



A journal for restless minds

WHAT GRAND ILLUSION

Admiration of reflected grace

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JUST PRACTICING

Be or be not, there is no try

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

What Grand Illusion

Admiration of reflected grace

The problem we face this November can well be illustrated perhaps by a brief conversation between two elderly gentlemen. One asks the other, "Have you decided who you're going to vote for?" And the second replies, "No. I can't say I care for either one of them. I'm thinking maybe I'll just cast a write-in vote for God instead." To which the first responds: "Bad idea. Both candidates would claim you voted for them." And I should add, "and so would the majority of the population."

We have a serious problem in this country which isn't limited to those seeking political office or positions of authority; the problem is within each of us to some degree or another. It is our arrogance and our conceit which serves to prevent us from seeing our god delusion for what it is: a lie. Lucifer suffered from such a delusion and we know the price demanded, yet we follow the devil just

the same, still believing we are capable of being gods ourselves.

What grand illusion it is in which we convince ourselves of our divine necessity. We are but fools believing we exist by our own countenance. And yet we do persist in standing before the mirror in admiration of reflected grace and admire the view as if it were reality. If but the universe were so inconsequential as to contain but the only god of me!



Now God, in his goodness, created all that is by thinking it into being, by knowing it into existence. He wills us into being by knowing us into being. The best we can do is to know something before

we will it.

Poor gods that we are, we are incapable of causing a single atom into existence out of nothing. God, however, has been doing infinitely more long before the beginning of time. It might be well to consider abdicating to the one true God before we find ourselves kneeling before the devil.

Long Past Dark

Persecution? Forget about it!

The attitude for a growing number of Catholics is that the Church—especially its leadership—has lost both currency and relevancy. More are coming to believe, with growing consternation, that the Church is living in the past, evidenced by its steadfast refusal to adapt to modern cultural mores.

As Monsignor Charles Pope points out in a recent post for the National Catholic Register:

“It is long past dark in our culture, but in most parishes and dioceses it is business as usual and there is anything but the sober alarm that is really necessary in times like these.

“It is zero-dark-thirty in our post-Christian culture. And while we may wish to blame any number of factors for the collapse, we cannot exclude ourselves. We who are supposed to be the light of the world, with Christ shining in us, have preferred to hide our light under a basket and lay low. The ruins of our families and culture are testimony to the triumph of error and the suppression of the truth.”¹

What Msgr. Pope writes of is alarmingly true. In his post he points out how we Catholics—he is especially critical of Church leadership in this regard—in our desire to make ourselves acceptable to the culture have lost or eliminated what was once distinctively Catholic.

In his essay *The Papal “Apology”* Joseph Sobran on March 14, 2000 wrote:

“So faithful Catholics are entitled to wonder whether Pope John Paul II’s recent “apology” for the historical sins of the Church was really a wise idea.

His Holiness made two basic distinctions: he was speaking of sins pertaining to the human part of the Church—her “sons and daughters”—which don’t touch the divine essence of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; and he was asking forgiveness of God, not of non-Catholics.



The reaction showed that these distinctions didn’t register with most people. Non-Catholics (including plenty of nominal Catholics, many theologians among them) don’t distinguish between the human and divine aspects of the Catholic Church, because they regard the Church as a purely human institution; after all, if they be-

Sobran continues: *“An editorial in the New York Times lamented the Pope’s ‘continued opposition to’ abortion, contraception, and the ordination of women, adding this priceless observation: ‘Regrettably, he made no mention of discrimination against homosexuals.’ In other words, the Pope failed to repudiate Catholicism. God may forgive this, but the Times isn’t about to.*

There is no bigotry like the blank-eyed liberal bigotry that demands that the Pope reach liberal conclusions from Catholic premises. The Pope’s ‘continued opposition’ to abortion, et cetera, is not just the stubborn attitude of one old priest; it derives from the most fundamental teaching and principles of Catholicism itself, which differ in certain respects from the editorial positions of the Times.”

He then concludes with this remarkably prophetic thought (written some sixteen years ago):

“But what might Catholics of the past (or the future) condemn in the Church today?”

They certainly wouldn’t accuse us of excessive zeal. They might be shocked by our luke-warmness, our cowardice masquerading as tolerance, our laxity, our willingness to countenance heresy, sacrilege, blasphemy, and immorality within the Church itself, our eagerness to ingratiate ourselves with the secular world—which the papal statement itself is a symptom.

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Nearly a century ago, the French Catholic poet Charles Peguy remarked: *'We will never know how many acts of cowardice have been motivated by the fear of appearing not sufficiently progressive.'*"²

What most comes to mind is this: far, far too many of us who claim to be Catholic—and here I must include Church leadership as well—have lost the courage demanded of faithful discipleship. Jesus did not say for us to sit back and let the world come to us; neither did he say that discipleship would be easy or painless, rather he commanded us to go tell the world all that he taught us and that in doing so we would be persecuted.

Yes he did. Jesus said very clearly: *"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*³

Persecuted? Forget about it!

We have become too sanitized and weak in our faith; we no longer want to harbor such disturbing thoughts as persecution. Yet persecution and martyrdom are very much a part of our Catholic faith and not just in the far distant past.

On July 26, 2016 just as Father Jacques Hamel, 85, was finishing Mass at Église St.-Étienne in Normandy, France, two ISIS terrorists forced the elderly priest to kneel and when he

resisted they slit his throat. Christians throughout the middle-east have been persecuted and martyred so consistently in recent years, almost to the point of complete annihilation. What stands out is how, when given a choice between denouncing their faith and living or standing firm and dying, they had the courage to choose the latter without hesitation.

Msgr. Pope asks *"From St. Peter to Constantine there were 33 Popes. Thirty of them were martyred and two died in exile. Countless clergy and lay people too were martyred. It is hard to imagine the Church in the decadent West being willing to suffer so. Surely our brethren in much less affluent parts of the world are dying in large numbers. But I wonder: After all these years of 'Comfort Catholicism', would the average American parishioner or clergyman be willing or able to endure such loss?"*

I cannot help but wonder for myself whether I would have the strength of will and the courage of faith to refuse to yield when confronted by such evil. It is more than unpleasant to contemplate but I believe we must, for we have lived far too long in quiet comfort, far removed from the dark and looming threat of evil which so many have and are facing still.

For the sake of cultural acceptance we have spent the last half-century compromising our Catholic faith, our Catholic identity, and our Catholic values. We have, in the interests of communal uniformity, tolerance, and equanimity chosen to forego our unique Catholic heritage. We have been tamed into submission and taught to sit quietly and behave for the

sake of the common good, much to the detriment of our immortal souls.

Persecution has come upon us whether we wish to acknowledge it or not. Like a growing cancer slowly metastasizing all that is good inside, the forces of evil have been steadily eating away at our fundamental religious liberties—all in the name of tolerance—by force of compulsory compliance and criminalization. And for the most part we Catholics have permitted this malignancy to grow without complaint; and, when it has suited our purposes, we have even welcomed it.

Above all else we have become too complacent, afraid to address controversial issues for fear of causing offense or causing a ripple in the force. Yet that is not what Jesus demands of his disciples. Jesus knew the persecution that awaited him in Jerusalem yet he journeyed there unafraid and with a certain joy in what he was about to do. He never hesitated or demurred when confronted by evil but stood firm in his righteousness. It is past time that we do the same.

Msgr. Pope asks when will the Church say to the bureaucrats who demand we comply with evil laws: *"We will not comply. If you seek to confiscate our buildings, we will turn maximum publicity against you, but we still will not comply. If you arrest us, off to jail we go! But we will simply not comply with evil laws or cooperate with evil."*

1. Msgr. Charles Pope, *Comfort Catholicism Has to Go; It is Time to Prepare for Persecution*, National Catholic Register Online, posted August 21, 2016.

2. Joseph Sobran, *Subtracting Christianity: Essays on American Culture and Society*, pp 267-268, FGF Books, June 20, 2016.

3. Mt 5:10-12.

A Place Of Honor

A beauty yet unseen

There is a country song popular some thirty-five years ago, written and sung by Mac Davis which begins "Oh Lord it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror cause I get better looking each day." We may laugh, but the truth is that there are far too many who would unhesitatingly agree and add, "Now, ain't that the truth!"

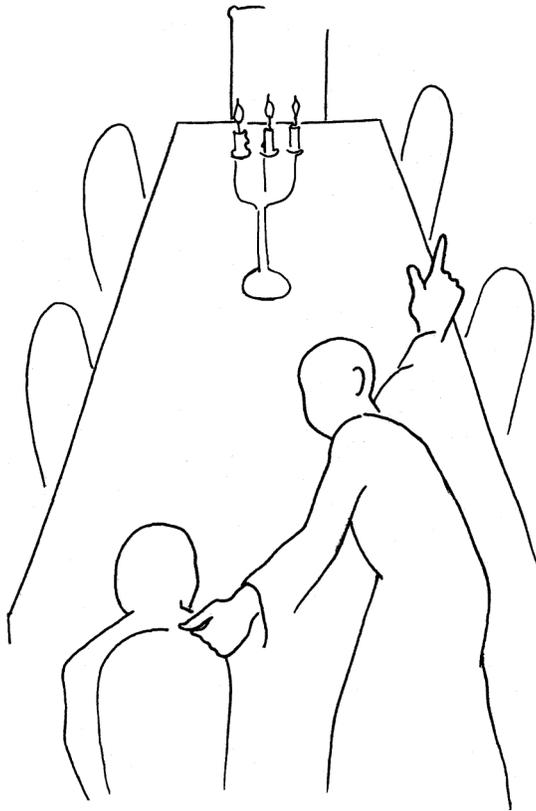
To be humble *is* hard for we quite naturally—at least on the face of it—wish to feel appreciated, valued, and recognized for who we are and what we do. Yet, despite what the lyrics say and in spite of what some may think or believe of themselves, no one is perfect in every way.

There is, of course, one who is perfectly humble in his perfection and that is God. Yet we in our vanity are want to be as gods—but poor imitations of the one true God who is perfect in every way. It is vanity that refuses humility its rightful place for vanity would recline nowhere but the place of honor.

Saint Thomas Aquinas says: "All created perfections are in God. Hence He is spoken of as universally perfect because He lacks not any excellence which may be found in creatures."¹ God in his perfection and out of his boundless love has created all manner of delightful "perfections" as Aquinas calls them—good things—stars, seas, mountains, sunsets, music, food, and especially

man and woman, made in his image and likeness. Saint Thomas calls us to realize that every created perfection, which is of necessity finite, is to be found in the infinite perfection of God.

All that we seek in created things is but a reflection of the Creator: we desire it only because it is a little like God.



Peter Kreeft says of this:

"The reflections of His perfections in the mirror of creation should send us away from the mirror, not into it. And when we run into the mirror, seeking our happiness there, the mirror breaks and our happiness shatters. For every truth is a reflection of his truth, every good is a reflection of his good, every beauty is a reflection of his beauty. The reflections are real, but they are only real reflections. They point back to the Reality they reflect. All truth is God's truth. All

goodness is God's goodness. All beauty is God's beauty.

*And therefore He is all we need, He is all of what we need, and He is the only One we need. For if we need something else besides God, something in addition to God, then God is not God."*²

Saint Augustine says, "Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it. You seek Life in the place of death." God is Life for it is by his will alone in which all that is has been created. All created things are finite, they cannot and will not last forever. If you seek happiness in created things you will not find it for you are looking in the place of death not Life.

St. Thomas wrote that for man the "one thing needful", the *sum-mum bonum* or "greatest good", the purpose and meaning of life is happiness which is often identified as "being a saint", "beatitude", and "union with God". True happiness is not merely "subjective contentment" but "real perfection". Aquinas says that "union with God" must necessarily begin now, not after death, for if you don't plant the seed—if you are not "born again of the Spirit"—then life cannot and will not grow in eternity.

*"The ultimate reason we must become holy is that that is the only way to become real. For becoming holy is becoming what reality ultimately is, i.e., what God, the ultimate reality and the touchstone for all reality is: true, good, and beautiful; real, loving, and joyful."*³

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“On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully.”

What are we to make of this? The Pharisees were openly hostile to Jesus and constantly setting traps for him, so why would a leading Pharisee invite him to his home?

In the Mediterranean world of his time, invitations to dine at someone’s home were extended only to people of the same social rank or class. The fact that the leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dine with him implied that they saw him as a social equal.

But did they really see Jesus as an equal? The word for *observation* used by Luke, *paratérésis*, implies a “*hostile observation*” from which we might well conclude that the invitation was for less than honorable motives.

Invitations were understood to be reciprocal. To invite someone who could not return the favor was considered cultural suicide, for such guests were clearly people of a lower social status than the host. Likewise, accepting an invitation placed an obligation on the guest to return the favor. It was not uncommon for guests to decline an invitation, especially if they realized that returning the favor was more than they could or cared to handle.

Jesus had no wealth nor did he hold any position of authority or power; he owned no property so he had no visible means of reciprocating so why would the Pharisee have invited him other than to humiliate him or to trap

him? One possibility is that they invited Jesus out of envy: the hatred of the good for being good. We often confuse envy with jealousy but they are not the same. “...*envy is not to be confused with coveting another’s possessions. Mere jealousy of wealth can be assuaged by acquiring wealth. But envy arises from the humiliation of moral inferiority. It makes you want to denigrate or even destroy the person you feel is better than you.*”⁴ Clearly the Pharisees felt morally inferior to Jesus and his goodness.

The parable that Jesus told was addressed first to those who had been invited and then to the host. There are multiple messages contained within and it is often difficult to grasp the fullness of what Jesus is saying for all that this parable contains.

The guests were social equals and thus knew that they had obligated themselves to reciprocate, so why were they so intent on choosing the places of honor at the table? Vanity and pride are the most likely reasons for their behavior. Each wanted to appear as more important than the rest because they believed they were more important, more distinguished, more prosperous than all the others, even among social equals.

Jesus points out the obvious and suggests that such blatant vanity could very well result in humiliation should the host consider another as more distinguished. Far better to choose a lower seat and be asked to move higher than to be embarrassed when asked to move lower for another. Those who exalt themselves, who preen and strut with pride, deluding themselves with their self-importance

will be humiliated when the host sees them for who they really are. They will be humbled. For those who were humbled merely by the invitation and cared not where they were seated, the host will ask them to move up higher and they will be exalted.

To the host Jesus has another message, although perhaps not as obvious as the first. The key here rests in creating a debt and in its repayment. Jesus tells the host that invitations should not place a debt upon those who are invited, a debt for which they are obligated to repay. Once they have done so, you have been repaid. But if you invite those who cannot repay you but rather do so solely out of kindness and generosity, then while you will receive no repayment in this life, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

We seek happiness where it cannot be found: in wealth, position, power, honor, fame, pleasure, even health. Earthly happiness is fleeting and ultimately unfulfilling. Vanity, pride, envy, jealousy: all sins which will lead us to the false belief that we are as gods. They are sins that lead to death, not to life, Life which is God. Amen.



Homily for
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C
Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24
Luke 14:1, 7-14

1. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, .I,4,2.
2. Peter Kreeft, *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from St. Thomas Aquinas*, Ignatius Press, Dec 16, 2016.
3. Practical Theology.
4. Joseph Sobran, *Smirking At Virtue, Subtracting Christianity: Essays on American Culture and Society*, FGF Books, June 20, 2016..

Just Practicing

Be or be not, there is no try

Whenever I meet with a couple preparing for marriage there is one question—asked of those who identify themselves as Catholic—which always gives me pause. Not due to any doubt as to the sincerity or honesty of the response but because I wonder whether the couple have any clear understanding of what they are affirming. Unfortunately, I believe few Catholics do.

The question: “*Are you a practicing Catholic?*” begs the question as to whether one understands precisely what is meant by “*practicing Catholic.*” Personally, I have serious objections to this particular terminology for it implies that one’s catholicity may be improved or increased with practice; that one can somehow acquire catholic virtuosity should one practice long enough or with sufficient perseverance and constancy. Conversely, it would seem that no matter how minimal the practice, one may still lay claim to being a “*practicing Catholic.*”

And then if one is not a “*practicing Catholic*” but a “*Catholic*” by virtue of being baptized “*Catholic*” is there any discernible difference? What about a “*non-practicing Catholic*” whatever that might mean? Do protestants have similar terminology? Have you ever heard of a “*practicing Protestant*” or a

“*practicing Buddhist*” or even a “*practicing atheist*”? I think not.

The question is subjective and therefore subject to *interpretation*. It is easy to understand what was intended but only under an objective lens *sans* personal whim or desire. But few are want to so restrict their options when it comes to faithfully following what Catholicism requires. In short, too many believe they can have their cake and eat it too. But it doesn’t work that way.



Simply put, Catholicism is not a sport or a skill that demands endless hours of practice to achieve any measure of expertise. Nor does it require any special talents, physical prowess, or mental ability.

It does however require an unshakable faith in God, an unconditional acceptance and unwavering

devotion to the teachings, doctrines, and dogma of the Catholic Church, the church instituted directly by Jesus Christ. And that is where the rubber meets the road for many who identify themselves as Catholic.

Cultural attitudes have left the impression in many minds that there are no absolutes, only personal preferences. What defines “*Catholic*” is left to personal whimsy.

As Joseph Sobran observed in April 2000:

“*Catholics may recall the high hopes for liturgical reform in the wake of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65. The vernacular Mass and the relaxation of old disciplines were supposed to inspire a new piety in the laity, who were given a larger role in the rites, including the freedom to receive the Eucharist in their hands—traditionally regarded as a desecration. The upshot, as such observers as James Hitchcock and Michael Davies noted many years ago, was precisely the reverse of what the liberals predicted and far worse than the reactionaries feared: Mass attendance immediately plummeted and tens of millions of Catholics in the United States alone have fallen away from the Church. Those who remain formally within the Church feel free to defy Catholic teaching on such matters as contraception and abortion; most no longer believe that the Eucharist is the true Body of Christ; and young Catholics are stunningly ignorant of Catholic doctrine.*”

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The general liberalization of religion has failed in the same way. The attempt to keep Christianity and Judaism au courant with contemporary fads has merely enfeebled the sense of the sacred, turning worship into thinly disguised self-indulgence. A "nonjudgmental" God is not God at all and, precisely because he needn't be obeyed, can't be adored. 'If God does not exist,' says Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov, "everything is permitted." And a God who permits everything doesn't really exist. What's the point of calling such an entity 'God'?"¹

And therein lies the true issue: those who call themselves "Catholic" have lost any understanding of the sacred, and as Sobran so clearly points out, a God who needn't be obeyed cannot be adored and a God who permits everything and denies anything really doesn't exist at all.

Returning to the question posed earlier, there are two questions asked prior to it. They are: "What is your religion?" and "What parish are you a member?" The question left unasked—but certainly ought to be—is "Do you regularly attend Mass every week?" It cannot be found anywhere on the form, but I ask it anyway. The responses vary from "occasionally" to "seldom", with "every week" rarely noted.

Individually, they are asked for the mundane but important information to include their name, address, and phone number. Nine out of ten engaged couples will admit to the same address, a clear indication of cohabitation, a high probability of pre-marital sex and the use of some form

of contraception.

All are clearly contra to long established Church teaching and all are in direct disobedience to the will of God. And yet moments later they will state without hesitation "Yes" to being a "practicing Catholic".

By no means is this overt disobedience to God's will limited only to those who wish to be married in the Church. The attitude that holds that God no longer needs to be obeyed has reached pandemic levels. "Fear of the Lord" has been replaced by the more palatable "Ignore the Lord".

Examples of this attitude can be readily observed in many public figures across this country who openly claim to be "practicing Catholics" but their talk simply doesn't walk the straight and narrow. Those who insist on being labeled Catholic but are in public opposition to Church teachings, doctrine, and dogma are a scandal to their faith and to those who remain in faithful devotion to the Church. Those who once were Catholic but left to join another faith and no longer call themselves Catholic at least have shown the courage of their convictions and left without causing further scandal to the Church.

It isn't enough to say "I'm a practicing Catholic." To be Catholic one must live Catholic, believe Catholic in all things, not just in what you prefer. Practice makes perfect may work for the piano but it doesn't work for God. Be or be not, there is no try.

1. Joseph Sobran, *Subtracting Christianity: Essays on American Culture and Society*, FGF Books, June 20, 2016.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

Subtracting Christianity

Joseph Sobran

FGF Books

June 20, 2016, 428 pages.

Practical Theology

Peter Kreeft

Ignatius Press

November 28, 2014, 400 pages.

Disorientation: How to Go to College Without Losing Your Mind

Edited by John Zmirak

Ascension Press

December 21, 2010, 188 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

Editor: R. R. Reno

Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

www.touchstonemag.com

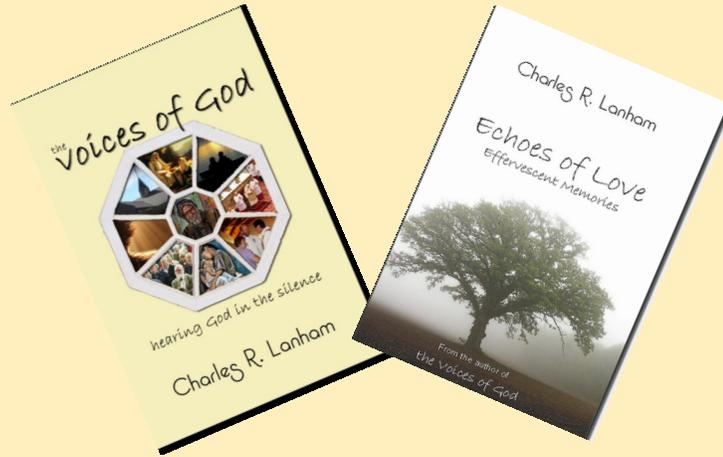
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

He is the bulletin editor for Saint Albert the Great Catholic Church. He has written over 230 articles on religion, faith, morality, theology,

Each issue of **Colloquī** can be viewed or downloaded from

<http://deaconscorner.org>.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org

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Deacon's Corner Publishing

4742 Cougar Creek Trail
Reno, Nevada 89519