

GRACE IN THE ARTS:
G. K. CHESTERTON: THE
THEOLOGY OF PHILIP YANCEY'S
FAVORITE WRITER

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A 1950s cowboy comic book advertised on its front cover that sidekick Andy Devine was “the master of mirth and of girth; that’s why he’s the rage of the sage.” Although G. K. Chesterton was once photographed with several of his cronies dressed in full Western get-up, he could hardly be denominated “the rage of the sage.” However, that other line of the preceding advertising could be readily reapplied, for Chesterton was unquestionably “the master of mirth and of girth.”

Evangelical Protestants are most likely to have read some of Chesterton’s quips, courtesy of the British intellectual C. S. Lewis or the popular evangelical author Philip Yancey, with whom G. K. Chesterton is a favorite. In fact, Yancey calls Chesterton “The ‘Ample’ Man Who Saved My Faith.”¹ Therefore, it seems appropriate to ask about the faith of the one who saved Yancey’s faith.

I. INTRODUCTION

G. K. Chesterton (hereafter mostly referred to as GKC) was often remembered for his wit and his weight. He was weighty in a dual sense of the word, for GKC was a heavyweight in the Jude 3, combative-for-Christianity sense of the term. One biographer-friend called him “the

¹ Philip Yancey, “The ‘Ample’ Man Who Saved My Faith,” *Christianity Today* (September 2001): 66-72.

greatest man of the age.”² Sir Laurence of Arabia reported that George Bernard Shaw (GKC’s frequent sparring partner in public debates) called him “a man of colossal genius.”³ Etienne Gilson, the foremost twentieth century authority on St. Thomas [Aquinas] commented ruefully on Chesterton’s [book] *St. Thomas*: “I consider it as being without possible comparison the best book ever written on St. Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement.”⁴

GKC was prolific in publication, penning seven books in 1926, six in 1927, and six in 1929. He authored around 4,000 essays and 100 books, including volumes of poetry and plays. He may be most remembered as the author of a mystery series starring the Roman Catholic priest-as-detective, Father Brown (a somewhat Columbo-like underplayed mystery solver).

C. S. Lewis once spoke of wit as “that sort of mental agility or gymnastic which uses language as the principal equipment of its gymnasium.”⁵ GKC’s quotable quips could easily constitute a separate volume. For example, he spotted a peacock with its “tail, that trailing tapestry of eyes” like the “monsters of the Apocalypse whose eyes were multiplied like their wings.”⁶ On another occasion he viewed a house as “a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, [and] a chair [as] an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two.”⁷ He once capered: “A yawn may be defined as a silent yell.”⁸ He quipped: “An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered.”⁹ Or, said Chesterton, “Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.”¹⁰ He

² Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), 267.

³ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁴ Laurence Clipper, *G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 110-11.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 97.

⁶ Ward, *Chesterton*, 249.

⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd, 1902), 69.

⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 47.

⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1908), 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

called nonsense “a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth.”¹¹

C. S. Lewis was once labeled a “paradox-monger.”¹² But GKC (before Lewis) was the acknowledged prince of paradox. Even the later famed mystery writer Dick Francis commented obliquely: “Horses appear to be as full of paradoxes as G. K. Chesterton.”¹³ An example of GKC’s paradox-making is: “Its faith was doubtful, but its doubt was faithful.”¹⁴ Elsewhere he noted that skepticism “implies a dogma of hopelessness and definite belief in unbelief.”¹⁵

In Chesterton the intellect and imagination were but two sides of his Janus face. He argued: “A man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword.”¹⁶

The man of so much width and wit had a strong sense of world-wonder and earth enjoyment. One may assume that GKC was asserting himself autobiographically when his character Adam Wayne declared (in 1904): “He was...one of those who live on the border of fairyland. But he was perhaps the first to realize how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city.”¹⁷ His close friend and biographer was to say that GKC might “use the word ‘jolly’ more than forty times a day.”¹⁸ “I can’t help enjoying enjoyment,” said his character Christabel Carstairs.¹⁹ Reflecting on the *inkiness* of a certain ink, GKC penned: “I do not think there is anyone who takes quite such a fierce pleasure in things being themselves as I do.”²⁰ In fact, GKC claimed that “joy is a far

¹¹ Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 64.

¹² Chad Walsh, *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), ix.

¹³ Dick Francis, *Dead Cert* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1962), 52.

¹⁴ Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (New York: Rand, McNally & Co., nd), 13.

¹⁵ Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 70.

¹⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *Twelve Types* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1902), 125.

¹⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 68.

¹⁸ Ward, *Chesterton*, 379.

¹⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Wisdom of Father Brown in The Father Brown Omnibus* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1951), 213.

²⁰ Ward, *Chesterton*, 567.

more elusive and elvish matter, since it is our reason for existing...”²¹ Because GKC had a heavyweight intellect and a humorous imagination, all preachers should read him with a set of 3 by 5 index cards close at hand for filing purposes.

II. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

GKC’s wry wit emerges in the very first sentence of his autobiography:

Bowling down in blind credulity...before mere authority and...superstitiously swallowing a story I could not test at the time by experiment...I am firmly of opinion that I was born on the 29th of May, 1874...and baptized according to the formularies of the Church of England in little church of St. George...²²

Of his early religious upbringing GKC wrote: “As a fact my family, having become Liberal, was no longer Protestant. I was brought up a sort of Universalist and Unitarian” where “the Universalist did not believe in hell” and “heaven was a happy state of mind.”²³ GKC was taken to hear Rev. Stopford Brooke preaching the “New Theology” of liberalism.²⁴ Brooke had left the Church of England when GKC was six years old. At age 12 GKC had gone to the same school as John Milton had, namely, St. Paul’s school. His future was foreshadowed when he joined the Junior Debating Club, consisting of numerous brilliant boys who went on to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. His college years (1892-1895) were spent at Slade School of Art while he also sat in on lectures in English literature at the University of London. Chesterton analyzed himself: “I was a pagan at the age of twelve, and a complete agnostic by the age of sixteen...”²⁵ His father had imbibed the liberal-universalist

²¹ Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 124.

²² G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), 1.

²³ G. K. Chesterton, *The Thing* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929), 74.

²⁴ Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 12.

²⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 1994), 122-23.

teaching, and his mother was an agnostic.²⁶ When GKC reflected back on his views at age seventeen, he stated: “all that time I had not even thought of Christian theology.”²⁷ Apparently GKC was churchless during the early 1900s.

In a poem GKC had published in 1900 he wrote of “an empty throne” and “angels dead,” yet he penned in one stanza:

“I am,” [man] says his bankrupt creed;
 “I am,” and is again a clod:
 The sparrows start, the grasses stir,
 For he has said the name of God.²⁸

Judging from line three immediately above, natural revelation seemed to be nudging at him, and by 1901 in *The Defendant*, GKC was speaking in positive terms about Christianity.²⁹

His in-family debating partner—his brother Cecil—converted from the Anglo-Catholic stance to the Roman Catholic Church in 1912. It was GKC’s wife-to-be, Frances, who converted Gilbert (GKC) “from what he calls the Higher Unitarianism to the most...rational kind of Anglicanism—Tractarian more than Ritualistic. She was educated by the [Anglican] nuns of Clewer [where she’d been brought up].”³⁰ Literary analyst Laurence Clipper claimed: “If one wishes to date the beginning of Chesterton’s commitment to religion...it is safest to point to 1908, the year of both *Orthodoxy* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*.”³¹

In 1904 GKC met the Roman Catholic priest who would later become the model for his Father Brown mystery series. He was Father John O’Connor who would pen his own biographical memories of GKC under the title of *Father Brown on Chesterton*. (O’Connor ended his religious career as “a Monsignor and Privy Chamberlain to Pope Pius

²⁶ Ward, *Chesterton*, 632.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems* (London: Grant Richards, 1900), 15.

²⁹ Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 158.

³⁰ John O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1937), 28.

³¹ Clipper, *Chesterton*, 129.

XI.”³²) O’Connor recorded a memorable moment in his recollections as follows:

In 1912 GKC “interrupted me...by telling me he had made up his mind to be received into the [Catholic] Church and was only waiting for Frances to come with him, as she had led him into the Anglican Church out of Unitarianism. ‘Because I think I have known intimately by now all the best kinds of Anglicanism, and I find them only a pale imitation [of Catholicism].”³³

To the correspondent of the *Toronto Daily Star* GKC wrote: “The change I have made is from being an Anglo-Catholic to being a Roman Catholic. I have always believed, at least for twenty years in the Catholic view of Christianity.”³⁴

Those readers who are dyed-in-the wool Protestants are baffled at such a transition, wondering, “How can a thinking person shift to a church which has a less-than-biblical view of salvation?” Partly, such a shift is explained by the doctrinal values of Anglicanism and Catholicism *at that time*. Chesterton’s was a period in religious history when many of the principal voices in the Church of England had become liberal (on the Bible, Christ, evolution, etc.), so by comparison, the Roman Catholic Church seemed the more conservative of the two churches. In other words, Anglicanism was then moving toward the liberalism of the churches of his early years. GKC declared: “I had a strong intellectual contempt for Modernism, even before I really believed in Catholicism.”³⁵

GKC asserted: “I grew up in a world in which the Protestants, who had just proved that Rome did not believe the Bible, were excitedly discovering that they did not believe the Bible themselves.”³⁶ Consequently GKC could blast out against “Arian and Pelagian demagogues like Dean [William] Inge [of St. Paul’s Cathedral] and Dr. Barnes [bishop of Birmingham].”³⁷ Therefore, GKC labeled “the

³² Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 93.

³³ O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

³⁵ Chesterton, *The Thing*, 211.

³⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), 29.

³⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows* (New York: Sheed and Ward, n.d.), 19.

Modernist Movement” as carrying “the stink of decaying Christianity.”³⁸ Thus, the liberalism of the leading lights in Anglicanism drove Chesterton into the fold of dogmatic Catholicism.

Of course, GKC was also rather dogmatic about drinking (being against teetotalism), which certainly would incline him toward Catholicism rather than toward any dissenters. His weight (more than some college football linemen at over 300 pounds) and his wine-drinking undoubtedly contributed to the three-to-six month critical illness during 1914-15 when he was in semi-consciousness for part of that time. (He was also a virtual cigar chain-smoker.)³⁹ His Catholic brother Cecil’s death in 1918 and his trip to Palestine and Rome in 1919 also nudged him toward Catholicism.

In 1920 GKC was at Mrs. Wilfred Ward’s home in Rome where he conversed with Lord Hugh Cecil. GKC concluded:

The strongest impression I received was that he was a Protestant. I was myself still a thousand miles from being a Catholic, but I think it was the perfect...Protestantism of Lord Hugh that fully revealed to me that I was no longer a Protestant.⁴⁰

GKC’s friend Maisie Ward indicated: “You can certainly search [the] pages [of GKC’s autobiography] in vain for any account of the process of his conversion; for that you must look elsewhere; in the poems to Our Lady, in *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, in *The Well and the Shallows*, etc.”⁴¹ Maurice Baring and Father Ronald Knox (the Bible translator) were among the most ardent supporters of GKC’s eventual entry into Catholicism. Maisie Ward, Chesterton’s Catholic biographer, seems to presume a real conversion prior to GKC’s entry to Catholicism when she wrote: “The profound joy of his early conversion to Christianity was linked with Anglicanism...”⁴² GKC obviously lingered, hoping his wife would join him in becoming a Roman Catholic. Frances wrote in 1922 to Father O’Connor: “I should be only too glad to come with him [to Roman Catholicism] if God in His mercy would show the

³⁸ Ibid., 211, 232.

³⁹ Ward, *Chesterton*, 494.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 445.

⁴¹ Ibid., 453.

⁴² Ibid., 455.

way clear, but up to now He has not made it clear enough to me to justify such a step.”⁴³

On July 30, 1922, Chesterton entered “the Kingdom of Heaven with the formalities of the Kingdom” according to his priest-friend.⁴⁴ “The ceremony took place in a kind of shed with corrugated iron roof and wooden walls...for at this time Beaconsfield had no Catholic Church. Father Ignatius Rice, O. S. B...came over from the Abbey at Douai” to help out.⁴⁵ GKC said confession. Frances wept. He wrote a sonnet that day on his conversion. “Father Walker, who prepared him for his first Communion wrote...that he was perfectly well aware of the Real Presence [of Christ]...gathered from the fact that he was covered with perspiration when he actually received Our Lord.”⁴⁶ Chesterton declared it the happiest hour of his life. Oddly, GKC did not often go to Confession, though when he was asked why he’d converted, he responded, “For my sins.”⁴⁷ Finally on June 12, 1936, GKC was anointed, received his last Communion and died. “Father Vincent McNabb sang the Salve Regina at his bedside.”⁴⁸ On the 27th Father John O’Connor sang the Requiem Mass for GKC at Westminster Cathedral.

III. HIS BASIC BELIEFS

A. THE BIBLE

“I [am]...an orthodox Christian,” GKC wrote in 1910, a dozen years before becoming a Catholic.⁴⁹ Thus he began “to dance and sing in the glorious Carnival of theology.”⁵⁰ For a launching pad GKC observed: “Every religion and every philosophy must...be based on the assumption of the authority or the accuracy of something.”⁵¹ Naturally we want to know his convictions about the locus of that authority.

⁴³ Ibid., 464.

⁴⁴ O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 147.

⁴⁵ Ward, *Chesterton*, 465.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 625.

⁴⁷ Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 232.

⁴⁸ O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 151.

⁴⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910), 13.

⁵⁰ Chesterton, *G. F. Watts*, 75.

⁵¹ Ibid., 43.

As a Protestant in 1902, GKC stated:

Protestant Christianity believes that there is a Divine record in a book; that everyone ought to have free access to that book; that everyone who gets hold of it can save his soul by it... Catholic Christianity believes that there is a divine army... upon earth called the Church, that all [people] should be induced to join it; that any[one] who joins it can save his soul without ever opening any of the old books of the Church at all. The Bible is only one of the institutions of Catholicism, like its rites or its priesthood. It thinks the Bible only efficient when taken as part of the [Catholic] Church.⁵²

Protestants should find nothing objectionable in his first sentence, assuming that in the phrase “by it” he means “by its proper use.” GKC views the Bible as the means of salvation for a Protestant, but as “only one of the institutions of Catholicism” and “the Bible [is] only efficient when taken as part of the [Catholic] Church.” Any convinced Protestant can say “right on!” to GKC’s early assessment of the major difference between the two groups concerning the locus of authority. Amazingly he can write that anyone who joins the Catholic faith “can save his soul without ever opening any one of the old books of the Church at all.” A Protestant can certainly agree with the pre-Catholic Chesterton that this is precisely one major problem Protestants have with Roman Catholicism. Indeed, Roman Catholic scholar William Smith could remark at the 2002 Conference on Roman Catholics and Evangelicals at Wheaton College that he’d never seen a Catholic *ever* in his life bringing a Bible to his own local Catholic Church! In 1906 GKC was to write that “Catholics can live in a tradition of Christianity without having looked at the New Testament.”⁵³

Later GKC could write with tongue-in-cheek of the liberal Anglican Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral as promoting a “Bible, with all its inexhaustible supply of errors and inconsistencies.”⁵⁴ Therefore, one might conclude that GKC held to an errorless Bible.

Chesterton was unquestionably biblically literate. Even in his first book of published poems he obviously knew Habakkuk 2:2 and devoted

⁵² Ward, *Chesterton*, 290.

⁵³ G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men* (New York: The Press of the Readers Club, 1942), 74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 505.

a poem to the battle at Gibeon in Joshua 10. Much later he could refer to his Jerusalem tour guide as “a Roman Catholic...but in a far cry from deserving the charge of not knowing the Bible.”⁵⁵ Though the remark was made prior to his conversion to Catholicism, it still shows that as of 1919 GKC still viewed (from the above exception) the average Catholic as essentially biblically illiterate.

In one of his later, most Catholic of defenses, GKC indicated that the Catholic Church “sweeps the whole world with one encyclopedic cyclone of uniformity...so wedded is it to its fixed idea that its own word is the Word of God.”⁵⁶ No longer is the Bible seen as the sole source of the Christian’s authority, for it is placed within the interpretive, official voice of the Catholic Church. In the same volume GKC remarks with sarcasm that “Protestants are famous for the close and passionate study of the Scriptures, unhindered by pope or priest...”⁵⁷ To such a remark, Bible-based Christians simply want to say—without the sarcasm—“Amen!”

In one of his outbursts against the Reformation, GKC speaks of the irony of early Protestants running into a Catholic cathedral,

Overturning the altar and driving out the priest, finding there certain sacred volumes inscribed “Psalms” or “Gospels”; and (instead of throwing them on the fire with the rest) [the Reformer] began to use them as infallible oracles rebuking all the other [church] arrangements. If the sacred high altar was all very wrong, why were the secondary sacred documents necessarily all right? If the priest had faked his sacrament, why could he not have faked his Scriptures?⁵⁸

This is a telltale statement about the position Chesterton eventually adopted concerning Scriptures when he (for the sake of argument) calls them “the secondary sacred documents.” This is precisely the problem a Protestant has with Catholicism: the Bible becomes “secondary.” Yes, says the Protestant, in the Bible we have “infallible oracles” by which all else in the religious realm must be measured or evaluated.

⁵⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, n.d.), 65.

⁵⁶ Chesterton, *The Thing*, 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

In 1935 the Catholic Chesterton owned that “real Protestants believe [the Bible] infallible...”⁵⁹ In the same book GKC observed that “it was the literal inspiration and inerrancy of the...Scriptures” that Protestantism in the 1800s believed.⁶⁰ Then he wrote that that view still lingers in provincial corners and is called fundamentalism, strongly suggesting that he did not then subscribe to the fundamentalist version of Scripture. He had shifted from an infallible Bible to an infallible Church.

B. GOD

Laurence Clipper averred that “Chesterton deplores the simplistic thinking of the Moslem mind, which ignores the profound implications of the Incarnation and the Trinity...”⁶¹ In short, GKC held the standard view of God, so we will not spend extensive time on this point.

GKC affirmed: “God is God, Maker of all things visible and invisible.”⁶² Furthermore, he could affirm: “The most incredible thing about miracles is that they do happen.”⁶³

GKC offered many pro-creation and anti-Darwinian statements. For example, he said: “the Darwinian theory of Natural Selection was a hypothesis; and it is still only a hypothesis.”⁶⁴ Elsewhere he argued: “If evolution destroys anything, it does not destroy religion but rationalism.”⁶⁵ He grants that if it simply means that an ape eventually becomes a human, “then it is stingless for the most orthodox; for a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly...”⁶⁶ This last assertion seems to allow for theistic evolution (similar to C. S. Lewis’s later statements).

C. SUPERNATURAL SPIRITS

GKC aligned himself generally with orthodox views on angels, Satan, demons, and spiritism. Even in a 1900 poem he penned:

⁵⁹ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶¹ Clipper, *Chesterton*, 92-93.

⁶² Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 174.

⁶³ G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Mattituck, NY: The American Reprint Co., 1910), 24.

⁶⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1936), 142.

⁶⁵ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

God Almighty and with Him
 Cherubim and Seraphim,
 Filling all eternity—
 Adonai Elohim.⁶⁷

Elsewhere he asserted: “I do believe in angels, and incidentally fallen angels.”⁶⁸ “I believe in the devil,” announced Father Brown,⁶⁹ echoing his creator, for GKC’s biographer acknowledged that “Chesterton believed in...the devil...”⁷⁰ Poetically in 1900 GKC wrote of Satan:

He was but an angel ere he fell,
 But I—before I fell—I was a man.⁷¹

In the sphere of supernatural spirits, one unusual entry may be noted—and it is initiated by GKC’s priest-friend, the prototype for “Father Brown.” Father O’Connor remembered:

I had kept [GKC] up too long [one night] with enlarging on the place of St. Michael the Archangel in the scheme of things...Michael was the first creature to resist temptation [of Satan’s rebellion], to resist it...once for all. So he watches over all undoings of [that] disaster, especially the Passion. That is why I feel sure that he is the angel...who rolled away the stone, since the Resurrection is the Challenge Miracle...⁷²

Speculative, though not heretical.

The creator of Sherlock Holmes authored six books on spiritualism and séances. GKC commented on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s spiritualism: “I doubt if anything but a devil from hell would say that all things are aspects of purity and peace.”⁷³ “All evil has one origin,” enunciated Father Brown.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 64.

⁶⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *William Blake* (London: Duckworth and Co., n.d.), 97.

⁶⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown in The Father Brown Omnibus* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1932), 379.

⁷⁰ Ward, *Chesterton*, 370.

⁷¹ Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 127.

⁷² O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 135.

⁷³ G. K. Chesterton, *Irish Impressions* (New York: John Lane Co., 1912), 161.

⁷⁴ Chesterton, *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, 376.

D. HUMANITY

Even in George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, GKC referred to one shining moment in Shaw's characters which revealed "at that moment the splendor of the God who made them and of the image of God who wrote their story."⁷⁵ Elsewhere he wrote that "every man ... is shaped in the image of Heaven."⁷⁶ The "basis for democracy," asserted GKC, lies "in a dogma about the origin of man."⁷⁷ GKC referred (through his fictional character) to "the good priest and the good atheist,"⁷⁸ demonstrating that the image of God is still retained even in the God-denier.

Absolutely pivotal to all GKC's philosophy is his doctrine of free will, which causes him to speak with great intensity and extent about the horribleness of Calvinism and Puritanism. (He probably uses these two *isms* for a punching bag more than any other of the ideas he eschews.) In contrast to Calvinism, the Chestertonian Catholic "accepted the ultimate arbitration which reconciled free will and grace, and did not exclude either."⁷⁹ GKC claimed: "The Catholic Church believed that man and God both had a sort of spiritual freedom. Calvinism took away the freedom from man, but left it to God."⁸⁰ Similarly he said: "A Calvinist is...obsessed with the Catholic idea of the sovereignty of God," so he "wishes particular people to be damned..."⁸¹ Nothing could be simpler, GKC opined, than what Calvinism says: "men go to Hell because God made them on purpose to send them to Hell."⁸² Thus, Calvin's God became demonic according to GKC. Consequently GKC concluded:

Of the idea of Predestination there are broadly two views: the Calvinist and the Catholic...It is the difference between believing that God knows...that I choose to go the devil; and

⁷⁵ Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 208.

⁷⁶ Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 47.

⁷⁷ Ward, *Chesterton*, 572.

⁷⁸ Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 37.

⁷⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *Chaucer* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1932), 257-58.

⁸⁰ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 192-93.

⁸¹ Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, 80.

⁸² Chesterton, *Chaucer*, 294-95.

believing that God has given me to the devil, without my having any choice at all.⁸³

As a result, poet William Cowper was “driven mad by...the ugly and inalienable logic of predestination” which is “hideous necessitarianism.”⁸⁴ Therefore, Chesterton coupled Calvinism’s double predestination with names such as Nestorians, Mohammedans, and Lenin,⁸⁵ and placed “Islam and Kismet, Calvinism and predestination, modern behaviorists and Freudians” all in the same corral.⁸⁶ The previous quotations constitute but a sampling of the many tirades GKC loosed on Calvinism, because for GKC “the determining factor in human life [is] the free will of man.”⁸⁷

E. SIN

Chesterton defended the doctrines of the Fall and original sin but not the Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity. In one of his clever mysteries GKC has Father Brown ask concerning some new religion: “Can [this new religion] cure the one spiritual disease?” His French-friend-to-be Flambeau inquires what that may be. Father Brown answers: “Oh, thinking one is quite well.”⁸⁸ When *The London Times* asked for an essay on “What’s Wrong with the World?” GKC replied with the crisp answer: “Dear Sirs: I am.”⁸⁹ In yet another picturesque slant on the same subject GKC declared: “we live on a planet with a sloping roof...”⁹⁰ No wonder Chesterton’s long-time friend said that “sin was almost the greatest reality” to him.⁹¹

In his first volume of nonsense poetry GKC referred to “The Early Sin—the Fall.”⁹² In one poetic line GKC wrote:

To the last our blood is tintured
With the madness of the fall...⁹³

⁸³ Chesterton, *The Thing*, 65-66.

⁸⁴ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 14.

⁸⁵ Ward, *Chesterton*, 618.

⁸⁶ Clipper, *Chesterton*, 104.

⁸⁷ Ward, *Chesterton*, 394.

⁸⁸ Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 194.

⁸⁹ Philip Yancey in *Orthodoxy*, xix-xx.

⁹⁰ Chesterton, *The Defendant*, 11.

⁹¹ Ward, *Chesterton*, 129.

⁹² G. K. Chesterton, *Greybeards at Play* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), 22.

H. G. Wells once asked if the Fall really happened and GKC replied in a monosyllable, “Yes.”⁹⁴

In his highly paradoxical manner, GKC referred to “the one grand and logical basis of all optimism—the doctrine of original sin.”⁹⁵ He also observed: “Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved [empirically because you] can see [it] in the street.”⁹⁶

Although GKC took the Fall and original sin at face value, on the other hand he proclaimed: “The Calvinist...darkened the land with a creed of Total Depravity and the Scottish Sabbath.”⁹⁷ Likewise he pointed out: “There are moments when [Aldous Huxley] seems to drift toward that Calvinist exaggeration that was called Total Depravity.”⁹⁸ Consequently, GKC did not equate the biblical perspective on sin with the “T” in the Calvinist’s TULIP.

F. CHRIST

Even back in 1900 GKC inserted in an early poem:

I only find him at last
On one old hill where nod
Golgotha’s ghastly trinity—
Three persons and one god.⁹⁹

Of course, the orthodox Christian would object to the lower case “g” in “god,” but GKC uses in the poem a double meaning—(1) three crucified individuals, including Christ; and (2) the “trinity” of the Godhead as present there. His early biographer deduced that by 1903 “It is clear that by now he believed in the Divinity of Christ.”¹⁰⁰ GKC proclaimed that it was not a compromise to say that “Jesus Christ was

⁹³ G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works: Vol IX* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994), 50.

⁹⁴ Ward, *Chesterton*, 504.

⁹⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1903), 21.

⁹⁶ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 11.

⁹⁷ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 31.

⁹⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *Sidelights on New London and New York* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932), 220.

⁹⁹ Chesterton, *The Wild Knight and Other Poems*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Ward, *Chesterton*, 197.

perfect God and perfect Man...”¹⁰¹ He noted: “Whereas the most recent heretics...would simplify the God-man by saying He was only Man, the most ancient heretics simplified Him by saying He was only God.”¹⁰² He further amplified concerning Christ’s deity and humanity by explaining: “Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half-human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God.”¹⁰³ As a result, GKC could affirm (quotably) that the Incarnation was “that incredible interruption that as a blow broke the very backbone of history.”¹⁰⁴

As a corollary of his high view of Christ, GKC could speak of Him as “the Creator and the Redeemer of the world.”¹⁰⁵ In *The Everlasting Man* GKC affirmed belief in Christ’s substitutionary atonement.¹⁰⁶ He spoke with affection of the Anglican Prayer Book’s clauses “By Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension.”¹⁰⁷ Gloriously GKC acknowledged: “Christianity is the religion of the Resurrection...The history of Christianity...started with the staggering miracle of a dead man who was a live man, and was not a ghost.”¹⁰⁸

Despite his overall orthodoxy in Christology, GKC voiced several somewhat eccentric views regarding Christ’s temptations. Many conservatives would take issue with GKC’s remark that “we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness [temptation] was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin.”¹⁰⁹ A bit more bizarre is his assertion that “the Lord thy God may tempt Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane. In a garden [that is, Eden] Satan tempted man; and in [the] garden [of Gethsemane] God tempted God.”¹¹⁰ This last

¹⁰¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1934), 71.

¹⁰² G. K. Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 87.

¹⁰³ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 152.

¹⁰⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 151.

¹⁰⁵ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, xi.

¹⁰⁷ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 130-31.

¹⁰⁹ Chesterton, *Twelve Types*, 49.

¹¹⁰ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 209.

statement flies in the face of James 1:13. However, given the fact that Chesterton was a life-long journalist and not a professional theologian, we can rejoice in his ardent championing a full-orbed essentially orthodox Christology.

G. SALVATION AND ASSURANCE

The question any Protestant believer wishes to ask any John Henry Newman, Tom Howard, G. K. Chesterton, or any other ex-Protestant-become-Catholic is: How can you participate in a church where the doctrine of salvation—the how—is defective? Up to this point in the theological treatment, Protestant evangelicals have had relatively little to take GKC to task over.

But now we must ask the indispensable question: how does a person come into a right relationship with God? GKC does use terms such as “born again” and “regenerate” on rare occasion, but his use of this terminology does not necessarily carry NT cargo in its boxcars. In his book *As I Was Saying*, GKC has a chapter entitled “About Changing Human Nature.” One might expect to find something in this chapter about supernatural conversion, but (though he mentions evolutionists, spiritualists, and Jesus) there is no mention of Christian conversion.¹¹¹

In the subsequent statement it is difficult to tell whether he is speaking of “conversion” to Christianity or to Catholicism when GKC said: “The mark of the Faith is not tradition; it is conversion. It is the miracle by which [people] find truth in spite of tradition and often with the rending of all the roots of humanity.”¹¹² Elsewhere GKC says that “conversion is something more personal and less corporate than communion...”¹¹³ He will also announce that Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* “is not only a story of a conversion, but of a sudden conversion, as sudden as the conversion of a man at a Salvation Army meeting.”¹¹⁴ However, GKC went on to say that Scrooge was converted *to* the punch bowl, not *from* it. From this idea he concluded that Dickens “represented a higher and more historic Christianity” than someone who

¹¹¹ Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, 145.

¹¹² Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, 22.

¹¹³ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 174.

¹¹⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciation and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1911), 112.

would be an absolute abstainer from alcohol.¹¹⁵ But evidence does not indicate that Charles Dickens was a born-again Christian.¹¹⁶

In other contexts GKC sought to penetrate to the major difference between Protestantism and Catholicism on the subject of salvation. GKC wrote that

the point of Protestantism was that it wiped out all of man's sins at once as if they were all equally sinful. All of Christian's burden [in *Pilgrim's Progress*] fell from him before the Cross. He did not have to unpack his own luggage in the confessional-box. But Catholicism always tended more to a table of sins, as of different weights and measures...¹¹⁷

In a second lengthy statement GKC chronicled the principal nub of disagreement between Protestants and Catholics as follows:

The genuine Protestant creed is now hardly held by anybody—least of all by Protestants...If almost any modern man be asked whether we save our soul through our theology, or whether doing good (to the poor, for instance) will help us on the road to God, he would answer without hesitation that good works are probably more pleasing to God than theology. It would probably come as quite a surprise to him to learn that, for three hundred years, the faith in faith alone was the badge of a Protestant, the faith in good works the rather shameful badge of the disreputable Papist...and that was the most important quarrel between Catholicism and Protestantism [which GKC equates with Calvinism].¹¹⁸

Observe that GKC denominates this issue to be “the most important quarrel between Catholicism and Protestantism.” Of course, informed Protestant readers would not wish our position to be represented as “faith in *faith* alone” but rather faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. Also, we would respond by saying that Protestants do not believe we “save our soul through our theology.” Rather, we are saved by Christ alone through our trust in His promise of eternal life to all who believe in Him. (That is our “theology” of salvation.)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ See James A. Townsend, “Charles Dickens: Cheshire Cat Christianity,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* (Autumn 1999): 76-82.

¹¹⁷ Chesterton, *Chaucer*, 229.

¹¹⁸ Chesterton, *The Thing*, 72.

Chesterton has yet a still longer statement concerning the salvation views of Protestants and Catholics. The Catholic Chesterton wrote:

What [the earlier orthodox Protestant] valued was the theological Scheme of Salvation...Of that theological theory there were two main versions: one universal in Scotland... (the Calvinist view) that God chose some to receive the benefits of redemption and rejected others even in the act of creating them; the other [or the Wesleyan one], that men could accept God but only by accepting this theological scheme of salvation, and that their good works had no effect on the result. This was the great doctrine of Faith independent of Works, which was so chiefly recognized as the chief mark and test of Protestantism, [so] that we might almost say that it was the whole of Protestantism...

From this idea of instantaneous individualist acceptance of the Atonement, by a pure act of faith, came the whole system of appeals on which this form of Christianity relied. That was why it was so easy, so personal...that was why [in *Pilgrim's Progress*] the *whole* of Christian's burden fell off at the foot of the Cross. There were no degrees of sin or details of penance, because works were not in question at all. That is why they needed no Confessor or Sacrament of penance, because there was nothing they could do to diminish sins either hopeless or already abolished or ignored. That was why it was wicked to pray for the dead, for the dead could not be anything but instantly beatified by dogmatic faith alone, or lost for the lack of it. That was why there could be...no Purgatory...¹¹⁹

The key question to raise here is: has Chesterton adequately understood the Protestant view of salvation? While allowing for some minor differences in his language or undue stereotyping, I think the fair-minded answer to that question is: Yes. If that is a fair conclusion (drawn from the previous three extensive quotations), then any saved person is likely to become disturbed about GKC's approach to this essential issue.

Just as GKC molded Father Brown in fiction, so the real "Father Brown" (Father John O'Connor) also molded GKC in real life to some extent. Here is what O'Connor said (approvingly about Thomas Carlyle's ideas):

¹¹⁹ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 185.

The two arms of the Cross by which alone is salvation are the Obedience unto death and regard for the poor.

...God came to earth to teach us obedience by object lesson.
...It is obedience that...has to be supplied from the Infinite Obedience of the Divine Sonship.

The other arm of the Cross of Salvation is regard...for the poor. It is the whole business of the new life to which we are born of water and the Holy Ghost...The only Son of our common Father warns us that excess of penury will more certainly than anything else bring us to dwell with everlasting burnings.¹²⁰

Any Protestant should observe that the Catholic priest indicates that salvation comes “alone” through obedience (admittedly “supplied” from Christ’s obedience) and compassion for the poor. He says that these are “the whole business of the new life”! (Admittedly concern for the poor is a *part* of the *outworking* of the new life; see Gal 2:10.) Interestingly also, while—on the Catholic approach—one can’t be certain about personal salvation, one can “certainly” be assured of hell if one hasn’t adequately cared for the poor!

The same Catholic priest who guided GKC wrote: “It is on the whole balance of good and evil in a man’s career that his eternal destiny depends.”¹²¹ Could there be any clearer statement of salvation by good works? GKC himself once spoke of a young man-turned-monk who “knew as well as I do that he could save his soul by normal living.”¹²²

In all GKC’s approximately 100 books one will find few clearcut references to belief and saving faith. Once he remarked of Martin Luther: “It is only fair to him to say that he was a Christian, in the sense that he believed nothing could be done except in the strength of Christ.”¹²³ In light of previous statements, however, one would wonder how GKC could afford to make this claim. In *Orthodoxy* he attempted “an explanation not of whether the Christian Faith can be believed but of how he [GKC] personally has come to believe it.”¹²⁴ Once he said he

¹²⁰ O’Connor, *Father Brown on Chesterton*, 58-59.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²² Ward, *Chesterton*, 598.

¹²³ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 27.

¹²⁴ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, xxiii.

“believed in Christ...”¹²⁵ One biographer believes that GKC’s Catholic friends, the Wards, thought his wife Frances to be a woman who believed in “justification by faith and not by works.”¹²⁶ In short, it is impossible for anyone who believes in justification by faith in Christ alone to justify GKC’s overall views about how to enter a relationship with God.

A logical concomitant of the Catholic understanding of salvation by faith-plus-works necessitates that there can be no certain assurance about one’s salvation. GKC called attention to the Anglican Prayer Book which teaches one to pray: “Suffer us not, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee.”¹²⁷ He then sarcastically called this prayer “so very *Roman*.”¹²⁸ He also admitted elsewhere: “The essence of Calvinism was certainty about salvation; the essence of Catholicism is uncertainty about salvation.”¹²⁹

H. THE CHURCH

For the later Chesterton the Catholic Church was the true Church. GKC had little sympathy with an independent Baptist or Plymouth Brethren group. In his first letter to Chesterton after GKC had become a Catholic (in 1922), his great friend Hilaire Belloc wrote to him of “the Infallibility of the Catholic Church.”¹³⁰ GKC wrote: “The motto emblazoned round the great dome [of St. Peter’s in Rome] is not, as a very thoughtful Unitarian once complained that it should be, the words of Peter acknowledging Christ [in Matthew 16], but the words of Christ establishing Peter.”¹³¹ Indeed, it is this intriguing insight which raises the principal problem for the perceptive Protestant—namely, Peter and the popes are promoted to the extent that Christ seems demoted. Instead of Christ alone forgiving sins, GKC’s biographer, Maisie Ward, speaks of “the Catholic Church who could forgive sins and offer the Holy Sacrament...”¹³²

GKC said (through a fictional character) that “when we belong to the Church, we belong to something that is outside all of us, which is outside ...the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to

¹²⁵ Dale, *The Outline of Sanity*, 15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹²⁷ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 49.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Chesterton, *Irish Impressions*, 204.

¹³⁰ Ward, *Chesterton*, 474.

¹³¹ Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 81.

¹³² Ward, *Chesterton*, 615.

them. If we all fell dead suddenly, the Church would still somehow exist in God.”¹³³

In one of GKC’s fictional pieces a character named Syme says, “I knew my intuition was as infallible as the pope.”¹³⁴ “Is it not saner,” asked GKC, “to ground our faith on the infallibility of the Pope, or the infallibility of the Book of Mormon...?”¹³⁵ He also wrote, “It is believed, somewhat inaccurately, that there is a conviction among Catholics that the Pope cannot possibly be wrong.”¹³⁶ One wonders: Can we have papal infallibility with a pope who can “possibly be wrong”? Is GKC talking about the doctrine of speaking *ex cathedra*? GKC affirmed that “the Pope is the Vicar of Christ...”¹³⁷ He asserted that the Pope “might be enthroned on the top of St. Peter’s with the population lying prostrate round it for miles, and I should still know that there was not in him any shadow of pride?”¹³⁸ But if the pope could “be wrong,” could he not be guilty of the sin of pride?

On the doctrine of the virgin Mary, GKC penned: “That strange mania against Mariolatry...the cult of Mary...that apparently presumes her to be perpetually and secretly encroaching upon the prerogatives of Christ...all that I have never...understood.”¹³⁹ GKC stated: “The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered [Mary]...”¹⁴⁰ He spoke positively of “the cult of Mary”¹⁴¹ and of her as the Mother of God. In one poem GKC rhymed:

...St. Joseph, when he saw
Christ asleep upon the straw,
In great love he worshiped there
Mary and the Child she bore...¹⁴²

¹³³ G. K. Chesterton, *The Ball and The Cross* (Beaconsfield, England: Darwin, Finlayson, 1963), 60.

¹³⁴ Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1986), 104.

¹³⁵ Chesterton, *G. F. Watts*, 43.

¹³⁶ Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 144.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 295-96.

¹³⁹ Chesterton, *The Wells and the Shallows*, 173.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

¹⁴¹ Chesterton, *Christendom in Dublin*, 97.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

If the plain grammar is to be taken at face value, Joseph worshiped Mary! In one place GKC quoted Swinburne's poetic line from a pagan poem as paralleling Mary, when he penned: "Goddess and maiden and queen..."¹⁴³ GKC was in Rome for the festival of the Immaculate Conception where (he said) "the doctrine is not in question..."¹⁴⁴

In connection with the use of images, GKC asked: "Was I worshipping the image? No. Oh no. Only with *dulia*. Not with *latria*," acknowledging that he was "quite well acquainted...with the fact that Protestantism forbids idolatry."¹⁴⁵

Said Chesterton: "Even the High Church Party [in Anglicanism]... confronts a particular heresy called Protestantism...It defends ritual rightly or even sacramentalism rightly..."¹⁴⁶ "I...go to Mass," owned GKC.¹⁴⁷ Father O'Connor spoke of conversing with GKC about "the cumulative evidence for the Real Presence [of Christ in the Mass]..."¹⁴⁸ He wrote: "A Puritan may think it blasphemous that God should become a wafer...Why a man should accept a Creator who was a carpenter, and then worry about holy water...I never could understand...I can only attribute it to Superstition."¹⁴⁹ (Protestants find such statements amazing and amusing.) In *The Ball and the Cross* the fictional Madeleine Durand urges a man before a duel "to go to Mass before dying." He thinks God false and a fable, replying that there is no God. She retorts: "Why, I touched His body only this morning [at Mass]."¹⁵⁰

GKC intimated that "thousands of Christians" during the late Renaissance would have been shocked "if one of the Popes had...said there was no such thing as Purgatory. They would have felt pain...if a Pope had [spoken against]...talking nonsense about prayers for the dead or praise of the Blessed Virgin."¹⁵¹ But why should such people be shocked if the last sentence of the next GKC quotation is true? "Romanism is supposed [to many Protestants] to be made up of Popery and Purgatory and the Confessional...and rosaries and images of saints.

¹⁴³ Chesterton, *The Well and The Shallows*, 175.

¹⁴⁴ Chesterton, *The Resurrection of Rome*, 309.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁴⁶ Maisie Ward, *Chesterton*, 458.

¹⁴⁷ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 159.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Chesterton, *The Thing*, 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, 146-47.

¹⁵¹ Chesterton, *Chaucer*, 41.

But these are often the things most important to Protestants, not most important to Catholics...”¹⁵²

Many more Catholic-oriented quotes could be extracted from GKC’s writings, especially from *The Thing, The Well and the Shallows, The Catholic Church and Conversion, and The Resurrection of Rome*.

I. LAST THINGS

Last on the list is GKC’s doctrine of last things. Apparently he expected no end-times Antichrist, for he acknowledged: “According to most legends Antichrist was to come soon after Christ. One has only to suppose that Antichrist came shortly before Christ; and Antichrist might very well be Caesar.”¹⁵³

GKC employed analogy and humor (in 1899) with reference to his (later) belief in purgatory by inquiring: “Why should we object to be boiled? Potatoes, for example, are better boiled than raw; why should we fear to be boiled into new shapes in the cauldron [of purgatory]?”¹⁵⁴

GKC seemed to stand by the supernaturalism of Christ’s Second Coming, for he believed in “God making Man, in God being made Man, [and] in God made Man coming in the clouds of glory.”¹⁵⁵ He affirmed that there is “truth in the doctrine of hell.”¹⁵⁶ Father Brown warned the silverware thief in the story entitled “The Queer Feet.” “I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.”¹⁵⁷ In another story when an Anglican curate who has committed murder attempts to commit suicide, Father Brown exclaims: “Not that door. That door leads to hell.”¹⁵⁸

On heaven Chesterton could say, “We forget that the base proposition of an eternity of happiness is by its very nature 10,000 times more optimistic than 10,000 pagan saturnalias.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 190.

¹⁵³ Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Ward, *Chesterton*, 110.

¹⁵⁵ Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows*, 82.

¹⁵⁶ Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 214.

¹⁵⁷ Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 62.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Twelve Types*, 70.

IV. CONCLUSION

The literary legacy of G. K. Chesterton has provided a rich database for writers and speakers due to his fecundity of thought and felicity of expression. Thank God for those who take the biblical narrative seriously. Praise God for those who champion classic orthodox Christology and biblical supernaturalism.

However, evangelical evaluators have either been unwillingly ignorant of or they willingly ignore another side of Chesterton—his soteriology and ecclesiology. Unquestionably he traversed a dangerous field of agnostics’ and heretics’ landmines in his spiritual pilgrimage. There is no question that he fully subscribed to the orthodox view of the person of Christ. Yet—despite his prolificness in publication—one almost looks in vain for any biblical explanation of how to receive eternal life. When he does speak more explicitly to the subject of salvation, his comments are cumbered by Catholic content (works, anti-Protestant spoutings, anti-Calvinist tirades, etc.). Whether people are rich young rulers or not, they still need to know how to enter eternal life. GKC once said somewhere that Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, but not tried because it was found hard. But how hard is John 1:12 or John 3:16 or Acts 16:31? Admittedly there is a paradox within Christianity of the “yoke” that is “easy” (Matt 11:30), but one has to come into the door before assuming the yoke (Matt 11:28, “Come to Me...and I will give you rest”).

I can only conclude that GKC who “saved [Philip Yancey’s] faith” did so because Yancey was saved in the first place.¹⁶⁰ Chesterton can give an individual a most enriching grasp of the lavish décor and splendid furniture within the mansion of Christianity, but (for a man of his size!) he was very unclear about how you get through the door.

¹⁶⁰ Editor’s Note: If Philip Yancey says that one as unclear as GKC saved his faith, then we might legitimately wonder what Yancey believes concerning the gospel.