



'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)

Chesterton and the Divine Comedian

by Karl Schmude

What did Chesterton have to say about Dante (pictured), the 700th anniversary of whose death has been widely commemorated in 2021?

A sprinkling of references to the 13th century Catholic poet can be found throughout Chesterton's writings, notably in his study of *Chaucer* (1922), as well as in various essays. One of his key insights is captured in a story that Maisie Ward recounts in *Return to Chesterton* (1952), a volume of memories she assembled as a sequel to her 1944 biography.

An American lecturer at Milbrook Junior College in New York State recalled speaking with Chesterton of a class she once took on Dante. At one stage she fumbled and, looking for the right place in *The Divine*



Comedy, recalled saying: "Where in hell are we?" The class roared. Chesterton, hearing her question, said:

"I rather like that phrase: good Catholic expression. A Catholic doesn't live particularly in Milbrook or in England, but *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the question always is, where in Hell are we, or where in Heaven are we, or where in Purgatory are we. We live in that spaceless, timeless commonwealth and the question is very important."

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2021 Conference on 'Chesterton and Woman'

While COVID-19 restrictions prevented the 2021 conference (postponed from 2020) from taking place at Campion College on October 23, the papers will be available in a print publication as well as on the Chesterton Society's website (<http://chestertonaustralia.com/>).

The presenters included three Campion graduates, Siobhan Reeves, Angela Schumann and Frances Cantrall, who explored the theme of womanhood in the light of Chesterton's clarifying insights. They addressed such topics as chivalry, Shakespeare's heroines, and the high school movement called the Culture Project.

Other papers were prepared by Dr Stephen McInerney, Senior Lecturer in Literature at Campion College, who focused on Sigrid Undset's award-winning novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter*, and Karl Schmude who reflected on 'The Fatherhood of Chesterton'.

Copies of the papers are being mailed to all financial members of the Chesterton Society. Additional copies are available for \$15.00 (including postage) from the Editor of *The Defendant* at: kgschmude@gmail.com

As Dominic Manganiello noted in a carefully researched and reflective article in the *Chesterton Review* (February 1994), Chesterton saw Dante “as a great poet whose perennial philosophy of hope can still speak to a modern world steeped in pessimism.”

A lost vision of goodness and hope

Chesterton believed that the modern writer has lost any clear or compelling concept of good. He readily imagines what hell might be like, but struggles without a vision of heaven.

By contrast with Dante, Chesterton cited a popular writer of his time, the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906):

“Dante describes three moral instruments – Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell, the vision of perfection, the vision of improvement, and the vision of failure. Ibsen has only one – Hell.” (*Heretics*, 1905)

Ibsen’s plays have “plenty of happy people,” so he is not an ordinary pessimist. But his philosophy provides no virtues of transcendental worth or inspiration.

“There are no cardinal virtues of Ibsenism. There is no ideal man of Ibsen,” wrote Chesterton.

The great weakness of the anti-Christian philosophies of the 20th century – and it continues to apply in the 21st century – is their loss of any clear concept of good. They have been “filled with a very definite image of evil,” Chesterton pointed out, but “no definite image of good.” They have not been able to convey any real understanding of virtue.

They are philosophies built finally on despair, not hope – spiritual and intellectual despair. In Chesterton’s words:

“It is the new orthodoxy that a man may be uncertain of everything; so long as he is not certain of any thing.” (*The Glass Walking-Stick and Other Essays*, p.178)

Chesterton challenged this rising movement of scepticism, directed at religious belief (though, curiously, not applied to the new, irreligious beliefs). He was conscious of a long tradition, reaching its culmination in the 19th century, which depicted Dante as “a dark and bitter spirit”.

For Chesterton the supreme balance of the *Divine Comedy*, comprising the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, meant that Dante “wrote the only one of the great epics that really has a happy ending.” (“On Dante and Beatrice,” *All is Grist*, 1932)

By contrast with the tradition of a gloomy poet, Dante was a poet of joy. In an Apostolic Letter this year on the seventh centenary of Dante’s death, Pope Francis described

him as “a prophet of hope and . . . witness to the innate yearning for the infinite present in the human heart.”

The Divine Comedian in a film comedy

Such hope is not readily found in present-day culture, but one example is a film comedy, *Big Night* (1996), which one critic, John-Paul Heil, an American priest-scholar, has analysed as an instructive modern version of Dante’s key themes (“Dante’s *Big Night*: Italian Food and the Bread of Angels,” *Plough Magazine*, August 30, 2021 - <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/dantes-big-night>)

Two Italian immigrant brothers open a restaurant in New Jersey. One is a chef, Primo, who is not interested in a prosperous business but has an almost-religious devotion to cooking authentic Italian food - as shown when his girlfriend Ann is inspired by an Italian sauce he has prepared. “Now you know,” he says. “To eat good food is to be close to God. You know what they say: to have the . . . knowledge of God is the bread of angels.”

By contrast, the younger brother, Secondo, pursues self-glorification and worldly ambition. John-Paul Heil notes that, like Dante, he finds himself, midway through his life’s journey, “in a dark wood” because he “wandered from the straight and true.” (*Inferno*, 1.3)

In Heil’s eyes, the two characters epitomise Dante’s treatment of sin and redemption – from the influence of the world presenting “false images of good / which promise all and never follow through” (*Purgatorio* 30.130-32), guiding us away from “the bread of angels, such a food / as brings men to life and never fills them full”, until they reach the One who makes it (*Paradiso* 2.11-12). Heil concludes: “*Big Night* finds hope for human redemption in communion, forgiveness, and providence’s ability to guide us to the truth through our own failings (*Inferno* 1.7-9).

Heil’s point harmonises with Chesterton’s conclusion that critics have missed the fundamental meaning of Dante’s poetry. This is found not only in *The Divine Comedy* but also in *La Vita Nuova* (“The New Life”), a hymn of love to Beatrice as the ideal woman. The lesson to be drawn from these poetic works is that human love is not an end in itself but the intimation of a higher love.

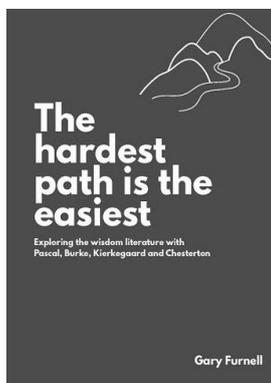
“Human love may indeed be a new life,” wrote Chesterton, “but the new life must be dedicated to a supreme good as much as the old life. All other goods are only manifestations of that supreme good, and must ultimately be referred to it, as Beatrice to the Beatific Vision.” (“On Dante and Beatrice,” *All is Grist*, 1932)

This was the happy ending of *The Divine Comedy* – the “laughter,” as Chesterton conveyed in his novel, *The Flying Inn* (1914), “that has slept since the Middle Ages.” ■

Exploring Writers of Wisdom

by Gary Furnell

A new book by **Gary Furnell**, *The Hardest Path is the Easiest*: exploring the Wisdom literature with Pascal, Burke, Kierkegaard and Chesterton (*Connor Court, \$29.95*), has just been published. It looks at the Old Testament books known as Wisdom literature, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, through the eyes of Chesterton and the three other significant writers noted in the sub-title. In this article Gary reflects on the years of preparation that went into the writing of the book.



I began making notes for a thematic treatment of *Proverbs* (later adding *Ecclesiastes*) in 2010 but didn't complete the project until mid-2021.

The long gestation and gradual development—over 11 years—is intrinsic to the project because as I read and wrote, thought and re-wrote, I realised that long stretches of time are essential to any examination of wisdom. Humans exist in time and we learn via instruction and experience, “little by little,” as Qohelet observes in *Ecclesiastes*.

Both *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* seem somewhat loose collections, almost inchoate in their gathering of observations, warnings and laments. But themes are discernible and these themes provided a structure.

Each got a chapter: *The Search for Wisdom; Four Follies to Avoid—Rebellion, Adultery, Lazyness and Pride; Wisdom and Wealth; Wisdom and Assets; Wisdom and Government; Wisdom and Relationships; Wisdom and Reverence*. There are few areas of life left untouched—and unimproved—by Hebrew wisdom.

My first desire was to become less of a nincompoop by studying the wisdom literature. Later, I hoped to have something printed to benefit my sons and daughters. I knew I wasn't—and never would be—sufficiently shrewd to provide commentary on *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*, but I recognised four writers whose reverent sagacity was profound: they could provide commentary, with my prose like a grey grout framing their brilliance.

I had been reading Pascal for nearly two decades and Chesterton, Kierkegaard and Edmund Burke for the best part of a decade before making my first notes. Re-reading them and selecting relevant passages was a labour of love. They provided an abundance of excellent — and beautifully expressed — aphorisms, observations, insights and assessments.

It helped that Pascal, Burke, Kierkegaard and Chesterton came from different eras and nations. Wisdom is humanity's mutually-held inheritance, and having writers — each very different individuals — whose lives crossed four centuries and three languages affirmed this common inheritance. Each of them had sought wisdom, and each found it in rare measure.

When I started writing it became obvious that I had to establish limits. As Chesterton understood, limits are essential: they aid creativity and provide focus.

The book couldn't be too long or academic in style or tone. *Proverbs* pictures Wisdom going into the streets inviting everyone to her feast, so the book had to be accessible, including people unfamiliar with philosophy or the Bible.

I had to avoid a needless multiplication of passages drawn from my four commentators because brevity aids engagement. Also, it was appropriate to try to write attractively because this makes learning and recall easier, as the wisdom literature itself notes.

The Hardest Path is the Easiest is a paradoxical title because *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* abound in paradoxes: for example, God is sovereign but we are still responsible; we have spirit but we live and die like animals; we are always human but we can de-humanise ourselves; we live in time yet exist beyond time. Paradoxes keep two different things in view, accepting the difficulty — and the mystery — of their concurrency. Chesterton, of course, was accused of a profligate use of paradoxes.

Many people today are uneasy with mysteries and paradoxes, especially religious paradoxes. The wisdom literature is currently unfashionable but for two millennia the easily remembered sayings of *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* were the common wisdom of European, Mediterranean, Byzantine and Levantine cultures. We've lost much of that wisdom, but it's worth reclaiming, first for our own good and the good of our family, and then for the good of our broader communities.

Wisdom brings direction, healing and hope. And, as the wisdom literature repeatedly emphasises, it also brings lasting joy.

Despite these benefits, there will be opposition from the opinionated, the proud, the clever, the greedy and selfish. Wisdom itself admits this opposition. Anyone seeking wisdom must be resilient and determined. Not everyone has the required stamina and sustaining vision.

The Hardest Path is the Easiest is dedicated to the few who seek — steadfast and unerringly — Spirit and wisdom. Kierkegaard called them “Knights of Faith.” ■

Distributism on the Front Porch

by Garrick Small

Garrick Small is a property economist who has taught at several universities and spoken at a number of Australian Chesterton conferences

The March 2020 issue of *Local Culture*, a journal of Front Porch Republic, was devoted to Distributism.

Its essays approached their topic from far more perspectives than an economist might think possible for the treatment of an economic idea. The collection in total conveyed an insight about Distributism that lies outside the scope of economics: that man's economic life is part of his social life - which is to say, it is as rich and deep as humanity itself.

The collection begins with some anticipated content. Allan C. Carlson chronicles the history of the movement, and John Médaille outlines its economic framework. These are sound reading for anyone who is unfamiliar with these more practical aspects of the movement, but what follows would curl the toes of a mainstream economist trying to make sense of what appears to the mainstream as quirky and impractical.

Cameron Moore considers Distributist Aesthetics in Chesterton's novel, *The Flying Inn*, as if the dismal science could admit an aesthetic dimension. Dr. Moore is a professor of English, and he is followed by papers by other learned men in the areas of literature and the humanities and other very un-economic disciplines.

John Médaille gives a clue as to how this apparent panel of experts outside their field could come to be found in a collection on an economic idea. Médaille complains that economics has been seduced by *equilibrium*, when it should have been exploring *equity*, and equity is a social and a moral idea.

He could have said that, because of that mistake, economics is nothing but a system of mistakes out of touch with its formal object. Médaille is an economist and one of the rare ones who have kept their common sense.

To be human is to be social

Common sense is the core of Distributism, which reckons on economic life being an inseparable part of human, social life. To understand it, therefore, requires understanding what it is to be human, and that means understanding what it is to be social.

Hence the importance of the aesthetic that fascinates Cameron Moore. It means that understanding its strict economic principles is less important than understanding

its anthropology, its ethics, its spirituality, its theology and its vision of human society. Some gems present themselves. John Médaille provides a penetrating outline of what economics should be to show what conventional economics is not.

Distributism has to do with justice, and some economists still recall the notion of distributive justice, though forget that means to give each man his due. In the economic system, that translates to giving each contributor to the social activity known as the production of wealth what is due to them.

Médaille shows how the tricksters in the dismal science have completed a disappearing act on distributive justice where all that remains is the market. Little wonder economics is known as the "dismal science".

James Matthew Wilson illuminates the way that socialism and capitalism are no more than different sides of the same coin, an idea that was a commonplace for Chesterton, noted as equivalent variants of "moral, social and juridical modernism" and "Twin rocks of shipwreck for the faith" by Pope Pius XI, but an anathema to the contemporary neo-conservative Catholic right.

What is Front Porch Republic?

Front Porch Republic (FPR) is an American blog emphasizing the values of local community and broadly distributed power in society.

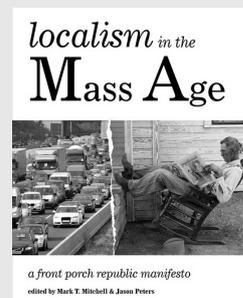
It began in 2014 as a movement in response to the powerful trends in contemporary culture - as it explains in its manifesto, *Localism in the Mass Age* - towards "political and economic centralization and atomization that have accompanied the century-long unholy marriage between consumer capitalism and the modern bureaucratic state."

FPR opposes the characteristic solutions proffered by the Left and the Right. It believes the conventional Left-Right distinction is increasingly irrelevant. It argues: "Liberalism, with its hostility to any limits, is collapsing. So-called Conservatism has abandoned all pretence of conserving anything at all."

Both sides of politics now ignore issues of human scale and the spread of power, and "those overlapping local and regional groups, communities, and associations that provide a matrix for human flourishing."

In 2019, FPR launched a print journal, *Local Culture*, published semi-annually. It focuses on "the conditions that best conduce to human flourishing: the virtues, political and economic decentralization, localism, liberty, respect for natural limits, tradition—especially the humane tradition in arts and letters—and living arrangements built to human scale."

SUBSCRIPTIONS: US\$35.00 (via <https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/local-culture/>)



Wilson also explains how the Distributists had much in common with the agrarian movement, and even the ideas regarding land property found in Henry George. A surprisingly insightful set of observations from a Humanities professor.

John Glass exposes an easily ignored, or perhaps subverted, idea, that an economic idea must be based on a theological foundation. Obviously, there can only be one true theology, and upon that will be found moral, social and cultural super-structures that are the most effective and the most human.

Glass uses the agrarian, Allen Tate, to illustrate how the commentary and popularity of the various strains of the agrarian idea were intimately connected with their authors' religious position. Tate thought himself into the Catholic Church as he refined his economics.

The agrarian idea, a largely independent eruption of the Distributist framework in North America, began without any strong connection to Catholic Social Thought.

Its brilliance lay in its recognition of human scale and human need in the economy, which it applied to rural production. Its weakness was partly its implicit dependence on Protestant theology and the American inclination towards individualism that tended to swallow the individuals who were not monied.

Jeffery Polet illustrates this principle - though largely in the negative - with the example of Eric Gill. Gill was an English artist, Distributist and the leader of three experiments in practical distributist living at Ditchling Common, Wales, and Pigotts which lies north-west of London.

Gill followed a similar path to Rome as Tate, entering the Church at age 33, and like Tate was an influential thinker. However, Gill's theological search did not end with the Catholic Church, despite outward appearances.

Gill developed his theological perspective based on his own inner spiritual experiences, which happened to be the unrestrained indulgence of lust spanning fornication, homosexuality, bestiality and incest.

Fr. Paul Scalia described modernism as a theology based on inner personal experience that can sometimes manifest outwardly as orthodoxy, but at others as any aberrant behaviour or belief, all the while believing one is on good terms with God. This was Eric Gill.

Polet claims that Gill had some sort of invincible innocence, though the argument seems empty, and perhaps betraying a comparable theological logic.

Gill and the short-lived distributist field experiments poignantly illustrate an unfortunate quality of Distributism: it seldom works in our time.

We have the Mondragon Industries in Spain, and other scattered durable distributist successes, but they tend to share key elements. They tend to have been started with the inspiration of sound priests; they continue under leadership strongly committed to Catholicism as it has always been, and they are always threatened by human frailty. Civilisation, and the Catholic Faith itself, share the same qualities.

In all, this volume displays Distributism in its integrity, its complexity - but also in its exposure to human frailty. ■



Collection of *Chesterton Review* available

A Sydney-based Chesterton Society member wishes to sell a set of *The Chesterton Review* (the journal of the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture) from 1974-1999. It is unbound and available for \$300, including packing and postage. The cost would be less if a prospective buyer could arrange for the set to be collected rather than posted. Enquiries may be directed to the Editor: kgschmude@gmail.com

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Society Membership

The annual membership fee of the Australian Chesterton Society is **\$30.00**, which entitles subscribers to receive the Society's quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*.

Donations are always welcome.

Subscriptions may be sent to the Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell, at the address in the adjacent box or by electronic transfer -

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Classical Education in Melbourne Schools

In recent years an important initiative in Melbourne is promoting a new educational opportunity – namely, a school-based program of classical education, which could ultimately lead to the establishment of classical schools.

In 2019, a number of teachers from St Monica's College in the suburb of Epping secured the support of the Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Comensoli, in exploring ways of establishing such a program in Catholic schools. Key figures in this initiative are Kon Bouzikos, Joe Capuana, and Jonathan Hili.

A sample curriculum in the liberal arts was developed in line with the Victorian educational guidelines. Among the elements of the classical tradition included are: the incorporation of several subject areas into one integrated discipline called "Classical Studies"; teaching from classical texts, especially primary sources, from Ancient Greece to the Modern period, such as Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Aquinas, Thomas More and others; a greater emphasis on classical pedagogy with memorisation and recitation, logical argumentation, rhetoric and choral practice being explicitly taught; imbedding the inculcation of cardinal and theological virtues; and a Socratic seminar to complete every week.

Most recently, the teachers in Victoria, together with those in several States from various vocational backgrounds, have established a network of classical educators. They have an online presence with the Australian Classical Education Society (ACES), whose purpose is to connect like-minded Australians in the pursuit of classical education.

ACES is now properly registered. It can hold meetings, receive grants, donations and funding, with legal protections



and tax-exempt status. It is interested in hearing from anyone who would like to join and promote this development in establishing schools and other centres of learning based on a classical education model.

It is particularly keen to hear from those who would be open to writing newsletter articles, lobbying, organising forums/guest speakers, or assisting with the development of the curriculum, as well as engaging in web production.

The ACES Facebook page already has over 200 followers, including classical institutions (like Campion College, St Augustine's Perth, and St John of Kronstadt Academy). It has also brought together teachers, home-schooling parents, business people, and academics from throughout Australia, who are interested in promoting classical education.

Anyone wishing to become involved in ACES are welcome to visit its Facebook page (Australian Classical Education Network | Facebook) or contact: the President, Kon Bouzikos - kbouzikos@yahoo.com ■

Chesterton's Appeal to a Young Podcaster



Michael Knowles (pictured) is an American political commentator, author, actor, and podcaster who hosts his own daily radio show. Raised a Catholic, he fell away during adolescence but experienced a reconversion to the Catholic faith while studying at Yale University. He has a special devotion to Chesterton's works, as he revealed in these

excerpts from a recent interview for The Daily Wire, a fast-growing media outlet known for its counter-cultural views.

Daily Wire: What books are currently on your nightstand?

Michael Knowles: On my nightstand at the moment are *The Managerial Revolution* by James Burnham and *The Complete Father Brown Stories* by G.K. Chesterton. The long-neglected Burnham, a Trotskyite-turned-conservative philosopher, seems to have understood the true character of the mediocrities that have come to rule us better than just about any other political observer since. And a single Father Brown story contains more wisdom than most full-length books.

DW: As a devout Catholic, which portion of the Bible is your favourite?

MK: I prefer the term "practising Catholic" inasmuch as I intend to keep practising until I get it right. Is it cheating to say that the gospels are my favourite part of the Bible? Well, too bad, because they are.

The book I have read more than any other is Genesis, both for its unsurpassed wisdom into human nature and also because I always manage to get through it on my many failed attempts to read the Bible cover to cover within the span of a year.

In my defence, Catholics prefer to read the Bible liturgically — which reminds me not to forget the Book of Revelation, which is itself a mystical reading of the Holy Mass.

DW: If you could require the President to read one book, what would it be?

MK: President Biden? The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

DW: Do you have an all-time favourite author?

MK: Taking Dante and Shakespeare off the table to give mere mortals a chance, I always find myself going back to Lewis and Chesterton. ■

The Colourful Chesterton – in Black and White

by Karl Schmude

A distinctive mark of Chesterton's mountainous writings is that he did not confine his most significant insights to his most significant books.

This has often made his popular sayings hard to trace – and vulnerable to misquoting. For example, his statement, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried”, is not found, as might be supposed, in one of his more famous works of philosophy and theology, such as *Orthodoxy*. It was published in his lesser known book of sociology, *What's Wrong with the World* (1910).

The appearance of a new volume of Chesterton essays, most of which have not previously been collected (and certainly not in their historical context as part of two series in now-defunct journals), highlights the challenge, as well as the joy, of uncovering Chesterton's decades of prodigious journalism.

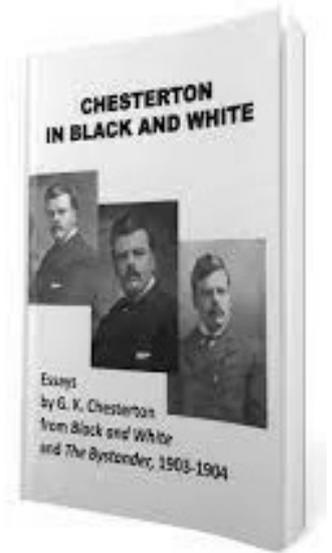
It contains 39 essays he wrote for two journals, *Black and White* and *The Bystander*. It abounds in quotable insights – for example:

- **On the value of the ordinary and the familiar:** “The conventional world is far more wild and fascinating than the unconventional. . . . It is really unconventionalism that is old and fastidious: it is conventionalism that is as new and triumphant as the world.”
- **On bigotry arising from a lack of beliefs:** “It is a total error to suppose that the possession of convictions – of hard, strong, unquenchable convictions – makes a man bigoted. It is quite the other way. The most bigoted people in the world are the people who have not got any convictions at all.”
- **On madness arising from unbelief:** “By far the greater number of people mentally unbalanced are mentally unbalanced in the direction of a universal scepticism. The beginnings of madness are not to be found in beliefs, however wild or weird: they are to be found in unbelief, however minute and unimportant.”

Chesterton was at the height of his creative intellectual powers in these early years of the 20th century. He wrote these series of essays in 1903-04, at about the same time as *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), and just before *Heretics* (1905), which was itself a precursor of *Orthodoxy* (1908).

That the essays have been gathered together is the result of an admirable salvage operation by the Norwegian scholar, Geir Hasnes, who is notable for his outstanding work as Chesterton's bibliographer – and the retrieval of endless, elusive references to Chesterton's writings.

After years of painstaking labour, Geir is about to publish a comprehensive bibliography of Chesterton. It is an eagerly awaited work for Chesterton devotees, and will be highlighted in a future edition of *The Defendant*.



Chesterton in Black and White has four sections. The first, *That Black is White*, contains such essays as “That Respectable People are More Interesting than Bohemians” and “That Poetical People are the Most Practical”; the second, *The Creed of a Credulous Person*, includes “The Joys of the Incredulous”; the third, *The Decline of Amateur Professions*, looks at various examples of “decline”, including of the “Amateur Actor” and the “Amateur Politician”; and the fourth, “With the Long Bow”, presents fourteen essays on romance and literature in general.

Are there special aspects of Chesterton's thought and writing revealed in this new compilation, *Chesterton in Black and White*? A key feature of the book, as Geir Hasnes notes in his Introduction, is that these essays contain early hints of his public defence of Christian belief, which he was to unfold more fully and impressively in *Orthodoxy*.

One example is the essay, “The Cruelty of the Incredulous”, where he asks whether the cruelty of Christians is unique to them - or, as he believes, “as ancient as the grass”.

“Christianity,” he says, “did not invent tortures. One would almost find a kind of pleasure in believing that it did.” Rather, “they were the broken playthings of the brutal childhood of the world”.

Here, in a single sentence, Chesterton expressed his vision of a world ruptured by sin but made whole by the recovered innocence of childhood – a familiar theme in his later writing. ■

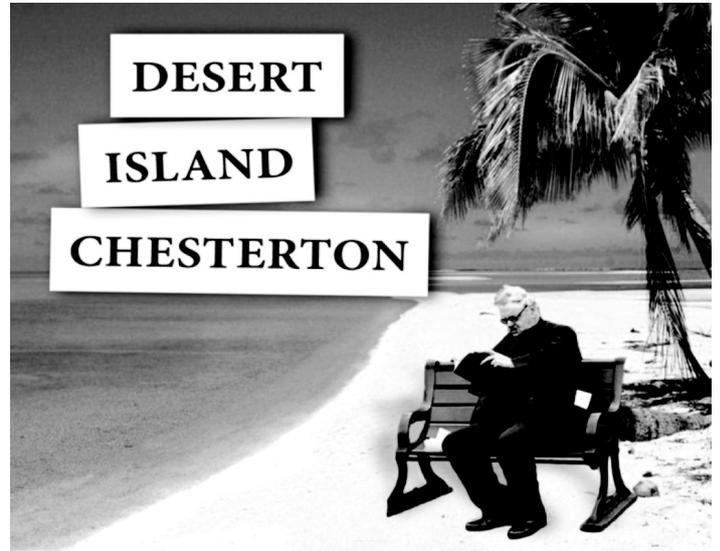
Chesterton in Black and White: Essays by G.K. Chesterton from Black and White and The Bystander, 1903-1904. Edited with an Introduction by Geir Hasnes (Kongsberg, Norway: Classica forlag, 2021). Copies available from the shop of the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton (www.chesterton.org), at abebooks or at ebay, US\$49.95.

Manalive

by Fintan Devine

Revisiting Chesterton's 1912 novel, *Manalive*, as part of our occasional series, *Desert Island Chesterton*, enables **Fintan Devine** to highlight the deep truths that Chesterton revealed in the main character of Innocent Smith and the other characters.

Fintan has his own law practice in Wellington, New Zealand, together with his wife, Monica, who contributed the article, "Chesterton – A New Zealand Experience," to the Winter 2020 issue of *The Defendant*.



As far as I know, GKC did not write a practical guide to ship building - or a practical guide to building anything for that matter.

If he had I am not sure that I would be guided by his design, though no doubt a read would be rewarded with amusement, insight and truths about our existence that can't be learnt from building boats.

If his collected works, hard backed for longevity and large print in case of failing eyesight, do not qualify as a single work, then the Chesterton book I would take to my desert island would be *Manalive*.

The title itself is pregnant with possibilities. For at least the first week of my solitude I would whisper, shout and sing 'Manalive', and not just in gratitude for being one.

The title conveys a good deal about the book. Innocent Smith is a man alive and one who brings life to others. For that first week or so, my reflection would be a consideration of the manifold meaning conveyed by that simple but inspired coupling of the two essential characteristics that we share - humanity and existence - and the wonder of both.

For the next month or so, I would write it in the sand, arrange it with driftwood and seaweed, carve it on tree trunks and scratch it on rocks. If I could make it with fire I would write it in the flames. If this resulted in my rescue I would be the last to complain, but if it did not I would do it as a lasting tribute to the genius of Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

I first read *Manalive* either at the end of my school years or the beginning of university. It was the perfect antidote to the dull philosophies that I had encountered or been forced with by the books that I had read and studied at that time.

I suppose the teachers and professors were not much to blame for that as they were probably only following orders. I could name a hatful of brilliant writers all afflicted with ideas akin to those of Dr Warner making man a monster, a machine, a being trapped by fate in a meaningless existence, etc etc.

That was the literary landscape into which *Manalive* swept like the wind through Beacon House, bringing 'a wave of unreasonable happiness' on the day Innocent arrives. Turns out that the happiness is perfectly reasonable, and it has always been the work of artists and writers to illustrate and describe it. Chesterton knew it, and Innocent Smith reveals it.

Close on the heels of the wind came Innocent Smith. Innocent, not as without sin or naïve, but innocent of the ideas peddled by Dr Warner and Mr Cyrus Pym and that clouded the minds of Arthur Inglewood and the other occupants of Beacon House.

Smith, as suggested by his quintessential English name, shows his ordinariness. If Innocent Smith is allegorical he is also anatomical. From leaping fences, catching hats with his feet and climbing on to rooftops, he is a very physical presence in the book.

Innocent Smith does ordinary things in extraordinary ways to wake the inhabitants of Beacon House to the wonder of the world. This contrasts with the dull and lifeless mental abstractions of Dr Warner. These attributes of Mr Smith also remind us that we are corporeal as well as spiritual united in one individual.

Diana Duke, Rosamund Hunt, Michael Moon and Arthur Inglewood: different in personality, habits and outlook, but the same in being somehow unhappy with their lots and at odds with each other.

Innocent Smith almost literally turns their world upside down, and when they come back down they are right way up at last, and no longer at odds.

I finish with a word about Mr Moses Gould. He comes into his own during the trial. Dr Warner and Cyrus Pym are the theorists, but Moses Gould raises the practical objections to the revelation that is Innocent Smith.

His ilk abounds today. The objections of Moses Gould fall before the truths that the trial reveals. May his fate be that of the naysayers of today. Read this book. ■