

## **Orthodoxy as Personal Statement or Cultural Blueprint?<sup>1</sup>**

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There is general agreement that G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* is, as Maisie Ward writes, "supremely Chesterton's own history of his mind."<sup>2</sup> Indeed he tells us so himself. On the very first page of the Preface he wrote, "It is the purpose of the writer to attempt an explanation, not of whether the Christian Faith can be believed, but of how he personally has come to believe it."<sup>3</sup> A little later he tells us that he wrote the book in response to the challenge laid down by several reviewers of his book, *Heretics*, one of whom wrote, "I will begin to worry about my philosophy when Mr. Chesterton has given us his." And Chesterton continues, "I have attempted in a vague and personal way, in a set of mental pictures rather than in a series of deductions, to state the philosophy in which I have come to believe."<sup>4</sup> Then he tells the charming story of the man who "discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas,"<sup>5</sup> that is, of someone who had thought up by himself what appeared to him to be a unique and new way of looking at the world, but found, to his surprise and delight, that it already existed under the name of (as he variously terms it) orthodoxy, Christianity, or the Church. Later on he tells other stories about himself, how he was gradually driven closer and closer to orthodox Christianity by reading skeptical and agnostic literature and how

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he repeatedly found that his most sure and fundamental insights and convictions about reality were already part of the doctrine or philosophy of orthodoxy.

It is very often easy for someone to sketch how he came to a certain conclusion about a philosophy of life, even of how he converted to Catholicism. Chesterton's account is unique, perhaps, or at least unusual, in this sense: that he discovered that his own longings, his own insights, his own deepest desires accorded with the beliefs of Christian orthodoxy. As he said, "I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me."<sup>6</sup> Many have gone on intellectual journeys or journeys of faith. But Chesterton found, in a sense, that when he arrived at his journey's end, it was the same place from which he had begun. His own insights both validated orthodoxy and were validated by it.

I think that Chesterton could trust his own sense of things so much because of his purity of heart. And that purity of heart, that goodness of soul, was based on something even more fundamental, his acute sense of reality as something given, his acceptance of being, which is the most basic of all philosophical categories because it includes all that God has created. Acceptance of being, of what is, indicates both humility and sanity. Humility because one takes what God has given us in gratitude and without complaint, sanity because to recognise reality is the first mark of a sane man.

Implicit throughout the book, however and often explicit as well, is a statement not just about Gilbert Keith Chesterton and his mental processes or his life history, but about the human race, the universe, and about God. Thus we can confidently say that *Orthodoxy* sets forth a standard or blueprint for cultural redemption or reform, although these words seem much too tame. Chesterton more than once calls it a "revolution,"<sup>7</sup> about which more later. Now I just said that the fundamental reason why Chesterton could so confidently rely on his own insights was his attitude toward reality as gift. If we think about the notion of gift we can say the following: a gift is generally unknown and (in a sense) arbitrary since it depends upon the will of another. In his chapter, "The Ethics of Elf-land," Chesterton talks about his reaction to fairy tales.

. . . the strongest emotion was that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale.<sup>8</sup>

And then he talks of the arbitrary character of creation, arbitrary in the sense that it simply appears to us; we must accept it at the price of our happiness and our sanity.

The note of the fairy utterance always is, 'You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, *if* you do not say the word "cow"; or 'You may live happily with the King's daughter *if* you do not show her an onion.'<sup>9</sup>

And if one were to challenge this arbitrary character of reality:

If the miller's third son said to the fairy, 'Explain why I must not stand on my head in the fairy palace,' the other might fairly reply, 'Well, if it comes to that, explain the fairy palace.' If Cinderella says, 'How is it that I must leave the ball at twelve?' her godmother might answer, 'How is it that you are going there till twelve?' If I leave a man in my will ten talking elephants and a hundred winged horses, he cannot complain if the conditions partake of the slight eccentricity of the gift. . . . And it seemed to me that existence was itself so very eccentric a legacy that I could not complain of not understanding the limitations of the vision when I did not understand the vision they limited. . . .

For this reason . . . I could never join the young men of my time in feeling what they called the general sentiment of *revolt*. I should have resisted, let us hope, any rules that were evil . . . But I did not feel disposed to resist any rule merely because it was mysterious. . . . I could never mix in the common murmur of that rising generation against monogamy, because no restriction on sex seemed so odd and unexpected as sex itself. . . . Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman. To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once. . . . A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once.<sup>10</sup>

Now this ethics of elf-land is in fact rooted in the most profound doctrines of philosophy. Chesterton wrote in his biography of St. Thomas Aquinas, "Now nobody will begin to understand the Thomist philosophy, or indeed the Catholic philosophy, who does not realise that the primary and fundamental part of it is entirely the praise of Life, the praise of Being, the praise of God as the Creator of the World."<sup>11</sup> And indeed St. Thomas himself had written, *Bonum convertitur cum ente, ita et verum*,<sup>12</sup> the good is convertible with being, just as is the truth. St. Thomas and Chesterton

saw the hand of God and his goodness in what he had created, in being and in all the various beings that cover our earth.

As I said above, the remarkable thing is that this "praise of Life" or "praise of Being" is exactly what the young Chesterton experienced as he heard fairy tales read to him and as he wandered about the garden of his parents' home. He was continually astonished by life, by reality, by being.

A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. . . . . nursery tales . . . make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.<sup>13</sup>

Chesterton's insights into creation allowed him to see that rivers *might* have run with wine; that they in fact run with water was due to God's choice, not to some impersonal necessity.

First, I found the whole modern world talking scientific fatalism; saying that everything is as it must always have been, being unfolded without fault from the beginning. The leaf on the tree is green because it could never have been anything else. Now, the fairy-tale philosopher is glad that the leaf is green precisely because it might have been scarlet. . . . He is pleased that snow is white on the strictly reasonable ground that it might have been black. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Chesterton is here emphasising not so much the arbitrary character of God's creation as the astonishing fact of any creation. Had we encountered a stream filled with water for the first time we would see that a water-filled stream is as wonderful and astonishing as one filled with wine, just as a green leaf is as startling and beautiful as a scarlet one. We ought to have an attitude of continual wonder toward whatever we see around us like the "child of three [who] is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door," an attitude which is rooted in an appreciation of the fundamental goodness of being.

Because "the Catholic philosophy . . . [has as its] primary and fundamental part . . . entirely the praise of Life, the praise of Being, the praise of God as the Creator of the World," Chesterton saw his chief and greatest enemy in the Manichean philosophy, the total negation of that "praise of life." He sums up Manicheanism in one short sentence: "The essential point is that as evil has roots in nature, so it has rights in nature."<sup>15</sup> From this

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flowed all the variant forms of that dark philosophy, even down to its manifestation in Calvinism. But against that Chesterton raises the banner of the goodness of reality, which turns out to be the banner of orthodoxy, which in turn is the banner of human happiness.

Orthodoxy does not mean adhering to some man-made standard established to oppress us. It means adhering to something which is actually exciting because normality is exciting. Not the mere normality of a statistical norm, but the thrilling normality of a natural norm, where things can be what they were meant to be, just as health, both physical and mental, is a natural norm and is ever so much more interesting than illness. If Manicheanism is true, then sickness is as fundamental as health. But if the philosophy of life, the Catholic philosophy, is true, then disease, being a negation, an absence of health and thus of being, has no rights. It exists only because man's state is disordered. This fundamental insight about being and goodness underlies everything else that Chesterton says. It underlies his approach to politics and economics and anything else that one might talk about under the head of redeeming the culture.

Now from here one could go on and begin to talk about almost anything, for Chesterton certainly talked at some time or other in his career about everything. But let us begin in this case at the very beginning. In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* Pope John Paul II wrote, "At the heart of every culture lies the attitude a person takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God." (no. 24)

Now if our attitude toward God, our beliefs about him are at the heart of every culture, then how does Chesterton himself approach that great mystery? A redemption or reform of culture must have some basis. Although it is true that even a renewal on the basis of natural law would be an improvement over what we have now, as Chesterton noted it is only the Church that protects not only the supernatural, but even the natural. As he said of the Greeks, they "became unnatural by worshipping nature."<sup>16</sup> Nature and the natural law are not strong enough without divine protection. We must have God if we are to have even natural sanity or happiness. Thus let us see what Chesterton can say about discovering that mystery of God that lies at the heart of culture.

Although *Orthodoxy* does not contain an extended argument for the existence of God, it does contain several very fine arguments against materialism. And in my experience any effective apologetic for the Faith today

is more often a question of removing popular anti-Christian dogmas than of giving rational arguments for the preambles to the Faith. More a question of removing mental deadwood so that the soil of the mind is clear enough for Christian truth to begin to grow. Take this passage from *Orthodoxy*:

Take first the more obvious case of materialism. As an explanation of the world, materialism has a sort of insane simplicity. It has just the quality of the madman's argument; we have at once the sense of it covering everything and the sense of it leaving everything out. Contemplate some able and sincere materialist . . . and you will have exactly this unique sensation. He understands everything, and everything does not seem worth understanding. His cosmos may be complete in every rivet and cog-wheel, but still his cosmos is smaller than our world. Somehow his scheme, like the lucid scheme of the madman, seems unconscious of the alien energies and the large indifference of the earth; it is not thinking of the real things of the earth, of fighting peoples or proud mothers, or first love or fear upon the sea. The earth is so very large, and the cosmos is so very small. The cosmos is about the smallest hole that a man can hide his head in.<sup>17</sup>

If materialism is true, one could almost say it is irrelevant, for what is obviously important, nay, central about man, is his conscious life, his loves, his fears, his insights, even his errors. But materialism either makes no provision for such or at best must regard them as trivial epiphenomena. How annoying that matter can think, that it can in fact rise above matter, that it can consider anything, even non-existent things. How irksome to the materialist that nearly all that really matters about human life is more than matter. Even those material things that we rejoice about, and very rightly rejoice about, such as our bodies, even those things are tightly connected to our souls in authentic human experience. For dogs and cattle do not write love poems, nor even, I would suppose, sex manuals. So Chesterton's seemingly simple words against materialism contain a quite sophisticated argument, an argument that is really unanswerable.

It is not just a heresy to say that man is merely matter, it is an insanity—and a heresy because it is an insanity. To deny that the loves, aspirations and insights of mankind are the real stuff of human life, and to embrace a philosophical theory that denies this elementary truth, is to be a madman.

Once we have laid the foundation for a culture, which is in God himself, we can go on to other matters. Chesterton clearly did not regard *Orthodoxy*

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as a systematic account of anything, and certainly not of a social order or culture. But nevertheless there is much in it from which we can glean something that might be of service for creating a blueprint to redeem the culture.

Chesterton calls *Orthodoxy* "a companion" to his earlier book, *Heretics*, and obviously the two books are related, the latter book intended "to put the positive side in addition to the negative."<sup>18</sup> But in an important way both *Orthodoxy* and *Heretics* are related to an even earlier book and, I think, to what we might call Chesterton's entire intellectual project. In 1901 he published a book called *The Defendant*. The *Defendant* was a collection of previously published essays defending things widely seen as undefensible. For example, Penny Dreadfuls, Rash Vows, Nonsense, Ugly Things, Slang, Baby-Worship. And interestingly, the first chapter of *Orthodoxy* is called "In Defense of Everything Else." Chesterton spent his entire life in defending things that other men had forgotten could be defended. Even when he is attacking things, such as capitalism and capitalists, birth controllers and birth control, divorce propagandists and divorce, he is really defending the central human things. For the men of his time had abandoned the defense of the family, of widely distributed property, even of human sanity and happiness because they despaired to find anything to say on their behalf. But Chesterton, with an insight that was connatural to him, and that has served a century of Christian apologists as a mine of arguments and examples, saw that these things not only were true, but could be defended. And very often defended with nearly the same arguments that were usually used against them.

In *Orthodoxy*, for example, he turns on its head the feeling that so many moderns have that a "strict rule" (as he refers to it), that is, a fixed moral standard, is reactionary, is opposed for example to social justice. But of course the exact opposite is true. As he says, "A strict rule is not only necessary for ruling; it is also necessary for rebelling. This fixed and familiar ideal is necessary to any sort of revolution."<sup>19</sup> And a couple of pages later he continues,

For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam. No unchanging custom, no changing evolution can make the original good any thing but good. . . . Men may have been under oppression ever since fish were under water; still they ought not be, if oppression is sinful. The chain may seem as natural to the slave, or the paint to the

harlot, as does the plume to the bird or the burrow to the fox; still they are not, if they are sinful.<sup>20</sup>

And we have his defense of the home not as a place of tranquility, but rather of adventure, even of anarchism,<sup>21</sup> and his criticism of socialism as being altogether too much like capitalism.<sup>22</sup> His whole career was thus devoted to restoring men's minds to see those truths which were exciting even though they were often old.

Before I proceed to speak about Chesterton's social and economic thought, I want to emphasise that in this field he is simply applying the insights and principles that he lays down elsewhere: The defense of the normal because it is the natural and ultimately because each created nature testifies to the creativity and goodness of God. Thus Chesterton's concept of orthodoxy begins with the ordinary man and the ordinary man's wisdom—that is, the wisdom of the human race as a whole. One can see this in his commitment to democracy, not necessarily the sometimes sham democracy of ballot boxes, but to the much more genuine democracy of ordinary men governing their own affairs. He seems to have thought that the public house was a more central institution of democracy than the parliament house. His statement that "tradition is only democracy extended through time," and his recognition that the Catholic Church, although monarchical in structure, is actually a very democratic organisation suggest a different notion of democracy.<sup>23</sup> At least such ideas testify to the fact that modern representative democracy is seldom democracy in fact. In his essay, "The Common Man" Chesterton says "that modern emancipation has really been a new persecution of the Common Man."<sup>24</sup> He saw the same modern state that prides itself on being democratic limiting the common man's access to his beer and his pub and interfering with his family life.

Modern emancipation means this: that anybody who can afford it can publish a newspaper. But the Common Man would not want to publish a newspaper even if he could afford it. He might want, for instance, to go on talking politics in a pothouse or the parlour of an inn. And this is exactly the sort of really popular talk about politics which modern movements have often abolished: the old democracies by forbidding the pothouse, the new dictatorships by forbidding the politics.<sup>25</sup>

Freedom then, is something concrete, something which allows a normal man and a normal woman, the foundations of a normal family, to live its own life unhampered within its own proper sphere. Any abstraction called



freedom that in fact does not permit such a normal life, needs to be looked at very suspiciously.

Before I talk specifically about Chesterton's social theories, let me say a brief word about *conservatism*. This is necessary, I think, because of some fundamental confusions which are very common today and because of a failure to distinguish between various possible meanings of the term. As to conservatism as meaning simply the status quo, Chesterton was of course an implacable and bitter enemy. But what does he say? "For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam. No unchanging custom, no changing evolution can make the original good any thing but good. . . ." A desire to restore can, I suppose, be called conservative, but Chesterton's desire arose not because something was old, but because something was right. If we believe that in the beginning God created us as we were meant to be, then to restore, as much as is possible, that original state is not to love primarily the past as past, it is to love the past as good. When our Lord abolished divorce and restored marriage to its original state (Matthew 19:3-9), he did not make an appeal to old custom, however many centuries of tradition it had behind it. The old custom at this time was for the possibility of divorce. No, he appealed to what was in the "beginning." Thus our Lord made a revolution, but a revolution that was also a restoration, not a restoration of the past as past, but a restoration of the past because it was right. Thus somebody like Rousseau, who thought that civilisation had corrupted man, wanted to be a restorer. He wanted to make a revolution that was a restoration. He was mistaken about man's nature, but he was not mistaken about the fact that (as Chesterton put it) "no changing evolution can make the original good any thing but good." And if this is so, it follows that any deviation from that original good is in some degree an evil. Thus the most mistaken socialist revolutionist, if he really believes that in the beginning mankind held all things in common and lived without private property, wants a revolution that is—in his mind—a restoration. Compared with those who justify private property merely because it has ten thousand years of tradition behind it, the socialist is the true traditionalist. He is wrong because he misunderstands human nature and society, but not because he desires to restore what he conceives to be the purity of the original state of the human race. But those revolutionists whose revolution is indeterminate in its demands, who do not know to what new heresy they will turn after accomplishing their

present goals, those are the truly evil revolutionists. They do not want to restore but to destroy.

These points are important, I think, because they constitute a major intellectual barrier to the acceptance of orthodoxy. Many people, I am convinced, reject any kind of orthodox Christianity out of hand because they see it as inextricably linked with conservatism, that is, with a general desire to uphold the status quo insofar as that means upholding the privileges and property of the rich and powerful and a corresponding exploitation of the powerless. And many Christians do nothing to disabuse them of this notion, rather the opposite, in fact. Thus it makes sense, it seems to me, for Catholics and for Chestertonians of all stripes to sharply distinguish orthodoxy from conservatism, since they really have nothing in common. If we have to label ourselves, it would be better to advertise ourselves as revolutionists, as Chesterton does, than as any kind of conservatives.

Now we can begin to talk in more detail about Chesterton's social theories, especially his economic thought. This aspect of his work was not only central to his lifelong intellectual task, but is too much neglected today, I think. Chesterton's often stinging attacks on capitalism and the rich are an integral part of his work as a whole, and any appreciation of him that omits that is an unreal appreciation.

As a social philosopher Chesterton proceeds as he generally does, by building on fundamental insights which others have ignored or misunderstood. He wrote in *What's Wrong With the World*, "As every normal man desires a woman, and children born of a woman, every normal man desires a house of his own to put them into."<sup>26</sup> From this can be deduced the entire theory of distributism. One of my favorite passages from Chesterton occurs at the end of that same book, in which he remarks on the proposals of some meddling "doctors and other persons permitted by modern law to dictate to their shabbier fellow-citizens" that "all little girls whose parents were poor" must cut their hair short because long hair is more easily infected with lice. Chesterton replies to that with what might be called a trumpet blast.

Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all over again, and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl's hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of these adamant tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against

it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down.

With the red hair of one she-urchin in the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilisation. Because a girl should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisured mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord, there should be a redistribution of property, because there should be a redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution. That little urchin with the gold-red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict's; no, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and slip and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down; and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.<sup>27</sup>

The dignity of the human person, the dignity of a little girl in the slums—these are the solid rocks upon which Chesterton could set his fulcrum and overturn the whole world. The subtitle of E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful is Economics as if People Mattered*. Chesterton knew that truth already, and equally importantly, he knew that the arguments made by supporters of the free market that they alone had the secret for the welfare of mankind, that these arguments were bogus. He needed only to look around him to see that.

Chesterton's social morality was not respectable. It was not just a matter of denouncing capitalism, but of sympathy and support for people deemed beyond the pale. One example of this was his support for the General Strike of 1926. On April 10, during the run-up to the General Strike, a strike that even Ramsay MacDonald, Labour Party leader, did not support,<sup>28</sup> and about a month before the strike began, Chesterton wrote in *G.K.'s Weekly*,

Now I have supported the Trades Unions all my life and all the time during which practically the whole press condemned them. I have supported Strikes which . . . the whole press condemned. I know well that the Trade Union was the only possible organisation to meet the evil of capitalism. I still think the Strike was the only possible weapon to meet the tyranny of those particular capitalists. If that situation happened to them to-morrow, I should

support them to-morrow. Where is happening to-day I am supporting them today.<sup>29</sup>

Distributism of course is the economic system which he championed. Although distributism is experiencing something of a revival today, it is not even acknowledged as existing in most circles. The critique of capitalism that distributism makes is as devastating as anything that socialism makes, indeed even more so. For distributism puts at the center of its analysis of economic facts the little red-haired girl in the slums, the girl whose hair must not be cut. It does not consider the Gross Domestic Product, still less such abstract and pernicious doctrines as free trade or the dictatorship of the proletariat as its desiderata. In this way distributism disagrees with the chief dogma of both socialism and capitalism, that human life consists in the multitude of things that we can possess, either individually or collectively.

One of the points that I think ought to strike any reader of Chesterton is the number of gibes that he continually makes about the rich and economically powerful. One of the passions that flowed from his unusual purity of soul was a passion for justice. This took the form of a hatred of political corruption, of the actions of officious bureaucrats and reformers who want to manage the lives and families of the poor, and very notably of a hatred of economic injustice. He was able to have that hatred, not of men, but of men's actions, because of his amazing and simple grasp of first principles. Although this preoccupation with economic justice and injustice does not figure as much in *Orthodoxy* as in many of his other works, it is nevertheless present. His comments about "sweaters"—we would probably call them exploiters in America if anyone much cared any more about economic injustice here—and revolutions are clear enough for anyone to see. But consider this from an unsigned editorial in *G.K.'s Weekly* in October of 1931.

If there is discontent now among the poor, that discontent is more than justified. If we are all in danger from the bankruptcy of Capitalism and from the destitution of workless men, it is no more than we have deserved for accepting the wrong values set before us. The poor have their wrong values too, but for that they are less to blame. The middle classes, the professional classes, the black coats, the 'intelligentsia' have for generations accepted the comforts procured by sweating the slums, and in consequence they find themselves involved in the bankruptcy, without the strength or the means to fend for themselves, and without realisation of the issues involved in the present breakdown. In justice and by necessity

all the middle classes should now be on the side of the poor, applying with them the possible remedies for the restoration of England. In truth, however, the middle classes have been taught only to admire success. They admired Capitalism while it seemed to be a success. Now, the more acute among them admire Russia because there they imagine Communism will be a success. The more stupid among them cling blindly to a broken Capitalism in the frightened hope that what seemed a success in the past will once more be a success in the future.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately such sentiments are not exactly in the mainstream of what is considered orthodox Catholic journalism today. For while Catholics generally are much concerned, as they certainly should be, with abortion and other direct attacks on the human person and the family, they seem curiously unaware of and uninterested in economic injustices, something that is the very opposite of Chesterton, and indeed of the Roman Pontiffs as well.

While it is easy to see that Chesterton's economic views will not be entirely pleasing to those who control society, in fact, his entire concept of orthodoxy was of a piece with his economic outlook. It was not the sort of thing that the powerful of the earth would feel comfortable with if they really understood what it meant. For maybe not since Louis IX of France has there been a government completely comfortable with the notion that there was a fixed morality, a fixed standard by which its actions could be judged and to which it might be compelled to submit, and by which the king and his officials might be punished if not in this world, then surely in the next. You can hit a man only with a firm object and you can overthrow injustice only with a firm idea of justice. Any attempt to remake the world, even the most evil or wrong-headed, must have some standard to which it can appeal. Even the purely destructive revolutionists that I mentioned above usually make such an appeal, for otherwise they would have no possible hope of success.

Before I end I want to bring up one more point. At least in the United States very many people seem to think that it has only been since the 1960's that things have gotten as bad as they are today in society. They see around them abortion, divorce, euthanasia, the legalisation of same-sex unions, even production of hybrids of humans and other animals, and so on. And of course most of this did not exist in the past. But we need only read Chesterton to see that if these evils did not exist in the past—and some of them, such as divorce certainly did—that it was not for lack of vigorous advocacy by many of

Chesterton's contemporaries. Read widely in Chesterton and you will see the same so-called cutting edge ideas being advocated in the Edwardian era as the ideas that are seen as cutting-edge today.

In his 1922 book, *Eugenics and Other Evils*, for example, he not only attacks supporters of euthanasia, but shows how those who deny any essential difference between man and the rest of the animal creation cannot logically oppose even cannibalism.<sup>31</sup> Chesterton was familiar with the entire range of human opinion and human evil, if not always as real and existing evils, at least as something advocated by many around him. Just because our times are very much out of joint, we need not fear that Chesterton lived in such an innocent time that he cannot be a help to us today. We can find more than enough in Chesterton to aid us in a reformation of our culture—that is, *after* we have our revolution!

Early on in *Orthodoxy* Chesterton says that the philosophy he expounds in this book is not really his own. For “God and humanity made it; and it made me.” God and humanity. Almighty God quite obviously created the world and made human nature the definite thing that it is. Thus mankind always works along the same lines. The old truths handed down by the democracy of the dead, the perhaps inarticulate utterance of truths by the workman in the pub or the little girl with the red hair—in the manner that they embody the recognition of being, of God's creation, they are what must serve as the foundation for redeeming culture. I do not say that Chesterton despised intellect or education. But he had seen too many intellectuals outside the Church embracing nonsense, a nonsense that was at best based on confusion of thought, at worst on a self-interested desire to profit from the misery of the rest of us. Chesterton desired to do nothing more than to enunciate these old truths, and he found in the Catholic Church, I will not say an ally, but a teacher and guide for his own endeavors. The Catholic Church, he wrote, “is the only type of Christianity that really contains every type of man; even the respectable man.”<sup>32</sup> But if there is any hope that the work of G.K. Chesterton, let alone the apostolate of the Catholic Church, can bring about a redemption of culture, I think it will begin to come about when we start to really pay attention to what Chesterton said, and *a fortiori*, to what the Church teaches. If I have suggested any points that might be helpful toward attaining those goals, that is so much to the good. But it is Chesterton himself who can suggest many more points better than I can, to the same end. For if we still have the goals of the Church in our hearts, then we can be sure that we have those of Chesterton.

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- <sup>2</sup> *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), p. 208.
- <sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. vii.
- <sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), pp. 13–14.
- <sup>5</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 14.
- <sup>6</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 14.
- <sup>7</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 203.
- <sup>8</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), pp. 97–98.
- <sup>9</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 99.
- <sup>10</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), pp. 101–3.
- <sup>11</sup> *St. Thomas Aquinas in The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 483–484.
- <sup>12</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I q. 16 a.3.
- <sup>13</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 96.
- <sup>14</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), pp. 105–6.
- <sup>15</sup> *St. Thomas Aquinas in The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 484.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Everlasting Man in The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 285.
- <sup>17</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 39.
- <sup>18</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. vii.
- <sup>19</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), p. 200.
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- <sup>21</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994 printing), p. 48.
- <sup>22</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994 printing), p. 200.
- <sup>23</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1909), pp. 84–85.
- <sup>24</sup> "The Common Man" in *The Common Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), p. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> "The Common Man" in *The Common Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), p. 2.
- <sup>26</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), p. 49.
- <sup>27</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong With the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), p. 191, 193–194.
- <sup>28</sup> Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: a Social History of Great Britain, 1918–1939* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 166.
- <sup>29</sup> "Our Critics: Trusts and Trades Unions," *G.K.'s Weekly*, April 10, 1926, p. 73, in *G.K.'s Weekly a Sampler*, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett (Chicago: Loyola University, c. 1986), p. 151.
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- <sup>31</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), pp. 15–16.
- <sup>32</sup> "Why I Am a Catholic" in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), p. 127.