

# Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

## Can You Hear Me Now?

*Does anyone really care?*

## Last Shot Of Tequila

*Toying with the worm*

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.

## Can You Hear Me Now?

*Does anyone really care?*

**H**enry Ford once observed "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason so few engage in it." Believing is by its nature antithetical to such cerebral labors and therefore can be more leisurely obtained. Opining (having an opinion) requires neither thought nor belief because it merely affirms a feeling; it is, therefore, the easiest of all things to conjure.

Human nature has the unfortunate tendency to lean toward taking the path of least resistance, of achieving the most while exerting the least, thus everyone has an opinion, many hold some belief, while few give a thought to much of anything at all. Understanding the differ-

ence between thinking, believing and opining requires thinking—a.k.a. hard work—which most would rather leave to "intellectuals" that onerous task, then wait for them to publish "Thinking for Dummies" which no one with any mind would ever think to read.

The Greek philosopher, Plato, thought a great deal about the differences and wrote his conclusions in the *Republic, Book VI*. Few, of course, will bother to read such a heady work for that would require a good measure of serious thinking.



**K**nowing that the vast majority will never "feel" the slightest need to know the difference although quite eager to proffer an opinion on that of which they have no knowledge is enough to drive the sane to madness. Those who cannot be induced

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to think are generally resolute in their conviction that they “know” the truth; but their reality is ephemeral, built on ever-shifting sand.

**P**lato posited that *thinking* is the process whereby our minds attempt to arrive at a sure and certain understanding of reality. Such a process, when successfully completed, necessarily leads to knowledge, that is, to discerning the truth concerning the reality of a thing. *Believing* affirms something about a reality; it can and should be the result of thinking as well (e.g. believing in the resurrection.)

As for *opinion*, Plato explains—through a conversation between Socrates and Meno, a rather idle and vain young aristocrat—the value of opinions (that is, opinions which are correct and true):

True opinions, as long as they stay put, are a fine thing and do us a whole lot of good. Only, they tend not to stay put for very long. They’re always scampering away from a person’s soul. So they are not very valuable until you shackle them by figuring out what makes them true. And then, once they are shackled, they turn into knowledge, and become stable and fixed. So that’s why knowledge is a more valuable thing than correct opinion, and that’s how knowledge differs from a correct opinion: by a shackle.

Prudence should be observed whenever an opinion is elicited; its truth or correctness must be verified. Opinion seldom finds itself planted in good soil; most often it falls on rocky ground. Opinions have no roots, nothing to hold them fast, thus they quick-

ly wither and die, unable to withstand the heat of scrutiny.

Belief stands at a crossroad, somewhere between true knowledge and mere opinion.

Belief stands between opinion and knowledge, and can be pulled in one direction or another depending on the person and on the belief. A belief with reasonable justification but no strict proof is closer to knowledge; a belief that is believed with no reason at all is practically the same as an opinion.<sup>1</sup>

This thus provides a methodology upon which to measure the legitimacy and reasonableness of one’s beliefs. Beliefs founded on reason and true knowledge can be justified; beliefs which have no basis in fact or reason cannot for they are but mere opinion.

Of course, it’s important to understand from the start that arriving at the truth is a matter of thinking, and not of feeling. That might sound impolite, but there’s no way around it. You can feel with all your heart that there’s a God near you at all times, or you can feel utterly abandoned and alone in the world, and the plain fact of the matter is that it doesn’t make a difference. If there isn’t a God, your feeling doesn’t make him exist or prove that he does, and if there is one, he’s there whether you like it or not, and no matter how alone you might feel.<sup>2</sup>

**N**otwithstanding the effort required to think, there are no shortcuts, no quick and easy paths to reach the fountain of knowledge; thinking takes time, effort and patience because it ... is ... hard

... work! How hard can it be? Thomas Edison, in an 1890 *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, summarized just how much time, patience, and effort was required to discover the truth which would lead to the electric light.

I speak without exaggeration when I say that I have constructed three thousand different theories in connection with the electric light, each one of them reasonable and apparently to be true. Yet only in two cases did my experiments prove the truth of my theory.

**E**dison wasn’t speaking here of experiments but theories, theories which he developed over a period of years through patience and persistent effort, that is by thinking. He didn’t “feel” his theories, he held no “belief” in any one theory over another, he simply did the difficult task of thinking. There were plenty of naysayers quick to offer an opinion, generally calling his quest a fool’s errand; in the end, it was they who were proved the fool.

The human mind requires regular and sustained exercise; it has been designed to think, to rationalize, to reason; lacking exercise the mind will atrophy, cognitive functions will diminish, and the ability to think, to reason, and to clearly discern reality will be reduced and impaired. Just as muscles must be rigorously exercised or they will weaken and atrophy, so must the mind be subjected to a serious thinking regimen. The adage “Use it or lose it” applies equally as well to mental faculties as it does to the physical. But, therein lies the rub, for we have become averse to any and all things

that would demand time and effort and patience; there must surely be an app for that. Our indolence has turned our minds to mush; we no longer desire or have the will to know what is true, what is real.

**W**e live in a world of make-believe and fairy tale conjured from atrophic minds who dare declare it reality. Reality and truth are thus become fiction, contrived by torpid supine minds to suit their individual desires. Tragically there are those, glib of tongue and quick of wit, who are more than willing to feed such fantasies for in doing so they fuel their need for power and control.

How often are you bombarded with questions for which there is no ready answer? How frequent are you confronted on subjects you shrink from engaging because you feel either incompetent or too ignorant to have an honest discussion or argument? How many times have you been challenged on an opinion expressed or for your beliefs?

Being challenged about an opinion or belief is not a bad thing; quite the contrary, it is one of the few things on earth powerful enough to get an ordinarily complacent, even lazy, human being to do the one thing he or she was ultimately meant to do: think.

There's a positive side to the bombardment ... : it gets you to think and question the basis for your beliefs. But there's a negative side as well: when many questions are

thrown together at once, it can imply that, if you can't answer them immediately, it means you're wrong. Even worse, it can imply that these questions can or should be answered quickly. Those are both awful implications.

The first implication is simply bad logic: "I asked you a question. You can't answer it right now. Therefore you are wrong." The logic might prove that you are ignorant, but it certainly doesn't prove that what you're saying is untrue. There could be ten million truths unknown to both your opponent and yourself; there could be a thousand different ways of interpreting things that neither of you have come up with. The truth of reality is not bound by your personal ability to argue or understand. *Reality is what it is*, independent of anyone's competence, and the real goal, if you are

you had before, and if you don't take the time (and it can take a LOT of time) to work through every step of the argument for yourself, you are simply trading one opinion for another.<sup>3</sup>

**E**ach of us, as Paul said, is given different gifts by God, the one Spirit who inspires them all in every one. Some have the gift of tongue, the ability to "think on their feet," seemingly capable of responding effortlessly without a moments hesitation and without any apparent need to think or seriously consider the subject.

Here we are presented with several possibilities; the difficulty is in recognizing which possibility is the most plausible in any given instance:

1. Those who speak with authority borne out of knowledge acquired through serious study and thought. Such voices "know" because they have spent time patiently searching for the truth.

2. Those with righteous authority, who "know" the truth but for ideological or other reasons speak falsely or bias what they know.

3. Those who know little or nothing but are proudly willing to stand in the spotlight and share their opinion. Unfortunately, more often than not we find ourselves surrounded by these facile and shallow intellects thoroughly enjoying hearing themselves talk. Watch any "news" show for five minutes. and you will find far more than

Non Sequitur/by Wiley



an honest person, is not to win an argument but to understand the world.

The second implication is ... worse. It implies that the truth of the world can be known easily and quickly, that a question as big as the existence of God can be resolved in a few hours or a handful of rhetorical jabs. This is not only insulting to the human mind as well as our amazing universe, it undoes the great good accomplished by asking questions in the first place: your opponent asked you a question and now you have the opportunity to think, but if the question is "answered" so quickly, then your opportunity for thinking is gone. This is simply another form of the same laziness

enough of these “talking heads.”

4. Then, there are those who despite their ignorance glibly opine based solely on a “feeling” of righteousness and truth, their truth, their reality. They “know” they are ignorant but claim authority all the same.

**O**f course, there are a plethora of those who fall in-between making it ever more difficult to discern who is speaking truth founded on acquired knowledge and who is simply opining, pontificating puffery without “knowing”. In every case—to borrow a phrase from former President Ronald Reagan—one must “trust but verify”; always, always think for one’s self and diligently search for the truth.

This then reveals the core issue: too many simply refuse to think for themselves; they are satisfied in their ignorance and happy to rely on others to do the heavy lifting; for they realize thinking is hard work, that truth of reality cannot be discerned easily or quickly. Thus, they argue—out of ignorance—that truth is relative and reality subjective, never noticing that “their truth” and “their reality” have been built on sand, which will be washed away with the tide.

A recent conversation with a friend caused me to pause, it made me think, which is a good thing, although

disappointing for a remark he made. We were talking about the current scandals rocking the Church. When I made some comment based on a number of articles I had recently read, my friend replied, “Well, you are an intellectual. You enjoy reading and knowing all that stuff. I’m not interested in that at all. What interests me is doing what Christ told us to do: care for the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc.”

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**O**uch! Coming from this particular friend, whom I highly respect and greatly admire, was painful. I had no response.

First, the Spirit has not thought to grace me with the gift of a glib tongue; I have never been able to respond to such challenges when they are presented but only long after, after some deliberative time, be it minutes, hours, or days. I must think before I can re-

spond, thus too often the challenger believes and asserts that what I said was wrong—which is untrue but that is the perception.

**W**hile, I suppose, there is reason to assume that the gift of writing is a close enough relative to the gift of gab that one should be equally comfortable with either, that would be and is—specifically in my own case—a false assumption.

I know of many writers who are as facile with their pen as they are with their tongue. Unfortunately, I am neither. Every word, every sentence, every thought or idea which I dare to write is a painful, painstaking exercise in thought and word. The words never come easy. Sentences often take hours and endless revisions to compose; even then, I hesitate, never certain that what I have written is correct or will be understood.

This essay is now some twenty or more hours in the telling and yet, to you, dear reader, it is but a few moments of your time. That is as it should be; I harbor no complaints with either. My gift, if I indeed have such a gift, as do all gifts freely given by God, comes with a price; a price I am more than willing to pay. I thank God every day for the gifts he has endowed to me; I can only hope and trust that I may honor him by doing the best that I possibly can with his gifts.

**Y**et, herein lies my dilemma. I know I shall never be a great orator, never become renowned for having any oratory prowess; that gift rightfully belongs to others and I thank God for their gifts. I am neither envious nor covetous of my neighbor's blessings and good fortune. It is when such gifts are misused or abused that I become frustrated and angry. Whatever the gift, it is the sin of vincible ignorance that so chafes my soul and dampens my spirit.

Here, a word on "vincible ignorance."

Lack of knowledge for which a person is morally responsible. It is culpable ignorance because it could be cleared up if the person used sufficient diligence. One is said to be simply (but culpably) ignorant if one fails to make enough effort to learn what should be known; guilt then depends on one's lack of effort to clear up the ignorance. That person is crassly ignorant when the lack of knowledge is not directly willed but rather due to neglect or laziness; as a result the guilt is somewhat lessened, but in grave matters a person would still be gravely responsible. A person has affected ignorance when one deliberately fosters it in order not to be inhibited in what one wants to do; such ignorance is gravely wrong when it concerns serious matters. (Etym. Latin *vincibilis*, easily overcome; *ignorantia*, want of knowledge or information.)<sup>4</sup>

This then, is the sin which is so prevalent these days, vincible ignorance. When we choose, upon our own volition, to remain ignorant, to willfully and purposefully fail to make any effort to learn what could be easily and readily known, we are guilty of a moral sin.

## The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

(Ps 19:9a)

**F**ar too many have fallen into this trap. Far too many depend on sound bites and "talking heads" for their understanding of the world, the Church, and their God. Far too many would rather pick up a copy of the National Enquirer because of the salacious headlines and believe what they read there to be credible and true. Far too many have become lemmings, willing to follow anyone over the cliff. It is enough to make a grown man or woman cry.

I find myself running short of time this week so I will close with the Responsorial Psalm for Sunday, September 30, 2018. Somehow, it seems so relevant. It is from Psalm 19 verses 8, 10, 12-13, 14:

*The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul;  
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
giving wisdom to the simple.*

*The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the LORD are true,  
all of them just.*

*Though your servant  
is careful of them,  
very diligent in keeping them,  
yet who can detect failings?  
Cleanse me from my unknown faults!*

*From wanton sin especially,  
restrain your servant;  
let it not rule over me.  
Then shall I be blameless and innocent  
of serious sin.*

1. Fr. Andrew Younan, *Thoughtful Theism: Redeeming Reason in an Irrational Age*, (Emmaus Road Publishing, Steubenville:Ohio, 2017), p. 2.
2. *Thoughtful Theism*, p. 3.
3. *Thoughtful Theism*, pp. 4-5.
4. Definition: Vincible Ignorance, Catholic Dictionary, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=37108>.

## Last Shot Of Tequila

*Toying with the worm*

**H**ave you ever wondered why there is a worm in a bottle of mezcal (tequila)? Have you ever eaten the worm? For some, to do so is considered an act of machismo; personally, I feel queasy and shudder just thinking about it.

No doubt, many if not most of us here have at some time in our lives, chewed on a worm, done something that now turns our stomach, makes us cringe with disgust, or makes us ask ourselves, "What was I thinking?" I know I have and then some.

I used to smoke cigarettes; four packs, eighty cigarettes a day. It was and is a nasty habit and incredibly addictive. Quitting was the most difficult thing I have ever tried to do; I tried many times and failed as many times as I tried, save one. I smoked my last cigarette Thanksgiving day, 1977, forty-one years ago.

No one has ever done anything with the clear intention of becoming addicted; no one has ever smoked that first cigarette, swallowed that first alcoholic drink, popped that first pill and thought, "It's so great to finally be an addict!" Anyone who has ever puffed, popped, or swallowed has done so initially for much the same reasons as anyone who would eat that worm: machismo, social acceptability, pleasure, relaxation, or simply because

it carries a trace of naughtiness, a taste of rebellion or a small sip of sin.

To paraphrase an old Chinese proverb: Every addiction is a journey that began with the first puff, drink, or swallow. And so also with sin. Sin is addictive; it is more addictive than anything we humans can possibly imagine. We are born into sin, we come into this world with a weakness, an addictive inclination to do the forbidden, the wrongful, the sinful. We are not born addicted to sin any more than any other addiction. But, like any journey, addiction to sin begins with the first sin, no matter how small or insignificant it might be.



**J**ust as I did not begin smoking four packs of cigarettes a day, no one begins life sinning against God and his commandments. No one is born a murderer, adulterer, or thief; no one starts out hating God or their parents; no one begins life blaspheming the name of God, denying God, or worshipping false gods. No, our first step toward an addiction to sin is always a small one.

**O**ne of the most predictive results of any addiction is denial; addicts always deny their addiction and the more addicted they become, the stronger their denial. In their denial there is always the assertion that they can quit whenever they choose to do so, but, they are only fooling themselves; their assertions fall flat, sounding every bit as much as Saint Augustine, who in his Confessions prayed "Lord, make me chaste — but not yet!"

We have heard and said it many times: "We are all broken" or "We are all sinners," and yet, those words sound as hollow as any addict who has ever proclaimed they could quit whenever. Why? Because we are in denial. We no longer fear the worm that does not die nor the fire that cannot be quenched. We have lost the sense of sin, the fear of losing our soul, the fear of the unquenchable fires of Gehenna. We pray to God, "Lord, make me pure — but not yet." It is in our "not yet" that we deny the seriousness of our addiction and in our denial we reject all sense of condemnation

or salvation. We have come to believe that tomorrow will never come, that there will always be another tomorrow, another opportunity to remedy ourselves from our addictions; always tomorrow, always not yet.

Our first reading comes from the Book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Pentateuch. God told Moses to select seventy elders upon whom the spirit would come to rest on them and

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they prophesied.

**H**owever, we do not hear verse 25 in its entirety and what is left out is important. The verse ends with this sentence: "But they did so no more." They prophesied one time, when the spirit came to rest on them, but then no more. Yet, when the spirit came to rest on two of the seventy who had remained in the camp and they began to prophesy, Joshua was indignant and jealous that others could prophesy when they no longer could.

Later, in Chapter 20 we read:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron you brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; ..."

And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly,...

For this, Moses was banned from entering the promised land! Where was the sin? God told him to "tell" the rock but Moses "struck" it twice with his rod, in other words, Moses ignored God's instruction, in his pride he disobeyed God, and for that he was punished.

The disciples did much the same. Their inner pride and their selfish desires caused them to reject the idea that others not of their group could receive the Holy Spirit. Whether inside or outside all were mortal human beings, all were subject to the same frailties and weaknesses that every human person encounters in our humanity.

Temptations and allures of worldly pleasures are always by our side.

St. James chastises those who have enjoyed riches and pleasures of life, cheated others, treated others badly, and had no regard for the hungry, poor, weak or oppressed. Unfortunately, this is humanity's evil side which we all have. For even the poor and the hungry can oppress those who are less fortunate; evil is not the sole domain of the rich and powerful.

The message is clear: any sin, all sin turns us away from God, effectively placing ourselves above the Lord. Jesus does not equivocate, he does not compromise, he does not condition any sin for he knows that the way of sin leads to the fiery gates of Gehenna. That is why he says it is better to put a great millstone around your neck if you cause a child to sin. That is why he says it is better to cut off a hand or a foot or to pluck out an eye than to sin. What sin deserves what punishment? All sin. Every sin.

**J**esus reopened the gates of heaven and thru our faith we can come to know salvation. Attending Mass is not a mere pleasant Sunday ritual, it is a reminder that our goal is salvation and eternity with God. There is a corollary, one which we should fear above all else: the loss of salvation. That is a fearful thing to consider. So, the next time you are tempted, remember the worm, and perhaps you will want to skip that last shot of Tequila.

Homily #184

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Numbers 11:25-29

James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

## 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

#### Thoughtful Theism

*Fr. Andrew Younan*

Emmaus Road Publishing  
2017, 200 pages.

#### Coming Soon

*Michael Barber*

Emmaus Road Publishing  
2005, 326 pages.

#### Strangers in a Strange Land

*Charles J. Chaput*

Henry Holt and Co.  
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

### PERIODICALS

#### First Things

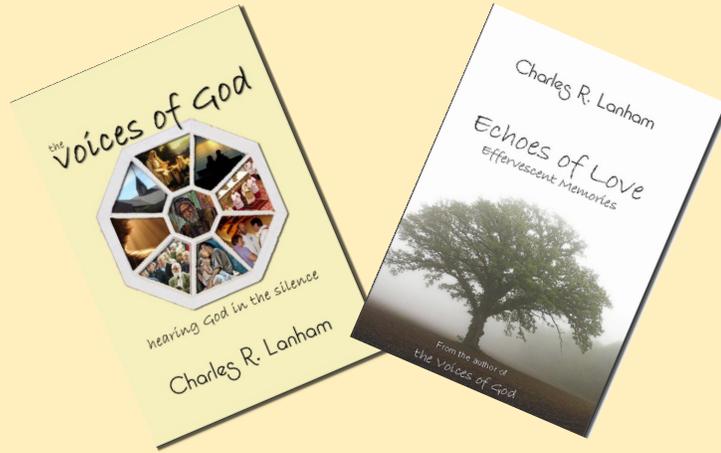
Institute on Religion and Public Life  
Editor: R. R. Reno  
Ten Issues per year.  
[www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)

#### Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity  
Editor: James M. Kushiner  
Bi-Monthly.  
[www.touchstonemag.com](http://www.touchstonemag.com)

#### Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith  
Editor: Tim Ryland  
Bi-Monthly.  
[www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)



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.

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

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

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