



A journal for restless minds

WITH EARS TO HEAR

The spirit of contention

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Be perfect

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.

With Ears To Hear

The spirit of contention

One of the better known insights from the French Philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) observes that the language of rights ultimately cannot build, or even sustain, a common social order:

"If you say to someone who has ears to hear: 'What you are doing to me is not just', you touch and awaken at its source the spirit of attention and love. But it is not the same with words like 'I have the right ...' or 'you have no right to ...' They invoke a latent war and awaken the spirit of contention. To place the notion of rights at the center of social conflicts is to inhibit any possible impulse of charity on both sides."

Another, oddly related, is this astute observation: *"The real sin of idolatry is always committed on behalf of something similar to the State."*

It is remarkable that someone—anyone, for that matter—so young (Weil only lived to the age of 34) could have been so well respected and highly regarded, especially in an age of developing suffrage sandwiched by global wars. And yet, T.S. Eliot wrote the she was *"a woman of genius, of a kind of genius akin to that of the saints."*



The genius that is the American experiment admits to an apparent contradiction: we are radically different and radically alike; we are differentiated, and yet we are bound together; we are called to sometimes radically unequal tasks, but those tasks

are part of an effort to benefit the whole.¹

The founders, aware of the fragile nature of societies, wrote into the American creed two seemingly contradictory postulates: the first emphasized and stressed the political belief in *"individual rights and liberty, promising that if we commit to a common project of building a liberal society, our*

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Glory Dreams

Be perfect

Competing in the 1976 Olympic games, fifteen-year-old Nadia Comaneci became the first gymnast to be awarded a “*perfect*” score of 10.0. In Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 5, verse 48, Jesus tells us we must be perfect (Matthew 5:48), and the Apostle Paul writes that through death and resurrection Jesus was made perfect—God brought him to “*perfection*” (Hebrews 5:9).

So, we must ask ourselves, what is it with being “*perfect*”? Is perfection ever really attainable, especially given our broken nature and our sinfulness? Is perfection sought for the glory to be obtained?

The answer lies in what it means “*to be perfect.*” Here, “*perfect*” means reaching a goal or destiny, not moral perfection. Jesus, the Son of God, became flesh, destined to suffer an inglorious death, and yet, to rise in glory, for the salvation of all who obey his commandments. Through his death and resurrection he was made perfect.

And yet, we all dream of glory, wanting to stand apart, to be recognized for great achievements, for achieving a perfect score, scoring the winning goal, receiving recognition and renown. We all want to be noticed, appreciated, recognized and loved.

Glory dreams are not necessarily

all bad or unhealthy. We have been created by God out of love, to love and to be loved. It is in our nature to desire to be loved, to feel wanted and appreciated, to be at the center and recognized for being there. This is healthy; this is good.

Glory dreams are often unhealthy in how we envision that glory. When we desire to be famous or to be successful in order to make others envious, when we dream of being the best-looking or the most intelligent or the most talented person in the room, when we dream of being a super star, better than and above others, then our glory dreams are decidedly bad and unhealthy.



The chosen people of God believed in and prayed for a Messiah, a savior, anointed by God, to deliver them from their oppression. In their fantasy, they envisioned the Messiah to be a worldly superstar, a mighty king who would slay their foes and make of them, once again, a mighty and a glorious nation. What they got instead was Jesus crucified and they were sorely disappointed.

Jesus, through his passion, death, and resurrection calls us to a different vision, to seek glory by being perfect. We will surely taste suffering, we will certainly fail in our attempts toward perfection. We are sinners and we will no doubt sin again and again and again, for that is what sinners do. In that respect, no one is perfect.

We come to church because we are sinners—not out of any self-imagined perfection—but because we have sinned and sin is a constant theme of every Mass. Let us pause for a moment to consider what this might mean.

No one ever comes here alone. By this I mean, each brings their faults and failures, anger and pain, their complaints, and their sins to the table of the Lord. No one comes before the Lord for their own glory and praise. We come to ask for God’s forgiveness and grace. And, as difficult as this may be for some to accept: you are just where you should be when you enter the presence of God!

The Mass is, by intention and expression, an act of contrition. Every Mass begins with the penitential rite. “*Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.*” In the Our Father, we ask God to “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us*”—a scary proposal if you spend a minute thinking about it.

Whether we forgive or not, we have publicly admitted we are sinners.

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It is an inescapable admission.

The celebrant then asks God to “look not upon our sins, but on the faith of your church,” prior to the exchange of the sign of peace. It is a sinful church that chants: “You, who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.” At the elevation of the body and blood of Christ—drawing all things to himself—“who takes away the sins of the world,” we confess that although we are unworthy, we will be healed by his word.

The acknowledgment of our sin is not an embarrassing hindrance to God’s presence; it is the prompting of God’s law, Jeremiah reminds us, written in our hearts. It is the condition of the new covenant itself. It is the reason for Jesus’ covenant. “*This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.*”

There are many things we take seriously in our worship but I wonder whether we are serious enough in reciting the ritual words; do we ever seriously consider the ritual words we are saying and their meaning? The Eucharistic Prayer, the reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice, is incomprehensible if we believe we are sinless.

To acknowledge our sin is to accept the new covenant, Christ’s passion and death embodied in our Eucharist, our Thanksgiving. When we take Communion, we take the new law, the new covenant, literally into our bodies, our hearts. And the promise of Jeremiah is realized in the flesh: “*I am yours and you are mine. I will re-*

member your sin no more.” It is as important to remember why Christ died for us as it is to remember that he did so.

It is impossible to enter the presence of God perfect. We cannot enter the covenant blameless and spotless. Nor can our good works make us worthy of this covenant. The only contribution we can make is to acknowledge our sin and trust in the healing power of God’s redemptive love.

Through our suffering, our failures and our sinfulness, we have the opportunity to grow ever deep: we can either grow deep in compassion and forgiveness or deep in bitterness and anger. And yet, true glory comes only through compassion and forgiveness.

Real glory is not the glory in achieving a perfect score, winning a gold medal, being a champion, or being envied for our looks or achievements. Real glory is in being deep in compassion and forgiveness—and compassion and forgiveness seldom come from worldly success, good looks, or being brighter, richer, or more famous than those around us.

True glory lies not in rock star status, but in being willing to fall and die like a grain of wheat. It lies in being willing to let go, to lose one’s life in this world in love for the glory of God’s name.

Amen.

Homily for the
The Fifth Sunday of Lent (B)
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Hebrews 5:7-9
John 12:20-33

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.

Society and Sanity
Frank Sheed
Sheed & Ward, New York
1953, 270 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

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.
www.catholic.com

distinct and often irreconcilable differences will be protected" thus affirming political unity as a means of securing our private individual differences.

The second was the absolute conviction in the necessity for Christianity to provide an opposing perspective, that is to say, acknowledging our differences, our unique individualities to serve a deeper unity. The founders borrowed much of this from the Apostle Paul's message to the Corinthians:

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:1-26).

As Patrick Deneen correctly observes, "So long as liberalism was not fully itself—so long as liberalism was corrected and even governed by Christianity—a working so-

cial contract was possible. For Christianity, difference is ordered toward unity. For liberalism, unity is valued insofar as it promotes difference. ... The recent steep decline of religious faith and Christian moral norms is regarded by many as marking the triumph of liberalism, and so, in a sense, it is. Today our unity is understood almost entirely in the light of our differences. We come together—to celebrate diversity. And today, the celebration of diversity ends up serving as a mask for power and inequality."

This triumph of liberalism in the public square, tragically, is destined to be a pyrrhic victory, for as history has proved countless times and the founders sagely recognized, a society premised solely upon a shared belief in individual differentiation must inevitably lead to conflict of all against all.

Pope Benedict XVI famously warned against the "dictatorship of relativism," apparently—for all the difference it has made—to an audience listening to rap music on their iPods. Relativism has become the abiding creed of the gods of academia, who proselytize facile young minds with an ardor bordering on madness. Allan Bloom noted this credal predilection over thirty years ago when he wrote:

"There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into

question 2+2 = 4. ... They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality. And the two are related in a moral intention. The relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society, or so they see it. They have all been equipped with this framework early on, and it is the modern replacement for the inalienable natural rights that used to be the traditional American grounds for a free society. ... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness—and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings—is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger.”²

Today, academia openly cultivates a virulent pathology, antithetical to reason, natural law and moral absolutes. Truth is relative; objectivity and reason relegated to the realm of opinion. *“The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.”*

Students have been inculcated to believe their opinion requires no defense; facts are irrelevant and truth inconvenient. The best they can do is exhibit umbrage—to be offended. Thus they demand to know what right anyone has to suggest one

opinion is better than any other.

Historically, the model citizen for the new republican experiment was understood to be rational, industrious, honest, respectful of the law and dedicated to the family. The model citizen *“was to know the rights doctrine; the Constitution, which embodied it; and American history, which presented and celebrated the founding of a nation ‘conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.’ A powerful attachment to the letter and the spirit of the Declaration of Independence gently conveyed, appealing to each man’s reason, was the goal of the education of democratic man.”*

This was, to bother the obvious, a new, yet untried, experiment, both in politics and in the education of democratic man. Over the last half of the twentieth century, education devolved, focusing on personality rather than the individual person. What this means can best be explicated by understanding the fundamental transformation that has occurred in what it means to be an American.

In the original, natural rights formed a fundamental basis for unity and a shared purpose. A society founded on rights inscribed by Nature and by Nature’s God necessarily proscribed differentiation predicated on class, race, religion, gender, culture or national origin. The immigrant anticipated and accepted the obligation to leave behind all claims to the old, to subordinate old habits and allegiances to new principles.

As the twentieth century stumbled forward to its conclusion, the educa-

tional predilection toward openness, tolerance, diversity, and inclusion openly rejected the original; denying the legitimacy of natural rights and the efficacy of history, for which both had been adjudged flawed and regressive. The new educational emphasis was decidedly *“progressive”* and *“forward-looking”*.

R. R. Reno recently editorialized, *“Karl Marx observed that history repeats itself, ‘the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.’ ... After World War II, mainline Protestantism faced a changing sexual culture. There have always been transgressions, but beginning in the 1950s, elite opinion shifted from censure to permission. Divorce was a leading indicator.”* As difficult as it might be to accept, divorce, while no wise new, was nevertheless, a rarity and socially unacceptable, with a heavy moral stigma, prior to the so-called sexual revolution of the 60s. By the dissolute 1970s, the stigma had dissipated, so much so that divorce had become normative for the upper-middle-class. Mainline Protestantism offered no resistance; if fact, clergy embraced divorce.

And Reno adds, *“The same held true for abortion, contraception, and cohabitation. The society matrons who served lemonade after church were on the boards of local chapters of Planned Parenthood. By the mid-sixties, the daughters of these society matrons were living with their boyfriends after college. Mom and Dad reconciled themselves to the new mores, as did the leadership of mainline Protestantism. Sexual ethics, if mentioned at all, emphasized ‘healthy relationships’ and ‘responsible sex.’ Books were published*

proclaiming 'the new morality.'"³

Allan Bloom found that, by the 1980s, American higher education had decidedly and dramatically shifted its ideological pedagogy. "It does not demand fundamental agreement or the abandonment of old or new beliefs in favor of the natural ones. It is open to all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies. There is no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything."

This radical shift in pedagogy, abhorred traditional objectivity and thought. History and social sciences must be used as tools to overcome prejudice. "We should not be ethnocentric, a term drawn from anthropology, which tells us more about the meaning of openness. We should not think our way is better than others. The intention is not so much to teach the students about other times and places as to make them aware of the fact that their preferences are only that—accidents of their time and place. Their beliefs do not entitle them as individuals, or collectively as a nation, to think they are superior to anyone else. ... So indiscriminateness is a moral imperative because its opposite is discrimination. This folly means that men are not permitted to seek for the natural human good and admire it when found, for such discovery is coeval with the discovery of the bad and contempt for it. Instinct and intellect must be suppressed by education. The natural soul is to be replaced with an artificial one."

Bloom goes on to introduce what he sees as the root cause of this moral decay: "At the root of this change in morals was the presence in the United States

of men and women of a great variety of nations, religions, and races, and the fact that many were badly treated because they belonged to these groups. Franklin Roosevelt declared that we want 'a society which leaves no one out.' Although the natural rights inherent in our regime are perfectly adequate to the solution of this problem, provided these outsiders adhere to them (i.e., they become insiders by adhering to them), this did not satisfy the thinkers who influenced our educators, for the right to vote and the other political rights did not automatically produce social acceptance. The equal protection of the laws did not protect a man from contempt and hatred as a Jew, an Italian, or a Black."

Resistance to this was predictable, the notion that outsiders had to give up their "cultural" individuality and become some abstract being subject to natural rights and compelled to a "cultural" life imposed by the majority was patently unconstitutional. Openness was, by its nature, designed to provide a respectable place for these groups and/or minorities—to wrest respect from those who were clearly not disposed to give it—and to weaken the sense of superiority of the majority. "Much of the intellectual machinery of twentieth-century American political thought and social science was constructed for the purposes of making an assault on the that majority. It treated the founding principles as impediments and tried to overcome the other strand of our political heritage, majoritarianism, in favor of a nation of minorities and groups each following its own beliefs and inclinations. In particular, the intellectual minority expected to enhance its status, presenting itself as the defender and spokesman of all the others."

As Bloom points out, this complete reversal of the intention of the founders with respect to minorities has been the most striking. The founders believed that minorities were in general, bad things, mostly identical to factions, selfish groups lacking concern for the common good. They held no illusions or hope of suppressing factions and educating a united or homogeneous citizenry. "Instead they constructed an elaborate machinery to contain factions in such a way that they would cancel one another and allow for the pursuit of the common good."

"The Founders wished to achieve a national majority concerning the fundamental rights and then prevent that majority from using its power to overturn those fundamental rights. In twentieth-century social science, however, the common good disappears and along with it the negative view of minorities. The very idea of majority—now understood to be selfish interest—is done away with in order to protect minorities. This breaks the delicate balance between majority and minority in Constitutional thought. In such a perspective, where there is no common good, minorities are no longer problematic, and the protection of them emerges as the central function of government."

There is much more which could be said, but suffice it to say, the Constitution does not "promise respect" for blacks, whites, yellows, Catholics, Protestant, or Jews. It guarantees the protection of the rights of individual human beings. Unfortunately, this has not proved to be enough to what is perhaps now a large percentage of Americans, educated by those who

disagree. The upshot is that higher education has failed to educate generations of Americans, especially in American history.

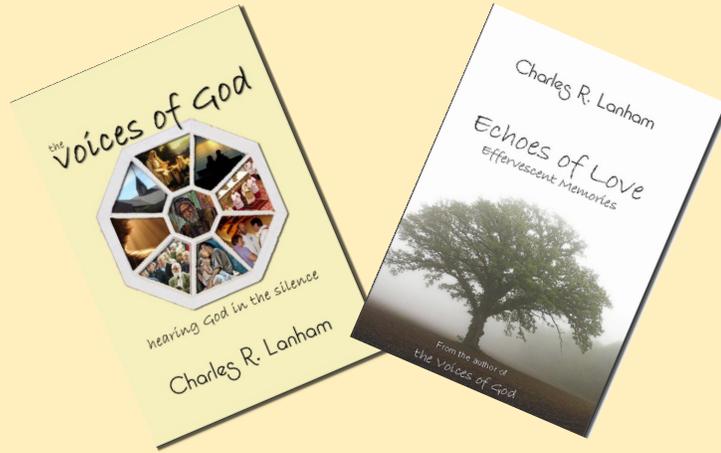
There is now a great indifference to such things for relativism has extinguished the real motive of education. Generations of young Americans have lost interest in and less knowledge in their own country as well as in foreign places, languages, and cultures.

None of this concerns those who would promote the new curriculum. Their objective is to propagandize acceptance of different ways, and indifference to their real content is as good as any.

Apologies

I have run out of time, literally. Thus, I will complete this essay next week. Deacon Chuck

1. Patrick J. Deneen is David A. Potenziani Memorial Associate Professor of Constitutional Studies at the University of Notre Dame. *"The Ignoble Lie: How the new aristocracy masks its privilege"*, First Things, April 2018, pp. 27-32.
2. Allan Bloom, *"The Closing of the American Mind"*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 25-26.
3. R. R. Reno, *"The Public Square: Permission to Kill"*, First Things, April 2018, pp. 65-66



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

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