Orthodoxy

G.K. Chesterton · 1874 – 1936 · Text: first edition text (1908)

Who wrote it

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was an English journalist, novelist, poet and debater, famous for his humour and paradoxes. After critics of his book Heretics (1905) challenged him to state his own beliefs, he wrote Orthodoxy (1908), an account of how he came to accept the Apostles' Creed. He was received into the Catholic Church in 1922.

What to look for

- His picture of himself as a man who set out to discover something new and found Christianity.
- The maniac who reasons perfectly but within a tiny circle (Chapter II).
- "The Ethics of Elfland": what fairy tales taught him about wonder and conditions (Chapter IV).
- How Christianity holds apparent opposites together at full strength (Chapter VI).
- His arguments for tradition, progress and adventure in the final chapters.

Reading plan

Session 1	Preface, introduction and the maniac	Preface – Chapter II
Session 2	Thought and fairy tales	Chapters III–IV
Session 3	The flag and the paradoxes	Chapters V–VI
Session 4	Revolution, romance and authority	Chapters VII–IX

Discussion questions

1. What point is Chesterton making with the image of the madman who has lost everything except his reason?
2. What did fairy tales teach Chesterton about the world?
3. Pick one paradox from Chapter VI. Does Christianity hold it together as he claims?
4. How does Chesterton argue that orthodoxy is an adventure rather than a dull safety?
5. Which of his arguments do you find most and least convincing?
6. How would you describe your own path to belief, or your questions about it?

Tips for a group

Read each session's pages before meeting. Bring one sentence that struck you and one question. Keep discussion to 45–60 minutes and end by sharing one thing to carry into the week.

Read it free

The full text is free to read online, with EPUB and plain-text downloads:
ancienttalks.com/books/chesterton-orthodoxy.html