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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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Chesterton in Silicon Valley **The Challenge of Artificial Intelligence**

by Karl Schmude

What would Chesterton have made of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

We can only speculate at this distance from his life, but he left at least two sources of guidance as to how he might have viewed AI. The first is his own writings about the machine age and the early implications of technological development. The second is his characteristic insights, in particular his sense of paradox as a way of balancing truths that are in tension - and thereby are more revealing of reality.

These intellectual legacies - Chesterton's insights into automation and his penetration of reality through paradoxes - may help us to evaluate the promise, and the peril, of the AI revolution.

Artificial vs human intelligence

Chesterton's first reaction to AI might have been to wonder at the very idea of "artificial intelligence". How could the workings of the human mind and imagination be construed as "artificial" - contrived, not real, and blind to the natural wonder of creation.

This might have been heightened when he found that AI relied on such a distinctively human quality as language. (He may even have joked that, while AI is powered by Large Language Models (LLMs), he himself was a Large Language Model!)

The practical effect of construing intelligence as "artificial" could be what Chesterton saw was the silent effect of machinery - that it can make us *think and act* like machines, so that it controls us rather than serves us. We can fall into a mechanistic



Chesterton 'visits' Apple Park, the futuristic headquarters of the Apple company in California's Silicon Valley

mindset, not fully rounded and responsive to the richness of human nature, and be tempted to evaluate human beings as if they were machines.

In *The Outline of Sanity* (1927), in a chapter aptly called "The Wheel of Fate", Chesterton argued: "Before we begin any talk of the practical problem of machinery, it is necessary to leave off thinking like machines."

Chesterton himself disdained any Luddite rejection of machinery. But he realised, even at this early stage, a curious trend - how quickly the initial wonder of a technological advance wears off, and we simply take it for granted as part of ordinary experience. In an essay on the telephone, Chesterton highlighted this risk:

"There has certainly been a rush of discovery, a rapid series of inventions; and, in one sense, the activity is marvellous . . . But it has been a rapidity in things going stale; a rush downhill to the flat and dreary world of the prosaic; a haste of marvellous things to lose their marvellous character." (*As I Was Saying*, 1936)

Resisting the technological imperative

Apart from dulling our sense of wonder, Chesterton was also concerned that the machine age could have a deeper and more insidious impact – that it might nurture an attitude of subservience which could easily lead, as we see in our pervasively technological age, to what has been called the “technological imperative” – that “if it can be done, it has to be done”, as though every technological advance spells progress.

Chesterton resisted the “technological imperative” by placing it in a wider humanist context:

“There is no obligation on us to be richer, or busier, or more efficient, or more productive, or more progressive, or in any way worldlier or wealthier, if it does not make us happier.” (“The Wheel of Fate”)

Even the AI industry is now beginning to echo Chesterton’s words of caution. The American company, Anthropic, a driving force in California’s Silicon Valley, has recently called for a global pause in AI development. Its leaders warn of “humans losing control over AI systems”, and of the speed with which AI capabilities will “eclipse those of humans.”

Certainly the early impact of AI is being felt in various fields. One is commerce, where the economic promise of increased productivity is offset by the social impact of job dislocations and depersonalised services. Another is education, where it provides easier access to the accumulated record of the past, but is also generating concerns that it favours superficial learning and facilitates academic cheating.

Concentration vs dispersal of power

Probably the deeper worry is the concentration of economic and political power that Chesterton long fought against. In his time, such power lay with the conglomerates of private industry (including in his own sphere of journalism with the control exercised by a handful of press barons), and was also unmistakable in the political sphere – in the encroaching structures of the state.

In our time, it has extended to the new technology, dominated as it is by a few massive companies such as Microsoft and Apple, and by individuals like Bill Gates and Elon Musk.

In his recent encyclical on AI, *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV invokes the Catholic social principle of subsidiarity, so beloved by Chesterton, to warn against this concentration of digital power (pars.68-72). The pope affirms the crucial need for technological power to be spread as widely as possible, across regions and organisations, so that human dignity is respected and social accessibility guaranteed.

The search for ultimate meaning

Yet the likely disruptions of AI may have a compensating (if painful) benefit of enlivening us to the spiritual emptiness

of contemporary culture. We are conditioned to see technology as an answer to all problems, even when we realise that it focuses on the “how” questions (how things came to be and how they work) rather than the “why” questions (why things exist at all, what they mean and why they matter).

Technology cannot finally quench the thirst for ultimate meaning and purpose that religious faith previously supplied.

A leading figure at Anthropic, Avital Balwit, has drawn on Chesterton’s power of paradox to shed light on the spiritual challenge of AI. Impressed by Chesterton’s belief (as expressed in a chapter in *Orthodoxy*, “The Paradoxes of Christianity”) that we should feel “at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it,” she notes our contrasting condition – that now “we are neither astonished at the world nor at home in it.” (“Searching for God in Silicon Valley” - <https://www.thefp.com/p/silicon-valley-faith-finding-god>).



Avital Balwit of the AI company, Anthropic

Balwit’s lament echoes Chesterton’s regret about the machine age - that we rapidly lose our sense of wonder at the marvel of new inventions, and find it hard to feel satisfied by the benefits they provide.

Closely connected - but lonely

A striking paradox of present-day culture, to which Chesterton would have been alive, is that the *most connected* generation in history - Gen Z, those in their mid-teens to late twenties – is *also the loneliest*. As noted by the American author, Presley Shumate (in “The Conservator,” May 2026), the craving for connection can give rise to screen-based interaction being taken for friendship, and disembodied closeness for commitment.

In the new age of AI, Balwit focuses on religious faith as a time-honoured way of recapturing the experience of wonder and welcome. As she writes:

“You cannot stand this close to questions of omniscience and immortality without being pulled toward the territory religion has always occupied.”

When Chesterton surveyed the main systems of concentrated power in his time, capitalism and socialism, he commented: “You have left certain human needs out of your books. You may leave them out of your republic.” Might he have offered a similar reaction to the concentration of technological power in our time? -

You have left certain human needs out of your AI scenarios. You may leave them out of your AI design of society. ■



Fr. Damian Ference

Flannery O'Connor - Intellectual Influences on Literary Art

by Gary Furnell



Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor and G.K. Chesterton both figured significantly in the revival of Catholic literature in the 20th century.

O'Connor's fictional works – the few novels and short stories she was able to write in her short life – had a profound effect on the Western imagination for their depiction of memorable characters from the American South who were 'Christ-haunted'. Chesterton's voluminous writings in every genre registered on both the mind and the imagination, inspiring fresh understandings of the Christian faith and the inspiration it could give to a culture without God.

Gary Furnell explores the intellectual background to Flannery O'Connor's writings in this review of a recent book, Fr. Damian Ference's *No One Was Paying Any Attention to the Sky: Flannery O'Connor and Modernity* (Wiseblood books, 2025).

The interest in Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964) continues unabated. New publications, highlighting various aspects of her life, thought, or art, appear every few months.

No One Was Paying Any Attention to the Sky is an 84-page essay on O'Connor's primary intellectual influences. She had discerned modernity's strictures, and this knowledge informed her fiction. The essay's writer, American scholar/priest Damian Ference, delved into O'Connor's personal library – held at Georgia College and State University – to uncover what she had read and especially those passages she'd underlined or where she'd added margin notes.

Fr. Ference also studied the many book reviews O'Connor wrote for her diocesan newspaper.

The resulting essay is a measured explication, based on evidence, of O'Connor's intellectual journey. It is complemented by the essay's structural clarity, the careful organisation aided by headings and sub-headings. The prose is unpretentious and accessible, for the most part. There are numerous endnotes for those who require references or additional contextual detail. The foreword by Christopher Scalia establishes Fr. Ference's scholarly *bona fides* and outlines the essay's themes.

While some familiarity with philosophical discourse will aid the reader, no deep familiarity with O'Connor's short stories is required. The newcomer will likely be encouraged to read her fiction, while established fans will re-read her stories and her novels, especially *Wise Blood*, with greater understanding. We'll discover that her characters are distorted by modernity's peculiarities.

A prophetic artist

O'Connor admitted that, in the modern West, scepticism about Christianity was prevalent, especially among the would-be cultured or intellectual. Attendant to this scepticism were nihilistic tendencies, masked by liberal sentiments.

O'Connor was a devout Catholic; she maintained its doctrines while living – as much as the physical debilitations of her

lupus condition allowed – in the modern world. She was not an indisposed anchorite; she was a prophetic artist.

Her faith was challenged during her studies at Georgia College, especially in the philosophy courses. Modernism, beginning with René Descartes, was espoused. O'Connor doubted the worldly philosophies, but she listened and learned. She found faith-affirming intellectual assistance, both philosophical and historical, in the books of Romano Guardini and Étienne Gilson.

Guardini was valuable because he highlighted the "pre-eminent philosophical problem of man ...modern man experiences alienation from God, the world, other people, and even, at times, himself." The alienation results when man turns away from God and seeks integration independently of the creator. O'Connor benefited further from Guardini because he warned of the Church's inadequate responses to modernity: sentimentality, exaggeration or anti-intellectualism.

Those of us who discovered the Catholic Church in its post-Vatican II configuration, and imagine that the pre-Vatican II Church was vastly superior, are reminded that O'Connor found plenty of vapid piety, silliness and fantasy among Catholics. She rejected these "musty, turgid" substitutes for grappling with divine realities.

Étienne Gilson's books gave O'Connor a historical overview of philosophy. Gilson defended western Christendom's Thomist philosophy, which was supplanted by the profane philosophies of – among others – Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Auguste Comte and Ludwig Feuerbach. Despite the skein of confident declarations, deep confusion was unleashed by these philosophies. O'Connor realised that they were anti-human because they were centred on humanity without God.

Moreover, Gilson aided O'Connor by championing the artist's freedom to manipulate or reimagine nature to fulfil their artistic vision. Thus, fiction was free to explore the grotesque, the mythic, the poetic and other modes according to the artist's talents and intentions. O'Connor knew she had the gift of portraying the comically grotesque. She used her gift well.

Key features of modernity

Guided by Guardini and Gilson, Fr. Ference examines four features of modernity that impacted O'Connor and affect us in our even more incoherent era:

The Self as the Centre of Existence

Fr. Ference summarised this characteristic: "...the full-blown absolutization of human nature – whereby the human being is taken to be the only personal reality in the universe and this subjectivity taken to be the origin and measure of meaning." This is an expression of secular humanism. Over time, it devolves into individualism running rampant, often contrary to family or community responsibilities, and hostile to established authorities.

A Disregard for Mystery

Gilson traced this truncating exclusion to Descartes' elevation of mathematical, measurable certainties. Greater scientific knowledge was undoubtedly encouraged, but the elevation slumped into the denigration of spiritual realities and doubt about being, essences and purpose. This neglect of mysteries is still part of our culture, but not in the Church, which wisely enacts and protects mysteries. O'Connor wrote, "Mystery isn't something that is gradually evaporating. It grows along with knowledge."

Abetting this disregard for mysteries are the philosophies of naturalism and scientism, which posit that matter is all that exists, with all processes having a material basis. Scientism insists that the knowledge gained from research into matter is the only knowledge vital for humanity. This means that interior experience – thoughts, feelings, intuitions, dreams and spiritual hunger – is impossible to integrate with the mechanistic external world. Man's deepest personal needs and aspirations are doomed to remain unsatisfied.

A General Distrust of the Concrete

Given man's predicament, a flight from reality is one consequence. It's a type of Gnosticism: ideas and fantasies are given more weight than troubling concrete realities. O'Connor rejected this Gnostic flight. She described herself as "a hillbilly Thomist", agreeing with St. Thomas Aquinas that we apprehend reality via the senses, with God's loving wisdom establishing a correspondence between our senses, our minds, and reality.

The Fall damaged this correspondence but did not annul it. In contrast, the Gnostic flight from reality leaves humanity adrift. As Fr. Ference states, "A philosophy that abandons the body as the way man naturally comes to know the world is a philosophy that essentially abandons humanity for a new conception of the 'true self.'"

He elaborates, "Flannery O'Connor was convinced that any attempt to separate the spiritual world from the material world is to meddle with our perception of reality in a way that causes harm, not only to one's art, but also to the human person and hence the human community."

The Subordination of Reason

O'Connor was alert to the attractions of sentimentality – that is, prioritising feelings over reason. She wrote about sentimentality, "It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror."

Wise Blood - in an unwise culture

Fr. Ference's final section presents O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* (1952) as an "artistic rendering of O'Connor's vision of modernity." *Wise Blood* portrays the strange trajectory of a war veteran, Hazel Motes, who is obsessed, negatively, with Jesus. The story is set in the southern Bible Belt, where Motes interacts with his unbalanced disciple, with cops and conmen, and a seductive teenage girl.

His mission is to expose Jesus; instead, he is exposed as deluded. But he admits his delusion, enacts a severe self-imposed penance and ends his life as an exploited, oddball ascetic. Fr. Ference recounts the story with skill, showing how O'Connor explored, via dramatic action, the troubles that beset a dedicated modernist.

No One Was Paying Any Attention to the Sky is among the best books on Flannery O'Connor's thought and on *Wise Blood*, her first novel. Fr. Ference's essay rewards, and sometimes demands, slow, reflective reading. He does not highlight this point, but O'Connor's art, her letters and her essay/lecture collection, *Mystery and Manners* (1957), demonstrate how gifted she was and how quickly her literary gifts matured.

Flannery O'Connor died aged 39, but her example and great art have been impacting people for over eighty years. ■

In Norway recently, the cause for canonisation was announced of the Nobel Prize-winning novelist, **Sigrid Undset** (1882-1949), best known for her three-part novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter* published in the 1920s. Bishop Fredrik Hansen of Oslo is presenting her as "far more than an author and Nobel Prize Laureate" but also as "a model of Christian faith" who lived a life of virtue and the pursuit of holiness.

Undset deeply admired Chesterton. She travelled to his home in Beaconsfield to meet him and, on returning to Norway, reportedly flung a copy of Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* on her editor's desk, declaiming that it was the best book ever written and had to be translated into Norwegian – which she herself did in 1931.

She lived a heroic life. Her outspoken criticism of the Nazis in the 1930s led to her books being banned and burned in Germany. She fled to America in 1940 and continued her public advocacy of Norwegian resistance to Nazism. Returning in 1945 to her home in Lillehammer, Norway, not far from the capital city of Oslo, she died in 1949.



Sigrid Undset

The Forgotten Sin of Usury

by Garrick Small

The subject of usury - the unjust charging of interest on loans - is now foreign to our understanding. It seems to defy the basic assumptions of modern economic practice on lending and borrowing and making profits. Yet the condemnation of usury goes back to the Old Testament, and extends as moral teaching at different points in Christian history, at least up to the Council of Trent in the 16th century.



Garrick Small

Dr Garrick Small, a property economist and author with wide academic experience, has addressed this subject in previous articles in *The Defendant*. He has teased out the moral principles involved – first, in acquiring wealth justly and receiving a living wage (Summer 2025 issue), and secondly, in charging a just price for goods (Autumn 2026).

In this third contribution, he provides further historical background, which sheds light on usury as an immoral practice, as well as on such issues as the difference between a loan consisting of money and a loan for what money can buy – viz, a productive asset.

Most recently, Pope Leo XIV has renewed the Catholic condemnation of usury – as a “grave sin” that exploits and enslaves the vulnerable, and a sign of the “corruption of the human heart”.

For reasons of politics rather than morals, the sin of usury dropped from sight in Christendom with the advent of Protestantism.

It had been illegal and immoral in Catholic communities for about a thousand years. That ended when Henry VIII legalised the charging of 5% interest as he rejected traditional Christianity to establish his own religion in England. Legalising usury was a political step to consolidate his supporters.

At about the same time, Luther’s new religion implicitly contained the same opportunity for German bankers. Using a quasi-theological approach, Luther argued that salvation came from faith alone (*sola fides*), independent of works. If works did not save you, then neither could they damn you.

Calvin’s new religion introduced the principle of *double predestination* to achieve something similar. According to it, God knew who was to be saved or damned before they were created, so their actions had no real effect on the outcome.

Max Weber, a Protestant sociologist and historian, explained the way that Calvinists used wealth as evidence of God’s favour to identify the elect. Since bankers tended to be wealthy, they must be amongst the saved in the Calvinist world. Their means of growing wealthy could not then be used to condemn them. Something similar also led to the Protestant invention of the “*divine right of kings*.”

All three approaches carried considerable political benefits but they robbed the Catholic Church of influential supporters. Some in the Church, such as St Peter Canisius in the 16th century, continued to condemn usury, though others were more pragmatic. Despite going on to be canonised, he was censured by the pope for refusing absolution to German bankers. Others, such as the more progressive members of the Spanish “*Neo-Scholastic*” School of Salamanca, employed modern arguments to retire any

condemnation of usury - in what were amongst the earliest intrusions of the modernist heresy into the Church. As a result, the Salamanca School has become the patron for the economic leanings of Catholic neo-conservatives, who favour free markets and what has been termed “democratic capitalism”.

Moral distinctions as economic circumstances changed

Overall, the Church stood back from the thorny problem until, in 1745, Pope Benedict XIV issued the encyclical, *Vix Pervenit*. The pope correctly stated that usury is mortally sinful, but he added reference to “*extrinsic titles*” as mitigating the apparent gain. Extrinsic titles are elements in the nature of a money loan that might justify the return of a greater quantity of money than was lent, such as inflation and other changed circumstances, but which do not represent an actual profit.

The key element in the concept of extrinsic titles is that, although a person may not make a profit from a money loan, he should not incur a loss.

St Thomas Aquinas’s consumptibility argument – distinguishing between goods that are consumable (like food or wine) from those that are durable (such as a house or a hammer) - demonstrated why a person had no right, no *title*, to a gain from a money loan.

This was based on the fact that a person owned, or had title to, his money, but it was not the money, but *what the money bought* - something useful or productive - that benefited the borrower.

Risk-taking and Profit

The element of risk is also important. In a money loan, the borrower incurs the obligation to repay the lender with the money value - that is, the purchasing power - that was

borrowed. That obligation remains regardless of what happened to the money. The repayment obligation was risk-free. It did not depend on what the borrower subsequently did with the money, and it could be retrieved even if the purpose for which the money was borrowed proved to be a failure.

This makes a money loan very different to the loan of a productive asset. If I lend you a cow, I lend you its value as a cow, and its future benefits in milk and calves. I have a right, or a title, to the cow, its future milk and its calves. I can ask for payment for all three. In practice, you might apply labour to feeding and milking the cow, so you deserve a share in the milk and calves, and we can negotiate how to share those. But the cow is still mine, and I continue to be responsible for it. I take a risk since the cow might die.

When I lend you money to buy a cow, I take no risk. You buy the cow, enjoy its milk and calves, and accept the risk of its dying. My money was used up in buying the cow, so it has served its purpose. Its usefulness was exhausted when you bought the cow. At some point in the future, you owe me that purchasing power, no more.

If, therefore, I charge you more than the money's purchasing power, I am charging you for more than I gave you, since it was not the money but what it bought, that provides the benefits above its price.

Extrinsic titles – when higher repayment may be justified

In the cow example, an example of extrinsic titles can be added. If the cow cost \$100 today when I lent you the money, then today you owe me \$100 of purchasing power. If cows are worth \$110 in a year's time, then I have the right to ask you for the value of a cow when the loan is repaid. I receive \$10 more in return, but I have not taken any more

purchasing power from you than what I lent you. I have not extracted usury from you because I had a right, a title, to the same purchasing power, which at repayment time was a greater money value.

Today's economy is complex, so identifying specific extrinsic titles is difficult. There remains a general test that I may use. If I am earning a real riskless gain from a loan, then it is probably usury. If not, then usury is unlikely to be present.

Many people earn a little interest from having their money deposited in a bank, but the interest rates seldom exceed the inflation level; and even if they do, the current tax laws mean that any real gain is lost to the government through income tax. There is no usury here.

Conversely, the interest rates that banks charge borrowers are usually sufficient for them to cover their risks, administration costs, obligations to depositors and taxes, and still leave a robust profit to the bank's shareholders. That profit to shareholders is most likely usury and should be avoided.

Profits on shares in other companies may also raise some questions regarding usury. Where dividends are due to profits and risks from real productive assets, there can be no usury, but part of the dividends may also be risk-free – and thus may contain usury. What is called the "Capital Asset Pricing Model" of modern finance theory sheds some light on this issue, as it seeks to balance the taking of higher risk with the expectation of higher returns. But this is a complex topic to explore at another time.

For a person wishing to avoid usury, a simple test can be this – whether a real (inflation-adjusted) profit is being made that does not participate in the risks of the productive assets that actually produce the benefits. ■

Sierra Leone Chesterton Centre - Gift from the Australian Chesterton Society

Members of the Australian Chesterton Society have responded generously to the Appeal for donations for the Sierra Leone Chesterton Centre (SLCC).

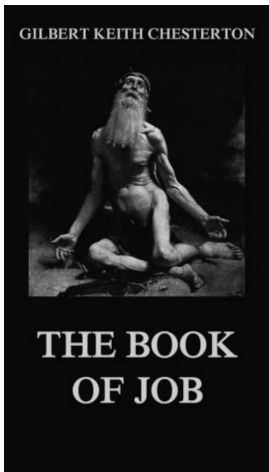
Launched with a goal of \$2,000, the Appeal was designed to give practical support to the SLCC – for the restoration of land degraded through mining (so that it can once again be productive fields and fish ponds) as well as the growth of two schools – the Chesterton Academy of Sierra Leone and a trade school.

Thanks to the wonderful support of our members, the goal was achieved by the end of July. The \$2,000 gift has now been transferred to the SLCC for these various initiatives. The Centre's Founder and Director, John Kanu has responded:

"I hardly know how to express our gratitude. . . This donation is an expression of the best Christian charity, by helping people living in difficult situations. I will convene a meeting over the weekend with the community and share the good news with them."



John Kanu



Unravelling the Riddle of Job

by Anthony Charles Smith

The Book of Job in the Old Testament has always been a source of fascination, especially for its insights into the mystery of human suffering and the trust in God that it demands.

A new contributor to The Defendant, **Anthony Charles Smith**, an author and retired barrister, draws on a famous short work of Chesterton's to explore "the riddle of Job" – a riddle that reflects the characteristically human yearning for an explanation of life and its most challenging experiences such as suffering; a riddle that Job knows only God can unravel.



Chesterton's masterful analysis of the Book of Job (first published as a long Introduction to Wellwood's 1907 edition of the Old Testament text) invited study beyond 'trying the patience of Job' cliché. It opened a veritable sea change of belief.

When language like this, *inter alia*, is deployed - "My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, And I am escaped with the skin of my teeth (19:20). . . My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope (7:6). . . They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. . . (4:8) - there can be no surprise that it inspired Chesterton.

Rejecting Mrs Job's urgings to "curse God and die" was what stamped Job's character throughout. Job knew that his Redeemer lived for him. In Chesterton's words: "He remonstrates with his Maker because he is proud of his Maker. . . He is anxious to be convinced [because] he thinks that God could convince him."

But, as Chesterton then notes, the Book of Job only "answers mystery with mystery" - and mystery begets revelation. As the Bible's oldest Book, it is at its the most baffling when Job is pitchforked into abject suffering by Satan, yet opens a window into Almighty God.

An upright, wealthy man living in the area now known as Kuwait, Job feared God and eschewed evil, then lost his children and his standing to wallow amidst a dung heap foraging for chards to scrape his sores. What was God doing? And as if his suffering wasn't enough, Job's friends, whom he labels "miserable comforters", and with whom he interacts for two thirds of the book, try to wrench unconfessed sin from him.

To the secularists, suffering - such as that caused by cataclysmic earthquakes, cyclones, and lightning strikes - provides another excuse to lambast God and those who believe in Him. These lead to some loss of life, but are necessary to the survival of billions.

The Book of Job makes references to lightning (cf.36:30-33; 37: 3-5; 38: 24-27, 35). Scientists declare that lightning contributes to nitrogen fixation, a nutrient for plants among

other benefits. Cyclones increase chlorophyll concentrations along continental shelves bringing nourishment to many species. Winds lift huge quantities of sea-salt aerosols from the ocean, which play a critical role in raindrop formation.

Job reveals an expanding universe: "He alone stretches out the heavens" (cf.9:8). The Hebrew verb *natah*, translated as "stretches out", implies an ongoing continuous expansion, expressed many thousands of years in advance of the astronomer Edwin Hubble's 1929 discovery of distant galaxies moving away from the earth.

The literal shifting to the metaphorical

The challenge in examining the riddle recognised by Chesterton ever remains in determining when and how a passage shifts from the literal to the metaphorical. What doesn't change in the Book is God's consistent involvement in the realm. The Genesis writer had Job from which to draw, and consequently things already set down there need not be repeated in Chapters 1-11 of Genesis.

Thus, Job's description of God's creative work indicates the flood could not have been global. "Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb. . . when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This...is where your proud waves halt?'" (38:8, 10-11).

Psalm 104:6 echoed Job in that primordial earth was a water world, but that on day three, continents rose separating land masses, and that "never again" (ibid.104:9) would waters "cover the earth". Noah's flood occurred well *after* the third creation day.

Through Job we see that the flood was for the world of "ungodly people" (2 Peter 2:5), "of that time" (2 Peter 3:6), making a clear distinction between Noah's world and the world of Peter's time. Were the descendants of Job, his three friends and young Elihu, the brilliant scribe (chapters 32-37), part of that "ungodly world"?

In the lead-up to God's appearing "out of a whirlwind" to "put Job in the dock", Chesterton asserts that Job remonstrates with his Maker (31:35). Job speaks of the Almighty as his

enemy, but he never doubts that his enemy has some kind of a case that Job himself does not understand.

From Chapter 38, Job is silenced. As Chesterton says, "It is one of the splendid strokes that God rebukes alike the man who accused [Job], and the men who defended Him." He asks Job who he is. Job, being a man of candid intellect, takes a little time to consider, and comes to the conclusion that he does not know.

Job needed time to comprehend why he had to endure so much suffering, but he never wavered in his conviction that God could offer good reasons for subjecting him to torment and devastation.

Riddles of God more satisfying than solutions of man

Chesterton strikes a solid note with the observation that men of religious faith have philosophic doubt. Rather than answer riddles, Chesterton argues, God propounds them. His refusal to explain His design, "is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man. . . . God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything; "Hath the rain a father?... Out of whose womb came the ice?" (38:28). He insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; "Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?" (38:26).

Chesterton adds: "Instead of proving to Job that it is an explicable world, [God] insists that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was. . . . He has contrived

to let fall . . . sudden and splendid suggestions that the secret of God is a bright and not a sad one – semi-accidental suggestions, like light seen for an instant through the crack of a closed door. . . this optimism breaking through agnosticism like fiery gold round the edges of a black cloud."

Chesterton's conclusion is striking: "For when once people have begun to believe that prosperity is the reward of virtue, their next calamity is obvious. If prosperity is regarded as the reward of virtue it will be regarded as the symptom of virtue."

And from Darwin to Dawkins, how would they answer those questions? Would Dawkins hold up a computer and point to man's brilliant mind, yet answer that from whence came the snow was the product of mindless, unguided processes?

So Job was given time to process the source of his suffering, and while undergoing it Job could say, presciently, of Christ, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth..."(19:25) And God gave back ten more children and double his former possessions.

To Chesterton for the final word:

"But in the prologue, we see Job tormented not because he was the worst of men, but because he was the best. It is the lesson of the whole work that man is most comforted by paradoxes."

Indeed we are, while discovering hidden treasures in the Book of Job. ■

Chesterton on the Book of Job - a mystery worth understanding

"Apart from more disputed matters, there were things in the tradition of Israel which belong to all humanity now, and might have belonged to all humanity then. [The Jews] had one of the colossal corner-stones of the world: the Book of Job. It obviously stands over against the Iliad and the Greek tragedies; and even more than they it was an early meeting and parting of poetry and philosophy in the morning of the world. . . . And the philosophy really perfects the pagan tragic irony, precisely because it is more montheistic and therefore more mystical.

"Indeed the Book of Job avowedly only answers mystery with mystery. Job is comforted with riddles; but he is comforted. . . . For when he who doubts can only say 'I do not understand,' it is true that he who knows can only reply or repeat 'You do not understand.' And under that rebuke there is always a sudden hope in the heart; and the sense of something that would be worth understanding."

- G.K. Chesterton, "God and Comparative Religion," *The Everlasting Man* (1925)

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