



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

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

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G.K.'s Weekly - The Success of a Beautiful Failure

by Luca Fumagalli

While Chesterton wrote for countless journals and newspapers during his lifetime, G.K.'s Weekly was plainly the journal most immediately associated with him as a journalist.

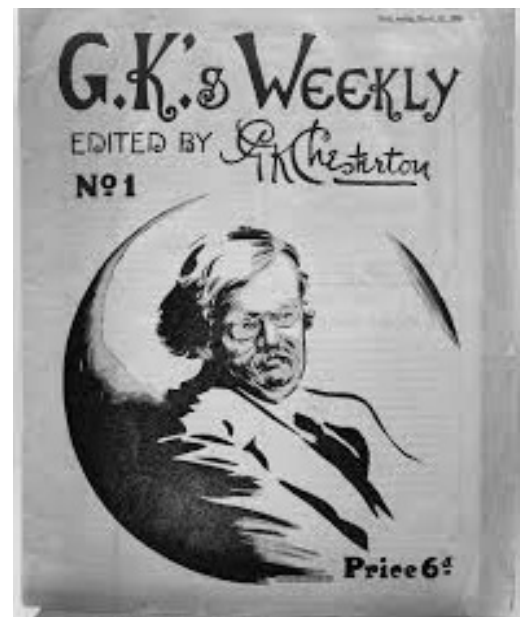
Luca Fumagalli, an Italian-born writer who now teaches literature and history in an American high school, has produced a fascinating and thoroughly researched article on the significant though precarious history of G.K.'s Weekly. It was first published in the May-June 2024 edition of St Austin Review (popularly known as StAR and edited by Joseph Pearce). It is reprinted with his kind permission – in a shortened form for reasons of space.

To learn the history of *G. K.'s Weekly*, the famous periodical edited by G. K. Chesterton and official organ of the Distributist League, the main source is *G. K.'s Weekly. An Appraisal* (1990), a slim volume written by Father Brocard Sewell, a Catholic convert who became a Carmelite, and worked for about a year on the editorial staff of *G. K.'s Weekly*.

In general, judgments regarding *G. K.'s Weekly* have always been ambivalent. Many, in fact, have questioned its value, considering it a waste of time, energy and money or, even worse, a distraction that prevented Chesterton from dedicating himself to his books, which were far more important.

Gregory Macdonald, a former member of the editorial team, and others with him, have widely denied this assumption; after all, Chesterton himself was proud of being a journalist and willingly followed the tradition of British intellectuals such as Defoe, Johnson, Cobbett and William Morris, who edited a periodical on their own to give public expression to their minority views. Numerous letters from Chesterton, including those addressed to Hilaire Belloc and Maurice Baring, underline this purpose.

Another erroneous idea shared by Maisie Ward and several subsequent Chestertonian biographers, is that Chesterton never



wanted to start a paper, but did so, and kept it going, out of a misplaced loyalty to his brother Cecil, who died in France at the end of World War I. The latter had in fact been the combative editor of *The New Witness*, successor to Belloc's weekly *The Eye-Witness*.

Even Frances Blogg and Dorothy Collins, Chesterton's wife and secretary respectively, had mixed feelings about *G. K.'s Weekly*. While contributing to it with poems and book reviews, both were worried about the stress and tension it caused their beloved Gilbert,



who was involved in a heavy burden of work and financial responsibility.

The sense of duty towards his brother was certainly an important aspect that influenced Chesterton's choice to take over the editorship of the *New Witness*, but it was not the only one: the management of a periodical guaranteed him the freedom he would not have in the other papers for which he wrote.

However, if he certainly wasn't the "world's worst editor" as he

stated, Chesterton lacked his brother's qualities in this role. He wasn't well-equipped to be the editor of a weekly paper of national circulation, partly because he had so much other work to do – articles, books and lectures – and partly because he had not Cecil's political instinct nor his talent for detecting and exposing political corruption.

With the end of the *New Witness* in 1923 due to poor circulation, the following year G. K.'s Weekly Limited was founded. Chesterton agreed to act as editor for a decade with a salary of £500 a year but probably he never received it.

In November 1924 a trial number of *G. K.'s Weekly* had been issued, and in an article, significantly titled "Apologia", Chesterton committed it to Distributism.

Due to the difficulty in raising the necessary funds, the first official issue appeared only several months later, on 21 March 1925. This delay was damaging: the trial number had in fact aroused great enthusiasm and thus potential writers and subscribers were lost. *G. K.'s Weekly* could not be adequately advertised, and this situation did not improve even later, only partially buffered by occasional donations.

In summer 1926 a crisis point was reached. It was therefore thought to establish some sort of organization to promote both the periodical and Distributism. The Distributist League was founded, and *G. K.'s Weekly* came to be the official organ of the League.

In November 1926 *G. K.'s Weekly* was reduced, for the first time, both in size and price. The effect was a rapid increase in sales but the hopes of reaching a circulation of 15,000 copies, the minimum not to require further funds, were never achieved.

Compared to Cecil, full-time editor, busy seven days a week, his brother was a non-resident editor: after all, he did not live in London but in Beaconsfield, about twenty miles from the capital. Consequently, an assistant editor handled the daily administration. The first was Ada Elizabeth Jones, widow of Cecil Chesterton and a highly experienced journalist. After the fifth or sixth number, William Reginald Titterton – who had for a time been assistant editor of the *New Witness* – replaced her and was at the helm during perhaps *G. K.'s Weekly's* best period.

Following some misunderstandings concerning the paper's very bad finances, Titterton abandoned the assistant editorship in 1927 and a semi-official editorial board was formed. In this period Frances Chesterton and Dorothy Collins tried unsuccessfully to convince Chesterton to

abandon a project which, at least according to them, was inevitably destined to fail.

The editorial board, which met on Friday evenings, before the Distributists' weekly meeting at The Devereux, a pub just off Fleet Street, continued in being only for four years. During that period *G. K.'s Weekly* published many important articles on Distributist policy and economy written, among others, by Eric Gill, by the famous Dominican Vincent McNabb and by Ezra Pound, who also contributed a poem with the title "Usura". Chesterton also wrote several articles on economy, later published in the volume *The Outline of Sanity* (1928).

In 1936, after Chesterton's death, the periodical changed ownership and editor: Hilary Pepler, the founder and director of the Saint Dominic's Press at Ditchling in East Sussex, was determined that the *Weekly* should not be allowed to disappear and bought it.

The paper was renamed *The Weekly Review* and Belloc acted as editor for the next few months; but a good deal of the editorial work was done by his son-in-law, Reginald Jebb, who soon took over the editorship. *The Weekly Review* continued until 1948, when it changed to a monthly magazine, which, however, did not last long.

G. K.'s Weekly had several strengths, first and foremost its columnists. Literary contributions – stories, essays, poems – were written, apart from Chesterton and Belloc, by talented novelists such as Walter de la Mare and J. C. Squire. In December 1925 the *Weekly* began serializing Chesterton's new novel, *The Return of Don Quixote*, but the serial was broken off at the time of the General Strike in 1926, and was never resumed.

George Orwell and G.K.'s Weekly

A highlight was the humorous cartoons, drawn by, among others, the Australian Will Dyson, as well as satirical articles. Few people would remember that George Orwell also made his journalistic debut in the *Weekly*.

Chesterton contributed every week with a full-page article under the heading "Straws in the Wind". For a long time he also wrote two unsigned half-page articles, headed respectively "Top" "And Tail", and sometimes he wrote book reviews and unsigned current affairs articles for the "Notes of the Week" column. It has been constantly repeated that his later writing in *G. K.'s Weekly* was tired and repetitive. Of course, sometimes the charge is justified; yet the latest numbers of the paper contain a great deal of good prose by him.

Under Titterton's assistant editorship, *G. K.'s Weekly* had a liveliness which was never quite regained after he had left. Titterton's own articles, characterised by a vehement anti-capitalism, were always amusing and not without pungency.

For a time he ran a series on contemporary politicians, and because he, like Chesterton, attacked the wealthy, dishonest Jewish financiers of the time, *G. K.'s Weekly* was labelled by them and their supporters as an anti-Semite paper. It was obviously a false accusation, demonstrated among other things by the *Weekly's* stance against Italian Fascism and German Nazism. Worst of all, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express* were ordered never to mention either Chesterton or Belloc, causing further damage to the paper.

The last number of *G. K.'s Weekly* under its founder's editorship was the one of June 18, 1936. Chesterton had died at his home, "Top Meadow", a few days earlier, on June 14.

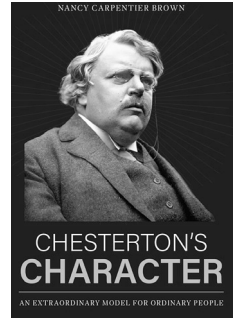
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Nancy Brown

Capturing the Character of Chesterton

by Karl Schmude



What was Chesterton's character like?

It's a question we may think has already been answered. His voluminous writings - and the various biographical portraits of him - provide abundant evidence of his gracious and generous character and the selfless life that he lived.

But it has taken Nancy Brown to capture his character in a more focused and vivid way. In *Chesterton's Character: an extraordinary model for ordinary people* (Chesterton & Brown Publishing, 2024), she brings together the various strands of Chesterton's life to form a coherent picture of the kind of man he was.

Organising her compact book under a series of headings, she asks in each case whether Chesterton was "ordinary" - as a man, a journalist, a husband, a friend, and a Christian. She then makes clear, with the support of various stories about his life, that he was "a very ordinary person who lived quite an extraordinary life."

She points out the various ways in which Chesterton changed her life, not as a convert (she's a cradle Catholic), but by inspiring her to be "more joyful, more hopeful, and more charitable." His example was reinforced by that of Frances, as shown in Nancy's biography of Gilbert Chesterton's wife, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton* (2015).

Chesterton's credibility was heightened by the fact that he lived in the secular world. As a journalist, he wrote for daily newspapers and cultural magazines. He gave lectures and engaged in debates in front of general audiences, and served as a broadcaster on the BBC.

Yet he seemed constantly to be pondering higher truths and realities. He was always thinking about God - and, in Nancy Brown's words, "always writing about God, even when he never mentioned God." He "was evangelizing in an extraordinary way: not preaching, not quoting Scripture, not proselytizing." He "met people where they were, in the secular world," telling stories and preaching truths "to an audience that loved the common sense they found in his writing."

Perhaps T.S. Eliot's comment about the vocation of a Christian journalist best describes the special gifts that Chesterton had as a journalist and public speaker - that he always found the topical excuse for writing about the permanent.

In a final chapter, Nancy Brown nicely summarises Chesterton's virtues. First, and outstandingly, he excelled in charity, which he himself defined as "a kind and reverent handling of the actions of sinners, an allowance for their temptations, an unconquerable hope for their souls."

Chesterton lived out his definition of charity, not only in his close friendships and dealings with ordinary people, but in being incapable of making enemies. His intellectual clashes with public figures like George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells did not become personal. He did not allow disagreements to turn into quarrels.

How extraordinary it was that he combined charity for others with profound intellectual integrity and courage. He did not practise charity by surrendering or sacrificing truth.

He wrote biographies of Thomas Aquinas and Francis of Assisi, and cherished a devotion to both saints. On Chesterton's death in 1936, Ronald Knox poetically pictured each saint beseeching God to welcome him into paradise:

"Take him, said Thomas, for he served the truth;
Take him, said Francis, for he loved the poor."

Chesterton's Character is a small book that fills a large gap. It fully demonstrates that Chesterton continues to be, in the words of the author's sub-title, "an extraordinary model for ordinary people."

Chesterton's Character: an extraordinary model for ordinary people, by Nancy Carpentier Brown (Chesterton & Brown Publishing, 2024). Available from Amazon as a paperback (price - US\$4.99), a Kindle book or an audio book.

Continued from Page 2:

Inside the paper for June 18 were articles on him by friends and admirers who praised his spirit, his wit and his undoubted journalistic qualities.

Although it was a small periodical with few financial resources, *G. K.'s Weekly* had its niche of influence. From the

tiny editorial office in London, an attempt was made to conduct a romantic attack on the heart of the corrupt British political and economic system.

If even today the name of the paper Chesterton edited is not forgotten, it is because the *Weekly*, despite the limitations, gave the hope that a new David could arise to definitively overthrow the Goliath of foolish modernity. ■

The World of Contemporary Finance - A Catholic Critique

by Gary Furnell

A recent book examines the enduring importance of Catholic teaching about economics and finance. Entitled *Money, Markets and Morals: Catholic Perspectives on Economics and Finance* (En Route Books and Media: St. Louis, Missouri, 2024), it is edited by the American social philosopher, Thomas Storck, who spoke at the 2008 Australian Chesterton Conference, "Redeeming the Culture: The Reforming Vision of G.K. Chesterton".

In this review, **Gary Furnell** highlights the perspectives that the Church's teaching makes available to help us judge present-day economic practices in such areas as productivity, interest on loans, and the stock market.



Tom Storck

The truth-defining principle of 1 John 4:6 is profound: Embracing apostolic teaching means embracing truth, while departing from apostolic teaching means embracing error.

This principle extends to economics and finance, the theme of *Money, Markets and Morals*. The contributors explain how Church teaching, from Christ to recent Papal Encyclicals, is fundamental to a just, stable economy.

This concise (187 pages), accessible book—the writers avoided *most* jargon—is an enlightening critique of some contemporary economic and financial practices. The common contention is that while these practices deliver wealth, the wealth may be unjustly accrued, unstable, and is idolatrous if money is made god.

The editor/contributor Thomas Storck, a US-based scholar, quotes from Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), establishing the Church's authority to make pronouncements about economic practices:

For the deposit of truth entrusted to Us by God, and Our weighty office of propagating, interpreting and urging in season and out of season the entire moral law, demand that both social and economic questions be brought within Our supreme jurisdiction, in so far as they refer to moral issues.

Storck adds:

It would be odd indeed were the Church to set forth the moral law for individual actions but be unable to do so for all the multifarious actions which mankind undertakes in common, for probably the majority of the world's activity consists in various kinds of joint actions.

After his introduction, Storck's first chapter examines the endemic, largely overlooked sin of usury. Pope Benedict XIV's 1745 encyclical *Vix Pervenit* defines the sin:

The law governing loans consists necessarily in the equality of what is given and returned; once the equality has been established, whoever demands more than that violates the terms of the loan... By these remarks, however we do not deny that at times together

with the loan contract certain other titles – which are not at all intrinsic to the contract – may run parallel with it. From these other titles, entirely just and legitimate reasons arise to demand something over and above the amount due on the contract.

The "certain other titles" were expanded (not by the Church's Magisterium) and exploited by merchants and lenders until we arrived at today's situation: interest on loans is expected and excessive.

Gentler Catholic commentary

Chapter 2, *The Catholic Church and Capitalism* by Italian journalist, Count Guisepppe Dalla Torre (1885-1967) is a blast from the past. This contribution shows how the Catholic economic commentary has become gentler recently—perhaps weaker, perhaps more nuanced. He defines capitalism variously:

Capitalism, according to the most accepted scientific definitions, "is the dominion of capital as represented by money and stock market values that can be rapidly be centralized anywhere"... "It is the separation of those who provide the capital and those who contribute to production exclusively by their labor."

Torre says capitalism is a societal cancer: "a proliferation of atypical cells given to continuous growth, whose structure and action follows its own laws, different from those of normal tissue, and independent of the organism in which it forms and develops." He insists that communism is atheist in philosophy, while capitalism—with no set philosophy—is atheist in *praxis*. Torre refers to *Quadragesimo Anno*: a shrewd encyclical that steered the Church between the twin errors of communism and materialistic capitalism.

Garrick Small, an academic and friend of the Australian Chesterton Society, focuses on *Finance and the Problem of Value*. He defines economics: "Economics is the study of how human society satisfies the material needs of its members through social interaction based on toil, use of natural resources, and exchange."

He contrasts these legitimate activities with the concerns of finance: "Unlike economics, which tends to retain an interest in the things that are exchanged, finance is concerned only

with the abstracted values of those things, and who controls them.” The financial markets don’t produce anything; they make money by trading money. There’s an illusion of economic growth, but no real increase in productivity occurs, creating instability.

A further distortion in value occurs when retailers set prices based on the *maximum* they can expect from the consumer irrespective of production and procurement costs. We pay huge mark-ups for many things. Dr. Small notes that the functionality of an economy depends on the willingness of participants to act with justice, emphasising the need for constant evangelism.

Concentrated vs distributed power

University of Dallas theologian John Médaille focuses his contribution on the irresponsibility inherent in the share market and the concentration of power in both huge corporations and the State that capitalism invites: precise responsibility is hard to identify.

Médaille contrasts this with a better model: multitudes of small businesses where responsibility is easily attributable, and production and profit are more equitably shared. This chapter echoes Chesterton’s critique of big business and big government.

Médaille suggests three reforms:

Any program of reform must have three goals in mind: one, reconnecting “ownership” with responsibility; two, spreading this real ownership throughout society; and three, encouraging investment while discouraging speculation.

Storck’s second contribution, *Investment: for or against the common good*, follows John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, differentiating between investments that help people use their resources and labour, and investments that seek

profit without adding to productivity, especially speculation in financial markets.

The first investment is legitimate, the second is illegitimate. “Financial products” attract vast sums of money because of the huge profits gained through manipulation or deception. Storck observes that these activities are accepted because society is divorced from Catholicism’s transcendent understanding of man and society. Instead, purely temporal concerns foster avarice and selfishness.

Just wage vs minimum wage

Distributist advocate David Cooney examines Church teaching on wages, insisting on a just wage (able to sustain a sensibly thrifty family) instead of a minimum wage. Both employers and employees have serious responsibilities to each other. He says,

... the Church’s teaching clearly points out that employers have obligations toward laborers because the latter are in a weaker position, the Church also teaches that the laborer must actually earn the wage he is paid and has his own obligations to his employer.

It becomes obvious that Papal encyclicals—*Quadragesimo Anno*, *Laborem Exercens*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Vix Pervenit*—constitute powerful correctives to the worst aberrations of modern economics, and these contributors have championed the Church’s wisdom. We’re reminded: Catholic social principles may be like dynamite, but our weapons are words, patience and prayers.

Some important points weren’t addressed: the vital role of entrepreneurs in an economy; the place of capitalism in raising many hundreds of millions of people from abject poverty to basic sufficiency over the past 30 years (an unprecedented achievement); and the distinction between communism’s insistence on a monolithic totalitarian system and capitalism’s many local diversities and degrees of religion or irreligion. ■

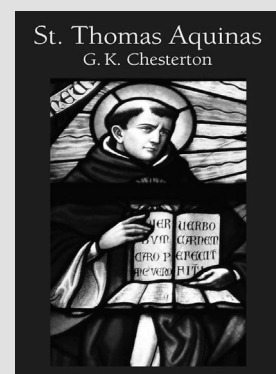
Chesterton on Usury

“[St Thomas Aquinas] foresaw from the first the peril of that mere reliance on trade and exchange, which was beginning about his time; and which has culminated in a universal commercial collapse in our time.

He did not merely assert that Usury is unnatural, though in saying that he only followed Aristotle and obvious common sense, which was never contradicted by anybody until the time of the commercialists, who have involved us in the collapse. The modern world began by Bentham writing the *Defence of Usury*, and it has ended after a hundred years in even the vulgar newspaper opinion finding Finance indefensible.

But St. Thomas struck much deeper than that. He even mentioned the truth, ignored during the long idolatry of trade, that things which men produce only to sell are likely to be worse in quality than the things they produce in order to consume.”

- G.K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933)

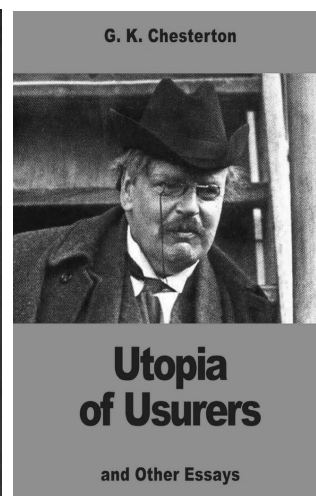
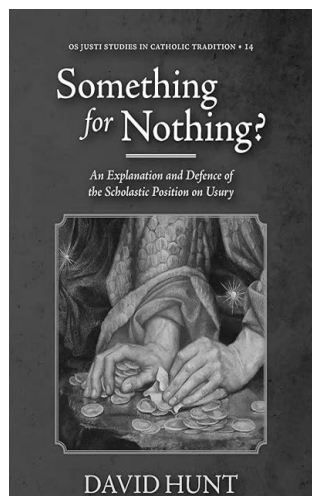


The Meaning of ‘Common Wealth’ - Acquiring Wealth Justly

by Garrick Small

The immorality of usury does not sit easily with the economic assumptions and practices of our culture. In this review of *Something for Nothing? An Explanation and Defence of the Scholastic Position on Usury*, by David Hunt (Os Justi Press, 2024), Dr Garrick Small, a property economist and author with wide academic experience, discusses the historical understanding of usury.

He probes the philosophical principles and practical distinctions that underlie the Catholic teaching on usury, highlighting Chesterton's *Utopia of Usurers and Other Essays* (1917), which contain some of his most polemical writing on the detrimental effects of modern economic practice on work, culture and family life.



Usury as the unjust charging of interest on loans is repeatedly denounced as a sin throughout the Bible, especially the Old Testament. It was well understood in the Catholic world as a grievous evil at least up to the Council of Trent, but since then it has become increasingly controversial to the point that the American Catholic jurist, John T. Noonan, argued that it was an example of the Church changing its mind on a moral question.

Few now believe it could actually be a common problem or mortally sinful. The last century in particular has seen it fade from Catholic consciousness, despite Pope Leo XIII lamenting that the world was awash with “rapacious usury” and Heindrich Pesch, the moral theologian behind Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno*, defining capitalism as “state sponsored usury”. These descriptions correspond with Chesterton’s argument in *Utopia of Usurers* that “taking a usurer’s money by proper authority is not robbery, but recovery of stolen goods.”

Into this debate David Hunt has contributed a novel explanation for why usury is indeed an evil, but curiously one that few need to be concerned over. Hunt’s explanation will please some who see themselves as morally upright whilst embracing the economic values of the world.

Chesterton’s *Utopia of Usurers* hints at Hunt’s persuasiveness. Hunt begins by adopting Chesterton’s understanding of St Thomas Aquinas’s argument for the immorality of usury and the Angelic Doctor provides a reference point to assess Hunt’s argument.

Candles and hammers

In his *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas developed Aristotle’s sterility argument into what is known as his *consumptibility* argument, to provide the best explanation for the immorality of usury.

He distinguished consumable value from durable value. He

recognised that goods are “good” due to their capacity to serve some human need, and some were used up in use while others were not.

A candle is consumed in its use, but a hammer is not. Goods like candles have usefulness, or value, only in being consumed. They are called *consumptible* goods, or more commonly *consumables*. Once they are used up their value is exhausted. They have no value apart from their use.

Hammers are *durable*, or *non-consumptible*, goods. They have two aspects of value since their usefulness is separate to their intrinsic value. One can sell a hammer for its capital value, or hire it out for the value of its use, expecting to eventually have it returned with its capital value unchanged.

Charging twice for the same thing

By contrast, it would be obviously unjust to lend a person a candle and expect it back intact as well as charging for the light it produces. This is because it is a consumptible good. It would be charging for both having your cake and eating it too. You can sell a consumptible good, but you cannot simultaneously charge for its use as well. This would be charging twice for the same thing.

St Thomas noted that *money was a consumptible* good. That is, it is consumed in use, in the way candles and cake are. There is no other value to money apart from its purchasing power. Hence charging for its use as an interest charge in addition to eventually expecting it back intact was selling it twice. David Hunt described this as charging *something for nothing*, and in this he is agreeing with St Thomas.

However, Hunt then develops his argument away from St Thomas by focusing on another closely related aspect of money, the fact that it is *fungible*. A fungible is a good that is not valued for its individual character, but merely for its quantity and quality. It is readily interchangeable with another similar item.

Consumptibles are often, but not necessarily fungibles. A rare and unique bottle of wine is consumed in use, but it is not fungible: it cannot be replaced from the shelves of a bottle shop in the way other wines are. Likewise, some durable goods are fungibles, such as the balls in ball bearings.

Fungibility has nothing to do with the consumptibility argument, but Hunt is not the first recent commentator to confuse fungibility with consumptibility. His innovation is to then focus on the contractual form used in Roman law for contracts involving fungibles, what is called the *mutuum*.

In a *mutuum* a fungible is lent, and the borrower holds it entirely at his own risk until return. The *mutuum* contract began in Roman law and was significant into the 18th century.

For some reason Hunt then asserts that the immorality of usury is actually based on the *mutuum*'s personal guarantee and proceeds to devote considerable attention to unpacking its implications. The result is a discussion on the contractual conventions involved rather than the essences.

The strategic merit of making a personal guarantee from the borrower the test for the existence of usury is that it exempts the great majority of money loans. A loan to an institution, such as a bank, is not secured by a personal guarantee from the individual owners of the bank, so interest on bank deposits is exempt from usury, according to Hunt.

Also, a loan secured by goods or real estate, such as car loans and mortgages, is secured by assets, not personal guarantees, so it may also be exempt.

The overall result is that David Hunt asserts support for the immorality of usury, but exempts all but a handful of lenders from the evil.

Overall, Hunt's treatment of usury is only superficially attractive,

despite its impressive bibliographical depth, and treatment of several technical aspects that accompany detailed treatments of the topic. However, it will be problematic for anyone pursuing a serious understanding of this critical economic problem. It will, regrettably, contribute confidence to those wanting to ignore the problem of usury and remain Catholic, which is now a well-established group with a half-millennia pedigree, who rely on modernist arguments to subvert Christian economic morals.

The late 20th century has seen this approach flourish amongst Catholic scholars in a manner foretold by Chesterton. His distributism opposed the exploitation of the majority using economic might and reflected Pope Leo XIII's vision for economic order.

Distributism is now offensive to many conservative Catholics whose preoccupation with opposing socialism has left them vulnerable to the British liberalism that the Church once explicitly condemned, and that has now resurfaced as neo-conservatism.

Fortunately, Pope Leo XIII established St Thomas as the philosophical reference point for all Catholic thought. The Church is currently flooded with initiatives from both its progressive and conservative wings that reject Pope Leo's insistence. Unfortunately, David Hunt's work will continue this trend.

Pope Pius XI pre-empted this dual attack on the Church's moral teaching when he described the threats as forming "twin rocks of shipwreck" (progressivism and conservatism) that were merely different aspects of "moral, juridical, and social modernism".

For those interested in genuinely understanding usury, there remains a strong correlation between those who respect St Thomas, and those who recognise the common sense of Chesterton. ■

Dawson Society relaunched in the West

Following a COVID-induced break, the Christopher Dawson Society has been relaunched in Perth (WA).

Founded in 2012 by Tom Gourlay and Daniel Matthys, the Society honours the English Catholic historian, Christopher Dawson (1889 - 1970), whose many writings revealed the cultural power and impact of religion in history.

The Society produces a monthly newsletter (available on request at <https://dawsonsociety.substack.com/>) and organizes lectures and conferences.

Its next conference will be held in Perth on **10-12 July 2025** on the theme, "Home: Family. Place. Economics". Papers are invited, and abstract proposals of between 100-300 words should be sent to the Society President, Dr Tom Gourlay, via email (thomas@dawsonsociety.com.au) by 31 March 2025.



Tom Gourlay

Why Poetry Matters

by Francis Phillips

Francis Phillips reflects on the purpose of poetry, and highlights the value of memorising at a young age such classic poems as Chesterton's 'Lepanto'.

A long-time occasional writer and book reviewer living in Buckinghamshire in south-east England, Francis published this article in the British online journal, *The Conservative Woman* (<https://www.conservativewoman.co.uk/>). It is reprinted in *The Defendant* with Francis' kind permission.

When I speak of poetry, I mean classic poems of the past that modern educationalists think 'elitist' literature. Such writing is now the preserve of private schools. This is a tragedy.

Great poetry should not be the preserve of the few but the birthright of all children. For poetry is the language of the soul (think of the Psalms) and we all have souls; a challenging statement for our age of spiritual mediocrity, but it matters urgently – reminding us that the language of beauty still exists and if children discover it through the cadences, rhythms, imagery of traditional poems they receive an unforgettable glimpse of eternity.

Children should memorise classic poems. This is not favoured by the educational establishment – but it is an essential tool for young people, whose memories are naturally retentive and who would develop a deep wellspring of the linguistic wisdom provided by poetry that remains always.

I once knew two elderly gentlemen who left school at 14. The first recited John Masefield's 'Trade Winds' 80 years after he first learnt it. The second recited Kipling's 'If'.

Before I started school a literary lady read me Lord Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott' and Matthew Arnold's 'The Forsaken Merman'. The first introduced me to Arthurian magic, the second to the mysterious sorrows of adult life.

For my 8th birthday in 1953 I was given *The Faber Book of Children's Verse*. Leafing through the index I recognise Tennyson's 'The Splendour Falls', Hilaire Belloc's 'Matilda', William Blake's 'The Tyger', Shelley's 'Ozymandias', Kipling's 'A St Helena Lullaby' and poets such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Keats and GK Chesterton, all with their melodic, stirring verse.

The sections of this wonderful anthology – including Music and Dancing, Beasts and Birds, Kings, Queens and Heroes, Charms and

Spells, Marvels and Riddles – taught me everything I needed to know about life; as Hamlet reminds Horatio: 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy...'

For classic poetry exposes us to the language of the imagination; and imagination is what separates us from brute beasts. Great hymns are also poetry; I am grateful for my Catholic childhood and to fine hymn-writers such as Fathers Faber and Caswall.



Aged 9 my father gave me Lord Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* for Christmas. I had been tasked with peeling a pile of potatoes and had proclaimed: 'I long for freedom!' My father overheard me and inscribed the book, "To Francis, who 'longs for freedom', from Daddy who is free from longings." Churchill, as a schoolboy, had learnt the whole of the *Lay of Horatius* – about 70 verses. I decided to imitate him and committed about 45 verses to memory before I got bored.

About the same age, I found Kipling's poetry on my father's bookshelves. I fell for his marvellous ear for rhyme and the intriguing glimpses he provided of what I supposed was Cockney soldiery. For a talent competition at my convent boarding school aged 14, I dressed up in my father's old RAMC uniform and recited 'Mandalay' in my best 'Cockney' accent. This would now be considered cultural misappropriation.

It was a shock to relinquish Kipling, GK Chesterton (whose 'Lepanto' with its vigorous rhythms I also learnt by heart), Stevenson and the other poets I loved as a child, to study TS Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Yet I grew to love Eliot and to develop more sophisticated literary tastes. But now I sometimes return to those childhood poems and to wish that future generations of children should possess such a vital element of their imaginative education. Elitism be damned.

My older brother gave me another superb anthology: *Other Men's Flowers*, compiled by Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, published in 1944. Wavell had been at Winchester College where learning poetry was a daily requirement. In his preface to 'Music, Mystery and Magic' he reminds readers such themes are 'the essence of the highest poetry'. Yes, indeed.

Wavell was not conventionally religious yet, as a cultured man, he includes at the end his own poem: 'Sonnet for the Madonna of the Cherries', inspired by a painting by Leonardo da Vinci. He concludes, 'For all that loveliness, that warmth, that light/Blessed Madonna, I go back to fight.'

As I said, poetry is the language of the soul - and we all have souls. ■

Executive of the Australian Chesterton Society

PRESIDENT and EDITOR of 'The Defendant'

Mr Karl Schmude, 177 Erskine Street Armidale NSW 2350
Phone: 0407 721 458 Email: kgschmude@gmail.com

SECRETARY / TREASURER: Mr Gary Furnell,

62/12 Goldens Road, Forster NSW 2428
Phone: 0419 421 346 Email: garyfurnell@yahoo.com

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