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A journal for restless minds

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Mere Orthodoxy, Revisited

Regaining a faith once lost

WHEN YOU REACH A CERTAIN AGE YOU come to realize of a sudden and with clarity unforeseen in youth precisely what Jesus meant when he said to Simon Peter, “when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go” (John 21:18). More frequently than I now dare admit, I find myself—knowing full well where I *wish* to go—inexplicably much too far afield. Not that I do not savor the journey or the unexpected venture, for I most always enjoy the surprise; what I miss is where I first had every thought of going. I cannot though but wonder whether I have perhaps simply come upon an interesting place to refresh my jumbled thoughts, or if I have completely lost my way within that synaptic jungle of gratuitous opinion, or, if as Robert Frost might suggest, I have occasioned upon a spot where roads diverge; still on the journey, just not as of yet where I had of a mind to go. It is as if Frost knew then what now I know: “Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back,” and yet, I cannot help but wonder if “that has made all the difference” or is of any mind at all.¹

I am thoroughly convinced—*sola fidei*—that happenstance is but a bit of Holy Spirit-ual humor played at our expense. Just moments ago, my first-born forwarded this message, along with her own rather snide comment: “I have a friend who is also the grammar police,” an occupation she has all too often ascribed to her doting father.

YOUR DINNER
vs.
YOU'RE DINNER
One leaves you
nourished.
One leaves you
dead.
GRAMMAR SAVES LIVES!



The difficulty in which I find myself—being a *mere* orthodox literalist—is that I seem to be lost in a jungle, complete with illiterate predators vainly lying in wait for their next meal. It is their jungle and they are the self-appointed magistrates of their self-proscribed domain; it is their rules or the dinner plate, they will have it no other way. So focused are they on their selves they are quite incapable of seeing the forest for the dead tree they are so intimately hugging; in short, they are literal illiterates much too eager to shoot poisoned arrows at anyone who dares diverge from their ideological path. They quite conveniently choose which words offend and summarily assess the speaker an offensive usage fee. They are new age sophists, masters of casuistry, whose only argument is to prove them better than their neighbor, which they cannot.

It is not that I dislike them, I dislike their ideas. As Justice Antonin Scalia once observed, “I attack ideas, I don’t attack people—and some very good people have some very bad ideas,” just as do some very bad people, on occasion have some very good ones. Should a good friend whom I much admire urge me to drink Kool-Aid laced with arsenic, would it be wise to drink simply on that friend’s assertion that it will cleanse the palate or settle my indigestion? I think perhaps I should ask my friend to first cleanse *his* palate. As I recall, nine out of ten doctors once recommended cigarettes to calm the nerves; that is until nine died of lung cancer and the tenth from their smoke second-hand. I find it odd there were but ten, identified neither by name nor—perhaps most important—credentials (M.D., D.V.M., or PhD. of Economics?). We shall never know; they are dead and no longer talking.

Those who rely on anonymous sources, unsubstantiated opinions of “experts”, and round numbers—instead of square facts—never seem at all concerned as to the authenticity of their *undeniable* facts—99.9% of scientists comes immediately to mind. I find no need to impugn anyone’s moral character or values, they are quite capable of being hoisted with their own petard; it is the bad ideas they prescribe to which I most reasonably object.

The modern reader finds reading too much a bore; so many words, so much a waste of time, so many games to play. To speed things up a bit they have developed a rather rapacious habit of “hunt and destroy,” searching for words that trigger an emotional response while disabusing the rest. Context and understanding are of no repute; just eat the meat and bag the veggies; better yet, start straight off with dessert. The objective is to object; the purpose to find fault, no matter how small or insignificant; the rationale—a set of reasons or a logical basis for argument or belief—often irrational and typically without logic. Logic? Who needs it? The point? A butter knife, with its blunt edge and no point, useless for carving stone or slicing paper; yet, the earnest fellow will still try too much. I mean no disrespect, but I rather pity the poor fellow who cannot see the foolishness of his own rebuttal to an argument he cannot articulate clearly. What is clear is there is no clarity, only a roux to thicken the gumbo.

Now it is much too much to ascribe any certain characteristic or attribute to those who have no or few ideas of their own design; it is simply not that simple. It is not a matter of creativity or intelligence, genetics or biology, gender, ethnicity or race, or any other physical attribute or trait. Anyone, from genius to imbecile, can participate in the game of Dullards. Education—most notably a liberal college education—can and often lends itself to ignoring what a liberal education, from the beginning, was organized to provide: a path to wisdom. If you doubt this, look it up, it is not terribly difficult though it will require some reading beyond picture books. What you will find is that universities were first established during the Middle Ages (between the 11th and 15th centuries) by the Catholic Church for the study of the Arts and the higher disciplines of Theology, Law, Science and Medicine. Imagine that! God and Science, faith and reason hand in hand; what was obvious then but is no longer is that “you can’t have one without the other.” God is perfect, man and all his scientific knowledge and know-how are not. Science demands proof, empirical proof; not everything can be empirically proven, not everything can be verified in a laboratory. Sometimes you just have to take it on faith.

Occasionally, I receive comments which take me to task on some point or another which I may or may not have made, implied or otherwise intended. Whether I

agree or disagree, I always find criticism profitable for it gives me further opportunity to retrace my thoughts and upon further reflection to revisit what I had written, to ask what I might have missed, was I sufficiently clear, was I too harsh or unfair, were my remarks incorrect or verifiably false? After all, I have not been granted the Perfection in holy Divinity (PhD) degree or anything of the sort. Recently, I received an email from a frequent friendly foe who took issue with a poem, written over a century ago by Mrs. Mildred Howells, a noted poet of her day:

*And so it criticized each flower,
This supercilious seed
Until it woke one summer hour,
And found itself a weed.²*

Now, before I mention his chief objection, it would, to my mind, be of some advantage to clear the air and explain the rather longish adjective—the second word in the second line, *supercilious*: behaving or looking as though one thinks one is superior to others. A few familiar synonyms to further explain: arrogant, conceited, pompous, snobbish—I am certain you now have the patronizing picture perfectly polished to a high degree of understanding. The obvious meaning of Mrs. Howells’ poem is, well, perfectly obvious. Supercilious people who are too quick to criticize will too soon be found out for the emptiness of their baroque pomposity and abruptly taken down a peg or two, or, as someone once said, “he is no different or better than I am for he puts his pants on the same way I do, one leg at a time.”

Any criticism, to be fair, should always be directed toward the specifics of the argument on which one takes issue. “Any one setting out to dispute anything ought always to begin by saying what he does not dispute. Beyond stating what he proposes to prove he should always state what he does not propose to prove.”³ Of necessity, any critique requires understanding the reasons and the logic of the premises upon which a conclusion has been proposed. Beyond a mere word or phrase—or pithy poem—the basis for any fair and honest critique ought always begin, not with differences of opinion, but with questions. What is the argument? What are the premises upon which the argument is founded? What reasoning was used and were the facts presented true; if not, why not? What knowledge was obtained from the information presented?

Sadly, those too quick to criticize seldom take the time and effort to think. It is simply too much for anyone to say what he proposes to prove or not prove or disprove; it is enough to merely disapprove. This “critique by disapproval” was quite apparent in the letter I received. The essay toward which his disapproval was directed focused on the commonly overused phrase, “practicing Catholics,” which he never once found a need to mention. The first half of his critique can be summarized by his brief statement:

It is worth noting that every plant is both a weed and a flower. Kind of like the human race. It depends on how you look at things. If you want to see the beauty of wild flowers you should take a drive through the California desert some spring. If you want to see the potential of a weed. You should do the same thing.

I am completely befuddled by this, it makes no sense, coming from someone for whom I have held the greatest respect, having always enjoyed our numerous friendly digital *tête-à-tête*. As much as I have tried, I simply cannot comprehend how it is in anyway related to the meat and substance of my essay. I can only hope that my friend will take the opportunity to read the essay for every good purpose of greater understanding. It would also be well worth the time to reread the poem with fresh eyes.

The latter half of his letter sets off on another path, a path of misdirection leading the unwary into a heavy fog filled with vague and shadowy figures laden with innuendo and insinuation, unsubstantiated assertions and accusations biased by the prejudices of personal and public opinion. There is no reasoned argument, no rebuttal, no discussion on the merits or challenges to perceived errors, only the serpent’s sibilant tongue slyly suggesting one should wake up, bite the apple and enjoy the worm. Nowhere is the true matter of the essay even so briefly mentioned, it is as if the poem was the essay, yet now seen “indistinctly as in a mirror” (1 Cor 13:12).

Your writing centers on the idea of God’s truth, but you have a bad habit of assuming your social and political beliefs are in accordance with God’s truth. Often things you write are demonstrably not true. It is very dangerous to say you know the truth under those circumstances and it does a disservice to our faith. An example is your dismissal of climate change and scientific evidence

in biology. You make a punchline out of people who set out to reveal scientific truth and who do a good job of it. Reliable and valid scientific study is a perfect way to reveal God’s Truth, yet you dismiss it out of hand when it threatens your social beliefs. The bible is not science nor is it a history lesson. It might very well be God’s Truth revealed in a certain manner but it is most definitely not God’s Truth relating to science or modern political perspectives for that matter. It is certainly not the totality of God’s Truth. Weeds and Wildflowers can also reveal God’s Truth.

There is, within this letter, nothing but a bully’s challenge, a childish dare which I find neither the necessity nor inclination to respond; to do so would be to submit to unreasoned sentiment. This is no critique, there is no point-counterpoint, it is but a fool’s errand, one I shall not take up other than to note the writer is quite the heretic in elevating “science or modern political perspectives” equal height with God’s Truth. The rest, it seems, is but a badly concocted fairy tale. I am reminded here of Macbeth’s soliloquy within Dunsinane castle upon hearing of the queen’s death.

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.⁴

Not to give overmuch attention to the writer of the aforementioned letter, I find his correspondence to be too often a hostile witness to the truth. In another letter (prior to the one just discussed) he wrote “I perused your last couple of colloqui and found a lot to think about and question.” That he “perused” what I wrote gave me pause for “peruse” means to read a thing thoroughly in a careful way, to examine it carefully or at length. Whether my friend did indeed *peruse* my essays with all the thoroughness he suggests, I will not question; he seems an honest man, I will take him at his word. What most troubles, however, is to what degree his *perusal* has led him to greater understanding and to knowledge of the truth.

I perused your last couple of colloqui and found a lot to think about and question. I will stick to a couple of items. You stated that Christianity is under attack in our country from the forces of secular liberalism in our country. That is not true in the least. the vast majority of people in our country identify as christian and claim to have christian values. So if religious freedom is under attack it is under attack from within-- not without. It is quite possible that all those secular liberals you find so distasteful actually have christian values. freedom and equality are not the exclusive to a particular political identity. Our country was indeed founded by men with christian values who did not always live by those christian values-- that seems to be a common problem. Genuine Christian values involve living and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is not always so easy. We all need to be forgiven for falling short in that regard. That is a problem which the religious right always struggles to grasp. Fundamentalists quite often confuse christian values with religious ones that do not reflect in the least the words, thoughts, or actions of Jesus. I believe that is a challenge worth reflecting on. I know I struggle with it on a regular basis.

Obviously (it is perfectly obvious to me, at least,) he did not *peruse* quite deep enough. If he had read beyond the poem, he would have, perhaps, not gone down the path he chose to travel. While I cannot nor care not to deny that I support and defend the truth of the argument that “Christianity is under attack in our country from the forces of secular liberalism” and am ready and willing to defend my position with well-founded facts, not opinions, I am deeply disappointed that the writer quite clearly and unequivocally says “That is not true in the least,” which is nothing as much as an unqualified euphemism for shouting “liar” in a crowded theatre. That the “vast majority of people in our country identify as christian and claim to have christian values” was and is precisely my point, though with a crucial caveat. Identifying as “christian” with “christian” values is a *non sequitur*, it means absolutely nothing. It is simply an empty label, a means of playing nice at identity politics. It is telling that “christian” is never Christian. A Christian is, by definition, a disciple of Jesus Christ who believes, lives, and obeys *all* that Christ commanded; I can only guess as to what a lower-case *christian* might believe or hold value. That those boogeymen “fundamentalists” are confused, confusing “christian values with religious ones” is in itself confusing—and wrong.

What is wrong is that we have lost a thing of infinite value, WE have lost God; WE have lost God though God is never lost. We have lost God in a million-million-million ways, small ways, seemingly insignificant, always with the best of intentions. We are creatures of habit and have grown much too much at ease with the easy, the comfortable, the pleasant; we abhor and avoid pain, suffering, unpleasantness, difficulties, hardships, and sacrifice at all costs, but at a terrible price: the loss of our souls and the loss of awe for our God.

An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four. What a man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age.⁵

What is true, what is real, what is good, it all comes from the Will and the Word of Almighty God. Those who depend on the minds of men cannot nor will not accept a greater power than their own; miracles and majesty, joy and salvation, love and Love are not under their dominion. They do not believe for they refuse to believe because it is too hard, because it is not scientifically provable. They have no faith for “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Once again, time has far exceeded its allotment. As for where I wished to go, I must admit to then, but not yet. There will be another week and another essay. I will get there should God grant I might live so long to write it. Have patience, dear reader, have patience.

1. Robert Frost (1874-1963), *Mountain Interval: The Road Not Taken*, 1920.
2. *An Exercise in Moral Reasoning*, Colloqui, Volume 04 Number 21, January 03, 2020.
3. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p.2.
4. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Scene V.
5. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p.56.

A Catholic Moment

Holding hands

THE CHURCH THROUGH THE *Congregation for Divine Worship* has consistently taught that “holding hands during the Our Father has become common place, but it is an **illicit** addition to the Liturgy. Holding hands is a sign of intimacy and not reconciliation, and as such disrupts the flow of the Sacramental signs in the Mass which leads to the Sacramental sign of intimacy with Christ and our neighbor, Holy Communion.”¹

Some of the Sacramentals used during the Mass are the sign of the cross, the beating of the breast at the *Confiteor* (I confess...) and the *Kyrie* (Lord have mercy). These are Sacramental signs of our openness to the word of God particularly at the Gospel when we stand in reverence (Nehemiah 8) and we sign the cross on our forehead, lips and heart.

Then at the Offertory, our gifts of bread and wine are sacramentals of our sacrificial offerings to the Lord.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is in and of itself a complete act of worship and thanksgiving. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of submission to the will of God, seeking reconciliation and peace with God, and, a sign of peace (reconciliation) with one another. All our actions—kneeling, bowing, etc.,—are sacramentals of our worship, thanksgiving, reconciliation and submission to God.

Harmony of gestures within the Mass

Many Catholics might not know that the “extending of hands” or practice of the *orans* posture at Mass is exclusively a priestly gesture. The rubrics for the Mass give the priest sole authority

of praying with elevated hands—neither the deacon nor the laity should ever assume the *orans* posture.

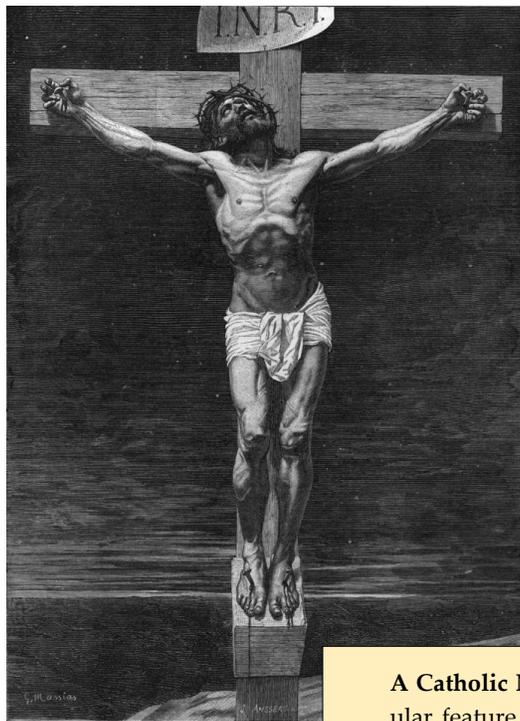
The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) states:

After the Eucharistic prayer is concluded, the priest, with hands joined, says alone the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer, and then with hands extended, he pronounces the prayer together with the people (GIRM §152).

The *orans* in history

The *orans* position has been used as a gesture of pleading and supplication since ancient times, thus it is true that many pagan religions widely adopted it, including Graeco-Roman paganism. The *orans* position was also present in Judaism as well.

The early Christians came to identify the *orans* position with the outstretched arms of Christ crucified. Hence, it is solely reserved to the priest at Mass, for he acts in “*Persona Christi Capitis*” (in the person of Christ the Head) leading the Mystical Body of Christ present at Mass in offering to the Father the perfect prayer and sacrifice of Christ.



A Catholic Moment will be an ongoing regular feature of Colloqui. The intention is to catechize Catholics on authentic Church teaching, rubrics and ritual. If you have a question, never hesitate to send it to Deacon Chuck.

1. See Notitiae, (1975), Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, The Vatican, Vol. XI, P. 226. [this same Notitiae was cited in 1981 US Sacramentary “Appendix- VII. Notices Of The Sacred Congregation For Divine Worship And The Discipline Of The Sacraments (1969-1981)”. Also see “Practical Provisions 6 §2” of the 1997 Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests; The approved US edition of the GIRM was issued in April 2003 and; in 2006, the response to President of the Episcopal Regional Liturgy Commission of CBCMSB received from the Congregation of Divine Worship Prot.N. 134/06/L].

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: What Every Catholic Should Know

Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press

2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press

2018, 269 pages.

The Day Is Now Far Spent

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Ignatius Press

2019, 350 pages.

Socrates' Children, Volume I: Ancient Philosophers

Peter Kreeft

St. Augustine's Press

2019, 169 pages.

G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Volume XXXVI

The Illustrated London News 1932-1934

Ignatius Press

2011, 613 pages.

Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism and the future of the West

R. R. Reno

Regnery Gateway

2019, 182 pages.

The Irony of Modern Catholic History:

How the Church rediscovered itself & challenged the modern world to reform

George Weigel

Basic Books

2019, 322 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

www.catholic.com

Catholic Herald

www.catholicherald.co.uk

Chronicles

www.chroniclesmagazine.org

The National Catholic Register

www.ncregister.com

Our Sunday Visitor

www.osvnews.com

ONLINE

Crisis Magazine

www.crisismagazine.com

The Imaginative Conservative

www.theimaginativeconservative.org

Catholic Exchange

www.catholicexchange.com

Intellectual Takeout

www.intellectuالتakeout.org

Life News

www.lifenews.com

Life Site News

www.lifesitenews.com

OnePeterFive

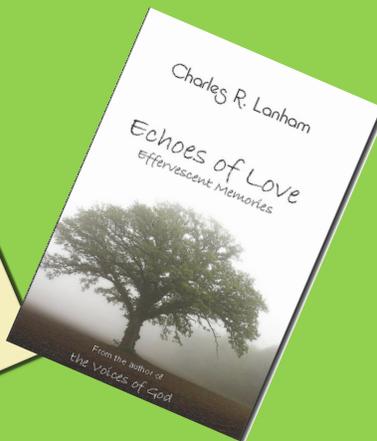
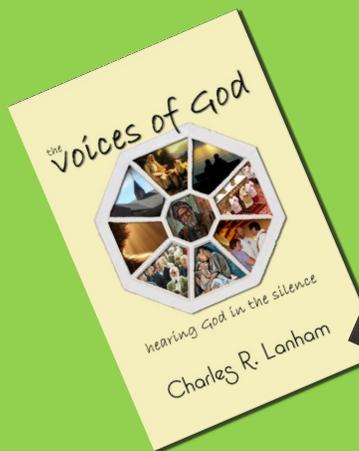
www.onepeterfive.com

Catholic Vote

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PragerU

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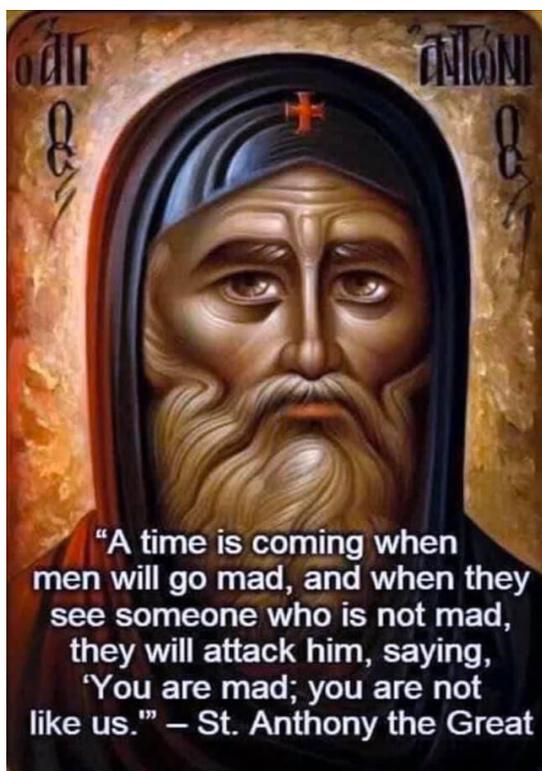
Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) 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 has written over 400 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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The real global warming that the Church should be talking about:



Colloquī, the present infinitive of *colloquor* (Latin: *to talk, to discuss or to converse*) 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! Essays may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the expressed intent to seek the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, so help us God.

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