



Institute for Advanced Physics

The Glory of God is a Man Fully Alive

by Anthony Rizzi

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Chesterton's book, *Manalive*, captures, in his joyful style, a deeply disturbing and deeply wrong element of our scientized world by exposing its pretensions and contrasting them with the truth.

Now, Chesterton did not know that the problem of our culture was its unexamined equational physics, but he did see the poisonous fruits of that incomplete physics, which acted, though less strongly, even in his age.¹ And, he fearlessly warned people of those poisons and attacked them with his considerable talent. If I were to summarize what he is saying in *Manalive* I would say:

"Chesterton exposes the closed, small world of rule-following that is the center of our modern way of thinking, acting, and being (all of us have it at some level). He shows that, as opposed to this dark, rule-centered world² which we choose, there is the sunny world of reason in which truth reigns. A world in which we come to our senses! A world in which those things we know through our senses are reasoned from and acted on according to the reality they expose. It is a world that is lost on us but can be found if we but finally choose it."

¹ After all, the scientism began at the birth of modern science in circa 1600. See A. Rizzi, *The Problem of Our Failing Culture*, Physics and Culture, 2011, <http://www.iapweb.org/iapmagazine.htm>, (this article also in G. Butera (editor), *Reading the Cosmos* (AMA, Washington, DC, 2011)), and see also A. Rizzi, *How a Neglect of Physics Has Turned Christianity into a Myth for Modern Man*, New Oxford Review, April/May 2013, pg 35/24.

² We even, maybe especially, take this rule-centered path with the Ten Commandments. This is in the face of Jesus' explicit warning against it!

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I would then add that to truly do this we must choose to take the time to learn the fundamentals and bring them into our ordinary life.³

So, how does Chesterton bring us to the core insights above?

Innocent Smith is the central character. He is *the man who is alive* because he innocently follows the truth he knows and leads others to see its wonders. He is clever as a serpent but innocent as a dove! Such a character is barely seen in ancient, let alone modern, literature. And, Smith is successful in his endeavors! Adding this bit makes him nearly unique in literature.

Smith is on trial for multiple crimes that the rule-following (scientized) world *assigns* to him. His crime is not following the rules, even though everything he did was actually good! Smith wants to wake himself and others up to the depth and wonders of the world. Smith does this in multiple ways.

For example, Smith is accused of burglary. Why? Well, he takes two churchmen away from their platitude-filled lectures. He takes them on a rooftop excursion through the city to "rob" a house. In fact, it will be his own house that they rob! They will go in down the chimney, and in so doing, will learn about the nature of St. Nicholas through his cultural

³ For the fundamentals that we are missing see, A. Rizzi, *A Kid's Introduction to Physics (and Beyond)*, Volume I and II (IAP Press, Baton Rouge, 2012, Vol. II: 2019). Also, see A. Rizzi, *The Science Before Science: A Guide to Thinking in the 21st Century* (IAP Press, Baton Rouge, 2004).

incarnation as Santa Claus! By entering his own house in this unorthodox way, Smith sees the worth of his own property. The churchman, by imitating the behavior of St. Nick (dropping in from the heavens), sees the value of a man's property in seeing that St. Nick is loved because he brings toys, not takes them.

Imagine how you would feel "robbing" your own house in this way; you would see the value of all your things in a new way. Imagine if, next, you were to get arrested and tried for doing so! After all, you violated appearances by entering your house in a way that looks like a criminal. It sounds crazy, but this example is iconic of how we often judge ourselves and each other. Johnny is a bad boy because he doesn't follow the rules, no matter how silly, or even evil, they are. Remember the lone woman who refused to sign a certificate for two men to get "married"; she was put in jail and defended by only relatively few; she broke the rule! The trial of Innocent Smith shines a bright light on our lunacy in this regard.

Only one churchman actually follows Innocent in what feels like larceny but is really just seeing the wonder of Innocent Smith and Smith's household. They finally reach Smith's kitchen and proceed to have a private party by "stealing" the food for the party. The wife eventually walks in unannounced and calmly says "I didn't hear you come in", and Smith flatly responds that he came in the other way (i.e. through the chimney!). Again, both Smith and the churchman feel as if they are "robbing" because of the way they came into the house, i.e. as if they were thieves.

The one churchman remains with Smith through the adventure because he is in despair of the (empty) life that he has chosen. He is discouraged and disgusted with the emptiness of the sham, unproductive word game that he

has played most of his life. And, he sees something in Smith that he is missing. As he follows Smith on their adventure on the housetops, he slowly learns the meaning of important things that he had looked thoughtlessly past. His (and others') cold and un-thought-out regurgitations of words, which he took for the truths he was seeking, had blocked the real meaning of those truths. It had blocked also the fact that he needed to live those truths.

All this can be taken as a metaphor for our modern world. To us moderns, behaving according to reason, according to principle, can sometimes feel like a violation of the Ten Commandments. Indeed, following the "Ten Commandments" as rules makes us feel like we are not like the rest of the world. It assuages our feelings of guilt that would otherwise nag at us for not living the lives we are meant to. In this way, the natural working of our conscience (our reason) is blocked. Blind rule structures, especially those deeply engrained by the scientism, have this life-draining effect. Chesterton's Smith helps the churchman break through this block at a real level.⁴ He helps him see the full, real meaning of the Ten Commandments, to see how primary the principles of the Ten Commandments really are. The churchman realizes, through Santa Claus!, why stealing is wrong in principle, not just as a rule (read the book to learn more how).

⁴ He, of course, does not get to see the modern source of the deep rule following mentality, which is the equational physics at the base of everything we moderns think. Nonetheless, the image is robust enough for us to see in it, we ourselves going that next step. That is, that next step is really the same metaphorical adventure but instead following the Institute for Advanced Physics down the chimney to the source of the rule-following mentality in ourselves and in our world.

Chesterton can help us in the same way if we let him.

Seeing the wonders of the world by truly understanding that world⁵ is the core message of *Manalive*. To deeply understand it means to reject a life based on unthoughtful execution of rules instead of lived principle. Even when we know full well that reason (and even the Faith, as we hint at next) shows a course of action against the rule structure to be correct, we don't *feel* the goodness, power, and the light of acting according to reason. This is because of our scientized upbringing. Chesterton brings this point home with his courtroom figures who push the rules to absurdity, revealing their absurdity!

The lives of the saints are overflowing with examples of violations of rules (even Ten Commandment derived rules)⁶ which were, in fact, really just deep applications of the principles at the base of those rules. St. Francis' life looks just like that of an unordered rebel (like a 1960's hippie) to someone who doesn't understand the core principles that animate his (admittedly unique) vocation. St. Thomas Aquinas's refusal to listen to his father (and mother) by letting the Dominicans hide him seems scandalous in the rule-based mindset. But St. Thomas and St. Francis's actions were rooted in deep principles applied to who each of them were as individuals.

These saints are themselves, in a way, incarnations of the principles of reason! We are called to be this as well!

We must ask ourselves: in what ways are we living simply according to rules, rather

⁵ We must begin where our nature demands we begin, with our senses.

⁶ Remember the Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the Ten Commandments when he did miracles on the Sabbath.

than principles? Are we seeking to ground our knowledge in the proper physics? Chesterton calls us, Christ calls us, each one of us, to be a man alive!

This Christmas make haste to respond to the call. Notice and properly appropriate, through right reason based on what we get through the senses, the gifts God has given you. Do what it takes to ground your life in the fundamentals; incarnate reason in your life in imitation of our Lord. He, Truth Himself, became incarnate at Christmas so that you may become who you are meant to be.

Merry Christmas!

Anthony Rizzi, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Advanced Physics, gained worldwide recognition in theoretical physics by solving an 80-year old problem in Einstein's theory; has physics degrees from MIT and Princeton University; has been senior scientist for Cal-Tech's Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO), which won the Nobel Prize in physics 2017 and taught graduate courses at LSU; worked on the Manned Mars Craft and the Mars Observer spacecraft; received the NASA Award, as well as, a Martin Marietta New Technology Award.

He is author of The Science Before Science: A Guide to Thinking in the 21st Century and A Kid's Introduction to Physics (and Beyond); he has been interviewed in many media outlets. In addition to his professional articles, Dr. Rizzi authored the ground breaking texts Physics for Realists-Mechanics and Physics for Realists-Electricity and Magnetism (both recommended by the journal of the American Association of Physics Teachers) and, recently, Physics for Realists-Quantum Mechanics. He has recently made groundbreaking discoveries in quantum mechanics.

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