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A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Morbid Moral Obesity

A fall from grace, a forbearance of gratitude

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Morbid Moral Obesity

A fall from grace, a forbearance of gratitude

Truth has an uncompromising arrogance that abhors dishonesty. Truth is a minority, knowing the severest poverty, for every truth resides among an infinitude of untruth in masquerade. Should a besotted alcoholic suggest sobriety an easy choice, no sober-minded observer would find such a tipsy confession to be honest gospel, and yet, no doubt, more than a few these days would demur from saying so aloud lest such disagreement be adjudged in some odd way, offensive. Thus, it seems, no one dares speak the truth to avoid offending tenderized *bœuf bourguignon*. Like an alcoholic, we have become a people who imbibe, imbibe, imbibe, never exhausting the desire for more, never thinking we should owe a thing for our insatiable imbibery. We overindulge on junk soul food, occupy our thoughts with trivial pursuits and slake our thirst with wine spiked with myrrh¹ to dull the imagined pain of meaningless existence, and, in the process, grow morally and intellectually fat, flabby, and stupid. Douglas Murray² calls it “moral obesity,” I must go further, for to this poor mind it is far, far worse, it is nothing less than *morbid* moral obesity, and it is destroying the dwindling remains of our humanity. Morbid moral obesity manifests in the absence of gratitude; none are grateful for what they have, bemoan what they have not, demand what others have, all in the name of equity and justice. What should be obvious, but self-evident it is not, is this: we have but two choices, two options in life: one, to bear witness to truth, the other, to increasingly despise oneself. Evidence weighs heavy on the second. That we are become fat, flabby, and stupid, morally speaking, is further evidenced by the numbers.

A recent Gallup poll indicates that, for the first time in living memory, fewer than half of Americans (47 percent) consider themselves members of a church. For most of the 20th century, the rate hovered around 70 percent. That number has been declining since at least the late 1990s, but the decline appears to be accelerating.

Membership in a church, it should be said, doesn't necessarily reflect belief or religious affiliation. The question Gallup asked in its poll was, “Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque?” A fallen-away Catholic and a Catholic in search of a parish in a new city might both plausibly answer in the negative. While a minority of Americans claim “membership” in some church, according to Gallup, 76 percent still claim some religious “affiliation.”

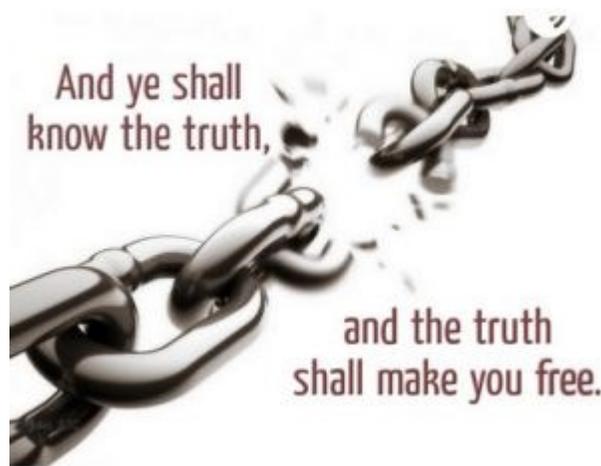
Particularly concerning for Catholics is that, even among those whose “affiliation” is Catholic, the rate of “membership” has fallen almost 20 percent since 1998. That's twice the rate of decline seen among Protestants.³

According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, “before COVID-19 made its devastating presence felt, 21.1% of American Catholics attended Mass every week. That was nothing to brag about, compared with 4.9% in 1970, but it looks positively hearty next to the 12% or so projected for the post-COVID era.”

Using data from dioceses, Villanova University's Center for Church Management, the source of that projection, had previously seen Mass attendance dropping to that level in 2030. But the pandemic speeded things up. “It's not going to be 2030. It could be 2022 (or 2023,” center director Matthew F. Manion told Catholic News Service.

What's happening is no mystery. As churches closed and bishops suspended the Sunday Mass obligation during the pandemic—measures initially required by state and local officials responding to a genuine public health crisis—people in the habit of attending Mass weekly acquired the new habit of staying home instead.

If they wanted to see a Mass, there was always one no farther away than the TV set or the computer screen. And even when Mass in church became possible again, many were perfectly content with the new option of non-attendance that the pandemic had opened up for them. To be sure, over time some may eventually decide to resume coming to church, at least now and then. But it's a safe bet many won't.



The sharp decline in financial support for the Church that has already occurred will continue. That will mean cutting back or eliminating many programs and services previously offered in areas like education and charities.

The consolidating or closing parishes already taking place in a number of dioceses will continue and accelerate. In many parishes that survive, the sense of community will be further weakened.

Worst of all, what is happening can't help but diminish if not totally end sacramental participation by many Catholics, with all the negatives that implies for their spiritual health.⁴

Though church attendance and participation are in steep decline, the modern and even more specific, the post-modern mind, despite what the polls might suggest, "remains greatly concerned with religion, and yet its concern is coldly theoretical, admitting of no practical sensibility of the relationship between God and man. The result is an emptying of all theological content from religion, reducing it to mere humanism."⁵ *Religion Without God* (1928) was Fulton Sheen's continuation of *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy* (1925), which taken together comprise a complete philosophy of religion. As he would become familiar to millions with his radio and television shows "*Life is Worth Living*," his ability to answer clearly often difficult theological questions to anyone and everyone remains second to none. In the preface to *Religion Without God*, he writes, "Present day religion is not in evolution, but in revolution. Evolution implies growth from a germ, revolution a rupture with a principle; evolution has antecedents, revolution knows not its parentage. When we say that there is revolution in religion, we mean not merely a break with the past, but an abandonment as well of much that is best in the culture and heritage of tradition."

Until a generation ago religion was generally understood in terms of man's attitude toward a Supreme and Perfect Being; today, it is understood in terms of man's friendliness to the universe or as "faith in the conservation of human values." The term "God" is still retained by some thinkers, but it is emptied of all content and dissolved to fit every volatile idea and fleeting fancy. God has been dethroned, the heavens emptied, and man has been exalted to His place in fulfillment of an evil prophecy that some day he would be like unto God. Problems which once centered about God now revolve about man, and those which were concerned

with man are now fused with the universe. Theism is reduced to humanism and psychology to cosmology, for there is no longer a distinction made between man and matter. God is humanized and man is naturalized. The science of physics and not the "flower in the cranied wall"⁶ has come to tell us what God and man are.

No longer do men look to the past as to their Golden Age; no longer do they have a memory of a Garden wherein man walked with God in the cool breezes of evening. The Golden Age is now placed in the future, but not one wherein man re-finds at the foot of a Tree the gifts he once lost there, thanks to a God-Man unfurled on it like a banner of salvation, but rather a future in which, due to a cosmic evolutionary urge, man not only makes but becomes God. Man in the supernatural state, it is said, needs no Redeemer as in the natural state he needs no God. As a result of this philosophy of self-sufficiency we have the strange modern phenomenon of a religion without God and a Christianity without Christ.

In these new terms religion remains the great concern of the modern mind. Never before has an irreligious world taken so much interest in religion. It is the one subject anyone may talk about, though scientists alone may speak of science and geographers alone of geography. The press is teeming with it and university professors are lecturing about it even when they lecture against it. But while it is true that there has never before been so much *talking* about religion, it is equally true that never before has there been so little *walking* in it. Religion today is only doctrinal, not practical—a concern of the Pure but not the Practical Reason. Its purpose seems to be to offer a consoling salve to erring consciences. Men first live and a doctrine is made to fit their living; bad thinking is flatteringly adjusted to bad living and thus phoenix-like a religion rises out of the ashes of irreligion.

Because of this new and revolutionary change in religion, the exponents of the traditional concept have lost the ear of the changing world. The terms "God" and "Religion" are still used, but they mean different things. It is easier for a Frenchman to understand an Englishman, than for a believer in a Perfect God to understand the God of Professor Alexander, "who in the strictest sense of the term is not a Creator but a creature." The two schools are talking a different language and revolving about different poles of thought: the older school is proceeding from God to religion while the new proceeds from religion to God.⁷

Candidly, bearing witness to the Truth, the Venerable Archbishop nailed modern man's irreligious sentiment to the temple walls; tragically, no one see where their eyes

never rest. "For my people are foolish, they know me not; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good they know not" (Jeremiah 4:22). "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not" (Jeremiah 5:21). Though fools⁸ have eyes and can see what is physically in front of them, they are incapable of seeing wisdom, knowledge or truth. In "Polite Conversation," Jonathan Swift paraphrased Jeremiah, "There are none so blind⁹ as those who will not see" which, by every indication, incorporates the preponderance of modern humankind. Likewise, the eyes do not see what the mind does not know, or stated another way, you are never going to find that which you do not seek.¹⁰

My good and dear friend, Mr. G.K. Chesterton, once wrote a book—actually, he wrote a great many books, as well as poetry, plays, and volumes of essays on a great many subjects, but that is neither here nor there, nor is it here particularly germane—on the history of man. As was his custom, he took the most uncustomary approach of pointing out how histories and the historians who write them are often so magnificently misguided. He began by pointing out what should be obvious to the most ordinary fellow, that pre-history is nowise history but the mere fancy of writers who fancy themselves historians. What he began with was the man in the cave, the pre-historic "cave-man." But first, he commented on an incident which he recalled concerning man's relationship with God.

One of my first journalistic adventures, or misadventures, concerned a comment on Grant Allen, who had written a book about the Evolution of the Idea of God. I happened to remark that it would be much more interesting if God wrote a book about the evolution of the idea of Grant Allen. And I remember that the editor objected to my remark on the ground that it was blasphemous; which naturally amused me not a little. For the joke of it was, of course, that it never occurred to him to notice the title of the book itself, which really was blasphemous; for it was, when translated into English, "I will show you how this nonsensical notion that there is a God grew up among men." My remark was strictly pious and proper; confessing the divine purpose even in its most seemingly dark or meaningless manifestations. In that hour I learned many things, including the fact that there is something purely acoustic in much of that agnostic sort of reverence.

I was struck by this confession; for myself, it was a genuine moment of personal serendipitous revelation at the genius of Chesterton's turn of the phrase, "that agnostic sort of reverence," for it describes a near perfect metaphor for a great many Christians these days. Unhappily, those who style themselves to be religious, too often reside lightyears away from the One True God in whom they, with a piety that strains credulity, profess to believe, worship, and adore. For those who bother to profess any faith at all, the question that must be asked, "faith in whom?" For those who claim to be members of the Body of Christ, the holy Catholic Church, how many can honestly, truthfully, and without equivocation declare: "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."¹¹ The key word, of course, is "ALL." Honesty would reveal most, who would, without hesitation, say "Yes, but ..." or "Yes, except ..." Sorry, there are no ifs, buts, or exceptions, neither common nor solemn, neither implied nor constructed from those three letters: A-L-L.

By way of clarification, a friend, objecting to the Church's stand against contraception, once declared that Jesus never said contraception was morally wrong in the eyes of God. Which is quite true, of course. Jesus, the man, so far as history has recorded, never mentioned "contraception" in Scripture. Though there are a great many things that Jesus never mentioned; his unmention does not, in any way, lend tacit or implied credence to Divine approval; God never equivocates, right is right, wrong is wrong, there is no splitting the infant down the middle. "Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," (Philippians 2:5-6) but being God, the Word Incarnate, he had declared it wrong, so morally wrong, death was the Lord's swift justice: "But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went into his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him also" (Genesis 38:9-10).

Another argument commonly raised in support of contraception or "birth control" is more specious: the proposition that pregnancy may be somehow inconvenient, whether too young, too poor, too busy, or now is

just not the right time. Strangely, should one stop to think this through, this argument, meant to bolster the beneficial need for contraception, obviates the contra argument. God created male and female and instructed them to be “fruitful and multiply.” For that to be possible, God created them with complementary bodies, bodies designed for union and procreation, to bring new life into the world. While it is true the conjugal act is pleasurable—God intended for it to be so—never was the pleasure of intercourse intended to be its sole end; God never intended pleasure to be the end justifying the means (coitus), rather pleasure was but a byproduct, a reward and further enticement to procreate. The use of any form of contraception eliminates the divine purpose, it cheapens the act, turning coitus into nothing more than mutual masturbation; it destroys the procreative relationship between two persons, and removes the need for mutual self-giving, life-sustaining love for another. The proof is easy to see. Casual coitus (mutual masturbation) is now considered normative, pleasure is its sole purpose, its singular reward, and gender complementarity non-essential; it is even seen as an element in deciding whether a person is “good” enough to date. If one is too young, too poor, too busy, or finds it merely too inconvenient to procreate, there is a moral and God-approved solution: “Just don’t do it.” How easy it is to slide the slippery slope, to excuse the risible, to convince the mind a sin less a sin unless you deem it so. Morbid moral obesity “creeps in this pace from day to day ...”¹²

While I began with no intention of focusing on the prurient absurdities of the modern mind with so keen a blade, it is perhaps an apt demonstration of how far, once again, we have sunk into the muck and mire. Some three years ago I offered what would be a seminal homily in many ways. In it I referred to a passage from a small book written by Saint Athanasius, a treatise entitled *On the Incarnation* which expands with clarity 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. I said then, “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.” From

the second chapter, “*The Divine Dilemma and its Solution in the Incarnation.*” Athanasius asked, since man had become so corrupted, “what then was God, being Good, to do?” Athanasius was uncompromisingly blunt in his harsh commentary, arguing that man’s wickedness and corruption placed God in a 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 continued to further examine the Divine Dilemma which man had, through his insatiable appetite for sin and corruption, set before his Creator, and then went on to suggest 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.

One must ask, with all sincerity, whether modern man has not once again placed God within a Divine Dilemma, and if so, what now ought to be his solution? In his inimical style, Chesterton goes roundabout, offering further explication, returning to the beginning and how man has rather consistently, nonsensically imagined creation without a Creator, which of course, inevitably leads to flawed design and self-mutilation—otherwise known as self-creation, which as anyone but a fool must readily admit is pure poppycock and balderdash.

But this little incident has always lingered in my mind as a sort of parable. Most modern histories of mankind begin with the word evolution, and with a rather wordy exposition of evolution, for much the same reason that operated in this case. There is something slow and soothing and gradual about the word and even about the idea. As a matter of fact, it is not, touching these primary things, a very practical word or a very profitable idea. Nobody can imagine how nothing could turn into something. Nobody can get an inch nearer to it by explaining how something could turn into something else. It is really far more logical to start by saying 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth' even if you only mean 'In the beginning some unthinkable power began some unthinkable process.' For God is by its nature a name of mystery, and nobody ever supposed that man could imagine how a world was created any more than he could create one. But evolution really is mistaken for explanation. It has the fatal quality of leaving on many minds the impression that they do understand it and everything else; just as many of them live under a sort of illusion that they have read the *Origin of the Species*.¹³

History is, one must trust, based upon a foundation of fact and evidence. Chesterton points out that the *Origin of the Species*, is not history, far from it. It is but speculation and imaginative conjecture, a mishmash of hypotheses

conjured up from the thinnest of air with neither a shred of empirical nor physical evidence toward its defense. To add insult to injury, such a theory has never nor can it ever be proved or reproduced by any sound empirical scientific experiment. When it comes to the caveman, Chesterton finds it immensely curious "that while ten thousand tongues of more or less scientific or literary gossip seemed to be talking at once about this unfortunate fellow, under the title of the cave-man, the one connection in which it is really relevant and sensible to talk about him as a cave-man has been comparatively neglected. People have used this loose term in twenty loose ways; but they have never even looked at their own term for what could really be learned from it."

In fact, people have been interested in everything about the cave-man except what he did in the cave. Now there does happen to be some real evidence of what he did in the cave. It is little enough, like all the prehistoric evidence, but it is concerned with the real cave-man and his cave and not the literary cave-man and his club. And it will be valuable to our sense of reality to consider quite simply what that real evidence is, and not to go beyond it. What was found in the cave was not the club, the horrible gory club notched with the number of women it had knocked on the head. The cave was not a Bluebeard's Chamber filled with the skeletons of slaughtered wives; it was not filled with female skulls all arranged in rows and all cracked like eggs. ... The old epic poets at least knew how to tell a story, possibly a tall story but never a twisted story tortured out of its own shape to fit theories and philosophies invented centuries afterwards. It would be well if modern investigators could describe their discoveries in the bald narrative style of the earliest travellers, and without any of these long allusive words that are full of irrelevant implication and suggestion. Then we might realise exactly what we do know about the cave-man, or at any rate about the cave.¹⁴

What was there about the cave? When modern man first entered the pre-historic cave, the "secret chamber of rock, when illuminated after its long night of unnumbered ages, revealed on its walls large and sprawling outlines diversified with coloured earths; and when they followed the lines of them they recognized, across that vast and void of ages, the movement and the gesture of a man's hand. They were drawings or paintings of animals; and they were drawn or painted not only by a man but by an artist."

Now it is needless to note, except in passing, that there is nothing whatever in the atmosphere of that cave to suggest the bleak and pessimistic atmosphere of that journalistic cave of the winds, that blows and bellows about us with countless echoes concerning the cave-man. So far as any human character can be hinted at by such traces of the past, that human character is quite human and even humane. It is certainly not the ideal of an inhuman character, like the abstraction invoked in popular science. When novelists and educationalists and psychologists of all sorts talk about the cave-man, they never conceive him in connection with anything that is really in the cave. ... The whole of the current way of talking is simply a confusion and a misunderstanding, founded on no sort of scientific evidence and valued only as an excuse for a very modern mood of anarchy. If any gentleman wants to knock a woman about, he can surely be a cad without taking away the character of the cave-man, about whom we know next to nothing except what we can gather from a few harmless and pleasing pictures on a wall.¹⁵

But the truth is that the curtain rises upon the play already in progress. In one sense it is a true paradox that there was history before history. But it is not the irrational paradox implied in pre-history history; for it is a history we do not know. Very probably it was exceedingly like the history we do know, except in the one detail that we do not know it. It is thus the very opposite of the pretentious prehistoric history, which professes to trace everything in a consistent course from the amoeba to the anthropoid and from the anthropoid to the agnostic¹⁶

It is within our nature to want to do good and avoid evil, but we are fallible, we are imperfect creatures, we are concupiscent beings, we are neither God nor Divine; being human also means it is peculiarly difficult to admit our imperfections, even, and specially, to ourselves. Confession may be good for the soul but that neither makes it easy nor pleasant to attempt. Some—most, if we are most candid and honest about it—cannot, will not, or simply are incapable of acknowledging that our thoughts and ideas are the leastwise misguided or in error. How conveniently we ignore the admonition once asked two millennia ago. “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:1-5). Of course, the log or, as is

more common, logs, firmly implanted in our own eyes have blinded ourselves from noticing the speck in another’s eye or anything but the self, too often we see only a reflection as if in a mirror darkly; thus it is disingenuous and surreal that the self-made blind so adamantly insist they are victims, their vision turned sightless at their own hands.

What is true of the race of men, whether disposed to admit of it or not, is their fallibility.

There is unfortunately one fallacy here into which it is very easy for men to fall, even those who are most intelligent and perhaps especially those who are most imaginative. It is the fallacy of supposing that because an idea is greater in the sense of larger, therefore it is greater in the sense of more fundamental and fixed and certain.

Thus history, especially prehistoric history, has a horrible habit of beginning with certain generalisations about races. I will not describe the disorder and misery this inversion has produced in modern politics. Because the race is vaguely supposed to have produced the nation, men talk as if the nation were something vaguer than the race. Because they have themselves invented a reason to explain a result, they almost deny the result in order to justify the reason.¹⁷

Chesterton, with concern for the broad disagreements that existed among the social and cultural “experts”, noted that the learned European ethnologists had “pretty well boxed the compass” by that time and “that I, who am not one of the learned, cannot pretend for a moment to decide where such doctors disagree. But I can use my own common sense, and I sometimes fancy that theirs is a little rusty from want of use. The first act of commonsense is to recognize the difference between a cloud and a mountain.”¹⁸

There once was a woman of a rather inconvenient religious habit—they used to call them nuns, though some, it seems, would be better served as “nones”—who had gotten herself ordained a Protestant priestess while teaching theology at a major Catholic University. As unlikely a tall tale as this may first appear, it is absolutely true; its retelling here meant to prove how foolishness is not a disease solely afflicting the misinformed. When informed that her services and her rather shameful habit were no longer appreciated, this silly none, as is well expected

these days, fled to court in sullen anguish to prevent herself from being so summarily shown the exterior of the locked cathedral door. Fortunately, though extremely uncommon, and as rare as hen's teeth, her case was dismissed and this foolish priestess, now denied the convenience of religious habit, found on her backside the imprint of a rather prodigious Catholic scandal. Why such a chuckleheaded fool could not recognize the foolhardiness of her actions is beyond belief, but sadly, she is not alone. Far from it. This is perhaps a more egregious example; it would seem no one is immune from mortal moral obesity, if not in kind, most certainly by degree. Anyone can play the moral fool, what is necessary is to change the habit of the mind before foolish habits turn fat, flabby, and stupid.

It is this overindulgence on self-reflection and gorging on self-gratulation which have turned humanity fat, flabby and stupid when it comes to their religious habits. Christ instituted his Church and commissioned his apostles to go into the world and spread the good news, to teach all nations all that he had commanded them. Once the world listened and believed. Once. Modern man has forgotten or simply ignores what God commands; God is too much the bother to bother. And yet, one must ask is it that man has forgotten or that the Church, divinely instituted by Christ, has failed to catechize, failed in its duty and responsibility to teach all that God commanded. Without the existence of an institutional structure divinely instituted by Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, there can be no coherent expression of faith, nothing designed to uphold the fullness and integrity of that faith. As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote "Intrinsic to the basic structure of the act of faith is incorporation into the Church, the common *situs* of that which binds together and that which is bound." He reminds us, referencing Romans 6:17, that "this act of faith is defined as the process by which an individual submits himself to one particular creed and, in doing so, performs an act of obedience that comes from the heart, that is, from the center of his whole being."¹⁹

"Guard the noble deposit," exhorts the Apostle Paul to Timothy, his young colleague and friend, in what was perhaps his final epistle. And why should he do that? Because, very simply, it is *the* mission entrusted to the Church by our Blessed Lord. It is not anything we have discovered on our own, pursuant to this or that swash-

buckling endeavor. Rather, it is something that we have been given, a pearl beyond price, and thus a thing we should be loath to lose. As the inimitable Belloc once put it: "The moral is, it is indeed, thou shalt not monkey with the creed!"

Faith is not philosophy, in other words. It is not something on which we reflect, but rather *Someone* we receive, and upon whom we are blessedly free to repose the whole weight of our understanding and trust. "It is not a matter of learning and cleverness," Hans Urs von Balthasar advises, "but the courage to put oneself at risk."

As did Pope St. John Paul II, by the way, when asked why he would not allow the ordination of women. "I am not authorized to do so," he said in effect. Not, heaven knows, because he despised women, or felt they were somehow inferior to men, whose bastions of medieval privilege he was determined to preserve. But because he and the Church, whose teachings it is the job of popes and bishops always and everywhere to defend, must remain on the side of Christ.

Christ willed these structures in the first instance, and thus they are irreformable. Just as you or I may not blithely set aside the whole constitution of being, the order of creation itself, in order to sanction same-sex marriage or, to cite the current grotesquerie, the castration of boys so that they may compete against girls on athletic fields.

Or, come to think of it, certain rogue bishops in Germany, who have lately become infatuated with the idea of Church blessings for homosexual unions. They appear to be in a great hurry to enact sweeping changes in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in order to accommodate what used to be called sodomy. The bishop of Mainz, for example; one of several spearheading the effort. His fixation on the subject has driven him to the extremity of whitewashing practices that, until the day before yesterday, were classified as mortal sins. "As to the demand for chastity," he asks "what does it mean from the perspective of people who experience same-sex attraction? I think that few of them would consider this demand as tactful and respectful because," as he patronizingly continues, "this inclination is not self-selected."

Is he kidding? What has "self-selection" got to do with it? Has he never heard of *concupiscence*? Or ever experienced the least tug of appetite for pleasures which, in the light of reason and with an aim toward greater self-mastery, demand that he say no to? Or is it only heterosexual temptation that needs to be resisted? Why should only married couples feel the need to exercise chastity when enticement comes around? Is moral heroism a vocation only for "straight" people to pursue?

How insulting it is to exempt whole categories of human beings from having to travel the high road of holiness and sexual purity!

If great big bishops will not guard the noble deposit, then it may be time to depose them.²⁰

The silence of the Church in the face of evil is deafening. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Silence in the face of evil, is evil itself. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Too many good bishops need to be reminded of this, often and repeatedly. It is long past time to speak and to act. As I was recently reminded, and we all should remember at the Passion of the Christ, the twelve proved themselves to be cowards, running away and denying their Lord and Master. They left Jesus out of fear, one betrayed him. But, experiencing the Resurrection, all but the betrayer came to believe, and all, despite unimaginable suffering and gruesome death, refused to deny the Resurrection and the divinity of Christ Jesus. They, in the end did as Jesus commanded, and baptized all the nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is time once again for their chosen successors to follow in their footsteps, even unto imprisonment and death, teaching what Christ commanded all to believe. "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Only then will the flock return to the fold. Only when the Church confronts the morbid moral obesity of its shepherds *and* their flocks and returns to a strict moral diet and righteous spiritual exercises centered on God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will the faith of the Church rebound. May God have mercy on us all.

1. The Romans often added the oleo-gum-resin of **myrrh** to **wine** to prevent it from vinegarizing (turning sour), which also provided a narcotic to deaden pain. **Wine** laced with **myrrh** helped Roman soldiers endure the discomforts of military life such as cold, damp nights on the ground. Such **wine** was also drunk by shepherds sleeping in the fields.
2. Douglas Murray is an author and journalist based in Britain. He is the author of "*The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*" (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2017) and "*The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*" (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020).
3. Stephen P. White, "*Not a Loaf, but Leaven*", The Catholic Thing, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org>, April 1, 2021.

4. Russell Shaw, "*The Future Is Here For U.S. Catholics*", Catholic News Agency, March 25, 2021.
5. Fulton J. Sheen, "*Religion Without God*" (New York: Preservation Books, 2019; orig. publ. Longmans, Green and Co., 1928). From the back cover.

6. "*Flower in the Crannied Wall*" is a short, six-line poem written by Lord Alfred Tennyson in 1869. The poem is thought to contemplate how little man understands the meaning of both his and God's existence, and whether true unity exists between nature and the divine. The main topic of the poem is discovering who God and man are in relation to one another.

*Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.*

7. Fulton J. Sheen, "*Religion Without God*", i-ii.
8. Fools come in every color of the rainbow, there are "educated" fools, as many, if not more, as there are "uneducated" ones, intellect is no barrier to behaving foolishly. Some of the most intelligent, well-educated, highly respected individuals possess no commonsense or wisdom or knowledge. Yet, they seldom hesitate to pontificate on anything and everything outside their own circumscribed expertise or experience.
9. The etymology (origins) of "blind" is derived from the Proto-Germanic "blindaz" which did not mean unable to see but rather a state of confusion, being confused. This also may be what was meant in Jeremiah.
10. This should be common sense, after all, Jesus said as much, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8).
11. The Profession of Faith, made by candidates upon being received into full communion with the Body of Christ. Tragically, few cradle Catholics are aware of this profession, thus the proliferation of Catholics In Name Only (CINOs) and Cafeteria Catholics.
12. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*. The soliloquy is spoken by Macbeth in Act V, Scene V as Malcolm and Macduff approach Macbeth's castle to besiege it, upon learning of Lady Macbeth's death:

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

13. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007; orig. pub. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 18-19.
14. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, 22-23.
15. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, 24.
16. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, 55.
17. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, 68.
18. G.K. Chesterton, *"The Everlasting Man"*, 70.
19. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *"Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology"* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987).
20. Regis Martin, "Does the Church No Longer Defend the Deposit of Faith?", *Crisis Magazine*, March 29, 2021. Regis Martin is Professor of Theology and Faculty Associate with the Veritas Center for Ethics in Public Life at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. He earned a licentiate and a doctorate in sacred theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. Martin is the author of a number of books, including *Still Point: Loss, Longing, and Our Search for God* (2012) and *The Beggar's Banquet* (Emmaus Road). His most recent book, also published by Emmaus Road, is called *Witness to Wonder: The World of Catholic Sacrament*. He resides in Steubenville, Ohio, with his wife and ten children.

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

Things Worth Dying For

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Company

2021, 258 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press

2018, 269 pages.

Voyage to Alpha Centauri: A Novel

Michael D. O'Brien

Ignatius Press

2013, 587 pages.

The Everlasting Man

G.K. Chesterton

Dover Publications

2007, 270 pages.

Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of

Catholic Beliefs

Peter J. Kreeft

Ignatius Press

2014, 426 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

First Things

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Catholic Answers Magazine

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Catholic Exchange

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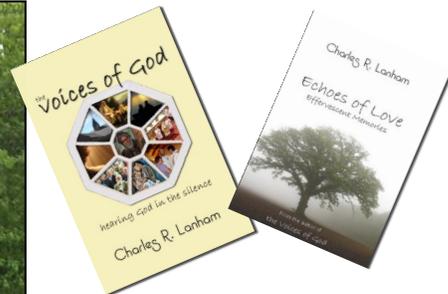
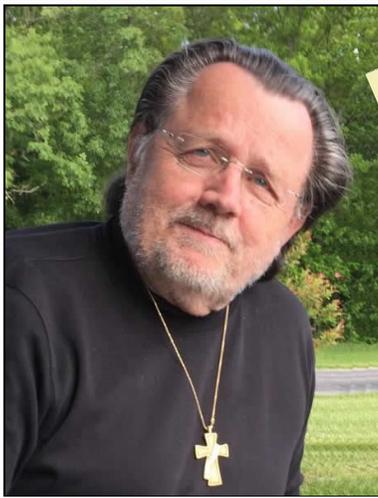
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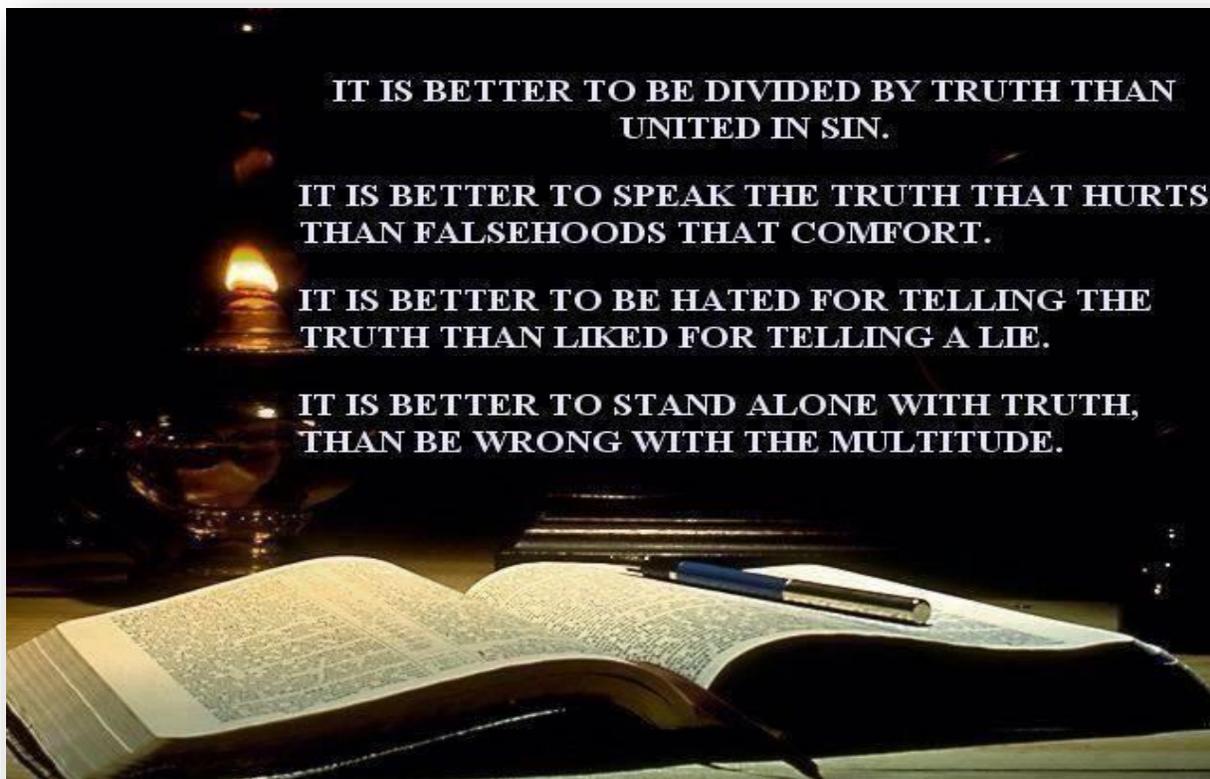


Books are available on
Amazon.com or from the
author's web site at:
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) and a servant 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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