

GK Chesterton - Lyfe story

Born: May 29 1874 in Kensington, London

Died: June 14 1936 (aged 62) in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

Spouse: Frances Blogg

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was an imposing figure as the result of both his giant frame and his brilliant mind. He was 6'4" and weighed about 300 pounds (21 stone), often found with a cigar in his mouth, wearing a cape and holding a sword-stick. During World War I, a lady asked him why he wasn't 'out at the Front.' Chesterton immediately replied, 'If you go round to the side, you will see that I am.' It was his ability to put his intellect (and wit) to work in a wide variety of ways that left the most significant impression on all who came across his path.

He was at home in discussions on literary criticism, history, philosophy, theology, apologetics, economics, fiction and anything related to humour. The consistent thread throughout all his academic and popular pursuits is the influence of his Christian faith on both the style and content of his work. Though he wrote during the ascendancy of the modern privatisation of religion, he seemed to effortlessly think 'Christianly' about whatever he was putting his hands to. It is for this reason that Chesterton is an intriguing example of an 'incarnational' life.

Chesterton grew up in London and, somewhat surprisingly, never completed a university degree. He took a few classes in literature and some in art, but instead of continuing his education, he took a job at a publishers. From this context, his literary career began. In his career, Chesterton wrote 4,000 essays, 80 books, over 200 poems and over 200 short stories. Alongside these, he also maintained a weekly column in several newspapers.

What seemed to come naturally to Chesterton was a way of communicating deep truth through the idioms of his time. A clear illustration of this is found in his reply to the Times newspaper when he was asked to write an essay on the question, 'What's Wrong with the World?' Chesterton wrote a letter in response: 'Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G K Chesterton.' This pithy reply contains a witty encapsulation of the Christian belief in fallen human nature as the fundamental cause of the world's problems.

Never one to shy away from debate, Chesterton sparred with many of his contemporaries, such as George Bernard Shaw, H G Wells, Bertrand Russell and Clarence Darrow. Though his disagreements were many and his criticisms severe, he maintained a warm relationship with those he debated. He had a particularly strong relationship with George Bernard Shaw who commented, 'The world is not thankful enough for Chesterton.' Chesterton's influence has been significant. One of his apologetic texts, *The Everlasting Man*, was a key factor in the conversion of C S Lewis. Ghandi said that an article Chesterton wrote played a significant role in motivating him to lead a movement to end colonial rule in India. Chesterton offers a fascinating picture of what it means to be in the world but not of it. T S Elliot is surely correct in his estimation that Chesterton 'deserves a permanent claim on our loyalty.'