

# Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

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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.

## The Truth Opined

*Relative humors*

There is a new truth in town and its name is Pew. Not to be confused with common church seating upon which too few find the need or desire to occupy these days; it is quite possibly a closer relative to what is frequently expressed when pleasant air of a sudden turns foul.

Finding no use in Divine Providence, the secular, materialistic left—not to be conflated with liberalism as the left would have you believe; they are decidedly not the same—

knowing it cannot win on merit or truth relies exclusively on opinion. It was G.K. Chesterton who noted over a century ago: "Thoroughly worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true."<sup>1</sup>



To explain, Chesterton wrote of a remark he had often heard before which had become almost a motto of the modern world:

Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, "That man will get on; he believes in himself." ... I said to him, "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 Supermen. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." He

said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. "Yes, there are," I retorted, "and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary

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tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. 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. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. 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.

One could very well appreciate the utter demise of such progressive cynicism were it verifiably so. But the humors of cholera and melancholy—having grown progressively ever more bilious—have not been especially kind to the thoroughly worldly people of the twenty-first century. The utter demise of lunatic asylums have placed the rotters who completely believe in themselves on the streets among the ever dwindling few who are still sane.

They are the walking dead; an unhappy, melancholy, peevish, irascible lot. Their fault: they have no faults; their weakness: the sin of self-confidence; their minds: empty vessels chanting maxims which are not true; their faith: they believe in themselves, believing they are gods but are at best inadequate pitiable gods of small and insignificant cosmos: how small their world, their universe, their hell.

They are mad because they have discarded their minds, they behave madly simply because the brain continues to control the physical senses

unreasonably. They have the brains to act but without the mind, in their madness, can neither think nor reason.

Aquinas acknowledged that not only does man perceive the world through the physical senses but so also through reason, a property of the immaterial mind; man alone can think in the abstract, conceptualizing the immaterial.

Unlike our sensory cognitive powers, which operate via materially constituted sense organs, our intellectual cognitive power, operating independently of any sense organ, represents the world, and so in its operations enables us to grasp the intelligible features of the world ... in terms of abstract, universal concepts free from material constraints. But why is our intellect able to do this—engage in immaterial cognitive operations, or produce immaterial thoughts? Aquinas's answer<sup>2</sup> is that the intellect itself, and so the soul as the source of that power, is immaterial.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Aquinas's answer asserts and affirms that:

... the human, rational soul, as pure form, is distinct from the matter, or body, that it informs, and does not depend for its existence or nature on the matter, or body, that it informs. And so no matter how physically immature or injured a human being may be, he or she remains a rational being, and so a person (even if his or her physical condition prevents him or her from performing distinctly intellectual acts.)<sup>4</sup>

Some will argue—those who support a metaphysical worldview—that all living things have souls, thus denying any distinction between man and all other living things. Thomistic (and Aristote-

lian) metaphysics afford such a view while adding that human beings alone possess a *rational* soul with distinctly rational powers of intellect and will.

Thus, the rational soul as the substantial form of a human being determines what the human being is, by nature. Being an individual substance of a rational nature, then, is not an accidental feature or property that a human being can gain at a certain point in his or her physical development, and then can lose, like a tree that grows leaves in the spring only to shed them again in the fall. ... So, once a human being, and so once a person—a rational being—always a human being, and so always a person. A human being is (and remains) a person, an individual substance of a rational nature, distinct from individual substances of other, nonrational natures, from the beginning of his or her existence until the end of his or her (physical) existence, regardless of what stage in his or her physical development he or she may be in (no matter how physically immature or mature), or what physical condition he or she may be in at any given time in his or her life.

Materialism and secularism are self-limiting philosophies, as narrow as any intelligent idea for 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 Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest. ...

Spiritual doctrines do not actually limit the mind as do materialistic denials. Even if I believe in immortality I need not think about it. But if I disbelieve in immortality I must not think about it. In the first case the road is open and I can go as far as I like; in the second the road is shut. But the case is even stronger, and the parallel with madness is yet more strange. ... For instance, when materialism leads men to complete fatalism (as it generally does), it is quite idle to pretend that it is in any sense a liberating force. It is absurd to say that you are especially advancing freedom when you only use free thought to destroy free will. The determinists come to bind, not to loose. They may well call their law the "chain" of causation. It is the worst chain that ever fettered a human being."<sup>5</sup>

Whether Chesterton or Aquinas, both point to the same fundamental fallacy of the materialist philosophy. The man who believes in himself limits himself to a very small world, a world which he cannot escape without realizing that he is mad. As Chesterton observed, "Materialists and madmen never have doubts." Their unabashed self-importance confines them to the smallest of cells in which mirrored walls reflect but the smallest of worlds filled with echoes of their deluded sycophancy.

In denying the immaterial, the spiritual, the rational soul, the materialist denies the value of the human person; no longer God-made but a mere random assortment of chemicals and atoms which as if by chance evolved. Thus they make man out to be nothing more than a brutish

unthinking beast, a tool to be used, then discarded, like cellophane or wrapping paper.

Those who are madmen thus refuse any thought of personhood for to do so denies those who are mad their madness. Their world is turned on its head but from their vantage point it is as it should be. Chesterton calls this being born upside down.

All the real argument about religion turns on the question of whether a man who was born upside down can tell when he comes right way up. ...

This is what I call being born upside down. The sceptic may truly be said to be topsy-turvy; for his feet are dancing upwards in idle ecstasies, while his brain is in the abyss. To the modern man the heavens are actually below the earth. The explanation is simple; he is standing on his head; which is a very weak pedestal to stand on. But when he has found his feet again he knows it. Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man's ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small.<sup>6</sup>

Saint Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* wrote of the laws that have been inscribed within the nature of man by God; that every individual is a person endowed with intelligence and free will.

Many people think that the laws which govern man's relations with the State are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemental forces of the universe. But it is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different. The Father of the universe has inscribed them in man's nature, and that is where we

must look for them; there and nowhere else.

These laws clearly indicate how a man must behave toward his fellows in society, and how the mutual relationships between the members of a State and its officials are to be conducted.

Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable.<sup>7</sup>

It is the manifest creed of Materialism as also Secularism, Communism, Fascism and Socialism to extol the divinity of man ever while denying the existence of a power beyond all understanding or of the very being of man dependent upon the continued goodness of God. Paganism is said to be a religion of joy and Christianity of sorrow; those who profess no religion for lack of gods ignore their profound belief in the religion of their own self-proclaimed godhood. The same thing that is said of Paganism might as well be said of those religions of divine man which is to say that "it would be just as easy to prove that Paganism is pure sorrow and Christianity pure joy." Chesterton continues by noting that:

Such conflicts mean nothing and lead nowhere. Everything human must have in it both joy and sorrow; the only matter of interest is the manner in which the two things are balanced or divided.

And the really interesting thing is this, that the pagan was (in the main) happier and happier as he approached the earth, but sadder and sadder as he approached the heavens. The gaiety of the best Paganism, as in the playfulness of Catullus or Theocritus, is, indeed, an eternal gaiety never to be forgotten by a grateful humanity. But it is all a gaiety about the facts of life, not about its origin. To the pagan the small things are as sweet as the small brooks breaking out of the mountain; but the broad things are as bitter as the sea. When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates, who are deadly. Nay, the fates are worse than deadly; they are dead. And when rationalists say that the ancient world was more enlightened than the Christian, from their point of view they are right. For when they say "enlightened" they mean darkened with incurable despair. It is profoundly true that the ancient world was more modern than the Christian. The common bond is in the fact that ancients and moderns have both been miserable about existence, about everything, while medievales were happy about that at least. I freely grant that the pagans, like the moderns, were only miserable about everything—they were quite jolly about everything else.<sup>8</sup>

**W**hat the materialist (I will forgo listing all the other isms although you may correctly assume them to be included) believes most is not the joy and the fullness of life but the futility in existing, despairing of anything greater than the self; without purpose or meaning, there can be no value, no exaltation directed toward the magnificence of creation.

**T**he key which would unlock the mysteries of God the materialist denies for to use it would be to open a Pandora's box in which every good and truth of humanity has long been banished. To unlock it would be to unleash the truth of the inestimable value of the human person and restore sanity to the madman.

The feature or property of *being a person* is "a feature that no human being can lack so long as he or she exists," and it is a feature or property that no nonhuman animal possesses, since no animal has even the potential to do what we human beings can do with our rational powers of intellect and will. As such, this feature gives to human beings a dignity or "worth greater than that which any non-human animal has," and the dignity and worth we have on account of possessing this feature is equal: *qua* persons, "we are equal in dignity." Finally, identifying this feature—our ineradicable, unique, and elevated ontological status as persons—enables us to shed significant light on "the intuitive sense that every human being has dignity just by virtue of being human."<sup>9</sup>

Here then is where common sense turns into complete nonsense. Lunatic asylums, once filled with those believing in themselves are become mad are now the last refuge for those who are sane. Insanity reigns over all who believe in themselves and they are legion.

One example will take a bit of preparatory explanation but is essential to understanding madmen who believe in themselves. One such madman was Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, who expanded on

the "Big Lie" mentioned in Hitler's Mein Kampf:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

Such a lie which has been told and retold is that the United States is a democracy. It has been repeated so often and stridently embellished that few would see it for the lie it is. The United States of America is not a democracy; it is a Constitutional Republic. It is furthermore a Constitutional Republic of sovereign States united under a representative form of government.

If it were a democracy, everything no matter how big or how small, would be up for a vote where the majority always wins, every time. The majority wins; the minority is required to grin and bear it. A democracy is the ultimate opinion poll and the surest sign of a madman is the sound of his opinion. Opinions are the refuge of the ignorant, the incompetent and the insane who would turn the country into the United Sanitarium of America and horrifyingly they are succeeding.

**I**n a Constitutional Republic each individual is protected from the madness of opinion and the tyranny of the majority. The Constitution is the law which binds and protects the individual from the mob and the madness of opinion.

With that as a preface, a recent essay written by Mr. Edwin Lyngar begs to be given serious consideration given the weight of public opinion upon which he holds such high esteem. Mr. Lyngar is no doubt a fine freelance writer (although I cannot say firsthand that he is so having never read any of what he has written) and quite obviously believes his opinion of the opinions of the amorphous mob to be salubrious; he is obviously a man who believes strongly in himself and in the opinion polls in which he embraces so wholeheartedly.

Mr. Lyngar quite confidently asserts that the current right-leaning of the U. S. Supreme Court (somewhat akin to the leaning tower of Pisa, I suppose) is “far to the right of American public opinion and good taste.” This of course begs the question: Good taste in what? Hotdogs or caviar, Dom Perignon or Boones Farm, modesty or pornography, virtue or sin? I await his response with utmost alacrity; I will not however hold my breath.

He further adds that by “vast margins, Americans support the rights of women, minorities, immigrants and the LGBTQ community.” Notwithstanding the ambiguity intentionally implied in his overstated estimation (“vast margins”) the ground upon which he suggests Americans support is as solid as quicksand and as porous as pumice.

He continues by stating there are “mountains of evidence” to support his views. After reading the remainder of his essay the only mountains I see are a few abandoned ant hills which have long been buried beneath the

heavy heel of some drunken giant. What he claims as evidence is in no wise evidence but mere opinion, gathered with enthusiasm by those who would likely abstain from consuming meat or hardy stock. Here then are the mountains upon which Mr. Lyngar would thus have us climb:

- According to Pew, 62 percent of American adults support gay marriage.
- Similar numbers support marijuana legalization.
- According to Pew, 59 percent aren’t concerned with sex before marriage.
- Americans support birth control by almost 90 percent.
- Abortion is supported by 57 percent of Americans.
- Three-quarters of Americans want rich people to pay more taxes.

Now, no doubt Mr. Lyngar believes as much in his sums and figures as he believes in himself, but whistling in the dark won’t change a broken lightbulb. If everyone who happened to be acquainted with Mr. Lyngar was of the opinion that he was a man as mad as a hatter and as looney as a loon would Mr. Lyngar be so thoroughly convinced that it must be fact based solely on the opinions of his acquaintances? Should Mr. Lyngar object to being labeled completely bonkers while ever believing so ardently in himself, what then, to his way of thinking, should he think? Or, if fifty-seven percent of his neighbors were to share the opinion of him having one too many children, which one should he be rid of? Or is that up to his neighbors to choose by their opinion?

Beyond the “mountains of evidence” lies the Sea of Acrimony, a dark, forbidding abyss

filled with mythical monsters whose monstrous appetites crave the flesh of all left-handed culture warriors. Hell knows no fury like a right-handed extremist; angels on the left, devils on the right; it is true for the Pew does tell us so.

According to public opinion, the culture war is over. Curious: when did it begin? Mr. Lyngar asks, “How can we even call ourselves a democracy when an ever-smaller slice of America is pushing policies that most citizens find abhorrent?” We cannot. America is not a democracy. Never was, never has been, still isn’t. He is asking the wrong question. The question to be asked is whether the slicer is left- or right-handed. Instead, he lays an egg, blaming “the religious right, a shrinking number of Americans who wield disproportionate political clout, .... Christians have lost the culture completely, but they think they can impose their religious doctrines on unwilling Americans.” But he can impose his because he believes in himself.

Opinions do not bear witness to the truth. Jesus said if we follow him we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. Opinions are not the truth nor can they set us free.

1. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (The Bodley Head Ltd, 1908), p. 4.

2. See *STh* I, q. 75, a. 5.

3. Paul A. MacDonald, Jr., *Grounding Human Rights and Dignity*, The Thomist, Vol. 82, No. 1, January 2018, 17.

4. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

5. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 13.

6. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 127, 129.

7. Pope John XXIII, *Encyclical: Pacem in Terris: On establishing universal peace in truth, justice, charity, and liberty*, April 11, 1963, § 6, 7, 9.

8. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 128.

9. Paul A. MacDonald, Jr., *Grounding Human Rights and Dignity*, p. 24.

## God's Complaint

*Do you believe in miracles?*

**A**t the National Diaconate Congress this past week in New Orleans, Bishop Gerald Kicanas, bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Tucson spoke of a couple who, as they were leaving church, were overheard commenting on a couple of things which had bothered them. The wife said, "The priest sure looked bored today. It was like he really didn't want to be here at all, like he wanted to be anywhere but here." And the husband, obviously not listening to a word his wife was saying, said, "The homily that the deacon delivered was the worst sermon I have ever heard. Absolutely the worst." The couple's small boy looked up at both of them and said, "So, what did you expect for a dollar?"

Do you believe in miracles? Most people don't. To believe in miracles is to believe in fairies and fairyland, magic wands and pixie dust: stuff of dreams and fantasy. No, we say, such childish visions are best left behind else we find ourselves looking foolish.

Miracles are not "make believe;" miracles are as awesome and real and yet as ordinary and commonplace as you and I. In one of his homilies, Saint Augustine remarked that:

People who hold cheap what they see every day are dumbfounded at the sight of extraordinary works even though they are no more wonderful than the

others. Governing the entire universe is a greater miracle than feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread, yet no one marvels at it. People marvel at the feeding of the five thousand not because this miracle is greater, but because it is out of the ordinary.



**I**ntoxicated by the abundance of material things, drunk on the goods which we have made, infatuated with appearance and style, enamored with our overstuffed egos, we live in a time and place where deeper realities are suspect. Miracles and transcendence are as uncomfortable as an ill-fitting shoe. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and transubstantiation seem improbable as do creation, redemption, resurrection, sin, and grace; even God is questioned and doubted.

Some time ago, I found myself in conversation with a woman who confessed that she did not regularly attend Sunday Mass, primarily she said, because she saw no compelling reason to do so since one Mass was pretty much the same as another. And, she further added, the rituals it seemed were intended to be nothing more than "symbolic" of Christ's life and death on

the cross. Now I had to give her partial credit for that one although her reasoning was seriously flawed and definitely not in line with either Canon Law or the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

**A** few years ago, the New York Times reported that nearly **two-thirds** of American Catholics believed the consecrated bread and wine were but "symbolic reminders" rather than the actual body and blood of Christ. Think about that for a moment ... a fundamental tenet of our faith believed by little more than a third of Catholics.

I once watched as Catholic apologist John Martignoni ripped pages from a Catechism to emphasize just how many Catholics take an a la carte approach to their faith: choosing what to believe, what not to believe; keeping what they like or find acceptable, discarding whatever seems inconvenient, uncomfortable, or those things with which they disagree.

We read and hear reports every day it seems, of issues of some controversy, in which there are diametrically opposing views held among Catholics and too often there is little or no consideration or any attempt to learn, to know, or to follow the teachings of Christ and his Church.

There is, rather, a casual and careless dismissal of doctrine and dogma simply because they are deemed to be irrelevant, out-of-touch, or inconsistent with one's own personal beliefs. It is,

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after all, far easier to ignore that with which you disagree than to follow what faith demands.

All too many of us have become anesthetized by the secular creed of instant gratification and easy living. All too many of us have subscribed to the notion that we can tailor our faith to our own unique design and still remain a true disciple. All too many of us place ourselves first, things second, and God, a distant third if thought of at all. All too many have forgotten that the Son of Man is also the Son of God.

There once was a time, not that long ago, when Christians placed God first. Many today, however, have placed man first, while striving to diminish or explain away the miracle and the divinity of Christ.

I would like to share with you a brief passage written by the English author, convert to Catholicism, and perhaps the first journalist to one day be canonized, G. K. Chesterton. In it he speaks powerfully of what Christians believe about God and the depths of his love for us. He wrote:

Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king. Alone of all creeds, Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator. For the only courage worth calling courage must necessarily mean that the soul passes a breaking point—and does not break.

Chesterton then concludes his thought with as powerful a truth as any I have ever had the pleasure to read.

But in that terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. It is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." No; but the Lord thy God may tempt Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane. In a garden Satan tempted man: and in a garden God tempted God. He passed in some superhuman manner through our human horror of pessimism. When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God.<sup>1</sup>

At the Eucharist, if you come forward to receive what you do not believe you deceive no one but yourself. If you truly believe that what you are about to receive is the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ then you should approach the Eucharist with trembling hands, your knees knocking, your heart pounding with gratitude for all the miracles which God has made.

Homily #182

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

2 Kings 4:42-44

Ephesians 4:1-6

John 6:1-15

1. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (The Bodley Head Ltd, 1908), pp 110-111.

## 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

#### Thoughtful Theism

*Fr. Andrew Younan*

Emmaus Road Publishing  
2017, 200 pages.

#### Coming Soon

*Michael Barber*

Emmaus Road Publishing  
2005, 326 pages.

#### Strangers in a Strange Land

*Charles J. Chaput*

Henry Holt and Co.  
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

### PERIODICALS

#### First Things

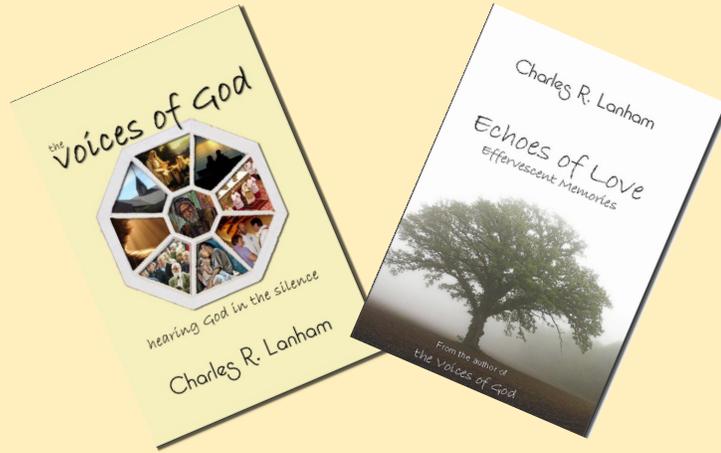
Institute on Religion and Public Life  
Editor: R. R. Reno  
Ten Issues per year.  
[www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)

#### Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity  
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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**.

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

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