



# The DEFENDANT

Newsletter of the Australian Chesterton Society

Vol. 26 No. 2

Autumn 2019

Issue No. 101

'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)



## Walking with Chesterton

by K.V. Turley

*A group of Chesterton admirers in England makes an annual pilgrimage from his London birthplace to his Beaconsfield graveside. K.V. Turley, a freelance writer and filmmaker, wrote about his experience of the 50-kilometre journey in the Catholic World Report (September 12, 2014). The article is reprinted with his kind permission, in an edited form for reasons of space.*

nearer still, found a young man puffing on a fat cigar. It was then I knew I had arrived at the right place.

I had come to join the Catholic G.K. Chesterton Society's annual pilgrimage. This consisted of a trek from the centre of London, beginning at the church Chesterton was baptized in, to the place he now lies buried in the country town of Beaconsfield.

Just before 8 am, on July 30, 2014, I made my way to a church in Kensington, London. As I drew nearer I saw smoke rising, and,

London at that time of a summer's day is particularly fine, but that morning the

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### 2019 Chesterton Conference

SAVE THE DATE

#### Reclaiming the Economy: A Chesterton Alternative

This year's conference will take place on **Saturday, October 19** at Campion College in Sydney.

The theme will be the value of Chesterton's social philosophy of Distributism in a present-day economic environment marked by the forces of bigness, nationally and globally – big business, big government, and big communications networks.

Speakers will include Fr Tony Percy, Dr Garrick Small, Fr Paul Stenhouse MSC, and Karl Schmude. Further information and registration details from the website (<http://chestertonaustralia.com/conference.php>); or from Karl – phone: 0407 721 458; email: [kgschmude@gmail.com](mailto:kgschmude@gmail.com)

street we waited on was bathed in a gentle sunlight, and it was through this, with a broad smile on his face, that our leader was to stride. Stuart McCullough is a Chestertonian character in his own right. He is as good-natured as he is unflappable, as humorous as he is determined. When not organizing excursions such as this, he is to be found running, with his wife, Clare, the Good Counsel Network, a charity for women who find themselves pregnant with few options available if plenty of “wolves” are circulating.

Stuart may be a serious man in many respects, but like many in the pro-life cause he wears it lightly. And so, as one might expect, the Catholic G.K. Chesterton Society is all a bit of a joke. The society has no members as such, no permanent abode; it is invisible except for the band of pilgrims assembling yearly on a London street, a band with no banners, with most of those assembled strangers to one another, and with a lone map—not only do I think Chesterton would have approved, I think he would have laughed out loud.

Just after 8 am we set off. There were about 12 souls. Male and female, young and not so young, those who looked fit and those who looked resolute, and then others who just looked a bit bewildered.

Pilgrimage is about journeying together. From the start this “togetherness” was going to be tough, setting out as we did along the crowded pavements of Notting Hill. Rushing commuters pushed by, plugged into headsets, oblivious to all around them, and without a second glance in our direction. It was as if we were wrapped in a cloak of invisibility.

Well, not quite: Stuart led the way with a papal flag perched on top of his rucksack and a scarlet t-shirt that called on others to “Join the revolution with Che-sterton.” He garnered a few shy metropolitan half-glances—as it turned out, mostly baffled ones at the t-shirt, expecting the expected before getting the unexpected. One could safely say it was a Chestertonian start.

On through the unfashionable parts of West London we ambled. No signs of fatigue yet, but then we had been going for only an hour or so. At this point of any pilgrimage, with the spirit and the body still joined together, conversation is able to flow quite naturally. And, therefore, we began to talk. My fellow pilgrims were a mixed bunch, impossible to categorize. For some reason I had expected a lot of young men and, of course, got it wrong. The other surprise was the extent of knowledge about the writer in whose name we walked. It varied from the very well-read to those with barely a nodding acquaintance. I gave up

trying to sort out who was who, and strolled on in the bright sunshine.

Then the first unexpected thing happened. We passed from city streets to find ourselves at the start of a canal towpath. It felt as if we had turned a corner and left London for the countryside.

Barges, of all shapes and sizes, now drifted by with friendly waves from the relaxed piloting ‘crews’ who also seemed to come in all shapes and sizes. At this stage, as the towpath was narrow, our pilgrim band stretched out into a long lean line that grew ever longer and leaner. Some walked quickly, others took their time, but, needless to say, all walked with a sense of purpose regardless of speed.

Begun on the busy streets of London, this Chestertonian pilgrimage was now making its way alongside a picturesque London canal—the paradox was not lost as we marched on, past the cool waters broken only by slow gliding craft, as more prayers were offered. All done privately, with little fuss or public show—as befits a walk in memory of a layman and one with a healthy sense of the absurd.

Finally, we made our way from the peace of the canal back to the noise of the streets before being enveloped in the calm of a nearby Catholic Church just as a High Mass was starting.

Early afternoon we were off once more, but with the pace, like the conversation, slower and more considered. From now on it was to be countryside, but odd countryside: alongside motorways, through concrete tunnels that went under them, and then out into green fields beside them. A constantly changing panorama, it was to be a strange mix of the rustic and the urban, the idyllic and the brutal.

### **Soles rather than souls**

Given the times that Chesterton had lived through, this backdrop to our pilgrimage somehow seemed entirely appropriate. However, unlike the increasing mood on the walk—one now overwhelmingly dictated by soles rather than souls—he would have been far more conscious of its beauty than were we, by then anyway, for those last miles proved a slog.

And then, at last, it appeared, like some fabled land, dreamed of if not quite believed: Beaconsfield. In the evening’s twilight, almost 13 hours after setting out, a band of weary pilgrims entered a quiet country cemetery. We all gathered around the graveside of the man in whose honour we had come, and, as we did so, beyond the headstone, a gentle night sky unfurled across the vault of Heaven.

It was then I smelt something familiar: cigar smoke. The young man had just lit a fresh cigar, in tribute. Doubtless, Chesterton would have approved. ■



# Les Murray - A Chestertonian Poet

by Karl Schmude

When Les Murray received an honorary D.Litt degree from the University of New England in 1990, he began his acceptance speech in an unusual way. He said that he only spoke in prose when the occasion would not allow him to speak in verse.

It was a remark that Chesterton might have made. Despite his profession of journalism, he had a profoundly poetic sensibility and style of writing with which Les Murray would have readily identified.

Both were Catholic converts. Both found their way into the Church by a process of development and completion, not of reversal and denial. When I first met Les in Sydney in the 1970s, I quickly realised that he was not simply a natural poet, expressed so memorably in the natural imagery of his poetry. He was also a supernatural poet. His poetic instinct was not only born in his mind and heart: it lay deeply imbedded in his soul.

His ancestry was Scottish, and he was baptised into the family faith in his hometown Free Presbyterian church in the village of Bunyah on the NSW mid-north coast. In his mature years he converted to Catholicism – in 1964, at the age of 26.

His recent death as Australia's unofficial Poet-Laureate has been widely lamented. Yet few of the obituaries have highlighted a crucial part of his life and character – that he was a deeply religious and sacramental poet – and in many ways a Chestertonian poet.

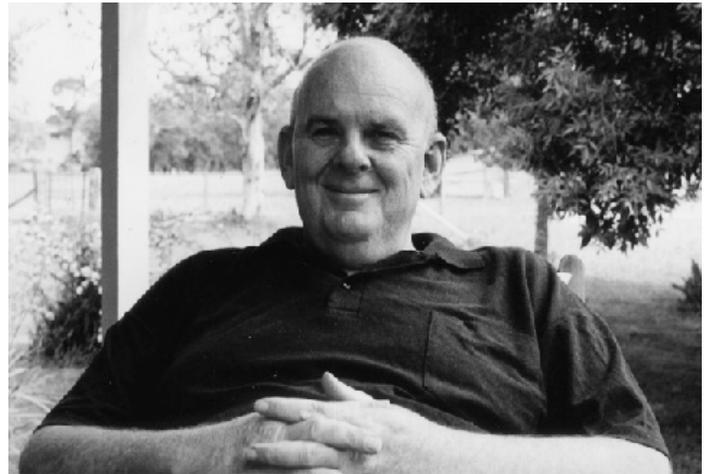
I once asked Les what had drawn him to the Catholic Church. Bearing as he did such a strong resemblance to Chesterton – in physical frame and, as the years unfolded, in literary genius – I mistakenly thought that Chesterton, a fellow convert and poet, might have influenced his fulfilment of faith.

Les responded that he only discovered Chesterton *after* his conversion.

What factor, then, had been most significant? He mused for a moment: "The pure devotion of a loving wife," he answered, with quiet feeling.

His wife Valerie, a cradle Catholic, was of Hungarian-Swiss descent and migrated to Australia as a child. She and Les met at Sydney University in the 1960s.

Her impact on his life was profound and enduring. She inspired and steadied him, in various ways, during their fifty-seven years of marriage. As she recalled in *Flight from the Brothers Grimm: A European-Australian Memoir* (2016):



Les Murray at his Bunyah farm near Taree NSW

"We married too young to have anything except each other. We grew each other up, as much as we were able to."

## Sense of sacramental reality

Les Murray responded deeply to images and the sacredness of words, and his sensibility paved the way, in his germinating Catholic imagination, for a sense of sacramental reality – of the visible embodying the invisible; of the material being fulfilled in the spiritual; of the Word made Flesh, so that language itself became a channel of divine communion, not just an instrument of human communication.

He faced no difficulty in seeing Christ's presence in the Eucharist. In 1994, thirty years after his conversion, he recalled:

'I was fascinated by the idea of the Eucharist. It absolutely wowed me. Anybody who's interested in imagery has to be interested in that type of fusion, metaphor taken all the way to identity.'

Les Murray's sense of the power of the Eucharist was physical and immediate. In *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral* (1980), an extraordinary novel presented in poetic form, he described the Eucharist as the 'food that solves the world'.

His poetic sensibility found expression in a multitude of poems – for example, 'Poetry and Religion':

'Religions are poems. . . .  
Full religion is the large poem in loving repetition;  
. . . God is the poetry caught in any religion,  
caught, not imprisoned. . . .'

Twenty years ago I mentioned to him a project that I thought he might see as a small verse that could be added to 'the large poem in loving repetition'. The project was

to establish Campion College, a university-level liberal arts institution of Catholic inspiration in Sydney. He applauded the possibility of this independent initiative, believing it would fill a crucial educational need in Australia.

I asked him at the time if he would provide a statement of support, and he wrote back that it would give students 'the chance to study even the humanities under scholars who believe there is such a thing as truth.' It was a significant testament from Australia's premier poet, and was published in an early issue of the College's newsletter, *Campion's Brag*, four years before Campion opened.

Nowhere did Les Murray's sense of truth manifest itself more vividly than in poetry, which he saw as opening up access to the transcendental significance of life. In the midst of suffering, his imagination rose to an exalted level of understanding in which only poetry could express the truth in a way that prose could not.

### The Poem that is God

In his poem 'You Find You Can Leave It All,' which followed his near-death experience from a liver abscess in 1996, he wrote:

'God, at the end of prose, somehow be our poem.'

An earlier poem, 'The Misery Cord,' contained some of his most sublime insights, which were worthy of Chesterton's deepest theological insights in *Orthodoxy*, and historical insights in *The Everlasting Man*:

'Just one man has broken the misery cord  
and lived. He said once was enough.  
A poem is an afterlife on earth:  
Christ grant us the other half.'



Les Murray in front of his portrait at Campion College in 2015.  
From left: Sam Rebbechi, Les Murray, Paul Morrissey, Karl Schmude

Les Murray vividly understood the barbarism that would engulf a civilisation when it abandons truth. His prize-winning novel in verse, *Fredy Neptune* (1998), highlighted the Armenian genocide of more than a million people in 1915, which he saw as a portent of the mass slaughtering by totalitarian regimes throughout the 20th century.

He saw deeply into the anti-human darkness and destructiveness of secular ideologies replacing religious faith. In his poem, 'The Craze Field,' he added what he called a codicil to G.K. Chesterton's famous insight: those 'who lose faith in God will not only believe in anything. They will bring blood offerings to it.'

Finally, in a spirit of hope that sprang from Les Murray's faith in the Resurrection of Christ - which, in defeating death, gives rise to the joy of eternal laughter - we might recall the final line of Chesterton's poem, 'The Last Hero':

'You never laughed in all your life as I shall laugh in death.' ■



Les Murray with Campion College students in 2015

# Religious Poetry in an Irreligious Time

When GK Chesterton wrote a biography of William Blake for the Men of Letters series in 1910, he opened it with the following paradox: "All the biggest events of Blake's life would have happened before he was born."

This is the first line of an enlightening review of a recent book, Michael D. Hurley's *Faith in Poetry*, by Rebekah Lamb of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College in Canada. The review appeared in the London *Catholic Herald* (18 January 2018).

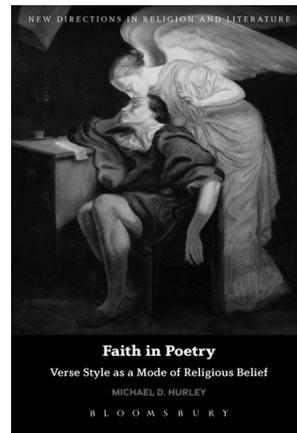
Lamb notes that Chesterton saw Blake's religious sensitivities, and his poetic programme growing out of his faith, in what 'happened before he was born' – the existential dramas recorded in the Old and New Testaments.

For the most part, 20th-century literary criticism gave attention to the sociological and political aspects of writers rather than their religious faith and experience. It presumed that the role and influence of faith were waning, as in J. Hillis Miller's *The Disappearance of God* (1963).

But Lamb notes that, in recent decades, literary scholars, theologians and historians of religion have questioned the idea that modernity has meant total secularisation. Such thinkers as Charles Taylor, Rowan Williams and Jean-Luc Marion have shown 'that a sense of the sacred did not withdraw from culture as radically as has been assumed.'

Hurley's *Faith in Poetry: Verse Style as a Mode of Religious Belief* is an important sign of this rediscovery, showing how faith informs the imagination.

Whereas Miller claimed that 19th-century poetry reflects a disappearing (or already absent) God – and he focused on



Michael D. Hurley, Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, has written widely on English literature. In 2012, he published a study of Chesterton (Northcote House/British Council) and edited a Penguin Classics edition of The Complete Father Brown Series.

five writers who illustrate this condition of unbelief – Hurley looks at five writers who demonstrate a dynamic devotion to religious faith. He takes Blake, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins and T.S. Eliot, and examines the connections between faith and poetic form throughout the 19th century.

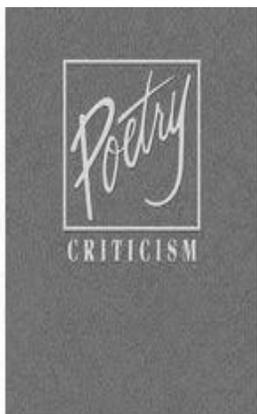
At the same time, Lamb points out, Hurley reveals how 'poetry not only expresses faith but also enables it, testifying to the poet's belief that poetry can say and do what "could not otherwise be said and done".'

Moreover, poetry has a natural link with a Christian worldview since, in Jacques Maritain's words, it has an 'incarnational character', a 'capacity to breathe life into thought' since it renders the metaphysical concrete.

Like Chesterton, Lamb concludes, Hurley treats poets as whole persons who see poetry as a vehicle for grace. He offers 'a thoughtful treatment of religious poets as those who dare to believe in God and poetry – that creative rite which, as Eliot pronounced, lets us "now and then, penetrate into another country"'. ■

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## Chesterton included in major reference work



A recent volume (no.198) of a long-running reference work, *Poetry Criticism*, includes a major section on Chesterton.

*Poetry Criticism* is published by the American company, Gale, in association with Layman Poupard Publishing, and available mainly in educational libraries. Each volume brings together articles and book chapters on the world's greatest poets, beginning with an

introduction to the poet's life and work and examining his poetry while noting other literary areas to which he contributed. The bulk of each section then comprises critical articles that were published over time and are wide-ranging.

Volume 198 contains an essay on Chesterton's boyhood (published in 1938) and another comparing him with such authors as Tolkien and Flannery O'Connor (1979). Included is an article on 'The Spirituality of G.K. Chesterton', which Karl Schmude contributed to *The Chesterton Review* (Spring-Summer 2006). It discussed his religious sensibility and explored the Marian inspiration of his verse. ■

# James V. Schall SJ – A Chestertonian Philosopher

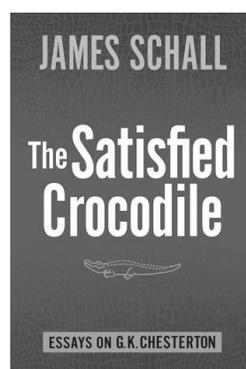
by Karl Schmude

The death of the American Jesuit priest and author, James V. Schall (pictured), on April 17 at the age of 91, marks the loss of a prolific writer who had a special love of Chesterton.

No one could rival the sheer exuberance of Chesterton's output, but Jim Schall showed a Chesterton-like literary lavishness over half a century of writing and speaking. He produced over 30 books and a continuing stream of articles that would test the capacity of any bibliographer to count.

He wrote ceaselessly on Chesterton, contributing to various Chesterton publications, such as *Gilbert*, the magazine of the American Chesterton Society, and *The Chesterton Review*, published by the Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture at Seton Hall University in New Jersey (USA).

In 2000 he brought together many of the articles he had written for a periodical called *Midwest Chesterton News*, which later merged with a number of regional Chesterton journals in America to become *Gilbert* magazine. These articles were subsequently published in *Schall on Chesterton: Timely Essays on Timeless Paradoxes*.



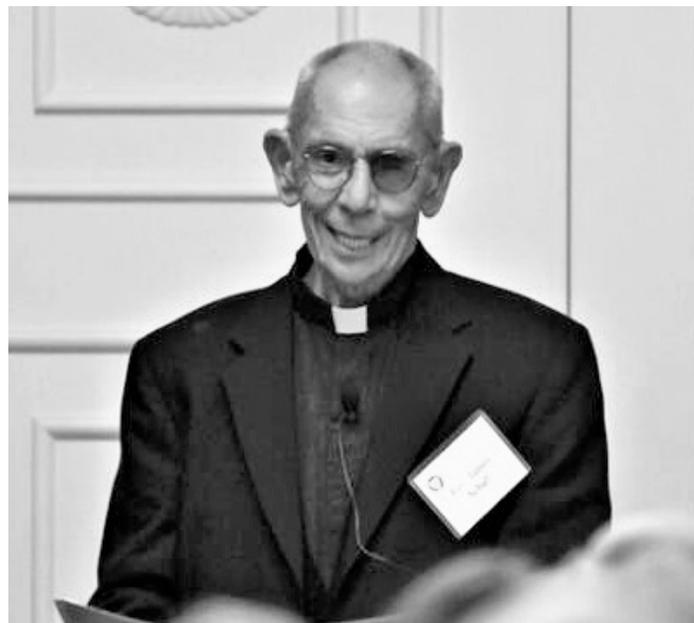
In 2017 a final book appeared consisting of essays originally published in *Gilbert*. It bore the intriguing title, *The Satisfied Crocodile*, based on Chesterton's famous distinction between a crocodile obeying his instincts and a man exercising free will and responsibility.

I had the privilege of knowing Jim Schall for over 40 years. By any reckoning, he was a model of the Catholic mind. He fused faith and

reason, divine revelation and human intelligence, in ways that deepened our understanding of ourselves and the world around and beyond us.

His academic vocation was political philosophy. He taught for long stints in various universities, in Rome, San Francisco and Washington DC. When I first met him in 1977, he was dividing his academic year between two beautiful cities, Rome and San Francisco, teaching a semester on the campuses of the Gregorian University and the University of San Francisco. But his interests extended far beyond political philosophy, embracing areas as varied as theology, history, politics, literature, spirituality and sports.

His thinking and writing showed a remarkable consistency. An early essay, for example, in a book he co-edited in 1966,



*Current Trends in Theology*, sounded many of the themes that he addressed throughout the next half-century.

One was the proper balance between action and contemplation, between the outer life of politics and the inner life of prayer, and he wrote instructively on the crucial value of such institutions as the monastery and the university.

Another theme rehearsed in the 1966 book was "the permanent things" (one of his favourite expressions) - the truths that finally matter in life. He had a living awareness and knowledge of the foundations of the Western intellectual heritage, forged by the blending of Greek thought and Jewish faith: the Greek tradition of all that was conducive to human perfection and happiness, and the Jewish belief in the transcendent power and love of God. These two traditions were dynamically forged in Christianity - in Christ's call to transform the world in fulfilment of God's saving plan, and to humanise it in the image of Christ.

Jim Schall had a profound affinity with ordinary people, reflected in his writings as well as his friendships. A typical Schall essay abounds in personal memories and concrete examples. He picked playful titles for some of his books, such as *The Praise of "Sons of Bitches": On the Worship of God by Fallen Men* (1978) and *On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs* (2001).

Yet he was wise and witty at the same time. He combined a popular sensibility with impressive scholarship and wide reading. He could blend, in one paragraph, a learned reference to Plato or Augustine or Dante with a memory of a recent baseball game or a description of a *New Yorker* cartoon.

This hospitable literary style was matched by his capacity for friendship and putting people at their ease. I recall the immediate rapport he established with my wife Virginia and our four sons (then aged 6 to 12) when he visited us during our stay in Washington DC in 1985. In the hotel bistro, he enthralled the boys at lunchtime with his stories about popular culture in America, conscious that they would have noticed those dining around them, mainly office-workers and tradesmen.

In 1988 he published one of his most characteristic works, *Another Sort of Learning*. While addressed primarily to students, it is a detailed guidebook for all those searching for wisdom, many of whom would have felt that present-day education had deprived them – and was denying their children and grandchildren – of access to our intellectual inheritance.

The book is Jim Schall's version of the Great Books. It comprises his reflections on works by ancient and modern authors, such as Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Newman, Josef Pieper and Christopher Dawson. They were authors who had shaped his life – and, he hoped, would inspire his students.

Apart from great love of Chesterton, Fr Schall cherished a special regard for Hilaire Belloc. In 2013, he published *Remembering Belloc*, which contained some of the essays

he had written on Belloc over the years. I reviewed the book for *Quadrant*, and in an email at the time Jim Schall wrote:

'Belloc's essays have always moved my soul. No one loved the earth more, or saw that we are here as wayfarers. He was a sailor as well as a walker.

'We are fascinated with space and those dots up there. Belloc loved bridges, valleys in the Pyrenees, African vistas, sailing into Patmos...'

He retired officially in 2012 from Georgetown University, but he never took the idea of retirement seriously. Despite serious bouts of ill-health, he continued to write endlessly – on Chesterton; and, as Chesterton did, on everything else. ■

## The Final Gladness

Jim Schall's final lecture at Georgetown was called 'The Final Gladness', drawn from one of his favourite books, Hilaire Belloc's *The Four Men*. It is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN1rFyYbKak>). The lecture hall was packed and the bulk of the audience of 700 were young people. A post-graduate student, Sophia Mason, wrote a report on the lecture for the *National Catholic Register* (December 13, 2012), and posed at the end a number of questions to Fr Schall. The last question was about Chesterton:

*Chesterton is frequently characterized as a brilliant but unsystematic thinker. Is that a fair characterization, and (if the latter part is true) does the unsystematic nature of his writings pose any problems for studying him?*

Chesterton, as you know, is simply the greatest. *Orthodoxy* is simply the greatest book written in the 20th century, and I have not seen a better one yet in the 21st. The major premise of the question about Chesterton being unsystematic is roughly that real thought only takes place in systems. Usually what takes place in systems is ideology. What Chesterton was is a metaphysician. He went where "what is" took him. That is why he understood St. Thomas practically without reading him. No more orderly mind ever existed than Chesterton, except perhaps Aquinas. Neither one had a system.

The real problem in reading Chesterton, as a lady once asked him, is his humor. She thought that one had to be serious to be a philosopher. Chesterton told her: "Madam, the opposite of funny is not serious. The opposite of funny is not funny." There is absolutely no reason why truth cannot be found in humour or presented in a humorous way.

Why people have difficulty in reading or appreciating Chesterton, I think, has nothing to do with his supposed unsystematic mind. It has to do with his clear grasp of the truth and where arguments contrary to it lead us. The conclusion of his 1905 book *Heretics* always seems to me to state the real issue. Modern philosophy has separated us from what is. It now takes faith to affirm whether the grass is green.

One cannot read Chesterton very long without examining his mind. He must be put away or put off by calling him unsystematic or funny to avoid the real implications of Chesterton, which is that Christianity has it right about man, cosmos and God. If we live our lives in a way that allows us to blind ourselves to his logic, we will have to find ways also to reject reality itself. This rejection, as I tried to point out in my book *The Modern Age*, is what we are about today. But if we want to know what reality itself is about, we had best read Chesterton.

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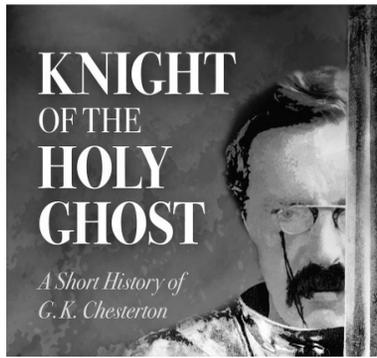
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# Chesterton's Prophetic Power

by Francis Phillips

Any new work by Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, is an important publishing event, given his unrivalled familiarity with Chesterton's writings. His latest book, *Knight of the Holy Ghost: A Short History of G.K. Chesterton*, was reviewed by **Francis Phillips**, a leading reviewer for the *London Catholic Herald*, in her online 'Comments and Blogs' feature of the *Herald* (April 3, 2019). It is reprinted with her kind permission.

I have just been charmed, provoked and stimulated by reading *Knight of the Holy Ghost: A Short History of G.K. Chesterton* by Dale Ahlquist (Ignatius Press). Only someone who is not merely familiar with Chesterton's enormous body of writing but who is saturated with it could succeed in conveying his uniqueness and loveliness in only 170 pages.

Ahlquist has done just this. Something of his favourite writer's gusto and zest has rubbed off on him. He admits that he has spent 36 years "listening to him talk" – and Chesterton wrote as he talked.

The author has divided his book, of which portions have been revised from articles, into three sections: The Man; The Writer; The Saint. This is the simplest way to encompass such a prodigious author, though one might add the proviso that Chesterton was all three most of the time; the man cannot be separated from the writer or from his holiness.

What strikes the casual reader (as I would describe myself) is Chesterton's prophetic power – the characteristic of someone capable of standing outside his own time. Ahlquist includes many quotations, confessing that he "could go on and on. I often do."

I note: "There was a dramatic drop in moral standards on the day they discovered that the test-tube is mightier than the sword", and "A strange fanaticism fills our time: the fanatical hatred of morality, especially of Christian morality." Bear in mind that despite its startling contemporary note the man who wrote thus died in 1936.

Ahlquist rebuts the regular attack on Chesterton, that he was an anti-Semite, drawing attention to his advocacy of a Jewish homeland at a time when to be a Zionist was uncommon, his long and loyal friendships with individual Jews, and his conviction that "The world owes God to the Jews."

Could the deadly sin of sloth be laid at GKC's door? Ahlquist points out that his work was writing, "and the fact is, he worked and worked. His typical day consisted of 8 to 10 hours of writing", in a career that produced over 100 books, thousands of essays, hundreds of poems, alongside editing two newspapers and giving hundreds of speeches.

The author provides a lovely and characteristic anecdote of Chesterton, the indefatigable writer, "of how when he was being moved from his flat in Battersea, he was writing an essay and had to keep switching to a different piece of furniture as each was being hauled out of the room, till finally he was using the mantelpiece." Writing was his vocation – and his vocation was pursuit of the truth.

On the fatuous charge that GKC wrote "too much", Ahlquist is dismissive, commenting that "His critics cannot approach him because they are overwhelmed." This is probably truer today, given over as it is to experts and professionals, where to be an "amateur" is to be thought of as shallow.

People might admit to GKC's prodigality with his pen – but to push for his canonisation: surely that is going too far? Reading the author's section on The Saint has convinced me of his cause. If Chesterton didn't radiate holiness with every fibre of his being – alongside humour, generosity, charity and unworldliness – then we have the wrong idea of what holiness is meant to be. As Ahlquist demonstrates, all his writings are "a continuous act of wonder, an expression of gratitude, a cry for justice, a psalm..."

Some people, including TS Eliot, found GKC's love of paradox exhausting. That is the only fault I can find with his style – aware that his champions recognise it as a mark of his originality and insight.

Leaving this small caveat aside, Chesterton, whose very happy marriage was not to include a longed-for family of their own, was a great champion of the family, writing in one of his innumerable trenchant passages, "Hardly anybody...dares to defend the family. The world around us has accepted a social system which denies the family. It will sometimes help the child in spite of the family; the mother in spite of the family...It will not help the family."

I conclude this very brief survey of this commendable introduction with a final anecdote, which somehow gives the flavour of GKC's effect on people during his life:

"His gardener used to pick up Chesterton's cigar butts and smoke the remnant in his pipe. It was not because he was being thrifty; it was a way of showing reverence." ■