

EXCERPT

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## *The Everlasting People* G. K. Chesterton and the First Nations

December 14, 2021 | \$20, 184 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0032-8

"Matthew Milliner's careful exploration of Native American history and current circumstances draws unexpected inspiration from the works of G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton, who made only two short visits to the United States, turns out to have addressed themes that for Milliner illuminate Indigenous experience with unusual force. Art, history, contemporary reflection, and theology combine to make this a work of rare and sparkling insight."

Mark Noll, author of *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*

## Chesterton and Contentment

G. K. Chesterton was not only the Apostle of Common Sense, as he is often called, but the Apostle of Contentment—tutoring us to love our own land, nations, homes, food, friends, and families. By such counsel he does not intend us to turn a blind eye to injustice, as might a lesser localist. "It is not strange that our workers should often think about rising above their position, since they have so continually to think about sinking below it." By counseling the love of lowly things, Chesterton was instead criticizing the restless modern striving for more. By *contentment* Chesterton has in mind the French meaning of the term, of simply "being pleased."

It may be true that a particular man, in his relation to his master or his neighbour, to his country or his enemies, will do well to be fiercely unsatisfied or thirsting for an angry justice. But it is not true, no sane person can call it true, that man as a whole in his general attitude towards the world, in his posture towards death or green fields, towards the weather or the baby, will be wise to cultivate dissatisfaction.

Such contentment is "an active virtue . . . not only affirmative, but creative. . . . It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare." And such contentment can bring into admirable focus the places where we live: "The young genius says, 'I have lived in my dreary and squalid village before I found success in Paris or Vienna.' The sound philosopher will answer, 'You have never lived in your village, or you would not call it dreary and squalid.'"

Chesterton's point was driven home for me one evening in Oxford, which I was enjoying with students on a study-abroad excursion. After our mandatory C. S. Lewis tour of the city, my family and I made our way with two students to The Eagle and Child, which once hosted the Inklings, who, of course, knew their G. K. Chesterton well. We opened the door to see a crowd of Americans like ourselves seeking the same experience staring back at us, and we retired to a café next door for a cheaper and less crowded meal. At that meal we concluded the obvious—that the Oxford of the Inklings was not our Oxford. After all, one block away at the Ashmolean Museum we had just seen a prized Native American artifact, prominently on display since 2017. Powhatan's mantle (c. 1600–1638) had been given to the English by the man who was Pocahontas's father. We had also passed the Pitt Rivers Museum, which, I was soon to learn at a NAIITS conference, still retains the family treasures of a Christian Haida woman who wants them back. Looking back on that rainy evening in Oxford, it was as if these famous Christian intellectuals of Europe, so many of them inspired by Chesterton, were telling us to go home and examine our own history instead. If Chesterton advises us to attend to our own homes and histories, grappling with Indigenous North American culture (and its suppression) is an inevitable consequence for any North Americans who wish to take him seriously. In short, Chesterton would wish us contentment at our own hearthstones, but without forgetting those whose hearthstones were taken from them.

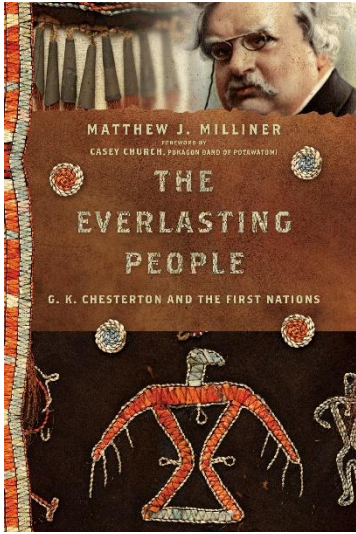
The theme of contentment is explored in Chesterton's 1912 novel *Manalive*, but perhaps best in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, written in 1904 but set in 1884. Chesterton imagines a democracy drained of any meaning and run by a humorist, Auberon Quin, elected by lot—a "man whose soul has been emptied of all pleasures but folly." Quin revives medieval banners for the sport of it, but local loyalist Adam Wayne, a resident of the London neighborhood of Notting Hill, takes



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the joke with deadly resolve. An Indigenous American connection here might seem far-fetched, but it is Chesterton himself that makes it. At the start of the novel, an Indigenous Central American character—the unseated president of Nicaragua—complains about imperialism:

When you say you want all peoples to unite, you really mean that you want all peoples to unite to learn the tricks of your people. If the Bedouin Arab does not know how to read, some English missionary or schoolmaster must be sent to teach him to read, but no one ever says, “This schoolmaster does not know how to ride a camel; let us pay a Bedouin to teach him.”

Later in the novel, when the young Adam Wayne defends his territory valiantly, we can see why two astute critics recently suggested that *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is a “a novel for the era of Standing Rock.”

Adam takes King Quin’s Charter of Cities seriously, just as the Potawatomi took the Treaty of Chicago seriously, and therefore sued for the land that was not ceded in that treaty—namely, a strip of landfill from the Chicago Fire known now as the Gold Coast. In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Adam Wayne is offered a staggering sum to enable a highway to be built through his neighborhood, but the money is refused. The would-be purchasers complain that Wayne “pleads the inviolate sanctity of Notting Hill and calls it the Holy Mountain.” And in the same way, the American government—after the Supreme Court acknowledged that the Black Hills were indeed stolen—has attempted to settle with the Lakota for seizing them. Like Adam Wayne, they will not take the money. In short, when we read Chesterton’s first novel as if it were a Western, many things fall into place.

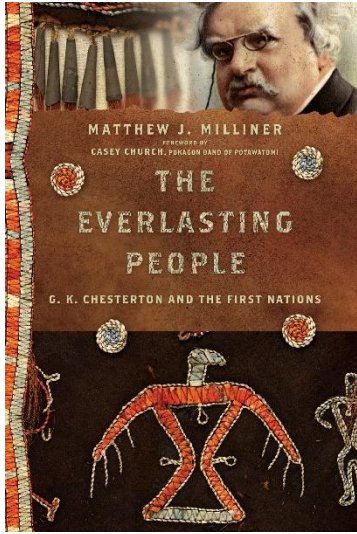
—Taken from chapter two, “The Cost of Chicago”



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## DETAILS



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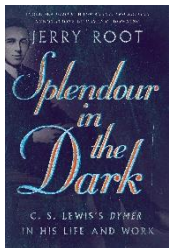
How might the life and work of Christian writer G. K. Chesterton shed light on our understanding of North American Indigenous art and history? In these discerning reflections, art historian Matthew Milliner appeals to Chesterton's life and work in order to understand and appreciate both Indigenous art and the complex, often tragic history of First Nations peoples.

## The Hansen Lectureship Series from InterVarsity Press

The Hansen Lectureship Series features reflections related to the imaginative work and lasting influence of seven British authors, including C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, and Dorothy L. Sayers. The books in the series are based on the Ken and Jean Hansen Lectureship, an annual lecture series hosted at the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, named in honor of former Wheaton College trustee Ken Hansen and his wife, Jean, and endowed in their memory by Walter and Darlene Hansen. Each book includes three lectures by a Wheaton College faculty member on one or more of the Wade Center authors, with responses by fellow faculty members.

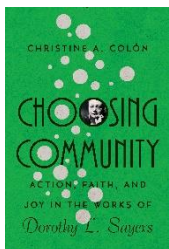
Founded in 1965, the Marion E. Wade Center houses a major research collection of writings and related materials by and about seven British authors: Owen Barfield, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams. The Wade Center collects, preserves, and makes these resources available to researchers and visitors through its reading room, museum displays, educational programming, and publications. All of these endeavors are a tribute to the importance of the literary, historical, and Christian heritage of these writers.

Titles in the Hansen Lectureship Series include



**Splendour in the Dark: C. S. Lewis's *Dymer* in His Life and Work** by Jerry Root  
November 3, 2020, 256 pages, 978-0-8308-5375-5

Several years before he converted to Christianity, C. S. Lewis published a narrative poem, *Dymer*, which not only sheds light on the development of his literary skills but also offers a glimpse of his intellectual and spiritual growth. Including the complete annotated text of Lewis's poem, this volume helps us understand both Lewis's change of mind and our own journeys of faith.



**Choosing Community: Action, Faith, and Joy in the Works of Dorothy L. Sayers** by Christine A. Colón  
October 15, 2019, 152 pages, 978-0-8308-5374-8

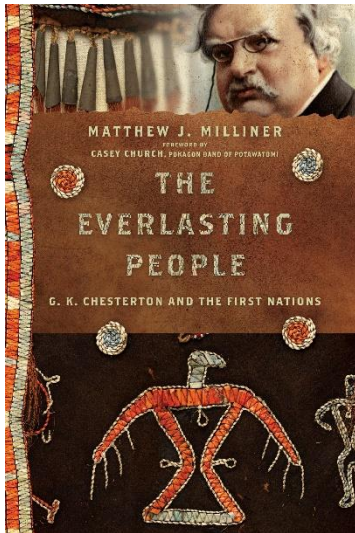
Few writers in the twentieth century were as creative and productive as Dorothy L. Sayers, the English playwright, novelist, and poet. In this volume in the Hansen Lectureship Series, Christine Colón explores the role of community in Sayers's works. In particular, she considers how Sayers offers a vision of communities called to action, faith, and joy, and she reflects on how we also are called to live in community together.



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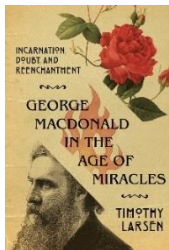
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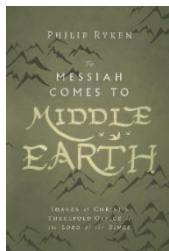
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**George MacDonald in the Age of Miracles: Incarnation, Doubt, and Reenchantment** by Timothy Larsen  
 November 20, 2018, 150 pages, 978-0-8308-5373-1

Timothy Larsen considers the legacy of George MacDonald, the Victorian Scottish author and minister who is best known for his pioneering fantasy literature. Larsen explores how MacDonald sought to counteract skepticism, unbelief, naturalism, and materialism and to herald instead the reality of the miraculous, the supernatural, the wondrous, and the realm of the spirit.



**The Messiah Comes to Middle-Earth: Images of Christ's Threefold Office in The Lord of the Rings** by Philip Ryken  
 November 14, 2017, 150 pages, 978-0-8308-5372-4

Can *The Lord of the Rings* help us understand the Christian faith more deeply? Wheaton College president Philip Ryken mines the riches of Tolkien’s theological imagination. In the characters of Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn, Ryken hears echoes of the one who is the true prophet, priest, and king, considering what that threefold office means for the calling of all Christians.



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