



A journal for restless minds

ON THAT DAY

Al-tirah ki imekha-ani

UNLOCKING THE CHAINS

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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 That Day

Al-tirah ki imekha-ani

That lowly worm, I have no doubt, carries no dreams of gossamer wings that float upon warm uplifting currents to lofty heights and unimagined

vistas yet revealed. It only knows the ever present need to eat and grow and crawl upon the ground and then to shroud its body within a tomb of its own making; it knows not its fate and thus no fear of death or thought of future glories.

Like that worm, we have no true and certain knowledge of what we will become beyond this brief, brief moment, but we know that there is more, much more: an eternity in truth that awaits. And for all its promised glories and the assurance of an eternity in the loving arms of God, we resist, unwilling to embrace eternity, to accept angelic wings and fly beyond this mortal coil.

Yet it is not our fears that hold us here but love's reluctance to letting go. Those who have yet to be invited into eternity want no part of it for the pain of loss and emptiness that will with certitude scar the soul and stab the heart enter in; unwanted guests who then refuse to leave.



There is no cure or care which can ameliorate the grief that follows any death yet we who grieve should rejoice in the knowing of what the dying have attained. For Jesus often said, "*al-tirah ki imekha-ani*" which means "*Fear not for I am with you.*" And in the truest sense those whom

we love are with us even more than before, for they, like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are with us always.

What beauty would be lost were not the worm to become the butterfly. How bleak and dreary would life be if there was nothing more, no greater beauty, no angelic wings to soar beyond the gates of heaven into the loving arms of God.

Unlocking The Chains

Using the key in our hand

It requires no genius nor high degree to recognize the deep divisions that have fractured our spirit, sorely wounded our collective pride, and weakened our will and our resolve. And while the recognition of it comes easy enough, any resolution of it will, with near certainty, prove as irresolvable as the Gordian knot.

"It is", as Winston Churchill once famously quipped, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma;" yet as with the Gordian knot and as Churchill would then suggest: "perhaps there is a key." Churchill was speaking of the difficulty in forecasting what action Russia might take in 1939 yet what he perceived as the key offers a possible means of addressing the current public schizophrenia that hangs before us now, threatening us with ever maddening madness. To paraphrase his response: "That key is America's national interest."

This past weekend I attended the 31st annual reunion of the descendants of Bob and Nellie Ann Lanham, my parents. This annual event has been held every year in northeast Missouri, since their untimely deaths in 1985, on the weekend closest to July 21st, the anniversary of their happy union in 1946, seventy years ago.

For those unfamiliar with Missouri in July, the weather is generally

overwhelmingly hot, with humidity generally described as swampy without the crocodiles, and almost always interrupted by thunderstorms that do little to lower the thermostat. To anyone accustomed to breathing thin air at higher elevations, it is much the same as trying to breathe soup through a tiny swizzle straw: thick with a heavy helping of sludge.



Yet year after year my siblings and their spouses, their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, boyfriends, girlfriends, occasionally relatives and friends, and frequently a fetal freeloader (this year there were three, expected to arrive next February) who come together to enjoy one another's company, reminisce on the past, and make new memories to be retold and embellished in the years to follow.

What is most amazing is that year after year increasingly more than sixty people come together and spend three days with nary a discouraging word; no anger, little argument, no bitterness or vitriol. Four generations span-

ning nearly seventy years; rich and poor; married, unmarried, divorced, and single; Catholic, protestant, atheist, and agnostic; straight and gay; liberal and conservative; white, yellow, and brown genuinely enjoying the company of one another.

While there may be and are as many divergent viewpoints and areas of serious disagreement as the numbers in attendance, there is among those an unspoken but well-understood tacit agreement to agree to disagree without rancor or bitterness, to find common ground upon which we can have civil and friendly discourse. What binds us together is family and that is of greater and far more importance than what would divide us.

We are, in every sense of the word, a microcosm of our nation—with at least one significant difference—we genuinely love one another and accept one another without condition or pause. And it is in recognizing that value in which the unique individual contributions of each member add to the *corpus familia* which we welcome with open arms. We recognize that it is in the best interests of the family to accept and embrace our differences and focus on what is truly important to the strength and welfare of the family.

We play together, we laugh together, we cry together, we eat together, and we pray together. Chasms that

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

could divide us are but opportunities to build bridges in order to span what separates.

There have been disagreements just as there have been good times and bad times, glad days and sad days, yet never, never, never has there been unreasoned bitterness and hate. When one is hurting we feel their pain and do what we can to salve the wound and mend the brokenness. Those who have less find no comfort or will in making demands of those who have more. The welfare and well-being of one is as important as another for we are each a member of the family and know the value and importance of it.

Our nation once was *“One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”* It once was a nation whose motto *“E Pluribus Unum”* *“Out of many, one”* held great truth. It was once a country filled with those who stood tall, silent and still, with hand over heart, while the nation’s anthem played tribute to a flag so revered. It once was the *“land of the free and the home of the brave.”*

Our nation was once created by those who stated with firm resolve that *“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

And this nation came into existence founded upon these hallowed words *“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic*

Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

From the beginning there have been disagreements and differences in direction and purpose. And yes, there was once that moment when such division and hatred became so severe as to sorely test the bonds of our blessed union. For one brief but violent moment our nation was torn and divided, statesmanship and civil discourse lost to the irrational violence of bigotry and hate. Too many died, far too many, yet our nation survived and began anew, much as it had first begun.

Through it all we have faithfully recognized and given due praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God for his providential care and blessings bestowed upon this great land we call home. Yet somewhere in the not too distant past we have turned away from God, our families, our friends, our neighbors, our communities, and our country. We have turned inward, looking only to ourselves.

In his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, newly elected Democratic President John F. Kennedy spoke to the citizens of this great nation and said, *“And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”* Sadly for this nation, his words have been tortured and strained by far too many to precisely the opposite effect: *“Ask not what you can do for*

your country—ask what your country can do for you.”

We have lost the ability and the will to respect others, seek common ground, look out for one another, and to acknowledge that we must depend on each other.

Benjamin Franklin, at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, is known to have said *“we must all hang together or most assuredly we will all hang separately”* which should give us pause to consider how little we can do or accomplish on our own. Nearly eighty years later on June 16, 1858, Abraham Lincoln in his acceptance speech at the Republican State Convention upon being nominated the Republican candidate from Illinois for the U. S. Senate said, *“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”*

We are now once again a house divided against itself, and indeed we are all hanging separately for we most assuredly are no longer hanging together.

There is perhaps a key that, even at such a late hour as now, can yet unlock the chains upon which we now hang separately. Each of us holds a key but it is not our own. Unaided we cannot unlock the chains from which we now hang. The key that will unlock my lock is in my neighbor’s hand as his resides in mine. As long as we each look to our own self-interest and not to our neighbor’s neither will ever be free. There is no master key with which any man or woman can unchain us all; to believe so is but false hope. Only God holds such a key but first we must use the one we hold in our hand.

Giving It All Away

It's harder than you might think

Not too long ago my wife retired. For much of the past twenty years her work has kept her away from home, traveling across the country and beyond the border into Canada. While having her home full time has been and is a true blessing, as you may well imagine some adjustments have been necessary on each of our parts.

For the first time in over forty-eight years we have suddenly and it would appear, quite irrevocably become that proverbial "old married couple." We no longer have somewhere else to go when we wake up in the morning. After more than twenty years there are no more early morning flights to catch or late night arrivals to meet. No more meetings to attend, no more conference calls to schedule, no more client calls to make, no more reports to write, no more board presentations to create and present, etc., etc., etc. The question she now has to ask herself is "what to do now with all this time on my hands?"

While I retired some years ago, my diaconal duties have occupied my days for the most part; add in my writing and I often wonder precisely what retirement is truly meant to be. So, when my wife surprised me with her decision to retire, my first thought was "what will she do to fill the time?"

After all this was the woman who had risen every morning at five to begin work for as long as I could remember and who seldom left the office or quit working when at home before eight at night, most often seven days a week.

Any concerns that I had were quickly laid to rest. From the moment that she arrived home with a car stuffed with "stuff", it has been non-stop busy! What I did not anticipate (but should have after so many years knowing her) was that she already had a well-devised plan and there was no time to waste in implementing it.



As you may recall, when a rich young man approached Jesus and asked him "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus told him that beyond keeping the commandments which the young man admitted he ob-

served, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." "When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions."¹

It is human nature to need and want those things which sustain us, shelter us, clothe us, and protect us. The problem is very few know when to stop accumulating "stuff" beyond the basic needs. And even fewer are willing to let go of even those things which are either no longer needed, wanted, or useful. When we run out of space to store our "stuff" we simply build yet another barn, purchase a larger house, or rent storage space. And then we just go on as before, continuing to accumulate more "stuff."

When we read the second verse in Ecclesiastes we tend to infer to "vanity" the modern notion of excessive belief in one's own abilities or attractiveness to others, yet the original meaning is what makes the most sense, that is: something that is "empty, valueless, or in vain." Listen to Qoheleth again with this new understanding: "Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!"² He is saying that all "things" are in vain, empty, and valueless for we cannot take any of it with us. Everything we accumulate or do is, in the end, in vain.

"For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun?"

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All his days sorrow and grief are his occupation; even at night his mind is not at rest. This also is vanity."

All the suffering and grief we experience in whatever occupation we engage; all the sleepless nights spent worrying and fretting over what needs or must be done tomorrow—in the end it will all be for nothing, it will all be in vain for we cannot take it with us when we die. All that you consider so important, all that you care about you will ultimately lose and there is absolutely nothing you can do to prevent it. That is why Qoheleth says all things are vanity. Whatever good there is in them is transient; they will die when you do.

Look around you and consider all that you possess and ask yourself: *"Do I possess them or do they possess me?"* Whom or what do you love more: yourself and all your possessions or God? Again, ask yourself precisely how much you will care for all that you now possess when you come before God? The truth is that when you do stand before God, neither you nor God will care one whit about them.

Saint Paul places it all in proper perspective when he writes: *"seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."*³ As long as we focus on accumulating "stuff" we will never seek what is above, it really is that simple.

As Paul goes on to explain: *"Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Stop*

*lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all."*⁴

We must also not ignore those things which we seldom consider to be possessions, those parts that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language. We tend to accumulate that kind of "stuff" as much if not more so than all that material "stuff".

One thing that must be said is this: Jesus doesn't demand that we get rid of everything or anything for that matter. What he wants us to understand is that the more "stuff" we accumulate, the more that "stuff" will possess us and consume us and the less we will seek what is above and that is God.

Forty-eight years and eighteen moves have provided more than ample opportunities to accumulate "stuff" and as we have begun to discover much of the accumulated "stuff" has been long lost and forgotten over the years. Clothes that have inexplicably shrunk, children's boots, shoes, and coats where no child has lived and now never will, old technology that has gathered dust behind boxes filled with broken stuff. The list never shrinks but only grows with each passing hour.

The plan was, has been, and continues to be to "get rid of all that stuff"

and it would seem that the more we give away, the more there remains to be found, sorted through, boxed or bagged, and then delivered to those who could make far better use of it.

What has surprised the most has been the insistent resistance, the reluctance to give it all away. The mind disposes what the heart opposes. Certainly not with every item but with enough to cause the mouth to want to utter: *"Stop, hold on, let's keep that!"*

If you have never tried to give it all away you cannot understand how difficult it can be. Your possessions will in no small way come to possess you; and like Velcro they will sink their hooks in and hold fast to you. And all the while you try to disengage, your focus is on the effort to do so. All but forgotten is the one who is most important: God. Let us hope that we will never hear him say: *"You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?"*



Homily for
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23
Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11
Luke 12:13-21

1. Mt 19:16-22.
2. Eccl 1:2.
3. Col 3:2.
4. Col 3:5-11.

To Lose A Mind

No critical thought required

Each year begins anew the annual rite of letting go, entrusting such young minds which have been planted, carefully nurtured on Catholic values, morals, ethics, and truth and showered with all the love and tenderness one could muster into the arms of strangers.

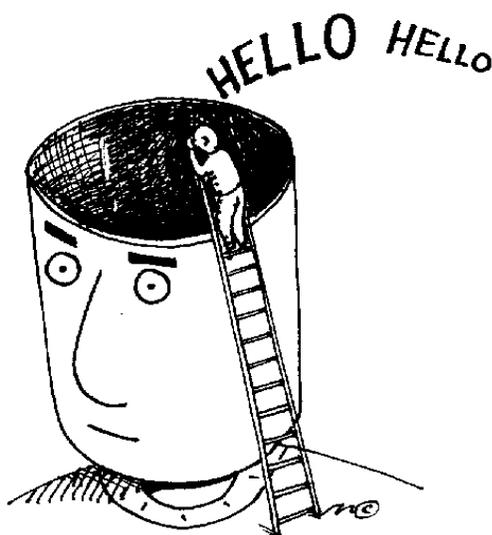
Every summer begins a new exodus of our young Catholic men and women, now free from the ever vigilant eyes of those who by the blessings of Almighty God and through their procreative love for one another gave them life and raised them to believe in the one who made us all.

And then they are gone, blithely dancing to a different tune, adults if only by the measure of years now lived. And we let them go because we must, but seldom is it easy or welcome. We want so desperately to hold on just a moment more, to know with certainty that they are safe and that they still love us as much as we love them.

There is a disquietude that rests within the heart, an uncomfortable uneasiness, a feeling of missing and of loss. Mothers attempting to hold back the tears, seeing yet a newborn, so softly wrapped, held close in her loving arms. Fathers braving smiles while deep within the heart is pounding with both pride and trepidation. And all the while their child laughs and dances in anticipation of

such great adventure now awaiting.

We cannot help but wonder what they will find beyond hearth and home but we have heard the tales and they leave us cold and uncertain of what they will encounter away from us. There is no doubt that what awaits will reshape their malleable minds but to what ends or purposes they will be molded is perhaps what worries most.



We taught them how to use their minds to think, to reason, and to value all that God has made. We gave them love and faith and understanding of what is good and right and true. And yet we harbor nagging doubts, wondering will it be enough or will it all be forgotten, discarded and abandoned as quickly as their parting.

From orientation to graduation some number of years from now our nation's colleges and universities will fill their minds with new ideas, indoctrinating them with a vision of reality vastly different from values

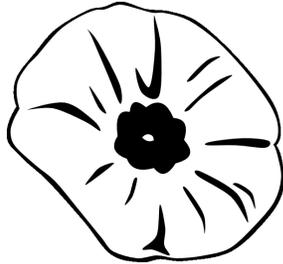
so carefully inculcated and instilled. Those impressionable young minds, especially those who have not the skills necessary to detect and question with a critical eye, will find themselves succulent prey to the sophistry of the intellectual elite whose ideologies are largely anti-church, anti-faith, and anti-God.

Our young deserve better; they need the tools to think critically and to defend themselves against an educational system that opposes reason, truth, faith, and God. Thankfully there is at least one such tool which should be required reading for anyone and everyone preparing to enter those hallowed halls of our colleges and universities. It is a small book with a rather lengthy title: *Disorientation: How to go to college without losing your mind*. Written by fourteen of the top Catholic writers in America—professors, priests, journalists, philosophers, and theologians—through a series of essays they dissect the trendy ideas that most often lead young Catholic minds astray. The book provides intellectual ammunition for every college student and parent, breaking down the history, analyzing the appeal, and debunking the empty promises of such popular ideological errors as: Sentimentalism, Hedonism, Relativism, Progressivism, Modernism, Scientism, Fundamentalism, Feminism, Multiculturalism, Anti-Catholicism, Utilitarianism, Consumerism, Cynicism, Americanism, and Marxism. It is well worth the price, for what price would you pay to save a mind?

Unselfish Devotion

Where poppies blow

Touring the National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City served as a stark reminder of a dark time in world history and yet there were souls, bright with the lights of courage, honor, duty, and love, who would not allow the darkness to prevail. It was to those souls and their unselfish devotion to their fellow man with whom I felt a gravitational pull.



Florence Edith Hemphill was born in 1887 in Wilson County Kansas, the sixth of nine children. Trained as a nurse, when America entered the war, she immediately volunteered for the U. S. Army Nurse Corps and volunteered to serve on the front lines.

Eleanor E. Washburn from Pine Grove, Illinois read a YMCA proclamation calling for volunteers to support the troops and she seized the opportunity. She and 35,000 other artists went anywhere and everywhere to entertain the troops. One observer noted that they brought the gospel of laughter while the shells burst over their heads. Even after the armistice, they stayed on to ease the homesickness that afflicted the young troops.

After the United States entered the war, the government turned the **American Red Cross** into a branch of the US military. Subsequently, the ARC went from 238,000 to 6.4 million members by mid-1917, raised over 100

million dollars for relief services and provided all Americans with opportunities for loyal national service.

American women volunteers served in all duties except combat. They were doctors and nurses, founded and ran hospitals, drove heavy trucks and ambulances, sang, entertained, and translated. One observer wrote *"they do anything they were given to do; that their hours are long; that their task is hard; that for them there is small hope of medals and citations and glittering homecoming parades."*

Beneath a glass bridge we saw a field of poppies which reminded us of the poem written by Canadian physician Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae during the First World War:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
in Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

To those with the courage and the honor enough to serve when country calls: God bless you.

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

Disorientation: How to Go to College Without Losing Your Mind
Edited by John Zmirak
Ascension Press
December 21, 2010, 188 pages.

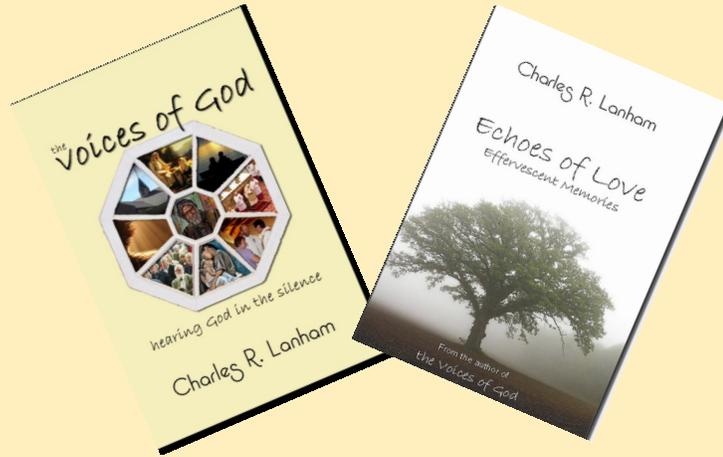
Old Errors and New Labels
Fulton J. Sheen
Alba House
(1931) May 30, 2007, 222 pages.

City Of God
Saint Augustine
Doubleday
February 1958, 551 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



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

deaconscorner.org

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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**.

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

<http://deaconscorner.org>.

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