

**DRAFT VERSION**

**Day of Study on Chesterton, Thursday April 11, 2019**

***Rome and faith that helps us to be human. Chesterton's Christian humanism***

Rome, April 11, 2019

## **G. K. Chesterton and the Historical Imagination**

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### **Introduction**

*The end of the world was long ago, when the ends of the world waxed free,  
When Rome was laid in a waste of slaves, and Caesar's sun sunk in the sea.*

G. K. Chesterton had the habit of memorizing poetry and then misremembering it, so I feel it is very Chestertonian of me to have created this tagline out of Chesterton's more capacious verses from *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1908):

*Before the gods that made the gods  
Had seen their sunrise pass,  
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale  
Was cut out of the grass.*

*Before the gods that made the gods  
Had drunk at dawn their fill,  
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale  
Was hoary on the hill.*

*Age beyond age on British land,  
Aeons on aeons gone,  
Was peace and war in western hills,  
And the White Horse looked on.*

*For the White Horse knew England  
When there was none to know;  
He saw the first oar break or bend,  
He saw heaven fall and the world end,  
O God, how long ago.*

*For the end of the world was long ago,  
And all we dwell to-day  
As children of some second birth,  
Like a strange people left on earth  
After a judgment day.*

***For the end of the world was long ago,  
When the ends of the world waxed free,***

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*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 hearkened right  
Could only hear the plunging  
Of the nations in the night.*

G.K. Chesterton's historical imagination might be summed up in these brief lines:

*The end of the world was long ago, when the ends of the world waxed free,  
When Rome was laid in a waste of slaves, and Caesar's sun sunk in the sea.*

G. K. Chesterton, born in 1874 and a nationally and internationally renowned journalist by World War I (1914-1918), converted to Catholicism in 1922. Three years later he published an ambitious book, a history of Western Civilization entitled *The Everlasting Man* (1925). The book was clearly written to counter H. G. Wells's influential attempt at the same project, *The Outline of History* (1920). Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* was divided into two parts: section one, dealing with human history up to the coming of Christ, and section two, dealing with human history since the coming of Christ. The first section begins with the first evidence of man, the cave drawings, and is entitled "Man in the Cave," while the second section begins with Christ's birth in the stable in Bethlehem and is entitled "God in the Cave."

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The centerpiece of Chesterton's historical imagination is Rome--the history of Rome as a chrysalis for the coming of Christianity. Chesterton literally refers to Rome's defeat of Carthage, or--better put--Rome's annihilation of Carthage, following Cato's dictum "*Cartago delenda est*, Carthage must be destroyed"--as "**what really happened in the Mediterranean.**"<sup>1</sup> The rise of the Roman republic through its struggle against Phoenician Carthage was crucial in Chesterton's imagination to the creation of "the health in the heathen world." It is a phrase he repeats--"the heathen health of the world"--the existence of a natural religiosity that became the good soil for the Gospel, the two-fold culture that formed the shepherds and the Magi who worship the Christ in the scene of Bethlehem. Similarly, the fall of the Roman empire was, in Chesterton's imagination, like unto the very fall of Man; it was, as the chapter title that closes part one proclaims, "The End of the World," the sign of the insufficiency of the natural and the need for supernatural rescue from outside of human history.

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "War of Gods and Demons," *The Everlasting Man* (1925 Dodd, Mead, and Co.; San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1993), 142.

## Part I. Ye Olde Spengler-Toynbee Debate about The Decline of the West

Before digging deeper into this miniature portrait of Chesterton's historical imagination, let us pause to reflect on the state of historical imagination today. What does Chesterton contribute to the current state of historical reflection, particularly historical reflection on Western Civilization? We all know that the teaching of Western Civ courses in universities has been largely abandoned as unpolitically correct, not inclusive, culturally hegemonic and hubristic, etc. And even when the teaching of Western Civilization holds on in certain enclaves it tends to be taught with textbooks which cannot escape the materialist, evolutionary, progressive narrative, which books such as H.G. Wells's *Outline of History* pioneered at the very beginnings of the modern, professionalized, academic discipline of history in the 1880s and the creation of Civ courses in the 1920s. Simon Schama's new post-modern *Civilizations* (plural) series for BBC, which aims to displace the BBC's 1969 *Civilisation* (singular) series that Sir Kenneth Clark made for the Greatest Generation of the World War II era, is evidence of the extreme difficulty that moderns have with finding a center to the story of civilization.

For example, Simon Schama's episode entitled "Radiance" disintegrates into a celebration of color, color, and nothing but color--whether it is the colors of the stained glass windows of Amiens and Chartres, or the colors of a Japanese print, or the colors of the Hindu spring festival. Color, Schama tells us, is one of the values of *Civilizations* (plural). And he stands in awe of it.

Without a definition of the nature of man derived from philosophical anthropology, or a coherent understanding of what a just social order would look like derived from political philosophy, "Civilization" as a historical subject disintegrates into meaningless and contradictory affirmations. The story has no center.

Both Benedict XVI and Josef Pieper (a German philosopher and psychologist who spent time in a Nazi prison, and the man who introduced Cardinal Karol Wotyla to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) have neatly diagnosed the modern impasse with regard to how we pass on our own history to the next generation.

As Benedict XVI put it in his historical essay, "The Spiritual Roots of Europe":

There are two opposing diagnoses on the possible future of Europe. On the one hand, there is the thesis of Oswald Spengler [given in his own attempt at a universal history of civilizations, his 1922 book *The Decline of the West*], who believed that he had identified a natural law for the great moments in cultural history: first came the birth of a culture, then its gradual rise, flourishing, slow decline, aging, and death. Spengler argued his thesis with ample documentation, culled from the history of cultures, that demonstrated the law of the natural life cycle. His thesis was that the West would come to an end, and that it was rushing heedlessly toward its demise, despite every effort to stop it [this was written in the immediate aftermath of World War I and seems prescient even today as a diagnosis of just how seriously European history has been impacted by that internal conflict]. Europe could of course bequeath its gifts to a new emerging culture--following the example set by previous cultures

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during their decline--but as a historical subject its life cycle had effectively ended.<sup>2</sup>

Spengler's diagnosis, that Western civilization/European culture had effectively ended its life cycle, easily lends itself to the abolition of Western Civilization into courses and European history requirements, and the proliferation of non-Western offerings in African, Asian, and Latin American history. At the very least, taking into account the idea that "Europe could of course bequeath its gifts to a new emerging culture," American history would predominate over the study of ancient or medieval European history.

Ratzinger continues:

Spengler's "biologistic" thesis attracted fierce opponents during the period between the two wars, especially in Catholic circles. Arnold Toynbee reserved harsh words for it, in arguments too readily ignored today [Toynbee's *A Study in History* was published from 1947 to 1957]. Toynbee emphasized the difference between technological-material progress and true progress, which he defined as spiritualization. He recognized that the Western world was indeed undergoing a crisis, which he attributed to the abandonment of religion for the cult of technology, nationalism, and militarism [what the American cultural critic Henry Adams famously called the struggle between "The Virgin and the Dynamo," or George Weigel recently described as the contrast between *The Cube and the Cathedral*]. For him [Toynbee] this crisis had a name: secularism.

If you know the cause of the illness, you can also find a cure: the religious heritage in all its forms had to be reintroduced, especially the "heritage of Western Christianity." Rather than a biologistic vision, he [Toynbee] offers a voluntaristic one focused on the energy of creative minorities and exceptional individuals.<sup>3</sup>

What Ratzinger/Benedict XVI was pointing out was that one either believed, like Spengler, that human civilization is multiple--plural--and that Western Civilization, or Christendom, is one culture among many, that has had its rise, and will have its fall--may indeed have already experienced its fall--and this is the natural, inevitable, and irreversible life cycle of civilizations, or you surmise with Toynbee--and Chesterton--that there is in fact one unified human story, that that story runs through Rome and Christianity, that Christian culture is *sui generis*, that there is "something solid in the solitary and unique character" of human history that sets it apart from natural and animal evolution, as well as "something solid in the solitary and unique character" about Europe's history, Christianity's history, that sets it apart from the cyclical rise-and-fall of other cultures and cults. As

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Spiritual Roots of Europe," *Without Roots* (NY: Basic Books, 2006). 67.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Spiritual Roots of Europe," *Without Roots* (NY: Basic Books, 2006). 67-68.

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Remi Brague has put it, Western culture has been subject to renaissances.<sup>4</sup> As Chesterton more colloquially put it, Western culture “has the jumps.”<sup>5</sup>

To put the unpolitically correct point bluntly: once upon a Spenglerian time there was shifting mirage of cultures subject to the rise-and-fall cycle--the Minoans, Myceneans, Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Mayans, Incas, Aztecs, etc.. But one civilization rose--Rome--and at its peak, before its fall, became the chrysalis of a new Christian culture, the locus of an encounter between natural man and the supernatural that is now a recurring feature of human civilization. This encounter is the point and heart of the human story.

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The end of Rome was the end of a world, the end of the rise-and-fall of cultures plural, perpetually destroyed like galaxies crashing in the night. Both Benedict XVI and G. K. Chesterton point us towards “the creative minorities and extraordinary individuals” who prepare the way for the next encounter, the next renaissance, the next resurrection of civilization. In Chesterton’s story, the shepherds and the Magi stand as layers of the “heathen health of the world” that were able to receive the impulse when it came.

### Part II. Pieper on the Christian view of history

Josef Pieper, describes “the Christian view of history” as having a “tense, and at the same time, extremely spacious structure.” The Christian view of history is tense because “the current present is construed as the era more or less immediately preceding the dominion of the Antichrist” and the “end of time [is] explicitly conceived as catastrophic.” On the other hand, the Christian view of history is spacious in that Rome is seen as “the last” empire, and we have been living in this last era for quite some time and have shown an “incomparable power of building and founding.”<sup>6</sup>

The tension in the Christian view of history arises from a distinction between “the intra-historical and extra-temporal end-situations.” The end of history can be viewed as both the finish in the sense of the mere cessation of time and the fulfillment or culmination of all the forces of history. The end can be conceived as both *finis* and *telos*. Christians accept “the catastrophic character of the intra-historical end, upon which, as a deliverance, the extra-temporal end ensues.” For the Christian, the finish within time has a manifestly catastrophic character, the character of an Armeggedon, characterized by rule by the Antichrist, persecution and martyrdom. Yet, the extra-temporal end--the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, the consummation of all things in Christ and the transfiguring of all good works into their effective completion in the Kingdom of God, the governance of the saints in glory--is equally affirmed.

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<sup>4</sup> Remi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization or Europe: The Roman Way*/ French: *La Voie Romaine* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> G. K. Chesterton, Chapter 9 “Authority and the Adventurer,” *Orthodoxy*.

<sup>6</sup> Josef Pieper, *The End of Time: A Meditations on the Philosophy of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 84-85.

Pieper affirms that the “highly intricate structure of this conception of history...answers to the intricate, indeed mysterious, structure of historical reality.”

Pieper contrasts this Christian view of history with the absence of tension in the progressive view launched by Kant and the absence of spaciousness in the existentialist-nihilistic view of Nietzsche. The tense-yet-spacious Christian view of history “dissolves” into the mere optimism of the progressive modern historical narrative or the mere pessimism of the nihilistic, post-modern rejection of all coherent historical narrative.

Pieper’s notion of the tense-yet-spacious Christian view of history, like Benedict XVI’s, leaves room for “creative minorities and extraordinary individuals” who remain good soil for the encounter with the supernatural, who prepare the way for renaissance and rescue from outside of history, those for whom catastrophe is fulfillment.

### **Part III. Who were the Shepherds? Who were the Magi? Or “On Hobbits and Wizards”**

Let us now turn to examine Chesterton’s historical imagination more fully as it unfolds in *The Everlasting Man* to see what light he sheds on these considerations from Benedict XVI and Josef Pieper.

There is a certain sense in which Chesterton’s *Everlasting Man* is primarily a Christmas book. Chesterton had previously written beautiful essays on English Christmases, Dickensian Christmases, and the philosophy of the gift. In *The Everlasting Man*, the pivotal chapter, the piece-de-resistance is the chapter entitled “The God in the Cave” which completes part one and introduces part two. In many ways, the second half of *Everlasting Man* simply recovers historical ground Chesterton had already interpreted in his 1908 pre-conversion apologia for Christianity, *Orthodoxy*. Part two covers the history of Christianity as *Orthodoxy* had in the marvelous chapters “Paradoxes of Christianity” and “The Eternal Revolution.” Chesterton had already made the case for a history of Christendom that was subject to renaissances. Chesterton’s majestic image of Christian orthodoxy as a chariot reeling through the centuries, swerving left and right, but always maintaining its course stands in perfectly for a synopsis of Chesterton’s history of the world since Christ.

What is new to *The Everlasting Man* is Chesterton’s account of the nativity scene as the culmination of ancient, classical culture. The marvelous chapter in part one, “Man and Mythologies,” prepares an introduction to the Shepherds. The following chapter, “The Demons and the Philosophers,” prepares the way for a new look at the Magi and Herod’s massacre of the Innocents. The threads that Chesterton had carefully prepared and woven together in the story of the Rise of the Roman Republic through its conflict with Carthage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in a mess of debauchery and philosophic detachment come together in his delightful description of the Christmas scene. It might seem a platitude to say that Chesterton’s historical imagination is dominated by the moment of transition from B.C. to A.D.--from Before Christ to Anno Domini. Christmas, placed squarely in the middle of the Roman Millenia, from 500 B.C. the rise of the Republic to 500 A.D. the last of the Western Emperors, gives heart and meaning to it all.

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Chesterton does not just rest on the scriptural infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke--the Davidic lineage, annunciation to Joseph, and the stories of the Magi's visit, Herod's massacre of the Innocents, and flight into Egypt in Matthew's Gospel, alongside of the priestly lineage, annunciation to Mary and Zechariah, and the stories of the Visitation, Presentation, and Finding of Jesus in the Temple in Luke's Gospel. Rather, Chesterton appeals to tradition--"the democracy of the dead"--to the way that the nativity scene has been told and re-told each Christmas--"the popular presentation of this popular story in so many miracle plays and carols." The paradox of Christmas--the extraordinary contrast between cosmic deity and little, local infancy "has been," Chesterton notes, "repeated, reiterated, underlined, emphasised, exulted in, sung, shouted, roared, not to say howled, in a hundred thousand hymns, carols, rhymes, rituals, pictures, poems, and popular sermons." Chesterton insists that Christmas is something new in human history, a combination of ideas which "has emphatically...altered human nature." Christmas has created "a psychological difference which can outlast any theologies."<sup>7</sup>

It is no more inevitable to connect God with an infant than to connect gravitation with a kitten. It has been created in our minds by Christmas because we are Christians; because we are psychological Christians even when we are not theological ones.<sup>8</sup>

In some sense, Chesterton here claims that Christian culture is essentially Christmas culture; the human civilization that flows forth from Christianity's Incarnational core. He gives point to all those local struggles of Christians to "Keep Christ in Christmas" or maintain public nativity scenes in neighborhoods and town halls.

For him [the Christian] there will always be some savour of religion about the mere picture of a mother and baby; some hint of mercy and softening about the mere mention of the dreadful name of God.<sup>9</sup>

If Chesterton were ever to be made a doctor of the Church, he might be called the Doctor of Christmas for his effort to plumb the meaning of the centuries long traditions of festivity. "Omnipotence and impotence, divinity and infancy, do definitely make a sort of epigram which a million repetitions cannot turn into a platitude."

What, for Chesterton, are the elements that make up this central scene in human history? Who are the Shepherds? Who are the Magi?

The Shepherds represent the mythmakers of classical antiquity. All those who sought to find some outlet to the human need and desire to worship. "The crux and crisis is that man found it natural to worship." "Sometimes it would seem that the Greeks believed above all things in reverence, only they had nobody to revere." Kneeling in reverence, raising hands in supplication expressed a need and became everywhere in the ancient world "a normal and necessary action." "The substance of all such paganism may be summarised thus: it is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination." "Mythology sought God through the imagination; or sought truth by means of beauty."

The most simple people have the most subtle ideas...Ignorant as a child is, he knows more than he can say and feels not only atmospheres but fine shades...Nobody can

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<sup>7</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "The God in the Cave," *The Everlasting Man*, 175, 169-171.

<sup>8</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "The God in the Cave," *The Everlasting Man*, 170.

<sup>9</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "The God in the Cave," *The Everlasting Man*, 170.

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understand it who has not had what can only be called the ache of the artist to find some sense and some story in the beautiful things he sees; his hunger for secrets and his anger at any tower or tree escaping with its tale untold. He feels that nothing is perfect unless it is personal. Without that the blind unconscious beauty of the world stands in its garden like a headless statue. One need only be a very minor poet to have wrestled with the tower or the tree until it spoke like a titan or a dryad. It is often said that pagan mythology was a personification of the powers of nature. The phrase is true in a sense, but it is very unsatisfactory; because it implies that the forces are abstractions and the personifications are artificial. Myths are not allegories...The impersonation is not of something impersonal...The imaginative does not mean imaginary...Every true artist does feel, consciously or unconsciously, that he is touching transcendental truths; that his images are the shadows of things seen through a veil. In other words, the natural mystic does know that there is something there; something behind the clouds or within the trees; but he believes that the pursuit of beauty is the way to find it; that imagination is a sort of incantation that can call it up.

Chesterton is insistent that “we do not know what we ourselves mean when we are moved” by beautiful images or beautiful stories. “Very deep things in our nature” are touched. Artistic “correspondences seem really to correspond to something in the soul”-- possibly, for example, “some dim sense of the dependence of great things upon small, some dark suggestion that the things nearest to us stretch far beyond our power, some sacramental feeling of the magic of material substances.” “Beauty and terror are very real things and related to a real spiritual world; and to touch them at all, even in doubt or fancy, is to stir deep things in the soul.”

Chesterton suggests that the gods and myths of the Latins maintained somehow the essence of this spirit of mythology by remaining local--the gods of the hearth, the lares and penates of a particular family. Chesterton posits that “imaginative impressions are often strictly local,” a reverence for a particular tree or grove, a particular mountain or spring. Particular things touched the soul with a sense of mystery--with doubts and fancies--but remained in that realm. These are what T. S. Eliot refers to in his *Four Quartets* as “hints and guesses, hints followed by guesses.” “Pagan or primitive myths are infinitely suggestive,” Chesterton writes, “so long as we are wise enough not to inquire what they suggest.” Pagan mythology satisfied some of the needs of the religious soul of man--for festivity in the seasons, and names to local habitations--a sense of the sacredness of place and of time, of here and of now--and for sacrifice: “the idea of surrendering something as the portion of the unknown powers.”

This was “the health of the heathen world.” These mythmakers were the shepherds, the pagans, the peasants, those attached to farm and locality, seasons and the rhythm of births and harvests. These were present, in Chesterton’s telling, in Bethlehem:

Men of the people, like the shepherds, men of the popular tradition, had everywhere been the makers of mythologies. It was they who had felt most directly, with least check or chill from philosophy or the corrupt cults of civilization, the need we have already considered; the images that were the adventures of the imagination; the mythology that was a sort of search; the tempting and tantalizing hints of something half-human in nature; the dumb significance of seasons and special places. They had best understood that the soul of a landscape is a story and the soul of a story is a



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personality. But the rationalism had already begun to rot away these really irrational though imaginative treasures of the peasant; even as a systematic slavery had eaten the peasant out of house and home. Upon all such peasantries everywhere there was descending a dusk and a twilight of disappointment, in the hour when these few men discovered what they sought. Everywhere Arcadia was fading from the forest. Pan was dead and the shepherds scattered like sheep. And though no man knew it, the hour was near which was to end and to fulfil all things; and though no man heard it, there was one far-off cry in an unknown tongue upon the heaving wildness of the mountains. The shepherds had found their Shepherd.<sup>10</sup>

Chesterton notes that the great medieval miracle plays dressed the shepherds and the landscape of Bethlehem in the garb of the English and European countryside. All peasants, all mythmaking men of all times and places were present at the nativity in the person of the Shepherds. The encounter of this natural piety and natural artistry of man with Christ becomes a perpetual feature of Christian civilization. The great English renaissance and Baroque poets “turn their Bethlehem play into a Latin Eclogue,” placing the nativity in a scene from the pastoral poetic tradition. Chesterton suggests that in doing so “they took up one of the most important links in human history.” He also suggests that “the Catholic Church has taken over with uproarious success the whole of this popular business of giving people local legends and lighter ceremonial movements.” Christianity fulfills rather than destroys the natural religiosity of mankind.

It is central to Chesterton’s story that this “saner heathenism” had already been threatened by “the insane heathenism of human sacrifice” and had come through victorious. Mankind won a significant victory in the dark night before the light of Christ dawned. That iconic victory, Chesterton says, was the victory of Rome over Carthage in the Punic Wars.

It was Moloch upon the mountain of the Latins, looking with his appalling face across the plain; it was Baal who trampled the vineyards with his feet of stone; it was the voice of Tanit the invisible, behind her trailing veils, whispering of the love that is more horrible than hate. The burning of Italian cornfields, the ruins of Italian vines, were something more than actual; they were allegorical. They were the destruction of domestic and fruitful things...The household gods bowed ow in darkness...The war of the gods and demons seemed already ended; and the gods were dead.

For Chesterton, the Romans in the struggle against Hannibal of Carthage were one of the original lost causes. The miracle is that they maintained their resistance for as long as they did:

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.

It is crucial for Chesterton’s vision that the Carthaginians were a very advanced material and technological and commercial culture. Indeed, they were a merchant empire that could not comprehend the allegiance of Rome’s political allies and relied almost entirely on a mercenary army. It is crucial for Chesterton’s vision that the greatest general of the Carthaginians, Hannibal, was defeated because the leaders resisted the cost of sending him reinforcements. In Chesterton’s

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<sup>10</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “The God in the Cave,” *The Everlasting Man*, 174.

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vision this highly commercial and practical culture, turned to a “realistic superstition”--a superstition that is not the mythological searching after the truth and mystery of things, but rather “another sort of superstition that does definitely look for results,” “the idea of employing the demons who get things done.” Child sacrifice is a kind of deadly and efficient exchange, a tit for tat, I give you this so that you give me that. Precisely the kind of religion a trading community would envision.

In his discussion of Carthage’s child sacrifice Chesterton returns to an idea that runs through much of his work. It is an idea that is especially apparent in the introductory chapters of his books about St. Francis and St. Thomas, when he talks about the need to purge the decadent classical culture of its addiction to sodomy. It is the idea of the all-too knowing commitment of evil. Chesterton has the idea that beyond the natural weaknesses and sins of human nature, there is a temptation to deliberately commit evil as a key to gaining power over dark forces. “With the appeal to lower spirits comes the horrible notion that the gesture must not only be very small but very low...Sooner or later a man deliberately sets himself to do the most disgusting thing he can think of. It is felt that the extreme of evil will extort a sort of attention or answer from the evil powers under the surface of the world.” Perversion, the reversal of natural forces, “violence against instinct,” is seen as the key to power. Perversion is chosen, not out of weakness, but out of lust for dominion. “They are not doing it because they do not think it wrong, but precisely because they do think it wrong.” Human sacrifice, cannibalism, sodomy are not the sins of weakness or the crimes of backward cultures. “They are refined and intelligent enough to indulge sometimes in a self-conscious diabolism.” “They are working backwards against their own nature and the nature of things.”<sup>11</sup>

Chesterton even goes so far as to see a parallelism between the ancient Hebrews and the Roman republicans. “Elijah raving above the slaughter of Carmel or Cato thundering against the amnesty of Africa...were at one in what they hated.”

[In the interests of time, I must postpone my discussion of Chesterton’s treatment of the Magi and Herod’s massacre of the innocents.]

### **Conclusion: So it matters, whether or not we think Carthage sacrificed her children**

Just as in the twentieth-century, it matters crucially for how one tells the story of modern history, whether or not the Holocaust happened, it matters crucially for how one tells the story of ancient history, whether or not the Carthaginians sacrificed their children to the god Baal and his consort goddess Tanit. We can discuss whether the Dresden bombing and the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were unjust means in a fundamentally just war to stop the world-wide takeover by a totalitarian, genocidal Axis. We can discuss whether the annihilation of Carthage and the selling of its entire people into slavery were unjust means in a fundamentally just war against the spread of a culture that lacked the most fundamental respect for the dignity of innocent human life. But the existence of the Holocaust and the existence of child sacrifice legitimately calls forth righteous anger and a heroic defense of human civilization against the forces of barbarism.

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<sup>11</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “The Demons and the Philosophers,” *The Everlasting Man*, 119, 120.

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One hundred years after G.K. Chesterton and H.G. Wells crossed swords over the meaning of history and the meaning of the Roman destruction of Carthage, the debate still rages. One group of scholars insists that this was merely a geo-political, economic rivalry, the replacing of one superpower in the Mediterranean with another, that the spoils of war fought for were amphora of olives and wine, that the so-called tophit of Carthage was a mere child cemetery, that tales of human sacrifice is part of a Black Legend invented as a hate smear campaign by Roman writers. The other group of equally talented and credentialed scholars insists that the archeological, epigraphical, and literary sources are overwhelmingly in favor of the real existence of child sacrifice in Carthage as in Tyre and Sidon as in Peru.

Chesterton's historical imagination centers on the Christmas scene. He finds there the perennial elements that make for the movement of history towards catastrophic *finis* and outside-of-time *telos*. He finds the creative minority of the Shepherds and the extraordinary individuals of the Magi whose embrace of the God-child constitutes the very fulfillment of human history, despite the catastrophic massacre of the Innocents by Herod. At every moment of history one can discern this paradoxical structure, both tense and spacious: a hidden culture of life receiving immortal confirmation, while a culture of death seems manifestly triumphant.

In the 1980s, when Mother Theresa visited the United States, she commented on the peculiar poverty that she found in a First World country. "It is a poverty," she said, "that a child must die, so that you may live as you wish." In the 1980s, the culture of death in America primarily centered around the legalization of contraception and abortion. Since then the multi-million dollar IVF industry, multiplying sperm banks, egg donors, and frozen fetuses has taken the culture of death to a new level. "It is a poverty that a child must die, so that you may live as you wish." Certainly the perennial figure of Herod and the Massacre of the Innocents is with us. May we not be lacking in Shepherds and Magi.