ANNUAL LIST OF RECOMMENDED BOOKS - FALL 2002

Science and Technology


Biographies and Memoirs of Great Scientists, Mathematicians and Inventors


The Soul Mate of Gifted Sensibility: G.K. Chesterton by Michael E. Walters
Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

“The way to be really a fool is to try to be practical about unpractical things.” p. 130. “Only Shakespeare has been optimistic when he felt pessimistic. This is the definition of a faith. A faith is that which survives a mood.” p. 122. Both statements are from The Quotable Chesterton by Marlin, Rabatin and Swan (Ignatius Press, 1987).

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) represents a life spent in the pursuit of his sensibility. He wrote all the time and his intellectual range was incredible – novels, essays, criticism of Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson, plays, philosophical treatises, and journalism. Yet, when he was a child and an adolescent, his talents were totally ignored by his teachers. He was held back twice in school and was considered to be a slow learner. This neglect of his gifted sensibility was a constant occurrence in the British private schools. Individuals such as Rudyard Kipling (Nobel Prize in Literature), the great political theorist and satirist George Orwell, the statesman Sir Winston Churchill, and the outstanding medical writer Oliver Sacks, were all tormented by their private school teachers who failed to come to terms with these individuals’ unique sensibilities.

Chesterton wrote some of the finest mystery stories in the English language. His detective was a Catholic priest named Father Brown. These detective stories are suspenseful and entertaining, and involve examinations of moral issues. Chesterton also wrote essays about the significance of the role of fantasy in literature which stimulated a later generation of British writers such as C.S. Lewis (Chronicles of Narnia, 1955) and J.R.R. Tolkien (The Lord of the Rings, 1965) who created masterpieces of literary fantasy.

The hallmark of Chesterton is his supreme control of wit. There are books that specialize in Chesterton’s quotes which are perfect for helping teachers to understand the sensibility of giftedness. His quotes are not just clever – they provide a profound insight into the mystery of being human. This is why individuals such as George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells appreciated the writings of religious conservatives such as Chesterton. What they cherished were his style and sensibility. It would be stimulating for gifted students to study Chesterton’s writings because they will find a soul mate in gifted sensibility.


