

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

Two Left Feet

The symmetry which defines us

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.

Two Left Feet

The symmetry which defines us

Thank God for symmetry, that marvelous combination of harmony, proportion and balance designed into all which he has so wonderfully made.

Imagine Vitruvian man as sketched by Michelangelo with two left feet or three arms or one eye. Or consider the proportions of the human body as Michelangelo saw them; consider how wonderfully symmetrical the body is relative to the square, the triangle and the circle. Symmetry is an essential attribute to all which the Lord has so wondrously made (Psalm 139:14).

Symmetry does not impose a sameness upon a rose, a butterfly, a hand or

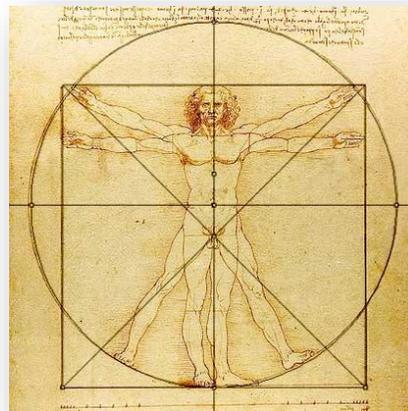
foot; it is more the meter and the measure of that which defines the essential qualities of every verse.

Yet another attribute, one as essential as symmetry, is complementarity which proposes purpose and mutual benefit in contrasting differences. Just as it would be quite unhandy and asymmetrical to possess two left feet or two

right hands, it would be equally as absurd to have arms for legs or feet for hands.

In short, this opposition complements and provides further functionality and added benefits to the body whole. Feet and hands, arms

and legs though dissimilar are thus complementary to the other; neither are of greater or lesser importance nor, unless out of necessity, should a foot consider itself any more than a poor substitute for a hand, likewise an arm for a leg. Those



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who find themselves missing one or more limbs will readily attest to having lost more than a mere limb; what abilities were possible with complementary limbs have been severely diminished or curtailed.

Symmetry and complementarity are to be found throughout all creation to varying degrees and without exception for they are the glue to wholeness, the valence which attracts and unites the unlikeliest of suspects. An idiom which has these days fallen out of favor with the *intelligentsia*, progressives and the left, nevertheless rings true often enough: “*opposites attract*,” that is to say, people who are very different from each other are often attracted to each other. One must look no further than the marriage of James Carville and Mary Matalin to prove the truth of it for they are staunch opposites on the political spectrum. Together, and arguably to some extent, because of their differences, they are more than two individuals, they are complete. Each complements the other, adding something which the other lacks and could never be or have of their own recognizance.

There is something deeply unsettling and, quite frankly, terrifying with the progressive ideology now *en vogue* within religious circles and society writ large. Progressivism, not of recent vintage by any measure, has historically proved in every case to be a squalid failure; but fueled by the ever-present constant-connectivity to social media it has regained certain respectability, garnering renewed enthusiasm among a new unsuspecting,

history-deficient audience hungry for its utopian promises.

One is reminded of a not recent breakfast commercial which had one child shove a bowl of cereal toward a smaller child saying, “Give it to Mikey, he’ll eat anything!” This is much the same as those who pedal progressive utopian dreams to those gullible enough to believe colored eggs come from the Easter Bunny. Peddlers of Progressivism rely on the ignorance of their prey, especially their ignorance of history.

P. T. Barnum, that quintessential huckster of the mid-19th century, once quipped, “There’s a sucker born every minute” and that is the implied mantra of the progressive left. Nothing bears this out more clearly than speaking “your truth.” Those who peddle this bilge are not in the least interested in what is verifiably true for verifiable truth, objective truth too often denies and refutes what they insist you believe. There is, despite all claims to the contrary, only “factual truth”; the rest is unsubstantiated belief. If “your truth” departs from “factual truth”, it is pure balderdash and poppycock.

What terrifies this poor soul is the progressive zealotry that has become the core tenet of public and private, religious and secular *academia*. As one pundit has suggested, most colleges and universities—here I would add seminaries to the list as well:

have no credibility with honest people. Many of their administrators and teachers are fanatical zealots who are running wild spreading their “truth.”

The entire university system in this country is biased left and the fix is in. Speaking “truth to power” is a one-way street where you make a sharp left to enter.

But it isn’t the truth, it’s ideological propaganda designed to attack and marginalize those with whom they disagree. Freedom of expression on college campuses is largely a myth in this country.

Progressivism preaches progress, but what is progress to the progressive? In an essay, originally published for *The Imaginative Conservative*, Joseph Pearce¹ provides a thoughtful and thought-provoking commentary on progressive ideology. While lengthy, it is well-worth the reading. It is reprinted here in its entirety.

We live in very mean-spirited times. In spite of all the hypocritical cant about “love” and “tolerance” it can be shown that there is little real difference between the superciliousness of “progressivist” snobbery and the most pernicious forms of racism. If, for example, we were to visit a village in a remote corner of Africa and were to witness children playing with crudely crafted toys and presumed from our observations that these Africans must be inferior to Americans because American children have iPods and smart-phones we would rightly be accused of racism. Yet this is exactly what “progressivists” do when observing cultures separated by time instead of space. The past is deemed to be inferior and can be treated with scorn or, which is perhaps worse, with patronising condescension.

Let’s employ another provocative analogy. If Plato were to walk into a room of impeccably progressive moderns, he would no doubt

become the cause of a good deal of humour on account of his quaint "ethnic" clothing. This, however, would be as nothing compared to the guffaws ensuing upon his inept attempts to make sense of the automobile parked outside. He would not only fail to know how to drive it, he might not even know what it was. Perhaps, if he surmised it was indeed a carriage of some sort, he might amuse us by looking in vain for the mechanism by which a horse would be attached to it. Oh, how superior we are to these primitive cultures, we would no doubt think! If, however, Plato deigned to linger among us for a few days, in spite of our decidedly barbaric behaviour, he would soon master the relatively simple skill (it is scarcely an art) of learning to drive. He might even buy some suitably modern clothes to avoid standing out in the crowd. In short, Plato would have mastered the niceties of our technological culture within a day or two, after which he would no longer be the source of such jocularly. On the contrary, he would soon become a nuisance at parties with his insistence on defining the terms under discussion, and his frequent interruption of polite conversations with the cry of "distinguo!", or whatever is its equivalent in Greek. The Philosopher would soon come to the inescapable conclusion that this strange race of "progressives" were in fact barbarians who adorned themselves with the baubles of technology but had no concept whatever of the meaning of life or the nature of reality. Feeling his exile from civilization intensely he would long for the profundities of the Lyceum.

These analogies all point to the uncomfortable fact that *progressivism* is as arrogant and as ignorant as the worst sort of redneck racism. It looks down its supercilious nose at the *untermenschen* who inhabit the "developing world" of the past, self-

-confidently convinced of its own inherent superiority and wanting to ensure that these *untermenschen* or their friends be excluded from the polite and politically correct society in which the "progressives" reside. Such an understanding of the arrogant "progressive" was shown by Chesterton when he observed that "man should be a prince looking from the pinnacle of a tower built by his fathers, and not a contemptuous cad, perpetually kicking down the ladders by which he's climbed".² The same point was made by Chesterton in the distinction between the "fatal" iconoclasm of this contemptuous and contemptible form of progressivism and the genuine progress associated with the growth of wisdom or virtue: "The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us, has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us."³ Nowhere has Chesterton encapsulated the essential arrogance of progressivism's chronological snobbery more eloquently than in his insistence that it was fundamentally undemocratic:

Tradition may be defined as the extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition.⁴

For Chesterton, tradition is the extension of democracy through time, the proxy of the dead and the en-

franchisement of the unborn. Progressivists, on the other hand, look upon the dead as savages and sanction the systematic extermination of the unborn. The contempt for tradition inherent to and endemic in progressivist circles is fundamentally undemocratic insofar that it excludes the vast majority of humanity. Respect for tradition is merely a demand for majority rule! Furthermore, Chesterton insists that the past is far from being dead and buried but that, on the contrary, it is more real, and therefore more alive, than either the present or the future:

We talk of people living in the past; and it is commonly applied to old people or old-fashioned people. But, in fact, we all live in the past, because there is nothing else to live in. To live in the present is like proposing to sit on a pin. It is too minute, it is too slight to support, it is too uncomfortable a posture, and it is of necessity followed immediately by totally different experiences, analogous to those of jumping up with a yell. To live in the future is a contradiction in terms. The future is dead; in the perfectly definite sense that it is not alive. It has no nature, no form, no feature, no vaguest character of any kind except what we choose to project upon it from the past. People talk about the dead past; but the past is not in the least dead, in the sense in which the future is dead. The past can move and excite us, the past can be loved and hated, the past consists largely of lives that can be considered in their completion; that is, literally in the fullness of life. But nobody knows anything about any living thing in the future, except what he chooses to make up, by his own imagination, out of what he regrets in the past or what he desires in the present.⁵

Although valid from a materialist perspective, Chesterton's definition of the future is incomplete from the

perspective of metaphysics. While it is true that a materialist has no grounds for believing in something that does not possess any material existence, such as the future, those who believe in eternity, and in an Eternal God, know that there is an existence beyond time and space in which past, present and future are not only known but are eternally present. There is no past or future for God, only the eternal Now. Nonetheless Chesterton's critique is valid within the parameters of time and the material limitations that it imposes, and, since these are the very parameters and limitations that materialism imposes upon itself, it is appropriate to employ the materialist perspective to expose that perspective's own contradictions. With pinpoint precision, Chesterton exposes the folly of the progressive's faith in a future of which the progressive's own philosophy denies the existence.

There is much to digest in this brief essay and the honest reader will pore over Pearce's words with an open mind, taking care not to take words or phrases out of the fuller context in which they are written and the measure of what was intended.

As a brief note for those who occasionally mention having some small difficulty understanding some of the words I have used, the word *Untermenschen*, which Pearson mentions twice in his essay is a German noun, the plural of *Untermensch*, which is a derogatory term for a person or persons considered racially or socially inferior.

While seldom, if ever, used in public discourse, it is too often subtly implied with increasing frequency by

tribal progressives espousing political correctness while pushing identity politics. The Progressive left thus replaces *Untermenschen* by labeling those who do not fit the mold of their ideological tribe "racist," "homophobe," "xenophobe," "sexist" "old-fashioned," "Out-of-touch" or some other terminology meant to demean and disparage. Whatever the term used, it is pure tribalism: either you belong to the tribe or you are *untersmenschen* and thus considered inferior and must be denounced as apostates to their relative truth.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger warned of this progressive *diktat* in his homily to the 2005 conclave that would soon elect him successor to Saint Pope John Paul II:

We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires.

And as Benjamin Wiker has observed,

Relativism is a poison. It attacks our most human capacity, the capacity to seek and know the truth, including the moral truth. A dictatorship of relativism imposes by real cultural force (and even by political force) a no-standard standard, a command that all must imbibe this poison.⁶

And as Cardinal Ratzinger had written earlier in his book *Without Roots*:

In recent years I find myself noting how the more relativism becomes the generally accepted way of thinking, the more it tends toward

intolerance. Political correctness ... seeks to establish the domain of a single way of thinking and speaking. Its relativism creates the illusion that it has reached greater heights than the loftiest philosophical achievements of the past. It presents itself as the only way to think and speak — if, that is, one wishes to stay in fashion. ... I think it is vital that we oppose this imposition of a new pseudo-enlightenment, which threatens freedom of thought as well as freedom of religion.⁷

Relativism ... in certain respects has become the real religion of modern man.⁸

Perhaps, what has long been most bothersome has been coming to grips with the progressive's insistent demand for "progress for the sake of progress." There is much common sense to be had in the bromide "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and yet to the progressive mind change is a necessary constant and the *status quo*, no matter how comfortable, never good enough.

As Chesterton so sharply (pun intended) observed:

To live in the present is like proposing to sit on a pin. It is too minute, it is too slight to support, it is too uncomfortable a posture, and it is of necessity followed immediately by totally different experiences, analogous to those of jumping up with a yell. To live in the future is a contradiction in terms. The future is dead; in the perfectly definite sense that it is not alive.

This then is the world of the progressive, a world that is a contradiction in terms, a fantasy world of an imagined future that is decidedly not

alive; it is not even “mostly dead,”⁹ it is irrevocably dead. It is existing in a dead barren nightmare controlled by the vagaries of ever-changing progress.

The progressive weapon *du jour* is the bitter tongue whose sharp barbs are dipped in poisonous treason to any truth not their own. Truth has become the victim, savagely and dishonestly traumatized by those who care for nothing but “their truth to power.” The past is the past, best left buried with the dead; the past has been ripped to shreds, destroyed, all in the name of holy progress. Only the perfect need apply for sainthood; the imperfect must and will be tried in the supreme courts of accusation and innuendo, prejudged guilty by the disgruntled progressive mob who will offer no corroborating evidence to support their case.

Perceived offenses on the part of the ancient dead suffice to deny their claim to greatness. Those who would honor such greatness must bend to the will of the offended. History is replete with the multifaceted moral nature of human existence but that, in and of itself, condemns history to the fires of Gehenna. The fact that George Washington was a slaveholder thus denies him claim to being the father of the country. The fact that Abraham Lincoln spent much of his career advocating for colonization of black Americans in Africa rather than integrating them into American life is sufficient to obliterate his role as the Great Emancipator.

Human beings are products of their time — and they are capable of holding viewpoints that resonate down through the ages and the prejudices of their own age. Undoubtedly, a century from now, few will look kindly at even the most broadminded Americans’ views on a variety of issues.

But the process of civilizational development requires us to separate the wheat from the chaff — and to celebrate the wheat.¹⁰

Perhaps Shakespeare said it best: “*The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones ...*” Those who worship progress seldom hesitate to point to the evil.

1. Joseph Pearce, *The Bigotry of the Progressive Present*, *The Imaginative Conservative*, Jan. 29, 2014, republished as “*Are Progressives Really Closet Racists?*”, *National Catholic Register Blogs*, Oct. 11, 2018. **Joseph Pearce** is a Senior Contributor to *The Imaginative Conservative*. He is Senior Editor at the Augustine Institute, and Tolkien & Lewis Chair in Literary Studies at Holy Apostles College & Seminary. He is editor of the *St. Austin Review*, series editor of the Ignatius Critical Editions, and executive director of Catholic Courses. His books include *The Quest for Shakespeare*, *Tolkien: Man and Myth*, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde*, *C. S. Lewis and The Catholic Church*, *Literary Converts*, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton*, *Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile*, and *Old Thunder: A Life of Hilaire Belloc*.

2. G. K. Chesterton, *Avowals and Denials*, London: Methuen, 1934, p. 78.

3. G. K. Chesterton, *Fancies versus Fads*, London: Methuen, 1923, p. 2.

4. G. K. Chesterton, *Collected Works, Vol. 1*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, p. 251.

5. G. K. Chesterton, *Avowals and Denials*, p. 182.

6. Benjamin Wiker, *Benedict vs. the Dictatorship of Relativism*, *National Catholic Register*, Feb. 25, 2013.

7. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*, Basic Books, Jan. 30, 2007.

8. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Ignatius Press, Jul. 18, 2005.

9. Apologies to the scriptwriters of the film “Princess Bride”.

10. Ben Shapiro, *Stop Apologizing for Our History*.

11. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2*.

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

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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.

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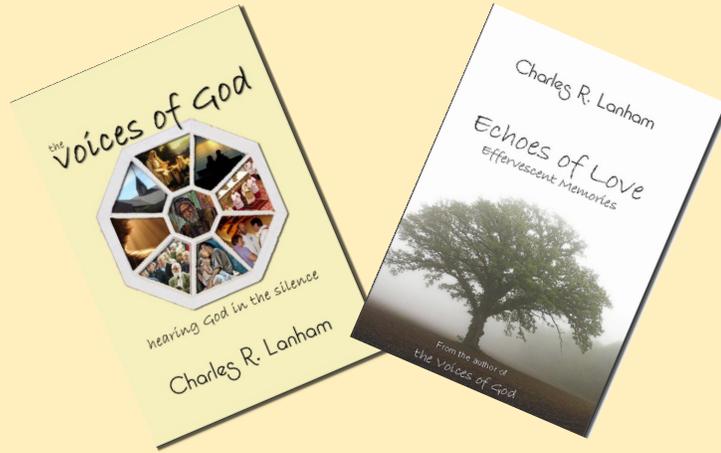
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