



A journal for restless minds

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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.

Walking Away

Who or what is God's rival

Listening to Bishop Paul Tighe last weekend at the LA Religious Education Congress, I was struck by a question he posed: "What or who is God's chief rival for your heart?" It is certainly a timely and an important question, one for each of us to reflect upon as we enter this season of Lent.

Jesus asked his disciples "But who do you say that I am?" to which Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." If asked, how would you respond? Would it be the same, bearing in mind that as Christians we regularly profess him to be God, the only Son of the Father?

How we see God, the Father, Son, and Spirit is of great spiritual importance, but of even greater importance is whether we have placed anything or anyone before him. Is there something or

someone who contends for our heart, who comes between and before God?

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. ...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who

eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." And many of his disciples found this too difficult to hear and they walked away, no longer willing to listen and to follow him.



Walking away from God is all too easy, for there are many temptations, each a rival for God's love. Here's another thought from last weekend: "If I don't want the Eucharist then I don't want Jesus." When we place other things or other people before and above God, when we desire other than the Eucharist we are most assuredly walking away, turning our backs away from no greater love.

Full Of Empty

Behind the mask

Thomas Merton once observed, *"We cannot possess the truth fully until it has entered into the very substance of our life by good habits and by a certain perfection of moral activity. And we cannot act so without a terrible struggle against temptation, a struggle that divides our whole being against itself with conflicting loyalties. The greatest temptations are not those that solicit our consent to obvious sin, but those that offer us great evils masking as the greatest goods."*¹

We are told that after his baptism, *"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."* Let us take a moment to reflect on that: Jesus went into the desert filled with the certain knowledge that in doing so he would be tested, tempted just as our first parents were tempted by the serpent, the most cunning of all the animals.

There was one significant difference, however: They had not fasted for forty days and forty nights. Adam and Eve lived in a wonderful garden, filled with an abundance of food; they had almost everything, they were want for nothing. Yet they were creatures with limitations; they were good, just not gods, and thus susceptible to the big lie.

They were not only physically well-fed, they were spiritually full—of themselves—easily beguiled by the devil with his temptations and lies: *"You certainly will not die! No, God*

knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil."

Jesus spent forty days and nights in the desert, fasting—*"and afterwards he was hungry."* Someone who fasts for such a long period of time will quite obviously be hungry, physically empty, and in need of nourishment. And likewise, in need of spiritual nourishment, for just as the body requires food to sustain itself, the soul must be fed as well.



Running on empty, in either case, leads one to be highly susceptible to temptation—something the devil knows all too well and will always use to his advantage. Those who find themselves full of empty are his prey. The deceiver wears a pleasant mask that hides the hideousness of his dark and evil visage. His forte is a pleasant guise which disguises the poison of his wares.

Once again, consider Adam and Eve: to be as God, unlimited, self-sufficient, self-made, to know what is good and what is evil, to live forever, to never die! The thought of such seemed so good, what could be the wrong of it?

Thus, as St. Paul writes, *"Through one man,"* we ought not forget the woman in any case, *"sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned."*

What was their sin, the offense for which death first came to man? It was the lie of self-sufficiency, the desire to be set free from the imagined yoke of dependency of the creature to its Creator. The sin, to speak of it clearly, was the outright rejection of the truth concerning the human condition, the denial of our nature as creatures created by, and therefore, dependent upon, the one who is our creator God.

This sin, which came into the world by the act of one man, would be righted by the act of another man, one filled with grace and truth. What the tempter offered Jesus were nothing but delusions, delusions which we are too often willing to accept in our longing for independence and self-sufficiency.

Temptation is a challenge for all of us, it has been so since our first parents were created by God and walked in the garden. We sometimes forget that there were two special trees in the garden—the Tree of Life, which provided eternal life, and the Tree of Knowledge which gave understanding and awareness of good and evil. Only one, the Tree of Knowledge, did God forbid them to eat its fruit. We may know what constitutes sin, we may know the difference between good and bad, but that doesn't reduce the temptation to

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want to experience either one or both.

We are a weak and broken people. With an unquenchable desire to know and to experience the unknown and the new. Yet, we can easily be led astray, susceptible to the delusions and the lies spun by the devil. We convince ourselves that what is illicit or immoral is, in truth, good, right, and just. And, we constantly challenge God, putting him to the test, by doing those things we know full well are abhorrent to him.

We live in an age where immediate gratification is the norm. Jesus was hungry, yet when tempted to immediately satisfy his hunger, he chose to delay gratification for bodily food in order to continue to seek spiritual sustenance. *"One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."*

Nowhere are we weaker or more vulnerable to the devil's wiles than with temptations of the flesh. These are but temptations to use God's gifts for selfish reasons, disregarding the inestimable intrinsic value of his creation.

Is this something we need to address? Is this part of our personal sin? Perhaps, we should consider delaying our own gratification, putting off doing something which gives us pleasure. We might do something to please someone else before we do something for ourselves, placing someone else's needs ahead of our own. Just as Jesus did, we might delay personal gratification by fasting, perhaps not for forty

days and nights, but for shorter periods of time, developing a valuable spiritual discipline in the process.

*"Suppose the tempter makes us feel the pinch of poverty, as he did even to Christ, and taking advantage of our hunger, talks of turning stones into bread: we must not be taken by him, but let him learn what he has still not grasped. Refute him with the word of life, with the word that is the bread sent down from heaven and that gives life to the world."*²

The devil attempted to stroke Jesus' ego by daring him to take a huge risk to his physical safety, saying, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. God won't let you fall to your death."* Jesus doesn't take the bait for he knows who and what he is. He throws the devil's taunt back at him, *"You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."*

"He [the devil] may try to ensnare us through our vanity, as he tried to ensnare Christ when he set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said: 'Prove your divinity: throw yourself down.' Let us beware of succumbing to pride, for the tempter will by no means stop at one success."

*He is never satisfied and is always pursuing us. Often he beguiles us with something good and useful, but its end is always evil. That is simply his method of waging war."*²

During Lent we should take the opportunity to examine or reexamine all the unnecessary risks in our lives. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, due the respect owed to temples of God. What situations do we place ourselves in, what thoughts and ideas do we har-

bor, what near occasions of sin do we place our souls at risk?

The devil tempted Jesus with virtually unlimited power and wealth, all the kingdoms of the world with one stipulation: *"prostrate yourself and worship me."*

Such power and wealth would tempt most. Who among us has not, on occasion, in our dreams and desires, lusted for such power and wealth? Who would hesitate to own the world for such a meager price?

"If the tempter tries to overthrow us through our greed, showing us at one glance all the kingdoms of the world—as if they belonged to him—and demanding that we fall down and worship him, we should despise him, for we know him to be a penniless imposter."

Strong in our baptism, each of us can say: 'I too am made in the image of God, but unlike you, I have not yet become an outcast from heaven through my pride. I have put on Christ; by my baptism I have become one with him. It is you that should fall prostrate before me.'

*At these words he can only surrender and retire in shame; as he retreated before Christ, the light of the world, so will he depart from those illumined by that light."*²

Amen.

Homily for the
First Sunday of Lent (A)
Genesis 2:7-9;3:1-7
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

1. Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1955), 136.

2. Commentary by Gregory Nazianzen, *Homily 40*, 10: PG 36, 370-371.

Keep Them From Idols

Teaching idolatry in our schools

W. Ross Blackburn, rector of Christ the King, an Anglican Fellowship in Boone, North Carolina offered well-considered advice on the education of children (Touchstone: March/April 2017, Keep Them From Idols, 31-37) in which he posits that it takes generations of fidelity to God to insure faithful servants.

Blackburn notes that *"The Scriptures understand that we are largely a product of our generations, and therefore put great weight on generational faithfulness, particularly passing on the knowledge of God to future generations. This is nowhere clearer than in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. ... The Shema begins as follows:*

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deut. 6:4-5)

... Israel's life is to be lived out in all areas as a practical response to God, who redeemed her and called her to himself. It has a bearing on, among other things, worship, one's economic life, one's sexual relationships, one's understanding of justice, and as we shall see, the raising of one's children. ... Nothing in Israel's life fell outside this command to love God, for all of life was an expression of this primary call."

Blackburn adds that while this portion of the Shema is largely uncontroversial with the Christian communi-

ty, what follows is, as he states, *"nothing less than a philosophy of education."*

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk to them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6-9)

What Blackburn writes next is key:

"At least three matters are worth noting. First, the command assumes that education is chiefly about God, in the implication that loving God and following his commands is the most important thing that a child can learn. Second, it establishes the parents as responsible for raising children to love God. Finally, it calls for such an education to be carried on in the course of life."

This is but an introduction to what Blackburn suggests are practical guidelines to ongoing, life-long education of our children. He firmly believes, as do I, that *"education is chiefly about God. If that sounds strange, it is because we have understood education to be a different endeavor than raising children to know God. Yet Deuteronomy implies that an educated child is not, in the first place, a child who has acquired skills or information, but rather one who knows and loves god."*

Speaking on the modern educational premise of *"not-God,"* a premise

axiomatic in our public, and much of our private, education, he observes that *"to see this, one need only recognize that teaching, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' is forbidden, while the equally radical notion that God did not create the heavens and the earth is taught as scientific truth....The idea that God has anything to do with the natural world, or historical movements, or mathematics, is effectively sidelined in the name of 'neutrality'.*

Yet this supposed neutrality is in fact a very bold statement that it is possible—even appropriate—to understand the world apart from God. In other words, underneath such a philosophy is a sturdy metaphysical commitment that is just as 'religious' as any religious perspective it might seek to sideline. In effect, the prevailing philosophy of education has institutionalized Psalm 14:1: 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God.' ...

The extent to which any educational system is built upon the premise of not-God, whether explicitly or implicitly, is the extent to which that educational system has become idolatrous. And it is so by definition. Which brings us back to the First Commandment."

Blackburn recalls a comment made earlier in the year on a political commentary website concerning the alarming dissolution of the family in the U.S., and the consequent effects on raising children:

"I think there are all sorts of traditional, social ways of taking care of kids, and of taking care of your parents, and as those things evaporate the real problem is we are

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not yet efficiently replacing them with state-based solutions. (Bloomberg.com/news/videos/2015-02-23/the-global-flight-from-the-family-eberstadt)"

His response: "The comment is revealing, for it locates the problem not in the dissolution of families, but rather in the lack of state-based alternatives, clearly implying that the family is irrelevant as long as the state picks up the responsibility of raising and educating children. While obviously the words of one commentator, the Church does well to pay attention here, for our culture is moving decidedly in the direction of offering our children to the state. Political initiatives such as universal publicly funded pre-school make clear that there are many in our world who believe the state should take the lead in raising children, and who have the political power to see it done."

Blackburn concludes his article with four broad suggestions:

"First, let us take seriously that the call to love God is countercultural, sometimes even in the Church. Loving God should be practically discernible, positively and negatively, in the life of the Church, and in the families within the Church.

Second, let us recognize the home as the primary context of education, and the call of parents to educate and disciple their children. Education is far more than imparting information. It is chiefly about forming Christian character and judgment, teaching children to love God in all of life. Yet much of our current practice, allowing secular education to be undertaken by the schools and religious education by Sunday schools or youth groups, in

effect suggests that education is best carried out by experts that can impart secular or religious information. The effect is to sideline parents, who are often deeply involved in neither.

Third, let us remember that teaching children to love God means that education is firmly grounded in the cross of Christ. Why is the cross of Christ so crucial? The cross reveals God most completely. We only love God insofar as we know who he has revealed himself to be in Christ and what he has done for us in Christ. Correspondingly, because man is made in the image of God, it follows we cannot know ourselves apart from knowing God, and it is folly to seek to understand the nature and movements of man if we don't know who man is. Man is not only the image of God, but as Christ is the most complete revelation of God, man is the image of Christ. And he is therefore the image of Christ crucified. The call to Jesus' disciples, therefore, is to 'love one another, as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34). And what is the purpose of education, if not to love God and learn to serve one another because we love him?

Finally, we need to see the connection between the family and the witness of the Church. As evident throughout Scriptures, the witness of the Church is chiefly manifest in her presence, even before her proclamation, for the witness of God's people rests on who we are before what we do."

This is but a brief summarization of the complete article. It is well worth reading the entire article and I encourage readers to do so by visiting Touchstone's website at touchstonemag.com. To find the article click on THE NEW ISSUE block, then Keep Them from Idols under Features.

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.

Called To Communion

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

1996, 165 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

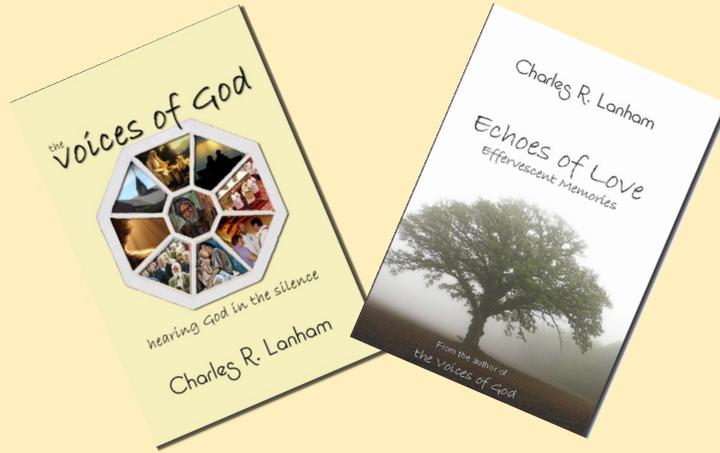
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

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