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A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Virtue Signaling and Social Disease

A self-poisoning of the mind

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Virtue Signaling and Social Disease

A self-poisoning of the mind

The progressive left and the mostly coastal elite would have you believe they protest a virtue, a cry for social justice in an increasingly unjust world. They cry for diversity, equity, and inclusion against the cruelty of bigotry, prejudice, and hate. It sounds so good to those who subscribe to victimhood much as the forbidden fruit must have been to mankind's original parents, yet as we have long known, there is a price to be paid for falling into temptation and it is never cheap. The civil and cultural unrest which has plagued our cities in recent days is purpose-led, fueled and catalyzed by an invisible enemy as insidious as the coronavirus and far more deadly. As one writer recently penned, "He Hates, Therefore He Is" noting that "A 'self-poisoning of the mind' motivates America's rioters."

A few days ago, rioters in Boston defaced the Robert Shaw Memorial, a masterpiece in high relief wrought by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, whom I consider to be, alongside Frederic Remington, the most distinctly American of our sculptors. I am supposing that the attack on the memorial was no mere act of vandalism, no instance of "rioting mainly for fun and profit," as Edward Banfield called it in *The Unheavenly City*, but a real expression of political hatred. If I am wrong about that, I could turn elsewhere for instances: churches set afire, harmless businesses smashed, men of good will slandered, all in the name of justice.

For most of us, such acts of hatred and senseless destruction may seem incomprehensible. The key to understanding them is a motive that Friedrich Nietzsche first identified in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), and that Max Scheler, refining and correcting Nietzsche's insight, made the subject of a brilliant book: *Ressentiment* (1913).

The French term is necessary because we are not talking about mere resentment. A neighbor who takes advantage of our good nature by letting his dog run loose in your yard is annoying, and the act may stir up pass-

ing resentment. But *ressentiment*, says Scheler, "is a self-poisoning of the mind," a consequence of repressing otherwise natural but negative emotions, leading to "certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions primarily concerned are vengefulness, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite." It goes beyond these evils and creates in the soul an inversion of values, so that the afflicted soul will say that the good it cannot enjoy is actually evil, and that the evil it indulges is good.

It is important to note that the emotions Scheler lists are but stages on the way to *ressentiment*. Take the desire for revenge. If you give me a box on the ear and I give you one right back, we clear the air, and *ressentiment* has no food to feed upon. Soldiers, says Scheler, are least subject to *ressentiment*. Think of Civil War generals Grant and Lee at Appomattox, or William Sherman's gracious and generous treatment of the Confederate soldiers in the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest, causing those two men to become fast friends.

An act of vengeance is not the same as vindictiveness, whereby you seek occasion to attack, for "great touchiness is indeed a symptom of a vengeful character," as you "tend to see injurious intentions in all kinds of perfectly innocent actions and remarks of others." Triggered! Thaddeus Stevens, the club-footed real estate mogul who never could have fought in the Civil War, was vindictive; Sherman was not, and he suffered politically because of it.

Or take envy, the only one of the seven deadly sins that brings not even a phantasm of delight. Here we are on dangerous ground. An emulous actor may cease to feel envy once success comes his way. He does not yet say that it is wrong to recognize excellence; he just wants his own to be recognized. To that end, though, he may indulge

his appetite for detraction, "to disparage and to smash pedestals, to dwell on the negative aspects of excellent men and things."

Likewise, the feminist is glad to believe the slanderous tale that her grandfather beat her grandmother. She is disappointed to learn the truth, that he was a modest and kindly man after all; but no matter, she who seeks for bad men to hate will find plenty. Or she need not find specific men at all, when she can settle upon a vague "patriarchy." The less specific and personal is the object of hatred, the closer we come to *ressentiment*.



These evils in a man sour and ferment into *ressentiment* when his felt inferiority is perceived as inevitable, as a destiny built into the nature of the world or of his society, against which he is impotent. He wants to strike back but he cannot. Or, the woman wants to tower over the man but she cannot. Both want history itself to be otherwise, but it cannot be. Then, says Scheler:

the oppressive sense of inferiority ... cannot lead to active behavior. Yet the painful tension demands relief. This is afforded by the specific value of *ressentiment*. To relieve the tension, the common man seeks a feeling of superiority or equality, and he attains his purpose by an illusory devaluation of the other man's qualities or by a specific 'blindness' to these qualities. But secondly—and here lies the main achievement of *ressentiment*—he falsifies the values themselves which could bestow excellence on any possible objects of comparison.

The fox in the fable who cannot reach the grapes calls them sour. That is detraction. The dog in the fable cannot eat the hay in the manger, so he makes sure the cow will not either. That is spite. But the fox has not gone so far as to prefer sour grapes. The dog has not gone so far as to prefer starvation. The man of *ressentiment* does so far. Examples in our time are easy to find, including those that bear upon the current riots. Young black students who with the encouragement of their peers might succeed in school are sneered at for "acting white." The courtly and earthy friendliness of blacks in the rural south is sneered at, too, as if it were no more than cringing; and thus do those of *ressentiment* reveal their own cowardice, like that of Uriah Heep.¹

Another writer, Walter E. Williams, who undoubtedly has experienced such sneering from the *ressentiment* mob for being a conservative voice and a man who was born with brown skin, commenting on the "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Nonsense" states the obvious, which of course means he is "acting white."

Check out any professional and most college basketball teams. Their starting five, and most of their other 10 players, are black, as is 80 percent of the NBA. This does not come anywhere close to the diversity and inclusion sought by the nation's social justice warriors. Both professional and college coaches have ignored and threw any pretense of seeking diversity and inclusiveness. My question to you is: Would a basketball team be improved if coaches were required to include ethnically diverse players for the sake of equity? I have no idea of what your answer might be but mine would be: "The hell with diversity, equity, and inclusion. I am going to recruit the best players and do not care if most of them turn out to be

black players." Another question: Do you think that any diversity-crazed college president would chastise his basketball coach for lack of diversity and inclusiveness?

Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (National Accelerator Laboratory) is home to the world's most powerful experiments, fastest supercomputers, and top-notch physics researchers. Much of SLAC's research is on particle accelerators that are complicated machines that are designed, engineered, and operated to produce high-quality particle beams and develop clues to the fundamental structure of matter and the forces between subatomic particles. You can bet that their personnel makeup exhibits very little concern about racial diversity, equity, and inclusion. The bulk of their scientists is not only Americans of European and Asian ancestry but mostly men. My question to you is: What would you do to make SLAC more illustrative of the racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity of America? As for me, my answer would be the same one that I gave in the basketball example: I am going to recruit the brightest scientists and I do not care if most of them turn out to be men of European and Asian ancestry.

In the hard sciences, one will find black Americans underrepresented. For example, a 2018 survey of the American Astronomical Society, which includes undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members, and retired astronomers, found that 82 percent of members identified as white and only 2 percent as black or African American. Only 3 percent of bachelor's degrees in physics go to black students. In 2017, some fields, such as structural engineering and atmospheric physics, graduated not a single black Ph.D. The conspicuous absence of black Americans in the sciences have little or nothing to do with racism. It has to do with academic preparation. If one graduates from high school and has not mastered a minimum proficiency in high school algebra, geometry, and precalculus, it is likely that high-paying careers such as engineering, medicine, physics, and computer technology are hermetically sealed off for life.

There are relatively few black fighter jet pilots. There are stringent physical, character, and mental requirements, which many black applicants could meet. But fighter pilots must also have a strong knowledge of air navigation, aircraft operating procedures, flight theory, fluid mechanics, meteorology, and engineering. The college majors that help prepare undergraduates for a career as a fighter pilot include mathematics, physical science, and engineering. But if one graduates from high school without elementary training in math, it is not likely that he will enroll in the college courses that would qualify him for fighter pilot training.

At many predominantly black high schools, not a single black student tests proficient in math and a very low percentage test proficient in reading; however, these

schools confer a diploma that attests that the students can read, write, and compute at a 12th-grade level and these schools often boast that they have a 70 percent and higher graduation rate. They mislead students, their families, and others by conferring fraudulent diplomas.

What explains the fact that over 80 percent of professional basketball players are black, as are about 70 percent of professional football players? Only an idiot would chalk it up to diversity and inclusion. Instead, it is excellence that explains the disproportionate numbers. Jewish Americans, who are just 3 percent of our population, win over 35 percent of the Nobel prizes in science that are awarded to Americans. Again, it is excellence that explains the disproportionality, not diversity and inclusion. As my stepfather often told me, "To do well in this world, you have to come early and stay late."²

S. M. Hutchens opining for *Touchstone* says, "Where the use of Reason makes one a racist—or any of the other things progressives accuse their enemies of being—then a racist one must be. This is a virtually pure example—akin to the assertion that marriage is rape, or that people of color cannot be bigots, or a Marxian utopia asserted in the face of Marxian history—of a phenomenon that marks the inanition of any society that allows absurdity to penetrate." On February 6, 2020, Heather MacDonald reported in the *Wall Street Journal*:

The University of Montana asked students, staff and community members to participate in an essay contest on the legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. When the school released the results last month, Montana students and race activists across the country accused university official of racism and disrespect. That's because all four winners were white. Turns out some would rather the school had honored King by judging entrants on the color of their skin rather than the content of their submissions. ... The four contest winners started receiving threats, and the African-American studies program, which had sponsored the contest, removed their photos and essays from its website. A central fact—no black students had even submitted an essay—failed to defuse the racism charge.

In his highly successful, New York Times best selling book *Live Free or Die*, Sean Hannity says what is notoriously well-known: America's social media companies, specifically the giants Google, Facebook, and Twitter, are owned and run by leftists bent on silencing and de-platforming

any ideological dissent. Hannity writes, "Actually, I find it amusing that leftists deny they discriminate against conservatives on social media while simultaneously defending their right and even their duty to do it—supposedly to protect users from hate and misinformation." Free speech is free as long as you toe the line and spew forth the left's narrative of hate; the left has politicized everything, it is their religion, their constitution, their everything. To that point, it must be made clear the secular project espoused by the left "has itself become a religion, pursued with religious fervor. It is taking on all the trappings of a religion, including inquisitions and excommunication."³ Attorney General William Barr argues that we are witnessing an intentional, deliberate assault on religious liberty in America. "First is the force, fervor and comprehensiveness of the assault on religion we are experiencing today. This is not decay, it is organized destruction. Secularists, and their allies among the 'progressives', have marshaled all the force of mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry, and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values. These instruments are used not only to affirmatively promote secular orthodoxy, but also drown out and silence opposing voices, and to attack viciously and hold up to ridicule any dissenters."

While all this may seem a bit like one of those randomized studies we so often hear about these days in search of a cure for whatever may or may not ail you, I assure you it will eventually come together, nicely wrapped and tied up with a bow or simply stuffed in a brown paper bag. At issue is there are simply far too many issues for the human mind to comprehend, at least rationally, which is why I suppose there are so many relativists in the world today. "All too often, relativists relativize others but not themselves" It is simply easier that way.

They relativize the past but not the present. They pour the acid of their relativism over all sorts of issues but jealously guard their own favorite ones. A recent study of classical education in the universities [Victor Davis Hanson in *Who Killed Homer?*, 1998] points to this attribute when it defines the present-day American academic as "a well-fed, elite, institutionalized thinker of the late twentieth century, who crafts ideas for his peers, with the assurance that the consequences of those solutions should not and will not necessarily apply to himself."⁴

The political and cultural elites are not our friends for they have no friends, never have, never will. Their arrogance precludes communing with baskets of deplorables, their ideology is antithetical to the inestimable value of human life. They sit in their ivory towers on their golden thrones and pontificate from on high, "The truth! You can't handle the truth!" And tragically, we bow before them in obeisant submission; they have become like gods unto themselves. No one questions, no one dares to question for fear of being cancelled. The truth comes down to this: "political and cultural elites have bigger, more revolutionary plans in mind," with an emphasis on "revolutionary," these "cultural revolutionaries seek to fundamentally change the nature of our country" and the world to their benefit. You are either a useful idiot or an impediment to their aims, nothing more, generally far less.

History, real history, informs us of the outcomes of such cultural revolutions; they never result in pleasant utopian dreams, far from it. Yet, we do not have to reach far into the past to encounter their tactics, they surround us as we speak.

First, instead of encouraging peaceful protests, they condone the riots sweeping America's major cities, which have thus far resulted in at least 17 deaths nationwide. In the Twin Cities alone, riots caused \$500 million worth of damage to businesses and homes, disproportionately affecting minority communities. Case in point: in response to an accusation from *Claremont Review of Books* editor, Charles Kesler, that the riots should be called the "The 1619 Riots," *New York Times* editor and creator of the 1619 Project, Nikole Hannah-Jones, tweeted (and later deleted), "It would be an honor. Thank you."

Second, instead of fostering free speech and open debate as we wrestle with some of the toughest political challenges in the past half century, cultural revolutionaries have baptized cancel culture and have begun purging heretics, including many liberals, from their jobs who don't positively affirm every tenet of woke identity politics, now the *de facto* religion of our elite class. According to a July survey from the Cato Institute, 62 percent of Americans "say the political climate these days prevents them from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive" and 32 percent are worried about losing their jobs because of their viewpoints.

The goal of today's cultural revolutionaries, which was succinctly expressed by a speaker at a recent demonstration in Portland, is nothing short of the "Abolition of the United States as we know it." And their method is to use the levers of power at their disposal to sow guilt, suspicion, and fear between citizens. This methodology is now mainstream. In their zeal to erase history, organizations like the Smithsonian Institution have taken things a step further and ventured into dangerous territory by labeling concepts such as "objective thinking," "work before play," "plan for the future," and "delayed gratification," as "aspects and assumptions of whiteness," and therefore suspect.

On the contrary, these values are embodied by Americans of all races, colors, and creeds. This approach of naming and shaming our cultural characteristics is not a recipe for healing racial tensions in America and achieving greater solidarity in our society. Thankfully, the Smithsonian recognized this point and issued an apology. Nevertheless, the promotion of such ideas in the first place indicates that Americans are undergoing a fundamental crisis of culture. In fact, "cancel culture" has its sights set on the very notion of culture itself.

Culture, by definition, implies a distinctive set of beliefs, traditions, and institutions shared among a people group. It often, but not always, includes shared languages or dialects, religious denominations, and political systems. These building blocks are accumulated over centuries and form the basis for society, which Edmund Burke aptly described as a partnership between the dead, living, and unborn.

Today's revolutionaries reject the idea of culture because it implies that one set of ideals is normative for a particular group of people. And normativity, in their minds, means exclusivity, which must be indicative of oppression. This is a tragic way of seeing the world. The problem lies not with normativity—every culture in every nation throughout world history has established norms—but with whether or not the norms established are good, bad, or merely customary. Making this determination, however, poses another challenge, because it demands that we test cultures against some objective standard. This is taboo for two reasons: 1) cultural revolutionaries believe it's racist to make value judgments about other cultures; and 2) they view objectivity as a social construct derived from Western thought

Thankfully, these claims are false and demonstrably so. Take the Antebellum South for example. Were the systems of chattel slavery and institutionalized racism just? Of course not! Yet, how do we arrive at that conclusion? If we are forbidden to make value judgments about other cultures, then we would not be allowed to

criticize slavery in the South. Moreover, if objectivity is merely a social construct, by what standard do we judge slavery to be immoral?

The truth is that we're able to render these judgments because we have inherited a Judeo-Christian tradition that recognizes the inherent dignity of all persons regardless of the color of their skin. Moreover, we're able to render these judgments as Americans because we believe that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with unalienable rights.

Have Christians and Americans always lived up to these ideals? Absolutely not. However—and this is the fundamental difference between true religion and identity politics—there is redemption and reconciliation through repentance. If we have gained privileges unjustly, let us come clean. But if we've been blessed with wealth, health, family, or friendship, let us not feel guilt, but rather a sense of obligation to use those resources on behalf of those less fortunate.

If this country is to have a future, it is our duty to resist the dehumanizing lies peddled by the new "anti-culture warriors" and affirm that the path forward to a more just, more humane, more confident America—an America where we can learn to love our enemies—will be achieved by rediscovering our best traditions, not by canceling the past.⁵

Now, it seems, I have danced around the maypole to the point of becoming completely knotted to it which is of course not at all where I intended to wrap up. I cannot help myself for as I said at the outset—or rather near it, I suppose—my intention was to put varnish on the brush and a fine finish to this essay; sadly I seem to have forgotten where I last laid the brush ... and the varnish altogether. It may well be I have arrived at a conclusion but if so, I have no concluding thought to dangle. It is, I suppose, much as my departed friend once said, "At the present time, those who are called advanced thinkers are no longer advancing in formation. It might perhaps be darkly suggested that they are not advancing at all, but are by this time actually retreating."⁶ That is precisely the circumstance I apparently have wrapped myself, at least by all appearances. So, I will leave this muddled mess with a thought from a priestly sage—assuredly as sensical as the rest—that "if you know what you are saying and believe it to be true, make it clear ... to everyone." Oh, dear.

Descent into jargon to give the impression that obscurity is profundity is a temptation indulged not only by ecclesiastics, for it luxuriates in the ivied halls of aca-

demia and the labyrinthine corridors of government. But it parades with colorful panache in the Church, and it can bewitch even in English translation. If you make a list of jargonish adjectives and another of jargonish nouns, you are on your way to writing your own neoplastic academic speech, papal audience address, Apostolic Exhortation, or even your own Encyclical. Look through the ever-lengthening volumes of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and other pontifical sources, and you can find inventive adjectives like "integrally ecological," "planetary," "dialectical," "epochal," "nuanced," "ontological," "clericalist," "osteoporotic," "neo-Pelagian," "leprous," "sloth-diseased," "schizophrenic," "paradigmatic," "issue-oriented," "cosmetic," and "pickle pepper-faced." Then in the column of nouns you can list, for starters: "field hospital," "coprophagist," "nominalist," "soap bubble," "rigidity," "peripheries," "paradigm," "dicastery," and "ecological debt."

By switching back and forth, or by occult inspiration, you can construct prophetic sounding platitudes such as: "integrally ecological field hospitals," "planetary coprophagists," "dialectical nominalists," "epochal soap bubbles," "nuanced rigidities," "ontological peripheries," "clericalist paradigms," and "pickle pepper-faced ecological debts." Then you can start crisscrossing: "issue-oriented coprophagists," "paradigmatic consequentialists," "sloth-diseased nominalists," and so forth. You can even describe "planetary field hospitals," "osteoporotic nominalists," "epochal peripheries," and "schizophrenic clericalists." It's fun, and might have been the sort of pastime the late imperial senators in moth-eaten togas engaged in while the Ostrogoths menaced the crumbling Roman walls in the sixth century. Mathematically there are hundreds and indeed thousands of possibilities, and enough verbiage to keep paradigmatic dicasteries busy forever, *per se[m]pre*. Or, to be more precise, *Jargon wird niemals kaputt sein*.⁷

1. Anthony Esolen, *Ressentiment: He Hates, Therefore He Is: A 'self-poisoning of the mind' motivates American rioters*, *Chronicles Magazine*, September 2020, 36-37.
2. Walter E. Williams, Ph.D., "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Nonsense", *Commentary: The Epoch Times*, September 2, 2020.
3. Attorney General William Barr, "Remarks to the Law School and the DeNicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame," *Justice.org*, October 22, 2019.
4. Os Guinness, *Time for Truth* (2000).
5. "Anti-Culture Warriors", *The American Conservative*, Vol. 19, Nol. 5, September/October 2020, 5-6.
6. G. K. Chesterton, "Lawrence and Other Moderns, March 16, 1935", *Collected Works Volume XXXVII: The Illustrated London News 1935-1936*, 51.
7. Fr. George W. Rutler, "How to Write Your Own Encyclical", *Crisis Magazine*, September 23, 2019.

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.

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

George Weigel

Basic Books

2019, 322 pages.

Letters on Liturgy

Father Dwight Longenecker

Angelico Press

2020, 164 pages.

Immortal Combat

Father Dwight Longenecker

Sophia Institute Press

2020, 144 pages.

PERIODICALS

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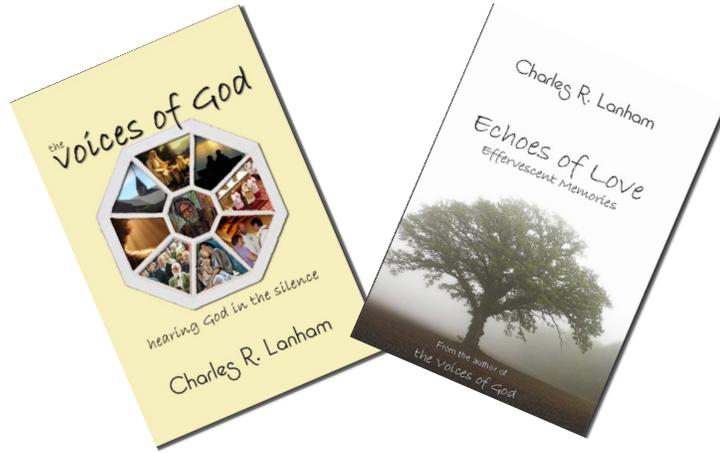
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Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

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 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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Yes, Jesus hung out with prostitutes and drunkards and outcasts.

Here's the thing, though - by the time Jesus was finished with these people, they weren't prostitutes or drunkards or outcasts anymore.

Jesus came to transform people, not indulge them. Christianity is about surrender, not comfort. We are to align ourselves to his standard, not the other way around.

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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