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A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Common Nonsense Unhinged

Tales sold to useful idiots and other dysphemisms

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Common Nonsense Unhinged

Tales sold to useful idiots and other dysphemisms

Those familiar with my tautological scribbles, what some have not at all shyly suggested to be meandering maunderings, will recognize rare the essay that does not necessitate foraging forgotten forests for an unfamiliar word or several. Either seek the truffle hidden beneath the leaves or eschew the reward of greater understanding, which is to say as the poet once did apprise, "... knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back."¹ Language fascinates me; it is of course, the method and means by which humans communicate, though these days, any honest communication is suspect well-beyond the oblivious. Oh, words are uttered, but sans consistency of meaning, any such utterances are but common nonsense unhinged lacking good effect. Man has progressed by despoiling the mind and denying the soul; man has singularly become the progressive absurdity, *reductio homo ad animalis*, barbarous brutes in shallow sheepskin. Quite simply put, we have lost our minds and like the nursery rhyme, we have neither care nor clue where we have lost them; unlike the medieval rhyme, once lost they will never come home, for if they are woke, they will find it a joke, and cancel the thought with a toke to Mary Jane.

"Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity,"² Chesterton wrote, and he believed every word of what he wrote. Someone, somewhere, somewhen once said or wrote—I have now quite easily forgotten the who, where, or when—that Chesterton not only believed this to be true, he lived as if it were true. His nonfiction writings are clever, but his fiction is brilliant. In the one he tells the truth, in the other he shows why and how it is true. The last thing the modern narcissistic mind wants to know is its own which is no doubt why great literature has lost its favor. Likewise, "because the humanities teach us about humanity, both our own humanity and the humanity of

our neighbors," the modern libertine avoids such enlightenment much like the dead denied daylight to the delight of daisies, daffodils, and dandelions.

In the great works of literature we discover a deep understanding of man's being and purpose. We discover that the human person is *homo viator*, a pilgrim or wayfarer who journeys through mortal life with eternal life always in mind. This understanding of who we are has been lost. "The modern man," wrote Chesterton, "is more like a traveller who has forgotten the name of his destination, and has to go back whence he came, even to find out where he is going." In fact, things are even worse than Chesterton imagined because modern man has not only forgotten the name of his destination, he has even forgotten that he has a destination. He does not know that he is a traveller. He is unaware that he is on a journey or that he has anywhere to go. He is not *homo viator*, but *homo superbus*, proud-man, a pathetic creature trapped within the confines of his own self-constructed "self," a prisoner of his own pride and prejudice.³

Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) has been acknowledged as perhaps one of the greatest theological minds since Thomas Aquinas. In *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger augments Chesterton's observation, and anticipates Pearce's commentary on the oblivious traveler. "On top of the gulf between 'visible' and 'invisible' there comes, to make things harder for us, the gulf between 'then' and 'now'."

For intellectual circles in the past, the concept of "tradition" embraced a firm program; it appeared to be something protective on which man could rely; he could think himself safe and on the right lines if he could appeal to tradition. Today precisely the opposite feeling prevails: tradition appears to be what has been laid aside, the merely out-of-date, whereas progress is regarded as the real promise of life, so that man feels at home, not in the realm of tradition, of the past, but in the realm of progress and the future.⁴ From this point of view, too, a belief that comes to him under the label "tradition" must appear to be something already



superseded, which cannot disclose the proper sphere of his existence to a man who has recognized the future as his real obligation and opportunity. All this means that the primary stumbling block to belief, the distance between the visible and the invisible, between God and Not-God, is concealed and blocked by the secondary stumbling block of Then and Now, by the antithesis between tradition and progress, by the loyalty to yesterday that belief seems to include.⁵

“In the realm of tradition,” Sohrab Ahmari writes, “truth is something that precedes individual human beings, something we inherit and must hand down, in turn. We can discover truth and reason about it, to be sure, but we can’t change it.”

In the realm of progress, however, truth is what individuals or groups can articulate or build on their own, through scientific inquiry and their acts in history. Truth thus becomes an ongoing project, a malleable thing. In our realm of progress, tradition is viewed as not only antiquated and inefficient, but as an impediment to achievement.

Pick your favorite negatively trending social indicator—loneliness, alienation, addiction, polarization, etc.—and the dire message is the same: The realm of progress can’t fulfill our soul yearnings or satisfy our urge to put ourselves right with the sacred. In vain we seek substitutes for that “firm program” of the past. We idolize politics and politicians, indulge in drugs or consumer extravagance, try out do-it-yourself spiritualities, and seek meaning and community online.

Even if these balms temporarily assuage the pain, the wounds don’t heal. We can’t integrate our own lives, as a personal project, without a vision of the whole that has endured the test of time: precisely what the great traditions promise. Yet given that superficial confidence of an anti-traditional age, the man of tradition in the twenty-first century can’t start with the “firm program.” Rather, he must begin by restating the fundamental human dilemmas his contemporaries have forgotten or would prefer to ignore. He must, in other words, assume the role of the critic, the interrogator of modern certainties.⁶

It was C.S. Lewis, as I now recall, who once imagined the absurdity and the linguistic curse of babbling Babel. In the climactic banquet scene in *That Hideous Strength*, the words of all the experts, technocrats, and policy wonks are reduced to complete nonsense. The Deputy Director vainly attempts to save the dinner from disaster by restoring order after the previous speaker’s unintelligible words

only to discover that his words, although eminently lucid to him, were complete gibberish to everyone else. Thus, the banquet attendees are *reductio homo ad animalis*, reduced to animals, incapable of intelligible speech, they can only make noises at one another.

The Deputy Director could not understand this, for to him his own voice seemed to be uttering the speech he had resolved to make. But the audience heard him saying, “Tidies and fogleman—I sheel foor that we all—er—most steeply rebut the defensible, though, I trust, lavatory, Aspasia which gleams to have selected our redeemed inspector this deceiving. It would—ah—be shark, very shark, from anyone’s debenture. . . .”

To each of them it seemed plain that things were just at that stage when a word or so of plain sense, spoken in a new voice, would restore the whole room to sanity. One thought of a sharp word, one of a joke, one of something very quiet and telling. As a result fresh gibberish in a great variety of tones rang out from several places at once.⁷

How perfectly babbled the words that pour forth from the mouths of experts, technocrats, policy wonks, politicians, churchmen, and media pundits these days. They cannot help themselves, of course, for it is they who speak in unctuous tongue the language of diversion and obfuscation; for those familiar with the building of the tower of Babel, to hear them speak is to realize a sense of “*deja vous* all over again,”⁸ and an uncanny dread that divine retribution has now rejoined the fray.

The building of the first Babel was an act of pride (cf. Gen 11). Like Adam and Eve, the builders didn’t want to receive from God; They wanted to obtain things on their own. They sought to construct a tower “with its top in the heavens” and to make a name for themselves, lest they be “scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” They desired to raise themselves to God’s level—to be self-sufficient—and to establish unity on their own terms.

To frustrate their aims and punish their pride, God confused their language and scattered them. The lesson of Babel is clear: it is human pride that has produced confusion and division in the world.⁹

Lewis then wrote that as the banquet descended into madness and panic ensued, the voice of the magician Merlin thundered above the tumult: “*Qui Verbum Dei contempserunt, eis auferetur etiam verbum hominis*—They who

have despised the Word of God, from them even the word of man shall be taken away."

We are witnessing the construction of a new Babel. Ours is a post-Christian society, an anti-culture that has rejected the Word of God. In our pride, we want on our own terms and by our own accomplishments what creatures can only receive from God. We have thrown off His reality—about gender, sex, life, etc.—and tried to construct our own.

As a result, our language is increasingly disconnected from truth, our words unintelligible, and our ability to communicate crippled. To say that a man can menstruate and give birth or that a woman's pronouns are legitimately "he/his/him" is complete gibberish. To say "Love is love" is to rob words of any real meaning.

Nor is it only our words that suffer this loss of meaning. The human body has also fallen victim. If a transgender man (i.e., a biological woman) is really a man, then the body tells us nothing about who we are. It has become unintelligible. We are now strangers to our very selves.

The crippling of language divides us. Once language is no longer a vehicle for truth, it becomes an instrument for control and domination. Of course, this is precisely how Critical Race Theory views language and how its advocates use it. So, we are reduced to the status of animals; we can only make noises at each other as we jockey for power.¹⁰

In comparing the modern to the Anglo-Saxons as described in *Beowulf*, Joseph Pearce recalls, "How much more alive were these Anglo-Saxons than are we moderns! They lived in a world that was harsh and hard, but at least it was real. We live in our computer-generated demi-worlds, centred on ourselves, utterly addicted to the artificial-life support machine which drips the anodyne¹¹ into the anoesis¹² of our comfortably numb minds."

And what is true of the natural is equally true of the supernatural. Unlike us moderns, the Anglo-Saxons were closely connected with the supernatural realities underpinning human existence. They called these realities "wyrd," a word which has decayed into the much weaker "weird." *Wyrd* was more than merely weird. It was the intimate, almost palpable, presence of Providence in the lives of men, the closeness and connectedness of God to the destiny of his creatures.

For the modern in his electronic dream-world this is but foolishness. He has no concept of wyrd. For him the wyrd is just weird, or, worse, merely absurd. Our ancestors' closeness to the natural and the supernatural is

seen as a sign of their ignorance or barbarism. Or so the modern perceives. But then the modern perceives very little because he is covered with too many artificial accretions to be able to experience, and therefore perceive, the real.

The modern is right in one respect at least. He is right in perceiving that the Anglo-Saxons were primitives. He is right, however, for the wrong reasons. His error lies in his perception that the primitive is synonymous with the barbaric or the ignorant. In point of fact, the Anglo-Saxons are primitive while he, the modern, is barbaric and ignorant. One who is primitive is one who never loses sight of the prime realities, the first things, upon which all else rests. As an adjective prime relates to the chief things, the most important things; as a noun it means the state of highest perfection. A primitive never loses sight of the most important things nor of the state of highest perfection which, properly understood, is the Godhead. It is the ignorant and the barbarian who lose sight of these things.¹³

Pearce is spot on. It is the primitive who walks, lives, and breathes reality, who understands "the first things, upon which all else rests." Those who eschew first things, dismiss tradition, skewer ancestry, thoroughly convinced progress shall or can be made with their oars out of water—gods forbid they should wet their paddles—are the ignorant and the barbarian. It is the primitive who sees beauty in all the marvelous things God has made and exalts in the glory of God. The modern, the ignorant, the barbarian sees nothing more than a perfectly proud pig wallowing in filth and demands the perfectly poked porker bathe itself, then clean up the filth, for its own good.

Banquets, such as so vividly imagined by Lewis, are all too common; clearly, as should be obvious to the most casual observer, we are become enslaved, chained to chaos and anarchy. One example should suffice to prove the truth of this. In a meeting with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) the President of the United States, sitting before the senior management team, stumbled and hesitated through prepared remarks. "What the — there's to be, you know, — beginning a, — this effort for 2021 is a, — think we've learned a few lessons from last year as well. There's help, you know, — being there to help clear roads, rebuild main streets, — and so, — families can get back to their lives. That's what FEMA does, — every single day."¹⁴ Now, the president, just as the Deputy Director in Lewis' novel, may have thought his words

“eminently lucid, though complete gibberish to everyone else.” Tragically and terrifying, such babbled gibberish is all too familiar from the Washingtonian tower of Babel.

Much of the abuse of language is innocently applied, and yet, there are more than a few disreputable characters, generally to be found among the over-educated elite, duplicitous media mob, and pompous pontificating politicians who waltz to sophistic melodies in order to deceive the naïve and gullible. Perhaps the nineteenth-century poet Sir Walter Scott said it best “Oh what a tangled web we weave / When first we practice to deceive,”¹⁵ which in practical terms refers to just how complicated life becomes when lies are a one-legged stool upon which one attempts to stand. In this day of video-everything, lies can and will be found out. There can be no better example of this than the sophistry exhibited over the global pandemic by so-called public health “experts” and power-mad, opportunistic politicians and the complicit propagandizing media.

Chesterton once wrote—in truth he was always writing and I have the literal literary meter to prove it—that “A new philosophy generally means in practice the praise of some old vice. We have had the sophist who defends cruelty, and calls it masculinity. We have had the sophist who defends profligacy, and calls it the liberty of the emotions. We have had the sophist who defends idleness, and calls it art. It will almost certainly happen—it can almost certainly be prophesied—that in this saturnalia of sophistry there will at some time or other arise a sophist who desires to idealise cowardice. And when we are once in this unhealthy world of mere wild words, what a vast deal there would be to say for cowardice!” Sophistic prophesy, indeed! Cowards hailed as heroes, cowardice posturing heroic virtue, the world a whirligig of unrelenting madness. Chesterton be damned to hell for the mere audacity of prophesying such sophistry! Why give a sophist just such an idea?

It would be quite as easy to defend the coward as a kind of poet and mystic as it has been, in many recent books, to defend the emotionalist as a kind of poet and mystic, or the tyrant as a kind of poet or mystic. When that last grand sophistry¹⁶ and morbidity is preached in a book or on a platform, you may depend upon it there will be a great stir in its favour, that is, a great stir among the little people who live among books and plat-

forms. There will be a new great Religion, the Religion of Methuselahism¹⁷: with pomps and priests and altars. Its devout crusaders will vow themselves in thousands with a great vow to live long. But there is one comfort: they won't.¹⁸

From the same essay, “But when we pass from abusing a thing to reforming it, we commonly pass from an easier condition to a much stormier one, for there is nothing more united than opposition, and nothing more divided than reform.” Crassly put, “ain't that the truth!” It is not at all difficult to admit we are well into “this unhealthy world of mere wild words,” the evidence is everywhere and overwhelming. Once there was the wild, wild west, now it is the wild, wild word. To employ a prosaic, overused argot, words have become weaponized; euphemisms are passé, dysphemisms are the common coin of this post-modern dystopian realm.

Here, permit me a few words to expound upon these linguistic antagonists. Euphemisms as commonly understood are a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing; a classic example: “my body, my choice” used to avoid the harsh reality of “abortion,” the killing of an unborn human life. Another innocuous, fine sounding expression, “women's healthcare,”—who could oppose healthcare for women, or for men for the matter—is a euphemism of a euphemism “women's reproductive healthcare”; again, generalizing the softening of the harsh language that abortion invokes. Two more examples that have long been popular, yet no less controversial: affirmative action¹⁹ and enhanced interrogation.²⁰

Enough said on euphemisms, let us now turn to their opposite, dysphemisms, which—as one might surmise should one be the least bit interested—are quite antagonistic toward their kinder, gentler cousins, an often-favored pejorative among useful idiots on the left side of normal. A dysphemism, an expression with connotations that are derogatory either about the subject matter or to the audience, are frequently motivated by fear, distaste, hatred, or contempt. Pejorative name calling is a common form of dysphemism: “that witch charmed the boss into approving a phony expense report” or “Only racists and white supremacists are Trump supporters” or characterizing

peaceful pro-life protestors as “radical extremists” or “a bunch of women-hating lunatics, misogynists” or the stereotypical racial slur “angry white male.”

Before proceeding further, I must anticipate a demurral. I will, no doubt, be accused of heartedly and frequently engaging in dysphemisms. To this I must object. The truth is never dysphemistic, calling a spade a spade is mere definition; repetitive, expositive, but never pejorative. Adding adjectives to a noun merely salts the wound, it does not deny the leech. Politicians, by definition, are “pompous,” always “pontificating,” and by habit and some may say of necessity, “liars.” Thus, to describe one as a “pompous, pontificating, lying politician” merely nails the coffin tight, it is merely hammering the truth, one adjectival nail at a time.

When I was young, much younger than now, an admonition I heard all too frequent was “Say what you mean, mean what you say.” I am of the mind that the frequency of the reminder was to indelibly scratch what infantile gray matter might then have existed between juvenile ears. Whether the surface was scratched or no, that adage has played a very long memory, as has its loyal companion, “Honesty is the best policy.” Sadly, no one no longer dares to follow such sage advice for it is of another time, an ancient artifact of best forgotten fairy tales, such adages will most assuredly get you fired or cancelled, the latter the more likely.

Unadulterated history tells a tale not to be denied or memory-holed, and yet ... there is much more to be said for memory holes and obfuscation, but that must be left aside for another time. The modern “historian” writes a sordid tale, so far afield from honest truth it dares not be equaled to the basest form of pulp fiction or anime. To think of all that has come before, since the dawn of man, as mere fault and failure, grief and pain, oppression and subjugation is to think neither the best nor mediocre but the worst of God’s creation. What best may be expressed with the phrase, “don’t worry, be happy,” except, of course, no one is happy for everyone worries even more. I am much impressed with Chesterton’s astuteness in observing that opposition unites while reform divides. Nothing comes nearer the truth; division is handmaid to wild words; they are as inseparable as conjoined twins. The list

is long, growing longer with each passing minute.

Orwell opened his novel, 1984, with a slogan. On the white pyramid of the Ministry of Truth, were written in enormous letters: “War is Peace / Freedom is Slavery / Ignorance is Strength.” Considering these words obvious contradictions, examples of doublethink, one might reasonably inquire why anyone would believe them plausible or for what purpose they were meant to serve. To answer the second first, the purpose of doublethink—the acceptance of or mental capacity to accept contrary opinions or beliefs at the same time, especially as a result of political indoctrination—was to inure people to live with constant contradictions. Doublethink, over time, then, becomes plausible because there is nothing else, no other way to think, truth and common-sense memory holed.

Once upon a time reality was real, objectively real; today it is virtual reality, subjective and relative: thus, desires are real, emotions are real, biology is construct and malleable, life a fairy tale told by idiots signifying nothing. Reason and intelligence, God-given gifts exceptional to the human person, endowed to no other living creature, are artificially inseminated into unthinking, insentient, manmade machines. Equality is no longer equal if it is not equitable; in the name of equitable diversity all must be encouraged (that is to say, enforced) to be churned into one homogeneous mass of indistinguishable collectivized goo. The pursuit of happiness has been memory-holed, happiness belongs to those who are most unhappy, that miserable lot who single-mindedly aim to make everyone equally miserable, but equitably happy. The human person no longer a creature made in the image and likeness of the divine but a self-creation of the creature who divines to play god. Such hubris will surely get someone killed and it has, and it will; life is of small significance, even less of value, except, of course, one’s own miserable unhappy self. Life is the reward or punishment for the selfish act of daring to exit the womb intact, naked and unafraid—should one be so miserably fortunated—which in and of itself defines a meaningless existence; living a long but meaningless life is a bore or an act of desperation, why not spice it up by an equitably meaningless death, or deaths, it matters not to the untimely dead.

I am always struck by the amazing gifts of the Holy Spirit, awesome in their serendipitous moments, most welcome whenever I find myself a loss for words—and yes, that occurs more often than most would suspect. Andrew Breitbart once said, “Politics is downstream from culture,” which is at minimum an interesting apothegm worth further explication, but when I heard Archbishop Charles Chaput tautologically mimic Breitbart, saying, “Religion is downstream from culture” I felt the awakening fire of the Spirit once again. It is, in a sense, counterintuitive and for many may offend by seemingly putting the cart before the horse. What Breitbart and Chaput claim is that culture drives our politics and our religious beliefs, not the reverse. The reverse may once have been true, but it has not been so for a very, very long time.

We are a species of storytellers, expressing and explaining ourselves thru fables and myths, stories that instill in future generations moral and ethical values, a sense of whom we are, from where we have come and to where we are going. Since the dawn of man, civilizations have understood that stories serve a vital purpose, to help us understand our place in the world; oral histories have been and continue to be a part of every culture across the globe. For Judeo and Christian religions, the Bible is the story that guides our culture and our lives. Stories place joy and tragedy in context, preserve cultures, grounding us in the meaning and purpose of our existence; humans live story on a daily basis. We seldom pause to consider, to our detriment I believe, how culture, especially popular culture, molds and shapes, misshapes, or even destroys (cancels) our lives, our beliefs, and our dreams. The truth is culture is delivered, as one might well expect, in stories via books, television, film, music, games, sports and the social environment in which we live and breathe and have our being. Most of us think of this as entertainment, few think of the messaging that underlies the stories. Would not it be prudent for us, whenever we view a piece of popular culture, to ask what messages it delivers? What values are espoused or rejected? What is the moral the story is attempting to convey? Whether we are aware of it or not, whether we believe it or not, the messaging, often sibilantly subtle, resonates unknowingly within our conscious and subconscious minds. Think about the messages absorbed by drug advertisements for erectile dysfunction

or schizophrenia. Or a commercial for a hedonistic paradise getaway where no words are spoken but all the scenes are of homosexual and lesbian couples embracing. If those messages are not consonant with your values, then is it not incumbent upon you to challenge yourself, to speak up or tune out? Ask yourself why such messages offend your moral sensibilities, then accept or reject the message, but never dismiss it out of hand.

Thus, we come to politics. Given the influence that story has on our everyday lives, and that popular culture is barraging us with story on a regular basis, we must remain ever vigilant as to the messaging in those stories.

Regardless of one’s ideological, moral, ethical, or religious leanings, every person should be aware of the messaging of every piece of popular culture. The thesis ... is that the vast majority of those with the power of content creation are Liberals. If you accept that thesis, then realize that Liberals control story. Given the breadth and depth of popular culture in our daily lives, it follows that Liberal messaging is what is primarily being imparted on the masses.

What is some of that messaging? Think about movies and TV. Corporations are evil — using unwitting poor Africans for pharmaceutical testing (*Constant Gardener*) or dumping toxic chemicals into nature (*Erin Brockovich, A Civil Action*) or responsible for the end of mankind (*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*). American soldiers are bloodthirsty lawbreaking maniacs (*Any military film*). The CIA conducts illegal, secret operations that have nothing to do with protecting America. Radical Muslim terrorists are never villains. Trial lawyers are crusading do-gooders. David Letterman and *Saturday Night Live* ridicule the Right 95% of the time. Jon Stewart pretends to be centrist, but in fact jumps all over the Right far more often than the Left.

This messaging reinforces Liberal narratives — that is, Liberal *stories*. These are the same narratives you see in Liberal politics. The popular culture backs up Liberal policies, morals, ethics, values, and standards. Liberal political candidates are the embodiments of those Liberal tenets. The goal is to associate them in voter minds via the vehicle of popular culture.

Finally, what are voters meant to take away from a candidate’s speech, platform, or appearance? The candidate’s story, of course. That’s why it is imperative to understand messaging. Not only will a politician tell his own story, he will also attempt to *define the opposing party or candidate’s narrative for him*. He who controls that narrative wins.²¹

Though somewhat dated, having been published nearly ten years ago (2011) it remains consequential; the facts are much direr and the popular culture as depraved as Sodom and Gomorrah and as narcissistic as Babel. Sadly, the same applies to Religion, for as Chaput points out, "Religion is downstream from culture" and as the culture goes, so goes politics and religion. Chaput describes hell as eternal self-isolation, someone so self-involved nothing else matters. "If we go to hell, it is not because God is punishing us for our sins, it is because we choose to be isolated, we choose not to enter into the relationship of love and self-forgiving."

I think the best image of hell would be pouting. I'm sure you've probably pouted with your wife or your children or they pouted with you. We think we're really showing them something by pouting and being angry. Well, hell is an eternal pout where we just refuse relationship with God and with other people, and we've become that people to do that. Perpetual pouting is hell, the willful isolation from other people or like Satan, who willfully withdrew from God, and God's love. When I've pouted I feel like I'm going to punish the other person by withdrawing my attention and affection, and I'm going to show them that they hurt me or that I'm better than them or whatever the motive is for pouting. And, at the moment, I think it's effective, it's going to accomplish my goal of making them feel bad about what they said to me or said about me or whatever. But it doesn't do that, all it does is isolate me from the other person. It blocks the relationship. If I decided to keep pouting the relationship would never come back, and it's an act of isolation in order to show something, an act of pride. And I think that that is what hell is like. It's telling God and other people that we're sufficient or that we don't need them, and we'll do it my way like Frank Sinatra sang.²²

I am not a fan of baseball or any sport, truth be told. I neither hate sports nor dislike it, I merely hold to a philosophy that there are better things to do than waste the time required to attend to any sport. Likewise, I do not belittle or beleaguer anyone who is a fan, though I often wonder what the attraction is that compels someone to idly bide the hours in the severest poverty of mind. That, of course, is my opinion and you know the value of opinions, like buttocks and anuses, everyone has one and they invariably stink. I am, however, not averse to a good morality play, set to the rules of a sporting game, especially when it agrees with my own rules of morality, virtue, and fair

play. Here then, is one tale, told to those with whom my opinion on their sport finds small favor, but in whom there should be no disagreement. Five years have come and gone since this tale was told, but its retelling is even more necessary today than yesterday.

"17 Inches"

Charlie Bounty

Twenty years ago, in Nashville, Tennessee, during the first week of January, 1996, more than 4,000 baseball coaches descended upon the Opryland Hotel for the 52nd annual ABCA's convention.

While I waited in line to register with the hotel staff, I heard other more veteran coaches rumbling about the lineup of speakers scheduled to present during the weekend. One name kept resurfacing, always with the same sentiment — "John Scolinos is here? Oh, man, worth every penny of my airfare."

Who is John Scolinos, I wondered. No matter; I was just happy to be there.

In 1996, Coach Scolinos was 78 years old and five years retired from a college coaching career that began in 1948. He shuffled to the stage to an impressive standing ovation, wearing dark polyester pants, a light blue shirt, and a string around his neck from which home plate hung — a full-sized, stark-white home plate.

Seriously, I wondered, who is this guy?

After speaking for twenty-five minutes, not once mentioning the prop hanging around his neck, Coach Scolinos appeared to notice the snickering among some of the coaches. Even those who knew Coach Scolinos had to wonder exactly where he was going with this, or if he had simply forgotten about home plate since he'd gotten on stage. Then, finally ...

"You're probably all wondering why I'm wearing home plate around my neck," he said, his voice growing irascible. I laughed along with the others, acknowledging the possibility. "I may be old, but I'm not crazy. The reason I stand before you today is to share with you baseball

people what I've learned in my life, what I've learned about home plate in my 78 years."

Several hands went up when Scolinos asked how many Little League coaches were in the room. "Do you know how wide home plate is in Little League?"

After a pause, someone offered, "Seventeen inches?", more of a question than answer.

"That's right," he said. "How about in Babe Ruth's day? Any Babe Ruth coaches in the house?" Another long pause.

"Seventeen inches?" a guess from another reluctant coach.

"That's right," said Scolinos. "Now, how many high school coaches do we have in the room?" Hundreds of hands shot up, as the pattern began to appear. "How wide is home plate in high school baseball?"

"Seventeen inches," they said, sounding more confident.

"You're right!" Scolinos barked. "And you college coaches, how wide is home plate in college?"

"Seventeen inches!" we said, in unison.

"Any Minor League coaches here? How wide is home plate in pro ball?" "Seventeen inches!"

"RIGHT! And in the Major Leagues, how wide home plate is in the Major Leagues?"

"Seventeen inches!"

"SEV-EN-TEEN INCHES!" he confirmed, his voice bellowing off the walls. "And what do they do with a Big League pitcher who can't throw the ball over seventeen inches?" Pause. "They send him to Pocatello!" he hollered, drawing raucous laughter. "What they don't do is this: they don't say, 'Ah, that's okay, Jimmy. If you can't hit a seventeen-inch target? We'll make it eighteen inches or nineteen inches. We'll make it twenty inches so you have a better chance of hitting it. If you can't hit that, let us know so we can make it wider still, say twenty-five inches.'"

Pause. "Coaches... what do we do when your best player shows up late to practice? or when our team rules forbid facial hair and a guy shows up unshaven? What if he gets caught drinking? Do we hold him accountable? Or do we change the rules to fit him? Do we widen home plate? "

The chuckles gradually faded as four thousand coaches grew quiet, the fog lifting as the old coach's message began to unfold. He turned the plate toward himself and, using a Sharpie, began to draw something. When he turned it toward the crowd, point up, a house was revealed, complete with a freshly drawn door and two windows. "This is the problem in our homes today. With our marriages, with the way we parent our kids. With our discipline.

We don't teach accountability to our kids, and there is no consequence for failing to meet standards. We just widen the plate!"

Pause. Then, to the point at the top of the house he added a small American flag. "This is the problem in our schools today. The quality of our education is going downhill fast and teachers have been stripped of the tools they need to be successful, and to educate and discipline our young people. We are allowing others to widen home plate! Where is that getting us?"

Silence. He replaced the flag with a Cross. "And this is the problem in the Church, where powerful people in positions of authority have taken advantage of young children, only to have such an atrocity swept under the rug for years. Our church leaders are widening home plate for themselves! And we allow it."

"And the same is true with our government. Our so-called representatives make rules for us that don't apply to themselves. They take bribes from lobbyists and foreign countries. They no longer serve us. And we allow them to widen home plate! We see our country falling into a dark abyss while we just watch."

I was amazed. At a baseball convention where I expected to learn something about curve balls and bunting and how to run better practices, I had learned something far more valuable.

From an old man with home plate strung around his neck, I had learned something about life, about myself, about my own weaknesses and about my responsibilities as a leader. I had to hold myself and others accountable to that which I knew to be right, lest our families, our faith, and our society continue down an undesirable path.

"If I am lucky," Coach Scolinos concluded, "you will remember one thing from this old coach today. It is this: "If we fail to hold ourselves to a higher standard, a standard of what we know to be right; if we fail to hold our spouses and our children to the same standards, if we are unwilling or unable to provide a consequence when they do not meet the standard; and if our schools & churches & our government fail to hold themselves accountable to those they serve, there is but one thing to look forward to ..."

With that, he held home plate in front of his chest, turned it around, and revealed its dark black backside, "... We have dark days ahead!."

Note: Coach Scolinos died in 2009 at the age of 91, but not before touching the lives of hundreds of players and coaches, including mine. Meeting him at my first ABCA convention kept me returning year after year, looking for similar wisdom and inspiration from other coaches. He is the best clinic speaker the ABCA has ever known because he was so much more than a baseball coach. His message was clear: "Coaches, keep your players—no matter how good they are—your own children, your churches, your government, and most of all, keep yourself at seventeen inches."

And this, my friends, is what our country has become and what is wrong with it today, and now go out there and fix it!

"Don't widen the plate."

1. Robert Frost, "*The Road Not Taken*".
2. Thanks Joannie for the inspiration.
3. Joseph Pearce, "*Literature: What Every Catholic Should Know*" (Greenwood Village, CO: Augustine Institute; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2019).
4. Footnote 6 from *Introduction to Christianity*: A newspaper advertisement that I [Ratzinger] read recently seems to me to typify this attitude: "You do not want to buy tradition but

rational progress." In this connection it is worth drawing attention to the curious fact that in its reflections on the concept of tradition, Catholic theology has been quietly tending more and more strongly for about a century to equate tradition with progress and to reinterpret the idea of tradition into the idea of progress, by understanding tradition, not as the firmly fixed legacy of the earliest days, but as the forward-striving force of the sense of faith. Cf. J. Ratzinger, "Tradition", in *LThK*, 2nd ed., 10:293-99; Ratzinger, "Kommentar zur Offenbarungskonstitution", in *LThK*, supplementary 2:498ff. and 15-28.

5. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger; Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 2nd Edition (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 52-54.
6. Sohrab Ahmari, "*The Unbroken Thread: Discovering the Wisdom of Tradition in an Age of Chaos*" (New York: Convergent Books, 2021), 19-20.
7. C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 1945.
8. One of the many malapropisms attributed to the late, great Yogi Berra.
9. Fr. Paul D. Scalia, "*The New Babel and the New Pentecost*", *The Catholic Thing*, May 23, 2021. Paul Scalia is the son of the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.
10. *Ibid.*
11. **Anodyne**: *adjective*, not likely to provoke dissent or offense; inoffensive, often deliberately so; *noun*, a painkilling drug or medicine.
12. **Anoesis**: *noun*, a state of mind consisting of pure sensation or emotion without cognitive content; medical definition: consciousness that is pure passive receptiveness without understanding or intellectual organization of the materials presented.
13. Joseph Pearce, "*Literature: What Every Catholic Should Know*", 34-35.
14. The "—" are pauses, the words are verbatim as recorded and publicly available. No words have been added or subtracted, changed or altered.
15. Sir Walter Scott, "*Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*", 1808.
16. **Sophistry**: *noun*, the use of fallacious arguments, especially with the intention of deceiving.
17. **Methuselahism**: Chesterton describes it with an example of a man enlisting as a soldier and some form was put before him to be filled up. One inquiry was what was his religion. The man wrote down the word "Methuselahite." When asked what sort of religion it was, the soldier replied that it was his religion "to live as long as he could." Chesterton ended his essay by inquiring, "if it was the man's religion to live as long as he could, why on earth was he enlisting as a soldier?"
18. G.K. Chesterton, "*Newspaper Snippets and the Truth*", *The Illustrated London News*, January 6, 1906; cf. *G.K. Chesterton Collected Works Volume XXVII* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986), 97-98.
19. **Affirmative Action**: a euphemism meaning a preference for minorities or the historically disadvantaged, usually in employment or academic admissions. This term is sometimes said to be a euphemism for reverse discrimination, which suggests an intentional bias that might be legally prohibited, or otherwise unpalatable.
20. **Enhanced Interrogation**: sometimes said to be a euphemism for torture.
21. Lawrence Meyers, "*Politics Really is Downstream from Culture*", *Breitbart*, August 22, 2011.

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.

The Unbroken Thread

Sohrab Ahmari

Convergent Books

2021, 270 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.

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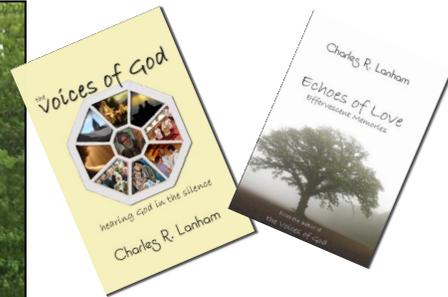
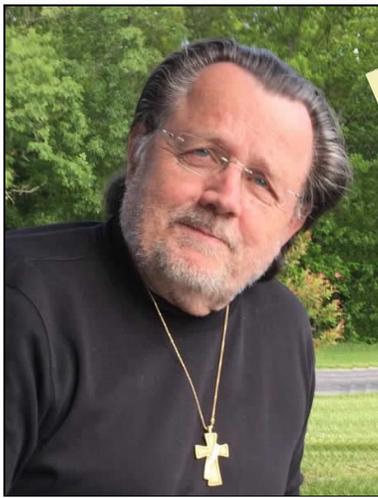
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) and a servant of God. He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and has written over 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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My dear wormwood,

Be sure that the patient remains completely fixated on politics. Arguments, political gossip, and obsessing on the faults of people they have never met serves as an excellent distraction from advancing in personal virtue, character, and the things the patient can control. Make sure to keep the patient in a constant state of angst, frustration, and general disdain towards the rest of the human race in order to avoid any kind of charity or inner peace from further developing. Ensure the patient continues to believe that the problem is "out there" in the "broken system" rather than recognizing there is a problem with himself.

Keep up the good work,
Uncle Screwtape.

"Screwtape Letters" by C.S. Lewis ~1942

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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