

Chesterton and the Rise of a Counter-Culture



**A Collection of Papers presented at a conference of
the Australian Chesterton Society on October 21,
2023, at Campion College Australia, Sydney**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Karl Schmude

CHESTERTON IS GOOD FOR YOU - JOURNALISM AND BOOKS IN THE COUNTER-CULTURE	5
---	----------

Greg Sheridan

WHY SUBSIDIARITY MATTERS	13
---------------------------------	-----------

Peter Fenwick

RECLAIMING FEMINISM	23
----------------------------	-----------

Veronika Winkels

LIGHTING CANDLES IN THE DARKNESS - A NEW LIBERAL ARTS SCHOOL	31
---	-----------

Michael Mendieta and Marie Yeo

WOULD CHESTERTON HAVE CREATED CAMPION COLLEGE?	40
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Karl Schmude

INTRODUCTION

Karl Schmude

The year 2023 marked the 30th anniversary of the Australian Chesterton Society. It was founded by Mr Tony Evans, who was a long-time presenter and producer with ABC radio and TV in Western Australia, as well as being a freelance writer, notably of several biographies.

Tony established the Society in Perth in 1993, to promote a love and knowledge of Chesterton in Australia. In the year 2000, it became a national society. Tony died in 2018, several years after returning to England, his original homeland, and we salute his memory. The Society is part of his legacy – for which we can all give thanks.

The conferences of the Australian Chesterton Society have been held since 2000 – and this is our 17th. Since opening in 2006, Campion College - as Australia's first (and still, at this stage, only) liberal arts college - has been the venue for our gatherings.

Some of you would know of this connection, but for those attending for the first time, I might briefly highlight the important link between these two names, Chesterton and Campion. One connection is educational – in that Chesterton qualifies as a 'one-man liberal arts program', and his works in history, literature, philosophy and theology could all have been included in the Campion curriculum.

But a second connection is historical, in that Chesterton and Campion hold a place in Australian history, and particularly in the Australian Catholic tradition.

In the early 1930s, the Campion Society was established – as Australia's first lay association for Catholic adult education. The Society was founded in Melbourne by several university graduates and professional people, and it spread rapidly throughout Australia. In Western Australia, the name it adopted was the Chesterton Club, and it is a fitting coincidence that, many years later, the Australian Chesterton Society was born in the city of Perth.

The theme of the 2023 conference was '*G.K. Chesterton and the Rise of a Counter-Culture*'.

The focus was on the *positive* responses - in areas such as journalism, business, education, and the family - to the culture that is currently dominating Western life and thought, and to reflect on how these responses, in each area, represent a constructive alternative that may now be forming a '*counter-culture*'.

Many of the responses can be seen to reflect the inspiration of Chesterton's ideas, or are in silent harmony with them as they coincide with the philosophical, religious, social and political perspectives that characterised Chesterton's thinking.

Let me briefly describe the kind of culture which I think these responses are seeking to counter. Christian belief and practice have now virtually collapsed in Australia, and in the West generally. We hear ever more loudly what Matthew Arnold in the 19th century famously called the "long, withdrawing roar" of Christian belief in our culture. But the religious and cultural void does not stay. It is inevitably filled - by one or more substitute faiths and loyalties.

For ease of reference, we might call the dominant substitute faith at present by the familiar term of 'woke', though I would prefer to look for a deeper description that addresses the root causes of the void – which is, that our culture has lost its sense of the transcendental; that it has become secularised in its fundamental vision of life. It has abandoned the inspiration of a higher purpose - more mysterious, and yet more satisfying, than earthly self-fulfilment, and the inevitable striving that human beings have for something more permanent, and more uplifting.

The process might be seen as a metaphysical counterpart to Aristotle's physical theory that "nature abhors a vacuum". In a comparable way, the human heart abhors the vacuum of meaning caused by unbelief. It cannot abide such emptiness. It will yearn to be filled.

At first, the substitute faith – underlying a 'woke' or, as I'd prefer, a secularist or trapped-in-this-world culture - was paraded as a movement of intellectual and social tolerance. It was responding to perceived historical oppression and injustice. To that extent, it may have appeared to surrender power. But, in recent times, it has taken on the trappings of a new power. It has enlisted the instruments of culture - political parties, business corporations, the courts, educational institutions, the media, and so on – to enforce a new and powerful orthodoxy of deadening belief and uninspiring practice.

I think it's true to say this new power has been manifested in two ways. One is by what the American critic, R.R. Reno, editor of the journal, *First Things*, has called 'The Great Forgetting'. The West has now managed to produce a whole generation of leaders who know next to nothing about the wellsprings of their own culture, or the key thinkers who have shaped our history. The result is cultural amnesia. So this way has involved the expulsion of memory.

A second way is the active replacement of these traditional figures – philosophers, poets, playwrights, novelists – with writers that represent the dominant 'woke culture'. The purpose has been to cement its cultural hold. In a study of campus cultural wars in Britain, Charlie Bentley-Astor discussed her recent undergraduate degree in English at Cambridge University. By the end of her three-year course, she had not studied authors such as Milton or Coleridge, Wordsworth or Shelley, Keats, or Dickens. "These writers," she recalled, "were replaced by black, female, and 'queer' writers, often for no other reason than that they are black or female or 'queer'."

This pattern was reflected in how the university library at Cambridge was reorganised: "Foucault takes pride of place on the top floor, whilst Chaucer and Shakespeare have been relegated to the basement."

Whereas the first way is to delete the memory of our culture, this second way is about manufacturing the future. It is to condition the discourse and the public life of Western culture so as to lock it into a certain pattern and direction of development.

Conference speakers

The conference speakers addressed these various flashpoints in the dominant culture. They discussed, in different areas, positive alternatives which are contributing to the rise of a counter-culture.

Firstly, in response to the generally unfavourable media image and presentation of religion - and particularly Christianity - in present-day Australia, **Greg Sheridan** surveyed the

positive reactions to his two recent books, *God Is Good for You: A Defence of Christianity in Troubled Times* (2018) and *Christians: the Urgent Case for Jesus in Our World* (2021), as well as to his various newspaper articles on Christianity (mainly in *The Australian* newspaper) and his interviews on radio and TV.

Secondly, in response to the highly centralised power of Big Business and Big Government and – most recently – Big Tech, **Peter Fenwick** examined the principle of subsidiarity, of power being pushed down to its lowest level of operation, so that it is efficient yet productive, and most conducive to human freedom and satisfaction.

Thirdly, in response to the feminist focus on economic and political pursuits, such as out-of-home career paths and parliamentary careers, which downplay, if not deny, a family-centred feminism in fostering deep relationships and the nurturing of children, as well as wider culture-making benefits, **Veronika Winkels** explored the cultural reclaiming, or rebalancing, of feminism. A significant example of this rebalancing is her serving as the Founding Editor of a new women's magazine, *Mathilde*.

Fourthly, in response to the corruption of the classical curriculum of cultural grounding and the practical skills of literacy and numeracy, at both the school and university level, which has had a deadening effect on learning and the awakening of wonder (wonder as 'the beginning of wisdom', as the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates thought), **Michael Mendieta** and Marie Yeo reported on the founding of Hartford College, a new Catholic liberal arts college in Sydney.

Finally, **Karl Schmude** speculated on whether Chesterton would have created Campion College.

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MEMBERSHIP OF AUSTRALIAN CHESTERTON SOCIETY

Membership of the Australian Chesterton Society is available for A\$35.00 per annum. It includes a subscription to the Society's quarterly publication, *The Defendant*, and can be arranged by contacting the Society's Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell (details above).

AUSTRALIAN CHESTERTON SOCIETY WEBSITE

All of the conference papers were video-recorded – by Michael Mendieta – and are available on YouTube as well as on the Australian Chesterton website (<http://chestertonaustralia.com/media.php>), where the papers of previous conferences are also available, both in video and text form.

Website designed by Martin Schmude.



Chesterton is Good for You: Journalism and Books in the Counter-Culture

Greg Sheridan

I'm talking today about books and writers and building a counterculture, or, so to speak, answering our cultural moment. Obviously, we're operating now in a pretty hostile environment. We shouldn't overstate these things; we're not persecuted. Our environment is not hostile the way it is hostile to Christians in Pakistan or in Iraq, but nonetheless it's a hostile, unfriendly, unsympathetic environment.

I've written eight books and I tell you, writing books is a lot like a heroin addiction. It's better if you don't start because you never really stop. My last two books have been about Christianity, as will be the next book. It's going to be a Christian book based on this premise: we live now in a time of neo-paganism, as Jewish rabbi Jonathan Sacks has argued.

Of course, the first Christians lived in a time of paganism; a very aggressive paganism in Corinth. In the time that St. Paul was there helping the first church, Corinth would've made King's Cross or Soho or Manhattan or even Bangkok look absolutely tame. And yet the Christians had astonishing success in that pagan environment. They completely transformed the world. So the question this next book seeks to interrogate is this: is there anything from the first time Christians were in a pagan environment which is useful for today's Christians in a pagan environment?

Chesterton and Orwell

Lots of things are different, of course, technology and everything, but the old gods of paganism have come back - the gods of sex, money and power. All the old practices of paganism have come back; a lot of the old beliefs—Earth as a deity, and so on. But today we're not considering the question of paganism. We're thinking about how we respond to the culture in the light of Chesterton.

I mentioned once before at an Australian Chesterton conference (2016) that Chesterton and George Orwell were two journalists who inspired me to enter journalism. They're very different, but they did have some things in common: their attachment to the particular; they're very journalistic writers; and they were *great* writers. Neither of them ever attended a university; so that's a paradox. Of course, they would have gone to Campion if it had been available at the time!

They were very much attached to the particular and to the concrete. Being attached to the concrete is not only a virtue of journalism. It's kind of an insight which permeates Christianity itself because Christianity is an incarnational faith. It's not an abstract faith. It deals with human beings and with human culture. There are much more abstract faiths; Buddhism, for example. It's a very honourable, fabulous creed, Buddhism; but Christianity is not like Buddhism. Christianity always starts and lives in the concrete and particular. But I think this was also a Chesterton position: you shouldn't think in abstract terms unless it's necessary. You start with the concrete, and then, when you need to classify the concrete, you might

move to an abstract concept. But if you start with the abstract you end up talking meaningless rubbish.

I was also attracted very much to a quality of Chesterton, which Orwell certainly *didn't* have, and that was Chesterton's cheerfulness. Orwell was a tremendous misery guts! He was a fabulously depressing person, whereas Chesterton was terrifically cheerful all the time. There's a great lesson in this because it seems to me that Christians who want to affect a hostile culture need, in particular, balance. They need to provide a quite serious, rigorous, searching critique of the culture that they're in, but they also need to provide a positive vision of the human condition and what human culture can be.

If they think the culture is rotten, they can start by creating a new culture. This is what this magnificent institution, Campion College, is doing. I think it's what Chesterton and Orwell did to some extent through their books. Chesterton tried very hard through various institutions as well: all the journals that he wrote for and edited and founded. But both men were influential mostly through their books. In an infinitely more modest way, this is what I've tried to do with my books on Christianity, *God is Good for You* (2018), and *Christians: the Urgent Case for Jesus in Our World* (2021).

My two Christian books

I've published a lot of books with Allen & Unwin, and they're very nice people. I don't think they agree with a single word that I write, but they are the most unusual people. They are *liberal* liberals. Incredibly hard to believe that such a species exists anymore, but they are actual liberals who are happy to have people who disagree with them. The publishers agreed to *God is Good for You*, at first, as an act of friendship to an author who'd done five previous books with them and had a long relationship with them. They produced a modest print run of four and a half thousand, which they really thought they would never sell. I think they thought it'd be really good if we sold a thousand copies, and the rest can just moulder in our warehouse. They even said to me, this will be a book which will sit on bookshelves for some time. They said specialist book sellers might only be reordering one or two copies at a time, but they *will* reorder, and it will have a longer shelf life than the average book. It might go for a year or 18 months, maybe even two years. I thought they were probably right. In fact, I thought that might have been a bit overly optimistic. But I was very determined to sell the books. I pestered Karl Schmude to help me get lots and lots of speaking events, so that I could sell copies. And then I thought, I'll secretly go around and buy a copy at each bookshop just so there's a minimal level of respectability!

The two books have done astonishingly well, which is no credit to their author or their publisher. The publisher did a great job, but it's a credit to the gap in the market; people really want to hear about these things. There are great Christian books every year, much better books than mine, but they are ghettoized by the popular culture. They're not allowed onto the stage. Just by being a journalist at *The Australian* and so on, I'm kind of already on the stage. It's a bit hard to kick me off, and so the books got that initial level of publicity. *God is Good for You*, in all its incarnations, has sold well over 30,000 copies. *Christians* is getting up there as well. Let's be clear: that's not *Harry Potter* territory, but it's much more than I or the publishers ever expected.

God is Good for You is first of all about belief in God, whereas *Christians* is mainly about belief in Christ and belief in the New Testament. Both books follow the same pattern. The first half

argues the case and the second half profiles people in movements who are living out the case. Campion College was profiled in the second half of the first book.

A public- and positive - Christian

I'm always happy in battle; I'm a very happy warrior. I'm absolutely relaxed about my enemies attacking me; in fact, I'd be terribly distressed if they didn't attack me. If they were a bit smarter they'd just ignore me altogether, and that would be really distressing, but being constantly attacked by the left is great. Constantly attacked on Twitter is fantastic. I never look at Twitter or social media, but it does annoy my son sometimes. There are people who have so little to do in their lives that they create fake Greg Sheridan accounts on Twitter. Some of them like me, some of them don't. Some of them are very funny, parodying my views. I never really see it unless someone points it out to me.

But with these books on Christianity I tried not to be in that space. I didn't want them to be essays of cultural despair—which ageing white conservatives are very good at. And I didn't want the books to be slugfests in which I deliver savage rhetorical *karate* cuts to my ideological opponents. I wanted them to be positive and cheerful and bit more gentle. Now coming out as a public Christian was a bit of a fraud; I mean, after 40 years in journalism there's quite a lot in the negative ledger, so to speak. When I started out talking about being a Catholic, I used to say I'm not a very good Catholic. I'd say that often in an interview. I was talking to Archbishop Fischer once, and he said, why don't you just become a *good* Catholic? I said, that's easy for you to say, you're an Archbishop. You haven't been a journalist for 40 years.

I certainly would never call myself a good Catholic, but I realized that, while you don't want the church judged by your own life, and you're aware of all the ways you fall short all the time, that can also be an excuse for cowardice. If you leave the discussion entirely to the morally qualified, it's going to be a very small group of people engaging in the discussion. So to come out as a full-scale believer required me to cross a certain psychological point.

I found that it was not really daunting at all once I did it. Journalism is a wonderful profession; we are extremely judgmental of everyone else, but we're very tolerant of ourselves and of each other. Merely being a Christian and going to church is by no means the weirdest activity that you find in any modern newsroom! I certainly got no negative feedback from my colleagues. In fact, I'm surprised at how positive and friendly the reception was throughout the culture.

Negative and positive influences

One of the challenges was to try to be positive. *God is Good for You* is, in essence, about belief in God. I began with the idea of refuting the new atheists. I read all the new atheists—that's a terrific penance, they're unbelievably tedious and dull and obtuse and lame. It's the same old 19th century arguments against God, often put next to a whole lot of irrelevant science. For example, Richard Dawkins says the universe is 14 billion years old, and obviously God wouldn't waste his time spending 14 billion years to create a little world for human beings. To which you think, Richard Dawkins - first of all you claim there is no God; second, how would you know how God would spend his time? It strikes me it's absolutely characteristic of God that he'd spent 14 billion years creating a beautiful garden for humanity. I was initially going to write that key chapter as a refutation of the new atheists, but then I realized you don't believe in God because atheism is mistaken. Nobody believes in God because atheism is not

an established truth, so I turned that chapter around and instead made that a positive chapter about the reasons for belief in God.

I was particularly influenced by Roger Scruton's book, *The Soul of the World*, in which he argues that the most powerful argument for God is not Thomas Aquinas's five proofs. Of course, they're wonderful proofs. But the most compelling proof is simply the long human experience of God, which the atheists won't allow as evidence because they think it's subjective. But every court of law relies on human testimony. And the fact is, that God is the intuitive explanation for everything, the explanation that makes sense. So I rewrote that chapter; it changed from being a culture wars "knock 'em down, drag 'em out" World Championship wrestling match in which I've got my foot on Dawkins' throat, and here I've driven a sharp elbow into the Hitchens' solar plexus, and there I've poked the eye of Sam Harris. All that got ditched, and instead it became a positive argument for the existence of God, although there's a little bit about the new atheists at the end of the book.

Smuggling Christ into the culture

The next book was *Christians*, and the chapter I had the most fun writing was the one on popular culture, which I called, 'Smuggling Christ into the Culture'. At first this chapter was going to be celebration of all the cultural products that I like from 100 years ago. Chesterton, of course, together with Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh; they're little bit less than 100 years in the past. I kept a lot of that discussion in the chapter because a lot by those authors is still in print; it's very accessible and modern folks should be made aware of it. But I realized a better way to talk to a contemporary audience is, in fact, to look at the ways that Christ is present in the popular culture today.

There are fantastic examples of Christian presence in popular culture, however unsympathetic the popular culture generally is. A friend, John Dickson, put me onto the novels of Marilynne Robinson, especially the novel *Gilead* (2004). It's the greatest Christian novel of the 21st century, I think, by a very long distance. The great Christian novels of the 19th century were Russian: Dostoyevsky, for example. The great Christian novels of the 20th century were, I think, English, especially Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, and in the 21st century I think Marilynne Robinson is without peer.

Gilead, and just behind that *Lila* (2014) and then just behind that, *Home* (2008) and *Jack* (2020)—the four novels in that group. *Gilead* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2005, in a culture completely unsympathetic to Christianity. It is set in 1956 and is about a 77-year old Congregationalist Minister, John Ames, who is coming to the end of his life and writing a long letter to his seven-year-old son. John thinks he probably is not going to be around to see his son grow up. The author is a Calvinist, and the book's full of lengthy theological contemplation of heaven and creation, and yet it's an absolutely gripping novel. It won the Pulitzer Prize which shows you can succeed if you're good enough.

Another example: the television series *Jane the Virgin*. Most of you wouldn't have seen *Jane the Virgin*. I got to see it in a very eccentric way. I was at one end of a hotel room doing my serious articles about the Chinese Communist Party; my wife was at the other end and she was watching *Jane the Virgin* on her laptop. The dialogue was so interesting I abandoned the Chinese Communist party and went over and watched this series.

Jane the Virgin is a modern kind of crazy American sitcom. Although it goes a little barmy at the end, it's all about this Hispanic—I think Venezuelan—young woman Jane, growing up in

Florida. Jane decides to remain a virgin until she's married, and through a normal crazy American sitcom device, she's artificially inseminated and becomes pregnant. Now you'd think this a setup to mock religion, to mock virginity and Catholicism and all the rest. Not at all. It's so positive because it's part of Hispanic culture. There's a deep dive into religion in series eight, I think: Jane is feeling discouraged in her faith. She has an atheist husband. She's saying, I don't know, maybe I'm going to take our son out of Catholic school. And he says, No, no, Jane. Your Catholicism is what makes you such a wonderful person. I can't embrace your belief myself, but don't you ever abandon it.

I nearly fell out of my chair every time I saw this series, and it was a big rating success in America. In the last series, they do a bit of gender ideology and so on, but overall it's an incredibly positive treatment of Catholicism.

Also, there's Mark Wahlberg's movies; especially I'd recommend to you *Father Stu* (2022), in which Wahlberg stars with Mel Gibson. Gibson completely blitzes him off the screen - he steals the show as the alcoholic dad. Mark Wahlberg plays a ne'er-do-well boxer who finds faith and is visited by a vision of the Virgin Mary. He embraces the priesthood. You could imagine this in the era of Bing Crosby and Gregory Peck, but can you imagine it today? However, it's there. I should have included, but didn't, in that chapter of my book the wonderful series, *The Chosen*, about Christ and the first apostles. The producers couldn't get funding for it from the big studios, so they crowd-funded it, raised \$10 million per series, and it's very good. It's probably not the best single TV series you'll ever watch, but it's an extremely good treatment of Christ and the apostles, which is orthodox, very human, and with lots of humour.

This chapter in *Christians* tries to be very positive about how we can get into the popular culture—if we're good enough.

Book promotion and encouragement

I'll finish with a couple of reflections on what fun it's been to promote the books, and what fabulous moments of grace have come about in their promotion. I'm a typical western suburbs Sydney boy. I've had three institutions that I've been faithful to all my life: Canterbury/Bankstown Bulldogs, News Corporation and the Catholic Church. They've all had their challenges but none of them has ever let me down. It is a bit of a test of faith being a Bulldog's supporter at the moment, but they're going to come good!

My books on Christianity are non-denominational. There's no doubt I'm a Catholic, but the books focus on the C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* consensus. One happy experience of promoting these books is that, in all the Christian denominations, I've made many good friends. They all promoted the book, so naturally I spoke at a lot of both Catholic and Protestant functions. They quite often have people speak *in* the religious service. I've had the quite unusual experience for an Irish-Catholic from Sydney's western suburbs of speaking to giant Pentecostal religious services with hundreds and hundreds of worshippers, in Melbourne and Perth, and to smaller Anglican and Presbyterian services.

I spoke last year at a Presbyterian annual dinner and began by describing how non-denominational I was, but I was *very* attached to the doctrine of purgatory because purgatory is the best chance for a journalist. Remember the end of the Vietnam War and the last helicopter leaving the U.S. embassy rooftop in Saigon? Somebody grabs the last rung of the rope ladder and just gets pulled up miraculously! That's the hope a journalist has. I said once

to Tony Abbott, We'll have a few million years to talk things over in purgatory, and he said, You might be at a few million, mate, but I think it'll be a bit longer for me!

A guy at the end of the Presbyterian dinner stood up and said, Well, here's a first for us—we've never been addressed by a Catholic before. He made a joke about purgatory and we all laughed. The Presbyterians thought that was wonderfully novel.

I had these astonishing moments of grace on ABC radio. Richard Glover is a wonderful Sydney ABC afternoon broadcaster. He read the book so thoroughly that my only complaint about him was that his questions were so much more interesting than my answers. He said his wife was really worried that I might have converted him because he started to doubt his atheism when he was reading about the sheer statistical unlikelihood of the human experience; how unlikely it is that human beings would exist, that a planet sympathetic to them would be made, and so forth. He did a wonderful interview about *God is Good for You*. We spent a full half-hour on it and a lot of his ABC listeners objected: What is this Christian propaganda doing on the ABC? The next day Richard Glover scolded his listeners. He said, What a bunch of narrow-minded bigots you are! He rebuked his own listeners. He was so kind to me. He said, This is a thrilling book - and if you think the ABC is pro-Christian propaganda, you must be crazy. He insisted, Greg's the only Christian author I've ever interviewed and you're so narrow-minded you won't even listen. I thought, Wow, Richard Glover deserves a sort of Victoria Cross for that kind of super courage.

Another ABC experience I had: I was doing the Conversation Hour in Melbourne. There was a panel of three people being interviewed. The ABC interviewer was talking to me about the Pentecostals, and she said, Are those are the people who think the Holy Spirit speaks through them in tongues. I said, Yep, that's them. And she said, I can't take them seriously at all.

I said, I think you should take people's religious beliefs with some respect even if you don't share them. She said, Oh, I respect them, but I just can't take them seriously, it's all nonsense, isn't it? One of my fellow panelists was a young Aboriginal woman—not, as far as I know, a Christian believer—I just don't know anything about her religious outlook, but she was a musician. She'd been engaged in a project going around collecting the old mission songs from the Christian missions amongst aborigines. She said to the ABC presenter, Greg might be on to something here: when we sing the old mission songs in remote Australia, we find there are more voices singing than there are people in the hall. The ABC presenter *was not* going to contradict her. All of a sudden I had new credibility, and what a lovely young Aboriginal person, with a spirit of generosity, to come to the defence of Christians at that moment on the air. It's only a small moment, but it was a wonderful moment.

I had long discussion over Zoom with an atheist ethical-living podcaster. These are ethical atheists who engage in philanthropy; they don't do it because of God. They wanted to have a serious discussion about religious belief and I thought, This going to be very hostile and I better be defensive and play a straight bat. Instead, it was the most open-minded, helpful, insightful discussion. The questions were really interesting; they'd thought through these things much better than the new atheists.

There's was one time on a plane when I was researching my book and I was still a bit shy about being a public Christian. I had all these Christian books that I was using, and I'd put them on the on the tray in a way that you couldn't see the titles. I thought, Well, that is really pathetic. So after that I left them so that you could see the titles if you wanted to, and getting off the plane a woman approached me from across the plane's corridor and said, Excuse me, I can't

help but be interested in all those books you've got about Christianity. I said, Yes... but I was thinking, Okay, what's your beef? And she said, Are you a priest? I said, No, no, no. That's the first time I've ever been mistaken in that way! It turned out she was a faithful member of the Salvation Army but in a category of Salvation Army members who don't wear uniforms. She was so happy to have a fellow Christian on the flight, and that resulted in a moment of solidarity where she encouraged me and I encouraged her. That's one reason I encourage all Christians that come out publicly, because fellow Christians can do with the encouragement, while non-Christians in our pagan environment can do with any pointer to the truth that they can get.

A Presbyterian, David Robertson, employed by the Sydney Anglican diocese, did a series of podcasts on *Christians* in which he had a separate conversation with me about each chapter. On some of the chapters that he was interested in, he did two or three podcast conversations. He has lots and lots of folks listen to his podcasts—and there he was talking about the books I'd published.

Sometimes I'm quite insistent about talking on the books. I address a number of business functions; all the time they want to hear the same thing. What's China going to do? What's Trump going to do? What can we do? The answers are: China will do whatever it likes; Trump is crazy and unpredictable; and you'd better say your prayers. But when the books are first published, I only will talk about the books. There are a number of business functions where they said, We really want you to talk about China. I said, No, I'll talk about *God is Good for You*. They'd say, Oh, jeez, I don't know. I'd said, Well, look, I'm too damn busy otherwise, so that's it, take it or leave it. You've got *God is Good for You* or nothing. Some of them said, Okay, we'll see you next year when you've returned to normal, but some of them said, Okay, come and talk to us about your book. Business audiences are not really sympathetic to Christianity anymore, but I had the chance to talk to them about the book. (And, as Karl mentioned, at least one student found their way to Campion through reading the book.

'An incredibly annoying book'

One of the best functions for the book was in Brisbane; I think it was partly co-sponsored by Campion. At the end of the talk there were some questions. A fellow in the audience got up and said, I found your book very bloody annoying. It's full of mistakes and your writing style is very annoying. I found the whole flaming book incredibly annoying and it's so annoying that I bought three copies and I'm going to send one to each person I want to annoy! I thought, You're doing God's work, you can't say it clearer than that. And I realised, That's a great new selling point: the perfect book for the person you want to annoy!

It was enormous fun promoting the books. Now, of course, the books are selling over 30 thousand copies. I'm so grateful for that; as I say it's not *Harry Potter* territory, it's not a million books. It's not going to convert the culture by itself. Nor is that to disparage a book which sells 100 copies, because one book read by one person might change a life so you can't apply quantitative judgments. I think anyone who writes in defence of Christianity, or who produces podcasts or films or educates in defence in Christianity is doing fantastic work.

As Karl says, I'm a spiritual Irishman, and the moral of the story is something which I live my life by, it's simply this: You can't win the lottery if you don't buy a ticket.

Greg Sheridan is the Foreign Editor of the *Australian* newspaper. He first worked for the *Bulletin* magazine in 1979, reporting on Vietnamese boat people who came to Australia in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Born in Sydney in 1956, he studied at Macquarie University and the University of Sydney before joining the *Australian* in 1984. He served as a correspondent in Beijing and Washington and later Canberra, and was appointed as Foreign Editor in 1992.

He is the author of eight books, initially focusing on Asian politics and culture, such as *Living with Dragons: Australia Confronts Its Asian Destiny* (1995) and *Asian Values, Western Dreams: Understanding the New Asia* (1999). He has written a memoir of his early years in politics and journalism, *When We Were Young and Foolish* (2015). Most recently he has explored the challenges facing Christianity in contemporary culture, in *God is Good for You* (2018) and *Christians* (2021).

Why Subsidiarity Matters: Living in Amity

Peter Fenwick

Preamble

You are probably wondering why I am standing before you looking like Moshe Dayan, bearing an eye-patch. Is this some pro-Israeli gesture? It is fifty years since the Yom Kippur war. Still the Israelis are fighting for their right to exist. I support that.

But the reasons for the eye patch are more prosaic. I have had surgery to repair a detached retina and will not be able to see out of my right eye for another ten days.

On 14th May this year I became an octogenarian. How does an octogenarian who studied civil engineering in the 1960s and ran a software company for 35 years come to be at this year's Chesterton Conference talking on the philosophy of subsidiarity and its political consequences? My explanation is that, for 35 years, I ran a software company. One had to earn a living. Writing books on libertarian philosophy and Austrian economics had to wait until I retired. However, I used the company as a test bed for my beliefs. I created a culture based on liberal philosophy. The company thrived.

When I retired in 2011, I established an employee shareholder scheme, and sold 75 percent on generous terms to key staff, one of whom, Greg Galloway - then not yet 30 - has been successfully managing the firm ever since. I explained to Greg at the time that now I owned only 25% of the business he needed to make it four times as large to make it worth my while. It took him nearly six years! It is now more successful and more profitable than ever. Greg and his fellow shareholders have maintained the culture.

After we had been operating for some years, my offsider, Andrew Ferguson, suggested that we should have written employment agreements.

When I asked why, he said, "Because everyone else does."

So I gathered together examples of other firms' employment agreements. They were atrocious. I observed two common failings: one, they seldom mentioned what the firm was all about - there was no sense of purpose; two, they had a clause, normally hidden toward the end of the document, explaining the grievous consequences if the employee ever did the wrong thing.

The worst example was one from the school where my wife taught. It began, not with an expression of how the aim was to educate the young ladies and to inspire them to fulfil their role as valuable members of society.

Not at all. Not a mention. It began with the entitlements of the teacher when she was not at work! I determined to correct these deficiencies.

Fenwick Software's employment agreement puts the most important clauses first. It begins with the *identity* of Fenwick Software:

"Fenwick Software is a consulting firm whose purpose is to help its clients, through

the effective use of information and communication technologies, to strengthen their competitive position and to develop their businesses in a sound and profitable manner.

You will participate in this work. You will be granted an appropriate degree of autonomy and will be responsible for your own actions.

You will have opportunities to learn and to grow and to assume more and more responsibility.

You will commit yourself diligently to apply all your skills and efforts to this end.

Your primary responsibility is to provide value for your clients.

You will use your best endeavours to promote and enhance the interests, reputation, and profitability of Fenwick Software.”

The second clause describes our staff’s responsibilities to others:

“In the course of your work you will have access to confidential information about Fenwick Software and its clients. This will include financial, marketing, personnel, and operational data, plans and methodologies.

We believe that it is essential if you are to fulfil your role as an employee and as a consultant that your access to information is not restricted. But this imposes a responsibility on you. You must never betray the trust that we give you. You must never use information made available to you or obtained by you in the course of your employment for any purpose of your own, nor exploit it at any time, including after termination of your employment.”

Of course, I never expected new graduates to comprehend all this all at once. Culture cannot be explained; it cannot be learnt; it must be imbibed. The culture of Fenwick Software can be understood only by experiencing it, by living it.

And they do. Most of them anyway.

One interesting statistic was permanence. In an industry where the average length of stay was typically 18 months, our average length of service was about 8 years. The other important concept was our relationship with clients.

This is the statement of values that guided that relationship.

1. “We believe that the effective delivery of professional services requires the establishment of an enduring and trusting relationship between client and supplier.
2. We commit to treating you honestly, fairly, and generously in all our dealings with you, and expect the same treatment from you.
3. We commit to having the courage to provide you with our best advice. We will identify alternative solutions and recommend what we believe is best for you.
We will ask for your opinions and act on your instructions.
4. We will persist in our efforts to deliver the best solution despite unanticipated obstacles.

5. We will identify conflicts of interest and bring them to your attention.
6. We will respect matters of privacy and confidentiality.”

The consequence of this is that we had wonderful people as clients.

To illustrate the trusting relationship: If any client ever rang me and requested a credit, I gave it immediately. You may fear that such a practice might be abused. Not so. Decent people, aware of my likely response, would not ask for something they did not deserve.

Mind you, we were selective in the clients we accepted, and kept. In 35 years, I fired five clients. They were ones with whom it had proved impossible to establish a trusting relationship. When a department of the Victorian Government indicated that they would fight an unpaid debt in the Supreme Court, we settled for half what we were owed, and resolved never to work for the public sector ever again.

Since I retired in 2011, I have written three books –

The Fragility of Freedom: Why subsidiarity matters:

Liberty at Risk: Tackling today's political problems; and

The Fortunate: Ten great writers highlight how we created free and affluent societies.

I have also written a couple of essays for Quadrant, including a review of Jim Chalmers Monthly Essay which I entitled *Chalmers Offers Australia a New Deal*, a hundred blogs and a few letters to the papers – including two-hundred-word satirical criticisms of Dan Andrews.

I am going to miss him. Well, maybe not.

These books can be purchased inexpensively from Amazon, Booktopia, or the publisher Connor Court.

Gary Furnell wrote a review of *The Fortunate* for Quadrant and a review of *The Fragility of Freedom* for *News Weekly* and then invited me to speak at your conference.

So that is how I come to be here today.

Living in Amity

Throughout the world, democracies are failing. Governments are finding it impossible to satisfy the irreconcilable differences between their citizens: Brexit in the UK, Abortion in USA, The Voice in Australia.

Everyone wants their opinion heard and legislated.

Those in the minority are obliged to accept laws and regulations which they regard as anathema. Wide-spread discontent ensues. Moreover, people on opposite sides of key issues regard their opponents with contempt.

This is not a sound basis for a good society.

During the Great Financial Crisis, we worried that businesses had become “too big to fail”.

Maybe states have become too big to govern. Maybe this is why there is renewed interest in secession. Could secession be the way to live in amity?

In early March 2023, my wife and I spent a week at the Adelaide Writers’ Festival. It is a great

event. It is free. It is held in the open air. There are multiple simultaneous sessions to choose from. The fiction is excellent, the non-fiction selective, with a plainly left-wing bias.

It is not the place to go if you want to hear from Geoffrey Blainey, Henry Ergas, or Suri Ratnapala; or views on Climate Change from Steven Koonin or Michael Shellenberger; or on The Voice from Jacinta Nampijinpa Price or Warren Mundine. The Director, Louise Adler, knows her audience. As did her predecessor Jo Dyer.

Mornings began at 8:00 am at The Star Kitchen & Bar where we joined Tom Wright for *Breakfast with Papers* as he interviewed journalists and writers about the news of the day. The panels seemed preoccupied with criticising the Murdoch press, although you sensed that neither they nor the audience read The Australian, nor the freely provided Adelaide Advertiser.

On the fourth day, Mr Wright, claimed that the interruption to Sydney trains the previous day was an example of market failure and disproved the whole Hayekian narrative. Neither his panellists nor his audience felt a need to challenge this assertion. I kept my head below the parapet.

Every one of the 119 sessions began with an [Acknowledgement of Country](#), often twice, once from the chair and once from the writer. Meanwhile, unconcerned Aborigines congregated amiably in nearby North Terrace.

The festival held much of interest. There were local writers such as Alex Miller, Richard Fidler, Chloe Hooper, and Jane Harper. Bill Browder told us about Putin and Ben Macintyre about spies. Simon Armitage read us some of his poems. Walid Aly and Scott Stephens talked about how contempt is corroding democracy. Grace Tame spoke about the fight for the survivors of sexual abuse and Inala Cooper (daughter of Mick Dodson) about the fight for reconciliation. Simon Holmes a Court gave credit to Cathy McGowan for revitalising community politics. Ross Garnaut was enthusiastic about saving the planet with timely energy transition.

But the highlight for me was the wickedly funny Jewish-American satirist Shalom Auslander.

When he signed his book [Mother for Dinner](#) - a book about whether a family of twelve Cannibal-Americans can retain their cultural heritage in the modern world – he wrote “To Peter - keep laughing, just to piss them off.”

Jill and I had travelled to Adelaide by car. We enjoy car trips. We can relax and appreciate the beauty of the countryside, with sheep grazing, crops flourishing, and eucalypts framing the highway. The long sight distance is therapeutic. It frees the mind for thought. I had been contemplating the problems of majoritarian democracy and been wondering if [secession](#) might be the answer.

At the festival, the erudite Bob Carr chaired a discussion asking, “As America has turned inwards and its exceptionalism engendered skepticism, what are the ramifications?”

At one point, he turned to Auslander and asked, “What is it going to be like returning to such a dysfunctional country?”

“Oh, I am not going back”, came the quick reply. “I am looking for an apartment in Adelaide.”

I did not expect to find material on secession in a satirical novel about twelve Cannibal-Americans.

But there it was on page 8 of [Mother for Dinner](#).

“We’re a tribal creature, Seventh, he said. Division is the way of man. And woman.

It’s in our blood. Have you ever looked at a map of human migration?

We began in Africa, as one, and got the hell out as soon as we could, braving storms, oceans, beasts, famine.

Why? Wanderlust? To see Paris in the springtime?

No – because we could not stomach each other, not for one more minute.

Hell is other people. Sartre said that, but early man would have said it sooner if he had developed language. Or she.

Someday, Seventh Seltzer, mark my words, everyone will have a nation of their own.

Not every people – every person. It’s the only way he’ll be satisfied. Or she.

Seltzerland. Rosenbloom Village. Abdullaville. Hernandez Town. One-foot-by-one-foot squares, evenly divided, all over the globe, surrounded by walls ten foot high, topped by razor wire and colourful flags, everyone in their own square singing rousing marches about how their square is Number One, how God chose their square over all other squares, how this square foot is their square foot and God help the person who tries to take it away from them.

We’ll want stories. Tales! Legends! About our square’s suffering and oppression, about our desperate journeys, about our founder’s valiant struggle to make our square the Number One it is, and about the evil enemies that to this very day try to take our square away from us.

In Seltzerland they’ll tell stories about the dirty Rosenblooms; in Rosenbloom Village, they’ll dream of wiping the Abdullahs off the map; and Abdullah will peep over his wall, watch Hernandez move into the square beside him and think. ‘There goes my property value.’ We’re obsessed with our squares, with our people, with our pasts. That’s why mankind has no future. Or womankind.”

Last year, in [The Fortunate](#), I documented how much life has improved for humanity over the past two hundred years. The ideas that changed the world. The contributions of Western Civilization to mankind. In Australia, we are more prosperous, healthier, safer, better educated, doing less physically arduous jobs and having more time for leisure than ever. Yet despite living in the freest and most affluent society in the history of mankind we are an *anxious* society.

Our politicians say that they know “Everyone is doing it tough.” Really? I saw a journalist the other day interviewing a housewife standing at a 5-metre marble bench with a gas range and a huge refrigerator behind her. She was bemoaning having to pay \$4 for an iceberg lettuce.

When Josh Frydenberg announced the halving of fuel excise, he said, with a straight face, that it “would be of great benefit to households with two cars”!

We are concerned that the good life is ephemeral and insufficient, frightened that our good fortune might suddenly disappear or be taken from us. Of course, recently it was. During Covid, arbitrary regulations took away our liberties. We accepted this without a whimper as necessary to protect our health and that of our fellow citizens. Subsequently, we read [The](#)

[Great Barrington Declaration](#), Scott Atlas' [A Plague Upon Our House](#) and many other analyses and learned that the regulations were unnecessary. Now we want our freedoms back. We do not want to be bossed around by politicians and bureaucrats with their false, self-serving propositions.

Driving through the vineyards near Padthaway, I was contemplating what might be done to improve things. It seemed to me that some of the changes we have made to our society over the past two generations, though made with the best intentions, have been counterproductive.

Three things stand out.

Firstly, **individual responsibility**: we have lost the sense that we should be responsible for our own actions; that we should respect the rights of others; and that we should accept that we are not entitled to anything we have not earned.

Secondly, the **role of the family** has been diminished: children can no longer rely on having a mother and a father around to love them, support them and nurture them; parents can no longer depend on their children to care for them in their old age; **the state has usurped the roles that families used to play**.

Thirdly, **economic decisions have been transferred from the private and business spheres to the political sphere**. Politicians and bureaucrats now make the decisions on energy, on education, on health, on transport, and on our private and work relationships. Moreover, they interfere in judicial processes. Fundamental concepts such as the rule-of-law and innocent-until-proven-guilty are violated.

And they are so sanctimoniously self-righteous about everything. Mediocre men, and women, control our lives. Midwits.

As the rows and rows of healthy vineyards passed by, I wondered if perhaps the solution to all this was subsidiarity. It is an unfamiliar but important concept. Its proponents are as diverse as G.K. Chesterton, Alexis de Tocqueville, Pope John-Paul II, Ludwig von Mises, Noel Pearson, and me.

Subsidiarity is the principle of devolving decisions to the lowest practical level, that what individuals can do, society should not take over, and what smaller societies can do, larger societies should not take over. Subsidiarity facilitates a wider range of solutions, quicker and more informed decision-making, and the personal involvement of more citizens.

We do whatever we can ourselves, with our family, friends, and neighbours. We form voluntary organizations – businesses, clubs, and societies – so that like-minded citizens can achieve their common objectives.

We keep government activity as local as possible, jointly funding only those activities that the group agrees to be valuable, keeping citizens closely involved in what is relevant to them. Because there is a diversity of solutions there is less chance of one bad decision causing a systemic failure. Because there is more responsibility for one's actions there is less opportunity for moral hazard.

As Pope John-Paul II explained in [Centesimus Annus](#):

... the principle of subsidiarity must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of lower order, depriving the

latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, The Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending. In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need. It should be added that certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material, but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need. One thinks of the condition of refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the sick, and all those in circumstances which call for assistance, such as drug abusers; all these people can be helped effectively only by those who offer them genuine fraternal support, in addition to the necessary care.

The more the state provides for us, the more it will want to control us. If the state provides health care, then it will want to legislate to restrict behaviours that endanger our health – not only hard drugs but also alcohol, tobacco, and sugar.

During Covid it also mandated vaccination, restricting access to employment and social gatherings for the unvaccinated, famously stopping world tennis champion Novak Djokovic from competing in the Australian Open.

If the state provides education, then it will want to ensure that its own ideology dominates, that *its* curriculum is taught.

If it supports the media, then it will want to ensure that information is not *misleading* - that only *its* views are presented. Satire will be *verboden*.

If it supports the arts, then it will want to control the exhibition of pictures and plays, determining which are pornographic, obscene, or blasphemous.

If it supports sport, then it will want to influence which games are played, where they are played, and the quality of the facilities.

This is the reality of modern democracy. Societies are ruled from afar by an elite clerisy. Citizens with influence use the state to impose their views and preferences on their fellow man. Sometimes they gain financial favours in return for political support. Are we brave enough to risk freeing ourselves from the government controls that constrain us?

Are we brave enough to give our citizens the autonomy to make decisions themselves?

If we are, then maybe we can release the energy that will deliver an era of prosperity and liberty and create a moral society: Fenwick Software writ large.

Back home in East Melbourne I began to ponder whether subsidiarity was feasible or whether our democracy had constraints that made such a change impossible. I read Hans-Hermann Hoppe's [*Democracy: The God that Failed*](#). Hoppe explains the reasons that majoritarian democracy fails and how it leads to an ever-larger role for the state and an ever-increasing proportion of productive output being usurped in tax. Hoppe, too, is unlikely to be invited to the Adelaide Writers' Festival.

A major feature of democracy is that the winning party must assemble cohorts of supporters who in total exceed 50% of the vote. In the social democratic welfare state

this is achieved by promising and delivering special favours to the sectors one wishes to court.

At every election, more promises must be made and none of the old ones rescinded. Consequently government spending increases and so does the bureaucracy that supports it. Once more than half of the citizens in a modern democracy are net beneficiaries of government largesse then it becomes practically impossible to change prodigal policies.

Yuval Levin explained the consequences in [*Beyond the Welfare State*](#):

Moreover, because all citizens – not only the poor – become recipients of benefits, people in the middle class come to approach their government as claimants, not as self-governing citizens, and to approach the social safety net not as a great majority of givers eager to make sure that a small minority of recipients are spared from devastating poverty, but as a mass of dependents demanding what they are owed. It is hard to imagine an ethic better suited to undermining the moral basis of a free society.

Robert Menzies had expressed similar sentiments in 1942 in his essay *The Forgotten People*.

The great vice of democracy ...is that for a generation we have been getting ourselves on to the list of beneficiaries and removing ourselves from the list of contributors, as if somewhere there was somebody else's wealth and somebody else's effort on which we could thrive.

Most people like receiving gifts. They do not like paying tax. Consequently, governments promise more in benefits than they are prepared to extract in taxation. This leads to another pernicious consequence – inflation. Journalists and politicians will often mistakenly portray the cause of inflation as businesses increasing their prices. In fact, inflation is the expansion of the money supply.

Governments do this through their central banks. They call it quantitative easing. How Orwell would have loved that phrase!

Instead of taxing more, governments pay for their largesse by printing money. This makes money worth less in relation to the goods and services purchased. So prices rise. To illustrate: over the last hundred years the price of gold has risen from US\$20 to US\$2000 per ounce. The value of gold is unchanged; the value of money has decreased one hundred-fold.

In the October 2023 edition of Quadrant, emeritus professor Wolfgang Kasper gives us an Australian example:

Australians have so far not had the opportunity to learn the lessons of inflation with clarity, as the experience has been of the 'frog-on-slow-boil' variety: too slow to expose the real dangers, but persistent enough to do damage. Since the launch of the 'Kangaroo Dollar' in 1966, it has on annual average been allowed to lose about 5 per cent of its value. Consequently, the dollar has now lost 94 percent of its original purchasing power! Who remembers that a litre of milk cost \$0.19 in 1966, a litre of petrol \$0.07, and a Holden \$2,000?

Politicians often describe their spending on welfare as *compassionate*. There is another word Orwell would have loved!

But if it is paid for by quantitative easing, then the unemployed, the single mothers, the disabled, and the elderly pensioners are disadvantaged compared to those who own property, shares, works of art, or gold. Inflation adversely affects the middle class, the working poor, retirees, and passive savers. It benefits the asset rich: assets rise in price, but borrowings don't.

As Hoppe explains in [*Democracy: The God that Failed:*](#)

...the very problem that the redistribution was supposed to cure will have grown even bigger. Accordingly, the cost of maintaining the existing level of welfare distribution will be higher now than before, and in order to finance it, even higher taxes and more wealth confiscation must be imposed on the remaining producers.

So, what should we do?

The larger a society is, the more heterogeneous it is. Citizens will have different views many of which cannot be reconciled by consensus. More and more of the matters dealt with by government are in this category. The results are binary. All or nothing. Only one view can prevail. The minority – and it could be a 49% minority – lose out and become disaffected. This is the problem in America that Bob Carr alluded to.

What if our societies were much smaller? More homogenous? What if we applied the principle of subsidiarity? What if we did as much as possible ourselves and with our friends and neighbours? What if we got things done by forming contractual relationships with our fellow citizens and their clubs and businesses? What if we ceased asking “what is the government going to do about it?” What if like-minded citizens **seceded** and formed their own society?

Impossible you say? Not necessarily so. The number of sovereign states in the world has tripled in the past eighty years. Many of them have done very well. Think of Israel, South Korea, India, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Botswana, and Algeria.

Also, secession is an active consideration in many places including Scotland, Catalonia, Flanders, Quebec, Orkney, Khalistan, and California. Even Western Australians and the citizens of [New England](#) in northern New South Wales, flirt with the idea from time to time. In the Basque country they never stop thinking about it.

As Ludwig von Mises wrote in [Liberalism](#), it is a universal right.

Whenever the inhabitants of a particular territory, whether it be a single village, a whole district, or a series of adjacent districts, make it known, by a freely conducted plebiscite, that they no longer wish to remain united to the state to which they belong at the time, but wish either to form an independent state or to attach themselves to some other state, their wishes are to be respected and complied with.

Our Canberra-centric democracy is not working well for us. The views of citizens living in rural north Queensland cannot be reconciled with those in inner-urban Melbourne. So let us contemplate something different – an Australia comprising a new set of states, voluntarily chosen, in a loose federation.

The arbitrary state boundaries of the nineteenth century would disappear and we might end up with twenty to thirty small states, even some city-states, representing the specific interests

of culturally homogenous groups. The new states would need to work together sensibly and cooperatively.

Australia would still be a federation for external matters such as defence, foreign affairs, and immigration. The states would need to form voluntary agreements to maintain consistent systems to facilitate commercial activities. A common currency would make sense – ideally gold, but that is a story for another day.

Trade between the states would need to be free. Services such as power, water, sewerage, waste removal, public transport, education, and hospitals could be developed and owned by businesses in one state and sold to others – much as Denmark buys power from France and Sweden. Welfare services would more likely be provided by charities than by government bureaucracies.

This would fit John-Paul II's exhortation "that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need."

There would need to be open borders so that citizens could move freely for business and pleasure. Citizens would need to be free to choose in which state they lived, and in which states they established their businesses, and to change those choices from time to time so that they lived and worked in states that aligned with their values.

Once a year, each state could organise its own writers' festival. Some might even find it worthwhile to invite discussion from David Kemp on [Australian Liberalism](#), his five-volume history of Australia; Vaclav Smil on [How the World Really Works](#), the fundamentals of prosperity; Edward Chancellor on [The Price of Time](#), the real story of interest rates; Greg Sheridan on [Christians](#), reminding us of the relevance of Christianity; and Hans-Hermann Hoppe on [Democracy: The God that Failed](#). Australians could live in amity as Captain Arthur Phillip intended.

Peter Fenwick is a Melbourne-based author of three books, *The Fragility of Freedom: why subsidiarity matters* (2014), *Liberty at Risk: tackling today's political problems* (2016), and *The Fortunate: ten great writers highlight how we created free and affluent societies* (2022). He is an occasional contributor to *Quadrant*., and blogs at www.peterfenwick.com where he applies Austrian economics and libertarian philosophy to current issues.

In 1976 he founded Fenwick Software, a professional services consultancy which he managed for 35 years. Its culture is built on the principles of classic liberalism. Its employees are granted an appropriate degree of autonomy, provided with opportunities to grow and assume more responsibility, and encouraged to apply their skills to help each other and to deliver value for their clients. In 2011, Peter established an employee-shareholder scheme and sold 75 percent of the business in equal parts to five key staff, one of whom, Greg Galloway, is now CEO.

Reclaiming Feminism

Veronika Winkels

'A NEW FEMINISM IS EMERGING.' FAIRER DISPUTATIONS

It is a pleasure to be given this opportunity to talk today about new developments happening over in the world of feminist discourse, which I hazard a guess may not be the natural habitat of most of us here. But it does concern all of us, because like it or not, we now live in a culture that is deeply influenced by the legacy of the Sexual Revolution, which went hand in hand with second-wave feminism and remains the still-dominant narrative around women's rights and liberation.

So, should feminism be a dirty word amongst lovers of tradition, upholders of the family and champions of the home? With so much baggage, isn't it better to abandon the term altogether, and find a better?

I believe we should hold fast to it, and redeem it from its often-bastardized latter forms. Which leads to the question, what in fact, is being reclaimed? And from who or what is it being reclaimed?

Or, in light of this conference's theme, what is the culture, which is in need of countering? And how is it to be countered?

Before I answer these questions, I would like to outline how I want to go about this huge and complex issue. I'm going to begin with where we stand today, culturally, and especially as regards women, and trace these back to some momentous events in Feminism's complicated and sometimes misrepresented history; with the biggest catalysts being the destabilizing effects on women are the Industrial Revolution of the 18th-19th centuries, and then the invention of the pill in the 20th, the first time in history where women could (semi) reliably control their fertility. In this way, I wish to glean the heart of the matter of what, in fact, is the distinctive cultural significance of women, if there is a distinction to be made at all, and explain why our magazine, *Mathilde*, was born to provide a threshing floor for this task—and to honour the best of our foremothers, as well as, through the wisdom of the past, and the experience of the present, forge a way forward for women and society in general that may be flown under a banner of what I term 'reclaimed' feminism, but which can likewise be understood as what Saint Pope John Paul II called 'New Feminism', what Mary Harrington calls 'Reactionary Feminism', and what I think could also be described as a 'Post-Pill Feminism'.

So, this new development of Feminism which, I argue, is more faithful to the original movement than what it became towards the end of the last century, throws distance from the heady and individualistic sisterhood of the sixties, and is flourishing into something very different to the legacy of those angry daughters. In the face of growing disenchantment of the Sexual Revolution, and in its deliverance of emotional damage and spiritual vacuity, this new feminist spring is gaining traction for an increasing openness to the distinctive promise

of womanhood, and motherhood, as offered by women predating that period, and represented most fundamentally by Mary Wollstonecraft.

A Culture of Death

To turn now to the question of what it is, in essence, that we are countering is, as again St John Paul II named, the pervasive *zeitgeist* we aim to counter is the 'Culture of Death.'

This can be taken in a literal sense, as the boundaries protecting the sacredness of human life grow narrower and more fragile with the prevalence of abortion at the beginning of life, and the slackening restrictions around euthanasia towards the end of life. But the culture of death is also reflected in our ideas, with cancel-culture being a kind of way to euthanize tradition and those repositories of wisdom which grow more cumbersome to our lifestyles and individual freedoms. We are less taught to conserve, or 'hold fast to what is good'—which is, incidentally, *Mathilde's* tagline.

That too, is part of the culture of death.

So if the culture we are countering is one of death, the obvious way to respond is by the promotion of a culture of life.

Enter the 'F' word. How can Feminism, so recently the handmaiden to the culture of death, produce architects for a culture of life? How can it be 'reclaimed' from those who self-ID as feminists— that is, those who nominally support the notion of equality between men and women, and may even live as if this is true while it does not impinge on their lifestyles. But who are erstwhile limited in their commitment to women's flourishing by that same lifestyle.

For example, in the realm of sex and relationships, we have a ubiquitous hook-up culture, a porn-epidemic, high rates of abortion, high rates of divorce, a loneliness epidemic, increasing dependence on the welfare state and increased sexual violence. Even higher costs of housing and living are interconnected phenomena which are well traced in the works of women such as Louise Perry in *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, and Mary Harrington in *Feminism Against Progress*, both books which have been published within the last 3-4 years. But do these women still identify as feminists. Why?

Because both believe that the cause for women before 1968 was substantially different, with different values and different aims. That is, the Sexual Revolution did not represent a second wave of the first substance. It was qualitatively different, and this difference can be located, as both Perry and Harrington agree, in the single new technology: the Pill.

The effects of this development cannot be overstated. For what seemed a win for women was, in fact, a corrosion of biologically embedded-sexuality, that is, sex-realist feminism. With the most fundamental sexual difference 'solved', the concept of equality shifted to become conceived as an interchangeable term with 'sameness', and not only sameness, but being the same *as men*.

This new reproductive technology, which initially seemed to liberate women from the oppression of their bodies, in fact damaged how men began to view women's sexuality, including their sexual availability. The underlying misogyny in most clearly revealed in that fertility now became the woman's problem.

Suddenly, women had no excuse to say ‘no’ to sex, because the Pill supposedly put them in control of their fertility, and on the other hand, they had little reason to say ‘yes’ to the life that might still arise because she has been impregnated by a man who most likely has no intention and no interest in supporting her, or his progeny.

Perry also maps out how hook up culture rapidly gave rise to more transactional sex, and its hyper-commodification, most obviously via porn, also developed into the commercialization of reproduction itself through IVF and commercial surrogacy. The sexual revolution’s cardinal virtue of Radical Autonomy, which the Pill enabled, also laid the groundwork, as Perry and Harrington contend, for the new phenomena of gender dysphoria and transgenderism in the now hugely powerful realm of Identity Politics.

Reclaimed Feminism

So, what would a reclaimed feminism look like?

This is incredibly fertile ground (pardon the pun) for new discussions about how women ought understand themselves, and be understood.

It also presents an opportunity to seek out common ground between the left and right. For example, the idea of a Post-Pill feminism could be defended on the grounds it is more environmentally friendly, as the synthetic estrogen contained in the Pill has been shown to contaminate waterways, disrupting reproduction patterns in marine life, and damaging whole ecosystems.

Sexual Ethics

Yet we cannot discuss women’s fertility in a void, nor its suppression, without a discussion of the implications of removing such a cornerstone as contraception from our culture.

This requires asking essentially, how ought women and men relate to one another?

This can be categorized into how women relate to men in *creating* life, (sex) and how women relate to men in *sustaining* life, and by life I mean human life, the life of society, individual wellbeing or, more broadly, care-giving.

To the first: we need a new sexual ethics.

No small task. It’s time to go back to the Industrial Revolution.

Industrialization, that is, the move from cottage industries to factory production dislocated people from their homes and communities. And the destabilizing effects of Industrialization made women especially vulnerable in ways they had not been previously. They became more exposed to sexual predation in the faceless factory towns than within the older hamlet villages. As homes were no longer the places of industry, women had to leave them, including what children they might have there, as no formal childcare arrangements existed and what informal ones there were often involved neglect and abuse. This was the plight that prompted women such as Elizabeth Anne Seton, Susan B. Anthony, and Frances Willard to become avid proponents of establishing legal safeguards for women.

This is why these women advocated for such things as chastity and temperance as well as suffrage, not as vehicles of sexual repression, as second-wave feminists would have it, but to place stronger restraints on men from exploiting women. And just to place the original

foremothers of feminism in even starker contrast to their later counterparts, it was these women who declared that women deserve better than abortion.

These proto-feminists sought equality by banishing the sexual double standards between men and women by *raising* the standards of male, not lowering women's via a complete deregulation of sex, as the Pill allowed. In this sense, Second Wave feminists are diametrically opposed to their foremothers.

In fact the sexual restraint the latter demanded of men is what became seen as synonymous with sexual repression. But regulation, true regulation, involves a channeling, not stifling, of energies— a channeling towards something constructive. These women understood that for men, marriage and children, and assuming the responsibility for their protection and welfare still remained the most effective and ennobling way of doing this, an argument that Perry advocates in our own time. And only if these things are reinstated in our culture, will it be possible to move beyond an age of the Pill, and “rewild sex” in the words of Harrington.

Would Post-Pill Feminism replicate pre-Pill Feminism?

Alongside the current of today's still predominant Liberal Feminism exists a parallel anti-feminist current amongst some conservatives, which categorically dismisses the legacy of Feminism in one fowl swoop, and advocates exclusively for The Housewife as women's highest calling. Yet shedding light on the current confusion over this delicate debate about the home/work divide for women, and how it is to be navigated, is Harrington's article '*Trad wives aren't trad enough*'. In it, Harrington argues that new trends of returning to the role of housewife, though well-intended, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding because, she claims, this model is not even traditional, but an artifact of an earlier form of modernity.

She writes, “until very recently it was normal for all members of a household to contribute, according to capacity, to a common enterprise that might include craft, agriculture, animal husbandry and other productive activities as well as the care of the dependent young and very old.” She also mentions that the housewife model of post-war society drove women insane, as, I quote, “In parallel with the neutering of women's economic contribution, the post-industrial division of domestic labour also saw the rise of a whole branch of psychiatric medicine devoted to managing the pathological effects that division had on women's mental health.” And while she commends the efforts by ‘tradwives’ to valorise family and home life, she thinks they would do better to “think trader” and look back to this pre-Industrialisation model of the cottage industries where men and women worked in tandem on a common enterprise. It's time, apparently, to return to the model of the tradewife.

Not that Harrington is calling men and women to go till the fields, but rather, embrace this model in new forms. The rise of the digital economy, for example, which was accelerated by the pandemic, provides an opportunity for women to bring about a return to the household economy, and in so doing, marry enterprise with motherhood. Curiously, this is where I would like to introduce Chesterton into the discussion. For while I do believe, (as any of you who may have read my review in August's issue of the *Defendant* will know,) his views of women and their roles are somewhat reflective of his times, his ideas on Distributism, insofar as I understand them, seem highly compatible with Harrington's model.

Returning to the cottage industries of pre-Industrialization is not possible, nor even desirable. But a resuscitation of the idea of home economies is again made possible. Of

course this would come with its own set of challenges and problems, but it has enabled women to participate in society and the economy in new ways not open to them before, and there is a strong case to be made that these new developments are better able to facilitate women in their roles as wives and mothers as well as “trade-wives”.

The Care-giving Model

I have so far discussed, although not exhaustively, the ways in which men and women currently relate in terms of sex, and how feminism needs to return to its roots in order to improve women’s end of the deal in this matter.

Let’s now turn to how men and women relate in the second sense, in terms of sustaining life.

As the first unit of society, we can predict by the nuclear family what our future societies will look like, their economic health and national security, their arts and cultural output and homogeneity by the strength of the nuclear family today. Which is why in *Mathilde*, we dedicate a section to ‘Child-Raising.’

Yet today families are financially strained, priced out of the housing market, under-prioritized in government policy, not protected against technologies which means not protected against the porn epidemic, undermined by pop culture, medically neglected (especially in childbirth and maternal care), and after all that, women especially, are told that they suffer these things because having children is no more than a life choice, of equal value to any other.

Because of the emphasis on the strand of feminism that favours the economy, that is, the “career woman” the dubbing of motherhood, and even more of stay-at-home motherhood as a lifestyle choice, also means the sentimentalisation of the domestic sphere. So that when women do choose this, they are invariably disappointed, because their romantic views of the role are thrown out the window with sleep deprivation, hormonal havoc and social isolation.

Sociologist Anne Manne argues compellingly that what is needed is a paradigmatic shift from the ‘bread-winner’ society to that of a care-giver one, in which care of the vulnerable, including the young, elderly and the sick, which still predominantly falls to the lot of women, becomes visible, and redistributed more evenly between men and women.

Waged work is not the only work that counts, an axiom which second-wave feminists, who fought for economic independence, compromised. This ‘shadow economy’ and the private sphere need to be publicly recognized and valorized.

Feminism is a multi-voiced movement, but note that the branch of it that benefits the economy, the career woman, is the one that is promoted to the exclusion of all others. Second-wave feminism did not seem to notice this, although exceptions such as Germaine Greer is an interesting case in revising her views about the value and importance of motherhood and children.

Still, women are being demanded to enter what is still largely a man’s world of the market economy, and in addition to her participation in the economy, to still fulfill the roles of the shadow economy, or the “second-shift” that go largely ignored. The “bread-winner” paradigm, argues Manne, is what needs to be exchanged, for a care-giver model, rejecting the GDP as a marker of progress, and making visible the role of care giving and redistributing

it more equally between men and women. This too, would seem to be supported by the philosophy of Distributism, and support the cottage-industry model, although Anne Manne comes at this conclusion via a different route to Harrington and Perry.

Ways forward

Gertrud von le Fort said that it is “under her aspect of mother [that woman] unquestioningly becomes the one who protects and fosters cultural values.”

The women who will play a pivotal role as architects of a new culture of life will be those who espouse a maternal feminism, and establish motherhood, whether literally or symbolically, as not just a lifestyle choice, but as a life choice.

While there are various fronts to the cultural battles, women cannot be said to be dedicated to any one, but in fact, stand to fill the breach on any and all at once.

Reclaiming feminism means realizing that a feminine presence in public life is required in order to uphold the best legacies of the past that have in recent times been lost.

Again, as Gertrud von le Fort claims in *The Eternal Woman*: women are the ones to fill the breach as a last resort at the twilight of a civilization. To touch briefly again on the subject of transgenderism, it is interesting to note that second-wave feminist Camille Paglia has observed that all civilizational collapse is preceded by a trend towards sexlessness or androgyny. At the end of the Roman Empire, there was a hyper-focus on the body and the effeminatization of men as well as widespread sexual slavery and homosexuality. The Georgian era exhibited the dandy, as epitomized in Oscar Wilde. Post-War society saw the masculinisation of women with bob cuts and lowered waistlines that hid the feminine form in the flapper era. Now, in our own rainbow-saturated times, sex and gender is itself repudiated with the Gospel of Non-Binary-ism. We are not without precedent. If there is a silver lining to be had with the rise of Identity Politics, and especially of transgenderism, it is that it has become the crucible in which women have realized the true nature and significance of womanhood; some choosing to reject this fully in the name of a new transhumanism; or else rejecting Identity Politics, and second-wave feminism’s doctrine of radical bodily autonomy, now exposed as having transgenderism as its logical conclusion.

Conclusion: Making the World more homelike’

Traditionalists in the room, which probably means everyone, will appreciate me saying that a way forward now means going even further back in time than I have so far taken us.

Because although this talk has been about feminism, it has been more profoundly about the nature of culture, and that is a spiritual exercise, not just a temporal one. And that is because the purpose of culture is to point to what’s beyond it. Which is why it is no use talking about feminist foremothers if we pass over their decisively Christian faith. And it was this very faith which gave them sight of women’s dignity, as made in the *Imago Dei*, just as men were, and were thereby, emboldened to fight for their rights, and most especially when that was a right to assume responsibility, as the pro-life tenant of proto-feminism reveals.

This is what offers a more visceral understanding of what woman is, removed from the oppressive expedencies of modern technologies such as the pill.

It is fitting that in seeking to build a culture of life, women ought to make the world more homelike, as Frances Willard envisions.

Its architects are the women who affirm life against the current tide of subjugating weaker life to the will of the stronger. Its stakeholders are the vulnerable, that is, women who are physically weaker than men, children, who are physically weaker than women, and the elderly, which are probably weaker still than the children, at least in body if not in will. And then men themselves are ones to benefit long-term, from a reinstatement of their mothers', sisters', wives', lovers' sexual boundaries and respect for their boundless potential within this metaphysical fortress. The labourers of this new culture are, of course, the women and men who wish better for their daughters, and its inhabitants are those who accept the parameters of these walls if they are to reap the rewards of living in such a home: security, privacy, belonging, freedom from slavery to their own and men's own sexual appetites, and of course, the true love that comes with this freedom. All these things presuppose interdependence between men and women, which is the real solution to patriarchy, not the radical independence sought by Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, Germaine Greer *et al.*

I sound like I'm edging closer again to the argument that women's place is in the home. But this is inaccurate. It is more that women's purpose is in humanizing culture by making it more home-like. And to do that, women and men both, must discover woman's distinct and equally important contribution to society: as more than just an economic unit, as more than an invisible care-giver, and as more than someone the 'same' as men.

FURTHER READING

Erika Bachiochi, *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision*, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2021.

Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress*, UK: Forum Press, 2023.

Anne Manne, *Motherhood: How Should We Care For Our Children?*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005.

Louise Perry, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022.

Gertrud von le Fort, *The Eternal Woman: The Timeless Meaning of the Feminine*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010. (Original English edition 1954, Bruce Publishing Company.)

WOMEN OF THE NEW FEMINISM

UK

Mary Harrington, *Feminism Against Progress*

Louise Perry, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*

Nina Power, *What Do Men Want?*

USA

Mary Eberstadt, *Primal Screams; Adam and Eve After the Pill*

Lila Rose, *Life Coalition*

Fairer Disputations

Feminists for Life

Punam Kumar Gill, *Hush*.

Erika Bachiochi, *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision*

Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*

AUSTRALIA

Holly Lawford-Smith, *No Conflict They Said* (website)

Rachel Wong, *Women's Forum Australia*

Anne Manne, *Motherhood*

Mathilde Magazine

Veronika Winkels is a mother of four and the founding editor of *Mathilde*, a high-quality biannual women's magazine. Published in Melbourne, *Mathilde* draws on a team of talented women who seek to reclaim the cause of feminism so that it recognizes the central importance of family, rather than being in conflict with it, and explores the legacy of the Western heritage without being defined and constrained by the prevailing political narrative of aversion. Her previous experience was as a freelance journalist and op-ed writer, and her additional skills include nine years as retail associate for a specialist bookstore.

Lighting Candles in the Darkness: A New Liberal Arts School

Michael Mendieta and Marie Yeo

I have the great privilege and honour to speak to you about a wonderful project called Hartford College. You may have seen Hartford College featured in the newspapers in recent months: an article published in *The Australian*, and some media coverage on radio 2GB as well as on Sky News.

Interestingly, we were dubbed an ‘anti-woke’ school, but we never intentionally set out to be, or labelled, as such. What we wanted to focus on is just getting back to the basics: rhetoric and logic and grammar; studying the great texts of our western civilization; and to explore the pillars of our culture’s foundations and story and unfold that to young minds. By virtue of doing that, we’ve been labelled ‘anti-woke’.

However, we’re not interested in certain political Ideologies, but to strive for academic excellence and give the boys the best opportunity to study, as Matthew Arnold would say, the best that has been said, thought and written. That’s the context in which I’d like to unfold the story of Hartford College.

There are some key ingredients to acknowledge, including Campion College, the work of Karl Schmude and James Power, along with many other people, including Edmund O’Donovan. They pioneered this educational space by introducing the liberal arts at Campion. I was fortunate to be involved at an early stage both as a student and an employee at Campion.

Starting a School

Championing the liberal arts is very much an uphill battle in Australia. We’re some years behind the United States, but I think overall there’s a growing awareness of the liberal arts and the value of such an education.

Because I graduated from Campion, that helped me to understand, when I started working at Hartford, what should be involved in a liberal arts curriculum. Hartford College has been the beneficiary of many of Campion’s graduates, including Marie Yeo who’s here with us today. She’s had one of the fastest climbs up the corporate ladder that I’ve seen. She began as an assistant to myself, and now she’s wearing many hats including a teacher of Latin, a teacher of music, serving as the registrar of the College, the school secretary, and helping with recruiting.

When I started working at Hartford, we were building from scratch. I’ve had experience in larger organizations—the Archdiocese of Sydney, for example, or similar organizations—and there are little things you take for granted. For example, I’d have lunch on my desk, finish an apple, put it in the bin and then a few days later I’d see these little flies around my desk. *What’s going on?* We need to organize someone to pick up the bins; we need to organize cleaners. Another day I needed to print something, and thought, “I don’t have a printer. I

don't have paper." We had to organize who was going to go out and get paper. So all these little details we had to become aware of, as well as all the major things that needed to take place, like actually *building* a school. I'll delve into this process more, but that's the context in which Marie joined us. In fact, we've had at least four or five Campion College graduates involved at Hartford.

Another key ingredient was help from other private schools. They're the schools primarily in Sydney: Redfield and Tangara in the Hills area, and Wollemi and Montgrove in Western Sydney. There's also a new school which Frank Monagle, the Principal of Hartford College who is with us at this conference, is quite involved in establishing, Harkaway College in Melbourne. They were great supports to us, providing guidance around a lot of the documents and policies that we needed. Some of our curriculum programs we built with their help and expertise, and the staff were invaluable.

Our Deputy Principal Ian Mejia is from Wollemi, and Frank Monagle was the former Principal at Redfield and at Wollemi. So you could say God's Providence was evident here, as these leaders have been crucial in the establishment of Hartford College.

Lastly, Hartford wouldn't exist without two key parents: Tim Mitchell, who's with us at today's conference, is the chairman of the school board, and his wife Penny. Many people are inspired to do great things, but not many persevere and implement something. Establishing a new school is no small feat, but they are committed to the challenge. Their story is they have six kids, including two boys. The experience of their oldest son in another boys' school led them to recognise that things could be done differently; things could be done better. They were inspired to establish a new school in the area. They run a law firm in Maroubra in Sydney, where they've lived for many years. They met with many other parents, discussed the potential of such a school, and then put together a proposal to the Archbishop of Sydney, Archbishop Fisher. He endorsed the idea of the school, and provided his full backing, including financial support by a loan through the Catholic Development Fund. I think he also recognized the value and fruits of similar schools like the PARED schools in producing well-formed individuals, and particularly men who do keep the faith, often taking up a vocation. Many of the seminaries are filled with graduates from these schools. We're aspiring for similar goals in forming young men, academically and in character, in virtue and in their spiritual journey.

Hartford College is in the Sydney suburb of Daceyville, on a 4,000 square metre site of what was a Marist School from 1954 to 1992. After 1992, the site was taken over by the Catholic Education Office and used as a facility to train teachers in the area. The buildings at the time were filled with offices and cubicles. Once Hartford took over the lease, one of the first things required was to refurbish the whole space so that it was fit for purpose: a functioning school.

Straight away, we started working with an architect, appointed a builder, and commenced renovating the site. We created three classrooms in the first wing of the building. The initial plan was to launch Hartford in 2022, but given the challenges and the lockdowns of Covid, that plan was delayed. Unfortunately, many of the builders were also impacted, and this further delayed a lot of the refurbishment works.

When Hartford took over from the Catholic Education Office, the site was quite tired-looking and run down. But it's now vibrant, with suitable facilities. We've got a basketball court, and are fortunate to have quite a few sporting facilities nearby. There's a park right across the road where the boys go at lunchtime. We've got University of NSW sports facilities next door

and we've established a partnership with them. They're very happy for us to use their grounds: they've got a tennis court, a basketball court, soccer field, and a hockey field. Also nearby is a PCYC, and we've established a partnership with them.

One section of the building was a large cafeteria area for the teachers during their training, and so we had to take everything out and install our equipment: the lab facilities we're going to use for Science, and the equipment for all the other subjects. At this point, we're ready to showcase the school and launch a marketing campaign.

I'm often asked about the funding, and I mentioned receiving a loan from the Catholic Development Fund; but we gain revenue from school fees, and also receive state and federal funding per student. We established three different funds: a library fund, a scholarship fund, and a building fund. We set up the required mechanisms to start receiving donations online.

Marketing Hartford College

The marketing campaign: the primary tool was to have monthly parent information nights. This was a great way to sell and build the case for our liberal arts education school. I would often start by quoting Steve Jobs, who said technology alone is not enough; it is technology married with the liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields the results that make our hearts sing.

Many of the parents, naturally, are still coming to understand the value of a liberal arts education. What they want is a good education for their sons so they can get a good job. We try to meet them halfway and say, "Well, look, a liberal arts education provides students with the skills to think critically and analytically, to think differently, or to think in different ways to solve a problem, and these skills can be applied to any area, whether that's business or accounting." Much to the effect of what Steve Jobs is saying, and this is the line that we'd take on the parent information evenings.

We'd also touch on the actual Humanities and the texts we study at Hartford. I remember one conversation with a parent. I'd just finished reading *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy and I was just amazed how a single author could have such a deep understanding of humanity. A single author writing profoundly on the inner thoughts of a woman's mind and heart, about the different areas of society whether it be elite or on the farm, to quoting Plato and different philosophers or theology. It demonstrates the value of having an education in the humanities and understanding the human condition, understanding our weaknesses and our strengths, our virtues and our vices. This helps anyone in any situation, whether you're in the office, at home or with friends. It does help you understand where someone is coming from, and in itself there is a good in studying these texts. We have a session each day where the boys read for an hour, and they have the opportunity to read the great authors, the great texts, and delve into the humanities.

But to get more into the details of our marketing campaign. We did invest quite considerably in various forms of marketing. First, we did a survey with all the parents that had expressed interest and we tried to understand what was appealing about Hartford; what made them decide to support Hartford College?

There are a range of reasons but predominantly it was because of our mentoring program. I'll talk more about that and our liberal arts curriculum, but parents also like the intimate nature of the school, and, even more practically, the location. We put together a suite of marketing material, but before that, we did a lot of work in the back office in terms of setting up our

database, making sure our website was integrated with the database, so when people express their interest we can collect that relevant information. How they heard about us, what they found appealing. We started to build data so that we could target parents accordingly each year.

In our marketing, we wanted to emphasize a few key things: we were number one in mentoring, and that we offered a unique liberal arts education; and also to highlight our location in southeast Sydney. We did a huge letter box drop to 88,000 homes. We also did some advertising in local shopping centres, on various bus routes, and a huge billboard sign above Anzac Parade in Maroubra. The most effective tools were social media and word of mouth. The letter box drop yielded a lot of interest and fruit. Likewise, the billboard on Anzac Parade was worthwhile. As we're putting all the marketing material together, we didn't have students yet, so we had to call upon those who were thinking about coming to Hartford and ask them if they would help us put together a video that we then screened in local cinemas.

The Mentor Program

At Hartford College our parents are enthused by the mentor program. Each student receives a mentor and the mentor works closely with parents to develop their son's character and knowledge. We strive for academic excellence with our unique liberal arts curriculum. Our focus is on students learning from the greatest minds in literature, philosophy and science.

We also decided to create memes for our social regular social media posts, including one featuring G.K. Chesterton, "The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year; it is that we should have a new soul." These memes would gain a lot of traction on social media. People appreciated the meme, share it with their friends, and we'd have our Hartford College branding on the meme too.

Regarding some of the personnel involved: Tim Mitchell, who's chairman of the College board, is a graduate of Redfield and so had a good understanding of the student experience that was required at Hartford College. Penny Wright, Tim's wife, is also with us today. Their combined expertise was very much needed to provide guidance in the early stages. We're fortunate to have Rob Ash who was involved with parents; he's our treasurer, and a board member, and was instrumental in setting up Harkaway College in Melbourne. For staff, we again sought graduates from Campion College. James Landon is a key teacher in year 7, a graduate from Campion, who teaches French. Marie Yeo, another Campion graduate. Dr Emma Wood is a lecturer at Campion, teaching philosophy. She greatly assisted us in establishing the philosophy curriculum at Hartford and is currently teaching there.

Frank Monagle and Ian Mejia, who have come from Wollemi and Redfield Colleges. Jennifer Hoare has got extensive experience in teaching boys in particular; she was a teacher at Riverview College and also at Waverley College. As the years 5 and 6 teacher, her work is crucial because she's setting the tone and the foundation for the boys coming through who will then progress to years 7 and 8.

We've set up several committees: a curriculum committee; a finance committee; a marketing committee, and a risk and policy committee. I'll focus on the curriculum committee. From the University of Notre Dame Australia, we have Dr Craig Smith; from UTS, we have Emeritus Professor Tony Shannon—he also taught at Campion College and served as Registrar. From Campion College we have Dr Steven McNerney, Campion's senior lecturer in literature and also its Director of the Centre for Western Civilization. Eamonn Keane is a teacher at Redfield

College. Both Tim Mitchell and I are on the curriculum committee, and so we've been fortunate to have this expertise helping us to put together a suitable liberal arts curriculum in the western tradition.

Many people have commented on the challenges within the NSW syllabus in trying to put a liberal arts curriculum together. Certainly there are challenges, but after studying it in some detail, there are also a lot of opportunities. For example, we're required to study China, India, Greece, Rome, Egypt, the Middle East. But we're also free to choose which subjects we might pick, and also the order in which we study them. We study Egypt, and then Greece, and then Rome, and then Europe, and that way we can see the unfolding story of western civilization.

There's also the liberty to choose how much time you put in one area, so we still cover China or India but we don't invest as much time as we do studying Rome and Greece, given the type of curriculum that we're striving to teach. It's a little more difficult in years 5 and 6 because you have to focus on Australian history. History is the backbone of the curriculum that we've established, and really sets the direction and the tone. So what we've done in years 5 and 6 is focus on Australian history, but we try and study texts around that era that tie into our Liberal Arts focus.

In English, boys will study Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Treasure Island*, and *Pinocchio*. Great texts demonstrating the virtues, especially bravery, the importance of strong character, as well as the danger of vices. Philosophy over years 5 and 6, basically, will be an introduction to western civilization. We'll introduce many of the key things that they'll study over years 7 to 10, but at a suitable level for years 5 and 6.

We've invested in a religious program called **SALT (*Scripture and Liturgy Teaching*)**, which is **being** rolled out across an increasing number of schools. SALT provides props and little figures or figurines to help illustrate the stories of the Gospel. We've found SALT very beneficial.

Year 6 literature includes *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Hobbit*, and Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. We aim to get back to some of these great texts, teaching the boys what good literature is like, what good writing looks like. In Year 7, we start chronologically in history with Egypt, and then move to Greece and Rome. Here we have integration occurring across the other subjects; for example, in English, when the students are exploring Egypt, they'll also study Genesis and Exodus. When they're studying the history of Greece, in English studies they'll consider *Aesop's Fables*, Sophocles' plays, and the Trojan wars.

We've been fortunate in knowing that schools in the United States are quite advanced in their own liberal arts curricula and programs. There's a site called Memoria Press which has tools for students as well as for teachers to teach appropriate texts. They have ready-to-go programs suitable for that age, and so we've obtained all their books. A lot of the texts that we study at Hartford have matching texts from Memoria Press. In Religion, the studies coincide with what the students are reading in history and in literature. For example, ancient Egypt and ancient Rome studies link with salvation history. Ancient Egypt links with the Ten Commandments, and Ancient Rome links with the gospels. Likewise, with art: when the boys are studying ancient Egypt, they'll learn about pottery; Greece—they'll do sculptures; and while studying ancient Rome, they'll investigate mosaics. We're still evolving the curriculum, looking for new opportunities to find integration, but I think we've made a great start. We believe we are pioneering in this space in Australia, as we are the first liberal arts college for boys in high school.

In year 8, we unfold more of the medieval period. Students study some of the classic texts like Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare and we even put *Jane Eyre* in there to give the boys with a feminine perspective. In Philosophy, we'll look at the Renaissance. The NSW syllabus does cover the Renaissance but not the Reformation, and particularly the Counter-Reformation, so we've inserted additional hours in history, giving the boys an understanding of what happened there, and not just hear about it from one side of the narrative. In Religion, we'll cover the Council of Nicea, Thomas Aquinas, the sacraments, the Council of Trent. We want students to be well versed in the scriptures, especially the New Testament, and we'll build upon that over the years, including some good theology, and the relationship between faith and reason.

Then our curriculum moves into modernity. In History, it covers the Industrial Revolution, some of the progressive social movements, the imperialist movements, and the Great Depression. Accompanying texts include *Oliver Twist*; *The Everlasting Man* by G.K. Chesterton, and some more of Charles Dickens' books. Some of the key thinkers throughout the Enlightenment include Hume and others, but again we want to balance that perspective with some good thinkers that we might align with more readily, such as G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis. Science covers many of the big events such as the Big Bang, evolution, Charles Darwin, and so forth.

That highlights how far we've developed the curriculum to this point. We have years 5, 6, and 7. Next year we're working more with the NSW Education authorities. We have year 8 registered, and we're now working to secure registration for year 9.

Obviously some of those major events covered in the modern era are World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. Some of the texts they'll study are George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. It's an ambitious curriculum but we'll try to give the boys an understanding of the atrocities that occurred around World War Two, particularly with Marxism.

We've assembled the curriculum, but it's still evolving. We're still needing to invest deeply in the preparation of the classrooms. We have the years 5, 6, and 7 classrooms, and we're looking ahead to build three more. We're now refurbishing Building B; it was previously a lot of cubicle spaces, but those have all been refurbished. There'll be a science lab, a general learning room which could be used for art or any other subject, and then a technical room for wood technology. We've been most fortunate to receive a generous donation of \$500,000 to sponsor one of these rooms. If anyone is willing or open to supporting us financially, to sponsor one of these rooms, please come forward. A project like Hartford College is very difficult to sustain and get off the ground without generous community support. Student recruitment, as everyone would understand, is challenging because people are still coming to grips with the liberal arts, so any additional financial support with would be of great assistance.

In the long term, we're also going to build at the front of the school: adding a library, more classrooms, and a chapel. We need classrooms for years 5 to 12, and a beautiful chapel as well; it will feature a loft area upstairs.

I mentioned earlier that what was quite attractive to parents is our mentoring program. Every student receives a mentor, who meets with the boys fortnightly and talk about how they're going in the school, as well as about things at home, such as how they're helping out, doing the chores, whether there is order at home, in terms of routines, and how they are going with

their homework? All those questions are focused on building the character of the student. Also, the mentors meet with the parents every term so the parents and the teacher work together to set goals for the student: how the individual boy needs to develop in this area or that, or be helped to grow in a particular virtue, in his character. This has been popular with parents; it's one of the key reasons why they are coming to Hartford.

I'll now ask Marie Yeo to come forward and speak from the teacher's perspective. She's well-positioned to talk about teaching first-hand, and report on the growth of the students. I've been delighted to see the boys sitting out in the sun with their books during that hour of reading and appreciating that time. Anecdotally, I've come to appreciate that, after Philosophy studies, they will debate a question like - do we have free will? And they'll continue that conversation outside the class. That was my experience here at Campion College, and I'm glad that the boys at Hartford are actually engaging in that at Hartford.

Marie Yeo's Report

I am very privileged to work with such a project. I'm a Campion graduate, from 10 years ago. I was home schooled in the classical method. In the past decade, I have researched classical education and liberal arts, with a growing interest in the need for this in our day and age. I got involved together with Michael at Hartford. I'm now teaching Latin and music, which is such a joy.

I will give you an example of what I am doing in the subjects I'm teaching. You'll see how we try to incorporate a classical education as much as we can. Keep in mind we're taking 'baby steps', so it's constantly forming and developing. Honouring historical continuity in the curriculum, we try and incorporate in pedagogical areas the *trivium* as much as possible. We bring back traditional methods: a lot of memorization, a lot of exposure to 'the Greats'. We get the boys to stand up, talk about the texts, read the texts out loud, and try writing.

We try to eliminate technology as much as possible. We've noticed that we now have a generation of boys who don't know how to write and read anymore, and they don't even know how to watch a video together because they're so used to having their own personal screen. We strip that away as much as we can, bringing them back to the basics and seeing if we can nurture skills and knowledge from the ground up.

I love Latin and music and I'm fortunate to teach both subjects. I've been a music teacher for more than 15 years. One of the things I've seen with students who've gone through music programs in normal schools—and I think it's a bit of an insight into how the whole curriculum works—is that the units are often quite abstract from each other, and they don't speak to each other. There is a lack of integration, a lack of formation in the subjects. What I've tried to do - and I have the freedom to do this in Hartford - is to build on the basics, and then as each unit progresses through the year, build on top of that unit, with constant revision of the basics, to try to align the subject historically as well. We can then show the students how music theory developed over time, like literature and philosophy. This allows us to continue an integrated understanding of Western Civilization. For example, we start with Year 7 boys. who are studying ancient Greek and Roman text and ideas, like those of Pythagoras. He's most often known in mathematical circles, but he actually did record a lot of sound waves and invented the first monochord instrument—the precursor to the violin, the harp and the

guitar. We explain how he recorded sound waves and tested how the sound waves worked with each other by pulling a piece of string across a movable bridge. The boys can then start to understand the basics of music theory, instrumentation, and musical language as they developed through time. This, allied to exposure to how composition developed through time, gives a holistic unpacking of music. I think this is fundamental.

One of the beauties of music as well of the Arts is that it's quite a kinesthetic subject. I think it helps the boys, born in a technological age where they just want to touch everything, to be able to say, "Look what you're learning in theory, you can apply little by little on things that you can play." Forming shapes through your hands, and seeing it in theory and in hearing. For example, knowing that your fingers can form a particular shape on the piano, and then develop skills as you go along. Sometimes the boys, especially coming from previous schools, say "Oh, it's so boring! Why are we doing theory again? Why can't we just get on the piano and twinkle away without any supervision?"

I think one of the beauties as a teacher, believing in this program and then staying true to it, is seeing the results. We have a very musically talented boy in class, and we started the first two terms on Pythagoras and then moved on to modes and scales. In the normal context of school music, scales means boring exercises, but in our curriculum we explain that scales are a way of measuring sound, and sound waves, and seeing how they work with each other. From that we can build melodies, and then see how the notes work in relation with each other. This boy, by Term 3, created a beautiful musical composition where he broke the boundaries of my criterion. I said to provide 8 bars and he gave me 15 bars, creating this amazing composition that blew me, and other teachers, away.

Latin is a fundamental subject in a classical curriculum. We studied Latin at Campion, and I do believe every classical school should have Latin. We are studying Western Civilization, and in that context, the study of Latin allows us to delve into the etymology of a word and then see how the word develops. That provides the roots of the spoken word and the written word. It develops articulation and nuance and that sort of thing. Latin allows us to go back to the grammatical basics which most schools don't do very much these days. We don't have time to study grammar as a separate subject, but we can really focus on grammar in Latin, looking at the importance of syntax, and how a subject speaks to an object and the verb.

One of the things that we value at Hartford is to create teacher formation. As great as a curriculum can be, the students won't learn unless you have a teacher who believes in the curriculum and who tries to embody it as much as possible. When you start from there, work with the parents and work in conjunction with the students, then the fruits come from the students quite naturally. We see the students grow in character formation quite naturally in various ways. We plan to maintain small class sizes to keep that interaction very personal between the teacher and the student. We have one boy who, when he first came to school, was an avid reader, keen painter, and loves music—his father's a musician—but every time it came to sports you'd hear his little voice piping in the corner, saying "I don't believe in sports." But when we went to a father and son camp recently, with all these extracurricular activities, lots of very active outdoor things, he was acing it all and beating his classmates in some of them. You'd see him stand taller, get proud, own a little bit more of what he's doing, and understand that sport is not just something you do only if you were skilled, but is a tool by which you can grow. It can support your academic learning.

Just to showcase a little bit more of the student life. We've got a Toastmasters program with James Landon. He runs public speaking once a week after school and debating as well, which we've labelled the Thomas More Debating Club. We also have a chess club, and we're forming a choir.

We know that we're a smaller school and so we're not going to have a leading rugby team in the area, but we try to expose the boys to various sports. We're fortunate because we have many facilities nearby. They boys play cricket, basketball, tennis and go swimming. At the PCYC, they're currently doing fitness and boxing.

I haven't said too much about the spiritual life but we have a chaplain, Father Paul Grant, who is also the chaplain at Warrane College. He comes to Hartford three times a week. On Mondays he does general catechesis with the boys. Each Wednesday we have Mass, and on Fridays he'll spend time mentoring individuals.

Please tell your friends about Hartford. There's a still a lot of work to do but we're making good ground.

Michael Mendieta is a graduate of Campion College Australia. He served initially as the College's Director of Development and Strategy and went on to work in various roles in development and fund-raising for the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta and the Archdiocese of Sydney. He was the inaugural Chief Executive Officer of Hartford College (in 2022-24). In 2024 he became Chief Advancement Officer for the PARED Foundation in Sydney, which supports a range of independent Catholic schools.

Marie Yeo, also a Campion graduate, serves a combined teaching and administrative role at Hartford College – Liberal Arts Coordinator in Latin and Music as well as Office Manager. She has more than 10 years' experience in musicianship, performance education and ensemble leadership, as well as in pedagogical development.

Would Chesterton have created Campion College?

Karl Schmude

Would Chesterton have created Campion College – as a counter-cultural institution? In a sense – as I hope to explain - he did.

The prompt for this paper came from a book of essays called *If It Had Happened Otherwise* (1931). The work was an exercise in alternate history, in which various authors speculated about the different course of history if events had happened differently. Chesterton himself contributed one of the essays - on “If Don John of Austria had married Mary Queen of Scots”. If the Catholic knight who defeated the Turks at Lepanto had married the English Queen who tried to restore Catholicism to England, Chesterton pondered, what would have been the wider ramifications of the marriage?

While such historical fantasies are endless and can become frivolous, they set me thinking that an essay in historical conjecture could be an occasion for counter-cultural thinking. It is premised on the idea that the future is not predestined; that it can turn out differently, given a chance event or an unexpected development.

This can be a salutary challenge to the plea we often hear that we should think or do something so as to ensure we are on “the right side of history” – as if the future is set on a predetermined path.

Chesterton’s influence on the creation of Campion College became clearer to me when I began thinking – “would he have created this college?” What was it about Chesterton that might have inspired such a venture, and how might this reveal the ways in which his influence continued so many years after his death?

The precise concept of a liberal arts college in Australia came to my mind from the English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, but Chesterton was an underlying source of inspiration - and a reinforcing influence. During my BA degree at Sydney University in the 1960s, my father, Alf Schmude, had introduced me to Chesterton. He first read Chesterton’s essays as a high school student in the 1920s at Assumption College in Kilmore, Victoria. In the early 1930s he joined the Catholic lay education group, the Campion Society, after it spread from its foundation in Melbourne to the NSW city of Albury where my father lived. As part of the reading of Campion members, he became immersed in Chesterton’s more directly philosophical and theological works, such as *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*.

Like my father, I was quickly captivated by Chesterton’s championing of Christian truth, which was intellectually compelling and imaginatively exciting. As the idea of Campion College germinated, Chesterton served a symbolic as well as an intellectual role. In his writings, he was a one-man liberal arts program. In his person, he was a practising journalist of profound learning - the embodiment of a liberal arts graduate influencing the broader culture through his writings and speeches.

Impact of Christopher Dawson's educational ideas

Describing the pivotal ideas of Christopher Dawson may help to set the context of Chesterton's inspirational impact on the development of Campion. In 1968, soon after I'd finished my Bachelor of Arts degree, I read Dawson's book, *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961), in which he traced the history of the liberal arts as the core of Western education and the channel of Western civilisation. He began with the Greek intellectual and literary tradition – of Plato and Aristotle and Homer, and how the heritage of intellectual and social order in the Graeco-Roman tradition blended with the Jewish and Christian traditions of divine revelation, as unfolded in the Old and New Testaments and subsequently by the Church Fathers (such as St Basil and St Augustine), to produce a rich heritage of learning.

Dawson then focused on the emergence of universities in the Middle Ages - how they were a new institution in Western culture, an educational institution, designed to deepen intellectually, and to spread culturally, the understanding of the Christian faith among its leaders and the people at large. Finally, Dawson explored the educational developments of later centuries, shaped as they were by science and technology, the rise of the nation-state, and the universal spread of education.

I found *The Crisis of Western Education* an extraordinarily impressive work – even though it only comprised 200 pages. Dawson made clear to me the profound connection between education and culture, and how the survival of any culture, including Western culture, was finally dependent on its educational tradition. As Dawson wrote:

“A common educational tradition creates a common world of thought with common moral and intellectual values and a common inheritance of knowledge, and these are the conditions which make a culture conscious of its identity and give it a common memory and a common past.

“Consequently any break in the continuity of the educational tradition involves a corresponding break in the continuity of the culture. If the break were a complete one, it would be far more revolutionary than any political or economic change, since it would mean the death of the civilization. . . .”

Dawson believed that such an educational rupture had taken place in the West. A vacuum had arisen in universities and schools from the disappearance of 'the classics', the study of Graeco-Roman language and culture, signified in the study of Latin, which had vitalised and shaped the Western tradition.

What had replaced this heritage? What was filling the vacuum? Dawson thought there was a twofold change – one related to preparation for a career, the other to the rise of specialist studies, especially relating to science and technology. So, in **teaching**, there was a **utilitarian** emphasis on **vocational training**, and in **research** as well as in **teaching**, an ever-growing **subject specialisation**. These two influences were causing the collapse of a common culture of learning in the West.

To note one crucial effect of what Dawson was arguing – and how it chimed in with Chesterton – and that was that the loss of unity in learning was causing a wider fragmentation of culture. It was exposing the great mass of people to intellectual confusion, moral uncertainty and, finally, spiritual emptiness.

Dawson thought that science and technology would not – and could not - supply a new source of unity, for they are in themselves morally neutral. They do not provide any guiding spiritual principle. “For modern society,” he argued, “like all societies, needs some higher spiritual principle of co-ordination to overcome the conflicts between power and morality, between reason and appetite, between technology and humanity, and between self-interest and the common good.” (p.159)

Study of Christian culture

If science and technology could not provide any higher principle of inspiration and cultural understanding, what could? Dawson thought it should be the study of Christian culture – of the Christian faith expressed and incarnated in the history of the Christian people. This would focus on the higher levels of intellectual and artistic creativity - in art and architecture, literature and music. It would offer such examples as Chartres Cathedral, Dante’s poetry, Shakespeare’s plays, a Beethoven Symphony and a Johann Sebastian Bach Mass. But it would reveal Christian culture at the popular level - in the ordinary life of the people. It is shown in family memories and celebrations, social customs and political conventions, as well as the manifestations of popular religious culture - in feasts and fasts, retreats and pilgrimages.

Secularisation and secularism

In Dawson’s mind, Western culture was now not only *secularised in social terms* - as a daily experience for people – but was moving *to justify and cement this condition in political and legal terms with the ideology of secularism*. This meant that religious faith was now privatised. It was ceasing to be integrated with the public life of the culture. In these conditions, he believed, only by a steeping in Christian culture, in the spiritual springs of cultural expression throughout history, would Christians be able to maintain a distinctive sense of Christian identity at the popular level.

I’ve dwelt at some length on Dawson’s arguments as they provide a context for the creation of Campion College, explaining the historical and intellectual perspective that lay behind its development. How do they relate to Chesterton? I think Chesterton illustrated in his life, as well as in his writings, the living importance of Dawson’s scholarly insights.

What a great contrast there was between the two writers - even if in a complementary way! Chesterton, for his part, was a huge and vibrant presence, physically and intellectually; prominent in public life to the point of being a renowned ‘character’; appearing as no more than what he modestly claimed, a practising journalist writing endless articles to impossible deadlines; and yet all the time a creative artist, producing works of fiction and non-fiction that illuminated the truths and re-imagined the realities of life, both human and divine.

He was, in fact, an artist in words who could depict reality in all its richness and evoke a vision of transcendental truth and meaning. He provided new perceptions, new imaginings of reality – not in the sense of being an escape into fantasy, but rather as a recovery of vision which had become dulled by familiarity and fatigue.

By comparison, Dawson was a reserved historian, leading the secluded life of a painstaking scholar, and publishing books and articles of careful synthesis. He produced drawings of the past – so that for the reader, as the English writer Robert Speaight noted, “the centuries lie before like a map.” (*Property Basket: Recollection of a Divided Life*, 1970) Dawson had absorbed St John Henry Newman’s insight into the supreme significance of the Incarnation. “History,” Newman believed, “seemed to have changed its direction with the coming of

Christ.” It was no longer running in a conventional line, backwards or forwards. It was now, Newman said, “continually verging on eternity”. This fundamental realisation shaped Dawson’s understanding of the past – reaching back to the prehistory of Europe, where he explored the origins of culture in his first book, *The Age of the Gods* (1928), and extending to the pervasive impact of the advent of Christ, which Dawson traced through the centuries in various books, covering both East and West, as he shed light on the cultural consequences of this momentous event.

Western educational tradition in history

When it came to the creation of Campion College, Dawson’s historical unfolding of the Western educational tradition was hugely persuasive, and his answer to what threatened it – an integrated study of Christian culture – was immensely appealing. His writings enlightened my mind. But Chesterton enlivened my imagination, as his sparkling writings brought this tradition to life. I came to see that it was not just an historical process or a convergence of abstract ideas, but a vital tradition that found expression in Chesterton’s writings. Each author was a vital intellectual inspiration – Dawson as the first architect of the Campion program, and Chesterton as the artist who infused it with life and imaginative promise.

Chesterton was a living model of the Christian culture Dawson recommended studying. He illustrated in a personally striking way what Dawson presented in a systematic way, historically and culturally.

Who could resist Chesterton’s provocative picture of sanity in the face of the mounting madness of his age – and of ours – when he wrote this paragraph as the conclusion of his 1905 book, *Heretics* (which proved to be the prelude to his great affirmation of the Christian faith in 1908, *Orthodoxy?*):

“Truths turn into dogmas the instant that they are disputed. . . . And the scepticism of our time does not really destroy the beliefs, rather it creates them; gives them their limits and their plain and defiant shape. . . . We who are Christians never knew the great philosophic common sense which inheres in that mystery until the anti-Christian writers pointed it out to us. The great march of mental destruction will go on. Everything will be denied. Everything will become a creed. It is a reasonable position to deny the stones in the street; it will be a religious dogma to assert them. . . . Fires will be kindled to testify that two and two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer. We shall be left defending, not only the incredible virtues and sanities of human life, but something more incredible still, this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face. . . . We shall be of those who have seen and yet have believed.”

Upside down – right way up

Or, to give another example of Chesterton’s spiritual vision, and his capacity for bringing a tradition to life, here is what he wrote about St Peter in his 1929 book of short stories, *The Poet and the Lunatics*:

“You remember that [St Peter] was crucified upside down [as he thought he was unworthy to be crucified in the same way as his Saviour]. I’ve often fancied his humility was rewarded by seeing in death the beautiful vision of his boyhood. He also saw the landscape as it really is: with the stars like flowers, and the clouds like hills, and all men hanging on the mercy of God”

So Chesterton's upside-down vision proved to be the right way up when it came to viewing God's creation.

A final example of Chesterton's inspirational quality can be found in the final paragraph of the chapter, "The Paradoxes of Christianity", in *Orthodoxy* (1908). Here he captures the vibrant nature of orthodoxy as a faith fighting continuously for truth in the face of distorting enthusiasms:

"This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad.

"It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and to sway that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic. . . .

"The orthodox Church never took the tame course or accepted the conventions; the orthodox Church was never respectable. It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It would have been easy, in the Calvinistic seventeenth century, to fall into the bottomless pit of predestination. . . .

"It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own. . . . To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom—that would indeed have been simple. . . . But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect."

I recall how scintillating I, as a teenage university student, found these writings in the 1960s, caught up as I was in the turbulence of that decade of cultural revolution in the West.

Chesterton inspired Dawson

Dawson himself was personally inspired by Chesterton's visionary genius. It was a Chesterton poem that awakened Dawson's interest in the so-called Dark Ages following the Fall of Rome and led him to write one of his most important books, *The Making of Europe*. When Dawson published this work in 1932, in the early years of his career, he sent a copy to Chesterton. In a covering letter, he mentioned that, as an undergraduate, it was his reading of Chesterton's poem, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, which [he said] "first brought the breath of life to this period for me". (*Chesterton Review*, May 1983) The so-called Dark Ages of European history, lasting from the Fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century to the Renaissance in the 15th century, had long been denigrated by the dominant Whig historians who interpreted history in terms of an inevitable progress towards liberty and enlightenment. They were dismissive of the preceding period, seeing it, in the words of Voltaire, as "a thousand years of stupidity and barbarism".¹ But Dawson peered more deeply into the Dark Ages. He shone new light on those centuries, seeing them as a time of silent and profound cultural growth, which

¹ Cited in Dawson, C. *The Formation of Christendom*. Sheed and Ward, New York, 1967, p.219

contained the seeds of so many later developments - in philosophy and science, in literature and art and architecture, and in social institutions.

Chesterton and Sir Robert Menzies

While the focus of this paper is on Chesterton and the creation of Campion College, it's worth noting that he had an earlier impact on Australian higher education— in a way that was a certain foreshadowing of the educational ideals of Campion. In September 2023, I was invited to take part in a podcast interview on Chesterton with Georgina Downer, Director of the Robert Menzies Institute at the University of Melbourne. It turned out that Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, was a devoted admirer of Chesterton, and was strongly influenced by Chesterton's views of education. The podcast of the interview is part of a regular Menzies Institute series called 'Afternoon Light', and is available at – <https://www.robertmenziesinstitute.org.au/afternoon-light-podcast/karl-schmude>

I found out from Zac Gorman, the Academic Coordinator at the Menzies Institute, that Menzies' private library – now held at the Institute - contained various Chesterton books. Most were kept in his bedroom for easy access and are annotated or underlined as a sign of close reading. When Menzies quoted Chesterton in his speeches, it made clear the deep harmony of thought which they shared. In the podcast interview, I explored the intellectual affinities between them. When reading two of Menzies' speeches, one in 1939 and the other in 1942, I was struck by the unusual blend of perspectives which resonated with Chesterton's ideas or reflected his influence.

Chesterton's rapport with ordinary people readily connected with Menzies' sense of their importance – and how aware he was that leaders often overlook them. Chesterton's oft-quoted 1907 poem, "The Secret People", found a ready echo, I think, in Menzies' celebrated 1942 speech, "The Forgotten People". The opening lines of the Chesterton poem, repeated with slight variation in its closing lines, were:

"Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget.

For we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet."

In 1942, Menzies highlighted the middle class in Australian society as "the forgotten people". They represent, he said, "the backbone of this country. . . They are for the most part unorganized and unselfconscious. They are envied by those whose social benefits are largely obtained by taxing them. They are taken for granted by each political party in turn. They are not rich enough to have individual power, nor are they sufficiently organized for what today we call 'pressure politics'." Menzies concluded his speech: "The real life of this nation . . . is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised."

Chesterton's "secret people" of England had become Menzies "forgotten people" of Australia.

Lifters, not leaners

Menzies also recognised a countervailing point, and that was *the aspirational quality of the middle class* – the striving to do better - what Menzies called the "noble instinct" of giving one's family members "a chance in life – to make them not leaners but lifters."

The pathway to such opportunity, he believed, was education, and in particular the university. A notable achievement of his many years in public office was his implementation

of the 1957 Murray Report, which brought about major developments in the university system in Australia, including new institutions (such as Monash and La Trobe Universities) and the creation of the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme (which up to the 1970s extended opportunities to a third of Australia's graduates).

As I researched Menzies' public statements, I found that a speech he gave in 1939 emphasised the special importance of universities for Australia's future. The speech was called "The Place of a University in the Modern Community." It was on the eve of World War II - and at the very outset of his prime ministership – so it may be surprising that Menzies did not stress the utilitarian benefits of a university education.

We are now more used to hearing about the economic importance of universities – that their role is to supply skilled workers to underpin Australia's prosperity - and that universities are a major export earner as a result of international students. Or we would hear emphasised the structural conditions of institutional size and efficiency - the bigger, the better - that are thought to make for a successful university. By contrast, Menzies focused on higher purposes. He outlined what he saw as the defining ideals of a true university.

He described the institution in exalted terms - as "a home for pure culture and learning." Learning, even "so-called useless scholarship", is "one of those civilized and civilizing things which the world needs as never before. . . [pointing] the moral that the mere mechanics of life can never be the sole vocation of the human spirit."

On other occasions, as the Melbourne scholar Bob Bessant amply documented in a 2006 article, Menzies valued the classical tradition of education and the need for scientific and technical studies to be balanced by the liberal arts. "A scientist," Menzies told the Australian College of Education in 1961, "who was unaware of literature and history or the principles of social responsibility would be dangerous."

In his 1939 speech, Menzies recognised the role of a modern university in professional training and job preparation, but even there he gave weight to its importance in training future leaders.

No doubt it would also be a centre for the pursuit of research, but rather than focusing on areas or outcomes, Menzies highlighted the human qualities required – "infinite patience, precise observation, an objective mind, and unclouded honesty" – and how these were linked with another fundamental ideal, the building of character.

Finally, he stressed that, in the continuing search for truth, the university needed to safeguard academic freedom. No university could expect to reach standards of excellence without academic freedom.

Fostering the educated mind

These lofty ideals found further expression three years later in "The Forgotten People", as when he asked:

"Are the universities mere technical schools, or have they as one of their functions the preservation of pure learning, bringing in its train not merely riches for the imagination but a comparative sense for the mind, and leading to what we need so badly - the recognition of values which are other than pecuniary?"

Menzies teased out the distinctive intellectual value of “the educated mind”:

“[It] should be more apt to be detached and balanced; to see both sides of a question; to understand the opponent. It should be more apt to take the long view, which is so commonly right, and disregard the short view, which is so commonly wrong.”

Of special interest is the extent to which, in his earlier speech in 1939, Menzies’ views on education echoed Chesterton’s. Drawing on a Chesterton essay on education, Menzies quoted one passage at length. It was not from a well-known Chesterton book - such as *Orthodoxy* (1908) or *The Everlasting Man* (1925) – still less from a book of Chesterton quotations. It came from an essay, “On Business Education”, which Menzies had found in one of Chesterton’s last books of collected essays, *All is Grist* (1931).

Though he was discussing a particular kind of education – in the area of business - Chesterton had offered a broad statement of principles. It clearly appealed to Menzies, and may be seen as disquietingly relevant to our own time, almost a century later:

“The whole point of education is that it should give a man abstract and eternal standards, by which he can judge material and fugitive conditions. If the citizen is to be a reformer, he must start with some ideal which he does not obtain merely by gazing reverently at the unreformed institutions. . . . That is what is the matter with Business Education; that it narrows the mind; whereas the whole object of education is to broaden the mind; and especially to broaden it so as to enable it to criticize and condemn such narrowness.”

The cultivation of an “educated mind” might imply a certain tension, even a contradiction, in Menzies’ outlook – and in Chesterton’s - that they valued education for its lifting up of citizens, and therefore may have seemed to favour an elite over ordinary people.

But the aspirations of Menzies in his speeches, and of Chesterton in his writings, are of a different kind of elite from our present-day experience. The elites of our time – in politics, business, education, and the media - tend to be divorced from their roots and disdainful of those less educated, or apparently less ‘virtuous’. But the elites Menzies had in mind were identified by Chesterton in another essay where he contrasted Poets and Prigs.

Poets are “those who rise above the people by understanding them,” Chesterton wrote, whereas Prigs “rise above the people by refusing to understand them: by saying that all their dim, strange preferences are prejudices and superstitions.” The Poets uplift while the Prigs diminish. “The Prigs make the people feel stupid,” while “the Poets make the people feel wiser than they could have imagined that they were.” But this can have strange consequences:

“The Poets who embrace and admire the people are often pelted with stones and crucified. The Prigs who despise the people are often loaded with lands and crowned.” And he added a sharp reference to the England of his day: “In the House of Commons, for instance, there are quite a number of prigs, but comparatively few poets. There are no People there at all.” (“The Three Kinds of Men”, *Alarms and Discursions*, 1910).

I have found it hard at times to resist the fantasy that Chesterton is alive and well - and writing as a contrarian commentator in present-day Australia!

Having looked at the seminal influence of Chesterton on the creation of Campion College, and recalling his impact on Australian universities through the influence of his educational thought

on Robert Menzies (an impact that, in some ways, foreshadowed the development of Campion as a distinctive liberal arts college), I'll conclude in two ways – firstly, by noting why Chesterton serves as a kind of ideal graduate of Campion College, and secondly, in a final lurch into historical speculation, how he might have organised the teaching of the liberal arts program at Campion, and who he might have appointed as lecturers.

Chesterton - a model for a Campion graduate

For several reasons, Chesterton seems to me to be a model of the kind of graduate that Campion aspires to produce.

Firstly, he had a mind of tremendous depth and delicacy, a profound capacity for reason and discrimination – for intellectual judgment. Secondly, he commanded a prodigious knowledge across the Liberal Arts – the key disciplines which still shape and inspire the mind of an educated person – history, philosophy, literature, language, theology, and science. These are the foundational subjects of a liberal arts program, and they form the core curriculum at Campion. Thirdly, Chesterton was a superb communicator - both in writing and as a speaker and broadcaster. He gave innumerable public lectures, engaged in endless debates, and in the later years of his life, made many radio broadcasts. Fourthly, Chesterton was a man of serious faith and spiritual devotion and moral character.

Who might Chesterton have appointed to the teaching faculty of Campion College? Some years ago, one of our sister Catholic liberal arts college in America, Thomas Aquinas College in California, ran an enterprising newspaper ad. It highlighted the question – “Who teaches at Thomas Aquinas College?” - and underneath it featured pictures of various professors who “teach” at the College – such as Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Virgil, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare! I imagine that Chesterton have appointed to the Campion faculty such scholars as Christopher Dawson to teach History. He might have asked one of his friends, the Classics scholar, Professor J.S. Phillimore, to lecture in Latin and Greek literature; and another friend, the Dominican priest, Fr Vincent McNabb, to teach Theology. (McNabb was a great preacher who devoted his life to loving the poor. I've always found it a touching gesture that, at Chesterton's death, he picked up Chesterton's pen that was on his bedside table - and kissed it.)

And yet, Chesterton could have avoided making any appointment – and simply have done all the lecturing and tutoring himself! As he wrote in every genre, he could simply have set all his own books in each of the four core subjects at the College -

In **History**, such works as *The Everlasting Man* and *A Short History of England*;

In **Literature**, the *Collected Poems*, and various novels and plays and books of literary criticism (such as on Browning and Dickens), as well as the Father Brown stories;

In **Philosophy**, *St Thomas Aquinas* and *What's Wrong with the World*;

In **Theology**, *Orthodoxy*, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, and books of Christian apologetics, such as his collections of essays in *The Thing* and *The Well and the Shallows*.

I think it would be easy to think to a narrower educational program!

The challenge would be trying to distinguish Chesterton's books so that particular titles could be assigned as texts for particular subjects. Nevertheless, immersing oneself in a Chesterton curriculum would provide a liberal education of unrivalled value.

If Chesterton alone were studied, then he could have reasonably renamed the institution as Chesterton College - just as, when he took over in the mid-1920s the Distributist journal, *The Eye-Witness*, that Belloc and his late brother, Cecil Chesterton, had founded, he gave it the name (reluctantly) *G.K.'s Weekly*.

Finally, I would like to offer a striking illustration of Chesterton's qualities of spiritual insight and intellectual power which Campion students have an opportunity to share. They are displayed in a poem that forms part of a collection called *The Queen of Seven Swords* – devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus - Our Lady, the Mother of God.

The poem is called "A Little Litany," and it depicts Mary and the Child. Jesus is crawling up from his mother's lap and, as he reaches her face, he looks into her eyes. Because Mary is untainted – as expressed in the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the one human being who was worthy to give birth to Christ - because of her purity of heart and soul - only Mary's eyes could accept the direct gaze of God. And Chesterton writes:

'[Jesus] found his mirror there; the only glass
That would not break with that unbearable light
Till in a corner of the high dark house
God looked on God, as ghosts meet in the night.'¹

What an extraordinary image this is! The child Jesus peers into his mother's eye and finds a mirror of himself. 'God looked on God' through the incarnational purity of his mother. As the notable Chesterton scholar, Dale Ahlquist, has asked: can we find in all of literature a more profound and provocative image than God looking at God in the reflection of his mother's eye?

The English novelist Anthony Burgess, author of the novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), said of Chesterton that he 'knew what it was like to live on the level of eternity.'¹

For many of us, I expect, reading Chesterton has provided glimpses of a life beyond time and space - enduring beyond time, and not confined to space. He stands, in fact, as an exemplar of the Campion College motto – "Educating for Eternity".

And so, to reflect on the question posed in this paper, "Would Chesterton have created Campion College?", it is good to be able to answer – his inspiration was there from the beginning in the 20th century. He did not need to wait until the 21st century!

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