



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)

Science Fiction - the Chesterton Factor

by Karl Schmude

When the science fiction author Gene Wolfe died in 2019, the obituaries made frequent mention of G.K. Chesterton and his influence on the best-selling author.

Wolfe, an engineer prior to becoming a popular writer of science fiction, singled out Chesterton's writings as among the greatest inspirations in his life. (As a former engineer, he revealed that another major influence was *Marks' Standard Handbook for Engineers!*)

Chesterton's impact on Gene Wolfe was part of a wider interest he developed in Christianity, and specifically Catholicism. Raised as a Presbyterian, Wolfe undertook a course of instruction to marry his wife, Rosemary, in a Catholic church. The effect was profound: he found something that resonated - and he subsequently converted with conviction.



Gene Wolfe

At that time he came across Chesterton's biography of Thomas Aquinas. He went on to read many of his books, as he had done earlier with C.S. Lewis' works. Later, when Ignatius Press began publishing Chesterton's collected works, including many newspaper columns not previously assembled in book form, Wolfe continued his reading. (Interview with James B. Jordan: <https://www.gwern.net/docs/fiction/1992-jordan.pdf>)

Wolfe's science fiction magnum opus was *The Book of the New Sun*, published in 1980-83 in four volumes. A magazine poll of the best fantasy novels, conducted by *Locus*, the American journal of science fiction and fantasy, ranked *The Book of the New Sun* in third place - just behind the Tolkien classics, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.

Science Fiction - the Chesterton Factor (Karl Schmude)

Pages 1-2

Chesterton and the Tragic Mystery of Suicide (Gary Furnell)

Pages 3-4

Distributing Power, not Money - Bishop Robert Barron (Karl Schmude)

Page 5

Katharine Whitehorn RIP (Karl Schmude)

Pages 6-7

Honouring Paul Stenhouse MSC - Two New Books

Page 8

Register for October 23 Conference

2021 Chesterton Conference

Chesterton and Woman: Romance and Reality

This year's conference will take place at Campion College on **Saturday, October 23**, starting at 9.00am and finishing at 5.00pm.

Speakers include Campion graduates, **Siobhan Reeves**, **Angela Schumann** and **Frances Cantrall**, who will focus on such subjects as chivalry, Shakespeare's heroines, and the young people's movement, the Culture Project; **Dr Stephen McInerney**, who will explore Sigrid Undset's award-winning novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter*; and **Karl Schmude**, who will speak on 'The Fatherhood of Chesterton'.

Registration can be arranged via the website, <http://chestertonaustralia.com/conference.php> - using the online booking agency, Eventbrite. Cost: \$65 (including lunch), with a student concession rate of \$30.00.



Siobhan Reeves Angela Schumann Frances Cantrall

In a *New Yorker* interview (April 24, 2015), Wolfe acknowledged the importance of his Catholic faith in his writing: "What is impossible is to keep it out," he told the interviewer, Peter Bebergal.

Some critics have speculated that Severian, the narrator and main character of *The Book of the New Sun*, is a Christ-figure. He brings the New Sun and puts an end to the cruelty of torture. But Bebergal suggests that this religious comparison is not easy to make as "Wolfe wraps his Catholicism in strange language and cryptic images."

Science fiction writers and Chesterton

The American medievalist and author, Sandra Miesel, has pointed out that Wolfe is not the only science writer who has been influenced by both Chesterton and Catholicism. In her article, "The Cross and the Stars" (*Catholic World Report*, May 15, 2011), she ponders the appeal which "speculative fiction" (SF), embracing both fantasy and science fiction, has exercised for various Catholic writers – and the extent to which some of them have been affected by Chesterton.

One example is the veteran science fiction writer, Fred Saberhagen (1930-2007), whom Miesel describes as a good storyteller steeped in traditional morality:

"In his career-making Berserker series, implacable robotic warfare attack all that lives, but are repelled in a battle modelled on Chesterton's *Lepanto* and tamed by a St Francis figure."

While noting the impact of Chesterton on Gene Wolfe, Miesel mentions the debt which three other science fiction authors owe to him. One is R.A. Lafferty (1914-2002), who, as "a self-educated man who spent most of his life in Oklahoma, lived and died as an unfashionably conservative Catholic." Lafferty embodied an approach of dramatic realism reminiscent of Chesterton. Armed with "the high hilarity of love and laughter," he once said, "we must kill the Devil afresh every day."

Another writer who has acknowledged Chesterton's inspiration is Tim Powers (1952 -). In interviews in *Science Fiction Studies* (March 1988) and *ignatiusinsight.com*, he calls Chesterton's *Lepanto* the "greatest poem in the English language," which his mother "was always reciting." "To this day, I can almost recite it by heart."

A third author of science fiction conscious of Chesterton's impact is John C. Wright (1961 -). He published his first novel, *The Golden Age*, in 2002, and has said – again, in a

Chestertonian way - that he likes "large themes, thunder, fury, and wonder."

In a website piece called "Just In Case You Have Not Read Chesterton", he admits that he could not limit himself to one recommendation. He nominates various Chesterton books - novels, poetry, detective fiction, and Christian apologetics – highlighting, for example, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which he describes "as odd as you can get without being actually science fiction"; *The Ballad of the White Horse*, "if your taste runs to epic poetry rather than to murder mysteries; and *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, "because nothing is better than a good murder mystery."

Wright is a former lawyer who turned to science fiction writing. Formerly an atheist, he became a Catholic in 2008, describing his conversion as starting with philosophical arguments and being sealed by mystical experiences.

In his list of recommended Chesterton books, he picks out *Orthodoxy*, "because it is a lively and entertaining autobiographic look at the Christian faith, of interest to sceptics and believers alike (as I can personally attest, having read it as one, then as the other)"; and *The Everlasting Man*, "a masterpiece".

Often mentioned as the most impressive modern work of science fiction by a Catholic is *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959). The author, Walter M. Miller Jr (1922-1996), had taken part in World War II in the bombing of the ancient monastery, Monte Cassino, founded in the 6th century by St Benedict. Miller's act of reparation was *A Canticle*, the only novel he published in his lifetime. It is a post-apocalyptic story of an order of monks building a new abbey – and rebuilding a civilisation - following a nuclear holocaust. The distinguished poet and literary critic, Dana Gioia, has described *A Canticle* as "a classic of both science fiction and Catholic literature." (*The Catholic Writer Today*, 2019)

The fictional world of modern fantasy and science fiction remains a pervasive feature of contemporary culture. Sandra Miesel is conscious of the ways in which it has challenged traditional religious faith, citing the "scientific romances" of H.G. Wells to the subversive tales of Philip Pullman." But she is also aware of the extent to which Catholic authors have gravitated to this form of literature.

She highlights the importance of JRR Tolkien as "a sublime and faith-saturated writer." *The Lord of the Rings*, she says, "ignited a demand for adult fantasy that still blazes bright," and "transformed the market for its wares." ■

Subscriptions for 2021

The Australian Chesterton Society is grateful to all those who have renewed their membership for 2021. This is of great assistance for the continuing production of *The Defendant* and meeting conference costs. Further renewals and/or donations would be very welcome.



Chesterton and the Tragic Mystery of Suicide

by Gary Furnell

Present-day society has developed a disturbing ambivalence to suicide – on the one hand, abhorring it as a tragedy and calling for preventative measures; on the other, promoting it by the legalisation of euthanasia. Gary Furnell, whose work for a funeral director has exposed him to the frequency of suicides, especially of young men, looks to Chesterton's wisdom as he wrestles with the philosophical and religious changes that have led to these ambivalent attitudes.

One of the sad surprises that confronted me as an undertaker's assistant—working with the police at the start of the coronial process—was the frequency of suicide, especially male suicide.

Men typically use surer methods of suicide: hanging, gunshot, jumping from buildings and cliffs, and exsanguination by deeply cutting multiple blood vessels. Women more often choose to overdose on medicines; a few will hang themselves.

Whatever the method, the tragic truth is that suicide may be much more common than we think. The expectation of mental health experts has been that it would increase as a result of the social isolation of Covid-19 lockdowns.

Without question, attitudes to suicide reflect the frequently bi-polar nature of our society. In our state parliaments, assisted-suicide proponents push for euthanasia to be legalised, or if it's already legal made more widely available, while the same parliaments—sometimes the same politicians—lament the frequency of suicide and demand more action (i.e. spending more taxpayer's money, never their own) to address the sad scourge.

The mixed message appears to be: killing yourself with professional assistance in a dedicated facility is a liberal, brave choice; killing yourself alone at home (or elsewhere) is a desperate and ignoble tragedy.

This inconsistency results from the absence of a commonly accepted philosophy or religion. If G.K. Chesterton, in the early years of the 20th century, correctly identified modernity, not as a new idea or the development of an idea, but the abandonment of an idea—the idea of Western Christendom, and with it the meaning and hope it gave to human life and death—then we in post-modern times are seeing the acceleration of this abandonment, and the dissolution of the meaning and hope that had been infused by the idea of Western Christendom.

Chesterton also noted that Christianity's supernatural explanation of everything had been rejected by many people, but no natural explanation had arisen to take its place.

He understood that we live in a confused and confusing time, and that it's confused to promote and lament suicide at the same time, as many would-be leaders in our society

are doing. Logic and consistency are neglected in many debates about end-of-life issues. As Chesterton put it:

"The best reason for the revival of philosophy is that unless a man has a philosophy certain horrible things will happen to him. He will be practical; he will be progressive; he will cultivate efficiency; he will trust in evolution; he will do the work that lies nearest; he will devote himself to deeds, not words. Thus struck down by blow after blow of blind stupidity and random fate, he will stagger on to a miserable death with no comfort but a series of catchwords; such as those I have catalogued above.

"Those things are simply substitutes for thoughts. In some cases they are the tags and tail-ends of somebody else's thinking. That means that a man who refuses to have his own philosophy will not even have the advantages of a brute beast, and be left to his own instincts. He will only have the used-up scraps of somebody else's philosophy; which the beasts do not have to inherit; hence their happiness. Men have always one of two things: either a complete and conscious philosophy or the unconscious acceptance of the broken bits of some incomplete and shattered and often discredited philosophy." ("The Revival of Philosophy –Why?" *The Common Man*, 1950)

The dilemma: embracing both justice and mercy

Last year, at a graveside service at which I was an attendant, the new-age celebrant and the funeral director lamented—while waiting for the family to arrive—the old-fashioned Catholic policy that forbade suicides being buried in consecrated ground.

How heartless it seemed! And yet Catholicism has the virtue of at least being unambiguous about suicide, regarding it objectively as a mortal sin; a rejection of the goodness, hope and sovereignty of God. Further, it ignores the commandment to love oneself. It negates the possibility of the person attaining spiritual maturity, and fulfilling their life-long vocation.

Obviously, pastoral sensitivity is required and we are reminded by the Scriptures "not to judge anything before its time," and that "the Lord know those that are His." It is God who passes the ultimate judgment on our lives; we may be wiser in our judgments to give the suffering—now deceased—individual the benefit of any doubt, while giving

due care and attention to those people hurt, angry or confused by a friend's or family member's suicide.



“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.”

- Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Nonetheless, a difficult question remains. When the Christianised culture presented an unambiguous belief about suicide, that it was a terrible denial of life, would people contemplating such a step have been deterred in some instances – and encouraged to look for other ways of coping with their extreme distress?

In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky defined Christian love in a way that appealed to people as different as Dorothy Day and Flannery O'Connor:

“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.”

Love is not just compassionate and helpful – and this conviction of “a harsh and dreadful love” ratified and reinforced the taboo by denying to those who had committed suicide the right to be buried in consecrated graveyards, in the hope that anyone tempted, in the midst of despair, might fight their moment of weakness, and constrain their harmful emotions.

Chesterton wrote that most suicides result when people lose sight of all the goodness, beauty and wonder of the world, and focus instead on their own present bad feelings.

Certainly Chesterton's judgment was offered in a different era from our own. The euthanasia movement has introduced

a newly positive attitude to suicide, which challenges in the deepest and most poignant way our judgment of the value of life – and death.

And yet, Chesterton is right, especially about many young people's suicides. If only they'd waited until the grief over a cheating boyfriend or girlfriend had passed; if only they'd allowed time to provide perspective on the shame of an embarrassing episode at high school; if only they'd sorted out access arrangements so they could see their children.

Tribulations will pass, however hard this may be to realise at the time. A concert of voices and consistent teaching that suicide was wrong would have saved many lives. They won't get this unequivocal teaching from society. The Church at least must maintain its historic teaching about suicide if it wants to save some lives.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, a reverent man blest with acuity, observed a link between a person's spirit and their emotions. He said that if a person neglects their spirit, it continues to demand attention, but its demands are expressed negatively through anger, depression or a generalised anxiety.

Obviously, when Darwin, Freud, Marx and contemporary scientism have declared human spirituality a delusion, or proclaimed its irrelevance, and many people have accepted this perspective, then anxiety, anger and depression resulting from man's repressed and denied spirit will dominate many of those same lives.

Chesterton, speaking again about the need for a logical, consistent philosophy that would guide us in a good, life-enriching direction, also said:

“Religion might approximately be defined as the power which makes us joyful about the things that matter. Fashionable frivolity might, with a parallel propriety, be defined as the power which makes us sad about the things that do not matter.” (“The Frivolous Man,” *The Common Man*, 1950). ■

Chesterton prophesying?

The “cancel culture”

“The modern mind is like the eye of a man who is too tired to see the difference between blue and green. It fails in the quality that is truly called distinction; and, being incapable of distinction, it falls back on generalisation. . . .

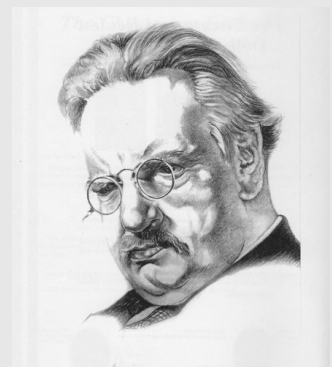
“But this shapeless assimilation is not only found in accepting things in the lump; it is also found in condemning them in the lump. When the same modern mind does begin to be intolerant, it is just as universally intolerant as it was universally tolerant. It sends things in batches to the gallows just as it admitted them in mobs to the sanctuary. It cannot limit its limitations any more than its license.”

(*Illustrated London News*, 6 January 1923, in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, Vol. XXXIII, 1990)

The dissolution of “the normal”

“We are no longer in a world in which it is thought normal to be moderate or even necessary to be normal. Most men now are not so much rushing to extremes as merely sliding to extremes; and even reaching the most violent extremes by being almost passive . . . We can no longer trust even the normal man to value and guard his own normality.”

(*America*, 4 January 1936)



Distributing Power, Not Money

by Karl Schmude

The American Catholic evangelist, Bishop Robert Barron, founder of the Word on Fire Ministries, is an ardent fan of G.K. Chesterton.

A gifted preacher who blends eloquence and a natural style with intellectual cogency, he picked Chesterton as among the most influential figures in Christian history, devoting a full episode to him in his initial six-part DVD series of *The Pivotal Players* (<https://www.wofdigital.org/packages/catholicism-the-pivotal-players/videos/chesterton-hd-1080p>).

Bishop Barron has spoken and written about Chesterton's life and writings on many occasions. Most recently, he highlighted the central insight of Chesterton's social philosophy of Distributism – that power in society should be as widely distributed as possible, as the best guarantee of freedom, economically, politically, religiously, culturally.

In an article in the online American magazine, *The Dispatch* (January 5, 2021), the Bishop gives a compelling explanation of Catholic social teaching on power. He echoes Chesterton's famous answer to George Bernard Shaw about the meaning of Distributism – and the profound fallacy of socialism. Shaw, Chesterton said, wants to distribute money among the poor. "We want to distribute power." (Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, 1944)

While Distributism is commonly defined as favouring a wide distribution of property and ownership, Bishop Barron broadens its application to the other spheres of culture.

Economic and political concentration

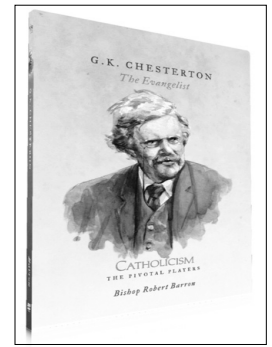
He acknowledges the economic concentration of power, where monopolies can control prices arbitrarily, hire and fire unaccountably, and block any competition that might offer better products and fairer wages. But he singles out the new social forms of concentrated power that have arisen in the area of high-tech communication, as Google, Facebook, Amazon and other conglomerates exercise virtually uncontested dominance.

He also points to the dangers of concentrated power in the political realm. The ascendancy of a single party in a nation, a state, a city, or a community almost inevitably leads to corruption of various kinds. While this kind of arrangement is obvious in oppressive states, such as banana republics, communist dictatorships, and enclosed theocracies, it can also prevail, to a lesser but still worrying degree, in local and state governments in the democracies.

Why, for example, the Bishop asks, are pro-life candidates in such American states as Illinois, Massachusetts, or California, highly unlikely to be elected to office? When a political monopoly is linked with economic power, the corruption and curbing of freedoms becomes even deeper, and more intractable.



Bishop Robert Barron



Bishop Barron's episode on Chesterton in his Pivotal Players TV series

How can such alliances of power be broken up?

Bishop Barron recommends "equipping a variety of parties, providing for a greater turnover within legislatures, lifting up various expressions of local government, allowing for mediating institutions [such as the family and community associations], and strengthening the system of checks and balances."

A new cultural domination

The Bishop's special updating of the Distributist philosophy is his insights into the cultural arena. He sees how a form of cultural dictatorship is now prevailing. It is transmitted and reinforced by the new communication channels (such as Google and Facebook), and reinforced by political and economic power (such as major companies promoting various expressions of "political correctness") – all of which make the convergence of influence even more pervasive and overpowering than any previous forms of control.

Bishop Barron notes the strict censorship of the arts in many Islamist states and in communist China, but his new emphasis on our own society is timely. He sees the degree of cultural monopoly that now applies in the West.

Not a brutal state censorship, as such, but nonetheless a definite ideological domination. This represents a monopolisation of social and political power, and effectively excludes any rival expressions of the perennial truths which the culture once held sacred – of the good, the true and the beautiful.

When speaking of Distributism, the Bishop looks to what he calls "a vivid narrative presentation" of this social philosophy in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which pays "particular attention to the manner of life in the hobbits' shire in contrast to the political and economic arrangements in Mordor."

Finally, Bishop Barron makes clear that the fundamental perspective of Catholic social belief about power – and the need for power to be dispersed, not concentrated and centralised – is that it is not connected with either the extreme left or the extreme right.

It rises above the present political categories and divisions. It advocates, as he notes, "neither statist control nor individual freedom run amok." It holds out, as an enduring ideal of freedom and justice, "a wide and just distribution of economic and political power." ■

Katharine Whitehorn RIP

by Karl Schmude

A popular British journalist of the second half of the 20th century, Katharine Whitehorn, who died recently at the age of 92, was a great admirer of Chesterton from her earliest days.

Whitehorn was notable for being the first woman to have a regular column in a large-circulation newspaper, *The Observer* (London), and among its most prominent columnists for several decades, 1960-1996. In a tribute, the former Editor of the London *Telegraph*, Charles Moore, recalled that she first wrote for the London *Spectator*, beginning a column called 'Roundabout' in 1959:

"I knew exactly what I wanted to do with it," Whitehorn recalled. "It was to start with a report on something – a book, an event, a trend – and then make a thoughtful, or ribald, point from it, so that it was not just reportage." ("The Spectator's Notes," *The Spectator*, 16 January 2021)

Whitehorn pioneered a distinctive style of "confessional journalism." It combined personal reminiscence which was sharp and candid with broader insights into changing social mores, particularly relating to the role of women in society and relations between the sexes.

In a best-selling book, *Cooking in a Bedsitter* (1961), she offered various bits of practical advice. She was fond of the casserole, which she introduced in the following, entertaining way:

"A French politician representing a somewhat backward district in Africa was found to have been eaten by his constituents. The journalist who discovered this used the phrase: '*Je crois qu'il a passé par la casserole*' ('I think he ended up in a casserole'). Clearly the Africans knew what they were about. For making a meal out of tough and intractable material, the casserole has no rival."

A schoolgirl's hero

In a column marking the 50th anniversary of Chesterton's death ("G.K. Chesterton Revisited," *The Observer*, 29 June 1986), Whitehorn recalled:

"[Chesterton] was my great hero when I was at school. No doubt, most people processed through education worship the author in whose work they first read all the great platitudes of mankind. Chesterton wasn't the first person to suggest that there is order in the universe, or that the poor get pushed around by the rich, or that the more you



Katharine Whitehorn (1928-2021)

look at things the less you see them, unless you continually jolt yourself into a new awareness – which he was singularly good at doing. But he was for me."

Reflecting on Chesterton's social philosophy, she asked whether Distributism still held meaning for our society half a century after his death.

Timid plants of Distributism

She described the Distributist as "someone who believes that all policies and laws should be directed, not at letting the State run things for the common good, or letting market forces rip for the common prosperity, but at letting as many people as possible have their own little bit of property, their own autonomy."

In the provocative style that characterised her columns, Whitehorn argued that it was "as ridiculous to approve of property and let a few men have a grossly unfair share of it, as say you are all for marriage, and then let one man have all the wives."

"I am inclined to think," she concluded, "that [Distributism] is more relevant now than it would have seemed 20 years ago."

This was in the mid-1980s. Whitehorn detected what she called "one or two timid plants" that were "uncommonly like Distributism".

These included the novelist and journalist, Keith Waterhouse, an "old-time socialist". More and more, she thought, he seems "to be standing up for the small inviolate homes and corner shops and local angers of ordinary people who are not to be steam-rolled by the well-meaning planners, social workers; still less by the ill-meaning bosses and snoopers and the City [of London]."

Whitehorn readily admitted: "I doubt if Distributism is about to make a mass comeback – there were only a handful of them even in Chesterton's day. But there is still a place for the view which finds the State and big business equally remote from ordinary people."



Katharine Whitehorn

“I still occasionally find that the last word on something I’m writing about was said by this blasted man before the First World War.”



Felicity Green

“I have plenty of people to do things with – I just have no one to do nothing with.”

In her autobiography, *Selective Memory* (2007), Whitehorn recalled that her first job at the London publisher Methuen was won “largely because I could quote G.K. Chesterton’s entertaining description of his own work at a publisher’s.” While at Methuen, she edited a collection of Chesterton’s essays - in 1953, in the Methuen’s Modern Classics series.

Her final tribute to Chesterton was offered with a nice touch of obstinate honesty. She echoed the reaction some of us might have when tempted to think we’ve come up with an original idea:

“I still occasionally find that the last word on something I’m writing about was said by this blasted man before the First World War.”

The experience of widowhood

Katharine Whitehorn outlived her husband, the writer Gavin Lyall, by nearly two decades. Some years after his death, she gave a poignant reflection on her experience of being a widow:

“Losing your husband has two separate aspects: there’s missing the actual man, your lover, his quirks, his kindness, his thinking. But marriage is also the water in which you swim, the land you live in: the habits, assumptions you share about the future, about what’s funny or deplorable, about the way the house is run or should be. What Anthony Burgess called a whole civilisation, a culture, ‘a shared language of grunt and touch’.

“You don’t ‘get over’ the man, though you do after a year or two get over the death; but you have to learn to live in another country in which you’re an unwilling refugee.” (*Selective Memory*, 2007)

Whitehorn echoed the lament of a fellow journalist, Felicity Green: “I have plenty of people to do things with – I just have no one to do nothing with.”

Such reflections were reminiscent of George Bernard Shaw’s touching question to Maisie Ward following the death of G.K. Chesterton’s wife.

“What did Frances die of?” he asked. “Was it of widowhood?”

Katharine Whitehorn in quotes

“A good listener is not someone with nothing to say. A good listener is a good talker with a sore throat.”

“The great rule is not to talk about money with people who have much more or much less than you.”

“The best career advice to give to the young is ‘Find out what you like doing best and get someone to pay you for doing it.’ ”

Executive of the Australian Chesterton Society

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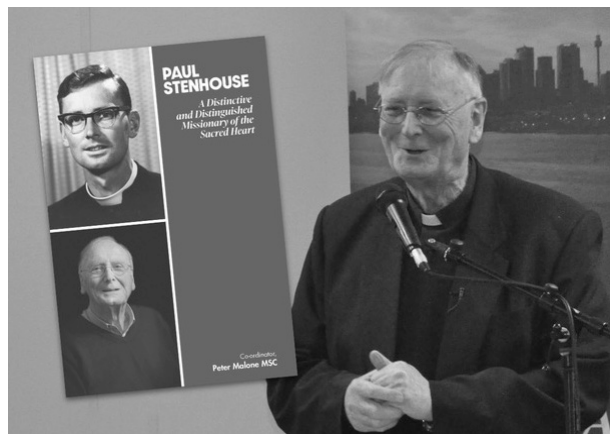
Honouring Paul Stenhouse MSC

Paul Stenhouse MSC, long-time editor of *Annals*, who spoke at a number of Australian Chesterton conferences including the one in October 2019 only a month before he died, has recently been honoured with two publications – a special book of tributes and a full-scale biography.

The book of tributes, *Paul Stenhouse: A Distinctive and Distinguished Missionary of the Sacred Heart*, contains chapters by friends and associates - fellow priests (including the movie critic, Peter Malone MSC, who edited the book); journalists such as Greg Sheridan and James Murray; and regular *Annals* contributors, Giles Auty and Wanda Skowronska. There is also a review by Tony Abbott of Fr Stenhouse's book on Islam, and a Postscript by Cardinal Pell.

In another chapter Karl Schmude, a long-time friend of Fr Stenhouse and contributor to *Annals*, discusses Fr Stenhouse's breadth of learning and love of the liberal arts, shown in his early support for Campion College of which he became an Honorary Fellow.

The book is available from Australian Scholarly Publishing in Melbourne at a price of \$20.00 (plus \$9.00 p&p) - <https://scholarly.info/book/paul-stenhouse/>



Paul Stenhouse MSC speaking at Campion College in 2011 when he delivered the St Edmund Campion Lecture



The biography, *Paul Stenhouse MSC: A Life of Rare Wisdom, Compassion and Inspiration* (2021), is the painstaking work of Wanda Skowronska, a frequent contributor to *Annals* who knew Fr Stenhouse personally.

The book was launched at the MSC Monastery in Kensington NSW on February 27, 2021, and attended by 70 friends. In his occasional address, the philosopher, mathematician and

historian, Professor James Franklin, noted that Fr Stenhouse had a unique style of being a conservative "cultural warrior". The biography, he said, expressed many sides of an "intellectual who delighted in conversation on almost anything," adding: "I remember in one conversation we moved from the alphabeticity of Ugaritic to the survival of the Lollards."

Wanda Skowronska remarked in her speech that the scholarly nature of Fr Stenhouse "co-existed with compassion for others, a little recognised poetic nature, and a gift for unmasking the illusions of the age."

She recounted stories of his journeys to China, the Ukraine, Armenia and Lebanon - and how his friends

from the Caribbean had miraculously drawn him, previously uninterested in sport, to become interested in cricket!

Chinese flautist, Chai Chang-Ning, who appeared in the films, *The Last Emperor* and *Mao's Last Dancer*, played the flute during the launch. Chai had met Fr Stenhouse by "chance" and was converted by the priest whom he called "the messenger of the living God." As Fr Stenhouse lay dying in November 2019, Chai played gentle melodies for him.

Also present at the launch were friends from various backgrounds - Malaysian, Armenian, Guyanan, Lebanese, Singaporean, Vietnamese, and Lebanese, who will never forget the many kindnesses of their friend. Many of their stories are recounted in the biography.

MSC Superior Fr Steve Dives read a number of messages for the occasion. One was from Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, a former student of Fr Stenhouse who was deeply influenced by him to become a priest.

A second message, from Karl Schmude who could not attend the launch, praised Wanda Skowronska for "evoking the multiple lives of a remarkable priest – a scholar rich in learning, a popular journalist and editor, a world citizen who cherished his Australian roots, a pastor to so many individual souls and communities."

The biography was published by Connor Court and can be obtained for \$39.95 via this website:

https://www.connorcourtpublishing.com.au/Paul-Stenhouse-MSA-Life-of-Rare-Wisdom-Compassion-and-Inspiration--Wanda-Skowronska_p_421.html ■