

**“ENGLISH IN SPIRIT”:  
G. K. CHESTERTON, CHURCH AND STATE,  
AND THE 1906 EDUCATION ACT DEBATE**

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*The efforts of Liberals to complete the project of a universal non-sectarian public education system launched in 1870 came to a head with their victory in the election of 1906. Liberals identified two popular Liberal essayists, Augustine Birrell and G. K. Chesterton, as leaders who could shepherd through a new religious education compromise as Secretary of Education and vox populi respectively. The failure of the bill, which has had repercussions lasting to today—can be attributed to the resistance of Conservatives in the House of Lords, to the political mishandling of Augustine Birrell, and to G. K. Chesterton’s unexpected opposition.*

**Introduction**

During the controversy surrounding the British Liberal Education Bill in 1906, against an alliance between the patriotic right and democratic left in support of a program that would enable the system of public education to replace all independent schooling, G. K. Chesterton reared his head and bellowed—to the surprise and annoyance of his erstwhile liberal political allies: “There is no such thing as education: the thing is merely a loose phrase for passing on to others whatever truth or virtue we happen to have ourselves...There is no education apart from some particular kind of education. There is no education that is not sectarian education.”<sup>1</sup> Chesterton’s voice was literally everywhere in the debate over religious education that year. His insistence on the primacy of strictly educational concerns—concern for the truth!—over the achievement of either national unity or popular control was a highly disruptive force and contributed significantly to the bill’s failure. More importantly, Chesterton’s participation in the 1906 education debate made him a significant player in bringing to the fore the odd political bed-fellowship between Christians and libertarians on the issue of state-involvement in education.<sup>2</sup> Echoes of Chesterton’s arguments can still be heard in evangelical and Catholic circles today;—they are an eccentric characteristic of the current American debate over school vouchers, for example.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the issues regarding church and state involvement in education have not changed so much over the

course of the past century that G. K. Chesterton's voice—a stark prophetic warning voice—has lost any of its relevance.<sup>4</sup>

### **Background**

In the history of public education we are presented with something of a Chestertonian paradox: Christians, who were largely responsible for the construction of the system of state-funded common schools in the nineteenth century, have largely spent the twentieth century fighting their own creation. The apparent contradiction quickly unravels, however, when we discern a narrative of the rise and fall of popular Christian support: Nineteenth-century public education in Britain and the United States was the product of the social conscience of the Christian churches combined with a large dash of intra-Christian denominational bigotry, but in recent years, as Christians have increasingly united in the face of aggressive secularism, they have also become the primary supporters of the restoration of authority over education to families, churches, and voluntary civil associations.

In nineteenth-century Britain, Nonconformist Liberals pushed for state funding for schools to fill the gaps in voluntary organizations, which were, by and large, Anglican-run parochial charity schools; similarly, in the United States, American evangelical and Unitarian education reformers promoted a state school system because of their concerns over Catholic parochial schooling and its deficiencies in dealing with the burgeoning working-class population. By the twentieth century, however, political concerns rather than religious or religious liberty concerns drove the growth and development of the school systems thus launched. The mixed system in Britain, by which the state and the churches cooperate in the funding of schools—very different from the clear dividing line that developed between public and private schools in the United States—was the result of a complex series of historical compromises between two different political concerns, the demands for preserving national unity and promoting popular government. On the one hand, there was the public concern for the maintenance of a common national culture and corresponding anxieties about the separatism fostered by a pluralistic system and the danger of the fragmentation of local communities; this primary concern for national unity was reflected in the fact that, typically, education policy came to the fore during times of war alongside concerns about national fitness, technical prowess, and public morale.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, there were always demands for some provision for religious liberty, generally expressed by Nonconformists in Britain in terms of a demand for popular control over the kind of religious teaching to be funded.

These two concerns found a home in the rhetoric of the two dominant political parties at the time of the 1906 Education Bill. The traditional nineteenth-century Tory view of education had been a desire to perpetuate the voluntary school, “not as a relic of an ancient system permitted as a matter of compromise to remain...out of harmony with the needs...of a progressive community...[but as]...the normal machinery for education required alike by the parent and the community.”<sup>6</sup> But by the turn of the twentieth century, British Conservatives, through their alliance with pro-empire Liberal Unionists, became more concerned about national unity and therefore more willing to allow the state to assume the support of all schools regardless of religious identity, in order to maintain a unified educational policy.<sup>7</sup> From Arthur Balfour’s 1902 Education Act, which explicitly enabled local school boards to fund denominational religious instruction out of local taxes to Thatcher’s grant-maintained independent academies, British Conservatives have accepted state-funded religious pluralism for the sake of national unity and educational strength. Liberals, on the other hand, consistently demanded more vigorous public control over education that is publicly funded and have therefore been far less willing to accept giving public money to independent schools, as can be seen from William Forster’s historic 1870 Liberal Education Act, which launched the public school system in Britain, to the Labour Party’s halting efforts to dismantle the system of grant-maintenance of independent schools reintroduced in the Thatcher era.

The 1906 Liberal Education Bill was one famous, and famously failed, attempt at a compromise between those two essentially political concerns—the Conservative desire to forge national unity and Liberal insistence on popular control. Arthur Balfour’s 1902 Conservative Education Act (despite sailing through Parliament in the midst of the Boer War) had resulted in mass protests that refused to subside. Large numbers of people were willing to go to prison for withholding their rates rather than allow their money to fund schools over which they had no control and religious doctrine in which they did not believe. The Liberals, immediately following their landmark landslide in the 1906 general election, introduced the 1906 Education Bill as a response to this popular upheaval and demand for reform. Nevertheless, the 1906 Education Bill went down in flames before the year was out, and no further comprehensive education reform was achieved until the aftermath of World War I—and that only by leaving the religious education question deliberately untouched.<sup>8</sup>

Historians have traditionally attributed the death of the 1906 Bill to its veto by Conservatives in the House of Lords. Following the

lead of contemporary Liberals like Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his education secretary Augustine Birrell, they present the bill's demise in the Lords as a blatant case of the Conservative-Anglican establishment defending its privileged position against the clear democratic will of the people expressed in the widespread campaign of passive resistance to the taxes intended for Church schools under the 1902 Act and in the 1906 Liberal landslide which had placed a record number of Nonconformists in the House of Commons.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, however, historian Neil Daglish has focused attention on the divisions within the Liberal leadership on the issue of religious education that led, in fact, to the Liberals withdrawing the bill from the House of Lords.<sup>10</sup> Daglish points out that education secretary Augustine Birrell, in his attempts to satisfy both Nonconformist and Roman Catholic constituencies (represented to the committee by David Lloyd George and George Robinson, Lord Ripon), formulated a bill that Birrell himself called "a miserable, mangled, tortured, twisted, tertium quid."<sup>11</sup> Birrell's single-minded commitment to state control over education had run into the brick wall of Roman Catholic resistance. Although in 1902 the Anglican Church had acquiesced (once again) in the Nonconformist majority's parliamentary control by signing on to the basic 1870 Liberal principle of state-funding/state-control for schools (while trying to take refuge in local control), a truly national nonsectarian education system could not be achieved while the Roman Catholics remained outside.<sup>12</sup> Daglish argues that Birrell failed to grasp that his bill, "a crude victory for ultra-Nonconformity" awkwardly coupled with outright exceptions for Roman Catholics, created a de-facto pluralism that was equally distasteful to the Nonconformist majority of his own party in the House of Commons and the Unionist-Conservatives led by Balfour in the House of Lords.<sup>13</sup> The Bill provided neither a unified publicly-funded national system nor complete public control of publicly-funded education.

The difficulty was that, while the Liberal leadership and Augustine Birrell in particular remained committed to the principle of public funding/public control that under-girded William Forster's 1870 Act, the resistance of religious groups (even within their own party) became more rather than less formidable.<sup>14</sup> The key compromise of that 1870 Act, the Cowper-Temple compromise, was designed to replace religious pluralism with a universal system of simple, non-denominational religious instruction—some acceptable public standard. The compromise embodied a historic vision: it assumed that in the future denominational differences would give way to broad church Christianity, fading gradually into a universal humanism. Liberals

believed that their educational vision had succeeded in 1870 because their great advocate William Cowper, Lord Temple had organized ecumenical mass meetings with speakers like the poet George MacDonald in hopes of finding that elusive “mere Christianity” that would unite all English-speaking peoples. They had hopes that a new mass movement in favor of their non-denominational national program would carry the project to its fulfillment in 1906.

During the years of Conservative government, the Liberals had looked to the Browning Societies to keep the vision of a universal program of non-denominational education alive. After his death, the poet Robert Browning had become a kind of patron saint of the Cowper-Temple project, and Browning Societies had sprung up on both sides of the Atlantic advocating the “New Humanism” in education.<sup>15</sup> Most of the prominent educational reformers in Britain and America moved in the circle of the Browning Societies—most notably, in America, William James, the philosopher of pragmatism who was closely allied with the godfather of the twentieth-century public school system, John Dewey.<sup>16</sup>

Browning’s heirs in the younger generation of British Liberals were the twin “Boanerges of literary criticism,” Augustine Birrell and G. K. Chesterton.<sup>17</sup> Birrell, as we have seen, became President of the Board of Education under the new government; Chesterton—almost alone among his cohort of journalist friends (his closest friends Hilaire Belloc and C. F. G. Masterman both took office in 1906)—remained outside the government as its *vox populi*. British Liberals believed that they would complete the Cowper-Temple project in 1906 if Chesterton were given a “free hand to do his best towards providing a ritual English in spirit, English in form, English in origin and human in sympathy.”<sup>18</sup> Just as William James had identified the American mind as tolerant of “over-beliefs” so long as they conduced to ethical living and thus paved a way for the acceptance of John Dewey’s plans for public moral education, the British New Humanists identified anti-dogmatism as the English trait par excellence and they believed Chesterton would be the “standard bearer of the ideal.”<sup>19</sup>

They were therefore taken aback to find that not only had they mistaken Chesterton’s espousal of a rationally discernible natural theology for a willingness to support a public education system committed to creedal and moral relativism, but that Chesterton’s following was growing. It was Chesterton himself, therefore, who came to be seen by his contemporaries as the rather large obstruction to progress, a prophet of the people to whom they had turned in vain. This paper traces their hopes and the dashing of those hopes through the course of Chesterton’s public interventions in the educational debate from 1905 through 1907.

## G. K. Chesterton and the Education Debate

After publishing a biography of *Robert Browning* in 1903 for the English Men of Letters series, Chesterton was lionized in Liberal circles alongside fellow essayist and Browningite Augustine Birrell—it was his coming of age as a voice for the Liberal opposition.<sup>20</sup> The Rev. William Robertson Nicoll, the editor of the Liberal literary monthly, *The Bookman*, and the Nonconformist Sunday paper, *The British Weekly*, and a kind of literary and artistic headhunter for the Liberal Nonconformists, became his particular patron.<sup>21</sup> A network of provincial Liberal papers and publishers largely underwritten by the Cadburys and Rowntrees enabled his rocket-like rise to celebrity status, and he worked feverishly to take full advantage of every available forum, contributing regularly to *The Daily News*, *The Speaker*, *The Nation*, *Reynold's Paper*, *The Manchester Sunday Chronicle*, *The Pilot*, and *The Echo* and periodically to many others. As Chesterton wrote to his mother, “I know the clockwork of these papers and among one set of them I might almost say I am becoming the fashion.”<sup>22</sup> One reviewer confirmed his view by saying that the Liberals only concern with regard to their new-found “prophet of the English nation” was that their own bottomless demand for Chestertoniana would prevent him from developing his abilities by a “sojourn in the desert.”<sup>23</sup>

For three years prior to the 1906 election, which is to say throughout the public agitation in response to the Conservatives' 1902 Education Act, Chesterton publicly represented the Nonconformists in a wide-ranging debate on the role of public support for religion against Robert Blatchford, the editor of the *Clarion*, a socialist weekly with a considerable circulation.<sup>24</sup> Robert Blatchford had decided in 1902 to transform his paper from an organ of Christian socialism into the mouthpiece of aggressive secularism, and, as one observer wrote, “For two years there came from the pulpits of Great Britain discussion of Blatchford, denunciation of Blatchford, answers to Blatchford.”<sup>25</sup> Chesterton had entered the ring to defend Christianity as the truest foundation for the tradition of English populism.

Then, in the midst of the Blatchford controversy, Chesterton published a collection of essays entitled *Heretics* that attracted widespread attention; with this book he transcended his beginnings in the Liberal Nonconformist press and “arrived” as a public moralist recognized as a nonsectarian voice for “Christian England.” During the run up to the publication of *Heretics*, Chesterton spoke on the state of Christianity in England at various churches.<sup>26</sup> Two of these speaking engagements, at St. Paul's Covent Garden and at St. Paul's Cathedral—

one an evangelical and the other an Anglican venue—are notable for what they reveal about Chesterton’s position in 1905 with regard to the looming question of the disestablishment of religious education.

In April 1905, Chesterton delivered one of the “Vox Populi, Vox Dei” Lenten lunchtime lectures at St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, entitled “Christianity and Democracy.” His participation in this innovative series of sermons by laymen attracted much attention. Newspapers painted a striking picture of Chesterton as a new English reformer and exulted that his success was a sign that “‘Sacerdotalism’ indeed is moribund.”<sup>27</sup> Against the backdrop of St. Paul’s, the “old Evangelical landmark of London” in which John Wesley himself had preached, a church with “an unbroken list of vicars dating back to Puritan days,” Chesterton’s lay sermon was an “experiment” that was “carefully watched with a view to adoption at other churches and dioceses.”<sup>28</sup> “Mr. Chesterton’s six-foot frame and strong, pleasant face, gave him a distinguished pulpit appearance.”<sup>29</sup> The “huge church...was crowded to the doors, the immense congregation, [was] composed mostly of men” but included people of all classes, “rang[ing] from market porters to young ladies of an obviously ‘literary’ stamp.”<sup>30</sup> “Mr. Chesterton, who wore the regulation black Geneva gown...[was] escorted to the pulpit by the vicar, the congregation singing, ‘Hold the Fort for I am Coming.’” He took as his text the scripture passage that Catholic Christianity associates with the founding of a hierarchical institutional church—Christ’s words, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” In his usual paradoxical style, Chesterton drew from this passage the message that Christianity was founded on the doctrine of equality. His sermon was clearly drawn from the chapter on George Bernard Shaw in his forthcoming book, *Heretics*:

When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its cornerstone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward—in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires and kingdoms have failed, because of this continual and inherent weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible.<sup>31</sup>

Here Chesterton repeated his mantra from the Blatchford Controversy: that Christianity, as the religion of the common man, was necessary to English society as a support for its liberal and democratic character.

But here also, in this lecture, Chesterton expressed a new concern. He worried that any state-mandated character education would only educate children in the virtues of “a gentleman” and “a citizen” and leave out other essential virtues—in particular the virtues of humility and a radical sympathy for the poor; in other words, he believed that the state would present “a moral ideal in an extremely lop-sided condition.”<sup>32</sup> Precisely because he considered Christianity a necessary support for the radical sense of human equality and spiritual dignity apart from all social or economic circumstances, he was wary of any state usurpation of a Christian people’s role in education; precisely because he considered Christianity inextricable from democracy, he insisted that the state should be restrained from interfering with the liberty of popular Christian initiatives in education. In other words, his particular combination of political liberalism and religious populism took him in a direction that diverged significantly from the Nonconformists’ willingness to align themselves with secular humanists in efforts to wrest the educational monopoly from the Anglican Church by asserting public controls.

The following month, May 1905, Chesterton spoke on “The Religious Education Difficulty” at the Chapter House of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and here again his defense of religious liberty turned quickly into a warning against a state-established agnosticism in education. While rejecting the 1902 Conservative education compromise that continued funding the Anglican church’s privileged position, Chesterton nevertheless equally rejected any proposed compulsory state system of non-denominational religious education. He proposed that either the clergy of various denominations should have right of entry into schools, because it was essential that a teacher teach only truths they believed (inclusive, state-funded religious pluralism) or there should be a complete abolition of Bible teaching in schools, because any such teaching would inevitably be doctrinally loaded (a complete separation between church and school). But once again, the starkness of these alternatives forced Chesterton onward, impelled him to take his argument one step further. In this talk, as in the lecture at St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, he launched what would become his signature radical libertarian argument against any state involvement in education whatsoever. State involvement in education became a marker of a fundamental usurpation of a function of civil society: of the family, the church, and local voluntary associations.

Chesterton's point of entry into this argument was that religious controversy in schools was unavoidable as long as history was taught in schools. While many progressives believed that a universal human history—a civilizational history that included comparative religious study—could replace theology as a unifying element in the curriculum and replace the Bible as the source of moral exemplars, Chesterton insisted that in teaching history it was impossible to hide behind a fictitious moral and theological objectivity. As he put it, "Those Victorian agnostics, Huxley and Webb, wanted to use the bland formula of 'Moral Instruction' to make a comfortable provision for a dying superstition," but in fact their alternative to dogmatic theology—the modern schools of history—"taught a doctrine of progress that was more outrageous than the Christian doctrine of the Trinity." Their progressive view of history and a priori belief that secularization was the natural trajectory of human cultural development made them blind to the popular vitality of "both Catholic and Puritan religion" in their own day and merely served as a justification for allowing an educated elite of "unbelieving Presbyterians and Unitarians inspired by a reverent infidelity" to dictate educational policy for the masses. The most oft-quoted line from the speech, the ringing close of this argument—"They are inspired by a reverent infidelity and nothing on earth can be so reverent as infidelity"—was a warning against replacing teachers who believed the truth they taught with teachers who professed agnosticism towards the truth about which they taught.<sup>33</sup> Chesterton's argument that teaching history was inevitably suffused with religious controversy involved him in a radical critique of state involvement in education that seemed to go far beyond the Liberal demand for the disestablishment of the Anglicans' denominational teaching.<sup>34</sup>

In *Heretics*, which appeared in the summer of 1905, Chesterton reiterated his two-pronged paradoxical argument: Precisely because a spiritual, intellectual ideal is a pragmatic necessity for a nation as for an individual, only an ideal arrived at through spiritual and intellectual freedom could serve the purposes of the nation.<sup>35</sup> At the heart of the book, Chesterton raised a purely pragmatic question of whether England could preserve the ideals the nation owed to "the historic Christian churches" without preserving their particular theological doctrine. He pointed out that in England, historically, the Christian churches had fostered "the democratic ideal" by teaching the doctrine of a common human nature beneath all differences of heredity, class, or education. As he put it, "The doctrine of original sin . . . may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men."<sup>36</sup> In the course of a series of critical essays on various modern social movements—the Victorian Romantic

neo-medievalists, Morris socialists, Celtic revivalists, the Salvation Army—he concluded that movements which focus only on ethical practices or communal gatherings and refuse to address the questions of philosophical and theological truth that are their underpinnings are doomed to remain small affairs of an aesthetic elite.<sup>37</sup> In each essay he returned, as a pragmatic necessity, to Christianity as the only viable religious tradition in England.

Chesterton repeatedly took the popular celebration of Christmas as the symbol of Christianity's success in awaking a democratic spirit of brotherhood and worried that "there is about these people [the inventors of rival popular traditions] a haunting and alarming something, which suggests that it is just possible that they do not keep Christmas . . . do not wave spoons and shout when the pudding is set alight . . . [do not] pull crackers."

Here is a solid and ancient festive tradition still plying a roaring trade in the streets, and they think it vulgar...Let no man deceive himself; if by vulgarity we mean coarseness of speech, rowdiness of behaviour, gossip, horseplay, and some heavy drinking, vulgarity there always was wherever there was joy, wherever there was faith in the gods. Wherever you have belief you will have hilarity, wherever you have hilarity you will have some dangers. And as creed and mythology produce this gross and vigorous life, so in its turn this gross and vigorous life will always produce creed and mythology.<sup>38</sup>

He concluded that England could only maintain a liberal democratic spirit by becoming "again a religious people," by recognizing the nation's marriage to "historic Christianity with all its sins on its head," and by "keeping Christmas." Chesterton had several places remarked that "every nation has a soul," and here he clearly suggested that the nation's soul would be best—perhaps only—kept alive by its popular, voluntary historic religion and not by some state-sponsored, state-orchestrated ethical replacement.<sup>39</sup>

While a number of reviewers noted that his essays were mainly critical and his language elusive with regard to the specific nature or locus of England's Christian tradition, Chesterton was nevertheless quickly becoming the dominant presence in the religious discussions surrounding the election of 1906 and the formulation of a new education bill to redress the concerns of Nonconformists. As the polls opened, Chesterton's insistence on the need for an engagement with theology and not merely with the external trappings of a state religion increasingly

found an audience. In September, Chesterton spoke at the Fifteenth Annual Conversation of the National Union of Teachers at Battersea Town Hall. His lecture entitled “Can We Teach Without Bias?” reiterated his warning to teachers against the pretense of acting the role of the impartial historian.<sup>40</sup> In October, his lecture on “The Greatest Disaster of the Church of England” in Queen’s College Hall, Oxford, “packed with undergraduates,” was considered the biggest event of Michaelmas term that year.<sup>41</sup> In November, his lecture for Church leaders in Nottingham, sponsored by the Christian Social Union and chaired by the Bishop of Birmingham, drew an audience of over two thousand.<sup>42</sup> In December, he was in Glasgow giving another Christian Social Union sponsored lecture on “The Sanity of Christianity.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, responses to his “Does Modern Education Ennoble?” article in the November issue of *Great Thoughts*, in which he insisted that moral education belongs in the home and is the prerogative of the family and not the state, carried the discussion into the new year.<sup>44</sup> Chesterton’s former narrow readership was unsure what to do with his radical rejection of state involvement in education, but voices from both ends of the religious spectrum endorsed his views; indeed, in Chesterton’s audience, a more self-conscious alliance between Nonconformist evangelical Christians, Roman Catholics, and secular libertarians was being forged.<sup>45</sup>

The event that, more than any other, signified Chesterton’s central position in the discussion of England’s religious identity in 1906 was the *Illustrated London News* editor’s decision to offer him the weekly “Our Notebook” column as a forum for his reflections. The *Illustrated London News* invitation signaled that Chesterton had gained a certain standing as a figure within the national consensus of opinion, just as John Morley’s selection of him to write the Browning biography for the English Men of Letters series had signaled his new standing within Liberal circles in 1902. *The Daily News*, which had run a weekly Chesterton column for five years, had a certain national status as Charles Dickens’s paper, despite being a paper of the Liberal opposition, but the *Illustrated London News* was an even more venerable national paper; founded in 1842 as the first illustrated paper, it surpassed even the *Times* in circulation in the 1890s, and by Chesterton’s day was considered a national institution, with a large readership in America and the English-speaking empire. Chesterton would go on to write continuous weekly articles for the *Illustrated London News* from 1905 until his death in 1937, a total of one thousand five hundred and fifty-three weekly essays, “one of the most phenomenal, one-man performances in the history of journalism.”<sup>46</sup>

The “Our Notebook” column in the *Illustrated London News* was therefore already considered a famous spot; the man who filled it became “as familiar to the literary world as its eggs and bacon.”<sup>47</sup> Following Chesterton’s accession to this pulpit, the public could read Chesterton in *A Book of Daily Guidance from Master Minds*, in a *Thought for the Day* collection of excerpts, or in his “Every Day Philosophy” series in *Public Opinion*.<sup>48</sup> He was invited to contribute “broad church” hymns for a new English Hymnal.<sup>49</sup> With reason his old secularist opponent Robert Blatchford jokingly complained that the public now read Chesterton as a substitute for Sunday Church attendance.<sup>50</sup> A single Saturday column by Chesterton would elicit a flood of correspondence on the religious question.<sup>51</sup> Everyone seemed to be reading Chesterton on English religion. The *Lady’s Pictorial* even suggested that he “ought to be provided by the nation with a handsome income in order that his services might be retained for the evolution of new and original ideas.”<sup>52</sup>

Chesterton acquired this important new pulpit just in time for the elections and the Education Bill and, although he was restrained by editorial policy from directly discussing politics, he intended to use it. On April 28, 1906, as rumors were beginning about the form the new government’s Education Bill would take, Chesterton wrote about the “new bigotry” which, in advance of all theological discussion, assumed that all parties agree on all essential religious matters.<sup>53</sup> The following week, May 5, in an article that was particularly sly about getting around the editor’s strictures, Chesterton scoffed at Augustine Birrell’s introduction of the bill in Parliament. In a brief, elusive article, Chesterton presented his three main objections to the government’s program. First, he objected to the reiteration of the progressive notion that non-denominational education was in some way appropriate to the modern age, that is was very “twentieth-century.” Chesterton knocked the modern idea that truth changes and adapts itself to different ages of history, asserting that truth was eternal, not subject to the changing politics of the hour, and that education should reflect this. Here, in this mystical belief in the forces of history, he warned, was precisely the kind of secular sectarianism that would replace theological sectarianism under the rule of state education. He objected doubly to the false impression of non-sectarianism, and to the particularly unnatural breed of anti-theological sectarianism that the Liberal government was purveying. “Children live,” he wrote approvingly, “in an almost entirely timeless world (in which they resemble the Deity of Thomas Aquinas).”<sup>54</sup> Second, he objected to Birrell’s suggestion that straight-forward, unadorned Bible teaching was an escape from the idolatry,

symbolism, and mystery of medieval superstition and thus an escape from sectarianism; on the contrary, Chesterton wrote, “read without comment, the thing becomes a sacred ritual of great pomp.”<sup>55</sup> Lastly, and most importantly, he laughed at the idea that one could strip the teaching of any and all other academic subjects (or topics for a weekly newspaper column for that matter!) of any dangerously theological assumptions: “Peasants, rustics, fishermen all talk about the weather, because it is a very good thing to talk about...But they began talking about the weather, and they ended with Thor and Apollo.”<sup>56</sup>

The new Liberal government in office desiring to further the 1870 Cowper-Temple project thus found itself faced, not only by the opposition of Conservatives in the House of Lords, but by disintegrating support within its own Liberal ranks for a national system of state-controlled, state-funded education as a replacement for all independent, voluntary religious schooling. The very prophet on whom the Liberals had relied to bring the Cowper-Temple compromise to fulfillment had exposed the project to ridicule, had uncovered as absurd the assumption underlying the compromise: that one could evade all theological questions while still teaching any truth as true. The Liberal government, realizing that on the issue of education they did not have the unity in their own ranks nor the popular support necessary to face down the Lords, withdrew the bill.

The failure of the 1906 Education Bill would ultimately mean that a complex, ever-shifting mixed education system would remain in place in Great Britain for the rest of the twentieth century, and Chesterton’s disruptive Christian libertarianism continued to play a role in keeping the eclectic system in place. Following the demise of the bill for lack of the public commitment necessary for ramming through a program of state-mandated non-denominational religious instruction, Chesterton himself faced two different responses to his work that forced him to continue negotiating his place in the public discussion. On the one hand, a congenial project sprang from his work. The Anglican editor of *Church Times* and the Islington and Highgate Free Church Councils, inspired by Chesterton’s principle that “theology unites and religion divides,” organized a series of summer “theological lectures and discussions” between High Churchmen and Nonconformists in Finchley Park. They insisted that any unification of English Christian churches must begin, as Chesterton had said, with theological discussion among Christians themselves and not with nationalization and a state-authorized, state-directed transformation of doctrine for schools and liturgy for public worship.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, considerably more worrying to Chesterton, a group led by R. J. Campbell (the

Congregationalist pastor of London's City Temple), Dr. Clifford (the Baptist minister who had led the Nonconformist protest against the 1902 Education Act), and Stanton Coit (an American minister who founded the Moral Instruction League and the British Union of Ethical Societies) continued to believe that Chesterton was the English author best suited to "appropriate the words orthodoxy, religion, theism, theology, and divine for their naturalistic morality."<sup>58</sup> Despite their momentary setback in the defeat of the bill, they refused to let go of Chesterton and hoped to woo him back to the cause.

Chesterton was thus forced to clarify his position, which he did by moving steadily towards the clear statement of Christian liberalism which he outlined in his most famous work of religious controversy, *Orthodoxy* (1908). He made it clear, in an article opposing "An Agnostic Establishment," that he considered England's national identity to be interwoven with Christianity understood as an essentially liberal rather than establishment religion. In fact, pointing back to the origins of England as a Roman province, he argued that England's identity as a Christian nation was formed precisely in reaction to the idea of the state as church.

There is in us a memory of the history of our race. Christianity was not an expedient tried in the barbarous twilight of history; it was an expedient tried after the sun of rationalism had both risen and set. It was an expedient tried after Dr. Coit's expedient had been tried—and found wanting. For the true name of this civic religion without dogma is simply Paganism. It is needless to discuss whether it can exist: it has existed. Men have worshipped the virtues as pure pillars of the State; they did it in ancient Rome. Men have worshipped a god who was simply public unity and equity—his name was Divus Caesar. And we modern Europeans are not so much men moving towards that experience as men fleeing from it; we are the advance guard of that immense revolt and rout which fled from the failure of the Pagan Empire.<sup>59</sup>

Chesterton reacted to Coit's proposed State Church by moving towards an even more determined Christian-libertarian position, suggesting that at the heart of Christianity was the separation between church and state.<sup>60</sup>

Chesterton eloquently expressed this vision of a Christian England formed in liberal reaction to the Roman religious state in a poem published in 1907, "A Ballad Epic of Alfred," a fragment of what

would later become his greatest poetic effort, *The Ballad of the White Horse*. The poem opens with the idea that what would come to be called the English nation could only be understood as the Christian aftermath of Roman civilization.

The end of the world was long ago,  
When the ends of the world waxed free,  
When Rome was sunk in a waste of slaves,  
And the sun drowned in the sea.  
When Caesar's sun fell out of the sky  
And whoso harkened right  
Could only hear the plunging  
Of the nations in the night.<sup>61</sup>

Chesterton's particular alliance of Christianity and the nineteenth-century anti-statist liberal tradition came as a surprise to the Nonconformist majority in 1906, but by the time *The Ballad of the White Horse* was being recited by men in the trenches in their fight against "Prussianism" or broadcast over the BBC during the fight against fascism, the apparently odd political bed-fellowship had become a mainstream feature of the political terrain on both sides of the Atlantic.

The vision of a liberal-Christian Englishness that Chesterton first clearly delineated during the 1906 debate over the Liberal Education Bill would be influential in the thinking of C. S. Lewis during his BBC wartime broadcasts during World War II (which would be published as *Mere Christianity*). It would be influential in the historical work of Christopher Dawson in his master-narrative of the inherent antagonism between Christianity and totalitarianism in the midst of the Cold War. Ultimately, it would contribute to an essentially positive understanding of the relationship between the Anglo-American liberal idea of the nation and the Christian tradition of the separation of church and state.<sup>62</sup> The alliance between Christians and libertarians that was constructed on the basis of a Chestertonian history of England has had a long, prosperous, and controversial, life in the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup>

### **Some Implications for Current Education Debates**

If one attempts to bring the Chesterton of 1906 into current controversies over education in the United States of 2006, as some of his American fans have attempted to do, one finds that his position lies askance of the fault lines of the debate. While one cannot apply, in any simple way, his considerations to the American situation, formulated as

they were in the context of a nation with an established church, his insights do enable us to discern a significant oddity in the current American debate. In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, the Supreme Court ruling on the question of school vouchers, one observes that it is the more liberal justices who consistently uphold Chesterton's core position—that it is not feasible to distinguish between the religious and secular aspects of education, that religious and secular are so intertwined in education that they cannot be segregated, that it is impossible to discern a clear demarcation line between secular subjects and “religious indoctrination,” and that all education is pervasively sectarian.<sup>64</sup> It is the more conservative judges who argue contrarily that one can navigate between the “secular” and “sectarian” ends of education, that the state can safely support the “valid secular purpose” of education without advancing or inhibiting religion.<sup>65</sup>

Defining the “valid secular purpose” that the state pursues through education has involved conservatives in a series of unfortunate contortions. Justice Clarence Thomas, for example, in his concurring opinion in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, argues that one of the valid secular purposes of education is “to promote democracy and a more egalitarian culture.” One might, with some imagination, suspect Justice Thomas of sublime deviousness in attempting to insert, under cover of the “valid secular purpose” (or perhaps, more deviously still, through a special refinement of the definition of “secular” as an antonym to “sectarian” rather than to “religious”), precisely that necessary complicity with religion that a democratic regime and all its public purposes involves that Chesterton illuminated in his well-known essay “What is America?”

America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature. It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice, and that their authority is for that reason just. It certainly does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these rights are derived. Nobody expects a modern political system to proceed logically in the application of such dogmas, and in the matter of God and Government it is naturally God whose claim is taken more lightly. The point is that there is a creed, if not about divine things, at least about human things.<sup>66</sup>

Did Justice Thomas intend to nod (or bow) his head in the direction of acknowledging that America is a “nation with the soul of a church,” arguing in Chestertonian fashion that it is a “valid secular purpose” for a democratic regime to promote through public education a widespread conviction of the equal spiritual dignity and claim to justice of all who share a common human nature constituted by God? It is, of course, extremely doubtful that this was Thomas’s intent; the danger here is not the conservatives’ disingenuity, but their capitulation to a secularist definition of education as the rest of his opinion makes clear.

Rather than taking note of the fact that the equality principle is an affirmation about all people that cannot be divorced from a view of the human person as having an inherent spiritual dignity before God the Creator, conservatives allow themselves to hold out utopian hopes of using the state as an instrument for creating a now non-existent social and economic egalitarianism. Rather than acknowledging or capitalizing on the truth in the liberals’ argument that all education is essentially sectarian and openly making a prudential case for the benefit, the necessity, or the danger of public support for a religious dispensation that has historically been a pillar of the democratic parameters of the public regime, conservatives coyly emphasize the purely utilitarian purposes of education. They tout religious schools’ success at achieving higher scores on standardized proficiency tests; they champion the right to an education that will enable access to jobs in a high-tech and advanced society in order to escape a life of poverty and crime; they argue that while liberals romanticize state neutrality with regard to the religious goals of education, the poor demand tangible, economic results from education; they offer the services of religious schools towards an education for the poor that helps them develop the specific abilities that will enable them to expand their individual life prospects.<sup>67</sup> This is not the kind of language that a vibrant religious community uses about the character and goals of their school; while a religious school often serves the cause of ameliorating poverty, this is secondary, indeed subsidiary rather than corollary, to the church’s fundamental purpose in opening a school—which is to lead people to the truth about God. Thus, if the language of the public discussion of school vouchers is any guide, Chesterton’s concerns about the way that the state’s involvement destroys the actual religious character of education are still relevant.

Both proponents of state-funded education—the liberal supporters of “secular” public education and the conservative supporters of a publicly funded “parental option” for religious education—have an unexamined allegiance to a particular notion of the end of human life and the kind of education proper to that end. It is Chesterton’s point that,

while reluctance to examine and adjudicate between particular conceptions of the end of human life may be in some way appropriate to the modesty of the state, such examination and adjudication is part and parcel of the project of education. Chesterton, vividly aware of the power of a state monopoly in education to determine the character of religious instruction, voiced, as his primary concern in the 1906 education debate, a warning to Christians about the dangers of “entanglement” *by the state*. This concern is by no means dominant in the public debate in America, where conservatives argue for a “parental option” in favor of a religious education that performs secular tasks better than public education and liberals voice fears of the state’s “entanglement” *by religion*. It is therefore a sign of hope that Chesterton’s voice and Chesterton’s prescient warning has reappeared on the scene among Christians desiring to maintain the realm of civil liberty outside the government stranglehold on education.

One could go one step further and say that it is a sign of the continued vibrancy of American democracy that the Chestertonian argument is still heard at all in the general outcry over the dangers of a Christian theocracy that surrounds the debate over school vouchers.<sup>68</sup>

The democratic contention is that [there are] things we want a man to do for himself, even if he does them badly. In short, the democratic faith is this: that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves—the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state.<sup>69</sup>

Chesterton’s contention was always that precisely to the extent that a regime is a Christian theocracy, it will be liberal and democratic; to the extent that its people embrace the God who is Logos and place their hope in the presence of his salvific power among them, it will respect the capacity of its citizens to rationally discern and freely conform to the natural moral law. He believed that only a people that has lost its faith and hope looks to the state to perform the most fundamental human duties: “It is when men begin to grow desperate in their love for the people, when they are overwhelmed by the difficulties and blunders of humanity, that they fall back upon a wild desire to manage everything themselves.”<sup>70</sup> According to Chesterton, the highest and most secure form of a liberal regime is precisely that which recognizes the supernatural character of the happiness that is the end of man and acknowledges that very supernatural happiness as indeed the end of the just political order; precisely in recognizing this high dignity and telos of human freedom, the Christian people’s regime learns to restrain itself,

because the telos of the free human person can only be achieved freely. Precisely the people who discern most clearly humanity's supernatural end and the difficulties, indeed impossibility humanly speaking, whether individually or collectively, of achieving that end must, in hope, consciously run the risk—of freedom.<sup>71</sup>

## Notes

1. G. K. Chesterton, "Talking about Education," *Illustrated London News*, January 26, 1907 in *Collected Works 27* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 380, 384.

2. Chesterton always considered himself as the bearer of the old liberal tradition rather than a purveyor of something new and with regard to the Christian and liberal strains in political life he was correct in saying that he was no innovator. Cf., G. K. Chesterton, "The Ethics of Elfland," *Orthodoxy* in *Collected Works*, vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 249-250; G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (Kent: Fisher Press, 1992). On this issue he was certainly bringing into the mainstream the anti-Erastianism of the Oxford Movement and the early nineteenth-century Liberal party. For a vivid example of this spirit see William Gladstone's June 19, 1845 diary entry, marked "Secret": "The State will adhere longer...to religion in a vague than in a defined form: but I for one am not favourable to tearing up the seamless garment of the Christian Faith in order to patch the ragged cloak of the State. Keep religion entire, and you secure at least to the individual man his refuge. Ask therefore on every occasion not what best maintains the religious repute of the State but what is least menacing to the integrity of Catholic belief and the Catholic Church." *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol. IV (1848-1854), edited by M. R. D. Foot; H. C. G. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

3. Chesterton is frequently cited in discussions of school vouchers, usually at the grassroots level (innumerable blogs!). Cf., Douglas Dewey, "Separating School and State: A Prudential Analysis of Tax-Funded Vouchers," *Cato Policy Analysis* No. 269 (March 12, 1997); Joseph Sobran, "The Trouble with Vouchers," *Sobran's Real News of the Month* (January 2, 2007); "The Truth about School Choice," *Gilbert Magazine* (December, 2005).

4. While Americans debate the legitimacy of using school vouchers for private schools and funding biblical literacy or religion-based character education programs for public schools, the British consider how to re-assert public control over Christian schools made independent during the Conservative years and whether to allow state funding for Muslim schools. For a sampling of some recent debates in Britain see Clare Dean, "Christians Blaze a GM [grant-maintained] Trail," *Times Educational Supplement* 4030 (September 24, 1993), 5; George Skinner, "Religious Pluralism and School Provision in Britain," *Intercultural Education* 13:2 (June, 2002), 171; Harry Judge, "Faith-based Schools and State Funding: A Partial Argument," *Oxford Review of Education* 27:4 (December, 2001), 463-474; Michael Shaw, "Labour vision with Tory echoes," *Times Educational Supplement* 4668 (January 13, 2006), 18; Adi Bloom and David Marley, "Move to More Creationist Schools Meets Opposition," *Times Educational Supplement* 4709 (October 27, 2006), 7; Irena Barker, "Self-Governing Schools Risk Social Segregation," *Times Educational Supplement* 4739 (June 1, 2007), 12.

5. John Burnett, "Eat Your Greens: A History of School Meals," *History Today* 56:3 (March, 2006), 28-30.

6. Arthur Balfour, *The Times*, January 19, 1895, reporting his speech in Manchester, quoted in J. E. B. Munson, "The Unionist Coalition and Education, 1895-1902," *The Historical Journal* 20:3 (September, 1977), 607-645.

7. T. Taylor, "An Early Arrival of the Fascist Mentality: Robert Morant's Rise to Power," *Journal of Educational Administration & History* 17:2 (1985), 48-62.

8. G. E. Sherington, "The 1918 Education Act: Origins, Aims and Development," *British Journal of Educational Studies* XXIV: 1 (February, 1976), 66-85: 75.

9. James Murphy, *Church, State and Schools in Britain*, (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1971), 94-102; and E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), 262-266.

10. Neil D. Daghish, "Lloyd George's Education Bill? Planning the 1906 Education Bill," *History of Education* 23: 4 (1994), 375-384.

11. Conversation recorded in J. Burns Diary, 5 December 1906, J. Burns Papers, Add MS 46324, quoted in Daghish, op. cit., 384.

12. Tony Taylor, "Arthur Balfour and Educational Change: The Myth Revisited," *British Journal of Educational Studies* XXXII: 2 (June, 1994), 133-149: 146.

13. Quotation from A. FitzRoy, *Memoirs*, 2 vols. (London, 1927), 287, quoted in Daghish, op. cit., 382.

14. A number of recent studies by historians have begun to acknowledge that the late Victorians assumptions about the rapidity and inevitability of secularization in Britain were indeed flawed. See for example, Hugh McLeod, "Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945," *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 44-70; Jeffrey Cox and Sheldon Stromquist, Introduction, *Contesting the Master Narrative* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998); Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Two studies that apply this kind of revisionist approach to groups involved in the 1906 Liberal victory are mark Bevir, "The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902," *Journal of British Studies* 38 (April, 1999), 217-245; and Ian Packer, "Religion and New Liberalism: The Rowntree Family, Quakerism, and Social Reform," *Journal of British Studies* 42 (April, 2003), 236-257.

15. Boyd Litzinger, *Time's Revenges: Browning's Reputation as a Thinker, 1889-1962* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1964). For example, around the time Birrell and Chesterton were writing on Browning there also appeared Sidney Herbert Mellone, "Robert Browning," in *Leaders of Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1902), John A. Hutton, *Guidance from Robert Browning in Matters of Faith* (Edinburgh, 1903), Dean William Ralph Inge, *Studies of English Mystics* (London, 1906), and Frank Gunsalas, "Robert Browning," in *The Higher Ministries of Recent English Poetry* (New York, 1907).

16. Sybil Eakin, "Giants of American Education: John Dewey, the Education Philosopher," *Technos: Quarterly for Education and Technology* (Winter, 2000).

17. *Daily Advertiser*, September 12, 1903. It would be interesting in light of their differences over education policy to compare Birrell and Chesterton's Browning criticism. Chesterton's only mention of Birrell in his book on Browning is (as was typical of Chesterton) complimentary, but he disagrees with Birrell about the irrelevancy of Browning's contrasting monologues in *The Ring and the Book*, an argument that is important for Chesterton's portrayal of Browning as a radical supporter of free speech, which seems to coincide with Chesterton's emphasis on freedom in religious education.

18. Stanton Coit, *National Idealism and the State Church* (London: Williams Norgate, 1907), 143. See also Colin Manlove, "G. K. Chesterton and George MacDonald: Strangers and Brothers," *Chesterton Review* 27 (February/May, 2001) 55-67. Manlove notes Chesterton's September 1905 *Daily News* obituary notice for MacDonald.

19. Stanton Coit, op. cit., 30-36. For a context for the power of these progressive hopes, cf., the two monumental studies of this trans-Atlantic progressivism, James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Daniel T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Belknap Press, 2000).

20. See for example *New York Evening Post*, USA, August 12, 1903 (refers to "his now familiar column in the *London Daily News* . . ."); *Sketch*, June 15, 1904 ("Mr. G. K. Chesterton is becoming very popular in America. All his recent books have been well received, and for everything he writes there is a growing audience"); *Louisville Journal*, KY, June 14, 1904 (Notes that he "is becoming a 'syndicate'"); *Birmingham Owl*, July 1, 1904. See also C. F. G. Masterman, "G. K. Chesterton: An Appreciation," *Bookman*, January 1903, reprinted in whole or part in *Glasgow Herald*, January 17, 1903; *Glasgow Evening News*, January 13, 1903; *Academy and Literature*, January 10, 1903; *St. James's Gazette*, January 10, 1903; *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 15, 1903; *Church Family Newspaper*, January 16, 1903; *Manchester Dispatch*, January 16, 1903; *Globe*, January 10, 1903; *Birmingham Gazette*, January 13, 1903; *Dispatch*, St. Paul, Minn, USA, June 20, 1903; *Bakers Record*, January 23, 1903.

21. *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 3, 1903, “Dr. Robertson Nicoll, who as editor of the *British Weekly* and the *Bookman* has helped many modern reputations—such names as J. M. Barrie, W. B. Yeats, and G. K. Chesterton occur readily to one.”

22. G. K. Chesterton to Mrs. Chesterton, undated letter circa 1901, in Maisie Ward, G. K. *Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 149.

23. Randall Blackshaw, “Who is Mr. Chesterton?” *The Critic*, September 1903.

24. For a detailed account of this exchange see, Stanley L. Jaki, “Chesterton’s Landmark Year: The Blatchford-Chesterton Debate of 1903-1904,” *Chesterton Review* 10:4 (November, 1984). Jaki sees this debate as a crucial turning point in Chesterton’s own religious journey.

25. *The Religious Doubts of Democracy*, edited by George Haw (London: Macmillan, 1904).

26. For example, his “Why am I a Christian?” Sunday address at the Ealing Congregational Church, reported in *Glasgow Herald*, February 25, 1905, and more fully in the *Ealing Gazette*, April 15, 1905, which also reported that the address would be repeated at All Saints Church, Notting Hill.

27. “Lent in London: Lay Lectures,” *Daily Chronicle*, April 21, 1905.

28. *Examiner*, April 13, 1905; “An Experiment,” *Vanity Fair*, March 23, 1905.

29. *Sheffield Telegraph*, March 17, 1905.

30. *World*, March 25, 1905; *Manchester Courier* and *Manchester Weekly*, March 17, 1905. Also *York’s Observer*, May 17, 1905: “There were market porters, clerks, shopmen, writers of books, journalists, and a good sprinkling of young ladies.”

31. G. K. Chesterton, “Chesterton at the Christian Social Union: Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” in *The Chesterton Review* XI: 3 (August, 1985), 263-264; and G. K. Chesterton, “Mr. Bernard Shaw,” *Heretics*, in *Collected Works*, vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 70. Chesterton appears to have repeated the lecture at St. Paul’s Cathedral under the

auspices of the Christian Social Union around the time of the summer release of *Heretics*; he was reported to have again urged that, “the ordinary man is the cornerstone of Christianity.” “The Press in the Pulpit,” *Sheffield Telegraph*, June 28, 1905 (which announced the lectures); reports appeared in *Glasgow Herald*, August, 10, 1905; *Liverpool Courier*, August 4, 1905; *Literary World*, September 1905, and *Church Times*, September 8, 1905.

32. G. K. Chesterton, “Chesterton at the Christian Social Union: The Citizen, the Gentleman, and the Savage,” in *The Chesterton Review* XI: 3 (August, 1985), 266-271.

33. The fullest contemporary account of this lecture appears in the *British Weekly*, May, 19, 1904; Also reported at length in *Manchester Dispatch*, May 18, 1904; *Morning Post*, May 18, 1904; *St. Andrew*, May 26, 1904, *Church Bells*, May 27, 1904 (the reporter objected to Chesterton “calling his Majesty’s Ministers at best Agnostics at worst devil worshippers.”); *Weekly Northern Whig*, June 18, 1904.

34. For more on his radical position on education see G. K. Chesterton, “The Decline of the Amateur Educator,” *Black and White*, in 1904-1905 series, “The Creed of a Credulous Person.” “Now in this struggle between the class of professional educationalists (mainly called teachers, psychologists, dons, and intellectual aunts) and the other class of amateur educationalists (loosely called mothers), I confess my sympathies are entirely with the latter...the inheritors of a great human tradition which is far more important than any technical excellence.”

35. Interview with Chesterton about *Heretics*, in *Public Opinion*, September 29, 1905. [This idea of a refusal of the late Victorians to deal with the national orthodoxy is in line with the Cowper-Temple compromise of Foster’s 1870 Educational Bill which allowed for only non-denominational religious instruction in state funded schools.]

36. G. K. Chesterton, “Paganism and Mr. Lowes Dickinson” and “The Moods of Mr. George Moore,” *Heretics*, 129, 107.

37. These are the seeds of Chesterton’s later stand against the New Theology movement. See G. K. Chesterton, “The Darkness of Virtue,” *Daily News*, July 28, 1906: “I feel a profound gratitude to the historic Christian Church, with its calendar of commonplace and unheard of saints. I respect it because almost alone I think among the institutions of

the earth it has thought it worthwhile to record and carve in marble for ever the names of a large number of quite stupid men merely because they are good... I think we have become seriously disproportionate in our esteem for mere intelligence, sometimes for mere culture.” And G. K. Chesterton, “The Need of Doctrine in the Church,” *Illustrated London News*, October 27, 1906: “If the Church of England or any other body tries to do without doctrines, the poor will fall away from it more than ever; the poor are found wherever doctrine is found . . . If we succeed in including all creeds, we shall fail to include all classes.”

38. G. K. Chesterton, “Christmas and the Aesthetes,” *Heretics*, 89.

39. G. K. Chesterton, “Raillery from the Bench,” *Illustrated London News*, October 28, 1905, in *Collected Works 27* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 45.

40. The most complete record of this lecture, which reveals it to be a reworking of an earlier article against the formation of an English National Academy, appears in *Wandsworth Burrough News*, September 30, 1905; also *Daily News*, September 25, 1905, *Morning Advertiser*, September 25, 1905, *Morning Post*, September 25, 1905, *Glasgow Evening News*, September 25, 1905 (which announced that he would speak on the topic in Scotland in the winter, which may refer to his Armistead lecture, “Shall We Abolish the Inevitable?” given before a “huge audience” in *Dundee*. See reports in the *Dundee Courier*, October 3, December 8, and December 9, 1905.)

41. *British Weekly*, October 27, December 14, 1905. Chesterton’s *ILN* column for this week touches on the same topic. He notes that Bishop Gore, the head of the Anglo-Catholic Movement had said that “the peculiar evil of the Anglican Church” was “its disposition to think and speak entirely in terms of the upper and upper-middle class.”

42. *Nottingham Guardian* November 25, 28, 1905; *Manchester Guardian*, November 30, 1905; *Times*, November 30, 1905; *Yorkshire Post*, December 6, 1905.

43. *Glasgow Evening News*, December 12, 1905.

44. *Great Thoughts*, November 1905; *English Review*, November 4, 1905 (quotes at length from *Great Thoughts* article); W. J. Hawkey, “Why I believe in Fairy Tales: their educational value,” *Evening News*, November 15, 1905; *Glasgow Evening News*, November 23, 1905

(quotes Chesterton's *Illustrated London News* to similar effect); *Book New and Trade Gazette*, December 12, 1905; Robert Lynd, review of J. A. MacCulloch's *Childhood Fiction: A Study of Fairy Tales and Primitive Thought*, *Sunday Sun*, January 28, 1906.

45. *Free Methodist*, May 18, 1905; *Life of Faith*, May 18, 1905; *Irish Catholic*, May 20, 1905; *Freethinker*, May 21, 1905, *Crusader*, May 25, 1905.

46. Lawrence J. Clipper, "Introduction," *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. XXVII (San Francisco, 1986). Ignatius Press has collected the entire series in eight volumes.

47. *Daily Chronicle*, September 26, 1905; *Morning Leader*, September 26, 1905; *Morning Advertiser*, September 26, 1905; *Daily News*, September 27, 1905 ("It has been said that Mr. Chesterton thinks in turns of weekly causeries and the Divine Image."); *Daily Mirror*, September 27, 1905; *East Anglia Daily Times*, September 27, 1905; *Gloucester Citizen*, September 27, 1905; *Irish Independent*, September 27, 1905; *Star*, September 29, 1905; *Liverpool Courier*, September 29, 1905; *Illustrated Sporting News*, September 30, 1905; *Globe*, September 30, 1905; *Glasgow Herald*, September 30, 1905; *Weeks Survey*, September 30, 1905; *Star*, September 30, 1905; *Western Weekly News*, September 30, 1905; *Doncaster Chronicle*, September 30, 1905; *Gazette*, September 1905; *Sketch*, September 1905; *Lloyd's Weekly News*, October 1, 1905; *Eastern Morning News*, October 3, 1905; *Sketch*, October 4, 1905; *Lady's Pictorial*, October 7, 1905.

48. *Tribune*, January 1, 1906; *Tribune*, February 16, 1906; *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 21, 1906.

49. *Daily News*, April 14, 1906; *Standard*, April 13, 1906; *Christian World*, April 19, 1906; *Christian Commonwealth*, May 3, 1906; *Glasgow Daily*, April 14, 1906; *Tribune*, May 25, 1906.

50. *Clarion*, June 13, 1906. Chesterton himself in his *Autobiography* echoed Blatchford, "I was described, in the phrase of the time, as having a Saturday pulpit, rather like a Sunday pulpit. Whatever the merits of the sermon, it is probable that I had a larger congregation than I have ever had before or since" (118).

51. One article on religion as a pragmatic necessity for public morality and democracy, for example, drew fourteen letters to the editor. Correspondence, *Daily News*, August 16, 17, 18, 1905. On the same topic, also *Daily News*, August, 2, 31, and September 1, 4, 11.

52. *Lady's Pictorial*, March 18, 1905. Also A. A. Milne, "Modern Fairy Tales: The Story of Mr. Chesterton's Ubiquity," *Vanity Fair* July 6, 1905 (in which three princes search the whole world in order to find a paper without a single reference to or article by GK); *Vanity Fair*, August 20, 1905, "Traveling on the top of a car the other day from Trent Bridge to Mapperley, I was interested in the books carried by my fellow-passengers. Strangely enough, three of them happened to be carrying works by Mr. G. K. Chesterton, an author whose popularity, though only recently acquired, is evidently very general. Two ladies who got on the car were carrying his *Browning* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and a gentleman at the Mapperley terminus had *The Club of Queer Trades*." Also *Free Lance*, March 3, 1906, carried a spoof of Chesterton's *Napoleon of Notting Hill*, in which Chesterton captures, but is finally forced to surrender Printing House Square.

53. G. K. Chesterton, "Bigotry in the Modern World," *Illustrated London News*, April 28, 1906 in *Collected Works XXVII* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 176.

54. G. K. Chesterton, "The Education Bill," *Illustrated London News*, April 28, 1906 in *Collected Works XXVII* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 179.

55. G. K. Chesterton, "The Education Bill," *Illustrated London News*, April 28, 1906 in *Collected Works XXVII* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 181.

56. G. K. Chesterton, "The Education Bill," *Illustrated London News*, April 28, 1906 in *Collected Works XXVII* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 183.

57. *Manchester Guardian* (May 6, 1907); *North Midlands Chronicle* (August 3, 1907). Chesterton delivered a lecture to the last of these meetings on "Is Theology Dry?" (The lecture title was no doubt a joking reference to the temperance movement.)

58. Report of Stanton Coit's lecture, "Shaw, Chesterton, and Angels," *Ethics*, July 15, 1907. Coit could have gotten this idea from some of Chesterton's early lectures. See "'G.K.C.' on Ceremonial," *Daily News*, March 20, 1903 (report of lecture at Hanover Chapel, Peckham, on "Advantages of Ceremonial," where Chesterton argued that England's ceremonial was "at a low ebb in this century and country," but that if she had a revolution it would revive. "Ceremonial breaks out at great spiritual crises... in the French Revolution for example." (Chesterton may have been lecturing from an article published earlier, see "The Weakness of Full-Dress Emotions," *Glasgow Herald*, January 24, 1903.) Also "The Ethical Movement," *Daily News*, February 23, 1903. Chesterton lectured to the Ethical Union on "Dogma and being Dogmatic," saying that it was silly for ethical societies to quibble over differences with churches when faced with profound skepticism. He declared his dogmas to be the Equality of Man and sanctity of individual life or right to live and most vociferously opposed the dogma of physical evolution and Darwinian theory.

59. G. K. Chesterton, "An Agnostic Establishment," *Nation*, May 16, 1908.

60. Failing to gain Chesterton to the cause, Coit attempted it himself, *National Idealism and the Book of Common Prayer: An Essay in Re-Interpretation and Revision* (London, 1908), and eventually, failing to gain support in England, he returned to America and tried his program there, *The Soul of America: A Constructive Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (New York, 1914). In America he again found the "anti-nationalism of the Church of Rome" to be his main obstacle, "You can be a Catholic, but you cannot be a Roman Catholic and at the same time be in spiritual life a true and loyal American."

61. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911); "Fragment from a Ballad Epic of Alfred," *Albany Review*, 1907. Later, after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, he took Thomas More as the prototypical Englishman because of his defense of the independence of the church from the state.

62. For several recent Chestertonian expressions of this positive relationship see Roger Scruton, *The West and The Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Willmington, DE: ISI, 2003); Pierre Manent, *A World Without Politics?: A Defense of the Nation-State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Joseph Ratzinger, "The Spiritual

Roots of Europe: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

63. Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), provides a thorough and critical history of that relationship.

64. This is the substance of Justice Souter’s dissenting opinion in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 639 (2002) on the constitutionality of the school voucher program. I am not here offering a comment on the question of constitutionality but on the implications of the language used, in explicit and implicit advocacy for or against the program.

65. Chief Justice Rehnquist’s majority opinion in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* involves itself in prescribing guidelines for discerning precisely such fault lines. The use of the more general word “religious” by liberals and the more limiting word “sectarian” by conservatives seems also to be a part of the project of arguing for the absolute or limited character of what is being hedged off from the public realm. Liberals thus warn against “religious indoctrination” and conservatives demure that the state can remain neutral with regard to the “sectarian-non-sectarian” options of parents.

66. G. K. Chesterton, “What is America?” in *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1922)

67. The language of this paragraph is taken from Thomas’s concurring opinion in *Zelman v. Simmons Harris*, but it is echoed in political endorsements of school voucher programs by many political candidates. Cf. “McCain Supports Final Elementary Secondary Education Bill,” (December 18, 2001), Senate Office press release.

68. For a review of some of this alarmist literature, see Ross Douthat, “Theocracy, Theocracy, Theocracy,” *First Things* (August/September 2006); For a critique of the way that this alarmist discourse creates a false dichotomy between “democracy” and “theocracy” see Remi Brague, “Are Non-Theocratic Regimes Possible?” *Intercollegiate Review* (Spring 2006), 3-12.

69. G. K. Chesterton, “The Ethics of Elfland,” *Orthodoxy* in *Collected Works*, vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 250.

70. G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1913; originally published, 1903), 31.

71. It was in this spirit that Chesterton asserted the liberal right to free speech: “It is not by any means self-evident upon the face of it that an institution like liberty of speech is right or just. It is not natural or obvious to let a man utter follies and abominations which you believe to be bad for mankind any more that it is natural or obvious to let a man dig up a part of the public road, or infect half a town with typhoid fever. The theory of free speech, that truth is so much larger and stranger and more many-sided than we know of, that it is very much better at all costs to hear everyone’s account of it, is a theory which has been justified upon the whole by experiment but which remains a very daring and even a very surprising theory.” G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1913; originally published, 1903), 174.