

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

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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.

An Adversity To Diversity

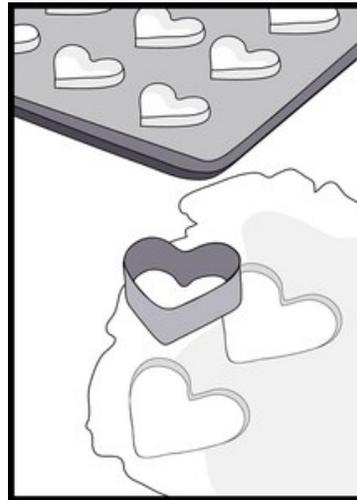
All things being unique

There are, or so we are asked to believe, mythological creatures so alike in appearance, yet biologically unrelated, as to be mistaken for another; such unrelated look-alikes are commonly referred to as Doppelgängers or more commonly "twin strangers."

There may indeed be another, God forbid, who shares a striking similitude to this unfortunate countenance, yet thankfully, I neither wish to share this contemptible visage with any other nor should I imagine any other would harbor much desire for an inheritance so unbecoming. The same may be said for those formed from the same biological egg, those so described as identical twins: they may look to be identical in appearance although never

more than proximate—close they may be, but never the same cigar.

We are as diverse as we are numerous; even in our biological orthodoxy we belie such cookie-cutter precision; God finds no use for clones, no desire for sycophantic drones for such minions will always lack the capacity to love him. A gross accounting of our superficial similarities accounts for little against the innumerable distinctive corporeal and incorporeal qualities and attributes which serve to distinguish and characterize each as a unique human being, a separate and distinct individual, and a child of God.



And yet, we look not upon the stately oak, so mesmerized are we by the horde of hornets that threaten whoever would dare rest beneath its pleasant canopy. The horde,

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small in both size and number, are no threat to the stately oak. Indeed, the oak for its part cares not a twig for such frantic foolishness; having seen its share of such annoying pests, here today and gone with the first hint of weather, the oak is but slightly tickled by their incessant nonsense. So it has become common legend to entertain the unruly mob, absent any notice of those who would stand apart refusing to engage in the unreasoned rant of the madding crowd demanding its due attention.

The naked truth bears neither guilt nor shame for no garment could ever hope to match its beauty. It is the lie which must be cloaked in subterfuge and cruel deception to conceal its scabrous dishonest guile. Why then has truth suffered such ignominy, so cruelly masked to forbid its light unveiled? The light of truth reveals the lie upon which foul and foolish fantasy does rely and reality therefore be denied.

Ignorance shows no partiality for it is a habit common to every creature without exception. Not knowing wears no shame; only a fool denies unknowing, and yet it seems the fool far outdoes the rabbit in its overbreeding. It was the 17th-century philosopher, René Descartes, who once observed that good sense is the most evenly distributed commodity in the world; for everyone thinks he has just the right amount, and even those people who are the most difficult to please in all other matters never want more than they already have.

We cannot help ourselves, it

seems, in overestimating our abilities and underestimating our weaknesses. The confidence we hold in our beliefs, in what we believe to be true and the choices we make based on those beliefs is seldom tested for we are convicted by our knowing. It is overconfidence in knowing that of which we are the most ignorant which inevitably leads to our undoing. The less we know a thing or how best to use it the more likely to overestimate our command of it. The more ignorant we are, the more we temper our steel, ill-prepared for challenge or argument.

We suffer greatly from what social psychologists call confirmation bias—that is, when we hold a particular belief, we search out that which we believe supports the belief and explain away or outright ignore that which undermines rational belief in the proposition. When faced with a small amount of supporting evidence and a huge amount of disconfirming or falsifying evidence, we focus on that which backs us up and use it to swamp the overwhelming evidence against us—especially when the belief is core to our worldview. We see this often in the world of politics.

We will do whatever we need to in order to save our preexisting beliefs. ... We are acculturated into a belief system, and the worldview it gives us—the basic categories and presuppositions that come with it—is notoriously difficult to change.

Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, discussed what he called “social facts,” which we acquire from being part of a society. Social facts are ways of thinking or acting that originate outside the individual, are enforced by the society, and become a part of the individual. These are beliefs that become invisible to us because

they are the lens through which we see the world, and questioning their truth strikes us as absurd, if not dangerous.¹

Most consider themselves to be independent minded, and yet, the views of others influence our thoughts and behaviors. We are social beings, we want to belong, we naturally desire to be in the company of like-minded souls. It is not in our nature to avoid the comfort obtained in being with others, to stand apart from the consenting crowd and believe what they do not; such independence of thought despairs the soul and fills the heart with unreasoned doubt. Surrounding ourselves with those of like-mind comforts us like a warm blanket that repels the bitter cold, but such a warm embrace too often leads us to “irrational exuberance”² and undeserved overconfidence in what we know and in what we believe to be true.

Longing to belong is in our nature, it is the foundational principle, written in Holy Scripture, upon which our social nature and the desire for communal acceptance (family) was first revealed: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

A society exists to serve and support the unmet needs of individuals and families (of individuals) with whom they share common interests, values, mores and beliefs. “Which came first?” may apply to eggs and chickens, but is never applicable to the relationship between the individual and society.

Let us take a moment to expand on this relationship between man and society. We must first establish as true precisely who created who, that is to say: God created man thus it is that man is His creation; a creature can neither create other creatures as itself nor be the creator of its own uncreated Creator, it follows thus that man is not a god but a creature.

The whole of mankind enrolls the entirety of individual human beings, each unique though each formed from common clay. Each individual, each human person is created by God with intelligence (that is, an incorporeal mind/soul,) free will, an innate moral code, and the capability to reason, thus providing each person with the necessary tools and the freedom to make their own choices, whether wise or unwise, rational or irrational. And each has been endowed with certain inalienable rights which are intrinsic truths written on the natural law.

Individuals have subsequently found it to be in their better nature to voluntarily bind themselves to one another under social contract, forming a society to serve their more common interests. Individuals have natural rights and concomitant responsibilities, whereas societies, formed for the mutual benefit of the individuals who operate within the terms of the social contract, have no rights *per se*, and thus have no just cause or licit reason to abridge those rights endowed by God.

Should then man relinquish what is his by divine right and natural law

on the mobbish cries for social justice and maniacal howls for equality in diversity, over-amplified by adulating trumpeted sycophants?

What then has become of man, that noblest of all God's creatures?

Though formed from common clay, by the inspiration of the Spirit that clay became a living being, like no other creature, for man was made in the image and likeness of God.

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I Have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you have them for food" (Gen 1:27-30).

God created everything for a purpose, a gift for his noblest and highest creation, man. He made it all for all them, every person, every human being and gave them dominion over it. He gave man everything so that man would have time enough to love him in return.

But man's ego quickly overrode common sense and they slipped on an apple peel and fell out of God's good graces. And it has been downhill ever since. Unable to keep our egos in check, we enjoy our selves more and God less.

Here is how Saint Athanasius would later describe man's descent into hell after the fall:

When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and raping filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both individually and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says:

Their women exchanged the natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26-27).³

Although Athanasius wrote this in the fourth century, it feels uncomfortably accurate for this twenty-first century man. The deeper we fall into the bottomless depths of depravity and wickedness, the greater our separation from God. The light of Christ still shines and the darkness shall not overcome it, but no light will show the way to those who

either refuse or care not to turn their eyes to his light.

Those who remain in the light see clearly what is intended to be obvious: God loves us because he made us out of love to love and be loved. We are his children, we are each a beloved son or daughter of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

God looks lovingly upon his children and sees each child as a unique individual, each with a soul made in his image and likeness and thus a reflection, like in a mirror, of Love. Saint Augustine once observed: "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us" and that is truth. God is Love. Period. He loves each of us. Period.

No matter how we see ourselves and our neighbors, God sees things differently. We forget this at the peril of our immortal soul.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

We may not understand or know God's thoughts or his ways, but we do know what God does not do: God does not mix and match, he does not discriminate, he does not sort, stuff and package his children into categories, he does not measure, he does not love some more or some less, he does not show partiality or preference, he does not hold a grudge, he does not hate, he does not kill, he does not change. Ever!

Athanasius speaks clearly on man's dependence and need for God, first by citing from the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:1-5).

Athanasius then writes

For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death.

Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good. By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears also the Likeness of Him Who is, and if he preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt.

Thus, those who would deny God, deny themselves, for nothing can come from nothing; only God can create something out of nothing.

This then is the core premise upon which the social mob has placed their bets: no God, no limits, no rules, no morality, no truth, no barriers; anything and everything is permissible, all are free to do as they will when they want with whom they want and how they want. The only caveat, individuality is toast, all hail the new and improved man-made god, Utopia.

Utopia (Society to her closest allies,) now enthroned, like any tyrant will, quickly issues her first decree:

Whereas and wherefore, I hereby decree that from this time forward my thoughts are your thoughts and my ways are your ways. Take heed and obey: There is no I in We, no Me in You, no thought not my own, the many outweigh the one, the one is of no importance, what is yours is ours. What you do not have will make you happy. What is taken from you will give you greater happiness. Self is selfish. Reality is a dream, truth a fiction. Above all else, worship me.

It is the individual with the independent mind who has been disenfranchised, tossed on the trash heap of deplorables along with their deplorable God. The ivied halls of academe have been emblazoned with these words: "Groupthink Saves Lives" and none dare to question the truth of it. They dare not because they care not and they care not because they have lost the ability to use their minds apart

and outside the group. They have no taste for independent thought, no atlas to guide them to their own conclusions.

P sychologists have long recognized and demonstrated that humans will more often than not change their thoughts and beliefs in order to fit in, to be accepted within a particular social or cultural group.

This is what psychologist Irving Janis called groupthink. Groupthink occurs when we sacrifice our own critical capacities of thought in order to adopt the consensus belief. All other things being equal, we would not have come to hold this particular belief; but because we're in a group that believes it, we do, too. It's not just that we act as if we believe it, we do believe it. Janis, Asch, and a couple generations of researchers following them have documented all sorts of factors that amplify or diminish groupthink. If those around you are unified in expressing the belief and do so passionately, you're more likely to get swept up in it.

But if even one person expresses skepticism, you're more likely to be skeptical yourself. If there's a strong, charismatic leader espousing the view, people are more likely to come to believe it. If there are rewards for believing, or punishments for disbelieving, people will respond. Our beliefs are affected by the beliefs, actions, and personalities of those around us, even if they violate what we otherwise know to be good reasoning.⁴

Remove God from the classroom, elevate society to his vacant seat, enculturate the minds with a godless code of morality and ethics, and de-

monize and demoralize those who object and/or question their authority.

This has been inscribed on the stone pages of the academy playbook and it has been so for decades, if not longer. Critical thinking, civil discourse, unfettered dialogue, fierce debate and reasoned argument no longer steer the ship from anywhere, especially from the captain's chair.

The tools of yesterday, a moral compass and a shining lamp have been abandoned, no longer accompanying the innocent through the doors of education. The goal of academia no longer aims its sights on reaching those lofty heights where Wisdom and Understanding meet and share the throne. No, the goalposts have been brought low, so low the crossbars dare to touch the ground.

Tragically, and with great dismay, few islands have been left unscathed by this accursed stream. Even the Church which Jesus Christ first ordained has been severely, though not mortally, wounded. In an essay for the National Catholic Register, Benjamin Wiker suggests

It might help bring some bracing clarity to those in the hierarchy making the decisions if they understand the unhappy position that the Catholic Church is now in.

Imagine that our contemporary society is a ship at sea in the darkest night, buffeted in a storm by winds coming from nearly every direction, so much so that the ship reels and lurches violently in continual danger of capsizing. Spun around so many times, there is no sense of direction left, and the only compass on board has been shattered by the captain's chief crew members in

circumstances too embarrassing to mention.

That's a pretty accurate allegorical image of our current cultural situation and the Church's place in it. The pope and bishops—the captain and his crew—are supposed to bring the moral direction of Christ to society, and there are few times in history where society was in greater need of the Church's authoritative guidance.

We live in a time when even the most natural and seemingly obvious moral lines are being feverishly erased. This has resulted in the elevation and acceptance, not only of unnatural acts (such as same-sex marriage or killing one's own offspring), but also the harnessing of science to commit anti-natural acts (such as violently changing one's natural gender by surgery and hormonal reconstruction, as if nature herself were the enemy).

For those trying to seize the ship and steer our society into such unnatural and even uncharted waters, there is no such thing as a moral compass. Or more accurately, each of us has his, her, eir, pers, their, vis, xyr, hir, zir, tem, thons, het, nir own internal moral compass and it points whichever direction one happens to want to go at the time. (No, those are not typos, but a small list of the latest gender-free, gender-manipulative pronouns handed down from the Tower of Linguistic Babel.)

Things are dark, very dark, and our society lurches in every direction, as new and shocking malformations spin us around and threaten to sink the ship.

1. Steven Gimbel, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy, Gettysburg College, *"An Introduction to Formal Logic"*, 2016.
2. Alan Greenspan, *"The Challenge of Central Banking in a Democratic Society"*, American Enterprise Institute, 1996.
3. Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, Chapter 2.
4. Steven Gimbel, *"An Introduction to Formal Logic"*.
5. Benjamin Wiker, *The Church's Broken Moral Compass*, National Catholic Register, Dec. 20, 2018.

The Divine Dilemma

A stirring in the womb

Once again we find ourselves approaching that lowly manger. It is time, but not yet. It is a time of great anticipation, a time of dreams and visions, of sleepless nights and longer days. It is a time of waiting, of knowing and not knowing what is yet to come. And no, not of sugarplums and flying reindeer or pretty presents under the tree. Those things would one day come but not this time.

This time of which we speak is like no other and yet, our eyes see ordinary people going about doing ordinary things, our ears hear what they always hear, and yet our senses are on high alert. For what? We do not know, but something is about to happen, something extraordinary!

It is a time when questions will be asked but seldom answered and dilemmas, both on earth and in heaven, will, in some ways, be resolved. Of the questions they will be asked, but it is of the dilemmas which we must first consider.

Let us place ourselves in the middle of the dilemma thrust unexpectedly upon a fourteen-year-old girl, living with her parents, doing what all teenagers do—eat, sleep, complain, laugh, cry, whatever ... and then in an instant the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. The dilemma she now faces is literally life or death. So, why her? What should she do? How should she respond? If it were you, how would

you respond?

Nothing is ever simple, is it? Think of her parents and the dilemma they now face. Of course, the times were much different then than now, but the situation no less serious and perhaps, in some ways, far more deadly. And what of the man, betrothed, yet, not married to this girl. What is he to think of this? Should he quietly break their engagement so as to cause her no further shame? If it were you, how would you respond?



This was serious, deadly serious and no doubt the question asked but never answered is why? Why then? Why them? Why there? Why, dear God, why?

There is certainly much here that begs for answers, answers which we may never find this side of heaven. But then, that is how it is with this life and we can worry more or ponder less, it

makes no difference either way.

Not long ago, my wife suggested I might enjoy a small book, a mere sixty pages, written in the fourth century by Saint Athanasius, the twentieth bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. Athanasius played a major role in the First Council of Nicaea. Convened in the year 325 by the Emperor Constantine, it was tasked with addressing the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God and distinct from his Father.

His treatise “On the Incarnation” expands with clarity on the conclusion reached by the First Council of Nicaea, that is, that God became man through His son, Jesus of Nazareth, and through Jesus, we too may become one with God. In just a few pages Athanasius explains why God became flesh through Jesus and why this transformation was necessary to save the corrupted human soul and prepare it for a perfect and immortal union with God.

It is considered an essential read for all students of the Christian faith. It is an easy read, but profound and I would encourage everyone to take the time to read it.

What I found most compelling is found early in the second chapter, which Athanasius, in perhaps a moment of divine inspiration, titled “The Divine Dilemma and its Solution in the Incarnation.” Since man had become so corrupted, he asks “what then was God, being Good, to do?” Thus then, we come to the Divine Dilemma.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Athanasius was uncompromisingly blunt in his harsh commentary, arguing that man's wickedness and corruption placed God his divine dilemma.

When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and raping filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both individually and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says:

Their women exchanged the natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26-27).

Athanasius then examines the Divine Dilemma and why God did what he did:

Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them? In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning? Surely it would have been better never to have been created at all than, having been created, to be neglected and perish; and, besides that, such indifference to the ruin of His own work before His very eyes would argue not goodness in God but limitation, and that far more than if He had never created men at all. It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.

He took our body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of human father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men.

It is time, but not yet. Now you know the answer to the question; when he comes you know the reason, you know the why. Come, O Lord, set us free. Come, Lord, bring us peace. Amen.

Homily #186
Fourth Sunday of Advent (C)
Micah 5:1-4A
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45

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

Thoughtful Theism

Fr. Andrew Younan

Emmaus Road Publishing
2017, 200 pages.

To Change the Church

Ross Gregory Douthat

Simon & Schuster
2018, 256 pages.

On the Incarnation

Saint Athanasius

Digireads.com Publishing
October 3, 2018, 60 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

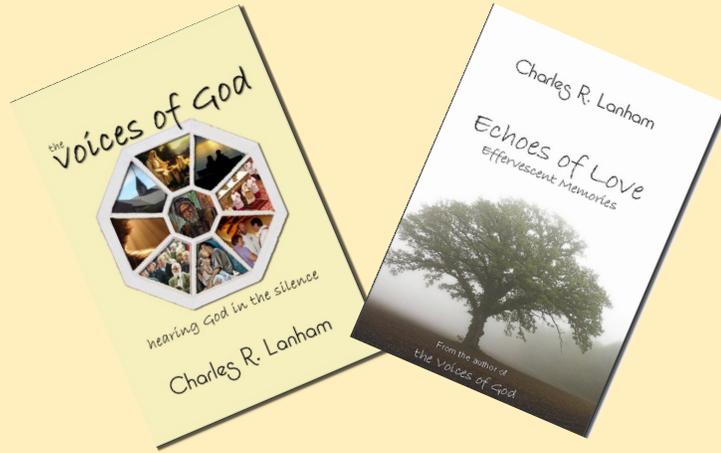
Institute on Religion and Public Life
Editor: R. R. Reno
Ten Issues per year.
www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity
Editor: James M. Kushiner
Bi-Monthly.
www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith
Editor: Tim Ryland
Bi-Monthly.
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.

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**.

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

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