



A journal for restless minds

IN THE INFORMATION AGE

Ignorance is a choice

THE WAY DOWN

Is the only way up

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.

In The Information Age

Ignorance is a choice

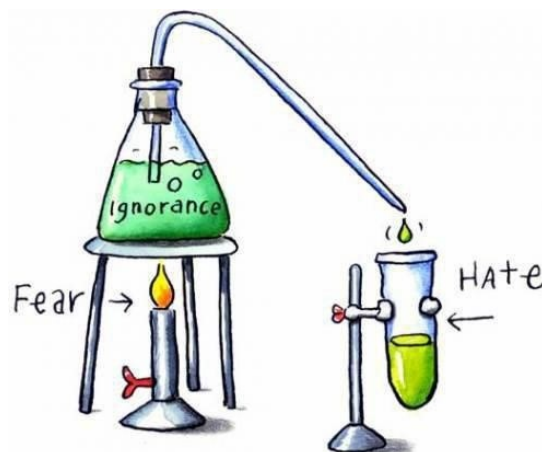
Oftentimes, we dismiss the smallest things as insignificant and unimportant; ignoring the mosquito feeding on our arm while placing all our attention on the massive elephant standing before us. After all, what harm could come from a thing so small? We ignore the small things until they are not; ignorance is bliss, until it is not.

We live in an unprecedented time, for never have we had so much information literally at our fingertips. The vast treasury of knowledge, accumulated throughout the ages, is readily available to anyone who would seek it. The near universality of education and the ubiquity of access have removed barriers which have heretofore proved difficult to overcome, turning ignorance—once the com-

mon and accepted lot of most—into a choice rather than a destiny.

For the vast majority, their ignorance is little more than a bothersome, seemingly harmless mosquito, not worth the effort required to swat. Like a badge of honor, those who choose ignorance over knowledge will readily acknowledge what they do not know, while simultaneously refusing to make any effort to

learn what they admit they do not know. Their ignorance, however, does not, in the least, preclude them from stating positions not evidenced by verifiable fact or reasoned thought.



Ignorance, fueled by fear, produces hate which further adds fuel to the flames of fear; it is a vicious cycle which can only be extinguished by replacing ignorance with understanding, hatred with love, and fear with faith. So, we find ourselves asking: "When did ignorance become a point of view?"

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The Way Down

Is the only way up

At times, it seems nearly impossible to discern whether we are going up, down, or sideways. We look for guidance but wonder whom to believe, whom to trust. Much of our misgivings rests in the abundance of hypocrisy that we encounter from our leaders, secular and religious.

Hypocrisy breeds distrust and contempt, and no one wants to seek guidance from a hypocrite, from someone who is deemed contemptible, who is not considered trustworthy.

The gospel today covers a lot of territory, and it would be easy to place our focus on one thing at the expense of another. There are two main points which we should consider.

We are told to do what the teachers say, not what they do. That, my brothers and sisters, is easy to say, but not so easy to do. Jesus is often heard chastising the Pharisees and scribes for their hypocritical behavior. *"They preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation, 'Rabbi'"* (Matthew 23:3-7).

That was then, of course, but hypocrisy can be found in abundance today. Consider our political leaders—no matter their party affiliation or ideological bent—who repeatedly place burdens on their constituents but not on themselves. They say what will win votes but act in their own self-interest. Is there any question why they are viewed with so much contempt, why they are not trusted?



The same can be found with teachers, both secular and clergy. A prime example is of course the sexual abuse of children by teachers and religious. How can we learn from people who do not practice what they preach?

Truth matters, and the gospel message illustrates just how much the message is compromised by the faults of the messenger, as well as the institution in which the messenger represents. Do what they say, not what they do, sounds like poor advice. How can we trust what they say when they fail to practice what they teach?

Jesus criticizes the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees when he says to them: *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you*

neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in" (Matthew 23:13-14).

We need to be able to discern the truth in the midst of falsehood, but how are we to know what is true and what is not? Paul tells us *"Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22).

It is important that we do not draw faulty and dangerous conclusions from today's gospel. Above all, the gospel is an invitation to turn our eyes toward our one Father in heaven and toward Christ who show us how to become a servant. In his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, Saint John Paul II notes:

"One who teaches in this way, with authority, has a unique title to the name of 'Teacher' ... This image of Christ the Teacher is at once majestic and familiar, impressive and reassuring ... I am not forgetful that the majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being. Accordingly, the whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: His silences, His miracles, His gestures, His prayer, His love for people, His special affection for the little and the poor, His acceptance of the total sacrifice on the cross for the Redemption of the world, and His resurrection are the actualization of His word and the ful-

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fillment of Revelation. Hence for Christians the crucifix is one of the most sublime and popular images of Christ the Teacher."

If Jesus was harshly critical of the religious authorities of his time, he was also harsh with his disciples and in some ways, with us as well. Jesus challenges us to wear the cloak of humility, which can at times be humiliating. As Christians, we represent Christ in the world today; how we present ourselves to the world is a direct reflection of Christ crucified for we are the body of Christ.

"The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." However paradoxical it might seem, the only way to heaven is by going down. When you elevate yourself you will inevitably be faced with a fall.

As disciples, to the extent possible, we must rid ourselves of selfishness and pride, we must avoid placing ourselves on a pedestal, exalting ourselves before others. Standing on a pedestal not only makes it easy to be knocked off, but the self-elevating height has the effect of moving us further away from God.

Like the Scribes and Pharisees, we often place ourselves on a pedestal, believing that we have special gifts or talents that make us superior to others while we conveniently forget that we all have our shortcomings and weaknesses. Or at least we want to forget, so that we don't have to acknowledge to others that we are not quite as good

as we might have them believe. For some, the statement "Lord, it is so hard to be humble, when I am perfect in every way" feels so right and true, but in truth, there is only one who has the right to make that statement... and He died for us on a cross some 2000 years ago.

Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* wrote, *"A humble countryman who serves God is more pleasing to Him than a conceited intellectual who knows the course of the stars, but neglects his own soul ... A true understanding and humble estimate of oneself is the highest and most valuable of all lessons. To take no account of oneself, but always to think well and highly of others is the highest wisdom and perfection."*

The word 'humility' comes from the Latin word 'humus', which means soil and is generally associated with words such as abject, ignoble, of poor condition, not worth much. More often than not we perceive a humble person as meek, stooped over with downcast eyes and a soft, timid voice, trying very hard to never be noticed or recognized. However, this is not the vision offered by Jesus, rather, his is one of a strong sense of self—that begins in humility; that we are in this together and we need and depend on one another, that we must use our gifts for the good of others and the glory of God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that *"The virtue of humility consists in keeping oneself within one's own bounds, not reaching out to things above one, but submitting to one's superior."* And Saint Augustine said that God accepts sacrifices only from

the altar of humility. We humble ourselves by being ourselves and God exalts us for who we are.

Humility is a gift neither earned nor self-created. When we live courageously in the spirit of communion with others we open ourselves to seeing others from God's perspective. Humility begins in the knowledge that we belong to God. It is the sense that all of God's creation is important and that our existence depends on our relationship with others. It is not a matter of denying our own self-interest but in seeing how our interests are connected to the well-being of others.

Humility does not call for us to reject or disparage our God given gifts nor does it require us to think of our gifts as less valued than the gifts God has given others. God has entrusted each of us with certain gifts and abilities and he expects that we use His gifts to their fullest. God measures each of us on our own merit; it is not a competition. What others achieve is never part of the equation; before God, everyone stands alone.

We all wish to stand out; yet, we need to step down from our pedestals and learn to become servants, to humbly thank God for the gifts we have received. Proper gratitude is ultimate virtue; it defines sanctity. To be a saint is to be motivated by gratitude, nothing more, nothing less. Amen.

Homily for the
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Malachi 1:14B — 2:2B, 8-10
1 Thessalonians 2:7B-9, 13
Matthew 23:1-12

This is not a specious question; far from it. It ought to be “intuitively obvious to the most casual observer” that as Marcellus once did opine: *“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.”*¹ Everyday we are spoon-fed opinion offered as fact by those who know little or nothing of what they are speaking. Public consumption of pure, unadulterated hogwash has risen to morbid heights, accepted, without question, simply because it was issued by a celebrity or person of some repute.

Case in point: a recent discussion concerning the *relevance* of the Ten Commandments by the hosts of the rancid and repulsive show *“The View”* provided viewers with balderdash *carte du jour*, rubbish presented as truth, absurd survey results pronounced as authoritative, and the name of “Jesus” placed on par with the seven dirty words never to be spoken on public airways.

On the last, the producers of the show had the unmitigated temerity to bleep the Lord’s name not once, but twice within less than a minute when one of the hosts casually mentioned his name. Mind you, they had no problem with the hosts’ frequent use of God’s name—God was never bleeped—but apparently the producers felt the need to be *sensitive* to those who might be offended by the mere mention of Jesus or of Christianity.

The segment of the show began with Whoopi Goldberg glibly stating, *“The Ten Commandments were set in stone thousands and millions, hundreds of zillions of years ago, but some people are*

wondering if a little editing isn’t in order...” Pointing and looking upwards she superciliously quips, *“Don’t hit me God.”* She then adds, *“Some people think we need to lop a few commandments off. They would like to lose, just saying, ‘Don’t worship idols, don’t take the Lord’s name in vain (only 38% say that,) worship no other god, and keep the Sabbath day holy.”*

Another host interjects that this was a poll of British Christians and that while 94% still think that stealing and killing are important, she wanted to know about the 6% that think stealing and killing are ok. Another host then stated what should have been eminently obvious, that *“they are the Ten Commandments not the ten suggestions.”* She went on to say she grew up a Catholic girl, *“You are supposed to follow the commandments. They’re not only the basis of our Christianity, of our faith, but of the law....I don’t know how you lop any of them off.”*

Yet another host jumped into the fray by admitting that some of them she didn’t realize were commandments, like *“using the Lord’s name in vain.”* She went on to admit that she often said, *“Oh my God!”* to which Whoopi responded, *“I don’t think that is what they mean”* to which several suggested it was only when you said *“G-D”* that you were breaking the commandment.

Another host (there appear to be an endless number of them) suggested that this might just be a *“societal thing, that we have gone back on so many things, like: what is ethical, what is moral.”* Having attended Catholic school but growing up Baptist she observed that she al-

ways thought she was going to hell because she didn’t follow all the rules that the *“Catholic girls”* followed, like having sex before marriage. Here, several argued that wasn’t in the Ten Commandments, so there was nothing sinful or wrong with that.

At this point, Whoopi jumped in, saying that she also attended Catholic school, *“Catholic school in the early sixties and how it was in the seventies was very, very different, because when John XXIII decided he needed people to understand that the Catholic Church recognized that there would be shifts and things, you had that ability to make those decisions and say, you know what, I think I’m going to go this way. And once we took this idea that you had to have 400 children out of the equation, I think people felt a lot better. But now I think the most important thing is, you know, if you are Christian, if you are not a Christian, if you are just a human being, a lot of these (Ten Commandments) are great to live by, just as a human being.”*

The viewers of *The View* have been fed a bucket full of manure, seasoned with rancid anti-Catholic innuendo, covered with a dollop full of baloney, and all presented by such authoritative scholars as Whoopi Goldberg and her bevy of Catholic school dropouts. God, the Ten Commandments, Catholicism, Christianity in general have all been trivialized and served up as a crude joke. And the disciples of *The View* swallow such tripe as gospel, hook, line and sinker. Whoopi said it, her co-hosts confirmed it, so, it must be true.

But wait! There’s more!

One woman offered this gem: *"I have a funny story about taking the Lord's name in vain.*

My parents were really strict about what we said in the home. We couldn't say 'Oh, my God!' We couldn't say 'J C', we couldn't say ... 'J<bleep>s'. We could say 'Jeez' but not 'J<bleep>sus' unless you were praising him, then you could say it." It was very clear, in both instances, when the bleeping of Jesus occurred.

Another offered this jewel: *"As you said, these commandments are universal in all doctrines of major religions. And I think as long as we try and lead some kind of moral code, I think no matter what lens you view God ..." whereupon Whoopi interjected, "Yeah, but some people don't believe in God, and that's ok too but it doesn't keep you from being a human being."*

Say what? This conversation—Should we call it one?—goes nowhere near truth. Unfortunately, few would exercise their minds and their reason to distill what they heard. Fewer still would exercise their free will and turn away from such nonsense.

Let's parse just one statement: *"I think as long as we try and lead some kind of moral code."* What precisely does 'some kind of moral code' look like? From the overall conversation, it appears to be whatever one defines for oneself. There is actually nothing new with this way of thinking. Hobbes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Machiavelli posited similar views. Of course, there were also those other philosophical geniuses: Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche who had their own personal moral code. Lovely men, marvelous moral codes.

I can hear each of them as they decide what belongs in their moral code.

"Well, for me, I like the Ten Commandments, that is, all except for the first three, they really don't make sense since Nietzsche has definitively declared that 'God is dead'. The fourth one doesn't really suit me at all. I never liked my mother much and hated my father. Still do. So no, the fourth just doesn't work for me. Now that I think about it, the fifth one is a bit too strict for my taste. I mean, let's face it, following that one means no abortion or euthanasia. I don't believe there is anything morally wrong with either of those. I have never understood what is so wrong with adultery. I mean, just because a person is married, should that take them off the market? I know what I want and I take it. So, don't tell me I can't. And, in my moral code, what is mine is mine and what is yours is mine if I have a hankering for it. Stealing is just another name for getting what should be mine anyway. And the eighth one, what is wrong with telling a little white lie every now and then. So, no, it is just not in my genes to always tell the truth. And that one about coveting my neighbor's wife or that other one about my neighbor's goods. I don't need that one either.

The problem with the Ten Commandments is they just don't fit within my own definition of a moral code."

Those who are content to live their lives ignoring the truth, who refuse to question, willingly remaining among the ignorant, will inevitably be led like lambs to the slaughter. Their souls, fired by fear and fueled by ignorance will be filled with hatred.

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 4.

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

On Conscience

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

2007, 82 pages.

How the West Really Lost God

Mary Eberstadt

Templeton Press

June 9, 2012, 268 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Co.

February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

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Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

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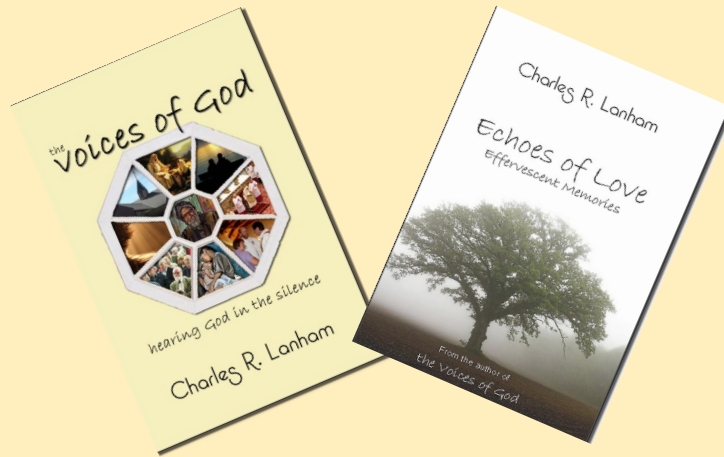
Catholic Answers Magazine

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.

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