



# *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)

**Chesterton as a Broadcaster**  
(Tony Evans)

Pages 1-2

**A Modern Chestertonian**  
(David Ryan)

Page 3

**Composing Hymns with James McAuley** (Richard Connolly)

Page 4

**The Music of Chesterton**  
(Simon Dennerly)

Page 5

**The Senior Syllabus – As It Should Be** (Dale Ahlquist)

Page 6

**The Man Behind Father Brown**  
(John Young)

Page 7

**Desert Island Chesterton**  
(Francis Phillips)

Page 8

## Chesterton as a Broadcaster

*by Tony Evans*

*In his later years Chesterton attracted an expanded audience as a result of his radio talks. This important, but previously neglected, part of his writing and public speaking was the subject of an address by the Founding President of the Australian Chesterton Society, Tony Evans, at its 2001 conference in Sydney.*

*Tony Evans was a long-time producer with ABC radio and television in Perth, and has published several historical biographies, the most recent of which was of the church architect, William Wardell. In this article for The Defendant, he demonstrates his unrivalled expertise in discussing Chesterton as a broadcaster.*

Chesterton received his first invitation from the BBC to broadcast on their overseas service to America, a full year before his regular Home Service broadcasts began. This broadcast went to air on 25th December, 1931.

Why to America? A possible explanation is that Chesterton's reputation in the United States at that time had been enhanced by his six-week lecture tour a year previously, and an alert Head of Talks in the Overseas Service must have noted his popularity and stolen a march on his Home Service colleagues.

The subject suggested for him was dear to his heart, 'Dickens and Christmas'.

There were no recordings in those days, and so Chesterton was obliged to make the journey from his home in Beaconsfield to Broadcasting House in central London



*Chesterton at a microphone in the BBC studios*

to broadcast live on Christmas Day. Luckily the script of the talk has survived, complete with additions and deletions. Thus we know that he first alluded to his journey by apologising for interrupting the listeners' Christmas holiday, and then adding ruefully, 'the equally disgusting interruption to my Christmas Day'.

The BBC, only five years old at that time, was still under the iron control of the formidable Sir John Reith. The highest standards of decorum were maintained; all talks were scripted and rehearsed, and male announcers wore evening dress to read the news. Even to be invited to give talks on the BBC was a passport to national fame.

Chesterton must have passed the test because within twelve months he received his invitation to broadcast on the BBC Home Service the following September. His second 15-minute talk was scheduled for 31 October and this led to an unbroken series of talks, roughly at monthly intervals until his death in 1936, with gaps only when he was away travelling; a total of 33

broadcasts if we include the debate with Bertrand Russell entitled, *Who Should Bring Up Our Children?*

Letters in the BBC files show plainly how successful Chesterton was as a broadcaster. 'You do admirably' declares one enthusiastically. Another writes, '[You are] Quite superb at the microphone'.

All broadcasters in those days had to submit scripts which were carefully vetted before broadcast. Invariably speakers were rehearsed until the required standard was reached. In a letter to Chesterton from a BBC producer he was told, contrary to usual practice, that he need not keep to the letter of his script, 'We should like you to make variations as these occur to you as you speak at the microphone. Only in this way can the talk have a real spontaneity about it'.

Most of Chesterton's thirty-three talks were presented under the general title of *Books and Authors*, each with its own individual title, but there were other contributions in the series too. They were book reviews only in a loose sense, because although he spoke of books and writers, they were selected to support a particular theme.

Much has been written about Chesterton's super-human output, and his capacity to work on several books, write poetry, prepare lectures, and so on, at the one time. We read this in the biographies but it is only when delving into these broadcasts that one becomes fully aware of Chesterton's formidable mental ability and the mountain of work he managed to get through.

Each month he would read and absorb eight books as preparation for his talk. We may be sure that he wasn't one of those reviewers – and there were many – who skim read and, as in Chesterton's satirical verse, rely on 'the back of the cover to tell them the plot.' This was not Chesterton's way of working. He obviously had a photographic mind.

At the same time as making his broadcasts – for example in 1932 – he was writing and editing *G.K.'s Weekly*; writing his weekly essay for *The Illustrated London News*; writing *Christendom* in Dublin published in November that year; writing *St Thomas Aquinas* published the following year, and in that same year appeared his book of essays, *All I Survey*.

But this is not the final tally: his faithful Secretary, Dorothy Collins, lists forty lectures in her diary in that one year alone, including a debate at the Oxford Union, and various other lesser engagements.

Chesterton made eight broadcasts in 1933. One, on 25 September, in which he reviewed books on the French Revolution, one on Marie Antoinette, and three books dealing with the Napoleonic dynasty.

Again there were eight radio broadcasts in 1934 – seven of them in the Autumn and Winter. He maintained that,

throughout his life, we should give thanks to God for our existence; he believed that we should all be filled with wonder and joy at the miracle of life: 'Unless we can bring men back to enjoying the daily life which moderns call a dull life, our whole civilisation will be in ruins in about fifteen years'.

It was a theme that he would return to poignantly in his final broadcast before he died two years later.

Incidentally, Chesterton's estimate of fifteen years would take us to 1949 – the desolate years after World War II, when the economies of Europe, including England, were all but in ruins, and the full murderous truth of the Holocaust was then being revealed. Did Chesterton pluck fifteen years out of the air, or was that estimate born out of his extraordinary prescience?

Chesterton's religious beliefs permeated his radio talks. He was subject to no strictures from BBC officials, and always spoke as an Orthodox Catholic.

In pre-war England there was not that disaffection towards Christianity that has become a characteristic of public life today. It was a time when, broadly speaking, the majority of the population believed in God and religion. Thus in one talk he was able to defend and praise the Book of Genesis. 'Do not jeer at the Book of Genesis,' he says, 'It would be better for all of us if [we remembered] that Genesis was a series of symbolic services reminding us of Creation'.

The edition of BBC weekly magazine, *The Listener*, published in the week following Chesterton's death in 1936, contained an editorial eulogy praising him as 'he took his place in the forefront of the best of broadcast talkers,' and added: 'Chesterton had enormous gusto in his broadcast talks and gusto is one of the essential qualities of a good broadcaster'.

The eulogy concludes by referring to a paradox 'which Chesterton himself would have loved... that when he was being most individual he was being most universal'.

A simple story which illustrates just how popular Chesterton was as a broadcaster is told by Maisie Ward in her definitive 1944 biography.

She relates that, on the Monday morning following the Sunday of Chesterton's death, a barber in Chancery Lane, London, rushed out of his shop, shaving-brush in hand, and accosted Chesterton's friend Edward Macdonald whom he recognised. He asked Macdonald if he had heard the terrible news. When Macdonald asked the barber if he had known Chesterton well, the barber admitted that he had never read any of Chesterton's books, but would never miss listening to his broadcasts. ■



Dawn Eden

# A Modern Chestertonian

## Interview with Dawn Eden

by David Ryan

A contemporary author, Dawn Eden, who became a Catholic as a result of reading Chesterton, has recently been interviewed by a Campion College student, **David Ryan**, who has been serving an internship at the Sydney Catholic Weekly provided by the Editor, Peter Rosengren. In this article, he explores the influence of Chesterton's writings on her conversion.

December 1995 was a turning point in the life of Jewish-American writer and journalist Dawn Eden; a turning point that paved the way to Catholicism, and that began with an encounter with the writings of G.K. Chesterton.

*I was 27 at the time and was working as a music journalist. During an interview with Ben Eshbach from The Sugarplastics I thought I would pose an intellectual question - I asked him what he was reading. He told me that he was reading The Man Who Was Thursday by G.K. Chesterton.*

In a recent interview I conducted with Dawn Eden, she recalls how it was pragmatism rather than idle curiosity that compelled her to read Chesterton; a small pragmatism that would ironically prove to be a blessing:

*I did not know who Chesterton was but I decided to pick up the book in order to possibly follow up with questions for a future interview. I immediately recognised similarities with Lewis Carroll - especially notions of the surreal and the eccentric - and I became hooked.*

Dawn, who grew up in a Reform Jewish household, had drifted into agnosticism as a teenager. Writing for rock magazines at the time, she was drawn towards the eclectic and the anti-establishment to combat the ills of the world. In Chesterton, she found this in his style and wit:

*I was looking for a writer to explain the meaning of rebellion and subversion since I saw myself as a non-conformist. When I read Chesterton, this was exactly what I found - a rebellion of beauty in an ugly world. This was not what the culture around me had told me. Chesterton's perspective resonated with me. It made me realise I needed beauty. I needed order. I needed sanity. It was refreshing.*

In her interview with me, Dawn emphasised how she had always been aware of Christianity, but that her impressions were of a mechanical religion. This was turned on its head after reading Chesterton:

*Chesterton changed my impression of Christianity. I had always seen Christianity as a religion of conformity where you had to lose your identity. Chesterton very much challenged this notion through the themes in his writings.*

*I could not believe there were Christians like Chesterton.*

*I was taken by Chesterton's quote that 'the most poetic thing is not being sick' and co-incidentally, prior to coming across Chesterton's works I had been following counter-cultural folk singer of the 70s Phil Ochs, and he had this line which struck a similar theme: 'In such an ugly world true rebellion is beauty.'*

Christ calls himself the Good Shepherd. The original Koine Greek term more holistically expresses this as *poimen ho kalos* (ποιμήν ο καλός), meaning the 'Beautiful Shepherd'; classical transcendentalists being seen as inseparable.

The role of the shepherd, however, in the Ancient Near East was associated with the role of a misfit. The Divine paradox of Christ being a misfit but also a King is telling. Chesterton brings out the 'good punk' as a theme in being a Christian; a rebel fighting for order. Dawn Eden notes:

*The Man Who Was Thursday I found to be profoundly metaphysical - especially at the end. You can see the policemen in the story akin to the Disciples. Christ, like Sunday, is inviting them all to lay their own personal suffering griefs: 'Can you drink of the cup that I drink of?'*

*Chesterton was suggesting that God knew something about suffering interiorly in the person of Jesus Christ. I had never ever contemplated that before.*

Dawn Eden's personal traumas in childhood and adolescence fortified an existential longing, which was fulfilled in the Catholic faith and the message of Jesus Christ. Chesterton's inversion of the fallen world in his literature is a perspective on the world that reveals a sublime truth which is manifest most poignantly in the life of Christ.

Paradox and mystery are integral to the Christian message. Through the paradox of suffering, yet being at peace, the paradox of being non-conformist, yet also ordered, Dawn and many others have realised the beauty of reality.

Such a message strikes a chord with the literature of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* where Prince Miskin exclaims that 'beauty will save the world.'

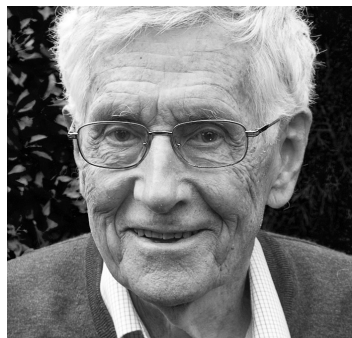
And indeed, it was the beauty of Chesterton's literature - working with goodness and truth - that lured Dawn Eden to Christ. ■

# Composing Hymns with James McAuley

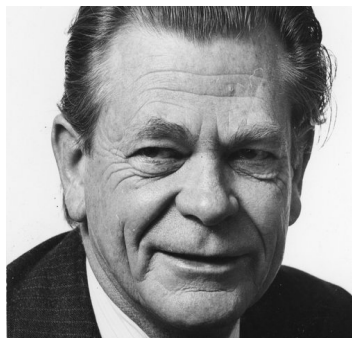
by Richard Connolly

October 2017 marked the centenary of the birth of the Australian poet James McAuley. While there is no known reference to Chesterton in McAuley's writings, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have read Chesterton's epic poems, *Lepanto* and *The Ballad of the White Horse*, and that Chesterton would have appreciated McAuley's narrative poem on the Portuguese explorer, Captain Quiros.

A memorable part of McAuley's outstanding corpus is the hymns which he wrote in conjunction with his close friend, Richard Connolly. In this centenary tribute, written especially for *The Defendant*, **Richard Connolly** recalls how he came to compose the music for which McAuley wrote the words.



Richard Connolly



James McAuley

In a speech I made at my 80th birthday party, looking back over things I had made and done, including ABC features of which I was very proud, I concluded with these words:

'Best of all, the day in 1955 that (Father) Ted Kennedy introduced me to James McAuley and the years of friendship that followed. The twenty or so hymns that Jim and I made are the best, the finest thing I have made or done in any field, except for my family. That is plain to me, and there is little to add to it.'

Ted had shown me some words of the recent convert to Catholicism, James McAuley, and asked that I put them to music. The result was 'Help of Christians, Guard This Land'.

It was included, together with an Offertory Hymn also by McAuley, in a collection called 'We Offer the Mass' (still the Latin, Tridentine Mass). The publisher -- under the aegis of a group of liturgically aware priests led by Roger Pryke -- was called The Living Parish Series.

The 'Living Parish' priests were men of imagination, and on the evidence of these two hymns they commissioned McAuley and me to compose hymns for the feasts and seasons of the Liturgical Year; and that was when our collaboration really got under way. Twelve hymns were made in the years 1960-1962, and published in 1963 as 'Hymns for the Year of Grace'.

By now, Jim and I had become close friends, and each of us possessed a sympathetic understanding of the other's craft. Jim was a classy jazz pianist and an organist as well, and I was a senior producer of poetry for a then very different ABC.

So although Jim moved to the University of Tasmania in 1960, just as we were getting started, we found the separation no

great handicap. He would post me the words of a new hymn; I would make a tune with accompaniment (normally within a few days) and await his comments and the next set of words, which might come soon, or after an interval of weeks or even months. No fuss, and never any disagreement. Once or twice I asked his approval for some minor change like the splitting of a long line into two short ones, and he readily agreed.

In his poem *Invocation*, James McAuley asks his Muse to

Teach me at last to speak aloud  
In words that are no longer mine;  
For at your touch, discreet, profound,  
Ten thousand years softly resound.

It seemed to me that most of the tunes I made in that collection were strangely not mine -- so nearly did the words seem to clothe themselves in music. One felt oneself to be only half agent, and the other half sounding board... perhaps a sort of channel.

Not that there was any question of a 'heightened' state of mind; the operation was practical and pragmatic. It was just that the tunes seemed to come straight out of the words with no real effort on my part more than a kind of submitting my musical mind, or, better, making my musical self available, to the words.

I have tried to set hymn texts by others, but never so successfully. The same magic doesn't happen.

I had by this time begun to have some reputation as a composer of film and TV soundtrack music for both ABC and BBC, as well as commercial outfits. But none of that music ever came so effortlessly. The reason, I think, was the perfection of McAuley's words. The language is theologically perfect and to the point. It uses beautifully the simplest of words, which nonetheless manage to embody infinite meaning and mystery.

No one could encapsulate the essential, eternal meanings and resonances as Jim did, steeped as he was in the Word, especially the Gospels and St Paul. I wrote somewhere that the merit of the hymns is '90% McAuley', and I think that is right. It was not false modesty.

When I speak of the hymns I was 'privileged' to make with James McAuley, I am not demeaning my contribution. I think it a worthy one, and I am proud of it. ■



# The Music of Chesterton

by Simon Dennerly

*It may be a surprise to know that Chesterton composed at least one hymn, 'O God of Earth and Altar,' and there have been various musical renditions of it which can be found on YouTube.*

*The hymn is often sung in the parish of Mt Lawley, Perth, by members of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross (established by Pope Benedict XVI as an avenue by which those of Anglican heritage can enter into full communion with the Catholic Church). They are also starting a study group along with other Chestertonians.*

*In this report **Simon Dennerly**, a member of the group, outlines some of the projects' background.*

Chesterton is somewhat of a hero in the Personal Ordinaries, those non-geographic dioceses set up for former Anglicans who want to keep the English spiritual tradition.

In our tradition music and singing are seen as acts of worship in themselves, and after 500 years of the liturgy in English we have literally thousands of hymns to choose from.

An important inclusion in our hymn books is Chesterton's 'O God of Earth and Altar'.

As Catholics we 'sing our theology' and it could be noted that Chesterton wrote this gem, like a number of his great works, while he was still a member of the Anglican Church; but it should always be remembered that Chesterton, in his time and in that institution, was of the Anglo-Catholic school and was critical of Reformed Theology.

Chesterton also wrote 'A Hymn for the Church Militant' which I do not believe has been put to music - yet.

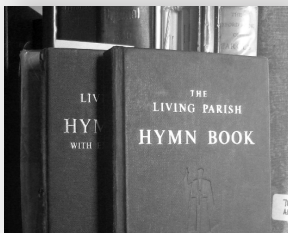
Indeed as a long term project, seeing if hymns can be created from the works of Chesterton and put to music, either in whole or selected parts, is being considered among the small group in our parish that want to form a choir.

The advantage the Ordinariates have in this regard is Anglican Chant, a method devised to chant non-metric texts (similar to those used to chant the Old and New Testament, which was well known to Chesterton.

Why do such a project? In the words of Chesterton: 'Life exists for the love of music or beautiful things.' ■

O God of earth and altar,  
bow down and hear our cry,  
our earthly rulers falter,  
our people drift and die;  
the walls of gold entomb us,  
the swords of scorn divide,  
take not thy thunder from us,  
but take away our pride.

- the opening stanza of  
Chesterton's hymn



## Remembering A Hymn Book Editor

Fr Anthony Newman, who compiled and edited in the early 1960s the *Living Parish Hymn Book* in which many of the hymns of James McAuley's and Richard Connolly's were published, has recently died. The book itself, with its small maroon cover, was familiar to many Christian denominations, in Australia and elsewhere, and about a million copies were sold in the years after its publication.

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# The Senior Syllabus - As It Should Be

by Dale Ahlquist

John Senior (1923-1999) was an American scholar and teacher of Christian culture who was a founder of the Integrated Humanities Program at the secular University of Kansas in the 1960s. The Program had a remarkable impact, both intellectual and religious, far beyond the boundaries of a single institution.

**Dale Ahlquist**, President of the American Chesterton Society, has reviewed a recent book on John Senior in the pages of *Gilbert* magazine (July-August 2017), which is here reprinted, in a shortened form for reasons of space, with his kind permission.

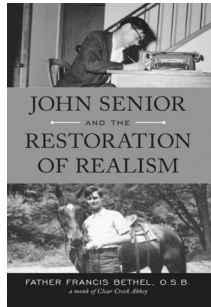


Dale Ahlquist

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*John Senior and the Restoration of Realism*  
by Father Francis Bethel OSB  
Thomas More College Press, 2016

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‘The critics of our revival, or whatever it may be called, are very fond of calling us romantic, and implying or declaring that they themselves are realistic. The very contrary is in fact the case. They are so far sunken in abysses of unreality that they do not know a reality when they see one, and have missed the point of what is really a return to realities.’

So writes G.K. Chesterton in *G.K.’s Weekly* in 1928, seemingly in anticipation of the work of John Senior.

Realism, as it is used in the title, is not the artistic form that was a mere reaction against Romanticism which put feelings forefront. Reality, quite simply, is truth, and it may include the ugliness of our fallen world, but it also contains the indescribable beauty of God’s creation, the goodness of God’s established order of things, the miracle of existence itself, and all the glorious attempts to express it.

True realism considers the facts that the foolish philosophies of the world take great pains to avoid and deny. It starts with the exhortation of the Psalmist: ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good.’ This is what John Senior did. And it is what he taught.

Father Bethel writes with the serenity and patience and certitude of a Benedictine monk. It may have something to do with the fact that he is one. He follows Senior on his path from unbelief to belief, including his delving into Occultism and Hinduism, and onward into the fullness of the Catholic Church, and then his somewhat difficult final years with the Society of Saint Pius X.

He also covers Senior’s career as a popular professor at Hofstra, Cornell, Wyoming, and finally Kansas. He takes us through his writings, including his major works, *The Death of Christian Culture* (1978) and *The Restoration of Christian*

*Culture* (1983), but also illuminating excerpts from essays and personal letters.

I think the greatest importance of this book is the thorough treatment of Senior’s ideas about classical education. Father Bethel writes:

‘For Senior, the reigning cultural poverty largely resulted from ignorance of the classics, a fact intimately linked to the eclipse of the humanities and of liberal education. The classics focus on the deep, universal values in which everyone shares; they speak to everyone, they are, as it were, the consciousness of our civilization.’

Modern education, says Senior, echoing Chesterton, ‘has become increasingly suicidal,’ destroying not only itself but our whole humanity.

In contrast, when we open the classics, we study—we plunge!—into poetry, which is the language of the Muses, beginning in delight and ending in wonder; philosophy, beginning in wonder and ending in wisdom; rhetoric, which is the art of persuasion; and culture, which includes agriculture, getting your hands dirty and learning the art of growing.

Senior clearly loved Chesterton, and there are several references to him in the book, but as Father Bethel points out, Chesterton did not form his thinking so much as confirm it and express it. That is often the case with others who discover GKC.

I suppose the remarkable thing is that he was reading and teaching Chesterton during the time when almost no one was doing either one. And teaching him proved to be formative.

One of the monks at Clear Creek Abbey [a Benedictine abbey in Oklahoma], who was a student of Senior’s and a Catholic convert, told me that everyone who studied under Senior read *Orthodoxy*: ‘So Chesterton played a part in all of our conversions.’

John Senior did not just theorize about restoring realism and Christian culture, we can taste and see what he did. ■

# The Man Behind Father Brown

by John Young

*John Young has written for Australian and international journals and taught courses in philosophy. He has made a particular study of Chesterton's Father Brown stories. This review is of Monsignor John O'Connor, 'the man behind' the famous priest-detective.*

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*The Elusive Father Brown*

by Julia Smith

GraceWing, Herefordshire, England, 2010

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This biography of Monsignor John O'Connor, the priest on whom G.K. Chesterton based the character of Father Brown, reveals the extremely varied life he led. He had a wide range of interests and knew an amazing range of people.

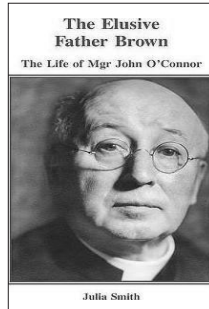
Born in Ireland, from the age of 12 he was educated on the Continent by the Benedictines at Douai, then studied for the priesthood at the Venerable English College in Rome.

After ordination in 1895 he spent his life as a parish priest in Bradford, England. Not only did he attend faithfully to his duties in his parish, but wrote books and many articles, and translated various French works into English.

Among his friends were statesmen, writers and artists. Eric Gill was a close friend from whom Monsignor O'Connor commissioned sculptures for his Bradford parish. He built up a valuable collection of art and antiques, some of which he sold to fund almost half the cost of building his first church.

There was something of the rebel in Monsignor O'Connor's personality. On one occasion he bought blue vestments, which were not in accordance with the rubrics. They had to be blessed by the Bishop, so O'Connor buried them under some other vestments, and the Bishop blessed them all without investigating!

He also approved of sexually explicit engravings by Gill, including religious subjects.



He was in favour of Mass facing the people, an unusual view at the time, saying he could not imagine Christ turning his back on the Apostles at the Last Supper.

O'Connor was a great friend of the poor, of whom there were many in his parish. He was as much at home with the poor and poorly educated as he was with the rich and with intellectuals. From his early days he had a habit of swearing, and on one occasion a woman complained to him of the bad language of some workmen. He answered: 'Yes, they're buggers, aren't they?'

He was a close friend of the Chestertons, having first met Gilbert in 1903. Frances corresponded with him frequently and sought his advice. Certainly that friendship, and the fact that it was Monsignor O'Connor who received Gilbert into the Church, made it easier for her to accept Gilbert's conversion.

Although Chesterton did not become a Catholic until 1922, he had told O'Connor ten years earlier that he had made up his mind to be received into the Catholic Church. While many people had expected that he would convert, it is interesting that Hilaire Belloc evidently had not expected it: shortly after the great event, Belloc said in a letter to Father O'Connor that the more he thought about it the more astonished he became.

In large part due to O'Connor's influence, Frances was received into the Church in 1926, after a long struggle to decide what she should do.

The close friendship of Monsignor O'Connor with the Chestertons, and the many discussions he had with Gilbert, must surely have had a big part in shaping Chesterton's outlook. Without that influence Chesterton might have fallen short of what he actually achieved, and might never have become a Catholic. That seems a reasonable speculation; we'll know whether it is correct at the Last Judgement.

On the final page of her biography, Julia Smith writes: 'But despite his national and international reputation as an intellectual, it is as a caring, compassionate, occasionally irascible, parish priest that he is fondly remembered, over 50 years after his death, by his ex-parishioners.'

This well-researched book is very informative and interesting, both as a biography of Monsignor O'Connor and for what it tells us about the many friends and acquaintances of that parish priest. ■

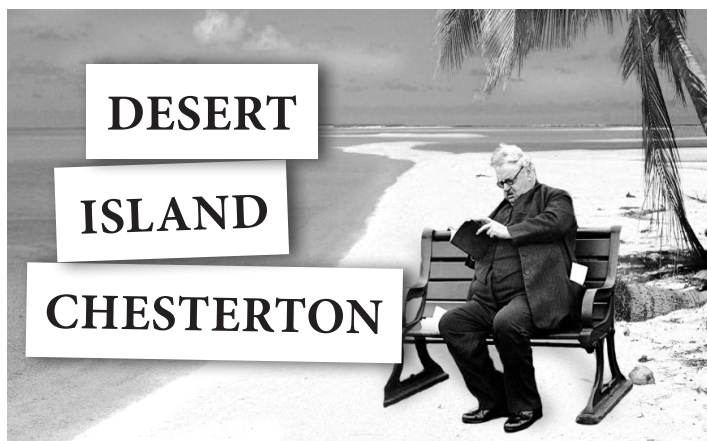


Conference speakers in a panel discussion conducted by Dr David Daintree

## The Serious Side of Laughter

More than 50 people from as far afield as Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane, attended the 2017 conference on Chesterton and humour, held on Saturday, October 21, at Campion College. Papers were given on topics as varied as the history of Christian humour, revealed in such authors as Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, and Chesterton (Dr Stephen McNerney); the mystical dimensions of comedy (Gary Furnell); Hilaire Belloc as a 'comical companion' of Chesterton (John O'Halloran); and a comparison of Chesterton and the Marx Brothers (Karl Schmude).

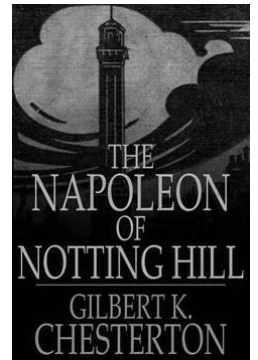
The papers were recorded and will be available on the Society's website ([www.chestertonaustralia.com](http://www.chestertonaustralia.com)). A printed set will also be available for \$20.00 (incl. postage) from Karl Schmude (on 0407 721 458 or: [kgschmude@gmail.com](mailto:kgschmude@gmail.com)).



# The Napoleon of Notting Hill

by Francis Phillips

One test of selection in our 'desert island' series is the wish to read a particular Chesterton book more than once. **Francis Phillips**, the lead reviewer of the London Catholic Herald, has applied this test to Chesterton's 1904 novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.



I like to think that Chesterton would have been amused by the way I discovered this book, his first novel.

I had volunteered to be a school librarian, partly to avoid duties I guessed would be more onerous and partly because it would mean I could spend extra time in a room surrounded by books. I was right on both counts. So one afternoon, when I was meant to be 'cataloguing', I pulled down a random book from a shelf and began to read it.

This was *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

I had only come across GKC's name once before, when we had to learn by heart his lovely little poem, 'The Donkey'. Now I recognised the same name – and an intriguing title. So during a long winter afternoon, in the beautiful library of an old Victorian mansion (my convent school, designed as a mini-chateau, had once been the home of the exiled Empress Eugenie), I fell into the imaginary world of this beguiling fantasy.

I must admit that after finishing it I did not read other works by Chesterton for many years.

In those days I was deep into a 'Russian exile', dominated by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Thus this random choice was simply a brief excursion into an altogether different world.

I was charmed and mystified by the fantastic idea that lay behind the novel, and swept up by the passionate and romantic figure of Adam Wayne. All I can remember now, after a passage of over fifty years, is the image of him, with his red hair, his banner and his sword, being prepared to defend to the death his own beloved suburb of London.

Re-reading the novel again after all this time, I can see that I missed – or have forgotten – GKC's playful yet serious intent: to poke fun at the bureaucrats who run governments and to show how love is at once local, loyal to the streets and familiar faces whom you know, and also universal, affecting many others according to its seriousness and intensity.

Reading it the first time I could sympathise with Wayne, the outsider who took life too seriously and, in this case – the fanciful suggestion that London might revert to little local fiefdoms, each with their own quaint traditions – too literally.

After all, I also fancied myself an 'outsider'. I had read Camus' novel, *L'Etranger*, in translation; I had sympathised with the predicament of Raskolnikov in his lonely garret in St Petersburg; so the extravagant dreams of Wayne, mocked by his peers, was not foreign to me.

Nevertheless, it took re-reading the book to make me appreciate GKC's underlying argument: that true sanity requires laughter as well as seriousness.

Left to himself, Wayne had a tendency to become a fanatic; left to himself, Auberon Quin tended to mere frivolity. Together, at the end of the book, Chesterton sends them out into the world with sword and halberd, the London suburbs' answer to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

I also saw how prophetic Chesterton was in conjuring up this wise fantasy. For it is always the case that planners and developers will seek to destroy any obstacle in their path, like the modest Pump Street where Wayne had spent 'the Eden of childhood', not being able to feel the pathos inherent in the loss of sentimental associations.

Indeed, what has been missed in the ongoing arguments of the European Union against the Brexit vote is what Chesterton would have instantly understood: that the 'common man' does not want to be bullied by a large and self-important neighbour and, like Wayne, the Provost of Notting Hill, he will obstinately defend his own patch.

Re-discovering this novel has been a pleasurable nostalgic return to the library steps in the corner of a grand old room, surrounded by worn hardback volumes and warmed by a gas fire. ■