

J. Ian Boyd, C.S.B. – 1935-2024



“Human life has all the characteristics of a story. We are characters in a story told by God. Like a novel it has an ordered plot, meaning everything in our lives is significant and providential.” --Ian Boyd, CSB

Rev. J. Ian Boyd, CSB, the doughty champion of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, died in Edmonton on 10 January 2024, two weeks short of his eighty-ninth birthday. He was raised in Blaine Lake Saskatchewan where his father, John Boyd, had moved from Antigonish in 1913. As a young lawyer—having been admitted to the bar in Nova Scotia in 1898—he remembered hearing John A. Macdonald in person, and his life-long allegiance to the Conservative party bore fruit in Ian’s conservatism, both political and religious. In 1920 John Boyd married Jean Thyrza McManus, member of a distinguished Maritime family of United Empire Loyalist stock; the couple had seven children, Ian being the youngest. Family life at the Boyds was solidly Catholic. They attended Sunday Mass at the small church of Saint Andrew in Blaine Lake where the sermon would be delivered first in French and then in English. Ian recalled reciting the rosary on walks with his father, all fifteen decades. The household was literary; one item in particular had a lasting influence on the young Ian: back copies of *G.K.’s Weekly*, Chesterton’s newspaper.

Ian attended local schools and then Saint Thomas More College, federated with the University of Saskatchewan from which he received his BA in 1956. Impressed by the intellectual apostolate of the Basilian Fathers at the College, Ian followed the example of an older brother, Leo, by entering the seminary. Ian was ordained to the priesthood in Toronto on 15 December 1963. Previously he had taught for two years at Saint Michael’s College School, with flair and originality. He inspired his students to astounding feats of memory. One learned a Wodehouse short story by heart; another could recite the Ukrainian Constitution . . . in Ukrainian. Ian himself enlivened predication classes in the seminary

when he would recite from memory John Henry Newman's magnificent sermon, *The Second Spring*, preached in 1851 to honour the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy to England. While studying theology in Toronto, Ian earned an MA from the University of Toronto with a thesis on Maurice Baring, a contemporary and friend of Chesterton: *The Development of the Narrative Method in the Novels of Maurice Baring*. Ian's devotion to G.K.C. was further in evidence in his doctoral studies at the University of Aberdeen; his thesis, *Chesterton's Fiction: A Political and Literary Study*, was later published as *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton* (1975). The new Doctor Boyd returned to Saint Thomas More College to teach undergraduate English, his specialty being the modern English novel, with an emphasis on Christian authors such as T.S. Eliot, Evelyn Waugh, Muriel Spark, Flannery O'Connor and, of course, Chesterton. Ian was a keen cyclist. In 1984, for instance, he bicycled from Saskatoon to Edmonton to honour the visit of Pope John Paul II. Edmontonites must have been surprised to see his tall figure moving down the main street shortly before the papal entourage! Another time he cycled from Calgary to Vancouver through the Rocky Mountains.

Attendance at a conference on the occasion of the centenary of Chesterton's birth provided the incentive for Ian to found the Chesterton Institute and its journal, *The Chesterton Review*, in 1974. He liked to emphasize the Chestertonian character of the journal's production with members of the faculty and staff pitching in to prepare each issue, a major academic journal originating from a small liberal arts college in the Canadian prairies. Ian became known outside Canada, mainly through local Chesterton societies, some of which had arisen because of the *Review*. These contacts increased dramatically when in 1999 the Chesterton Institute moved from Saint Thomas More to Seton Hall University, located in South Orange (New Jersey, U.S.A). With more professional support and greater funding, the Institute was able to sponsor conferences around the world, sending Ian and his associates—Dermot Quinn and Gloria Garafulich-Grabois—to Europe, South America, Africa, Australia and the Far East.

With failing health, by 2020 Ian had surrendered direction of the Institute to Mrs. Garafulich-Grabois and editorship of the *Review* to Doctor Quinn. Father Boyd was named President Emeritus of the G. K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture and Founding Editor of *The Chesterton Review*—that year, he moved to Edmonton where he lived with his sister Betty until he died.

“Larger than life” best describes Ian. Virtually single-handedly, he brought G.K. Chesterton to the attention of the contemporary world by an indefatigable promotion of his vast literary remains as well as by collecting scholars world-wide to write for *The Chesterton Review*. But it was his priesthood that was the centre of his long career as an academic, a teacher, an editor and a minister of the Gospel. His profound Christian faith impressed everyone who met him, and it gave his priestly ministry a sensitivity and effectiveness far beyond the ordinary, whether among the indigenous community in Yellowknife, where he would fill in for his brother Leo, an Oblate priest; or in a college or university chapel; or as celebrant in a local parish church in Saskatoon, South Orange or Edmonton. A brilliant conversationalist, he could draw effortlessly on his vast reading to provide *le mot juste* to

drive home a point. His gift for friendship was enhanced by a wit which could be as devastating as it was, paradoxically, kindly meant, for like Chesterton he was acutely aware of what was ridiculous in contemporary society.

The funeral was celebrated on Saturday, 20 January, in Saint Andrew's church, Edmonton. Archbishop Richard Smith presided, Glenn McDonald CSB preached the homily and Kevin Storey CSB, Basilian superior general, led the final commendation. Interment was at Holy Cross Cemetery, Edmonton.

Prepared by Fr. Daniel Callam, CSB



[In Memoriam Page, Seton Hall University](#)

The G. K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture is collecting tributes and messages in honor of Father Ian Boyd. Those who would like to share a tribute message are welcome to email the Chesterton Institute at: chestertoninstitute@shu.edu

The tributes are available by visiting the *In Memoriam* page, and the publication is updated periodically. If you wish, you can also send a photo.