

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

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On the foggery of foolishness

None So Blind

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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.

Hobgoblin Hooliganism

On the foggery of foolishness

There are moments which arrive with particular vengeance, when a thought here and another there collide like an immovable object meeting an unstoppable force and echoes of Archimedes exclaiming, "Eureka!" suddenly tickle the vocal cords. Here then, was just such a moment, when a dozen lay-about thoughts were of a sudden so inclined to throw off their moribund lassitude and come to a rather raucous meeting of the mind.

After the fact it is almost impossible—as well as imperfectly impractical—to determine which lash from what whip caused the brain to first notice the indignity of the enfleshed assault enough to heed the pain. In the end it mattered not in the least what precipitated the meet-

ing but that a meeting had, most definitely and in actual fact, occurred.

What brought such a motley riot of random thoughts to congenially meet over a cup of Earl Grey were these words uttered by an itinerant preacher:

I know my place, I am not your pastor. But, these words must be said. They are strong words and perhaps some of you will be offended by them and want to run me out of town; it wouldn't be the first time.

When you approach the altar and receive Holy Communion it is "**totally unacceptable**" to return to anywhere other than your pew! Leaving church after receiving the true Body and true Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is "**disrespectful and rude**" and shows just how little you understand who it is you are receiving.

I could not have said it better myself although I have said it before. There was a decided difference, however,



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in the congregation's reaction and subsequent behavior.

Perhaps it was familiarity which bred such contempt for certainly my words were dismissed as if never uttered; behaviors did not change for the doors kept on swinging with the unruly "after communion" exodus. Yet, when a stranger admonished those slinking in 10 to 30 minutes after Mass had begun as well as those with the regular propensity for leaving immediately upon receiving Holy Communion, well, even the bats in the belfry took notice.

It was not, however, so much what was said as the absolute resoluteness in which the complaint was so severely delivered. What was different was the absence of even the slightest suggestion of waffling, no vague dissembling, no permissive crack wide enough for one to slither, but rather, a firm unequivocal denial of the common justification that God will not take notice of such disrespect.

This then was the lash that caused the mind to finally sit up and take notice. This was not at all what was expected, what the mind had been inculcated, indoctrinated to accept as acceptable. Surely, the peasants would revolt, the masses would riot; certainly, the common churchman long inured to vague subjective correctness emanating from the pulpit so as to offend no one by saying nothing at all would summarily arise *en masse* from the pews so as to make a hasty exit.

Despite such dire expectations, dare I say in spite of such, there was

no revolt, no riot, no hasty retreat. There was, in short, a roar, a shout, a joyous exclamation of approval from the heretofore sullen corps. Row upon row of empty pews groaned beneath the weight of their filling. And the singing! Every voice singing loud and strong, lifting their voices in joyful praise to their God!

Such was the lash that tore away the veil of foggery foolishness (mental shrink wrap) which had enveloped the mind. Of a sudden the answers seemed so obvious, reasons so reasonable, the foolish fog dissipated revealing the path forward with amazing clarity.

For far, far too long we have chewed the apple from the serpents mouth, drank the Kool-Aid from the cup of complacency and smiled, while lash upon lash, our lives have been demeaned, tenderized and devoured, served as lambs to the ravening wolves.

Examples are plentiful, as plentiful as a fruit tree bent low by the sheer weight of its exuberant overabundance. What brings great satisfaction to the grower will surely elicit complaints from the picker. As Chesterton would tell us, the worst is the habit of exhaustively describing a social sickness, and then propounding a social drug.

Now we do talk first about the disease in cases of bodily breakdown; and that for an excellent reason. Because, though there may be doubt about the way in which the body broke down, there is no doubt at all about the shape in which it should be built up again. No doctor proposes to produce a new kind of

man, with a new arrangement of eyes or limbs. The hospital, by necessity, may send a man home with one leg less: but it will not (in a creative rapture) send him home with one leg extra. Medical science is content with the normal human body, and only seeks to restore it.

But social science is by no means always content with the normal human soul; it has all sorts of fancy souls for sale. Man as a social idealist will say "I am tired of being a Puritan; I want to be a Pagan," or "Beyond this dark probation of Individualism I see the shining paradise of Collectivism." Now in bodily ills there is none of this difference about the ultimate ideal. The patient may or may not want quinine; but he certainly wants health. No one says "I am tired of this headache; I want some toothache," or "The only thing for this Russian influenza is a few German measles," or "Through this dark probation of catarrh I see the shining paradise of rheumatism." **But exactly the whole difficulty in our public problems is that some men are aiming at cures which other men would regard as worse maladies; are offering ultimate conditions as states of health which others would uncompromisingly call states of disease.**¹

Chesterton goes on to point out that social issues are quite the opposite to medical ailments where there is often disagreement concerning the nature of an illness while agreeing to the nature of health, while on social ills afflicting the country, there is wide agreement, "but half of us would not look at her in what the other half would call blooming health." He concludes: "The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal. We can all see the national

madness; but what is the national sanity?" he asks.

Anything that strikes a cord most these days is the degree to which we have embraced moral cowardice. It is symptomatic, I suppose, of the current trend toward timid deference to the loudest crowd on virtually any issue which is most prevalent among the politically correct and the immorally elite.

The cowardly political class, those somnolent masters of duplicity and guile, are masters of little more than compromise which means they stand for nothing and are forever prepared to prove it. Much the same could be said of the denizens residing beneath the steeped concourses of religious institutions but dare to rankle those who would profess to greater witness opens wide the gates of hell to souls who would commit so great a sin.

There used to be a rather odd but gracious creature roaming the corridors of politic who answered to the name of "statesman"; alas, such marvelous creatures have become extinct, leaving but the dodo waddling aimlessly among the shuttered doors of once honored statecraft. What now forages among the fossilized remains are but botoxed raptors clawing for scraps of their decaying dignity.

It once was said of statesman that to compromise meant half a loaf was better than no bread at all. Among the current clamoring cowardly crowd it now really means that half a loaf is better than a whole loaf, but only as long as that half a loaf is theirs to eat.

I find it very well said, as well said today as yesterday, upon meeting someone who, in belonging to a century past lived as if he did not. Chesterton wrote every much of then as now, the only disappointment I surmise is that none today know of him and are at all keenly aware of what he wrote.

The one argument that used to be urged for our creedless vagueness was that at least it saved us from fanaticism. But it does not even do that. On the contrary, it creates and renews fanaticism with a force quite peculiar to itself. This is at once so strange and so true that I will ask the reader's attention to it with a little more precision.

Some people do not like the word "dogma." Fortunately they are free, and there is an alternative for them. There are two things, and two things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal. ...

Our political vagueness divides men, it does not fuse them. Men will walk along the edge of a chasm in clear weather, but they will edge miles away from it in a fog. So a Tory can walk up to the very edge of Socialism, if he knows what is Socialism. But if he is told that Socialism is a spirit, a sublime atmosphere, a noble, indefinable tendency, why, then he keeps out of its way; and quite right too. One can meet an assertion with argument; but healthy bigotry is the only way to which one can meet a tendency. ... Such is the force of a great impersonal prejudice, such as possess-

es the modern world on so many points. Against this there is no weapon at all except a rigid and steely sanity, a resolution not to listen to fads, and not to be infected by diseases.

In short, the rational human faith must armor itself with prejudice in an age of prejudices, just as it armored itself with logic in an age of logic. But the difference between the two mental methods is marked and unmistakable. The essential of the difference is this: that prejudices are divergent, whereas creeds are always in collision. Believers bump into each other; whereas bigots keep out of each other's way. A creed is a collective thing, and even its sins are sociable. A prejudice is a private thing, and even its tolerance is misanthropic. ... Genuine controversy, fair cut and thrust before a common audience, has become in our special epoch very rare. For the sincere controversialist is above all things a good listener. The really burning enthusiast never interrupts; he listens to the enemy's arguments as eagerly as a spy would listen to the enemy's arrangements. But if you attempt an actual argument with a modern paper of opposite politics, you will find that no medium is admitted between violence and evasion. You will have no answer except slanging or silence. A modern editor must not have that eager ear that goes with the honest tongue. He may be deaf and silent; and that is called dignity. Or he may be deaf and noisy; and that is called slashing journalism. In neither case is there any controversy; for the whole object of modern party combatants is to charge out of earshot.

Should the reader choose to ignore the source and the times, what was written then mirrors the times today.

1. G. K Chesterton, What's Wrong With The World.

None So Blind

What do you want?

Each of us, no matter the age, health, wealth, education, faith or station in life was born partially blind; newborns can see objects less than a foot away but then only indistinctly in black and white. Learning cues about space, distance, and texture, and coordinating these impressions with what we hear and feel—all this takes a considerable period of trial and error.

Blindness comes in many forms but seldom do we recognize any but the physical inability to see through the eyes in our head. Those who are physically blind, whether from birth or later in life, learn to adapt to their inability to see. They learn to see by sharper hearing, more sensitive touch, even a more delicate nose.

There is another blindness, spiritual blindness which is borne out of hatred, ignorance, jealousy, greed, lust, selfishness, ego or other sinful desires; such loss of spiritual sight dulls the senses and leaves the soul unable to see the good.

What we see through our eyes is always colored by our past, skewed by what we believe we know, altered by what we do not understand, and often *“seen indistinctly, as in a mirror”* (1 Corinthians 13:12). Even when we are confronted by the truth we often refuse to alter our perceptions because as Mark Twain once quipped, *“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick*

to possibilities; Truth isn’t.”

In *“The Myth of the Cave”*, the Greek philosopher Plato weaves a story where all of humanity lives their lives chained within a darkened cave, with nothing but shadows and illusions flickering upon a wall to define their reality. One man escapes his bonds, travels beyond the darkness of the cave, and looks upon the sun and sees the world as it truly is. When he returns and tells the others what he has seen and experienced they refuse to believe it. His truth must be mere fantasy, an illusion, the ravings of a madman, and he is summarily dismissed. How often do we dismiss or deny that which conflicts with our own perception of reality?



Yogi Berra, infamous for his malapropisms, once quipped *“Sometimes you can see a whole lot of things just by looking.”* Sadly, most of us find ourselves doing a whole lot of looking without really seeing; the truth is there is more to seeing than having good eyesight—for too often do we find ourselves failing

to see what is either directly in front of us or there in plain sight. No doubt we have all experienced such moments.

This malady—which affects not only the eyes but the ears as well—is part and parcel of the human condition. The Lord God has been telling us so for a very, very long time. According to Jeremiah who lived six centuries before Christ, the Lord told him to say to his people: *“Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not”* (Jeremiah 5:21).

The sixteenth-century English writer, John Heywood, subsequently borrowed from this passage when he coined the proverb *“There are none so blind as those who will not see.”* It is as true today as it was then, we delude ourselves into seeing only what we want to see and hearing only what we want to hear. Failure or refusal to see God in the countless works of His creation is definitely the worst kind of blindness. It is often and rightly said that a blind man may still have the possibility of seeing, but a man with good eyes but refuses to see surely cannot see.

How many of us, having read or heard of the conversion of St. Paul, have assumed that Paul was struck physically blind by his vision? But could there be more to it than just physical blindness? In Acts 9:8 we read: *“Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; ...”*

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Paul may or may not have been physically blinded but as likely unable to understand what had just happened, to comprehend what he had seen and heard. Someone had to come and open his eyes, not just so he could physically see again but most importantly so he could see more deeply into the mystery of Christ. Seeing, truly seeing, implies more than having eyes that are physically healthy and open.

There are, it seems to me, some rather humorous parts to the story in today's gospel. Imagine, this blind beggar asking Jesus for pity. Does Jesus do the logical thing and go over to the one who cannot see? No, he simply stops and waits for the blind man to find his way to him. And then he asks the "blind" man "What do you want me to do for you?" Well, duh! He's blind! What do you think he wants? Cheesecake?

But then, Bartimaeus obviously doesn't see the humor in this, does he? Notice that he does not say to Jesus, "I want my sight," but rather "I want to see," and between the two responses there is a marked difference. Wanting to see is wanting to know the true nature of reality, hidden in some way from a person when he is blind. Seeing isn't limited to seeing the blue of the sky or the road to home. It is also a matter of seeing reality, the truth about things, or even of seeing The Truth himself.

The story of Bartimaeus is the story of each one of us. God created us to be His sons and daughters of honor and dignity. But because of our sins,

many of us are living as sons and daughters of dishonor and shame. It is our sins of pride and egoism that usually make us blind..

We are blind to the presence of God because we are consumed by the pursuit of our selfish ambitions. We fail to see and appreciate the many blessings we have because we want and crave for more. We have voracious appetite for material things and our thirst for power and praise is unquenchable. We refuse to see the goodness and giftedness of others because, in our pride and arrogance, we think we are the best, the first and the greatest. We choose to ignore our own sins and weaknesses because we have grown used to our hypocrisy and lies. We cannot see and read the signs of the times because we believe the world revolves around us. We live in complete darkness because of our pride and selfishness.

So, let the Gospel open our eyes today. Let it be a call to repentance and conversion. Too many of us have for a long time been living in dishonor and shame due to pride, selfishness and arrogance. Now is the time for us to throw aside our cloaks of false comforts and delusions, rise up and stand with honor and dignity, and come to Jesus; and let this prayer be ours today: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me. I want to see!"

Amen.

Homily #185

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52

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

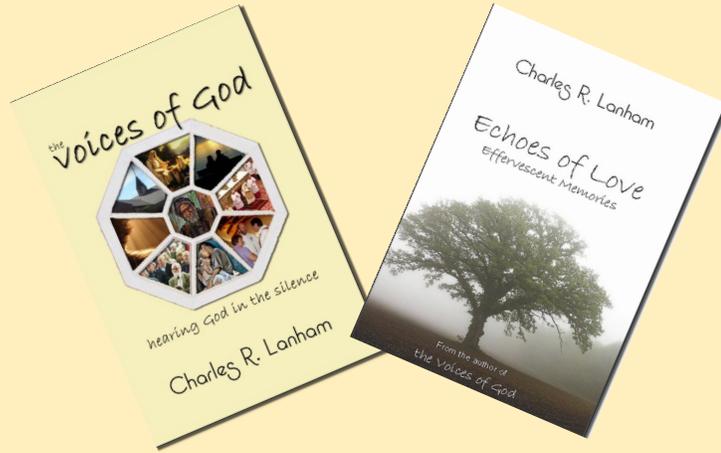
Institute on Religion and Public Life
Editor: R. R. Reno
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Touchstone

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

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

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