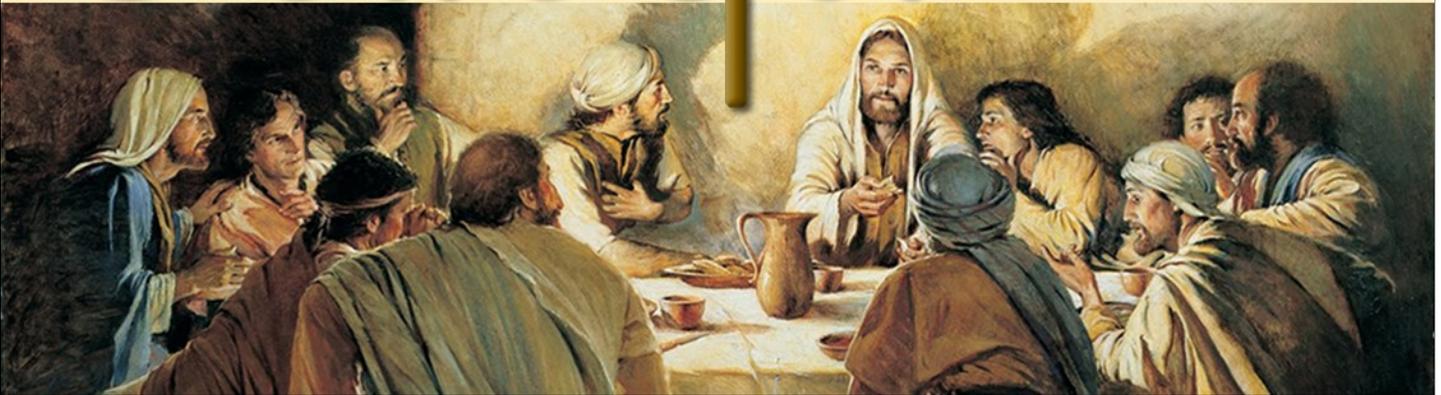


Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

On Coming Of An Age

Then and back again

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.

On Coming Of An Age

Then and back again

Once upon a time, or so this story goes, there was laughter and a woman much infected with it. Why she left we will never truly know this side of heaven; that she left, now that we have no doubt, no doubt at all. Oh, we see her still and yet we don't, not really. She lives and breathes with neither care nor worry. She smiles—oh yes, she smiles, always smiling—but the eyes tell of a somewhere elsewhere, so very far away. I suppose she is in heaven for where else would such a gentle soul know bliss so pure and peace so sweet, and yet, could heaven be so presumptuous? I suppose she knows. Perhaps she smiles because of it. If that be true then let us share a smile in her delight.

To lose the mind is a leaving no one is ever of the mind to take. The worst is not the leaving but what remains long past the going. It is the long goodbyes of those then left behind, unable to find a small farewell.

Of this story I will return, but first, a brief diversion.

I must confess to blatantly borrowing a phrase from that great English novelist, J.R.R. Tolkien, who subtitled *The Hobbit*, that wonderful children's fantasy novel, *There and Back Again*. In my peculiar case I found it somewhat more intriguing to change the first word from *There* to *Then* which I will make clear in a moment or two, maybe three. It is important, I promise.

Memories are, when we get right down to it, the sum and substance of lived experience, the who and what of



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all we are and will be. Without memory, without the ability to lift experiences from another time, we would find our present selves difficult if not impossible to live with or to anticipate what happens next.

When we burn our hand on a flame, our memory of the experience warns against doing the same a second time. Lose the memory and you are bound to repeat the experience; without remembering we can never learn.

But there is another part of memory that is far more important. Memory provides us with the ability to love, to form close relationships with our God, ourselves and one another. It is memory that takes us to then and back again; remembering and putting the then in the context of the now.

Monday last was filled with memory. It began with a trip through the Harrah Collection at the National Automobile Museum in Reno, Nevada. Although we had toured the museum just two weeks prior, what made this tour more than special were the friends who walked beside us. Our friends are native Nevadans, not quite a decade older, but older enough to have memories that we were too young to have obtained on our own. One had known Bill Harrah personally and shared memories of him and the cars he had collected. Old cars turned into new memories and we were the better for having made them.

A few hours later we traveled up the mountains to Sand Harbor on the

northeast shore of Lake Tahoe. This was not our first, nor our only time but memory never quite captures the beauty of the bounty which God has so wonderfully created. For those who have never occasioned to visit Sand Harbor, it is a jewel within a gem. Built on a large sand dune, an open air stage faces an auditorium of beach chairs firmly embedded in the sand.

Each summer Shakespeare comes to Sand Harbor as well as many other artistic performances. What we enjoyed that evening was the Reno Philharmonic together with Peter Brennan's *Jeans N' Classics* performing *A Night At Woodstock*. The venue was packed with tie-dye, ribbons in now grey hair, and the music! The memories of Carlos Santana (*Samba Pa Ti*, *Black Magic Woman*), Janis Joplin (*Piece of My Heart*), Sly and the Family Stone (*Hot Time in the Summertime*), Jefferson Airplane (*Somebody to Love*, *White Rabbit*), The Who (*Pinball Wizard*), The Band (*The Weight*), Joe Cocker (*Delta Lady*, *With a Little Help From My Friends*), Blood, Sweat & Tears (*You made Me So Very Happy*), Jimi Hendrix (*Hey Joe*, *All Along The Watchtower*) The Lovin' Spoonful (*Darlin' Be Home Soon*), Crosby Stills and Nash (*Suite: Judy Blue Eyes*) and the encore (*Woodstock*). Now fifty years past but the music lives on in memory. Flooding the mind as if yesterday, voices no longer young, weaker now perhaps, yet the songs still remembered and so we sang them all again.

It was more than the music though that stirred the soul and memory. Before the orchestra and band played the final song *With A Little Help From My Friends*, Peter Brennan re-

minded us of three moments from 1969: fifty years ago the Reno Philharmonic first took the stage; Woodstock defined a generation over three days in August; and, on July 19, 1969 Neil Armstrong took "one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind" onto the surface of our neighbor moon.

As the music, first heard fifty years before now played by an orchestra of the same vintage—as if by divine design—a full redolent moon arose from below the mountains as if not to miss their fifty-year reunion.

Memories of then came flooding back. We were young, much younger, twenty-two, a daughter newly minted the day before our marriage from the year before. We were poor yet we were rich in all that counted. An army private earned a handsome sum, \$99 once a month. Stationed at Redstone Arsenal/Marshall Spaceflight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, we were well aware of what was happening around the nation and some 250,000 miles away. Like all Americans we watched with pride as man first frolicked on the moon and our daughter cooed to our amusement.

What memories we have are more than precious, worth more than wealth of all the gold and silver, for memories are never purchased but only made by living; memories are etched upon the soul.

This weekend I will fly away, fly away home to reflect upon some memories and make a few more in the telling. It is an annual journey, a reunion

of family in remembrance of our parents and those now gone who made all our memories possible.

They say Alzheimer's is genetic, in the genes. If that is so, and I believe it to be true, then memory may one day leave me for some unknown country or somewhere elsewhere. My mother's mother left us a quarter-century before her rest in peace. Her youngest sister much the same though time was blessedly much shorter.

I need no convincing to surmise, should my mother not have died through untimely accident, she would have left us just the same. It is of her sister Juanita that I began and of whom I now return.

To speak of either woman demands mention of the other for they were sisters whose lives were wedded as tight as to their husbands and their God. In temperament they would differ, but little else. They were kindred spirits, tied at the hip and by telephone, and above all else, they loved, oh how they loved!

Three shy of two dozen children proved testimony to their selfless love. I believe it was the only race in which they ever were in competition; it was, when the race was over, a friendly sport. Juanita took the first lap by a nose, or to be more precise, twenty-seven days. Mother went the distance though never by intention or desire.

For most of growing up we lived within walking distance; it never mattered where you began your day or what pillow you might bend at

night. They were sisters, we were family, with so many who could tell the difference anyway. As the song goes: memories are made of these.

In front of me is a small thing, cut from somewhere I no longer recall; it doesn't really matter in the least, what matters is in its reminding.

Let us remember that love lives through sacrifice and is nourished by giving. Without sacrifice, there is no love.—Saint Maximilian Kolbe

Somewhere elsewhere I wrote of memories, of growing up and of the awesome power of God. It is worth recalling.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork (Psalm 19:1). There is a beauty in all which God has made, a majesty so breathtaking, so wondrous, so magnificent; words dare not express, for such words would most assuredly fail in their defect and imprecision.

The summers of my youth were generally spent in the rural Midwest, working for any one of several uncles; farmers who tilled the soil, planted corn, soybeans, wheat, and oats in the main; each crop requiring careful tending from seed to maturity; always praying for just the right amount of rain and sunshine to produce a bountiful harvest. The days were long and hot and hard, most often beginning before the sun peeked over the Eastern horizon and ending long after it had said goodnight. And when your head at long last hit the pillow, you did not

remember it, for sleep always won the race.

Yet there were nights when boyhood friends would camp beside an indolent pond, an artificial reservoir of still water, alien to the plainness of the earth; the miles and miles of emptiness, no intrusions of manmade stuff; just boys on the cusp of becoming men, in the darkness looking up recognizing the awesome power of God.

We would lay there on our backs – the smell of clover wafting on the night wind – just staring into that vast and endless sea of stars; each alone in contemplation of the wonder of it all.

And we would listen to the silence of that universe which God had made and hear his voice speak to each of us. And we would dream of it. We never wondered why, because we knew the reason. God made it all for us. Why? Because he loves us. Imagine that.

As a young Catholic growing up in the fifties and sixties I can recall – with a longing in my soul – the reverence and the awe I felt when in His Presence. It was a sacred time and you knew it; you were on holy ground and you felt it; you were in His house and you trembled at the very thought of it.

The church was old but full of marvelous statues and images, beautiful stained-glass windows and ornate light fixtures suspended from high above, and a large wooden altar painted white, with its spires and spindles reaching toward heaven tipped with gold. The altar railing stood low,

guarding the sanctuary, in silent testimony to the sacred presence residing beyond its gates.

God was there and so we prayed and worshipped and adored. We knelt in humble supplication when we received our Lord upon the tongue. There was no question what and who we received: it was the body and blood of our Lord, so sacred and holy that only the priest could hold or touch his preciousness.

From the moment you entered the church you knew you were in the presence of God, in his house, on sacred ground. You dressed as if you were in the presence of someone very important – because you were. You left the world behind when you walked through the doors. You behaved as if you were in the presence of a King – because you were.

Many say, “Those days are gone” and I must agree with deep regret for we have lost our sense of the sacred, the mystery and the majesty of God. We receive our Lord now, not with reverence and awe due our Lord, but like a handout. Too many no longer believe we are receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ; it is merely a piece of bread and ordinary wine – symbols. They are mistaken.

I miss the sacred and the holy. I miss the trembling before the majesty of God.¹

So much of memory has been dismissed, not lost, but tossed away as

irrelevant, thus rid of to free up space for mindless drivel. As Ryszard Legutko has observed, “Ignorance kills the life of the mind. But ignorance is only a symptom ... not the disease.”²

Legutko was originally invited by Middlebury College to speak about his book *The Demon in Democracy* but upon his arrival was informed that his lecture had been cancelled by the college president, without notice. As he writes, “I would have thought that a university professor and E.U. parliamentarian coming all the way from Poland deserved some such consideration.” He was subsequently asked to give his lecture by students who disagreed with the administration.

The cancellation of my lecture was announced only a few hours before I was scheduled to speak. Soon thereafter, I was approached in my hotel by two students who told me they were unhappy with the president’s decision and were determined, together with others, to defy the administration. They asked me to give a lecture in an “underground” format. I immediately agreed and was driven to the campus in a big American car. The students told me that a political science professor had invited me to his seminar. We entered through a back door and joined the seminar.

When I started my talk, there were about twenty students, but soon others began coming in. When I finished, there were more than forty. My talk was followed by questions, all of them sensible and to the point, to which I responded as sincerely and clearly as I could. The whole session resembled a standard university talk, like countless other talks all over the world, except that at the end, news reached us that the radicals had found out about our clandestine meeting and it was un-

clear what they were going to do. Fortunately, nothing happened. In the evening about forty students and two or three professors met for a dinner during which, in a friendly atmosphere, a civil conversation continued. This is, I think, a fair reconstruction of the facts.

This was the first time in my entire academic life that I was prevented from speaking because of my views, and the first time I was openly insulted by students with the tacit approval, or at least a *désintéressement*, on the part of the school authorities.

One is struck by a number of—to use an Orwellian phrase—“thoughtcrimes” I am supposed to have committed, the same thoughtcrimes that haunt the modern political and moral conscience. Homophobe, misogynist, xenophobe, Islamophobe, sexist: These are but a few of the titles Middlebury students and professors bestowed on me. And the list is far from complete. Contemporary discourse has many more: transphobic, binarist, Eurocentric, ageist, logocentrist, white supremacist, and many others of which I lost track a long time ago.

The communist system generated thoughtcrimes, but liberal-democracy has generated far more, and it generates still more every year. The result is that the space in which the human mind may safely roam gets smaller and smaller. One is constantly in danger of crossing the red line. More and more topics are dangerous territory. A reflection, an insight, a clarification, or an argument may be taken for a criticism—which is not allowed. One cannot express even the mildest doubts about, say, feminism or homosexuality, without being accused of grave transgressions against political morality, so grave that the most humiliating apologies will not atone for them.

The policing of thoughtcrimes is deadly to the intellect in another way as well: It corrupts the language in which we communicate with each other about reality. Take the statement issued by the Middlebury protesters after the incident:

Our intention for the protest was to create an affirming, nonviolent space for marginalized people (particularly those impacted by Ryszard Legutko's hateful rhetoric) to celebrate themselves and each other. . . . We planned to create a non-disruptive, respectful counter-space to create a place of healing and inclusivity in the face of prejudice.

It does not require great intelligence to see that the quoted passage is gibberish, composed entirely of the clichés that litter our political language today. Whoever uses this language—"respectful counter-space," "celebrating themselves and each other," "a place of healing and inclusivity"—condemns himself to intellectual impotence.

Yet there is method in this gibberish. By comparing the clichés with the realities they supposedly describe, we find that the aim of this language is to reverse the meanings of words. "Marginalized people" are not people who are marginalized, but people who set the college's agenda and can get away with just about anything, including physically assaulting their professors. "Respectful and non-disruptive counter-space" means subjecting a lecturer to insults and humiliations. "Inclusivity" is the systemic censuring of people and ideas. I don't know what "healing" is supposed to mean, but I suspect it might refer to the joy a hooligan feels in his acts of vandalism.

The corruption of language, the omnipresence of stifling ideology, and the triumph of power over reason are not exclusive to this other-

wise charming town in Vermont, but have infiltrated public spaces throughout the West. But I would not like to finish on a pessimistic note. Having experienced life under totalitarianism, I know that change begins when people cease to fear the system. The fact that a group of students at Middlebury got fed up with the ideologues' opportunism, cowardice, intimidation, and dogmatism, and had the courage to say no and to stand by their principles, is a sign of hope. Perhaps their stand will mark the beginning of the end of our present Dark Age, which has for too long kept too many in intellectual and moral subjection.

We have removed the past, whether good or bad, from our memories.

It is a characteristic of any decaying civilization that the great masses of the people are unconscious of the tragedy. Humanity in a crisis is generally insensitive to the gravity of the times in which it lives. Men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because it involves too much self-accusation and principally because they have no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world; the great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on, because they have lost the vision of the heights from which they have fallen. The tragedy is not that the hairs of our civilization are gray; it is rather that we fail to see that they are.—*Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, 1948*

1. From the preface to my upcoming book, *God Reimagined: and you will be like gods*.
2. Ryszard Legutko, Professor of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University, Krakow Poland, author of *The Demon in Democracy*, from an essay *The Demon in Middlebury* for First Things, August/September 2019, pp. 9-12.

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

Salvation

Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press
2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press
2018, 269 pages.

Catholicism & Modernity

James Hitchcock

The Seabury Press
1979, 250 pages.

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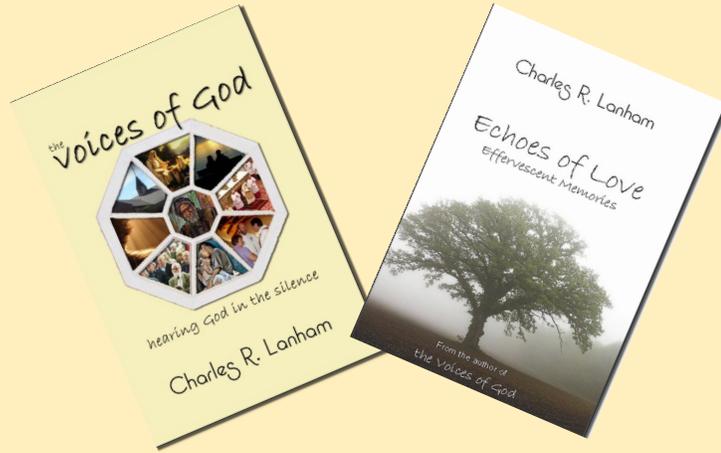
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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

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