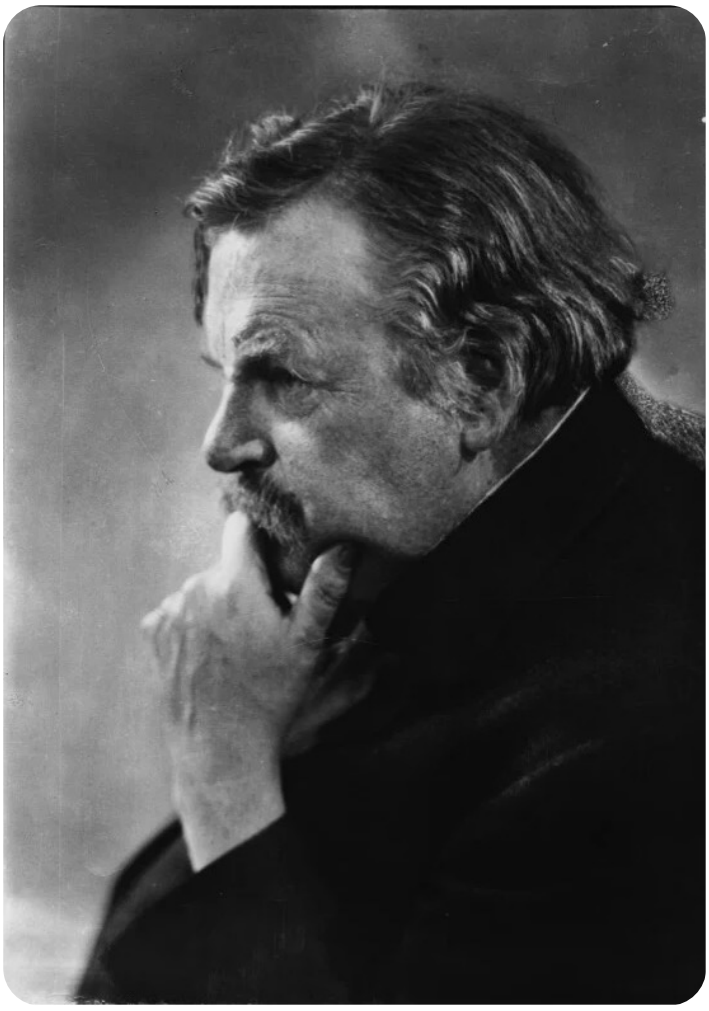
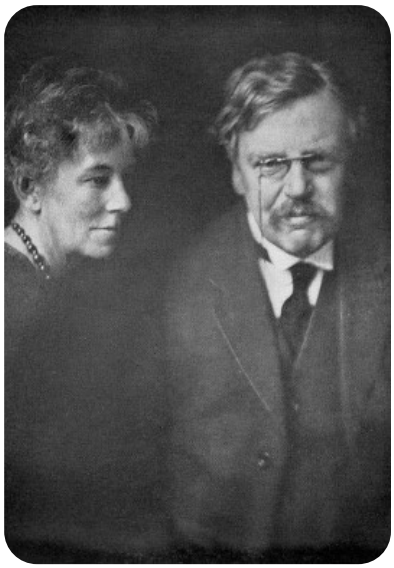
Chesterton
– The Great Detective



2022 Australian Chesterton Conference Papers

Held at Campion College on 22 October, 2022



Chesterton – The Great Detective

Conference Program

October 22, 2022

8:30	Conference Registration (tea/coffee available)
9:00	Introduction and Welcome (Karl Schmude)
9:15	**Symeon Thompson** *'The Mean Streets of Merrie England – Private Eyes and Sensitive Minds'*
10:15	Tea break
10:45	**Elvis and Heather Joseph** *'Magic – The Making of a Movie'*
11:45	**Richard Egan** *'Chesterton and Sayers: Mystery Writers and Defenders of the Mystery'*
12:45	Lunch
1:30	**Karl Schmude** *'Father Brown Meets Inspector Clouseau'*
2:30	**Screening of movie *'The Detective'* starring Alec Guinness**
4:00	Tea break
4:20	**Report on Australian Chesterton Society**
4:30	**Panel Discussion**
5:00	Close of Conference
5:15	Mass (Campion Chapel)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

KARL SCHMUDE

The pattern of annual Australian Chesterton Conferences has been interrupted by COVID restrictions, though, in 2021, the papers and video recordings of our postponed Conference were made available on the Society's website[1].

The theme of the 2022 Conference was "G.K. Chesterton – The Great Detective". The genre of detective fiction is highly popular, both in books and TV programs. The great detective characters in literature, such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, and Chesterton's Father Brown, have been translated to the screen, both in movies and TV series. Father Brown was first featured in a 1934 movie, *Father Brown, Detective*. Later, in 1954, in *The Detective* (in the UK, called *Father Brown)*, starring Alec Guinness, which was screened at the 2022 Conference.

Chesterton himself, as the creator of a detective character, has even figured as a detective character - in a mystery novel, entitled *Murder in the Mummy's Tomb* (2002), by the Australian author and broadcaster, Kel Richards. (I invited Kel to speak about his book at the Conference, and his writing of detective mysteries. He would have loved to come but had another commitment on the day.)

The popularity of detective fiction is shown on the Australian Chesterton website. For example, John Young's articles on this subject in *The Defendant*, our quarterly publication, attract continuing attention. His comparison of Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes in the Summer 2021 issue of *The Defendant* has

[1] http://chestertonaustralia.com

been consistently popular, receiving many “hits”, not only in Australia but overseas.

In planning the 2022 Conference, we thought at first of Chesterton as the creator of Father Brown. If we probe the word, ’detective’, we think immediately of the detecting and solving of *crime*: a person who detects the *bad* - acts of wrongdoing that need to be righted. But when invoking this title for the 2022 Conference, I was thinking of Chesterton as someone who detected the *good*, not just the bad; that is, someone who is alive to the fullness of reality – and therefore *detects* virtue and goodness, not just vice and evil.

In his first book of essays, *The Defendant*, published in 1901 (and Tony Evans, the founder of the Australian Chesterton Society, when he selected the title of “Defendant” for our quarterly publication in 1993, was thinking of this title), Chesterton has an essay called “A Defence of Detective Stories”. He argues that it would be a good thing for the average man to look imaginatively at ten men in the street, even if it is possible the eleventh might be a notorious thief. But “it would be harder,” Chesterton writes, “and more exciting to hunt their virtues than to hunt their crimes.” I’ll have more to say on this in the paper on “Father Brown Meets inspector Clouseau”, but sufficient to note at this point that Chesterton’s desire to recognise the good and not just the bad (which he did in this statement in 1901) really foreshadows the kind of character Chesterton conceived in the person, and the *detecting* approach, of Father Brown a few years later. (The first Father Brown story, “The Blue Cross,” appeared a decade later - in 1910 – and it’s the story on which our movie at this year’s conference, *The Detective,* is loosely based.) Father Brown detected the bad in order to convert it to “good”- that is, to redeem the criminal, not to condemn him; to save him, not to cast him aside. (I think he would have struggled hugely with the emergence of a “cancel culture”!)

In short, what made Chesterton such a "great detective", not only in the Father Brown stories, but in his other writings too, is that he wants all the time to *detect* clues – clues to meaning, clues that will reveal the truths of life – of human nature, and particularly the intersection of the divine and the human in the person and mission of Christ. That's what made him a "great detective", I believe.

Let me finish these introductory remarks by noting that, since the last in-person conference of the Australian Chesterton Society, we have lost two regular attendees - Janet Coomb and Joseph Lenehan. Both have died in recent months. I should also mention that, at our previous in-person Chesterton conference (in 2019), Fr Paul Stenhouse gave his last public address here at Campion. He died a month later. He was a long-time friend of the Australian Chesterton Society who often publicised our efforts – including our conferences – in *Annals*. A second item is to mention is how indebted we are in Australia to our overseas Chestertonians. I'll single out three people in particular – **Dale Ahlquist** (who always allows us to reprint in *The Defendant* articles that have appeared in *Gilbert* magazine), **Geir Hasnes** (whose monumental 3-volume bibliography of Chesterton is now available), and **Aidan Mackay**. Aidan has recently turned 100, and in a recent email to me described himself as "Ancient Aidan"! He has long been a wonderful friend to the Australian Chesterton Society.

THE MEAN STREETS OF MERRIE ENGLAND – PRIVATE EYES AND SENSITIVE MINDS

SYMEON THOMPSON

Introduction

My paper is titled *The Mean Streets of Merrie England – Private Eyes and Sensitive Minds*, and my theme is the parallels between the work and thinking of G. K. Chesterton and that of the hardboiled/film noir school of detective fiction.

In this paper I propose Chesterton as a prefigurement of those later key writers of the genre – of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross MacDonald – but not necessarily a direct influence. Rather, I suggest he is responding to the same concerns they are and doing so from a similar perspective. These concerns relate to the dehumanisation that accompanied modern industrial society, and the alienation that results from it.

At the same time the private eye writers embraced by instinct a chivalric, heroic code and understanding of the world – much like Chesterton. However, they and Chesterton, recognised that chivalry plays out differently in a world run by dragons than one where dragons are in the minority. As a result, as much as their quest is a quest for truth, the truth will not necessarily make them free – but it might keep them alive.

This paper has a loose structure. It is a conversation that operates through comparison and allusion. Ultimately, to quote one of Chesterton's own detectives – it's all about atmospheres.

Opening Comparisons

"Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. … He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it… The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure."

These words are perhaps the most famous, certainly the most pastiched, comments on detective fiction. They come from *The Simple Art of Murder* by that pioneering master of the craft, Raymond Chandler, author of the Philip Marlowe private eye novels.

For this audience, however, I suspect they might also be experiencing a certain *deja vu*, an awareness that this sounds somehow familiar.

Consider:

> *"The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life… No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey the casual omnibus assumes the primal colours of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery."*

And:

> *"A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood."*

And:

> *"By dealing with the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of society, it tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates… The romance of the police force is thus the whole romance of man. … It reminds us that the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and protected is only a successful knight-errantry."*

These words are from Chesterton's *In Defence of Detective Stories*.

Both Chandler and Chesterton see something more in the detective story than just an entertainment.

Throughout Chesterton's writing there is a sense of adventure, a sense of discovery, a sense of detection. Chesterton's philosophical thrillers are both that: philosophical and thrilling. They are mysteries in which the detective discovers truth like an explorer discovers an unknown realm.

I think Chesterton's work prefigures the hardboiled school of detective fiction and its cinematic image of film noir. Chesterton and the hardboiled writers are responding to similar concerns about the world and operating from similar broad philosophies of existence.

They are all concerned about the dehumanisation and depersonalisation of human experience, about the role of wealth and power in defining and controlling what is true, and the difficult question of how exactly truth frees us – and whether or not it matters.

Furthermore, their protagonists are Everyman, representatives of the people, representatives of the mob or masses, but they also see behind the curtain and into the machinations of power – machinations they cannot really affect, but ones in which they may be able to save one life or one soul.

In referring to the hardboiled school, I refer to the likes of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Ross MacDonald. These authors, and especially through the film adaptions of their work, starring the likes of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, define the hardboiled private eye in the popular imagination. Their underlying anxieties and gritty urban combativeness might seem a world away from Chesterton's England, but I disagree.

In my writings I have often challenged the popular image of Chesterton the nice guy, Chesterton the comfortable village dweller, Chesterton the hobbit. While I doubt serious readers of Chesterton would have this perspective, the commercialisation and memeification of his work water down his edge such that he seems like a paradox-loving Santa Claus, a decent Falstaff, that chap at the pub you really get along with.

In doing this, I'm not making a particularly radical claim. Julian Symons, in his seminal study on crime fiction *Bloody Murder*, highlights Chesterton as being much more socially and politically conscious than his peers in the Detection Club.

Chesterton, of course, delighted in the intellectual gamesmanship of his peers like Agatha Christie, Ronald Knox, and Dorothy L. Sayers, but at the same time he was always conscious of suffering, injustice, and pain.

Symons argues that the essential philosophical and social value of the detective story is how it shows the value of the individual person, no matter who they are or where they are. These stories, and all their modern descendants, including

such TV shows as *Criminal Minds* and *Law and Order*, emphasise that each person matters – or at least, that is the mythos they seek to reinforce.

However, it only takes a cursory glance at the news of the world to realise that as much we might want every person to matter, the reality is, that for the system at large, they don't, not particularly. Look at the numbers of homeless, mentally ill, working poor. Look at victims of abuse and crime. Look at the numbers of people in wage slavery, or slave-like conditions. It's pretty clear, if pretty depressing, the establishment and the comfortable classes, no matter if they are in the church or the world, business or government, don't really know what to do – or else their solutions involve more control and, ultimately, more dehumanisation.

Chesterton was vitally aware of these dynamics. Nowadays he's seen as a "nice" figure, a comfortable conservative. His visage and quotes adorn memes and merchandising. As with all things in industrial capitalism, what the Irish novelist Paul Kingsnorth calls The Machine, he has been co-opted by the system and his bite neutralised. His harder sayings and darker writings are nudged away in favour of his cheerier quotes and gentler, less real yarns.

The recent Fr. Brown TV series is a case in point. I gave up after a while, convinced Chesterton and Fr. Brown was a victim of the very phenomena Chesterton described in *The Vampire of the Village* – namely, the utter ignorance the English public has of Christianity, let alone Catholicism. I tend to think this ignorance applies rather more widely than just theological matters, and it's somewhat reminiscent of how Hollywood history might be rather thrilling, but certainly not history.

The English genius for compromise, as Monsignor Ronald Knox put it, emphasises comfort over conviction and poses a challenge for the detective whose priority is truth.

And I do not think Chesterton was a "comfortable" writer. I do not think he was one of the cosy crime writers, as they are known, that Chandler blasts as incomparably the best dull writers in the world.

No. In my view Chesterton is a writer with a keen appreciation of the existence of evil in its many forms. He is a man with knowledge of conspiracy and corruption in the heart of government decision-making. He is a crusader for truth – but also one who knows sometimes the truth will not set anyone free, and so there is little point in sharing it.

In previous papers for this conference, and elsewhere in my writings, I've argued repeatedly that Chesterton's philosophy is best expressed in his fiction. Chesterton was a poet and a journalist. He was not a systematic thinker – definitely not a Thomist, nor a Platonist, nor a whatever you want to try and fit him in. He does not lend himself to academic study because he was never part of that world.

Chesterton's journalism, like all journalism, responds to current affairs. It is not meant to be timeless, but timely. As such, while it may be animated by general principles, it cannot be said to operate according to a generally thought-out philosophy.

And for those who bring up *Orthodoxy* as a counterpoint, I would like to point out the entire opening of that work is a conversation with a correspondent and critic who challenged Chesterton to name his orthodoxy after having identified many other heresies.

Chesterton's fiction, on the other hand, is different.

To use Ayn Rand's definition, "art is a selective re-recreation of reality according to the artist's metaphysical value judgements". I should add I'm not a Randian, but her literary criticism and discussion of Victor Hugo and Fyodor Dostoevsky are amongst the most perceptive analyses of how art works since Aristotle's *Poetics*. I'm aware that's a provocative statement, but throughout my years exploring these topics, I quickly came to grips with the dearth of relevant material, and the obsession of post-Enlightenment aesthetics with perception as opposed to production.

Chesterton's fiction, as I've previously argued at our conferences, is about watching ideas play out in practice. It's an almost laboratory approach of seeing what the logical results of holding to a particular point of view are by seeing how it might play out in a dynamic and interactive environment.

Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas take similar approaches. But while those authors write immensely detailed epics, Chesterton composes sketches and caricatures, clear enough to see the dynamics, but not overwhelmed by detail. His point is the idea animating the story.

This is not to say they're allegories with messages, but they are what military strategy communities calls models and simulations. While those communities focus on modelling conflict outcomes in bloodless experiments, Chesterton looks at ideas in practice in the life of individuals.

But why then do I say Chesterton is a prefigurement of the hard-boiled school? His detective stories do look rather different to films like *The Maltese Falcon*.

Most of our cultural knowledge of the hard-boiled school is filtered down to us as overly broad sketches. We think fedoras and trench coats, rye whiskey and

pistols. We think gumshoes with five o'clock shadow and dames with legs that go all the way up. We think of *femme fatales* in trouble who are in trouble and tough guys who talk with their fists and are just trying to get by.

All that is true, but it's also a memory of tropes more than an accurate picture. I t's how my nephews and nieces would understand the genre when they go to play. It's an important layer to the stories, but it's not the whole story.

Hardboiled fiction and its cinematic image of film noir are quintessentially modern genres. They arise from the wars and the widespread breakdown in meaning coming from the vast death and destruction of the Trenches, the Spanish flu, and the Depression.

As technology advances, so does human suffering and inequality. Traditional religions are destabilised by science and political movements fashioning new civil religions. The existential drama of the individual in mass society is rendered cinematically by German Expressionism and its imagery is re-purposed for thrillers, thus blending the popular and the profound.

The Wars and the Depression highlight the role of power and influence behind the curtains of everyday democratic society, as the war-fighting elite of the aristocracy is replaced by the money-moving elite of business and industry.

Mass media enables the people to know more about the movers and shakers in the world, and allows competing factions to find and target adversaries and scapegoats to cover up their own machinations.

The romances of chivalry concern the fighting of monsters, be they men or beasts. The technocratic modern world gets rid of the fantastical creature, but the human soul remains as dark and fractured as ever, overlaid and clouded by

suffering and sin. The hard-boiled detective story concerns the fight against those human monsters.

Unlike the cosy crime tales of the English school, the American private eye deals with conspiracy and corruption, with people of such wealth and power they can get away with murder. The detective here is the Everyman as knight-errant. Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe are witnesses to things they cannot affect, as much the victims of the system as the murder victims they seek to avenge.

This idea goes in different directions in different hands. Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer opts to vote for justice with his pistol and his fists. His mysteries are accompanied by mayhem and the only reason he is not arrested for murder is his victims are themselves criminals – and he has friends in the police.

Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer, on the other hand, is perhaps the most intellectually rich. MacDonald deliberately modelled his stories on Greek tragedy. Archer was meant to be a cipher, a witness like a Greek chorus to the death-dealing wages of sin. His cynicism was curdled idealism and a belief in truth.

Archer is animated by a drive which is not seen as usual for his profession. In *The Goodbye Look*, the femme fatale comments Archer must be one of those men with a secret passion for justice. He disagrees – he has a secret passion for mercy. For a desire for mercy is the only rational response to intergenerational pain and suffering, the only real response to a world where victims respond to their victimisation by victimising others, where original sin seeps into every wound and enslaves people in their pain.

The hard-boiled world is a world where people do what they think they have to do to survive – and most of what they do is unsavoury at the least and deeply wicked at the worst. The moral point of such stories is not to excuse such

behaviour, or justify it, but to explain it, to explain that the choices people make are most often the result of choices they made long ago, choices made for them, and things that are not choices at all, like growing up in brutal poverty.

If this sounds familiar, it should, because it is a similar idea that dominates Dostoevsky's work and that of the French novelist George Bernanos and the American writer Flannery O'Connor. It is compassionate in the sense it can enter into the experience of the other and render it in such way it becomes explicable.

This compassionate, empathetic and imaginative mindset is the essence of not only Fr. Brown's approach to crime-solving, but the whole panoply of Chestertonian detectives like Gabriel Gale's in *The Poet and the Lunatics*. One of the distinguishing features of Chesterton's detectives is how they use this empathy and imagination in a deliberate and intentional manner to investigate crime. This does highlight what is, if not a strict difference with the hardboiled school, a change of emphasis.

Oftentimes, the private eye or noir reporter is less of active investigator and more of a perceptive witness like the classical chorus of Greek tragedy. Ross MacDonald described Lew Archer as a being a cipher to enable to readers to enter into the drama.

While some private eyes do indeed investigate, they are far more likely to be carried off by thugs than to engage in what might be called a more "active", as opposed to contemplative, approach to detection. Not for them the sort of scientific inquiries of a Sherlock Holmes, or the rigorous interrogations of an Hercule Poirot.

Chesterton's detectives operate more like the private eyes, except there is an intentionality there, that is lacking in the sort of situations a Philip Marlowe finds

himself in – such as getting kidnapped, drugged and waking up in private hospital.

Chesterton's detectives are more contemplative, in the mystical sense of the term. They listen. They imagine. They reflect. They allow the reality of the crime and their own personal reality to intermingle in a sort of communion of souls.

Fr. Brown explains his method in the *The Secret of Fr. Brown*. Witness:

"I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully," went on Father Brown, "I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was."

I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murders. I didn't actually kill the men by material means; but that's not the point. Any brick or bit of machinery might have killed them by material means. I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realized that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action.

I am inside a man. I am always inside a man, moving his arms and legs; but I wait till I know I am inside a murderer, thinking his thoughts, wrestling with his passions; till I have bent myself into the posture of his hunched and peering hatred; till I see the world with his bloodshot and squinting eyes, looking between the blinkers of his half-witted concentration; looking up the short and sharp perspective of a straight road to a pool of blood. Till I am really a murderer."

No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and

talking about ‘criminals,’ as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he’s got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he’s squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat."

Such a mindset naturally means a certain empathy, a certain awareness, a compassion, a desire for mercy. Such a mindset cannot but focus on the humanity of the villain as well as the victim, and such a mindset cannot but see the inhumanity and dehumanisation of the modern world.

One might be forgiven for wondering how this fits in with that other aspect of the hard-boiled and noir school of thinking – its borderline despair at the state of a world where the wicked triumph over the weak. While villains get their comeuppance in such tales, they are often not publicly recognised as villains. The detective remains alone and isolated and the ultimate malefactors often remain secure. The truth comes out, but the truth does not change the world – it makes the detective free, but hardly anyone else.

How does this tie in with Chesterton’s work? He’s seen as such a jovial character, and while he’s clearly aware of the darkness it doesn’t dominate his tales. I would suggest however that this current runs through all his fiction, and occasionally it comes to the forefront.

The best example of this is Chesterton’s darkest and most cynical work – *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. This is one of Chesterton’s most political sets of tales. Its hero is Horne Fisher, a man, who despite his lack of trenchcoat and fedora, is closest in spirit to the hardboiled truth seekers – and Fisher is not even a detective.

Instead, Horne Fisher is a civil servant of ill-defined and interchangeable role – no KPI's for him. Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's older and more governmental brother, has a more defined role in the civil service than Horne Fisher does – so much so that the *Sherlock* series transforming Mycroft into some sort of super spymaster was entirely plausible.

For want of a better descriptor, Horne Fisher is a 'fixer', a man who knows things and knows what to do about things. He is trustworthy and capable, but not the sort of person who handles accounts and records. It helps that his family is one of the leading in the land and he has been formed from birth in the dark arts of governance – but, at the same time, he lacks the charisma and drive required for public office, or the obsessive attention to detail required for backroom management.

Fisher has a sensitivity to the human condition often lacking in such figures. He is a man of insight and undoubted value, even necessity, but he doesn't fit within the roles or requirements of a modern government. In another age, he'd have been an eminence grise, a monastic who kept to his prayers as a day job, while advising the powerbrokers on the flaws in their plans after dinner. In the series he comes across as a necessary voice and presence taking cares of the things that also do not fit within the system. The end result is a commentary on governance from an empathetic insider.

What comes through *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is not a belief in the rightness of Britain or its imperial governance. What comes through is its venality, its incompetence, its corruption. From Prime Ministers starting far away wars to satisfy blackmailing financiers, to war "heroes" so jealous and petty they'll murder the men who made them succeed, it is a picture of the worst of government, illustrated with such savagery that the Hollywood of the Vietnam

Era would have been shocked at its horrors – had they read it. Despite all this Fisher remains a believer, if that is the right word, in the system.

Or rather, it might be more accurate to say, he believes in the people the system serves and doesn't see the point in revealing the extent of the nightmares animating their betters. What will it serve such people to know just how bad their nominal masters are? What good will it do them? They probably don't believe in the moral superiority of their masters, but will the truth they're no better than the snivelling shopkeeper or secretly sauced clergyman actually matter in their lives?

And this becomes the most disturbing of the thoughts Chesterton and the noir writers leave us with – that the truth may set us individually free, but it might not set the world free. Things might be too big and too complex and their ramifications too dramatic to allow them to be revealed. If the dragons are running the system, then slaying them all will also result in chaos.

In keeping with Chesterton's notion of the fence then, silence becomes a prudent option, because who knows if the damage done by the revelation will be worse than the wickedness being revealed. Secrets are to be found out, but they are also to be kept.

This is a worrying thought for a world that demands transparency. But transparency is no more real than any other form of authenticity. Nakedness is not authentic for modern human beings in all circumstances – the artifice of clothing and the obscuring of the flesh is.

And this gets to another aspect of the noirish detective tale – its conclusion is unsatisfactory and its loose ends are not tied up. This echoes our own lives. They are satisfactory in the experiencing, but not in the understanding. In *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown* the hero-victim has to content himself

with the knowledge he will not have all things explained in this life. He accepts that, because he believes all will be revealed in the next.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton is a modern man. Despite his love of the medieval and the magnificent, he was well aware he existed in particular time and place and his purpose was to do what he could within that reality. He was no fantasist fanatical for an imagined golden age, but a keen believer in fundamental principles who wanted to make the here and now as best he could, however he could.

Chesterton wore a cloak instead of a trench-coat, and his broad-brimmed fedora was not as snap-brimmed as his private-eye heirs, but he was just as much a knight-errant as they were. He fought for the people as much as any fictional investigator, and discerned his way into the darkness that lurks in the hearts of men. He brought light into the shadows, even if there was no satisfaction to be had from that illumination. Chesterton is the hero the modern world deserves, even if the modern world refuses to see it.

Symeon Thompson is the film and culture critic for *News Weekly*, and a graduate of Campion College and the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

He is currently a sessional academic at Macquarie University in the Department of Security Studies and Criminology, with a particular focus on strategic and intelligence issues, especially the use of scenarios, simulations and narrative in shaping strategic outcomes.

In 2022, he was selected as one of 103 international voters for the 80th Golden Globes.

‘MAGIC’ - THE MAKING OF A MOVIE

ELVIS AND HEATHER JOSEPH

Introduction (Karl Schmude):

The Australian Chesterton Society has been enthusiastic since first hearing about the Chesterton movie projects of Heather and Elvis Joseph, beginning with the adaptation of his play, *Magic*, with other movies planned that are based on Chesterton’s short stories and novels. The medium they are working in, and the quality of their productions, will do much to promote a wider awareness and appreciation of Chesterton’s thought and writings.

Presentation (Elvis and Heather Joseph):

Heather:

I must say, first and foremost, that from the time when I first made contact with Karl, I’ve never had such a wonderful, warm welcome; and throughout the process it’s just been such an encouragement to us. To have people who really know Chesterton behind you when you’re trying to bring something out as a light to the world is really very special. So thank you very, very much.

Seventeen and a half years ago, I left working in managing our actors agency to go and get a ‘real job’ so that Elvis could focus on writing and developing projects for film and get into producing. I gave him five years. That was 17 and a half years ago, so we’re getting there! But it all works towards creating - bringing you to the place you need to be, so you go through whatever you have to go through that brings you to that place. About five years ago, we decided *Magic* was going to be our first film, which Elvis will go into a little bit more.

Elvis:

I'd like to pick up where, in his paper, Symeon Thompson said that the thing about Chesterton is that he looks for the good in people, in things. I always thought I was an outsider from childhood. My background is that I'm Assyrian. I speak the Aramaic language, my family came from parts of what is now Ukraine and northern Iran. They're Christians - the Assyrians are members of the Apostolic Catholic Church of the East. Look that one up! They were basically chased by the Turks, who tried to wipe them out, and so they ended up with the British in Iraq for a long time. I was born in Baghdad, Iraq. The idea of 'rooftop' (which became the title of our movie company, Rooftop Seven) is of a place where you live. In summer, we lived on the roof - all the beds, everything was taken up there and you lived under this beautiful starry sky. So my fondest memories as a child are of always looking for God in that sky - and that was just life, and our belief in God was just the normal natural thing.

We were surrounded by community because we lived in this suburb where there were basically just Assyrians and a few Armenians, and Jews thrown in. But you lived in a community where you could be on the roof of your house and speak with your neighbours. We're talking about the 1950s and 60s, and beyond that. Everybody knew each other. We all thought that we were in a scary place, being a very small minority surrounded by Arabs and Muslims. They tried to wipe us out several times. Fortunately, my grandfather served with the British RAF in a base just north of Baghdad, where my father was born. Being under the British mandate, we were protected by them. But that protection was lost in the year I was born, 1958. Things started to get hairy - and so we ended up coming to Australia.

Outsider and outlier

To cut a long story short: I've kind of grown up in this feeling, because you live there as an *outsider*. I came to Australia, and I spoke English, and I was this skinny little dark kid in this very white society. I remember going to my father crying because the teacher was worried about me, saying I hadn't spoken - I'd been there for two weeks - and I said: 'You told me they spoke English here'. I couldn't understand what anybody was saying. People would say: 'I'll meet you there this arvo'. I didn't have a clue what that meant! So it took me a while to get used to the fact that they do speak English in Australia!

I've grown up here, but being an outsider - that's how I've always felt in everything, everywhere that I've been. That's just been me: this spirit, this soul trapped inside this weird outside body, and the world being even further removed from me. And then I discovered the word *outlier*. And that's the positive side, seeing things in a positive light: that I'm not an outsider - but maybe I'm an outlier. And that's a nicer place to be - and I think G.K. Chesterton was that. He was an outlier; he was just kind of 'never in the average', and he understood what it was to be 'out there in the wings'.

I was driving one day and surfing the radio, and I came across a radio station where somebody was talking about a book called *Sole Survivor*. It turned out to be a Christian channel, and he was talking about this book - so I thought, 'I have to read this book'. There was a chapter in it about Chesterton - and I thought, 'I have to read this man'. The book that he mentioned was *Orthodoxy.* I bought *Orthodoxy* and started reading it, and began to think: 'I don't know if I can get into this'. But I wondered: 'What else has he written?' And I found he'd written *The Man Who Was Thursday*. I like stories, so I got *The Man Who Was Thursday*, read that, fell completely in love with it, and thought: 'This would make a terrific film'.

Then I discovered that one of my favourite directors, Orson Welles, had done a radio play of Chesterton's novel back in 1938. I listened to that - and it just started to happen. I contacted my friend and mentor, Tony Wickert, who said: 'there's a couple of guys you should talk to' - Australian producers, one of whom was in New York. So we organised a trip. I went to New York, met with Danny, and he said: 'we need to talk to Norman Stone' - an English director based in Glasgow in Scotland. We met him, and he said he'd come to Australia to show off his latest film (which was Florence Nightingale). So I was going to learn to become a producer and be involved in the making of a movie of *The Man Who was Thursday*.

Ten years later, nothing was happening. We talked to everybody, tried to get something to happen, but after ten years - nothing. In that time I'd decided I was going to learn to write. If we couldn't get someone else to write this thing, I was going to have to write it myself. I took to learning how to write, and I wrote the script, but it was too hard to produce.

Then I thought: 'OK, let's look at something else', and then I read another Chesterton novel, *The Ball and the Cross*. I fell in love with that, and I've written a script to it. That's the film I really, really want to make, but it's too big. It would require quite an effort to do it.

So what now?

There's a saying in the film industry: for your first film, try to do something small, working independently. You've got no money. You've got to make a film that you do in one location with a handful of actors – and very few crew. You just make something cheap - and get it done.

Most film makers - all the greatest directors you know of today - that's how they started: they made a film in one room. I thought: 'what happens in a room, what

can you do in a room? Plays occur in one room - I wonder if Chesterton's written any plays'. I researched it, and, lo and behold – *Magic*! I got my hands on Chesterton's play, and played around with it - and played around with it! Eventually I came up with a script and thought: 'let's do this'. So we went about trying to get this to happen.

I love theatre, I love theatre in the round, and so the idea I had was – make it something like the Ensemble Theatre in North Sydney - the idea being to create that kind of atmosphere, where basically the stage is in the centre, and everybody sits in a circle around the stage. The stage is lit and everything else is dark. I wanted that feeling of intimacy that you have in that kind of theatre. I thought, 'how do you do that?'. We would build a set that was a circular room. We'd light the middle of this room and have the cameraman working in amongst the actors and filming. We tried doing that – but it failed dismally. We ended up with really no footage that was useful - and I went through minor depression for a few days! And Heather called my friend Tony Wickert and said: 'what do we do?', and he said: 'just get a room, put your furniture in any room and just shoot the thing.' So we did that, and got the film done. [At this point Elvis showed three film clips from *Magic*.].

Adapting Magic to the screen

The way I approached the making of a movie of *Magic* is probably a little different to how everybody else does this play, because it was written in 1913, and you have to take everything in context. And the context of the time, with the way it was written and the way it would have been acted on stage, is quite different. This becomes clear if you go back and look at English films from the 1930s, you get a feel for the way they act: their speech, their rhythm, everything is very different to the way we are in the 2020s now.

So I couldn't simply go back and do the play the way it was originally done. The story centred on the conjurer, the stranger. It's a love story – the conjurer and the girl Patricia fall in love. It ends happily, when he's about to leave, with their saying they're in love with each other. But I didn't want to do that, and so took that out completely. I also had to make changes to the approach - to its rhythm, its context, its themes, and so on. Not taking away from the original - I wanted to keep what Chesterton had there underneath - but I had to bring it to a contemporary audience as best as I could.

One of the things we played with was to emphasise the idea of 'magic' – of playing tricks. The conjurer, Vincent, is actually a magician. At a critical moment he is given a cheque as payment to give up the secret – and he tears it up. Now that is one of the oldest tricks there is - when magicians take somebody's $20 note and rip it up in front of their eyes, and then pull it out intact from somewhere. At the end of *Magic*, when Vincent is outside, he actually has the cheque in his hand, and we don't know if it's the 20 thousand pound cheque (which is what we made it out for) or the 20 pound cheque that was given to him. (I like to believe it's the 20 thousand one because he decided that he'd earned it.)

Magic is our first film – the opening act of Rooftop Seven. It is something that was manageable – and we felt we could make. The next one we'll be working on is a collection of Chesterton's stories, *The Club of Curious Trades*, which he published in 1905. It's called that because the book it's based on is *The Club of Queer Trades*, which we changed because of the modern connotation. Our hope is to step our way up through Chesterton's fiction, book by book - and I'm still going to make *The Man Who Was Thursday*!

The novel I'd really like to turn into a movie is one that Chesterton published in 1909, *The Ball and the Cross*. I think, if you're into Chesterton you should read it

as it strikes me as really pertinent to what is going on in the world today, particularly the tribalism that's taken hold (for example, in the USA) - with Right-vs-Left and everyone split into two camps. You can, of course, see it as just a bad thing, but there's another way to look at it – and that is, using the opportunity to seek the good in what's going on.

The two characters in *The Ball and the Cross* are Scottish - one is a Roman Catholic who's been brought up in a very small community and is extremely Catholic, to the point that he didn't know that there were non-Catholics in the world. So he's on the 'far right'. On the 'far left' is an atheist, socialist character, Turnbull, who edits a paper called *The Atheist* and writes terrible articles about the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Birth and so on. The two characters clash. They decide to have a duel to the death to make a point about their beliefs and ideologies.

The whole story is about these two guys trying to kill each other to make a point whilst being chased by the police. It's a crazy adventure, which goes all over England. They go to what they think is France, but it's actually one of the Channel Islands. And then they end up in a lunatic asylum where Lucifer, Satan himself, is actually running the asylum. It turns out that he's taking over the government – and the story just goes on and on. But the wonderful thing, the message in that, is that these two guys are willing to fight and to die for their beliefs. They're both wrong in their extremism, but what it does is that it wakes up all the rest of the world - all the people who've gone to sleep. There is something positive in that.

Why I like these two guys is that the characters were actually based on Chesterton and one of his great friends (though they rarely agreed). One was Chesterton himself, the Catholic; the other was George Bernard Shaw, the

Socialist. And it's about their friendship and the fact that they debated each other constantly - and yet, remained friends to death - the closest of friends.

So this is what I want to do - to look for the positive, and try to bring that out in the best way I can, and in the medium I know best, film. In our next project, *The Club of Curious Trades*, we've taken four of the stories - the first three, and then the last one. I've made them into one story, although they are separate (and Chesterton did originally write them as serial parts for a magazine). So you could see them as episodes, but also watch them as one feature. Heather can tell you more about it.

Heather:

Visionary. The way we work is: Elvis puts forward the vision, he writes, he directs, and I make the vision happen as a producer. We have worked in partnership pretty much our whole married life, for over 30 years.

A little bit on the making of *Magic*. We actually did it twice. It was a very intense experience both times because we did it in a very short time period - the first one over a single weekend, and when that failed, we thought 'we can do it in two weekends' - one night and then two pickup days, which is amazing for a feature film. Most people will spend at least four weeks doing it, if not three months.

And we had COVID to contend with as well, which added to the delay in editing the movie. Elvis didn't mention that he did the editing of *Magic* – and, in fact, learned to edit during this time. We had a very kind editor who said: 'well look, this is your budget so therefore how about I give you access to my editing program? I'll teach you what to do, you put down the bare bones'. So Elvis actually took on a journey of learning to become an editor as well – and is a very fine one. He did the final cut, and also the trailers. We're kind of 'do it yourselfers', which is not normal in the film industry because everybody has

their own jobs and only do those jobs. But we do like doing a few more things. It took us two and a half years to get it through to the final version of *Magic*, and the movie was released on the 28th December, 2022.

The filming took place inside the Balmain Town Hall meeting room. We had to come in on a Friday afternoon after the knitting ladies finished - they wouldn't give up their spot! But it was fun. There were 4-metre-high ceilings, and we had to get scaffolding because the only way we could light it was by hanging lights from the existing lights. We very precariously got up on the scaffolding and hung these lights - and even the actors came and helped. We had students working on the film with us, which is a great passion of ours – to actually have people in their graduating year or new graduates working - because we know how hard it is to get into the industry.

Within the industry Elvis and I really are outliers, because we haven't gone through the traditional path. That's why we knew, with this first movie, we would have to fund it ourselves - though during the editing processes we did have a little bit of financial help from The Australian Chesterton society, which was really wonderful.

One thing we have to do now is actually get known in the industry, which would help us to attract investors for our next films, which will be bigger. *The Club of Curious Trades* will be a step up, but we've made good progress with *Magic* as we've been accepted into the AACTA Awards (the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts), and we've been shown on Amazon, Amazon Prime in the US and UK, on Tubi and quite a few other streaming platforms. We now have a DVD of the movie available for purchase.

Entering the AACTA awards - we know we're not going to win against movies like *Three Thousand Years of Longing*, or *Elvis*, or *The Drover's Wife*. But it's about

getting into the film community - not being such outliers, but actually becoming known. With *The Club of Curious Trades* we will be drawing on the industry a bit more. We hope to get a little bit of funding here and there – though we know that there's a lot of criteria that you have to meet to be eligible for funding. We're not sure if a Chesterton film would qualify - but we'll give it a good go. Other than that, we'll be crowd funding and crowd sourcing for venues and things.

It's been quite a journey - and the journey continues into the next film. We will get to make *The Ball and the Cross*, and we will get to make *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which would be a giant project.

Audience Questions:

Q: I'll ask a question about the music. Just from those short clips of Magic, the music seemed really perfect. Did you commission a composer, or how did you do that?

Heather:

One of our actors, who plays Morris in the film, is an incredibly talented guy and he's also a composer. He actually studied film music and he did composing, and he plays most instruments except for woodwind. So he actually composed the music according to each character. So throughout the film, you'll notice instruments that represent each character, which is really cool. He played the instruments, he composed the music, and he produced the music as well.

Q: It seems like you're really branding yourself as a Chesterton production company. Is that fair?

Elvis:

Yes and no. No, I don't want to be boxed in too much. But what I love are the themes, and it's the themes that I really identify with. My favourite film of all time is *It's a Wonderful Life*. There are a lot of films that I like, but that's the one I'll always go back to. Whenever I feel depressed, and that my life is just awful and worth nothing, and I'm a failure - I watch *It's a Wonderful Life*, and by the end of it, I go: 'yeah I wanna live'.

So that film touched me throughout the decades - since probably my 20s, it's been my go-to film. I was reading an article about it, and somebody said that they could never really figure out the number of people who did not commit suicide because of that film - it's countless. And Frank Capra is one of my favourite directors, and just to think that that could be your legacy in life - you know, the Apostle Paul said: 'if I could just save one'. Frank Capra and that film may have saved hundreds of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of suicides. If I can do something like that – then that's what I want to do. *It's a Wonderful Life* makes me think: 'I want to be a film maker' - nothing else. I'm not into James Bond, I'm not into all these Marvel films, they bore me to death - but I would go back to a Frank Capra film any day, I watched it a hundred times. And these are the things that I see in the characters, the themes of Chesterton I've really identified with.

Going back to the rooftop - when you hear something, good news, you just want to go to the rooftop and shout it out. And back in the Biblical days when you did, everybody knew you. So they'd see it's Elvis up on the roof shouting, what's up? You do that here and people will think you're crazy and have you carted away.

We want to do it this way because Christianity spreads through synagogues, from one synagogue to another - and so this is a synagogue we're in today, and this is how I imagine this is going to spread.

But who it's really meant for is not necessarily Chestertonians - though I do hope that they like what we do. It's actually meant for the people who've never really read Chesterton or know of him, that they could watch something and say: 'you know what, there is something good to life, there is something good to my neighbour or my friend'. I just want to share the themes, and try to find something else that does the same.

Q: Were you ever tempted to do Father Brown?

Elvis:

Only when I've actually read some of the Father Brown short stories, yeah. And especially because the one on the BBC is awful, it's tripe, it's absolute BBC tripe. It's lazy. When I read a couple of the short stories, I thought: 'this is really good', but I would do it as the book says. It'd have to be, because it's too clever. It's more Poirot than Poirot, and that's what I really like about it. The character that David Suchet plays - he's really good. I think David Suchet would have made a much better Father Brown, because he would've taken it seriously and actually done it well. If he'd had really good writers, it would have been brilliant.

Audience member:

Good producers and directors would have helped.

Elvis:

Good luck with that, that's the problem. The system in the US is run by bean counters, and all they care about is what they think people are wanting and it's

just money and turnover, nobody cares about anything else. We were talking about the whole 'woke' thing when we were outside the hall today. It's just, Hollywood has gone very woke - not because Hollywood actually feels bad for what it's done or anything, they're just thinking – "there's a buck in it'. But as soon as it starts to fade, you watch, they'll go to the other way. They just go where the money is, and unfortunately the BBC has its own issues - and they're just making tripe.

Heather:

With Father Brown, the way it is at the moment, we couldn't make it any time soon because the impression that people have of it is as it is. So we would be setting ourselves up to fail if we tried to compete against something like that. We wouldn't call it 'Father Brown' so maybe down the track when we're making more Chesterton - and I guess at the moment we are seen to be a 'Chesterton production company', but we don't want to be hedged in. It's interesting because even with the people we have work on the set, and working with us, we're not looking for 'Christian' or 'Catholic' or anybody in particular, because what was one really interesting thing was that the people who worked with us were affected by the material. So if you're only ever working with people who are already knowing the material and already in love with it, you don't actually affect anybody beyond your own sphere. So we want to be able to affect people beyond that, and the wonderful thing with Chesterton is it makes people think. And that's one thing that a lot of people don't do these days. They watch films, they watch movies, and it's just sheer entertainment. They walk out the door and forget about it. We want to make films that, when they walk out the door, they keep talking about it and keep thinking about it. And it's been really encouraging because we have had lots of messages from people who've said, 'wow I can't stop thinking about it' or 'I've watched it three times now because there's so

much in it', and that's not us - that's the material we're working with, which is why it's so wonderful to work with Chesterton.

Q: I read recently that Shia LaBeouf, a young man who portrayed St Padre Pio, has had his life totally turned around, and he said that it's because of his portrayal and his experience of the immemorial Mass – whereas it's as though someone wants to sell him something during the Novus Ordo Mass.

Heather:

I think that there's a lot of films in the 'Christian' genre, and a lot of the time the only people who watch them are Christians - and so what's the point? I mean it's lovely - everybody wants to be entertained, but that's not what we're about.

Elvis:

There was an awful film called *God's Not Dead*. It's just horrible. I'm sorry if you like it and you've seen it, but it's just horrible. There's this idea of an 'Us and Them' - there's a thing about evangelicals in the US: you just get up there and say: 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus' three times, and that's it, you're good and you're saved, so whatever you do you're saved, you've been washed by the blood. Anybody who's not is going to hell, and that was the message of that film. What upsets me more is that that whole theme that 'God's not dead' is taken completely out of context because, as any professor who's teaching philosophy will know, it's part of a message that was by Nietzsche. What he was saying is that we have killed God. It's metaphorical and he's talking about: 'so what do we replace him with?'. He was talking about how awful society becomes when there is no God in society. They took that completely out of context and turned it into a hammer to beat people with, and I don't like that. And so again, coming back to this thing: what we want to do is just make people think that there is more than just the

material world, that there is something more to them and more to life and more to everything than just this.

Thinking of another book - *The Alchemist*. That is a beautiful book, that's another one - I would give up an arm to do that one.

Q: If people want to support you financially - because you're not going to get funding from the Australian film industry, in all likelihood - so how can people support your work financially?

Heather:

We're going to be setting up an Indiegogo campaign soon. Once we start raising money there's my email address (heather@rooftopseven.com). I have thought about putting a donation button on our website - haven't had the courage to do it yet, maybe we should. The other thing is we are looking for financial assistance and possible investors, so we'll be reaching out to people, but also sourcing places to shoot - locations and things. So that's something - it's not always money that makes a difference, it can actually be finding a place where we can shoot where we're not paying $2,000 or $3,000 or even $10,000 a day, because we won't have that in our budget. We're about to meet with a production designer and then our budget can be finalised. Thank you.

Elvis:

We should have been evangelicals, I think that would help! Because they can raise money - millions.

Conclusion (Karl Schmude):

Thank you so much. Among all the fascinating things that Heather and Elvis said - the effect on people involved in these projects is so heartening. I think the way

that Elvis described 'being an outlier rather than an outsider' pinpoints an important distinction. Heather's and Elvis' creativity and perseverance show that they want to remain outliers - that is, they want to remain different: saying something different, doing something different cinematically. Movies that are not being offered by the mainstream studios, or the best known of movie makers, can have an advantage, particularly when the quality is outstanding. I think that's where the perseverance comes in, and our thinking: 'I'm on to a good thing here'. it's a great credit to Elvis and Heather that they've been doing this, and have further plans beyond *Magic*.

Elvis and Heather Joseph have had a lengthy apprenticeship in movies – Heather, in hair and makeup, numerous photo shots, and the management of an 'extras' agency, and Elvis in photography and what he calls "honing the craft of light', as well as managing actors as an assistant director on productions. Elvis now runs an actors' management agency in Sydney, which he and Heather co-founded and ran for many years together, and which Elvis looks after specifically. Heather serves as a senior sales manager for a major hair care company.

Elvis contributed an article to the Spring 2018 issue of the Australian Chesterton Society's quarterly, *The Defendant*, on "Discovering Chesterton: A Movie Maker Remembers". At the 2019 Chesterton conference, **Heather** reported on the progress of the making of *Magic*, of which Elvis is the director and Heather is the executive producer.

The DVD of Magic is available on the Rooftop Seven website by going directly to the purchase page - https://www.rooftopseven.com/store/p/magic-dvd

G.K. CHESTERTON AND DOROTHY SAYERS: MYSTERY WRITERS AND DEFENDERS OF THE MYSTERY

RICHARD EGAN

G.K Chesterton (1874-1936) and Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957) were writers who did not limit their prolific output to a single genre. As well as poetry, drama and literary criticism they both wrote detective or mystery stories, and both wrote on Christian orthodoxy and the Creeds.

Sayers, who was 19 years younger than GKC, wrote of Chesterton in the Preface he asked her to write for his 1932 play *The Surprise*:

To the young people of my generation, G.K.C. was a kind of Christian liberator. Like a beneficent bomb, he blew out of the Church a quantity of stained glass of a very poor period, and let in the gusts of fresh air in which the dead leaves of doctrine danced with all the energy and indecorum of Our Lady's Tumbler.[2]

Our Lady's Tumbler is the hero of a 12th century legend of a man who joins the Cistercian order at Clairvaux and, distressed at having no other learning or skills with which to serve God, spends several hours each day dancing and tumbling before an image of Our Lady in a chapel. The Abbot finds out and, far from scolding him, honours his zeal and humble devotion. The legend concludes:

In happy hour he tumbled; in happy hours he served; for thereby he won high honour such that none may compare therewith. This is what the holy fathers

[2] G.K. Chesterton*, The Surprise*, 1953

relate concerning what befell this minstrel. Now pray we to God, who has no like, that he grant us so to serve him that we may earn his love.[3]

This could be a fitting tribute to GKC. In *Orthodoxy*, he describes himself as "*the fool of this story*" which "*no rebel shall hurl*" from his "*throne.*"

G K Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*[4], published in 1908, and read by Sayers as 15-year-old girl, is better known to many than Sayers' own *The Mind of the Maker*[5], published in 1941, five years after Chesterton's death. While differing in style and scope, there are some instructive similarities between these two works.

In the introduction to The Mind of the Maker, Sayers states that she is not writing as an apologist for Christianity but as a commentator "on a particular set of statements made in the Christian creeds and their claim to be statements of fact".

Chesterton, in his introduction to Orthodoxy, states that it sets out "the philosophy in which I have come to believe. I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me". Later he writes "I do not propose to turn this book into one of ordinary Christian apologetics; I should be glad to meet at any other time the enemies of Christianity in that more obvious arena. Here I am only giving an account of my own growth in spiritual certainty."

His focus is on discussing "the actual fact that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) is the best root of energy and sound ethics. When the word 'orthodoxy' is used here it means the Apostles'

---

[3] https://elfinspell.com/OurLadysTumbler.html

[4] Available online at: https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/130/pg130.html

[5] Available online at: https://www.fadedpage.com/showbook.php?pid=20140909

Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed."

Sayers writes "The proper question to be asked about any creed is not, 'Is it pleasant?' but, 'is it true?'"

Chesterton states "there is an authoritative need to believe the things that are necessary to the human mind. But I say that one of those necessities precisely is a belief in objective truth."

This focus on facts – is it true? – is central to solving crimes, and therefore to the detective story, as well as to solving the larger questions which confront any thinking person, such as the existence and nature of God.

Chesterton and Sayers both express the view that the sharply defined statements in the orthodox creeds resulted from the need to respond decisively to heresies, by making it clear exactly what is held by the Church to be true and what is not.

Chesterton, with typical imaginative colour, famously describes orthodoxy as "the heavenly chariot" flying "thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect."

Sayers - more prosaically - asserts that the Creeds "would never have been drawn up at all but for the urgent practical necessity of finding a formula to define experienced truth under pressure of misapprehension and criticism".

One central tenet of Christian orthodoxy is the assertion that the One God is a Trinity of Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In *Orthodoxy* Chesterton refers directly to the Trinity only in one section where he compares Islamic monotheism to Christian Trinitarianism.

The complex God of the Athanasian Creed may be an enigma for the intellect; but He is far less likely to gather the mystery and cruelty of a Sultan than the lonely god of Omar or Mahomet.

The heart of humanity is certainly much more satisfied by the strange hints and symbols that gather round the Trinitarian idea, the image of a council at which mercy pleads as well as justice, the conception of a sort of liberty and variety existing even in the inmost chamber of the world. For Western religion has always felt keenly the idea "it is not well for man to be alone" … to us Trinitarians God Himself is a society … this triple enigma that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart: but out of the desert, from the dry places and the dreadful suns, come the cruel children of the lonely God; the real Unitarians who with scimitar in hand have laid waste the world.

For it is not well for God to be alone.

By contrast, Sayers' The Mind of the Maker is focused on the Trinity, and more precisely on expounding "The Christian affirmation that the Trinitarian structure which can be shown to exist in the mind of man and in all his works is, in fact, the integral structure of the universe, and corresponds, not by pictorial imagery but by a necessary uniformity of substance, with the nature of God, in Whom all that is exists."

Sayers approach is in the same line of thinking about the Trinity as the analogy proposed by St Augustine in Book IX of his *On the Trinity*[6], where he suggests that "*we may see in ourselves, as much as we are permitted, the image of God*" and

[6] Available online at: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130109.htm

explores the internal experience we have "*when the mind knows itself and loves itself".* He states that in this experience:

there remains a trinity: mind, love, knowledge; and this trinity is not confounded together by any commingling: although they are each severally in themselves and mutually all in all, or each severally in each two, or each two in each.

The mind knowing itself is, according to Augustine, analogous to the Father, in knowing Himself, begetting the Son (or speaking the Word). The mind loving itself as known is analogous to the Father and Son together breathing forth the Holy Spirit, who is their mutual love.

In the play Sayers wrote for the 1937 Canterbury Festival, called *The Zeal of thy House*[7] she neatly summarises the thesis she will develop more fully in *The Mind of the Maker*:

For every work of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly.

First, there is the Creative Idea, passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning: and this is the image of the Father.

Second, there is the Creative Energy begotten of that idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter: and this is the image of the Word.

Third, there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit.

---

[7] Available online at: https://ia800302.us.archive.org/22/items/zealofthyhouse012297mbp/zealofthyhouse012297mbp.pdf

And these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without other: and this is the image of the Trinity.

It should be noted that Sayers' analogy applies more fittingly to the "economic Trinity" – the Trinity considered in its external action in Creation and Redemption in which the Son and the Spirit are "sent" whereas Augustine's analogy relates more closely to the "immanent Trinity" – the eternal relations of the Three divine Persons with each other.

In the second chapter of *The Mind of the Maker*, which is titled *The Image of God*, Sayers writes:

Looking at man, [the author of Genesis] sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the "image" of God was modelled, we find only the single assertion, "God created". The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.

Sayers refers to this ascription to both God and human beings of the term "creator" as using an analogy. She cites St Thomas Aquinas from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* on the point that all positive statements about God necessarily use analogical terms:

since we arrive at the knowledge of God from other things, the reality of the names predicated of God and other things is first in God according to His mode, but the meaning of the name is in Him afterwards. Wherefore He is said to be named from His effects.[8]

[8] Book I:34:6, Available online at: https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles1.htm#34

St Paul speaks of God as "*the Father from whom all fatherhood is named*" (Ephesians 3:15). In the order of being Fatherhood exists first eternally in God; but in the order of our knowledge, we come to know fatherhood first in our own fathers. There would be no fatherhood if God was not first father; we couldn't call God "Father" if we had not first called our dads by that name.

George Macdonald (1824-1905), expresses this well in his poem, *To My Father*[9]:

> *Take of the first fruits, Father, of thy care,*
> *Wrapped in the fresh leaves of my gratitude*
> *Late waked for early gifts ill understood;*
> *Claiming in all my harvests rightful share,*
> *Whether with song that mounts the joyful air*
> *I praise my God; or, in yet deeper mood,*
> *Sit dumb because I know a speechless good,*
> *Needing no voice, but all the soul for prayer.*
>
> *Thou hast been faithful to my highest need;*
> *And I, thy debtor, ever, evermore,*
> *Shall never feel the grateful burden sore.*
> *Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed,*
> *But for the sense thy living self did breed*
> *That fatherhood is at the great world's core.*

Macdonald experiences fatherhood through the lived encounter with his own father and through this comes to the knowledge of God's eternal fatherhood as the core of the "*great world*" of created being.

Similarly, [says Sayers] we know a human "maker" and picture to ourselves an ideal "Maker". If the word "Maker" does not mean something related to our human experience of making, then it has no meaning at all. We extend it to the concept of a Maker who can make something out of nothing; we limit it to

---

[9] Available online at: http://www.online-literature.com/george-macdonald/3568/

exclude the concept of employing material tools. It is analogical language simply because it is human language, and it is related to human experience for the same reason.

Outside our own experience of procreation and creation we can form no notion of how anything comes into being. The expressions “God the Father” and “God the Creator” are thus seen to belong to the same category—that is, of analogies based on human experience, and limited or extended by a similar mental process in either case.

The dialectic between the meaning of a name when applied to God and its meaning when applied to things of which we have direct experience is a two-way process. This is very evident in Sayers’ approach. Is she trying to get us to understand the Trinity better through her analogy of the human creative process or is she is offering insight into that process by exploring how it relates to the great Creedal statements? The answer is she is doing both.

As well as drawing from her own experience as a creator of literature, Sayers draws from other authors, including from G.K. Chesterton, to give us insight into the creative process. Each of the four quotes from Chesterton, and the use made of them by Sayers, is worth exploring.

Sayers quotes a passage from *The Secret of Father Brown*[10] to explain how an author creates a character:

When making a character [the author] in a manner separates and incarnates a part of his own living mind … He follows out, in fact, the detective system employed by Chesterton’s “Father Brown”:

---

[10] Available online at: https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0201041h.html#story1

I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murders . . . I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realised that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action.

This leads into a lengthy discussion about the relationship between an author's characters and the author and how this, by analogy, applies to the relationship between God and his created works. In doing so Sayers rejects pantheism – the author's "Complete Works" do not exhaust the mind of the author which, while revealed in his works still transcends their totality. She also, without naming it, rejects the Hindu doctrine of maya that all apparent creation is an illusion and so nothing is real but the absolute. Sayers asserts that the author's characters are real and once written have a real existence, in some sense at least, outside the author's mind.

Sayers also quotes from Chesterton's essay on Dicken's *Our Mutual Friend*[11] his comments on the character development of Mr. Boffin.

She is exploring the notion of free will and predestination through examining the relationship between an author and the characters he creates. After citing and agreeing with Chesterton's complaint that the reason given in the novel for Boffin's change from being miserly to being generous of his miserliness having been a pretence is not remotely convincing, she disagrees with Chesterton on the explanation for how such a great writer as Dickens lapsed on this occasion.

Chesterton suggests that Dickens originally meant to trace a gradual process in Boffin of slow degeneration followed by slow repentance but "*the story went too*

[11] Available online at: https://omf.ucsc.edu/scholarship/bibliography/chesterton-text.html

quickly for this long, double and difficult process" so Dickens (unwisely) attempted to mend the break by this unconvincing trick.

Sayers, however, sees a more fundamental clash in which "*the intrinsic sweetness and modesty*" of Boffin could not be made to confirm with the plot – a failure in the writer as creator.

This discussion leads Sayers to draw an interesting conclusion – based on analogy – about predestination and free will:

if the characters and the situation [in a novel] are rightly conceived together, as integral parts of the same unity, then there will be no need [for the author] to force them to the right solution of that situation. If each is allowed to develop in conformity with its proper nature, they will arrive of their own accord at a point of unity, which will be the same unity that pre-existed in the original idea.

In language to which we are accustomed in other connections, neither predestination nor free will is everything, but, if the will acts freely in accordance with its true nature, it achieves by grace and not by judgment the eternal will of its maker, though possibly by a process unlike, and longer than, that which might have been imposed upon it by force.

In her chapter on *Scalene Triangles*, which develops Sayers overarching analogy by classifying defects in literary endeavours as analogical examples of particular heresies, Sayers refers to Chesterton's criticism of "*a preposterous stage-direction at the end of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's play* Drama of Exile"[12] as an (analogous)

[12] G.K.Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature*, 1913 - *Chapter III, The Great Victorian Poets,* Available online at: https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks13/1301651h.html#ch3

example of Gnosticism – the denial of the positive value of the world of matter. This direction reads:

> *The stars shine on brightly while ADAM and EVE pursue their way into the far wilderness. There is a sound through the silence, as of the falling tears of an angel.*

"How much noise," inquires G. K. Chesterton with brutal common sense, "is made by angel's tears? Is it a sound of emptied buckets, or of garden hoses, or of mountain cataracts?"

Pity the stage manager attempting to comply with this direction.

By contrast to Gnosticism: The Word was made flesh and we have seen His glory. Every scene in the gospels can be concretely imagined.

In passing, it is worth noting that Sayers gives as an example of what she calls "artistic Arianism" with "all technique and no vision", "that slicker and more mechanical kind of detective-story which is nothing but an arrangement of material clues." Neither Chesterton's nor Sayers' detective stories fall into this heresy!

Patripassianism, is a term given to the heresy of denying the real distinction of Persons in the Trinity and considering Father, Son and Holy Spirit merely to be three "names" or "modes" of the one God. The term is based on the logical consequence of this heresy – unless the Incarnation is denied as well – that the Father also became Incarnate and therefore Himself underwent the Passion of the Cross.

Sayers writes:

> *We might, I think, also class as Patripassian those works in which the Idea [remembering in her analogy this corresponds to the Father in the Trinity] insensibly undergoes a change in the course of writing, so that the cumulative*

effect of the whole thing when read is something other than the effect to which all its parts are supposed to be working.

Noting that "This peculiarity is a little difficult to convey clearly", Sayers gives an example "noted by G. K. Chesterton, who (possibly because of his sound Trinitarian theology) is an exceptionally shrewd observer of scalene irregularities in other writers."

After acknowledging that Tennyson was a great lyric poet, Chesterton asserts that "He was always best when he expressed himself shortly. In long poems he had an unfortunate habit of eventually saying very nearly the opposite of what he meant to say."[13]

Take the case of **In Memoriam**.... I will quote one verse ... which has always seemed to me splendid, and which does express what the whole poem should express—but hardly does.

That we may lift from out of dust
A voice as unto him that hears
A cry above the conquer'd years
To one that with us works, and trust—

The poem should have been a cry above the conquered years.

It might well have been that if the poet could have said sharply at the end of it, as a pure piece of dogma, "I've forgotten every feature of the man's face: I know God holds him alive."

But under the influence of the mere leisurely length of the thing, the reader does rather receive the impression that the wound has been healed only by time; that the victor hours can boast that this is the man that loved and lost, but

[13] Ibid.

all he was is overworn. This is not the truth; and Tennyson did not intend it for the truth. It is simply the result of the lack of something militant, dogmatic and structural in him: whereby he could not be trusted with the trail of a very long literary process without entangling himself like a kitten playing cats'-cradle.

Sayers comments: This curious literary result might be put forward as an example of father-weakness; but G. K. C. instinctively pigeon-holes it as a heretical imperfection in the son [remembering in Sayers analogy that the Son corresponds with the work as written, the Incarnated Energy expressing the Created Idea] —"the lack of something **structural**", "the trail of **a long literary process**"—and I believe he is right.

Sayers and Chesterton were founding members and successive presidents (with EC Bentley serving in between) of the Detection Club, whose oath included a solemn promise as writers of detective stories to, among other faults, avoid "*Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or Act of God*".[14]

In the chapter on Free Will and Miracle, Sayers, as it were imputes (analogously) a similar Oath to the Almighty:

The study of our analogy will lead us perhaps to believe that God will be chary of indulging in irrelevant miracle, and will only use it when it is an integral part of the story. He will not, any more than a good writer, convert His characters without preparing the way for their conversion, and His interferences with space-time will be conditioned by some kind of relationship of power between will and matter.

---

14 https://web.archive.org/web/20111005235200/http://www.sfu.ca/english/Gillies/Engl383/Oath.html

Faith is the condition for the removal of mountains; Lear is converted but not Iago.

Consequences cannot be separated from their causes without a loss of power; and we may ask ourselves how much power would be left in the story of the crucifixion, as a story, if Christ had come down from the cross. That would have been an irrelevant miracle, whereas the story of the resurrection is relevant, leaving the consequences of action and character still in logical connection with their causes.

In a chapter on the Incarnation, Sayers writes "Christian doctrine further affirms that The Mind of the Maker was also incarnate personally and uniquely. Examining our analogy for something to which this may correspond, we may say that God wrote His own autobiography."

C.S. Lewis in his review of The Mind of the Maker[15] suggests that Dante's insertion of himself into the *Divine Comedy* would be a better analogy than "*autobiography*", although I am not sure he is entirely right. Dante in the Divine Comedy is a character who does not necessarily fully Incarnate, Dante the man.

Sayers go on to say:

> *By incarnation, the creator says: This is what my eternal idea looks like in terms of my own creation … this is my characterhood in a volume of created characters.*

In *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton writes:

> *According to Christianity, in making [the world], [God] set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as*

[15] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0040571X4104325618

> *perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it.*

Although Chesterton does not advance the idea, the notion of creation as a play naturally accommodates the possibility of the author entering upon the stage as a character in his own drama – perhaps a better analogy for the Incarnation than either autobiography or the *Divine Comedy*.

In a chapter entitled *Problem Picture* Sayers seeks to distinguish the limited range of matters properly addressed as "problems" for which a "solution" can be found from the broader challenges of life which require creative energy, ideas, and activity to meet.

In illustrating this distinction, Sayers lists four characteristics of the mathematical or detective problem which are absent from the "life-problem". In doing so, Sayers gives us some insights into her approach as a writer of detective fiction.

Firstly, Sayers states that "The detective problem is always **soluble**. It is, in fact, constructed for the express purpose of being solved, and when the solution is found, the problem no longer exists."

By contrast, Sayers writes:

> *The "problem of death" is not susceptible of detective-story solution. The only two things we can do with death are, first: to postpone it, which is only partial solution, and, secondly, to transfer the whole set of values connected with death to another sphere of action—that is, from time to eternity.*

Secondly, Sayers writes: "The detective problem is **completely soluble**: no loose ends or unsatisfactory enigmas are left anywhere."

Thirdly, she says "The detective problem is **solved in the same terms in which it is set**. Here is one of the most striking differences between the detective

problem and the work of the creative imagination. Does not an initiate member of the Detection Club swear to observe this entirely arbitrary rule?

PRESIDENT: Do you promise that your Detectives shall well and truly detect the Crimes presented to them, using those Wits which it shall please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance upon, nor making use of, Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo-Jumbo, Jiggery- Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God?

CANDIDATE: I do.[16]

Finally, The detective problem is **finite**.

We get to the end of a detective story. The murderer is unmasked. We close the book.

Another member of the Detective Club, and also a Christian apologist, Ronald Knox, codified the rules of the game of detective stories in Knox's Ten Commandments, which were adopted by the Club. Knox explained a detective story "*must have as its main interest the unravelling of a mystery; a mystery whose elements are clearly presented to the reader at an early stage in the proceedings, and whose nature is such as to arouse curiosity, a curiosity which is gratified at the end*".[17]

Sayers in *Gaudy Night*, her penultimate Lord Peter Wimsey detective story, on her own admission moved beyond the limits of the classic detective story to

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] Knox's Decalogue was first formulated in 1924. He refers to it in the Introduction he wrote for Best Detective Stories, 1934. Available online at: http://gadetection.pbworks.com/w/page/7931441/Ronald%20Knox's%20Ten%20Commandments%20for%20Detective%20Fiction

explore ethical challenges not capable of the neat solution, specifically the question "*Is professional integrity so important that its preservation must override every consideration of the emotional and material consequences?*" To this extent *Gaudy Night* is more than a detective novel and paved the way for her subsequent plays and theological writings.

Sayers sums up her conclusion from pondering the analogy between the mind of the divine Maker and the mind of every human maker or artist as follows:

> *The mind in the act of creation is thus not concerned to solve problems within the limits imposed by the terms in which they are set, but to fashion a synthesis which includes the whole dialectic of the situation in a manifestation of power.*
>
> *In other words, the creative artist, as such, deals, not with the working of the syllogism, but with that universal statement which forms its major premise. That is why he is always a disturbing influence; for all logical argument depends upon acceptance of the major premise, and this, by its nature, is not susceptible of logical proof.*
>
> *The hand of the creative artist, laid upon the major premise, rocks the foundations of the world; and he himself can only indulge in this perilous occupation because his mansion is not in the world but in the eternal heavens.*

Chesterton, in *Orthodoxy*, writes:

> *If I am asked, as a purely intellectual question, why I believe in Christianity, I can only answer, "For the same reason that an intelligent agnostic disbelieves in Christianity." I believe in it quite rationally upon the evidence. But the evidence in my case, as in that of the intelligent agnostic, is not really in this or that alleged demonstration; it is in an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts.*

The eighth commandment of Ronald Knox's Decalogue for detective writers reads:

> *The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.*[18]

A satisfying detective story must give sufficient clues for an astute, attentive reader to solve the problem without making it evident from too early in the story.

In his second Father Brown story, and the first with a murder to solve, *The Secret Garden*[19], Chesterton drops clues about generously:

- there was no exit from the garden into the world outside;
- Valentin, Chief of the Paris Police, was late because he "*was making some last arrangements about **executions***" – As the setting is Paris, the reader can be expected to think of the guillotine.
- [Chief of the Paris Police, Valentin] went straight through his house to his study, which opened on the grounds behind. The garden door of it was open, and after he had carefully locked his box in its official place, he stood for a few seconds at the open door looking out upon the garden. [why mention the box?]
- Valentin was expecting, **for special reasons**, a man of world-wide fame, whose friendship he had secured during some of his great detective tours and triumphs in the United States. He was expecting Julius K. Brayne
- [Brayne] was a huge fellow, as fat as he was tall, clad in complete evening black, without so much relief as a watch-chain or a ring.
- [Lord Galloway] was left over the coffee with Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who believed in none. They could argue with each other, but neither could appeal to him.

All these clues are given to the reader before he knows what the question is, that is before "*the body of a very tall and broad-shouldered man*" with *"big shoulders … clad in black cloth*" is found in the garden with a severed head "*entirely sundered from the body".*

Who is the dead man and who killed him?

---

[18] Ibid.

[19] Available online at: https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/204/pg204-images.html#chap02

We are born into this world with an endless capacity for curiosity – we see the clues before we can formulate the questions.

Chesterton, towards the end of *Orthodoxy*, writes a passage that captures something of the curiosity of a child:

For I remember with certainty this fixed psychological fact; that the very time when I was most under a woman's authority, I was most full of flame and adventure. Exactly because when my mother said that ants bit they did bite, and because snow did come in winter (as she said); therefore the whole world was to me a fairyland of wonderful fulfilments, and it was like living in some Hebraic age, when prophecy after prophecy came true.

I went out as a child into the garden, and it was a terrible place to me, precisely because I had a clue to it: if I had held no clue it would not have been terrible, but tame. A mere unmeaning wilderness is not even impressive. But the garden of childhood was fascinating, exactly because everything had a fixed meaning which could be found out in its turn**.** Inch by inch I might discover what was the object of the ugly shape called a rake; or form some shadowy conjecture as to why my parents kept a cat.

Our divine Creator has left enough clues lying about for us to discover the answers to the big questions – if we really want to know them.

G.K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers, who both wrote detective or mystery novels, were also defenders of the mysteries of Christian orthodoxy – Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption. They help us follow the divinely scattered clues and grasp the Truth.

Richard Egan worked initially as a librarian in State and University libraries, and long been a researcher for Members of Parliament in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. He has been active in the prolife movement since 1985 and is the author of two online books on euthanasia. He first read works by GK Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers in his teenage years. He was a foundation member of the Chesterton Society started by the late Tony Evans in Western Australia in the 1990s.

FATHER BROWN MEETS INSPECTOR CLOUSEAU

KARL SCHMUDE

To speak of a meeting between Chesterton's Father Brown and Inspector Clouseau raises the immediate question of comparing two characters in different media – books and movies. Father Brown is a literary character (even if he has been converted, at different times, into a screen personality, on movies and TV), while Inspector Clouseau is a movie character only, most notably in the five Pink Panther movies starring Peter Sellers.

Each medium can bring out certain dimensions of an individual character. The *visual* medium can make vivid the physical features and actions of the person, and reveal, especially through dialogue, his interior life and character. The *literary* medium, on the other hand, can develop and reveal a person in depth, through dialogue and description. It can stimulate the imagination of the reader, often at a deep level - even more powerfully and permanently than the visual medium which is direct and explicit. The literary medium can also provide a forum for exploring and reflecting on reality.

There's a further difficulty with our two detectives being presented in different media – the literary and the visual - and that is the issue of visibility. In the Pink Panther movies, Inspector Clouseau is a prominent presence, whereas in Chesterton's stories, Father Brown is a rather inconspicuous character. This doesn't quite fit the visual medium which favours the character at the centre. The visual medium calls for prominence. It does not readily recognise or reward the unassuming and the humble. As the British author, Michael Newton, has observed, Father Brown often makes his first appearance in the

stories as an afterthought. He edges onto the scene from the side. Newton even wonders if Chesterton is making a joke in his stories, so that the reader is left thinking - not who the criminal is, but who the detective is! ("Father Brown: the empathetic detective," *The Guardian*, January 19, 2013)

Despite these difficulties in comparing Father Brown and Inspector Clouseau, I've felt encouraged to pursue this task as I think the contrast between two detectives who are so unlike – how they look and dress, their speech and demeanour, their approaches to crime detection - might be revealing, even more revealing than comparing two characters who are similar.

This can also be the case, I think, in comparing countries. I remember my first trip to America in the 1970s not only brought me – as I expected - a greater understanding of the United States, *but also* of Australia. It made clear to me Chesterton's comment that the purpose of visiting another country is to discover one's own – in other words, to dispel the cloud of familiarity that shrouds our appreciation of what is in front of us, what we live with all the time. By seeing a contrasting culture, we can gain a fresh insight into the distinctive qualities of our own culture. In Chesterton's words:

> *"The whole object of travel is not to set foot in foreign lands; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land."*
>
> - *"The Riddle of the Ivy," Tremendous Trifles, 1909*

In America, I saw the similarities of a modern way of life, of commerce and organisation and lifestyle, but I also became conscious of the differences – such as the American sense of destiny (expressed in Abraham Lincoln's famous description of Americans as "the almost chosen people"), which is quite different from the Australian conception of its history and culture. We think of James McAuley's narrative poem, "Captain Quiros," about the Portuguese explorer who missed the continent of Australia in 1606, so that we did not become what he

wanted to call "the South Land of the Holy Spirit," an Iberian settlement and a Catholic culture. We developed as a British penal colony and a secular culture almost two centuries later. In McAuley's poetic words:

> *"The South Land would have taken the impression of Cross and Crown.*
> *But Heaven willed otherwise: This was the end of our sea-enterprise,*
> *And we were carried far from our possession."*
>
> - *"Captain Quiros," Collected Poems, 1936-1970, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971*

To focus on our main theme - what would we notice if our two detective characters were to meet? Father Brown is plainly a priest, a "little Essex priest" (as Chesterton described him), having the garb and title of a priest. This may be a little surprising at first – that a priest is investigating a crime, not a policeman or a conventional detective. Inspector Clouseau is clearly a police detective, who announces himself as such – Inspector Clouseau. But he's an unusually smart-looking one, with his tweed hat and trench coat and air of vain self-assurance – and he has a pronounced, if peculiar, French accent, that can't cope with simple English words such as "monkey" and "funny"! In fact, Clouseau might remind us of another detective from France, Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's fictional character. It's thought that Clouseau was actually based on Poirot – Poirot being also a smartly attired detective, sporting a manicured moustache, full of rather stately vanity, and speaking with an exaggerated French accent (though, it should be noted, Poirot is actually Belgian).

Poirot also comes to mind in the Father Brown stories – in the person of Flambeau, the best-known character apart from Father Brown. Flambeau appears in most of the 50 or so of Chesterton's stories, first as a master criminal, and then as a reformed man and a private detective. The full name Chesterton gave him was Hercule Flambeau – and it's been suggested that Flambeau

influenced Agatha Christie when she created Poirot, as the name she gave him was Hercule Poirot.

Every fictional detective needs to have a distinctive personality – be a recognizable character. No doubt this accounts in part for the tremendous popularity of detective fiction, and helps to make this genre so entertaining. The emphasis on *personality* was once noted by Ronald Knox, the English writer and preacher – and himself a writer of detective stories - who published a selection of Father Brown stories in the 1950s. In a foreword to this volume, Knox pointed out that crime detection is not just a mathematical or machine-like process. The detective must come across as a *real* person – which means he needs to have idiosyncrasies and eccentricities.

Certainly Father Brown and Clouseau each has idiosyncrasies. Our priest-detective is rather inept - carrying parcels, dropping his hat or losing his umbrella, misplacing his glasses. Chesterton describes him, in one story, as having "bodily disarray" and being "the embodiment of all that is homely and helpless." ("The Absence of Mr Glass").

Our police-detective, Inspector Clouseau, however, takes ineptitude to a new level – entirely! His clumsiness causes chaos wherever he goes. He turns the detective story into a "theatre of the absurd", in which, even when disguised, he manages to ruin whatever he touches.

In his foreword to the Father Brown stories, Ronald Knox observed that the idiosyncrasies of a detective character do have a point. They are intended to put us off the scent. We wonder – could such a person really be a threat to any criminal? Knox thinks that, when our detective character appears on the scene of a crime, the general reaction should be: "A man like that will never be able to

get at the truth." (It's as if Knox had been exposed to early footage of Clouseau in a *Pink Panther* movie!)

And yet, this may not just be a matter of levity. Chesterton believed that detective stories are, in fact, meant to be "jokes". The writer is trying to play tricks on the reader. He is trying to mislead us with false hints or characterizations. In an essay in 1925, entitled "How to Write a Detective Story" (in the collection titled *The Spice of Life*), Chesterton formulated a number of principles for a good detective story. One of these is that the actual criminal needs to be a familiar figure so that he does not emerge at the end out of nowhere. He should be in the foreground, though *not* as the criminal but in some other capacity which explains *why* he is prominent, even though he has, up to now, been familiar in an unfamiliar (and thus unsuspicious) function.

Without doubt, Inspector Clouseau takes to an extreme the detective story as a "joke"; but perhaps he is simply reversing the joke. Clouseau plays tricks, not on the reader (or, in his case, on the viewer), but on himself – for example, in *The Return of the Pick Panther* (1975), where Clouseau is unaware of a menacing police officer in the room, and becomes utterly confused when finally confronting him.

Yet the idiosyncrasies that Knox highlights, as an essential part of the detective character, may have a deeper point – and that is, that it takes an odd and unusual person to pick up on the odd and the unusual, to detect things that most ordinary people would overlook or take for granted.

We hear echoes here, of course, of a common Chesterton theme – the need to refresh our perception of ordinary life so that we don't overlook, or undervalue, the important realities that are so familiar. We think of Chesterton's memorable statement of this truth in his 1904 novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*:

> *"There is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time."*

In his 1908 book, *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton's great unfolding of the Christian vision, he reveals that he never lost the sense of wonder that he experienced as a child. In the chapter, "The Ethics of Elfland," he makes a phenomenal assertion – that God, in his words, "is strong enough to exult in monotony." Like a child enjoying a game or a joke, and pleading for it to be repeated, endlessly. The child calls out to the grown-up, "do it again". Chesterton ponders (in awe) whether "God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon." The wondrous repetition in Nature, Chesterton thinks, may not be a mere recurrence, but rather, a theatrical *encore.* God just keeps coming back for more.

In the Father Brown stories, perhaps the most famous example of overlooking the ordinary, and undervaluing the familiar, is in the story, "The Invisible Man". Here "the man who is invisible" is simply "the man who is not noticed" – the postman, as it turns out, who delivers a series of threatening letters to a man he finally murders. No one ***saw*** the postman – they all assumed the letters were the work of another person, not the postman. As Father Brown explains near the end of the story:

"Have you ever noticed this - that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean - or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, 'Is anybody staying with you?' the lady doesn't answer 'Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlour-maid, and so on,' though the parlour-maid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says: 'There is *nobody* staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, 'Who is staying in the house?'

then the lady will remember the butler, parlour-maid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions [the name of the apartment block], they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him.

> *" 'An invisible man?' inquired [a character in the story, John Turnbull] Angus, raising his red eyebrows. 'A mentally invisible man,' said Father Brown."*
>
> - *"The Invisible Man", The Father Brown Stories, 1929*

But Father Brown's approach goes much deeper than seeing the familiar and the ordinary with fresh eyes. He does not just see reality, he *penetrates* it. He does not just look at the exterior – or, at least, he looks at the exterior as a *channel to the interior*. So he sees the crime from *within*, by looking into the mind and heart of the criminal. He does not concentrate on the clues left around, or the aspects of the crime that attract the conventional detective (in particular, the material details, such as the nature of a poison used in the murder, or the exact time of death as determined by *rigor mortis*). Father Brown does not so much examine the crime as interpret the criminal. As a priest, he peers into the *soul* of the man.

A rather striking example is in the story, "The Secret of Father Brown". Here our priest-detective is mildly annoyed at the line of questions from an American traveller, Mr Grandison Chace (a grand name, for sure!). Mr Chace is staying as a guest at a Spanish castle where Father Brown is visiting Flambeau (who is now reformed and living in retirement). Mr Chace is keen to unlock the "secret" of Father Brown's success. He wonders whether it is due to some special powers the priest has – certainly esoteric, perhaps even occult in character. Father

Brown feels pressed to tell his "secret" – and he opens with a dramatic revelation. "You see," he says to Mr Chace, "it was I who killed all those people. . . . I had murdered them all myself. … So, of course, I knew how it was done." His listener is, of course, shocked. Father Brown goes on:

"I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully. I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was."

But Mr Chace misunderstands what Father Brown is saying. He thinks he is simply probing into the *psychology* of the criminal, and invoking a figure of speech - not, as Father Brown makes clear, that he's making, not a metaphorical point, but a moral one. He explains further:

> *"I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murders. I didn't actually kill the men by material means; but that's not the point. Any brick or bit of machinery might have killed them by material means. I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realised that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action."*
>
> - *"The Secret of Father Brown"*

Father Brown provides a similar explanation of his method of crime detection in another essay, "The Secret of Flambeau". Here he imagines himself as the murderer who is a revolutionary poet, who loves revolt in the modern form – that is, pessimistic and promoting anarchy; bent on destruction more than reform. The priest's explanation brings out what he describes, rather pithily, in a further story, "The Hammer of God." He is asked how he can know so much about the criminal mind. "Are you a devil?" asks the enquirer. "I am a man," answers Father Brown, "and therefore have all devils in my heart."

I think that this can be claimed to be the unique mark - the defining feature - of Father Brown's approach to crime detection. His approach is spiritual and moral, not just material and psychological. Focusing on material clues and psychological condition is the approach of the conventional detective - and, certainly, of detective characters in literature and movies and TV series. And it's the approach of our Inspector Clouseau – that is, it's *material* - in picking up physical clues – and it's *psychological,* in focusing on the mind and motivation of the criminal. Clouseau focuses on the material and the psychological, though his glory as an "anti-detective" (as I might term him) is he can't really manage to *notice* the material – or *comprehend* the psychological.

It is well known that the inspiration for the character of Father Brown was a priest-friend of Chesterton's, Father John O'Connor. Father O'Connor's apparent innocence and unworldliness made a deep impression on Chesterton, who saw that it disguised the depth of his insight into the nature of evil – what Ronald Knox called, "the byways of human depravity". These could be best explained, as Chesterton came to realise, by the hours he had spent listening to sinners in the confessional. As Father Brown says to Flambeau in the very first story, "The Blue Cross":

> *"Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?"*

So, these spiritual and moral understandings inform the character of Chesterton's priest-detective – and they make him a singular figure in the field of detective fiction.

At the same time, it's important to note that Father Brown does not ignore the scientific approach. As the American historian, Melvin Cherno, has noted, there is, in a number of the stories, a discussion of detective science and the intuitive method of detection. Cherno highlights the examples of the "The Secret of

Father Brown" and "The Secret of Flambeau". Cherno also points to Chesterton's discussion of evidence in a couple of stories – one being "The Strange Crime of John Boulnois" and a second is "The Duel of Dr Hirsch".

Cherno also points out that, in the story, "The Absence of Mr Glass", Chesterton offers **a** devastating satire of a scientific detective, named Dr Orion Hood. He is an eminent criminologist who extolls the scientific imagination and displays a condescending attitude towards Father Brown. Dr Hood enjoys promulgating his elaborate theories about Nature and Race. (It all sounds very contemporary, doesn't it, Nature and Race - latching on to those fashionable areas? Dr Hood would have been handy as a consultant to present-day educators – to advise on how these theories could be incorporated into school curricula!)

I mentioned Flambeau earlier, whom we meet in the first Father Brown story, "The Blue Cross". (He's featured in the movie screened at the 2022 Chesterton conference, titled *The Detective*, in which he is played by an Australian actor, Peter Finch.). Flambeau is a master criminal who, under Father Brown's influence, is reformed, and becomes a detective himself. The conversion of Flambeau seems to me to highlight another distinctive feature of Father Brown – and that is, his motivation in *detecting* the criminal.

Chesterton created a detective who would see into the mind and heart of the criminal. But he was not content with that. He also wanted a detective who took a radically different approach to the criminal – who was inspired by a radically different motive. Father Brown wanted to catch the criminal, but it was not to charge him and confine him, but to *free* him – spiritually and morally, that is. To free his soul, rather than lock up his body. Father Brown's motive was to *save* the criminal, not to punish him.

An insight into Chesterton's thinking can be found in an early essay - in 1901, in fact, nearly a decade before he created the character of Father Brown. Chesterton's essay is entitled, significantly, "The Divine Detective". Here he offers an instructive contrast between the State and the Church – in effect, a contrast between human law and divine law, between the human law of an imperfect, unredeemed world, and the divine law, a law of love, governing a perfect and redeemed world. Chesterton calls the Christian Church "an enormous private detective", in contrast to what he terms "that official detective, the State":

"The State, in all lands and ages, has created a machinery of punishment, more bloody and brutal in some places than others, but bloody and brutal everywhere. The Church is the only institution that ever attempted to create a machinery of pardon. The Church is the only thing that ever attempted by system to pursue crimes, not in order to avenge, but in order to forgive them."

Chesterton argues that the "speciality" of the Church is what he calls "this merciless mercy". It is an "unrelenting sleuthhound who seeks to save and not slay." (*A Miscellany of Men*, 1912)

If we look again at Inspector Clouseau, we realise that he sits at the other end of crime detection from Father Brown. He lacks the intuition of Father Brown in discerning the criminal, and he also lacks the scientific skill of the conventional detective. He might, in fact, be described, as I've mentioned, as an *"anti-detective*"! He *undermines* detective work. He misses clues, failing to see things that other people notice. He misremembers details, like the name or occupation of a witness or suspect he is interviewing. In a scene in *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (1976), Clouseau provides a dramatic display of his *physical* incompetence - when he falls violently down the stairway of a house while exercising on the parallel bars – and this only serves as a prelude to his showing

his *detective* incompetence when he interviews possible suspects. This is in contrast to Father Brown, whose physical ineptitude *disguises* his competence as a detective.

Let me touch on another dimension of our comparison – and that is, the physical setting in which both Father Brown and Inspector Clouseau operate (as detectives). Father Brown goes to various places – France and Spain and Italy, and so on. Inspector Clouseau does, too. But, whereas in the Pink Panther movies, they are, essentially, exotic backdrops for cinematic effect, in the case of Father Brown they have a greater meaning.

Firstly, Chesterton creates the setting in detail – often in quite imaginative language. Many of the Father Brown stories contain memorable descriptions – of landscapes and other scenes. In one of his early stories, "The Sign of the Broken Sword," he opens with a long paragraph (which I'll only quote in an abbreviated form), as we imagine we are looking at a forest:

> *"The thousand arms of the forest were grey, and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue-like slate the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly wooded and sparsely tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost."*

Later in this story, Father Brown is talking with Flambeau, and Chesterton offers this description – again, in graphic language, evocative of both religious and psychological references. In Chesterton's words:

> *"And they plunged into the black cloister of the woodland, which ran by them in a dim tapestry of trunks, like one of the dark corridors in a dream."*

Without doubt this is Chesterton the artist. We recall that he was an artist all his life – from his earliest years he produced drawings. He was certainly an artist long before he became a writer, at which time he became an artist in words.

At one level, the descriptions are simply physical – that is, creating an atmosphere for the story. But, with Chesterton, the descriptions usually have a more profound significance. As an American Professor of English, Gertrud M. White, once pointed out (*Chesterton Review*, May 1984), the setting is created to carry deeper meanings. It is not just for mood, but for metaphor. That is, its purpose is to produce an imaginative impact, not just a physical ambience. The setting goes beyond the description. It brings in other layers of meaning – literary and historical - and, finally, religious.

For example, at one point in "The Sign of the Broken Sword," Father Brown mentions the name of Dante, and Flambeau is puzzled. "What do you mean," he asks the priest. Father Brown points to "a puddle sealed with ice that shone in the moon." This physical image and reference then lead into a literary - and religious – one. The priest asks Flambeau: "Do you remember whom Dante put in the last circle of ice?" "The traitors," answers Flambeau, and he imagines that he was Dante, and that, as Chesterton suggests, drawing on Dante's classical references in his great poem, *The Divine Comedy*, Father Brown was "a Virgil leading him through a land of eternal sins."

For Chesterton, the setting yields a richer meaning. It is not an end in itself. It is not just a memorable description. It is a pathway – a pathway to new insights for the reader. What Chesterton does is reach for something that poetry often captures more than prose – and that is, the ultimate weight and significance of things – a focus on the eternal.

I'm reminded of two wonderful lines from one of Les Murray's great poems,

> *"Poetry and Religion":*
> *"Nothing's said till it's dreamed out in words*
> *and nothing's true that figures in words only."*

Some years before Chesterton created the character of Father Brown, he was conscious of the value of the detective story. In an early essay, he thought such a story was quintessentially modern – in the sense that it celebrated what he called "the poetry of modern life". He thought the detective story could lift our appreciation of the *urban* landscape – just as writers in earlier ages celebrated the beauties of the *natural* landscape. Chesterton picked out the distinguishing marks of the city in the early 20th century – for example, the chimney-pots that sat above the chimneys on homes - which, in Chesterton's vision, would now be seen "as rich a purple as the mountain-peaks"; or the lamp-posts, which would now appear "as old and natural as the trees."

Another feature of the modern cityscape was "the casual omnibus", as Chesterton calls it. It would now assume, he thought, a more romantic status, resembling (as he put it - thinking, no doubt, of the colourful London bus) "the primal colours of a fairy ship." ("In Defence of Detective Stories," *The Defendant*, 1901)

I think it's worth noting that Chesterton's love of "the poetry" of the city is a challenge to the common caricature that was made of Distributism – as the social and economic philosophy that he and Hilaire Belloc espoused, which provided a popular version of the social teaching of the Popes, beginning with Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891.

Distributism has often been misrepresented – and mocked at times – as yearning for a wholesale reversion to rural life, with everyone having "three acres and a cow". Yet, far from seeing the modern city as dull and dismal, Chesterton saw it as "more poetic even than the countryside". It was "a chaos of conscious forces". Every stone and every brick was a symbol - a message from someone who put it there. It has, he said, an "unfathomably human character. . . . [the] narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the

soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave." It is full of the "romance of detail".

By contrast, the countryside is "a chaos of *un*conscious forces" – shown in the features of natural growth, such as the crest of the flower or the pattern of the lichen. They may not be significant symbols, compared with the deliberate symbols in the street or the wall, or the physical structures and monuments.

Thus, we can see that, when Chesterton came to create Father Brown, he placed him as a priest from Essex, north-east of London; but the settings were invariably in a town or city rather than in the countryside. I think this testified to Chesterton's special love of the human romance of the city.

Perhaps a final observation about the detective stories Chesterton wrote – and that is, how well it suited his imagination. We know that he had the special gift of reawakening our sense of wonder at the familiar, the ordinary, the common. In a striking phrase, he compares how God "exults in monotony" to the childlike love of repetition of a favourite game – "Do it again, Do it again."

The special advantage of the detective story, for Chesterton's imagination, is that it is full of surprises – often minor surprises, but surprises nonetheless. It is the unexpected revelation in the story that excites our interest – such as the noticing of an overlooked or an undervalued clue, or the penetrating interpretation of a motive. So, alerting us to the unfamiliar (as the detective story does) complements, in a way, our being reawakened to the familiar.

In Chesterton's mind, I suspect, God grants us the gift of surprise – and He prepares us to be surprised at the ordinary by starting us off with surprise at the extraordinary.

I have - inevitably, I suppose, at a Chesterton conference – given more attention to Father Brown than to Inspector Clouseau in this comparison. It might be thought that including Clouseau was just to introduce some fun into one of the conference sessions – and I could not, in honesty, deny that! But, no doubt, there has been more depth to explore in the literary character of Father Brown than in the movie character of Inspector Clouseau.

At the end of "The Blue Cross", Father Brown is speaking with Flambeau, the master criminal, and with Valentin, the head of the Paris Police. The oriest-detective admits that Flambeau betrayed himself in a series of false steps, as when he ordered a ham sandwich on a Friday – not being aware, as a priest, of the practice of Friday abstinence. But the clincher was when he showed, unmistakably, that he was only a priest in disguise. He made a fatal error in conversation. " 'You attacked reason,' said Father Brown. 'It's bad theology.' "

At that point in the story, Valentin emerged from behind a tree with two other policemen. Flambeau made a respectful bow to Valentin. But Valentin simply said: "Do not bow to me, *mon ami*. Let us both bow to our master [by which he meant Father Brown]."

I have no doubt that the "little Essex priest" would, in turn, have bowed to the ***true*** master, his literary creator, G.K. Chesterton.

Karl Schmude is President of the Australian Chesterton Society and editor of its quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*. He is the author of various biographical booklets, including one in 1974 on Chesterton (re-published in London in 2008) and on the historian Christopher Dawson, and he has engaged in freelance writing and speaking for more than 50 years, both in Australia and internationally. He served for many years as University Librarian at the University of New England in Armidale NSW. Most recently he was the co-founder of Australia's first liberal arts college, Campion College in Sydney, where the Australian Chesterton Society holds its annual conferences.

AUSTRALIAN CHESTERTON SOCIETY

OFFICE-HOLDERS

PRESIDENT AND EDITOR OF 'THE DEFENDANT'

Mr Karl Schmude

177 Erskine Street
Armidale NSW 2350

Phone: 0407 721 458
kgschmude@gmail.com

SECRETARY + TREASURER

Mr Gary Furnell

6/68 Short Street
Forster NSW 2428

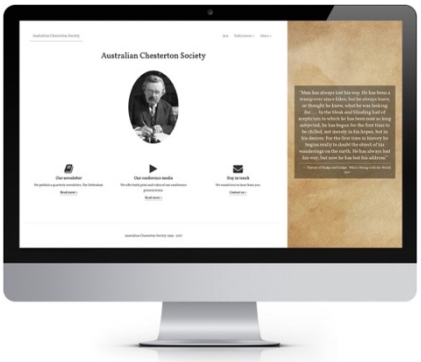
Phone: 0419 421 346
garyfurnell@yahoo.com

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Australian Chesterton Society is available for A$30.00 per annum. It includes a subscription to the Society's quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant,* and can be arranged by contacting the Society's Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell (details above).

AUSTRALIAN CHESTERTON SOCIETY WEBSITE

The conference papers were video-recorded and will be available on YouTube as well as on the Australian Chesterton website[20], where the papers of previous conferences are also available, both in video and text form.



[20] http://chestertonaustralia.com/past-conferences