

*“There is only one unanswerable argument against Christianity: Christians. They prove conclusively what the Bible teaches about the Fall.” ~G.K. Chesterton*

This quote sets the tone of *Orthodoxy* as Chesterton establishes himself as a chief among sinners, a repentant soul who has taken a spiritual and intellectual journey and has lived to tell about it. The book is basically an autobiography, tracking the development in the author’s mind of a unique belief system all his own which made sense of the world in which he lived. It turns out his ideal religion was none other than what Christ has been teaching for centuries.

The book follows the processes which brought the author to his realization of the absolute, logical, and necessary truths of the Christian faith. He begins by pointing out the logical fallacies in the materialistic mindset which occupies those who have not yet heard the message. (Chapters 1 – 3) Then the subject matter flows naturally to the next step in the conversion of one’s heart and mind; the fact that if right and wrong exist, then there must be a source of this ethic, a source which is outside the human race and which provides the standard by which we know what is indeed right and what is wrong. (Chapters 4 & 5) From here it is a simple step into the meat of the message of Christ and how it affects our daily lives. (Chapter 6) The book then concludes with an eloquent description of the excitement, the romance, the hope of the future which is available to those who believe the biblical message of Christ and His works among the human race. (Chapters 7 - 9)

### **Chapters 1 – 3**

In reply to the argument that the man who believes in himself can accomplish much, Chesterton says, “It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself but undoubting about the truth; that has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert – himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt – the Divine Reason.” Chesterton defeats the materialistic mindset and attacks the humanist’s desire to place mankind in control of things.

The materialists are trapped in a circular argument. They believe that reason and faith must be separated. This is the essence of the modern conflict between science and religion.

*“Reason itself is a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a skeptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, ‘Why should anything go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic? They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape?’”*

## **I. Introduction in Defence of Everything Else**

1. Why does this book belong to the literary genre called apologetics?
2. What is at stake in reading it in light of this form and not some other?
3. What does GKC mean by “sanity,” and why is it at once something obvious and yet immensely strange?
4. What is the link between discovering one’s homeland and discovering the meaning of the Gospel?

## **II. The Maniac**

1. What is the chief source of modern madness, and why is a recovery of imagination so crucial for its cure?
2. Why are scientific materialism and individual solipsism so oddly linked?

## **III. The Suicide of Thought**

1. What makes modern rationalism deeply irrational?
2. How is our suicidal rationalism reflected in our architecture, in our philosophy, in our art?
3. Why are creeds and hierarchies not evil things, in GKC’s estimate of them?
4. What is the one source of personal and cultural balance that also preserves the surprise of paradox?
5. How does mysticism guarantee sanity?

## Chapters 4 &amp; 5

Chesterton makes a transition toward the hands-on portion of his journey. "Ethics in Elfland" addresses the progression into a rational thought process that concludes with the need for a Creator. If right and wrong exist, if good and bad exist, and if humans are capable of distinguishing between the two, then a higher standard must exist.

*"I had always believed that the world involved magic; now I thought perhaps it involved a magician. And this pointed to a profound emotion always present and sub-conscious; that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story; and if there is a story there is a story teller."*

A need for a righteous "story teller" who cared about the universe he created and the beings with which he populated it, is essential to a worldview which actually works. A merely physical universe with merely physical beings (as opposed to immortal or spiritual ones) would be an awfully boring place to reside. Although the universe is grand and fascinating, yet it is limited, and can be discovered. But certain aspects of the spiritual being are not so easily surmised.

*"The cosmos went on forever, but not in its wildest constellation could there be anything really interesting; anything, for instance, such as forgiveness or free will."*

Many pundits will claim that such "really interesting" things as forgiveness and free will imply religious thought, which may have been quaint and understandable in the dark ages, but are inappropriate for our modern scientific age. Chesterton effectively deals with the notion of an expiration date for certain belief systems or creeds.

*"An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth century. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. What a man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in a will behind the law, he can believe in any miracle in any age."*

#### **IV. The Ethics of Elfland**

1. Why are the deepest moral truths ensconced in fairy tales, and what do they disclose about the constancies of human nature?
2. How does tradition extend fundamental virtues through time, and why is Christianity their highest clarification and completion?
3. What is the Doctrine of Conditional Joy, and how is it joined to the First Commandment?
4. How do the cleansed lenses of moral vision enable us to see the world teleologically?

#### **V. The Flag of the World**

1. Christianity is the answer to what riddle?
2. Why does suicide figure so largely in both ancient and modern paganism?
3. What is the doctrine of the Outer Light, and why is it the key for raising the Flag of the World, and for understanding the peculiarity of human existence?

## Chapter 6

Having laid the groundwork for the necessity of a higher being, a Creator by whom standards have been established, Chesterton uses a logical approach to Chapter Six, "The Paradoxes of Christianity." In his own search, he found that certain incongruities exist in the Christian Faith which he did not immediately have a handle on. These were not, however, considered roadblocks, but rather more like challenges to help him discover the truth.

*"Whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth."*

This truth, that at first seemed odd, but then seemed to fit the world like a key fits a lock, turned out to be the very thing which C.S. Lewis had struggled with early in his life. Lewis gradually made the conversion to Christianity because he saw no other possible route which made logical sense. Certain aspects of the Christian Faith were so ironclad, so powerful, that their force became inexorable for both Lewis and Chesterton. Chesterton writes:

*"It looked... as if... any stick was good enough to beat Christianity with. What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves?"*

The power of the message of Christ had taken hold and did not thereafter let go of either Lewis or Chesterton. The necessity to live according to this new world view permeated their beings, and changed their characters.

### VI. The Paradoxes of Christianity

1. How are the paradoxes of the Gospel echoed in the paradoxes of the created order?
2. What makes Christianity at once immensely like and immensely unlike other religions?
3. Why is dogma a sure safeguard of freedom?

**Chapters 7 – 9**

How does this new character (the Christian) act? How does it respond to the world around it? How does it affect one's view of the future? The titles of the last three chapters hint at the joy and excitement that belong to those who serve an infinitely loving Creator: "The Eternal Revolution," "The Romance of Orthodoxy," and "Authority and the Adventurer."

The Christian is obviously expected to enjoy life. "Seriousness is not a virtue," claims Chesterton. This faith is a joyous one in which levity is a mark of the soul with eternal security.

*"A Characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity; pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One settles down into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise to a gay self-forgetfulness for solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity."*

The true "Romance of Orthodoxy" lies in its simplicity. We need not be serious, we need not be solemn and heavy to appreciate the message of orthodox belief in the claims of the Christian Bible. It is a simple message to grasp and to live one's life by. A simple message requires simple thoughts and simple words. These simple words confound the most intellectual skeptics. These truths are irreducible, and thus cannot be refuted by either logic or experience. Truth is available for those who would search for it, and it is expressed in simple terms. These truths may be difficult to hear for some, but in the end it is this truth that will set you free.

*"This, therefore, is, in conclusion, my reason for accepting the religion and not merely the scattered and secular truths out of the religion. I do it because the thing has not merely told this truth or that truth, but had revealed itself as the truth-telling thing. All other philosophies say the things that plainly seem to be true; only this philosophy has again and again said the thing that does not seem to be true, but is true."*

## **VII. The Eternal Revolution**

1. Why is there a need for a perpetual rebellion to remind us that nature is our sister and not our mother?
2. What is the tie between an environmentalist view of human existence and the worship of wealth?
3. Why is evil so sad and depressing, good so glad and mirthful?

## **VIII. The Romance of Orthodoxy**

1. Why are all the alternatives to orthodoxy not only dull but finally illiberal and inhumane?
2. How are miracles, divine transcendence, the Trinity, repentance and forgiveness of sin, as well as the divinity of Christ, all examples of the one truly interesting adventure called the Gospel?

## **IX. Authority and the Adventurer**

1. Why is rightful authority not oppressive but invigorating? And what is the tie between true Christian authority and the lasting vigor of western culture?

As the word itself signifies, **Materialism** is a philosophical system which regards matter as the only reality in the world, which undertakes to explain every event in the universe as resulting from the conditions and activity of matter, and which thus denies the existence of God and the soul. It is diametrically opposed to Spiritualism and Idealism, which, in so far as they are one-sided and exclusive, declare that everything in the world is spiritual, and that the world and even matter itself are mere conceptions or ideas in the thinking subject.

**Determinism** is the philosophical view that past events and the laws of nature fix or set future events. The interest of determinism in analytic philosophy primarily lies in whether determinism is an accurate description of how the world's events proceed. However, determinism is also an important part of the metaphysical debate over the existence of free will. Thus, it will be important to discuss the varieties of determinism, the critics of determinism, and the application of the thesis of determinism to the debate over free will.

There are two major varieties of determinism. First is *causal determinism* which claims that past events and the laws of nature uniquely cause future events. In other words, causal determinism posits a relation of deterministic causation between past and future events. Secondly is, *correlative determinism* which claims that past events and the laws of nature fix, but do not cause, future events. In other words, correlative determinism posits a relation of deterministic correlation between past and future events.

Resources:

Study Questions: Ralph Wood

Summary/Review: Jim Berge

Determinism: New World Encyclopedia

Materialism: Catholic Encyclopedia