



A journal for restless minds

FAILURE'S NOT AN OPTION

It is of absolute necessity

JOY IN THE KNOWING

Waiting in anticipation

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.

Failure's Not An Option

It is of absolute necessity

Growing up used to be a necessity, often far sooner than one might wish it, for no other reason than survival. I can still recall being told of a distant relative who, at the age of five, sold matches and wasn't allowed to come home until he had sold all that he had. It wasn't cruelty that compelled his parents to send such a young lad out each day, it was necessity, for everyone had to contribute in order for there to be enough money to eat.



I can also recall first reading of the adventures of Peter Pan, the boy who wouldn't grow up. It wasn't that Peter couldn't grow up. No, Peter simply refused to do so. Peter was a boastful and careless boy, a symbol of the selfishness of childhood, forgetful, self-centered, nonchalant, and fearlessly cocky. The author J. M. Barrie wrote of Peter that

when he thought he was going to die on Marooners' Rock, he was scared, yet he felt only one shudder. With this blithe attitude Peter says, "To die will be an awfully big adventure." As for Peter's unending youth Barrie explained that Peter must forget his own adventures as well as anything he learns about the realities of the world in order to stay childlike.

Somedays it seems as though this country has become Neverland with an ever increasing number of Peter Pans and lost boys (and girls) flitting around in childish ignorance, ever forgetful, refusing to grow up. Maturation is thus blissfully denied for what fun is there in

adulthood?

Sadly, too many are well beyond their childhood to the point that Neverland is where they do now permanently reside. Reality is but a figment, maturity unsought, reason disdained, repulsive to their childish minds; their only thought: to think not at all.

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They care not for tomorrow for today is all that matters.

Solipsism is their unacknowledged philosophy; their first principle is this: that the truth about truth is that there is no truth; that all truths are mere claims. They believe only in themselves because all else is but a ghost within their minds.

G. K. Chesterton describes those who believe in themselves as madmen. *"Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums. ... If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. ... It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief."*¹

Chesterton goes on to observe that *"Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin—a fact as practical as potatoes. ... But certain religious leaders ..., not mere materialists, have begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt.*

Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved. ...

The strongest saints and the strongest skeptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument. If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.

In this remarkable situation it is plainly not now possible (with any hope of a universal appeal) to start, as our fathers did, with the fact of sin. This very fact which was to them (and is to me) as plain as a pikestaff, is the very fact that has been specially diluted or denied. ... I mean that all thoughts and theories were once judged by whether they tended to make a man lose his soul, so for our present purpose all modern thoughts and theories may be judged by whether they tend to make a man lose his wits.

In short, oddities only strike ordinary people. Oddities do not strike odd people. This is why ordinary people have a much more exciting time; while odd people are always complaining of the dullness of life."

Frank Cronin ruefully reports on the demise of orthodoxy: *"Orthodoxy doesn't matter. And it hasn't for decades. It has become a word foreign to modern ears, an idea meaningless to modern minds, a body of practical ideas and principles with no real practicality or significance, except as a predicta-*

*ble means of inciting controversy and conflict or fostering intolerance and bigotry."*²

The very nature of "orthodoxy" is one of conclusion, of assertion about the way things are, not as we might prefer them or choose them to be. This of course is radically antithetical to the modern relativistic mind: to believe in a set of ideas and to assert that those ideas are objectively, factually, and actually true. Such orthodoxy is simply unbelievable, a modern heresy, an act of prejudice.

Cronin says it is very easy to test this. *"Just tell any modern person Catholic orthodoxy is true — objectively, factually, rationally and scientifically true. They will either be incredulous that you could be so naïve or stupid to think the Catholic faith is actually true or they will be angry that you could be so arrogant as to believe Catholic orthodoxy is actually true.*

In fact, to moderns, all orthodoxies are acts of bigotry by virtue of the simple act of asserting a claim of objective truth. For actual and factual truth is inherent to the very idea of real orthodoxy. And all that type of thinking and the very content of orthodox thought itself is outside our modern truth paradigm.

Our modern way of thinking presumes there are no real right answers. Modern minds perceive any and all such orthodoxies as merely claims, beliefs and nothing more."

Logic and reason are no longer relevant to the modern way of thinking, thus such a mind sees no contra-

diction in their illogical and nonsensical assertion that: the truth is there is no truth. One can only wonder where such lunacy was first implanted in their never-never-minds.

Perhaps it is Chesterton who offers the most plausible cause of modern thinking (or lack thereof): *"Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion, To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits."*

Chesterton believed (and rightly so) that the modern mind moves in a perfect but small circle, a circle while quite as infinite as a large one, yet not as large. For instance, a marble is as round as the world but it is not the world. He writes *"we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable mark of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction."* To explain, he speaks of a madman who would call himself Christ. *"If we said what we felt, we should say, 'So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God; and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvelous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash*

your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!

If the man is the real God, he is not much of a god. And similarly, if the cosmos of the materialist is the real cosmos, it is not much of a cosmos. The thing has shrunk. The deity is less divine than many men; and the whole of life is something much more grey, narrow, and trivial than many separate aspects of it. The parts seem greater than the whole.

For we must remember that the materialist philosophy (whether true or not) is certainly much more limiting than any religion. In one sense, of course, all intelligent ideas are narrow. They cannot be broader than themselves. A Christian is only restricted in the same sense that an atheist is restricted. He cannot think Christianity false and continue to be a Christian; and the atheist cannot think atheism false and continue to be an atheist."

The ordinary man Chesterton describes as a mystic, with one foot on earth and the other in fairyland. Such souls are free to doubt their gods and free to believe in them. *"If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that. ... Thus he believed that children were indeed the kingdom of heaven, but nevertheless ought to be obedient to the kingdom of earth. He admired youth because it was young and age because it was not."*

Such disturbing insight from a century past remains relevant to our time and place. So much madness, so

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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

Faith Comes From What Is Heard
Lawrence Feingold
Emmaus Academic
July 8, 2016, 756 pages.

Practical Theology
Peter Kreeft
Ignatius Press
November 28, 2014, 400 pages.

Orthodoxy
G. K. Chesterton
Digireads.com
March 30, 2004, 121 pages.
Originally published 1908.

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

much insanity. So much anger, hatred and violence. So little peace.

Teresa Tomeo writing in an Our Sunday Visitor editorial opines, *“Mick Jagger is old enough to be the grandfather of a good number of the protestors who have taken to the streets following the major presidential upset. ... Maybe they’ve never heard of the rock star—or the Rolling Stones for that matter. But it’s about time to sit those folks down — along with much of the blatantly biased secular press, a fairly long list of political pundits, and lawmakers who are still in a total meltdown mode now weeks after the election — and inform them, as one of the classic Stones’ tunes explains, that guess what? You can’t always get what you want.”*

It’s one thing to peacefully practice our First Amendment rights. There’s nothing wrong with marching or rallying to raise awareness about an issue. ... But what we’ve seen since Nov. 8 has crossed into recklessness and lawlessness by people old enough to know better.

Not only are adults taking part in the violent acts that have occurred during some of the ... protests, but in many ways, they’re adding to the problems by encouraging the ridiculously bad behavior, keeping silent about it and in some cases even using our tax dollars to coddle those who just can’t deal with reality of defeat.”³

Tomeo reports that one Iowa State legislator has introduced what he calls the *“Suck it up, Buttercup’ bill”* which would cut budgets at public colleges and universities that are spending extra money on students upset over the

presidential election. She observes that the legislator remarked, *“I’ve seen four or five schools in other states that have established ‘cry zones’ ... staffed by state grief counselors, and kids come and cry out their sensitivity to the election results.”*

She writes how this is what a lot of people have been thinking, knowing this is not how life works at all. Where is the mature understanding that hurt and disappointment are a big part of life?

The concern most often expressed: if you are of such a mind, still childishly living in Neverland, then when adversity stares you in the face you will have convinced yourself that all you have to do is simply press the reality *‘pause’* button.

Unfortunately at some point there will no longer be someone around to hug and coddle you and provide *“safe zones”* and surrogates to assure you that everything will be ok. One day you will wake up and be hit with a very painful slap to the face. Reality provides no timeouts, no rewinds, no resets, no pauses. There comes a time, call it adulthood, when we must all grow up and leave Neverland.

The madness of it all is palpable and real. It also, sadly, is neither a new phenomenon nor is it limited to the young—although young college students seemingly comprise a major portion of the most visible and worst affected. As Tomeo mentions, in addition to students, the secular press, political pundits, and lawmakers — and I would add academic elites and Hollywood

glitterati — collectively have experienced a total meltdown, refusing to leave their Neverland asylum.

The zeitgeist of privilege and entitlement which now permeates our society, from high-brow to low-rent, threatens the heart and soul of the nation. Questions abound as to how such a surfeit of angst, anger and irrational fear could have so suddenly and so virulently infested the social fabric of our nation. There are no easy answers; solutions have proven as elusive as the yeti and bigfoot. Yet, it may well be possible to begin to look toward ourselves to ponder and to well-consider what it is indeed which we have wrought.

We cannot place the burden of blame on nameless, faceless others, although we may well be wish to do so, for that only serves to perpetuate and strengthen the infection. Unintentional though it may have been, each of us has become a carrier, unwittingly in most cases, spreading the infection by our words and actions.

As parents and adults we are responsible for preparing our children to become productive adults, to teach them of the world, God, faith and morality, and to show them how to succeed in life. Yet far too many of us have abrogated our responsibilities as parents and guardians of the next generation. And in our failure to treat our children as children and thus guide them toward maturity we have created a monstrous society of self-indulgent, self-centered, unhappy Peter Pans who have not the skills necessary to grow up and leave childhood behind.

Family psychologist John Rosemond describes one aspect of the problem in telling a true story of a 14-year-old girl, an only child, and her parents in a typical white-collar home. He writes:

"It is the summer of 2016, and said young teen is between eighth grade and her first year of high school. One hot and humid summer day she tells her parents she does not want to go to the high school in her district because her friends, all of who play (as does she) on the same elite athletic squad, are going to go to a high school some twenty miles away in another county. She informs her parents she wants to go to Twenty-Mile High. After much yelling, crying, gnashing of teeth, threats, resentment and guilt, the parents put their home on the market, promptly sell it and move to the Twenty-Mile High district. And everyone lives happily ever after or until said child's next outrageous demand, whichever comes first.

What is it like, wonders a person who was denied such privilege as a child, to be 14 years old and in complete control of one's family, to be able to throw a tantrum and thus cause one's parents to pick up and relocate? What is it like to be a Big Deal at age 14? What sort of adulthood (in the chronological sense of the term only) does this portend?

The answers are, in order: weird, strange and unhappy. Concerning weird and strange, it must be noted the children in question lack a proper frame of reference. They have no way of knowing what a legitimate childhood is like, including being no Big Deal. Therefore, they are (to borrow from their vernacular) clueless. Because the Big Deal child is ubiquitous,

they do not know their childhoods are weird and strange from a normal, albeit outmoded, point of view.

But the real problem, not just for them but the rest of us as well, is the strong likelihood they will never experience sustained contentment as adults. ... I have long noticed that a good number of children now known as millennials seem to believe a life without drama is a life without meaning. And so, because life is not drama, they manufacture it out of the mundane. Every insult is cause for drama. Every conflict is cause for drama. Every disappointment is cause for drama. Every bump in the road is cause for drama. This is the inevitable consequence of a childhood high on indulgence and short on reality."⁴

Another related aspect comes from a recent article by Katie Coombs who wrote of millennials and how entitled they have become. Stereotypically they are more often than not pictured "sitting in their parents' basement playing Xbox and eating nacho flavored Doritos. They are the first generation truly impacted by the smart phone and its ability to take away social interaction. They were the first to grow up with the trophies-and-ribbons-for-everyone mentality, and they are confused. Some of them have graduated from college and are having difficulty finding jobs. ... There are some adults in their twenties struggling from a combination of being handed too much from their parents and always being told they were amazing in all of their activities."⁵

Coombs writes of the first time she let her daughter fail. Torn between helping her on a school project in order to get an A or allowing her to complete the project on her own and get a C, she chose the

latter. She said that when her daughter came home with the C she asked her mother why she had let that happen, to which she replied "Why did *you* let it happen?"

Coombs goes on to say she knows "so many people who would have fixed the project for their children, or even worse, completed the entire project for them. We have all seen the science fair projects completed by Mom and Dad. What is the lesson in that? That you can only succeed if someone helps you? That you are better off winning by cheating than you are losing with your own best effort? Isn't the feeling of losing the exact motivation our children need to grow and improve?"

I do not have homework when my children do. It is 100 percent their responsibility, and if they can't complete it, I encourage them to seek out their own solutions. If they expect Mommy or Daddy to be the solution every time, the only result will be a future adult who can't truly function in society. You must let your children fall—hard sometimes. You must let them fail, which means they will feel pain and get an occasional, emotional bruise. These bruises form their conviction and their passion for success."

Failure is **not** an option. Rather, it is an absolute necessity for success. If we ever hope to stem the madness, we **must** let our children fail.

1. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 1908, 4-5.

2. Frank Cronin, *Orthodoxy, Heresy and Objective Truth*, National Catholic Register, November 27, 2016, 11-12.

3. Teresa Tomeo, *Eye on Culture: Dose of Reality*, Our Sunday Visitor, December 4, 2016, 17.

4. John Rosemond, *Avoid 'Big Fish' illusion when parenting*, Reno Gazette Journal, December 7, 2016, 3C.

5. Katie Coombs, *Our kids must fail to succeed*, Reno Gazette Journal, December 3, 2016, 1-2D.

Joy In The Knowing

Waiting in anticipation

Have you ever tried to have a deep personal relationship with God? If you have then you know just how difficult a task that can be. It should be easy, one might surmise, since God is pure love and he created each of us out of that love and he sustains us out of his love. So why should we find it so difficult to respond to his love?

Some years ago, just prior to Halloween, I brought home a small, white ball of fur, a seven-week-old Labrador puppy. Cutest little thing with eyes that sparkled so bright, filled with a joy that spoke of nothing but *"love me."* Halloween evening it seemed as though every costumed child who came to the door wanted the puppy, that was the power of love which emanated from her squirmy, playful demeanor and those big dark eyes. It was instantaneous bonding, an eager desire to love, to hold, to form a relationship with a small soft furry creature.

Surely God ought to be loved more than a puppy, after all, he loves all things, including puppies, into existence. So why don't we swoon over God as much or more than we do over some tiny creature created through his inestimable love?

While this may appear simplistic and even a bit condescending, perhaps it is our unknowing that keeps us from having such a deep, loving relation-

ship with our creator. We cannot see God, we cannot touch God, we cannot hold God, we cannot know God. God is being yet not a being, God is present yet cannot be seen, God is infinite yet unmeasurable, God caused all that is yet is himself uncaused. Our minds are incapable of comprehending the magnificence, the essential essence, the infinite, boundless, omnipotence and omnipresence of God.



Simply put, we find it difficult to have a loving relationship with something that we can neither see, touch, feel, smell, or hear with our limited human senses. Our human emotions are inextricably entwined with our senses. What we can enjoy through our senses helps us to form

connections and relationships; what we cannot sense in any measurable human way makes it difficult, if not impossible to form any kind of bond.

Thus for most, love of God becomes more affectation and less affection. If God is unknowable, then our desire to encounter him, to love him, or to have a deep, personal relationship with him are not nearly as great as experiencing the simple love for a puppy.

God, in his ineffable love for his creation, and with his all-encompassing and perfect understanding of what he has made, is fully cognizant of our human weaknesses and shortcomings. In his knowing of our unknowing what is God to do to further reveal himself to mankind, to allow us to see his face, to hear his voice, to touch the hem of his garment, to hold him, to love him?

Understanding the inability of mankind to know him, God condescended himself, *"taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."*¹

God descended in order that we might one day ascend to him, but also so that we might discover how to love him as we ought. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, fully God in all his divinity took human form so that the unknowable could become knowable. God no longer could be thought of as

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an abstraction, a transcendent being beyond the ken of man. God, through and by the humanity of Christ, incarnated himself, becoming a fully human person, without giving up any of his unknowable divinity.

Jesus *is* God become man and in his humanity God is no longer unknowable, no longer abstract, transcendent or ineffable; he has now a face, the face of God. This we know for he has said: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."* Philip said to him, *'Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.'* Jesus said to him, *'Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.'*²

God has made himself knowable to all of mankind in the countenance of his only Son, Jesus Christ. When we love Jesus we of necessity love God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, for there is but one God, whole and indivisible, with three divine persons.

Yet, even though we have seen the face of God and heard his words, we

struggle to attain a deep personal relationship with God. Perhaps it is because Christ has died, risen, and ascended into heaven and is thus no longer physically present to modern man.

Perhaps. But, then again, perhaps our struggles are made more manifest by the world and times in which we live. Here are eight struggles which may be keeping us at a distance from God:

- 1) The struggle to have a vital sense of God within a secular culture which, for good and for bad, is the most powerful narcotic ever perpetrated on this planet.
- 2) The struggle inside of our own wounded selves to be healers and peace-makers rather than contributing to the tension.
- 3) The struggle to live, love, and forgive beyond the infectious ideologies that we daily inhale, that is, the struggle for true sincerity, to be men and women of true compassion.
- 4) The struggle for interiority and prayer inside of a culture that in its thirst for information and distraction constitutes a virtual conspiracy against depth and solitude, the eclipse of silence in our world the struggle to move our eyes beyond our digital screens towards a deeper horizon.
- 5) The struggle to not be motivated by paranoia, fear, narrowness, and over-protectionism in the face of terrorism and overpowering complexity.

- 6) The struggle with moral loneliness inside a religious, cultural, political, and moral Diaspora.
- 7) The struggle to link faith to justice.
- 8) The struggle for community and church, the struggle inside a culture of excessive individuality to find the healthy line between individuality and community, spirituality and ecclesiology.³

Yet, despite these obstacles which come between us and God, each of us has the capacity to overcome them all. No one has to overcome them alone for God will always help should we ask.

Soon he will come again, born of a virgin on a cold winter's night in a stable; a helpless newborn baby boy, so perfectly beautiful, with a gentle smile upon his face and eyes that sparkle so bright, filled with great joy, so as to bring glad tidings to all the world.

Everyone who sees him loves him and wants to hold him in their arms. It is so easy to love such a small innocent child, much as a puppy, only more. So much more joy in the knowing, knowing you are looking into the loving eyes of Almighty God.

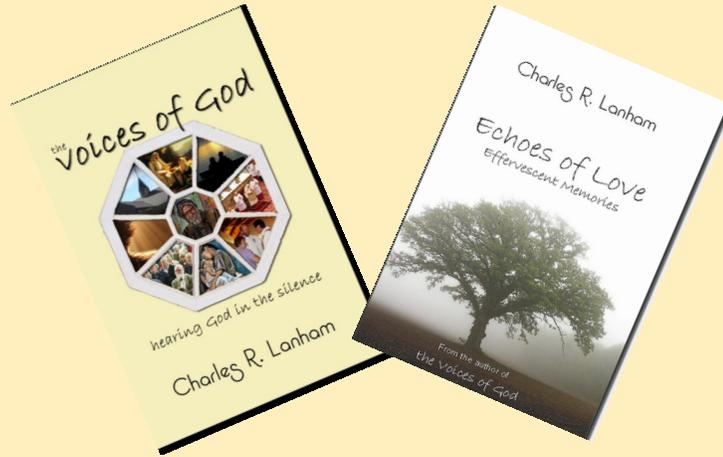
Amen.

Homily for
Third Sunday of Advent (A)
Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

1. Phil 2:7-8.

2. Jn 14:6-12.

3. See Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: The Ten Major Faith Struggles of Our Age*, The Sunday Website of Saint Louis University. Partial list of struggles.



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

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

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