The Everlasting Man Study Guide

The Everlasting Man by G. K. Chesterton

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The history of the world highlights two major facts, both of which contradict the anti-religious and even anti-human theories that have become fashionable in academic circles. The first of these facts is that man, though certainly an animal, is distinguished from all other animals by his possession of reason. On account of this rational nature, man naturally wants to know God, whose existence he can only vaguely grasp through the various mythologies and philosophies he creates. The second fact is that the Christian religion is unique in its ability to satisfy man's yearnings by revealing God to man in a way that would otherwise be impossible.

Though the theory of evolution in its entirety is not contested in this book, many of its proponents suppose that it proves that every aspect of man, including his rational nature, is subject to the same laws of gradual development. While man's body may indeed be the product of such a process, his reason is patently not. This is obvious from the fact that there is no parallel in nature. Animals resemble man in every other aspect; a dog or a bird might have a skeleton that in someway resembles the skeleton of a man, for example. However, there is nothing that resembles man's reason, even poorly. The difference between a monkey and a man is not merely that a man draws better than a monkey; the difference is that a man draws and a monkey does not draw at all. Archaeological evidence only confirms this. Cave drawings, however primitive the style and technique may be, reflect the same fundamental human nature that takes pleasure in reflecting upon what it sees and tackling the challenge of representing it. The drawings differ from Rembrandt only in skill, no matter how great that difference may be. Yet, certain scientists are so beholden to their theories that they tend to gloss over this fact. Instead of drawing conclusions from what evidence is available, they suppose that the cave-man must have been an unprecedented brute, basing their theories on no evidence at all.

The theory of evolution has become so fashionable that scholars of other fields have found ways to incorporate it into their own studies. Thus, for example, historians suppose that religion is an evolution from the crude starting point of tribal spiritualism to the more sophisticated theologies of modern religion. Such an explanation, of course, completely guts religion. It is no longer a spiritual revelation, but a product of merely natural and inevitable process. However, these historians miss the mark in the same way the anthropologists did: They put their theory before the facts. There is great evidence to suggest that monotheism is the primitive religion and the polytheistic mythologies of antiquity are a response to it. A single, transcendent God is, in a way, too transcendent for the Pagan mind to comprehend, and rightly so. It is only natural, then, that they try to make Divinity something more comprehensible by inventing gods not unlike themselves, who walk around, play jokes, and even sin. There is something deeply unsatisfying about this approach, for, however imaginative it might be, it does nothing to satisfy man's desire to understand. This desire is what motivated the great philosophers, like Aristotle or Plato, to create their great, abstract theories of metaphysics and ethics. It is difficult for a modern person to understand the relationship between philosophy and mythology. It would not be inaccurate to say that there was no

relationship; the two, however contradictory they might have been, coexisted side-by-side.

This tenuous coexistence could not last forever, though, and gradually Paganism began to decline from the heights it reached in Rome. People began to become bored with their gods and began to turn to other, less benevolent gods or even no gods at all. Morality declined and sensuality reigned. The stage was set for the arrival of Christianity, a religion unique in its ability to satisfy the desires represented by mythology and philosophy. Like mythology, it was a story and, indeed, a tangible story, for God had become tangible. However, like philosophy, it was true, and its truth could be understood not only by the imagination but by reason. In other words, Christianity was the religion man had longed for along. Its existence, from the very beginning, was not to be an easy one, however. From Roman persecution to modern, scholarly persecution, the Catholic Church has constantly had to face adversity which should destroy any merely natural institution; indeed, at times, it seems as if the Catholic Church had been crushed. Each time, however, not only has the Catholic Church survived, but it has risen anew, stronger than ever.

Introduction: On The Creature Called Man

Introduction: On The Creature Called Man Summary and Analysis

Oftentimes, a thing can only be appreciated by those who are very close to it and those who are very far from it. People who are familiar, but not intimate, with it, often bring with them a variety of biases that make any objective judgment impossible. A person who is very close to it naturally understands it well; a person who is very far from it sees with, so to speak, a fresh set of eyes capable of seeing it for what it is. Such is the case with Christianity. While Christians understand its doctrines, non-Christians who live in largely Christian societies, like most Western countries, will generally have a kind of unwarranted contempt for the religion, a contempt which they will not have for, say, an Eastern religion with which they are not familiar. The same relationship holds for man. Man's uniqueness among the rest of nature has been lost on the modern mind because the sense of novelty has been lost. Both of these trends—the contempt for Christianity and the contempt for man—underlie two of the chief movements of modern society: the denigration of Christianity and the spread of the doctrine of evolution. The task of this book, therefore, is to attempt to show both of these—man in his natural state and man in his supernatural, Christian state—from a novel perspective which will invite the non-believer to, perhaps, understand things in a different way.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter I: The Man in the Cave

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter I: The Man in the Cave Summary and Analysis

Darwin's theory of evolution is frequently set forth as an explanation for life which is meant to trump any idea of Divine creation. The theory, however, does no such thing; at best, it just makes Creation a slow, gradual process instead of the instantaneous process once envisioned. Whether it is is quick or slow, however, Creation still requires a Creator; if evolution can correctly explain how one form of life changed into another, it cannot explain how life came into being in the first place.

Another troubling fact for evolutionists is the existence of rationality. Evolution supposes that all changes are gradual, and yet there seems to be no precedence in nature for man's ability to reason. It would seem that something is either rational or it is not. Evolutionists—blinded by their desire to strip man of anything to distinguish him from beasts—decided, instead, to invent examples of a semi-rational being. In Chesterton's time, the archaeological discovery of the so-called cave-man captured the attention both of the scientific community and society in general. There was, in fact, very little factual evidence about the cave-man; in truth, there was not even enough evidence to prove that he lived in a cave. Nonetheless, it was bandied about that the cave-man had the habit of beating women, particularly his wife, with a large club. The effect of this fiction is to turn the cave-man into some kind of half-man and half-beast (never mind the fact that this fictional cave-man is quite a bit more bestial than other beasts, who do not batter their females).

What is even more damning is the evidence that did exist which the scientific community ignored. A priest and a boy one day decided to explore a large cave formation and discovered pre-historic paintings of deer on the wall. The pre-historic artist even captured some subtleties of how deer moved and stood; it showed the deer standing and looking towards its hind legs, a posture well-known to anyone with experience with deer. Whatever stylistic differences there are between the cave-man painter and modern artists is unimportant; the motivation behind the painting is the same. The artist wanted to draw the deer because he found it fun, fulfilling, or even just challenging. Whatever other facts have changed about man since then, whatever great technological achievements he has made, the same natural curiosity which inspired the cave-man persists to this day—and it is not found anywhere else.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter II: Professors and Prehistoric Men

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter II: Professors and Prehistoric Men Summary and Analysis

The science of anthropology, which supposes that it can reconstruct not only the skeletons but also the daily lives of man-like creatures which are supposed to have lived ages ago, differs from other sciences in its inability to correct its mistakes. The inventors of the airplane, for example, always knew when they made a mistake, because their machine would not fly. An anthropologist can make a mistake, though, and there is nothing to correct it. When this fact is coupled with the extreme, and unjustified, confidence that permeates the field, what results is a proliferation of incredibly detailed but entirely unsupported theories about prehistoric man. For example, one anthropologist claimed that a certain prehistoric race did not wear clothes. The existence of this prehistoric race was based upon a finding of a few bone fragments; certainly, nothing was found which showed whether or not the creature wore clothing. Yet this thesis not only went unchallenged, but became part of the scientific record.

Very often, these professors put their own preconceptions first when formulating their theories. One writer, for example, supposed that a community of cave-men had no religion because none of the few drawings they found were of religious symbols. Aside from the fact that the professor could hardly identify a prehistoric religious—perhaps they worshiped the deer they drew—surely the fact that someone makes a non-religious drawing is hardly a sign that he is not religious. The professors, however, are interested in showing that religion is not something natural to man. Rather, they want to prove that it is some phenomenon that emerges naturally out of certain circumstances. Once such theory supposes that it is the product of awe for an authority figure (like a chief), contemplation of the cycle of life and death observed in crops, and the strange quality of dreams. Such an explanation is not very helpful, however; indeed, it gets the picture entirely backwards. Such a strange assortment of experiences could hardly produce an entirely new sensation unless there were already some capacity in man to unify them. In other words, man could not find anything mystical about the death and resurrection of corn, so to speak, unless he already had the capacity to find things mystical.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter III: The Antiquity of Civilisation

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter III: The Antiquity of Civilisation Summary and Analysis

It is commonly supposed by anthropologists that the history of human society, much like the history of organisms, is a slow, gradual evolution from lower forms to higher ones. Thus, it is supposed, the first humans were nomads. They gradually settled down and became farmers and societies began to develop. These societies, without exception, were ruled by an autocratic chief who oppressed his people, but they submitted out of fear (perhaps he was the strongest man in the village and muscled his way into power). After this stage, more advanced forms of civilization began to evolve, at least in some places—for some societies, evidently, remained tribalistic despotisms.

Of course, like many anthropological theories the evidence to support these conclusions is non-existent; once again, scientists are imposing their paradigm upon history and hoping everything winds up making sense. First of all, there is no reason to believe that there is a linear evolution as supposed by these professors. It could very well be that some societies were never nomadic; it is possible that some societies were once organized as farmers and then became farmers. Further, there is no reason to suppose that despotism was the universal form of government employed by ancient civilizations. After all, despotism often develops in modern times out of quite civilized societies—even Western democracies. The argument often given to show that ancient, primitive civilizations were dictatorial is by analogy with modern, primitive civilizations—such as the increasingly few pockets of tribal government that are still found in regions of Africa. Of course, there is no reason to suppose that primitive governments in the past were the same as primitive governments in the present.

Very little is known about the history of civilization. The best known examples are Egypt and Babylon and both of these examples happen to refute the assumptions made by many modern scholars. Egypt shows that despotism is not the necessary result of a lack of civilization. Egypt existed for centuries before the Pharaoh, mainly as a collection of farming communities which were governed in a very decentralized fashion. It was only when Egypt began to develop as a civilization that the despotic Pharaoh came to power.

Babylon, on the other hand, contradicts the theory that human society develops in some roughly uniform pattern. Many scholars suppose that barbarism is a precursor to civilization; a logical deduction of this is that barbarism and civilization can never exist side by side. Of course, the modern world offers adequate counterexamples to this theory—for there are still many pockets of barbarism to be found throughout the world—but Babylon's entire history is one of perpetual battle with barbarians. Yet, it would be

difficult to doubt that Babylon was truly civilized; its cultural and technological achievements are impressive even to this day and certainly rival those of Egypt.

Certainly, Egypt and Babylon were not the only ancient civilizations worthy of notice. Many civilizations, in all likelihood, rose and fell without leaving any discernible trace of their existence. Certainly there were many great empires in the East, like the Chinese and Mongols, but for a Westerner, it is difficult, maybe impossible, to understand them. As remote as Egypt and Babylon are from the modern day in years, they nonetheless belong to the same cultural tradition which still persists in the Western world. Tradition is one of the greatest sources of knowledge that men have, but modern so-called scholars often fall into the trap of attempting to replace it with their unproven, abstract theories.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter IV: God and Comparative Religion

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter IV: God and Comparative Religion Summary and Analysis

There is a popular thesis among certain types of scholars which states that all religions are, in essence, the same. The evidence for this position is based upon scattered similarities between the major religions of the world. Certainly, there are some such similarities—it is not at all surprising, for example, that Islam should bear some similarities to Christianity, since it was largely derived from it. However, the thesis that all religions are fundamentally the same is saying something a bit stronger; having a few superficial resemblances is not enough. The theoretical backbone of this thesis is that religion is an evolution that took place over times. The starting point for religion is usually with spiritualistic, polytheistic religion that gradually evolves into the monotheistic religions that are dominant today. If religion truly is the product of a kind of psychological and spiritual evolution of man, it should hardly be surprising, then, that all religions should be, essentially the same—after all, man is essentially the same.

However, this theory of religious evolution is no more successful than the theory of societal evolution explained in the previous chapter. It is, first of all, simply not true that the roots of modern religions lay in polytheistic religions; in fact, it is the other way around. Polytheistic Paganism is really a reaction to and an inability to understand the immensity of the One God. That the old Pagans recognized the existence of such a God is obvious from their religions. Every now and then a reference will be made, almost parenthetically, to some "Great Spirit" who rules over the whole universe and all of the other gods. He is only mentioned in, so to speak, hushed tones. It is not that the Pagans were exactly overwhelmed by him; it is just that he was so big to them that they could not even begin to understand his significance. Their own created gods, who walked around, pranked one another, and fought side-by-side with heroes, were much more tangible and accessible. It was not until the Jewish religion arrived that monotheism really became possible.

One might say that Pagans were very open-minded about religion. The development of their vast pantheons was often a process that took place over centuries as they gradually accepted this or that foreign god into their ranks. A modern mind might find something quite liberal and enlightened about this; there was no attempt to exclude or denigrate another's religion. The Jews, on the other hand, would never have allowed their Jehovah to mingle with the gods of, say, the Greeks or Babylonians, and the Old Testament is replete with stories of God and his prophets stopping those exact practices. As sophisticated as the Pagan practice might seem, the monotheistic practice

is really the more humane. For, if one people has their god and another people as their god, there is nothing to unite them together; indeed, their religious differences can help encourage the worst kind of cruelties—for will Molloch really punish his followers for destroying and enslaving the worshipers of Jupiter? The Jewish, and Christian and Muslim, God, on the other hand, allows for no such divisions; for, in a monotheistic religion, everyone is united—whether they like it or not—under the same One God. However, the prize of monotheism, while it was still held by the Jews, was not yet disseminated throughout the world. That moment had to wait for Christ.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter V: Man and Mythologies

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter V: Man and Mythologies Summary and Analysis

Many anthropologists believe that all, or at least most, of the world's mythologies derived from a small set of beliefs that managed to disseminate throughout the world. To support this theory, they point to certain parallels in the myths; or, at least, they point to parallels which they believe exist. For example, they will find the common theme of an "external soul" in a story about wizard whose heart was lost in a cave and the story of a giant whose spirit was trapped in a box. While certainly there are bound to be some similarities between myths—after all, the men who created them were all human and often had similar environments—these theorists go wrong by failing to see the myths like the myth-makers did: imaginatively.

It is important to realize the function of myths in ancient society. They were not analogous to the religious beliefs of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. The common man did not exactly believe his myths. When confronted with the mystery of the world and hints of the divinity behind it, he did the best he could to understand it. He probably did not believe that he was completely wrong, but he also was probably aware, on some level, that he was hazarding a good guess. Myths, in other words, are an attempt to reach God purely through imagination. It is not until the arrival of Christianity that imagination finally met reason and myth became doctrine.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VI: The Demons and the Philosophers

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VI: The Demons and the Philosophers Summary and Analysis

Though there was much noble in the paganism described in the previous chapter—insofar as the myth-creation stemmed from an earnest desire to know God—there was another form of paganism which lacked that nobility: the various cults of devil-worship that arose in places all around the world. Of course, devil worship needs to be clearly defined; after all, the system of theology which clearly defined what an angel was, and what it meant for an angel to be fallen, was not around for much of human history and, even when it was, it was not universally known or accepted. Nonetheless, there is a clear difference between the cults that arose to Jupiter and those that arose to a demon, like Molloch. In the latter, the dark hope was that by violating the most basic principles of humanity, one could somehow be better off; it was a way of, so to speak, cheating the system. There is some evidence that these devilish cults were actually effective, too. When one prayed to Jupiter, there was perhaps some distant hope that one's prayer would be answered. When one prayed to a demon, however, there was almost a kind of certainty to the matter, and that is why these ghoulish practices gained so much property. Of course, when a person did receive a favor, they often regretted it later.

The Pagan attitude towards philosophy helps shed quite a bit of light upon their attitude towards religion. Today, the connection between philosophy and religion is intimate, even if philosophy is sometimes used to undermine religion. In those days, however, the two were seen in utterly separate spheres. When Aristotle deduced the existence of a single, transcendent God, it did not interrupt his life as a worshiper of the Athenian gods; it simply would never have occurred to him, or any of the other Greeks, that he had done anything more than arrive at a philosophical conclusion. At the very least, Aristotle, and his fellow philosophers, did not think it was worthwhile to try to impose their philosophical theories upon the masses. It was common to have a rather elite, condescending view of mankind; many of the great minds simply thought that the foolish tales of the Olympian gods were a good fit for the small minds of the average citizen. Even when philosophers became kings, this view more or less remained dominant and civil religion went out without disruption. The sole exception was the Egyptian king, Akenahten, whose attempts to replace popular region with the sophisticated, if sterile, religion of philosophers was met with violence and rebellion.

The philosophies of the East help clarify the differences between the Eastern and Western views on religion. More precisely, what many today believe to be Eastern religions would be better described as Eastern philosophies. Confucianism is a refined

and enlightened form of agnosticism; Buddhism is really a method more than a theology. Central to Eastern thought is the idea of repetition. The idea that history is constantly repeating itself is prevalent, as are the somewhat pessimistic implications of that idea. There is indeed some significance to the symbols used in the East and West. In the East, the pervasive symbol is the circle, a shape which embodies both the endless cycle of time and the importance of the interior life. The Christian Cross, however, points outwards and, symbolically, breaks free of the confines of the circle and, instead of pointing inwards, points outwards to a truth outside of the believer.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VII: The War of the Gods and Demons

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VII: The War of the Gods and Demons Summary and Analysis

The materialist interpretation of history has become fashionable among professors and scholars. According to this theory, all history—and therefore all human action—can be understood purely and simply in terms of economics. It is easy to show that such a theory is heavily flawed. The mere fact that men need food to live is no proof that they live only for food. Further, such a theory cannot possibly explain the actions of those who explicitly reject life—as is the case, tragically, in those who commit suicide and, heroically, in those who give their lives as martyrs.

This interpretation has been given to the Punic War, the war between Carthage and Rome which nearly erased the latter from history. Carthage was, in many ways, the superior civilization. It was more advanced technologically, it had a robust economy and a mighty army. The national deity of Carthage was quite different from the pleasant, if absurd, pantheon of Roman mythology. The Carthaginians worshiped Molloch, a demon, and their religious practices involved the ritual sacrifice of children. As Carthage marched through Europe and conquered Greece, Spain, and any number of smaller nations, its power only grew. When it finally reached Rome, it did not take long for Rome, by all appearances, to be destroyed. The avaricious financial backers in the capital decided that Hannibal, the army's leader, did not need much more in the way of reinforcement. The situation was totally hopeless for Rome and they could not imagine Rome would resist much longer. They were projecting themselves into the Roman's position; their religion was one of despair and helplessness and so they could not imagine sustaining a fight which defied all odds and logic. Their greed, however, turned out to be their downfall and not only did the Romans take back their own city, they marched through Europe and finally into Africa to ensure that Carthage was annihilated from the Earth.

The Romans cannot be said to be motivated by mere economic advantage; Carthage was, after all, a booming civilization. Though life might be different under Carthaginian rule, it would probably not be uncomfortable. What the Romans could not fathom, however, was to be ruled by devil-worshipers who built their kingdom upon the burnt corpses of their infants. In this chapter of history, at least, the nobility of mankind outshone the corrupted, degenerate lust which historians believe pervades human affairs.

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VIII: The End of the World

Part I: On the Creature Called Man, Chapter VIII: The End of the World Summary and Analysis

Though the good aspects of Roman paganism ought to be credited with the salvation of Europe from the demonic armies of Carthage, as Rome rose to prominence its paganism began to sink into immorality. Though the Roman and Greek cults shared certain similarities—many of the Roman gods were simply renamed versions of the Greek gods—they differed for a long time in certain moral attitudes. In short, the Romans were generally subdued and reserved while the Greeks had become almost lawless in their obedience to their passions. Gradually, this sensuality began to infect the Romans. Two causes can be assigned for this. First, Rome had lost touch with its agrarian roots. There is something about the rural life which makes it simpler and therefore happier than the urban life. The farmer has no greater advocate than Virgil, one of Rome's greatest poets. As the city progressed, however, the farmer became decreasingly important and the focus shifted to the city. Rome lost its agrarian roots and was susceptible to the seduction of Greek eroticism. Further, however worthy Paganism might have seemed in the face of Carthage, it is fundamentally flawed; it cannot permanently hold man's interest. The quaint domestic gods of the hearth will keep their charm only for so long before worshipers begin to look elsewhere.

The Roman politicians invented an ingenious way to deal with what might be a tumultuous religious overhaul: tolerance. In truth, the Roman governors had never been terribly religious to begin with, and did not really care what the people believed in. Their only fear was that some upstart religion would start causing political unrest and thus they laid down the law that any cult whatsoever was allowed, so long as they showed their religious reverence to the Emperor. This condition excited little resentment among Rome's many religions at first. However, news began to surface of a strange Eastern sect, an offshoot of the Jewish religion, which claimed that God was dead but had risen again. At first, there was probably nothing the least bit interesting about it; to claim that God was dead could easily have been a symptom of the pessimism which was engulfing the Empire. What was strange, however, was the demeanor of these followers: They were happy that God had died. After unsuccessfully trying to ignore them, the Roman officials, sensing some vague threat in this new sect, turned to persecution. The nation seemed to be reinvigorated, not with the joy of nature, but with the morbid delight of watching a man be devoured by a lion.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter I: The God in the Cave

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter I: The God in the Cave Summary and Analysis

Just as the first men, or so scientists believe, lived in caves, when God came to the Earth in the form of Jesus Christ, he was born into a cave that was converted in a manger for farm animals. The Incarnation represents a great paradox: the coming of the immense, infinite God into the body of a helpless, finite infant. It also simultaneously vindicates and reconciles the Pagan's simple but imaginative religion with the abstract and theoretical metaphysics of the philosopher. Christ confirmed the Pagan's belief that God is visible and tangible, but he also confirmed that God that is invisible and transcendent. This reconciliation is symbolized by Christ's first visitors: the simple, rural shepherds and the sophisticated, learned Magi from the East. His coming also represented a new worldview which had a largeness that was hitherto unprecedented. It is large in the sense that it can be validly understood from any number of perspectives; there is something in it for each man, but nothing a man might take away from it contradicts the rest. Finally, though it was an unusually expansive doctrine, it was also notable for its exclusive nature: For Christ's passion for inclusion was equaled by his passion for excluding everything that was wicked in the world. The target for this exclusion was the same evil that entered the world through the corrupt forms of Paganism, particularly devil worship, which at that time was increasing its hold over the Mediterranean world as more traditional forms of religion declined.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter II: The Riddles of the Gospel

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter II: The Riddles of the Gospel Summary and Analysis

It is difficult for one, especially someone born in the modern age in a Christianized culture, to try to see the New Testament from the perspective of someone who had never seen it. Not only is it difficult for the obvious reason that they are not familiar with it, but also because there is the temptation always to read the New Testament in a more human—that is, a more diluted—form. Many scholars have set about this task, and thus they commonly claim, for example, that the merciful and loving Christ of the Gospels has been obscured by the harsh, judgmental Christ of the Church. In fact, the opposite is true. The aspect of Christ the Church most commonly presents is Christ the Good Shepherd or the Christ forgiving Peter after his three denials or the Christ who called the Samaritan his neighbor. If one were to read the New Testament with, so to speak, a fresh mind, one would find a quite different story: Christ was often wrathful and indignant, sometimes, it would seem, arbitrarily so. These episodes are less emphasized, and perhaps rightly so—it may be too much for the common person to handle. For in passages Christ denounces Bethsaida as worse than Sodom and prophesies that it will meet an ever grimmer end; he calls Peter Satan; he promises, not peace, but the sword. At other times, Christ's behavior is simply inexplicable, and perhaps in that regard it is most obviously authentic. A clever, if inane, critic might come up with all sorts of theories to explain why Christ rises from the dead—he is a metaphor for the corn harvest, say—but he would be hard-pressed to explain why Christ seems to have done nothing for the thirty years preceding his public ministry.

Critics also like to say that Christ was really a man of his times, teaching a morality that made sense, perhaps, for a Galilean in 20 A.D. but does not make sense for an Englishman in 1920. What the critic does not understand is that if his morality is difficult to accept today, it was equally difficult to accept in his time, for his teaching is striking in that it really bears no trace of its historical situation. Even Aristotle, perhaps the most liberal thinker in history, assumed that slavery, very much a Greek economic practice, figured into a universal theory of man. Mohammad, too, compromised on the doctrine of marriage and allowed men to have four wives, as was the custom in Arabia. If one considers Christ's prophecy that the meek will inherit the Earth or his praise of voluntary celibacy, however, one will find no parallel in his own time. His fellow Galileans were just as outraged as people are today

The first-time reader, then, even if he does not immediately find the Christ as preached by the Catholic Church—and it may well happen that he does not—he certainly not find the Christ described by scholars. n fact, he will likely be startled, perhaps even scared, by the figure he finds in those pages, and in a sense, this is a natural reaction. It is

much better to react strongly, even if negatively, to a figure as powerful and impressive as Christ, than to respond by multiplying a million theories which try to shove Christ back into the background out of which, it is supposed, he emerged.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter III: The Strangest Story in the World

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter III: The Strangest Story in the World Summary and Analysis

Purely considered stylistically—one of the most remote and detached ways one can consider a text, perhaps—the Gospels distinguish both themselves and their main author. First of all, the manner of writing immediately debunks any notion that Christ was a simple teacher perpetuation the values of agrarian lifestyle. His speech is incredibly sophisticated. It is filled with metaphors, similes, and symbolism which is often only partially grasped even after several readings. Both Christ's message and the form of its delivery hint, at the very least, at the claim that he was truly Divine. A claim of that nature should be rather surprising from a man like Christ. Claiming to be God is really nothing new—egomaniacs and lunatics do so all the time. What is rare, however, is for a man who, by all appearances, is at least a very good and sound-minded man, to make that claim. Socrates was one of the wisest and most enlightened in all of Athens and the capstone to his work was that he knew nothing. Christ's work surely suggests virtue, but even if that is contested, it cannot be contested that it suggests intelligence and, if it suggests intelligence, then it also suggests sanity. If it suggests sanity, however, then it is difficult to dismiss his claims to be God—for how could a sane man make such a claim if it were not true?

Christ's existence on Earth may superficially resemble the lives of many great teachers, like Confucius or Socrates. These men were all, in a certain sense, wandering teachers. Christ differs from them in this respect, however: He did not really come to teach, but to fulfill his mission; as it turned out, that mission was to die. Socrates and Confucius, however, really were just teachers and that mission was interrupted, not fulfilled, by their deaths. If one can see a kind of purposelessness in Socrates' roamings, the opposite can be said of Christ. His actions all lead up to their culmination on the Cross and it is curious to note that the propriety of his timing. He arrived precisely when the old world was ending. The great Roman civilization, hitherto the pinnacle of human achievement, was starting to crack. Religion—Jewish and Pagan alike—had rapidly begun to deteriorate and drift away from that initial instinct to find God. It was more than a coincidence, perhaps, that Christ's execution was presided over by representatives of both: Pontius, the Imperial governor, and Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter IV: The Witness of the Heretics

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter IV: The Witness of the Heretics Summary and Analysis

When Christ founded his Church, he described the authority he gave to his Apostles with the metaphor of a key. This metaphor is actually incredibly fitting for the Christian faith. Like a key, the Christian faith promised to unlock the chains that bound mankind to sin. Further, like a key, the Christian faith had a very specific shape which, if it was lost, would compromise the whole. In other words, Christianity was fundamentally committed to the notion of orthodoxy, that every belief had to be just so or the entire system fell apart and it is cause for some wonder that this commitment to orthodoxy was not a development which occurred centuries after its creation; the earliest Christians, even the Apostles themselves, were zealous defenders of orthodoxy.

These defenders of orthodoxy were busy from the start and the doctrinal controversies which faced the early Church help clarify exactly what the Church believed precisely by showing what the Church rejected. This is a useful remedy against the "histories" of modern scholars. Some such scholars claim, for example, that the Catholic Church is committed to an extreme asceticism which denies the goodness of the body and the legitimacy of pleasure. While the Church certainly had—and continues to have—a notion of asceticism, this description fits the Manicheans much more precisely. The Manicheans were an Oriental sect which believed that all of material creation was the act of an evil spirit. As a result, they, at least ideally, abstained from all physical goods insofar as was possible. The Church, especially St. Augustine, railed against them and eventually helped dismantle their religion. Similar stories abound for many controversies that follow. Time and time again the modern professor accuses the Church of believing the very heresies which it vehemently opposed in antiquity; ironically, they also criticize the Church for opposing those heresies—the Church, it would seem, cannot win.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter V: The Escape from Paganism

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter V: The Escape from Paganism Summary and Analysis

Though there is a great variety to be found among the various Pagan religions of the past and the present, there is a kind of general pattern in them which both separates them from Christianity and unifies them under the heading of "heathenism." The difference, chiefly, is the separation between mythology and philosophy, a theme touched upon in some detail in previous chapters. Basically, the Pagan priests and the Pagan philosophers really never met to work out their differences and they never really saw it necessary to meet; they were quite content operating in totally different spheres. The problem is that such a separation is bound to lead to social decay. A mythology without an ethics will devolve into immorality very quickly; a purely intangible philosophy will quickly bore its followers. Christianity is unique in its synthesis of the two. It is not merely an abstract pattern of how the universe should work but it also not an inexplicable, irrational picture like the mythologies of the world; it combines the best elements of both into a religion with a robust theology. This complete picture is the only one which can ultimately satisfy for a person, for philosophy and mythology represent two distinct but equally important drives in man, and Christianity is the first and only religion to ever successfully combine them. It is the only religion to do so because such a task is too much for human ingenuity; the beautiful picture of Christianity is something that had to be revealed.

One need not speculate where Western civilization would have gone had Christianity not saved it from the degenerating Paganism, for Asia provides a perfect picture of civilization that had never been redeemed from Paganism. While there is much that is beautiful, intelligence, and valuable in Asia, it bears the unmistakable mark of its Pagan heritage. To this day, the same separation between faith and reason permeates Asian culture and, like European Paganism, it is an institutional separation. No one tries to reconcile the Hindu myths with Indian philosophy because no one has ever thought that it was worthwhile to do so.

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter VI: The Five Deaths of the Faith

Part II: On the Man Called Christ, Chapter VI: The Five Deaths of the Faith Summary and Analysis

The most peculiar thing about the history of the Church is not merely how long it has existed, but rather the way it has existed over those centuries. In the East, many religions or philosophies have survived for centuries, but their survival is marked by a kind of inertia: Nothing else in Asia changes, and no one wants anything to change, so they seem to survive simply because they exist. In Europe, however, nothing could be less true. From the time of Rome to the present day, its history has been filled with downfalls and revolutions that far outpace any other region of the world. Often, during these periods of upheaval people have predicted that the Church will go away with everything else. In a sense, this is reasonable, for any institution should be consumed in such turmoil and, in another sense, it is actually true, because it often has seemed like the Church has been all but snuffed out. To the amazement, and probably the horror, of these critics, though, the Church always rises from its ashes and is, so to speak, born again.

Conclusion: The Summary of This Book and Appendices

Conclusion: The Summary of This Book and Appendices Summary and Analysis

In the conclusion, Chesterton rewrites the history of the world in the form of a brief myth. In this myth, man is presented as something like a god among the rest of the animals. Though he bears certain external similarities with the other animals, what distinguishes him is his ability to reflect upon those similarities; no other animal has the gift of reason. Through his use of reason, he grasps some notion about an invisible author of the world who has instilled it with some purpose, but this notion is only vague. As an attempt to reach this idea, he creates all kinds of imaginative myths which do sincerely represent a desire to know God, even if they are filled with fanciful fictions. At the same time, the philosophers are writing and reflecting upon the nature of the world, trying to understand the abstract pattern behind it. It is only when God himself visits the world—in the form of Jesus Christ—that these two disparate groups can be reconciled. The church that he founded seemed only in the most superficial ways like the other religious cults which had risen and fallen; in a more important way, it was different from all of them: It gave man a picture of God and a picture of the Universe which could satisfy, at last, both his imagination and his reason. This Church survived through centuries of European upheaval and turmoil, though it often seemed as if it were eradicated, only to rise from the dead.

In the appendices, Chesterton clarifies some points about his views on history and science. He makes it clear that he does not mean to diminish the value or fruitfulness of sciences like anthropology, but rather that he targets those who try to pervert the minds of the uneducated with a biased presentation of the facts.

Characters

Cave-Man

The cave-man is man's supposed primitive ancestor. Very little—at least at the time of this book's writing in the early-20th century—is known about him. Indeed, it is not even certain that he lived in a cave: The mere fact that he sometimes went into a cave is no proof that he lived in one, any more than the fact that a Frenchman sometimes goes into a wine cellar is proof that he lives in one. The lack of evidence is troubling to the anthropologist, who, perhaps jealous of the expansive theories of other sciences, wishes to create one of his own. Somehow, then, the usual standards of science have been thrown to the side. It is completely common, for example, for a scientist to reason that the cave-men had no religion, merely from the fact that none of the three cave drawings that have been discovered show any religious symbol. Of course, one can be a religious artist and not make exclusively religious art and the scientist can hardly be trusted to correctly identify five thousand year old religious symbols anyway: Perhaps the cave-man worshiped the deer he drew.

It is not coincidental that these anthropological theories all confirm the ideologies of their theorists. Scientists are committed to the idea that man is a brute like every other brute, except for the fact that he happens to walk on two legs. Thus, they create all kinds of fictions to prove this like saying that the cave-man would club his wife (or perhaps just the nearest woman) to make her submit to his will with no regard to the utter lack of evidence that such a thing ever happened. However, not only do they draw conclusions where evidence is lacking, they also ignore drawing drawing valid conclusions from what evidence actually exists. The deer drawings discovered in a French cave, for example, clearly show that man, even in that primitive state, possessed the same rational and creative faculties that he possesses today. Yet, since such a fact seems to suggest that there really is a difference between a man and a monkey, scientists are curiously uninterested.

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is, according to Christians, the physical Incarnation of the one God. His coming to the world marks the synthesis of man's natural religious desires, which can be divided into two categories. First, man is an imaginative creature, who wishes to see what he believes. This instinct is the source of the often beautiful and sometimes frightening mythologies which every culture in history has produced, from the Olympian gods of the Greeks to the six-handed gods of the Hindus. Second, man is a rational creature and wishes to understand and conceptualize his beliefs. Prior to the advent of Christianity, this desire was filled (though insufficiently) by philosophy. In the ancient world, philosophy and mythology, though often incompatible, lived uneasily side-by-side. With Christ, the veil between the two was rent: The transcendent God of the philosophers became the tangible God of the myth-makers.

It is fashionable among so-called biblical scholars to deny Christ's divinity but, almost as a kind of consolation prize, praise him for his humane, ethical teaching. The Church, they claim, has sapped Christ's teaching of its humanity and substituted the harsh strictures of a dogmatic theology in its place. If one were to approach the New Testament for the first time, however, he could hardly come to such a conclusion. The Catholic Church, if anything, makes Christ too kind: The Gospel repeatedly presents Christ as a wrathful judge, indignant at the lack of faith he encounters on Earth. It is also absurd to suppose that Christ could be a good man and yet deny his divinity, since claiming to be divine was integral to his message. If Christ claimed to be God but was not, he was not a good man, but a lunatic or at least a vicious liar.

Aristotle

Aristotle was a Greek philosopher who, in Chesterton's estimation, may be the greatest philosopher. Purely through the use of reason, he was able to come to a theoretical understanding of God wholly consistent with the God revealed by Christianity centuries later.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was a medieval philosopher and theologian who synthesized Aristotle's philosophy with Christian revelation.

H.G. Wells

H.G. Wells was a fiction-writer and historian contemporary with Chesterton. Chesterton targets his view of history which downplays the significance of Christianity.

Confucius

Confucius was a Chinese philosopher whose ethical teachings—which often seem more like etiquette than morals—became the belief-system known as Confucianism.

Buddha

Buddha was, according to legend, a noble who left his riches and prestige to live a simple life. His teachings form the basis for the Buddhist religion.

Hannibal

Hannibal was the general who led the Carthaginian armies against Rome.

Akenahten

Akenahten was an Egyptian philosopher and king who tried to force his abstract understanding of God upon his citizens. His attempts were met with violent resistance.

Virgil

Virgil was a Roman poet who praised the virtues of rural life.

Objects/Places

Greece

Greece was one the West's greatest civilizations in antiquity. It produced art and philosophy which retains its value to this day.

Rome

Rome was the apex of Pagan civilization. It rose to prominence after fending off the Carthaginians in the sometimes desperate Punic wars.

Carthage

Carthage was a city in northern Africa which prospered largely on account of its highly efficient and hard-working culture. It was destroyed during the Punic Wars with Rome.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is, according to Chesterton, the living messenger of Christ's Gospel.

Confucianism

Confucianism is the belief-system based on the teachings of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher. It teaches one how to live one's daily life, often with a focus more on etiquette than morality.

Buddhism

Buddhism is an Oriental belief-system based on the teachings of Buddha. According to its doctrines, one achieves happiness—or rather, a kind of blissful oblivion—by eradicating desires.

Islam

Islam is a religion founded by the Prophet Mohammad. Chesterton believes that Islam is a Christian heresy and uses that claim to explain certain similarities between the religions.

Demon Worship

Demon worship is, according to Chesterton, a natural product of Pagan mythologies. People often turned to demon worship out of a feeling that to accomplish something, one had to turn to the darker forces in the world. The Carthaginians worshiped a devil named Molloch.

Philosophy

Philosophy, the love of wisdom, is the method by which pre-Christian men tried to know God through reason.

Arianism

Arianism was a Christian heresy that arose during the fourth and fifth centuries. Its central claim was that Christ was not Divine, but some kind of semi-Divine being.

Themes

Human Nature a Constant Throughout History

Though open to the possibility that Darwin's theory of evolution is a correct explanation of the variety of life on Earth, Chesterton is sharply critical of any notion that the theory of evolution can explain man's spiritual nature. Chesterton believes that man is a kind of animal that is fundamentally different from all other animals, even if there are some basic physical resemblances. Evolution does not, generally speaking, produce stark differences. Even the most peculiar feature of an animal is often found in some recognizable form in another; the strangely shaped snake, for example, turns out to be very similar to other reptiles and even mammals in skeletal structure. Yet, when it comes to human reason, there is no precedent in nature. Art, for example, is a behavior that is intimately bound up with reason and it is found nowhere among the other animals, even in a lesser form. It is not the case that monkeys, say, draw, but draw poorly; rather, they do not draw at all.

What archaeological evidence is available supports Chesterton's claim, though scientists are quick to downplay that fact. While the cave-man is often fictionalized as a brutish, almost bestial semi-human, the only concrete evidence that has been discovered shows a rather different side. His cave drawings of deer, however primitive in style and technique, show the same basic human nature that inspires Rembrandt or da Vinci: taking pleasure in what one's sees and undertaking the challenge to recreate it.

Christianity as the Synthesis of Man's Mythological and Phil

Man has a natural thirst for knowledge of the Divine. Even in the simplest men to ever exist, there is a kind of instinctive knowledge that there is a God, even if that knowledge is often obscure or vague. Indeed, though monotheism is often thought to develop only out of primitive polytheistic religions, there is a significant amount of evidence that suggests that monotheism is really the most basic form of religion. The notion of a single, supreme God can almost be overwhelming to man; at the very least, it can be inaccessible. Man desperately wants to access his God, though, and he tries to reach him with his imagination. Unable to fathom the immensity of God, he instead creates more accessible and less immense gods, figures who are often not unlike himself. They have bodies, they walk around, they eat, and sometimes they even sin.

This mythology leaves another aspect of man unsatisfied, however: his reason. Just as much as man wants to see what he believes, he also wants to understand. Myths are often irrational, or at least non-rational. They paint pretty, sometimes beautiful pictures, but those pictures often make no sense. Thus, in antiquity, the philosopher took it upon himself to attempt to reach God through reason. He actually enjoyed a shocking amount

of success; the God which Aristotle deduced through reason was very much like the God which Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe into this day: supreme, transcendent, omniscient, and, most importantly, one. Yet, this philosophy lacked a certain appeal; it helped, to some extent, satisfy the reason, but it left the heart lonely.

Man's two great religious desires would not, and could not, be satisfied until the advent of Christianity. Christ, by becoming a man, satisfied the imagination of the myth-maker, for here the supreme God was something tangible. He also satisfied the philosopher because he was not merely imagination; he was true. He was the perfect, transcendent, universal God who created the entire university. From the Church he founded would flow vast systems of philosophy and theology which, quite often, drew inspiration from the Pagan philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle.

The Detachment of Catholic Church From Time and Place

In the second part of the book, Chesterton attempts to show how Christianity, specifically Catholic Christianity, is unique among all of the revealed religions of the world. What distinguishes it, among other things, is the fact that it is the recipient of revelation. Pagan mythology never really claimed to be revelation—usually the authority for the myths was claimed to be tradition. In Christianity, however, not only did God make revelations to man, he revealed himself by taking on a human nature and dwelling among men. Chesterton notes that, whether one believes Catholics really to possess a fact or not, their actions certainly indicate that they at least think they do. A person who possesses a fact is inflexible about it and they refuse to admit anything which contradicts it; in the case of Christianity, this is dogma and orthodoxy.

A fact is something which is, in a certain sense, timeless; if something is true, it is true in all times and places. Practically speaking, however, no teachers are really ever timeless. Their teachings almost invariably bear the marks of the city or country or era into which they were born. Thus, even Aristotle, one of the most liberally minded thinkers in human history incorporate the peculiarly Greek form of slavery into his understanding of humanity and ethics. Many have supposed that the Church is no different. When Christianity became the official religion of Rome, many supposed that it was just another Roman fad like the worship of the Sun God; when Rome fell, they predicted, so would Christianity. They were quite naturally shocked to discover that Rome fell but Christianity was as strong as ever, the lone source of light throughout the Dark Ages. As Europe approach the Renaissance, the same predictions were made: The Church is nothing but a Medieval institution that will not survive the winds of progress. Once again, its critics were silenced as their new philosophies and theologies were swept away in the winds of change but Catholicism stood as strong as ever. Such always has been the history of the Church, even to the modern day.

Style

Perspective

Chesterton has no pretense of being an historian or anthropologist and thus is very careful in his approach to criticizing much of the scholarship that takes place in those fields. Thus, he generally does not attempt to present original research and only makes use of facts which are well-known and more or less uncontested. Thus, for example, when he criticizes the anthropologists, he points out simply that they are not following their own standards of scientific honesty; they are creating theories which have no evidential support and ignore evidence that supports theories contrary to their own. Far from disinterested scholarship, Chesterton sees an ideological commitment to denigrating both man and Christianity, and this ideology is his chief target in this book.

Though Chesterton's goal in this book is to defend Christianity in general, he is an unashamed Roman Catholic. This is an important fact to realize, for on this point he surely faced opposition from almost every side. The scientists and historians he attacks were probably atheists and agnostic; at the very least, they were probably not orthodox Christians. However, it is likely he did not have a lot of support from the layperson either. Catholicism was a minority religion in England, a country dominated by the Anglican Church. Catholics were often looked down upon for, among other things, their submission to the authority of the Roman Pope. Thus, while one is reading Chesterton's arguments in this book, his religious situation should always be kept in mind, as it is why he is careful to not overly emphasize his Catholic version of Christian history.

Tone

Chesterton attempts to strike a balance between the sincerity of his belief in the book's primary theses and his awareness of his lack of his credentials: Chesterton is a renowned and respected writer, but he is not trained in philosophy, theology, history, or anthropology, subjects all crucial to the study contained in this book. His strategy for dealing with this lack of education is modesty; he tries not to contradict the facts ascertained by the experts in these fields, but rather the spirit in which they interpret them. For example, when he criticizes anthropologists for unfairly trying to turn the cave-man into a brute, he does not dispute the facts that are known about the cave-man. Instead, he points out how few facts are known about him and criticizes for the anthropologists for making too much out of them.

The book is unquestionably argumentative in nature: He is trying to dispute the claims made by many modern scholars which denigrate both man and the Catholic Church. He is probably not so optimistic as to think his work would have much of an effect on the scholars themselves, who, in all likelihood, are already fairly committed to their views. Instead, he is targeting those educated men who are influenced by their ideas and are,

perhaps, torn between their attachment to Christianity on the one hand and, on the other, keeping up with modern intellectual movements.

Structure

The book is divided into two parts, preceded by an introduction and ended with a conclusion. The two parts of the book represent Chesterton's two man theses. First, he tries to distinguish human nature from animal nature by showing how man's unique desire for Divine knowledge motivates human history. The second part of the book focuses on distinguishing the Christian religion, specifically the Catholic form of Christianity, from all of the various Pagan cults which were prevalent in Pagan Europe and are still found in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere.

Though the book is divided into sections, the two flow easily into one another, since the book is a more or less chronological history of religion. Part one begins with an analysis of how the most primitive man lived, represented by the interesting, if exaggerated, figure of the cave-man. Chesterton points out that the cave-man still has the same fundamental human nature of men today and this is evidenced by his creation of art. However primitive his art was it is still uniquely human and uniquely rational; no other animal draws, even poorly. One of the consequences of man's rational nature is a desire to know God, of whose existence man has an almost instinctive knowledge. Without revealed religion, the notion of a transcendent, single deity is almost too much for man to comprehend and he instead turns to more comprehensible and less exact mythology. He creates gods for himself who are tangible and physical beings; they are not entirely unlike himself. This discussion of mythology and Pagan religious beliefs in general occupy the second half of the first part.

Chesterton's second major thesis, that Christianity, by being revealed religion, is qualitatively different from Pagan, man-made mythologies, is the subject of the second part. The insufficiency of Paganism is dramatized historically with the religious and moral decline of Rome. People had become bored with their myths and began to adopt strange, sometimes diabolic cults. In other groups, religious belief disappeared altogether. Christianity, then, arrived at exactly the right moment. Christianity is uniquely capable of fulfilling man's desires. Mythology is insufficient because it fails to satisfy man's rational nature; philosophy is rational enough, but it is too abstract. The person of Christ embodied both: He was tangible and visible, but he was also transcendent and omnipotent. The final chapters of the book discuss the nature of Christian teaching and, particularly, the unique institutional history of the Catholic Church, which has an unprecedented resiliency.

Quotes

"There are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there. The other is to walk around the whole world till we come back to the same place . . ." (9)

"It is useless to begin by saying that everything was slow and smooth and a mere matter of development and degree. For in the pain matter like the pictures there is in fact not a trace of any such development or degree. Monks did not begin pictures and men finish them; Pithecanthropus did not draw a reindeer badly and Homo Sapiens draw it well. The higher animals did not draw better and better portraits; the dog did not pain better in his best period than in his early bad manner as a jackal; the wild horse was not an Impressionist and the race-horse a Post-Impressionist." (35)

"The trouble with the professor for the prehistoric is that he cannot scrap his scrap. The marvelous and triumphant aeroplane is made out of a hundred mistakes. The student of origins can only make one mistake and stick to it." (41)

"They [the anthropologists] have never put the spirit of youth into their descriptions of the youth of the world. It follows that amid all their primitive or prehistoric fancies there are no jokes. There are not even practical jokes, in connection with the practical inventions. And this is very sharply defined in the particular case of hieroglyphics; for there seems to be serious indication that the whole high human art of scripture or writing began with a joke." (66)

"In short, there is a feeling that there is something higher than the gods; but because it is higher it is also further away. Not yet could even Virgil have read the riddle and the paradox of that other divinity, who is both higher and nearer. For them what was truly divine was very distant, so distant that they dismissed it more and more from their minds." (93)

"The substance of all such paganism may be summarized thus. It is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination alone; in its own field reason does not restrain it at all." (110)

"The gods of mere mythology had a great deal of nonsense about them. They had a great of good nonsense about them; in the happy and hilarious sense in which we talk of the nonsense of Jabberwocky or the Land where Jumblies live. But the man consulting a demon felt as many a man has felt in consulting a detective, especially a private detective; that it was dirty work but the work would really be done." (118)

"Nobody understands the romance of Rome, and why she rose afterwards to a representative leadership that seemed almost fated and fundamentally natural who does not keep in mind the agony of horror and humiliation through which she had continued to testify to the sanity that is the soul of Europe. She came to stand alone in the midst of an empire because she had once stood alone in the midst of a ruin and a

waste. After all that men knew in their hearts that she had been representative of mankind, even she was rejected of men." (150)

"There was nothing left that could conquer Rome; but there was also nothing left that could improve it. It was the strongest thing that was growing weak. It was the best thing that was going to the bad." (162)

"We might well be content to say that mythology had come with the shepherds and philosophy with the philosophers; and that it only remained for them to combine in the recognisation of religion." (179)

"The statement that the meek shall inherit the earth is very far from being a meek statement. I mean it is not meek in the ordinary sense of mild and moderate and inoffensive. To justify it, it would be necessary to go very deep into history and anticipate things undreamed of then and by many unrealised even now; such as the way in which the mystical monks reclaimed the lands which the practical kings had lost. If it was truth at all, it was because it was a prophecy. But certainly it was not a truth in the sense of a truism." (191)

"Now the curious fact is this; that the very heresies which the early Church is blamed for crushing testify to the unfairness for which she is blamed. In so far as something deserved the blame, it was precisely the things that she is blamed for blaming. In so far as something was merely a superstition, she herself condemned that superstition. In so far as something was a mere reaction into barbarism, she herself resisted it because it was a reaction into barbarism. In so far as something was a fad of the fading empire, that died and deserved to die, it was the Church alone that killed it. The Church is reproached for being exactly what the heresy was reproached for being." (222)

"In short, if classic paganism had lingered until now, a number of things might well have lingered with it; and they would look very like what we call the religions of the East." (237)

Topics for Discussion

How does myth-making reflect man's rational nature?

Why does Paganism often leave to devil-worship?

Is Chesterton qualified to make the claims he makes in this book?

How does Christ represent the best parts of mythology and philosophy?

Explain how the literary style of the Gospel contradicts the modernist interpretation.

Do the references to Catholicism undermine this book's effectiveness on a Protestant reader?

Explain the relationship between the theory of evolution and the theories Chesterton criticizes.