



A journal for restless minds

LIVING ON EMPTY

Going nowhere at all

CATHOLICISM À LA CARTE

Choosing what to believe

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.

Living On Empty

Going nowhere at all

Utopian dreams have long been the fashion of those who believe in fairy tales and unicorns; such dreamers dream of living life in paradise, where *"the rain may never fall till after sunset. By eight the morning fog must disappear. In short, there's simply not, a more congenial spot, for happy-ever-after-ing than here in Camelot."*¹

Those who proffer utopia would have you believe it too easily attained. Simply believe strenuously enough and long enough—and here there is always a catch: write a check to prove your good faith—and your own personal nirvana will be guaranteed.

Happiness can be yours at a bargain price, but only for a limited time. Hurry, supplies are going fast!

It is apparently within our nature, that will to be gullible, to buy into an obvious lie, to desire a thing so dear as to be willing to sell the soul to possess it. It matters not in the least how much we have which satisfies, offer something exquisite, delectable, or enticing, not currently within one's possession, and most will irresistibly reach for their wallet.

Our gullibility extends well beyond the lure of magical elixirs and cure-all potions; for we have insatiable appetites,

always eager to believe what we desire to be true, to take a bite of the proverbial apple for the promise of immortality or never-ending bliss. This, of course, has been so since God first thought us into being.

Our appetites have forever been a bane to our existence and a torment to our souls; our wants and desires but fodder for the devil's use to entice us away from God's love and mercy. Yet, we are never



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satisfied, for nothing but the love and grace of God will ever fill us.

Placing our life at the center will inevitably leave us living on empty; the emptiness we feel inside is all too real; it can never be filled with any amount of selfishness, lust, greed, hate, power, anger, gluttony or sin of any kind. No matter how inviting the temptation, all the devil can offer is emptiness.

It is within each of us, this natural inclination to seek the good. God made us with an innate moral code, that natural ability embedded within us to discern what is good and what is not. And yet, we are free to obey that God-given moral code or to choose to ignore it; God has no need for sycophants or automatons, he wants us to love him as he loves us, freely and unreservedly.

We owe him our love because without God we are nothing; God made us, God sustains us, God loves us into being. When we deny God, we deny ourselves. We have neither the power nor the capability of thought to self-create, to think ourselves or anything at all into existence. But God does. We are utterly and completely dependent upon God's everlasting thought of his creation; should God tire of any or all that he has created, all would cease to exist the instant he no longer wishes us to be.

Given our total dependence on God's good graces for our very existence, it is indeed curious—and terribly frightening—why we continue to try his patience.

The same must be said of Satan for, while solely a spiritual being and thus without a body, he likewise was created, is sustained and loved by God. Like us, Satan and all his brethren are completely dependent upon the will and the love of God.

So, again, one must ask: why does God put up with his disobedient children? Why not simply wish it all away and start over from scratch? One partial but acceptable answer might be: God knows, we don't. Yet, in truth, it is God's unconditional love which sustains all he has created. No matter how errant we creatures may be, God's love for us never ceases nor does it waver. He loves us: good or bad, faithful or unfaithful, believer or unbeliever, angel or devil; that is what unconditional love contends.

If nothing we can ever say or do will cause God to cease or decrease his abundant love for us, then why should we be good, why should we care to love anyone but ourselves? This is, I believe, quite distressingly, the prevailing attitude, whether we are willing to admit or deny it, that: God doesn't seem to care whether we follow his commandments, live moral lives, love him or our neighbors; reality is what we make of it, what we desire to be true.

If God doesn't care, then why should we? From there it slides into denial: If God is an uncaring God, then why worry about obeying his laws? Since God's laws are obviously from long ago written by men to keep their peoples in line, they are archaic and no longer applicable to modern societies. Since God's laws are

nothing but man-made, who needs God? If God is nothing more than a figment conjured up by ancient man, why believe God exists? If there is no God, then I must be god. If I am god, then what I believe true and good must be true and good. If I am god, reality is my reality, love is what I make of it.

Now, this slope is never as apparent as one would think for it comes to mind with soft irregularity, not the least with trumpets trumpeting and horns alarming. No, one's divinization comes like a thief in the night, with stealth and silent bearing, most never notice the moment when godhood becomes them. And godhood comes in varied sizes; most grow from insignificant to megalomaniacal. To each the measure of their own divinity is self-determined, some so small they have no sense of it.

One's godhood is confined to one's perception of reality and truth. Each holds some guilt in this, some conviction at odds with what is real and what is truth. Each has occasioned to evade the truth, to fudge a fact, to embellish or deny what we know to be real and true. Each has acquiesced to some temptation, large or small; each has transgressed against another. We are all sinners, repeat offenders, breaking or bending the truth to fit our fancy.

Here I will offer a slight digression, pursue a relevant course for a few weeks, including on these pages a commentary I wrote some two years ago.

Catholicism À La Carte

Choosing what to believe

As Catholics, particularly those in this country but also around the world, it appears that we have entered into a near permanent state of denial or perhaps we are merely attempting to delude ourselves. But then again it could be that we have simply switched onto autopilot and are coasting through life caring little for what it truly means or what is required of us to identify ourselves as Christian and Catholic.

How else can one explain why so many carry the notion—common among a majority of both Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and non-believers alike—that faith and morality are no longer objective gifts from God but are subjective and relative matters determined by the desires and whims of each individual? How is it that after two millennia Christ's commandments and teachings passed on by him to his church through his apostles and their successors (the magisterium) are now considered by so many to be available à la carte: take what you like and find agreeable, discard or ignore what you do not; approaches to which a majority of Catholics mistakenly believe acceptable while remaining faithful to the Catholic Church and her teachings?

But then again, "ignorance is bliss" or is that "ignorance is nine-tenths of the law"? Try that last one on the next time you are caught speeding, "But officer, I had no idea there was a speed limit, when

did that happen?" and see how that works out for you.

After a recent article I received an email from a reader with a dissenting opinion which I believe illustrates what has become a growing and troubling misconception among many Catholics on what it means and is required in order to be a faithful practicing Catholic. The writer and I have communicated in the past, specifically on the subject of evolution, and while we may find ourselves on opposite sides of the fence at times, I always welcome his thoughts and the fact that he is willing to take the time to communicate them with me.

Deacon Chuck,

I have not corresponded with you in quite some time regarding your column in the parish bulletin which speaks to the fact that I am often in agreement with your ideas. We are certainly entitled to our personal opinions on the issue of contraception and I might even agree with you, but in connecting contraception with the extinction of the human race you are defending the indefensible. CS Lewis did not show prescience or clarity of mind in arguing against the use of contraception and neither did you. He showed ignorance. In fact your use of the word prescience is rather ironic. CS Lewis was speaking prescience indeed. Armed with scientific knowledge of evolution and the survival of species it is quite possible to show actual physical evidence that over population and pollution will lead to extinction much sooner than giving power to women through the use of safe, effective birth control. That is a great gift of scientific theories and research that has been proven time and time again. It is impossible to

argue against them with any credibility what so ever. The Catholic Church does not even try to do that. Their argument against giving women control over their own bodies is based on dogma alone, not scientific evidence or moral clarity. And many Catholics, especially women disagree with you. Many of them are in church with you on Sundays. It would be wise on the part of our church to respect their voice on the subject since it can be morally justified much easier than yours. Arguments against contraception are fine with many people even if they do not make sense because they can be justifiably ignored. What cannot be ignored is an argument that equates contraception with the extinction of species. Given that fact that every living thing on this planet is a gift from God, it is dangerous to imply that it is ok to over populate the planet to the point of extinction of any living creature. Wars are fought and ecosystems destroyed because of selfishness and competition for natural resources directly related to over population. Contraception could be considered an effective tool against that kind of greed. Scientific progress has allowed consenting adults to express love and affection through sexual contact. There is no law, natural or otherwise that says an expression of love should lead to unintended pregnancies. And there is nothing paradoxical about your argument. It is simply misguided. Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to respond to your thoughts and ideas.

The letter contains so much that bears comment that it is difficult to decide how to respond, but as I must begin somewhere I will do so by offering a few thoughts upon that which C. S. Lewis was speaking of

concerning contraception and the abolition of man.

While I intend to write further on this very subject in another article or two, I believe it is important to this discussion to clearly articulate as precisely as possible what Lewis was attempting to describe. In cases such as this I highly encourage the reader to pick up a copy of *The Abolition of Man*² and read what Lewis himself had to say on the matter. Although a small book and a quick read, it is quite literally packed with wisdom and insight to which I cannot hope to do true justice.

Lewis begins his work with the following statement: *"'Man's conquest of nature' is an expression often used to describe the progress of applied science."* He ends his opening paragraph with a question: *"In what sense is Man the possessor of increasing power over Nature?"* He makes it clear that he has no desire to disparage all that is really beneficial in the process or of the devotion and self-sacrifice that has gone into making man's conquest of Nature possible. The primary thrust of his work is to show how inevitably (and verifiably so) power tends to gravitate to the privileged few, while invariably to the detriment of the unfortunate many. What is of special interest is the rather unique perspective Lewis provides in raising awareness of the inherent dangers that come from blind allegiance to the *'progress of applied science'*.

As with many subjects, which carry with them no small amount of controversy, Lewis' use of the word *'abolition'* and my own unfortunate use

of the word *'extinction'* bear certain connotations for which further explanation is required. I will admit here and now that my use of the word *"extinction"* was perhaps inappropriate and inaccurately applied to my article, inferring meaning to what Lewis wrote that could lead the reader astray. I can only ask for your mercy and forgiveness. As for Lewis' use of the word *'abolition'* a brief explanation should suffice to show relevancy.

No matter whether you subscribe to the notion that man has evolved from some other form of life—and there certainly are considered reasons to assume it might well be possible (I am want to say even probable to some extent) and the Catholic Church does not object to such a possibility—there should be little if any dispute that by our own hands we have impacted and continue to alter the human evolutionary chain far faster and in ways inconceivable no more than a century past.

Neither Lewis nor I would suggest that much of the advances that have come about through man's scientific endeavors which have provided greater longevity, better health, restorative procedures and life-saving devices among many other technologies are necessarily or intrinsically bad, yet coincidentally neither do such advances positively advance the nature of man. As often occurs when man intervenes in the natural course of nature there are unintended consequences and undesirable results. *"God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them."*³ Please note that God did not create two men or two women but a male and a female

because God knew that only through the union of man and woman could the earth be filled and subdued. *"God blessed them, saying: be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."*⁴

Each step we take in the evolutionary process transforms and mutates until what once was no longer is; case in point, gender modification. Whether by natural or human selection, the first evolving over eons, the second over some finite number of generations, Lewis' point was that man would no longer be man as God created but as man desires. Man would have, at his core, fundamentally and irrevocably abolished man, once made in the image of God, to something entirely and substantially new. The question we should be asking ourselves is whether such power is necessary, right, or good. I would suggest that we are treading on sacred ground and should take great care in any attempt to *'improve'* what God has designed.

I need to take a moment or two to write of a different but related and equally relevant topic: the impact of technology—the output of the applied sciences—on our lives. I spent over thirty years in the technology field and therefore believe I understand the impact, both good and not so good, on our society, our culture, and yes even our faith. And while, through that experience, I consider myself more than qualified to discuss how technology has changed the human condition, I believe Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has already stated quite eloquently all that I could hope to say. What follows

is a portion of a speech he delivered on March 22, 2016 at a forum on the campus of Brigham Young University⁵:

“Technology has played a big role – the decisive role – in changing our economic lives, often for the better. But it’s also changed how Americans think. To put it another way: We use our tools, but our tools also use us. In half a century, the United States has gone from a manufacturing economy based on production, to a knowledge economy based on consumption. The impact on our imaginations and behaviors has been huge. Production is a joint affair. It requires guilds, unions and corporations. It needs assembly lines, heavy industry and communities. Consumption is a private affair. It requires only the self.

This difference between production and consumption is what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls the gulf between solid and liquid modern life. Older, “solid” societies based on production find their security in ownership, delayed gratification and rational organization. They seek methodical progress, and they put a high value on durable goods. “Liquid,” consumer-based societies – creatures of the tech revolution and its rapid rate of change – feed on “incessant new beginnings” and experiences.

What that means is this: In liquid, consumer-based life, the biggest fear is “drag coefficient” – the burden of having to live with obsolete or bad product choices. Inevitably, this approach to life shapes personal relations. As Bauman notes, “Once the pattern to reject and replace an object of consumption . . . is extended to partnership relations,” the partners themselves become disposable consumer objects.

In this sense, nothing is more liquid than no-fault divorce, which is now common across the country.

I could go on with a list of examples for a long time. But before we turn to the last part of my remarks, I want to note just one more factor that divides the America we now have, from the America we remember – or at least we think we remember. That factor, of course, is sex – sex and relationships, sex and marriage, sex and family, sex and human meaning.

To borrow a thought from C. S. Lewis, the human person is a kind of “amphibian” – a creature made by God for this world and the next; a blending of spirit and flesh that gives the body special dignity. The body is not modeling clay. It’s not raw material at the service of our wills, and there’s something profoundly sad in watching a person mutilate his or her body in the hope of creating a new identity. The body has a purpose. Our sexuality is ordered to creating and raising new life, and to the mutual support of a man and woman in a covenant of love.

*My point is this: Sexual confusion isn’t unique to our age, but the scope of it is. No society can sustain itself for long if marriage and the family fall apart on a mass scale. And that’s exactly what’s happening as we gather here today. The Supreme Court’s Obergefell decision approving same-sex marriage last June was a legal disaster. But it didn’t happen in a vacuum. It fits very comfortably with trends in our culture that go back many decades, even before the 1960s. It’s useful to read or reread Wilhelm Reich’s book from 1936, *The Sexual Revolution*. Reich argues that a real revolution can only be made at the level of sexual freedom. And it needs to begin by wiping away institu-*

tions like marriage, family and traditional sexual morality.

What’s interesting about Reich’s work is that, 80 years ago, he saw the United States as the most promising place for that kind of revolution to happen, despite its Puritan history. The reason is simple. Americans have a deep streak of individualism, a distrust of authority and a big appetite for self-invention. As religion loses its hold on people’s behavior, all of these instincts accelerate. The trouble is that once the genie is out of the bottle, sexual freedom goes in directions and takes on shapes that nobody imagined. And ultimately it leads to questions about who a person is and what it means to be human.”

What Archbishop Chaput had to say is of course correct, especially with regard to sexuality and its true purpose. Sex has become a recreational activity, a meaningless act whereupon we can derive some momentary pleasure at little or no risk and no commitment to another beyond the moment.

Through the ‘progress of applied science’, contraceptives and abortifacients are widely available and easily obtained; worst case, should an unwanted pregnancy result a ‘legal’ abortion can be performed. The dissenting writer substantiates this point to near perfection by stating that “Scientific progress has allowed consenting adults to express love and affection through sexual contact.”

It seems unusually clear to me that what scientific progress has wrought coupled with the ongoing sexual revolution is the transformation, or rather devolution—at least in the area of

sexuality—of man into little more than a unthinking, rutting animal. There is a natural purpose for sex and it isn't and has never been solely for pleasure so casually obtained. Conflating love and affection with sex is wrong, just as turning sexual intercourse into a recreational activity is wrong. No amount of wishful thinking will alter the fact that the purpose for sexual intercourse is procreation. This is not my opinion but should be obvious to anyone with at least a minimal understanding of human physiology.

Here I would like to return to the dissenting email and respond specifically to what we read there. After the beginning sentence we read: *"We are certainly entitled to our personal opinions on the issue of contraception and I might even agree with you, but in connecting contraception with the extinction of the human race you are defending the indefensible."*

Now I have already admitted to the unfortunate use of the word 'extinction' and offered a reasoned explanation for Lewis' use of 'abolition' so I will add nothing further other than to point out that neither Lewis nor I would suggest or imply any connection between contraception and the 'extinction' of the human race. To do so would most assuredly be 'indefensible'. I must object however to the assertion that what I wrote was, in any way, shape, or form, intended to be 'my opinion' on the issue of contraception. I will have more to say on contraception further along but will simply state for now that it is not 'my opinion' but several millennia of Church doctrine that codifies contraception as an 'intrinsic

evil', both objectively and morally wrong.

The dissent continues with *"CS Lewis did not show prescience or clarity of mind in arguing against the use of contraception and neither did you. He showed ignorance."* While left unstated, the implication is clear that the writer believes that Lewis' ignorance rests upon my shoulders as well. I will couch my response by strongly recommending a thorough and thoughtful reading of *The Abolition of Man* and doing the same with my article. While I could offer a suggestion as to where the ignorance better rests, I will refrain from doing so for brevities sake.

Given our past conversations on the subject, I was not in the least surprised at the scientific and evolutionary mention: *"Armed with scientific knowledge of evolution and the survival of species it is quite possible to show actual physical evidence that over population and pollution will lead to extinction much sooner than giving power to women through the use of safe, effective birth control."* I must admit to being somewhat amused by the conflating of over population and pollution with the use of birth control. While there is much that seems highly debatable and tenuous in this statement I will refrain from doing so as much of it is not germane to the topic at hand and is unusually open to unreasoned debate and heated argument.

I must confess that the following is a bit mystifying but I will endeavor to slog through it as best I can. *"That is a great gift of scientific theories and research that has been proven time and time again. It is impossible to argue*

against them with any credibility what so ever." It is difficult to understand what the writer intended here as no specifics have been provided upon which one could agree or disagree. Generally, once a theory has been proven and the proof independently verified further proof is not required or necessary. Thus, *"has been proven time and time again"* is unduly repetitive. Likewise, the impossibility of credible argument is meaningless in the absence of specific proven theories.

Without revisiting ancient (to the writer and myself) argument regarding theories, I will only reiterate what I have said before: a theory is based upon a set of hypotheses which must be assumed to be true for the theory to be true. Should one or more hypotheses prove to be untrue, the theory likewise is adjudged to be untrue.

Some theories can be empirically proven to be true; and on occasion, such theories will continue to be referred to as a theory. There are also many theories which cannot now or ever be empirically proven. Why? Because the hypotheses upon which the theory rests cannot be reproduced under controlled repeatable conditions. Take for example the Big Bang theory which attempts to explain the creation of the universe. No one can reproduce the big bang and stick around for 13.7 Billion years to watch it unfold in order to prove the theory. The same holds true for the theory of evolution and the survival of the species previously mentioned.

What should be understood is that

ten million scientists might agree to a theory's conclusions but their agreement doesn't prove a thing. In fact, more often than not those scientists nodding their heads so vigorously in affirmation of a theory have found themselves eating a large portion of crow when subsequent evidence finds one or more hypothesis to be false.

Good scientists will readily admit to the inherent weaknesses of unproven theories. For instance, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg agrees to a certain ambiguity found in the widely accepted theory called "*the standard model*", a theory "*more or less the same as what is sometimes called the 'big bang' theory, but supplemented with a much more specific recipe for the contents of the universe.*" As Weinberg explains "*The standard model ... is not the most satisfying theory imaginable of the origin of the universe. ...there is an embarrassing vagueness about the very beginning, the first hundredth of a second or so. Also, there is the unwelcome necessity of fixing initial conditions, especially the initial thousand-million-to-one ratio of photons to nuclear particles. We would prefer a greater sense of logical inevitability in the theory.*"

So now we arrive at the heart of the dissent. The writer states, "*The Catholic Church does not even try to do that. Their argument against giving women control over their own bodies is based on dogma alone, not scientific evidence or moral clarity.*" I find it both amusing and utterly fascinating whenever someone attempts to set the Catholic Church in direct opposition to science. Atheists such as Richard Dawkins and

the late Christopher Hitchens have enjoyed making the claim (fallacious as it well is) that religion and science do not mix, that there is some inherent conflict between them.

Why do I find myself amused? For the simple reason that the Catholic Church has never been opposed to scientific endeavors, in fact it has more often than not led the way in scientific discoveries and the development of such theories as the Big Bang.

Dissecting this may well prove to be an exercise fraught with great frustration but I will give it my best effort. The claim of "*giving women control over their own bodies*" is misleading and inaccurate, and it demonstrably mischaracterizes the human (in this specific case, female) body. Our bodies are not property, machinery, technology, or fungible goods over which anyone (self or other) may '*control*'.

The Catholic Church has never suggested, supported, or promoted any position or doctrine which would permit or condone '*control*' over one's body, and that includes the person of the body. Quite the contrary, the Catholic Church teaches that we are each made in the image and likeness of God, created by and for God, and therefore commended to maintain the same dignity for the body as is owed to God.

"The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that "then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man

became a living being. Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God."

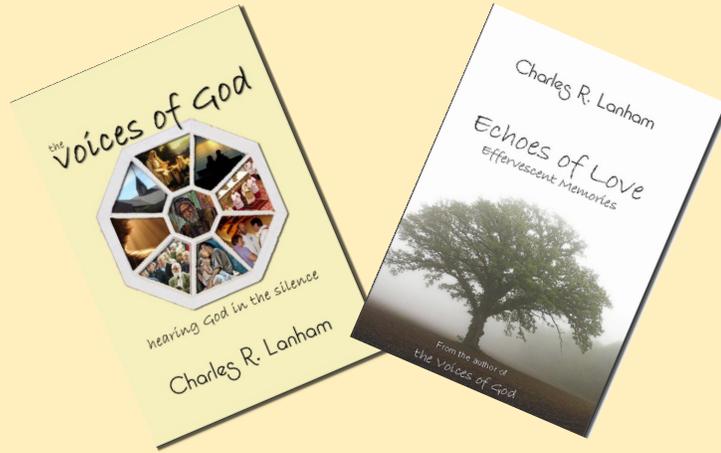
"In Sacred Scripture the term 'soul' often refers to human life or the entire human person. But "soul" also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: 'soul' dignifies the spiritual principle in man."

"The human body shares in the dignity of 'the image of God': it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day."

The Catholic Church doesn't argue either for or against anyone having '*control*' over their own body since control implies and requires ownership along with the power to do whatever we want with and to our bodies. We cannot '*control*' what we do not own or hold title; we can only grant it the respect and dignity owed to the human person. We must respect the dignity of the human person because we are made in the image and likeness of God and therefore owe our bodies the same respect and dignity owed to our Creator.

To Be Continued ...



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