

Chesterton's Romantic Humanism

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*We Catholics have only in that sense got as far as realising that
a man is a man.*

G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*

INTRODUCTION

[...] we need this life of practical romance; the combination of something that is strange with something that is secure. We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome. We need to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable.¹

Why does an author who was important a century ago continue to be current? This publication aims to offer some possible answers as to why some of Chesterton's writings continue to question the woman and man of today.

First of all, we must consider that the vastness of time and the richness of the arguments used by GKC do not represent a complete explanation of the genius of this writer. His success is also based on another pillar: G.K. Chesterton knew how to speak not only to the reader's mind but also to his heart, to his deepest memory. Even today his unmistakable irony and authentic, unexpected poetic characters touch both the reader's heart and imagination. His allegories, metaphors, allusions, and comparisons transmit in a simple, concise way even the most complex concepts, like this one about divorce:

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, London, John Lane; New York, John Lane Co., 1909, p. 14.

It is not like the breaking of a chain, which has been forcibly imposed upon a slave. It is like the breaking of a sword, that has been deliberately taken up and deliberately dishonoured by a traitor.²

It should be emphasized that in addition to the vastness of the means of persuasion, the rational means reinforced by the more poetic and emotional means, G.K. Chesterton is an author of deep and broad-minded thought, so to speak. He always looks at society and man, reflecting on all sides of his existence. In this way, during the decades of his journalistic work and as a writer, he successfully dealt with the most diverse themes. He wrote about the main political and economic systems, education, family, women's rights, education, literature, theater, the fashions of his time (like vegetarians), various kinds of ethical-moral-social issues, the Church, faith, and God – without ever mentioning his name directly. So he did it through content and ideas themselves, thereby awakening the “common sense” of the most different groups of people. He worked in various literary genres, in prose and also in poetry, and above all as a publicist (as a journalist and collaborator of various newspapers). In addition, he also wrote plays that were highly appreciated, especially by his best friend and adversary Bernard Shaw. In fact, as biographers report, Shaw was sure, that Gilbert had to devote himself to plays, otherwise he would have wasted his talent. But talent was not wasted, on the contrary,

² G.K. Chesterton, “On Glorifying Divorce”, January 25, 1913 in L. J. Clipper (Ed.), *The Illustrated London News*, 1911–1913, 29, p. 430.

for the amount of content produced, G.K. Chesterton is truly unique. Throughout his career he wrote more than 5,000 articles and essays for various newspapers. He wrote about 100 books (some of which are collections of his essays from newspapers).³ And don't forget his *Father Brown*, which continues to be reprinted.⁴

G.K. Chesterton was also an exemplary author of continuity. Continuity and constancy. Working in the most diverse literary styles and also in publishing, he was able to maintain and demonstrate a straight line of thought and analysis. His ideas expressed in the articles find a deeper reflection on the pages of his books, and at the same time they intersect with what is read in his poems, in which his thought flew with even more freedom, revealing the romantic side of this very critical author's mind. The continuity of his thought, unity to the way he wrote, to irony, to daring argumentation, make his style unmistakable and his ideas really difficult to contrast.

And here, naturally, one wonders about his level of genius. What is the reason for such talent? Actually,

³ His articles have appeared in over 42 journals. However, we emphasize the two most systematic collaborations. First, with the *Daily News*, a newspaper with which Chesterton collaborated from 1901 to 1913, publishing an article every week. In addition, the work for *The Illustrated London News*, a collaboration that lasted 31 years (1905–1936). Here, too, G.K. Chesterton published an article every week, thus continuing his column. Cfr. A. Kovalenko, “La difesa della famiglia negli scritti giornalistici di G.K. Chesterton”, PhD diss., Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, 2019, pp. 486–487.

⁴ Cfr. D. Ahlquist, *Knight of the Holy Ghost. A Short History of G.K. Chesterton*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2018, pp. 70–71.

to give an answer, we have to take a comprehensive look at the wealth of this author, that is, not only at his education but also at the context in which he was born. Therefore, first of all we must recall his family, not only his family of origin, but also the spiritual unity that he formed with his wife Frances. She is the one who always took care of the practical things while G.K. Chesterton dedicated himself completely to writing. And it was Frances who helped him to arrive at his faith, as Chesterton himself writes in the dedication of the *Ballad of the White Horse*, “[...] I bring the rhymes to you, who brought the cross to me [...]”.⁵

At the same time the family he was born into was the first pillar on which the genius of Chesterton rested. So his Father Edward with his “toy theater” had, as GKC himself writes in his *Autobiography*, a strong influence not only on the way G.K. Chesterton understood art but also in laying the foundations of his extraordinary ability to *wonder*, to have love for life and for all creation.⁶ And also his mother, Marie Louise, although more severe, transmitted to him the importance of women’s role in society and above all the sincere respect he must have for women. We cannot forget his brother Cecil Chesterton. As for his birth, G.K. Chesterton said, “Now I shall always

⁵ G.K. Chesterton, *The ballad of the white horse*, London, Methuen, 1911, p. XVI.

⁶ Cfr. G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography*, London, Hutchinson, 1937, pp. 31–32, 34, 44, 49–50.

have an audience”.⁷ Cecil became a great friend and collaborated with him as a journalist and writer. In other words, his family was the very hearth that first transmitted to him a true ardor, importance, and love for what he would defend throughout his career – the family.

Another aspect of G.K. Chesterton’s genius is his irony. To many people it may seem like an element of vainglory. Simply read a few lines of GKC to understand that in his case, irony has a completely different role. In Chesterton’s writings, it has a real argumentative role because it helps to lighten the most rigorous criticism and to return to the more human aspect of things. In addition, irony helps him to maintain and transmit to the reader the inner calm and the ability to *wonder* despite social or political opposition.

In his talent, his deep love for creation, his sense of gratitude, his love for the truth, his good humor, his respect for the freedom of the individual and the family, which in his thought was rather like the culmination and realization of such freedom, are supported, or rather, are strengthened by an intellectual dowry: a rather prodigious memory that allowed him to “produce” an incredible amount of authentic and profound writings. G.K. Chesterton read a lot and, as his wife and secretary Dorothy Collins claimed, he remembered well all he had read throughout his life. His hair could be messy, he could forget the most

⁷ Cfr. M. Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, London, Sheed & Ward, 1944, pp. 13–22.

practical and simple things (like, for example, the place of some meeting or the address of his own newspaper) but his mind became more and more tidy as the years went by. He could dictate two articles at a time or dictate a few books and remember right where he left off the last time when he returned to it.⁸

When we talk about Chesterton, we are dealing not only with a genius, but above all with a person who, despite the devastating amount of work, and thanks to his inner wealth, has been able to build solid bonds with people who have the most diverse ideas and has been able to cultivate a very sensible and well-argued faith. For him, as he says through one of the characters in *The Ball and the Cross*:

[...] the supernatural to me is more reasonable than the natural; for the supernatural is a direct message from God, who is reason.⁹

In fact, one of the particular aspects of G.K. Chesterton's thought process is precisely the way he saw the role of Revelation and faith in the life of every single person and in the history of humanity in general. His romantic mind allowed him to see life as a story, and this, in time, led him to discover that "if there is a story there is a storyteller".¹⁰ His ability to won-

⁸ Cfr. M. Ffinch, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, Torino, Edizioni Paoline, 1990, pp. 87–89.

⁹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, New York, J. Lane, 1909, p. 134.

¹⁰ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, London, John Lane; New York, John Lane Co., 1909, p. 108.

der and gratitude led him to the Catholic faith, and later, faith itself allowed him to find the deeper meaning of life and further enrich all his writings by making them deeper.

Chesterton's humanism is therefore expressed first of all in his ability to "wonder", in his constant gratitude for life and respect for man's freedom, his sincere desire for his happiness. And it was with this desire that he wrote his literary works and articles. And precisely for this reason there is so much persuasion in G.K. Chesterton's writings: it is not only a pure consequence of his learned intellect, though incomparable, but it is a fruit of the truly exceptional unity between intellect, irony, and the ability to appreciate the world and wonder before it. The formula of persuasiveness that permeates Chesterton is therefore very Christian. His stances on various topics and his inner disposition, good humor, and faith have guided his intellect and enriched the strength of his rhetorical abilities.

This publication aims to contribute to keeping alive the intellectual genius of this author, and in it, we have collected some articles and reports presented during the workshop entitled "Rome and faith that helps us to be human. Chesterton's Christian humanism" organized in Rome at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in 2019.¹¹

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (often referred to as

¹¹ "Rome and faith that helps us to be human. Chesterton's Christian humanism" ("Roma e la fede che ci aiuta a essere umani. L'umanesimo cristiano di Chesterton"), Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, April 11, 2019.

GKC) was a rather unusual journalist and writer who deeply loves the world and people, dedicating all his writings to the defense of freedom, life, and happiness. The reports presented in this book analyze some of the main writings of this author, showing his fundamental ideas, i.e., the themes that were closest to his heart. Thus in her text, Professor Susan Hanssen analyzes the historical vision of Chesterton presented in her book *Everlasting Man*, in which the author tries to demonstrate that the history of man has only two main stages: that before Christ and after Christ.

Prof. John P. Wauck's paper contains an analysis of G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* in which we get a good glimpse of this author's ability to wonder and his deeply romantic soul. The following is the text by Prof. Giulio Maspero which, based on the book *Manalive*, demonstrates one of G.K. Chesterton's main thoughts: man by nature has a deep desire for the Supernatural, and it is precisely here that man becomes himself. This report is followed by a more artistic text, which during the workshop was presented in the form of Giampiero Pizzol's theatrical short rendition of the novel *Manalive*, which helps the reader to feel the spirit and the main idea of this book more deeply.

This publication also contains an article of analysis by Alla Kovalenko on how G.K. Chesterton defended the family in *The Illustrated London News*. The theme of the family, in fact, for Chesterton was one of the most important because it was directly linked

to the freedom and happiness of the human being.¹²

G.K. Chesterton was a rather versatile and complex author. His literary, journalistic, and spiritual contribution is – without exaggeration – unique, especially considering the simple fact that it is really difficult to find any aspect or dimension of the human being's life, which was not analyzed by Chesterton in one of his writings, providing original arguments and thus addressing the readers' reason. For this reason the purpose of this publication is to present a central aspect of G.K. Chesterton's thought: his way of bringing man back to the center of modern thought.

His writings never lose relevance; indeed, they often seem to be an analysis of the current state of our society, or rather, a reflection on the deeper causes of current problems. And at the same time they contain a continuous reminder of the common sense – of a return to the right and effective path. And that is what centralizes man but with an integral vision, like a free being who by nature seeks out God.

Alla Kovalenko

¹² This article, as well as the text by Prof. Susan Hanssen and Prof. Giulio Maspero were previously published in the journal *Church, Communication & Culture (CC&C)*. *Church, Communication & Culture (CC&C)* is an Open-Access International Journal of the Pontifical University of Santa Croce's School of Church Communications.

If Christianity were really one of the cults studied in comparative religion, if it were really, as its critics sometimes say, a thing made up of materials borrowed from Paganism, if it were really only the last myth or ritual of the long undying death of the Roman Empire, then there is no reason why its symbolism should not be used forever by anybody; as the symbolism of nymphs and cupids is still used forever by anybody. The real reason is that this religion does differ in one detail from all those ancient and beautiful religions.

It is not dead.

Everybody knows in his heart that it is not dead; and none better than those who want it to die.

G.K. Chesterton, *The Illustrated London News*,
"The Continuing Power of Christianity"
August 17, 1935

ROME IN THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION OF G.K. CHESTERTON'S *EVERLASTING MAN*

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INTRODUCTION

The centerpiece of Chesterton's historical imagination is Rome – the history of Rome as a chrysalis for the coming of Christianity. For Chesterton, the entire history of Rome acts – so to speak – as a kind of stage setting for the Christmas story.

G.K. Chesterton summed up his historical imagination in a pithy set of verses which expressed his idea that the Roman Republic and the Pax Romana represented all that natural man could achieve on his own. Chesterton believed that the ancient, classical world of the natural man had come to an end with the fall of Rome, and that the new age of Christian nations arose in its wake – a new civilization arisen from the ashes of the old.

For Chesterton, the world of the natural man had ended long ago, when Rome let go of “the ends of the world” – of Spain, of England, of France. A new world

of the Christian nations had arisen from the decline and fall of the old Roman classical civilization:

For the end of the world was long ago,
When the ends of the world waxed free,
When Rome was sunk in a waste of slaves,
And the sun drowned in the sea.
When Caesar's sun fell out of the sky
And whoso hearkened right
Could only hear the plunging
Of the nations in the night.¹³

G.K. Chesterton's historical imagination might be summed up in these brief lines:

For the end of the world was long ago, / when the
ends of the world waxed free,
... When Rome was laid in a waste of slaves, / and
[Caesar's] sun drowned in the sea.

Nevertheless, Chesterton does not dismiss ancient history as a mere prequel to the coming of Christ. Chesterton makes much of the classical history of Rome as a time of preparation for the Gospel. He tells a rollicking tale of an all-important struggle between what he calls "healthy heathenism" and its threatening opponent in the ancient world – "perverse paganism". For Chesterton, "healthy heathenism" was symbolized by Rome while "perverse paganism" was symbolized by Carthage. This gave weight to human history, even before the coming of Christ.

¹³ G.K. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, London, Methuen, 1911, p. 3.

G.K. Chesterton, born in 1874 and a nationally and internationally renowned journalist by World War I (1914–1918), converted to Catholicism in 1922. Just after World War I, Chesterton published an ambitious book, a history of Western Civilization entitled *The Everlasting Man*¹⁴. He clearly intended his book to counter H.G. Wells's (1920) influential attempt at the same project of universal history, *The Outline of History*.¹⁵ H.G. Wells told a story in which Western Civilization progressed to the extent that it left religion behind. Wells deals with man as an evolutionary force, indistinguishable spiritually from material nature. Chesterton's counternarrative was bent on restoring the distinction between man as a spiritual creature and the material universe, as well as the distinction between the Christian Church as a supernatural institution from purely natural, human institutions.

Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* was divided into two parts: section one, dealing with human history up to the coming of Christ, and section two, dealing with human history since the coming of Christ. The first section begins with the first evidence of man – the cave drawings – and is entitled “Man in the Cave”, while the second section begins with Christ's birth in the stable in Bethlehem and is entitled “God in the Cave”. In Part I, Chesterton refutes the idea that the human is indistinguishable from the rest of evolving nature. Against the nineteenth century positivist social sciences of sociology, psychology,

¹⁴ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, San Francisco (CA), Ignatius Press, 1993.

¹⁵ Cfr. H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, London, George Newnes, 1920.

art history, and comparative religion – taking each social science discipline in turn, and chapter by chapter, Chesterton insistently argues that human development – human history – the human story – is a distinctive part of the past. In Part II, Chesterton makes a parallel argument that Christianity is not indistinguishable from other mystery religions, ethical philosophies, or humane and moral sects, but that the Christian Church stands out as a distinctive institutional, theological, and cultural force within the larger human story.

For Chesterton, the first part of Western Civilization was a preparation for the Gospel; the second part of Western Civilization is the story of the vicissitudes of the Christian Church in history.

There is a certain sense in which Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* is primarily a Christmas book. It asks and answers the question what difference to human history the Incarnation of Jesus Christ made. The pivotal chapter – the piece-de-resistance of the entire book – is the chapter entitled “The God in the Cave”, which completes Part I and introduces Part II. The pivot of *Everlasting Man*, then, is Chesterton's account of the nativity scene as the culmination or fulfillment of the good forces at work in ancient, classical culture. The marvelous chapter in part one, “Man and Mythologies”, prepares an introduction to the shepherds' role in the Nativity story. The following chapter, “The Demons and the Philosophers”, prepares the way for a new look at the Magi and Herod's massacre of the Innocents as parts of the Nativity story. The threads that Chesterton had carefully prepared and woven together in Part I, in

the story of the rise of the Roman Republic through its conflict with Carthage and the fall of the Roman Empire through a mess of debauchery and philosophic detachment, come together in his delightful description of the Christmas scene.

It might seem a platitude to say that Chesterton's historical imagination is dominated by the moment of transition from B.C. to A.D. – from Before Christ to Anno Domini. But for Chesterton, Christmas, placed squarely in the middle of the Roman Millenia, stretching roughly from 500 B.C. with the beginnings of the Republic, to 500 A.D. with the last of the Western Emperors, gives heart and meaning to it all.

What was it then about Roman history that contributed to shaping “the fullness of time”? For Chesterton, Rome's defeat of Carthage was a watershed moment.

Chesterton literally refers to Rome's annihilation of Carthage – following Cato's dictum “*Carthago delenda est*, Carthage must be destroyed” – as “what really happened in the Mediterranean”.¹⁶ The rise of the Roman republic through its struggle against Phoenician Carthage was crucial in Chesterton's imagination to the creation of “the health in the heathen world”. This is a phrase Chesterton uses repeatedly in various forms – “the heathen health of the world” – signifying the existence of a natural religiosity that became the good soil for the Gospel, the two-fold culture that formed the shepherds and the Magi who worship the Christ in the scene of Bethlehem. Similarly,

¹⁶ Cfr. G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 142.

the fall of the Roman empire was, in Chesterton's imagination, like unto the very fall of Man; it was, as the chapter title that closes part one proclaims, "The End of the World", the sign of the insufficiency of the natural and the need for supernatural rescue from outside of human history.

For Chesterton, the shepherds of the nativity scene represent the Roman peasant with pastoral, rural piety to the *genius loci* – the gods of field and grove, crossroads and boundaries; the *lares* and *penates* of hearth and home; the *imagines* of one's ancestors. It is not too much, I think, to evoke the image of Bernini's Pious Aeneas, as it stands in the Villa Borghese, to sum up Chesterton's vision of the core of Roman religiosity: Aeneas is the embodiment of piety to god, father, and country as he holds his father Anchises on his broad shoulders, clutching the *lares* and *penates* of Troy, with his son Ascanius as his heels. This piety to the particularity of one's own ancestors, city, and children is the exact opposite of modernity's aspiration toward the abstract, the universal, the cosmopolitan, and the global. Chesterton, a Little Englander and opponent of the cosmopolitanism of London's commercial elite, idealized this loyalty to the small, the intimate, and the local.¹⁷ For Chesterton, the shepherds are the mythmakers – those who have discovered that "the soul of a landscape is a story and the soul of a story is a person".¹⁸

¹⁷ For further exploration of the centrality of localism to Chesterton's historical thinking, see J.R. McCleary, *The Historical Imagination of G.K. Chesterton: Locality, Patriotism, and Nationalism*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009.

¹⁸ Cfr. G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 174.

PART II. THE HEALTH OF THE HEATHEN WORLD

As I have said, there is a certain sense in which Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* is primarily a Christmas book. Chesterton had previously written beautiful essays on English Christmases, Dickensian Christmases, and the philosophy of the gift. In *Everlasting Man*, Chesterton does not just rest his view of the Nativity on the scriptural infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Rather, Chesterton appeals to the entirety of the Christian tradition of celebrating the mystery of the Nativity throughout the ages. Chesterton appeals to "the democracy of the dead", as he called it in *Orthodoxy* – to the way that the nativity story has been told and retold and the Christmas nativity scene depicted and re-depicted each Christmas. Chesterton was not just reading Luke's Gospel or Mathew's Gospel for the annunciation scenes, the story of the shepherds, the account of the coming of the Magi, but rather reading "the popular presentation of this popular story in so many miracle plays and carols". What Chesterton is struck by is that the central paradox of Christmas – the extraordinary contrast between cosmic deity and little, local infancy – "has been repeated, reiterated, underlined, emphasised, exulted in, sung, shouted, roared, not to say howled, in a hundred thousand hymns, carols, rhymes, rituals, pictures, poems, and popular sermons". Chesterton insists that Christmas is something new in human history, a combination of ideas which "has emphatically [...] altered human nature". Christmas, Chesterton suggests, has created "a psy-

chological difference which can outlast any theories".¹⁹ The story of the Incarnation, of the Nativity in Bethlehem, has had a lasting artistic, cultural, and psychological impact on human history:

It is no more inevitable to connect God with an infant than to connect gravitation with a kitten. It has been created in our minds by Christmas because we are Christians; because we are psychological Christians even when we are not theological ones.²⁰

In some sense, Chesterton here claims that Christian culture is essentially Christmas culture; the human civilization that flows forth from Christianity's Incarnational core. Chesterton is certainly correct that the proliferation of Madonna and Child images, which are part of the earliest Christian iconography on tombs, is an irreversible contribution to the world's imagination.

For [the Christian] there will always be some savour of religion about the mere picture of a mother and baby; some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God.²¹

Chesterton here gives point to all those local struggles of Christians to "Keep Christ in Christmas" or maintain public nativity scenes in neighborhoods and town halls. If Chesterton were ever to be made a doctor of the Church, he might be called the Doctor of Christmas for his effort to

¹⁹ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 175, 169–174.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

plumb the meaning of the centuries-long traditions of festivity. “Omnipotence and impotence, divinity and infancy, do definitely make a sort of epigram which a million repetitions cannot turn into a platitude”.²²

What, for Chesterton, are the elements that make up this central scene in human history? Who are the Shepherds? Who are the Magi? Here I will focus on explaining Chesterton’s remarkable theory regarding the Shepherds. For Chesterton, the Shepherds represent the mythmakers of classical antiquity. All those who sought to find some outlet through imagination for the human need and desire to worship. Chesterton begins this argument immediately in the opening chapters of the book, when he is dealing with the earliest known human art. “The crux and crisis is that man found it natural to worship”. In studying Greek mythologies, Chesterton suggests that “sometimes it would seem that the Greeks believed above all things in reverence, only they had nobody to revere”. Chesterton surmises from the ubiquity of images of men kneeling in reverence or raising hands in supplication that the gesture of sacrifice and the impulse to libation expressed a natural human need and became everywhere in the ancient world “a normal and necessary action”. Trying to connect the artistic and mythological evidence, Chesterton asserts: “The substance of all such paganism may be summarised thus: it is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination”. “Mythology sought God through the imagination; or sought truth by means

²² Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 171.

of beauty”.²³ Chesterton does not dismiss mythology as a mere work of imagination. Rather, he affirms these imaginative efforts to express inchoate religious insights – and one of these religious insights was that the personal is a perfection:

The most simple people have the most subtle ideas. [...] Ignorant as a child is, he knows more than he can say and feels not only atmospheres but fine shades. [...] Nobody can understand it who has not had what can only be called the ache of the artist to find some sense and some story in the beautiful things he sees; his hunger for secrets and his anger at any tower or tree escaping with its tale untold. He feels that nothing is perfect unless it is personal. Without that the blind unconscious beauty of the world stands in its garden like a headless statue.

Chesterton suggests that trying to wrestle the personal element from even the seemingly impersonal, material world, is one of the elements of mythological art: “One need only be a very minor poet to have wrestled with the tower or the tree until it spoke like a titan or a dryad”. Chesterton goes further to resist dismissing this fascination with the personal as a mere projection of the human element onto nature, and to rather grasp how it was a search for the personal aspect of divine nature:

It is often said that pagan mythology was a personification of the powers of nature. The phrase is true

²³ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 112, 108, 112, 110, 111.

in a sense, but it is very unsatisfactory; because it implies that the forces are abstractions and the personifications are artificial. Myths are not allegories. [...] The impersonation is not of something impersonal. [...] but imaginative does not mean imaginary. [...] Every true artist does feel, consciously or unconsciously, that he is touching transcendental truths; that his images are the shadows of things seen through a veil. In other words, the natural mystic does know that there is something there; something behind the clouds or within the trees; but he believes that the pursuit of beauty is the way to find it; that imagination is a sort of incantation that can call it up.²⁴

Chesterton is insistent that “we do not know what we ourselves mean when we are moved”. To be touched or “moved” by beautiful images or beautiful stories is a universal experience but one hard to fathom. “Very deep things in our nature” are touched. Artistic “correspondences seem really to correspond to something in the soul” – possibly, for example, “some dim sense of the dependence of great things upon small, some dark suggestion that the things nearest to us stretch far beyond our power, some sacramental feeling of the magic of material substances”. “Beauty and terror are very real things and related to a real spiritual world; and to touch them at all, even in doubt or fancy, is to stir deep things in the soul”.²⁵

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

²⁵ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 105, 108.

Chesterton suggests that the gods and myths of the Latins or the Romans maintained somehow the essence of this spirit of mythology by remaining local – the gods of the hearth, the *lares* and *penates* of a particular family, which were continuously worshipped even alongside the Olympian pantheon. Chesterton posits that “imaginative impressions are often strictly local”, a reverence for a particular tree or grove, a particular mountain or spring.²⁶ C.S. Lewis refers to this ethos as the Londoness of London or the Donegality of Donegal²⁷; the spirit or ethos of a place with its seasons, memories, and character. Particular things touched the soul with a sense of mystery – “with doubts and fancies” – but remained in that realm. These are what T.S. Eliot refers to in his *Four Quartets* as “hints and guesses, hints followed by guesses”.²⁸ “Pagan or primitive myths are infinitely suggestive”, Chesterton writes, “so long as we are wise enough not to inquire what they suggest”. Pagan mythology satisfied some of the needs of the religious soul of man – for festivity in the seasons, and names to local habitations – a sense of the sacredness of place and of time, of here and of now – and for sacrifice: “the idea of surrendering something as the portion of the unknown powers”.²⁹

²⁶ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁷ Cfr. C.S. Lewis, *Spenser's Images of Life*, compiled by Alastair Fowler, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 115.

²⁸ T.S. Eliot, *The Dry Salvages. Four Quartets*, New York, Harcourt, 1943, stanza V.

²⁹ Cfr. G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, pp. 111, 110.