

# WHO IS

## G.K. CHESTERTON

"An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered; an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered."  
– G.K. Chesterton, "All Things Considered," 1908

Some say Gilbert Keith Chesterton's greatest work was in the realm of fiction, perhaps "The Man Who Was Thursday" or his "Father Brown" mystery novels. Others say it was his literary criticism, his journalism or even his poetry and plays. Intellectual Christians often prefer "Orthodoxy," in which he expounds on how he came to faith through reason. C.S. Lewis fans might say it was the apologetics of "The Everlasting Man," which led Lewis and many others to faith. Historians could argue it was his essay in the "Illustrated London News" which inspired Gandhi and his movement to pursue an independent India.

Chesterton's varied contributions to both literature and the heritage of Christian faith endure today because of his unique voice: sound logic presented through witty remarks, insightful paradox, common sense and a healthy respect for the wondrous miracle of life.

Born on May 29, 1874, Chesterton was a native Londoner and child of the middle class. He received a rigorous education alongside future scholars, but went on to attend art school instead of university. However, writing had already taken hold of his interest as a member of the Junior Debating Club. He and 11 peers wrote papers,

plays and poetry, which led Chesterton to art criticism and eventually into journalism. In total, he authored or contributed to around 300 books, wrote 4,000 essays and newspaper columns, and founded his own newspaper. As Dale Ahlquist wrote: "To put it into perspective, 4,000 essays is the equivalent of writing an essay a day, every day, for 11 years. If you're not impressed, try it some time. But they have to be good essays – all of them – as funny as they are serious, and as readable and rewarding a century after you've written them."

But what of Chesterton's impact on faith? His parents were not particularly religious and he vigorously examined many of the world's philosophies before converting to Catholicism at 48. Once he converted, however, he defended the Christian faith by engaging in debates with the most popular thinkers of his time, most famously George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, on materialism, relativism, socialism, agnosticism and other issues still relevant today.

He was not only a large presence intellectually, but literally. Ahlquist, president of the American Chesterton Society, paints the portrait vividly: Chesterton "stood 6'4" and weighed about 300 pounds, usually had a cigar in his mouth, and walked around wearing a cape and a crumpled hat, tiny glasses pinched to the end of his nose, swordstick in hand, laughter blowing through his moustache."

It was his laughing, kind, friendly spirit that was his greatest testimony in the end. Despite a pilgrimage to the legendary healing waters of Lourdes, France, Chesterton's ill health overcame him. He died of heart failure on June 14, 1936. Even though many did not accept Christianity themselves, his greatest debate opponents were among his greatest admirers and dearest friends, recounting his hope and joy as they mourned his passing and wrote moving tributes in his honor. As T.S. Eliot said of Chesterton shortly after his death:

"He leaves behind a permanent claim upon our loyalty, to see that the work that he did in his time is continued in ours."



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