the editors of various cultural journals, notably Fr Paul Stenhouse, editor of *Annals Australasia*, as well as Fr Ian Boyd, editor of the international journal, *The Chesterton Review*.

In 2002, Fr Boyd published in the *Review* Tony's article, 'Chesterton on Air: The Writer and Broadcaster', based on a paper he delivered at the 2001 Australian Chesterton Conference. As recently as in the Spring 2017 issue of *The Defendant*, a shortened form of this article appeared. It showed Tony's unrivalled understanding of radio, and shed crucial light on Chesterton's underrated achievements as a broadcaster.

Requiescat in pace.

Peter Milward SJ (1925-2017)



Peter Milward SJ (pictured) was a noted Jesuit priest and literary scholar who played a key role in fostering an interest in Chesterton among Japanese scholars and students. He was a member of the International Advisory

Board of the Christopher Dawson Centre in Hobart, and its foundation Director, Dr David Daintree, who previously served as President of Campion College (2008-2012), has provided the following obituary.

Fr Peter Milward was emeritus professor of English Literature at Sophia University in Tokyo and a leading figure in scholarship on English Renaissance literature.

He was chairman of the Renaissance Institute at Sophia University since its inception in 1974 and director of the Renaissance Centre since 1984. His studies concentrated on William Shakespeare and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Born in London in 1925, Milward was educated at Wimbledon College, entering the Society of Jesus in 1943 at the age of 18. He went on to study Classics and English Literature in Heythrop College and Campion Hall, Oxford. While in Oxford he regularly attended the lectures of C. S. Lewis and the meetings of the Socratic Club.

In 1954 he was sent to Japan, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life and ministry.

I came to know him well when he spent a week at Campion College as a visiting fellow in 2010. He was wise, learned, modest, and a lovely character.

Requiescat in pace.

Comedians Who Delighted in Chesterton



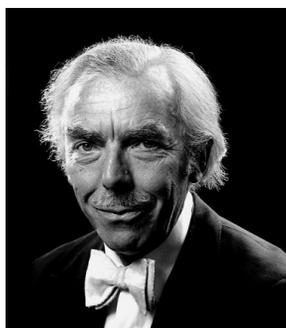
From left: Frank Muir and Denis Norden

One of the most remarkable comedy teams in modern entertainment history was formed by Frank Muir and Denis Norden. For half a century, they collaborated on the scripts of various radio and TV shows, such as the school comedy series, *Whack-O*, starring Jimmy Edwards. They became best known for their appearance as panellists on BBC Radio's *My Word!* and *My Music*, which can often be re-heard on ABC Radio.

Apart from being gifted comedy writers and performers, they were also deeply cultured and widely read 'men of letters'. Most intriguingly, they had a special devotion to Chesterton. The excerpts below are from their own writings and interview comments.

Frank Muir on Chesterton

One evening some years ago I arrived from London tired and tetchy as usual in time to see the nine o'clock news. The lead story was Prince Charles's maiden speech in the House of Lords. The newsreader said, 'Prince Charles began his speech with the quotation, 'As Oscar Wilde said, "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly!"' (much respectful laughter).'



Frank Muir

A good modest introduction to a speech, but unfortunately the line was not written by Oscar Wilde but by G. K. Chesterton. Ascribing it to Wilde suggested it was nothing more than a witty *bon mot*, one of those amusing Wildean inversions such as 'Work is the curse of the drinking classes.' But coming from G. K. Chesterton meant it was a more thoughtful observation. In Chesterton's work his humour arose from a serious thought, as an oyster was prompted into action by a gritty grain of sand.

What Chesterton was saying (in a piece about playing croquet) was that playing a game simply because you enjoyed playing it, perhaps hoping to get better at it in time, is a worthy enough reason for playing it however badly.

In my tetchy mood I lost my cool for a moment, telephoned *The Times* newspaper and left a message for the editor of *The Diary* column explaining how important I felt it was that the quotation was given its proper author.

Next morning *The Times* made the Prince's speech its front story. It began, 'Last night the Prince of Wales began his maiden speech to the House of Lords by saying "As Oscar Wilde said, "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly!"' (laughter).

Then came an asterisk, and at the bottom of the page was its twin asterisk and, in nasty black type, '**Mr Frank Muir pointed**

out last night that the Prince had opened his speech with a misquotation. The line was not written by Oscar Wilde but by G. K. Chesterton.'

And then other newspapers began telephoning for follow-up stories...

Worse happened. A year or so later I found myself in the Crystal Room of London's 'exclusive' Grosvenor House Hotel having pre-dinner drinkies with the formidable committee who were mounting the evening's ball, which was an early exercise in prising money out of the rich and good for the World Wildlife Fund. I was there to give my after-dinner speech.

Also speaking was the Duke of Edinburgh. I found myself beside the Duke in a quiet corner of the noisy room. He was looking a bit bored, so I felt it incumbent upon me to put him at his ease.

'Oh sir,' I said. 'I feel I must apologize for correcting the Prince of Wales on the misquotation in his maiden speech to the Lords. But sir, I felt rather strongly about it. You see, sir, it wasn't a joke, but a philosophy which I happen to agree with. It is the opposite view to the American cult of winner take all. If your child does not come top of the class does that mean that it is a useless human being? No, of course not. . .'

As I warmed to my theme the Duke closed his eyes several times, presumably in order to concentrate on what I was saying, but as I talked on I remembered that both he and Prince Charles had been to stern Gordonstoun school where, it was rumoured, those pupils who did not come among the top three in exams were shot (only a slight wound in a fleshy part of the thigh, I understood, but still. . .). After something like a quarter of an hour I brought my little apology to a close by saying, laughingly, '... anyway sir, I would have thought the blithering idiot who gave Prince Charles the quotation would had the nous to check it first!'

The Duke looked at me levelly. 'I gave him the quotation,' he said.

From: Frank Muir's autobiography, *A Kentish Lad* (1997)

Denis Norden on Chesterton

My first published stab at the genre [of comedy writing] was in the school magazine. I was about twelve or thirteen at the time and the essay was written to order on the subject of 'Honesty is the Best Policy'. It reflected the powerful influence G.K. Chesterton was currently exerting on me, arguing that anyone who regards honesty as a policy, rather than a moral obligation, is essentially dishonest.



Denis Norden

It won me the John Carpenter prize, any book of my own choosing. I opted for *The Collected Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant*, a volume whose raciness the Headmaster made

apparent to all by the elevation of his eyebrows when he presented it to me.

From: the chapter 'Early Days and Afterthought,' in Denis Norden's memoir, *Clips from a Life* (2008).

.....

I was interested to see Kingsley [Amis] in a TV programme the other night, when he was asked who was his boyhood hero, and he said exactly the same sort of thing that I would have said – G.K. Chesterton. When I wrote my essays they were sub-sub-Chesterton. In other words, they weren't funny, but they were straining like mad to be 'paradoxical' and have a kind of O. Henry twist of thought.

From: 'About Town' [an interview with Denis Norden, conducted by Ian Woodward], *Woman's Weekly* (UK), October 29, 1983.

Chesterton on Humour



Alone among the animals, [man] is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter. (*The Everlasting Man*, 1925)

Unless a thing is dignified, it cannot be undignified. Why is it funny that a man should sit down suddenly in the street? There is only one possible or intelligent reason: that man is the image of God. It is not funny that anything else should fall down; only that a man should fall down. No one

sees anything funny in a tree falling down. No one sees a delicate absurdity in a stone falling down. No man stops in the road and roars with laughter at the sight of the snow falling down. The fall of thunderbolts is treated with some gravity. The fall of roofs and high buildings is taken seriously. It is only when a man tumbles down that we laugh. Why do we laugh? Because it is a grave religious matter: it is the Fall of Man. Only man can be absurd; for only man can be dignified. ('Spiritualism,' *All Things Considered*, 1908)

It is the test of a responsible religion or theory whether it can take examples from pots and pans and boots and butter-tubs. It is the test of a good philosophy whether you can defend it grotesquely. It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it. ('Spiritualism,' *All Things Considered*, 1908)

Humour is meant, in a literal sense, to make game of man; that is, to dethrone him from his official dignity and hunt him like game. It is meant to remind us human beings that we have things about us as ungainly and ludicrous as the nose of the elephant or the neck of the giraffe. If laughter does not touch a sort of fundamental folly, it does not do its duty in bringing us back to an enormous and original simplicity. Nothing has been worse than the modern notion that a clever man can make a joke without taking part in it; without sharing in the general absurdity that such a situation creates. It is unpardonable conceit not to laugh at your own jokes. Joking is undignified; that is why it is so good for one's soul. ('The Flat Freak,' *Alarms and Discursions*, 1910)

Laughter has something in it in common with the ancient winds of faith and inspiration; it unfreezes pride and unwinds secrecy; it makes men forget themselves in the presence of something greater than themselves. ('Laughter,' *The Common Man*, 1950)

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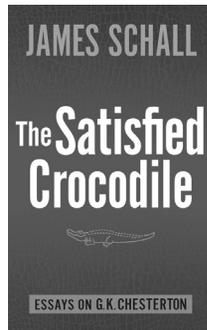
Chesterton and the Crocodile

by Garry Nieuwkamp

A new book by Father James Schall SJ is always a special event. An Emeritus Professor of Political Philosophy at Georgetown University (Washington DC), he continues to be a prolific author in retirement. He has published books and articles frequently on Chesterton. In 2000, he produced *Schall on Chesterton: Timely essays on Timeless Paradoxes*, and he has now released a book of essays with the intriguing title of *The Satisfied Crocodile*.

The book is reviewed by **Garry Nieuwkamp**, who is a doctor on the NSW Central Coast and a long-time member of the Australian Chesterton Society. He has previously reviewed various books for *The Defendant*.

The Satisfied Crocodile: Essays on G.K. Chesterton, by James Schall.
ACS Books, 2017, US\$14.95. Available from the American Chesterton Society:
<https://www.chesterton.org/shop/satisfied-crocodile/>



James V. Schall, S.J has gathered together a number of his essays on Chesterton and published them under the title of 'The Satisfied Crocodile'

I have to admit that I approach such collections with a degree of anxiety. I have this nagging sense that I should be reading Chesterton in the original, unadorned by other commentary.

I recall a conversation once with a philosopher friend who made the observation that many well-known modern philosophers seem unfamiliar with the original works of philosophers they were citing. The implication was that the ever-expanding volume of modern philosophical writing, while originally built on a solid foundation, had, over time, formed 'commentary concretions' like barnacles on a ship hull.

After all, it is much easier reading Christine Korsgaard on Kant, than it is to read Kant on Kant. So why read the turgid Immanuel when you could be reading the delightfully lucid Christine? Hence my anxiety. I should be reading Kant, but it is so much more enjoyable and maybe even more fulfilling reading Korsgaard.

Such is my state of mind when I pick up a collection **on** Chesterton rather than a collection **by** Chesterton.

Despite this anxiety, and despite a growing pile of Chesterton's works that remain as yet unread, this book was a wonderful diversion.

James Schall SJ is a busy man. Search the name in any online bookstore and you'll find enough reading material to last you a lifetime. He is an expert on Chesterton, and in 2005 was the recipient of the American Chesterton Society Lifetime Achievement Award. His academic achievements are impressive. The essays collected in this edition first appeared in *Gilbert* magazine and its predecessor. They represent a lifetime of achievement in Chesterton scholarship and for this reason alone they *must* be read.

One of the extraordinary features of this collection is Fr Schall's capacity to pull into view, not only the most well-known writings of Chesterton, but often the most obscure to the neophyte.

For example, in an essay titled 'On Men Being Like Gods', we learn that Chesterton wrote an introduction to Owen Francis Dudley's book of the same name. In another essay titled 'Existence: "Cherish It!"', we are reminded that Chesterton gave a talk in the Cambridge Guild Hall in 1911 in response to George Bernard Shaw on 'The Future of Religion'. The talk was apparently summarized in the *Cambridge Magazine* on January 12, 1912. It was reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* in 1986.

Fr Schall reminds us that Chesterton wrote a column in the *Illustrated London News* on April 26, 1924 asking the question: "Why is there not more esprit de corps among intellectuals, especially of the academic and scientific sort?"

In an essay titled 'Chiefly A Conflict Between Goods', Fr Schall refers to an essay Chesterton wrote in 1901 in the *Daily News* titled 'The Divine Parody of Don Quixote'. After 59 chapters of reading Fr Schall, it becomes clear that he is a scholar not only of great depth but also vast breadth. It is only possible after a lifetime of reading Chesterton to pull so much together.

So Fr Schall is really the perfect travel guide. If we regard Chesterton as a land to be explored, then Fr Schall knows all the good places. He takes you off the beaten track while at the same time immersing you in the usually touristy places. He knows all the cheap cafes and the best restaurants.

From top to bottom side to side he has Chesterton covered. This is no mean feat, for if Chesterton in fact could be compared to a landmass; his girth would start at some beach near Byron and carry all the way over to Geraldton. Chesterton is more than one postcode. For a neophyte this collection of essays allows you to say 'I've seen the place', while at the same time whetting the appetite for more.

For the serious and experienced Chesterton reader, this volume is a reminder of the sheer joy of not only reading Chesterton, but also having your hand held while doing so in the company of such a distinguished scholar.

Fr Schall and Chesterton are a great combination, and any anxiety I might have experienced in the beginning had dissipated long before reaching the concluding essay: 'A Splendidly Sane Man: Chesterton on Samuel Johnson'. Happy reading! ■



Christopher Dawson
Drawing by Helen Hull Hitchcock
(1939-2014)

Christopher Dawson at Large in Australia

It is remarkable that Australia has two associations named in honour of Christopher Dawson, the esteemed Catholic historian of culture. One is the Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies in Hobart, the other the Christopher Dawson Society for Philosophy and Culture in Fremantle WA.

Both bodies will be holding important gatherings in 2018, which Australian Chestertonians are sure to find of interest.

Christopher Dawson Centre 2018 Colloquium On 'A World without Christianity'

On **Friday and Saturday, 29 and 30 June 2018**, the Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies will host its fourth annual colloquium in Hobart, Tasmania, on the theme 'A World Without Christianity'.

The Director of the Centre, Dr David Daintree, invites papers relating to this theme.

Proposals should be sent to: director@dawsoncentre.org, or phone: 0408 87 9494.

Further information on the colloquium is available from the Centre's website:
(<http://www.dawsoncentre.org/colloquium-2015/>).

Christopher Dawson Society Conference on '1968 – Five Decades On'

The Dawson Society in Western Australia (<http://dawson.society.com.au/>) has announced a conference on the legacy of 1968 as a watershed year in 20th century thought and culture. Taking advantage of the 50th anniversary, the conference will spotlight that year as representative of the countercultural movements of the 1960s as a whole and the various responses that they generated.

The Conference will take place on **Thursday-Saturday, 12-14 July, 2018**, at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, WA.

Proposals for papers are invited, and abstracts of between 100-300 words should be sent to Tom Gourlay, The Dawson Society for Philosophy and Culture, at: Thomas@dawsonsociety.com.au by 15 May 2018.

The Prophetic Voice of Christopher Dawson

'The contemporary indifference to religion is accompanied by an indifference to many other things which are necessary for the welfare of society. It is essentially a negative attitude which implies the absence of any deep moral conviction and of any effective social dynamics beyond the appeal to self-interest.

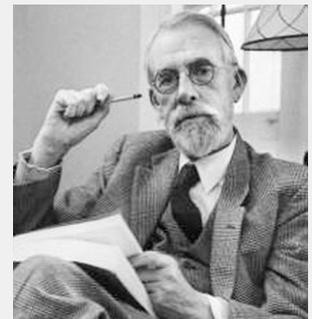
'It is a sort of spiritual vacuum, which can produce no cultural fruit whatever. In this respect it is inferior even to Communism, which has a dynamic character, even though in the last resort its dynamism is that desire for power which is embodied in the party dictatorships and the police state.

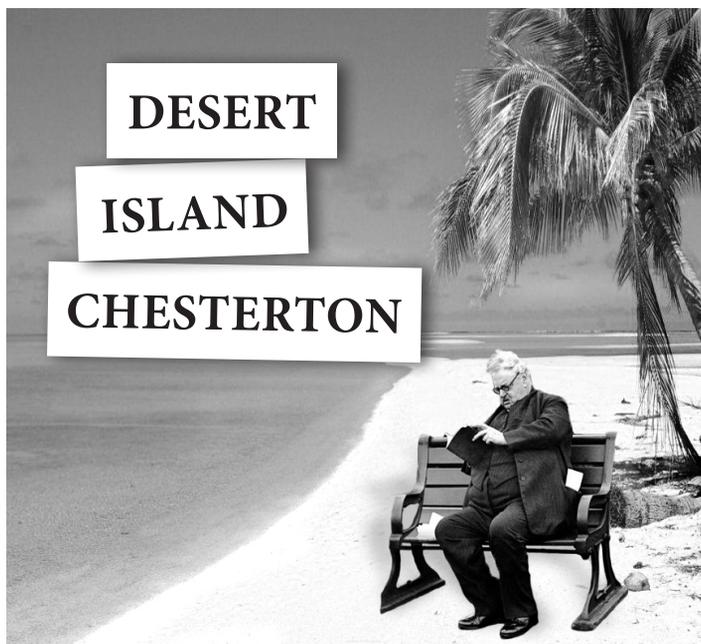
'And this is one of the greatest of the dangers that threaten the existence of Western culture when the latter is identified with what we call "the democratic way of life." It produces a society which is spiritually neutral and passive, and consequently it affords an easy prey for any strong, aggressive revolutionary power like Communism [or half a century later, Dawson might have suggested, militant Islam].

'Now it is not the business of Christianity to defend our secularized Western culture from the menace of social or political revolution. From the Christian point of view there is not much to choose between passive agnosticism or indifferentism and active materialism. In fact, both of them may be different symptoms or phases of the same spiritual disease. What is vital is to recover the moral and spiritual foundations on which the lives of both the individual and the culture depend: to bring home to the average man that religion is not a pious fiction which has nothing to do with the facts of life, but that it is concerned with realities, that it is in fact the pathway to reality and the law of life.

'This is no easy task, since a completely secularized culture is a world of make-believe in which the figures of the cinema and the cartoon-strip appear more real than the figures of the Gospel; in which the artificial cycle of wage earning and spending has divorced men from their direct contact with the life of the earth and its natural cycle of labour and harvest; and in which even birth and death and sickness and poverty no longer bring men face to face with ultimate realities, but only bring them into closer dependence on the state and its bureaucracy so that every human need can be met by filling in the appropriate form.'

From: Christopher Dawson, 'The Religious Vacuum in Modern Culture,' *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961).





The Poet and the Lunatics

The third contributor to our Desert Island Chesterton series is **Siobhan Reeves** (pictured), who has chosen a collection of Chesterton short stories, *The Poet and the Lunatics*, published in 1929.



Siobhan's interest in Chesterton was sparked at Campion College, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in the Liberal Arts in 2011. She completed a Masters of International Relations at the University of Melbourne, and spent a year working in Timor-Leste on remote healthcare delivery. She is currently a public servant based in Canberra.

Her previous article in *The Defendant*, in September 2013, was on Chesterton and George MacDonald, and it was later republished in *The Chesterton Review*, the journal of the G. K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture.

To be marooned on a desert island and permitted one work of G.K. Chesterton's is an opportunity to engage with what it means to reason, what it means to wonder, what it means to be alive - pertinent intellectual pursuits when stranded between sea and sky.

The options are many, but I would choose *The Poet and the Lunatics*, a lesser known collection of eight stories featuring the poet, artist and unlikely detective, Gabriel Gale.

The eccentric and widely-considered insane Gale detects more than mere motive and mastermind, but intuits the tiniest psychological flaw and the most sweeping societal malaise that reveals much more about the crime than the mere identification of the crime-doer.

The Poet and the Lunatics explores numerous themes that could be expounded upon: sanity, sin, art, reason, belief, science and more, but it would not be Chesterton without arresting moments of paradox: an exploration of contradictions which provides much food for thought in the reader's current predicament.

As Gale observes when faced with an apparent attempted suicide in 'The Fantastic Friends' (in reality an attempted murder by a man in Gale's charge), in such dire circumstances 'what you want here is an unpractical man. That is what people always want in the last resort and the worst conditions'.

Embracing 'unpracticalness' is necessary not only to survive on our desert island, but is sorely needed to rise above and redeem a world reduced to resources to be exploited and appetites to be indulged.

It is only by stepping outside of this narrow view of humanity, by embracing a 'topsy-turvy world' and standing on our heads that we see the ultimate and beautiful truth: 'the stars like flowers... and all men hanging on the mercy of God'.

Another relevant theme is beauty to be found throughout creation, exemplified by Gale's passionate defence of the equal aesthetic worth of shark as a flower.

In the tale 'The Shadow of the Shark', a classic locked-room murder, with the expected twists of the genre and the unexpected delights of Chesterton, a self-pro-claimed man of science sees nothing of beauty in a shark or a flower - 'a growth like any other'. Gale responds furiously that 'all the sea monsters are themselves flowers; fearful and wonderful flowers in that terrible twilight garden of God'. This is certainly a unique perspective to take on the ocean surrounding us, and is also a thought-provoking observation on creation itself.

In addition to his aesthetical insights, Gale is deeply intuitive, and empathizes not just with a person's apparent misfortune or plight, but with the inner most limitations and deformities of how they perceive the world.

This is exemplified in the tale 'The Crime of Gabriel Gale', where Gale administers a desperate remedy on a young man in danger of believing himself to possess God-like power. In a truly shocking scene, Gale lassos the man in a terrible storm, ties him to a tree and pins him there with a pitchfork.

Gale is more than a critic of how others view the world, but is able and willing to take dramatic altruistic action when required.

In what I am sure would have amused Chesterton himself, there is something very appealing about *The Poet and the Lunatics* as the founding document for a new civilization on this desert island, were I so fortunate to be joined by other waylaid seafarers.

Inspired by Gale's 'topsy-turvy world' and his view of a world charged with the very electricity of a creative mania, the most unlikely of utopias could develop, where the poet is recognized as 'more useful than the policeman' and the terrors of the deep as beautiful as any estate we'd left behind. ■