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A journal for restless minds

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This Is A Hard Saying

Will you also go away?

Perhaps it is a post-modern peculiarity, this particularly awful habit of disengaging the intellect before engaging the barbed and wicked tongue. How else to explain the titter twitter twaddle so misused by bold brazen cowards trolling the shadows of anonymity on “social media” and the *unnamed sources* incessantly quoted by the propagandizing media. Once, there were disagreements; today, disagreeables. Once, disagreements *were* deplorable; today, disagreeables *are* deplorable. And yet, *once* and *today* are relative, but once removed from *now* and *then*. Our memories are clouded, corrupted by the gray ambiguities and shifting sands of “progress” and the constant necessity for “change” for the mere sake of it; post-modern sages constantly massage the narrative to support their now and future histories. The past is ever filled with unsavory characters, ill-gotten gains, evil inhuman acts and religious nonsense; no need for the modern mind to stir the dust of ancient rhyme.

But is it true? Is there nothing to be learned from the dusty pages of human history? The sages would have you believe not; they know better, so listen to them. Ignore those who would say look behind you for the answers; ignore the Preacher *Qoheleth* who would call them vain (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11), written over 2200 years ago, circa 450-200 BC.

*What has been done is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done;
and there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”?
It has been already, in the ages before us.
There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance of later things
yet to happen among those who come after.*

Obviously, *Qoheleth* was wrong; obviously, there are many “new” things (cars and airplanes, robots and artificial intelligence to name just four) under the sun. Obviously. Ancient history. Nothing new here or there.

But then, around the same time, there lived another man, this one, like another who would come four centuries after, never wrote a book, but, is considered the second most important and influential human being who ever lived, next to Jesus. This man was the Greek philosopher, Socrates. Saint Justin Martyr wrote that “Christ is the Logos of whom all men are partakers, and those who lived according to Reason are Christians even though they have been thought atheists, as, among the Greeks, Socrates.” Saint Thomas Aquinas compared him to Christ: “It was proper for Christ not to write down

his teaching ... which is also the reason why, among the pagans, Pythagoras and Socrates, who were the most excellent teachers, did not want to write anything.” John Stuart Mill called him “the head and prototype of all subsequent teachers of virtue,” and famously said, “It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”

Prayer
When life gets too
hard to stand...kneel.

Socrates is also the only great philosopher who was executed by his society. Like Jesus, he died as a martyr, died for his beliefs, after an unjust trial. It was not just Socrates but philosophy itself that was on trial. And like Jesus, Socrates was tried for impiety when he was in fact the most pious man in his society.

Why was Socrates so offensive to Athens, which was the world’s most enlightened, tolerant, and democratic society in history so far? If we do not understand that, we do not understand Socrates, just as we do not understand Jesus if we do not understand his offensiveness, and why the world’s most religious society thought Jesus to be so evil and threatening to religion that he deserved to be crucified.

How did he offend? Both by his method and by his teaching. His method, the famous “Socratic method,” consists in cross-examining ideas as attorneys cross-examine witnesses. This inevitably showed up the inept

defenders of foolish ideas as fools—a lesson people are not usually very grateful for. Socrates always began by teaching them Lesson One: the lesson of ignorance; that we do not know what we think we know; that there are only two kinds of people: fools, who think they are wise, and the wise, who know they are fools. It is the intellectual equivalent of Jesus' moral lesson that the only two kinds of people are sinners who think they are saints and saints who know they are sinners—another lesson to which most people did not respond with gratitude!

His teaching was minimal, but enough to be threatening: that your identity is in your soul, not your possessions or your body, and that the care for the soul by wisdom and virtue was the only really necessary thing, and only fools neglect it—another lesson not likely to win many friends among the fools.

To establish this, Socrates had to defend the validity, and objective reality, of wisdom and virtue, truth and goodness, against the Sophists' epistemological and moral relativism and subjectivism.¹

Socrates was either unemployed or, following in his father's footsteps, a stonemason. His life was remarkably similar to Jesus in what he *never* did. He never traveled far from home, never founded a school, wrote a book, inspired a war, or took sides in politics. Though famous in his own lifetime, his sole focus was on one thing: "know thyself". Like the Jewish religious leaders—the Pharisees and Scribes, priests and rulers—who condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy, it was the leading segments of Athenian society, the poets, politicians, and craftsman, who impiously neglected the Delphic Oracle's first commandment of religious piety—*Gnothi seauton*, "know thyself"—who condemned Socrates to death for impiety. According to Plato's "Apology" ("Defense"), at his trial Socrates spoke of an incident that transformed his life.

I will call the god in Delphi as witness of my wisdom ... Chairephon, my friend since I was young ... once went to Delphi and dared to ask this question of the oracle ... he asked if anyone was wiser than I was. The priestess answered, then, that no one was wiser. ... Well, when I heard that reply I thought: 'What in the world does the god mean? What in the world is his riddle? For I know in my conscience that I am not wise in anything, great or small; then what in the world does he mean when he says I am wisest? Surely he is not lying? For a god must not lie.' I was puzzled for a long time to understand what he meant; then I thought of a way to try to find

out, something like this: I approached one of those who had the reputation of being wise, for there, I thought, if anywhere, I should test the revelation and prove that the oracle was wrong: "Here is one wiser than I, but you said I was wiser." When I examined him—I need not tell his name, but it was one of our statesmen ... when I conversed with him, I thought this man seemed to be wise both to many others and especially to himself, but that he was not; and then I tried to show him that he thought he was wise but was not. Because of that he disliked me, and so did many others who were there, but I went away thinking to myself that I was wiser than this man; the fact is that neither of us knows anything beautiful and good, but he thinks he does know when he doesn't, and I don't know and don't think I do, so I am wiser than he is by only this trifle, that what I do not know I don't think I do. After that I tried another, one of those reputed to be wiser than that man, and I thought just the same. Then he and many others took a dislike to me. So I went to one after another after that, and saw that I was disliked; and I sorrowed and feared, but still it seemed necessary to hold the god's business of the highest importance, so I had to go on trying to find out what the oracle meant ... the truth really is, gentlemen, that the god in fact is wise, and in this oracle he means that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and it appears that he does not say this of Socrates but just adds my name to take me as an example, as if he were to say that this one of you humans is wisest who like Socrates knows that he is in truth worth nothing as regards wisdom. This is what I still, even now, go about searching and investigating in the god's way. ... I help the god by proving that man is not wise.

And for such "impiety" Socrates was tried, convicted and executed. In 399 BC, Socrates was put on trial and subsequently found guilty of both corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens and of impiety (*asebeia*, "not believing in the gods of the state"), and as a punishment sentenced to death, caused by drinking the poison hemlock. He was the antithesis of the Athenian sages—egotistical, arrogant, self-righteous—just as Jesus was to the Jewish leaders of his day. Both were humble, gentle, ironic, humorous, and patient. Both clashed with the current courses of politics and society in their time and place. Rather than upholding a status quo and accepting the development of what he perceived as immorality within his region, Socrates questioned the collective notion of "might makes right" that he felt was common in Greece during this period. Plato refers to Socrates as the

"gadfly" of the state (as the gadfly stings the horse into action, so Socrates stung various Athenians), insofar as he irritated some people with considerations of justice and the pursuit of goodness.

Parallels go only so far, of course. Despite their differences, the philosophies expressed by Socrates and Jesus hold much in common. Socrates claimed to teach nothing, he was but a clarifying mirror, reflecting what the philosophy of others truly meant. What he taught was what he believed and that was to "know thyself," to seek and to know the nature of humanity, what is the meaning and purpose of human life. To know the self, "you must know its *telos*, its purpose, its end, its *summum bonum* or 'greatest good.'"² Socrates taught that this greatest good is neither wealth, pleasure, power, fame, nor honor but **virtue** (*arête*, "excellence"), which is not just good deeds but good character; personal virtue is the key to ethics. For Socrates, the true self is the soul. He reversed the conventional relationship between body and soul:

instead of the soul being a pale copy of the body, the body was a pale copy of the soul; life's fundamental task was to care for the soul which is immortal. Indeed, if Socrates had heard Jesus ask "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" he would have called it the most practical sentence ever spoken.

The soul *is* the self, therefore, to "know thyself" is an expression of free will; good and evil do not *just* happen, they are chosen; others may harm my body but only I can harm my soul, by ignoring its true goods, which are wisdom and virtue. Socrates believed and taught that ignorance was the cause of evil, that not knowing the self, identifying the self with the body and its needs rather than the soul was the root of evil. Man always seeks the apparent good, but does not always seek the true good; it is wisdom that differentiates between the true good and the apparent good. It is wisdom that is the key to all virtues.

We always seek happiness; if we only were wise enough to know that virtue is the key to happiness, and to let that knowledge rule our lives, we would always seek virtue too. If we don't, we are ignorant. Vice is ignorance—not of facts but of values.³

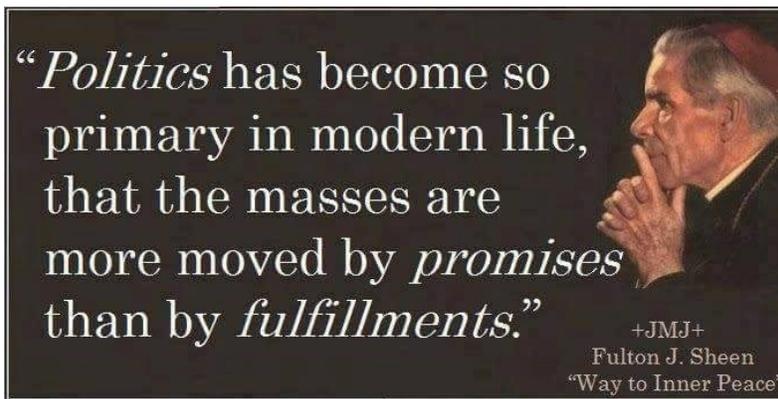
Socrates sought the realities, the real natures and essences of things. Philosophy seeks the truth, the essential natures of such things as justice, soul, teaching, virtue, death, piety, courage, friendship, beauty, love, law, or pleasure; the metaphysics behind Socrates' question "What is that?" Is it any wonder why philosophy holds so little emphasis in academia or to the minds of men? We ask the questions but will not nor cannot wait nor make the effort to seek the answers; we have neither the patience nor the time for such things. Jesus, in response to the question asked of him, "Teacher, which is

the great commandment in the law?" said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and the first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as

yourself" (Matthew 22:36-39). It is of the second that we find Socrates and Jesus of like minds, for in order to love your neighbor as yourself, you must first "know thyself." You can only love yourself if you know yourself; you cannot love a soul so filled with pride, arrogance, deceitfulness, dishonesty, capriciousness or other iniquities that goodness, honesty, humility, graciousness, truth, justice, and other virtues are refused a resting place. We are grown accustomed to the easy, the pleasant, the comfortable; the hard, the unpleasant, the uncomfortable are simply to be avoided at any and all costs.

We have become blind to the prosperity around us! That is what a 26 year-old grad-school student so aptly observed.

I'm sitting in a small coffee shop near Nokomis (Florida) trying to think of what to write about. I scroll through my newsfeed on my phone looking at the latest



Headlines of presidential candidates calling for policies to “fix” the so-called injustices of capitalism. I put my phone down and continue to look around.

I see people talking freely, working on their MacBooks, ordering food they get in an instant, seeing cars go by outside, and it dawned on me. We live in the most privileged time in the most prosperous nation and we’ve become completely blind to it.

Vehicles, food, technology, freedom to associate with whom we choose. These things are so ingrained in our American way of life we don’t give them a second thought.

We are so well off here in the United States that our poverty line begins 31 times above the global average. Thirty One Times!!!

Virtually no one in the United States is considered poor by global standards. Yet, in a time where we can order a product off Amazon with one click and have it at our doorstep the next day, we are unappreciative, unsatisfied, and ungrateful.

Our unappreciation is evident as the popularity of socialist policies among my generation continues to grow. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently said to Newsweek talking about the millennial generation, “An entire generation, which is now becoming one of the largest electorates in America, came of age and never saw American prosperity.”

Never saw American prosperity! Let that sink in.

When I first read that statement, I thought to myself, that was quite literally the most entitled and factually illiterate thing I’ve ever heard in my 26 years on this earth. Many young people agree with her, which is entirely misguided.

My generation is being indoctrinated by a mainstream narrative to actually believe we have never seen prosperity. I know this first hand, I went to college, let’s just say I didn’t have the popular opinion, but I digress.

Why then, with all of the overwhelming evidence around us, evidence that I can even see sitting at a coffee shop, do we not view this as prosperity? We have people who are dying to get into our country.

People around the world destitute and truly impoverished. Yet, we have a young generation convinced they’ve never seen prosperity, and as a result, we elect some politicians who are dead set on taking steps toward abolishing capitalism.

Why? The answer is this,?? My generation has only seen prosperity. We have no contrast. We didn’t live in the great depression, or live through two world wars, the Korean war, the Vietnam war or we didn’t see the

rise and fall of socialism and communism.

We don’t know what it’s like to live without the Internet, without cars, without smartphones. We don’t have a lack of prosperity problem. We have an entitlement problem, and ungratefulness problem, and it’s spreading like a plague.⁴

This young woman writes as if she was the freed prisoner of whom Plato wrote in *The Allegory of the Cave*. Written as a dialogue between Plato’s brother Glaucon and his mentor Socrates, Socrates describes it as a cave where people live chained, facing the wall of a cave all of their lives, watching shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them. The shadows are their reality. Socrates explains how the philosopher is like a prisoner who is freed from the cave and comes to understand that the shadows on the wall are not reality at all, for he can perceive the true form of reality rather than the manufactured reality that is the shadows. The prisoners of this place do not even desire to leave their prison, for they know no better life.

Like those described by Socrates, Ahlgren writes, her generation believes they have never seen prosperity because they have never known anything *but* prosperity. Prosperity is all they have ever known, they “have no contrast.” Likewise, far too many Americans are blind to privilege, to freedom, to living as individuals unencumbered by the chains that bind them to the shadows because privilege, freedom, religion, inalienable rights are all they have ever known; we have no contrast, no direct experience, no understanding of what it means to be anything else.

Jesus said to the Jews, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:51). Many when they heard this said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” and went away no longer believing. Will you also go away? Or will you seek wisdom and understanding?

1. Peter Kreeft, *Socrates’ Children, The 100 Greatest Philosophers: Volume I: Ancient Philosophers*, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press: 2019), pp. 94-97.
2. Peter Kreeft, *Socrates’ Children*, p. 100.
3. Peter Kreeft, *Socrates’ Children*, p. 101.
4. Alyssa Ahlgren, *My Generation is Blind to the Prosperity Around Us!*.

A Catholic Moment

A Ten Commandments Quiz

First question: Name the Ten Commandments in order. This is a trick question; extra credit if you know why. I will give you credit because here is the answer: it depends. I warned you. The trick is in how you enumerate them. The Catholic tradition follows the ordering of St. Augustine (Lutherans do so as well) while other confessions & traditions use slightly different numberings. The primary divisional differences are found in what is contained in the first & tenth commandments. The first commandment in the Catholic tradition combines Exodus 20:2-4:

I am the LORD your God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them....

The tenth commandment in the Catholic tradition combines Exodus 20:17a & 17c:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; ...; or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Exodus 20:17b: "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife;" is made the ninth commandment. Shown above is the *Decalogue* in the Catholic Tradition.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC §2056):

The word "Decalogue" means literally "ten words." God revealed these "ten words" to his people on the holy mountain. They were written "with the finger of God," unlike the other commandments written by Moses. They are pre-eminently the words of God. They are handed on to us in the books of *Exodus* (20:1-17) and *Deuteronomy* (5:6-22).

Just before the people of Israel entered the land promised them by God, Moses, who was forbidden by God to

cross over the Jordan, spoke to the people, telling them what the LORD God had told him to say.

If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish (Deut 30:16-17).

So, just how important does the Catholic Church consider the Ten Commandments?

Since they express man's fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, *grave* obligations. They are fundamentally immutable, and they oblige always and everywhere. No one can dispense from them. The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart (CCC §2072).

Breaking any one is a *grave* (mortal) sin, always and everywhere. "No one can dispense from them." Fair

enough. But then, how do you interpret them? Take the fifth, "Thou shall not kill," what does that mean to you? The Catechism (§2073) states that abusive language is forbidden by the fifth commandment under certain circumstances. Or what of Jesus' saying that "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her" (Mt 5:28). So, what are your thoughts on the second and the third? Each commandment will be covered in upcoming issues.

Final questions: How well have you observed and obeyed God's Commandments? Being honest, how many can you say you have *never* broken? How many of those you have broken have you asked God for forgiveness and mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation?



A Catholic Moment is an ongoing regular feature of Colloqui. The intention is to catechize Catholics on authentic Church teaching, rubrics and ritual. If you have a question, never hesitate to send it to Deacon Chuck.

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

Salvation: What Every Catholic Should Know

Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press

2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press

2018, 269 pages.

The Day Is Now Far Spent

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Ignatius Press

2019, 350 pages.

Socrates' Children, Volume I: Ancient Philosophers

Peter Kreeft

St. Augustine's Press

2019, 169 pages.

G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Volume XXXVI

The Illustrated London News 1932-1934

Ignatius Press

2011, 613 pages.

Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism and the future of the West

R. R. Reno

Regnery Gateway

2019, 182 pages.

The Irony of Modern Catholic History:

How the Church rediscovered itself & challenged the modern world to reform

George Weigel

Basic Books

2019, 322 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

www.catholic.com

Catholic Herald

www.catholicherald.co.uk

Chronicles

www.chroniclesmagazine.org

The National Catholic Register

www.ncregister.com

Our Sunday Visitor

www.osvnews.com

ONLINE

Crisis Magazine

www.crisismagazine.com

The Imaginative Conservative

www.theimaginativeconservative.org

Catholic Exchange

www.catholicexchange.com

Intellectual Takeout

www.intellectuالتakeout.org

Life News

www.lifenews.com

Life Site News

www.lifesitenews.com

OnePeterFive

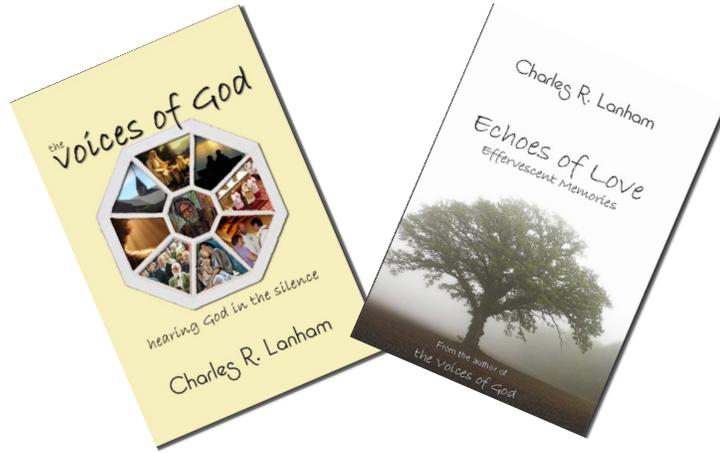
www.onepeterfive.com

Catholic Vote

www.catholicvote.org

PragerU

www.prageru.com



Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) 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 has written over 400 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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“Once the world, like Pilate, gives Christ and Barabbas, *virtue* and vice, *good* and evil an equal hearing, and *allows a vote* to determine which will be chosen, there is no need to count the ballots.

Goodness will invariably be led to a Cross.”

+JMJ+
+Venerable, Fulton J. Sheen, 1948

Colloquī, the present infinitive of *colloquor* (Latin: *to talk, to discuss or to converse*) 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! Essays may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the expressed intent to seek the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, so help us God.

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