



The DEFENDANT

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

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

Lapsing into Relevancy - the Art of the Essay

by Karl Schmude

In 2018 the American author and editor, Joseph Epstein, wrote an enchanting essay on "The Bookish Life," (*First Things*, November 2018), in which he mentioned that part of his current reading – among many books – was Chesterton's biography of St Francis of Assisi.

For nearly 25 years Epstein was editor of the general cultural journal, *The American Scholar*. I used to read with pleasure his long and thoughtful editorials, which were really a series of random reflections in the tradition of the personal essay, beginning with Montaigne in the 16th century and extending to – perhaps reaching its culmination in – Chesterton



Joseph Epstein

and other popular authors of the 20th century.

Epstein has a richly stocked mind and would once have been called a Man of Letters, the fruit of a liberal education grounded in wisdom – exposing us, in Matthew Arnold's words, to "the best which has been thought and said in the world". Epstein's reflections in his article, "The Bookish Life", bear witness to this tradition as he describes his lifelong reading habits.

I found his insights to be very Chestertonian – in the immediately recognisable sense of being informal and desultory, yet full of surprising insights. Chesterton once

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Conference postponed to 2021



Frances and Gilbert Chesterton

The annual Australian Chesterton conference held at Campion College was to focus this year on the theme of **Chesterton and Woman: Romance and Reality**.

Papers would be given on such topics as chivalry; heroines in Shakespeare's plays; Sigrid Undset's classic novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter*; the importance for young people of human dignity and sexual integrity; and the fatherhood of Chesterton.

Regrettably, because of the coronavirus restrictions and the uncertainty relating to travel for speakers and participants, the conference has been postponed to 2021.

Further information on next year's conference will be provided in the first issue of *The Defendant* in February.

introduced a book of introductions he had written to the works of various authors ("prefaces to which other people have fervently contributed excellent books") by describing them as "scraps of scribbling" that showed "occasional lapses into relevancy". (*G.K.C. as M.C.*, 1929)

Epstein has a similar talent for lapsing into relevancy. His reading habits are rather casual and unsystematic – reflecting, as he admits, his multiple and changing interests – and yet they are underpinned by a devotion to the pursuit of illuminating truths.

He is resistant to recommended lists of "best books", which he sees as undesirably limiting – they leave out too many other worthy books. Trying to define "best books" is based on a mistaken "yearning for a direct route to wisdom" for which, he believes, there is no map or blueprint or shortcut.

Epstein is not explicit about whether certain works merit the description of "Great Books", but he might endorse the advice of the American classics professor, John Senior, that there are very many "Good Books" everyone should read. Senior once proposed a list of a thousand such works, which prepare the cultural soil for any higher reading. He argued that "the seminal ideas of Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine and St Thomas thrive only in an imaginative ground saturated with fables, fairy tales, stories, rhymes, and adventures." (*The Death of Christian Culture*, 1978)

The search for books worth reading leads Epstein to enjoy the unexpected discovery. He loves second-hand bookstores – as "places where you find books you didn't know you wanted". He laments the likely loss of the independent bookstore in the digital age, citing his late friend, the American sociologist Edward Shils, who thought that bookstores – and particularly used bookstores – were a crucial pathway to education.

This advice fits in with Chesterton's lifelong stress on the imagination – as necessary for seeing reality as it is, so often staled by familiarity. For this reason Chesterton, as the practising journalist he was, saw the importance of fiction in conjunction with fact:

"Every healthy person at some period must feed on fiction as well as fact; because fact is a thing which the world gives to him, whereas fiction is a thing which he gives to the world."

Human beings, he argued, "cannot be human without some field of fancy or imagination; some vague idea of the romance of life; and even some holiday of the mind in a romance that is a refuge from life." ("Fiction as Food," *The Spice of Life*, 1964)

Speed reading - and slow reading

What is at odds with dwelling in "some field of fancy or imagination", or taking time for a "holiday of the mind"? Epstein believes it is the practice of speed reading, which he abhors. He recalls Woody Allen's famous comment that, after taking a speed-reading course, he got through Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in twenty minutes. "It's about Russia," he concluded.

Epstein's firm preference is for "slow reading", which allows for savouring, not simply swallowing, and is likely to

yield deeper understandings as a result of digested reading and reflecting.

"I myself rarely read," he says, "more than twenty-five or thirty pages of a serious book in a single sitting." He relishes the experience of not rushing through a novel by Thomas Mann, a short story by Chekhov, or an essay by Max Beerbohm. "After all," he muses, "you never know when you will pass this way again."

Thus he is not keen on novels or biographies described as "page-turners". "I prefer," he writes, "to read books that are page-stoppers, that cause me to stop and contemplate a striking idea, an elegant phrase, an admirably constructed sentence. A serious reader reads with a pencil in hand to sideline, underline, make a note."

One of Epstein's remarks most reminiscent of Chesterton is his desire to avoid the trap of only reading present-day works. Aldous Huxley raised this problem in the 1930s. In a scientific age when people feel forced to "keep up", Huxley worried that the pressure to be well informed could prove incompatible with cultural perspective.

"To be well informed," he wrote, "one must read quickly a great number of merely instructive books. To be cultivated, one must read slowly and with lingering appreciation the comparatively few books that have been written by men who lived, thought and felt with style." (*Texts and Pretexts*, 1932)

In Epstein's words: "We all live in the contemporary world, but that doesn't mean that we have to restrict our reading to that world, which is doubtless already too much with us."

This call for chronological - and cultural - freedom echoes Chesterton's comment on literature that is not trapped by time. "The first use of good literature," he said, "is that it prevents a man from being merely modern. . . . The road of the ancient centuries is strewn with dead moderns." ("On Reading," *The Common Man*, 1950)

Epstein is of Jewish background and thus not bound by time. He entertains the prospect of heaven and the threat of hell. Conscious of his Western cultural roots, he takes a broad view of all that he has not yet read, not only about his own culture but about the life and literature of other continents and ages. But, as he reflects:

"They'll have to wait, it begins to look, until the next life, which, I like to think, will surely provide a well-stocked library. If it doesn't, I'm not sure I want any part of it. Hell of course will have a library, but one stocked exclusively with science fiction, six-hundred-odd page novels by men whose first name is Jonathan, and books extolling the 1960s."

Epstein finishes with a rousing affirmation of the value of books:

"One brings one's experience of life to one's reading, and one's reading to one's experience of life. You can get along without reading serious books – many extraordinary, large-hearted, highly intelligent people have - but why, given the chance, would you want to?"

"Books make life so much richer, grander, more splendid." ■

Chesterton – A New Zealand Experience

by *Monica Devine*

Monica Devine, a wife and mother, lives in Wellington, New Zealand, where she manages a family law practice. In this special article for *The Defendant*, Monica reflects on her personal experience of reading Chesterton and her efforts to promote his writings in New Zealand.



I think that I first became acquainted with the writings of GK Chesterton out of sheer boredom. I was visiting friends in the home of a woman who was to become my mother-in-law, Clare Devine.

I feel that Chesterton would have been very much at home in her lounge. Shabby, disordered but warm and friendly with music, laughter, food and literary treasures abounding.

There we played cards, listened to Gilbert and Sullivan and enjoyed the best of times. When totally exhausted from all the revelry, we fell on her dishevelled book collection. Fulton Sheen, Newman, Dickens, Belloc, CS Lewis and Chesterton, to name a few.

Some of these books were first issued from the local library and then painstakingly copied by hand out into notebooks. With no TV in the house, what else could we do but devour every page of these books and then discuss their merits or otherwise? Thus, my formation in the faith was completed, something like a finishing school for budding Christians.

At first I thought Chesterton was rather full of himself, but as I ventured more deeply, this 'Apostle of Common Sense' revealed his depth of insight and his authentic love of and charity towards all of mankind.

What struck me early on was his knack for explaining the faith from an oblique angle, shedding new light on the truths we had come to know, using metaphor and humour. He was both earthy and real and supernatural, an unusual but saintly combination.

My mother-in-law often quoted Chesterton in her public missives – something I have continued to do to this day.

My husband Fintan, significantly more literate than I, has read and re-read most of the Chesterton titles. Due to the busy-ness of my domestic and professional duties I tend to dip in and out of his books, but I am ever watchful for a quote

suited to the current events of the day. The logic and common sense of Chesterton are timeless and in a very true sense he is a prophet of our times.

I wanted to do something to help pass the gift to mankind that Chesterton was on to the next generation. Starting a Facebook page seemed like a good beginning. As a subscriber to the *Gilbert Magazine* from the US, I asked them to send me a list of all New Zealand subscribers, which they did. There weren't many but at least that gave me a base from which to start.

Now our Facebook page, about one year later, has about 50 followers and many more visitors. I use the page to post quotes which might pique the interest of readers, invite them to online events and to the annual Australian Conference, and suggest reading material that is relevant to the times in which we live.

I personally attended the 2019 Chesterton Conference in Sydney which was particularly useful and enjoyable. I had heard and read a little about Distributism, but during the conference we heard twice from Garrick Small about how the precepts of this system of economic organisation may provide the solution to many of our first world problems.

The principle that struck me most was the idea that the economy should be organised around the family, not individuals. I think the 'Covid-19 drama' has reinforced the essentiality of the family unit to the economy a whole. I was also privileged to hear Fr Paul Stenhouse, one of the sharpest intellects of the Australian clergy, speak at what might have been his last public address before his death in late 2019.

I hope we can work towards having a small conference in New Zealand in the near future.

We all owe a great debt to Chesterton, a beacon of light in a world that has lost its way – but always full of hope. My prayer is that the next generations will discover this great, though humble, man of God. ■

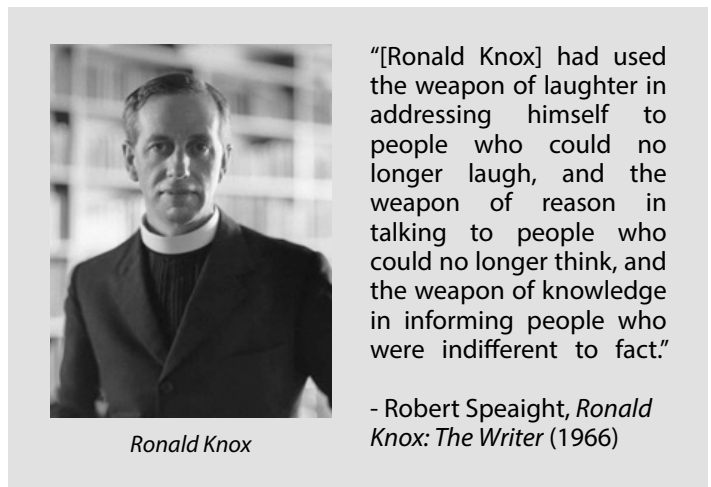


The family of Fintan and Monica Devine in Wellington

Ronald Knox and the Cultural Credibility of Christianity

by *Francis Phillips*

*The English feature writer and book reviewer for the London Catholic Herald, **Francis Phillips**, pondered - in her April 24, 2020 blog - the significance, in a different cultural era, of the beliefs of the English Catholic apologist, Msgr Ronald Knox (1888-1957). Her article is reprinted with her kind permission.*



Ronald Knox

"[Ronald Knox] had used the weapon of laughter in addressing himself to people who could no longer laugh, and the weapon of reason in talking to people who could no longer think, and the weapon of knowledge in informing people who were indifferent to fact."

- Robert Speaight, *Ronald Knox: The Writer* (1966)

Having discovered it in a pile of books I have been reorganising, I have been dipping into Ronald Knox's *A Spiritual Aeneid* (1918), the account of his spiritual journey from High Anglicanism to Catholicism.

Knox converted in 1917, influenced both by Robert Hugh Benson, himself a convert and the son of an archbishop of Canterbury, and G.K. Chesterton, a convert some years later. When Knox died in 1957, his first biography was written by his friend Evelyn Waugh, another famous convert.

What struck me about the world that Knox describes at the outset of the 20th century is that Christianity was taken with entire seriousness by educated people.

Knox, a brilliant classicist both at Eton and at Oxford had grown up in an Anglican milieu; his father later became bishop of Manchester. He writes that at Eton, "I seem to have accepted a supernatural religion without trouble or speculation at this period." This meant belief in "the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Saviour, Heaven, Hell, and the forgiveness of our sins only through the atoning merits of the Precious Blood."

In a much-quoted passage at the end of his book, Knox describes his journey from Anglicanism to the Church:

"It was as if I had been a man homeless and needing shelter, who first of all had taken refuge under a shed at the back of an empty house. There he had found an outhouse unlocked, and felt more cheerfulness and comfort there. Then he had tried a door in the building itself ... [and] had visited this back part of the house, more roomy than anything he had yet experienced, and giving, through a little crack, a view into the wide spaces of the house itself beyond.... Unable now to content himself with shed or outhouse, he had wandered round and round the house ... and then he had tried the front door, and found that it had been open all the time."

Earlier this century, the prize-winning novelist Hilary Mantel described Catholicism as not for "respectable people". What has happened in the last hundred years for the Faith, once intellectually respectable enough for brilliant and creative minds like Knox and Waugh to find their home in it, to have come to this pass? That is, to be dismissed without challenge by a prominent historical

novelist like Mantel – and otherwise largely ignored by the intelligentsia?

If the BBC, the UK's national broadcaster [Ed: and Australia's ABC] is anything to go by, Christianity is irrelevant where it is not suspected of moral scandal.

American poet and critic, Dana Gioia, has asked the same question in his thoughtful essay "The Catholic Writer Today" (2019), which is his opening article in a collection that includes studies of poets such as GM Hopkins and Elizabeth Jennings.

As in the UK in the mid-20th century, Gioia describes a strong Catholic presence in poetry, criticism and literature in the USA, citing names such as Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Allen Tate and Robert Lowell.

As Gioia points out, not all such writers were necessarily practising Catholics (Graham Greene certainly wasn't) but they did share a general "Catholic world view" that was both coherent and artistically fruitful: that we live in a fallen world; the need for grace and redemption; that evil is real; that nature is sacramental; and having a grasp of a long historical perspective. As he remarks, contemporary culture is secular. One might describe it as ahistorical, narrowly rational and dominated by relativism: you have your truth, I have mine.

According to Gioia, the collapse of Catholic literary life "reflects a larger crisis of confidence in the Church, that touches on all aspects of religious, cultural and intellectual life".

Somehow, I see this reflected in our UK Bishops' immediate closing of all churches and sacramental life when the current lockdown began. It gave the (false) impression that this sacramental life and the sacramental world-view lying behind it are not vital to us Catholics; indeed, an acceptance that our beliefs are on the margins of society, dwindling in importance compared to the National Health Service, our alternative "religion".

Whether as poets, creative artists, intellectuals or ordinary members of the Church, we need to find ways to make Catholicism respectable again, as it still was in the mid-20th century world of Knox and Waugh. It starts with confidence in what we believe. ■



Nancy Brown

Denis J Conlon RIP

by Nancy Brown



Denis J Conlon



G.K. CHESTERTON,
THE POET
by Denis J. Conlon

A dear Chestertonian friend and scholar Denis J. Conlon died of Coronavirus on May 7, 2020. He was 88 years old and had been living in a nursing home for the past year.

Denis was one of the world's most distinguished Chesterton scholars—the Dean of all Chesterton scholars. He was also a Catholic gentleman and husband. His knowledge of Gilbert and Frances was extensive, his research thorough, and his kindness in sharing his knowledge brought others joy.

He is mainly known for having edited many Chesterton works, including *Chesterton: The Critical Judgements (1900 -1937)*, *Chesterton: A Half-Century of Views and Collected Works - Volumes VI (Novels), X (Poetry), XI (Plays), and XIV (Stories)* of The Ignatius Press Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton.

His last book was a new biography of G.K.C., called *G.K. Chesterton: A Reappraisal*, which came out in 2015 to critical acclaim. In this excellent biography Denis Conlon portrays Chesterton as the giant that he was, literally and metaphorically. It includes some previously unpublished photographs and illustrations and the diary of Gilbert and Frances Chesterton's trip to Palestine and the Holy Land.

The book is a worthy addition to the genre. One might wonder at yet another biography of Chesterton. But Chesterton has a unique problem: he's a 21-stone man who continues to fall through the cracks.

Perhaps Conlon's best discovery was when he was visiting the attic of the home of Chesterton's former secretary, Dorothy Collins, shortly after her death. It was while going through an old trunk that he happened upon some writing of Chesterton's.

One thing he found was a notebook containing an unpublished early novel. The only thing missing was the title page. Denis dubbed it *Basil Howe* after the main character. Written in 1893 or '94 when Chesterton was about 19 years

old, and only published in 2001, Conlon believed the story was about one of Chesterton's first romantic relationships, with a young woman named Violet Vivian (named Gertrude Gray in the novel). *Basil Howe: A Story of Young Love* and the biography *G.K. Chesterton: A Reappraisal* are unfortunately both out of print.

Dr. Conlon taught in England, Singapore, Newfoundland and Belgium where he was Professor of English Literature & Culture at the University of Antwerp. He served in the Royal Air Force as a young man. He was a long-standing member of the [UK] Chesterton Society, serving as its chairman from 1996 until 2008.

Denis Conlon was a recipient of the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Maureen, and separated from his second wife, Hendrika.

Conlon presented a paper at the Chesterton Conference in Beaconsfield in 2004 titled *The Laughing Giant in Chesterton's Poetry*. Additionally, he edited many editions of mediaeval texts, modern plays and short stories in both English and French.

Anyone who has read any of the Collected Works volumes Conlon edited for Ignatius Press has benefited from his helpful and insightful footnotes. He added interest and historical background and helped the reader to better understand the writings of G.K. Chesterton.

This Chestertonian gentleman will be greatly missed. ■

Nancy Brown has assembled a list of Denis Conlon's works on Chesterton (including his BBC interview about the character of Father Brown), which are available on request from the editor of *The Defendant* (kgschmude@gmail.com).

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Global Gateways to Chesterton

• London and Sydney

by Karl Schmude

The Defendant has previously published reports on two special collections of Chesterton's works – one in London (now managed by the USA's University of Notre Dame at its UK campus), the other in Sydney (developed at Campion College).

This section of our newsletter gives updates on these collections, and relates the story of a young American student at Notre Dame who wrote a thesis on Chesterton as a result of using the London-based collection.

Chesterton in London

The Notre Dame University collection springs from the superb collection of Chesterton's books, journals and memorabilia assembled over many years by Aidan Mackey, a former teacher and bookseller and noted Chesterton scholar.

The collection was originally developed in Aidan's home in Bedford; then housed in a number of locations in Oxford, before being relocated to Notre Dame's London Global Gateway just off Trafalgar Square.

Aidan Mackey outlined the proposed move to London in *The Defendant* (Autumn 2016), and our Winter 2019 issue provided an update.

Most recently, the Academic Director of the London Global Gateway, JoAnn Della Neva, has announced plans to encourage individual scholars to access the Chesterton collection. These include the offering of public lectures and academic

conferences to showcase the results of recent research, some of which can be conducted in conjunction with the British Library's significant Chesterton collection.

For a sneak preview of the collection now at Notre Dame's London campus, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ljl4yWrN0&feature=youtu.be>



Aidan Mackey with the Chesterton collection he developed

A semi-annual newsletter reporting on the collection can be requested for free at: <https://signup.e2ma.net/signup/1915416/1895974/> ■

The Student Who Discovered Chesterton

A young American student at the American campus of the University of Notre Dame applied to study for a year at its London campus - and used the relocated Chesterton collection in London as a basic resource for his major undergraduate thesis.

Brady Stiller (pictured at Chesterton's grave in Beaconsfield UK) was recently named as Valedictorian at Notre Dame for the Class of 2020. His remarkable story can be found at: <https://london.nd.edu/>

In summary, he began studying a 'Chesterton and Catholicism' course taught at Notre Dame by the theology professor, David Fagerberg, a devotee of Chesterton and regular columnist to the American Chesterton magazine, *Gilbert*.

"Just a few classes in," Stiller recalls, "I knew I'd found my favourite author for life."

On reaching England, Stiller decided to follow literally in Chesterton's footsteps. He started locally in London, visiting such sites as Fleet Street, the traditional haunt of British journalists including Chesterton, and then travelling to Beaconsfield west of London, where Chesterton spent the last 14 years of his life.



The student then began to use the precious collection that Notre Dame had moved to London. The material was still in boxes, but the University's staff helped the young researcher to find the resources for his senior thesis on the idea of vocation and the ways in which Chesterton's sense of story and romance and adventure can reveal to every person a vocation from God.

Stiller was deeply impressed by the quantity of pictorial material that Chesterton produced. There was an abundance of designs and illustrations, worthy of Chesterton as a former

student of the Slade School of Art in London, which he had attended after leaving school instead of going to university.

The original characters that Chesterton had drawn for the toy theatre he designed were of special interest, and Stiller read Chesterton's copious notes.

"I think the toy theatre is the star item from this archive," he has remarked. He came to realize how much these pieces symbolized Chesterton's worldview – so deeply

artistic as well as intellectual, depicting reality as well as conceptualizing it.

An inspiring footnote to Brady Stiller's discovery of Chesterton is that he met Aidan Mackey who had painstakingly developed the original collection.

Aidan told me in May this year that he had the great pleasure of meeting Brady in London in 2019. He was deeply impressed by the young student, and believes that Brady's thesis deserves to be published and made more widely available. ■

Chesterton in Sydney

The Sydney-based collection of works by and on Chesterton has been developed at Campion College in the suburb of Old Toongabbie.

The Campion Librarian, Keziah van Aardt, described the collection in *The Defendant* (Winter 2016), and provides the following update:

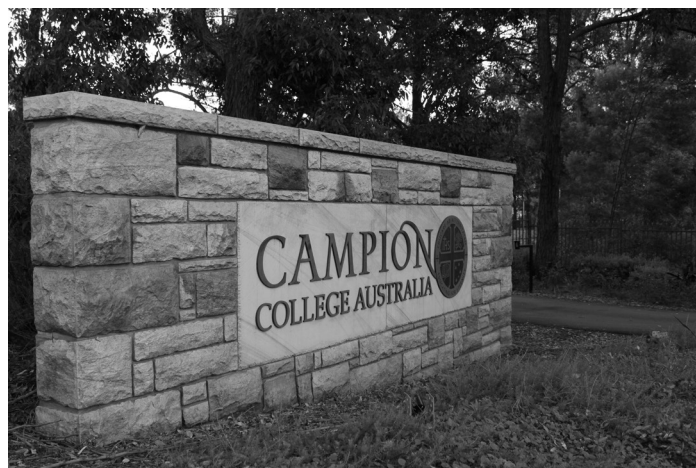


Campion College Librarian Keziah van Aardt holding Ian Ker's biography of Chesterton in front of the special collection

The GK Chesterton special collection at Campion College library is a small but important part of the library collection, containing over 200 monographs and subscriptions to journals such as the *Chesterton Review* and *Gilbert Magazine* – and, of course, *The Defendant*! Many of the older editions are works by Chesterton such as a first edition of *Robert Browning*.

Some of the newer items added to the collection include William Oddie's volume, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*, and *The Holiness of G K Chesterton*, edited by Oddie and containing chapters by various authors including Aidan Nichols and Sheridan Gilley. The latest purchase was Dale Ahlquist's recent book, *Knight of the Holy Ghost*.

In 2016, the library acquired the four-volume set *G.K. Chesterton at the 'Daily News': Literature, Liberalism and Revolution, 1901-1913*, edited by Julia Stapleton. This was an important addition, not only for Campion's



collection but also for all Australian libraries as it is the only copy of this particular edition recorded in Trove, the online database maintained by the National Library in Canberra.

While the collection at Campion has currently reached its full capacity due to space limitations, items continue to be purchased so they can be added into the collection when more space becomes available. This is hopefully not too distant as Campion College has plans for a major new library building and is fundraising for this project.

Collecting is only one part of a librarian's job when managing a special collection. Encouraging and facilitating borrowing is just as important. Students are encouraged to read Chesterton's works which are sometimes showcased through library displays and book reviews.

The most borrowed titles in the Chesterton Collection are *Orthodoxy*, *Manalive* and *Everlasting Man*, all of which are especially popular with students.

Chesterton's works have an enduring value and his diverse writings are still widely appreciated by Campion students and staff, as well as other scholars and library visitors.

Anyone visiting the college is welcome to contact the library if they wish to view the Chesterton collection. ■

The Chesterton Novel for Spies

by Karl Schmude

The Chesterton novel which has proved singularly popular since it first appeared in 1908 is *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

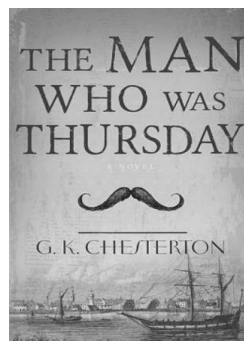
It has been the subject of numerous adaptations, particularly for radio, including one in the 1930s by Orson Welles (who was a great admirer of Chesterton) and another by the founder of the Australian Chesterton Society, Tony Evans. A movie adaptation of the novel by the Hungarian writer and director, Balazs Jusz, was made as recently as 2016.

A surprising sign of the book's enduring popularity has recently emerged. During a visit to Baylor University in Texas, the leading Chesterton scholar, Dale Ahlquist, met the distinguished historian of religion, Philip Jenkins. As Dale notes in the May-June 2020 issue of *Gilbert* (the magazine he edits on behalf of the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton in America), Philip Jenkins revealed a new point of appreciation of *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

In the 1970s, a British newspaper conducted a poll of both active and retired intelligence operatives – often called “spies” for short – and asked which fictional work best captured the spirit of their profession. The answer that was anticipated would have been a book by a well-known writer of espionage novels, such as Tom Clancy or John le Carré, or even the James Bond novelist, Ian Fleming. But the unexpected response was . . . Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

Philip Jenkins told Dale Ahlquist that he has taught criminology, and that this Chesterton novel is a work he keeps returning to.

At the same time, like any classic, *The Man Who Was Thursday* can be read at various levels of appreciation. In the words of the English novelist, Kingsley Amis, it “is not quite a political bad dream, nor a metaphysical thriller, nor a cosmic joke in the form of a spy novel, but it has something of all three.” (*The Amis Collection, Selected Non-Fiction 1954-1990, 1991*)



Kingsley Amis

Yet, as Chesterton's poetic dedication to his life-long friend, E.C. Bentley, makes clear, the book has a profoundly metaphysical meaning – and a decidedly modern relevance. It captures the spirit of elitist cultural loathing with which we are now so familiar, energized by intellectual anarchy and fanaticism.

As Amis points out, quoting passages from a key section of the novel (in chapter IV: “The Tale of a Detective”):

“Chesterton foretold the shape of some of our present discontents. He saw destructive forces in our society that would be nothing but destructive, ‘not trying to alter things but to annihilate them’, basing themselves in the first place on an inner anarchy that denies all moral distinctions ‘on which mere rebels base themselves’.

“[As Chesterton wrote] ‘The most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher.’ The enemy arises not from the people, but from the educated and well-off, those who unite intellectualism and ignorance and who are helped on their way by ‘a weak worship of intellect and force’ – near the knuckle, that one [as Amis comments].”

Chesterton believed, as one of his characters puts it, “that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization. . . . [T]he scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State.”

In Amis's words:

“By ‘silently’ [Chesterton] can hardly have meant more than ‘secretly’ – if he had meant ‘by an unspoken consensus’ he would have been not just a remarkable prophet but a terrifying one.” ■

Chesterton - A Chat over Lunch

A Catholic blog site in America, *Patheos*, recently asked several writers to imagine having lunch with their favourite deceased Catholic writer. Chesterton featured among the most popular authors nominated, and the editor of *Patheos*, Mark Wilson, published the responses to the question:

If you could have lunch with any deceased writer, who would it be, what would you eat and what would you talk about?

Two writers picked Chesterton. The first, **JoAnn Wuland**, author of the blog, *The Catholic Working Mother*, offered this explanation:

“We’d have a full English pub meal (steak and ale pie, for example), and we’d talk about Catholicism and the issues of the modern world.”

A second contributor, **Will Duquette**, included Chesterton with several others:

“Trouble is, I get tongue-tied when face to face with anyone that I idolize, or I say dumb things. But if I could put, say, Thomas Aquinas, Tolkien, Lewis, Chesterton, and maybe Flannery O’Connor at the table and sit and listen the food would be irrelevant. Also, there would probably be beer.”