

379
N81
NO. 5198

G. K. CHESTERTON: TWENTIETH CENTURY CATHOLIC REFORMER

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Amanda Hasbrouck Blackman, B. A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1976

77A.

Blackman, Amanda Hasbrouck, G. K. Chesterton: Twentieth Century Catholic Reformer. Master of Arts (History), August, 1976, 116 pp., bibliography, 102 titles.

This thesis attempts to discover the basis of Chesterton's theories and the link between his religion and politics. The main sources for this paper are the religious and political non-fiction works by Chesterton and his collaborators. The first chapter brings G. K. from his birth in 1874 to 1908 and the publication of Orthodoxy. The second chapter describes his conversion to Roman Catholicism, and the third discusses his distinctive Christian theology. The fourth outlines G. K.'s political solution for England's economic and social ills and how his theory--distributism--fit into British intellectual tradition. The conclusion identifies G. K.'s romance with the Middle Ages as the link between his religious beliefs and his political utopia.

PREFACE

The twentieth century has produced a variety of individuals who offered plans to save their worlds from imminent destruction. Such a man was G. K. Chesterton. As a utopian thinker, Chesterton was doubtlessly not original, but he was a prolific writer, one of vision, and he had a great public following in his lifetime. Chesterton wrote over fifty books, weekly articles in the Illustrated London News for thirty-one years, and free-lance articles in virtually every major British publication that was printed in the first quarter of the twentieth century. He was affiliated with the prominent Daily News from 1901 to 1913, and subsequently he wrote for many smaller Fleet Street newspapers. With the demise of small publishing operations, Chesterton turned toward collections of essays as a means of voicing his beliefs and earning a living.

Chesterton and his fellow Englishman and journalist Hilaire Belloc were the first Englishmen since Henry VIII that Rome publicly proclaimed as "Defender of the Faith."¹ This honor was overlooked by the British press, an oversight that suggested the emotionalism which popery generated, even in 1936. At Chesterton's death in 1936, eulogists regretted his passing for different reasons. Some remembered his

¹Pius XII bestowed this title on G. K. at his death.

jovial personality and kind heart; some his honesty and integrity; some his contributions to understanding among faiths through his Father Brown mystery stories. A small circle of his readers were doubly saddened, for they saw with his death the inevitable death of his political and economic reform program: distributism. Though Chesterton claimed he did not desire immortality through his works, he did hope and strive for the success of his political reform movement; and the failure of his ideas to captivate English policy makers should not condemn Chesterton and his thought to obscurity.

The problem in Chesterton studies is to identify the threads of his thought and the manner in which he wove them together to form his plan. With research based primarily on his essays, this thesis will consider the major themes in Chesterton's mature thought. "Orthodox faith," as he defined it, was central to his thought, and some critics emphasize this concept above all else. The political system he worked for and believed in so intensely incorporated those personal religious strains as well as medieval concepts of work. He incorporated his orthodoxy into his philosophic endeavors, and used it as a foundation for his political plan, distributism. Distributism was a plan in which each individual owned enough property, land, or capital goods within a guild, to maintain his political and economic autonomy in a Roman Catholic society. This

thesis will evaluate those highly integrated political, economic, and religious proposals and will determine the dominant contours of Chesterton's thought. Finally, this thesis will appraise the validity of his basic assumptions, for if his program was based on distortions, the result would surely be questionable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. G. K. CHESTERTON: TWENTIETH CENTURY
CATHOLIC REFORMER. 1

II. THE ROAD TO CONVERSION 19

III. CHESTERTON'S CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY 38

IV. CHESTERTON: POLITICAL ECONOMICS 74

V. G. K. CHESTERTON: AN ASSESSMENT 111

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 117

Bound by NTSU BINDERY

(Form 82 - 5/73)

CHAPTER I

G. K. CHESTERTON: TWENTIETH CENTURY CATHOLIC REFORMER

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born May 29, 1874, at Sheffield Terrace, Campden Hill, the first son of Edward Chesterton and Marie Grosjean Chesterton. Gilbert's family was liberal both politically and theologically. They had been exposed to Darwin and Spencer and had learned tolerance through this exposure.¹

Descriptions of Gilbert Keith's immediate ancestry bring to mind Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga or Mann's Buddenbrooks.² During the Regency, Gilbert's great-grandfather had dissipated the family fortune and become a coal merchant and finally a house agent. Gilbert's grandfather established a house agent's business and settled into his place in life, satisfied that his tasks were important; Gilbert's father was now a house agent in the Kensington family business.³ Years later Gilbert recalled that "my people belonged to that rather

¹Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), pp. 5-6.

²Ibid., pp. 3-4.

³Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936), pp. 2-3.

old-fashioned English middle class, in which a businessman was still permitted to mind his own business."⁴ The Chesterton branch of G. K.'s family were educated individuals with a sense of duty to mankind.⁵ George Laval Chesterton, his great uncle, was a prison reformer in the mid-nineteenth century. His two books, Peace, War and Adventures and Revelations of Prison Life, both part of the family library, were among Gilbert Keith's early reading material. An atmosphere of "noblesse oblige" embodied in both works was coupled with the dogged determination that anything undertaken could be accomplished; they proffered the idea of progress as the answer to all ills.⁶

His mother's legacy was quite different. She was one of twenty-three children born to a Scottish Wesleyan lay preacher. Her mother was Franco-Swiss and Scottish and her upbringing was very strict and pious. Gilbert Keith noted in his Autobiography that he had many traits in common with his maternal grandfather. Foremost was his religious nature, although he was unable to imitate his grandfather's abstinence from alcohol.⁷

⁴Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁵Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 12-13. Gilbert Chesterton pictured his Uncle George as a Dickens-like character. This was a compliment from G. K., a great Dickens admirer.

⁶George Laval Chesterton, Revelations of Prison Life, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856), 1:v; George Laval Chesterton, Peace, War and Adventure: An Autobiographical Memoir of George Laval Chesterton, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), 1:247, 354.

⁷Ibid., p. 12.

G. K. tended to recall good times that he had had with his family and only their positive traits. He recalled that his father was a "serene, humorous" man "full of hobbies."⁸ Of his mother, G. K. wrote that she was "more swift, restless and generally Radical in her instincts" than his father.⁹ G. K. was apparently drawn to his father's genial temperament and not to his mother's straitlaced approach. In his Autobiography, G. K. Chesterton noted apologetically that he had had a "disappointingly respectable and reasonable" background.¹⁰ He taunted the Freudians that he was unable to provide them with an ogre of a father or a suicidal mother, so that his artistic bent remained unexplained.¹¹

His parents had two additional children: Cecil and Beatrice, who died in early childhood before the second son, Cecil, was born. Cecil Chesterton was five years G. K.'s junior, but throughout their lives they remained great friends and verbal sparring partners.¹² Upon Cecil's birth, Gilbert is said to have remarked, "That's all right; now I shall always have an audience."¹³ And he did, until Cecil's death during the Great War.

⁸Ibid., p. 2

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 199.

¹³Ibid.

When G. K. was five, his parents moved to 11 Warwick Gardens, away from the Waterworks Tower and St. George's Church where G. K. had been baptized in the Anglican rite. When Gilbert reached school age he attended Colet Court first. Then he advanced to St. Paul's School where he encountered many new boys who would remain his friends in later years.

G. K. seldom excelled in his studies. His form reports reflected his disinterest in the standard educational courses. "The idea that I had come to school to work was too grotesque to cloud my mind for an instant. It was also in too obvious a contrast with the facts and the results."¹⁴ G. K. observed that the educational system must have been set up to allow the students to study their masters. The progress reports made that attitude quite apparent. Generally, the master noted G. K.'s ability--"not applied"--and his "literary" leanings.¹⁵

Late in G. K.'s school days he caught the attention of Edmund Clerihew Bentley, one of the leaders among the students at St. Paul's. Though two years younger than G. K., Bentley saw the spark of genius beneath the befuddled, day-dreaming gaze of the oversized boy (Gilbert was six feet tall by his

¹⁴Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵Ward, Chesterton, pp. 25-26.

early teens). G. K. said of E. C. Bentley that he was "my first and in every sense original friend."¹⁶ Chesterton and Bentley founded the Junior Debating Club, among whose members were Robert Vernede, Edward Fordham, Lawrence and Maurice Solomon, Lucien Oldershaw, Langdon Davies, and Bernard Salter. After scorning and mocking G. K. in the school yard for many months, all these youngsters began to vie for his attention and friendship. "We would have done anything to get in first place with Gilbert,"¹⁷ Lucian Oldershaw noted, but that place always went to Edmund C. Bentley. These boys together put out The Debater, an underground journal which they sold at school and in the neighborhood around St. Paul's, to cover costs. Toward the end of Gilbert's school days he entered the Milton poetry contest held annually at St. Paul's (which Milton had attended) and won with a poem on St. Francis Xavier. With this unexpected show of ability, G. K. was sent to the Eighth Form from the Sixth to join all his young comrades for graduation.¹⁸ G. K. remarked on the occasion: "Personally, I was perfectly happy at the bottom of the class."¹⁹

¹⁶Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 61.

¹⁷Ward, Chesterton, p. 32.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 42; Maisie Ward noted that St. Paul's had eight forms, unlike the standard six form system found in the majority of English schools at that time.

¹⁹Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 67.

When G. K.'s friends left for Oxford and Cambridge, he decided to stay behind in London. After a summer vacation, G. K. chose art for his career. He entered Slade School of Art in London, where he attempted to master drawing. There he underwent a philosophical crisis which, without the help of his friends, found him sinking into "nihilism, pessimism and almost solipsism."²⁰ Dudley Barker, recent biographer of Chesterton, sees in this crisis an encounter with the devil, or real evil.²¹ This encounter, impressed upon G. K.'s mind, left him forever in awe of the presence of evil in this world.²² Thereafter, he deliberately directed his life to avoid evil while educating the world of evil's existence. Chesterton himself claimed to be a pagan at twelve and an agnostic at sixteen.²³ Yet by twenty he was firmly convinced of evil, if not of good.

After three years in Slade School, G. K. at twenty-one had become aware that a career in art was beyond his powers of self-discipline and probably his capabilities, and he now determined to find some other calling.²⁴ While still a student

²⁰Christopher Hollis, The Mind of Chesterton (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970), p. 27.

²¹Dudley Barker, G. K. Chesterton: A Biography (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), p. 56.

²²Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 86-87.

²³Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Orthodoxy (1908; reprint ed., New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1950), p. 153.

²⁴Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 91.

at the Slade, G. K., with a friend, Ernest Hodder Williams, had audited Professor W. P. Ker's lectures on literature. Williams, later a publishing executive, encouraged Gilbert to write, and supplied him with some books to review for Bookman, a magazine published by the Williams family firm.²⁵ Gilbert later laughed that failure at art had led him to journalism, "the easiest of all professions."²⁶

Thus G. K. Chesterton began a career which suited his personality. Where else could a daydreamer be paid for his ever-churning imagination? Surely this had to be better than his first jobs: proofing copy in Mr. Redway's publishing company or editing the works of other writers in the Fisher-Unwin offices.

As G. K. began his career in journalism, his childhood friends returned to London from university life. They brought with them connections which would later prove advantageous for G. K. Lucian Oldershaw and Eric Bentley introduced G. K. to their college friends who were also in the field of journalism. Oldershaw encouraged G. K. to write for the Speaker, which had been purchased by several young liberals who hoped to establish the periodical as the voice of their political position. After Oldershaw convinced E. Y. Eccles and J. L. Hammond that G. K. was not a Jew--for Eccles was

²⁵Ibid., p. 96.

²⁶Ibid., p. 97.

convinced that G. K.'s handwriting was that of a Jew and he therefore rejected his work--G. K.'s work was immediately accepted.²⁷

From this time until journalism became big business in the 1920s, G. K. Chesterton was sought out to write for many of the major newspapers and journals of Fleet Street.²⁸ Fleet Street had for centuries been the center of London's publishing firms and famous also for its taverns and coffee shops where much of the copy for the next deadline was conceived.²⁹ G. K. belonged to the Fleet Street of the late Victorian era--free-wheeling, bustling, interpretive--and not to the Fleet Street of the mechanized, quasi-monopolistic press of his later years.

G. K.'s trade was words, and he bargained well with them. He credited his early success on tumultuous Fleet Street to listening to the journalistic sages of the time and proceeding to do the exact opposite of what they had recommended. He claimed later never to have written an article with a specific journal in mind.³⁰ Fleet Streeters' memories of G. K. are

²⁷Ward, Chesterton, p. 127.

²⁸G. C. Heseltine, "G. K. Chesterton: Journalist," in John Sullivan, ed., G. K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974), p. 128.

²⁹Walter George Bell, Fleet Street in Seven Centuries (London: Sir Isaac Putnam and Sons, 1921). This early twentieth century work on Fleet Street can only be called intriguing. From Roman times, a main artery of the London suburbs, Fleet Street in Fleet Liberty bustled with activity. In its history, one finds characters ranging from Milton to Chesterton.

³⁰Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 185.

many and fond. Most remembered him in a tavern with a bottle of wine, enjoying a good meal, and they recalled his lively conversation full of laughter and joy.³¹

It was during those Fleet Street years that G. K. met Hilaire Belloc, an Anglo-French Catholic, who became an intimate friend and collaborator. Many versions of the initial meeting of G. K. and Belloc exist. Doubtless, it occurred during the days of Belloc's affiliation with the pro-Boer Speaker. The most reliable account, by Oldershaw, placed their introduction early in 1900 at a Soho restaurant.³² G. K. concurred in his Autobiography, adding that when the evening ended he was dedicated to Belloc. "The Chesterbelloc" as G. B. Shaw aptly termed the friendship, emerged from their first encounter.³³

G. K. still labored at the Fisher-Unwin publishing house for meager wages. He slowly began publishing what he had been writing during the previous years. In 1900, the same year he met Belloc, he published his first book, Greybeards at Play.³⁴ It was a small book of three satirical poems. This first book met with some success, and with this success began G. K.'s popularity, at this time particularly

³¹Bernard Falk, Bouquet for Fleet Street (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951), p. 48; Comyns Beaumont, A Rebel in Fleet Street (London: Hutchinson & Co., n.d.), p. 27.

³²Ward, Chesterton, p. 127.

³³Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 115.

³⁴G. K. Chesterton, Greybeards at Play (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1900).

with young radical intellectuals.³⁵

One month after Greybeards at Play appeared, G. K. published a second collection of poems, A Wild Knight. G. K.'s father, Edward Chesterton, ventured the financial backing necessary to find a publisher for this first collection of serious poems.³⁶ The venture paid off handsomely, for G. K. gained recognition throughout the literary world. Rudyard Kipling, among others, commented on the "promise" in the work and admitted curiosity as to what the mature G. K. might produce.³⁷

Earlier in his career, G. K. had met a "Bohemian" group of youths who lived in Bedford Park. Lucian Oldershaw, a long-time friend from Junior Debating Club days, introduced Gilbert to the Bloggs. The Blogg family consisted of three working daughters and their widowed mother. Lucian Oldershaw visited the youngest Blogg daughter, Ethel, and he invited G. K. to meet Frances, the eldest and most serious of the three. In G. K.'s typical romantic fashion, he fell in love with Frances at that very first meeting. His early poetry had imagined his future love. Maisie Ward noted that in G. K.'s unpublished early notebooks, there follows, a few pages after his last wondering poem, verse

³⁵Ward, Chesterton, p. 140.

³⁶Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 91.

³⁷Rudyard Kipling to R. Brimley Johnson, 28 November 1901, in Ward, Chesterton, p. 143.

entitled "F. B." and "To My Lady."³⁸ G. K. did more than put Frances on a pedestal; he enshrined her.

G. K.'s mother was dismayed by her son's new associates. She disapproved of his association with the avant-garde in Bedford Park. The circle, which included such prominent figures as William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, and many young bright stars of the future such as Chesterton himself, centered, like his earlier activities, around a discussion group. His mother had long since chosen a wife for Gilbert, Annie Firmin, a girl with "ropes of golden hair."³⁹ Annie, however, had been merely a childhood playmate, certainly not a romantic object in G. K.'s eyes.⁴⁰ Unable to tell his mother that his choice was Frances, G. K. resorted to his pen. In a letter which he wrote to his mother as she prepared cocoa in the same room, Gilbert described his relationship with Frances and his hope that his mother would not be unsympathetic. He conveyed Frances' message that she would try to be worthy of Gilbert.⁴¹

In his Autobiography some thirty-five years later, Gilbert recalled the trauma of asking for Frances' hand in St. James Park after a two-year courtship. He was frightened,

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 84-85.

³⁹ Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Ward, Chesterton, p. 92.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 89.

but she allayed his fears, and accepted his halting proposal.⁴² In celebration of the engagement in 1898, Gilbert wrote a love poem about Frances' birth: "God made thee mightily, my love."⁴³ Mightily, indeed, for the engagement that followed was long; over three years after G. K. asked Frances to marry him, they were still unwed. Financially, he was unable to support a wife, and in 1900 young wives did not work after marriage. Thus Gilbert would have sole responsibility for the future household. Then Fleet Street opened up for Gilbert, and his income increased from around 65£ a year to nearly 500£. As he wrote to his mother, his income was at last adequate if they limited themselves to one servant for the heavy work.⁴⁴

On June 28, 1901, G. K. wed Frances Blogg. Conrad Noel performed the ceremony at the Kensington Parish Church. G. K. was full of comic antics, forgetting his tie, leaving the price tag on his new shoes, and missing the fast train to Ipswich and their honeymoon in order to buy a glass of milk and a revolver.⁴⁵ After an apparently typical Victorian wedding night, life together settled into a happy routine. Gilbert wrote of his

⁴²Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 154-55.

⁴³Ward, Chesterton, p. 93.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 148-50.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 151; Barker, G. K. Chesterton, pp. 109-11.

honeymoon:

Between the perfect wedding day
And that fierce future proud, and furled,
I only stole six days--six days
Enough for God to make the World⁴⁶

After those six stolen days Gilbert and Frances returned to their household at Edwardes Square, and G. K. entered the most productive and creative period of his life. A few months later they moved to Overstrand Mansions, Battersea, where they lived until 1908.

Shortly after his wedding, G. K. published The Defendants. It was well received, especially considering that the essays had all been previously published in the Speaker. G. K. early learned the tactic of collecting his essays to double his earnings from one effort. He also illustrated his own work, a pleasant utilization of his art training. Sometime in 1901, Chesterton met Max Beerbohm, who remained an interested acquaintance for years. More important for Chesterton was another introduction that same year. This one was to George Bernard Shaw, the socialist dramatist who soon became G. K.'s favorite opposite in public debate and a lifelong friend.⁴⁷

The years following these first publications were busy ones for G. K. He wrote weekly articles for both the Speaker

⁴⁶Barker, G. K. Chesterton, p. 110.

⁴⁷Ward, Chesterton, pp. 153-55.

and the Daily News. He continued his free-lance work in other journals and wrote several books. The first of these books was a biography of G. F. Watts in 1902. He quickly followed this biography with another collection of previously published essays, Twelve Types. In addition to his literary efforts, G. K. spent many hours in public debates and lectures. His childhood pastime of Junior Debating Club days continued into adulthood.

In 1903, Chesterton published a work on Robert Browning which met with critical acclaim. Most critics agreed that G. K. was amiss factually, although all concurred that his insights were remarkable.⁴⁸ The excellent reviews were important for his career. More important was the fact that the book was part of the distinguished English Men of Letters series. G. K. was finally established. He and Frances were not rich but were able to afford more than just the necessities of life. The success of the Browning book brought G. K., whose formal education had stopped with St. Paul's, an offer of Professor of Literature at Birmingham University.⁴⁹ G. K. refused; he could not forsake Fleet Street for the boring tempo of university life.

In 1905, four years after his marriage, Chesterton undertook the writing of Heretics, a book which dealt with

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 167.

what was wrong with the thought of leading controversialists of the day. Chesterton castigated Rudyard Kipling, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Henrik Ibsen, yellow journalism, and science for their rejection of traditional values. In place of traditional values these men had substituted the modern placebos of progress, liberty, and reform. Ibsen's shortcoming stemmed from the lack of an ideal. He was always able to understand evil, but virtue escaped his perception. Chesterton faulted Kipling for his imperialism without patriotism and Shaw for his distrust of the common man and reliance on a superman.

All of G. K.'s criticisms were founded on the belief that these "moderns" were building systems without sound foundations. To believe in progress of freedom, one must have a discernible moral basis. Without an identifiable starting point, progress did not exist. According to G. K., it must be in relation to a fixed position.⁵⁰

By the concluding essay, G. K. had determined that this terminus was orthodox Christianity. Man was a dogma-making animal. If man continued to reject dogma after dogma he would slowly sink to the animal level. Relativity was acceptable for lower life forms, but man needed the permanence of dogma.⁵¹

Heretics received mixed reviews. Most reviewers were horrified that G. K., a rising young writer, would so vilify

⁵⁰Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Heretics (New York: John Lane Company, 1905), p. 37.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 256-57.

his elders.⁵² Had he no respect? Heretics sparked the writing of G. K.'s most important Christian work, Orthodoxy, in 1908. It also outlined his reasons for rejecting the modern philosophical arguments and his continued search for something better.

The years between Heretics and Orthodoxy were extremely active ones for Chesterton. He continued writing regular columns, which had expanded to include one in the weekly Illustrated London News. In addition, G. K. wrote two books, prefaces to nearly a dozen books, and countless free-lance articles in popular journals. He, his brother Cecil, and Belloc also used this period to analyze and organize their political views. In consequence, they spent many evenings in debates and public lectures.

In 1908, G. K. answered the challenge of the critics of Heretics. He finally offered an alternative to the modern philosophers he had castigated in that work. This new work, Orthodoxy, was merely a "statement of preference" and not a "philosophy."⁵³ The work was vaguely autobiographical; it portrayed an inner struggle to determine just what G. K. thought, or as he aptly stated in his introduction, "It recounts my elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious."⁵⁴

⁵²The Times (London), 9 June 1905, p. 183.

⁵³George N. Shuster, The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature (1922; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 237.

⁵⁴Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 18.

He was willing to accept the Apostles' Creed, but was not ready to debate the authority derived from the Creed.⁵⁵

In his first essay, "The Maniacs," G. K. questioned the contemporary trend of defining everything. He held that man had to believe in mysteries. To define something completely was its death knell.⁵⁶ He then turned to suicide, a heinous sin which modern philosophers approved. G. K. denied the merit of suicide, for it negated the traditional hierarchy of virtues by emphasizing pride over humility.⁵⁷ Next, G. K. attacked pessimism. He recalled that he had always called himself an optimist for a negative reason; he was not a pessimist. Christian optimism gave him a sound reason for being an optimist because it taught of something beyond this world.⁵⁸

In Orthodoxy, G. K. concluded that his playground, earth, needed walls. These walls were to be found in the dogma of Christian theology and doctrine.⁵⁹ Man needed definite, concrete guidelines for living. G. K. was certain as he finished the "adventure" of this work that he had found all he would need in Christianity.

Shortly after the publication of Orthodoxy, G. K. and his wife moved from London to the suburbs. They made their

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 269.

new home in Beaconsfield, and from there G. K. commuted regularly to Fleet Street. The move signalled a change in G. K.'s lifestyle, since now he wrote in a quiet study far from his former habitat, the noisy pubs and offices of Fleet Street. His productivity grew while his extra-curricular activities diminished, leaving him more time to contemplate his personal philosophy.

CHAPTER II

THE ROAD TO CONVERSION

For Chesterton, the religious individual had no need of philosophy, because religion had all the answers, and G. K. described Christianity as the only real religion. The others were mythology or philosophy.¹ Christianity, uniting the priests of the old myths and the philosophers of ancient times, combined mystery and reason.² For Chesterton, who was convinced of the presence of evil in the world, "the object of religion is to be good."³

How Chesterton reached this highly orthodox understanding of religion is significant. In his childhood, though baptized in the local Anglican parish, G. K. participated in a liberal lifestyle. His parents were no longer devout Anglican; they dabbled in the latest religious styles while seeking understanding of life. Among those influential on them were idealistic theists of the Stopford Brooke style. This school of thought, according to G. K., insisted that God, if He existed, had to be "supremely perfect," but this movement, though attractive to his parents, had little influence on G. K., ultimately.⁴

¹Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man (1925; reprint ed., New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1946).

²Ibid., pp. 45-46.

³Chesterton, Heretics, p. 95.

⁴Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 73.

Friendless at Slade School of Art, G. K. sank into a nihilistic attitude which clouded his thinking and led him to believe all virtuous ideas were under attack.⁵

After this three-year bout with evil, he began his search for good. In Orthodoxy, G. K. recalled that even at the Slade, he had concluded that good and moral absolutes did exist.⁶

With Heretics in 1905, G. K. took his first strides toward Roman Catholicism. The critics' clamor for a more positive statement of G. K.'s position gave them Orthodoxy in 1908. Chesterton observed in Orthodoxy that he had decided to discover his own heresy only to find that it already existed in orthodoxy.⁷

G. K.'s definition of orthodoxy is crucial to understanding his religious philosophy. In Orthodoxy, he limited it to "the Apostles' Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed."⁸ Chesterton made other statements before the publication of Orthodoxy. According to his friend and biographer Maisie Ward, G. K. discovered the "wealth of Catholic truth" before

⁵ Ibid., pp. 85-86; Hollis, Mind of Chesterton, p. 27.

⁶ Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 118.

⁷ Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 19; Bernard Bergonzi, "Chesterton and/or Belloc," Critical Quarterly 1 (Spring 1959): 64-71; George N. Shuster, "G. K. Chesterton," Commonweal, 24 July 1936; p. 319. Shuster argued that Chesterton's first collection of essays, The Defendant, foreshadowed his future as a Christian propagandist seven years before Orthodoxy. This was possible; however, The Defendant, though critically well-received, was a first book without the impact of a respected name and reputation to back it.

⁸ Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 20.

he left Slade School of Art.⁹ Unlike the traditional British view that orthodoxy was equivalent to the position of the Church of England, to G. K., Orthodoxy was Roman Catholic.

For many years, Gilbert practiced the Anglican variety of Christianity. He belonged to that branch within the Anglican church called the Anglo-Catholics, many of whose members at that time believed the Anglican church was still part of the Roman church.

The Reverend Conrad Noel, who married G. K. and Frances in the Anglican Church, was an eccentric on the fringe of Fleet Street and a sometime communist. According to G. K., Noel's presentation of the orthodox case was more successful with Cecil than with himself.¹⁰ Inspired, Cecil went beyond the Anglo-Catholics and the Reverend Mr. Noel to the Roman Church in 1913, long before G. K. could justify such an act for himself. G. K. and Cecil were very aware of, and respectful of, each others' opinions, which gave Cecil's action its importance. According to Hilaire Belloc's biographer and friend, Robert Speaight, this reaction was entirely in line with the brothers' personalities. G. K. was quick to reflect, slow to act. Cecil, whom G. K. greatly admired, was a strong-willed extrovert, and action came easier for him.

For twenty-one years, from 1901 to 1922, G. K. tended

⁹Ward, Chesterton, p. 68.

¹⁰Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 165; J. J. Semper, "The Quintessence of Chesterton," Catholic World 156 (October 1942): 42.

toward the Roman Church. He termed this waiting period his uncompleted conversion to Catholicism.¹¹ He had trod the long road from a spiritual void to a convinced belief in a definite set of dogmas. Yet long before his conversion he appeared to be a Catholic to his readers.¹²

What held G. K. Chesterton from following his brother into the Roman Catholic church sooner? G. K. had many sound reasons. He felt an obligation to his parents. They were typical English persons of the Victorian era; Catholics were tolerated, but one did not fraternize with them nor join their faith. As Gilbert noted to his friend and confidant, Father Ronald Knox,

My father is the very best man I ever knew of that generation that never understood the new need of a spiritual authority and lives almost perfectly by the sort of religion men had when rationalism was rational. I think he was always subconsciously prepared for the next generation having less theology than he has; and is rather puzzled at its having more.¹³

Gilbert went on to remark that his mother was less understanding, and consequently he felt he "couldn't bother her" with his concern over conversion, now at his father's death.¹⁴

¹¹Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Catholic Church and Conversion (1926; reprint ed., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 31.

¹²Barker, G. K. Chesterton, p. 251.

¹³G. K. Chesterton to Ronald Knox, n.d., in Ward, Chesterton, p. 461.

¹⁴Ibid.

The second and equally important inhibition to his conversion was Frances, his wife of twenty years. She had been reared in a family of convinced Christians; her father was a Wesleyan lay minister. She was able to practice the Anglo-Catholic creed without hesitation.¹⁵ Since she had exposed him to the correct way, G. K. found it hard to leave her alternate branch for what he found to be the main path. The idea of changing allegiance to Rome was "more of a wrench for her."¹⁶ She was not yet prepared, but G. K. realized she would not want to be the reason why he waited.¹⁷

Paradoxically, Frances was also one of the most important individuals among those who guided G. K. to Roman Catholicism. She was a devout individual who believed the basic tenets of Anglo-Catholicism and she was very probably the anchor of G. K.'s life also. He noted in a letter to Father Ronald Knox that "she gave me my first respect for sacramental Christianity" and "she is one of the good who mysteriously suffer. . . ."¹⁸ When Gilbert finally determined to convert in 1922, her only remark to Father O'Connor, long-time family friend, was

¹⁵G. K. Chesterton to Father Ronald Knox, n.d., in Ward, Chesterton, p. 462.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Conversation: Frances Chesterton and Father John O'Connor, 28 July 1922, in Ward, Chesterton, p. 464.

¹⁸G. K. Chesterton to Father Ronald Knox, n.d., in Ward, Chesterton, p. 460.

Oh! I shall be infinitely relieved. You cannot imagine how it fidgets Gilbert to have anything on his mind. The last three months have been exceptionally trying. I should be only too glad to come with him, if God in his mercy would show the way clear. . . ."19

The other reasons why G. K. was hesitant over conversion were neither so great nor profound. The Great War, which seemed to G. K. to be a clear case of Anglo-French Christianity versus the barbarians (i.e., the Prussians), left him baffled over why anyone could be reluctant to support the Christian cause. It was particularly grating that the most Catholic state of the British Isles, Ireland, gave only perfunctory support to the Allies and often gave none at all. In a typically Chestertonian good-versus-evil conflict, all Catholics were necessarily firmly on the side of good. Ireland did not conform to this Chestertonian axiom, and its failure to do so gave G. K. doubts about Catholicism.²⁰

He found Protestantism unsatisfactory. Many Protestant sects offered a firm outline of their beliefs and defined good and evil, right and wrong, but after his conversion, G. K. noted several shortcomings that Protestantism had for himself. He found the answers of Protestantism dead or incomplete.²¹ The Roman Catholic teachings contained more

¹⁹Ward, Chesterton, p. 464.

²⁰Hollis, Mind of Chesterton, pp. 188-89.

²¹Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Thing: Why I Am a Catholic (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1930), pp. 63-71.

substance, he thought, and not just rhetoric. He looked for quality rather than imitative forms.²² Quality meant keeping the "old" fresh and contemporary to meet current problems.²³ As an aside, Chesterton wondered aloud why parents of his time should fear or find annoying the traditions of the Catholic church which remained so applicable.

Chesterton had the benefit of many Roman Catholic acquaintances, some of whom were lifelong friends. Among these men, G. K. attributed the greatest influence to Maurice Baring, longtime banking friend and previous convert to Roman Catholicism. In a letter to Baring immediately after his baptism (and G. K. wrote only his mother and Baring on this subject), G. K. tried to acknowledge this influence and express his gratitude to Baring. He wrote of ". . . trying to tell you about this wonderful business, in which you have helped me so much more than anyone else."²⁴ Another individual who succeeded in setting a "good example" in the Roman Catholic sense was Monsignor O'Connor. The Monsignor, prototype of Chesterton's Father Brown, baptized Chesterton.

Cecil Chesterton wrote that he considered his brother's imminent conversion as actually a seeking to confront "a personal Devil."²⁵ In addition, Cecil saw Hilaire Belloc,

²²Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 20.

²³Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴G. K. Chesterton to Maurice Baring, n.d., in Ward, Chesterton, p. 467.

²⁵Cecil Chesterton, G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism (London: Alston Rivers, 1908), p. 104.

the South African War, and the Irish state as prime influences on Gilbert.²⁶ Belloc was an example of a good Catholic, the South African War showed the shortcomings of British society and its solutions, and Ireland was a living Catholic organism full of the best Catholic traditions, in spite of its posture in the Great War. E. C. Bentley, G. K.'s lifelong comrade, felt that Belloc was of some influence simply because he and G. K. had their Catholicity in common.²⁷ Another friend, W. R. Titterton, credited Belloc with influence equal to Frances Chesterton's but felt that Cecil's Roman Catholic conversion had little effect on G. K.²⁸

Only G. K. could know who influenced him the most on the road to Catholicism. In a letter to his mother immediately after he was received into the Church, he claimed, "It is months since I saw my Catholic friends and years since I talked to them about it."²⁹ When Belloc heard of G. K.'s conversion, he noted, "Yet Gilbert was received in the Church at the end of July. . . . It is a very astonishing occurrence, but these things are always astonishing."³⁰

²⁶Ibid., p. 100.

²⁷E. C. Bentley, "G. K. C.," Spectator, 19 June 1936, pp. 1125-26.

²⁸W. R. Titterton, G. K. Chesterton: A Portrait (London: Douglas Organ, 1947), p. 48.

²⁹G. K. Chesterton to Marie Grosjean Chesterton, 30 July 1922, in Ward, Chesterton, p. 466.

³⁰Hilaire Belloc to Maurice Baring, 25 August 1922, Hilaire Belloc, Letters from Hilaire Belloc, ed. Robert Speaight (London: Hollis & Carter, 1958), p. 124.

Five years after his leap of faith, Chesterton wrote The Catholic Church and Conversion (1927), in which he described the stages of conversion and what a convert felt. Before discussing the stages he berated the accusers of the Roman religion for denouncing a fiction as reality. Long before his conversion, G. K. stated that he had learned to look past the accusations of non-Catholics on Catholicism to the teachings of the Church. He noted the importance of understanding something on its own terms, not only from the standpoint of the convinced unbeliever.³¹

The three stages of conversion identified by G. K. were first, "patronizing the Church"; second, "discovering the Church"; and third, "running away from the Church."³² The first stage commences when the individual "imagines himself to be entirely detached, or even to be entirely indifferent."³³ At this point the individual was totally unaware that he had begun the conversion process, and felt only that he had dealt fairly and dispassionately with a highly volatile subject. Chesterton saw himself in this first stage while he worked for the Daily News during the first decade of the twentieth century. The Daily News was a non-conformist liberal paper which G. K. left in 1913 because of its

³¹Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, pp. 35-38.

³²Ibid., p. 71.

³³Ibid., p. 57.

liberalism.³⁴ The fallacies of religious criticism seemed more interesting during the first stage than the "fallacies about Free Trade or woman's suffrage."³⁵ The "accumulation of falsehood" against the Church endeared him more at this time than the idea that it held the truth.³⁶

The second stage begins for the convert when he realizes not just the injustice of the attacks on the Church but also that it held many truths. The individual becomes "enormously excited to find that there is far more truth than he would ever have expected."³⁷ The words of the Catholic church all take on new and wondrous meaning, words that, as a non-Catholic, the person had always misused. The potential convert was in fact converting himself throughout this second plateau in the conversion process.³⁸

The third step must be considered the crucial step. This stage, which Chesterton described as "running away from the church," leaves no middle ground. One must leap or else back down. While in the second stage the individual desires conversion, in the third he would rather not face the decision. Fear overrides doubts in the final stage.

³⁴Ibid., p. 58. Stephen E. Koss, Fleet Street Radical: A. G. Gardiner and the "Daily News" (London: Archon Books, 1973), pp. 113-17.

³⁵Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 57.

³⁶Ibid., p. 59.

³⁷Ibid., p. 60.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 60-61.

Doubts are banished during the second stage, but fear of grasping the greatest of truths could paralyze the individual.³⁹ "It may be that I shall never again have such absolute assurance that the thing is true as I had when I made my last effort to deny it."⁴⁰ Chesterton saw the Catholic idea of "good example" in action during this period. When a non-Catholic questioned or derided the Catholic tenets, little harm could be done because those people did not have full knowledge of the truths. If, however, a Catholic, one of the fold, acted in a manner incongruent with Catholic teaching, that is, set a "bad example," grave harm could be done to the potential convert. After all, the Catholic, in the eyes of the neophyte Catholic, has the truth and the grace of God to help him live a good Christian life.⁴¹ Chesterton recalled, "I know in my own case that I always experienced a slight setback whenever some irresponsible individual interposed to urge me on."⁴²

Chesterton believed that once converted, the individual took on a whole new character. The Catholic Church provided a measure of truth which he felt allowed the convert, including himself, to think correctly automatically.⁴³ This very point in Chesterton's credo left him open to criticism. One critic determined that Chesterton had "short-changed"

³⁹Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 63.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 55.

⁴²Ibid., p. 56.

⁴³Ibid., p. 86.

himself; while another noted simply that Chesterton's refusal to question beyond Catholic theology left him with only assumptions.⁴⁴ Chesterton would have rebutted both these critics without hesitation. Of course, he thought that Catholic theology was all that he needed. Faith would overcome any doubt, substantiate any assumption. Merely the name Catholic implied universality. For G. K. "all truth was in," insofar as man needed to know it. This aspect of Chesterton's thought, the unwillingness to admit truths beyond those taught by his religion, justifies criticism. Belief that the corpus of knowledge extant is all that will ever be extant defines a closed society and a closed mind. If, however, the idea of progress and growth be denied, the argument would necessarily be ended. Chesterton did exactly that: he denied progress as an active element in society. The principles which composed the cornerstone of his social and political beliefs, readily conformed with his stance on religious dogma.

Conversion, central in Chesterton's vision, led the convert to truth, although it did not lead him to tradition. Faith also centered in conversion. "It is the miracle by which men find truth in spite of tradition and often with

⁴⁴ Janet Gassman, "Second Look at G. K. C.," Religion in Life 28 (Summer 1959): 450; Donald Attwater, ed. Modern Christian Revolutionaries (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947), p. 101.

the rending of all the roots of humanity."⁴⁵ This almost Protestant emphasis on the moment of conversion as "being saved," breaks with traditional Catholic teachings. Catholicism does not teach that one will be saved by the act of conversion alone. Chesterton's zeal in describing the joy emanating from the knowledge of a decision well-made may account for such a simplification of reality. Chesterton was convinced that the convert feared the enormity of Catholicism's virtues more than the vices of the world.⁴⁶ "It is the scale and multiplicity of the forms of truth and help that it [the church] has to offer" that outweighed these fears and doubts.⁴⁷ Chesterton commented in a letter to his longtime friend and fellow Catholic convert Maurice Baring that "we have not the shadow of a doubt about what was the wisest act of our lives."⁴⁸ W. R. Tritterton, fellow journalist and critic, noted that for G. K. "religion was the one burning reality of life."⁴⁹ No longer did G. K. search. He began to propagandize, to proselytize, for, once convinced, he wished to impart his immense joy to the awaiting world. In addition, Leo XIII, Pope until 1903, had admonished in his encyclical message "On Christian Citizenship" that all

⁴⁵Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 22.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁷G. K. Chesterton to Maurice Baring, 14 February 1923 in Ward, Chesterton, p. 459.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Tritterton, G. K. Chesterton, p. 232.

Catholics were bound to bear witness to their faith. Even the laymen should try to increase the flock and "repel the attack of unbelievers."⁵⁰ Karl Pflieger, author of Wrestlers with Christ and a contemporary of Chesterton, sensed a deepened surety and joy in G. K. after his conversion. Pflieger attributed this heightened state to the infusion of grace which could only be perceived by others so infused.⁵¹

Shortly before the publication of Chesterton's work concerning the road to conversion, his wife Frances also converted. She had fretted for four years, ever on the verge of decision, yet always too involved with day-to-day affairs to make her decision. She was received into the Church on November 1, 1926.⁵² The great Roman Catholic apologist had convinced his own wife to leave her position in the Christian Social Union, a branch of the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Anglican church. Gilbert's joy was complete. He had followed Frances' lead into orthodoxy and finally, after twenty-five years of marriage, she could follow him on his last step.

Life for G. K., this "homo religiosus," was a mystical

⁵⁰ Leo XIII, "On Christian Citizenship" in The Church Speaks to the Modern World: The Social Teachings of Leo XIII, ed. Etienne Gilson (New York: Doubleday Company, Image Books, 1954), p. 255.

⁵¹ Karl Pflieger, Wrestlers with Christ, trans. E. I. Witkin (1936; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 170.

⁵² Ward, Chesterton, p. 542; uncomfortably for Frances, publicity in the Catholic journals and parishes throughout England ran high.

experience in a universe which consisted of co-existing spiritual and material realms. Though Chesterton had no mystical experiences, he envisioned life in general as the mystical experience within the Christian focus.⁵³ Chesterton claimed that an individual manages to stay sane through mysticism; he must "keep one foot in earth and the other in fairyland."⁵⁴ Mysticism need not necessarily involve an ascetic sense of life nor a totally pious, spirit-like religious one. It can be an awe-inspired observation of life and its meaning and end. Chesterton displayed this second type of mysticism, dependent upon imagination, not upon illumination from above and within.⁵⁵ A basic, often paradoxical tenet in the classical description of a mystic holds that the mystic is, above all else, a practical man. Chesterton's whole philosophy was grounded in its practicality. He must find a reason for doing anything the way it is done, even if it were only to explain something as "magical."⁵⁶ In Chesterton's thought mysticism was often connected with medieval Europe.

Chesterton's interest in the Middle Ages was almost obsessive. The only thing that kept it from becoming entirely

⁵³Pfleger, Wrestlers with Christ, pp. 175, 180; Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 58.

⁵⁴Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 48.

⁵⁵Leonard Feeney, "Metaphysics of Chesterton," Thought: Fordham University Quarterly 17(March 1942): 29.

⁵⁶Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 94.

an obsession was its highly integrated role in his philosophy. He said in The Catholic Church and Conversion that he was a medievalist because he perceived in medieval life much that could benefit modern life.⁵⁷ For Chesterton's study of the Middle Ages encompassed the Church, the economic system, and the social structure.

The medieval ideal was pervasive in Chesterton's thought. It is essential to the study of Chesterton's thought to understand that his medievalism was both serious and joyful. Medieval men had a religion and an economic system that worked and offered stability. The age also offered a joy of life, a child-like innocence. The romantic in Chesterton was aptly manifested in his love of the Middle Ages. The knight and dragon had long held sway over his fancy. In fact, he spoke of a duel between a dragon and knight during his childhood; the knight was St. George with his spear. Actually the St. George of his daydream was the parish church, the spear its bell tower. The dragon was the water works tower which stood behind his first home. One Chesterton critic, Bergonzi, was disconcerted that Chesterton, in such a well-organized philosophy, was "perfectly prepared to give imaginative expression in well-worn trappings borrowed from the second-hand wardrobe of William Morris and others."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 63.

⁵⁸Bergonzi, "Chesterton and/or Belloc," p. 66.

After his conversion, Chesterton's favorite topics were often religious in nature. He wrote biographies of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, Chaucer, and William Cobbett, general essays on his Catholicism, Everlasting Man, and many others.⁵⁹ St. Francis epitomized the idea of wonder for Chesterton. Without tangible evidence, St. Francis could believe. This ability to give thanks and to believe simply out of wonder that nature existed was in Chesterton's eyes a truly Catholic trait. The biographer found his subject, St. Francis, similar to Christ; the difference was the same as that between man and Creator.⁶⁰ This very similarity pointed to the "continuity and authority" found in the Roman Catholic church.⁶¹ Chesterton's treatment of St. Francis was almost as vague as it was sympathetic. A man of the mind, Chesterton attempted a discussion of the heart. Though he handled it clumsily, he did catch the joie de vivre of both the pre- and post-conversion St. Francis.

Another of Chesterton's biographical works gained much praise from scholars and readers. Etienne Gilson acclaimed St. Thomas Aquinas, published in 1933, as the "best book ever

⁵⁹G. K. Chesterton, St. Francis of Assisi (1924; reprint ed., Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1946); G. K. Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1933); G. K. Chesterton, Chaucer (London: Faber and Faber, 1932); G. K. Chesterton, William Cobbett (London: Hodder and Soughton, 1925).

⁶⁰Chesterton, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 171.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 177-78.

written on St. Thomas."⁶² Gilson proceeded (with feigned chagrin) to note that Chesterton had fluently interpreted the St. Thomas whom academicians, with all their formulas, had only succeeded in partially pigeon-holing. This compliment, possibly overstated but very sincere, surprised those who thought before they had seen the work that it might be a topic beyond G. K.'s ability.⁶³

St. Thomas Aquinas, thirteenth-century theologian, had ordered Christian thinking for ages to come when he determined that it should be "supernatural but not anti-natural."⁶⁴ Once again Chesterton found a paradox--two tensions pulling against one another, yet maintaining a balanced situation. He noted that St. Thomas had based his doctrine on the co-existence of two goods in the world, that of God's supreme good and man's natural good. This co-existence had been Aquinas' answer to the skeptics of his age, and Chesterton found it equally apt for doubters in the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Man should not separate himself from nature, for though man was between God and nature in the Thomist cosmos, that separation did not indicate that he was

⁶²Cyril Clemens, Chesterton as Seen by His Contemporaries (Webster Groves, Mo.: International Mark Twain Society, 1937), pp. 150-51.

⁶³Ward, Chesterton, p. 619.

⁶⁴Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 240.

⁶⁵G. K. Chesterton, "St. Thomas Aquinas," Spectator, 27 February 1932, p. 281.

better than nature. Rather, it meant man was unique in it.⁶⁶ Chesterton paid Aquinas his highest compliment when he declared the Thomist system one of "common sense; terra viventium: a land of the living."⁶⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas affirmed for Chesterton his fundamental belief that the world was rational and real. The categorizing of the cosmos left a place for everything and everything in its place. Chesterton, physically untidy himself, could not abide an untidy vision of the universe. He did not settle for one; instead he found refuge again in the Middle Ages.

G. K.'s road to conversion was long and tortuous. He first recognized his orthodox beliefs at the turn of the century. Frances reinforced G. K.'s orthodox inclinations, encouraging him to participate in Christian political society. In 1905, he chastized the modern philosophers in Heretics, and once he had stated what he did not believe, G. K. felt compelled to outline briefly what he did believe. Orthodoxy in 1908 was that statement.

G. K. required fourteen years of contemplation before he finally converted to Roman Catholicism. He overcame each obstacle, purposefully searching for intellectual and moral direction. Once converted, G. K. devoted his time to the advocacy of the "true" faith. For G. K., the Roman Catholic church's teachings held the basis of a sound moral system upon which a new society might be organized.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CHESTERTON'S CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY

Any attempt to understand G. K.'s political and social thought must begin with his orthodox religious position. His secular and sacred beliefs were intertwined beyond extrication, with his religious position laying the foundation for his secular programs. Chesterton's religious views remained static throughout his adulthood, and his conversion to Roman Catholicism marked only the change of allegiance from monarch to Pope. The pressure of being English and therefore anti-papal by tradition was the main barrier to G. K.'s conversion. The views he espoused from 1905 in Heretics until his death in 1936 remained virtually the same. They provided the intellectual anchor his mind required to deal with more mutable things.

After his conversion, Chesterton refined the specific boundaries of his Catholicism. He reviewed the mysteries and tenets of Roman Catholicism, fitting each aspect into his ever more complex world view. His cosmos was enmeshed in the dogma of the Roman church long before 1922, but once unburdened of the weight of conversion, G. K. soon began discussing the basic Roman ideas and their justification. He was quickly able to fit each idea into his popularized "philosophy."

Perhaps the most important themes of Christianity are the relationships of God and His subjects and God and His Son. By 1905 in the book Heretics, G. K. had proclaimed the Trinity as much more sensible than the modern idea of worshipping man. While the Trinity is but three-in-one, the worship of humanity would involve "ninety million persons in one God."¹ The idea that every man could be his own God baffled G. K.'s imagination. For Chesterton God was the great magician or storyteller who explained the purpose of man on earth.² This description was possibly the greatest compliment he could find to pay God, for Chesterton regarded fantasy and stories highly. This storyteller God was personal to G. K. in much the same way that John Cardinal Newman or Emmanuel Kant saw God. He was the God derived from conscience, not the Deist First Cause.³ To differentiate God from man, G. K. noted that God was "that which can make something out of nothing," while man was the one who could "make something out of anything." These two levels of life and spirit differed in their creative ability.

Chesterton marvelled that the Christian God lacked completeness. Even though God was omnipotent, he was not

¹Chesterton, Heretics, p. 96.

²Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 110.

³Hollis, Mind of Chesterton, pp. 68-69.

⁴Gilbert K. Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1910), p. 57.

human at the same time. This paradox explained to Chesterton the need for a Christ, Son of God and that which completes God.⁵ The humanity of God in Christ also exhibited the divinity of Christ in God. Chesterton explained this paradox in Everlasting Man. Christ was more than simply human; he not only knew, but he knew that he knew.⁶ From Christ through Christianity came the soul of modern society, and Chesterton called that soul "common sense."⁷

Christianity, with its soul of common sense also had its foundation in three paradoxes which Chesterton thought were easily justified. The first paradox, that of hope, held that the less cause for hope one had, the more hopeful one must be. Despair could not overcome the Christian individual because faith or hope would only allow the best to occur. The second paradox to Chesterton was that of charity. In contradiction to the modern outlook, the true Christian must love and respect the weak more than the strong. The third mystery was more negative than the first two. It held that pride was a defect which "dries up laughter; it dries up wonder. . . ." ⁸ Through these mysteries Chesterton found a system within which he could live. Life was not so large and relative; it had definite boundaries with definite guideposts.⁹

⁵Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 256.

⁶Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 249.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 129-30.

⁹Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 145-46.

The central guidepost or dogma for Christianity was the teaching of original sin or the "fall of man." Chesterton adhered to the traditional belief that man indeed fell from God's favor. Sin brought mortality to man along with the advent of evil in a society theretofore free of evil.¹⁰ In Heretics, Chesterton had reminded his readers that original sin was a great equalizer in society. As a result of that original sin, all humanity suffered under the same moral strictures.¹¹ Yet, without the concept of original sin, man could only despair because if man were already as good as he could be in a society in which evil existed so plentifully, there was no hope. With the concept of original sin man could affirm that he had been in a better situation once, and therefore he could hope for a better life to come.¹²

Chesterton's hope for a better life centered around his concept of man and his place in the cosmos. Man was the measure of all things for Chesterton, just as for Aristotle; however, Christ as Son of Man was the supreme example of man. He was the "most important man who is not there."¹³ This ideal man, Christ, raised for all mankind a

¹⁰Horace James Bridges, Criticisms of Life (1915; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), pp. 48-49; Hollis, Mind of Chesterton, p. 257.

¹¹Chesterton, Heretics, p. 167.

¹²Christopher Hollis, G. K. Chesterton (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1950), p. 9.

¹³Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 27.

model toward which their lives and thoughts might strive. In almost every work by Chesterton the theme was man. Whether the work dealt with man in society, in theology, in politics, or at home, Chesterton attempted to describe man from a Christian perspective. This preoccupation with humanity long preceded his "Romanization," since even his early works had centered on man. In fact, he determined that men were almost always simple men. That very simplicity allowed them to be great men for short bursts of time. Important to his argument was that these same men returned to ordinary stature after their moment of glory.

The first-rate great man is equal with other men, like Shakespeare. The second-rate great man is on his knees to other men, like Whitman. The third-rate great man is superior to other men, like Whistler.¹⁴

The universal quality of man was his uniqueness in the universe. Man alone among the creatures of the world had free will, and a truly Chestertonian observation was that man alone could laugh. Free will and laughter raised man above the animals, yet his lack of divinity left him still beneath God and his angels.¹⁵ Chesterton chose his own chain of being; denying the missing link, he adhered to the traditional medieval scheme.

Chesterton envisioned the universe as fixed, with all

¹⁴Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 245-46.

¹⁵Chesterton, Everlasting Man, pp. 19-20.

living things ordered as they had been and would be. Evolution was not an acceptable theory. God alone set up the universe with each separate part individually created and permanently fixed within that universe. Chesterton's views coincided with the medieval one that God set up a fixed universe and intervened only when necessary. When God intervened in the world, He was an active force for good just as His adversary worked for evil.

Chesterton viewed man as "a thing standing absolute and alone."¹⁶ Man's distinct nature did not allow gradual change in any facet. Chesterton imaginatively illustrated his disregard for evolution in an allegory of the cave similar to Plato's. In G. K.'s account of the story, the cave walls were covered with primitive paintings, not shadows. G. K. insisted that man had initiated the paintings; he did not simply carry forward the efforts of a monkey. He brought his allegory to a climax by reminding his readers that "art is the signature of man."¹⁷

Evolution denied to Chesterton the need to find causes because he interpreted evolution as leaving nothing at which to wonder.¹⁸ Too many links were missing in the theory for him to allow the argument for evolution to sway him.¹⁹ This denial of evolution transcended the physical world. Chesterton

¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁸Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 60-61.

¹⁹J. G. Eaker, "G. K. Chesterton Among the Moderns," Georgia Review 13(Summer 1959): 154-55.

rejected religious evolution. The effect of a leap of faith was much more final, more impressive, more stable in his analysis. In a letter to Maurice Baring shortly after conversion, G. K. commented that "no evolution into Catholicism will have that moral effect,"²⁰ Christianity was living proof that the arguments of evolution and progress were fallacious. These two closely linked ideas rejected the use of anything once tried and cast aside. The rebuttal to this argument appeared obvious to the Christian Chesterton. Christianity still answered the questions for him which science could not answer.

Beyond evolution for Chesterton stood that impregnable fortress, the Holy Mother Church. Long before his conversion, Chesterton seemed to take refuge there from the fearful moderns who demanded supermen, no Supreme Being, and faith in nothing.²¹ He took refuge in Church doctrine, not recognizing that evolution had not substantially disturbed doctrine. He found in orthodox Christianity a profound truth. For Chesterton, the paradox involved in Christianity, with the tensions of opposite passions producing moderation and a comfortable position with which the majority could agree, was the most easily justified modern philosophy. True to his belief in imagination, Chesterton

²⁰G. K. Chesterton to Maurice Baring, 14 February 1923, in Ward, Chesterton, p. 458.

²¹Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 82; Chesterton, Heretics, p. 88.

held that "the vision is always solid and reliable . . . ," a fact. It is reality that is often a fraud."²²

In Orthodoxy, Chesterton declared that all religion began as a protest against reason and authority in an effort to counter the already spiralling effects of skepticism.²³ Christianity offered a common-sense approach to everyday problems which allowed mankind to transcend the determinist ideas of modern philosophy and to become truly free. Faith, the cornerstone of freedom, was a necessary ingredient in day-to-day activities, and it allowed a Christian individual to be among the fittest, the survivors.²⁴

Evil acted as an impetus to Chesterton's Christianity. He could not abide the Pharisees of the modern world and the evil they represented. Evil acted as an unwanted catalyst, small and sinister. "We can deal it its death-wound one moment; it deals us death in the end," was his description of the strength of evil in the world.²⁵

He equated pessimism with evil, and the resulting ills were also equal. Most of Chesterton's contemporaries

²²Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 82.

²³Ibid., p. 59.

²⁴Gilbert K. Chesterton, "Return to Religion," Fortnightly Review 135(April 1931): 455; Eaker, "G. K. Chesterton among the Moderns," p. 152.

²⁵Gilbert K. Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles (1909; reprint ed., London: Methuen & Co., 1920), p. 126.

recognized that his argument focused on pessimism.²⁶

Pessimism acted as the wellspring of contemporary philosophies such as materialistic determinism, pantheism, art for art's sake, paganism (i.e., atheism), and many others. Chesterton held evil in such awe that he allowed no gray area between evil and good. Everything was one or the other, evil or good; he was deeply concerned to emphasize the good and chastize the evil which had caused him such anguish in his youth. In his Autobiography he discussed

the period of youth which is full of doubts and moribidities and temptations; It . . . has left in my mind forever a certitude upon the objective solidity of Sin.²⁷

In Orthodoxy, Chesterton described the healing of an insane person as "casting out a devil."²⁸ Chesterton rebuked as participants in satanic intervention the persons who took part in seances, in the dissolution of monasteries, and in anarchism.²⁹ Evil existed in many forms, political, mystical, and philosophical.

Just as evil weighed heavily on Chesterton's spirit,

²⁶Maurice Evans, G. K. Chesterton (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), pp. 17-18; Emile Cammaerts, The Laughing Prophet (London: Methuen & Co., 1937), p. 23; Joseph J. Reilly, "Chesterton as Poet," Catholic World 141 (December 1935): 270; Semper, "Quintessence of Chesterton," p. 44.

²⁷Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 75.

²⁸Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 37.

²⁹Semper, "Quintessence of Chesterton," p. 44; Frank Swinnerton, The Georgian Scene (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934), p. 95; Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 60-61.

humility, joy, innocence, laughter, and fantasy lightened his burden. Humility was a necessary ingredient in a realistic world view. Without humility, man might lose perspective, seeing himself as larger than the rest of the universe.³⁰ Chesterton distinguished two types of humility in contemporary society. The first, "modern" humility, made men doubt their whole reason for existence, and it led to skepticism and defeat. The second or "old" humility led the individual to doubt his efforts in life and therefore to try harder. The old humility was constructive, for it encouraged an individual to overcome his shortcomings, while modern humility was self-defeating. Chesterton feared its impact on a society already quite pessimistic.³¹

Closely related to his vision of humility was Chesterton's gift of laughter. He laughed at himself when laughter was warranted and made others laugh whenever he could. The ability to laugh was a gift of God, a God which Chesterton pictured as laughing through time and space. Chesterton did not simply demand laughter without cause; he felt that man's philosophy ought to emphasize humor and joy, especially in the small things of life--a puppet show or fairy tale.

Like humility, Chesterton admired innocence, not

³⁰Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Defendant (1901; reprint ed., London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1932), pp. 134-36.

³¹Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 54-56.

feigned innocence but the innocence of a child who had never witnessed perversion or evil.³² His own childlike innocence has often been noted. Chesterton's quips about his ability to lose himself in time and place, his own remarks about his absentmindedness and his love of fairy tales and children's songs, are elements of that innocence. This innocence allowed him, as an adult, to still "wonder" at the world and the universe. Chesterton linked these pleasurable moments with faith in a poem entitled "The Song of the Strange Ascetic" in which he commented about people "that do not have the faith,/ And will not have the fun."³³ Faith and fun were partners in Chesterton's life.

Joy must be the central element of a man, with grief no more than a veneer.³⁴ Joy, wonder, and happiness were often used interchangeably by Chesterton. Joy simply meant the ability to find the good in things and not to notice only the bad. Joy was synonymous with optimism. Chesterton's sense of wonder was directly tied to his love of fantasy and fairy tales, and tales of all kinds were his tools. When Chesterton illustrated his ideas, the illustration was always imaginative, often full of elves

³²Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 41.

³³Gilbert K. Chesterton, Wine Water and Song (1915; reprint ed., London: Methuen & Co., 1946), p. 55.

³⁴Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 296.

and fairies. Chesterton's ability to be awed or enraptured by the world ranged from the sight of the smallest flower to the mountains and machinery. He early admitted that for him fairy tales were true; they were, in fact, "the sunny country of common sense."³⁵ One critic found Chesterton's "sense of wonder" as the basis of all true religion.³⁶ He found Chesterton's poetic imagination and instinct so intertwined with his laughing faith as to be inseparable.³⁷ Chesterton appeared to concur with this when he stated in Heretics that man can only celebrate the nature of things, which excludes all but religion.³⁸ One should rejoice for all that is pleasurable in religion. Pleasure or happiness was as mysterious as religion and held the seeds of that permanency which Chesterton needed. He admired that which appeared to continue into the future without end.³⁹ The happiness espoused by the advocates of carpe diem horrified Chesterton; that happiness was without foundation and had no future. "To enjoy the day" was not for him; instead he thought it a motto for "very unhappy people."⁴⁰

³⁵Ibid., p. 87.

³⁶Cammaerts, Laughing Prophet, p. 46.

³⁷Ibid., p. 47.

³⁸Chesterton, Heretics, p. 110.

³⁹Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 107.

In Christianity he had found a way to love the world and enjoy happiness without succumbing to worldliness. Awareness of this aspect of Christianity had marked Chesterton's first steps toward acceptance of orthodox Christianity.⁴¹

With his emphasis on appreciation of the mystery of the universe, Chesterton has often been linked with the romantics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He did not advocate the worship of nature as had Whitman or possibly Wordsworth; rather he had a more Franciscan outlook on nature. "Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister."⁴² We do not work for nature, but with her, as a contemporary. The pantheism of nature lovers was too obscure for Chesterton. He needed something greater than himself to credit for the wonders of the universe.⁴³

Just as he differed from pantheists like Wordsworth and Whitman, he differed from Tolstoy and Tolstoy's morality based on nature. In an essay on Tolstoy, G. K. rejected Whitman's tenet that man can return to nature through accepting as much as he can, while at the same time, G. K. maintained the inaccuracy of the Tolstoian idea that man can return to nature by rejecting as much as he can.⁴⁴ Chesterton was amazed by Tolstoy's ability to conceptualize

⁴¹Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 144-45.

⁴²Ibid., p. 207.

⁴³Feeney, "Metaphysics of Chesterton," p. 35.

⁴⁴Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Common Man (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950), p. 161.

man within nature and then at his attempts to tear man from nature. The simplicity which Tolstoy demanded of humankind was not admirable to Chesterton, who stated that Tolstoy's philosophy was "more natural than it is natural to be. It would not only be more human, it would be more humble of us to be content to be complex."⁴⁵ The virtue of this humility rested in a belief that God had properly fixed man's nature. Man had to live with his complex nature.

Chesterton's love of nature was tempered with reason. Man cannot return to nature, but he can participate sanely within it. Chesterton's philosophy of man was often compared to the neo-platonic philosophy.⁴⁶ He believed in the existence of the individual, but also in that of a perfect example; an ideal existed in Christ. In his study of St. Thomas Aquinas, Chesterton asserted that the historical Catholic church was originally under platonic influence, especially with respect to the idea of the transcendent perfection of God.⁴⁷ The idea of the transcendent perfection of God arrived in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas through St. Augustine who was neoplatonic.

The most controversial aspect of G. K. Chesterton's public thought on religion was his ready acceptance of dogma. He held that all people believed in dogma, some just did not

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 164.

⁴⁶Eaker, "G. K. Chesterton among the Moderns," p. 156.

⁴⁷Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 89. Through ignorance, G. K. described as platonic that which was actually neoplatonic.

realize it. If man merely existed without reasoning, dogma would be unnecessary; however, dogma was desirable to G. K. Chesterton quipped that "turnips are singularly broad-minded" in response to the idea that dogmatism was an undesirable characteristic.⁴⁸ Most of his life Chesterton worked at defining the dogma in which he believed. In 1905 with the publication of Heretics, Chesterton proclaimed his search publicly.⁴⁹ He further cemented his ideas on dogma with his book Orthodoxy. For Chesterton dogmas were simply a set of conclusions on a variety of subjects affecting everyday living. The skeptics' argument that dogma denied reason remained unrecognized by Chesterton. Once he converted, he easily slipped further into this unquestioning outlook. The historical validity of the Roman Catholic church was difficult to doubt. For Chesterton, reality was a constant, not a relative condition.⁵⁰ While Heretics detailed the negative aspects of contemporary society, Orthodoxy explored Chesterton's own set of beliefs directly. In his introduction he stated that his book was based on the Apostles' Creed, "the best root of energy and sound ethics."⁵¹ This statement was made more than a decade before

⁴⁸Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 285.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 303-304.

⁵⁰Gassman, "Second Look at G. K. C.," p. 449; Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 174.

⁵¹Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 20; Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 179-80.

his actual conversion, yet it reads as if it had been written by one already convinced of orthodoxy, and not as the tentative statement of a man in quest of truth.

Rationalism played a minor role in Chesterton's defense of Roman Catholic dogma.⁵² Reason supplemented faith; it did not act independently from faith. Even his fabled imagination took a secondary position to his faith, much to the dismay of many of his critics.⁵³ More important than either reason or imagination was a framework of reference within which Chesterton could operate. In his Autobiography Chesterton recognized this phenomenon after he had described the paradise of his father's paper doll theatre.

I recognize a sort of symbol of all that I happen to like in imagery and ideas. All my life I have loved frames and limits; and I will maintain that the largest wilderness looks larger seen through a window.⁵⁴

He had previously offered the same idea in an essay entitled "The Toy Theatre," published in Tremendous Trifles, in 1909. Chesterton felt that man could more easily formulate and understand an idea within a limited framework.⁵⁵ For

⁵²Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 32; Arnold Lunn, Roman Converts (1924; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1966), p. 219.

⁵³Elizabeth Sewell, "G. K. Chesterton: The Giant Upsidedown," Thought: Fordham University Quarterly 30 (Winter 1955-56): 576; Lunn, Roman Converts, pp. 237, 229; Gassman, "Second Look at G. K. C.," p. 449; W. F. R. Hardie, "Philosophy of G. K. Chesterton," Hibbert Journal 29 (April 1931): 461-62.

⁵⁴Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁵Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, p. 151.

his religious thought the framework and limitations were to be found in the dogma of the Roman Catholic church. The making of dogma was a task distinctly left to man. An individual who refused to formulate dogma would be shirking his duty.⁵⁶ Chesterton held this view because he equated the formulation of dogma with the construction of a definite philosophy of life. Man was bound by integrity to develop his own philosophy of life, and once his philosophy crystallized, he must defend it with all his strength.⁵⁷

The reader of Chesterton must equate philosophy with theology and theology with orthodox Roman Catholicism. Chesterton absolved himself of the duty of assiduously tracking down his whole life's philosophy. Rather, once he realized the similarity of the main tenets of his beliefs to Roman Catholic teachings, G. K. adopted the remaining dogmas as truths. He greatly admired the ageless quality of Roman Christianity and the logic of even the seemingly illogical teachings of the Church. Or, as he stated in Orthodoxy, when the Church veered from the logical, it had only discovered an illogical truth.⁵⁸

Once a man chose his philosophy of life, Chesterton argued that the individual must be ready to defend the choice.

⁵⁶Chesterton, Heretics, p. 286.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 287.

⁵⁸Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, pp. 93, 97; Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 150.

He surely followed his own advice, for after his conversion his writings became less secular and more those of a Catholic apologist. Some critics of Chesterton dismissed this narrowed vision as typical of a convert whose zeal seems greater due to its focus.⁵⁹ Chesterton felt his work was the just end of his search. The best effort was always a product of someone's firm convictions. He cited H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw, and Rudyard Kipling as examples of men with their own set of dogmas on which each had focused his life and work.⁶⁰

Once he discovered the similarity between his dogma and orthodox Christian dogma, no proof is available that he pursued his object further. He could have easily acquiesced, accepting the remaining orthodox dogma for his own. In an unfinished letter, Chesterton said, "I think that I am morbid; but I want to be told so by authority."⁶¹ He argued that without dogma the human mind was reduced to prejudice. The direction provided by the Roman church simply kept him from baseless preconception.⁶² Earlier students of Chesterton's thought have questioned this particular point.

⁵⁹ Cammaerts, Laughing Prophet, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 280-82.

⁶¹ Ward, Chesterton, p. 625; Attwater, Modern Christian Revolutionaries, pp. 91, 99.

⁶² Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, pp. 21, 27.

Most have determined that though truly a religious man at heart, Chesterton was also very much afraid of the rigors of the self-discipline required of the free thinker.⁶³ His youth provided the best examples of his self-doubt and general lack of discipline. In school, he rarely did his lessons. When all his friends went to Oxford and Cambridge, Chesterton stayed behind, preferring the less regimented Slade School of Art. According to E. C. Bentley, Chesterton's greatest friend, G. K. learned nothing in all his time at Slade School; he emerged with his natural talent, but nothing more.

His parents, though moral individuals, gave their sons no credo by which they might weigh other ideas. This lack of a framework led them into bewilderment, but they finally adhered to the guidelines of orthodox Christianity. Cecil's wife Ada recognized in G. K.'s conversion his need for an unchangeable social structure. The void emerged as his family died, leaving him to face the uncertainties of life without a frame of reference. According to Ada, Gilbert sought a new anchor in definite beliefs.⁶⁴ She also discussed the effects of Gilbert and Frances' move from London in 1909. Ada Chesterton found that with the lack of outside stimuli from his journalist colleagues of Fleet Street,

⁶³Lunn, Roman Converts, p. 229; Hardie, "Philosophy of G. K. Chesterton," p. 461; Sir Frank Brangwyn, The Way of the Cross (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), pp. 22-23.

⁶⁴Chesterton, The Chestertons, pp. 264-65.

Gilbert's mind began to work in "ever-narrowing circles."⁶⁵ Without any precise catalyst, Gilbert Chesterton slipped easily into unquestioning dogmatism.

Chesterton defended his position. His contemporaries accused him of distorting truth. His method of presentation of facts employed "framing" the idea, which he believed gave the idea more clarity. G. K.'s critics felt that in isolating an idea he simplified it beyond reason. The idea no longer fit the original context. Or critics claimed that Chesterton, in isolating an idea, embellished and enhanced it until it no longer related to reality.⁶⁶ Chesterton recognized this criticism, but he maintained in an essay on "The Advantages of Having One Leg" that in order "to appreciate anything we must isolate it."⁶⁷ The dependency of the one leg on the entire body did not impress G. K. He was unable to comprehend complex issues except on a simplified level.

Although Chesterton believed in isolating ideas, he also held that man must be aware of an idea's many facets. He abhorred bigotry, which was the path of ignorance. Chesterton equated ignorance with bigotry because the ill-informed, seldom-thoughtful individual was often the easy

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁶ Arnold Bennett, Books & Persons (London: Chatto & Windus, 1917), p. 150; Cammaerts, Laughing Prophet, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, p. 40.

follower of baseless convictions.⁶⁸ A little knowledge was dangerous to the ignorant just as a glass of wine was to a teetotaler.⁶⁹ Chesterton advocated moderation; one should learn all sides, determine the truth and the other ideas will fall. He did not equate bigotry with firm convictions; he equated it, rather, with lack of opinion and with indifference.⁷⁰ Fanaticism, unlike bigotry, comes from the fervent convictions of a thoughtful individual man, and Chesterton admired fanaticism.⁷¹ W. H. Auden, otherwise enchanted with Chesterton's thought and writings, found Chesterton's own bigotry and anti-semitism a sound refutation of Chesterton's position on bigotry. After all, Chesterton was a thoughtful bigot--a living contradiction to his own philosophy.⁷² Though an obvious Christian zealot, G. K. thought of his position as moderate, moderate as he would define it, for he had studied the alternatives and had chosen what he had construed to be the middle position. He never realized that his position was no longer moderate although it had been at one time. He criticized the "moderns" for the supposition he saw in their writings

⁶⁸Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 294-95.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 297.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 296.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Gilbert K. Chesterton, G. K. Chesterton: A Selection from his Non-Fictional Prose, ed. W. H. Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 11.

that all traditions were superstitious. Chesterton denied this equality. If man realized why he followed a tradition, it no longer was a superstition. He based his reasons for following tradition on "Christian faith."⁷³ The synthesis of ideas Chesterton found in the traditional was as close to the truth as he felt man might approach. "Original" thought had to be inferior by its nature since, for Chesterton, original thought was that not tempered by tradition.⁷⁴ The Roman church in itself, was not tradition, but it knew traditions and used them to remain vital. The Church was the center of a world torn apart by the Reformation to which all the parts were returning. Protestant sects were merely Catholics accidentally separated from the Mystical Body. Each sect of Protestantism wrongly emphasized only one small part of the corpus of traditions. For example, the Calvinists emphasized the aspect of the sovereignty of God found in Catholicism, and carried it to its extreme in predestination.⁷⁵ Chesterton termed all sects as small nightmares in Catholic history.

The Reformation of Luther and the other sixteenth-century zealots was, in Chesterton's interpretation, a "belated revolt of the thirteenth century pessimists."⁷⁶

⁷³Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Superstitions of a Sceptic (Cambridge: W. Heffler & Sons, 1925), pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴Gilbert K. Chesterton, Come to Think of It (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931), p. 176; Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. xxi.

⁷⁵Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, pp. 80-83.

⁷⁶Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. x.

It represented the remains of Augustinian conservatism against the resurgent Aristotelian liberalism.⁷⁷ The only basis of agreement for the Protestant sects was that there should be no papacy. Chesterton wrongly asserted that the reformers did not question the historical validity of the papacy; instead their rejection of the papal institution, according to Chesterton, was a commitment without the favor of tradition. Because he valued the tradition, he had to reject the Protestant sects as possible avenues to salvation. They valued only parts of the tradition; he respected the whole tradition.

In addition to tradition, morality acted as a guidepost to orthodoxy. Chesterton could not understand modern morality, which he claimed was negative in its basis. He held that the "moderns" founded their morality on an ethic which allowed them to recognize imperfection but did not help them approach perfection.⁷⁸ The "monkish" morality of the medieval tradition strove to attain spiritual good and perfection. Chesterton admired this quest for self-improvement which he believed was more difficult than simply identifying the imperfections of others. He also questioned the emphasis of modern morality, decrying the method of strengthening minor morals at the expense of the major ones. The peripheral were being emphasized while

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Chesterton, Heretics, p. 25.

the basics were ignored.⁷⁹ Chesterton believed that morals were absolute, and thus not to be tampered with or modified to fit the immediate situation. This immutability linked morals with tradition in Chesterton's mind. Just as tradition could not be ignored, morality could not be modified.

Chesterton saw the modern approach to morality and tradition as signals of a return to religion. From the chaos created by modern morality man would realize the only answer was that which survived in orthodox Christianity. The negativism of modernist philosophy dehumanized mankind with its continued denial of life beyond this limited spectrum. The skeptics had so limited their beliefs that there was little left to believe except that part of traditional orthodoxy which had survived countless attacks.⁸⁰ Here Chesterton overlooked or denied the possible validity of existentialism. Man could live and was living without perceiving the existence of a supreme being. This was beyond Chesterton's comprehension or ability, for he required a framework well-defined and well-rooted in the past.

In a society of tradition and morality, virtue played an important role. Virtue was not merely the absence of evil; it stood as a separate entity, and was positively revealed in faith, hope, and charity.⁸¹ With the Reformation

⁷⁹Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, p. 60.

⁸⁰Chesterton, "Return to Religion," pp. 450-56.

⁸¹Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, p. 67.

and its shattering of the traditional religious world view, individual virtues were freed from the restraints of the system. Chesterton described the problems of the modern world as those of virtue "gone mad."⁸² These virtues unchecked could do great damage; Chesterton chastized Robert Blatchford of the Clarion for his advocacy of unchecked charity. Extreme charity of love would lead to anarchy because no one would be accountable for his sins.⁸³

Faith was the first virtue, the cornerstone of Chesterton's belief. Logic had its place in the road to religion, but faith was the virtue that bridged the expanse between the provable and that which man accepted because God dictated. Beyond this, G. K. saw faith as a belief in reality. He characterized the Reformation as a breakdown of the unified view of reality and faith in it.

Joan of Arc had a hidden moral cohesiveness and practicality which faith in his day had somehow lost.⁸⁴ G. K. saw the ages which were unified by faith as happier than the twentieth century or any similar time of great skepticism. He did not advocate faith as a sole means of salvation, since he also held that good works must play a role.⁸⁵ Yet if a man had no faith, good works alone would not gain him eternal salvation.

⁸²Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 52-53.

⁸³Ibid., p. 53.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 79.

⁸⁵Chesterton, Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 58.

The absence of faith or the depletion of faith led to despair. An individual who dwelled upon himself without thought of the outside world or one who doubted God's ability (i.e., lacked faith) committed a grievous sin.⁸⁶ Only a person who loses his faith and sinks to despair would resort to suicide. Chesterton's rejection of suicide was the traditional Catholic viewpoint, which placed faith among the essential virtues for salvation but not the sole virtue.

Faith also accounted for Chesterton's belief in miracles. For him, a miracle was only a sudden revelation of the mind rather than the gradual mastering of matter by the mind. He wrote before his conversion that since he did not belong to any particular denomination he was able to study the validity of miracles without prejudice. He concluded that miracles did occur, basing his judgment on common sense. If no other explanation could be given, common sense dictated miracles.⁸⁷ Chesterton ignored the medieval tenet that stated that the simplest explanation was the one most acceptable. A miracle required the unusual intervention of God in everyday affairs. Occam's Razor would indicate that the unknown law of the universe was simpler; therefore miracles were not the "common sense" answer. Arnold Lunn, a contemporary critic of Chesterton,

⁸⁶Chesterton, Orthodoxy, pp. 133, 135.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 236, 280-82.

termed his defense of miracles as the "weakest" part of Orthodoxy.⁸⁸ The arguments were weak because his analogies were bad and inconclusive. Another contemporary of Chesterton, Alan Handsacre, wrote a book analyzing the defects of Orthodoxy called Authodoxy. He correctly determined the basic fault of all Chesterton's writings when he noted that often his argument was superfluous because the original assumption was false. He argued that Chesterton never actually discussed basics, instead he emphasized the superficial.⁸⁹

Hope as a virtue was closely tied to faith. Chesterton was unable to visualize human nature devoid of hope. Without a vision, humankind must surely perish.⁹⁰ Later, Chesterton would teach that if man lost hope he could renew his spirit and vision through the sacrament of penance, since despair could be lifted through the understanding of God's love and help.⁹¹ Pride should not keep an individual from admitting his need for support, because Chesterton felt all mankind needed external support. Charity did not depend on the supernatural. Man could be charitable to man, thereby restoring hope.

⁸⁸Lunn, Roman Converts, p. 220.

⁸⁹Alan Handsacre pseud., Authodoxy: Being a Discursive Examination of Mr. G. K. Chesterton's "Orthodoxy" (London: John Lane, 1921), pp. 116-18.

⁹⁰Chesterton, Heretics, p. 298.

⁹¹Chesterton, Autobiography, p. 342.

G. K. Chesterton's theology influenced his view of society. His orthodoxy extended beyond abstractions to social institutions. Most important to G. K. was that of marriage and the family. He believed in a marriage of love, not simply one for procreation's sake.⁹² Marriage was also a holy sacrament which demanded respect.⁹³ Lasting beyond the times of incompatibility, a successful marriage came "after the failure of the honeymoon."⁹⁴ Divorce, or failure to survive the instance of incompatibility was an act of injustice on the part of the participants. Marriage was particularly important because it was the framework for the family, and the family was the cornerstone of society.⁹⁵ The stability of the domestic structure was a barometer of the political conditions. If man's personal life were in disarray, then society, as a collection of family units, would be in disorder in direct proportion.⁹⁶

G. K.'s Weekly, steeped in medievalism, could hardly condone birth control and other twentieth-century innovations which threatened to rock the social order.⁹⁷ Birth control,

⁹²Chesterton, Heretics, p. 78.

⁹³Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Superstition of Divorce (New York: John Lane Company, 1920), p. 143.

⁹⁴Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, pp. 65-66.

⁹⁵Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 167.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷G. K.'s Weekly, 15 August 1925, p. 488.

a delicate subject for the well-bred Chesterton, posed an especially difficult problem. The Church absolutely forbade the practice of "artificial" means of control; however, his deep concern for the common man made it painfully obvious that some sort of relief must be made available to the mass of society. G. K. wanted to do something for all of mankind, not simply for those self-indulgent members of society who wanted pleasure to excess and had no real interest in reducing the rate of population growth. For this, Chesterton advised self-control, rather than birth control. For advocates of birth control, he proposed a Feast of Herod to replace Christmas. He refused to confront the impracticality of his suggestion. Self-control had not worked in previous centuries, and reliance on man to restrain himself seems a weak program for the future.

According to Chesterton, even Malthus, often quoted on the population explosion by birth controllers, was against birth control; he had preferred to let the death rate increase to eliminate the rise in births.⁹⁸ Chesterton was not entirely fair to Malthus when he thrust Malthus into a technologically more advanced era. Malthus accepted the extreme of increased death rates only if all else failed.

Chesterton saw the birth control issue as moral and

⁹⁸ Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 25 December 1926, p. 9; 22 January 1927, p. 11; Thomas Robert Malthus, On Population, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (New York: Modern Library, 1960), p. 494.

not as a conflict of capitalism and socialism. Motherhood would follow women into any political structure.⁹⁹ In a letter to the editor of G. K.'s Weekly, a female reader (Dora Russell) rebutted Chesterton's position saying that a woman ought to have some say in her own destiny. She blamed Chesterton's lack of sympathy to the cause upon his masculine background rather than upon his religious convictions.¹⁰⁰ Chesterton lamely retorted that the situation was not as grim as the pessimistic predictions had suggested, and therefore did not warrant any action as strenuous as had been recommended by the alarmists.

At the center of Chesterton's argument on birth control was his belief that if it became a common practice the family would no longer act as a cohesive unit or a stable structure in society's mechanism. This was another example of the intermingling of religious and social ideas in Chesterton's thought; Christianity had given man the Holy Family as an example of proper living; therefore, to disturb that tranquil relationship could only do harm to all of society.¹⁰¹

According to Chesterton, man gained his identity from the family and society. An individual defined himself according to the set of dogmas of their own.¹⁰² From the Renaissance through the Bolsheviks, the skeptics had rejected

⁹⁹Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 22 January 1927, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰G. K.'s Weekly, 3 October 1925, p. 67.

¹⁰¹Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 42.

¹⁰²Chesterton, Superstitions of a Sceptic, p. 16.

the established position of the orthodox Roman church and its dogma only to define their own truths with even greater limitations than those they had previously rejected. Chesterton termed these new dogmas "narrower prisons."¹⁰³ The attempts of modern men to escape from some well-defined system only led them into deeper bondage and away from the freedom they sought. Chesterton illustrated this point with Jeremy Bentham and the Utilitarians. Intellectually they were free, but in an effort to provide the greatest good for the greatest number they succeeded only in restricting their avenues of operation.¹⁰⁴ Chesterton found orthodoxy less encumbering and more true.

How this orthodox Christianity developed into the perfect answer became a topic of discussion in Everlasting Man. Mythology was an early form of structured religion. Mythology had both a light and a dark side: a mythology of daydreams versus a mythology of nightmares. Evolutionists depicted the development of religion from the mythology of nightmares and superstitions, full of fear and sacrifice. Chesterton rejected that ugly description of the origin of religion.¹⁰⁵ He depicted the origin of religion as commonplace, understandable, without fear. Theology applied only to monotheistic religions, because polytheistic religions

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 34.

were simply highly refined mythologies in which no one deity was almighty with his own omnipotent rules. G. K. rejected all non-Christian monotheisms as imitative and therefore not truly religions. He held that the movements usually thought of as monotheistic religions such as Buddhism and Mohammedanism were just philosophies like Plato's. Unlike Plato's these philosophies were generalized and accepted as a way of life which were later interpreted as religions. He acknowledge Christianity's debt to Judaism for the living monotheism. G. K. noted that the mosaic God withstood the polytheistic tendencies evident in the civilization of the time. Without its all-powerful, jealous, fearsome God, the modern world would surely not have the relative peace and serenity that existed.¹⁰⁶ Chesterton felt certain that the Jews had a separate destiny within this monotheism which had not yet been revealed. He seemed drawn to their singular position and admired the unity of such a scattered people.¹⁰⁷

Early Christianity directed man to look for explanations not only within but also in the external world. The complexity of life on earth demanded a "divine captain."¹⁰⁸ The gospel of the early Church held the mysticism; the organized Church

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 103-104. Chesterton wrote this immediately after World War I in the midst of the pacified twenties.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰⁸Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 139.

offered the rationalism. Chesterton found the universality of this combination made it more applicable than the teachings of the philosophers, ancient or modern.¹⁰⁹ Mythology, defined by Chesterton as a quest, ceased with the first Christmas. Christmas was a dream come true, full of humanity, and yet offering answers beyond the human. The enormity of this realization did not shatter the world; instead, it set the hopes and directions of the world into modern times.¹¹⁰ Chesterton's world must be defined. He did not consider as part of the "world" Africa, Central Asia, or South America. His world was Christian and European and his faith and reasoning are short-sighted when dealing with "colonial" areas.

The decline of religion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries alarmed Chesterton. He likened life without religion to a tree whose limbs have been severed. The tree survives in a shrunken state. The limbs degenerate and finally die.¹¹¹ Politics and the arts would also degenerate once removed from the foundation of religion. But religion had been through crises before with the Arians, Albigensians, the humanist skeptics, Deists, and evolutionists; and in each case orthodox religion survived, not the upstarts.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 215.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 340.

¹¹¹George Perry Morris, "Gilbert Keith Chesterton," Outlook, 25 November 1905, p. 732.

¹¹²Chesterton, Everlasting Man, pp. 319-20.

These enemies of Catholicism would continue to suffer defeat because "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."¹¹³ Chesterton reflected that if one could not be inside orthodoxy, the best place to be would be totally outside of all religion, beyond hating it, all the way to disinterested neutrality.

In response to the Roman Catholic duty to spread the "good news" and set a "good example," G. K.'s profession of journalism led him to describe and defend as much of orthodox Christianity as he could in his adult life. Beginning in 1905 with Heretics, he had established the Apostles' Creed as the backbone of his religious beliefs. The years following Heretics were concerned with enhancing and highlighting the other important concepts of orthodox Christianity.

The relationship of God, Christ, and man in the universe required explanation. Other men were able to live without a God or Christ, but G. K. was determined to explain the need for a God and his relation to man. God was for G. K. the mosaic God tempered by Christ: the Old Testament Jehovah of fear and revenge combined with the compassionate and gentle Christ of the New Testament. Together they reigned over the universe which the former had created and the latter redeemed.

Man was subservient to God and unique within the universe. G. K. clearly distinguished man from nature and its other

¹¹³Ibid., p. 327.

inhabitants. Man could laugh, think, and create. Chesterton saw man as distinctly separate and not part of some evolutionary scheme. For Chesterton, evolution denied man his proper place in the order of creation. Evolution was fallacious because the universe was immutable as was everything inside it.

G. K. subsumed the relationship of God and man in his discussions of religion. Evil existed within the world and might interfere with man's attempt to live a moral, good life. To counterbalance evil, G. K. cited the joy, humility, and innocence in man's life. Each of these states of mind helped an individual overcome the temptress, evil.

In order to organize his life, G. K. found a framework essential. The common term for his framework was dogma and specifically orthodox Christian dogma. These dogmas were the rules of life which allowed the individual to be certain of where he stood, right or wrong, good or bad. G. K. required a definite plan for his life and was happy to be able to accept that offered by orthodox Christianity.

Tradition and the stability it symbolized were other essential elements in Chesterton's mind. He could rely on the validity of the orthodox Church not simply because it existed, but more because it had survived many attacks and seemed capable of meeting new ones. Among the new attackers was what G. K. described as modern morality. Rejecting it, G. K. accepted a morality grounded in the traditions of orthodox Christianity.

G. K.'s religious convictions suffused his social thought. Marriage, the sacrament necessary to family life, was central in his religious and later his political thought. The family, with its supreme example being the Holy Family, stabilized society and formed the nucleus of his economic system.

Orthodox Christianity had survived. That survival and the spirit of stability were important for G. K. He required this stability which he could not otherwise find in his life. If he could rely upon a static situation in morals and religion, G. K. felt certain he might be able to control the variables of economics and politics in his utopia.

CHAPTER IV

CHESTERTON: POLITICAL ECONOMICS

Chesterton's politics and economics were as unorthodox as his religion was orthodox. He recoiled from Social Darwinism and big business conservatism, although he was anti-Labour and anti-Liberal.¹ He belonged to none of the major political parties in Great Britain; for some time he worked for the liberal Daily News but resigned when its liberal approach became more than he could tolerate.² In the late 1890s when Chesterton joined the Fabian Society of London, it was because he was drawn to the caliber of intellect usually found in the Fabian Society, not because of their basic tenets. "I call myself a Socialist; because the only alternative to being a Socialist was not being a Socialist," Chesterton wrote in his autobiography.³ As he chose among the evils, he was tentatively satisfied that he had found the least evil when he declared that he was a reluctant socialist. Through his early adult life, he

¹Reginal Groves, Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement: An Adventure in Christian Socialism (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), p. 42.

²Koss, Fleet Street Radical, pp. 113-117.

³Chesterton, Autobiography, pp. 107-108.

searched for an acceptable alternative to state socialism, which others had termed inevitable. He first turned to the Christian Social Union, which, though socialist in outlook, was firmly grounded in the religious concern for man. The majority of the members were Anglo-Catholics or twentieth-century tractarians. Chesterton was, however, uneasy with collectivism and philanthropy. He soon equated the CSU and Fabian Society with the Independent Labour Party and rejected all of them.⁴

Chesterton swung to the idea of land redistribution as the cure to modern political and economic problems. Hilaire Belloc, friend of G. K., offered an alternative solution to socialism in his book, The Servile State, published in 1912. His proposals included the redistribution of land, and G. K. soon became an advocate of "distributism," the newfound name for the fledgling movement. It never became a mass movement or even well-known, because it lacked a unique program to distinguish it from the socialist plan to reallocate the nation's wealth. The Chesterton brothers and Belloc were no less keen for it, and they used the pre-war years to define their program and popularize it in the small newspapers of London. Moreover, in the early stage of 1910 and 1911, the Chesterton brothers and Belloc, devoted to the ideal of democracy, were most concerned

⁴Groves, Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement, pp. 32-33.

with the party system in England. English democracy, as witnessed in parliamentary rule and which G. K. thought to be "farcical," worried them.⁵

Many factors led Chesterton to his distributist position. One important one was his assumption that only two types of government existed in the world, demagoguery and democracy.⁶ The choice of where the power and authority lay determined one's position. Many of Chesterton's ideas fit comfortably with those of the last nineteenth-century Pope, Leo XIII. In his encyclical Libertas Praestantissimum (On Human Liberty), Leo had dealt with divine and natural law and considered to whose authority a Christian ought to submit. In On Human Liberty, he commanded men to respect authority and just law; but, if the law be unjust and the authority wanting, one must obey God only. Leo equated natural law with divine law; hence, denial of one predetermined the denial of the other. The Pope also clearly rejected liberalism, which he contended was a refusal to submit to divine authority because it proclaimed each individual a law unto himself.⁷ Christians could not be liberals. Men were created unequal, and they should be governed equally as unequals.⁸

⁵Ward, Chesterton, pp. 317-21.

⁶Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 202; Gilbert K. Chesterton, Twelve Types (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1906), p. 175.

⁷Gilson, ed., The Church Speaks to the Modern World, pp. 9-10, 65-66.

⁸Ibid., p. 20.

In the majority of his works, Chesterton dealt with the aristocracy romantically. His love of the medieval predisposed Chesterton to admire aristocrats as a class with class traits, although he rejected the inequality inherent in that class structure.⁹ He scoffed at the usual description of the aristocracy as tradition-bound conservatives. This was simply not so. The English upper classes drew their power from their ability to keep up with the latest trends and innovations, and not by clinging to tradition blindly.¹⁰ The surest way to lose the power and position enjoyed by the aristocracy would be to adhere to only what grandfather had done, without looking to see what the grandchildren were undertaking. Nevertheless, traditionalism, with its defects, was creeping into the English aristocracy; hence their power was not so great as it had been before the industrial revolution and the capitalists.¹¹ "Democracy is founded on reverence for the common man, or if you will, even on fear of him," wrote G. K.¹² To Chesterton, all men were worthy of respect, because he believed that man was made in God's image and likeness and for that reason alone commanded respect. For those who did

⁹Chesterton, Heretics, p. 202.

¹⁰Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, pp. 87-88; Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Outline of Sanity 2d ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1928), p. 109.

¹¹Chesterton, Heretics, pp. 213-14.

¹²Ibid., p. 268.

not believe in God, G. K. stated that the unbeliever might respect man for fear of what man could do if he were not respected. In this he differed from Pope Leo XIII without question, for Leo saw men as basically unequal but deserving of equal treatment, while Chesterton saw men as equal, and therefore entitled to equal treatment. Chesterton proposed that democracy was "arbitrament by anybody." Since all were equal, any individual would be qualified to act.¹³ Chesterton admitted in Orthodoxy that he favored democracy and tradition. Again he tied democracy, conservatism, and tradition to the common man and not to the monied classes.¹⁴ The aristocratic ideal of noblesse oblige was extremely distasteful to Chesterton's egalitarian tendencies. He abhorred philanthropy and the subservient position in which it placed the common man in modern democracy.

Chesterton found the historical basis of English democracy not in its Anglo-Saxon heritage but in the monastic tradition of the Roman Church in England.¹⁵ He also claimed that the city charter of Cambridge was more significant than Magna Carta because of the difference in the beneficiaries of the trust: in the first instance, the people benefited, in the latter a handful of nobles,

¹³Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 119.

¹⁴Chesterton, Orthodoxy, p. 86.

¹⁵Lunn, Roman Converts, p. 247.

an oligarchy.¹⁶ He was convinced that true democracy, as witnessed in guilds and direct grants of rights and charters, had vanished to the detriment of all Englishmen.¹⁷ Dignity and the independence provided for the common man in medieval democracy were the goals of Chesterton and the distributists.

Politically, Chesterton was dissatisfied. He was firmly against government by the few, which assumed the inequality of men. He could see nothing innately better in the aristocrat than in the small shopkeeper. Likewise, modern democracy required restrictions on the common man; the state necessarily controlled many aspects of his life. Modern democracy in England was actually an oligarchy and therefore needed to be modified or replaced. Chesterton's political solutions were all closely tied to his economic remedies and his orthodox religious commitment. He wanted a return to medieval democracy and a return to religion. Together this rededication to God and man would lead the world to a more just political and economic organization.

Chesterton wrote widely about his views on the economic systems in use in his day. Capitalism, socialism, and the servile state were his main areas of concern in economics. Capitalist and socialist systems were well known and in

¹⁶G. K. Chesterton, introduction to Mary Evelyn Moncton Jones, Life in Old Cambridge (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1920), pp. xvii-xviii.

¹⁷Ibid., p. xviii.

competition in England. Each political party espoused not only a governmental system, but an economic organization as well. The Conservatives backed the capitalist system; the Labour Party supported the socialist system; and the Liberal Party in the 1920s vacillated between the two systems, taking what it felt was best from each. To Chesterton, all three were inferior systems which preyed on the common man. Each in its own way helped produce the servile state in which man was secondary to machine.

The economic system operating in England during Chesterton's life was capitalism. He never supported this system during his adult years; he went from Christian Socialism to distributism, both of which opposed capitalism. Chesterton defined capitalism as an "economic condition" in which the few control so much of the capital that the many must serve the few for wages.¹⁸ He thought a more descriptive name for capitalism was proletarianism.¹⁹ Belloc similarly described capitalism as a system in which property was not a general characteristic of society since it was concentrated in the hands of a few.²⁰ Both of these men freely used the terminology of Marxist thought in

¹⁸Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 5.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 6.

²⁰Belloc, Servile State, p. 81.

describing their common enemy, capitalism, yet they were unconvinced of Marx's solution.

Chesterton saw the capitalist system as based on two ideas: first, that there would always be enough rich to hire the poor; and second, that the poor would always be destitute enough to want to work for the rich. Unlike socialism, each individual is thinking of his own good and not of the public good.²¹ The assumption of capitalism that the wage-worker would also be the consumer of the goods he produced was contradictory. The less the wage-worker earned, the less the wage-worker could consume, and minimizing the wages of workers was the goal of the capitalist. Chesterton accepted the classical "recession spiral" theory which held that once the consumer bought less, production would slacken, reducing need for workers who in turn consumed less.²² He did recognize the efforts of the capitalists to curtail the ill effects of capitalism on some parts of society by the initiation of the dole. Although he found philanthropy utterly distasteful, G. K. saw it as a political necessity removed from the question of class and philanthropy. This quasi-socialistic dole saved England from the anarchy of Bolshevism, and the extremes of pure capitalism as well.²³ In the first column entitled "Notes of the Week" in G. K.'s Weekly, the editors

²¹Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 25.

²²Ibid., p. 27.

²³G. K.'s Weekly, 28 March 1925, p. 7.

(in fact, Chesterton) challenged the assumption of Stanley Baldwin, Conservative Prime Minister, that what existed was justified simply by its existence. Baldwin acquiesced to what he considered inevitable: monopolistic capitalism.²⁴ Chesterton chided his readers not to yield; what was, was not necessarily right.

Big business, synonymous with capitalism, dehumanized modern society. Chesterton abhorred the psychology of capitalism, which recommended the consolidation of tasks and the standardization of parts and jobs.²⁵ Chesterton revelled in the individual, the hand-crafted, the one-of-a-kind item. To assume that men had to accept a shoddy, mediocre existence was unthinkable to G. K. He worried that the English people more than presumed the inevitability of capitalism; they despaired that capitalism was insurmountable.²⁶

Hope reigned over all gloomy predictions and fears. Chesterton thought that he saw the seeds of destruction within capitalism. The greatest problem would be to control the transformation of society, for without control chaos would ensue.²⁷ Belloc too saw self-destructive elements in capitalism. He described these aspects in the Servile State

²⁴G. K.'s Weekly, 21 March 1925, p. 5.

²⁵Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 216.

²⁶Ibid., p. 93.

²⁷Ibid., p. 76.

as two tensions. The first tension arose from the gap between moral theory and the facts of existence under capitalism; the ideal did not agree with the real in even the vaguest aspect. The second tension arose from the majority of society living with constant insecurity.²⁸ Chesterton plotted a logical, timed, methodical breakup of capitalism. He hoped society would gradually extend profit-sharing in large corporations so that a greater number of free citizens would have a stake in the economy. In those businesses too large to be broken into component small shops, he proposed a guild system similar to stockholding in which the guild members would buy the capital goods as a group and then divide the proceeds. For national operations such as the coal mines, Chesterton suggested dividends, not just to the stockholders and wealthy owners but also to the workers who invested their lives in the endeavor.²⁹

Without this hope of overcoming capitalism, Chesterton would have had no need to formulate his system. Quite early he saw the similarity between capitalism and collectivism; both systems led to an ever more centralized society. This realization led him to dread the possible non-revolutionary combination of these two systems. Without radical transformation, the individualist, non-collective, decentralized alternative

²⁸Belloc, Servile State, p. 82.

²⁹Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 78.

would not have a chance to survive.³⁰

Socialism, the heir apparent to capitalism was as undesirable as capitalism. In 1910, before he had deserted socialism, Chesterton qualified his support of even Christian Socialism, declaring that socialism was a medicine and not a wine.³¹ Man's real desire was for private property, but as the individual despaired of ever obtaining his desire, he chose what he thought would be the best alternative. That alternative appeared to be socialism. Even before England had experienced its first socialist government, Chesterton had reservations. By 1925, Chesterton termed socialism the opposite of anarchy: "it is extreme enthusiasm for authority."³² The economy and the government were viewed as a consolidated unit. Pope Leo XIII wrote in Rerum Novarum (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor) that the socialists were wrongly attempting to destroy private property. He saw the motivation to help the problems of the worker as misdirected and the effects miscalculated. The removal of private property under socialism was certain to harm the worker first.³³ In general, Belloc also agreed that socialism would be the easiest solution to capitalism, but he also saw an inherent danger in socialism.

³⁰G. K.'s Weekly, 23 May 1925, p. 210.

³¹Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 97.

³²Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 7-8.

³³Gilson, ed., Church Speaks to the Modern World, p. 207.

He thought it reduced the power of the masses while increasing the power of the elite.³⁴ The masses lost power as individuals because the state controlled large aspects of their lives. G. K.'s Weekly realized that the central flaw in a workable socialist system was the absolute submission and loyalty demanded of one unit.³⁵ Socialism was synonymous with totalitarianism to G. K. This totalitarian demand for loyalty left no room for criticism and healthy participation in one's own system. The only remedy to the centralized authority was to have sub-units which would demand a loyalty also.³⁶

One problem which Chesterton rarely confronted was the conflict between socialism and orthodox Christianity. Both proposed helping mankind, but the methods employed varied greatly. Christianity saw each man as worthy of respect because he was made in the image of the Supreme Being. The Christians owed final loyalty to God and His authority. The Socialists, according to G. K., claimed final authority for the state and failed to see each worker individually. Rather, they spoke of the masses. Although not correctly, G. K. lumped all socialists into one category. He carried on a debate on "truth" with Robert Blatchford of the Clarion, a materialist socialist. Chesterton strove toward

³⁴Belloc, Servile State, p. 106.

³⁵G. K.'s Weekly, 28 March 1925, p. 3.

³⁶For a thorough analysis of this concept of the division of loyalties, see C. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 166ff. Friedrich and Brzezinski discuss these subloyalties as "islands of separateness."

the supernatural explanations of the problem. The public simply was not justification enough for an individual to turn against his own free will.³⁷ The state did not deserve ultimate loyalty.

Chesterton, in conjunction with Belloc, contended that socialism was not the inevitable outgrowth of capitalism. The bible of the individual frustrated with the socialist solution soon became Hilaire Belloc's The Servile State. In it, Belloc depicted the inevitable government as a combination of capitalism and socialism which encompassed the worst of each system, oppressing the majority for the minority's benefit while demanding complete, undivided loyalty. For this reason Belloc termed it the servile state.³⁸ Throughout Chesterton's subsequent writings this servile state was accepted as fact. His economic plans all sprang from the fear of the servile state becoming a reality. Once socialism had been his reluctant answer to society's problems, but now Chesterton had to devise a new system of organization for a society of free men. The individual must understand thoroughly the system he wishes to avoid, so that he does not unwittingly participate in the combination of capitalism and socialism.

G. K. displayed his continued concern for the problem of political economics after Cecil's death in World War I. He felt particular allegiance to Cecil's projects, which

³⁷Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 24.

³⁸Belloc, Servile State, p. xi.

included the newspaper The New Witness. An outgrowth of Belloc's Eye Witness (June 1911-October 1912), The New Witness (November 1912-May 1923) was devoted to exposing corruption and injustice in government and to the defense of the liberties of all Englishmen. Chesterton's definition of liberties often placed him in alliance with the Conservatives, for he thought all men ought to care for themselves to avoid the loss of rights and liberties to the servile state. The state ought not provide for the individual's daily needs; rather, the individual must be made able to provide for himself. The people mired most deeply in the effects of a servile state were the landless poor. The New Witness and, after the financial collapse of that periodical, G. K.'s Weekly, offered an alternative solution which proposed a distribution of wealth, defined mainly as land, to use the resources of England for the greatest number of Englishmen. This understanding of English society formed the basis of the distributist program.

G. K.'s Weekly gathered political writers and observers who wished to halt the seemingly inevitable rush to monopoly in the modern world. G. K. Chesterton, as the paper's editor, was quick to recognize that opinions differed as to how to circumvent this inevitability. The majority of the writers were distributists, but among their ranks they included both guild socialists and communists.³⁹ The paper conjectured

³⁹G. K.'s Weekly, 16 January 1926, p. 453.

that if all anti-socialists would cease criticism of socialism the socialists would destroy themselves, but it did not follow its own advice.⁴⁰ The unifying theme for the coalition of anti-socialist journalists who wrote for G. K.'s Weekly was the common belief in man. These men and women had a common vision and love of the individual, not of mankind in the abstract.⁴¹ Their program was to give the common man real power through property.

The politics would be G. K.'s in style, thoughtful and purposeful, not Cecil's aggressive, sometimes reckless style. G. K. asked Mrs. Cecil Chesterton not to join the newspaper staff except as drama critic "J. K. Prothro." According to Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, the paper would not be as daring in its exposes without her dead husband.⁴² Just as the paper got underway Gilbert further deviated from his brother's flamboyant path, asking Maurice Reckitt to join the editorial board. Maurice Reckitt was not a distributist nor had he had much previous connection with the circle of Chesterton and Belloc. Chesterton was trying to broaden the forum and strengthen their economic resources.⁴³

⁴⁰G. K.'s Weekly, 11 April 1925, p. 52.

⁴¹Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, p. 134; Chesterton, Twelve Types, p. 26. In Twelve Types, Chesterton faulted William Morris' visionary powers for his lack of love for man.

⁴²Chesterton, The Chestertons, p. 263. Ada Chesterton, unlike the majority of G. K.'s acquaintances, felt that Cecil was the innovative brother.

⁴³Maurice G. Reckitt, As It Happened: An Autobiography (London: J. M. Dent, 1941), pp. 179-80.

A short year after its inception, however, G. K.'s Weekly was in financial trouble. The subscriptions could not keep the business solvent, so G. K. Chesterton underwrote the outstanding debts from his other earnings. The board of editors raised the question of how the paper could, or whether it should, continue. By this time, many readers had sent contributions to support the paper, but the amount was insufficient. In the August 7, 1926 issue of G. K.'s Weekly the staff asked the subscribers if the paper should be shut down and if not, how it might be continued. The board protested that "distributism is not a stunt invented to keep G. K.'s Weekly going. 'G. K.'s' was invented to keep Distributism going."⁴⁴ The readers advised the journalists in the next week to continue the paper as the arm of a league which would support it financially. The board decided in its regular weekly meeting to continue the paper on a week-to-week basis until the pounds started rolling into the office. By August 21, 1926, the editors had decided to persevere in spite of adversity.⁴⁵

Acting on the advice of readers, the editors proposed a league of supporters to save the paper and to link distributists throughout the British Isles in a common voice; the inaugural meeting of that Distributist League was held on September 18, 1926.⁴⁶ The editorial board of G. K.'s Weekly

⁴⁴G. K.'s Weekly, 7 August 1926, p. 368.

⁴⁵G. K.'s Weekly, 14 August 1926, p. 384.

⁴⁶Maisie Ward, Return to Chesterton (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p. 263.

rented the small room at Essex Hall, Strand. The response was so great that they moved to the large hall. The meeting started at 5:30 P. M. on Friday. Cedric Chivers, Mayor of Bath, was elected chairman of the organizational meeting. After several speeches on the distributist plan and a debate on the appropriate name for the new league, chairman Chivers appointed a committee to develop a program. The committee consisted of G. K., Belloc, Reckitt, Tritterton, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, and the man who originally proposed the league, Captain H. S. D. Went; the majority of the committee also served on the editorial board of G. K.'s Weekly.⁴⁷

The league accomplished what it had undertaken. G. K.'s Weekly remained solvent until Gilbert's death, and beyond. It also gave a forum in many sparsely populated areas for the ideas of the distributists. With no distributists holding national office, these debates by prominent league members often provided the only contact distributists had with the English citizenry.

The impetus to G. K.'s Weekly was Belloc's Servile State; however, the definition of distributism was Chesterton's Outline of Sanity. The servile state had many characteristics. The key to the servile state was wealth. Wealth now was not just defined as land, but as matter made more useful to man's requirements.⁴⁸ Three factors entered into the

⁴⁷G. K.'s Weekly, 9 September 1926, pp. 4, 20.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 11.

accumulation of wealth. The first was the energy applied, called "labour." The second factor Belloc saw, the natural resources used to make the matter more useful, was "land." The third factor comprising the accumulation of wealth was capital. Capital was money set aside in the past for future production.⁴⁹ Capital entered the cycle when it accelerated the rate of accumulation of wealth. The individual worker was no longer essential in production and additionally, he no longer owned a portion of the means of production. Without such a stake in the fabric of society the majority of free men were reduced to chattel slavery, a condition Belloc termed proletarian.⁵⁰

Belloc discerned patterns of servility throughout the history of western civilization. In antiquity, the servile state was common knowledge. The haves did not attempt to hide the position of the have-nots.⁵¹ With the acceptance of Christianity the servile state was transformed into a society of small owners. This was the first appearance of the distributive state. Belloc and Chesterton actually viewed the medieval serf as a small landholder, overlooking the fact that allodial holdings in the Middle Ages were quite scarce. This manipulation of history to fit their theory was regrettable. It gave credence to the charge

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 34.

that he and G. K. were romantically attached to the Middle Ages: its religion, its pomp, and its pageantry. The Reformation in England had destroyed the idyllic beginnings of distributism. According to Belloc, the seizure and redistribution of monastic lands enriched a few select individuals and caused an economic revolution.⁵² Thus the Reformation both destroyed the unity of religious viewpoint and planted the seeds of monopoly in the British Isles. Both G. K. and Belloc maintained the benevolent nature of the wealth centered in the Church during the Middle Ages. This view of the Church predated the distributists. J. F. Oakeshott had come to that view in *Fabian Tract* no. 54, published in May, 1897.⁵³

In modern times monopolies were both public and private. Monopoly by big government was as bad as monopoly by big business. In *G. K.'s Weekly*, the editor berated public monopoly for being as onerous as private ownership: big government was big business in disguise.⁵⁴ Government had become a parasite on the very citizens it purported to aid.⁵⁵ Chesterton assured his readers that an answer could be found.

This answer came in the form of distributism as

⁵²Ibid., p. 63.

⁵³J. F. Oakeshott, "The Humanizing of the Poor Law," Fabian Tract no. 54 (1897; reprint ed., Nendlen/Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson, 1969), p. 123.

⁵⁴G. K.'s Weekly, 26 June 1926, p. 248.

⁵⁵G. K.'s Weekly, 25 April 1925, p. 98.

advocated in G. K.'s Weekly and through membership in the Distributist League. Having rejected the two accepted solutions to modern economic difficulties, Chesterton proposed a third called distributism. His main purpose was to restore property to the individual in an effort to overcome capitalism and communism-socialism-bolshevism.⁵⁶ Distributism held that no man should be forced to live as a wage-laborer. To remedy the slavery of the multitude, Chesterton suggested that capital be divided among the propertyless.⁵⁷ The property was to return England and its citizens to self-government not merely by voting rights but also by the ability of the individual to have some control over his own life and to have a measurable impact on his environment.⁵⁸ This possible future of self-government renewed Chesterton's hope and brought optimism to a thinker who, before World War I, had held tyranny as inevitable.⁵⁹

How to assist the birth of this alternative state was one major problem confronting Chesterton, the theorist.

⁵⁶Hilaire Belloc, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940), p. 11. Belloc wrote this evaluation after communism had become the major threat. In the beginning socialism held the attention of the distributists. The distributists equated the Bolsheviks with socialism, and rarely mentioned the term communism.

⁵⁷Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 7.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 218.

⁵⁹Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 92.

This system had to be "by" the people not "to" the people, as the capitalist, socialist, and liberal plans operated.⁶⁰ This undertaking required a deliberate movement toward the final goal; however, Chesterton granted partial concessions to the existing system. Saintlike patience would be required before a fully distributist state could be achieved.⁶¹

Another dilemma which Chesterton never fully grasped was rapid population growth. How were all these new individuals to be given enough property to be economically and politically self-contained? Chesterton's weak reply was emigration.⁶² The consequent overcrowding of the rest of the world never troubled Chesterton. The establishment of distributism could not be evolutionary. The distributists saw evolution as a process of growth from something already existing. Since the existing system was undeniably bad, no good system such as the distributist plan could originate within it.⁶³

Two letters to the editor in G. K.'s Weekly doubted the difference between socialism and distributism, which was only the peasant solution to capitalism. In answer to the first critic, the editors explained their view of the state.

⁶⁰Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 219.

⁶¹G. K.'s Weekly, 23 May 1925, p. 210.

⁶²Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 107, 226.

⁶³G. K.'s Weekly, 2 May 1925, p. 123.

They saw the state as a social evil which would exist in any system. Distributism took into account this evil and prepared the individual to withstand any siege by the state. Property became the key to the economic independence of the individual.⁶⁴ In the English liberal tradition, John Stuart Mill had connected property with individual independence. He made it a necessary requisite for voting on tax matters. Man had to have a stake in society.⁶⁵ The second correspondent took issue with the agrarian nature of this liberty-giving property. Land, he noted, was not the only form of property, and England no longer had enough land to return its populace to a rural environment. He agreed that guilds could be a partial solution within the industrial sector but concluded that state socialism was the only mechanism large enough to solve the problems. The editors replied that by the nature of its size state socialism was dehumanizing and impersonal. This lack of compassion and respect for the individual within mankind left state socialism in the same category as capitalism. Guilds were more responsive and their size more appropriate. According

⁶⁴G. K.'s Weekly, 30 May 1925, p. 234.

⁶⁵John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1950), p. 378. A similar view was earlier expressed by James Harrington in The Oceana and Other Works (London: T. Becket and T. Cadell, 1771), p. 32. For a further discussion of Harrington see G. P. Gooch, English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century 2d ed. (1927; reprint ed., New York: Harper & Brothers, Harper Torchbook, 1959), pp. 241ff.

to the editors they would adequately organize urban life.⁶⁶

K. L. Kendrick wrote in G. K.'s Weekly that the distributist program had two primary principles. The first was that to preserve liberty, property also had to be preserved. The second principle was that the plutocratic concentration of capital must be broken up to accomplish the first principle.⁶⁷ This distributive society would simplify life to the point that man might once again ponder the causes of things around him. Modern man only knew how something was accomplished, not why. This lack of knowledge distressed Chesterton.⁶⁸ He admitted that his ideal necessitated a compromise which he called a "balance." Consequently his ideal state would include nationalized industry like the socialist state, profit sharing as in capitalism, and guilds as in the Middle Ages, in addition to the basic property owner.⁶⁹ Probably most important to all this "balance" was its Christian orientation. Chesterton hoped to restore pre-Reformation Christianity to England while correcting economic problems.⁷⁰ The distributist program aimed at individual happiness for all men. Wealth was of no importance if the participants were happier with life.⁷¹ G. K. tied happiness to a better

⁶⁶G. K.'s Weekly, 13 June 1925, p. 282.

⁶⁷G. K.'s Weekly, 13 November 1926, p. 124.

⁶⁸Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 133-34.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 108, 136-37.

⁷⁰G. K.'s Weekly, 10 October 1926, p. 73.

⁷¹Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 147.

society, that is, to an improved quality of living, not greater possessions.

The road to happiness and the distributist ideal was to be a long struggle. Small steps had to begin immediately before monopolistic capitalism indeed became inevitable. The movement to destroy capitalism had to originate within the capitalist system. Individuals could help by purchasing from small shops, not from the large convenience stores, and by owning their own homes and equipment.⁷² The difficulty of these modest tasks was increased by modern psychological advertising techniques which lured the public into the monopolistic stores. Educating the common man on the dangers of such advertising was another deliberate step on the road to the distributist ideal.⁷³ Volunteers were to undertake this program. Chesterton compared this call for volunteers with the appeal made in the Great War. The crisis England faced was as dire as the one of 1914. He did not think the effort to recruit would be easy, but he maintained a guarded optimism.⁷⁴

The government could aid the distributist efforts by enacting several laws favorable to small propertyholders. For example, a law prohibiting the sale of property to large proprietors and favoring the breakup of large conglomerations would help to redistribute land. Free legal

⁷²Ibid., pp. 151-52.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 118.

services for the poor were also suggested by Chesterton. This would enable small property holders to defend themselves against the great. He also suggested government sponsored experiments in the concept of small property with subsidies and protective tariffs to nurture the program.⁷⁵ Chesterton's argument supported one English view of property as seen in its common law history. English law was a common-sense development through the centuries. The impartial application of that basically decent law would be sufficient to correct injustice in society. That is, the smallholder was protected as efficiently as the great landowner provided he had equal access to the law.⁷⁶ In the nineteenth century, the common law embodied the liberties of Englishmen. G. K., like some of his Victorian predecessors, placed his trust in the decency and fairness of the common law; it would protect English liberties. Chesterton avoided another and less trusting interpretation of common law which was prevalent in the early twentieth century in England. J. A. Hobson, who was among G. K.'s acquaintances, agreed that the law protected liberty, but those protected, he thought, were limited to those who had property. Hobson held that the law protected those who wrote the laws, the propertied classes. The "impropertied" individual was left without protection in confrontation with a propertied citizen.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁶F. W. Maitland, The Constitutional History of England (Cambridge: University Press, 1926).

⁷⁷J. A. Hobson, Democracy After the War (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917), p. 54.

Besides the enactment of proper laws, another typically Chestertonian proposal was for each worker to receive a one-half day per week general holiday. Ostensibly this one-half day would allow the wage-slaves time for their own endeavors which Chesterton was certain would be their own small shops.⁷⁸ Chesterton's confidence that the common laborer would devote his spare time to more work was a noble if misplaced belief in man.

All of the initial stages required government intervention in order to stave off the monopolistic onslaught. Chesterton admitted that state socialism might be a necessary step on the path to distributism. Distributists had to use what power state socialism offered in order to bring its eventual demise.⁷⁹ These proposed tactics parallel the Marxian idea that the state must be used by the Communists in order to eventually eliminate itself.

Distributism was offered as a solution to capitalism. Proponents of the new system claimed that, unlike other systems, it would undo capitalism, not outdo capitalism.⁸⁰ According to G. K., the trend established by 1920 was one of increasing loss of property and dehumanization. To remedy this problem

⁷⁸Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 86-88.

⁷⁹G. K.'s Weekly, 2 May 1925, p. 136. Marx also allowed a resting stage in totalitarian government before all government could be eliminated. His followers never got beyond that intermediate stage. Chesterton failed to recognize the possible permanency of the state socialism.

⁸⁰Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 128.

Chesterton declared that "all tools in the universe" were available for his use. Previously unsuccessful use of a tool did not automatically disqualify it for consideration.⁸¹ He later said that if he could not go back, (distributism originated in the Middle Ages, he claimed) he certainly did not want to go forward.⁸² Loving nature and simplicity, Chesterton found both in distributism which returned man to the land and the uncomplicated life of a peasant.⁸³ He found examples of this happy rural life in Quebec and Ireland. Both were Catholic, homogeneous areas in which religion helped bind the yeomen into a community that was distributist in nature.⁸⁴ Chesterton hoped that once a small move was made in reaction to monopolistic capitalism, the recovery would begin. The initial recovery would inspire others to participate until a spiral effect instituted the ideal state.⁸⁵

The distributists regularly explained that peasant proprietorship was not their sole concern. Peasant landholding was the simplest example in their system and therefore was more easily understood.⁸⁶ Property was defined by Chesterton as something that an individual could shape to his wishes.⁸⁷

⁸¹Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 43.

⁸²Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 19.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁸⁶G. K.'s Weekly, 2 May 1925, p. 128.

⁸⁷Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 59.

This definition did not limit property to land but did limit it to physical property and thus excluded ownership of a share in some monopoly. Chesterton had the full support of the Roman Catholic church in his desire to restore property. Pope Leo XIII had stated as early as 1878 that the right to property was protected by the Church as divine law. Leo XIII's statement appeared to contradict G. K.'s reallocation of property, because it supported property; however, the property was only protected if the authority under which it was received was just. If the authority was wanting, it did not require respect. In this proclamation, Leo XIII contradicted the socialist contention that property was man's invention.⁸⁸ In his famous later encyclical Rerum Novarum, Leo XIII reiterated the inviolable position of private property and added that the law should favor individual ownership. The governments of the world should have as their policy the growth of private property.⁸⁹ Both Leo XIII and Chesterton attempted to make life for the common man more worthwhile. Chesterton hoped that property would provide contentment for the individuals of the world. To this desire for contentment for all, he contrasted the socialist method of dictating what is necessary for one to be content.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Gilson, ed., Church Speaks to the Modern World, p. 194.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 230.

⁹⁰G. K.'s Weekly, 9 May 1925, p. 146.

He characterized the capitalist approach to the problem as trying to take more property away. Chesterton noted that the communists "reform the pickpocket by forbidding pockets."⁹¹ He disagreed with that method of protection; instead he supported legal protection of the individual against the schemes of plutocracy.

He often exclaimed that a large minority was ready to return to the land. This land or property, symbolizing independence, could be an acre of land in the Midlands or a home and a garden plot in the city slums. The location was unimportant; the sense of belonging, no matter how humble, was the desire of all men.⁹² Even this sense of belonging would be marred if the peasant lived only to sell his wares. He had to produce for self-consumption to enjoy the completeness of life envisioned by Chesterton.⁹³ The city dweller might improve his quality of life by taking a product through the whole production process rather than doing the repetitive, non-creative factory work on an assembly line. An individual must use his whole being in his daily life in order to reach complete contentment. Chesterton never distinguished between contentment and complacency, thus allowing his native optimism to cloud his vision. He failed to realize that complacency was enough for many men;

⁹¹Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 3.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 121-23.

⁹³Ibid., p. 136.

true contentment as envisioned by Chesterton would require too much effort for many.

Creativity was the key to Chesterton's view of happiness. A peasant created in his work and in his recreation. Songs, dances and handicrafts were all creative contributions that previous peasant societies had made. Chesterton foresaw these same benefits for a society growing from a renewed peasant class in a distributive state.⁹⁴ The traditions of a peasant class were also described as the future bulwark of democracy in Great Britain in an inevitable struggle with Bolshevism.⁹⁵ For all the benefits a peasant class had to offer, Chesterton held the practicality of the existence of such a class as its main basis of support. If an individual was without work, and land existed in an unproductive condition, distributism merely advocated the unification of these two to the greater contentment of all.⁹⁶

The concept of a society populated with individuals energetically pursuing their needs to fulfill harmoniously the needs of all of society hinged on the family unit. The family, conceived as having the special mission of populating the earth, had inherent rights and responsibilities--among

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 112-14.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 110.

⁹⁶Chesterton, Everlasting Man, p. 187; G. K.'s Weekly, 2 May 1925, p. 127.

them property.⁹⁷ Chesterton saw these two entities as interdependent. The destruction of either would harm the other and further the growth of the servile state.⁹⁸ To save both property and the family, Chesterton prescribed the reallocation of property on the scale of the French Revolution.⁹⁹ This reallocation of land would serve to make the largest number of family units content, thus satisfying the utilitarian desires of distributism.¹⁰⁰

Realistically, G. K. and other distributists admitted that not all people could be returned to the land as peasant owners. Chesterton never admitted that an individual might not desire a return to the land, only that the land could not be divided successfully among all Englishmen. Consequently he supported small shops. The small shopkeeper, like a master craftsman or the peasant farmer, thwarted monopoly, and thereby both capitalism and communism. Chesterton saw the economic basis of the distributist state in a future unification of his three ideal vocational groups.¹⁰¹

This basis was the guild system. A revival of the guild system would lash the otherwise independent individual to the needs of all. With this unification of interests

⁹⁷Gilson, ed., Church Speaks to the Modern World, p. 24.

⁹⁸G. K.'s Weekly, 29 January 1927, p. 213.

⁹⁹Chesterton, What's Wrong with the World, p. 347.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰¹G. K.'s Weekly, 27 November 1926, p. 140; 17 April 1926, p. 92.

and goals, government as it was known in 1925, would eventually cease to exist.¹⁰²

Chesterton never explained how these guilds could successfully coordinate all the master craftsmen, shopkeepers, and yeomen. He determined that they could govern themselves.¹⁰³ The guild system had protected the workers in the Middle Ages and would once again protect workers who had long been at the mercy of their employers.¹⁰⁴ G. K., however, was unaware that this was no longer true in the late Middle Ages, for the guilds protected only the master craftsmen, not the individual laborers. In modern capitalism, G. K. saw the reduction of the worker to a wage-slave. Distributism would restore equilibrium to a system gone awry.

Leo XIII had recommended the restoration or adaptation of the guild system in his encyclical On the Rights of Capital and Labor.¹⁰⁵ The existing system failed to protect the worker. Leo XIII wished the worker a better position, protected through association. In 1931, on the fortieth anniversary of that encyclical, Pius XI issued his own, entitled Quadragesimo Anno (Forty Years After), which reiterated Leo XIII's earlier recommendations.¹⁰⁶ Pius

¹⁰²G. K.'s Weekly, 21 March 1925, p. 5; Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰³Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰⁴Gilson, ed., Church Speaks to the Modern World, pp. 206-207.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 232, 135.

¹⁰⁶Pius XI, After Forty Years (New York: Barry Vail Corp., 1931).

admonished each segment of society to seek their needs judiciously while keeping in mind the needs of all of society.¹⁰⁷ Pius vaguely said that for this to take place, free competition had to be subjected to a guiding principle through the efforts of an enlightened government.¹⁰⁸ At that point, Pius XI seemed to support fascism, which also desired moral restraint upon free competition. In fact, his system was tangential to fascism, for it was based on charity and justice for all as members of the mystical body of Christ.¹⁰⁹ Yet even in 1935, G. K. still referred to Leo XIII's teachings, not to the then-controversial teachings of Pius XI. This attitude was, on the surface, indifferent to the fascist question; however, many Catholics, including G. K., saw Forty Years After only as a reiteration of the workingman's rights as stated by Leo XIII. Consequently, G. K. took little notice of the details in Quadragesimo Anno.

Chesterton used Leo XIII's suggestion of a workers' organization to protect them from unscrupulous employers and his love of all things medieval to incorporate the guilds into his plan.¹¹⁰ G. K. defended Leo XIII's suggestions, noting that they had been promulgated before the blackshirted fascists, and were prostituted only after the fascists

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, The Well and the Shallows (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935), p. 64.

adopted them. At the same time that Chesterton advocated guilds, a National Guild League, similar to that advocated by the distributist plan, already operated. A member of the governing body of G. K.'s Weekly, Maurice Reckitt, was also active in the National Guild League. The goals were virtually identical; in fact, the NGL used a Chesterton poem for the lyrics of their song.¹¹¹ The distributists were willing to compromise on the name if the modernists insisted on calling the organization of workers a trade union; but the actual organization would be a guild.¹¹²

More than a decade later, in 1929, the radical socialist turned fascist, Sir Oswald Mosley, would also adopt the guild system into his program. Unlike Chesterton, Mosley recommended a highly authoritarian form of government. Since Chesterton had been committed to his program for twenty years before the fascists entered the British political scene, he rarely considered their plan. When he chose to comment on the fascists in Britain he wrote of his distrust and dislike of the organization and its methods.¹¹³ If the fascists were influenced by G. K., they left no record of it. His program was too closely enmeshed with religion to have much credence with the fascists.

¹¹¹Reckitt, As It Happened, p. 138.

¹¹²G. K.'s Weekly, 3 April 1926, p. 54; 9 May 1925, p. 149.

¹¹³Chesterton, Well and the Shallows, pp. 71, 245; G. K. Chesterton, The Resurrection of Rome (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1930), pp. 246-50.

Perhaps one reason that G. K. never recognized the affinity of some of his economic ideas with the fascist programs of his day was that G. K.'s own economic program presented difficulties which he never resolved. Machinery presented theoretical problems to the distributists. Being ardent medievalists, they held the handmade item in high esteem, yet modern society was built on machines. Chesterton endorsed machines only if the user despised them.¹¹⁴ He stated, "Machinery is not wrong; it is only absurd."¹¹⁵ The machine could be owned by a guild which would share the profits from the machine.¹¹⁶ This machine was only to be used to enhance the individual's property. A regular use of machinery could lead to dreaded standardization and the waning of creativity. The machine could help man gain leisure time, but it also could turn that very leisure into a mechanical, habitual, regimented thing.¹¹⁷

The already centralized aspects of society such as power sources gave Chesterton greater problems. The solution Chesterton found was for each home to have its own power plant.¹¹⁸ This solution was a desperate attempt to avoid any standardization. Coal mining was tackled in the same

¹¹⁴Chesterton, Outline of Sanity, p. 179.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 171.

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 148-49.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 170.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 172.

manner. Chesterton finally conceded the necessity of large coal mines; individual coal mines were totally unfeasible.¹¹⁹ He demanded a stable wage for the miners and hoped that a solution to that loose end of his program could be worked out later. For all his fear of standardization Chesterton hailed the automobile as the savior of the individual because it provided mass transportation individually.¹²⁰ The automobile, Chesterton hoped, would allow the many the privilege of leisure theretofore enjoyed only by the few. Most important was that the car meant the individual could travel alone; not as a number on a train or bus.

G. K. worked on his plan for twenty-five years. He conceived his program during his early adulthood, the most creative period of his life. After the Great War, G. K. added to his undertakings a newspaper devoted to his Christian distributist philosophy. G. K.'s Weekly served Chesterton as a popular outlet for his convictions. By 1930, the weekly consumed his energies and the refinements of the program slowed. His vitality faltered.

Most of G. K.'s distributist plan was derivative in nature. Though he did not always acknowledge his debt to the British intellectual tradition many of his ideas were traditional ones he shaped to fit his Catholic, antiquarian outlook. Like the Fabians, he believed the dissolution of the monasteries had begun the impoverishment of England.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 208.

¹²⁰Ibid., pp. 173-74.

An affinity to the traditional liberal interpretation was discernible in Chesterton's emphasis on property as the key to individual freedom. His unquestioning faith in the diligence, initiative, and pride of the worker was an idea popular in Victorian England with its emphasis on self help. On the other hand, all of G. K.'s ideas and plans were undergirded by the teachings of Roman Catholicism, which gave him a particular image of man and his position in the world.

Chesterton never completed his distributive plan. He failed to undertake explanation of some aspects, such as mining and railroads, hoping that his plan's problems might eventually resolve themselves. Instead of a priori solutions, Chesterton hoped to reform these immediate situations during the transition from capitalist/socialism to Christian distributism. The social and economic structures which had existed in England throughout G. K.'s life were to wither in the final form of the distributive state; among those institutions were Parliament, monopoly-capitalism, and Protestantism. In place of a society of outmoded institutions, Chesterton characterized his utopia as neo-medieval: a Christian, guild, and serf/yeoman society.

CHAPTER V

G. K. CHESTERTON: AN ASSESSMENT

G. K. Chesterton died in June, 1936, at the age of sixty-four, physically and mentally exhausted. His thought had centered on two themes, orthodoxy and distributism. By 1901, with his marriage to Frances Blogg, G. K. had sealed his quest for religious orthodoxy begun during Slade School days. He pursued this nebulous position through his many books until he finally converted to Roman Catholicism in 1922. His conversion focused the future scope of his literary undertakings. G. K. quickly earned a reputation as an apologist for Roman Catholic teachings in England.

In the past seventy years, many critics and friends have assessed the role of G. K. Chesterton and his influence on English society. The praise and criticisms were varied. G. K. Chesterton had no discoverable enemies.¹ Everyone seemed to respect him, even if he or she could not agree with him.

One obituary viewed G. K. as the first anti-Victorian and a voice of optimism in an age of doubt.² To his long-time friend Theodore Maynard, his voice in the dark days

¹Belloc, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton, p. 87.

²"G. K. Chesterton," Saturday Review of Literature, 20 June 1936, p. 8.

was more specifically Roman Catholic. Maynard termed G. K. a "saint."³ By 1939, another close associate, Father J. J. O'Connor, called for a new Catholic leadership, "a Second Mr. Chesterton." He recalled that what he admired most in G. K. was the combination of optimism, humility, veracity, and journalistic abilities which had produced the principal orthodox propagandist of the early twentieth century.⁴ Critics also praised the verbal effectiveness of Chesterton. He received a testimonial to his ability when Theodore Maynard credited his own conversion to Roman Catholicism to Chesterton's writings.⁵ Some assessments cited the Father Brown mysteries as the most influential of G. K.'s writings while others chose The Thing or Heretics and Orthodoxy.⁶ A few obituaries chose to praise him generally on his journalistic output without evaluating his work substantively.⁷ William Blatchford, among others, forgave

³Theodore Maynard, "G. K. C.," Catholic World, 143 (1936): 522.

⁴J. J. O'Connor, "The Second Mr. Chesterton," Commonweal, 28 March 1939, pp. 120-22.

⁵Maynard, "G. K. C.," p. 529; Roger B. Lloyd, The Church of England in the Twentieth Century 2 vols. (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1946), 1:102-103; "G. K. Chesterton Attains the Paradox of Death," Christian Century, 1 July 1936, p. 925.

⁶Shuster, "G. K. Chesterton," p. 320; Belloc, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton, p. 67; Lloyd, The Church of England, 1:102-103.

⁷"Mr. G. K. Chesterton: Poet, Novelist, Critic and Debater," The Times (London), 15 June 1936, p. 17; Bergonzi, "Chesterton and/or Belloc," p. 65.

G. K. his "tiresome" political and social positions, noting G. K.'s warmhearted generosity.⁸

During his lifelong search for orthodoxy, G. K. actively sought a political and economic affiliation. After early flirtations, he rejected socialism, including the Christian Socialist leagues, as degrading to the majority of citizens. At this time his friendship with Hilaire Belloc became important. Together these men developed an alternative to capitalism, materialism, and socialism. They called it distributism and couched it in a romantic view of the Middle Ages.

G. K.'s distributive system was built on flimsy foundations, among which was his unusual definition of orthodoxy which had disconcerted his contemporaries. His zeal was so great for his Catholicism that he hoped to subject the rest of England to it, even though he himself had wavered indecisively at the door of Roman Catholicism for twenty years.

G. K. never fully developed his political system. He hoped that the inconsistencies and gaps in the theory could be worked out in practice, and because he was the primary theorist of distributism, Chesterton must be held accountable for these weaknesses. His attention span was never long; rather, he preferred to work in short bursts of energy on each subject, and as a consequence, when he arrived at a

⁸Clemens, Chesterton as Seen by His Contemporaries, pp. 22-23.

stumbling block in his theory, he dropped the problem for another less exacting task.

Chesterton designed the distributive state to cure the economic, political, and social ills of English society. He envisioned a modified guild system for urban dwellers and a yeoman/serf land-holding system for rural people, whom he hoped would constitute the majority of Englishmen. Again his assumptions were distorted and consequently the plan lacked credibility. The guilds were to function on both economic and political levels. The master, journeyman, and apprentice system was to be applied to all forms of economic endeavor. Unfortunately for the distributists, this hierarchy was not applicable to many modern factory situations. His hope of simplifying the structure of society to the point that it would need no government was only a fantasy. Like Karl Marx he envisioned the stateless society as the final stage of his plan. Unlike Marx's international scope, G. K. constructed his plan for England only. He cared little for the rest of the world, so little that he failed to realize that the interdependence of twentieth-century mankind was international in nature.

The serf of the Middle Ages was to Chesterton a propertied citizen. Thus, to build a society on serfs was to build on self-contained individual economic units. G. K.'s definition of a serf as a freeman differed from the traditional one of the serf as a bonded man hardly higher than a slave.

This distortion of the generally accepted and popular notion regarding medieval serfdom hampered the popularization of his plan.

The link between G. K.'s religious and political-economics was his admiration for the Middle Ages. This admiration, almost an obsession, gave a positive impetus to a life filled with reaction. Chesterton fled from evil to orthodoxy. His politics, based on an admiration of the individual and an aversion to the masses, swung away from the existing systems in which the individual became submerged in the amorphous mob. G. K. sought refuge in a time of apparent harmony. In the Middle Ages, church, state, and economics had combined to produce a unified world view. Most important to Chesterton was the seemingly content world of the common man in that golden age.

A system based on such distortions could not survive. To the optimistic, the distributive state and all the incumbent ramifications will remain an historically important attempt at resynthesizing the religion, politics, and economics of the Middle Ages for the twentieth century. To the skeptical, it will merely be a monument to the fertile imagination of Fleet Street's beloved storyteller. The voice of G. K.'s program survived his death. G. K.'s Weekly continued with Belloc as editor for many years. The distributists still met in league, but with the death of Chesterton, the beacon light of distributism, they lost their

direction. It had been the dream of an inspirational man and without him was doomed to obscurity.

The first to venture an opinion on the durability of G. K.'s writings was G. K.'s brother Cecil, in his anonymous G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism (1909). He suggested that the only permanent portion of G. K.'s writings might be "those parts of his work which deal with things in their nature eternal."⁹ The diversity of G. K.'s efforts viewed from a specialized age might shorten his durability or hamper his revival according to Hilaire Belloc, who hinged G. K.'s survival on the return of England to Roman Catholicism. He also questioned Chesterton's permanence because he saw a lack of controversy in G. K.'s writings and friendships.¹⁰

A return to Chesterton may be a long time in coming. His writings, appropriate when written, no longer seem timely in the 1970s. The paradoxical, often convoluted style of his non-fiction makes it difficult to read. Nevertheless, Chesterton offered a unique, sometimes contradictory, blend of ideas which suggested another possible way of life.

⁹Chesterton, G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism, pp. 264-65.

¹⁰Belloc, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton, pp. 81, 35.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Works

Chesterton

- Chesterton, G. K. The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton.
New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936.
- _____. The Catholic Church and Conversion.
1926. Reprint. New York: The Macmillan Company,
1951.
- _____. Chaucer. London: Faber & Faber, 1932.
- _____. William Cobbett. London: Hodder and
Stoughton, 1925.
- _____. Come to Think of It. . . . New York:
Dodd Mead & Company, 1931.
- _____. The Common Man. New York: Sheed & Ward,
1950.
- _____. The Defendant. 1901. Reprint. London:
J. M. Dent & Sons, 1932.
- _____. The Everlasting Man. 1925. Reprint.
New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1946.
- _____. G. K. Chesterton: A Selection from His
Non-fictional Prose. Edited by W. H. Auden. London:
Faber and Faber, 1970.
- _____. Greybeards at Play. London: R. Brimley
Johnson, 1900.
- _____. Heretics. New York: John Lane Company,
1905.
- _____. Introduction to Life in Old Cambridge, by
Mary Evelyn Monckton Jones. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons
Ltd., 1920.
- _____. Orthodoxy. New York: Dodd Mead and
Company, 1950.

- _____. The Outline of Sanity. 2d ed. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1928.
- _____. The Resurrection of Rome. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1930.
- _____. "Return to Religion." Fortnightly Review 135(1931): 449-56.
- _____. St. Francis of Assisi. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946.
- _____. St. Thomas Aquinas. New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1933.
- _____. "St. Thomas Aquinas." Spectator, 27 February 1932, pp. 280-81.
- _____. The Superstition of Divorce. New York: John Lane Company, 1920.
- _____. The Superstitions of the Sceptic. London: W. Heffer & Sons, 1925.
- _____. The Thing: Why I Am a Catholic. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1930.
- _____. Tremendous Trifles. 1909. Reprint. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1920.
- _____. Twelve Types. London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1906.
- _____. What's Wrong with the World. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1910.
- _____. The Well and the Shallows. London: Sheed & Ward, 1935.
- _____. Wine Water and Song. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1946.

Others

- Belloc, Hilaire. Letters from Hilaire Belloc, Edited by Robert Speaight. London: Hollis & Carter, 1958.
- _____. On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940.

- _____. The Servile State. 3d ed. London: Constable and Company, 1927.
- _____. Why I Am a Catholic. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932.
- Bennett, Arnold. Books & Persons. London: Chatto & Windus, 1917.
- Bentley, E. C. "G. K. C.," Spectator, 19 June 1936, pp. 1125-26.
- _____. Those Days. London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1940.
- Bridges, Horace James. Criticisms of Life. 1915. Reprint. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1969.
- [Chesterton, Cecil.] G. K. Chesterton: A Criticism. London: Alston Rivers, Ltd., 1908.
- Chesterton, George Laval. Peace, War and Adventure: An Autobiographical Memoir of George Laval Chesterton. 2 vols. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1953.
- _____. Revelations of Prison Life. 2 vols. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856.
- Chesterton, Mrs. Cecil. The Chestertons. London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1941.
- Clemens, Cyril. Chesterton as Seen by His Contemporaries. Webster Groves, Missouri: International Mark Twain Society, 1939.
- Fabian Tracts, 6 vols. Reprint. Nendlen/ Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson, 1969.
- Gilson, Étienne ed. The Church Speaks to the Modern World: The Social Teachings of Leo XIII. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Image Books, 1954.
- Handsacre, Alan. [pseud.] Authorodoxy: Being a Discursive Examination of Mr. G. K. Chesterton's "Orthodoxy". London: John Lane, 1921.
- Harrington, James. The Oceana and Other Works. London: T. Becket and T. Cadell, 1776 (Microreproduction).
- Hobson, J. A. Democracy After the War. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1917.

- Lunn, Arnold. Roman Converts. 1924. Reprint. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1966.
- Malthus, Thomas Robert. On Population. New York: Modern Library, 1960.
- Maynard, Theodore. "G. K. C.," Catholic World, 143(1936): 522-32.
- Mill, John Stuart. Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1950.
- O'Connor, J. J. "The Second Mr. Chesterton," Commonweal, 28 March 1939, pp. 120-22.
- Pius XI. After Forty Years. New York: Barry Vail Corp., 1931.
- Reckitt, Maurice B. As It Happened: An Autobiography. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1941.
- _____. G. K. Chesterton: A Christian Prophet for England To-day. London: S. P. C. K., 1950.
- Slosson, Edwin E. Six Major Prophets. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917.
- Smiles, Samuel. Self-Help. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1860.
- Tritterton, W. R. G. K. Chesterton: A Portrait. London: Douglas Organ, 1947.

Biographies

- Barker, Dudley. G. K. Chesterton: A Biography. New York: Stein and Day, 1973.
- Beaumont, Comuns. A Rebel in Fleet Street. London: Hutchinson & Co., n.d.
- Bullett, Gerald. The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton. London: Cecil Palmer, 1923.
- Cammaerts, Emile. The Laughing Prophet. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1937.
- Clipper, Lawrence J. G. K. Chesterton. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974.
- Evans, Maurice. G. K. Chesterton. Cambridge: University Press, 1939.

- Groves, Reginald. Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement: An Adventure in Christian Socialism. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968.
- Hollis, Christopher. G. K. Chesterton. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1950.
- Koss, Stephen E. Fleet Street Radical: A. G. Gardiner and the "Daily News". Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, Archon Books, 1973.
- Speaight, Robert. The Life of Hilaire Belloc. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy, 1957.
- Ward, Maisie. Gilbert Keith Chesterton. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943.
- _____. Return to Chesterton. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952.

Secondary Studies

Reference

- Sprug, Joseph W., ed. Index to Chesterton. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1966.
- Sullivan, John. G. K. Chesterton: A Bibliography. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1958.

Books

- Attwater, Donald, ed. Modern Christian Revolutionaries. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1947.
- Barker, Ernest. English Political Thought from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1915.
- Bell, Walter George. Fleet Street in Seven Centuries. London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons. Ltd., 1921.
- Brangwn, Frank. The Way of the Cross. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936.
- Ensor, R. C. K. England 1870-1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936.
- Falk, Bernard. Bouquets for Fleet Street. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951.

- Friedrich, Carl J., and Brzezinski, Zbigniew K. Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956.
- Furlong, William B. GBS/GKC: Shaw and Chesterton the Metaphysical Jesters. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970.
- Gooch, G. P. English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century. 2d ed. 1927. Reprint. New York: Harper & Brothers, Harper Torchbook, 1959.
- Hollis, Christopher. The Mind of Chesterton. Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970.
- Lloyd, Roger B. The Church of England in the Twentieth Century. 2 vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946.
- Maitland, F. W. The Constitutional History of England. Cambridge: University Press, 1926.
- Pfleger, Karl. Wrestlers with Christ. Translated by E. I. Witkin. 1936. Reprint. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1968.
- Shuster, George N. The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature. 1922. Reprint. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967.
- Sullivan, John, ed. G. K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974.
- Swinnerton, Frank. The Georgian Scene. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934.
- Taylor, A. J. P. English History 1914-1945. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Trevelyan, G. M. English Social History. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942.

Articles

- Benet, W. R. "Great Christian Poet." Saturday Review of Literature, 27 June 1936, p. 8.
- Bergonzi, Bernard. "Chesterton and/or Belloc." Critical Quarterly 1 (1959): 64-71.

- Eaker, J. G. "G. K. Chesterton among the Moderns." Georgian Review 13 (1959): 152-60.
- Feeney, Leonard. "Metaphysics of Chesterton." Thought: A Fordham University Quarterly 17(1942): 22-36.
- "G. K. Chesterton." Saturday Review of Literature, 20 June 1936, p. 8.
- "G. K. Chesterton Attains the Paradox of Death." Christian Century, 1 July 1936, p. 925.
- Gassman, Janet. "Second Look at G. K. C." Religion in Life 28(1959):443-54.
- Hardie, W. F. R. "Philosophy of G. K. Chesterton." Hibbert Journal 29(1931):449-64.
- Morris, George Perry. "Gilbert Keith Chesterton." Outlook, 25 November 1905, pp. 729-32.
- "Mr. G. K. Chesterton: Poet, Novelist, Critic and Debater." The Times (London), 15 June 1936, p. 17.
- Reilly, Joseph J. "Chesterton as Poet." Catholic World 156(1935): 40-45.
- Semper, J. J. "The Quintessence of Chesterton." Catholic World 156(1942):40-45.
- Sewell, Elizabeth. "G. K. Chesterton: The Giant Upside-down." Thought: A Fordham University Quarterly 30 (1955-56):555-76.
- Shuster, G. N. "G. K. Chesterton." Commonweal, 24 July 1936, pp. 319-20.

Newspapers

- G. K.'s Weekly. 1925-27.
- Lansbury's Labour Weekly. 1925-26.
- The Times (London). 1905, 1936.