

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.

Euphemistically Speaking

When truth offends

Perhaps, it is the ears long distracted by wagging tongues. But then again, perhaps, it is the eyes unforgettably etched by caustic *ignis fatuus*¹ acid. Perhaps. But then, perhaps it is the spirit profoundly weary, weighed heavy by what might have, could have, would have been now but distant all-but-forgotten memory, no more covetous of young wings to soar above the clouds.

Perhaps, it may be all or none or an as yet unmentioned; I care not, dare not engage in maudlin dissatisfaction for assuredly no benefit could be earned by indulging in deep despairing. No, such musing I must profess but sets the stage, giving reason to my argument, good purpose to my

joy, and wind beneath my floundering wings.

I must confess a sinful thing, to wit, by all accounts, my wits have left me at wits end, which is, without a doubt, a most untimely sin against the dwindling remnants of my meager sanity. Never one to claim an abundance of those witty

wits, it is a wonder that I ever had the wits to realize they had so abruptly left without so much a fair adieu.

I know, I know, my addled wits are rambling on and on and on ... the point, the point, I cannot seem to find the point. Oh, but there it is, thank goodness it has stuck around, rather than

leaving with those witless wits, good riddance! This lack of wits is much more a bother, but I digress,—at least I believe I do, without your wits it is difficult, you



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know—now where was I? Oh, here I am, and rightly so, therefore, I shall proceed straightaway and directly to the point.

But before I do so, forgive me, for first, a small diversion. Please, return your attention to the photograph you could not possibly have missed if you began reading from the beginning. Every picture tells a story and this one could tell more than a few and then some.

The picture was taken sixty years ago on the 50th anniversary of Monsignor Edward Joseph Connolly, ordained to the priesthood December 20, 1908 in County Meath, Ireland. Born November 17, 1885, he came to America in 1918 and was the pastor of Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Monroe City, Missouri for 40 years. Pope Pius XII named him Monsignor.

His life was the stuff of legend and the tales would fill a library. He came with an Irish temperament accompanied by a fiery Irish temper. And yet, he was deeply loved—one might add revered for emphasis—for he was, above all else, a holy man of God, a faithful servant, and the rock beneath our feet.

Altar boys (no girls) feared him for he had little patience for even the slightest error or misstep. He had no reluctance for calling you a stupid fool or worse, but then you always knew what sin you had committed to earn it. And, I swear this to be true, no one died from the experience!

It is sad to think, had this sainted priest been born but a century later,

how he would have been so poorly received. He would, no doubt, be befuddled, believing his wits had left him along with common sense, morality, truth and an unshakable faith in the God who made us. He would find the flock lost in complacent pastures, for having left their wits far behind them, they now follow the wolf wherever he would lead them. He, the good shepherd, who loved and cared for his flock so deeply would be vilified, called a bully or worse, scorned, mocked, condemned and crucified by the court of public opinion.

Perhaps, it is the ambiguity which leads the wits to wander, to follow hollow echoes leading nowhere but in endless circles.

Once, we stood on solid ground with rock beneath our feet; now, our feet are turned to clay, floundering on ever-shifting sand. Once, we feared ourselves; what fortitude and courage would be enough to meet the challenges of mortal life. We feared our God his righteousness; what love would be enough to earn eternal life, not loss for all eternity.

Alas, no longer do we fear ourselves, for we know not who or what we are. In our arrogance, we believe in ourselves of whom we must confess we do not know at all. We no longer fear our God, for we have made our god in our image and likeness. Thus, says our god: this is all there is, enjoy it while you can. There is no sin, only pleasure, do what you will, the skies the limit. Heaven is what you make of it; hell is heaven without the guilt.

This view, of course, winks and waves to fawning fans, but quickly changes course, fearing close attention. There is no room for compromise, no argument, no discussion. The sand will move as it will, mocking the unmoving rock for its intransigence. Progress is the unholy grail; few would dare deny its providence. Truth has been proven false by reason of insanity, committed to a padded cell now occupied by reality.

All this is but a nightmare, or a dream, depending on your point of view. In either case, there will come a waking, when death comes calling and Truth triumphs as it must. In either case, there is a price: pay it now while a bargain or lose it all forever.

Not long ago, these simmering thoughts were quite abruptly brought to a boil and I was, quite uncomfortably, the one being boiled alive. What turned the heat to high was perhaps poor timing coupled with a less than perfect choice of words, but whether one or the other, what was said was said, what was heard was heard by some as hurtful. While I can control what I say and take the utmost care to speak with clarity and truth, I am human with attendant faults and failures, well-aware that what I say risks faulty delivery as well as broken reception. Such, I believe, is what occurred in this instance, and I sincerely regret having caused anyone distress.

In last week's Colloqui, as is my practice, I included my homily for the Fourth Sunday in Advent. The readings focused on the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh, God made man.

I chose, perhaps unwisely, to speak of the reason why God became man rather than on the joy we receive because of it. I quoted extensively from St. Athanasius' book, *On The Incarnation*, and specifically from the second chapter. Regrettably, what I cited was narrowly focused on man's fallen nature, his wickedness and depravity, and his ever-increasing distance from God. It did not serve what St. Athanasius wrote well.

What I tried to say, in a broad, general way, was that the Incarnation was the only and best solution available to our loving God in order to rescue his human creation from the corruption and death of sin. In this, I admit my failure, for my failure caused personal pain.

Subsequently, I received a letter, addressed not to myself, but the people of the parish, our priests, and the bishop. I will not publish the contents of this letter, it is not for me to do so. Please allow me the opportunity to give public acknowledgement to what has caused such unintentional pain. This is my response:

You are a child of God. God loves you as if you were his only child. Whether you wish to believe or not believe, I love you just as much as I love my very soul, not because God has commanded us to love one another but for no less the reason than we each are kindred spirits created in his image and likeness. I cannot but love you more or less than any other or myself.

I believe it was Evelyn Beatrice Hall who wrote, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." To this I must agree with all my soul and yet it would appear by your verbal assault after Mass and from your letter that you do not share such sentiment. Having written and published my homily, the same which you took with so great offense, I have attached it for your prayerful review and solemn reflection.

I make no apologies for either what I wrote or for what I said. Much of what I spoke were not words of my own device but were those of two revered and holy men of whom the Church holds in the highest regard—Saint Athanasius who in turn cited Saint Paul. Their words were used to contextualize God's holy purpose for the Incarnation: to save the human soul from spiritual death, self-inflicted through man's wickedness. But, as Athanasius asks, "what then was God, being Good, to do?" While, Athanasius was uncompromisingly blunt in his commentary, please note his (and Paul's) condemnation was directed toward man's ever-increasing wickedness, even devising new kinds of sin. Let's be perfectly clear: neither Athanasius nor Paul (nor I) condemn the sinner.

God's love for his children is unconditional; his love for us is not conditioned by the sin. Although God does not, will not, cannot condone the sin, he will always forgive the sinner who acknowledges his brokenness and asks God, in his inestimable mercy, for forgiveness. Such offenses against our God ought

never be too quickly dismissed nor trivialized, and yet, so often we forget our place, whenever convenient, trivializing our true relationship with our heavenly Father as his sons and daughters.

As a lifelong Catholic you must be well-aware of the alarming increase of those who claim no allegiance to or relationship with their Creator God. This is not a new phenomenon, man has desired to be like a god since the beginning. Like a willful child, we much prefer dessert over peas and carrots, pleasure now not tomorrow, our truth not the Truth; too often, I fear, it's our way or no way, seldom is it God's way.

You wrote—quite rightly, I might add—that:

In the readings, Micah's words told us that Christ comes to us all. Paul taught us that Christ supersedes the empty sin offerings of the old law so that we might all be consecrated in Him. We, like John in Elizabeth's womb, are moved by the anticipation of Christ's arrival as Luke described. What readings could more clearly have communicated that the incarnation, an act of love eclipsed only by His death on the cross, comes to each of us as we are?

God's love is perhaps the greatest case of unrequited love one could ever know; having created us out of love, for love, to love and be loved, all he asks is for us to love him in return. But instead of loving him we, his beloved children made in his image and likeness, his highest creation, turn from him, reject him, mock him, deny him; we choose to worship not our ever-

loving, all-loving God but rather those self-made gods most amenable to our will, not God's will.

Yes, God sent the Incarnate Word out of his great Love for us. And yet, why he did so is the question which we are wont to avoid like the plague, never asked or answered. Perhaps, it is because we are unwilling to admit to our own complicity or is it that we dare not look too closely within ourselves? And yes, the readings inspire us with God's great love for each of his beloved children, yet when has he never loved us? Even in the depths of our sinfulness, God loves us. Perhaps, it is in our knowing that nothing we do or say can or will ever cost us his love that we treat it so casually, that we think so little of it, that we offer no love in return.

I suppose, upon some reflection, I might have tempered my remarks, focusing more on the anticipated joy of the Incarnation, of the coming arrival of the Word made flesh. No doubt, that would have pleased a few and discomfited no one; just one more present under the tree, a momentary joy too soon forgotten. And yet, I ask you, what joy can come from mere repetition? What joy can come to those who hear the Word of God but do not follow his commandments? Jesus, on the night before he died told his apostles,

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy might be in

you and your joy might be complete (John 15:9-11).

How then should I inspire such joy, without a mention of what has left us joyless? Ignoring our obligation to keep God's commandments can never make our joy complete.

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, wrote:

It is worthy remembering that "the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his people, a dialogue in which the great deeds of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the covenant are continually restated." The homily has special importance due to its eucharistic context: it surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion. The homily takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people. The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren" [EG 137].

"The homily cannot be a form of entertainment..." [EG 138].

The purpose of the homily is neither to entertain nor to salve the conscience with platitudes and pleasanties, offering mere candy for the soul. Rather than whet the appetite for the exquisite meal to follow, such candy dulls the senses, denies the hunger but never satisfies. That is why no one serves dessert before the meal.

Quite clearly, you found the food I served as distasteful as did I. I posed the question none dared ask nor answer. I dared ask the question though I feared the answer for myself. I am but a sinner as are we all and it hurts to know that I am as much at fault as anyone ever created by our loving God for placing God in such a divine dilemma. The Divine Dilemma is, of course, a mere metaphorical device meant for human consumption, God, being Good, has no need of such a poor concoction.

As for your bitter words I take no offense; what you choose to think of me is your business, none of mine; and yet, you serve a bitter brew difficult to swallow. Had you asked—which you did not—for clarity or understanding, I am confident we both would have found mutual benefit in the sharing of our thoughts. Should you ask to engage in reasoned conversation, I would welcome it. Should you find yourself reluctant, know that I remain willing to listen and to have a conversation whenever and if ever you are of a mind to do so.

In asking "Who am I to judge," Pope Francis rightly recuses himself, for none but the Supreme One may sit in judgment over any person. To this, I swear before Almighty God, I did not judge you, I do not judge you, I have not judged you, nor will I judge you or any other, so help me God. Yet, I stand damned and convicted, not by God but by unreasoned condemnation for words I neither uttered nor considered. You do not know me, you know nothing of me, and yet you judge me.

Of the nearly 1200 words I spoke, only one—"unnatural"—had the strength to pass your hearing. You say I explicitly emphasized the directive to "condemn." You make egregious claims without foundation: "He willfully laid out his distaste for gay men and women everywhere ..." Where sir, is your evidence? Show me where I belittled, alienated, or exhibited any kind of hatred toward you or anyone. No, you will not because you simply cannot.

Words matter; they have the power to destroy or to build up, to deny the truth or grant it full disclosure, to express love or promote hate. For this reason, prudence demands those who preach take great care in the words they choose and the thoughts they express. I dare not entrust my homily to the extemporaneous thoughts that fill my fevered mind, thus, I always put my thoughts to paper, editing and revising, deleting and adding, massaging my homily with the utmost care and with the greatest concern for those who will hear my words. Some homilies are better received than others, some best forgotten, others, I can only hope, long remembered but, never, never carelessly prepared or given.

I say this, not for my own satisfaction, but in the sincere hope you may find it in your heart to end my confusion and my pain. Of what you wrote, you wrote, and I will not deny your right to say what was in your heart. You were hurt, and I cannot and will not deny your pain, and yet, in your pain, you have lashed out, it sorely feels, as if to inflict a mortal wound.

No words could have stabbed my heart as deeply as these:

I fear for the parishioners of St. Albert's given Deacon Lanham's roles in media, communications, spiritual direction, and counseling. His gross misunderstanding of identity and faith formation and responsible counseling was evident in his remarks. He is misaligned with Catholic teachings, is unfit to represent the Church to the media, is unqualified-if not dangerous-as a counselor, and should not be allowed to minister to the families and young people of St. Albert's.

This is judgment, this is condemnation, this is conviction incommensurate with anything I might have—but have not—said. You impugn my character and judge me dangerous and unfit; you judge me, you condemn me, you sentence me. Should there not be cause for my confusion? Who are you to judge? I have shown you no malice, issued no calumnies, no slander or unkind words against you.

I do not know you, I sincerely wish I did, I hope I may one day come to know you better. I will pray that day may soon come.

We are all beloved children of our Creator God. Each loved, unconditionally. We are called to love our God and to love our neighbor as we love our self. Know that I take that commandment seriously for I still strive for heaven. I love each of you. That is the truth, so help me God.

1. *Ignis fatuus*, Latin, literally 'foolish fire', delusion, hallucination, mirage, figment of the imagination.

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

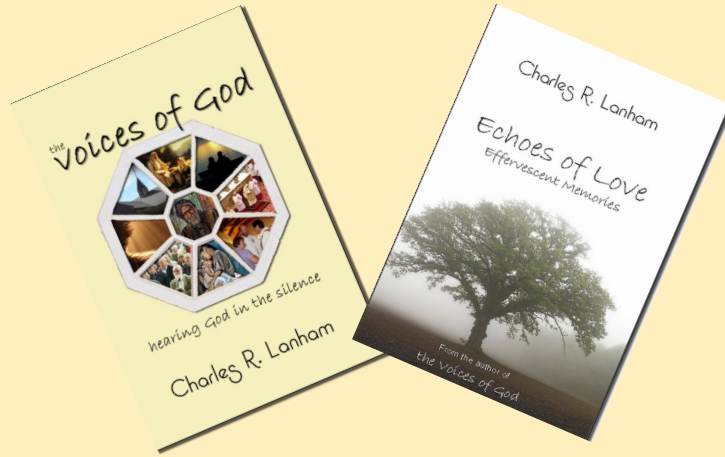
Institute on Religion and Public Life
Editor: R. R. Reno
Ten Issues per year.
www.firstthings.com

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

<http://deaconscorner.org>.

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