Renew Membership for 2026

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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)

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A Quiet Surge of Faith - and a Literary Revival

by Karl Schmude



Chesterton and Newman

A surprising development of our time is a quiet resurgence of the Christian faith, marked by a sudden increase in young adult converts, and an even quieter renewal in Christian, and especially Catholic, literature.

Such a spiritual and literary rebirth last occurred a century ago. While its roots lay in the 19th century – notably in the writings of St John Henry Newman and the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Francis Thompson - its most popular flowering took place in the first half of the 20th century. It was the time of Chesterton and an array of other writers - of history, biography, religious apologetics, and fiction - such as Christopher Dawson and Ronald Knox, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene.

Reeling from the slaughter fields of World War I, Western society was driven by an anguished search for answers far beyond the palliatives of political and economic solutions. The horrors of the trenches exposed a spiritual desolation in the culture, which sapped its capacity to provide any uplifting sense of meaning and purpose.

The time was ripe for a rediscovery of the vitalizing roots of Western culture in Christianity.

Between 1910 and 1960, more than half a million people in Britain experienced conversion to the Catholic faith, and those who led the Catholic intellectual and literary revival were themselves mainly converts.

Religious decline reversed

Is a comparable phenomenon beginning to take place in our time?

Dioceses around the Western world, in Australia, Europe and the United States, are noting an unexpected rise in conversions – in contrast to the familiar reports of decline: lower church attendances, fewer Catholic marriages and funerals, vanishing numbers at confession. As the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher, has reported:

"Generation Z, the 'Zoomers' or 'post-millennials,' is the demographic group bucking this trend, suggesting a renewed interest in Christianity among young people. University campuses, long incubators of

secularization, are now offering new Bible studies, ceremonies, and courses in apologetics." (https://fsspx.news/en/news/catholic-church-attracting-conversions-56020)

The phenomenon of conversions among university students is especially surprising, as the typical campus would not be presumed to be friendly to Christian belief. Yet even at historically religious universities like Harvard, there has been a pronounced growth in Christian faith and practice.

Conversion of young men

A marked proportion of the converts is young men. Pondering an explanation, the American writer Noelle Mering points to the sexual revolution for causing "the sustained demonisation and disorientation of men." She sees "an increasingly fatherless culture [that] made vicious behaviour easy, and recast virtue as repressive, effectively weakening men, hardening women, and stoking the antagonism of the sexes."

It is hardly surprising, she writes, that young adults, "fleeing the nihilism of hookup culture, yearning for beauty and transcendence, and responding to the disintegration of social and moral structures," should be rediscovering Christianity ("What young converts are really looking for," *Catholic Herald* (London), January 2, 2026)

While it would be tempting to exaggerate the extent of this Christian revival – and it would certainly be premature to identify it as a movement - it is hard to ignore the comment of the English Catholic philosopher and writer, Sebastian Morello: "There's something bubbling under the surface." ("England's Decline – Is the Catholic Faith Set for a Revival?," *National Catholic Register*, February 12, 2025)

Impact on the imagination

Joseph Pearce, too, is alive to these "underground stirrings", and sees a new Catholic revival taking place in the visual arts, music and literature.

In *The Imaginative Conservative* ("Notes from Underground," June 6 and 13, 2024), he highlights a range of literary works by new Catholic authors. On the one hand, murder mysteries, such as those of Fiorella de Maria (particularly her Father Gabriel Mysteries), Barbara Golder, and Lorraine V. Murray, and on the other, works of realist fiction (such as the novels of Glenn Arbery, as well as of Fiorella de Maria who is skilled in both genres).



Fiorella de Maria

An undercurrent of influence continues to flow from established Christian authors, such as Marilynne Robinson, who recently added an impressive study of the Book of Genesis to her acclaimed novels such as *Gilead* (2004), and the Catholic poet and literary essayist, Dana Gioia, who has long witnessed to the value of faith-inspired literature.

But new authors are also making their mark – for example, the novelists, Joshua Hren, Trevor Cribben Merrill and Katy Carl. They are responding creatively to a culture that is fundamentally at a loss as to what it believes. It searches anxiously for ways of satisfying its spiritual longings, shifting from one substitute to another – a political cause here, a technological opening there, without finding any lasting truth to embrace.

Joshua Hren has founded a publishing house for the new Catholic authors, Wiseblood Books. Its name comes from Flannery O'Connor's 1952 novel, *Wise Blood,* thereby honouring the Catholic literary tradition in America reflected in writers such as O'Connor and Walker Percy.


Joshua Hren

Literature enriching philosophy

Chesterton himself embodied the two approaches of philosophical exposition and literary imagining. In the same year as *Orthodoxy*, 1908, his classic unfolding of Christian belief, he published the novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which made real the spiritual impact of evil and suffering and hope. It showed how the imagination in literature can enrich the mind in philosophy, deepening and illuminating the revelation of Christian belief.

Literature has this enriching effect by depicting, in story and character, the Christian experience. It captures the lonely and desperate life a person faces when deprived of this experience. As the French Catholic novelist, Francois Mauriac, described:

"To show the vast abyss that the absence of God has created in our modern world, one has only to picture the man of today in all his misery." (*La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète - Life and Death of a Poet*, 1924)

As so often, Chesterton revealed a prophetic sense of the cultural environment that would in time confront Christian authors. He saw the rise, "both for good and evil, [of] a highly poetical and largely illogical faith in liberty," which induced people to run risks "for the sake of spontaneity and diversity." These were the psychological roots of what would become our culture's preference for emotional choices, distorted perspectives, and an indulgence in distractions.

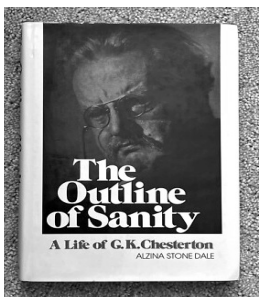
Chesterton noted "the spectacle of small or originally small things swollen to enormous size and power," which would lead to an upending of cultural values (*Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*, 1911). As he argued:

"If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals, it is the modern strengthening of minor morals" ("on Lying in Bed," *Tremendous Trifles*, 1909). We have since seen our culture enacting this contradiction - abolishing restrictions on abortion and euthanasia, while imposing bans on smoking.

If the quiet recovery of Christian faith were to gain wider traction, we might nourish the hope of another reversal of values, which could prepare the way for a cultural recovery. Solid convictions might come to challenge transient feelings, and major morals of substance overturn the minor morals of fashion. ■

Reflections on *The Outline of Sanity: A Biography of G.K. Chesterton*

by Chris Rule



A perceptive review by the English writer Peter Ackroyd of a biography of Chesterton has prompted one of our Chesterton Society members to reflect on Chesterton's enduring qualities, and why he continues to attract readers.

Chris Rule *has a professional background in the Commonwealth Public Service and school librarianship. He previously contributed to* The Defendant *(Summer 2024) on the extensive Chesterton Collection available at the London campus of the University of Notre Dame.*

Alzina Stone Dale is author of *The Outline of Sanity: A Biography of G.K. Chesterton* (1982). The title is taken from Chesterton's book, *The Outline of Sanity* (1926), in which Chesterton explained what 'distributism' is.

Peter Ackroyd reviewed Dale's biography for *The Spectator* (8 May 1983), and I came upon the review in a book titled *Peter Ackroyd: The Collection* (2001), edited by Thomas Wright.

Ackroyd argues that Dale "has written a sober and most convincing study of Chesterton as a child – or, rather, orphan - of his age whose arguments in favour of familial responsibility and private liberty were intended as a challenge to the collectivist tendencies of the time and whose hard-won faith was based upon the intellectual merits of Christianity and opposed to the socialism or bogus humanitarianism of his contemporaries."

The value of Ackroyd's review, apart from its positive attitude towards Dale's book, is that it draws attention to those factors which attract Chestertonians to Chesterton and his writings.

These factors include: he was not afraid to question the "conventional wisdom" of the age. Because of this he was called a "romantic" or a "reactionary", insults usually thrown at those who didn't support the intellectual fashions of the time.

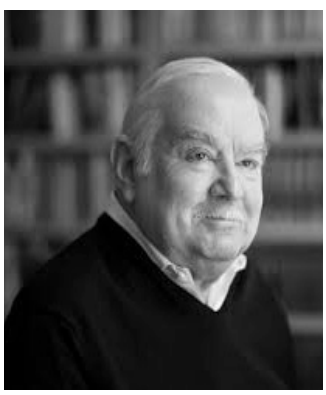
He did not take himself seriously. As a consequence of this, he was not taken seriously by others.

His ability to see paradox was second to none. As Ackroyd points out: "The appropriate response to confusion is laughter, just as the only remedy for earnest but empty-headed orthodoxy is paradox."

According to Ackroyd there was an "air of buffoonery" and "heartiness" about Chesterton. This disguised "great strength of intellect and a man who stood in fear of this God". It also concealed "a most hard-headed man."

He was a religious man whose faith was "hard-won". He was an agnostic who became an Anglican, due to his wife. He eventually moved from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1922.

He was a writer who became a journalist and author of books. At one time he worked for an occult publisher. It was when he began writing for the *Speaker* and the *Daily News* that he established himself as a journalist. According to Ackroyd he called himself a journalist and he was a journalist of "genius" who "scattered it in all directions." By writing books he "set the tone of his whole life".



Peter Ackroyd

Extraordinary things in an ordinary way

Amongst those who admired his writing talent were: Franz Kafka who admired his allegorical novels; T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden who both praised him; Etienne Gilson, a Thomist theologian, who was so impressed with his book on Thomas Aquinas that he said "it made him despair" given it was based on "the most modest research." Chesterton had a "large popular following" which, Ackroyd said, was based on his ability to say "the most extraordinary things in an ordinary way".

Ackroyd concludes as follow: "And so we have a figure as paradoxical as any of his own epigrams or insights. A jolly, sensible Englishman who found sanctuary in the Roman communion; a good-humoured and equable man who in his Father Brown stories is obsessed by the nature of guilt and of sin; a man who could do nothing else but write and who damned his own writing with no praise at all.

"Now that his assaults upon 'collectivism' and the bureaucratic state seem to have some contemporary relevance, however, perhaps he will enjoy a revival. Alzina Dale has written a biography in which the imaginative and intellectual stature of the man is seen in full measure. Despite his own best efforts, he runs the risk of being taken seriously."

Given Ackroyd's words of praise for Dale's biography, I would recommend it as an addition to the libraries of all Chestertonians. ■

Christopher Dawson: The Founding of an Australian Centre

by David Daintree



Dr David Daintree *(pictured, left) was the inaugural Director of the Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies, prior to which he served as President of Campion College in Sydney from 2008 to 2012.*

"Y*ears ago when I was an undergraduate your* Ballad of the White Horse *first brought the breath of life to this period for me when I was fed up with Stubbs and Oman and the rest of them. Unfortunately, the boredom that is generated in people's minds by academic history leads to a positive anti-historicism which seems to be becoming characteristic of modern 'left-wing' thought."*

So wrote Christopher Dawson in a letter to Chesterton in 1932, the year in which his *The Making of Europe* was published. I'm not aware if they ever met face-to-face but there can be little doubt of their eventual good companionship in the Communion of Saints.

Their minds and their priorities, however, were somewhat different. And why not? There are many flowers in God's garden. For all his sympathetic understanding of the Middle Ages, Dawson was perhaps more 'modern' and forward-looking in his thinking. Living longer than Chesterton he also had the dubious privilege of understanding more directly the measureless horrors of which godless tyrannies such as Hitler's and Stalin's were capable.

Chesterton was also a man who thought deeply about the future, but had perhaps a more romantic and idealised view of the medieval past. These are just impressions of mine, but in any case they matter little: what united Chesterton and Dawson in mind and heart was their firm orthodoxy and total commitment to the Catholic Christian faith.

Advancing the Catholic Educational Tradition



Emeritus Archbishop Julian Porteous of Hobart, who established the Christopher Dawson Centre

In 2013 Bishop Julian Porteous was translated to Hobart to become its Archbishop, and he it was who asked me to establish a new organisation to, as he put it, 'advance the good name of the Catholic Educational Tradition'. You have to give these things a name, and we thought for a while of 'The Hobart Institute' as a fairly bland and open-ended title, but His Grace very quickly came up with a better alternative: 'would you do me a favour,' he asked, 'and name it after Christopher Dawson?'

It was no great favour he was asking, for I had been imbued with Dawson's thinking after my years at Campion and under the influence of my old friend Karl Schmude. Thus the *Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies* came into being.

Coincidentally on the other side of the country, in Perth, a small group of people established *The Christopher Dawson Society*. People assume that we were linked, but that was never the case. We both came into existence spontaneously, a circumstance that demonstrates the ongoing importance of Dawson to Catholics of a certain ilk, those who cling very strongly to, and are especially moved by, the notion that there is never a conflict between Faith and Reason, that the truths of Christianity are completely in accord with Science, and in fact that there would be no Science as we know it without the motivational power of Divinity.

So the Centre came into formal existence towards the end of 2013 - we didn't let much grass grow under our feet - we were formally launched at a ceremony in State Parliament House by former Deputy Prime Minister the Hon Tim Fischer.

Thereafter our biggest event of the year was an annual conference - which we rather snottily preferred to call a *colloquium* - in July each year. We attracted speakers and participants from all over the country and even overseas, thoughtfully enabling them to enjoy all the glories of a Tasmanian winter.

Our focus was primarily on education: truth was our Hero, and phoney ideas our target. Numbers each year were modest - we would get 30 or 40 a time - until in 2024 we were fortunate enough to be banned by our usual venue for an indiscreet allusion in our promotional literature to 'gender realignment'. This had the effect of more than doubling our registrations, a useful lesson perhaps to all who wonder about the wisdom of speaking up in a good cause.

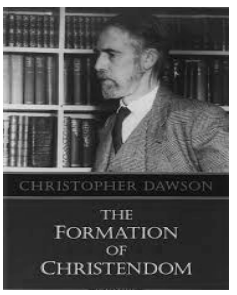
I mentioned the Colloquium first, but we tried to meet a need in other areas as well. There was a fortnightly newsletter, often with guest articles from friends and supporters at home and overseas. We also hosted up to half a dozen talks by visiting specialists each year, often piggy-backing on visits to Australia by overseas speakers for whom a side-trip from Sydney or Melbourne was for us an affordable luxury.

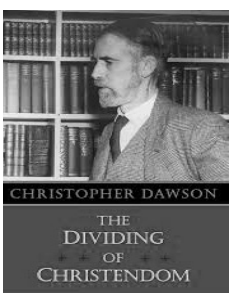
To name all the distinguished speakers we managed to attract to Hobart for our colloquia and our guest lectures would be far too ambitious for this short paper; to name just a few might look like blatant name-dropping. But it's perhaps not unreasonable to say that if a former deputy PM (Tim Fischer) launched us, a former PM (Tony Abbott) gave us a shot in the arm by being keynote speaker a few years later and - to show that we are not narrowly partisan - a member of PM Keating's cabinet (Gary Johns) presented a fine paper at our first colloquium.

Apart from politicians we had the privilege of hosting such Vice-Chancellors as Rufus Black and Steven Schwartz, a high-ranking UN official (Ramesh Thakur), and a medical man who has battled hard for human life (David van Gend).

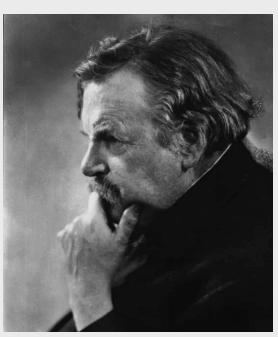
There were so many more of equivalent rank and importance; if any happen upon this article, I beg their forgiveness for not naming them. But the most controversial of all, if that can be measured by the ferocity of the opposition to him, was a mining engineer and climate scientist named Ian Plimer. As soon as his name was mentioned we were banned from three venues. You can guess what sin his was: he denies the official narrative on climate change. He is therefore, in the opinion of most modern trendsetters and 'influencers', a heretic of the most heinous kind. This tells us a lot about the mentality that now dominates human thinking. How Chesterton would have roared! In fact I think I can hear him now, among the music of the spheres, laughing at the folly of an age that excelled all others in placing mere creation above its Creator.

I retired last year, but the Dawson Centre is going from strength to strength under the leadership of its new Director, Alex Sidhu. Alex lives in Melbourne, so our focal centre has shifted from Tasmania to the mainland, from the periphery of the nation to a point much closer to its heart so that it now has much more potential to become what we hoped it would be, a Catholic Think-Tank for the whole Nation.





This paper was intended for the annual Chesterton Conference at Campion on 1st November last, but unhappily I fell off a ladder and broke my left humerus (no, not humorous - there was nothing funny about it) a few weeks before and there were further complications that prevented me from flying to Sydney. I had to ring Karl just a couple of days before to apologise. But I did promise to write on the proposed topic for the *Defendant*, and here it is. ■



Intellectual fault . . . moral fault

Now this modern refusal to undo what has been done is not only an intellectual fault; it is a moral fault also. It is not merely our mental inability to understand the mistake we have made. It is also our spiritual refusal to admit that we have made a mistake.

G.K. Chesterton, "The Impotence of Impenitence," *Eugenics and Other Evils* (1922)

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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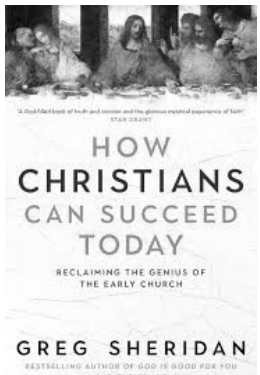
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Greg Sheridan speaking at the Australian Chesterton Conference at Campion College, November 2025.

Return to a Christian Future

by Karl Schmude



How Christians Can Succeed Today: Reclaiming the Genius of the Early Church *by Greg Sheridan (Allen & Unwin, $34.99). This is a shorter version of the review that appeared in* Quadrant*, November 2025. It is republished in* The Defendant *with the kind permission of the journal and its Literary Editor, Professor Barry Spurr.*

One of the tests of quality journalism is the ability to integrate insights from different sources and subjects, historical as well as contemporary, and meld them into a coherent narrative.

As the long-time Foreign Editor of *The Australian*, Greg Sheridan has fulfilled this test admirably in the sphere of political commentary, but most recently he has extended his gaze to religion, in particular present-day Christianity. His latest book, *How Christians Can Succeed Today: Reclaiming the Genius of the Early Church,* draws on the findings of historical scholarship as well as the testimony of contemporary Christians to present a series of instructive comparisons between the first and twenty-first centuries.

Calling the first half of his book, "The Revolutionary Christians of the Early Church", he examines the life and profound impact of the first Christians, while in the second half, "Contemporary Early Christians", he features certain individuals in various fields who are having a significant Christian influence on the culture of our time.

The book serves as the third volume of Sheridan's trilogy on present-day Christianity. Whereas his first book, *God is Good for You: A Defence of Christianity in Troubled Times* (2018), focused on the religious foundations and inspirations of Western culture, and his second book, *Christians: The Urgent Case for Jesus in our World,* presented the person of Jesus Christ as the most radical figure in human life and history, his latest work is a revealing study of the Christian people.

His unifying theme is that Christians separated by twenty centuries actually have much in common. They are both "early Christians". Despite the obvious differences between the two eras, Sheridan sees the experience of Christians in the first century as providing lessons for Christians in the twenty-first century.

He begins with the first phase of Christianity after Christ, when the future of the new Church hardly seemed promising. Christians were few in number, devoid of financial resources and political power, and subject to savage persecution and the threat of martyrdom. They were timid, hidden away in fear and bewilderment.

Then the risen Christ appeared to the apostles and spent time with them. They were convinced his promises were true and that they would be emboldened by the Holy Spirit to overcome their fears. They would turn into the most adventurous disciples, prepared to live out, and die for, the universal mission of a divine saviour they had initially thought they had lost.

Christianity as a developing religion in the first centuries stands in contrast to its sharp decline in our time, at least in the West, and Sheridan argues that Christians should accept that they are now a minority. But an attitude of acceptance should not induce gloom or a spirit of defeatism. As the book's title suggests, and the second half illustrates, there are many grounds for hope and creative response.

While Christians face growing antagonism and discrimination, they are not, at this stage, subject to the level and brutality of persecution of the early Christians. The spiritual resilience of the Christian faith is evident in new shoots of growth, which Sheridan discerns in different spheres of modern cultural life – literature, education, politics, media and the movies.

Radical qualities of Christianity

His interviews with various people in these areas highlight the qualities of Christianity that are the most radical and universal, and that challenge the selective morality of modern secularism at its very core. Qualities such as forgiveness rather than retribution, and loving one's enemies, not just one's friends.

Tellingly, Sheridan begins with stories of forgiveness, such as in the lives of the Sydney Lebanese couple, Leila and Danny Abdallah, who suffered the poignant loss of three children and a niece when a driver affected by drugs and alcohol drove into them in a suburban street near their home. They forgave the man. Danny visited him in prison where he found him disconsolate. In time the man became a Maronite Christian like Leila and Danny, saying: "I want what you have." A certain spiritual camaraderie developed, reflecting the power of forgiveness offered - and accepted.

In the unforgiving field of politics, Sheridan turns to Mike Pence to gain insight into whether it is possible to love your enemies. Exploring his subject's religious beliefs, not his politics or period of service as Vice-President to Donald Trump, he reveals how Pence has sought to live out his

Christianity as a religion of love and solidarity in an arena that thrives on conflict and the exploitation of division.

Certainly Pence felt challenged by the Christian injunction to love his enemies. He responded by compiling a prayer journal in which he kept a list of those he should pray for. He found it was "a pathway to forgiveness and grace. To pray for someone who you feel has wronged you."

Pence found, as Sheridan notes, that the act of prayer "drains the hatred out of your body. . . . Prayer dissolves hatred." Pence quotes C.S. Lewis: "I don't know if prayer changes things, but it changes me."

In a chapter on Christian influence in the media, Sheridan studies the impact of three figures - American Bishop Robert Barron, the founder of Word on Fire, whom he calls "the most successful and important Catholic communicator other than the pope himself"; Mark Varughese, a Malaysian-Australian Pentecostal pastor, whose Kingdomcity churches span fifteen countries and are part of a worldwide Pentecostal Christian movement comprising some 650 million followers; and Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist and author, whose books and media commentaries have attracted a vast audience, particularly of the young, who are searching for higher purpose in a culture that can no longer supply any deep or satisfying answers.

Each of these media evangelists is alive to the spiritual emptiness of present-day culture, now bordering on nihilist despair.

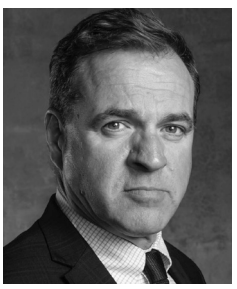
In the first half of *How Christians Can Succeed Today,* Sheridan devotes separate chapters to St Paul and his transformative power as the greatest teacher of the early Church, and to St Augustine as an outstanding intellectual leader who influenced Christian thought profoundly, and as a result the mind of Western civilisation.

The chapters on Paul and Augustine as supreme communicators pave the way for the later chapters on today's media evangelists and on the series, *The Chosen*, and give the entire book an underlying unity.

Sheridan explores how The Chosen, the surprisingly successful TV series about Christ and his disciples, illustrates the narrative power of Christianity when depicted on the screen. It confirms, as he comments, that in neglecting the transcendental mysteries of faith, "the gatekeepers of popular culture are simply missing an enormous part of the human experience."



Marilynne Robinson



Niall Ferguson

The one modern area of communication in which Sheridan believes that Christians should be more active is social media, which would extend their outreach beyond mainstream channels.

Turning to present-day literature and education, Sheridan highlights two modern examples of the imagination and the mind illuminating Christian truth – the American author, Marilynne Robinson, whom he calls "the greatest Christian novelist of the 21st century," and the British historian and journalistic commentator, Niall Ferguson, who became, in his own words, a "lapsed atheist", embracing Christianity after he found that the experience of life had dissolved his disbelief.

Central to any solution is a Christian educational renaissance. Reviving classical education would reconnect the people of the West with their spiritual and cultural heritage. Niall Ferguson is co-founder of a private liberal arts university in Texas, the University of Austin. It is a new example of the deep-rooted liberal arts tradition in America, now being revitalised at the school level by a flourishing of Christian classical institutions – such as the Chesterton Schools, one of which Sheridan visited for this book and reports on in detail.

This educational rebirth corresponds to a similar movement in Australia, reflected in the creation of Campion College at the university level and schools like Hartford College and the St John Henry Newman College.

The diffuse and largely overlooked Christian revival in the West that has been highlighted by Sheridan accounts for his recent books becoming best sellers. *God is Good for You* sold over 30,000 copies, a remarkable figure for an Australian book on Christianity – and one offering a positive perspective.

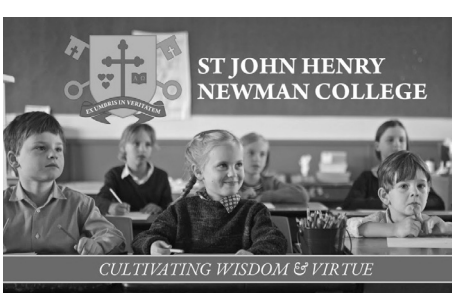
It is salutary that it should be a respected foreign affairs journalist who is shedding light on what has become most foreign to our culture, the world of transcendental meaning and religious faith, and that it is a general publisher, Allen & Unwin, which is alive to the untapped audience behind a quiet reawakening of Christian belief and life in the 21st century. ■



Campion College
Australia's first liberal arts college in Sydney - venue of the Australian Chesterton Conferences



Hartford College
Australia's first liberal arts school for boys - in Sydney's southeast



John Henry Newman College
Catholic classical school recently opened in Brisbane

Chesterton Schools Expanding Worldwide

The Chesterton Schools Network (CSN) are expanding rapidly. As Emily de Rotstein, the CSN's Executive Director, and her husband, Nes, who is responsible for international pat-partnerships in education, revealed at the 2025 Australian Chesterton Conference, Chesterton schools are springing up throughout America and in many other countries.

Kimberley Heatherington recently reported (OSV News, January 29, 2026):

"At the beginning of 2026, there were Chesterton schools in 30 U.S. states and 76 dioceses, with more than 3,000 students enrolled. The list of schools on the Network's website includes anticipated openings both domestic and overseas. It notes 22 schools slated to open this year, including those in as diverse locations as Tokyo; Barcelona, Spain; and Lagos, Nigeria."

Heatherington quotes Emily de Rotstein on the special attraction of this movement:

"The Chesterton Schools Network unites the growing interest in classical, Catholic education with the entrepreneurial spirit of faithful parents who want to be of service to the Church. We've been growing consistently over the last few years, and our pipeline of interested start-up groups wanting to open new schools is only increasing, now internationally as well as in the U.S." In his recent book on Christianity, Greg Sheridan reports on his visit in 2024 to a Chesterton school in Annapolis near Washington DC, where he met Bill and Azin Cleary, the couple who founded and run the school. The Clearys drew on the experience and guidance of the CSN, which, Sheridan notes, "provided them, invaluably, a full template for a classical school."



Greg Sheridan and his wife Jessie (seated left and centre) visiting with the Cleary family who founded and run the Chesterton Academy in Annapolis, Maryland (USA)

In 2025, the CSN won a prestigious award for its remarkable initiative – the Yass Prize, which is seen in America as a form of Pulitzer Prize for education. The prize is worth US$1 million and will be used to strengthen resources and support current schools, while launching an ambitious 15-year plan to grow to 1,000 schools worldwide by 2040. ■

Chesterton Centre in Sierra Leone - An Appeal for Support

by Gary Furnell



John Kanu

In the Spring 2025 issue of *The Defendant*, John Kanu described the sterling and effective efforts of the Sierra Leone Chesterton Centre (SLCC) to serve its local communities.

John focused on three initiatives:

- **returning land degraded** through surface mining for diamonds and gold, into productive fields or fish ponds run by families/co-operative clans;
- **Chesterton Academy of Sierra Leone,** providing Catholic education to over 500 students, many of them Muslims; and
- **Chesterton Vocational and Skills Development Institute,** providing useful job skills for young people with little education, some of whom might have slipped into unemployment, dependency or drugs.

John's story, and his firm support of the very Chestertonian ideal of local people taking charge of local matters, has inspired the Australian Chesterton Society to contact John and ask if a donation of $200 would be helpful. John's response was strongly positive. He indicated that the money would directly benefit the mining-affected village of Bandafayi in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone, allowing families living in this community to convert degraded lands into fish ponds. With additional donations from a number of Australian Chestertonians, an amount of $1,000 has recently been sent to the SLCC for its use in their projects.



Sierra Leone - restoring the productivity of degraded land

John's words show how far the influence of Chesterton's social and economic ideas can reach:

"After 15 years involvement in this work, we now have irrefutable evidence to demonstrate that the cooperative approach is an effective 'distributist' model."

Expanded goal for Sierra Leone

We'd now like to expand this donation opportunity to other Australian Chestertonians.

Our aim is send a further $2000 by the end of July. We don't need governments or NGOs to solve every problem. Local people in Australia can help local people in Sierra Leone.

If you'd like to participate, please send a donation to the Australian Chesterton Society, clearly identifying the amount for transfer to the SLCC.

Our banking details are:

Regional Australia Bank **BSB 932000**, Australian Chesterton Society, **account no.: 722360**. Donations are not tax-deductible.