



A journal for restless minds

MUSING MINDLESSNESS

Disposing of the mind

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Of whom do we love?

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.

Musing Mindlessness

Disposing of the mind

For all the supposed advances man has made since God saw fit to create us, somewhere along the way we most assuredly left reason and rationality behind to rot and putrefy. Everyday, the evidence grows, exponentially it seems, that man has exhausted the utility of the mind, finding it a defunct appendage, much akin to the tailbone and the appendix.

How else to explain the inexplicable mindlessness that has befallen mankind? What is one to think—assuming one has yet to enter their mind—of the emotional wasteland so many have permanently parked their now empty-headed vessels? The disposal of the mind is so pervasive it takes no effort at all to prove the point, or pointlessness, of the condition.

Case in point: For all the attention and ballyhoo over the recent Charlottesville, Virginia protest turned hate

riot, little has been written or spoken that would put it into perspective. While I do not know who the author is, this brief essay sums it up fairly well:

"Here is what I learned about America over the weekend. After 6 months of organization and promotion, the 'largest white supremacist gathering in decades' drew only several hundred sick puppies from around the country on Saturday. Several hundred.

And on Sunday, 52 million Americans went to church—where everyone is welcomed and we all drink from the same cup. 62 million Americans volunteer in any given year, and 83% of American adults give to charity. And 145 million Americans went to work today—where people of every race, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, orientation, and ability get along just fine. America is not those few hundreds who hate; it is those tens of millions who don't. Let's keep our perspective."

The problem, it seems to me, is that those who hate—no matter what or who or why they hate—now own the bully-pulpit.

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Who Is My Neighbor?

Of whom do we love?

There is something to be said for neighbors. Some we know well and some we know not at all. Some we like and some...well, not so much. Some we trust and some we attempt to avoid like a plague. Some are always willing and eager to help when you are in need and others quickly find themselves too busy to lend a hand. Some will do for you before you ask of them.

The same can as well be said for our families and our communities. No doubt, the question of "Who is my neighbor?" can be, and often is, challenging. In this we are often tempted more toward suspicion than acceptance, our onboard fight-or-flight response reaction on high alert. Our reactions toward others is seldom instant embrace. We seldom see Jesus in the eyes of a stranger.

Yet, Jesus reminds us, over and over again, that our neighbor is not only the person next door, but the ones up the street, the ones that live on the next block, the stranger around the corner, the enemy lurking in the shadows, the ragged person lying in the doorway, the people we have yet to meet. Jesus shows us that the stranger, the tax collector, the soldier, the leper, the dying, the blind, and the lame are all neighbors, worthy of love, compassion, and forgiveness.

It sounds so easy, to love a stranger, but we know it is not. It is

hard, some might say impossible to love those who return hatred for love; violence for peace. There are those who don't want to be neighbors, those who reject us, distrust everyone, and even those who want to persecute us. How can we extend our hands and our hearts to them, how can we ever hope to be their neighbors?

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"



All too often, we hear the first, nod our heads, and give it little, if any, further notice. The second we hear but partially, and are wont to qualify, misunderstanding an important part of it. What we fail to understand is that the two are inextricably intertwined, the second made possible only because of the first.

It is because of his love for us that we must love God with our entire being. Our being, our existence is entirely dependent on God's sustaining love.

Without God's love we simply would not, could not, be. His love gives us life, sustains us, nourishes us. It is the first and great commandment that make the second one possible for only by and through God's love are we able to love God, our neighbor, and ... ourselves.

In order to love our neighbors, we must first believe in the forgiving power of God's love and allow him to heal our brokenness. We must forgive ourselves, letting go of our faults and failures, allowing ourselves to be forgiven. We must place our trust in God and know that we are his beloved children. Only when we see the image of a loving God in ourselves can we see God in our neighbors.

Irish playwright Oscar Wilde once said, "*Some people cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go.*" We all know those whose presence warm our hearts and fill the room with joy and laughter just as we are aware of others for whom we cringe at the very thought of them. To paraphrase Wilde: "*Some people we love without reservation; others, with great reservation.*"

Jesus tells us, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust*" (Matthew 5:43-45).

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No one, especially Jesus, ever said loving others would be easy, and he should know. Even after excruciating torture and crucifixion, he still offered those who would kill him his love and forgiveness.

The truth is that loving others can often be far more difficult a task to accomplish than anything else we might attempt to do in this life. Let's face it, some people make it extremely difficult if not nearly impossible to love.

And then there are those whose virulent hatred and animosity toward others lends no opening through which one can hope to inject even an ounce of love. They hate for the sake of hating. Their words and actions condemn you because you wish to love them. Their hearts are cold, hardened against any and all attempts to love. It seems to be an impossible quest.

We all know of someone for whom it is difficult to love and yet we are called to love them as our heavenly Father loves them. Jesus does not equivocate; he is crystal clear on what we must do: we must love our enemies and pray for those who would persecute us, for it is only in loving those for whom it is most difficult to love that we may be called children of God.

How are we to love the unlovable, especially those who project hatred and ill-will, those who espouse to perpetrate evil upon us?

First we must recognize and admit that all of life comes from God; we are God's creatures, made in his image and likeness. We must also remember

that God is a community of Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, one in being yet mutually interdependent.

Our obsessive desire to be independent is not Godly. Too often we live our lives believing we are accountable to no one but ourselves and that attitude almost always results in trouble, pain, and suffering. Our defenses rise whenever others take offense or offer criticism for anything or something we say or do. For some, any criticism, real or imagined, can be devastating, emotionally and psychologically so, the current demand for safe spaces and abundant trigger warnings on campuses obvious examples.

The truth is, no one lives alone. We are communal creatures; God made us that way. He said so, from the very beginning, *"It is not good that the man should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18). Yet, communal creatures though we are, living with others can be difficult at times. We are a broken people, selfish, egoistic, with a lust for power. Factions, backbiting, jealousies abound in our communities, our neighborhoods, our parish families as well as our personal families. Cynicism, disillusionment, distrust seep into our bones.

We bristle at being criticized, and yet without it we cannot grow, we will not learn. Anyone who desires to grow and learn to excel at anything should welcome, even seek out criticism. It is how we learn. But criticism must be loving, not harsh, negative, or belittling. We must love others enough to mentor and care for them as children of God.

Jesus tells us, *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone."* Often we hesitate out of fear of the other's response. As the victim of some injustice, we are tempted to harden our hearts, when Jesus calls us to love and forgive our neighbor.

As a sinner, and we all fall into that category, ought never be tried, convicted or sentenced in absentia. Why should that be so? Because it is the sinner's welfare that is at stake as much as the one who has been sinned against. We live in a throw-away culture; redemption runs counter-cultural: we can love the victim but not the criminal. Jesus tells us to love both.

Directly confronting another person, especially someone with whom we have or are having difficulties is seldom enjoyable. *"Some families will go for years before addressing a problem. Grudges or resentments within a community more often die with those who hold them rather than come to resolution in quiet conversation. Misdeeds of friends or relatives are usually discussed with anyone but the accused."*

Our human relationships mirror our relationship with God. Whenever we encounter each other—not only in prayer—Jesus is in our midst."

Amen.

Homily for the
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20

1. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Challenge in Community*,
The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

Their shrill, clamoring, mindless bleating resonates all too well with those who believe they are the true voices of America. They are not, yet they fuel the insatiable appetites of the political elite and a media firmly convinced of their own righteousness. It is a case of the mindless dead leading the brainless living.

The vast majority of those who live in this fair land see those who hate for what they are, haters. It matters not their race, color, creed, or origin of birth, haters don't think, they don't care for reason; their minds are petrified, ancient matter now preserved in stone.

At Charlottesville, there were haters on all sides, not just neo-Nazis and white-supremacists, but members of the violent left-wing "antifa" activist group well-known for their violence and hate-filled rhetoric. There was an unreported commonality present, and it had little if anything to do with the purpose of the protest. Pure, unadulterated hate was the common ingredient and no one, especially the media, reported it. Assuredly, neither the alt-right nor left-wing groups cared for truth or justice for they know only hatred.

The impetus for the protests, notwithstanding what has been reported and entertained by the media and political punditry, had nothing to do with bigotry, nothing to do with slavery, nothing to do with racial injustice. No, the impetus behind the protests began long before the current outbreak of violence and hatred.

America's racial divide can be laid squarely at the feet of those politically correct revisionists of our nation's history. In a recent opinion piece, Red Kittell wrote:

"The German language has a word America's politically correct history revisionists should learn and understand: 'Zeitgeist,' meaning 'spirit of the time.'

Zeitgeist relates to a general cultural, intellectual, ethical, spiritual and/or political climate that is no longer acceptable today but was considered correct and acceptable for a given historic time.

Factual history should be indelible and not influenced by emotions, opinions or personal feelings. Sadly, history is the most subjective of all social sciences and therefore regularly revised or reinterpreted based on personal emotions, social agendas and aesthetics, along with political and economic expediencies.

The current lifespan of modern-day humankind reflects the fastest and most comprehensive moralistic, spiritual, scientific and political transformation ever encountered throughout the evolution of our species. Regretfully, there exists a misdirected element of educators, political and spiritual leaders obsessed with avoiding facts and truths that might suggestively cause discomfort among various social, religious and ethnic groups. This group of history revisionists is instrumental in rapidly revising literature, art and historical facts to make them less offensive to modern day Americans.

Some elements of America's culture related to music by Stephen Foster, literature by Mark Twain, slave ownership by national patriots and various periods of antisocial behavior related to

past expediencies necessitated or condoned during specific historical periods are being systematically erased or revised in text books, lesson plans and media presentations. Admittedly, such behavior is considered abhorrent today, but it was deemed acceptable in its time period.

A more realistic school of thought related to the un-whitewashed study of history is that current and future generations would hopefully avoid repeating unacceptable civility in response to real or conceived situations if they could truthfully and realistically engage history as it occurred, rather than in a revised socially acceptable format."

Kittell closes his essay with a quote which bears repeating. It is from "The Art of Racing in the Rain" by George Stein:

"Inside each of us resides the truth, the absolute truth. But sometimes the truth is hidden in a hall full of mirrors. Sometimes we believe we are viewing the real thing, when in fact we in fact are viewing a facsimile, a distortion.

We must shatter the mirrors by breaking the glass, shattering the illusions, thereby creating the capability to look into ourselves and root out the distortions until that thing we know in our hearts to be perfect and truth stands before us."

Archbishop Charles Chaput wrote a few weeks ago on the epidemic of hate that has recently set the tone of our national discourse. In it he writes, "We're not yet tearing at each other with our teeth. But the irrational fury on our campuses, in the streets, in our news media, and in our larger political and cultural debates leads inevitably in that direction.

'Hate has no home here' is an admirable theme for one of today's most popular lawn-sign campaigns. But its message simply isn't true.

Hate does have a home here. It's welcome and very well-fed in a lot of our hearts, regardless of our political allegiances. And our refusal to admit that is part of the problem.

When an organization like the Southern Poverty Law Center labels a mainstream religious-liberty advocate like the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) as a 'hate group' it's simply betraying its own bitter contempt for the people and convictions the ADF defends. So, yes, hate has a home here all right: not just among white nationalists, immigrant-haters and neo-Nazis, as loathsome as their ideas are, but also among the 'progressive' and educated elites who have the power to insulate themselves from the consequences of their own delusions and bigotries.

The reason the Church names anger as one of the seven 'deadly' sins is because it's simultaneously so poisonous, so delicious and so addictive. Anger congeals quite comfortably into hatred. ... People easily begin to like being angry. Wrath feels good, especially when the ugliness of the habit can be dressed in a struggle against real or perceived evils."

Bishop George Murry of the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio, along with Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) announced at an August 23 press conference a new anti-racism effort undertaken at the diocesan, parish, school and other institutional lev-

els.

Bishop Murry said that *"Recent events reveal yet another reminder of what can be traced back to the original sin of the United States: racism."* He went on to say that the new committee's aim now will be to marshal resources for a concerted national effort, including a summit of religious leaders to develop a united front to end racism.

While I applaud and support the USCCB's efforts, I hold little hope for the demise of racism now or in the future, either in America or around the globe. Here, I am not being pessimistic, rather realistic. Racism is not a matter which can be legislated or educated out of existence. Racism, violence, hatred, like anger, as Archbishop Chaput so rightly put it, are *"so poisonous, so delicious and so addictive,"* that we too easily begin to like the taste.

The cure will not, nor can it, come from institutional directives or legislation. The cure cannot come from denying the truth of the past, from revising history to soothe the sensibilities of perceived injustice. As George Santayana so famously wrote, *"He who forgets history is condemned to repeat it,"* the same goes for those who would deny or revise history to save their souls. Historical fact cannot be altered, erased or ignored because someone is discomfited by the truth.

The cure must come from within ourselves, each and every one of us. It begins when we remember these words: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say*

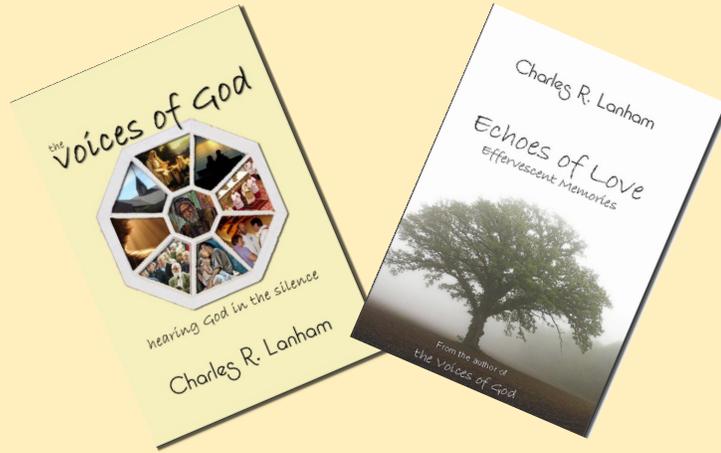
to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

The cure to racism and hate is the same as it has been forever: love. But to love your enemies as Christ commands us, we must reopen our hearts *and our minds*, we must be willing to shatter the illusions, to look within ourselves and root out the distortions, the preconceived notions and the petrified thoughts which have been clogging our minds.

We cannot listen to the angry voices of those who would advocate violence, who would promote hatred and bigotry, who would traffic in fear and distortion. They no longer use their minds, they no longer seek the truth, they no longer have the capacity to love anyone, even themselves. They can only hate.

Like addicts, until they choose to help themselves, they will never escape the self-induced nightmare where they now reside. They justify themselves and their actions by dragging others into their living hell.

Hatred, racism, bigotry, anger. All come from disposing of the mind, from mindlessness. Use your mind, feed your soul, and above all, love.



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

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

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