The Theology of Father Brown

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THE THEOLOGY OF FATHER BROWN

by

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B.A. December 1989, Christopher Newport College

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ABSTRACT

THE THEOLOGY OF FATHER BROWN

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Old Dominion University, 1991
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This thesis explores the theological thought of G. K. Chesterton, particularly as it is found in his detective short stories about Father Brown. In his other works (e.g., Orthodoxy, Heretics, and his many books of essays), the theology of Chesterton is obvious. However, in the light, whimsical Father Brown stories the theology expressed is often profound, but underrated if not ignored by his critics. Specific examples from his stories will be used to highlight the theological points within the mysteries.

The life and times of Chesterton are discussed as having highly influenced his thought. His unconventional religious upbringing, in particular, allowed for the freedom he felt to express his thoughts on religious issues. The times in which he lived are also of importance to the religious attitudes reflected in his stories.

Other factors of note for this topic are: the genre of detective fiction and how this form was used by Chesterton to make a point within the mystery; Father John O'Connor, the model for Father Brown; and a look at Chesterton as a
Thomistic thinker as reflected in his great work, *The Dumb Ox*, and in the quaint character of Father Brown.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the encouragement of my mother and father, my children--Sophia, Christianna and Alexander, and especially my husband Joseph for his support and enthusiasm.
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CHAPTER 1
CHESTERTON--A BIOGRAPHY

G. K. Chesterton begins his autobiography with the following words, which hint at the beginning of his formal religious life:

Bowing down in blind credulity, as is my custom, before mere authority and the tradition of the elders, superstitiously swallowing a story that I could not test at the time by experiment of private judgement, I am firmly of opinion that I was born on the twentieth of May, 1874, on Camden Hill, Kensington; and baptized according to the formalities of the Church of England in the little church of St. George opposite the large Waterworks Tower that dominates the ridge. I do not allege any significance in the relation of the two buildings; and I indignantly deny that the church was chosen because it needed the whole water-power of West London to turn me into a Christian.¹

He was born at Sheffield Terrace, a quiet road between Holland Park and Kensington Palace Gardens. This would later be the setting for many of the Father Brown stories. His family history was rich, including one character who was not only a reputed drinking companion of the Prince Regent, but also a war hero, and a friend of Charles Dickens.

His father's side of the family was full of such characters. His mother, Marie Louise Grosjean, was not so colorful. Throughout the many biographies about Chesterton, his mother is barely mentioned; however, a little
information is available. The Grosjean family came from French-speaking Switzerland and were of a wealthy background. They had immigrated two generations prior to Chesterton's generation to Britain. Marie Louise's father was a Temperance Movement pioneer, a Wesleyan lay preacher. The Keith family, Marie Louise's mother, was from Scotland. Chesterton wrote that it was from this side of the family that he was provided with "a certain vividness in any infusion of Scot's blood or patriotism . . . a sort of Scottish romance in my childhood."² Marie Louise was known for her great mental strength and physical weakness. She was famous for serving and eating huge meals; both of her sons inherited these tendencies.

G. K. Chesterton's father, Edward, was one of six sons. Chesterton compared his father to "Dicken's Mr. Pickwick, except he was always bearded and never bald; he wore spectacles and had all of the Pickwickian evenness of temper and pleasure of the humours of travel."³ He was not a particularly good business man, leaving most of these dealings to his brother, Sydney, although he was by trade a partner in the family property firm. Because of a heart ailment he took early retirement. This gave him ample time to invest in his real pleasures of life: photography, painting, and conversation. His son Gilbert would also receive great pleasure from the last two hobbies of his father.
G. K. Chesterton was one of three children. One of the great tragedies of his life was the accidental death of his older sister, Beatrice, who died when she was eight and Gilbert was three. Her death profoundly affected the family, particularly Edward. Her picture was turned to the wall and no one was allowed to speak of her. Following her death, whenever a funeral procession would pass through the Chesterton neighborhood, the family would often retreat to the back of the house to avoid any contact with death. They also no longer attended funerals. This was an attitude that carried over into the adult lives of the Chesterton children. It took many years for Chesterton to overcome this fear.

When Gilbert was five years old his brother Cecil was born. Of this event Gilbert wrote, "Now I shall always have an audience." His home life, with the exception of the death of his beloved sister, was one of great stability and warmth. In his autobiography he wrote of his childhood: "What was wonderful about my childhood is that anything in it was a wonder. It was not merely a world full of miracles, it was a miraculous world." His father created a toy theatre for his sons. This theatre, for Gilbert, became a world of playful imagination. The sense of wonder and imagination continued to grace his life and his writings well into his old age.

Gilbert was a slow-moving, awkward boy. He could usually be found with his nose in a book or dreamily staring
into space. His brother Cecil, whom Gilbert had anticipated as an audience, was the more aggressive of the two boys. He was a quick learner, where Gilbert took his time to understand a subject fully. His mother clearly showed favoritism to the better student, Cecil, and Gilbert was called his father's child. Edward appreciated Gilbert's dreamy nature and encouraged his imagination.

Edward, who was largely a product of late Victorian Progressive humanism (something Gilbert would later so fiercely refute), took his children to Sunday services at Bedford Chapel. This was highly unusual for a modernist like Edward. This chapel was Unitarian and was pastored by Stopford Brooke, an Irishman of considerable fame having been a royal chaplain of the Church of England. He left because of a doctrinal disagreement; he did not believe in miracles.

Gilbert did not find this a gratifying religion and referred to Brooke as a "bewildered theologian." Gilbert did find spiritual gratification in the stories of St. Francis that his parents had read to him as a small child. This story of the child-like love that Francis had for God appealed to Gilbert who could not find comfort in a totally intellectual approach to God. This interest in St. Francis continued after his conversion to Catholicism, when he published a book on St. Francis. In this book he expressed his gratitude to this "Le Jongleur de Dieu" who had given
him such a great example of the humility and joy he found through his religious experience.

Indeed he credited St. Francis with his conversion. "We find the councils of perfection produced by the same religious system which claims continuity and authority from the scenes in which they first appeared. Any number of philosophies will repeat the platitudes of Christianity. But it is the ancient Church that can again startle the world with the paradoxes of Christianity."\(^7\) For Chesterton, any tradition that could have produced a son like St. Francis was the tradition for him.

Chesterton reveled in his childhood experience of Christmas. He referred to it as "Dickensian in the richest sense, a time of magic." Chesterton wrote that "I believed in Christmas before I believed in Christ . . . and from my earliest years I had an affection for the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Family, Bethlehem and the story of Nazareth."\(^8\) The brief, unsatisfying visits to the Reverend Brooke's church and his love of Christmas were among the very few references in his autobiography to religion in his childhood. Although he was baptized in the Church of England there was no mention of any further association of his family with the Church of England again. Perhaps this was a social obligation rather than a religious duty.

Chesterton's first school experience was at Colet House. Later, he attended St. Paul's when he was twelve. Both Colet House and St. Paul's were well known for the
liberal use of corporal punishment. Chesterton had a
difficult time learning in such a disciplined environment.
He was not thought of as a good student. He was considered
lazy and not very bright by his masters. However, his
fellow students found him to be an engaging, imaginative
companion. School was a mixed blessing for Chesterton; he
disliked the classroom discipline, but enjoyed the
relationships he developed with his fellow classmates.

In *As You Like It*, one of his collections of essays, he
describes his feelings about school: "And then the whining
schoolboy, with his satchel, and a shining morning face
creeping like a snail, unwilling to go to school." His
masters grew fond of him in spite of his lackadaisical
attitude. Once a class of boys reported that upon looking
out of the window during class they spotted Chesterton
aimlessly walking on the playground. When the master
inquired as to why he was not in class, the befuddled
Chesterton replied that he thought it was Saturday. He
sheepishly returned to class with no punishment. The master
understood that this was just Chesterton.

G. K. was often the object of practical jokes and he
was known to be a good sport. His great physical size made
him awkward and slow-moving. He was not at all athletic and
he was unkempt. Toward the end of his schooling, it was
discovered that he was quite myopic and he immediately began
wearing glasses. This was the cause of the brooding stare
and the inability to concentrate. During this period he
began to draw pictures on anything he could find. His drawings ranged from the angelic to the scary. A schoolbook from his St. Paul's days revealed the "Crucified Christ sketched over incomplete French conjugations, two duallists and an angel with a devils face roughed in on top of the start of an essay on Elizabethan literature."9

The relationships that profoundly affected his life occurred in 1889, his fifteenth year. His closest friend was E. C. Bentley, later the author of the classic detective story, Trent's Last Case. They met at St. Paul's and had a fight, but ended with a discussion of literature. Bentley introduced Chesterton to many other boys, all with a passion for literature. These boys decided to form a club where they could debate various topics. Usually, they discussed literary works, but occasionally politics would creep in.

This club was called the Junior Debating Club, or JDC. This became, for Chesterton, the beginning of his audience. Here in the JDC he was the respected orator who could call upon his incredible memory and transfix his young audience with his renditions of great literary works. This club became the most important segment of his school life. The relationships he developed stayed with him well into adulthood.

The JDC was composed of twelve boys and included boys of various backgrounds. Lucian Oldershaw, later to become Chesterton's brother-in-law, was the son of an actor, Bentley. Two of the other boys were of French descent and
there were various religious backgrounds: Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. This was a group of boys who were tolerant of everything but ignorance, and enjoyed nothing as much as a good argument over the virtues of Milton or Shakespeare. The motto of the JDC was "Hence loathed melancholy." Chesterton later changed it to "Hence loathed mottoe."^10

When the group set about creating their own newsletter, they coined yet another motto: "Conference maketh the ready man."^11 The Debater, the newsletter, had a circulation of between fifty and one-hundred. Chesterton was the main contributor of each issue. This was his first venture into writing. The other members of the JDC were so impressed by Chesterton's offerings that they convinced him to submit his work to magazines and journals. He gained acceptance in the Speaker, a radical review. His poem "Labour" was selected:

    God has struck all into chaos, princes and priests down-hurled,
    But he leaves the place of the toiler, the old estate of the world.
    When the old Priest fades to a phantom, when the old King nods on his throne,
    The old, old hand of labour is mighty and holdeth its own.^12

Following this, he was awarded the Milton Prize at St. Paul's for a poem on St. Francis Xavier. In return, Chesterton presented Frederick Walker, the High Master of St. Paul's, with a copy of The Debater. Walker was a large, loud, impressive man; one that the boys feared as well as revered. He was quite impressed with Chesterton's work and
could not believe that this work was done by the same boy that he believed to be sleeping through life.

The following year, Chesterton was to rank in the top form of the school. The JDC continued to be an important part of Chesterton's life, but he had now gained confidence and was performing well in school. The boys continued to meet and the club was in existence until all the boys had gone on to university.

Following St. Paul's, Chesterton did not join his friends at Oxford or Cambridge but attended The Slade School of Art, where he studied for three years. It was during this period that Chesterton encountered great emotional distress and came close to a complete mental collapse. This was an inward journey. There were no indications of an outside influence that brought about this time of great difficulty. In his autobiography, he refers to this part of his life in a chapter entitled, "How To Be a Lunatic":

I am not proud of knowing the devil, I made his acquaintance by my own fault; and followed it up along lines which, had they been followed further, might have led me to devil worshiping or the devil knows what . . . there is something truly menacing in the thought of how quickly I could imagine the maddest, when I never committed the mildest crime. Something may have been due to the atmosphere of the Decedents, and their perpetual hints of the luxurious horrors of paganism; but I am not disposed to dwell much on that defense; I suspect I manufactured most of my morbidities myself. But anyhow, it is true that there was a time when I had reached that condition of moral anarchy in which a man says in the words of Wilde "As with the blood-stained knife were a better thing than I am." I have never indeed felt the faintest temptation to the particular madness of Wilde; but I could for a time imagine the worst and wildest disproportions and distortions of more normal passions; the point is that the whole mood
was overpowered with a sort of congestion of the imagination.\textsuperscript{13}

Chesterton described this impulse to draw horrible images full of sexual and violent themes as "plunging deep into a blind spiritual suicide . . . I dug low enough to discover the devil and in some dim way to recognize the devil."\textsuperscript{14} This particular period, for Chesterton, was a time of loneliness and isolation. It followed a time of great comraderie and close relationships with the boys of the JDC.

Chesterton missed his friends, although they kept up correspondence with each other. Bentley would write to him and describe the successor of the JDC, the Human Club. They also wrote letters about their academic successes, athletic accomplishments and their budding romances. Chesterton clearly felt left out and retreated into a secret world of fantasy. Chesterton wrote a wistful poem about his friends and his longing to see them, called "An Idyll":

\begin{quote}
Tea is made; the red fogs shut round the house
but the gas burns.
I wish I had at this moment round the table
A company of fine people.
Two of them are at Oxford and one in Scotland and
two at other places.
But I wish they would all walk in now, for the tea is made.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Chesterton also dabbled in spiritualism. He had severe headaches following a seance, but continued to attend the sessions. Many years later Father John O'Connor, the priest on whom the character of Father Brown is based, wrote, "Gilbert suffered long severe headaches after even the
mildest of spiritualism, like planchette” [Ouji Board]. Although he was drawn to the occult and for a time fascinated by the reality of evil he did not ever experience anything which could be called psychical. Very little is recorded about this period in Chesterton's life.

This phase was certainly both difficult and important for Chesterton. At this time, Chesterton became firmly convinced of the existence of evil in the form of a devil, for Chesterton, a forceful power in his own right. This belief stayed with him for the remainder of his life.

By the time that he was twenty, he had come out of this period of darkness and depression. He went on holiday with his family and it was at this time that he wrote to Bentley and explained what he termed his sickness: "Inwardly speaking I have I have had a funny time. A meaningless fit of depression, taking the form of certain absurd psychological worries came upon me and instead of dismissing them and talking to people I had it out and went very far into the abysses indeed." Chesterton's ability to trust in Bentley's friendship with this matter led him to dedicate his first novel, Napoleon of Notting Hill, to him.

Following this period of mental turmoil he returned to his reading with voracious appetite. It was during this time that he read the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah and Job. He also read Walt Whitman and Robert Lewis Stevenson. Leaves of Grass was such a favorite that he introduced his old friends from the JDC to it. He loved the simple
approach to life Whitman wrote of. Like Chesterton, Whitman found wonder and delight at every turn--great joy from all things animate and inanimate.

At this period of recovery and the re-discovery of reading just for the pure joy of it, Chesterton decided that he did not want to spend his life painting. He was ready to write.

He was motivated by a deep-seated anger against the Decadents whom, he thought, had infiltrated contemporary art, literature and society with the "blasphemy of pessimism." He longed to write from a different perspective--to proclaim the idea which had emerged from his earlier mental frustration. That idea was the optimistic belief that "the fact of existence in itself was wonderful."

It is in these earlier writings that for Chesterton, God emerges as a vaguely pantheistic idea:

The axe fall on the wood in thuds, "God, God."
The cry of the rook, "God," answers it,
The crack of the fire on the hearth,
the voice of the brook, say the same name;
All things, dog, cat fiddle, baby,
Wind, breaker, sea, thunderclap
Repeat in a thousand languages--"God."

Chesterton's writings of this period, found in untidy notebooks, clearly reflect the beginning of a religious thinker, not yet in an orthodox sense, rather in an innocent, neophyte stage.

In 1895, following his attendance at the Slade School of Arts, Chesterton went on to work for a publisher named
Redway. Oddly, Redway was a publisher for books about spiritualism and the occult, subjects that Chesterton was no longer interested in. Chesterton's duties included sending out review copies to the press, and reading manuscripts that had been submitted and left unread by the publishers.

Later, at the age of 21, he went to work for the more prestigious publishing firm of Fisher Unwin. He stayed at Fisher Unwin for six years. His first professional writing was criticism for an art magazine, The Bookman. He also had poems published in The Clarion, The Speaker, and The Academy.

During this time Chesterton affected a new image. He had expanded into large proportions and carried a sword-stick. The sword-stick was a part of his romantic image. The weight gain was due to his heavy drinking of wine and ales. He was also given to long rambling walks through London. It was during one of these walks that he encountered Bedford Park. During Victorian times it was an avant-garde neighborhood teeming with writers, painters, philosophers, and historians. One of the most notable inhabitants was Rudyard Kipling. Another, less notable, inhabitant was Frances Blogg. Chesterton was introduced to her by Lucian Oldershaw, one of his friends from St. Paul's and the JDC, and later his brother-in-law. Oldershaw had been courting Ethel Blogg, Frances' sister. Gilbert and Frances developed a fast friendship. The Blogg home became
another sort of club, much like the JDC, where people gathered for conversation and debate.

Frances was a slight woman with a frail nature. She was employed at the Parents National Education Union in London. She was educated in an Anglo-Catholic convent. She was eclectic enough to hold her own with Chesterton and his voracious appetites for books, conversation, wine, and food. It was a perfect match. Going against both maternal wishes, Chesterton proposed to Frances. In 1901, on June 28th, Frances and Gilbert were married.

In typical eccentric Chesterton fashion, he made two unannounced stops on the way to their honeymoon destination—Norfolk. First, he stopped at the dairy to buy his bride a glass of milk. This was a place of childhood remembrance where his mother would bring him following an outing. Of this stop, he wrote, "It seemed to me a fitting ceremonial to unite the two great relations of man's life."20

The second stop was at a gun shop to buy a revolver and cartridges. He wanted to protect his wife from "the pirates doubtless infesting the Norfolk Broads where after all there are still a suspiciously large number of families with Danish names."21

Frances and Gilbert wanted a family but were unable to have children. Even after Frances had surgery, they were unable to have children. Instead, they became godparents to
many children and spent many hours entertaining nieces and nephews.

Chesterton continued meeting with his friends, old and new, at the local publishers or at one of their residences. Drinking into the early morning hours was a major part of these meetings. Chesterton continued to gain weight. His appearance became even more eccentric and unkempt. Frances began to keep him closer to home and to his writing. Chesterton responded to Frances' demands with enthusiasm. He was also able to maintain his friendships but entertained at his own home under the watchful eye of Frances.

Because of his marriage and his desire to entertain, Chesterton frequently found himself without money. He discovered that articles and essays, the type of writing that he most enjoyed, were marketable. His first collection of essays was The Defendant, published in 1901. This book brought in a little money, but more importantly, received good reviews. His second book was Twelve Types, published in 1902, mostly composed of literary essays and reviews. In these essays he reviewed the works of Shaw, Kipling, and Milton. This second collection of essays led to a commission from Macmillan to write Robert Browning for the "English Men of Letters" series.

In his writing, Chesterton often ignored basic grammar. He quoted from memory and often misquoted. He was known for inventing quotations. Macmillan warned him that such misquoting would be a disgrace to them and to Chesterton.
Macmillan was wrong--his book, published in 1903, was a huge success. Reprints were needed every year for three years.

The reason for its success was simple. The book was less a book about Browning and more a book about Chesterton. Chesterton himself later remarked good-humoredly that he had "written a book on love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religions (highly undeveloped), and various theories of my own about optimism, pessimism and the hope of the world; a book in which the name of Browning was introduced from time to time . . . . There were few biographical facts in the book, and those were nearly all wrong. But there is something buried somewhere in the book; though I think it is rather my boyhood than Browning's biography."\(^{22}\)

This work in particular introduced Chesterton to the men of letters of his day. It was at this time, in 1903, that he became acquainted with George Bernard Shaw through mutual association with the Fabians. The Fabian Society was an organization of English socialists established in 1844, whose aim was to bring about socialism by gradual reforms rather than drastic changes.\(^{23}\) The public debate between Chesterton and Shaw was legendary, but their friendship was genuine.

Chesterton's next book was A Biography of G. F. Watts, for the "Popular Library of Art," published by Duckworth in 1904. This book influenced Oliver Lodge of Birmingham University to invite Chesterton as a candidate for the Chair of English Literature. Chesterton was honored, but did not
accept. Following the biography of Watts, Chesterton wrote his first novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, in 1904.

While vacationing in Yorkshire following the two books, Chesterton and Frances met Father John O'Connor. Father O'Connor, like Chesterton, loved to roam the moors for hours. Together they walked and talked. Chesterton was amazed at the worldly knowledge of this celibate priest. Father O'Connor had discovered the shadow side of life in the confessional. In Father O'Connor, Chesterton discovered a character that would become a favorite detective-priest for many readers, Father Brown. Frances also became close friends with Father O'Connor. Father O'Connor was the confidant of the Chesterton's and a significant influence on their spiritual lives.

In 1905, Chesterton, ever the big spender, found himself strapped for funds again. He produced two books: *The Club of Queer Trades* and *Heretics*. These two books helped him financially, but not enough to pay all his debts. Towards the end of 1905 he received an offer from Bruce Ingram, the editor of *The Illustrated London News*, to write a weekly column. This would provide an annual, dependable income. The columns were to "run about 2000 words and take the form of a light discussion of the matters of the moment."24 Chesterton continued this column for 31 years and never asked for a raise in pay. He was quite happy in his later years to write for the joy of writing. These
essays were later published in several books, e.g. *All Things Considered* and *A Shilling for My Thoughts*.

During this period of time, Chesterton conducted a running debate with Robert Blatchford on Determinism and Free Will. These debates were published in *The Clarion* and *The Commonwealth*. Chesterton, through this debate, declared himself to have faith in the orthodox system of Christian dogmas. He proclaimed the return to Christianity to save the civilization of Europe and the West. This view helped to solidify his beliefs in orthodoxy.

Frances became increasingly worried about Chesterton and his health. She felt that he would benefit from a move to the country. They moved from London to the country outside of Beaconsfield. Chesterton's friends—Belloc, Baring, Shaw, and Oldershaw—were not happy about this move but Frances felt it was necessary for both his health and his career. The country was more conducive to a quiet life and less drinking.

It was here in the house called Overroads that Chesterton began the series of stories called "The Father Brown Mysteries." The first of the stories, "The Blue Cross," was published in a magazine called *The Storyteller* in 1910, followed by "The Secret Garden." These stories were enormously popular and he continued to write about Father Brown for the rest of his life. They were collected in five volumes, with three stories remaining uncollected.
In 1913, just prior to the beginning of the European war, Chesterton became ill. His illness was first diagnosed as a persistent bronchitis. He was still drinking heavily and suffered long bouts of digestive problems. At Christmas of that year his illness became more severe. He had what the doctors described as "gout all over." His brain, stomach and lungs were affected. Christmas Eve he lapsed into a ten-week coma. During Easter of 1914 he regained consciousness. His recovery, however, was slow.

For Frances and Chesterton his reawakening from the coma had great religious significance. Frances wrote, "I feel the great significance of the resurrection of the body, when I think of my dear husband, just consciously laying hold of life again." It was during this recovery that Chesterton spoke to Father O'Connor about entering into full communion with the church. But it would be seven years before he would officially follow through with this decision.

Many of his contemporaries were involved in the war effort. Belloc was a staff writer for Land and Water. Cecil Chesterton, Gilbert's brother, was a soldier in the Highland Light Infantry. Cecil married Ada Jones, another journalist.

Gilbert Chesterton took over the editorship of his brother's newspaper, the New Witness. Frances was not pleased; she saw this move as a trap that he, out of a sense of duty, could not get out of. In addition, there was no
great love among Frances, Cecil and Ada. The paper had financial difficulties and Chesterton had constantly to subsidize it.

Not long after Armistice Day, Cecil died. This was a difficult time for Chesterton; he buried his grief in the paper. His fierce loyalty for his brother's work made him strive even harder, and he invested all of his savings into the paper to insure its success.

As a welcomed rest from the paper and stresses of sickness and the war, Gilbert and Frances set off on a great trip. After seeing Paris and Rome and crossing the Mediterranean to Alexandria, they took the train to Cairo and east to Jerusalem. He felt great spiritual connectedness at the Church of the Nativity and ignored the blatant commercialism of the place. At the church of the Ecce Homo he said that his way of thinking was "coming to explosion."27

The explosion that he was anticipating was his formal entry into the church. His only hesitation was his hope that Frances would also take this step. She was an Anglo-Catholic and for the time quite contented. Chesterton began informal instruction with Father Ronald Knox.

During this time, the Chestertons journeyed to the United States for a lecture tour, the first American visit for both of them. His books had been best sellers, so he was well known. After his return home he wrote a book, What
I Saw in America, published in 1922, containing essays about what he experienced in the U.S.

Because of the popularity of his books and lecture tours, he was financially successful. Although he continued to pour money into The New Witness, it failed and Chesterton finally gave up on it. Edward Chesterton, Gilbert's father, died around the same time, in 1922.

Frances was also ill with a severe attack of arthritis. The death of his father and the great discomfort of his wife led Chesterton to seek formal entry into the Church. He was received into the church on Sunday, July 30, 1922, by Father O'Connor in a temporary chapel set up for the occasion. The world of Catholic England was jubilant at this news. He had been considered very much a Catholic son, and now it was official.

After a lapse of ten years, he began writing more Father Brown stories. There were a few changes—the Father Brown of the 1920's was a more intelligent, deductive detective.

As the Chestertons aged, they found themselves in need of help. They hired Dorothy Collins, who became their secretary, chauffeur, and friend. It was at this time, in 1926, that Frances became Roman Catholic. Dorothy Collins joined the Roman tradition as well.

In 1930, Chesterton began his autobiography, which was not published until after his death. In between writing sessions, Gilbert and Frances, driven by Dorothy Collins,
toured Europe. They were able to see the Pope while in Rome.

Their last long journey was to a lecture tour at Notre Dame in Indiana. Upon his return to England, Chesterton was engaged in public debate with Shaw and Belloc, which was broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). This was very exciting for the many fans of Chesterton. Following this broadcast was a series on Dickens by Chesterton, which was also heard in the United States.

Chesterton wrote a biography of St. Francis of Assisi. His last book was *The Dumb Ox*, a biography of St. Thomas Aquinas. This was a special request from the publishers of *St. Francis of Assisi*. *The Dumb Ox* is a simple book about the author of a complex doctrine. The readers of this book heaped praise on Chesterton for his unique approach to Aquinas.

His last broadcast was on March 18, 1936 and was appropriately called "We Will End With a Bang." In the summer of 1936 he felt himself drifting into sleep while trying to work. His mind was no longer clear. He was experiencing heart failure. Before lapsing into a coma he received the Roman Catholic sacrament of Last Rites. He died at 10:15 on June 14, 1936.

His funeral service was held at Westminster Cathedral, with Father Ronald Knox as presider. Father O'Connor, the model for Father Brown, sang the Requiem. Cardinal Pacelli, later to become Pope Pius XII, sent a message of condolence
to Frances, referring to Chesterton as a "devoted son of the Church."\textsuperscript{28}
NOTES


2. Ibid., 11.


5. Dudley Barker, *G. K. Chesterton* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 19. This book is the source of all biographical information within this chapter, unless otherwise noted.


7. Ibid., 21.

8. Ibid., 22.


10. Ibid., 31.

11. Ibid., 31.

12. Ibid., 33.


14. Ibid., 89.


18. Ibid., 63.

19. Ibid., 66.

21. Ibid., 30.


24. Ibid., 160.

25. Ibid., 227.

26. Ibid., 229.

27. Ibid., 242.

CHAPTER 2
DETECTIVE FICTION, PARADOX AND FATHER BROWN

There are two schools of thought concerning detective fiction. One is that this genre has existed since very early days, found in sources like the Bible and epic poetry. Another school suggests that detective fiction could not have existed until detectives, in the most literal sense of the word, professional detectives--the police--existed. Therefore, for the first group detective fiction is found in antiquity. For the second group, detective fiction began with Edgar Allen Poe's C. Auguste Dupin.

A brief study of the first group will perhaps shed some light on Chesterton's leap from mystery to detection. Following that, the authors that gave form and characters to this genre will be looked at, both of which were borrowed from heavily by Chesterton.

Those who think of the detective story as a form closely related to or evolving from older literary forms, probably use the term mystery story interchangeably with detective story, with one often omitted characteristic, the detective who solves the mystery. Strictly speaking this is the wrong use of the word, mystery. In any other language
the word mystery could not be used this way. In German, for instance, _Das Mysterium_, the mystery, refers only to the problems of faith that cannot be solved, not a puzzle which can be solved. However, it is worthwhile to look at this understanding of the mystery story in light of Chesterton's use of the detective story to reveal a greater mystery. Indeed, Chesterton plays on the word mystery in order to expound on deeper theological thought.

The mystery story is as old as the human experience. Indeed, Holy Scripture is filled with stories of mystery and detection. William David Spencer, in his book _Mysterium and Mystery. The Clerical Crime Novel_, writes that "in one very real sense the story of Jesus is a murder mystery." Spencer believes that "the murder story of Jesus is the enactment in history of his parable of the vineyard owner who, seeing his messengers rebuffed, sent his own son, thinking that unruly employees would respect and obey him. The murder of the vineyard owner's son is the bad news that sets the scene for the discovery of good news. Jesus as victim, humanity as murderer, God as judge. The quest of the theologian for the truth about Christ begins like the search of the detective for the mystery of evil."

Along with the mystery stories of both Hebrew and Christian scriptures, other mystery stories were taken from apocryphal texts and the lives of the saints. Religious drama in the medieval church was divided into three categories: miracle plays, based on the lives of the saints;
allegorical moralities, dealing with humanity's struggle against sin and death; and mystery stories, based on biblical stories. The term mystery then was used for the enigma revealed in the scriptures. The Latin liturgical drama was not preempted by the mystery plays but coexisted, side by side. The solemn Mass was celebrated within the church walls. The somber mysteries, i.e. enigmas revealed in scripture, of the faith became exciting moments of pageantry in the market place.

The English word, "mystery," stood not only for the Scripturally based plays but also for its theological meaning, the mystery of existence. Spencer writes:

Perhaps the prior claim of God's law on human law, God's justice on human enforcement, God's enigma on human secrets, God's revelation on detection and exposure, informs the secularized modern mystery genre as well. Because these tales are mysteries by designation, they point back to the great mysterium of existence. They are images of the hidden enigma of God. They stand in the way of affirmation. They image a truth in the nature of God about eternal order, the primal goodness, justice, love and mercy which human existence in the image of God reflects.²

Spencer's contention, then, is that the clerical detectives are at the root of the origin and main intention of the detective story. Spencer writes "the newly arrived police inspector, private eyes, detecting citizens, in spite of their multiplicity, finally congregate around them (clerical detectives). Anyone who penetrates the secular deeply enough will reach the borders of the sacred."³

This discussion of the theological significance of the mystery within the detective story is pertinent because the
subject of my thesis is Father Brown. He is the main character in a series of clerical crime stories, a sub-genre of popular detective literature.

Those who adhere to the thought that detective fiction began with Edgar Allen Poe's C. Auguste Dupin are probably more factually correct. Poe created the first story devoted to a fictional detective. There were, however, other kinds of earlier crime fiction that possibly prepared a certain kind of audience very much interested in the criminal mind and the nature of the crime.

The first published popular stories about crime and criminals were produced in the 16th and 17th centuries. These stories were in the form of prison tracts and repentances, beggar-books, and cony-catching pamphlets. They were written loosely based on facts, to warn the readers of the fate of those on the wrong side of the law. The picaresque novel was also popular at this time. These novels described the amusing rogues and their adventures. Crime at this time became entertaining and often the criminals were romanticized. This continued into the eighteenth century. One famous criminal was Spring-heeled Jack Shepherd, aptly named for the inability of a prison to contain him. Pirates and highwaymen were the subject of popular tracts.  

The eighteenth century gave birth to the Gothic novel which did not heavily influence the detective story except to lend its scary brooding mood to detective fiction. One
book that has been considered a detective novel, but not by its author, was William Godwin's *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, published in 1794. In portions of the book, Caleb acts as a detective, or at least investigator, but Godwin intended this story to reflect his anarchist leanings.

Detective fiction was most properly ushered in by the publication of the first genuine detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by Edgar Allen Poe, published in March 1841 in *Graham's Magazine* of Philadelphia. Following this story Poe published four other detective tales. C. August Dupin, Poe's detective, was a supreme intellect. He was a reasoning, deductive machine. With Dupin, Poe created the character of the detective. He was clever, unemotional, and cool, the omniscient precursor to future detectives. The most obvious future detective is Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

Many great detective story writers depended on Poe for inspiration, including Wilkie Collins, Emile Gaboriau, and Arthur Conan Doyle. There were other writers of detective fiction, and other detective heroes besides Dupin and Holmes, but none were as definitive as the detectives of Poe and Doyle. Readers were captivated by the perfect Sherlock Holmes and his less than perfect Dr. Watson. Sherlock Holmes almost always solved the crime. He was rarely fooled. Like Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, Holmes was an omniscient character solving crimes through brilliant deduction.
Sherlock Holmes is a paradox. He is a great detective, yet he was a drug addict in his early years. He plays the violin and suffers from long episodes of depression. Although he investigates situations brought him by ordinary people, he is less concerned with them as human beings than with their problems as intellectual challenges. He detects by sheer genius. He exhibits great knowledge and great skill at observation. The most minuscule detail does not escape Holmes. Like Poe's Dupin, Sherlock Holmes is the master detective.

Personality was the biggest difference between the Holmes style of detective and the First Golden Age detective that immediately followed Holmes (toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth). The Sherlock Holmes type detective was a superman, showing little or no emotion and appearing to have no life outside the vocation of crime solving. The method of detection they used was purely analytical.

This particular period also gave rise to other notable mystery writers and their characters. One that is often given equal footing with Chesterton's Father Brown is Jacques Futrelle's Professor Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, who was an omnipotent genius—a walking brain—a thinking machine. Futrelle's short stories are found in The Thinking Machine (1907) and The Thinking Machine on the Case (1908). Where Father Brown finds a sort of unworldly power through faith, Van Dusen's power is in the power of thought. Both
characters emerge as the central larger-than-life detectives of this time period.

G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown was one of the most famous detectives of this time. His detective was a superman only in regard to the method he sometimes employed in detection; he occasionally was "given knowledge from God." Otherwise, this profoundly ordinary priest is a quiet observer of human nature. Chesterton received criticism for breaking detection rules, for instance not telling the reader "whether all the windows were fastened or whether a shot in the gun room could be heard in the butler's pantry." Chesterton ignored this kind of information for the more obvious clues that the readers should have noticed.

Chesterton did this admirably in "The Invisible Man." A murder was been committed. A dwarf had been killed. The murder occurred while all access to the house was being watched by a chestnut vendor. No one had entered or left the house. Chesterton tossed in the element of the weird: large robot dolls, the maid who would not flirt and the Butler who would not pilfer the bar. When the murder was discovered, the robot was standing over a large blood stain, with hook-like claws extended. The supposed victim, the inventor of the lifeless servants, was not to be found.

One of the life size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy
that poor Smythe's own Iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so what had they done with him? "Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork."

Chesterton is an artist at weaving those moments of horror into the story to distract the reader from the ordinary. Indeed, in this story, the villain is the arch-rival of the dwarf who slipped in unnoticed, disguised as an invisible man--the man no one notices, the mailman. Chesterton gives one clue: "Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack? If it were any other colored sack (containing the murder victim), the case must begin over again, but if it was a light brown sack, why the case is finished."[8]

Chesterton tries hard to be fair and at the same time creates an atmosphere which fools the reader into forgetting what he or she should already know. "Nobody ever notices postmen, somehow, yet they have passions like other men and can even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily."[9]

Other interesting characters arrive during this period but are not judged to be as artistically drawn as Professor Van Dusen and Father Brown. Baroness Orczy, the author of the well-known Scarlet Pimpernel, also wrote detective fiction. Her character of the Old Man from The Case of Miss Elliott (1905), The Old Man in the Corner (1909), The Unraveled Knots (1926), is a curious old man who "sits in
the corner of an A.B.C. teashop consuming glasses of milk and pieces of cheese cake, endlessly tying and untying knots in a piece of string and giving his solutions of cases that have baffled the police to a girl reporter named Polly Burton who seems never to have read the newspapers, since the Old Man has to describe the background of every case to her in detail." Although he speaks with a kind of absolute authority, like Father Brown, there is no hidden reason for his detection of the crime. No justice is served beyond the Old man's demonstration of brilliance.

There were many female detectives during this late Victorian era. Baroness Orczy also wrote Lady Molly of Scotland Yard; Catherine Pirkis' wrote The Experiences of Loveday Brooke Lady Detective (1894); M. E. Braddon wrote Thou Art the Man (1894) with Coralie Urquhart; and Mrs. George Corbett wrote When the Sea Gives its Dead, A Thrilling Detective Story (1894) with Annie Cory. Leroy L. Panek makes the point that these stories were probably written to capture women's interests and contained many references to household details that traditional detective stories did not have. However, the use of a female detective does point to the need for different kind of characters--unusual and interesting.11

There was also a blind detective, Max Carrados, who had "no blundering, self-confidant eyes to be hood-winked." This detective was the creation of Ernest Bramah Smith, who wrote his stories from 1914 to 1927.
This period along with producing many eccentric, fascinating detectives was also the period that developed the scientific detective story. Leroy Panek writes, "scientific stories boil down to portraying the detective as a scientist or building the principal crime around some scientifically technical means." Certainly readers during this time were more than a little interested in the new inventions of the day, the new technology. Stories that included radio waves, electricity, any modern science, were well received by readers. One important writer of this kind of detective fiction was R. Austin Freeman. His Dr. Thorndyke (1907) was a forensic scientist. Many stories by various authors contained references to little-heard-of inventions that had either been fabricated by the author or just did not make it commercially. These inventions now seem quaintly antique and silly. In the previously discussed story, "The Invisible Man," the robot with no head and hooks for arms reads like a late Victorian technical nightmare/dream invention.

Chesterton's writing was a kind of antithesis of the scientific detective story. His fairy-tale settings and intuitive motions stood in contract to the scientific logic used by other authors of the day. The scientific detective stories used mechanical, materialistic rationality—which was the opposite of Father Brown's true reason of faith. If Chesterton mentioned some great scientific invention it was to throw the reader off the track or to point to the
silliness of the invention. Chesterton based all his stories on intuition and guesses. Leroy Panek wrote that "Chesterton went beyond the normal limits of the detective story with the Father Brown tales; he demonstrated new possibilities for the form and brought a new area of consciousness into the detective story's exploration of human intelligence."¹²

Almost all of Chesterton's fiction contains typical elements of detective story. For instance, the offering of a riddle with a logical solution. Some of his stories have the structure of a detective story without the detective, but in The Man Who Was Thursday, there are multiple detectives. In his detective fiction, as well as his other fiction, Chesterton shows a creative dependance on paradox. In The Napoleon of Notting Hill, there is little that is not paradox. "All ceremony," says Chesterton, "consists in the reversal of the obvious."¹³

Auberon Quin, the randomly chosen King of England, says to demonstrate his point, "he removes his coat and puts it on backwards." When Chesterton's characters exhibit such eccentric behavior, it seems nonsensical until the underlying paradox is understood.

Some Chesterton critics were irritated by his overwhelming use of paradox. T. S. Eliot complained that Chesterton "seems always to assume that whatever his reader has previously believed is exactly the opposite of what Mr. Chesterton knows to be true." Chesterton's use of paradox
serves not only to offer a religious view of the world but also a rationale for his climactic reversals of plot. Paradox is used liberally in all of Chesterton's fiction. The difference between his detective fiction and non-detective fiction is the presence of an expert paradox reader who interprets the paradox for the less perceptive characters in the story. And, of course, for the less perceptive reader.

Chesterton's detectives, his readers of his paradoxical riddles, were hardly professional in their fields. In *The Club of Queer Trades* (1905), the detective was a former judge who "suddenly went mad on the bench." He was a "stargazer, a mystic, and a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic." In *The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond*, published posthumously in 1937, he was a faceless civil servant. Gabriel Gale, in *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929), was the companion of a lunatic. And, of course, Father Brown, Chesterton's most famous detective, was a country bumpkin priest. The detective in *The Man Who was Thursday*, was a departure from the amateur detective. Gabriel Syme was a police agent surrounded by other police agents.

**Chesterton's Prescription for Detective Fiction**

Chesterton, who was president of The Detection Club in Britain, asked its members to take an oath, written by Dorothy L. Sayers, promising that their fictitious detectives would "well and truly detect the crimes presented
to them without reliance on divine revelation, feminine intuition, mumbo jumbo, jiggery pokery, coincidence, or Act of God."  

Chesterton not only wrote detective fiction, but also wrote extensively on how to write the stories:

The whole point of a sensational story is that the secret should be simple. The whole story exists for the moment of surprise; and it should be a moment. It should not be something that it takes twenty minutes to explain and 24 hours to learn by heart, for fear of forgetting it.

In his collection of essays, *As I Was Saying*, Chesterton expressed the need for the element of shock in a detective story. He believed it to be the top priority of a shocker to produce a shock. The thrill of a common thriller was caught up with human conscience and the will. Chesterton was fascinated with the eternal battle between a man's conscience and a man's free will. The mechanical truth behind how a crime was committed was not of great interest to Chesterton, but the mere fact that a person wanted to commit a crime was.

Chesterton believed that the audience's enjoyment of detective stories hinges on its trust that the author will obey the rules of the game because the point of detective story is not so much mystification as revelation. In his essay, "On Political Secrecy," Chesterton writes:

Mystery stories are very popular... but that is because the author of a mystery story reveals. He is enjoyed not because he creates mystery, but because he destroys mystery. Nobody would have the courage to publish a detective story which left the problem exactly where he found it. The point of mystifying the
audience is ultimately to enlighten them, just as being an agnostic is the best and purest preparation for receiving the happy revelation of St. John.\textsuperscript{17}

In "A Defense of Detective Stories," Chesterton presents two moral functions of the detective story:

The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life. The poetry is the ability of the minutiae of reality to point to hidden meanings. A city is, properly speaking, more poetic than the countryside, for while nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones. The crest of a flower or the pattern of the lichen may or may not be significant symbols. But there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol—a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post card.\textsuperscript{18}

Chesterton believes a modern city to have the ability to simultaneously assert and conceal symbolic meaning, and he persists that the detective story uses this ability more than any other genre.

The second moral function of the detective story is "to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates." Detective fiction asserts that "civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions" and that morality is the most dark and daring conspiracies. It reminds us that the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled is only a successful knight-errantry. The romance of the police force is the whole romance of man.\textsuperscript{19}
G. K. Chesterton's ideal detective story reader "emerges from his quest through a book with an eye trained to read every brick, every tile, every twist of the road, every slate, every chimney as a hieroglyph of its human author, the living letter sent by God." Chesterton was an avid reader of detective stories and turned to the writing of these stories as a sure source of income. Chesterton viewed this genre not merely as "escapist amusement for the masses, but a powerful vehicle for transmitting the moral, religious, and political ideals of society."  

Chesterton's Five Principles for Detective Stories

G. K. Chesterton writes in "How to Write a Detective Story":

The first and fundamental principle is that the aim of a mystery is not darkness but light. The story is written for the moment when the reader does understand. The understanding is only meant as a dark outline of cloud to bring out the brightness of that instant of intelligibility.

Chesterton proposes five great principles for creating good detective stories. The first, which he refers to in the above quote, is the necessity of darkness to set off illumination. Alzine Stone Dale, in The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G. K. Chesterton, writes that Chesterton "recalls that his first vocation was that of an artist. He fills his writings with light and shade." In the article "The Twilight Harlequinade of Chesterton's Father Brown Stories", William Scheick writes, "At one level Chesterton was
intentionally practicing the art of the sketch of drawing caricatures. A quickness and lightness of hand characterize these stories, punctuated now and then by a bolder stroke."\(^{24}\)

This technique is clearly shown in this excerpt from "The Salad of Colonel Grey":

Father Brown is walking home from Mass on a white weird morning when the mists were slowly lifting; one of those mornings when the very element of light appears as something mysterious and new. The scattered trees outlined themselves more and more out of vapor, as if they were first drawn in grey chalk and then in charcoal.\(^{25}\)

Throughout most of the stories Chesterton draws these kinds of settings--the twilight between night and morning; a time of mystery when the light always triumph over the darkness.

Chesterton's second greatest principle is that the soul of detective fiction is simplicity. "The secret may be complex but it must be simple and in this also it is a symbol of higher mysteries." In *Mysterium and Mystery*, The Clerical Crime Novel, William Spencer writes, "Chesterton's appeal to the great mysterium certainly affirms his pivotal place in the transfer (and partial reclamation) of the sacred mysterium to the secular mystery, which harkens back to its great parent, the quest for the revelation of God."\(^{26}\)

The third principle is that no "diabolus ex machina" is allowed. "The fact or figure explaining everything should be a familiar fact or figure."\(^{27}\) The great dawning comes
when we recognize what we thought to be familiar is unfamiliar.

In his fourth principle, Chesterton warns that the reader must remember that the author is purposely arranging all the details in the story, and the reader must "stalk the author as the real culprit. The story is like a toy, a trick, a joke, a dexterous game where anything, even the love-interest, may be blind."\(^{28}\)

Chesterton's final principle is that "the detective story, like every literary form starts with an idea, and does not merely start out to find one . . . a positive notion, which is in itself a simple notion; some fact of daily life that the writer can remember and the reader can forget. But anyhow, a tale has to be founded on the truth."\(^{29}\)

For Chesterton, the detective story is the age-old battle between good and evil. The detective is the agent of social justice. He is the one who embodies the elements of Chesterton's five principles—he is the light emerging from darkness; he is simplicity; he may know of God but is not divine or magical; he, like the author, appears to always be "in the know about the culprit." Above all, he is truth.

The character Chesterton has chosen to embody all of these elements is the paradoxical character of Father Brown.
Chesterton's Use of Paradox

The most striking, repeated characteristic of Chesterton's work, particularly the detective stories, is the use of paradox. Paradox, as defined by Webster, is a statement that seems "absurd but may be true." It is also known as contradiction in theological dress. Because of this apparent contradiction, paradox stimulates thought.

Chesterton has been called a maker of paradox while others have suggested that he did not make the paradoxes, but saw them. He observed paradox in the deepest of mysteries and was driven to use paradox to explain them. In Paradox in Chesterton, Hugh Kenner suggests that Chesterton uses three types of paradox: verbal, metaphysical, and aesthetic.

Verbal paradox is meant to stimulate the reader. Chesterton does this by contradicting commonly held ideas and reversing normal language. The purpose of verbal paradox is to persuade the reader to think of an idea in a new light.

Metaphysical paradox is used to help the reader understand Being, especially the Supreme Being. Paradox must be employed because language and logic are inadequate to explain a mystery. Paradox is the essential bridge between language, logic and the Supreme Being. All of Chesterton's paradox is metaphysical, as well as including the other two forms in secondary fashion. Metaphysical paradox has a two-fold mission: one is the exegesis of what
cannot otherwise be explained; two is the expression of wonder and awe in the presence of the Mystery.

As a literary artist, Chesterton also uses aesthetic paradox. Aesthetic paradox is the marriage of the tensions between the word and the world. This paradox is used to supplement the detective stories with aesthetic artistry. In many of the Father Brown detective stories, the reader is led down the path towards a curse, a supernatural flaming tower, or an ancient interdiction; however, the solution to the mystery is much more rational.

In his work, Orthodoxy, Chesterton writes of paradox as a reason for his interest in Christianity and later, in a more formal way, in Roman Catholicism. He begins by writing that life itself is paradoxical. He refers to this as the "secret treason of the universe." He writes at length about his fascination with the paradoxes in Christianity. Chesterton finds these paradoxes amusing and, a convincing argument for the church.

In "The Paradoxes of Christianity," found in Orthodoxy, Chesterton describes the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. "I was much moved by the eloquent attack on Christianity as a thing of inhuman gloom; for I thought (and still think) sincere pessimism the unpardonable sin." But later, he tries to prove that Christianity is too optimistic. Indeed, Chesterton quotes a great agnostic, who refers to Christian optimism as "the garment of make-believe woven by pious hands." Christianity was called a
nightmare before another rationalist called it a fools' paradise.

Continuing in *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton discussed paradoxes within the Gospels:

The Gospel paradox about the other cheek, the fact that priests never fought, a hundred things made plausible the accusation that Christianity was an attempt to make a man to like a sheep. Then I found that Christianity had been not accused of fighting too little, but of fighting too much. Christianity, it seems, was the mother of wars. The very people who reproached Christianity with the meekness and non-resistance of the monasteries were the very people who reproached it also with the violence and valor of the Crusades.\(^3\)

This was the achievement of this Christian paradox of parallel passions. Granted the primary dogma of the war between divine and diabolic, the revolt and ruin of the world, their optimism and pessimism, as pure poetry, could be loosened like cataracts.\(^3\)

By defining its main doctrine, the church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed these inconsistent ideas to break out in a sort of artistic violence. For Chesterton, Christian doctrine embraced the oddities of life.

Chesterton's love of paradox is clearly reflected not only in his writings on the subject as it relates to Christianity, but also in his personal judgements of paradox as a proving ground for his new-found faith.

The use of paradox is seen throughout most of his fictional work. In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, for example, Chesterton creates a paradoxical world of anarchists who are really policemen, although they do not know the identity of each other. They are led by and in the pursuit of the head
anarchist named Sunday. Each of the anarchist policemen is named for a weekday. As the story unfolds, paradox is used freely, and often in a humorous way. The story ends in a typically paradoxical fashion as Sunday informs the detectives, "I am the Sabbath, I am the peace of God."

Chesterton's book, *The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond*, is a veritable showcase for his ability to play with paradox. The entire book contains tales of fantastic paradoxes and Mr. Pond's explanations of them. Moreover, Chesterton lavishly uses paradox throughout the Father Brown stories. One recurrent paradoxical theme is the relentless effort Father Brown invests in the pursuit of the guilty only to allow them to wrestle with their own conscience without benefit of the law. Along with this more general concept of paradox are many specific examples of paradox. As one example out of many, we shall examine "The Secret Garden."

**The Secret Garden**

The major paradox within the story, "The Secret Garden," is found in the identity of the murderer. The story takes place at the house party of Aristide Valentin, the renowned Chief of Police in Paris. He is the detective who was mentioned in Chesterton's first Father Brown mystery, "The Blue Cross." Chesterton refers to him in "The Blue Cross" as "one of the most powerful intellects in Europe," who is noted as being "ruthless in his pursuit of criminals, but very mild about their punishment."
Valentin has to witness numerous executions (beheadings), but is totally opposed to this punishment. He is also an atheist and has a deep-seated hatred for the Roman Church.

The other members of the house party include a doctor, an Irishman in the French Foreign Legion, an English ambassador and his family; and Julius K. Brayne, an American multi-millionaire "whose colossal and even crushing endowments of small religions have occasioned so much easy sport and easier solemnity for the American newspapers."

"Nobody," Chesterton continues, "could make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist, but he was ready to pour his money into any intellectual vessel as long as it was an untried vessel."38

The home of Valentin is unusual in that it has only one way to enter and exit. The garden is completely surrounded by high walls.

In this garden a decapitated body is found, which did not seem to be a member of the party. The only missing person was Julius K. Brayne, who became the first suspect. Later in the evening a head is found, which belonged to the supposed twin of an executed criminal. Father Brown, using insight into Valentin's mind more than deduction, believed him to be the murderer. Father Brown knew that Valentin's greatest enemy was the Church. "He would do anything, anything, to break the superstition of the Cross." said Father Brown. "He has fought for it and starved for it. And now he has murdered for it. Valentin heard a whisper
that Brayne was drifting to us and would pour supplies into the impoverished and pugnacious Church of France."

Father Brown, using logical deduction, knew that the only place to find severed heads was in the basket of the guillotine. And Father Brown knew who had access to the grisly object: Valentin, the Chief of Police who so adamantly condemned capital punishment. However, Valentin was so completely opposed to the Church that he used murder, a method he despised, to keep millions of dollars from the hands of those who followed the superstition of the cross. This was the paradox.

The seemingly wholly reasonable Aristide Valentin is in reality insane in his opposition to the Church and the superstition of the cross, a religion whose fundamental base is the execution of an alleged criminal.

**The Character, Father Brown**

Chesterton began to write Father Brown stories in 1910 and continued until 1935. These mysteries were published in journals like *Storyteller* and *Pall Mall Magazine*. Eventually, almost all of them were collected into five books: *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911); *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914); *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926); *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927); and *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935). In addition, all of the above were compiled into one collection called *The Father Brown Omnibus*, first published in 1951. (There was, however, one additional
story published in the *Omnibus*, as well as two other uncollected stories.) The stories are still widely printed and read today.

Although Chesterton wrote these stories over a 25 year span, there were no important changes in the character of Father Brown. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he had hit upon a profitable formula. A large part of the popularity of this character was the reality that he was based on the underlying moral tone of the stories. Like many of the other literary works by Chesterton, these stories reflected his theological thought. Often, Chesterton reflected the popular thought of the day, the thought of the common man. This area will be studied further in the discussion of Thomism.

An investigation into the details of Father Brown's existence turned up little personal information. Throughout the stories there is no mention of parish life, ecclesiastical peers, home, rectory, or office. Chesterton admitted that, "There is also in conception, as in nearly everything I have ever written, a good deal of inconsistency and inaccuracy on minor points; not the least of such flaws being the general suggestion of Father Brown having nothing in particular to do, except hang about in any household where there was likely to be a murder."[^40]

Father Brown is not a typical priest of his day. William Spencer, the author of *Mysterium and Mystery*, refers to him as a "free-floating priest without bishop,"
pope, Mary, or Rome." He does, however, perform the priestly duties of confession and last rites.

Physical Attributes of Father Brown

Chesterton gives a physical description of Father Brown in many of the stories: he has "a large, round head; a moonlike face, as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; heavy expressionless features; great grey eyes as empty as the North Sea; moonlike spectacles; and a round snub nose." In "The Scandal of Father Brown" he is described as dark enough to be mistaken for a Mexican. He is short, stumpy, short-legged, and physically awkward. He wears a broad-brimmed shovel hat and black clerical clothing. He sometimes carries an umbrella.

Father Brown is normally abstemious in his eating habits; he likes an occasional gourmet meal. He drinks wine or beer and sometimes smokes a cigar or a very large pipe.

Setting

The locations of the stories are as follows: 12 in London; two in Oxford; 24 in various English countryside locations; one in Scotland; two in Paris; one in Germany, in the small City-State of Heiligwaldstein; one in Italy; two in Spain; four in the U.S.; one in Mexico; and one in an unnamed South American country.

Lawrence Clipper wrote that the main characters are usually drawn from the aristocracy, the upper middle class, professional men, high civil servants or artists. Again,
Chesterton is aligning the good with the common man by his selection of upper class characters as the perpetrators of various crimes.

Father Brown's vocation takes him to many places. His parishes include St. Francis Xavier and St. Dominic's in and around London; and a prison chaplaincy in Chicago. In "The Resurrection of Father Brown" he is a missionary on the northern coast of South America.

He is liked by dogs and children and he likes them. Father Brown knows theology, history, and literature. He has more than a general knowledge of politics, archaeology, and Eastern cultures. He dislikes modern art and has no interest in sports, with perhaps the exception of boxing.

Besides Father Brown, the only recurring character in the mysteries is Hercule Flambeau, whose legal name is Duroc. He appears in or is mentioned in 20 stories. Flambeau is a native of Gascony. He is six feet, four inches tall and very strong. He is the gentleman that never commits violent, mean crimes, but rather spectacular attention-grabbing robberies. It is in his character that Father Brown reveals his most profound theological thought.

Chesterton does not give specific dates for the stories. A few clues are given that point to the time period for the stories. The mention of a Panhard car in the "Mistake of the Machine," published in 1914, would place this story sometime after 1889 - 1900, when it was manufactured. "The Arrow of Heaven," published in 1926,
contained references to prohibition. This would place the story after January 16, 1919, when the eighteenth amendment went into affect. There are similar vague clues in some of the other stories, but no exact dates are given.

Father Brown Based on Father John O'Connor

As mentioned previously, the original inspiration for Father Brown was the Chesterton's discovery of the extent of knowledge held by Father John O'Connor concerning the depravity of the human condition. Chesterton and O'Connor met and became fast friends. On one of their many walks together, Father O'Connor amazed Chesterton with his profound insight into the criminal mind. In "The Blue Cross," Father Brown explains the origin of his insight to the criminal mind: "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?" 46

Later the same evening, Chesterton heard two students from Cambridge commenting on the total naivete of celibate Catholic clergy. Chesterton laughed out loud at the naivete of the students. He also stumbled upon a great new character, the bumbling Father Brown, who like O'Connor, fooled all around him with the paradox of his outward innocent appearance, his "blank expression like an idiot," and his profound understanding of the element of evil in the human soul. Clipper writes that part of the charm of these
stories is the incongruity between the innocent Father Brown and the sinful situations he always managed to get into.47

The character of Father Brown, which was chosen to embody all of these elements, is a paradox. The inspiration for the all-knowing, insightful priest came from his friend Father O'Connor. Chesterton based his clerical detective's personality on Father John O'Connor, however, Father Brown was physically based on G. K. Chesterton, himself. The priest's disheveled appearance, the sword stick he carried, his inability to carry packages without dropping them, and his round body all correspond to Chesterton.

From Father O'Connor, Chesterton drew a detective who detects not by lots of incidental clues, but by professional and priestly knowledge of what goes on in the human mind. Father Brown, like Father O'Connor, received this insight from his priestly vocation as confessor.

**Father Brown's Techniques for Detection**

Father Brown is radically different from Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin, or Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Father Brown has some disparaging remarks about Holmes, who he says "lives in a lonely house with his opium and acrostics."48 Father Brown, like his creator, Chesterton, does not have much use for "the techniques of science and the undiluted rational powers of man." Father Brown finds mere facts "commonplace." He prefers intuition of truth which depends on an understanding of the human heart and not
scientific investigation. "I go by a man's eye and voice, don't you know, and whether his family seems happy and by what subjects he chooses and avoids." Father Brown attributes his success as a detective of the human soul to his own inner struggles: "I am a man and therefore have all devils in my heart." 

Father Brown detects by identifying with the criminal. The secret of his detecting style is revealed in the following: "The secret is . . . you see it was I who killed those people."
NOTES


2. Ibid., 9.

3. Ibid., 9.


6. Ibid., 82.


12. Ibid., 106.


19. Ibid., 5.


23. Ibid., 77.


27. Ibid., 77.

28. Ibid., 78.

29. Ibid., 78.


33. Ibid., 149.

34. Ibid., 159.

35. Ibid., 177.


37. Ibid., 24.

38. Ibid., 26.
39. Ibid., 44.


42. Chesterton, *Omnibus*, 5.

43. Ibid., 821.


48. Ibid., 23.


50. Ibid., 153.

51. Ibid., 637-639.
CHAPTER 3
THE THEOLOGY OF FATHER BROWN

Chesterton uses Father Brown to illustrate many theological points. The most prominent theological issue throughout the stories is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There are other points made less frequently, but nevertheless important enough to be mentioned.

Anti-Calvinism

One recurring theme throughout Father Brown's religious commentary is the lack of humility in certain religious traditions. One in particular is Calvinism, as it is found in the Presbyterian Church or the Church of Scotland. This is interesting as Chesterton was of Scottish descent on his mother's side of the family. In fact, Keith, his middle name, is the Scottish surname in his mother's family.

He spoke of his anti-Calvinist feelings during a speech at the University of Notre Dame, when he was awarded an honorary Ph. D.:

The University [of Notre Dame] called a special convocation in November, 1930 of its faculty and student body to confer an honorary degree of Dr. of Letters on Chesterton. In his remarks expressing appreciation, he recalled that he had received an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh.
In that ceremony he was tapped on the head with the cap of John Knox.¹

This must have been difficult for him, knowing his anti-Calvinist feelings.

Father Brown refers to a Calvinist blacksmith as "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving." Father Brown believes that this is because of his "Scotch religion," which looks down on the world and not up to heaven in humility.

Chesterton writes that Calvinism is morbid. In "Three Tools of Death" and "The Honor of Israel Gow" he speaks about the sense of doom in Calvinism. "Scotland has a double dose of that poison called heredity; the sense of blood in the aristocrat and the sense of doom in the Calvinist."²

In "The Sign of the Broken Sword" the villain has some of the eccentricities of "puritan piety, which is not surprising because pre-historic Scottish people really worshipped demons. They jumped at the puritan theology."³ Father Brown does not believe in doom, "but in doomsday."⁴

Father Brown expressed his displeasure at Calvinism, a religion that appeared not to have an appropriate attitude of humility towards God and other people. This sense of superiority conflicts with Father Brown's feelings of the dignity and worth of all humanity.
Other Theological Traditions

Father Brown also talked of other traditions that he found to be lacking in humility. He refers to Flambeau's pillorying of Christian Science in "The Eye of Apollo" as one of those "new religions that forgive your sins by saying you never had any."\(^5\) Father Brown and Flambeau meet a priest of Apollo who worships Apollo by worshipping the sun. This cruellest of gods, the sun, was the cause of a woman's loss of vision. The priest of this new-found religion encouraged her to view the sun at high noon to cause her blindness, so he could inherit her wealth. Father Brown debunks this cult and ends the story with usual profound insight. "Optimism is a cruel religion that won't let one weep."\(^6\)

Father Brown displayed both intolerance and tolerance of Eastern religion. In one story he said that the followers of Eastern religions, probably Buddhist, "claim no need for God and long for nothingness and annihilation."\(^7\)

In another story, "The Quick One," Father Brown showed approval for a Moslem teetotaler's response to a heckler: "The Oriental total abstainer abstained from speech as well as Spirits; and certainly gained in dignity by doing so. In fact, so far as he was concerned, the Moslem culture certainly scored a silent victory."\(^8\)

Father Brown did not depend on orthodox theology, but was comfortable inventing his own theological points. He interjects folksy bits of homemade theology which read like
Chesterton essays. In "The Honor of Israel Gow," he writes, "Do you know what sleep is? Do you know that every man who sleeps believes in God? It is a sacrament; for it is an act of faith and it is a food."  

Finally, reflecting a theological perspective that certainly led to Father Brown's role as confessor, was his view of the value of all human beings. He lectures on the sanctity of all humanity in "The Quick One":

You see, it's so easy to be misunderstood. All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe. We matter to God--God only knows why. If all men matter, all murderers matter. That which He has so mysteriously created we must not suffer to be mysteriously destroyed.  

Thomism

Because of his theological outlook, Chesterton was considered by his peers to be a Christian humanist. At the turn of the twentieth century, this meant the rediscovery of what was believed to be the aesthetic criteria of the Classical period: balance, clarity of outline and form, proportion, simplicity, dignity of style, and the control of emotions, all in harmony with the accepted truths of Christian revelation.

The most important form of Christian humanism for Chesterton was what has been referred to by Thomistic scholars as Christian Aristotelianism. Christian Aristotelianism describes the attempt of St. Thomas Aquinas in the late thirteenth century to blend Christianity with certain elements of Aristotelian thought. St. Thomas called
this "The baptism of Aristotle." The most crucial points Thomas gleaned from Aristotle were: "(1) the primacy of being; (2) the vindication of the senses as a source of human knowledge; and (3) the power of man's reason or philosophy to reach the truth." 11

St. Thomas reasserted the goodness of the world because it was created by an all-good God. This was in direct contrast to the Medieval Platonists, inspired by Augustine, the one-time Manichee, who originated the Christianization of Greek philosophers by "baptizing" Plato. Plato's philosophy held a negative view of creation as a physical form, less worthy than the spiritual form. Within the physical form of creation, particularly human life, lies the ability to discern by the use of the senses. Man can enjoy the beauty of creation and detect truth with his senses. The senses only assist in the discovery of truth, but the primary way to arrive at truth is through reason. The only other avenue to truth is faith. 12

Thomas followed a natural law ethic; it might be also called an ethic of the natural reason. His basic principle is that good is to be done and evil is to be avoided. His understanding of law is that it is an ordinance of reason promulgated for the common good. Thomas believed just as there are laws inherent in physical nature, which are natural laws, so there are laws implanted by God in human nature and discernible by human reason. The difference is that humans have the power to disobey the laws of his
nature. All laws—divine, eternal, natural, and civil—for Aquinas, are based on the eternal law in the mind of God.\textsuperscript{13}

This was probably the extent of Chesterton's knowledge of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. This knowledge was gained in school as a boy and enhanced by others in his circle, who were interested in theological matters. In his last years when he was asked to write a book about Thomas, his knowledge was so limited that he had to ask his secretary, Dorothy Collins, to find some books on Aquinas. When Collins asked which books to obtain, Chesterton had to acknowledge that he did not know. Collins had to contact Father John O'Connor to get an adequate list. After glancing through the books, Chesterton put them down and wrote his own book.

Chesterton's book on St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{The Dumb Ox}, was very well received. Although Chesterton had written it for the layman to understand and gain an appreciation for St. Thomas, the book was appreciated by Catholic Thomistic scholars. One of the most famous scholars of the day, Etienne Gilson, wrote, "Chesterton makes one despair. I have been studying St. Thomas all of my life and I could have never written such a book."\textsuperscript{14}

Indeed, the book, like the author and the subject, reflects profound thought within simplicity. The book clearly reflects Chesterton's enthusiasm for Thomas Aquinas, \textit{The Dumb Ox}. Chesterton highlights the Christian Aristotelianism of St. Thomas. Chesterton compares himself
to St. Thomas, both men being large, lumbering, and fat, slow and awkward. They were avid readers and writers who constantly put forth their thoughts for others to contemplate. Both Chesterton and St. Thomas had been dull students in their early years. St. Thomas was given the name "The Dumb Ox" to describe his slow-witted thinking. Later Albert Magnus, St. Albert the Great, wrote, "You call him a Dumb Ox. I tell you this Dumb Ox shall bellow so loud that his bellowings will fill the world." St. Thomas, like Chesterton, was often found wandering and thinking, lost in his own thoughts.

There are glimpses of St. Thomas in the character of Father Brown; not only in appearance and mannerisms, but in fundamental theology. The physical similarities are obvious. Father Brown with his moon-calf simplicity is easy to compare to the slow, heavy, dumb ox of Sicily. Like Father Brown, St. Thomas was quiet and unobtrusive. After long periods he would suddenly blurt out his thoughts. St. Thomas was considered to be rather stupid by those who did not know him. Like Father Brown, he was not one to try to impress with idle chatter, but when he had something to say he surprised everyone with his thoughts.

I doubt, however, that Chesterton physically modeled his clergyman after St. Thomas. I suspect that we see Chesterton himself as the physical model of Father Brown.

Thomistic thought can be found in Chesterton's social position; he was born into a time of great religious change.
England had just experienced the conversion of John Henry Newman to Catholicism, later to become John Henry Cardinal Newman. Oxford had undergone a great spiritual renewal under the leadership of Newman, and the world was experiencing the radical voice of Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1891. Father Brown, in "The Secret of Father Brown," refers to Pope Leo XIII as one "who was always rather a hero of mine."  

*Rerum Novarum* was inspired by Pope Leo's *Aeterni Patris*, an encyclical written in 1879, which called for a return to traditional philosophy and specifically directing attention to the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Particularly important to *Rerum Novarum*, was the Thomistic tradition of natural law, the right to resist bad governments, limits of riches, and concern for the poor. *Rerum Novarum* demanded equality for the working class and an equal division of property.

This encyclical called for great social reform. Leo's encyclicals were designed to demonstrate "the happy union of reason and revelation, to show that the many modern dilemmas--of freedom and order, of progress and stability, of individual and society--were resolved by the proper understanding of God, man and nature, knowledge accessible to reason and sanctioned by revelation."  

Leo's encyclicals, particularly *Rerum Novarum*, helped to revive the classical teachings of St. Thomas. It affirmed the inherent rights and dignity of humanity. These
included the right to fair wages and fair working conditions. These rights were for all strata of society and not just the middle or upper class. This encyclical described a Christian social order based on the law of justice, infused with a sense of responsibility.

A study of Chesterton's political views, distribution in particular, clearly shows his influence by this encyclical and the thought inspired by it. Many of Chesterton's essays refer to his Distributist League involvement. The Distributist League was started in London in September 1926. The purpose of the league was to restore property to the common man and to encourage small businesses and independent craftsmen. This was in contrast to the current trend during Chesterton's time of large landholdings by the wealthy and big business.¹⁸

Indeed, this resurgence of Catholic social and moral theology possibly contributed to the resurgence of Roman Catholicism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century England. Chesterton and many of his contemporaries, most of whom were in agreement with his distributist ideas, were also converts to Roman Catholicism. Perhaps they found a common link between their political and theological thought in the Roman Catholic world of Pope Leo XIII.

Chesterton also showed the direct influence of Thomistic thought in his writings. Chesterton did not write about the Catholic traditions of asceticism and of
authoritarian submission, but about the Thomistic thought of reason and common sense.

Chesterton presented the reason and common sense of the Roman Catholic faith in the character of Father Brown as the "guardian of common sense against the coherent yet unbalanced heresies to which the unaided intellect is continually attracted."¹⁹

Father Brown, like Thomas Aquinas, had definite, although simple, ideas about good and evil and the nature of human beings. Father Brown also viewed as one of the highest principles of the Church the importance of reason. This idea, of course, was held in concert with his clerical brother, Thomas.

The first and perhaps the best Father Brown story was "The Blue Cross." The story has the basic confrontation of good and evil. True to his paradoxical nature, Chesterton clothed both of these elements in ecclesiastic garb. Chesterton had Father Brown in town for an important Eucharistic Congress. Father Brown admitted to all around him that he was in possession of a cross of silver with real blue stones. This object he carried with a host of brown-paper parcels. The narrator, never Father Brown--always a third party--described Father Brown as a person whom "The Eucharistic Congress had sucked out of their local stagnation, a creature blind and helpless like a mole disinterred."²⁰
Father Brown seemed like the perfect foil for the brilliant villain Flambeau. Dressed as a priest, Flambeau followed Father Brown, discussing theological matters and waited patiently for an opportunity to steal the blue cross. Father Brown led the pseudo-priest through a maze of locations and behaved in an outrageous manner, which of course gathered attention from all around him. Father Brown was throwing soup on the wall of the restaurant, breaking windows, anything to keep attention on himself and his companion priest. Particularly taking note of all this flurry of activity was Valentin Aristide, the great head of the French police. He followed the path of the two priests, becoming more and more confused by the strange actions.

At the end of their journey, under a sky that was described as "a dome that was turning slowly from peacock-green to peacock-blue, with stars that seemed more like solid jewels," the two priests discussed Thomistic thought, the incorruptibility of the heavens:

The taller priest [Flambeau] bowed his head and said:

"Ah yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?"

"No," said the other priest [Father Brown]; "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his face to the sky and responded, "Yet who knows if in that infinite universe--?" "Only infinite physically," said the
little priest, "not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of the truth."  

Valentin, who had been hiding behind a tree for this great discourse, was beside himself with fury that he had wasted his time following these two mild clergymen and was now bored listening to their metaphysical gossip. Yet, he continued to listen and wait, as Father Brown continued to speak:

"Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliance. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Flambeau spoke simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

"Well, I think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:

"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll."  

Father Brown informed Flambeau that he would do no such thing. Flambeau replied that it was too late; he had already taken the brown-wrapped package from Father Brown, whom Flambeau called a stupid, celibate simpleton. Father Brown coolly told Flambeau that he had allowed him to steal a dummy package. This switch was a trick Father Brown had learned from one of his parishioners, who had confessed his thievery.
Flambeau was beside himself that he had been bested by this humble Essex priest. He demanded to know how Father Brown knew:

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest. You attacked reason. It's bad theology."  

Valentin emerged from the trees and arrested Flambeau. As they both left the grove of trees, Flambeau and Valentin agreed to bow to their master, while "the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella."  

Chesterton, through the character of Father Brown, addresses issues of social justice. The most prominent Roman Catholic theology of Chesterton's time was the liberal egalitarian teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated in 1891. Chesterton was strongly influenced by this encyclical, and Father Brown refers to it as supporting his social position. *Rerum Novarum* is one of the justifications for the theology of contemporary liberation theology, and it is therefore not surprising that Chesterton's statements sound very much like the positions of present day liberation theologians.  

In a Father Brown story, "The Resurrection of Father Brown," Chesterton writes of a third world community caught in the struggle of an encroaching European population living off the labor of the native South American Indian population. In this story, Father Brown was supposedly dead, murdered by voodoo practitioners. In reality, the
almost successful murderers were simply Indian stooges in
the back pocket of European plantation owners.

Father Brown had been sent out to officiate as
something between a missionary and a parish priest, in
one of those sections of the Northern coast of South
America, where strips of country still cling insecurely
to become independent republics under the gigantic
shadow of President Monroe. The population was red and
brown with pink spots; that is, it was Spanish-
American, but there was a considerable and increasing
infiltration of Americans of the Northern sort,
Englishmen, Germans and the rest.26

One of the characters in the story, Paul Snaith, a
newspaper journalist, asked questions of a group of natives.
The natives sat quietly smoking long black cigars, not
talking or moving. Snaith shouted at them, enraged that
they would not answer him. He explained to them that they
were lazy and filthy, and bestially ignorant and lower than
the beasts that perish. In his opinion it was the
deleterious influence of the priests that had made them so
miserably poor and so helplessly oppressed that they were
able to sit in the shade and smoke and do nothing.

"And a mighty soft crowd, you must be at that," he
said, "to be bullied by these stuck-up josses because
they walk about in their mitres and their tiaras and
their gold copes and other glad rags, looking down on
everybody else like dirt--being bamboozled by crowns
and canopies and sacred umbrellas like a kid at a
pantomime; just because a pompous old High Priest of
Mumbo-Jumbo looks as if he was the lord of the earth.
What about you? What do you look like, you poor simps?
I tell you that's why you're way-back in barbarism and
can't read or write."27

At this moment the High Priest of Mumbo-Jumbo, Father
Brown, hardly dressed in papal finery, came out of the door
still dressing himself. He did not wear a tiara, but an old
black hat much like the natives wore. He politely interrupted the angry journalist, "Can I be of assistance?"

Paul Snaith went into Father Brown's mission house and talked to him. He discovered that the Indians could read and write because Father Brown taught them. He also learned that these seemingly motionless, lazy people had their patches of land which they had turned into self-sufficient family farms. As a matter of fact, that was the real dilemma that Father Brown found himself in. Father Brown, in the name of the Church, had helped these natives become self-sufficient, and he had earned the anger of others whose concern it had been to keep them ignorant and dependent. In response to this, Father Brown's opposition had created a political party based on anarchy and atheism.

These people, led by a man named Alvarez, worked hard to discredit Father Brown and the Church. They (Chesterton does not name this political anti-religion party) were not successful. Father Brown was found murdered near the town gate, by a blow to the head. Alvarez was the first suspect. He denied that he would have committed so heinous an act. "If I had the men here that did it, I would rejoice to hang them on that tree." 28

A great funeral was held with Father Brown's casket surrounded by natives who had loved him. "They would have risen in a revolution and lynched the leader, Alvarez, if not blocked by the direct necessity of behaving respectfully to the coffin of their own religious leader." 29 Even
Alvarez accompanied the coffin of Father Brown, "with a sort of bravado of reverence."³⁰

Father Brown's coffin came to rest at a very steep green bank, "at the foot of the great gaunt crucifix that dominated the road and guarded the consecrated ground. Below in the road were great seas of people lamenting and telling their beads; an orphan population that had lost a father."³¹

Alvarez took advantage of the moment to promulgate his anti-god creed:

"Who murdered him?" he roared. "Your God murdered him! His own God murdered him! According to you, he murders all his faithful and foolish servants--as he murdered that one," and he made a violent gesture, not towards the coffin but the crucifix.

Though I dare heaven to raise him, he will not rise. Here and now I will put it to the test--I defy the God who is not there to waken the man who sleeps forever.³²

At this point Father Brown gave a great groan and sat up blinking his eyes at the grieving crowd. Thousands prostrated themselves to this newly risen man. Alvarez sat down shaking his head, unable to speak. Father Brown, in a small, quiet, voice said, "Oh you silly people. You silly, silly people."³³ He jumped up and ran to the telegraph office to stop any messages of miracles or sainthood, because "miracles are not as cheap as all that."³⁴

The natives threw themselves in front of him and begged his blessing. "Bless you, bless you," said Father Brown, "God bless you and give you more sense."³⁵
Father Brown investigated his own murder and discovered that he had been poisoned. Further inquiry led Father Brown to discover that Paul Snaith, the journalist, had deliberately set up this "miracle" and telegraphed the news abroad to credit, and then to discredit, the Church. Alvarez had tried and failed to discredit the Church, but Snaith might have succeeded. However, the credibility of Father Brown and his ability to use his powers of reason and common sense would not allow him to accept a miracle that he knew was false. Although the story is not one of the better Father Brown mysteries, the real treasure found in the book is the relationship between the priest and the natives. He sets them on the path of education and self-sufficiency, while allowing them to continue age-old patterns of behavior, like sitting quietly en masse and smoking cigars.

This story clearly illustrates the beginnings of liberation theology, which began in the 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. This encyclical, which was written to safeguard the property and rights of the working man, also spoke at length of the dignity of all humanity and the desire for all to have certain rights. Indeed, it addressed the needs of all citizens of the world. This encyclical was based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and may have been responsible for the resurgence of Thomist study in the 20th century.

St. Thomas wrote, in the *Summa Theologica*, that material goods exist for the use of men because all are made
in the image of God. St. Thomas's writings are inclusive and radical because they applied to all levels of society. The dignity of humanity was not a given fact in the thirteenth century or Chesterton's early twentieth century. The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* demanded this dignity. Father Brown echoes that thought to the natives of the fictional village in South America. By establishing their property and education as a priority, he treated them as children of God. This story is very different from the others. It shows Father Brown in his most active priestly role, that of a liberator. Chesterton makes sure the reader has a little help realizing these points. In "The Oracle of the Dog," one of the stories following "The Resurrection of Father Brown," Chesterton writes, "Father Brown took up his pen and went back to his interrupted occupation of planning a course of lectures on the encyclical *Rerum Novarum.*"36

**Father Brown and the Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Father Brown proves to be a theologian in many of the stories. But, as mentioned earlier, the strongest theological point for Father Brown is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Penance. At the time Chesterton wrote these stories, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was referred to as "Penance," or more colloquially, "confession."

Between 1910 and 1935 Penance was a very private matter, an auricular activity between the priest and penitent. Unlike the post-Vatican Council II church of
today, general absolutions were not permitted except in cases of extreme emergency. Thomas of Aquinas developed a theology for this sacrament which was endorsed at the Council of Florence in 1439 and is still considered the magisterium of the church, although it has gone through slight changes. The Thomistic formula for Penance is "(1) Penance is a Sacrament; (2) it consists of contrition of the heart (including the resolution not to sin in the future), oral confession to the priest, satisfaction (e.g. prayer, fasting, almsgiving) and absolution by the priest; and (3) the effect of the sacrament is forgiveness of sin."

Throughout the mysteries, Father Brown resolves the cases through the penitential nature of man and not the strong-arm of the law. Indeed, Father Brown would have been in agreement with Vatican Council II, which refers to the priest more as a healer than a judge.

In most of the stories, Father Brown did nothing to apprehend the criminal or alert the police. Instead, he invited them to participate in a sacramental moment with him. In fact, he often demanded a confession from the criminal. In "The Queer Feet," he has once again come face to face with Flambeau. The setting is a posh inn that caters to the select club, The Twelve True Fishermen, an exclusive group which dined on fish-shaped plates. The setting was sterling silver knives and forks shaped like fish, complete with a gigantic pearl on the hilt. It was a club of the elite. The manager had sent for Father Brown,
the nearest priest, to administer the sacrament to an
Italian waiter dying of a stroke. The dying man asked
Father Brown to write some papers for him in order to "right
some wrong."38

Father Brown was shown into the office. While writing,
he overheard strange footsteps in the hallway. Curious, he
walked into the cloakroom near the office to investigate.
An elegant, tall man in evening dress stood before Father
Brown. He was dark and had the face of a foreigner. Father
Brown's identity was cloaked by shadows and he was mistaken
for a hat check boy. The gentlemen asked for his hat and
coat.

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and
obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the
first menial work he had done in his life. The strange
gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket,
said laughing: "I haven't got any silver; you can keep
this." And he threw down a half a sovereign, and
captured his coat.

Father Brown had a real inspiration--important at
rare crises--when whosoever shall lose his head the
same shall save it.
"I think, sir," he said civilly, "that you have
some silver in your pocket."
The tall gentleman stared. "Hang it," he cried,
"if I choose to give you gold, why should you
complain?"

"Because silver is sometimes more valuable than
gold," said the priest mildly; "that is, in large
quantities."
"Stand still," he said, in a hacking whisper. "I
don't want to threaten you, but--"
"I do want to threaten you," said Father Brown, in
a voice like a rolling drum, "I want to threaten you
with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not
quenched."
"You're a rum sort of cloak-room clerk," said the
other.
"I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau," said Brown,
"and I am ready to hear your confession."39
The dinner of the Twelve True Fishermen continued with placid success until a waiter made a grim discovery that the silver fish service was missing. The gentlemen, of course, were flabbergasted. The only people in or out had been the members of the club or the waitstaff. Father Brown entered the room carrying the silver service.

"Did you steal these things?" the gentlemen inquired.

"No, to make a clean breast of it, I didn't. I don't know his real name, but I know something about his fighting weight and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me and the moral estimate when he repented."

"Oh, I say—repented!" cried one of the gentlemen, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown continued, "Odd, isn't it, that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little on my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are the Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men."

The gentlemen were anxious to know the identity of the criminal. "Did you catch this man?"

"Yes", said Father Brown, "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

Father Brown identifies strongly with the criminals of his stories. He recognizes within himself the potential to commit a wrongful act.

I was a sort of understudy; always in a state of being ready to act the assassin. I always made it my business, at least, to know the part thoroughly. What I mean is that, when I tried to imagine the state of mind in which such a thing would be done, I always realized that I might have done it myself under certain mental conditions."
Father Brown realizes the potential all people have for goodness and above all, the highest priority is the spiritual salvation of the offender, not deliverance to a court of law. Father Brown is much more interested in a Higher Court.

It is important to this section of my thesis to recall the origin of the character of Father Brown. Chesterton based the main character in all of the stories on the real life priest, Father John O'Connor.

Father O'Connor was a small, well-groomed priest, a priest who was well known for his intellectual activity in the Church. The only aspect of Father O'Connor used to create the dumpy, dull character of Father Brown was the insight Father O'Connor had into criminal nature, which he had gleaned from the confessional. It is, therefore, not unusual that the Father Brown stories became a catechism or an apology for reconciliation. From a practical standpoint, Father Brown learned the tricks of the trade from his penitent parishioners.

In "The Blue Cross," for example Father Brown realizes the switch that Flambeau has tried on him:

"Shall I tell you why you won't give me the blue cross? Because I've got it already in my own breast pocket," said Flambeau. "Are you sure," asked Father Brown. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel and now you've got the duplicate and I've got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown—a very old dodge."
"Yes, I've heard of it before," said Father Brown. The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.
"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. I suspected you when we first met. It's that little up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

Flambeau, in utter amazement, demanded to know how Father Brown could know these things.

"We can't help being priests. People come and tell us these things."

One more element, then, to be added to the list of how Father Brown detects is the wealth of criminal how-to knowledge gained from his little flock.

The Father Brown stories are filled with examples of reconciliation. First, specific sacramental moments between Father Brown and penitents will be discussed. Following these examples, we will look at the pattern of reconciliation both to the church and community as it was illustrated with Father Brown and Flambeau.

Father Brown, in the true fashion of a presbyter, invites those who have sinned against God and nature to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. Chesterton set this pattern in his second story, "The Secret Garden." Following a murder, Father Brown sought out the murderer, Aristide Valentin. "I am going there," said Father Brown heavily. "I must ask him to confess, and all that."

Unfortunately, Valentin had taken his own life.

Father Brown's first attempt to reconcile a criminal to God was foiled by Valentin, who was "dead in his chair; and on the blind face of the suicide was more that the pride of Cato." Chesterton does not make any judgement on this
suicide. In another story, to be discussed later, he does make a comment on a suicide attempt.

In "The Invisible Man," Father Brown uncovered the identity of a murderer by using common sense. The invisible man was the man nobody noticed, the mailman. The story ended with Flambeau, now a detective, and all the other characters returning to various duties. "Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known." In these final words of "The Invisible Man," Chesterton reminded the reader of the seal of confession. Once again, as in other stories, there is only the promise of healing and forgiveness, without the element of secular interference.

In "The Hammer of God," which contains one of Chesterton's most improbable solutions, Chesterton included two other religious traditions in his story. One of the main characters is "the Reverend and Honorable Wilfred Bohun, very devout, who was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn." Another character is Barnes, the blacksmith, a Presbyterian with puffed up Calvinist piety.

The Presbyterian blacksmith referred to the Anglican clergyman as one who had a greater love for gothic architecture than for God. The clergyman's brother, Colonel and Honorable Norman Bohun, was a wolfish, drunken lout who was currently suspected of having an affair with the
blacksmith's wife. The two brothers were completely different and had no affection for each other. Wilfred spoke to his brother Norman about the state of his soul: "Norman," said the cleric, "are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?" "What do you mean," asked the Colonel, "Is your hobby meteorology?" "I mean," said Wilfred, "that God might strike you in the street." The Reverend and Honorable Wilfred prophesied the truth. Hours later, Norman Bohun was found in the street with his "skull only a hideous splash like a star of blackness and blood.""47

Clearly, the murder was committed by a giant of a man with a giant of a hammer. All of the village assumed that the rumors about Norman Bohun and the wife of the blacksmith were true--so the culprit must be the blacksmith. Suddenly, two clergymen appeared on the scene, the Presbyterian minister and the priest from the Catholic chapel, "to which the blacksmith's wife belonged."48 The Reverend Wilfred Bohun ran to the other clergymen and expressed his horror and sadness at the violent passing of his brother.

When the blacksmith spoke with the three clergymen, he asked, "When did this dog die in his sins?"49 Everyone believed that this unsympathetic smith with an obvious motive must have killed Norman Bohun. Father Brown, however, was not so sure. Father Brown had found a small hammer near the body, not a giant smith hammer. The riddle, then, was a small hammer and a big blow.
Father Brown looked for a little diversion from this horrible event. He asked the Reverend Bohun to give him a tour of his church. The Reverend Bohun was always ready to show his church in all its gothic grandeur and he took Father Brown into his church. Before walking away from the murder scene, a member of the Presbyterian minister's congregation accused Father Brown of holding back black secrets. Father Brown responded, "There is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them."\(^5\)

Once entering the church, Father Brown walked off by himself, ignoring the other priest, to the winding staircase that led to a stone platform overlooking the village. Father Brown called for Reverend Mr. Bohun to join him on the high platform.

"I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray," said Father Brown. "Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from."

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving . . . Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he—he didn't do it", said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said Father Brown in an odd voice; "we know he didn't do it. I knew a man who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in
the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. He thought it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. He had in his hands one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer—even a small hammer—"

Wilfred Bahun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."51

In "The Hammer of God," unlike the earlier story, "The Secret Garden," Chesterton expresses the traditional Catholic view that suicide is an unforgivable sin.

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightened eyes.

Father Brown said, with a shadow of a smile, "I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession."

Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: "I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother."52

This story has two interesting theological points not often found in Father Brown stories. First, Chesterton, who has expressed displeasure with the Calvinist tradition of the Scottish people, had a probable murderer in the Presbyterian blacksmith, Barnes. Chesterton chooses, however, to create another kind of villain—the village priest, of High Church tradition, who peers down from lofty spires at the rest of lowly creation.

Here Chesterton is pointing an accusing finger back to the more orthodox tradition that he personally favors. In
the story he finds the blacksmith to be an honest man, but not a Christian. The Anglican priest is found to be neither one. The second theological point is the self-inflicted penance of the Reverend Wilfred Bohun, who, following his confession, turns himself in. Chesterton offers a clear illustration of the sacramental process outlined by Thomas Aquinas centuries ago of confession, satisfaction, and absolution. This is a rare occurrence in the Father Brown stories in which the criminal seeks out the authorities to turn himself over to the law.

In "The Man with Two Beards," Father Brown speaks about a penitent who as well as receiving consolation from the priest, offers it back. In this case, the man was a convicted thief, recently murdered.

"I knew this man very well indeed; I was his confessor and his friend. He was one of those great penitents who manage to make more out of penitence that others make out of virtue. I say I was his confessor but, indeed, it was I who went to him for comfort. It did me good to be so near a good man. If ever a man went straight to heaven, it might be he. Remember only a convicted thief has ever heard such assurance, 'This night shalt thou be with Me in paradise.'"\textsuperscript{53}

This example shows Father Brown to be not only the confessor priest, but one who gains personal comfort from true penitence.

In "The Red Moon of Meru," a crime is committed and it is assumed that the criminal is an "oriental fakir," who, as it turned out, had a perfect alibi. The stolen property, a ruby called "The Red Moon of Meru," was simply returned. Father Brown, ever the optimist, said, "He was a Christian
thief. I hope and believe he was a penitent thief." In this story, Father Brown is content to have the culprit reconcile himself without the aid of a priest.

Father Brown is lectured in Christian charity in "The Chief Mourner of Marne." In this story a duel was fought many years ago by two brothers over a woman. One brother shot and killed the other. The surviving brother, James Mair, disappeared, locking himself into the family castle. He dressed and lived as a celibate contemplative monk without the benefit of order or church.

A group of naive social reformers who had known the two brothers and the circumstance of the duel, tried to reconcile James Mair to the world. The friends of Mair felt that he was under an evil influence, the Church, and needed to be saved. Father Brown happened onto the scene, as he so often did, his presence explained by some conference or parish member. Upon hearing the plans of the friends of James Mair, he begged them to leave Mair alone. The friends assumed this attitude of Father Brown's was to keep the Mair riches for the Church. They accused Father Brown of forgetting Christian charity.

"You mean to leave him to this living death of moping and going mad in ruin!" cried Lady Outram, in a voice that shook a little. "And all because he had the bad luck to shoot a man in a duel more than a quarter of a century ago. Is that what you call Christian charity?"

"Yes," answered the priest stolidly, "that is what I call Christian charity."

"It's about all the Christian charity you'll get out of these priests," cried Cockspur bitterly. "That's their only idea of pardoning a poor fellow for
a piece of folly; to wall him up alive and starve him
to death with fasts and penances and pictures of hell-
fire. And all because a bullet went wrong."
"God soften your hard heart," said the lady. 55

Father Brown simply stood mute, not refuting or
rebutting their arguments. When James Mair's self-
proclaimed friends broke into the castle, they made a grim
discovery. The shrouded monk in the castle was not James,
but the other brother Maurice, long considered to be dead by
his brothers hand.

"Father Brown," he said, "before your friends
disperse I authorize you to tell them all I have told
you. Whatever follows, I will hide it no longer."
"You are right," said the priest, "and it shall be
counted to you." 56

Father Brown explained that Maurice dressed up as a
monk to hide his face. Maurice faked his death during the
duel; he fell without a bullet touching him. Then, when his
older, remorseful brother James came to check on his
condition, Maurice drew his pistol and shot James through
the heart.

Father Brown said, "And now I leave Maurice Mair,
the present Marquis of Marne, to your Christian
charity. You have told me something today about
Christian charity. You seemed to me to give it almost
too large a place; but how fortunate it is for poor
sinners like this man that you err so much on the side
of mercy, and are ready to be reconciled to all
mankind."

"Hang it all," exploded the general, "if you think
I'm going to be reconciled to a filthy viper like that,
I say I wouldn't say a word to save him from hell. I
said I could pardon a regular decent duel, but of all
the treacherous assassins--"
"He should be lynched."
"There is a limit to human charity."
"There is," said Father Brown dryly, "and that is
the real difference between human charity and Christian
charity. For it seems to me that you only pardon the
sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel, just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven."

"But you don't expect us to be able to pardon a vile thing like this?"

"No," said the priest, "but we have to be able to pardon it. We have to be able to touch such men, not with a barge pole, but with a benediction," he said. "We have to say the word that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favorite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon. Leave us with the men who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew, and yet the dawn came." 

In one last comment to this sanctimonious group of James Mair friends, Maurice Mair enemies, Father Brown found a defense for the villain:

"Let me ask you one question. You are great ladies and men of honor and secure of yourselves; you would never, you can tell yourselves, stoop to such squalid treason as that. But tell me this. If any of you had so stooped, which of you, years afterwards, when you were old and rich and safe, would have been driven by conscience or confessor to tell such a story of yourself? You say you could not commit so base a crime. Could you confess so base a crime?"

As Father Brown stood there blinking at them, they drifted out of the castle; Father Brown went back to the monk of the "Melancholy Castle of Marne."

In this story, Father Brown praises a criminal for making a true confession and redeeming himself, if not in the eyes of his old friends, then in the eyes of God. At the time that Chesterton wrote these stories, England was
full of such society matrons and gentlemen who would pick and choose popular causes that were palatable to their personal tastes. Chesterton reminds his reader of the responsibility of the priestly office; Father Brown does not get to pick and choose conventional sins or sinners.

As mentioned earlier, the only recurring character, other than Father Brown, is the gentleman thief, Flambeau. We first encounter him in "The Blue Cross," where he disavows reason. The second encounter is in "The Queer Feet," where Father Brown threatens Flambeau with the horrors of hell, then lets him go free.

In "The Flying Star," Father Brown and Flambeau were visiting the country estate of a parishioner on the afternoon of a boxing day. The youngest member of the family, Miss Ruby Adams, suggested that they put on a harlequinade for entertainment. The parts of columbine, pantaloons, policeman, and the harlequin were chosen, and the guests scurried around to put together costumes. Father Brown suffered the humiliation of wearing a donkey head.

"He even found a private manner of moving his ears." All of the guests in costume paraded into the banquet hall. At this time, Ruby Adams was given a very special gift by her godfather, inside a black oval case, "In a nest of orange velvet were three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set the very air on fire around them." These famous African diamonds were known as the Flying Stars. They were given this name because they had been
stolen so often. During the harlequinade, it was discovered that the Flying Stars had again been stolen. Father Brown quickly ascertained that the harlequin was in fact Flambeau, who had taken the place of one of the guests. Father Brown found Flambeau still wearing his costume, hiding in a tree with his spangles reflecting in the moonlight.

"Well, Flambeau," said Father Brown, "you really look like a Flying Star; but that always means a Falling Star at last."

The silver, sparkling figure above seems to lean forward in the laurels and, confident of escape, listens to the little figure below.

Your never did anything better, Flambeau. I want you to give the diamonds back; and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honor in you; don't fancy they will last in that trade. The road goes down and down. Many a man I've known started out like you, to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime. But some day you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your free forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree-tops will be very bare."

Three flashing diamonds fell from the tree to the turf. Father Brown stooped to pick them up, and when he looked up again the green cage of the tree was emptied of its silver bird.  

Father Brown wore him down. Not only was Flambeau penitent, but he turned to a life of crime solving, which he did alongside his great confessor and friend, Father Brown.

These examples, particularly the examples from the stories with Flambeau, illustrate Chesterton's sense of wonder in the redemptive power of faith, especially as it is represented in the sacramental exchange between priest and penitent.
NOTES


3. Ibid., 109.
4. Ibid., 140.
5. Ibid., 176.
6. Ibid., 225.
7. Ibid., 127.
8. Ibid., 837-838.
9. Ibid., 112.
10. Ibid., 846.


21. Ibid., 18.

22. Ibid., 19.

23. Ibid., 19.

24. Ibid., 22.

25. Ibid., 23.


27. Ibid., 437.

28. Ibid., 446.

29. Ibid., 446.

30. Ibid., 446.

31. Ibid., 447.

32. Ibid., 448.

33. Ibid., 449.

34. Ibid., 449.

35. Ibid., 450.

36. Ibid., 493.


39. Ibid., 53-54.

40. Ibid., 61.

41. Ibid., 805.

42. Ibid., 20-22.

43. Ibid., 44.
44. Ibid., 46.
45. Ibid., 100.
46. Ibid., 158.
47. Ibid., 162.
48. Ibid., 162.
49. Ibid., 165.
50. Ibid., 171.
51. Ibid., 173-174.
52. Ibid., 174-175.
53. Ibid., 678.
54. Ibid., 781.
55. Ibid., 799.
56. Ibid., 800.
57. Ibid., 802-803.
58. Ibid., 804.
59. Ibid., 75.
60. Ibid., 71
61. Ibid., 80-81.
CONCLUSION

G. K. Chesterton is well-known as a maker of paradox, political and religious commentary, and mystery. He was a man of his era, an era of tumultuous change. Chesterton was an observer of the changes in his world and he wrote about them profusely and his commentary was taken seriously.

He was not afraid of criticism and wrote on a wide variety of subjects, like the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, on which he had no formal training. Of particular interest to Chesterton were religious matters. When writing political commentary, mystery novels or playful paradox, he injected them with theological insights. Some of these are little more than opinion, as in the case of Chesterton's anti-Calvinist views. Other points, like those involving reconciliation, can be viewed as important theological work. Chesterton's most profound theological thought, however, is found in the simple little detective stories of Father Brown.

The character of Father Brown was a great find for Chesterton. He was based on a real-life priest, Father John O'Connor, but infused with the physical traits of Chesterton and the mannerisms of the common man. He was exceptional
only in the knowledge which he brought to criminal cases—a knowledge gained by virtue of his office as priest and confessor. Chesterton's creative brilliance shows in this well-drawn character who in one moment seems as innocent as a newborn lamb, yet in another moment can describe all sorts of criminal activity gleaned from his listening ear in the confessional.

Chesterton is very clever to offer a man of God as the detective, a very devout lover of humankind who can become the murderer by thinking his way through the crime. This process allowed Father Brown to solve many crimes, but it also allowed the reader to view the cleric as a real human being, embodying not only the good priest but also one who was, in a sense, capable of being the evil criminal. Father Brown knows well the validity and the necessity of reconciliation. He does not place himself above the penitent but alongside him.

Chesterton had experienced his own brush with evil and his own sense of reconciliation. As a young man full of boyish curiosity he came close to that which he considered evil and, although he rejected it, he remembered how close he came to a more decadent understanding of life. His personal belief in evil and in the ability to overcome the urge to side with evil is seen not only in Father Brown but in the penitent Flambeau.

The true wisdom of G. K. Chesterton is found not only in his great collections of essays, his more scholarly works
on St. Francis and St. Thomas, and his playful paradox, but also in his detective fiction. This is Chesterton's great paradox, to find something in a place where one would never look for it and at a time one is not looking for it.

The reader of Chesterton's detective stories, especially the Father Brown stories, finds beautiful twilight settings, creative solutions to the mystery, and the essential elements of a detective story. And it is a Chestertonian paradox that he puts words about the eternal truths of forgiveness and reconciliation into the mouth of the humble Essex priest, "who goes stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge."
NOTES

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