

# Chesterton on the 'New Rebel'

*Orthodoxy* (1908) is known as one of G.K. Chesterton's classics. What is truly fascinating about the work is that it is both a critique of the social and cultural changes taking place at the turn of the last century and a sort of prophecy of what was to come.

Arguably, we are living in or nearing the logical conclusion of the ideas that upended the old order of the West. We are in a state of rebellion against the past, tradition, and even nature and reality.

Chesterton's assessment of this "new rebel" is particularly hard hitting and insightful:

*But the new rebel is a skeptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. . . . As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is waste of time.*

*A Russian pessimist will denounce a policeman for killing a peasant, and then prove by the highest philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. . . . The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite skeptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on*

*morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.*