

Chesterton and the Child

Fostering the Family Today



**A Collection of Papers presented at a conference of
the Australian Chesterton Society on October 20,
2018, at Campion College Australia, Sydney**

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INTRODUCTION

Karl Schmude

The year 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Australian Chesterton Society – and the holding of its thirteenth national conference.

The first conference took place in Western Australia in 2000 at the Benedictine Monastery in New Norcia outside of Perth. Subsequent gatherings were organized in Sydney (2001), Canberra (2002), and Melbourne (2004). Since 2007, they have been held at Campion College, beginning soon after Campion opened as Australia's first Catholic liberal arts college – in fact, our nation's first liberal arts college, Catholic or secular.

The names, **Chesterton** and **Campion**, have an important connection - in part, educationally, in that Chesterton can readily be seen as a 'one-man liberal arts program' – with his works in history, literature, philosophy and theology qualifying for inclusion in Campion's core curriculum – but, in part as well, in an historical sense. The coincidence of the two names finds an echo in Australian history, and particularly Australian Catholic history. In the 1930s, the Campion Society was created – as Australia's first lay association for Catholic adult education. The Society was launched in Melbourne by several university graduates and professional people, and it spread rapidly throughout Australia.

The name it adopted in Western Australia was the Chesterton Club. And it was in the West – in the city of Fremantle many years later (1993, in fact) - that the Australian Chesterton Society was born. This was due to the initiative of Mr Tony Evans, a most learned and accomplished Englishman who had migrated to Australia in the early 1960s. Very sadly, Tony died in England earlier this year, and I want to acknowledge with great gratitude his pioneering efforts in creating a Society to promote a knowledge and love of Chesterton in Australia.

The theme of the 2018 Conference was children and the family in the light of Chesterton's wisdom

The gathering featured five speakers, including the American author Nancy Brown, and attracted an audience of more than fifty people from various parts of Australia.

Chesterton's deep insights into family life were drawn from the joy of his own childhood and his subsequent marriage to Frances. He cherished a lifelong appreciation of playful entertainment, such as toy theatres, and recognised the importance of childhood literature, especially fairy tales, in forming the imagination in early life and sustaining a sense of wonder and reality in adult life.

Nancy Brown delivered two papers which are reproduced here. The first was on Frances (of whom she has written a definitive biography, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*), which highlighted her profound importance in Gilbert's life, both in coping with the practical demands of daily life and as an imaginative artist and writer in her own right.

A second talk focused on the Father Brown stories, which Nancy has adapted for younger readers in two volumes, *The Father Brown Reader* (2007) and *The Father Brown Reader II* (2010).

Other speakers were **Sophie York** and **David van Gend**, who looked at various critical issues affecting children and the family in contemporary Australia; **Karl Schmude**, who

explored the meaning of innocence in Chesterton's life and in his detective character, Father Brown; and **Gary Furnell**, who illustrated the historical significance of toy theatres in developing the imagination of children.

As part of these introductory remarks, I thought I'd report briefly on the cause for Chesterton's canonisation – and the stage it has reached (as of October 2018).

While no cause has officially been opened, the movement to advance Chesterton's canonisation began in the mid-1980s when a Canadian Cardinal, Emmet Carter, and a British historian, Professor J.J. Scarisbrick, exchanged views on the subject in the pages of the *Chesterton Review*. This prompted a group of prominent Argentinians to appeal to Rome that Chesterton be considered for canonisation. I had occasion to be invited to a Chesterton conference in Buenos Aires in 2006, and was amazed at the passionate interest in Chesterton in South America. Only later did I find out that the present pope, who was at that time Cardinal-Archbishop of Buenos Aires, chaired the conference organising committee, and authorised the prayer to be said worldwide for Chesterton's canonisation.

This first request by the Argentinian group did not succeed. It was turned down on the grounds there was no evidence of Chesterton's heroic sanctity. But subsequently, the Bishop of Northampton, the diocese in which Chesterton lived in the town of Beaconsfield, was requested to take up the cause, and he appointed a priest of the diocese, Fr John Udris, to carry out the initial work of investigation. (Chesterton himself may possibly have regarded Fr Udris as a latter-day Father Brown, returning to the scene of the crime!)

Not every admirer of Chesterton has been in favour of the cause. The *Chesterton Review*, for example, the scholarly journal founded by the Canadian priest, Fr Ian Boyd, in the centenary of Chesterton's birth (1974), was opposed. Fr Boyd believed it would have the unintended effect of limiting Chesterton's appeal, particularly among Protestant Christians and secular readers, who might balk at accepting Catholic truths if they were presented by a St_Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

Another objection was lodged by the seasoned London journalist, Melanie McDonagh, who found it hard to believe that any journalist could ever be knighted! McDonagh thought 'it's a contradiction in terms . . . it just doesn't go with the ttory.' Would the Father Brown stories be less appealing, she wondered, if they were billed as written by St Gilbert Keith Chesterton? A more serious impediment, McDonagh thought, was GK's views on Jews, which disqualified him as a candidate for sainthood. These views can be – and have been – countered, but finally, McDonagh argued, Chesterton would have hated the idea of being canonised. I myself think that he would have greeted such a prospect with volcanic laughter. But then, most saints would have – and, as McDonagh says, that is actually an argument *for* – in the sense of humility and an unshakable conviction of unworthiness – not *against*.

Fr Udris has completed his preliminary work and presented his report to the Bishop of Northampton. We await word on whether the cause will be opened.

Without doubt, Chesterton's own insight, that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most, could apply to Chesterton – and he would have relished the paradox described by the English writer K.V. Turley:

‘That someone so chaotic as Chesterton, renowned for forgetting his way from one side of Fleet Street to the other, should, in this age of moral chaos, be our guide and our hope in pointing us to a world better ordered is paradox indeed.’

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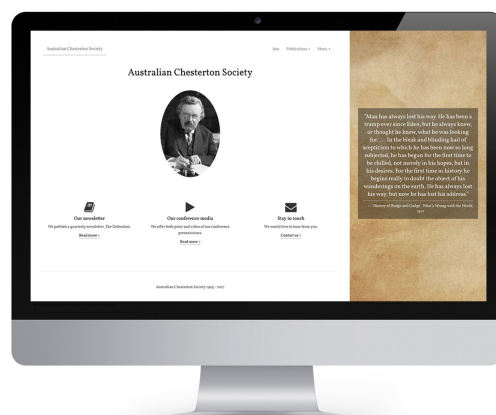
MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Australian Chesterton Society is available for A\$30.00 per annum. It includes a subscription to the Society’s quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*, and can be arranged by contacting the Society’s Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell (details above).

AUSTRALIAN CHESTERTON SOCIETY WEBSITE

All of the conference papers were video-recorded – by Michael Mendieta – and will be available on YouTube as well as on the Australian Chesterton website (<http://chestertonaustralia.com/media.php>), where the papers of previous conferences are also available, both in video and text form.

Website designed by Martin Schmude.



FRANCES – THE WOMAN WHO WAS CHESTERTON

Nancy Brown

Frances is an excellent example of Spiritual Motherhood and Gilbert is an excellent example of Spiritual Fatherhood, but together, paradoxically, they are an excellent example of Spiritual Childhood.

A few years ago, I was in the British Library, looking at folders of letters written to Frances Chesterton after her husband died. I had been given a pair of cotton gloves to wear as I held these original letters. I was very discretely photographing them, as I hadn't a lot of time, and the only other way to remember what each one said was to copy the letters by hand with a pencil on a pad of notepaper I'd brought. I thought photographing would be faster and I could get to more of the letters when suddenly a very large man tapped me on my shoulder and said:

"If you don't put that camera away, you will be kicked out of this library and asked to never return."

Needless to say, I put the camera away. And so I sat, reading the sympathy letters written to Frances, telling her how much Gilbert's writings had meant to the writer, how their family had converted because of his work, and how she didn't know them, but they'd been reading Chesterton for years and loved his work, and more.

It dawned on me, as I sat reading, that Frances had touched each one of these letters. She read them, and probably wept over them. I looked over my shoulder, wondering where the big scary man was. He wasn't near me. I slowly slipped off a glove, and gently touched one letter. I was almost sure, in that moment, that Frances and I connected.

I'd like to tell you everything I know about Frances Chesterton. But instead I'm going to give you a nice overview, to help you appreciate her value in Gilbert Chesterton's life.

And if you'd like to know more about her, please consult *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*.

I've been involved with the American Chesterton Society for almost 20 years. But I first came across Chesterton as a freshman in college. The book assigned was *Orthodoxy* and because I couldn't understand it in the two days I had to read it I hated it. So, I burned that first copy. Our whole class did. Embarrassing, but true.

20 years later, I picked up the same book, *Orthodoxy*, and loved it. I began reading everything I could by Chesterton and about Chesterton. I discovered he was married, and I wanted to know more about his wife, Frances. There was no more. No one knew anything about her. This person who was for 35 years the most important person in Gilbert Chesterton's life—no books, no articles, no websites. I did find a few obituaries, so let's start there. This one is good. It's written by a good friend of the G.K. Chesterton's named Edmund Clerihew Bentley—a longtime friend of the family.

If Frances Chesterton is best remembered as the wife of Gilbert Chesterton, it is certainly not in the sense of her having sunk her individuality in that of her renowned husband. It is

because theirs was so close and natural a union that those who knew them both could hardly think of them apart; and so it was for their thirty-five years of married life.

She was from the first a woman of firm personality and definite habits of mind, masked by gentleness and quietude of manner due, perhaps, to her serenity of religious conviction. G.K.C. met her first in a circle in which a loose culture and a vague soulfulness were the fashion; and what interested him in her was her active dislike of all such laxity and aimlessness.

She was practical, she was an organizer, she was, above all, a devout Anglo-Catholic, and her unparaded literary gift came out in the simple devotional poetry known only to her friends, and treasured by them. G.K.C., when he first met her, was a creedless pantheist; he became her convert: as he wrote in the dedication to the *Ballad of the White Horse*, "I bring these rhymes to you, who brought the Cross to me." After he was received into the Church of Rome many years later, it was at her own time and by her own way of thought that she followed him.

The basis of what he called his "indefensibly fortunate and happy life" were the devotion of his mother and the devotion of his wife. He passed directly from the care of the one to the care of the other. Frances Chesterton made his household and home, shared his every interest, was his right-hand in all his dealings with the world. They had in common that goodness which, as he wrote, "is God's last word." Limitless charity, steady pursuit of the Christian ideal: they had humour, the love of friends, delight in letters and art. It was a perfect companionship.¹

Reading that passage just led me to want to know more. Why? I thought Frances held clues for me. I thought she must know something about being the wife of an artistic and intellectual genius. The wife of an absentminded professor type. I wanted to learn from her. I wanted to be her friend. I wanted to have tea in the afternoon with her and discuss our faith, our families and our husbands.

So I began researching. My research took me from Chicago to London, and ultimately to Beaconsfield where Frances and Gilbert are buried in England.

I started at the beginning, how did they meet? To find that out, I had to find out more about the Blogg family. Frances Alice Blogg, before she was Frances Chesterton, was the first-born child of her family. Her mother Blanche Blogg came from an artistic family of silkscreen and stained-glass artists. Her father George Blogg was a diamond merchant.

Unfortunately, George Blogg, Frances's father, died of a heart attack in his 40s, when Frances was 14 years old. She had two younger sisters and a younger brother.

Frances's mother Blanche was an intellectual who read about new experimental methods of education. Frances and her sisters attended the very first kindergarten that operated in London by two German women who had introduced it. Then Frances attended a girls' high school and went on to study at college. In those days, it was rare for young ladies to attend college, but not impossible. Frances was learning to be a teacher. However, when she finished, rather than teach at a public school, she started teaching Sunday school and

¹ "Mrs. Frances Chesterton: G.K.C. and His Wife," *The Observer* (December 18, 1938): 9. E. C. Bentley met GKC at St. Paul's when they were but boys, and one of the original members of the Junior Debating Club, and author of the well-known work *Trent's Last Case*. He married Violet Boileau, of whom Chesterton wrote many teasing poems.

volunteering at a free school for poor children. She obtained a full-time position at the PNEU—the Parent’s National Educational Union, run by Charlotte Mason, and it was in fact Charlotte Mason who hired her and who was her boss. The PNEU was a new and growing organization that sought to help parents and governesses do a better job at teaching children at home. Many homeschoolers follow the Charlotte Mason philosophy even today.

Frances was the general secretary, taking notes, typing up minutes, keeping track of the lending library, organizing conferences, writing articles for their two publications, and giving speeches at their local chapters.

The Blogg family lived in Bedford Park, the first suburb of London, immortalized in Chesterton’s work *The Man Who Was Thursday*, but called “Saffron Park” in his novel. Into this neighborhood, all of the loose wheels of London rolled—the bohemians, the artists, the communists, the spiritualists and the socialists. The Blogg family loved living here among the ideas and doctrines and economic theories of Bedford Park.

However, Frances was a bit different even from her other family members. When Frances had gone to college at St Stephens, she’d met and befriended the Clewer Sisters of St. John, a traditional Anglo-Catholic order. Frances loved the life they led, and began praying regularly, reading the Bible, and admiring the saints and the liturgy. In other words, she began practicing the faith she’d been born into but had never before adopted.

Gilbert Chesterton said Frances was the first Christian he’d met who actually practised her faith, because Frances went to mass every Sunday, prayed and read her Bible, and lived the Christian ideal. So Frances stood out from the rest of the bohemians in Bedford Park. She had her philosophy of life, and she was prepared to defend it.

The young adults in the Blogg household decided to start a debate club in about 1894 called the IDK Debate Club.

You may recognize the name Lucian Oldershaw. Lucian was a good friend of Gilbert Chesterton’s at his school, St. Paul’s. Lucian was also a part of the Junior Debate Club, which was the group Chesterton started with his high school friends. In Chesterton’s club, they discussed literary works, politics, faith; and held debates, and wrote stories and poems. They eventually published a little newspaper called *The Debater*, where some of Chesterton’s first works were published. Lucian had been a part of the Junior Debate Club, but now in his early 20s, he was living in London, and working as a tutor.

Gilbert, meanwhile, was done with college, and had started reviewing books at Redways. He was also writing his own critical reviews and they were published anonymously. He was not famous—he was still an unknown. He was also writing poetry in his notebooks and of his future love, he wrote in his diary:

MADONNA MIA

About Her whom I have not yet met
I wonder what she is doing
Now, at this sunset hour,
Working perhaps, or playing, worrying or laughing,
Is she making tea, or singing a song, or writing, or praying, or reading?
Is she thoughtful, as I am thoughtful?
Is she looking now out of the window
As I am looking out of the window?²

Gilbert was ripe for love. And he had already had a few failed love affairs, which he wrote a lot of poetry and one book about, being young and full of emotion. He was 22 years of age.

Lucian had brushed elbows with the members of the Bedford Park group, and had been invited to the Blogg home for a debate one evening. There Lucian was introduced to Ethel Blogg, Frances's younger sister, and he thought she was beautiful. Ethel was the only blond of the sisters, and the only extrovert. She was lively and opinionated.

Lucian told his friend Gilbert about the house, the debate club, and the beautiful sisters. He had picked one sister out, he told Gilbert, but there were two more. The next Sunday afternoon when Lucian was invited to the Blogg's, he took Gilbert along.

Now that particular day, Frances wasn't there. Gilbert met her sisters, her brother, her mother and some other neighbors. And he was invited to come again.

The second time he came though, the stars aligned. Frances was there.

As soon as he saw her, Gilbert had this flash of insight. But let's let him tell the story, as he wrote to a friend:

But the second time he went there [Gilbert is speaking in the third person] he was plumped down on a sofa beside a being of whom he had a vague impression that brown hair grew at intervals all down her like a caterpillar. Once in the course of conversation she looked straight at him and he said to himself as plainly as if he had read it in a book: 'If I had anything to do with this girl I should go on my knees to her: if I spoke with her she would never deceive me: if I depended on her she would never deny me: if I loved her she would never play with me: if I trusted her she would never go back on me: if I remembered her she would never forget me.' It was all said in a flash: but it was all said....

Something about Frances was extremely attractive to Gilbert. But something about Gilbert was also attractive to Frances. Her family was full of literary and artistic types, perhaps she recognized that in Gilbert. Anyway, they began a courtship, which included visiting at the Blogg home most Sunday afternoons, participating in the IDK Debate club twice a month, and various other social functions. Gilbert had to pass the office where Frances worked on his way to work, and he would often stop in, go to her desk, and draw her a picture on the blotter so she would see it when she came in to work. He collected forget me nots and left them for her, which she pressed into her diary.

² Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p.77.

One day, Gilbert sat writing a letter to a friend, wondering what Frances was doing at that moment. He wrote:

I wonder how that young lady of mine is getting on. I wonder what she is doing now. Cooking supper, perhaps, or reading Tolstoi [sic], or entertaining Cousin George (aha, I have a rival!) or doing art needlework, or dressing for a party, or wishing she had a vote, or working a telephone, or visiting the sick and keeping herself unspotted from the world, St. James, again. I really feel quite interested in that girl. I assure you that compared with her, Nina is quite inferior. You wait till I find her out. Meanwhile, bother her [for me]....

...She is good, she is nice, she is polite, she is intelligent. She is sane. These things are scarcely novel, they are among the common objects of a morning walk. If you care to know ordinary conversation, we talked about laughter, and I said how sacred it was, and she said her monosyllable. By the way, not that it matters much, and although she does say "Yes," she is really an acute, if not clever girl, I find. I really didn't know it until I began to throw out a few Christian reflections. She hasn't been broadened enough by reading, but when it comes to interior meanings, she's all there.³

Nina was one of Gilbert's old girlfriends, and of course, since she hadn't been broadened enough, Gilbert wrote out a list of books Frances should read. These included Classics such as Herodotus and Cicero.

But let's take apart the important points:

Wishing she had the vote. Now many of Frances's friends were suffragettes. Frances's mother actually HAD the vote, since she was a woman head of household, she could vote. Frances and her friends wanted all women to vote. Gilbert Chesterton believed one family, one vote, because he believed so strongly in the family as the basic unit of society and not in individualism. However, despite everything you will read, Gilbert did support Frances and her interest in women's voting rights, and even gave talks in favor of women's suffrage.

Visiting the sick. Frances took the corporal works of mercy seriously. Visiting the sick was something she would do all their married life; in fact, rather than visiting the sick, Frances often took the sick into her home, and nursed them herself. She also visited prisoners and taught the poor.

St James again. Gilbert and Frances had a special connection to St. James at this time; there were several points of geographic connection, St James Park, St James Square and St. James Bridge - but then also, St. James the Epistle writer of the Bible.

She is sane. This theme of sanity weaves throughout Chesterton's writings. Who is sane? The person who uses reason. Who is sane? The person of faith. Sanity is a marriage of faith and reason. Frances is sane.

³ Transcript letter, with the following written above it: "Letter found among old papers, beginning missing, never posted, probably to Bentley." Excerpt, from G.K. Chesterton undated, G.K. Chesterton Family Correspondence, Folder 317, The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

She is really a...clever girl...I really didn't know it until I began to throw out a few Christian reflections. Frances knows her Christian faith— she knows theology. Gilbert throws out Christian reflections but doesn't yet believe them himself. He comes to credit Frances with bringing him to Christianity. Prior to meeting her, he was a pantheist who believed in God. After meeting her, he was a Trinitarian Christian. She evangelized him.

When it comes to interior meanings, she's all there.⁴ Everything that Gilbert finds important: faith, the practice of the faith, intelligence, reason, sanity—he finds it all in Frances. And he finds her to be beautiful. He's in love. And he's found exactly what he wants.

On Thursday, July 21, 1898, on the middle of St. James Bridge in St. James Park, they became engaged. They married three years later, on June 28th, 1901, on Frances's 32nd birthday. Now what? First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage, right? Well, not for them. The first eight years of their marriage they tried to conceive. Frances underwent an operation. Then a second. Then a third. There are no medical records as far as what exactly these operations were. After the third, the doctor sadly informed Gilbert and Frances that it was unlikely they would have any biological children.

Now comes the amazing part. Rather than become depressed, rather than get angry at God or at the doctors, rather than hide from a world where babies are everywhere, Gilbert and Frances seem to have made some sort of silent pact. They would not adopt, although it was considered, but instead, they would welcome children into their lives, and into their home, they would pay special attention to all the children they met. They would eventually have over 25 godchildren. One child, Michael Braybrooke, the son of Frances' cousin, stayed at their home in Beaconsfield during every school break for ten years. The Chestertons paid for his schooling all the way through Medical school.

This is a beautiful example of Spiritual Motherhood and Fatherhood in action. They were not their biological children, but the Chestertons cared for and loved many, many children. They provided a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, gave out comfort and advice, taught them, prayed for them, and in all ways were parents—except biologically. We who are parents can learn from this to act as spiritual mother and father to those near us in need. Those who are not parents can do the same. The vocation to spiritual motherhood and fatherhood is open to everyone and is a beautiful gift.

Lucian Oldershaw eventually married Frances's sister Ethel, and they had five children for Gilbert and Frances to love. Two of the girls came to visit their Uncle and Aunt and came down with chicken pox while there, and Frances nursed them and kept them at their house for two months.

Hilaire Belloc was one of Gilbert's greatest friends, and he once came down with pneumonia. He stayed in the Chesterton's spare bedroom for a month while Frances nursed him back to health. And there are many more examples of this.

So the Chestertons welcome children. Gilbert is making his living now as a writer, becoming more and more famous as the years pass. Frances, always shy and introverted,

⁴ Transcript letter, with the following written above it: "Letter found among old papers, beginning missing, never posted, probably to Bentley." Excerpt, from G.K. Chesterton undated, G.K. Chesterton Family Correspondence, Folder 317, The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

finds his fame trying at times. But she bears with it using humour. Once, while traveling in the US, after giving numerous interviews about her husband, she was asked what she could be doing during his tour of the United States. She said she would be “organizing a campaign for the emancipation of the wives of famous men.”

Now the newspapers in the US were very keen to interview Frances, so the newspapers in England began to notice her, too. A prophet is mostly unknown in her own country. They printed this:

Mrs. G.K. Chesterton, like so many other clever wives of distinguished husbands, runs the risk, perhaps, of lacking that justice from the public which is her due. Yet, Mrs. Chesterton has several titles to distinction; she is not only a spirited and practiced debater, but she writes “occasional verse” of a most rare and delicate beauty. She is likewise keenly interested in social reform; she constantly presides at “happy evenings” for the children of the slums, and is a prominent supporter of the “Christian Socialist” ideals.

Frances had a distinguished husband, but she never would have wanted the attention of the public; she was too humble for that. She would much rather write her poems and give them to friends; would much rather tend the sick and have no one notice her. But she was important to Gilbert, and for that reason, we must notice her.

And we can learn much from her humility. We know plenty of famous spouses who want attention. Look at the whole Kardashian thing. Frances wasn’t like that. She looked after Gilbert, and Gilbert was humble enough to not let the attention affect him, either. They were two innocents at home. Frances is an excellent example of Spiritual Motherhood and Gilbert is an excellent example of Spiritual Fatherhood, but together, paradoxically, they are an excellent example of Spiritual Childhood.

Many hundreds if not thousands of people have read the works of Chesterton and have been converted. Some, like C.S. Lewis, were atheists, and by reading Chesterton, he became a Christian. Some, like Father Ronald Knox, heard Chesterton speak and read his works, and converted from Anglican to Catholic before Chesterton himself even converted. Knox was converted by Chesterton in 1917, and went on to help Chesterton with his conversion in 1922— How’s that for a paradox?

Chesterton credited his conversion to Christianity to his wife, Frances. In 1922, Chesterton converted to Catholicism. Why? Because he believed it to be reasonable. He believed it to be—sanity. It was the only church, he said, that could really take away his sins. There were a thousand reasons for conversion, he said, all amounting to one: The Catholic Church is true.

But what happened to Frances? She didn’t convert when he did, although she was there, sniffing. Their conversions were very different. Chesterton never really completely embraced the Anglican Church, even though he would go to services every Sunday with Frances. Frances, though, was a devout Anglican. She’d been taught, as Anglicans were in those days, the “Branch” Theory, which stated that there were three legitimate Branches of the Catholic Church: The Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox and the Anglican or Anglo-Catholics (as they were called). Frances believed this for a long time. She went to mass, she loved the saints, she was devoted to Mary, and she taught Sunday school. After Gilbert converted, she struggled with this belief. By Christmas of 1922 only six months after Gilbert’s conversion, she already knew which direction she was headed, she said.

However, because of illness and fear, it took her till 1926 to actually convert. But then, finally, the two were again one. And then, watch what happens.

They had moved to Beaconsfield. There was no Catholic Church there. So, the Chestertons helped build one. They found a statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus while traveling and gave it to the new church. It's still there. St. Thérèse of Lisieux—the Little Flower— had just been canonized in 1925, and so the parish was named for her. (Confusingly, the parish spelled her name Teresa.) After Gilbert died the money people donated was used to build a side chapel in St. Teresa's for the English Martyrs, St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More. There is also a memorial stained-glass window with a beautiful image of St. Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata. Gilbert took the name Francis as his confirmation name. Sadly, no records remain of the name his wife Frances took at her confirmation.

Frances faithfully travelled everywhere with Gilbert. She came to the US twice - in 1921 and 1930. They traveled all over Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. And everywhere they went, Frances made sure Gilbert had his speech, his clothes were pressed and his shoes were tied.

And although they never came to Australia, as you may already know, in 1936, the Chestertons booked a passage on a ship to come here. They were going to come and visit you. But they couldn't come, they had to cancel. Gilbert's health rapidly declined, and he died on June 14, 1936. Frances was devastated. Her one true love, her life's companion, her hero and friend was gone. She was lost, her eyes haunted. People came and visited, they wanted to see the home, where he worked, where he lived, and Frances wanted to be hospitable, but she was deeply grieving. She couldn't share her grief with anyone. People began to realize that they should stop talking about him, to her; it made her too sad.

She got cancer, and died two years after him in 1938. Her lasting legacy is as his wife, and his one true love. True hearts, at home at the Inn with the Open Door.

They certainly were a unique couple. The Catholic Church is now seriously considering this question: Was Gilbert Keith Chesterton a saint? To be clear, there is no Cause open as of yet. But there is an investigation into whether a Cause should be opened. That investigation has been ongoing, seriously, for the last 5 years.

Chesterton himself said: It is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most. And for a couple who were as close as they were, who shared as much as they did, whose lives were exemplary, I believe in the idea that they should be considered for canonization together. A saintly married couple might just be what this world needs—what might “contradict the world most”—when the very definition of marriage is under attack, is being “redefined.”

However, there is just one problem. Few know who Frances is; few are devoted to her. Gilbert has his following, and that's great. But let's get to know Frances better. Gilbert couldn't have done what he did, wrote what he wrote, or accomplished what he did without her. Gilbert would want us to know Frances.

This is what I learned while writing the biography of Frances: that she was talented, thoughtful, helpful and wise. That she was motherly without having her own children, that she was an excellent wife, filled with patience and endurance. That she was humble and stayed in the shadows letting her husband shine in the light. That she knew sorrow, and that sorrow did not overtake her. That she knew death, and she never lost her faith. That

she prayed and was devoted to Our Lady, and that she adored Jesus as a Babe in the Manger.

If you happen to look up at the stained-glass window inside St Teresa in Beaconsfield, the window directly behind the altar, what you expect to find there, as in most churches, is a depiction of the cross. In St Teresa in Beaconsfield, I believe under the influence of Gilbert and Frances, that stained-glass window shows the Nativity, the Holy Family at Bethlehem, and the Baby Frances adored. Christmas was her favourite time of year.

There is one poem of Frances's that stands out. A sublime poem. It was set to music, it's won awards, and it's sung each Christmas in England, and it's called *How Far is It To Bethlehem*.

*How far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.
Shall we find the stable room Lit by a star?
Can we see the little Child? Is He within?
If we lift the wooden latch May we go in?
May we stroke the creatures there Ox, ass, or sheep?
May we peep like them and see Jesus asleep?
If we touch His tiny hand Will He awake?
Will He know we've come so far Just for His sake?
Great kings have precious gifts And we have naught
Little smiles and little tears Are all we have brought.
For all weary children Mary must weep
Here, on His bed of straw Sleep, children, sleep.
God in His mother's arms Babes in the byre
Sleep, as they sleep who find Their heart's desire.
How Far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.*

In many ways, this poem is simplistic, it almost sounds as if a child wrote it. But it is profound. Frances, like Gilbert, pondered the Nativity, pondered the Stable at the End of the World, where all souls meet, where they will find, ultimately, their heart's desire.

*And people were bringing children to [Jesus] that he might touch them,
but the disciples rebuked them.
When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them,
"Let the children come to me;
do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to
such as these.
Amen, I say to you,
whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child
will not enter it." (Mark 10:15)*

Gilbert and Frances were examples of many virtues: faith, trust, hope, charity, chastity, innocence, mercy, forgiveness, humour, and goodness—but perhaps the thing they embodied most was their childlike trust in God, and perhaps they were one of our best

examples, along with St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, of this virtue. And perhaps because of this, they may one day be declared saints.

Gilbert and Frances, pray for us!

CHILDREN AND THE FAMILY IN AUSTRALIA TODAY

Sophie York

Talking about family is, for me, like trying to explain, say, the importance of **oxygen**. Or the importance of **love**. Or the importance of **life**. And that is what family is! It is the oxygen of life. And it is both the **yield** of love, and the **haven** for love.

I will confess upfront that one of the great joys of being married to a fellow movie buff is that you plough your way through many joyous films together, and these works of dramatic art give you food for thought. Robin Williams, in the movie *Mrs Doubtfire*, plays a man who is driven to dressing up as a housekeeper to see his own children. It is an almost painfully funny, but brilliant movie. He says to his wife, played by Sally Field: "You just sat there in that courtroom and let that judge pass that despicable *sentence!*". "I was angry" she says. "You ripped my heart out!" he replies. She then says, "...the only thing I know in my heart is that the children were happier when Mrs Doubtfire was a part of their lives."

So, her children were happier when their father (even dressed up as a woman) was in their lives. I am not advocating cross-dressing, by the way! It was his desperate measure to be with them.

To me, the importance of 'family' is self-evident and unassailable. If I may share my personal backdrop, which partly informs my perspective. My mother believed in family. In a big way. She raised 12 children! My father provided for us by serving for 43 years in the Navy. We moved often - changed schools, neighbourhoods and friendship circles - and the one constant was *family!*

My siblings are my dearest friends. With all the ups-and-downs in life – and we have recently weathered a very big tragedy: the sudden death of my 27-year-old niece next door - it has never been more clear to me: *The precious worth of family*. As the author of the Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupery, put it: "it is with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye."

So, when I look at my husband, for example, my eyes see him, that is true - and yes, he looks good to me! - but my heart sees selflessness, fidelity, determination, diligence, and humour. He sets an example to our four sons every day.

The most valuable things in life cannot be seen with the naked eye: love, friendship, hope, integrity, trust, consideration. These are all qualities which are found and nurtured in the cradle of a loving family.

It was when I was National Spokeswoman for Marriage Alliance for three years, in the lead-up to the postal survey in 2017, that it became apparent to me that marriage and family could be something "under threat". Family to me was so *obviously* a good concept that the idea of its being something which could be defined by government, or undermined by culture, was anathema.

Marriage in the history of the world came about as a *sensible* arrangement for the survival of the human race. The protection, the bond. It has been around in *every* culture, since time immemorial. Marriage makes sense biologically, philosophically and theologically:

Biologically - needs no explanation – there is no child created without a mother and father. (*The human body needs the corresponding other-half to fulfil this mission*). Some are, right now, seeking scientifically to overturn this.

Philosophically – it reflects the *natural-law-based* human right of every male and female to marry each other and procreate.

Theologically – a few samples:

...at the beginning of creation God made them male and female.

“Be fruitful and multiply”(Genesis 1.28)

‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mark 10.6-9) -

ie Leave & Cleave

We had the beautiful example of the Holy Family where Joseph took Mary as his wife and raised Jesus as his son. In fact, there is an amusing Christmas card I was once given which has Joseph saying “Never mind the ‘how’ and ‘why’, Mary - all that matters, is that we’re in a *stable* relationship”!

So this was my touchstone in the Marriage campaign. That the foundational concept of marriage and family was rock solid. I could back it with confidence!

Recently, thanks to Karl Schmude’s suggestion, I have been reading the anthology of Chesterton’s entitled *Brave New Family* (1990). He made a number of observations (and drew conclusions) about marriage and family in society, including:

- that given there were few places still to discover in the world, the real exploration was to stay home - “Nothing probably requires more courage, determination and spirit of adventure”¹ for “Everything in the modern world is against the unruly, audacious man who is daring enough to have a wife and family”²!
- He thought normal men and women very much *relied upon each other* with all their endeavours³.
- the home was, far from being tame or dull, was “the only place of liberty, the only place of anarchy . . . the only spot on earth where a man can alter arrangements suddenly, make an experiment or indulge a whim. Everywhere else he goes he must accept the strict rules of the shop, inn, club, or museum that he happens to enter. He can eat his meals on the floor in his own house, if he likes.”⁴

Chesterton also revealed a deep appreciation for his wife, and observed that:

¹ Alvaro de Silva summarising Chesterton’s views, in the Introduction to Chesterton GK, *Brave New Family* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p.12.

² Charles Péguy, quoted by Alvaro de Silva in the Introduction to Chesterton GK, *Brave New Family*, p.12.

³ *Brave New Family*, p.76

⁴ *Ibid.* p.77

A man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place” “. . . in modern times this terror of oneself, of the weakness and mutability of one’s self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind. It is this transfiguring self-discipline....”⁵

1. He perceived the denigration of marriage and family as being evident in the encouragement of children to ignore their parents – and asked *why are then not parents free to disregard the child?* And that some social reformers talked only about an abstraction called “education” whilst eliminating the parental function. “The actual effort of this theory”, Chesterton writes, “is that one harassed person has to look after one hundred children instead of one normal person looking after a normal number of them!” “If you cut off that force [of parental input], and substitute a paid bureaucracy, you are like a fool who should pay men to turn the wheel of his mill, because he refused to use wind or water which he could get for nothing”.⁶ *One can only imagine what he might have thought of the current federal Opposition leader’s \$1.7 billion dollar proposal to have Australian 3 year old toddlers educated by the state, in their tender formative years, rather than be raised by their parents!*
2. Chesterton thought that whatever solution was to be found for the women and career issue, it ought NOT be on the “paltry and small-minded” basis that there was anything *noble* in professional work and anything *degrading* in domestic.
3. He felt strongly that those who sought to **reform** the social institution of marriage should actually understand the historical institution that they were seeking to destroy. Unless they could not explain its worth, they should NOT be permitted to *touch* it!

If I may leave Chesterton for the moment. The concept of family has engaged the minds of many leaders in Australia. Former Prime Minister John Howard regarded a stable, happy family as the greatest asset and advantage that anybody could have in life⁷, and the **best welfare** support system yet devised⁸. In his time, he voted against the mere one-year-only separation requirement in the Family Law Act of 1975, knowing the terrible message it sent to society as to the quality and permanence of marriage - but the vote was lost. Anti-marriage, anti-family ideology won, and the figures thereafter spoke for themselves. His predecessor Robert Menzies, observed: “The home is the foundation of sanity and sobriety; it is the indispensable condition of continuity; its health determines the health of society as a whole.”⁹

Pope John Paul II said in a homily in Australia in 1986: *As the family goes, so goes the nation*, and *so goes* the whole world in which we live.” His Holiness made the point that *“In a world that is becoming ever more sensitive to women’s rights, what is to be said of the rights of women who want to be, or need to be, full-time wives and mothers? Are they*

⁵ Ibid. p.49

⁶ Ibid. p.56

⁷ JWH Howard, Campion College Graduation Speech 2012.

⁸ JWH Howard, Headland Speech 1995 <http://australianpolitics.com/1995/10/13/fair-australia-howard-headland-speech.html>

⁹ “The Forgotten People” broadcast, Macquarie Network, Australia, Friday 22 May 1942

*to be burdened by a taxation system that **discriminates against women** who choose **not** to leave the home in order to earn a separate income? Without infringing the freedom of anyone to seek fulfilment in employment and activities outside the home, should not the work of the homemaker too be properly appreciated and adequately supported?¹⁰*

My own view is that children in a good family learn about the realities of **love**. They learn about little babies, noise and fun. They learn about deep friendship and different people's temperaments. They learn how to treat other people with respect, how to resolve disagreement, how to *own and look after one's own things* - but also how to *share*. They learn how *husbands and wives* treat each other – this will influence them, one way or another, for life. And that the state can never replicate that, *nor can it do better than that*. In my view couples can have confidence that they can be good parents, as they have the strongest of *natural instincts for nurture*. (The exceptions of course, proving the rule).

On all the evidence I've read, the **best** thing for a child, including social, emotional, life aspirations and positive outcomes, is to have a **married** mother and a father, in a stable, low-conflict marriage. *This is not to say that all people in different settings are not doing their best. Most are! People are juggling all sorts of arrangements and making sacrifices for their life situation.*

A few statistics:

In Australia in **1970**, there were 9.3 marriages per 1,000 Australian residents per year. This is called a '**marriage rate**' of **9.3**.¹¹ In 2016, the marriage rate had declined to **4.9**. So almost **half the rate of 1970**. This tells you what Australians think about marriage – worth venturing into as a worthwhile institution, but risky. They take it seriously and don't want it to fail, so they don't get married. There's undoubtedly, multi-factorial reasons.

The divorce rate rose in the 1960s and 1970s. It peaked at **4.6 per 1,000** resident population *after* the introduction of the *Family Law Act 1975* in January 1976, which allowed no-fault divorce. The good news is: the divorce rate has fallen. **In 2016 it was 1.9, the lowest rate since 1976.** So marrying less, and divorcing less.

Bettina Arndt found in her sex survey of 2014, of 20 000 people across Australia, that 96% of respondents said they expected **sexual exclusivity** of themselves and their partner, which is *higher than it was a decade ago*. So the expectation of **fidelity** is growing.

We have 25 million people, with 8.8 million households. 3.6 million of them have children in them (2016 census). *Not* such good news: **919,000 are single-parent households**. A quarter. Divorce rates have finally dropped slightly, but the overall picture is sad, if you recall the earlier evidence about what is **best for children**.

What I learnt during those years working in Marriage Alliance is that our opponents *are* hell-bent on destroying the traditional concept of family. They do not believe in it, and they fail to see its benefits. The legalisation of same-sex marriage was going to be the vehicle by which they achieved a shrinking: of freedoms - religious and speech - and parental rights.

¹⁰ https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II Perth (Australia), 30 November 1986**

¹¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3310.0>

The driving philosophy is **Cultural Marxism**. It is evident in: schools, universities, societal institutions and professional bodies, corporations, and the governing discourse.

A brief run-down on Karl Marx: He himself was baptised and married in a Lutheran Church but he did not remain Christian. He and his wife, who was a Prussian Baroness had 7 children together. He is believed to have had a child with his housekeeper also. Only 3 of his 7 children with his wife survived to adulthood, as they lived in extreme poverty because Marx did not do much paid work - he mostly involved himself in writing and revolutionary activities. He had poor health, which was not helped by his alcohol and tobacco habits, poor diet, and failure to sleep. He seemed to blame his own lack of ability to provide adequately for his own family, or remain faithful, upon the entire capitalist system, which rewarded risk and hard work. He was famous for his 'conflict theory' view of society divided into *oppressor* and *exploited* classes.

Marx and Friedrich Engels collaborated on *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, which called for the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions, and on *Das Kapital* in 1867. Rather than simply agitating to improve working conditions, they thought it was better to throw the baby-out-with-the-bathwater and upend everything – economy, government, family, society, and to an extent, religion – despite Marx believing it was the people's comfort – the opium of the masses, "the sigh of the oppressed creature".¹²

With Marx' notes, Engels penned *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in 1884, they suggest that the nucleus of private property and inequality *lies in the family*, where wife and children are essentially *slaves of the husband*. The construct was a prop for capitalism, and the idea that 'gender is a *social* construct' had its genesis here, along with gender-neutral language, gender-neutral toilets and sports.

Marketers and linguistic scholars know the worth and **power** of words. Wittgenstein wrote about it, as did Orwell. *He who controls language, controls people*. In his essay 'Politics and the English Language'¹³ Orwell noted that the decay of language was connected to the decay of thought and the collapse of a culture. He was very concerned about the ruthlessness that collectivist regimes showed towards any dissent.

The word "marriage" has a particular meaning - husband and wife. It has positive cachet, built up over thousands of years. *They should have found another word*. What has happened is quite artificial. Politicians have legislated to redefine a longstanding, special word.

In schools - The Safe Schools' programme was the biggest giveaway. In other countries, they waited until same-sex marriage had been legalised. In Australia, they thought they would roll it out first. They never expected the outcry. Parents were so horrified by the content that it was cancelled in NSW but it is still going in Victoria. The content includes teaching children about chest-binding and penis-tucking; that gender is fluid, and any tomboyish inclinations by teenage girls, or effeminate tendencies by a boy, were actually that they were 'in the wrong body' and should consider *transitioning* - with puberty-blockers and later sex-change surgery.

¹² Karl Marx, 1976. *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. *Collected Works*, v. 3. New York.

¹³ George Orwell: 'Politics and the English Language' First published: *Horizon*. — GB, London. — April 1946.

One mother told us her son was advised he could wear a dress to school. Another said they were shown sex toys and told *not to tell their parents!* The dangers this teaching has exposed children to, and the promotion of gender dysphoria, will be something which will unfold in decades, I suspect.

The separation of one's identity from one's biological sex, and your *worth* being connected to your *identity*, is 'identity politics' - and the goal is to try to belong somehow to *an oppressed group* based on race, colour, gender, and so on. The author of Safe Schools, Roz Ward, has said that, if the parents complained, tell them 'tough luck'.¹⁴ As the LGBTIQ activists stripped gender from marriage, it is now "any two people", *they are also stripping it from all other aspects in civil life* – language, birth certificates, school education, restrooms, hospital wards, prisons and sport. It is creating havoc overseas, from rapes in women's prisons to female sportswomen having to compete with men who either have surgery - or simply identify as women - and who, like Transgender Mixed Martial Arts Fallon Fox gave Tamikka Brents, a broken eye socket and concussion. Recently we saw a biological male win the International Masters Track Cycling World Championships... XY chromosome transgender Rachel McKinnon beat two biological women – a lifetime of testosterone in the muscles will enable that!

The word mother, arguably the most evocative word in the world, is being removed from birth certificates. Already in Australia, Mothers' Day (& Fathers' Day) at *some* schools is being replaced by "Special Persons' Day".¹⁵ We've seen **ADFA** issuing guide-lines to cadets about what *pronouns* they should use,¹⁶ the **Diversity Council of Australia** issuing guide-lines to corporations on acceptable language – using they, zhe and zhir.¹⁷ – and our national airline **Qantas** advising employees they were not to use words like mother and father, wife or husband. Or 'darling' or 'love' (I don't know how they'll get their stewards to obey *that* one!¹⁸

¹⁴ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/safe-schools-tell-concerned-parents-tough-luck/news-story/cc2e9d420e9cddf5ddf1d94849d0d9f4>

¹⁵ <https://www.naracoorteherald.com.au/story/5421594/frances-primary-schools-special-persons-day/> <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/special-person-day-fathers-day-change-campaign-dr-red-ruby-scarlet-parents-children-one-parent-a7917681.html>

¹⁶ http://www.defence.gov.au/ADFA/Docs/%20LGBTI_Guide.pdf;
<https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/australian-defence-force-denies-it-has-banned-employees-using-he-and-she/news-story/125c5410498ad83a52407edc0b087f63>

¹⁷ https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_wordsatwork_overall_guide.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/travel/qantas-staff-told-to-avoid-gender-inappropriate-terms-like-wife-and-husband/news-story/068e9769c30a180b182ab8020a2d0e50>

In universities, straight white males are being more and more regarded as ‘oppressors’.

Bella D’Abrera of IPA analysed 700+ *history* courses to find an over-representation of gender and oppression studies. La Trobe University tried to ban Bettina Arndt from talking and providing accurate data about the fake ‘rape crisis’ to students. And this week, **IPA** revealed that allegations of sexual assault are planned to be dealt with by Universities (Sydney and Tasmania) doing their own investigations and applying a lower standard of proof to the allegations: ‘On balance of probabilities’, instead of the ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ of civil authorities. This is all ideological over-reach of the highest order.

In Chesterton’s words: “When all are sexless, there will be equality. There will be no women, and no men. There will be but a fraternity, free and equal. The only consoling thing is that it will endure but *for one generation*.”¹⁹

We have seen the tactics play out recently in the leaked results of the Religious Freedom Review. Marriage Alliance made a submission and I read others. In the main, people simply wanted to be able to teach, preach, practise, employ, and raise their children, *according to their faith*! It is *monstrous* that the major parties threw gay kids onto a political bonfire, as though that’s what religious freedom was all about - *Christian schools wanting to expel gay kids*. They don’t.²⁰ It was a ploy designed to get the public off-side, against believers.

It is the inherent right of any parent *to have their children educated according to their faith and according to their own moral convictions*. Australia ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which affirms this at Article 18 (4):²¹

This new political movement allows no space for anyone else. And yet John Millbank, in his ‘Ontology of Peace’, points out correctly that peace is achieved by not domination of one over the other, *but by allowing space for each other*, to live alongside each other.

The issues affecting children and family in Australia are not limited to religion. Our language and our traditions are also being trashed.

Warren Mundine shared his view on family²² from an Indigenous perspective. He felt that it had become unfashionable in progressive circles to talk about the importance of family. He said, “A good family is where parents do their job. . . Ensuring children are fed and have good hygiene, taking them to a doctor or hospital when they are sick; ensuring they have clothing and shelter and go to bed; sending them to school every day; and keeping them safe – which means knowing *where they are* and *who they’re with* and ensuring they’re safe in the *home*. The family is the core of safe and sustainable communities. Get families back on track and communities will follow.”²³

¹⁹ p. 101 Brave New family

²⁰ Subject to appropriate behaviour/disciplinary standards according to the school ethos – as with *all* students.

²¹ States undertake to respect the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

²² “Protection of Children Must be Colourblind” *The Australian* Newspaper, Wed Aug 27th 2014 p12.

²³ Ibid

Horrid examples of moves overseas to usurp the parental role include things as bizarre as, in the UK, 6 year olds being compelled to write a love letter to a man²⁴, or in Scotland the outrageous “Named Person” idea, where a *bureaucrat* is appointed for every child in the nation²⁵. Our opponents *know* that *the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world*, as William Ross Wallace (1819 to 1881), an American poet (of Scottish ancestry) put so well - and so they deliberately want to intervene and take control. And that is why we must never give in to them. *Never*.

I began with Mrs Doubtfire, may I finish with it?

Mr Hillard, played by Robin Williams, gives his closing address to the Family Court judge:

*‘Your Honour... In regards to my behaviour, I can only plead insanity. Because, ever since my children were born, the moment I looked at them, I was crazy about them. Once I held them, I was hooked. I'm addicted to my children, sir. I love them with all my heart. And the idea of someone telling me I can't be with them, I can't see them every day... **It's like someone saying I can't have air. I can't live without air, and I can't live without them.** Listen, I would do anything. **I just want to be with them.** I know I need that, sir. Thank you.*

²⁴ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/bbc-highlights-6-year-olds-forced-to-write-gay-love-letter-to-teach-accepti>

²⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35752756>

GENDER FLUIDITY AND OTHER HERESIES:

What the future child faces in Australia

David van Gend

I begin where Chesterton begins in *What's Wrong with the World*:

'I begin with a little girl's hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamantine tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down.'

Ladies and gentlemen, "gender theory" must go down. Gender theory, which tells that little girl (and all little girls) that she might well be a boy; which tells her mother she must cut off her daughter's hair and dress her as a boy if her child believes she's a boy; that if the mother refuses, she will be deemed guilty of child abuse under federal Labor's proposed law.

The Gender Fairy is a symbol of this madness, and all its ilk must go down. It's a book for Australian four-year-olds and it teaches them: "*Only you know whether you are a boy or a girl. No one can tell you.*"¹

That good-natured gentleman, Pope Francis, called gender theory "demonic" and a form of "ideological colonisation" like we saw with "the dictators of the last century".² His scholarly predecessor, Benedict, warned of "the anthropological revolution contained within it":

'According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society ... People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being.'³

A less illustrious philosopher, former federal Labor leader Mark Latham, agrees that gender theory's insidious colonisation of our schools is a threat to our children and even to our civilisation:

'The craziest trend in Australian politics is to teach Neo-Marxist genderless programs in our schools through the Orwellian-named Safe Schools and Building Respectful Relationships (BRR) curriculum ... Safe Schools seeks to eradicate the use of terms like "his and her" and "boys and girls". It believes

¹ Hirst J., *The Gender Fairy* (Oban Road Publishing, 2015), see <http://www.thegenderfairy.com>

² Westen J., "Pope Francis condemns gender theory a third time: 'The family is under attack'," *Life Site News*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pope-francis-condemns-gender-theory-a-third-time-the-family-is-under-attack>; Kengor P., "Pope Francis vs. the 'Demon' of Gender Theory," *CNS News*, October 6, 2015, <http://cnsnews.com/commentary/dr-paul-kengor/pope-francis-vs-demon-gender-theory>

³ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia," Vatican Publishing House, December 21, 2012, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html

genderless language will produce a genderless generation of young Australians, self-selecting their sexuality as a fluid identity ... As parents we need to make our views known to election candidates and school leaders alike. Anyone who has researched this issue will know we are fighting for the future of our civilisation.”⁴

The gender theory creed runs like this: binary is bad; male and female are social inventions not biological realities; gender is a sliding scale from mostly masculine to mostly feminine; whatever gender you feel yourself to be is what you are and nobody has the right to question your judgment. The implications are that we must stop using binary terms like boy and girl; we should affirm children in moving freely between the masculine and feminine poles of gender; we must ensure people are free to use the toilets and change rooms of their preferred gender identity and use the power of the state to punish citizens who don't get with the programme.

The pressing objective of the gender strategists was to achieve genderless 'marriage', which would cement this genderless madness into our law and from there into the wider culture. The logic of their approach is irresistible: if we agree there is no objective gendered meaning to husband and wife then we must agree there is no objective gendered meaning to mother and father – and ultimately, no meaningful distinction between male and female.

Benedict notes what such an abolition of natural structures will mean for the child:

'If there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. Likewise, the child has lost the place he had occupied hitherto and the dignity pertaining to him ... perforce, from being a subject of rights, the child has become an object to which people have a right and which they have a right to obtain.'

It is to be expected that leaders of the Christian church would take up arms against this old enemy, for gender theory is a modern manifestation of gnosticism. This ancient philosophical warp of the human mind blossomed from the second Christian century as a series of heresies; it views the material world as less than real and defines reality by a secret inner knowledge, or "gnosis". Today's slogan taught to our kids, that gender "is not what's between your legs, but what's between your ears" is a cartoonish modern statement of the gnostic flight from the objective to the subjective.

Sherif Girgis, a Rhodes scholar and graduate of Yale Law School, reflected on the gnostic quality of the US Supreme Court's decision in 2015 to change marriage from an objective biological gendered bond to a subjective emotional genderless bond. He shows how the Court's high-minded doctrine, now untethered from the natural world, will be used to enforce increasingly strange assertions about gender:

'Beyond marriage, this doctrine entails that [biological] sex doesn't matter, or that it matters only as an inner reality. Since I am not my body, I might have been born in the wrong one. Because the real me is internal, my sexual identity

⁴ Latham M., "From reason to radicalism: gender fluidity," *Daily Telegraph*, May 31, 2016, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/from-reason-to-radicalism-gender-fluidity/news-story/832eb330f1e68c0af8ab37521dc402d7>

*is just what I sense it to be ... The Court didn't simply free people to live by the New Gnosticism. It required us, "the People," to endorse this dogma.'*⁵

Genderless 'marriage' is the capstone for the overarching structure of genderless dogma. Now that Australia has legislated 'marriage equality', the whole oppressive gnostic edifice will be near-impossible to bring down.

HERETICS

Consider some examples of this genderless dogma being imposed on children. First, in *The Australian*, April 2016:

*'Pre-schoolers should be introduced to the concept of same-sex marriage, according to a leading early education academic who is advocating against the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" in the classroom. Melbourne University research fellow Kylie Smith, a contributor to the education curriculum in Victoria, has published a paper about the importance of political activism in the early childhood sector, focusing on the marriage equality debate and ideas around gender. Echoing proponents of the controversial Safe Schools program, Dr Smith laments the degree to which early education resources represent gender and sexuality as "fixed" rather than "fluid and changing". She refers to her experience teaching "Lydia", who had said she wanted to grow up to be a boy. She had told the young girl that "it might not be easy but she can and people like doctors can help". The paper [was] titled "And the princesses married and lived happily ever after: challenging compulsory heterosexuality in the early childhood classroom".'*⁶

Just pause there and ask what experiences might have made little Lydia so unhappy being a girl; also ask by what authority a university academic encourages a little girl in her quest to become a boy. And by what authority do other academics, like the transgender Margot Fink, impose their gnostic notions on our children in an entirely unchallenged, uncritical way? For that is what Fink does, as director of the Safe Schools *All of Us* programme with its glossy promulgation of gender theory and transgenderism. She is also the main editor of *OMG I'm Trans* (with Roz Ward on the team) and her column on page 6 is pure gender dogma:

*'For a lot of people gender might not be strictly male or female. It could be somewhere in between, or something else entirely! I have friends who experience gender more fluidly, it can shift and change over time. An important thing to understand is gender isn't about the physical stuff. It's much more about how you identify and feel most comfortable, not your body, not the sex you were assigned at birth, and definitely not what anyone else thinks!'*⁷

⁵ Gergis S., "Obergefell and the New Gnosticism," *First Things*, June 28, 2016, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/06/obergefell-and-the-new-gnosticism>

⁶ Urban R., "Call to study gay issues at preschool," *The Australian*, April 30, 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/call-to-study-gay-issues-at-preschool/news-story/b3e7ff84aa012df302424d7756741790>

⁷ Fink M. et al., eds., *OMG I'm Trans* (MINUS18, 2015), 6, <https://minus18.org.au/omgit/omgit-web.pdf>

“Spoiler alert” says this document. “It’s a total lie that all guys have dicks, that all girls have vaginas.”⁸ This is the document that teaches confused students how to conceal their unwanted gender’s sexual features by “chest binding” or “penis tucking”.⁹ Fink reports uncritically on “a lot of great options” for students to transition gender, including hormone treatments and genital surgery, as if such an approach was harmless and uncontroversial. Worse than that, one Safe Schools document which escaped the March 2016 federal government review subverts the role of parents in the care of their gender-confused child. In the *Guide to supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school*, we read this advice:

‘If a student does not have family or carer support for the process, a decision to proceed should be made based on the school’s duty of care for the student’s wellbeing and their level of maturity to make decisions about their needs. It may be possible to consider a student a mature minor and able to make decisions without parental consent.’¹⁰

The urgency of gender activism at school! Press on, teachers, even if the parents don’t want you to do it! Press on, because you might be caught out by the awkward fact that the vast majority of gender-confused students will get over their confusion around puberty and live as their natural sex.^{11,12,13} No time to lose!

And so new programmes keep rolling off the press. In South Australia:

‘Children as young as five have been used for story time sessions featuring books with transgender characters, introducing concepts ranging from cross-dressing to gender reassignment surgery, as part of a university study being used to advocate for the expansion of the Safe Schools program into primary schools ... One of the books, My New Daddy, written by transgender author and LGBTI rights advocate Lilly Mossiano, follows the tale of a young boy who is told by his mother that “nature made a mistake” and “she should’ve been born a boy like him”. “Mommy begins transitioning, and Charles calls her daddy,” says the blurb for the book. “Daddy goes to see a doctor and has an operation. Charles now has a new daddy who loves him and he loves his daddy.”’¹⁴

⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ward R., Radcliffe J., Parsons M. et al., *Guide to supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school* (Safe Schools Coalition Australia, 2015), http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au/common/downloads/guide-to-supporting-a-student-to-affirm-or-transition-gender-identity-at-school_oct-2015.pdf

¹¹ Korte A. et al., “Gender identity disorders in childhood and adolescence: currently debated concepts and treatment strategies,” *Dtsch Arztebl Int.* 105, no.48 (November 2008): 834, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19578420>

¹² Cantor, J., “Do trans-kids stay trans when they grow up?” *Sexology Today* website, January 11, 2016 http://www.sexologytoday.org/2016/01/do-trans-kids-stay-trans-when-they-grow_99.html

¹³ De Cuypere G., Knudson G. et al., *WPATH consensus process regarding transgender and transsexual-related diagnoses in ICD-11* (World Professional Association for Transgender Health, May 31, 2013), 55, <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/7789275/ICD%20Meeting%20Packet-Report-Final-sm.pdf>

¹⁴ Urban R., “Kids, 5, in sex-change stories research trial”, *The Australian*, August 16, 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/kids-5-in-sexchange-stories-uni-research-trial/news->

This is the world we are allowing radicals to create for our kids, where Mossiano's character tells our five year olds, "Now I am a lucky little boy because my mommy is my new daddy. He will always love me and I will always love him."

ORTHODOXY

A leading authority on gender confusion is Dr Paul McHugh, Distinguished Service Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins medical school led the world in surgery for transgender adults back in the sixties; it also led the world in rejecting the practice in the seventies, and McHugh was in the midst of it as senior psychiatrist. As recently as August 2016, *The New Atlantis* called McHugh "arguably the most important American psychiatrist of the last half-century".¹⁵

McHugh explains that Johns Hopkins stopped doing the transgender surgery that they themselves had pioneered, because the adults who had undergone surgery "were little changed in their psychological condition." He reports:

*'The hope that they would emerge now from their emotional difficulties to flourish psychologically had not been fulfilled. We saw the results as demonstrating that just as these men enjoyed cross-dressing as women before the operation so they enjoyed cross-living after it. But they were no better in their psychological integration or any easier to live with. With these facts in hand I concluded that Hopkins was fundamentally cooperating with a mental illness. We psychiatrists, I thought, would do better to concentrate on trying to fix their minds and not their genitalia.'*¹⁶

The essence of the troubled transgender mindset, McHugh says, is a disorder of "assumption". Writing in 2015, he gives an illuminating analogy with anorexia - a condition where the patient is utterly convinced that she is obese and needing to diet, when in fact she is dangerously thin and suffering a delusion of body perception:

*'Gender dysphoria - the official psychiatric term for feeling oneself to be of the opposite sex - belongs in the family of similarly disordered assumptions about the body, such as anorexia nervosa and body dysmorphic disorder. Its treatment should not be directed at the body as with surgery and hormones any more than one treats obesity-fearing anorexic patients with liposuction. The treatment should strive to correct the false, problematic nature of the assumption and to resolve the psychosocial conflicts provoking it.'*¹⁷

A young woman who struggled with the "disordered assumption" of anorexia, Moira Fleming, wonders why a transgender delusion is treated differently:

'I approach this topic with a wrenching awareness of what it feels like to be disconnected from your body, to hate with every fiber of your being the way you look in the mirror, and to be willing to undergo great feats of self-

[story/2a5f196e1609ec2541d0fee4dd3545e5?utm_source=The%20Australian&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=editorial](http://www.thenewatlantis.com/story/2a5f196e1609ec2541d0fee4dd3545e5?utm_source=The%20Australian&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=editorial)

¹⁵ Editor's note, "Special Report, Sexuality and Gender", *The New Atlantis*, Number 50, Fall 2016, 1.

¹⁶ McHugh P., "Surgical Sex: Why We Stopped Doing Sex Change Operations," *First Things*, November 2004, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/11/surgical-sex>

¹⁷ McHugh P., "Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme," *Public Discourse*, June 10, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145/>

... mutilation to achieve a vision that is always just out of grasp ... As a person who has struggled with anorexia nervosa since puberty, the transgender anguish resonates with me. The similarities between the two illnesses are striking. Yet one is an identity, and the other is a disorder. Why?’¹⁸

A truthful diagnosis about gender confusion needs to be made even when it's unfashionable. That is the service McHugh provides:

“Sex change” is biologically impossible. People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women. Claiming that this is civil-rights matter and encouraging surgical intervention is in reality to collaborate with and promote a mental disorder.’¹⁹

Children are different to adults when it comes to gender confusion, as McHugh explains:

‘Most young boys and girls who come seeking sex-reassignment are utterly different from [the typical adult]. They have no erotic interest driving their quest. Rather, they come with psychosocial issues - conflicts over the prospects, expectations, and roles that they sense are attached to their given sex - and presume that sex-reassignment will ease or resolve them.’²⁰

Some examples of these psychosocial conflicts are given by Dr Kenneth Zucker, who used to run Canada's largest clinic for childhood gender dysphoria:

‘When asked why he wanted to be a girl, one 7-year-old boy said that it was because he did not like to sweat and only boys sweat. He also commented that he wanted to be a girl because he liked to read and girls read better than boys. An 8-year-old boy commented that “girls are treated better than boys by their parents” and that “the teacher only yells at the boys.” His view was that, if he was a girl, then his parents would be nicer to him and that he would get into less trouble at school. One 5-year-old boy talked about having a “girl’s brain” because he only liked Barbie dolls.’

Medical experts who recommend “watchful waiting” for such muddled young children, rather than putting them on the path of gender transitioning, do so because we know as surely as we know anything in this field that the majority of young people who assert that they are “in the wrong body” will simply get over their confusion around puberty, when their body starts sending them clear signals about being a girl or being a boy. This was the experience of British actor, Rupert Everett. He told the *Sunday Times* in June 2016 that, for a period of childhood, he dressed exclusively as a girl: “I really wanted to be a girl. Thank God the world of now wasn't then, because I'd be on hormones and I'd be a woman. After I was 15, I never wanted to be a woman again.”²¹

¹⁸ Fleming M., “Why Is Transgender An Identity But Anorexia A disorder?” *The Federalist*, June 26, 2016, <http://thefederalist.com/2016/06/27/why-is-transgender-an-identity-but-anorexia-a-disorder/>

¹⁹ McHugh P., “Transgender Surgery isn't the Solution,” *Wall St Journal*, June 12, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/paul-mchugh-transgender-surgery-isnt-the-solution-1402615120>

²⁰ McHugh, “Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme,” op. cit.

²¹ “Rupert Everett: I really wanted to be a girl”, *The Telegraph*, June 19, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/19/rupert-everett-i-really-wanted-to-be-a-girl/>

McHugh gives the figures: “When children who reported transgender feelings were tracked without medical or surgical treatment at both Vanderbilt University and London's Portman Clinic, 70%-80% of them spontaneously lost those feelings.”²² So if three quarters of young ‘transgenders’ (higher, in other studies) will no longer think of themselves as transgender a few years later, why the pressure by Safe Schools to affirm them and facilitate their transition?

McHugh spoke up for the children most likely to suffer harm at the hands of gender ideologues in schools:

‘Another subgroup consists of young men and women susceptible to suggestion from “everything is normal” sex education, amplified by Internet chat groups. These are the transgender subjects most like anorexia nervosa patients: They become persuaded that seeking a drastic physical change will banish their psycho-social problems. “Diversity” counselors in their schools, rather like cult leaders, may encourage these young people to distance themselves from their families and offer advice on rebutting arguments against having transgender surgery.’²³

The susceptibility to suggestion at that age is profound – in 2015, *The Australian* newspaper reported the skyrocketing cases of transgender confusion presenting to Melbourne’s Royal Children’s Hospital that so strangely coincided with the Victorian rollout of Safe Schools: “From one patient in 2003, the hospital expects to see 200 children and adolescents this year.”²⁴ With the uncensored version of Safe Schools now compulsory in every state high school in Victoria and primary school versions flourishing under different names around the country, what hope is there for impressionable children to escape the suggestive power of “everything is normal” sex education?

The only hope is to sweep away the gender-ideology muddle and restore sound clinical insight. As McHugh puts it, “What is needed now is public clamor for coherent science—biological and therapeutic science—examining the real effects of these efforts to ‘support’ transgenering.”²⁵ But is that likely to happen any time soon, when the forces of political correctness intimidate clinicians and teachers and even parents from speaking their mind?

“Think”, says McHugh, “of the parents whom no one - not doctors, schools, nor even churches - will help to rescue their children from these strange notions of being transgendered and the problematic lives these notions herald.”²⁶

In this context, remember that federal Labour, at its conference in December 2018, is expected to pass policy to make it illegal in Australia to offer help to gender confused children to revert to their natal sex – what Labor calls, contemptuously, “conversion

²² McHugh, “Transgender Surgery isn’t the Solution,” op. cit.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Legge, K., “Transgender children: what’s behind the spike in numbers?” *The Australian*, July 18, 2015, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/transgender-children-whats-behind-the-spike-in-numbers/story-e6frg8h6-1227446188926>

²⁵ McHugh, “Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme,” op. cit.

²⁶ McHugh, “Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme,” op. cit.

therapy". McHugh describes the situation in some states of the USA where clinicians are deterred from giving the necessary help to troubled youngsters:

*'The grim fact is that most of these youngsters do not find therapists willing to assess and guide them in ways that permit them to work out their conflicts and correct their assumptions. Rather, they and their families find only "gender counselors" who encourage them in their sexual misassumptions. There are several reasons for this absence of coherence in our mental health system. Important among them is the fact that both the state and federal governments are actively seeking to block any treatments that can be construed as challenging the assumptions and choices of transgendered youngsters ... In two states, a doctor who would look into the psychological history of a transgendered boy or girl in search of a resolvable conflict could lose his or her license to practice medicine. By contrast, such a physician would not be penalized if he or she started such a patient on hormones...'*²⁷

And not just in America. Dr Ken Zucker, a world expert in childhood gender issues who had run the largest gender identity clinic in Canada for thirty years, was sacked in December 2015 and his clinic closed because the transgender lobby deemed it was no longer "in step with the latest thinking":

'In the transgender community, Dr. Zucker's dismissal was celebrated – he had long been controversial for research suggesting children should be steered away from becoming transgender adults ... [Colleagues called it] a deplorable end to a fine career, wrought by political correctness and a misguided, but vocal, band of protesters with a flawed understanding of science.'²⁸

It is chilling to read of Zucker's PC assassination, a man in the sensible middle of clinical practice for decades but now washed away by a flood of fluidity fundamentalism. He had cared for some 650 troubled children over the years, about 10% of whom he was very comfortable helping to "transition" as adolescents, but his clinic's cautious approach with younger children was unacceptable to the new gender enforcers:

*'All else being equal, clinicians [at Zucker's centre] viewed it as preferable for a child to become comfortable with his or her natal gender rather than for them to socially transition ... If the child was probably going to desist [lose their transgender feelings] anyway, why nudge them prematurely toward accepting a cross-gender identity'*²⁹

Here in Australia, the Professor of Paediatrics at the University of Western Sydney, John Whitehall, has been a lonely voice calling for reason and science to prevail over gender ideology. He writes:

'On November 30 [2017] the Full Court of the Family Court of Australia abrogated its responsibility for the approval of the administration of cross sex

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Anderssen E., "Gender identity debate swirls over CAMH psychologist, transgender program," *The Globe and Mail*, February 4, 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/gender-identity-debate-swirls-over-camh-psychologist-transgender-program/article28758828/>

²⁹ Singal J., "How the fight over transgender kids got a leading sex-researcher fired", *New York Magazine*, February 7, 2016, <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/02/fight-over-trans-kids-got-a-researcher-fired.html>

*hormones to children suffering from 'gender dysphoria'. It surrendered that responsibility to small groups of protagonists in various children's hospitals in Australia who promote a medical pathway of 'therapy' in which the appearances of the natal sex of the child are subsumed in a chemical and even surgical attempt to approximate features of the opposite sex ... [These] small groups of therapists have failed to bring to the Court's attention the reality of repeated publications warning of lasting cerebral effects of both blockers and cross sex hormones. Also, they have failed to bring statistics to the Court that should have warned of grave error in entering the medical pathway because most children would revert to natal sex through puberty. Lastly, the protagonists should have emphasised to the Court that their diagnoses, and treatment, and prognostications were merely based on strong opinion, without any fundamentals of scientific proof.'*³⁰

McHugh agrees with John Whitehall about the lack of scientific foundation for this experimentation on children:

'The idea that one's sex is fluid and a matter open to choice runs unquestioned through our culture ... It is doing much damage to families, adolescents, and children and should be confronted as an opinion without biological foundation wherever it emerges.'

³¹

THE OUTLINE OF SANITY

We must cling to sanity in these surreal times and that means clinging to nature.

By the standard of nature, a human being with male chromosomes and genitalia is a male no matter what other traits he exhibits. He is male if he wants to play with dolls rather than trucks. He is male if he is sexually attracted to men rather than women. There is indeed a rainbow spectrum of ways of being male, but nowhere on that spectrum from the most refined to the most brutal are we anything but male. That is where gender realists part ways with gender gnostics: we accept that we are defined by nature while affirming the vast variety of ways to be male; they do not accept that we are defined by nature and insist the identities of male or female or genderqueer or agender are fluid and free and all in our mind.

When we sit with a gender-confused child, gender realism sounds like tough love while gender gnosticism sounds compassionate. But it is false compassion to affirm a gender-confused boy in his mistaken assumption that he is a girl; he is not, he is an effeminate boy – and we still love him. Tough love requires understanding the sources of his confusion, helping heal any emotional wounds, keeping him company as he finds his way through puberty - at which time most young people get over their confusion.

It is false compassion to affirm a grown man's delusion that he is a woman; he is not, he is a feminised man – and we still love him. If he seeks the sexual excitement of permanent cross-dressing, that is a private fetish that we have no duty to affirm. If he does it out of conflicted homosexuality, wanting to see himself as a "heterosexual woman", that is a task for sensitive counselling, not surgery. And if he is unshakably deluded in his belief that he

³⁰ Whitehall, J. "Ideology has triumphed over science". MercatorNet.com, January 17 2018. www.mercatornet.com/conjugality/view/gone-is-protection-by-the-family-court-for-children-confused-over-gender

³¹ McHugh, "Transgenderism: a Pathogenic Meme," op.cit.

truly *is* a woman, in the same way as an anorexic schoolgirl is unshakably deluded that she truly *is* obese, then he is no longer a man in charge of his mind, and we should not collaborate with his delusion.

It is false justice to legislate that schools and public toilets and change rooms and sports teams and beauty pageants have to treat gender-confused males as females; they are not. Their private needs can be addressed by the responsible authorities with discretion, with not a whisper of unkindness, and everyone can get quietly on with their lives - as they always did until the recent ideological frenzy. But it is unjust and irrational to validate a transgender fetish or confusion or delusion to the detriment of others - of the female athletes forced to compete with cross-dressing males; of the schoolgirls confronted in the bathrooms by trans-males.

And it is a capitulation to craziness to buy the idea that boys and girls are “socially constructed” and therefore we should make girls play with trucks and boys play with dolls to overcome society’s gender stereotyping. We are mammals, and nobody suggests the differences between stag and doe are socially constructed.

G.K. said, “This triangle of truisms, of father, mother and child, cannot be destroyed; it can only destroy those civilisations that disregard it.”³²

The “disregarding” of the primal truth of father and mother, husband and wife, male and female is a sinister gnostic enterprise that will eventually fail, because nature says it must. But it will do grave damage to our children and our civilisation before it is tossed on the scrap heap of inhuman ideologies. Gender theory must go down.

³² Chesterton G.K., *The Superstition of Divorce*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920)

G.K. CHESTERTON'S TOY THEATRE

Gary Furnell

In his autobiography, Chesterton records that his first vivid memory was of a man carrying an oversized golden key. The man was set in a landscape that featured a woman in the window of a distant tower. Chesterton says he was entranced by the man with the key and the woman, and the story implicit between them. He had no doubt the man was journeying to release the woman from some form of captivity. It wasn't a scene Chesterton saw in the London suburb of his childhood. The scene he remembered was constructed by his father in a toy theatre. Chesterton says it was, for him, an exciting early intimation of the many exciting wonders of the world. And it was also an affirmation that his father was one of those wonders. After all, his father created - with cardboard, pencil, scissors and paint - the figures in the toy theatre that so entranced Gilbert that he could remember them with clarity sixty years later.

Toy theatres were once a common form of household recreation. You may remember in Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* that there was a craze current for "home theatricals." Toy theatres were part of his craze and the Austen household itself had a toy theatre for the presentation of little plays that Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra wrote. Toy theatres have fallen out of fashion and are now collector's items. They are little seen anymore. Fortunately, one Australian family - the Everitt family - were collectors of toy theatres and they donated their collection to the Australian Museum in Canberra. The toy theatres they collected varied from simple cardboard models to sophisticated models with multiple backgrounds, lighting, traps, curtains and prosceniums.

Toy theatres formed a valuable way to develop skills in story-telling, scene setting, characterisation and dramatic action. It is no surprise that gifted story-tellers, playwrights, novelists and film-makers were keen producers of toy theatre plays. Actors' movements and interactions, lighting, scenery dressing, and dramatic timing all would have been developed as the young person created and then played with their toy theatre. One can see how for playwrights and film-makers in particular, long hours in childhood playing with toy theatres would help to create an almost intuitive level of dramatic skill. Here is a list of some of the people whose early creative efforts were expressed using toy theatres:

Jane and Cassandra Austen
Robert Louis Stevenson
Edward Chesterton
Gilbert and Frances Chesterton
Laurence Olivier
Ingmar Bergman
Steven Spielberg
J.W. von Goethe
Orson Welles
Charles Dickens

Hans Andersen
W.B. Yeats
Lewis Carroll
W.S. Gilbert

Chesterton treasured a toy theatre he bought when he visited Spain because the little theatre had the novelty of multi-coloured electric lights. In his essay *In Defence of Toy Theatres*, Chesterton laments that he can't see his way clear to devote the required time to a production of St George and the dragon, but he and Frances entertained guests and the children of Beaconsfield with many other toy theatre productions.

Chesterton's contemporary, Robert Louis Stevenson, wrote an essay called *A Penny Plain and Two Pence Coloured* in which he described the many visits he made as a boy to the exciting toy theatre shop on Leith Walk. Just looking through the window was exciting. But then to go inside with some money to spend! The boys got so excited by the cardboard pirates, robbers, knights, and golden-haired princesses that the shopkeepers had canes to control the boys and gave them a whack if they got out too rambunctious. Here is Stevenson's recollection:

And then to go within, to announce yourself as an intending purchaser, and, closely watched, be suffered to undo those bundles and breathlessly devour those pages of gesticulating villains, epileptic combats, bosky forests, palaces and war-ships, frowning fortresses and prison vaults - it was a giddy joy. That shop, which was dark and smelt of Bibles, was a loadstone rock for all that bore the name of boy. They could not pass it by, nor, having entered, leave it. Every sheet we fingered was another lightning glance into obscure, delicious story; it was like wallowing in the raw stuff of story-books.

In order to help you see what a toy theatre looks like, I've constructed one and will present a very short, single act toy theatre play for your education and delectation. It's Chestertonian in four senses: 1) the themes are large - it deals with mortality, and you may recall that Chesterton said a story lacked a little life if it didn't include a little death; 2) leaders are the objects of a little fun, hopefully in a respectful manner; 3) it is comic; and 4) rather than paying someone else to write a play and perform for me, I'm having a go at writing and performing myself. If you were at the conference last year you might remember that I spoke on mystical merriment - the comic possibilities of spiritual concerns. This is my attempt to explore this mystical merriment. You might further recall that Chesterton said if a thing was worth doing it was worth doing badly. I'll probably exemplify that principle right here, right now with this play. The play was inspired - if that's the right word - by a Woody Allen piece called *Death Knocks*, in his collection *Getting Even*.

THE GRIM REAPER COMES FOR KARL

Scene: home office/study

Karl (reading): Oh, this essay is dull. It's deadly boring! Why he thinks his writing is worth sharing is beyond me! It's so turgid I can feel millions of my brain cells dying with every sentence!

Lights flash, room shakes, darkness, then light returns. The Grim Reaper appears in the room. The Reaper is a tall, skeletal being, wearing a Bintang singlet and colourful boardshorts. He holds a scythe.

Karl (standing, shaking): Wh-who are you?

Reaper: You have to ask? The dramatic entrance, the skeleton and the scythe don't give it away? I'm the Grim Reaper!

Karl: Wha... What do you want?

Reaper: What do I want? Are you kidding me? It's time to go! To check out! To say hasta la vista Karl-baby!

Karl: But I'm not ready!

Reaper: *You're not ready.* If I had a dollar for every human who said that I'd be richer than the Saudis. Hey, a moment ago I heard you complaining about what you were reading. It was pretty bad, huh?

Karl: It's an essay by Gary Furnell. He emails me his work, as he calls it. He's got no style, no sense, nothing to say, *and* he's long-winded. It's a killer combination.

Reaper: Ah! That checks out. It says on my job-sheet that you die of boredom.

Karl: Great! Problem solved! I won't read his junk again. I won't be bored!

Reaper: Not so fast, Karl. I can't go back to the underworld empty-handed.

Karl: Hey, your voice is pitched kinda high. I thought you'd have a deep, serious voice.

Reaper: Jeez, you are annoying. I'm going to enjoy taking your soul. Let me explain the obvious: I'm a spiritual being, I don't have testicles, so yes, my voice is a tad girly.

Karl: And - if you don't mind me saying - I thought you'd be wearing dark flowing robes and have a black hood over a chalky-white face.

Reaper: Ugh! That Ingmar Bergman movie really stereotyped me. Look, mate, this is Australia, a place not known for its formality. And it gets hot. Now it's my turn to make an observation. Someone visits you - obviously come a long way - and you don't offer any refreshments? How about getting me a beer and putting out some chips or peanuts?

Karl (edging towards the door): Yeah, you're right. I'll just, err, go to the shops and get some.

Reaper: No way, Buster! I know that plan. You'd rush straight to the hospital and get resuscitated. *(Chuckles)* That reminds me of a funny story. Last week I collect the

soul of a big, fat middle-aged guy. A pathetic bachelor. Naturally, it's a heart attack case. Anyway, I do the gig. Bang! He falls down dead. Right then, the doorbell rings. I'm polite so I step over his carcass and open the door. It's a pizza delivery! 2 pizzas, garlic bread and large Coke. Ordered and paid for online. I sat on his lounge, put my feet on his chest, and feasted! Some days, Karl, you just get lucky.

Karl: Yeah, *you* get lucky! What about the dead bloke?

Wife (outside door, offstage): Karl, who're you talking to?

Karl (loudly): No one, dear. It's nobody!

Reaper: *Nobody??* I'm a big, spooky skeleton that takes people's souls. I'm the scariest being on the planet. What've I gotta do to get some respect?

Wife: I hope you're not telephoning Pope Francis again. The Catholic Church is (*pause*) trouble-free, so I'm sure the Pope doesn't need any help or advice.

Karl: No, Dear, I wasn't phoning Jorge.

Wife: I'll make a pot of tea and bring you a cuppa.

Karl: Thank you!

Reaper: Who was that?

Karl: My wife.

Reaper (shaken): Oh, no, not your wife!

Karl: What's the problem? She's very nice.

Reaper: Yeah, sure, she's nice to *you*, but wives tend to take a dim view of my activities. I don't want 'em around when I'm boppin' the husband. I had a very bad experience in Berlin in 1945 when I took two German husbands. I'm still getting counselling for that episode. I've got a little Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Karl: Really? What happened?

Reaper: Well, it's near the end of World War 2. It's a busy time, I'm working long hours, not getting any sleep. I go to this underground bunker to take the souls of some Nazi bigwigs, and their wives find out about it. These two hausfraus go crazy, and start beating me black and blue. "You can't take my husband, he's a good, decent, gentle man" screams the blonde. "My husband is the last hope for humanity" says the brunette. I'll never forget the names of those hellcats: Magda Goebbels and Eva Braun.

Karl: Phew! Bad day at the office.

Reaper: Ever since I get real nervous around wives when they get cranky.

Karl: Yep. Most men know that feeling.

Reaper: Listen! You're a Chestertonian. Here's a paradox: How is it that a man's wife can be his most relentless critic *and* his staunchest supporter? Anyway, this is your lucky day. You get a reprieve. If she's here, I'm going.

Karl: Woo hoo! I'm saved!

Lights flash, darkness, lights return. Grim Reaper has disappeared.

Karl (yelling): Wait! Wait! You can't go back to the underworld empty-handed. Let me give you Gary Furnell's address.

When you are looking at the toy theatre you are looking at a type of window. A selective window for sure, as all windows are. They don't show everything, only what they allow to be seen. In the same way, a computer screen, a television screen and a cinema screen are windows that allow you to see what has been chosen by someone for you to see. In other words, they are purpose-filled frames. They limit vision, usually with the purpose of focusing attention on particular things. Chesterton loved windows and frames and the focus they provide. In particular, he likened a toy theatre to a very small window. He said:

... the philosophy of toy theatres is worth any one's consideration. All the essential morals which modern men need to learn could be deduced from this toy. Artistically considered, it reminds us of the main principle of art, the principle which is in most danger of being forgotten in our time. I mean the fact that art consists of limitation; the fact that art is limitation. Art does not consist in expanding things. Art consists of cutting things down, as I cut down with a pair of scissors my very ugly figures of St. George and the Dragon ... The most artistic thing about the theatrical art is the fact that the spectator looks at the whole thing through a window. . the advantage of the small theatre exactly is that you are looking through a small window... This strong, square shape, this shutting off of everything else is not only an assistance to beauty; it is the essential of beauty.

The most beautiful part of every picture is the frame.

This especially is true of the toy theatre; that, by reducing the scale of events it can introduce much larger events. Because it is small it could easily represent the earthquake in Jamaica. Because it is small it could easily represent the Day of Judgment. Exactly in so far as it is limited, so far it could play easily with falling cities or with falling stars. Meanwhile the big theatres are obliged to be economical because they are big. When we have understood this fact we shall have understood something of the reason why the world has always been first inspired by small nationalities. The vast Greek philosophy could fit easier into the small city of Athens than into the immense Empire of Persia. In the narrow streets of Florence Dante felt that there was room for Purgatory and Heaven and Hell. He would have been stifled by the British Empire. Great empires are necessarily prosaic; for it is beyond human power to act a great poem upon so great a scale. You can only represent very big ideas in very small spaces.

My toy theatre is as philosophical as the drama of Athens.

Making things small makes it is much easier to deal with grand themes. In real life it would be very hard to get Karl Schmude and the Grim Reaper in the same room, let alone engaging in banter. Even if two actors were employed to undertake the roles it would still be costly and tedious to arrange. But if the scale is reduced and simplified to small paper figures, it becomes very easy to arrange. That there is more freedom

to be found in a small scale than in a large scale is one of the points Chesterton makes about art. This massively increases the potential for more people to be involved in expressing their own creativity. If we combine toy theatres with youtube, for example, then the potential to explore and then export creativity becomes immense. Already amateur artists are using Lego figures and simple still-frame animation to augment the telling of the Easter story and the Christmas story, for example, to excellent effect. It is a contemporary version of the toy theatre concept.

The simple technology of toy theatres and the powerful technology of youtube await a talented Chestertonian artist or team of artists to present a richly-human, multi-faceted and hopefully comedic vision to the world. It would be easy to do. Toy theatres might yet experience a re-birth.

FATHER BROWN AND OTHER IMAGINATIVE BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Nancy Brown

You and I have a mutual friend. We could even claim that we have a mutual Uncle and Aunt, for Gilbert and Frances loved to be addressed that way. And if this is true, we are all cousins.

In my first paper on Frances Chesterton, I mentioned that I burned my copy of Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*. Twenty years later when I rediscovered Chesterton, my oldest daughter was eight years old. I was voraciously consuming Chesterton, loving everything he wrote. My daughter asked me one day what I was reading, and I said G.K. Chesterton. And she wanted to know who he was, and if there were any children's books about him. So, I said I'd find out.

I was on my way to a Chesterton Conference, and so when I got there I asked Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society what did he have for children on Chesterton? "Nothing," Dale said. "You should do something about that," I said. "Maybe **you** should," he said.

I stared into space, imaging myself growing rich and famous, having written the definitive children's book on Chesterton. But no one gets rich on Chesterton, Dale warned me, as if reading my mind. So that year, I wrote my first children's book, and it was a very simple board book about Chesterton:

Who is this big man? His name is Chesterton.

What does he do? He writes books.

Why is he laughing? He thinks everything is jolly.

It was my first attempt. And it went nowhere.

Then I discovered that Chesterton had written the Father Brown mysteries. And my daughter loved mysteries. This would be the way. I bought the *Innocence of Father Brown* and read it, and then gave it to her. She was now about nine, and a good reader. After a week or so I asked her how was the book? She said it was difficult to read.

Really? I said, well that's ok, I'll read it out loud to you. Have you ever tried that? Reading Father Brown out loud? Let's just hear the first paragraph of the *Blue Cross*:

'Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale grey jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a grey-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler.

There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the grey jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.'

Now that's a great paragraph to you and me, but to a nine-year-old there were many questions. Where is Harwich? What does 'conspicuous' mean? What is 'holiday gaiety'? What's 'official gravity'? What's a 'waistcoat'? What's an 'Elizabethan ruff'?

And there were three more questions - and that was only the first paragraph.

I knew it was not really going to work. After reading books out loud for nine years, and studying books like *The Read Aloud Handbook* (Jim Trelease), I knew what constituted a good story to read out loud, and not every book made the grade.

Chesterton's work contains obscure references to places in England. His work uses British English, which I needed to translate and explain. He often referenced people, government, social and economic systems, in other words, they were written for adults in the early 20th century in England. I hadn't really noticed all of that while reading the book to myself, but it became obvious when I was attempting to read it to my daughter.

So, I stopped reading. Chesterton has a huge vocabulary. Some of the words I needed to look up myself. I understood why my daughter was having a hard time reading it; I was having a hard time reading it out loud.

But I really wanted her to like it. I wanted her to know about Chesterton and Father Brown. There had to be a better way. But what? Someone should simplify the language and write this so children can understand it, I thought. It's a great story and kids would still like it, I thought. Someone really should do it, I thought.

A short time later, I was in the library in the storybook area, and pulled a book off the shelf called *Sherlock Holmes for Kids*. This book contained four of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries but with easier language for 9-12 year olds. I immediately checked the book out and studied it. This was exactly what someone should do with the Father Brown, I thought. Someone should do this, and I'd buy it and read it to my daughter. I even wrote to the publisher suggesting they do the same thing with Father Brown. I never heard back.

I thought I was probably the only person in the world who wanted that book. This was 20 years ago when interest in Chesterton wasn't what it is today.

So, I took my daughter's copy of *The Innocence of Father Brown*, and I looked at the Blue Cross, the first story. And I started to re-write it. I underlined all of the parts I thought I should keep, and highlighted all of the words that were difficult. I studied 4th grade vocabulary lists, and kept as much of the original language as I could, and kept the story exactly the same, but took out some of the more difficult language and references.

I came to appreciate the way Chesterton wrote even more doing this. My awe of Chesterton grew. He's really a great writer.

So, I adapted the first story. And I started asking around to see if anyone was interested in publishing something like this, and luckily, someone was. I adapted three more stories, so we had a collection of four, and we published it under the title *The Father Brown Reader: Stories from Chesterton*.

It was popular, people loved it. People besides myself were interested in introducing Chesterton and Father Brown to their children. People wanted more, so I worked on the next four, cleverly called *The Father Brown Reader II: More Stories from Chesterton*. Luckily, Catholic Heritage Curriculum decided that the Father Brown Reader would be required reading for their fourth grade. And then Seton recommended it.

One of the other reasons I worked on the Father Brown Readers is that I wanted children to have a positive experience with Chesterton when they were young, so that as they grew older and needed theology and philosophy and Chesterton's name came up, they would want to read his books as adults. They would have a positive memory of Chesterton to fall back on. Not as I did, where I had a negative experience with Chesterton at first. This made me not want to read his books as an adult. Obviously, I got over that, but I wanted something better for future children.

Now as a parent, I understand that you get to a point in your children's lives where you can't pre-read everything they're reading. And that's when you have to find trusted friends to recommend books, or trusted resources.

Obviously reading lists from Catholic homeschool providers on line, like Seton, Kolbe and Catholic Heritage Curriculum are good places to start.

When I was homeschooling, someone suggested *The Read Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease. And that became one of my best resources. But today there is a whole Read Aloud Revival going on, and one place to find out more about good children's books that are more recently published is called The Read Aloud Revival, with Sarah MacKenzie. She puts out book lists for every month, for every age, and for every season, as well as conducts interesting interviews with famous children's authors on her podcast. She even interviewed me.

Chesterton's father read to Gilbert when he was a boy. He also recited poetry from memory and encouraged Gilbert to do the same. Getting kids to memorize poetry might not seem that easy, but maybe that's only because we parents skipped the step where we ourselves memorized poetry, or we didn't like it when we had to.

The most famous bit of Shakespeare's is generally considered to be Portia's "Quality of Mercy" speech.

The quality of mercy is not strained.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes. And so forth.

I once had my daughter memorize this speech, and shortly afterwards we went for a visit to Grandma's house, and when Grandma, whose memory was just beginning to fail, asked what was new, my daughter said she's memorized this bit from

Shakespeare. So Grandma asked her to recite, and my daughter began. After one line, Grandma joined in, and it brought tears to my eyes to hear them recite the whole passage together. For that, it was worth the whole effort. Grandma had memorized the same speech 50 years before.

Gilbert Chesterton said he memorized Shakespeare before he even knew what the words meant—he just enjoyed the sounds of them. And that, he thought, was the best way to learn Shakespeare.

His father had a toy theater. The very first memory Chesterton has is of seeing a young man crossing a bridge, with a curly mustache and a swagger. He was wearing a crown and carrying a key. Chesterton admits that the man was about six inches high and made of cardboard, but nevertheless, seeing that puppet man was his very first memory. Chesterton made toy theaters and put on plays with them the rest of his life, considering the “work” of play to be very important.

The other importance of Chesterton’s father was that he read to Gilbert when he was young, and one of the things he read was the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Now Chesterton’s parents professed to be Unitarian Universalists, free thinkers. They had not brought Gilbert up in the Anglican faith as their neighbors and friends had done. They were more modern than that. However, certain ideas were introduced to Gilbert, such as the idea of St. Francis.

Gilbert states that his father knew all his English Literature backwards, and the result was that Gilbert himself knew a great deal of literature by heart at an early age.

Frances Chesterton was brought up in a Victorian household, her parents of the Anglican faith but only for social reasons. They had married in church and had their children baptized, but they did not attend the weekly services. Frances’s mother was interested in modern spiritual and educational theories, and Frances and her siblings attended avant garde schools. Frances loved poetry and began writing her own poetry as a teen, an effort that brought her joy and comforted her in her sorrows. Her poetry reads as a sort of diary of what she’s thinking and feeling throughout the years.

During their engagement, Gilbert and Frances wrote poems back and forth to each other. After writing many such love poems, they began using a form quite regularly called the Ballade.

A typical ballad is a plot-driven song, with one or more characters hurriedly unfurling events leading to a dramatic conclusion. The Chestertons usually included humor, and usually demanded a response, and so they wrote them back and forth to each other.

As we know, the Chestertons loved children, they loved families, and although they couldn’t have children of their own, they welcomed many children into their home. Many of these families also shared stories, puppet plays and poetry with the Chestertons. There is a folder in a special collection somewhere I saw with a series of local newspaper articles, so local only one copy was made to be shared between the Chestertons and one family. It was called something like the Bee Gazette and was all about the danger of bees in the yard and how to avoid them. Poems were written

about bees, a play was proposed, songs, and illustrations included, all on the subject of bees.

The fun the Chestertons and their young friends had doing things like this prompted me to think of a way to tell young people how much fun the Chestertons were. I wanted to take them inside their home and get cozy by the fireplace. I had read about a family of girls, the Nicholls, that befriended the Chestertons while they were on holiday in Lyme Regis, on the coast of England. This family, called the “Last Family” in Maisie Ward’s biography, consisted of a widowed mother and the last three of her children, the older five were grown and out of the house.

The Nicholl Family grew so close to the Chestertons, that they actually moved from Lyme Regis to Beaconsfield to be closer to their new Aunt and Uncle. So I’m writing a series of children’s books, based on these stories of this Nicholl family and the Chestertons. The stories are cozy and fun and demonstrate the love of the Chestertons. The first book is how they meet, and it’s called *The Chestertons and the Golden Key*. I’ve just finished the second, and it’s not published yet, but it will be the story of how the Nicholls plan to move to Beaconsfield. The first book ends with the Nicholls finding a treasure, and putting on a puppet play for everyone in the neighborhood.

A group of homeschoolers wrote me a while ago, and told me how they had read the *Chestertons and the Golden Key* together, culminating in the kids all building a toy theater and putting on a play of their own. This is just exactly the reason why I love writing books like this.

And this shows us that one of the most important lessons of the Chestertons for families is this: Make Your Own Fun. The best times in the world are when families spontaneously decide to put on a play just for themselves. Or they decide that tonight, we’re going to recite poetry. Or this afternoon, we are having a family talent show. Or today we are having a comedy or an improv show, just for each other. Or we decide to play a board game, and we change the rules to Our Family Rules. Whatever it is, it includes spontaneity, fun, laughter, maybe silly hats, and costumes as well. No one has to record anything, no one has to take pictures and post them on Instagram. The Chestertons used their imaginations to create fun for their friends, and we can too.

The books our family liked best were the ones that engaged the imagination. There were times that we’d read a book that someone had made a movie out of. Our rule in our house, was that movies were second best after books, so if there was a movie, and if we were going to watch it, we had to read the book first. Then we’d know what parts were left out of the movie, and what parts were changed. And we could discuss why we thought those parts were left out. But we couldn’t have those discussions unless we’d first read the book. This rule was often met with resistance, but it was good for us all.

The second reason for the rule that the book must be read first, was that when we read a book, we create the world of the book in our own heads, in our own imaginations. We see things in our minds based on the descriptions, and think of how the characters look based on what was written.

Once you see the movie, those visuals get locked in your head. The characters in your head now look like the movie characters. The scenes in the movie, whether they are in the book or not, become the scenes you remember. A good example of this is to read *Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers, which is a very imaginative book, and then watch the movie, which is also good, but has changed the story quite a bit. The changes are necessary to manage a book that is lengthy and has many characters, to squeeze that down to a two hour movie. In the book for example, there are four children. In the movie, only two. The same thing goes for things like *Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, and *Little House on the Prairie* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

In addition, there are a few more things I'd like to say about movie watching as family entertainment. I've always been one who considers the things our children watch to be guarded quite closely. I would not let my children watch movies until they were really old, like eight—the only TV I would let them watch was Mr. Rogers and our own home movies. This is because many TV images can be frightening for children, and I wanted to keep my children innocent for as long as possible. In addition, many tv shows for children are cut fast, and actually shorten their attention spans.

For my family, I am very careful to look at ratings, and I do not want to see things on the screen that I don't want to see. People today get so much screen time, and they become immune to the decrepitude and immorality they are watching. Chesterton says it's very easy to slide on that slippery slope down towards depravity. One must work to keep oneself from taking that first step down. Once halfway, in other words, you're going to find it much easier to keep sliding downwards.

In addition, as my children grew, and became teens, we never progressed past the "young adult" genre for the most part. I personally don't think anyone needs to become used to "adult" situations that people read in romance novels and even the most popular novels today. There is enough perversion and immorality in the world already; we don't need to read more about it in the novels we read for pleasure.

Reading aloud, as those of you who do it know, is much, much more than just reading a book out loud. Reading aloud, when a child is very young, is a time of snuggling and sharing and bonding. Reading aloud once your children are older becomes a time of shared adventure. I would often read something to both girls at the same time when they got older, and we'd have to stop at the end of a chapter because it was bedtime. The next day, I found we'd be discussing the book. What had happened, why someone did this or that, what we thought this thing had to do with the whole story, and what did we think would happen next? Book reports happen spontaneously when you discuss them as a family after reading aloud.

Reading aloud teaches your children to read, but if you keep reading to them, it increases their vocabulary. You can always read books beyond their own ability to read, because their comprehension always tends to be above their reading level. Even when they are teens—and maybe especially when they are teens—keep reading to them. It is hard enough to talk to teens, it is hard to keep connected to teens, but it isn't hard when you are reading a book together.

There were times in my girls' teen years when difficult things were going on, things that we had a hard time talking about. But while reading a book, maybe a certain character was going through something similar, or another character makes a great suggestion. Reading together helps teens and their parents talk.

Reading aloud is a bonding experience. There are certain phrases from books like:

Avast! Me hearties!

Land, ho!

Look, a Kingfisher!

Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!

Old Dan Tucker was a fine old man, washed his face in a frying pan

And many more, are words and phrases that our family shares from reading books together.

Each night before going to bed when my girls were little, I'd read to them. Most nights, I was reading a different book to each one. We'd read for about 30 minutes.

To show you what this meant to them, let me tell you a little disciplinary thing I figured out.

If either of them misbehaved or threatened to misbehave, the worst punishment I could ever threaten them with was that I wouldn't read to them that night. I can report that there were very few nights I did not read to them.

I believe mysteries and detective fiction, even for the very young, are good imaginative books for young people. Encyclopedia Brown, for example, gives children a chance to hear the clues, and try to solve the mystery themselves, as most of these books do. Some of the books have puzzles and games in them to help the child participate in the mystery.

Magic Tree House, Jigsaw Jones, From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, Mrs. Frisbee and the Rats of Nimh, The Chime Traveler Kids Series, Hoot, the Vision Book Series of Saints: St Joan the Girl Soldier, Saint John Bosco and Saint Dominic Savio, and all the others in the series.

Trixie Belden, The Bobbsey Twins and Cherry Ames, Nurse Books; Betsey Tacy, and Nancy Drew were what I read when I was a young teen. *Nancy Drew* is still a great series, and they can be read aloud as well.

I love a book called *The Door in the Wall* by Marguerite de Angeli.

Treasure Island and Swiss Family Robinson are both great classic books. Anne of Green Gables, the Fairy Tales Retold books by Regina Doman (Shadow of the Bear, Black as Night) good for teens, the Little House on the Prairie Series.

There are series that are bad, or are just not recommended. For example, the *Series of Unfortunate Events*. You'd think after reading a series of thirteen books about unfortunate event after unfortunate event it would finally work out for this family, but no. It just ends very sadly. Why read it? What's the point?

Even books that have won awards—especially if recently, might not be worth the time. Sometimes they are too realistic, or tell too tragic of a story for children to

hear at that age. So don't pick a book just because it has an award. Some awards are given for political correctness, and not with children in mind.

Books about Zombies, Monsters or books with titles like *My Brother Joe is Dead* just don't seem appropriate to me for kids.

Book Scavenger is good, the Gallagher Girls series and Embassy Row series by Ally Carter for young teens, as well as the Alex Rider series.

Historical fiction can be very imaginative, as kids must imagine another point in time. *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Johnny Tremain* are favorites.

Tintin is a graphic novel, but it can be read aloud, I've done it many times.

If your child is into mysteries, there are numerous series books that you can read. Again, the Read Aloud Revival site has resources galore. We started with *Nate the Great*, went through Meg MacIntosh, Cam Jansen, the A to Z Mysteries and graduated to Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys.

I'm only going to give you one more. My favorite childhood book, and this is because this is the book that turned me into a writer, is: *Harriet the Spy* by Louise FitzHugh which I read in about fourth grade. I began keeping notebooks and writing down everything, and that eventually led me to this.

Teens can read to their younger siblings, but it is really important to keep reading to teens, as I said. They need their own time with mom and dad. So much is going on in their world, they need ways to keep connected and reading is one way.

Teen book clubs are also a good idea, where teens read the same book and then discuss it with supervision of course. And you can do the same thing with middle school age kids, too. Kids love book clubs.

So, reading is important, but the connections we make with our children while reading is the most important thing about reading. Reading keeps us connected as families, takes us on trips to see the things we're reading about, helps us talk about difficult subjects, engages our imaginations, and brings us joy.

So now there is a way to introduce children to Chesterton, in fact, there are three books. The first two are the *Father Brown readers*, and the other is the *Chestertons and the Golden Key*. I hope you enjoy bringing imaginative books into your home as much as the Chestertons and our family.

THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER CHESTERTON

Karl Schmude

The title of this paper emphasizes both “innocence” and “Father”, and it’s based on the title of the first collected edition of the Father Brown stories, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, published in 1911.

Why would Chesterton highlight the “innocence” of Father Brown? And what did he mean by “innocence” – given how conscious he was of the fallen nature of all human beings, including priests? (In our time, of course, tragically, we’re even more acutely conscious of the fallen nature of priests – though I’d hope this does not give rise to any presumption of lay superiority – of the superior moral condition of lay people!)

But innocence held a profound meaning for Chesterton, and I’d like to focus on this dimension of his life and character, and link it with his insight into the nature of childhood and his love of children. I’ll also explore how deeply Christian his understanding was, how reflective it was of Christ’s attitude to childhood.

Let me mention a couple of incidents that capture the emotional response that Chesterton had to children – the ways in which children tugged at his heart-strings. One occasion was when he was travelling to give a lecture. He had planned to prepare his talk in the train, but he spent the journey playing with children in the compartment. The father of the children had just suffered the loss of his wife, and he thanked Chesterton for entertaining the children during the trip.¹

Another occasion was when he was at a party with children, and a mother, conscious of Chesterton’s literary reputation, asked her child, when he came back home, if Mr Chesterton had been very clever. The child replied: ‘Yes, Mum - you should see him catch buns in his mouf.’²

Without doubt, Chesterton’s sense of children was very much bound up with his own experience of childhood, which was abundantly happy. In his autobiography, published several months after his death in 1936, Chesterton recalls not only various incidents from his childhood, but also the thoughts and feelings which a child experiences. He displays a deep intuitive understanding of the way a child forms his picture of the world. As the British literary critic John Gross once commented, the opening chapters of Chesterton’s **Autobiography** ‘are littered with sound observations and shrewd distinctions which are still worth pondering, notably in connection with the nature of play and the difference between imagination and illusion.’³

In her biography of Chesterton, Maisie Ward testifies that, even as a schoolboy, he had an ardent love of children.⁴ In his earliest writings, he showed a profound affinity with childhood that he never lost. As he wrote in an early essay:

¹ Maisie Ward, *Return to Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p.238.

² Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p.222.

³ John Gross, “Behind the Toby Jug,” *The Observer* (13 April 1969), p.28.

⁴ Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, p.210.

*Happy is he who still loves something he loved in the nursery;
he has not been broken in two by time; he is not two men, but one,
and has saved not only his soul but his life.*⁵

By the time Chesterton reached his early 20s, his imagination was clearly enlivened and strengthened by his affection for children. In a notebook he kept at this time, as a way of recording his developing philosophy of life, he wrote – in the form of a poem:

*Sunlight in a child's hair.
It is like the kiss of Christ upon all children.
I blessed the child: and hoped the blessing
would go with him
And never leave him; . . .*⁶

Here we can see an early sign of one of Chesterton's deepest intuitions - connecting the Christian belief in God becoming man – the Incarnation of Christ - with the experience of a little child.

Nearly 30 years later, in a mature work, *The Everlasting Man* (1925), he devoted a chapter to 'The God in the Cave', and he outlined the significance of God as a child in these terms:

*Any agnostic or atheist whose childhood has known a real Christmas has ever afterwards, whether he likes it or not, an association in his mind between two ideas that most of mankind must regard as remote from each other; the idea of a baby and the idea of unknown strength that sustains the stars. His instincts and imagination can still connect them, when his reason can no longer see the need of the connection; for him there will always be some savour of religion about the mere picture of a mother and a baby; some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God.*⁷

In his picture of reality, Chesterton linked these two apparently unconnected, even opposing, ideas – God and a child, divinity and infancy, omnipotence and powerlessness. As he once wrote: '*Bethlehem is emphatically a place where extremes meet.*'⁸ It is the birthplace of the Divine Child, at once human and divine, at once powerless and all-powerful. The British theologian, John Milbank, has pointed out that Christian teaching turns around the traditional approach to pedagogy. It proposes the *child* as the *teacher of the adult*. God becomes incarnate as a child, and as a child, he instructs the learned, teaching the Elders in the Temple.⁹

⁵ G. K. Chesterton, "Old Forms and Ceremonies," in *G.K. Chesterton's Collected Works* Vol. XXVIII: *The Illustrated London News, 1908-1910* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) p.186.

⁶ Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, p.210.

⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947; orig.ed.1925), p.197.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ John Milbank, 'Innocence that Grows: Christianity and the Fantastic Imagination', ABC Religion & Ethics, 31 December 2013.

Repeatedly the Gospels show the singular importance and value that Christ attached to childhood. On the celebrated occasion when children were brought to Him but then turned away by the disciples, Christ called them back:

*Let the little children come to me and do not stop them: for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.*¹⁰

In another part of the Gospels, Christ confronts his disciples who are discussing which was the greatest among them. He speaks of not being the first but rather the last - of being a servant of all. He sets a little child in front of the Twelve, embraces him, and says:

*Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me. . . .*¹¹

And on another occasion, after Christ had expanded his community of disciples as He made his way to Jerusalem to face his crucifixion, He acknowledged yet again the need for being 'childlike'. 'I bless you, Father,' He said, 'for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.'¹² This represents a huge antidote to intellectual pride, and perhaps accounts for the small numbers of intellectuals to be found among the saints! It also helps to explain why St Thomas Aquinas thought, at the close of his life, that all he had written was so much straw.

One of the last books of the Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, explored the profound meaning of Christ's call that we become like little children. The book was entitled *Unless You Become Like This Child* (1988), and it reflected on the condition of spiritual childhood to which we all are called; the life of childlikeness, by which we will see that our supposed condition of adulthood – recognized as apparently successful and self-sufficient – is at odds with our calling to be children of God, which is to be wise about our eternal destiny rather than this earthly life, and dependent on God's wisdom and mercy rather than our own ambitions and achievements.

What are the qualities of childhood that most appealed to Chesterton - and, we can assume, to Christ, given his exaltation of children as the model of those aspiring for Heaven. They are such things as a sense of wonder at creation – the constantly manifested realities of creation – and yet also its mysteries; a natural honesty and innocence (children have not yet learned to dissemble – to be one way and act another); a simplicity of spirit and humility of heart; a deep sense of dependence; a capacity to live acceptingly in the present. These are among the most vital qualities of childhood, which tend to fade as the years pass and the trials and betrayals of life take their toll. Yet Christ's statements would imply that upon the recovery and nurturing of these qualities rests our salvation. In other words, a *childlike* attitude, *not a childish* attitude but a *childlike* one, is a central element in our approach to life, and to a relationship with God.

¹⁰ Luke 18:15-17.

¹¹ Mark 9: 37.

¹² Luke 10:21.

I think this distinction – between ‘childlike’ and ‘childish’ – is fundamental, and it should guard against any misunderstanding or false romanticism about childhood, which might encourage a cult of childhood that represents the very opposite of what Chesterton is saying – that is, a retreat or a sheltering from the hard realities and responsibilities of adult life, and a readiness to avoid immaturity – or lapse back into it - and justify bad behaviour. One of the ironies of our time is the extent to which adults are excused for acting childishly, especially if – in an atmosphere heightened by identity politics - they are seen as part of a protected group that is beyond criticism, related to gender or race or some other category. One thinks of the recent controversy surrounding Serena Williams in the US Tennis Open, or the juvenile, door-banging tactics used by protestors against certain speakers on university campuses because their political views are judged to be too ‘incorrect’ to be heard.

Several years ago, the film critic of the *New York Times*, A.O. Scott, analyzed a major cultural shift that he saw in present-day movies and TV series – what he called “the death of adulthood in American culture,” and particularly the death of manhood.¹³

Scott thought that present-day culture endorsed a permanent childishness - almost the price to be paid for our modern worship of youthfulness. It promoted “an essentially juvenile vision of the world”, and this was making traditional adulthood intellectually untenable - to the point where, as Scott put it, “nobody knows how to be a grown-up anymore.”

Scott cited a TV period drama, *Mad Men*, about the characters in a New York City advertising agency in the 1960s, which illustrated the collapse of male authority in the culture – leading to declining respect for the qualities of masculinity. The series *Mad Men* was among the movies and TV series of our time which favour what Scott called “adolescent heroism” and “comedies of arrested development”. Now, as movie critic for the *New York Times*, Scott was, unsurprisingly, quite ambivalent about these changes. He applauded the demise of what he called “patriarchal authority”, as he believed that the defeat of this authority had liberated women, and created a freer and more open society. He shrank from the sense of male entitlement that had underpinned that authority – though he did not mention that this commonly carried with it a sense of male responsibility, for family and especially for women, as well as society and nation. But Scott acknowledged that the change had effectively “killed off all the grown-ups”. It had had an infantilising effect on our culture.

The current crop of TV’s stock characters – in sitcoms like *Broad City*, *The Simpsons*, and *Bob’s Burger* – are people who are disaffected: in Scott’s words, each “wallows in his own immaturity”. These series abound in desperately sad individuals and dysfunctional families, in which the search for adulthood is conceived “as the state of being forever young”, and grown-ups no longer feel any “compulsion to put away childish things”. (Almost an echo of the words of St Paul [in 1 Corinthians 13] – When I was a child, I spoke and thought as a child; but when I became a man, I “put away childish things.”)

¹³ A.O. Scott, “The Death of Adulthood in American Culture,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/magazine/the-death-of-adulthood-in-american-culture.html>

The death of adulthood did not happen suddenly, Scott thought, and it was ushered in by the emergence of characters who are both sad and bad. We think of such long-running TV series as *The Sopranos*, which the Australian sociologist John Carroll has argued is symbolic of the cultural temper of our times, in which the stability of a culture founded on firm beliefs - particularly Christian beliefs about life and the afterlife - is giving way to one of unbelief, which tries to ignore any ultimate questions (of purpose and meaning).¹⁴ It cannot satisfy the spiritual longings of its people, nor appease its spiritual torments - *spiritual longings*, which are disguised and distracted by the obsessive allurements of a consumerist culture, and *spiritual torments*, which find expression in physical and psychological addictions and self-destructive behavior of one kind or another. As the French theologian, Cardinal Jean Danielou, reflected in *Prayer as a Political Problem* (1967), a culture that does not provide for the spiritual yearnings of adoration and contemplation and prayer for its people is an inhuman culture. It is not fit for human beings. It excludes a fundamental human need, and so fails to fulfill its role as a culture.

To return to *The Sopranos*: the main character, a Mafia mobster, Tony Soprano, is seemingly powerful and in control of his life – and yet he is besieged by insecurities. He suffers panic attacks despite his presiding over a Mafia network in New Jersey. *The Sopranos* illustrates the profound cultural change that A.O. Scott explores – and that is, not just a presumed progress from oppression to liberation, but a shift from family solidity to individual insecurity – family solidity that recognised the value of a child being allowed to be a child, and not a prematurely sexualised adult, and the importance of maturing without losing the enduring qualities of childhood. I think *The Sopranos* could be seen as exemplifying the agony of a culture that aspires to adulthood by experiencing the loss of childhood.

In the popular imagination of our time, a Western hero such as John Wayne, sure of his identity as a man, has been succeeded by an urban gangster, Tony Soprano, abounding in deep insecurities despite his apparent power. Soprano is a character at once detestable and enticing, plagued by anxieties arising from a fearful childhood – a key factor in his psychological unwinding. He has only managed to become an adult by jettisoning his essential nature as a child of God.

If we look at Christian literature over the centuries, we can find examples of the distinction between ‘childlike’ and ‘childish’. In Dante’s *Paradiso*, for example, Beatrice, the guide of Dante, calls him, in the Second Canto, a baby - for his incomprehension about Heaven. At the 2017 Chesterton conference, Stephen McInerney (a Campion lecturer currently on secondment to the Ramsay Centre in Sydney), pointed out the twofold nature of Beatrice’s comment – that it suggests mockery, but is not just mockery. It is also a *compliment*, for it highlights that Dante has, in fact, become like a little child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chesterton recognized this deeply in an early essay, where he explicitly links the idea of childhood with the idea of fatherhood (which is what prompted the title of this paper today - ‘The Innocence of Father Chesterton’). Chesterton wrote:

¹⁴ John Carroll, “These days, we face our most difficult truths through HBO [Home Box Office],” *The Australian*, October 30, 2015. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/popular-cultures-renaissance-led-by-hbo/news-story/0eedf641f56da1f3e1f01244e6c1f7db>

*Christianity seeks after God with the most elementary passion it can find – the craving for a father, the hunger that is as old as the hills. It turns the whole cry of a lost universe into the cry of a lost child.*¹⁵

I'd like to turn to another essay that Chesterton wrote on children in 1901, again at the beginning of his writing career (while he was still in his 20s). It was called 'In Defence of Baby Worship', and formed a chapter in his first book of essays, entitled *The Defendant*. Here he presented a paradoxical defence of such things as 'Rash Vows', 'Penny Dreadfuls', 'Skeletons' and 'Nonsense'. It was the beginning of a long and noble struggle, on Chesterton's part, to champion ideas and values that were ignored or derided in his time.

Chesterton explored a number of themes in this early essay. He began by trying to capture what he sees as the essential qualities of children – that they are, first, very serious, and secondly, that they are, as a result, very happy. '*They are jolly*', he says, '*with the completeness which is possible only in the absence of humour.*'¹⁶ They have what Chesterton calls 'gravity' – '*the gravity of astonishment at the universe*', of seeing the world with utterly fresh eyes, and holding within their heads a new universe – '*a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea.*' If only we could see the stars as a child sees them, observes Chesterton, '*we should need no other apocalypse*' – no other revelation.

Chesterton himself exemplified, throughout his life and his writings, this freshness of vision – a singular ability to see things as they are, unclouded by familiarity, undistorted by ideology. It was, as we've noted, in his own childhood that he received this gift of appreciation – the appreciation of primary realities. As he once noted:

*Nearly all the best and most precious things in the universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing.*¹⁷

What Chesterton valued **instinctively as a child** - such fundamental things as the experience of the concrete and the commonplace, and the personality of the small in comparison with the rootlessly large – he came to **value intellectually as an adult**. This was the way in which he developed towards maturity. As he put it in his autobiography:

*If anybody chooses to say that I have founded all my social philosophy on the antics of a baby, I am quite satisfied to bow and smile.*¹⁸

There is another important theme in this early essay of Chesterton's - and that is, his deep sense of the *spiritual* meaning and significance of children. Chesterton saw childhood as a remarkable image of weakness of nature, an unmistakable helplessness, combined with profound spiritual power and impressiveness. As he argued in his essay offering 'a defence of baby-worship':

¹⁵ A.L. Maycock, *The Man Who Was Chesterton* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1963), p.181.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.149.

¹⁷ G.K. Chesterton, "The Shop of Ghosts: a Good Dream," in *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.249.

¹⁸ *Autobiography*, p.109.

*The very smallness of children makes it possible to regard them as marvels; . . . I doubt if any one of any tenderness or imagination can see the hand of a child and not be a little frightened of it. It is awful to think of the essential human energy moving so tiny a thing; it is like imagining that human nature could live in the wing of a butterfly or the leaf of a tree. When we look upon lives so human and yet so small, we feel as if we ourselves were enlarged to an embarrassing bigness of stature.*¹⁹

Chesterton's insights into the spiritual importance of childhood find a remarkable echo in the writings of French Catholic writers of the same era. The novelist Georges Bernanos, for example, emphasised the continuing significance of childhood in the life of the adult. In the eyes of Bernanos, as the British critic Peter Hebblethwaite noted, childhood was an image of the supernatural condition.²⁰ It was the reflection of a more or less instinctive right relationship to God. An adult possesses hope insofar as he has preserved something of childhood, and struggles to restore and enhance its qualities. As Chantal de Clergeric, the heroine in one of Bernanos's novels, remarks:

*"It seems to me," she had confided to Abbe Cenabre one day, "that it is possible to act like an adult, keeping up one's little place in the world, defending one's legitimate interests, and at the same time view the essential, elementary things – joy, sorrow, death – with the eyes of a child."*²¹

The theologian John Milbank, whom I've quoted before, makes a similar point when discussing the 19th century Scottish author, George MacDonald. (Chesterton, incidentally, cherished a great admiration for MacDonald, acknowledging the deep impact on him of one of MacDonald's fantasy novels.) Milbank reflects on a fairy story of MacDonald's, entitled 'The Light Princess', and he points out that the love between the Princess and a Prince is dependent on the Princess becoming a child; recapturing the vision of childhood in order to become a full adult. Thus, the experience of maturing, Milbank argues, is actually 'an event *within* childhood'.²² Childhood, therefore, is not something that we grow out of. It is something we *grow into*.

Bernanos held a similar view. He thought that the values enshrined in childhood still call to us from the future. They are a sign, a faint intimation, of communion with God. In his final book, *The Carmelites*, a play about a community of nuns martyred during the French Revolution, Bernanos cast the meaning of a religious vocation in terms of the rediscovery of childhood values. The Prioress in the play compares the prayer of a shepherd-boy, which is offered spontaneously as he tends his flock, with the absorption in prayer that should distinguish the life of the nun:

What a little shepherd-boy does from time to time, and on an impulse of the heart, it is our duty to do both day and night. Not that we have any

¹⁹ G.K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Baby Worship," *The Defendant* (London: J.M. Dent, 1901), p.153.

²⁰ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Bernanos: An Introduction* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1965), p. 102.

²¹ Georges Bernanos, *Joy* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1948), p.93.

²² Milbank, op.cit.

*reason to suppose that our prayers are better than his, but on the contrary. That simplicity of spirit, that sweet surrender to the Divine Majesty which, in him, is the inspiration of a moment, a true act of grace, and as though the flooding illumination of genius, we must devote our lives to acquiring, or of finding again, for it is one of the gifts of childhood. . . Once we have left those behind us, we have to suffer for a very long time before entering them again, just as when the long night is over, we find the dawn once more.*²³

Another French Catholic author with a profound grasp of childhood was the poet, Charles Péguy. He was killed in 1914, in one of the first battles of World War I. Péguy was conscious of the links between childhood and innocence. He thought that innocence was not the absence of experience. It was not a naïve refusal to accept the experience of the world and deal with reality. Rather the opposite. 'It is innocence that is full, ' Charles Péguy wrote, 'and experience that is empty. It is innocence that wins and experience that loses.' Péguy saw that innocence is not really a lost condition from the past, but a future hope. It beckons to us from the future. 'It is innocence that grows,' he wrote, 'and experience that wanes.'²⁴ So the sense we have, very deeply in Péguy and Bernanos, as in Chesterton, is *not* of living in a past childhood, but of *a past childhood living in us*. It's not a condition of futile escape or naïve nostalgia. It's a condition of *promise* calling out to us – a condition of hope, and a pathway to salvation.

In 1909, Chesterton moved to the village of Beaconsfield, outside of London on the road to Oxford. He developed there a special friendship with the local children, entertaining them, in company with his wife Frances, entertaining them individually - and in groups. A particular favourite was his sword-stick, which fascinated children as he waved it about, drawing it out of a decorated cane walking stick and lunging at nearby bushes. He devised for the children quite elaborate games – and the children attending these spectacles would, as one biographer, Michael Coren, has written '*scream with delight at such games, dancing around the huge Gilbert as though he were a never-ending source of fun and amusement.*'²⁵

Chesterton welcomed with delight the arrival of his friends' children into the world, an attitude that must have been tinged with a certain heartache over his and his wife's inability to have children of their own.

I would like to conclude these reflections about Chesterton's attitude to children with a poignant expression of his championing of childhood.

His first published books consisted of poems, not prose works or pieces of journalism, and in his first volume of collected poems (published in 1900), he imagines, with remarkable prescience, the life of an unborn baby. The baby itself is the voice of the poem, giving expression to the sentiments of wonder and gratitude. I would like to quote three of its stanzas, particularly the last two, very touching ones:

²³ Georges Bernanos, *The Carmelites* (London: Fontana Books, 1961), p.40.

²⁴ Milbank, *op.cit.*

²⁵ Michael Coren, *Gilbert: the Man Who Was G.K. Chesterton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), pp.179-180.

*In dark I lie: dreaming that there
Are great eyes cold or kind,
And twisted streets and silent doors,
And living men behind.*

*I think that if they gave me leave
Within the world to stand,
I would be good through all the day
I spent in fairyland.*

*They should not hear a word from me
Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
If only I were born.²⁶*

Let me turn finally to a second, important aspect of Chesterton's innocence – and that is his lifelong love of fairy tales. We might understandably presume that fairy tales are for the very young, and that we grow out of them as we get older. But Chesterton saw them as bound up with our sense of mystery and enchantment, and he deplored the way in which the culture of his time – and even more, I think, of our time – is full of disenchantment and despair.

We think of other authors, such as Tolkien and his imaginative works like *The Lord of the Rings* (hailed as the most popular book of the 20th century, and turned into a movie set amid the breathtaking beauty of New Zealand), and C.S. Lewis, with his books for children, notably *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which have also been turned into a series of movies revolving around the adventures of children in the fantasy world of Narnia (also partly shot in New Zealand – and, in the case of one of the movies, filmed almost entirely in Australia). Now, Narnia, like Tolkien's world, is not a fantasy that is devoid or destructive of reality. It is an imaginative re-creation of our world, emphasizing the qualities that inspire and ennoble us, rather than drag us down.

Chesterton believed that fairy tales were *real*. They were not a product of fantasy. They were all about reality. They do not represent an indulgence in fantasy or 'make believe.' On the contrary, they contain what Chesterton called 'the deepest truth of the earth, the real record of men's feeling for things.' Fairy tales are full of moral truths, so that, for example, *Beauty and the Beast* contains 'the eternal and essential truth that until we love a thing in all its ugliness we cannot make it beautiful.'²⁷

In *Orthodoxy* (1908), he devotes an entire chapter, 'The Ethics of Elfland,' to showing how fairy tales supplied his earliest intellectual formation. 'My first and last philosophy,' he wrote, 'that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery.' Fairyland was for him 'the sunny country of common sense'²⁸ – and fairy tales the source of a sound philosophy of life.

²⁶ G.K. Chesterton, "By the Babe Unborn," in *Collected Poems* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1927), p.291.

²⁷ G.K. Chesterton, "William Morris and his School," *Varied Types* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968; orig.ed. 1903), pp.22-23.

²⁸ G.K. Chesterton, "The Ethics of Elfland," *Orthodoxy* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1908), p.85.

In another place, he explains that the core of fairy tales is also the core of ethics - that 'peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. . . . that all happiness hangs on one thin veto; all positive joy depends on one negative. . . . that, if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided.'²⁹

He went on to illustrate the many fundamental truths revealed in fairy tales:

'Cinderella may have a dress woven on supernatural looms and blazing with unearthly brilliance; but she must be back when the clock strikes twelve...

*A girl is given a box on condition she does not open it; she opens it, and all the evils of this world rush out at her. A man and woman are put in a garden on condition that they do not eat one fruit: they eat it, and lose their joy in all the fruits of the earth.'*³⁰

In early 2018, the State Government of Victoria announced that it would be encouraging children to act as 'fairytale detectives', so that they can identify gendered messages in fairy tales. What a remarkable contrast with Chesterton's appreciation of fairy tales! He focused on the principal truths about life that are to be discovered in fairy tales. He was, of course, aware that some people thought fairy tales were bad for children – as when, on one occasion, a lady wrote to him to say that it was cruel to tell children such tales as it frightened them. Chesterton's response was that this misunderstands the nature of children. If they are denied stories about scary mythical creatures like goblins, they will simply conjure them up for themselves.

Children are alarmed at this world, Chesterton argued, because it is a very alarming place. Their fear does not come from fairy tales: it comes from what Chesterton calls 'the universe of the soul.' He then went on to explain how fairy tales fill out the child's understanding of reality:

*'Fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give a child his first idea of bogey [something that causes fear or worry] What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.'*³¹

The Victorian government's concern about the damaging effects of fairy tales bears out, in a peculiar and even perverse way, Chesterton's high appreciation of such childhood literature. The government is only pursuing such programs of social engineering because it recognizes the powerful impact that fairy tales can have on the very young. What a pity it did not consult Chesterton's writings on the subject, and spend some time in 'the sunny country of common sense' - and thus avoid the embarrassment of a monumental missing of the point.

²⁹ G.K. Chesterton, "Fairy Tales," *All Things Considered* (London: Methuen, 1908), p.257.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.256.

³¹ G.K. Chesterton, "The Red Angel," *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.102.

Let me conclude where we began – and that is the title of this paper based on the “innocence” of Father Brown.

What did Chesterton mean when he highlighted the ‘innocence’ of Father Brown? Is he simply a rather bumbling, eccentric priest who seems, by accident, to identify the criminal? Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, provide a succinct answer. Father Brown, he has said, solves crimes for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, he gets inside, not only of the criminal’s mind, but also the criminal’s *heart*. He gets inside of the criminal as a *fellow human being*, relying neither on modern technology or even the scientific accumulation and analysis of clues. As is made clear in one of the Father Brown stories, ‘The Hammer of God,’ when the priest is confronted by a questioner:

“How do you know all this?” [the man] cried. “Are you a devil?”

“I am a man,” answered Father Brown gravely; “and therefore have all devils in my heart.”

And secondly, Father Brown penetrates the human heart by appearing so unworldly, so ordinary and innocent - so *like a child* at times - that he is never suspected of being so perceptive and penetrating, so in touch with reality. He catches the criminal by surprise. There is, perhaps, something of the historical character of the ‘Holy Fool’ (or ‘Fool for God’) about Father Brown – one who is prepared to appear a fool because of his simple and straightforward imitation of Christ; a person for whom, in St Paul’s words, the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men. So divine wisdom is connected with human innocence – especially the innocence of the child.

Probably the earliest model of the ‘Holy Fool’ is a Christian monk in the 6th century, a simpleton called Simeon, who pretended to be stupid and ineffective as a way of leading people to Christ. He would give simple answers to expose them to the obvious – to a childlike awareness of reality, to common sense. (In the paragraph following the one I quoted earlier from a Father Brown story - about a man having devils in his heart - Chesterton is asked by the same man how he knew something else, and Father Brown replies, simply: ‘Oh, . . . that was common sense.’)

Thus the ‘innocence’ of Father Brown is the ‘innocence’ of Chesterton. Not a state of naivety or avoidance of experience, but rather one that accepts, yet transcends, experience. Not simply a condition of the past, but a call of the future - a cry for God that only He can answer, when He calls us home.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS



Speakers at the 2018 Australian Chesterton Conference at Campion College. From left: Karl Schmude, Gary Furnell, Nancy Brown, Sophie York, and David van Gend.

Nancy Brown is an award-winning poet and well-known author on G.K. Chesterton, who has done much to promote an appreciation of his writings, as was recognised by the American Chesterton Society's conferring upon her in 2018 its Lifetime Achievement Award. She has adapted the Father Brown stories for younger readers – in two volumes, *The Father Brown Reader: Stories from Chesterton* (2007) and *The Father Brown Reader II: More Stories from Chesterton* (2010). In 2015 she produced the definitive biography of G.K. Chesterton's wife, Frances, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton* (which the author Joseph Pearce has called 'a great gift to the world of Chesterton scholarship'), and she has also produced editions of Frances Chesterton's plays and poetry.

Sophie York is a dedicated wife to anaesthetist Paul Dunkin and mother of four sons. She is a speaker and writer, a barrister (presently working as a university lecturer teaching Jurisprudence - the philosophy of law). She is a Naval Legal Officer in the Reserves. She is on the Board of Campion College, a post she took up in 2010. She was the National Spokeswoman for Marriage Alliance for the last 3 years, during which the Federal Government held a National Postal Survey relating to the definition of marriage in Australian law. She is the lead Senate candidate in NSW, for The Conservatives [The Australian Conservatives]. Hobby-wise, she is into photography & and would happily curl up with a good book, given the chance!

David van Gend is a medical GP in Toowoomba, married to Jane with three adult sons. His main claim to fame is that he lived for 6 months on Grove Rd, Beaconsfield, five doors down from the Chestertons. For 25 years he has been pointing out what's wrong with the world as head of various pro-life and pro-family organisations, and humbly believes that he has played a key role in losing almost every battle over that time! Most recently he was president of the Australian Marriage Forum and wrote a

book called "Stealing from a Child", which was banned by a printer and ignored by the media but still reached best-seller status. The book, published by Connor Court, considers the injustice of so-called 'marriage equality' and the future of the child in an increasingly "gender fluid" culture.

Gary Furnell is a professional librarian and a frequent contributor to Australian literary and cultural journals. He has spoken at several Australian Chesterton Society conferences, and following the 2018 Conference, he succeeded Ray Finnegan as the Society's Secretary-Treasurer.

Karl Schmude is President of the Australian Chesterton Society and editor of its quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*. He is the author of various biographical booklets, including one in 1974 on Chesterton (re-published in London in 2008) and on the historian Christopher Dawson, and he has engaged in freelance writing and speaking for more than 50 years, both in Australia and internationally. He served for many years as University Librarian at the University of New England in Armidale NSW. Most recently he was the co-founder of Australia's first liberal arts college, Champion College in Sydney, where the Australian Chesterton Society holds its annual conferences.