



'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)

## Satire in a Disbelieving Culture

by Karl Schmude

In the mid-1960s a satirical series called *The Frost Report* screened on BBC TV. Hosted by David Frost, it brought together the comedians Ronnie Barker, Ronnie Corbett and John Cleese, and attracted the most brilliant comedy writers in England, including Frank Muir and Denis Norden as well as Antony Jay (of *Yes Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* fame).

The series satirised most Western institutions, from parliament and schools to the law and the mainstream media. It fulfilled the purpose of satire by exaggerating particular features or situations so as to expose hypocrisy. This is not done to destroy the institution but, paradoxically, to affirm its importance – and recall its representatives to the exalted roles they serve.

Satire is meant to be funny but its underlying purpose is to inspire a change of heart. It is meant to replace self-importance with a new sense of the institution's originating ideals.

In the decade prior to *The Frost Report*, the



David Frost (left) with the cast of *The Frost Report*

Boulting Brothers made a series of films satirising most of our cultural institutions - the armed forces (*Private's Progress*, 1956), law (*Brothers in Law*, 1957), universities and academia (*Lucky Jim*, 1957), industrial relations and the media (*I'm All Right, Jack*, 1959), diplomacy and foreign relations (*Carlton-Browne of the F.O.*, 1959), and the Christian religion (*Heaven's Above*, 1963, which even featured Malcolm Muggeridge in a cameo role as an Anglican bishop).

These satirical shows appeared at a critical moment. They were made just before the "Cultural Revolution" which began in the 1960s. This upheaval challenged the moral authority of our social and political institutions, undermining their public credibility. It took away, as a result, our ability to laugh at them.

Satire is only possible in a believing culture – a culture that stands by certain core beliefs and builds them into its institutions and

**Satire in a Disbelieving Culture (Karl Schmude)**  
Pages 1-2

**Chesterton and Anti-Semitism (Gary Furnell)**  
Pages 3-4

**The 'Magic' of Chesterton**  
Page 5

**Margaritas in Elfland – William F. Buckley Jr (David Deavel)**  
Pages 6-7

**Chesterton and the Locked Tomb (John Young)**  
Page 8

### Redrawn and Quarterly

The observant reader will have noticed a small change in *The Defendant's* sub-title - from "newsletter" to 'quarterly'.

Our publication has developed over the years into something that is more than a newsletter if not quite a journal. It publishes more articles than news items, more serious reflections than reports. "Quarterly" seems the right word to capture this transition.

The heading above this announcement is drawn from the headline used by the Philosophy Professor Ralph McInerney, an inveterate punster, when he changed the subtitle of the publication he edited on behalf of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars in America.

practices. Only when they are taken seriously can they be funny.

Human flaws and frailties will always expose the gulf between belief and reality, between the light of our higher dignity and the darkness of our fallen condition. But in this contrast lie the precious seeds of satire.

### **Balance of exaltation and humility**

As Chesterton recognised, the Christian faith balances exaltation and humility. It asserts our being divinely dignified by being made in the image and likeness of God, but also our being humbled by the weakness of sin and the chronic misuse of freedom. As Chesterton put it:

“In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners.” (“The Paradoxes of Christianity,” *Orthodoxy*, 1908)

When a culture abandons its fundamental beliefs, and can no longer profess their essential truth and value, it becomes incapable of producing satire. There is no longer a rich contrast between what it believes and what it does. Is there anything left to mock - except cynically - and to find funny?

The result of a loss of belief, as our culture now exhibits, is that we are losing the capacity to laugh at ourselves. As Ronald Knox feared, even a century ago, when writing about the decline of satire, we “have lost, or are losing, the power to take ridicule seriously.” (*Essays in Satire*, 1928)

A century ago, Chesterton foresaw the link between the credibility of a culture and the capacity for satire. He found that satire was already weakening in Western culture - that “the world has become too absurd to be satirised. . . . There must be a certain dignity in the subject of a caricature; with us the facts anticipate the caricaturists.” Actual events had become so ridiculous that they were already a caricature. In Chesterton’s words:

“You can make solemn things look silly; that is the whole affair of satire. But if things choose to be silly, and nothing else but silly, the only answer is silence. It is impossible to caricature that which caricatures itself.” (*Illustrated London News*, December 16, 1911).

And yet Chesterton himself employed satire to great effect at times. He once conceived of an interview with H.G. Wells who, in his *Outline of History* (1920), showed a naïve belief in evolution as supplanting faith in the Bible.

Chesterton’s imaginary interview began by recording “the recently discovered traces of an actual historical Flood: a discovery which has shaken the Christian world to its foundations by its apparent agreement with the Book of Genesis. . . . Mr H.G. Wells exclaimed: ‘I am interested in the Flood of the future, not in any of these little local floods

that may have taken place in the past. I want a broader, larger, more complete and co-ordinated sort of flood: a Flood that will really cover the whole ground. . . . *Après moi le Déluge*. Belloc in his boorish boozy way may question my knowledge of French: but I fancy that quotation will settle him.” (Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, 1944)

### **Facebook confusion**

Kyle Mann, editor-in-chief of a Christian news satire service, *Babylon Bee*, quoted Chesterton’s thoughts on satire when he found them borne out in a recent experience with Facebook (*Wall Street Journal*, October 21, 2021). He had posted a blog containing a satirical headline from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) about a witch, and a reference to the Pythonesque line, “We must burn her.”

Facebook misconstrued the reference. Based on the prompts of their computer alert system, they saw it, not as a satirical reference to a well-known comedy film, but as “inciting violence”. Mann believes this represents a new threat to satire on the part of the social media giants. Facebook has no sense of humour and cannot tell the difference “between comedy and a threat of violence.”

Such confusion may stem from the hidden truth about satire, and that is its fundamentally moral purpose and power. As Ronald Knox pointed out, satire is not a toy of relaxation but a weapon of discomfort – and correction. It is “entrusted to us for exposing the shams and hypocrisies of the world.” It is “born to scourge the persistent and ever-recurrent follies of the human creature as such,” and thus applies to the satirist, and not merely his readers or listeners.

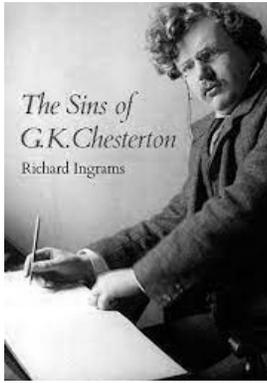
### **The Beneficent poison of satire**

Little wonder that satire does not appeal to those who prefer to signal virtue rather than practise it. It brings all too close the need for self-examination – and self-correction. The most striking feature of the “woke culture” is its loss of humour.

Knox recognised what he called “the disciplinary effect of satire” – or, more colourfully, “the beneficent poison of satire” – which has been replaced by the more benign diversions of humour.

Humour is, of course, an intrinsic and irresistible part of satire, but the silent purpose is remedial – and even redeeming. It is to produce a sharp re-awareness, and a change of behaviour. As Chesterton’s great friend and protagonist, George Bernard Shaw, is reputed to have said:

“If you want to tell people the truth, you’d better make them laugh or they’ll kill you.” ■



# Chesterton and Anti-Semitism

## A Review of Richard Ingrams' *The Sins of G.K. Chesterton*

by Gary Furnell

Historical novelist Geraldine Brooks nominates the Biblical story of King David—augmented by his self-revealing psalms—as the world’s first complete biography.

The narrative is honest, detailing David’s military and artistic triumphs as well as his sins, administrative errors, and violent feuds—with no attempt to whitewash these failings. Yet the legacy of King David’s reign is nonetheless celebrated, its glory intact in Judeo-Christian history. There is no unrealistic—and unfair—dichotomy of perfection or dismissal.

It’s a shrewd way to view any noble figure: honest about their mistakes and whatever vices deformed them, without these admissions entirely destroying their reputation or diminishing great achievements.

### Chesterton biographies

I kept the Biblical biographical model in mind while reading *The Sins of G.K. Chesterton*, although it’s more a portrait of the Chesterton circle with Gilbert at the centre. It’s a beautifully produced book, not too long, well-written and concludes with a wealth of scholarly resources to aid further exploration.

Richard Ingrams is a Catholic convert, a journalist and cartoonist—like Gilbert Chesterton—and an admirer. He is a sympathetic biographer; his aim isn’t character assassination. He wants evidence of faults given due weight. The questions are: what is the evidence and how are we to weigh the faults?

*The Sins of G.K. Chesterton* is a provocative title, hinting at scandalous secrets. Basically, the ascribed sins are anti-Semitism, and weakness before the intemperate influence of brother Cecil Chesterton, Cecil’s wife Ada, and mutual friend Hilaire Belloc. These journalists worked closely with Gilbert and it seems fair to say—as Ingrams does say because many of their contemporaries and close associates said it—that they were often abrasively opinionated.

Allied with them, Gilbert in print taunted good friends in politics and at one point mocked his employer, the gentle Quaker George Cadbury, because of his political affiliations. In addition Cecil, Ada and Hilaire were genuinely averse to Jews, although this antipathy was mostly expressed through innuendo in their newspaper articles.

These three colleagues caused Gilbert considerable difficulties but he didn’t recognise them as the primary sources of his troubles. His wife, Frances, saw it but her gentleness prevented her from insisting that Gilbert manage better these periodically wearying people. Frances did what seemed prudent to protect Gilbert from their selfishness and bellicosity, but it wasn’t easy because Cecil, Ada and Belloc were family and/or long-standing friends.

Before reading Richard Ingrams’ book, I’d read two biographies of Gilbert Chesterton — Chesterton’s autobiography and Maisie Ward’s biography. I finished those books dissatisfied. Nobody could be so blithe and jolly for so consistently long as Chesterton was portrayed. Nancy Brown’s excellent biography of Frances Chesterton revealed that along with their love for each other and prodigies of creative work there were other realities: their distressing bouts of serious ill-health, their money worries; his over-eating and drinking; his and her battles with depressive episodes, and the grief of childlessness.

Also, there was the sadness of sudden bereavements. Richard Ingrams’ book enlarges and elaborates the group portrait. Belloc, self-important, doesn’t emerge well; Ada seems painful, and Cecil—sad to say—is obnoxious. Throughout, Ingrams provides a multitude of quotes, examples and evidence to corroborate his narrative and assessments.

The Marconi controversy occupies a large part in Chesterton biographies but it’s the least interesting part of Gilbert’s story. It has a key place in Ingrams’ book because it revealed prejudices. Wealthy politicians colluded to make money by insider trading and then denied wrong-doing. The fact that the politicians involved were “Anglo-Judaic plutocrats” Jews got Belloc and Cecil Chesterton excited. They thought greedy Jews were dependably loyal to each other rather than to their adopted country. Insinuating articles were published, some by Gilbert but the most outspoken pieces by Cecil. A court case followed and Cecil was fined 100 pounds for defamation. Gilbert saw the Marconi scandal as a huge betrayal of public trust—which it was—perpetrated by powerful English Jews to make more money for themselves—but their Jewish heritage was incidental.

Ingrams doesn’t shirk the unpalatable truth: in the decades ahead Gilbert, as newspaper editor, published some

provocative anti-Jewish articles by Belloc and Ada Chesterton. In Ingrams' view, Gilbert should not have printed these pieces; a view shared by friends and newspaper subscribers who wrote to Gilbert protesting the rancorous tone and absence of evidence. Why did he publish these rants?

Gilbert found it hard to manage Ada Chesterton, a pushy woman who was also his sister-in-law. After Cecil's death in December 1918, Gilbert—grief-struck—dedicated himself to honouring Cecil's newspaper work and public concerns. This dedication became a trap because Gilbert was not an organiser, accountant, or skilled editor.

Widowed, Ada worked hard at the newspaper but was unsuited to a senior role. Gilbert avoided confrontation, allowing too many poor situations to continue for too long; under his editorial control the newspaper struggled and staff morale was low.

Gilbert was yoked by loyalty to Belloc who could sometimes write pugnacious articles—which Gilbert published in the newspaper he and Belloc controlled. Belloc was so sure of his own judgments that he didn't bother sifting evidence. During WWI, for example, Belloc wrote such ridiculous campaign reports that he was satirised: a pompous correspondent parading as military expert.

Both before and after the war, Belloc wrote worthwhile articles but over time their value has been undermined by his unworthy pieces, such as his 1930s articles defending Mussolini—the strong decisive leader who would clear Italy's corrupt parliament. Gilbert—overlooking the Abyssinian invasion—likewise wrote a piece with this view of Mussolini and earned stinging rebukes from prudent friends.

### **Canonisation? Not likely**

Ingrams appears to agree with Bishop Doyle's negative recommendation (after a six-year investigation by an assistant, Canon Udris) into the canonisation of Gilbert Chesterton. Bishop Doyle's reasons for not recommending the canonical process were threefold: no local cult of devotion to Gilbert Chesterton existed; there was no discernible pattern of personal spirituality; and the charges of anti-Semitism—even allowing for the different sensitivities of different eras—blocked canonisation.

I regularly read G.K. Chesterton's books. I don't discern a pattern of wicked prejudice, although at times I'm stopped,

re-read a passage and conclude no one is free of misjudgement. However, by publishing—or at least failing to edit—the obvious prejudices of Ada Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, Gilbert was complicit with their callous or foolish excesses.

In another context Chesterton observed that different eras and cultures put varying emphasis on virtues and vices. For example, in a post-Holocaust world, we are obsessed with racial and identity slurs—undoubtedly cruel—that would've passed without much public outrage a hundred years ago. The emphasis will change, for better or worse, because humanity finds it nearly impossible to balance right and wrong.

Ingrams doesn't examine Gilbert's own defence against the charge of anti-Semitism.

Gilbert said anti-Semitism was an example of thoughtless use of words. Semites were people from the Middle East—Jews and Arabs—who spoke related languages. He was not an anti-Semite: hostile to a suite of languages and people. He confessed that, if he was anti-Jewish, he would say he was anti-Jewish; honesty would compel the candour. He wrote that avarice was a particular Jewish vice, just as snobbery was a particular English vice and materialism an American vice. This didn't mean he disliked Jews; rather he saw no point denying that different cultural groups had their different faults. He also wrote of Jewish genius in the arts, in morals and religion, saying they gave God to the world and he would die defending them. He knew that Jesus, the apostles, and the Jerusalem Church were Jews and he owed his faith directly to them.

I have no firm opinion about G.K. Chesterton's possible canonisation, so I won't take that stray dog by the ears and risk being bitten, as Proverbs warns. I'm glad I read (and re-read before writing this review) *The Sins of G.K. Chesterton* because it provides valuable information—some of it dismaying—on the Chesterton circle.

Gilbert said that sentimentality favoured one fact at the expense of other facts. It's a mistake to build a sentimental view of G.K. Chesterton as innocent, child-like sage; it obscures his humanity and invites disappointment because we all have failings.

Following the model of King David's Biblical biography, we celebrate what we can and admit what we must. ■

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**Layout of 'The Defendant' designed by Jenna Fulop**

### **Society Membership**

The annual membership fee of the Australian Chesterton Society is **\$30.00**, which entitles subscribers to receive the Society's quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*.

**Donations are always welcome.**

Subscriptions may be sent to the Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell, at the address in the adjacent box or by electronic transfer -

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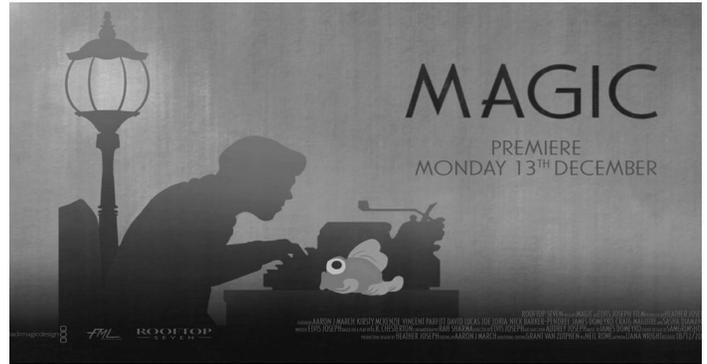
# The 'Magic' of Chesterton

## Premiere of a Chesterton Movie

Last December the Australian-made movie of Chesterton's play, *Magic*, premiered in the Actors Centre Australia in the Sydney suburb of Leichhardt.

It was an adventurous undertaking for the film-makers, Heather and Elvis Joseph. They operate an actors management agency and are the founders of the film company, Rooftop Sevens. As reported in the Spring 2020 issue of *The Defiant*, they have long wanted to make a Chesterton movie. Elvis was the screenwriter and director of *Magic*, while Heather served as the producer.

The Chesterton play offered special points of appeal as a potential film - first, as a compelling play, replete with



fascinating characters and memorable Chesterton lines, and secondly, as a work largely set indoors and thus readily adaptable to the screen.

*Magic* is now available for viewing – at <https://vimeo.com/on-demand/magicthefilm>

## Signed Chesterton Books at Campion

An original signed copy of *Magic* is one of two Chesterton works acquired recently by the Library at Campion College and added to its special Chesterton Collection.

The other book is *The Sword of Wood*, a short story he wrote in 1928. The library's signed copy is itself rare, published in London by Elkin Mathews & Marrot. The pages are made of rag paper, the type is set by hand, and the endpapers are decorated with a curlicue design.

Believed to be the only book publication of this Chesterton work, only 530 copies were printed.

The College Librarian, Keziah Van Aardt, commented in the College's newsletter, *Campion's Brag*, that the Library "is

privileged to own these two works as they provide examples of Chesterton's early writing and demonstrate his ability to turn his hand to different genres and styles of writing."

She highlighted the distinctive quality of an autographed book:

"A handwritten signature is a very individual, personal touch on a printed book and seems to somehow bring to life the woman or man who wrote it. . ."



Signed copies of Chesterton books in the Campion Library

## Classical Education Conference Online



The newly formed Australian Classical Education Society (ACES), featured previously in *The Defiant* (Spring 2021), is holding its first online conference on the theme of "Why We Need a Classical Renewal."

It will be held in conjunction with the CIRCE Institute in America (a body promoting the cultivation of wisdom and virtue in students through the truths of Christian classical education - CIRCE standing for Center for Independent Research on Classical Education).

A founder of ACES, the Melbourne teacher Kon Bouzikos, believes the conference is an ideal opportunity to reignite an important conversation in Australia about the purpose of education and the value of a study of the liberal arts.

The conference will take place on **Friday-Saturday, April 8-9 (AEST)**. It will feature Australian as well as American speakers, including author and commentator Kevin Donnelly, Christopher Dawson Centre Director David Daintree, and Campion President Paul Morrissey. Further details are available at:

<https://www.circeinstitute.org/store/events/why-we-need-classical-renewal-online-conference>



# Margaritas in Elfland - William F. Buckley, Jr. (1925-2008)

by David Deavel



William F. Buckley Jr

William F. Buckley Jr was a significant public figure in post-war America, known in particular for his founding of the conservative journal, *National Review*, his syndicated columns in more than 200 newspapers, and his weekly TV program, *Firing Line*.

He was also a devoted reader of Chesterton – as this article reveals. **Dr David Deavel** lectures in *Classics and Catholic Studies* at the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, Minnesota), and edits *LOGOS: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*. His article appeared in the March-April 2021 issue of *Gilbert*, the journal of *The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, and is reprinted with the kind permission of the Editor of *Gilbert*, Dale Ahlquist.



David Deavel

The *Gilbert* magazine feature, “Chesterton is Everywhere,” would have been a doozy if it had existed in 1970.

In that year William F. Buckley, Jr., founder and editor of the journal *National Review*, newspaper columnist, spy novelist, television talk show host, inveterate skier, sailor, and harpsichordist, former CIA operative, and one-time political candidate, managed to bring GKC’s name into *Playboy* magazine in an interview.

Reacting to a question about the youthful rejection of traditional religion, Buckley declared it difficult to take seriously the youngsters’ rebellion since they couldn’t even be bothered to read Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* or any books by C. S. Lewis.

*Orthodoxy* was, for Buckley, the greatest apologetic work. He quoted it in his own writings on faith, often commenting on Chesterton’s discovery that the philosophy he had invented had been there all along in the Apostle’s Creed.

In his spiritual memoir, *Nearer My God* (1997), Buckley marvelled at how “illuminating” Chesterton’s imaginative question is about what society would be like if it were not for “such lapidary postulates as dogma gives us concerning the uniqueness of the individual human being and his obligations under God to his fellow man. We can condemn the Inquisition or slavery, but it was under Christian assumptions that such evils were criticized and often overturned.” Elsewhere in the book he cites Chesterton’s lines about “the wild truth reeling but erect.”

It wasn’t *Orthodoxy* alone that fascinated him. In *Nearer My God* he quotes passages from Chesterton’s essays read while visiting Lourdes.

In *Cruising Speed* (1971), he says that though Christianity is foreign to most of the British, a “spiritual experience” is

available to those who go to Evensong at King’s College, Cambridge, or High Mass at Chartres, or read Scripture.

Failing that, he advises: “Read a volume by Chesterton—The Everlasting Man, Orthodoxy, The Dumb Ox—and the spiritual juices begin to run. . . .” But Chesterton’s account of his “elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious” was clearly the most important.

Buckley’s son, Christopher, who rejected his father’s faith, recalled in his memoir, *Losing Mum and Pup* (2009), his father’s method of spiritual formation: “When I was younger and periodically confessed to him my doubts about the One True Faith, he dealt with it in a fun and enterprising way: by taking me off to Mexico for four or five days, during which we would read aloud to each other from G. K. Chesterton’s great work of Catholic apologetics, *Orthodoxy*.”

He labelled such trips “Not a bad way to restore one’s faith, really.” After such a period of sipping margaritas to the soundtrack of Elfland, “I was content to shrug off my doubts about the Immaculate Conception or the Trinity.”

Buckley’s own Catholic faith was rock solid. The sixth of ten children, he moved with his father, oil man William Frank Buckley, Sr., and his mother, Aloise Steiner Buckley, to Mexico early in life. Though he became famous for his astonishing English vocabulary, his first two languages were Spanish and French.

He was home-schooled until high school when he was sent to St. John’s Beaumont, an English Jesuit prep school. He studied for one year at a Mexican university and then attended Officer Candidate School before being commissioned as a lieutenant in the US Army, in which he served during World War II in the United States.

After the war he went to Yale, working as an FBI informer while taking honours in his studies and taking part in the secretive Skull and Bones Society. Upon graduation, he married Patricia "Pat" Taylor, a Protestant and the daughter of a Canadian industrialist.

He was recruited into the CIA, in which he served for two years in Mexico. He later turned his knowledge of spy craft to use in a series of novels featuring agent Blackford Oakes. But his first literary success was polemical, an attack on his alma mater for its secular progressivism: *God and Man at Yale* (1951).

By 1955 he had started *National Review*, which he would edit until 1990 and which served as the house organ for conservatives for many years. His television show, "Firing Line", on which he demonstrated both his debating prowess and his exotic vocabulary as he interviewed figures left, right, and centre, began in 1966 and became the longest running show of its kind with a single host.

#### Asking for a recount if he won

A Chestertonian producer, he wrote 5,600 iterations of his syndicated column, *On the Right*, and produced fifty books.

Always a writer and political organizer, he dipped his toes into electoral politics in 1968 with a run for mayor of New York, famously declaring that the first thing he would do upon victory would be to "ask for a recount."

Despite his combative qualities, "Bill," like Chesterton, had a number of friendships with political and philosophical opponents, including Murray Kempton, John Kenneth Galbraith, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ACLU head Ira Glasser, and even George McGovern. They all knew of his love for Chesterton, too.

Upon Karol Wojtyla's election as pope in 1978, Moynihan wrote to Bill, "Did we get the man you hoped for? I hope so. He likes Chesterton." Garry Wills, whose first book was on Chesterton, started out on the political right at *National Review* and then migrated leftward. After migration, he suggested that *National Review* was a CIA operation. To soothe Buckley's anger, he sent Bill some Chesterton books.

A lover of the Traditional Latin Mass, Buckley died at 82. He was buried next to his wife in Sharon, Connecticut. ■

## Rebirth of the Catholic Novel

by Karl Schmude

In recent years, a new generation of Catholic novelists has appeared. Invoking the earlier tradition of Evelyn Waugh, Georges Bernanos and others, mainly in England, France and America, the contemporary authors include Christopher Beha, editor of the American cultural monthly, *Harper's Magazine*; Randy Boyagoda, a Canadian novelist and biographer; and Martin Mosebach, a German novelist, poet and screen-writer.

The American author Trevor Merrill (pictured) has written a significant essay-length study of this new Catholic literature, *The Situation of the Catholic Novelist*. Published by Wiseblood Books, itself a new Catholic publisher in America, founded by Joshua Hren, his booklet focuses on the dilemma – and the opportunity – facing the present-day Catholic novelist, who has to deal with the cultural expulsion of religious faith by a new and aggressive secularism.

He draws on the insights of an earlier essay by the distinguished British writer, Piers Paul Read, "The Catholic Novelist in a Secular Society" (1997), and explores a range of works by



modern Catholic novelists. They now find themselves stranded between two worlds – a fading post-religious culture of freedom from the imperatives of religious faith and a surging post-secular culture tormented by the emptiness of unbelief.

Trevor Merrill's essay is available most readily from Amazon – at <https://www.amazon.com/Situation-Catholic-Novelist-Wiseblood-Contemporary/dp/1951319753>

# Chesterton and the Locked Tomb

by John Young

Kel Richards is a well-known Australian broadcaster and wordsmith who also writes crime novels. His novel, *Murder in the Mummy's Tomb* (2002), features Chesterton as one of the fictional characters. **John Young**, who has written previously for *The Defendant on Chesterton's detective fiction*, reviews Kel Richards' novel.



This is a locked room mystery, or rather a locked tomb mystery, and the author has included two real people among his fictional characters: Gilbert and Frances Chesterton.

Set in 1919, an archaeological team opens an ancient Egyptian tomb and finds it has two occupants: the ancient Egyptian they had expected to find and a freshly murdered member of their own team.

Against this central mystery the author sketches the contrasting characters, their relationships and the tensions between them. A romantic relationship develops between the young archaeologist who tells the story and the daughter of the expedition leader.

But not all the characters are fictional. G.K. Chesterton and his wife Frances arrive on the scene, and after the murder is discovered he sets himself to solve the mystery. An interesting aspect of the novel is the way Kel Richards portrays Chesterton's character in conversation with the fictional characters of the story.

His boisterous nature is evident, his quick intellect, key elements of his philosophy. His dialogue, when it touches the deeper issues of life, often repeats statements found in his books and essays. His philosophy of life is shown in contrast with the various views of the other characters.

To a character who regards theology as irrational Chesterton replies: "your mistake, young sir, is to assume that theology is irrational. It is not. It is the rational mind at its finest. A man is never thinking more logically than when he is thinking theologically."

To another character, who thinks Christianity is the thinking of yesterday, Chesterton replies: "I should certainly hope it is the thinking of yesterday, which is what makes it true today. Otherwise, you might as well say that a philosophy can be believed on Mondays but not on Tuesdays."

In another conversation Chesterton recommends the book *St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* by Sir William Ramsey, which shows "how accurate and reliable the New Testament is".

Chesterton had a great deal of illness during his life, and his ill-health is emphasised in this novel. His weight is often mentioned, he is described as having three chins, he is often short of breath and clearly out of condition. But his intellect is strong and clear.

He investigates the perplexing mystery. The tomb in which the murdered man was found had clearly not been disturbed since the ancient Egyptian had been buried. There was no way in until the archaeologists broke their way in. Yet when they entered they found the murdered member of their expedition.

Kel Richards plays fair with the reader (Monsignor Ronald Knox would have approved), and if the armchair detective can't solve the mystery he should not blame the author.

Although published in 2002 this novel has the tone of earlier detective stories. There is no sex, there is no bad language. There is a wholesomeness about it in contrast with so much recent fiction.

I can't judge the accuracy of the archaeological and Egyptological information scattered through the book, but the author acknowledges the help with these matters given to him by Dr Karen Sowada, so I presume it is accurate.

The story moves along at a good pace with a cast of twenty-two characters, including journalists, two clergymen, a British Army Intelligence officer and an escaped convict. The author has thoughtfully provided us with a list of the characters.

It is an interesting story, the clues are given fairly, while Chesterton's personality and his philosophy are well presented. ■