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**G.K. Chesterton Should Be Numbered Among the Saints**

Statement from Dale Ahlquist, President, Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton

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It may be reprinted elsewhere without modification.*

MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota (August 5, 2019 – *Feast of Our Lady of the Snows*)

On August 1, 2019, at the 38th Annual Chesterton Conference, held this year in Kansas City, I read to the 500 attendees the following letter from Bishop Peter Doyle of Northampton, England, a man who has always shown me the greatest kindness and respect:

Dear Dale,

... This is not a letter I find easy to write, and I know that you will not find it easy to receive.

As you know, Canon John Udris completed a preliminary investigation into the cause of G K Chesterton last summer. Since that time, I have consulted on John's findings, a wonderfully thorough and supportive study, and I have prayed much about the issue. I also went with some of the Bishops of England and Wales to see the Congregation for the Cause of Saints during our Ad Limina visit in the last week of September 2018.

I am very conscious of the devotion to G K Chesterton in many parts of the world and of his inspiring influence on so many people, and this makes it difficult to communicate the conclusion to which I have come.

That conclusion is that I am unable to promote the cause of G K Chesterton for three reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, there is no local cult. Secondly, I have been unable to tease out a pattern of personal spirituality. And, thirdly, even allowing for the context of G K Chesterton's time, the issue of anti-Semitism is a real obstacle particularly at this time in the United Kingdom.

As a very unworthy servant of the Church, I recognise Chesterton's goodness and his ability to evangelise but, in my heart of hearts, I believe that he himself would not want any fuss other than asking his prayers for the Church today and praying for him.

I realise that this is very disappointing for you and for the vast number of people around the world who have such a high regard for Chesterton, and I think particularly of the American Chestertonian Society.

I have no doubt that you will seek new ways to promote Chesterton's cause, and I would not want to stand in the way other than stating, as the local Bishop, my own conclusions.

Be sure of my prayers for you and your family and for the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton and the Chesterton Schools Network.

With every blessing

Yours sincerely in Christ

Peter

Bishop of Northampton

Although I had received this letter back in April, this was the first public mention of it. The next day the *Catholic Herald* in England reported the story, and the Catholic press around the world picked it up.

In my reply to the Bishop, I expressed my sympathy for the difficulty of his task and told him I was indeed disappointed but not discouraged. I added that Chestertonians would, as he predicted, continue to do everything we can to promote Chesterton's canonization. I did add that no saint would ever endorse his own cause, least of all, the humble bard of Beaconsfield. The bishop immediately responded agreeing with that last point.

Just before the conference, I wrote to him and told him that we would be discussing this issue at our conference, and I asked for his prayers. He responded and said he would say a Mass for the conference and the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

I would like – as succinctly as possible – to address the Bishop's objections because they will be important to others as well.

First, there *is* a local cult. It was the Senior Deacon (now deceased) of the Diocese of Northampton who first appealed to the Bishop to open Chesterton's cause, saying, "We need his holiness." There is a group based in London called The Catholic Chesterton Society, led by Stuart McCullough, whose conversion story is told in our recent book *My Name is Lazarus – 37 Stories of Converts Whose Path to Rome was Paved by G.K. Chesterton*. Every June, pilgrims walk and pray from London to Beaconsfield, culminating at Chesterton's grave. The Catholic

Chesterton Society has translated the prayer for Chesterton's intercession into more than 20 languages.

There is also a universal cult. We have distributed over 25,000 prayer cards, and we get daily requests for more. The cult is growing and does not show any signs of slowing down. People all over the world are devoted to Chesterton, asking for his intercession because they have been touched and transformed by his wisdom and goodness. He brings people to Christ.

The second objection – the lack of a clear pattern of spirituality – reveals the difficulty of getting a lay person canonized. At the conference I stumped the audience when I gave them five names and asked what the five people had in common. It turns out they all had lived during Chesterton's time, they had all been Catholic priests, they had all founded religious orders, and they were all canonized within the last 30 years. And no one knew who they were. Clearly, there is little difficulty in discerning the spiritual pattern, as it were, of the founder of a religious order. But G.K. Chesterton did not write about his own spiritual life, and he did not found a religious order, telling his followers how they should live. Rather, he revealed his spirituality in his writings and in his life, in his love for the Sacraments, in his abiding sense of wonder and joy, and in his tireless labor for social and political reform. He lived a theology of thanks. He is the model of lay spirituality.

I might add that I have been giving retreats based on Chesterton's very coherent spirituality for some years.

The third objection is the most disappointing because it has been addressed repeatedly, including by great scholars of Chesterton and his time. Chesterton was not anti-Semitic. A man who not only physically defended the Jews when they were attacked (read his *Autobiography*) but repeatedly spoke out against their persecution in Germany, in Russia, and in England, who said "The world owes God to the Jews," and "I will die defending the last Jew in Europe," should not have this poisonous epithet anywhere near his good name. I am pleased that the Bishop does not make the accusation, but he says that there is an "issue." While Chesterton's writings are amazingly fresh and vital, there is no question that he occasionally says things that are awkward by our modern standards of political correctness (and the Bishop makes this allowance as well). However, an issue being "sensitive" should not stand in the way of proceeding with the Cause. It simply needs to be dealt with honestly, fairly, courageously and charitably. In addition to the fact that there are many Jewish converts, drawn to the faith by none other than G.K. Chesterton, I wish to emphasize that there is not a wisp of hostility toward the Jews in our Apostolate. We are saddened when anyone repeats the falsehood that Chesterton was anti-Semitic.

It is fitting that Chesterton, who made a living as a controversialist, should continue to find himself controversial. But if anything, that is proof of his abiding presence. It is also evidence that he belongs in that controversial group, the Communion of the Saints.

My recent book *Knights of the Holy Ghost – A Short History of G.K. Chesterton* addresses these issues more fully and makes a strong case for Chesterton's sanctity. I have previously sent both this book and *My Name is Lazarus* to the Bishop.

While Bishop Peter Doyle was always gracious and kind to me, I was aware of the fact that he did not have any enthusiasm for Chesterton and by his own admission did not really know much about him. Although I tried to give him the knowledge, I could not give him the enthusiasm. It was my hope that the Prophet would be honored in his own country. **Although it is clear Bishop Doyle will not be opening the Cause of Canonization for G.K. Chesterton, this does not mean the cause is dead. We are confident that, in time, it will open, under a different ordinary and perhaps in a different diocese, which is a possibility under canon law.**

In the meantime, we ask that those who are disappointed by the announcement to be charitable and supportive of the Bishop of Northampton. He is praying for us. Let us return the favor.

Dr. Dale Ahlquist

President  
Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton

#### **ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON**

The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton is a Catholic lay apostolate, recognized formally as a canonical private association of the Christian faithful. The mission of the Society is to promote Catholic education, evangelization, and the social teaching of the Church. To help carry out its mission, the Society sponsors organizations including schools in the growing Chesterton Schools Network, and the missionary organization, Teach for Christ. Learn more at [Chesterton.org](http://Chesterton.org).

#### **MEDIA CONTACT**

For more information, to request a review copy of *Knight of the Holy Ghost – A Short History of G.K. Chesterton*, or to schedule an interview with Dale Ahlquist, please contact Emily de Rotstein (651-757-9613 or [emily@chesterton.org](mailto:emily@chesterton.org)), executive director of the Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

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