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Chesterton and Solzhenitsyn

by Joseph Pearce



Joseph Pearce is the author of many acclaimed biographies, including *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (1996) and *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile* (1999).

He serves in leading roles in a range of scholarly journals and centres of higher learning in America, including as editor of the *St Austin Review*. This comparison of Chesterton and Solzhenitsyn is reprinted with his kind permission.

At first sight, it would seem that G.K. Chesterton and Alexander Solzhenitsyn have very little in common.

The one has a reputation for jollity and rambunctiousness, the other for sobriety and solemn sternness. One penned swashbuckling fantasies about lovable eccentrics, the other wrote gritty works of realism set in prison camps or cancer wards.

Although both have been described as prophets, Chesterton is a laughing prophet, capering with the anarchic *joie de vivre* of St. Francis; Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, is a searingly serious seer, blasting the follies of the age with the excoriating scorn of a modern-day Jeremiah.

In spite of such appearances to the contrary, these two giants of twentieth century literature are, in fact, kindred spirits who

share the same political philosophy and the same religious orthodoxy.

I had the great pleasure and inestimable honour of meeting Solzhenitsyn at his home near Moscow in 1998. I was astonished when he had agreed to be interviewed by me, especially as he had repeatedly spurned the advances of many better-known writers. When I had written to him requesting the interview, I mentioned that I had written a biography of Chesterton. I had not expected a reply, still less a reply granting my request, and was astonished when he invited me to Russia to interview him in person.

Upon my arrival at Solzhenitsyn's home, his wife showed me a whole shelf filled with the Ignatius Press *Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*. I was pleasantly surprised, and realized that the word 'Chesterton' in my original letter had been the magic word that had gained me Solzhenitsyn's trust and the rare and privileged access that was its consequence. This is one of the many reasons that I remain deeply indebted to Chesterton.

Having established Solzhenitsyn's admiration for Chesterton, I believe you will not be surprised to discover that Solzhenitsyn shared Chesterton's creed of Distributism, even though Solzhenitsyn called it by other names. Take, for

'I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea...; therefore I have imagined that the main business of man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world - that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in the terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.'

G.K. Chesterton, 'Introduction,' *The Defendant* (1901)

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instance, the visionary agrarianism in Solzhenitsyn's *Letter to Soviet Leaders* (1974):

'How fond our progressive publicists were, both before and after the revolution, of ridiculing those *retrogrades* . . . who called upon us to cherish and have pity on our past, even on the most god-forsaken hamlet with a couple of hovels. . . who called upon us to keep horses even after the advent of the motor car, not to abandon small factories for enormous plants and combines, not to discard organic manure in favour of chemical fertilizers, not to mass by the millions in cities, not to clamber on top of one another in multi-storey blocks.'

Condemning 'the dreamers of the Enlightenment' for believing in an unsustainable 'progress', he called the 'progressive' dream, 'an insane, ill-considered, furious dash into a blind alley.'

Against the huge conurbations, Solzhenitsyn contra-posed life in the 'old towns—towns made for people, horses, dogs . . . towns which were humane, friendly, cosy places, where the air was always clean. . . An economy of non-giantism with small-scale though highly developed technology will not only allow for but will necessitate the building of new towns of the old type.'

There are clearly remarkable parallels between the ideas set forth in Solzhenitsyn's *Letter to Soviet Leaders* and the ideas espoused by Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc fifty years earlier. In another essay written shortly before his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1974, Solzhenitsyn summed up the distributist creed with succinct brilliance:

'The peasant masses longed for *land* and if this in a certain sense means freedom and wealth, in another (and more important) sense it means obligation, in yet another (and its highest) sense it means a mystical tie with the world and a feeling of personal worth.' (From *Under the Rubble*, 1975).

Years later, after the fall of communism that he had always prophesied, he wrote a book entitled *Rebuilding Russia* (1991), in which he championed small government against the centralizing encroachments of Big Brother:

'All the failings noted earlier would rarely apply to democracies of small areas – mid-sized towns, small settlements, groups or villages, or areas up to the size of a county. Only in areas of this size can voters have confidence in their choice of candidates since they will be familiar with them both in terms of their effectiveness in practical matters and in terms of their moral qualities. At this level phony reputations do not hold up, nor would a candidate be helped by empty rhetoric or party sponsorship. . .

'Without properly constituted local self-government there can be no stable or prosperous life, and the very concept of civic freedom loses all meaning.'

During my meeting with Solzhenitsyn, I commented on the way in which his ideas dovetailed with those of E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful* (1973). He replied that he had come to the same conclusions as Schumacher at about the same time, though independently. It could be stated with equal accuracy that Solzhenitsyn's ideas also dovetail with the Distributism of Chesterton and Belloc.

Great minds do indeed think alike! ■

As Joseph Pearce makes clear, the comparison between Chesterton and Solzhenitsyn extends to their religious understanding of human beings, not just to the political and social philosophy they share. These two quotations illustrate their common insight into human nature.

Solzhenitsyn

'It was granted me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good.'

'Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an uprooted small corner of evil. Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the evil inside a human being (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.'

Roger Scruton quoting Solzhenitsyn from *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974) – in an article, 'Alexander Solzhenitsyn: the line within' *Open Democracy*, 7 August 2008 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/alexander-solzhenitsyn-the-line-within>)

Chesterton

There is one little defect about Man, the image of God, the wonder of the world and the paragon of animals; that he is not to be trusted. If you identify him with some ideal, which you choose to think is his inmost nature or his only goal, the day will come when he will suddenly seem to you a traitor.' ('My Six Conversions II: When the World Turned Back,' in G.K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows* (1935))



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So Sayers the Lord - Recovering a Religious Play

by Richard Egan

Richard Egan (pictured), a long-time member of the Australian Chesterton Society, has wide intellectual interests which include the English playwright and poet, Dorothy Sayers. Here he explores the background and plot of her first religious play, *The Zeal of Thy House*. By profession, Richard is a researcher whose current focus is on euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) was a co-founder with G.K. Chesterton of the Detection Club. He was its inaugural president (1930-1936), and she its third (1949-1957).

Initiation into the Club involved an elaborate but amusing ceremony which began with an oath: *"Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God?"*

Like Chesterton, Sayers used a broad range of literary forms to express her ideas, including twelve detective novels (eleven featuring her aristocratic detective Lord Peter Wimsey); poems; essays; literary criticisms; translations - most notably of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; and plays, including six religious dramas, the first of which was *The Zeal of Thy House* (1937).

In 1928, George Bell, Dean of Canterbury Cathedral and later Bishop of Chichester, initiated an annual series of religious plays to be performed in the Cathedral Chapter House as part of the Canterbury Festival. The first in the series was *The Coming of Christ* by John Masefield (later Poet Laureate from 1930-1967). The best known of the series is *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) by T.S. Eliot.

Charles Williams (1886-1945) was then overseeing for Oxford University Press the publication of a biography of Randall Davidson (Archbishop of Canterbury from 1903-1928), written by George Bell. After meeting Williams, Bell arranged for him to be commissioned to write the play for the 1936 Festival. *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* was a success - described as a "hurricane" that "silenced both approval and censure into acknowledgement of greatness".

Williams had met Sayers in 1934 after favourably reviewing her Wimsey detective novel, *The Nine Tailors*, as "a marvellous book of high imagination". He recommended that she be commissioned to write the play for the 1937 Festival. (We can also thank Williams for his extraordinary work of Dante criticism, *The Figure of Beatrice*, which led Sayers into learning Italian so she could translate the *Divine Comedy*.)

Sayers chose to write about one of the pioneer architects of Gothic, William of Sens, who was commissioned by the

Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral to rebuild the choir of the Cathedral which was destroyed in a fire in 1174. As recounted by a contemporary monk, Gervase, William was chosen because he was "a workman most skillful in both wood and stone," with "a lively genius and good reputation". In 1178, with the work not yet completed, William was severely injured in a fifty foot fall. Gervase comments that the fall may have been due to "the vengeance of God—or the spite of the devil", hinting that William, aware of his genius, embodied the cardinal sin of pride.

Sayers' play is an exploration of the artist as an imitator of the divine Trinity in the creative enterprise as well as of fundamental doctrines such as sin and redemption. In a key passage on the role of an artist or craftsman, one of the monks, Theodatus, says (*sullenly* according to Sayers' stage direction):

*We could do better without William's craft
In more ways than in one. I would rather have
A worse-built church with a more virtuous builder.*

The Prior is having none of this:

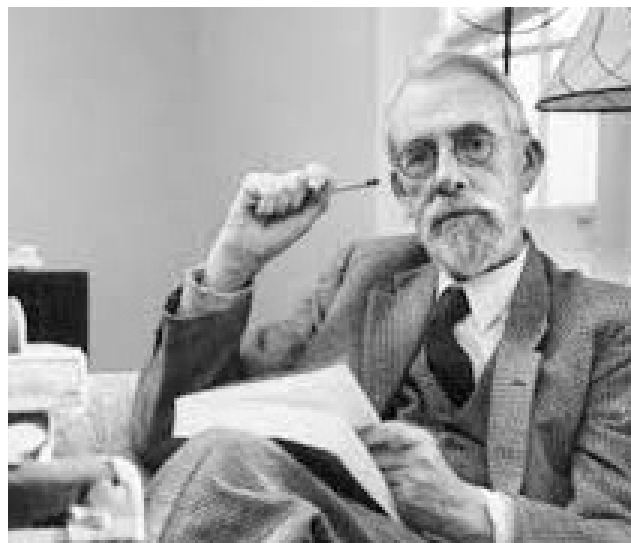
*My son,
Will you not let God manage His own business?
He was a carpenter, and knows His trade
Better, perhaps, than we do, having had
Some centuries of experience;
...
For God founded His Church, not upon John ... but Peter;
Peter the liar, Peter the coward, Peter
The rock, the common man. John was all gold,
And gold is rare ... but Peter is the stone
Whereof the world is made. So stands the Church,
Stone upon stone, and Christ the corner-stone
Carved of the same stuff, common flesh and blood,
With you, and me, and Peter; and He can,
Being the alchemist's stone, the stone of Solomon,
Turn stone to gold, and purge the gold itself
From dross, till all is gold.*

All of Sayers' religious plays are currently in print. The 1937 American edition of *The Zeal of Thy House* is also available online at: <https://ia600302.us.archive.org/22/items/zealofthy-house012297mbp/zealofthyhouse012297mbp.pdf> ■

The Importance of Christopher Dawson

by David Daintree

A special irony marks the current interest in the thought of the English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson (1889-1970): he is more widely considered and celebrated in Australia, the continent furthest from his homeland, than in the land of his birth – and, indeed, of America, the country in which he spent his final active years. Two Australian associations are named in his honour, the Christopher Dawson Centre in Tasmania and the Christopher Dawson Society in Western Australia. In addition, he was a vital intellectual inspiration in the founding of Australia's first liberal arts institution, Campion College Australia.



Christopher Dawson in his study at Harvard University in the late 1950s

A special issue of an American scholarly journal, *The Political Science Reviewer* (Vol.XLI, No.2, 2017), has been devoted to Dawson. In this review, **David Daintree**, Director of the Dawson Centre in Tasmania, reflects on Dawson's importance as a thinker and writer for our time.

Admirers of Christopher Dawson (am I right, or merely fond, in saying that their number appears to be increasing?) will delight in this collection of learned papers by several of his distinguished devotees.

The historian and philosopher Christopher Dawson, an Anglican by upbringing and subsequent convert to Roman Catholicism, is emerging from relative obscurity for his prescient appreciation of the dangers of political dictatorship of both the left and the right. The whole world suffered, in varying degrees of closeness, from the eruption of Marxism in its many forms, and from the equally brutish manifestations of fascism in Europe and East Asia, but few apart from Dawson seem to have appreciated that the loss of religion lay at the root of these social disorders.

He saw clearly that religion, and chiefly the Christian religion, was the most powerful, possibly the only, prophylaxis against materialism and the politics spawned by it, and that this was so not only for ethical reasons but because Faith is bound up with that sense of the immanence of the Holy that uniquely puts mankind in perspective.

Needless to say, such an interpretation of the world's ills is hardly likely to enjoy widespread approval in our highly materialistic and secular western world, but many of us are coming round, and this anthology of papers in a special issue of the *Political Science Reviewer* will provide a boost!

The field of contributors is led by Joseph T. Stuart, who serves as guest editor. (Dr Stuart contributed an article on Dawson to the Summer 2017 issue of *The Defendant*.) He provides a succinct introduction and overview of the collection, but also includes a very good piece of his own, *Christopher Dawson and Political Religion*. Thoughtfully placed

immediately after Stuart's introduction is a background study of Dawson entitled *The Life and Times of Christopher Dawson* by Julian Scott, Dawson's own grandson and literary executor. Not every reader will be *au fait* with Dawson and an overview such as Scott's will ease the path of many.

After the introduction and biography follow various contributions, three of which address a number of Dawson's seminal works, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, *The Crisis of Western Education* and *Religion and Culture*. The so-called 'New Atheism' is the focus of a paper by Gerald Russello, while another, by Lee Trepanier, compares the views of Dawson and Eric Voegelin. Mattei Ion Radu looks at Dawson's judgment of Communism and asks the question *How Much Did He Get Right?* A bonus that readers will appreciate to conclude the collection is a short piece by Dawson himself, *The Claims of Politics*, written in 1939, and annotated by the editor. There could be no clearer demonstration, in six short pages, of Dawson's cultural and political acumen.

As I suggested at the outset, Dawson's reputation appears to be gaining ground and the number of thinking people with no religious affiliation appears to be growing larger. There can be no true progress without religion: that is Dawson's fundamental claim. Most of the world's people, particularly in the affluent West, would still dismiss it as simply outrageous and impertinent, an affront to the dignity of man. But the paradox is that the dignity of man can only be recognized in the acknowledgement of his dependency on God. Man may indeed be 'the measure of all things', as Protagoras asserted, but God became man and that changes everything.

I warmly recommend this volume of essays to believers, who will find solace in it, and to unbelievers for whom it could be an eye-opening revelation! ■

The Australian Chesterton Society - Celebrating

by Karl Schmude

The 100th issue of *The Defendant* newsletter coincides nicely with the 25th anniversary of the Australian Chesterton Society.

The inaugural issue of *The Defendant* (Vol.1 No.1, as it was buoyantly dated) appeared as a 'Christmas/New Year 1993-94' edition. It reported on the birth of what was initially the G.K. Chesterton Society of WA, which took place officially on November 8, 1993 at the University of Notre Dame Australia in Fremantle.

The issue featured messages of congratulations from various representatives of an international Chesterton revival, including Fr Ian Boyd, founding editor of *The Chesterton Review*, and Aidan Mackey, founder of the Chesterton Study Centre in England.

The emergence of a Chesterton Society in Australia was the splendid initiative of the late Tony Evans. Tony was a writer and broadcaster who had migrated from England in 1961 and worked until 1989 in various roles for ABC radio and

television in WA. He served as the Society's President throughout its early years, arranging annual lectures by such distinguished speakers as Fr Paul Stenhouse, Editor of *Annals Australasia*, Dr Pierre Ryckmans and Dr Race Mathews, and various local events for discussion - and moderate imbibing.

In October 2000, Tony organised a national conference at the monastery town of New Norcia (WA), where the state-based society assumed its identity as the Australian Chesterton Society. Conferences have since been held regularly - most recently at Campion College in Sydney.

The Society has continued to grow, and expanded its links with Chesterton societies worldwide. Its inspiration might be summed up in the noble words of T.S. Eliot - that Chesterton 'leaves behind a permanent claim upon our loyalty, to see that the work that he did in his time is continued in ours.'

It is a commission - and a call to arms - that represent an abiding commitment.



Dale Ahlquist

Congratulations to the Australian Chesterton Society from "The Other ACS" on the 100th issue of *The Defendant*. We have always enjoyed the Chestertonian camaraderie that extends all the way around the world, but we

especially relish that delightful newsletter packed full with such bounty of news, sparkling reflections, unearthed treasure, and GKC! I am looking forward to the next 100 issues.

Dale Ahlquist is President of the American Chesterton Society and publisher of the Society's regular magazine, *Gilbert*. He is the author of several books on Chesterton, the host of an EWTN TV series on Chesterton, *The Apostle of Common Sense*, and co-founder of a network of Chesterton schools throughout America.



Nancy Brown

The Australian Chesterton Society—what I fondly think of as the other ACS—is to be proudly commended for 25 years of activity and for producing 100 issues of *The Defendant*. The Society has kept the memory of G.K. Chesterton alive in Australia at a time when Australia, along with most of the world, desperately needs him.

Ever since my mentor and boss Dale Ahlquist was invited to Australia in 2004, I've been aware of the ACS and have known of its good work in a place so remote I could not imagine seeing it. But if Dale Ahlquist, Fr. Ian Boyd and Thomas Storck could make the trip, then so could I.

If the Aussies are putting on a Chesterton conference, why not travel there? And so I did visit Sydney in October of 2018 and felt at home with the Aussie Chestertonians, because

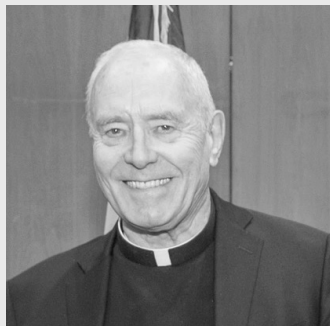
Chestertonians share many things in common: joy, faith, family, and common sense.

Our ACS/ACS connections are strengthening. The American Chesterton Society has enjoyed the writings of Tony Evans, your founder; Race Mathews, the Distributist writer; and Karl Schmude, the current ACS President, in *Gilbert!* Magazine.

Tony Evans' description of the Bedford Park neighbourhood in London was helpful to me as I wrote the biography of Frances Chesterton. The Americans put on a great annual conference, which Karl and Virginia Schmude have attended and can attest to its goodness, and I invite you all to attend, too. [The next conference will be held in Kansas City, Kansas, on August 1-3, 2019, on the theme, "The Future of the Family"]

May the ACS continue to prosper in joy, faith and friendship, and I wish you a Happy Birthday and Anniversary and All God's Blessings for Many More!

Nancy Brown is the biographer of Chesterton's wife, Frances. She gave two papers at the 2018 Australian Chesterton conference - one on Frances, the other on Father Brown, which can be viewed at: <http://chestertonaustralia.com/media.php>



Ian Boyd CSB

Greetings and warm congratulations to the Australian Chesterton Society on its 25th birthday. Bringing the wisdom of the great and good Chesterton to Australian readers is an achievement that Chestertonians everywhere will want to celebrate.

The Defendant is a journal that never disappoints. As the editor of another Chesterton publication, I have to confess that my congratulations are tinged with a feeling of guilt. That feeling is owing to the fact that every issue of *The Chesterton Review* has been brightened by the pieces which I have borrowed from *The Defendant*.

There is also another personal reason for my interest in Australia. It has been twenty years since my visit to your country, and my memories of that visit remain as clear today as ever. No need to attempt to provide a list of the people who gave me so warm a welcome. Joseph and his wife Soonie Santamaria received me in Melbourne as a guest in their remarkable family. It was a special delight to meet Joseph's father, Bob Santamaria, whose contributions to the Catholic intellectual life of Australia are legionary.

The hospitality Hilary Hayes provided was another delight. Hilary had been the distributor of *The Chesterton Review* to its readers across Australia. A lawyer who combined his practice of the law with a love of farming gave a new meaning to what Chestertonians call the Distributist way of life.

Before travelling to Sydney, I visited the home of Karl Schmude in Armidale. Karl was someone whose writing was well known to me, although we were meeting each other for the first time. I felt that it was a meeting of old friends.

My Australian travels also included a visit to Perth (WA) where I visited a nearby town in which a Benedictine abbot had created a community to teach aboriginal people the arts of self-support. That enterprise was a fulfilment of what Chesterton meant by his social philosophy of Distributism. It was a fitting end to my Australian travels.

For Chestertonians worldwide, perhaps the most important Australian writers are Karl Schmude and Race Mathews – Karl, the long-time President of the Australian Chesterton Society and a frequent contributor to *The Chesterton Review*, and Race, a well known political figure and an acute critic, whose writings on the contemporary relevance of Distributism have been an immense contribution to the Chesterton project.

As a Canadian, I was conscious of the fact that Canada and Australia belong to the same British Commonwealth. Having a chance to visit Australia gave me a better sense of what membership in that commonwealth meant, but more importantly it gave me an excellent example of what a Chestertonian fellowship means.

Fr Ian Boyd, a Basilian priest originally from Saskatchewan, Canada, is the founder and editor of the international journal, *The Chesterton Review*, published since 1974, and President of the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture at Seton Hall University in New Jersey (USA).



David Daintree

Warmest congratulations to the Australian Chesterton Society for a quarter of a century of achievement!

My own acquaintance with Chesterton goes back many decades to a time when I was deeply persuaded by *Orthodoxy* and entranced

by *The Man who was Thursday*. Like Chesterton I had an Anglican background, a circumstance that undoubtedly contributed to my appreciation of him as a remote but

kindly kindred spirit. His mentality and his writing are, in modern parlance, well within my comfort zone.

I had the pleasure of hosting ACS annual conferences at Campion College during my presidency. I still try to go to the conference each year, because I know that I will meet interesting people and enjoy the stimulus and excitement of lively discussion, always tinged with wit. Paradox and wit – what a combination! Nobody ever did it better than Chesterton, and the good old Australian Chesterton Society worthily upholds the honour due to him. Floreat semper!

David Daintree is Director of the Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies in Tasmania (www.dawsoncentre.org), and previously President of Campion College (2008-2012).

‘The [British] Empire took a magnificent revenge, for it was in the “Suburbs of England” that Distributism was first taken seriously and used as practical politics. . . [T]he main Distributist impact has been felt in the [United] States, in Canada and in Australia.’

(Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1944, p.445)



Piers Paul Read

Throughout my life as a Catholic writer and journalist, I have felt the spirit of G.K. Chesterton hovering over me like that of an auxiliary guardian angel. (It's possible that some Australian Chestertonians share this sense of spiritual guardianship. Karl Schmude reminded

me recently that in Western Australia, the birthplace of the Australian Chesterton Society, the Campion Society in the 1930s was named the Chesterton Club.)

St. Joseph's nursing home in Beaconsfield where I was born had been opened by Chesterton, the town's most distinguished resident; Monsignor Smith, who baptised me, had earlier given Chesterton the last rites. Later, as an adult, I lived for twenty-five years in Kensington not far from his home in Warwick Gardens; and later moved west to the borders of Chiswick, a short walk from the childhood home of his wife Frances in Bedford Park.



THE MISOGYNIST
PIERS PAUL READ
Illustration by the author, 1999. The book is a collection of essays on Chesterton and his influence on modern thought.

In his novel *The Misogynist* (2010), Piers Paul Read discusses the friendship between the main character, Geoffrey Jomier, who epitomises secularised Western man, and his Catholic friend, Theodor Tate:

'Jomier and Theo had rooms on the same staircase in their first year at Oxford. . . . They had argued about religion. They still argue about religion. The position of neither has changed. Theo would like to convert Jomier and Jomier

I have learned much from his writing, sheltering as it were, when it came to Catholic apologetics, beneath the oak of his impregnable reasoning and common sense. At times like T.S. Eliot, I have found that that Chesterton's style could be 'exasperating to the last point of endurance': even Chesterton's biographer, Ian Ker, acknowledges that his 'generous use of paradox' can be irritating. However, Chesterton's Distributist theories, which might once have seemed cranky, have gained a relevance and credibility in the face of the rampant injustice of today's globalisation.

Overall, there is such a cornucopia of wit, learning and common sense in Chesterton's writings that one's appetite is never sated. And for Catholics today, struggling in an increasingly intolerant secular culture, his polemic with the atheists of his day - sharper minded than the atheists in ours - is an armoury always at hand.

Piers Paul Read is an award-winning English author who visited Australia for a lecture tour in 1999 at the invitation of the Campion Fellowship, a successor to the Campion Society. He has published more than fifteen novels, a number of which have been translated to the screen, and various works of non-fiction, most famously *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors* (1974).

to convert Theo. But convert him to what? Jomier is aware that his agnosticism is a spongy alternative to Theo's clear-cut Christian beliefs; but he feels in tune with the zeitgeist whereas Theo is not. . . . Is Theo a reincarnation of G.K. Chesterton? Or Hilaire Belloc? Theo admires both writers though he is embarrassed by some of the things Belloc said about the Jews.

'Jomier tells Theo that his views are anachronistic; Theo retorts, quoting Chesterton, that the great advantage of Catholicism is that it saves a man from being a child of his time.'



Thomas Storck

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Australian Chesterton Society, two things come clearly to my mind. First, on a personal note, are my fond memories of my short but very enjoyable visit to Australia to speak at your annual meeting in 2008.

The graciousness which I experienced from everyone, in particular from Karl Schmude and his wife Virginia, and the conversations which the speakers and participants had over breakfast and dinner at our motel, were high points.

Secondly, it is highly gratifying that in this age of so many diverse ideas, a thinker of such fundamental importance as GK Chesterton continues to exercise influence.

Chesterton, of course, has many valuable points as a thinker. But what impresses itself on me most right now is the fact that he can take us back before and behind, as it were, many of the modernist/postmodernist controversies, and ground us in a philosophy of reality.

Orthodoxy, although written over 100 years ago, addresses many questions that are still matters of lively debate.

Chesterton's approach to reality as something inherently exciting, but which we are too apt to take for granted, can be an effective method of undermining the arguments of the New Atheists, who have emptied reality of all meaning by their reductionist materialism, which is as tedious as it is false.

His biography of St. Thomas Aquinas is outstanding here, as it exemplifies philosophy grounded in reality, something that used to be taken for granted among Catholic intellectuals, but sadly is often no longer the case. Moreover, this same common sense approach is used again and again in his many essays, and throws light on the most highly diverse subjects.

Of his apologetic works, probably *The Everlasting Man* continues to have the most value. This is because, I think, we often lose sight of the forest while examining the trees - that is, we lost sight of the big picture, and GKC is nothing if not a big-picture thinker!

So, my hearty congratulations and best wishes for the continuing activity of your society. May you have an influence on Australian cultural life commensurate with the enduring value of Chesterton's thought.

Thomas Storck is an American author of books and articles on Catholic social teaching and Catholic culture and history, most recently *An Economics of Justice & Charity*. An archive of his work can be found at thomasstorck.org.



Geir Hasnes

There is no doubt that Chesterton was widely read in Australia. His books arrived there regularly, as testified by their availability today from Australian antiquarian book-sellers, and his journalism was eagerly reproduced in Australian newspapers, as can be seen by consulting

the internet Trove of the scanned newspapers in the National Library of Australia.

What really brings headaches to the bibliographer is whether any of these contributions to Australian newspapers was original from Chesterton's hand. With the help of American Chestertonian John Holland, I was able to find texts published by a small Australian monthly magazine, *Catholic Fireside*, founded in 1934 in Sydney, and obviously eager to promote the writings of great Catholics like Chesterton and Belloc.

John is in charge of digitizing all of Chesterton's text for future availability through the American Chesterton Society, a project led by their President Dale Ahlquist, and I followed a clue I had got from the Chesterton catalogue author Dr. Richard Christophers at the British Library. Chesterton's secretary Dorothy Collins had sent an article to the *Catholic Fireside*, and naturally I wanted to find out whether this was an original article for the magazine.

It turned out that, from July 1934 to November 1935, the magazine published 11 articles by Chesterton. All were

reprints from other sources, notably *G. K.'s Weekly*. Then I learned that Dorothy Collins sold articles all over the world, even though they had been printed in England already.

There are probably thousands of Chesterton articles in the Trove, and many of them were reprints of English articles. There is no list of Chesterton articles in various places, and I have up to now found his contributions in more than 400 newspapers, magazines and journals. Anyone could ask Chesterton for a contribution for whatever worthy cause, be it coalminers on strike or the newest poet's association.

There must also have been Chestertonians in Australia for quite some time. While I was going through all kinds of Chesterton items in Aidan's Mackey's huge office on the ground floor of his home in Bedford 30 years ago, when I first started this quest for Chesterton, I found four items originating in Australia, all published at about the same time. Joseph McLoone of Melbourne made a collection of essays for the centenary in 1974: *A Primer of Chesterton Essays*, and P. P. Kelly from Kangaroo Island made a collection of passages called: *G. K. C. Saw. A Selection of Insights from the Writings of G. K. Chesterton* the year after. Sister M. Laurence, OP, from Osborne Park also made an undated *Biographical Sketch of G. K. Chesterton and an Anthology of His Various Works* at about that time, and 'A Centenary Essay' on *The Man Who Was Chesterton* was written by none the less than Karl G. Schmude and published by the Catholic Truth Society in Melbourne, also in 1974.

Geir Hasnes is a Norwegian research scientist who has been working for many years on a comprehensive bibliography of Chesterton's works. Any information for Geir on Australian Chesterton publications could be sent to him via the editor of *The Defendant*.



Tom Susanka

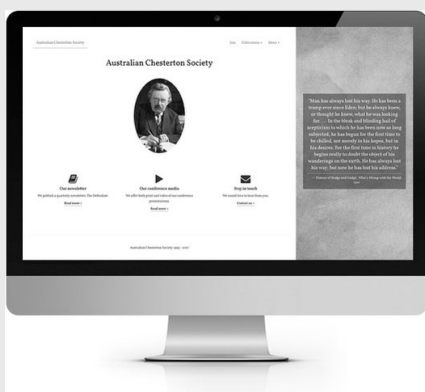
Thomas Aquinas College heartily congratulates the Australian Chesterton Society on the 25th anniversary of its auspicious founding... and on the 100th issue of *The Defendant*!

Those of us here at Thomas Aquinas, Campion College's northerly sister school, who have enjoyed the Society's excellent newsletters over the years find each number

helps meet our need of Chestertonian thought – Catholic, apologetical, witty, poetic, unapologetical, catholic – all of which *The Defendant* is.

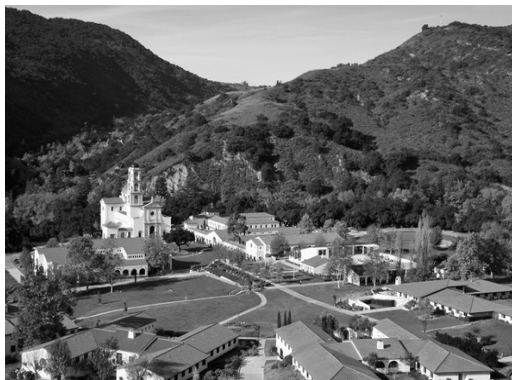
I consider my early introduction to the great man's writing to be an abiding blessing in my life, and I thank the Society for keeping Chesterton's legacy alive, well, and ready at hand for future young Chestertonians.

Tom Susanka has served in various leadership roles at Thomas Aquinas College, a Catholic liberal arts college in the city of Santa Paula close to Los Angeles. He has been a cherished adviser and friend of the Australian Chesterton Society and Campion College for many years.



<http://chestertonaustralia.com/>

The Australian Chesterton Society website, developed by Marty Schmude in 2016, is regularly updated. It provides access to past issues of *The Defendant* newsletter as well as to the papers (in both textual and video forms) given at recent Chesterton conferences at Campion College in Sydney.



From the Roof of the Arctic

by Tom Susanka

*The accidental discovery of Chesterton - a quotation in an article or journal, a book sighted in a second-hand bookshop - has often led to an enduring interest. **Tom Susanka** of California's Thomas Aquinas College (pictured) recalls his early discovery of Chesterton, and reflects on the deeper meanings it has held for him over the years.*

Of Chesterton's many self-portraits, two were riveted into my youthful imagination from the moment I caught sight of them, side-by-side in a journal, the name of which has since fallen out of my aging memory.

Here are two others which could just as well enjoy the captions he gave their cousins:

Myself as I wish I were.

Myself as I am.

In those self-effacing images of his humour, humility, and high-mindedness, Chesterton gave us with characteristic generosity the golden chapter of his autobiography.

Therein we see his poetry and wit, his gift for the middle term and the metaphor, his rhetoric and his invitation to set out like brothers and men on a quest for truth, his child's absorption in the wonderful truth that the world is sensible, mythical, rational, mysterious, and governed by a God who raises us from comedy to knighthood and onwards and upwards to Himself.

That chapter, or rather, that life of Chesterton, with all its human art, luminous wisdom and fiery charity, does not really conclude even with its final sentence: the Kingdom of God is here, already among us. So, Chesterton reminds us, is the City of Man, and of this city we also are citizens with present duties and adventures. . .and expectations of suffering and martyrdom!

As to martyrdom, the extraordinary liveliness of the Australian Chesterton Society and its already long-lived

newsletter, *The Defendant*, give to the unpracticed eye little evidence of suffering, let alone of extinction.

Those of us whose roof is the Arctic and in whose imaginations Antarcticans walk upside down can judge of the sufferings only by the experience everybody has, that every great good is accompanied by great suffering.

Civilised fellowship

There has no doubt been much to bear and survive in establishing and sustaining the Australian Chesterton Society over its 25 years, and in gathering and publishing the essays, poetry, book reviews, speeches and commentaries of so many gifted men and women of letters and political insight in the 100 numbers of *The Defendant*. But those of us who can enjoy the Society's spirited intellectual colloquy – and who are edified and instructed by it principally through our subscription to *The Defendant* – see not so much suffering as civilized fellowship and the great fun it is to be Chestertonian, and this at a time when learning, teaching and even courtesy are often, at least up here under Ursa Major, despaired of.

May you be of good cheer. You cannot know what great fruit your Society will bear for civilization and the Church – in all its members, arts, schools, clergy, governors and citizens – nor how important and heartening an example you are in your joys in the fray.

But fruitful, important and heartening you very certainly are and, God willing, will long be. May the Australian Chesterton Society be blessed, and may its members endure only as much suffering as will make each one perfect! ■

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Chesterton and Science

by Garry Nieuwkamp

Chesterton was born in an era of remarkable scientific discoveries and advances. Garry Nieuwkamp, a doctor on the NSW Central Coast, has made a careful and comprehensive study of Chesterton's views on science, and reports his findings in this special article for The Defendant.

There is a scene towards the end of the National Geographic television series *Genius*, based on the life of Albert Einstein, where the pathologist who had performed a post-mortem on the body of Einstein was in discussion with Einstein's son, Hans Albert.

Perched on a nearby table is a large specimen bottle containing the preserved brain of the world's greatest scientist. Einstein's son is determined that the brain should be cremated along with the body. The pathologist is equally concerned this should not happen. The pathologist explains: "Before us is your father's last great gift to the world." Presumably the pathologist believed that an examination of Einstein's brain would do for the field of neurobiology what Einstein's theories did for humanity's understanding of the cosmos. Einstein's son responds: "Do what you will with the brain but if you think you can comprehend who my father was or why he was so brilliant by looking at his brain under a microscope you are sorely mistaken. It is just a thing." That, he says pointing to the brain on the table, "is not the man."

Hans Albert's response to the pathologist has an echo of familiarity for readers of Chesterton. It is a response that Chesterton himself could have given.

Chesterton was born in 1874 into a world undergoing seismic changes. The telephone, the phonograph and the electric light were invented during his childhood and adolescence. Impressionism was challenging the art world, while photography was pushing 'art' in new directions. Kraepelin and Freud were exposing and decoding the unconscious. Woman's rights were being discussed. *Das Kapital* had been published in the previous decade. The American Civil War was a recent memory. The industrialization of agriculture was creating massive population movements. Discoveries in physics and chemistry appeared to have decoded the book of nature.

Joseph Lister was evangelizing the medical profession by pioneering antiseptic surgery. Koch had discovered the organisms causing anthrax, tuberculosis and cholera by the time Chesterton was winning poetry prizes at his London school, St Paul's. Mendel had provided the groundwork for the understanding of heredity.

Only four years had passed since the close of Vatican I, and Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* was not far off. The tsunami of Darwinism was rising to provide the intellectual latticework on which the eugenics movement would ultimately be built.

Despite Chesterton's vast output, it is not possible to stray for very long in his work before his awareness of these scientific breakthroughs is revealed. He belonged to the generation that would witness the millennial-long relationship between man and horse giving way to automation. We cannot begin to imagine how massively world-altering the replacement of the horse was to become. Whole industries disappeared, while new ones took their place.

Chesterton's generation also observed a young upstart, working out of the Federal Office for Intellectual Property in Bern, overthrow the verities of Newtonian physics, and replace them with something the ordinary citizen marveled at, but could not understand. Einstein remains, even for our generation, a pop icon.

Scientific magisterium

So the triumph of science was obvious to all of Chesterton's generation and it was hard not to see it other than as the language of success and progressivism and knowledge.

Chesterton was not immune to the wonder and awe of scientific discoveries. But he was sufficiently astute - and intellectually humble - to recognize over-reach and arrogance in those making claims for science.

He had a low threshold for detecting pseudo-science, and responded critically to those supporters of the 'scientific magisterium' (to use the term of the American scientist Stephen Jay Gould) when they sought to extend the scope of science beyond its proper domain of knowledge, or to deny the existence of the explanatory alternative of the religious domain.

As Chesterton warned:

'When men of science (or, more often, men who talk about science) speak of studying history or human society scientifically they always forget that there are two quite distinct questions involved. It may be that certain facts of the body go with certain facts of the soul, but it by no means follows that a grasp of such facts of the body goes with a grasp of the things of the soul.' ('A Criminal Head,' in *Alarms and Discursions*, 1910).

The scientist has one foot on the ground and with the other is stepping into Efland. Or more often than not, the material and the transcendent are elided. 'They know everything about biology, but almost nothing about life.' ('A Criminal Head').

For Chesterton, it was not a question of rationality versus mysticism. The question, rather, was 'between mysticism and madness. For mysticism, and mysticism alone, has kept man sane from the beginning of the world. All the straight roads of logic lead to some Bedlam, or Anarchism or to passive obedience, to treating the universe as a clockwork of matter or else as a delusion of mind.' ('Why I Believe in Christianity,' 1904 - <https://www.chesterton.org/why-i-believe-in-christianity/>)

And mysticism does not imply that a mind can be split in two, as the 13th century philosopher Siger of Brabant would have us believe; that the scientific truth of the natural world can contradict the religious truth of the supernatural world, as though we have two minds, 'with one of which

he must entirely believe and with the other may utterly disbelieve.' (*St Thomas Aquinas*, 1933).

The Church cannot be right theologically and wrong scientifically. Faith and reason, in the words of John Paul II, 'are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.' (*Fides et Ratio*, 1998). The scientist advances to the very edge of thinking, and believes that ultimate truth has been discovered within its border. It is also an ultimate truth that the scientist believes is immune to ultimate judgment.

By the mid-20th century, man with the help of the scientist had perfected the art of killing in great numbers. God was dead and the tyrant now ruled. The theologian, like the scientist, sees the 'white and solid road and the worthy beginning of the life of man', as Chesterton explained in his autobiography, but does not go astray from it in self-deception.

The further a scientist moves away from the laboratory, the more care should be taken with the claims that are made.

In the *Nichomachean Ethics* (Book 1, Ch.3), Aristotle notes it is the mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject matter being examined permits. The same precision is not to be sought in all subjects, any more than in the works of craftsmanship. Consequently, the further a scientist moves away from the laboratory, the more care should be taken with the claims that are made.

Chesterton seemed to be familiar with this warning. When he reflected on Darwinian discourse, he noted an evidentiary gap. 'There is hardly enough evidence to be even evidential. While most science moves in a sort of curve, being constantly corrected by new evidence, this science flies off into space in a straight line uncorrected by anything.' (*The Everlasting Man* (1925))

In response, the Darwinian enthusiast clutches a promissory note in the certitude of future discoveries - like 'a primitive man clutched his fragment of flint.' He fills in the evidentiary gap, the missing evidence, with the patois of science; the Missing Link because the subject matter does not allow of any greater precision.

Science and scientism

It would be false to assume, based on Chesterton's criticisms of Darwinism, that he was anti-science or even anti-evolution. He strikes the reader as being far too curious to dismiss science out of hand.

Of creationists, he believes their impatience meant 'we have a series of hypotheses so hasty that they may well be called fancies.' It is this same curiosity and sense of wonder that has immunized him against scientism's materialist dogmatism. 'I am not arguing with the scientist who explains the elephant,' writes Chesterton, 'but only with the sophist who explains it away.' (*The Everlasting Man*)

Like Syme in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton believed that scientism leaves the more interesting drama of the cosmos unexplained.

"Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face?

"If we could only get around in front," cries Syme. But there is no 'in front,' says the materialist; only the possibility of discovery of what is behind.'

Chesterton looks at a tree and thinks that we are in Eden still. The tree and the fields and the stars are the language through which God has communicated.

The scientist sees only the tree, only the back. The magic of the tree, the miracle of the tree, is not a language for which the scientist has a vocabulary. He has a scalpel and a microscope certainly, but he has become 'strangely separated from the mere news and scandal of flowers and birds.' ('A Defence of Useful Information,' in *The Defendant*, 1901)

Of course, the scientist may respond by agreeing with Samuel Johnson that 'wonder is the effect of ignorance'. Or he may disagree that the sense of wonder dissipates with conquests of the intellectual world. It is possible to wield the scalpel and yet stand back and be in awe of the image of earthrise taken during the 1968 Apollo 8 mission; or of those first images from Viking 1 looking into the northern hemisphere of the rock-strewn surface of Mars.

But for Chesterton, the cosmos is a theme park of which science is only *one* of the rides. Scientism's boast of intellectual superiority is a natural response to an intellectual incapacity.

While scientists may well acknowledge dual *magisteria*, *pace* Stephen Jay Gould, their certitude of the veracity of their own platform blinds some of them to what they only see as unreason and nonsense in the alternative platform.

Their own magisterium cannot answer all questions.

Wrong end of the microscope

'What everyone knows is that pumpkins produce pumpkins. What nobody knows is why they should not produce elephants and giraffes,' wrote Chesterton ('Miracles and Modern Civilisation,' 1904 - <https://www.chesterton.org/miracles-and-modern-civilisation/>).

The cosmos is a gift, and scientism's response to the gift is to deny there is a giver. Addressing his audience, Chesterton reminded them that the cosmos is a gift, and the correct response to the gift is humility and gratitude.

The pathologist with Einstein's pickled brain believed the brain was Einstein's last great gift to the world. His scientific credentials and instruments would answer the unanswerable.

'You're looking through the wrong end of the microscope,' Chesterton would say. ■



Comparing the Clues: Philip Trent And Father Brown

by John Young

A childhood friend of Chesterton's was E.C. Bentley. Among their many common interests was detective fiction, and Bentley's best known work was *Trent's Last Case* (1913). **John Young**, who has written authoritatively in the past on the *Father Brown* stories, analyses the content and significance of Bentley's novel.

"The finest detective story of modern times." That was G.K Chesterton's assessment of *Trent's last Case*, the famous detective story published in 1913. But maybe he exaggerated, because the author, E. C. Bentley, was his best friend, and had dedicated the novel to him.

But Agatha Christie was as generous in her assessment, regarding it as one of the three best detective stories ever written.

E. C. Bentley, in his 1940 autobiography, explains how the story came about. "It should be possible, I thought, to write a detective story in which the detective was recognisable as a human being and was not quite so much the 'heavy sleuth'... Why not show up the fallibility of the Holmesian method?"

Sherlock Holmes explains that method to Dr Watson in chapter two of the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes had written an article on observation and deduction (actually more like induction!). Not knowing who the author was or Holmes's profession, Watson said he would like to bet the author that he couldn't name the trades of all the travellers in a third class carriage on the Underground.

Holmes replies: "You would lose your money. As for the article, I wrote it myself."

Philip Trent searches carefully for footprints, fingerprints and other physical evidence, and he ascertains where all the suspects were at the relevant times. (Witnesses in detective stories always have a remarkably good memory for exactly where they were at relevant times.)

But Trent gets everything wrong, and could easily have sent an innocent man to the gallows. So he resolves to give up detective work.

Chesterton had already written many *Father Brown* stories. How do they compare with *Trent's Last Case*? There is no close resemblance. The two characters are very different, and Chesterton's philosophical and moral insights are largely absent from Bentley's story. But not entirely.

Bentley does stress the emptiness in the lives of millionaires who live just to make money. The dead man, Manderson, was

ruthless and self-centred, lacking normal human feelings. His secretary, Marlowe, says: "Most of the very rich men I met with in America had become so by virtue of abnormal greed, or abnormal industry, or abnormal personal force, or abnormal luck. None of them had remarkable intellects."

Then there is a comment by Mr Cupples, criticising one who would have "totally renounced all trust in the operations of human reason; an attitude which, while it is bad Christianity and also infernal nonsense, is oddly enough bad Positivism too, unless I misunderstand that system". That sounds like *Father Brown*.

Similarly, Mr Cupples deplores the fact that "the more we preoccupy ourselves with the bewildering complexity of the external apparatus which science places in our hands, the less vigour have we left for the development of the holier purposes of humanity within us."

In appearance Trent and *Father Brown* are widely dissimilar. Trent is a nice looking young man, while *Father Brown* "had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea", as Chesterton describes him in *The Blue Cross*.

Trent is an artist and part-time crime reporter. *Father Brown* is a priest who keeps accidentally getting involved in mysteries.

Their methods are also different. Trent works in the Sherlock Holmes tradition, and in doing so shows up its inadequacies. *Father Brown's* approach is psychological and moral. He sees into the human heart, including his own. He understands murderers because he has the humility to realise that he is himself capable of murder.

There is also an immaturity about Philip Trent, shown in the way he falls hopelessly in love with the dead man's widow, even though he scarcely knows her.

Trent's Last Case is a clever story with its fresh twist to the traditional "observation and deduction" mystery. Chesterton said: "the detective story differs from every story in this: that the reader is only happy if he feels a fool." Bentley takes it further: he makes the detective feel a fool. ■