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PROPHECIES OF G.K. CHESTERTON

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By Karl Schmude

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight at Warrane College. And thank you to Dr Shannon for the invitation.

We recently celebrated Anzac Day in Australia, which brought to our minds once again the events at Gallipoli and of the First World War. They also brought to my mind a particular incident in the life of the English Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton.

In 1914, Chesterton was gravely ill. On a November afternoon of that fateful year, barely three months after the beginnings of the First World War – a conflict that was to kill three-quarters of a million of his countrymen (as well as many millions of other peoples), Chesterton was in his Beaconsfield study dictating a detective story. From a newsboy outside, he could hear of the unending carnage on the Western Front. Suddenly he paused – and then, in a new voice, he drew a deep draught of hope from the well of despair. This is what he said:

*'If seeds in the black earth can turn into such beautiful roses,
what might not the heart of man become in its long journey
towards the stars.'*ⁱ

For me, this statement captures the visionary quality of Chesterton's mind. John Ruskin once noted that, for a hundred people who can feel, there is only one who can think; but for ten thousand who can think, there is only one who can see. Chesterton, as the critic A.L. Maycock pointed out, had that rare power of intuition which is called in Scripture

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the gift of wisdom – an immediate understanding of truth that outstrips the exercise of reason, coming like a sudden blaze of light and with a quality of revelation.ⁱⁱ

Chesterton had more than intellectual sparkle. He had spiritual insight. He had the capacity to penetrate reality and perceive the inner truth, not just the overt fact. He was, in this sense, a prophet: and it is in this sense that I would like to speak of him tonight. The ‘prophecies of G.K. Chesterton’ might suggest a power to foretell future events – with the menace of a Nostradamus, or the credulousness of a magazine astrologist. I am not using ‘prophecies’ in that sense, but rather to focus on Chesterton’s gift for discerning the trends and movements of *his* time, and anticipating their likely outcome in *our* time.

Chesterton himself had no pretensions to prophecy. He saw himself primarily as a journalist, a practising journalist, concerned with the passing problems of the day. He did not cherish any false notion of artistic immortality. There was, he once said, *‘no nobler fate than to be forgotten as the foe of a forgotten heresy and no better success than to become superfluous.’*ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet it is striking that there are few figures who could be judged less ‘superfluous’ to our time, more profoundly and more acutely alive to the movements of our century, and more possessed of prophetic insight into the character of our society, than Chesterton. The journalism that seemed so ephemeral has proven, in large measure, to be enduring, and Chesterton is the supreme exemplar of T.S. Eliot’s definition of the Christian journalist – that he found the topical excuse for writing about the permanent.^{iv}

I still recall, as a young university student, here in Sydney in the 1960s, the enormous intellectual excitement I experienced on reading Chesterton. Like the British social critic, Bernard Levin, I remember how *‘enthralled, stirred and delight’* I was by Chesterton’s works.^v He certainly performed for vast numbers of people the vital task of forming a Catholic mind – helping so many of us to think in Christian categories. For me, as possibly for some in the audience tonight, Chesterton is an outstanding model of the Catholic intellectual – of a man who placed his mind in the service of truth, not only man’s truth but Also God’s truth, inspired, that is, by natural reason as well as supernatural faith.

Malcolm Muggeridge once expressed surprise that, when Chesterton has so often been proved right in his judgements, he should still be less seriously regarded than other popular writers of the time. like George Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells, who were almost invariably wrong.

The major reason would seem to be that Chesterton was, for the most part, writing against the spirit of his age. Like his contemporary, W.R. Inge, the Anglican Dean of St. Paul’s in London, Chesterton thought that the man who marries the spirit of the age soon finds himself a widower. Chesterton did not want to be a widower – and he did not marry the spirit of the age.

In his mind, Christianity is always out of fashion, because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. A ready example of this truth in our time is the combination of a fashionable emphasis on the unessential and a fashionable disregard of the fundamental. In his 1909 essay, 'On Lying in Bed', Chesterton noted this profound distortion of reality and right values:

'If there is one thing worse,' he wrote, 'than the modern weakening of major morals it is the modern strengthening of minor morals.'^{vi}

In regard to minor morals, Chesterton instanced the preoccupation with cleanliness and matters of hygiene, and in regard to major morals, he noted the neglect of religion and ethical principles. In our day, I suppose, we might see the unfolding of this prophecy in the elevation of a ban on tobacco smoking, the imposition of a 'smoke-free' environment, combined with the abandonment of a moral stand on abortion or euthanasia. We may exercise choice in the killing of the unborn or the enfeebled, but not in the indulgence of a pastime.

Chesterton, the master of paradox, was himself a paradox. He was the embodiment of eccentricity, yet he was, at the same time, a model of sanity and orthodox values. Chesterton gave a special meaning to the Biblical statement that 'no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.' (Lk 4:21-30) Not that Chesterton himself was not accepted in a personal sense. In fact, he had a profound capacity for friendship and a rare gift for inspiring affection among those with whom he disagreed. H.G. Wells, for example, once said that, if he were ever to reach Heaven, it would be as a friend of GKC's. When Chesterton died, the English author Hugh Kingsmill conveyed the news to his friend Hesketh Pearson, the biographer of George Bernard Shaw. Pearson gave out a 'hollow groan', which [Kingsmill said] 'must have echoed that morning all over England.'^{vii} But while Chesterton himself was a widely revered figure, his message was not widely accepted at the time. This is the burden – and the abiding value – of the prophet; that he is neither behind the times nor even in advance of the times, but rather beyond the times.

Chesterton's first book of essays was entitled **The Defendant**, published in 1901, and much of his life was devoted to defending what is commonly considered indefensible. The topics included a defence of 'rash vows', a defence of 'ugly things', and a defence of 'humility'.

'I have conceived,' Chesterton wrote in the Introduction, 'that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world – that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in that terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.'^{viii}

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, but with a distinctly different style, Chesterton championed the unfashionable truth and advanced the abandoned ideal. Such an exercise did not make for popularity, but Chesterton knew the difference between common wisdom and popular whim. Christ, after all, had been condemned to death by majority

vote, and Chesterton continued to exalt common sense, even in an age when he found it no longer common.

Perhaps Chesterton's greatest prophecy was his early awareness of the nihilism that has come to permeate our culture; the sense of nothingness and emptiness; the attitude of ultimate doubt and denial that atrophies our capacity for belief and exposes us to false substitutes. '*The best lack all conviction,*' wrote W.B. Yeats, '*while the worst are full of passionate intensity.*' In Chesterton's mind, the special mark of the modern world was not that it was sceptical, but that it was dogmatic without knowing it. (Chesterton once said, in relation to the novelist Arnold Bennett, that there are only two kinds of people in the world – those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and don't know it. The only advantage he had over Arnold Bennett, he said, was that he belonged to the former class!^{ix}) Thus, contemporary culture was prone to unconscious dogmas; and 'an unconscious dogma' Chesterton wrote in 1919, 'is the definition of a prejudice...'^x

More colourfully, Chesterton said on another occasion that the problem for modern man is not that he has lost his way. Man has always lost his way. The problem now is that he has lost his address.^{xi}

The history of our century has been marked by the triumph of prejudices – by the force of unconscious dogmas that have served as a substitute for beliefs; that have sought to fill the void left by 'lost addresses' – by the abandonment of one's true home. In the main, these dogmas have been utopian enthusiasms of various kinds, a craving for an unreal perfection in this world, whether political, like Nazism and Communism, or politically correct – ideologies which have proved profoundly totalitarian, destroying freedom in the name of freedom, and destroying ideals in the name of idealism. They have advanced their cause by the power of enforcement rather than the attraction of authority. In the age of 'political correctness', I think that Chesterton would have been alive to the paradox that sweetness and tolerance are being enforced by the most embittered and the most intolerant. Chesterton's complaint about Fascism in the 1930s was that '*it appeals to an appetite for authority, without very clearly giving the authority for the appetite.*'^{xii} He saw all the difference in the world between power and authority; between the bullying – even (perhaps especially) legalised bullying (bullying imposed by law) – that allows the strong to oppress the weak (and, as power always does, to have a corrupting effect in the process), and the inherent rightness of rule and transcendence of law that is the basis of authority and the safeguard of human dignity and identity.

One of the most striking of Chesterton's prophecies was his realisation of the likely consequences of 20th century liberalism. He recognised, at an early stage, the deep and fundamental opposition between liberalism and liberty; the deep and fundamental connection, in other words, between liberalism and totalitarianism. Chesterton saw that liberalism was a philosophy, not of liberty, but of license – and that it would eventually license the loss of liberty. In fact, it was not really a philosophy or a system of beliefs at all: it was the absence of beliefs: it was the ultimate nihilism. It was not a value, but a

void; and it led inevitably to the greatest void of all – the enslavement and extermination of human life.

Chesterton always argued that the world needs a fixed spiritual standard even for its own intellectual purposes. ‘*Unless we have some doctrine of a divine man,*’ he said, ‘*all abuses may be excused, since evolution may turn them into uses.*’^{xiii} Chesterton admitted that he was very fond of revolutionists, but not very fond of nihilists. ‘*For nihilists, as their name implies, have nothing to revolt about.*’^{xiv}

In 1940, T.S. Eliot had argued that 20th century liberalism was likely to ‘*prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanised or brutalised control which is a desperate remedy for its chaos.*’^{xv} But several decades earlier, Chesterton had offered an even more chillingly specific prophecy.

‘The earnest Freethinkers,’ he wrote in 1905, ‘*need not worry themselves so much about the persecutions of the past. Before the Liberal idea is dead or triumphant, we shall see wars and persecutions the like of which the world has never seen.*’^{xvi}

As Malcolm Muggeridge noted many years later, Stalin, who was then a young man of 26, and Hitler, 10 years younger, were, along with others, to make good these words of prophecy to a fabulous degree – enormously helped by the liberal intelligentsia of the Western world.^{xvii}

Chesterton had a very clear understanding of the human need for belief. He thought that a critical mind was imperative, but he realised that criticism was not enough: it was a means, not an end. The purpose of an open mind, he once said, is similar to that of an open mouth – and that is to close it again on something solid.^{xviii} The proper end of thought is not doubt, but devotion; and Chesterton saw that the mind, once set loose from its moorings of religious faith, would not stay adrift endlessly, but rather find refuge in a new and probably alien harbour. One of his most famous comments – at least attributed to him, though it has not yet proved directly traceable - summarises this point perfectly: when man ceases to believe in God, he comes to believe, not in nothing, but in anything.^{xix}

In 1971 the British novelist, Kingsley Amis, contributed to a Reappraisal of Literature series in the weekly journal **The New Statesman**.^{xx} The book which he singled out was Chesterton’s novel, **The Man Who Was Thursday**, originally published in 1908. Amis had first read it as a schoolboy and now, several decades later, was moved to reassess it in the context of a profoundly changed world. He was astonished to discover that the novel spoken even more urgently and resoundingly to the present generation than to the one originally addressed by Chesterton.

The Man Who Was Thursday carries the apt sub-title of ‘A Nightmare’, and it unfolds the story of a group of desperate anarchists who menace all order in society. The main character, Gabriel Syme, is elected to a Central Anarchist Council, the members of which are named after the days of the week. Syme himself is ‘the man who was Thursday’.

The book demonstrates how exactly Chesterton discerned the shape of things to come – the final consequence of nihilism. He saw destructive forces in our society that would be nothing but destructive, ‘*not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them,*’^{xxi} basing themselves in the first place on an inner anarchy that denies all the moral distinctions ‘*on which mere rebels base themselves.*’^{xxii}

Chesterton argued that ‘*a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization.*’ The destruction of the future would come, not from the commonly supposed seedbed of revolution – the lower classes – but rather from the educated and affluent, those who have been cut off from their cultural roots and lost contact with spiritual truth and moral wisdom; who combine intellectualism and ignorance and thereby indulge in what he called ‘*a weak worship of intellect and force.*’^{xxiii} ‘*The most dangerous criminal now,*’ concluded Chesterton, ‘*is the entirely lawless modern philosopher.*’^{xxiv} It was a remarkable insight, for it underlined the critical importance of human thought in moulding the future – and it highlighted the destructive impact of the alienated mind. It portended the profound influence of the intelligentsia on such epoch-making events as the birth of Soviet Communism in 1917 and the Nazi extermination programs of the 1930s and 1940s.

Chesterton thought that our society had suffered a mental breakdown far more pervasive and complete than a moral breakdown, though the intellectual process prepared the ground for the moral change. An error is more menacing than a crime, Chesterton declared, for an error brings about crimes.^{xxv}

The Man Who Was Thursday contains one of Chesterton’s most remarkable prophecies – and that was his sense of a perverse alliance that was forming in our society between the rationalist outlook and the imaginative impulse, between reason and the imagination, both of which had become spiritually unanchored. Chesterton was certain ‘that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State.’^{xxvi} By ‘silently’, as Kinsley Amis commented, Chesterton could hardly have meant more than ‘secretly’; if he had meant ‘by an unspoken consensus’ – that is, observing at an early stage the power of political correctness – he would have been, in Amis’ words, not just a remarkable prophet, but a terrifying one.^{xxvii}

The other novel of Chesterton’s that merits the accolade of being ‘prophetic’ is **The Napoleon of Notting Hill**, published in 1904 but set eighty years ahead – in the symbolically significant year of 1984 – and devoted to the theme of the encroachments of a future totalitarian state. George Orwell was only an infant when Chesterton’s novel appeared, and his later adoption of ‘1984’ as the title of his visionary novel may be no more than coincidence. We know that he admired Chesterton’s prophetic qualities, though he was intensely irritated by what he saw as Chesterton’s levity and his lop-sided championing of Catholicism.^{xxviii} The profound threats to civilisation had to be taken seriously and grimly, thought Orwell, and not in the jocular way that Chesterton apparently did. No doubt Chesterton’s playfulness has not helped to secure his reputation as a prophet, for it conveyed the impression of a lack of gravity. **The Napoleon of Notting Hill** opens with the following words:

'The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children's games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up.'^{xxix}

And this sentence appears below the title of the first chapter: 'Introductory Remarks on the Art of Prophecy'. It is easy to see how a superficial reading of Chesterton could lead to the conclusion that he was incurably frivolous. But below the foam and the froth, like that of an ocean, there was great depth. Chesterton understood the distinction between being 'serious' and being 'serious-minded', and he shared Bernard Shaw's view that, if you are going to tell people the truth, you had better make them laugh – or they'll kill you!^{xxx}

A key theme of **The Napoleon of Notting Hill** is the menace to human liberty posed by the over-organisation of society and the growth of large impersonal units. This is now such a familiar criticism of modern society that it is easy to underrate the visionary understanding shown by Chesterton at the very beginning of the 20th century. But in 1904 it was not at all clear that the development of massive social corporations – large units of production and distribution, large bureaucracies, large cities, etc – would lead to a profound loss of personal freedom and responsibility and a vast array of social problems. Chesterton was among the first to recognise the stifling of human personality in the mass state, and he inspired various social thinkers, such as E.F. Schumacher, whose best-selling book, **Small is Beautiful**, might well have received its title from Chesterton.

In the face of what Chesterton saw, nearly a century ago, as the trend towards totalitarian conformity, he proposed the solution of small and elementary units as the basis of human happiness. From his earliest years, as he relates in his **Autobiography**, he was much more attracted by the microscope than the telescope.^{xxxi} He wanted to understand reality in all its teeming tangibility, all the life he could touch and feel, rather than as part of a contrived intimacy. He wanted to understand it through the microscope rather than the telescope. In **The Napoleon of Notting Hill**, he prophesied the revival of suburban patriotism – the resurgence of local loyalties, which would satisfy the spiritual longings of ordinary people by providing a cause or object sufficiently small and real for them to comprehend and cherish.

Chesterton's love of small and tangible structures had an obvious influence on his social philosophy which was called **Distributism**. Distributism emerged as an alternative to the two main philosophies of our century – Capitalism and Socialism – and it involved the principle of a wide distribution of property as the necessary condition of social freedom. In his inimitable way, Chesterton argued that the problem with Capitalism was that the ordinary person, instead of minding his own business, was minding somebody else's. And the Socialist solution was no solution at all: far from decentralising power, it merely concentrated it in a new form, creating bureaucrats where there were formerly capitalists. Chesterton was a lifelong Liberal, in the 19th century sense of the term, and he harboured

a deep distrust of the State and of bureaucracy which was the instrument of the State, for he saw this as part of the organised injustice of society. If people were unjust and cruel when they had the advantage of economic power, as they did under Capitalism, how much more unjust and cruel could they be under Socialism, when they had the additional advantage conferred by political and legal power?

Most of the influential social thinkers of Chesterton's day, such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, were committed Socialists; but Chesterton believed that they lacked any profound affinity with their fellow citizens. They seemed to criticise human nature as if they themselves did not possess it. *'You left certain human needs out of your books,' he once said 'You may leave them out of your republic.'*^{xxxii}

There is one area in particular in which Chesterton's childhood instincts found later philosophical expression – and that was his profound sense of wonder towards the earth. Chesterton would have felt very much at home with the new-found appreciation of the environment. He always argued that life had to be appreciated first and only reformed afterwards; that is, a person might hate the world enough to want to change it, but he had to love the world enough to think it worth changing. There had to be that primary and supernatural loyalty to things. This attitude did not imply a Luddite tendency on Chesterton's part. He did not have a horror of machinery: witness his romantic feeling for the production of a newspaper – watching 'the great lights burning on through darkness into dawn, and [hearing] the roar of the printing wheels weaving the destinies of another day.' The modern newspaper, in Chesterton's mind, was the greatest work of anonymity since the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages.^{xxxiii}

The modern conservation movement can be said to owe an intellectual debt to Chesterton; and what has been termed a theology of the environment would draw abundant inspiration from his writings. As the American religious writer, Lawrence Cunningham, of the University of Notre Dame, has pointed out, the framework for a theology of the environment, of man's stewardship over the earth, could well be constructed from the religious writings of Chesterton;^{xxxiv} for Chesterton appreciated the profoundly religious nature of this world as it comes from the hand of God. He understood that the world of creation should be the object of wonder – that that world should inspire our search for the transcendent, long before it is an object to despoil, manipulate and subdue.

Chesterton's literary career began at the close of the Victorian Age. Queen Victoria died in 1901: an era had unquestionably ended, and a new one was waiting to be explored and defined. Probably in no sphere has this process been carried out more ardently than in that of sex. From the Victorian hypocrisy that sex does not exist, the new age moved to the other hypocrisy that nothing else exists.

The assurance was offered that, when once sex came to be discussed openly and treated as perfectly natural, our society would be immeasurably healthier. No longer would we suffer repressions and frustrations; sexual expression would constitute self-expression, and we would find in this a more exciting and complete means of self-fulfilment. Even in

those early days, Chesterton perceived that this belief did not represent the panacea it was assumed to be. In his biography of **St. Francis of Assisi** (1923), he examined the Graeco-Roman civilisation which Francis inherited, and he concluded that the nature-worship promoted by the Roman Empire in its decline had ended in producing things decidedly against nature:

‘Thus the effect of treating sex as only one innocent natural thing was that every other innocent natural thing became soaked and sodden with sex. For sex cannot be admitted to a mere equality among elementary emotions or experiences like eating and sleeping. The moment sex ceases to be a servant it becomes a tyrant.’^{xxxv}

It is difficult, amid the disorder of our strained and jaded appetites, to deny the truth of that statement. In the Western world, sex has obviously become an obsession. It has swamped all the expressions of our culture – our art and literature, our songs and dances, our movies and advertisements. We have got sex on the brain, which – as Malcolm Muggeridge once commented – *‘apart from any other considerations, is a most unseemly place to have it.’^{xxxvi}*

Chesterton was acutely aware that sex cannot just be natural: it is also supernatural. To deny this sacramental and transcendental dimension is not only to impoverish it, but finally to render it unnatural. It is to exalt sex at the expense of love. The sexual revolution of our time, as is now so sadly obvious, has imposed limits on the enjoyment of sexual love by reducing it to sexuality.

In 1920, Chesterton produced a critique of divorce, entitled **The Superstition of Divorce**. He saw that the process which *‘began with divorce for a king [Henry VIII] ... is now ending in divorces for a whole kingdom.’^{xxxvii}* His closing section of the book – a typical piece of Chesterton’s using what his wife, Frances, once called ‘buckets and buckets of red paint’ – is a rousing defence of the vital harmony between the divine and the human in marriage:

‘Those of us who have seen all the normal rules and relations of humanity uprooted by random speculators, as if they were abnormal abuses and almost accidents, will understand why men have sought for something divine if they wished to preserve anything human. They will know why common sense, cast out from some academy of fads and fashions conducted on the lines of a luxurious madhouse, has age after age sought refuge in the high sanity of a sacrament.’^{xxxviii}

‘The high sanity of a sacrament’ – what a brilliant summation that is of the Christian scheme, and of the quality of Christian humanism of man exalted by God!

Only a few years after the appearance of **The Superstition of Divorce**, Chesterton offered a striking prediction:

'The next great heresy [he wrote in 1926] 'is going to be simply an attack on morality; and especially on sexual morality. And it is coming, not from a few Socialists surviving from the Fabian Society, but from the living exultant energy of the rich resolved to enjoy themselves at last, with neither Popery nor Puritanism nor Socialism to hold them back.... . The roots of the new heresy, God knows, are as deep as nature itself, whose flower is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life. I say that the man who cannot see this cannot see the signs of the times; cannot see even the sky-signs in the street that are the new sort of signs in heaven. The madness of tomorrow is not in Moscow but much more in Manhattan – but most of what was in Broadway is already in Piccadilly.'^{xxxix}

It was Chesterton's surpassing achievement to have seen the signs of the times – and to have grasped their significance. He recognised at an early stage, a number of key truths. He recognised, as I have tried to show this evening, the destructive influence of bad philosophy on the social order – and especially on the dignity of the human person and the integrity of the family. He was alive to the profound human need for intimate loyalties, for small and manageable structures, and he shrank from the dehumanising consequences of 'bigness'; and finally, he foresaw the ruinous effects of sex when it became a promiscuous appetite and not a creative and controlled power. He foresaw many other things as well, which time has not permitted us to cover on this occasion, such as the confusing fruits of feminism and the corruption of education.

Several months ago, an American writer, Dawn Eden, published a book called *The Thrill of the Chaste: Finding Fulfilment While Keeping Your Clothes On*. Dawn Eden is a journalist for the *New York Post* and her book details how betrayed she has felt by the so-called 'sex revolution' of recent decades. After experiencing many years of casual sex, with an uncountable number of partners, she has come to regard it as a con – and something that is far more destructive for women than for men.

I mention her tonight because a major reason for the return of balance and happiness to her life was due to her discovery, just over 10 years ago, of G.K. Chesterton. She has done a lot of work in the recording industry and, in fact, is regarded as the most prolific liner-note writer in compact-disc history. One day she was interviewing Ben Eshbach, leader of a Los Angeles rock band called the Sugarplastic, and she asked him what he was reading. He answered: '*The Man Who Was Thursday*, by G. K. Chesterton.'

Dawn Eden later picked the book up out of curiosity and was captivated. Soon she was reading everything by Chesterton that she could get hold of, starting with his book entitled *Orthodoxy*, in which he explained why he believed in the Christian faith.

This was the first time that it struck Dawn Eden that there was something exciting about Christianity. She kept reading Chesterton, even as she continued her dissipated lifestyle. And then, one night in October 1999, she had a hypnagogic experience – the sort in which you're not sure if you are asleep or awake. She heard a woman's voice saying:

‘Some things are not meant to be known. Some things are meant to be understood.’

Dawn Eden got on her knees and prayed – and eventually entered the Catholic Church.

In all my years of reading Chesterton, which goes back to my undergraduate years in the 1960s, I have repeatedly come across stories like Dawn Eden’s – of people who happen to have picked up a Chesterton book and been captivated and enthralled.

A key part of his appeal is his remarkable insight into life – both human and divine, both natural and supernatural. It is this dimension of prophecy – of being able, not only to see events and trends, but to see *through* them – that marks him out as a quite extraordinary person.

In the panegyric which he preached on Chesterton’s death in 1936, Msgr. Ronald Knox observed that Chesterton *‘will almost certainly be remembered as a prophet in an age of false prophets.’*^{xl} His gift was to see reality in the light of eternity rather than of time, and thus his vocation was, like that of the prophets of the Old Testament, to serve as an interpreter and mouthpiece of God.

These are large claims, but there is much evidence to support them. Perhaps the final paradox about Chesterton is the quintessentially Christian one, that one must die in order to live – and Chesterton had to die in order to establish his reputation as a prophet. As the late English novelist, Anthony Burgess, put it:

‘Solid and earthbound as he seemed, Chesterton knew what it was like to live on the level of eternity.’^{xli}

ⁱ Maisie Ward, *Return to Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1952), p.137.

ⁱⁱ A.L. Maycock, *The Man Who Was Chesterton* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1963), p.40.

ⁱⁱⁱ G.K. Chesterton, “Apologia,” in *G.K.C. as M.C., Being a Collection of Thirty-Seven Introductions* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967; orig.ed. 1929), pp.271-72.

^{iv} Quoted in Roger Kojecky, *T.S. Eliot’s Social Criticism* (London: Faber, 1971), p.87.

^v Bernard Levin, “Pantomime Horse,” *The Spectator* (5 December 1958), p.833.

^{vi} G.K. Chesterton, “On Lying in Bed,” in *All Things Considered* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.60.

^{vii} Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p.553.

^{viii} G.K. Chesterton, “Introduction,” in *The Defendant* (London: Dent, 1901), p.16.

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- ^{ix} G.K. Chesterton, "The Mercy of Mr. Arnold Bennett," in *Fancies versus Fads* (London: Methuen, 1923), p.86. Cf. a similar statement, "On Europe and Asia," in *Generally Speaking* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968; orig.ed 1929), p.23.
- ^x Maycock, *op.cit.*, p.98.
- ^{xi} G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (London: Cassell, 1910), p.65-6.
- ^{xii} Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, p.492.
- ^{xiii} *What's Wrong with the World*, p.22.
- ^{xiv} G.K. Chesterton, *The Thing* (London, Sheed & Ward, 1929), p.12.
- ^{xv} T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, in *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968; orig.ed 1940), p.12.
- ^{xvi} Maycock, *op.cit.*, p.123.
- ^{xvii} Malcolm Muggeridge, "G.K.C.," *New Statesman* (23 August 1963), p.226. Repr. In Malcolm Muggeridge, *Things Past*, ed. Ian Hunter (London, Collins, 1978), p.148.
- ^{xviii} G.K. Chesterton, "The Extraordinary Cabman," in *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.24.
- ^{xix} This statement sounds Chestertonian and has been commonly attributed to him, but no definitive source has yet been identified.
- ^{xx} Kingsley Amis, "The Poet and the Lunatics," *New Statesman* (26 February 1971), p.289.
- ^{xxi} G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, in *A G.K. Chesterton Omnibus* (London: Methuen, 1936), p.247.
- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, p.222.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, pp.242, 267.
- ^{xxiv} *Ibid.*, p.246
- ^{xxv} G.K. Chesterton, "The Diabolist," in *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p.228.
- ^{xxvi} *The Man Who Was Thursday*, p.245.
- ^{xxvii} Amis, *op.cit.*, p.289.
- ^{xxviii} See George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," in *Collected Essays* (London: Mercury Books, 1961).
- ^{xxix} G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, in *A G.K. Chesterton Omnibus* (London: Methuen, 1936), p.5.
- ^{xxx} See <http://www.dailycelebrations.com/shaw.htm>
- ^{xxxi} G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), p.106.
- ^{xxxii} Ward, *Return to Chesterton*, p.58.
- ^{xxxiii} Maycock, *op.cit.*, p.16.
- ^{xxxiv} Lawrence Cunningham, "Chesterton Reconsidered," *Thought* XLVII (1972), pp.271-79.
- ^{xxxv} G.K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), p.32.
- ^{xxxvi} Malcolm Muggeridge, "Down with Sex," in *Tread Softly for You Tread on My Jokes* (London: Collins, 1966), p.46.
- ^{xxxvii} G.K. Chesterton, *The Superstition of Divorce* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), p.97.
- ^{xxxviii} *Ibid.*, p.146.
- ^{xxxix} This prophecy first appeared in *G.K.'s Weekly* (19 June 1926), and was later included in the anthology edited by Maycock, *op.cit.*, pp.123-24.
- ^{xl} Ronald A. Knox, *Occasional Sermons* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p.402.
- ^{xli} Anthony Burgess, "Introduction," in G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, new ed. 1969), p.7.