



A journal for restless minds

## WORD WARS

*Euphemistically speaking*

### ET QUOD HOC ...

*This and that ...*

### 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.

## Word Wars

*Euphemistically speaking*

**G**eorge Orwell once penned an essay on politics and the English language.<sup>1</sup> He opined therein that while most people who bother with the matter at all would admit the language was “in a bad way, ... it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it.” He went on to observe that underneath the general collapse of language was a half-conscious “belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.” Readers should make note that this essay was first published seventy-one years ago, in April, 1946.

Orwell further remarked: “Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it

is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”



The late comedian George Carlin often spoke of the increasing use of “that soft language, that language that takes the life out of life.” We are drowning in euphemisms—soft words carefully chosen to sugarcoat and soften harsh realities—so as to make those un-

pleasant realities easier to swallow. This may, at first light, seem a quite trivial and trite matter, but most assuredly, it is

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far more insidious and dangerous than one might readily surmise. The danger lies not in the softening pattern and of itself, but in the coincident loss of knowledge and the divorce from reality which inevitably ensues.

**A**dd technology to the mix and, as Jonah Goldberg observes, “Despite the fact each of us has access to more information in our pockets than any scholar in the world had twenty years ago, we don’t use it. We drown in information but we starve for knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> The Internet in general and social media in particular, by all reasonable indicators, have contributed significantly to the dismaying growth in tribalism, promoted the rise in envy, anger, and vile argument, and polluted the public discourse with falsehood.

Words matter, they shape how we think; they color how we view and understand the world. Languages do not limit our ability to perceive the world or to think about the world, but they focus our perception, attention, and thought on specific aspects of the world. Language functions as a filter of perception, memory, and attention. When language is criminalized, brought low by political correctness, pablum-cized so as to not offend tender sensitivities, it matters. And it matters a great deal more than the majority of people realize.

Why does it matter whether we call someone who breaks the law to enter the country an “illegal alien” or an “undocumented immigrant?” What is the difference between a Christmas tree and a “holiday tree?” What differ-

ence does it make to turn “Global Warming” into “Climate Change?” After all, it is just semantics, right?

It is, ... and it isn’t. Whenever anyone suggests that it is “just semantics” it more often than not reflects their total lack of understanding of semantics. Semantics is the branch of linguistics and logic concerned with the meaning of words. So yes, it is just semantics, but “semantics” means the meaning of words. Words exist so that we might discriminate one thing from another. Without words and a common meaning ascribed to each there could be no effective communication. Control the words and you control the culture; euphemize reality and you distort it. Make no mistake, soft words are insidious, their sole purpose is to deceive, to hide the truth.

There are endless examples, of course, to illustrate the nefarious purpose behind the explosive use of euphemistic caterwauling. We can start with race discrimination in hiring and college admissions: such harsh words to describe a harsh reality, refashioned into the more positive, much nicer sounding “affirmative action.” Who would dare oppose “affirmative action?” And yet, who would publicly admit to the semantic equality of “racial discrimination” and “affirmative action?” It is a deception, a purposed fabrication intended solely to placate and mislead us from the truth.

**T**here is an old nursery rhyme which says “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” which feels extraordinarily appropriate these days. Originally intended to persuade children to

ignore name-calling and other hurtful taunts, to refrain from physical retaliation, and to remain calm and good-natured, its persuasive effectiveness is certainly suspect to say the least. Likewise, it would seem, is the efficacy of the command enjoined by Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

**I**f there is one virtue conspicuously absent in this world today it is love while sadly what appears to be in promiscuous overabundance is quite the opposite. Reasoned discourse, good manners, consideration for the views of others, moderation, a willingness to compromise, respect, a genuine fondness or love for neighbors are virtues no longer held in high regard, especially in the public square.

There is little if any consideration to dialogue for dialogue requires an honest attempt to reach common ground, to depolarize the intransigent, and to accept the unacceptable. It would require recognizing that every issue ought not to be a question of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

What is perhaps most distressing is the deliberate and malicious high-jacking of the lexicon by those who wish to confuse, obfuscate, and distort in order to hide their true purpose. Mathematicians enjoy the exacting detail upon which all mathematics depends. Two plus two must equal four under any and all conditions and circumstances. It can never equal any other value, no matter how much one might wish or desire it to be so. Linguistics, like mathematics, has defined rules and definitions, but unlike

mathematics, its most important rule, or so it would seem, is that all rules are meant to be broken.

**T**ake the word “*discrimination*” which is defined as an act or instance of making a distinction, the ability to see fine distinctions and differences, subtle appreciation in matters of taste, or discriminating judgment. The original meaning which was first defined in the 1640s was “*the making of distinctions*” and from 1814 it meant “*discernment*.” Now here is the rub. Based on these definitions no one, absolutely no one, is immune for we all discriminate in some form or fashion, from choosing what color to paint a room to which car to buy or what wine to drink. We all make distinctions and choices based on our own personal preferences and tastes. Quite simply, we discriminate every day and all the time.

Somewhere along the way “*discrimination*” has been high-jacked, conflating bigotry with discernment, obfuscating its true meaning. Discrimination has now become a derogatory, sufficiently opaque to blur and confuse even those most learned among us.

And there are so many other high-jacked words, words such as “*fundamental*”, “*religion*”, “*faith*”, “*rights*”, “*values*”, “*love*”, “*life*”, “*freedom*”, “*choice*”, “*entitled*” and “*justice*”. The language has been skewered and betrayed, euphemized to give argument to those whose sole purpose is complete acquiescence and subjugation to their myopic point of view. It is an ethic based on and sup-

ported by hate, never by or for the love of God.

The examples are endless; new euphemisms crop up literally every week. “*Global warming*” has morphed into “*Climate Change*,” a meaningless term since the climate is always changing. Young criminals have become “*justice-involved youth*,” government mandates and taxes have been reconstituted as “*individual shared responsibility payments*,” government spending has illogically become “*investments*.”

Very few suffer from gender dysphoria, and yet, countless funds, time, and energy have been expended in an all-out assault on gender-specific pronouns, not out of compassion for those few who are gender-confused, but to blur or deny the natural distinctions and biological differences between male and female.

The same can be said for “*Same-sex marriage*.” Since the beginning, throughout history, in every culture, time, and place, marriage has been the union of husbands (men) and wives (women.) “*Same-sex marriage*” in the union of men with men or women with women, but it is most definitively not the union of husbands and wives. Simply said, such unions do not, cannot, and will not meet the definition of “*marriage*,” not now, not ever.

**P**lacing a qualifying adjective before a word can and often does either change or negate the original definition of the word it precedes. Its inclusion into the common lexicon offers an opportunity to redefine, or worse, conflate its true meaning. For instance, once the phrase “*same-sex*” was placed before the word

“*marriage*,” the semantics—the meaning—of marriage was irreparably obliterated, altered beyond reconstitution; and, just as quickly as the definition changed so did the argument become one of “*marriage equality*.” Any disagreement suddenly became an act of bigotry, a hate-crime, and a blatant discriminatory attempt to limit marriage to husbands and wives.

The media shares much of the blame for the overwhelming expansion of euphemistic excess that has befallen the English language. Political correctness and social media are co-equal partners in the demise of reasoned public discourse. Media have banned certain phrases such as “*Islamic terrorist*,” “*terrorist*” and “*illegal alien*” from their reporters vocabulary. As Michael Gonzalez, vice president of communications at The Heritage Foundation and a legal immigrant wrote in 2013:

*“Political correctness can of course sap a language of meaning. But there’s a higher price to pay. As Orwell observed, the decay of language affects thought, which in turn produces even worse politics.”*

*For example, the forces of political correctness today have made it all but impossible to write the sentence: ‘The Islamic terrorists were illegal aliens.’ The subject, ‘terrorists,’ is judgmental, they say. And it can never, ever, be used with the qualifier ‘Islamic.’*

*To be sure, Islamic terrorists have not gone away. But thanks to the arbiters of political correctness, we no longer speak their name, at least not in polite society. Though Islamic terrorists present a clear*

## Et Quod Hoc ...

*This and that ...*

**T**his Wednesday last marked the unexpected and untimely passing of a man, a month shy of his 77th year on this earth. And while his death is no doubt but one among many for that day, it is his which has caused me to pause and to reflect upon his life and his relationship to myself and to so many others.

Joseph Kendrick Lanham was my uncle, the youngest of seven, born June 9, 1941, the son of Charles Kendrick and Anna Lou Lanham. Six years, minus one week later, he became an uncle upon the momentous occasion of my birth. For as long as I can now recall, we have exchanged birthday greetings each year.

We both shared in our dislike for the names with which we were saddled in our younger years and just as quickly discarded them when we flew the nest. That being said, neither of us were ever able to fully shed our disagreeable monikers, for family and childhood friends still refer to us by those names so familiar. But the rest of the world knows us only by the names we found most agreeable and we have come to live with the disjunction.

For family and lifelong friends, my uncle was always Kenny, or to his many nieces and nephews, Uncle Kenny. Even now, when six years lacks any discernible distance, I still call him Uncle Kenny. To do differently would be quite unthinkable. Perhaps this is a middle-American archaism, a thing from a different place and time, but

then again, perhaps it isn't as anachronistic as it may now appear. I have many nieces and nephews—and even some greats—who comfortably attach the “uncle” and “aunt” honorific to those who rightly own them. There is a great deal to be said for such tradition, especially in these rude and vulgar times.

The rest of the world knew Uncle Kenny as Joe which always seemed so strange to those who knew him from his youth. But Joe he was and would be known for more than fifty years. Our lives ran parallel to each other in many ways: he married my Aunt Connie shortly after I graduated from high school; a few weeks after our respective birthdays, my 18th and his 24th.

He served in the Air Force, I served in the Army, our time served even overlapping a bit. His mother, my grandmother, baked both of our wedding cakes; his father, my grandfather, was conscripted to carrying said wedding cakes, ingeniously boxed, on his lap for the entire journey by car to our respective weddings. From the northeastern corner of Missouri to Amarillo, Texas for his, a much shorter distance (some 200 miles) to Decatur, Illinois for mine.

Both our marriages have been enduring: his marriage of 52 years, interrupted but briefly, by her death 8 months ago. Like Janet and myself, they were graced by God with two beautiful daughters. Like ours, their daughters are successful in their chosen careers, have married and given them grandchildren to dote, spoil, and thoroughly enjoy.

Early on he felt a call to the priesthood and graduated from St. John's Seminary in 1959, but subsequently decided not to pursue a priestly vocation, opting for marriage instead, and for this, I am sure, his daughters will be eternally grateful.

Too often these days, family is given short shrift; all too many have little time for relatives, especially those half a continent distant. We live busy lives and it is far too easy to forget the importance of staying in touch, of reunion and conversation, of the necessity for familiarity with those who, like or not, are part of who we are, family.

Earlier today I was asked to participate in the Mass and to deliver the homily for my uncle. I was deeply humbled and honored to be asked. Godspeed, Uncle Kenny. Until we meet again.

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## Man Up

*A Friday reflection*

**T**his weekend's gospel has that now well-known passage from John, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13). I was reminded of this reading a brief essay written by James M. Kushiner, Executive Director, The Fellowship of St. James, the publisher of Touchstone Magazine. In “*Man Up Above All: One Aspect of Manhood We Can't Live Without,*” Kushiner shares his thoughts on the disinclination by many to not care for men and to forget

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or suppress what the two sexes are really like. Here is his essay in its entirety.

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*"The cause doesn't have to be righteous and battle doesn't have to be winnable; but over and over again throughout history, men have chosen to die in battle with their friends rather than to flee on their own and survive."* — Sebastian Junger (War)

What is it about men that they do this? We may as well ask why the following is also exemplary of men:

*"During the mass shooting in Aurora, Colo., four of the twelve victims were young men who died protecting women with their bodies; there no examples of the opposite."* (Junger, National Review)

Junger notes that women sometimes will protect children, as did one teacher during the Sandy Hook killings—"but examples of women using their bodies to shield male partners are vanishingly rare."

But not all men risk their lives:

*"An armed sheriff's deputy working as a security guard at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School during [Feb. 14's] mass shooting has resigned amid an investigation that found he did not enter the school during Nikolas Cruz's deadly gun rampage, which killed 17 people."* (CrimeOnline)

Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel was visibly angered by the deputy's inaction. *"Devastated, sick to my stomach - there are no words,"* Israel said, adding that [Deputy] Peterson was *"clearly"* aware of the active shooter situation.

The condemnation of the guard's inaction is nearly universal. Some call it pure cowardice. Some may only say he did not do his job. Didn't he have an obligation to enter the school and risk his life? He was, in fact, carrying a gun for a reason and he didn't use it.

What if it had been a salesman or lawyer who happen to be carrying a gun and heard the shooting? Had he gone in, we would call him a hero. But if a guard had gone in, we might still call him a hero; such heroic policemen or soldiers often say, "I was just doing my job." But we still admire them, for this job uniquely includes the willingness to die.

We admire men who risk their lives when it is their job, and all the more when it's not. The young men who died in Aurora may have felt it was their job—their *role as men*—to protect women, even if they were not being paid to do it. For willingness to die seems to rise from within such men when the situation calls for protection. But it didn't rise from within the Deputy Peterson, even when it *was* part of his job.

So here we have a role that is not routine, that is not always taken up, that, when it is embraced, is considered manly, and when it is expected but refused, it is put down to cowardice. Junger writes, *"Even in a society such as ours that aspires to gender fairness, harbors differing expectations for the sexes. Both men and women blithely use the phrase 'Be a man about it' despite the fact that our vernacular has no female equivalent."*

The status of women as adults is simply not in question. Not so for men. The stubborn persistence of phrases such as *"Man up"* and *"Be a man about it"* imply that it's possible to

be an adult male and yet fail the societal definition of manhood.

If there is an *"add on"* to being merely male that we call *"being a man,"* it doesn't seem, then, that it is merely biologically based or acquired (unlike motherhood, biologically speaking), but has to somehow be developed in the man, and must emerge as manhood.

Most societies have had various ways to make boys into men, and have instinctively known that it is a project for the good of society. If the recent demise of the Boy Scouts of America (now accepting girls into what has now been renamed *"Scouting BSA"*) is any indication of our society's interest in manhood, liberal sexual-revolutionized America does not care for men and has forgotten or suppressed what the two sexes are really like.

What has Christ got to do with this? Plenty. With an eye to my opening quotation from Junger, Jesus Christ is the one who laid down his life in full for his friends, in this case, children, women, and men—using his own Body to absorb the deadly arrows of sin. *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* Moreover, he feeds us with that Body, broken for all. Such love lies at the heart of the cosmos, beats in the heart of every true man, and is admired by all.

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Have a blessed week.

God bless everyone.

And present danger, we are denied a concise way to describe them clearly."

**G**onzalez goes on to further explain the dangers political correctness presents, by first speaking of the predicate, "were illegal aliens."

"The object 'aliens' is simply gone, unless you are referring to ET. Back in the 1970s, I carried that word in my wallet — on the 'green card' that identified me as a 'resident alien.' I don't remember ever feeling that the word minimized my existence in any way, yet today it is expunged from our vocabulary when discussing people.

As for the adjective "illegal," that can never be used for people either. Apparently it is now impossible for people to be illegal.

Instead, we learn from our supposed betters that the only acceptable term now is "undocumented immigrants." In making the change, however, we sacrifice meaning and purpose.

For example, the other day I went down to the hardware store to get my wife dishwashing gloves, and suddenly realized that I had left my wallet home. Had I suddenly become an undocumented immigrant? Well, I guess so. I don't think, however, this is what Tulane professor and TV host Melissa Harris-Perry means when she uses the term on her MSNBC show.

The problem here is that if we don't express ourselves clearly, we don't think clearly and then we can't act with purpose to fix our problems. If we can't ever say that there are Islamic terrorists in the world or people who are in our country illegally then we can't articulate real solu-

tions to these problems — whether efficient or compassionate ones.

At its worst, political correctness becomes totalitarian, not just dictating what words we utter or write, but even our thoughts and actions. Say the wrong thing, and you will be kicked out of your university or job, which means you will find it very difficult to enter another — which means that your entire life has suddenly been changed, and not for the better.

As a result, you will avoid even thinking the wrong thought. It would be suicidal to do so. It's Soviet Russia without the Gulag.

Orwell knew what he was warning us against. After all, he lived through some of the worst isms of the 20th century. He observed that, in his time, some considered abstract words meaningless 'and have used this as a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism?'

To fight for the good, we must be able to name the bad. As Orwell put it: "To think clearly is a necessary first step toward political regeneration."

**F**or those who may find this little more than a conspiracy theory written by a lunatic, it would do well to carefully listen to what is being said and taught these days. There is so much more that could be said but time and space preclude more musings. Be it enough to say that free speech, religion, culture, liberty, and our God-given rights are under direct assault. It behooves us all to join the battle for our minds and our God.

## Deacon's Diner

### Food for a restless mind

**F**or 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

**The Closing of the American Mind**  
*Allan Bloom*  
Simon & Schuster  
1987, 402 pages.

**The Demon in Democracy**  
*Ryszard Legutko*  
Encounter Books  
2016, 182 pages.

**Strangers in a Strange Land**  
*Charles J. Chaput*  
Henry Holt and Co.  
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

### PERIODICALS

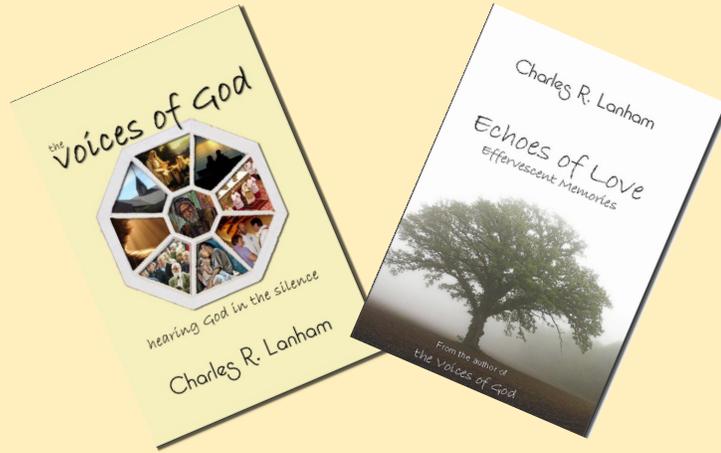
**First Things**  
Institute on Religion and Public Life  
Editor: R. R. Reno  
Ten Issues per year.  
www.firstthings.com

**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

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*Deacon Chuck is away this weekend  
attending a funeral for his uncle.*



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

**deaconscorner.org**

**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

**<http://deaconscorner.org>**.

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