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A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

A Pseudonymous Epistemology

When pigs fly and cows leap over the moon

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

A Pseudonymous Epistemology

When pigs fly and cows leap over the moon

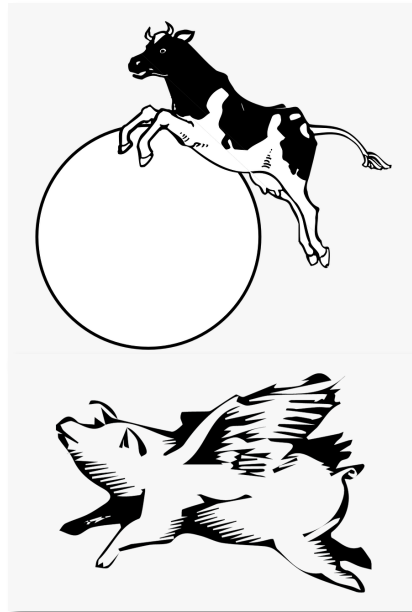
There are those so convinced pigs fly and cows regularly hurdle the moon they would confidently bet *your* life on it. They are credulous to a fault, those who with absolute conviction “believe in the science” yet know nothing of *the* science. They lack, first and foremost, a meddlesome mind, being perfectly content, unquestioningly accepting the protestations of *experts* who smarmily admit to having no appetite for whatever they would profess, but rather, own an affection for hubris embellished with a tankard of bravado and a truck of prevarication on a power trip to “bring them all and in the darkness bind them.”

Chesterton points to this tendency of the facile mind for oversimplification and ready conviction, scrubbing the shine off truth, gilding what it knows nothing about. “They talk of searching for the habits and habitat of the Missing Link; as if one were to talk of being on friendly terms with the gap in a narrative or the hole in an argument, or taking a walk with a *non-sequitur* or dining with an undistributed middle.” To illustrate, Chesterton notes of professors of antiquities and prehistoric man: “Strictly speaking of course we know nothing about prehistoric man, for the simple reason that he was prehistoric. The history of prehistoric man is a very obvious contradiction in terms. It is the sort of unreason in which only rationalists are allowed to indulge.”

That people are so convincible, so mentally malleable toward accepting the provably absurd is a question desperately seeking, never finding a satisfying answer. Former Soviet KGB informant and defector, Yuri Bezmenov once described it as a decades long process of demoralization, what he called ideological subversion, that succeeded largely from the absence and lack of moral standards. There is a penchant to consider demoralization as a loss of

confidence or hope, a deliberate process of dispiriting the soul, and such is entirely one claim for it. But, it is crucially important to note, the ideological subversion Bezmenov described was of a different sort, a manifest defenestration of the morals of a people, for in the process of demoralization, man loses a thing essential: the objective meaning for being.

Bezmenov claimed that for the demoralized, exposure to truth no longer had any perceivable effect; a person who was demoralized was incapable of assessing the accuracy or truth of any information presented. Even when showered with authenticated data, verified truth, facts backed up with documents, with pictures and hard irrefutable evidence, the thoroughly demoralized would refuse to accept the truth—until a military boot crushed him. Then he would understand but not before.



It is in the process of demoralization that man’s relationship with his Creator is destroyed, or, at a minimum, distorted beyond reason. Fulton Sheen (*Religion Without God*, 1928) foresaw this ideological assault on religion, culture, history and tradition; the abject purpose being the complete devaluation of the rational creature: man.

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 cran-nied wall” has come to tell us what God and man are.

Then again, George Orwell (1984) coined perhaps the perfect word for it.

—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. “Who controls the past,” ran the Party slogan, “controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. “Reality control,” they called it; in Newspeak, “doublethink.”

Winston sank his arms to his sides and slowly refilled his lungs with air. His mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which canceled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself—that was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word “doublethink” involved the use of doublethink.

It is pointless to point to the meanest error among those so convicted of their absolute absolutions; simply put, they are correct to the point of absurd infallibility, therefore, it is useless to argue, there can be no allowance for dissent or debate. It is as the psalmist pondered “But who can discern his errors” (Psalm 19:12)?

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) offered this insight (*Conscience and Truth*, 1991) comparing the guilt of the Pharisee to that of the tax collector.

No longer seeing one’s guilt, the falling silent of conscience in so many areas is an even more dangerous sickness of the soul than the guilt that one still recognizes

as such. He who no longer notices that killing is a sin has fallen farther than the one who still recognizes the shameful-ness of his actions, because the former is further removed from the truth and conversion.

Not without reason does the self-righteous man in the encounter with Jesus appear as the one who is really lost. If the tax collector with all his undisputed sins stands more justified before God than the Pharisee with all his undeniably good works (Luke 18:9-14), this is not because the sins of the tax collector were not sins or because the good deeds of the Pharisee were not good deeds. Nor does it mean that the good that man does is not good before God, or the evil, not evil or at least not particularly important.

The reason for this paradoxical judgment of God is shown precisely from our question. The Pharisee no longer knows that he too has guilt. He has a completely clear conscience. But this silence of conscience makes him impenetrable to God and men, while the cry of conscience that plagues the tax collector makes him capable of truth and love.

Ratzinger, with a well-deserved reputation for Teu- tonic sobriety, could on occasion evoke a wry humor. In a 1984 workshop at the National Catholic Bioethics Center, examining the relationship between the magisterium of the Church and theologians, i.e., *theological experts*, he quipped, “It is strange that some theologians have difficulty accepting the precise and limited doctrine of papal in- fallibility, but see no problem in granting de facto infalli- bility to everyone who has a conscience.”

Ignorance is strength

The sainted apostle Paul admitted what anyone who has matured into adulthood should readily acknowledge, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor 13:11). These days, the pedagogy necessary to reach maturity, to grow up and relinquish childish ways has been usurped by those who would wield unconstrained power over the thoroughly demoral- ized. Far too many, through vincible ignorance, ideologi- cally contrived, find themselves in Neverland willing to believe what they have been sold—fairy dust and flights of metaversal fantasy—never wanting to outgrow their childhood.

It is the ambition of post-modern philosophers push- ing pseudonymous epistemologies to replace reality with

conjured self-medicated fantasies via the digital metaverse; to churn the mind into gelatinous masses of human dross, entertained but never enlightened; controlled and manipulated by the few, as Lewis so accurately predicted.

According to Wesley Smith *"The Great Reset is placing the world under control of invisible bureaucrats"* (Lifesite, January 14, 2022). Smith writes of the growing dangers concomitant with the encroaching "rule by experts."

What do I mean by "technocracy?" In essence, the word translates into "rule by experts." But in its currently gestating iteration, it means much more than that. The looming technocracy threatens to impose substantial control over most important aspects of life by "experts"—scientists, bioethicists, and societal "influencers"—but it also poses the threat of iron-clad enforcement of cultural orthodoxies and policies, not only in law, but also via the voluntary actions of powerful segments of the private sector.

Technocracy is a soft authoritarianism. It establishes no gulags to imprison dissenters and pronounces no tyrannous executions to punish the rebellious. Instead, a technocracy smothers democratic deliberation by removing most decision-making about essential policies from the people (through their elected representatives) to an expert class whose decisions are based on their education and experience, and the data they think matter.

It is far too easy to ignore the expert, never questioning their expertise, never doubting their power to control what men must or must not think; the aim for man to never think at all. The truth as C.S. Lewis surmised in *The Abolition of Man*, is man's "conquest of nature" meaning some men possess a power which is, "in reality, a power possessed by some men which they may, or may not, allow other men to profit by." Such men must inevitably—it is in man's nature—wield such power "over other men with Nature as its instrument."

There is another view worthy of consideration for it speaks to how such power over other men corrupts absolutely. Smith writes of the "quality of life ethic" in which a person needs to *earn* his or her value by possessing identified capabilities and characteristics. According to most bioethicists, Smith writes, "the most influential among them adhere more toward a "quality of life" utilitarian

approach in which some lives count for more or are perceived as having a greater claim to legal protection than others."

Here is the problem: Quality-of-life considerations are fine when they are a factor in medical decision-making—that is, does the patient think the potential harmful effects of a proposed treatment are worth risking to attain the health benefit sought. But it becomes a form of bigotry when the judged quality of a patient's life becomes determinate of his or her moral worth.

Here is how the Princeton bioethicist Peter Singer explains the 'quality of life ethic' as it pertains to life and death issues:

We should treat human beings in accordance with their ethically relevant characteristics. Some of these are inherent in the nature of being. They include consciousness, the capacity for physical, social, and mental interaction with other beings, having conscious preferences for continued life, and having enjoyable experiences. Other relevant aspects depend on the relationship of the being to others, having relatives for example who will grieve over your death, or being so situated in a group that if you are killed, others will fear for their own lives. All of these things make a difference to the regard and respect we should have for such a being.

Smith adds that the danger of such an approach should be obvious. "The standards Singer uses to measure human worth are his standards based on what he considers important and 'relevant.'" Such thinking is insane, irrational, and displays a level of ignorance no human being should ever claim. On such ignorance, Chesterton notes those who ought to be able to reason rightly so seldom are of a mind to do so. "It is necessary to say plainly that all this ignorance is simply covered by impudence. Statements are made so plainly and positively that men have hardly the moral courage to pause upon them and find that they are without support."

Memory is fleeting and yet it first must be memorialized, it must be come by through honest effort, through reality experienced not imagined, otherwise, it is like Winston (1984) struggling to remember even what year it might have been.

He tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite

like this. Were there always these vistas of rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with balks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron, their crazy garden walls sagging in all directions? ... But it was no use, he could not remember; nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright-lit tableaux occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible.

Ignorance is strength but for whom? A thought must not be thought, a question never asked. Fear and anxiety are the external manifestations of a hypnotized society exhibiting Mass Formation Psychosis (MFP). According to Clinical Psychologist Dr. Mattias Desmet, there are four conditions for MFP:

- Lack of social bonds
- Lack of meaning making
- High levels of free floating anxiety. They don't know why they are anxious and it is very distressing/painful for humans to experience because of the lack of control, resulting in risk of developing panic attack. They actively look for something to which they can attach the free-floating anxiety, something they can control.
- High levels of free floating frustration and aggression.

Whenever such social conditions exist, as they do now, the *experts* disseminate a narrative providing an object for the anxiety (White Supremacy, domestic terrorism, systemic racism, pandemics) and a strategy/solution (more power to the State) that will remove or diminish the object of anxiety, thus, all the free-floating anxiety attaches to the object suggested by the narrative, resulting in a willing participation in the strategy by the hypnotized masses. In effect, the people believe that by participating in the strategy they are in control of their fear and anxiety. When large groups of people participate in the strategy, it leads to a new social bond, new connectedness, a new solidarity, and this leads to a new sense-making in life. In other words, life becomes meaningful through the heroic struggle with the object of anxiety. As Erich Vieth (*About Mass Formation Hypnosis*, January 2, 2022) explains:

Those caught up in the narrative don't do so because the narrative is correct. Rather, they do so because they seek the new powerful social bonds. Many of the measures are not relevant or true, but they function as

rituals in which people participate in order to connect to the masses of others caught up in the narrative. The more absurd and unscientific the ... measures and the more that sacrifice is demanded, the better the measures function as rituals. This fits the general function of rituals: a behavior that you participate in not because it is functional ... but to show to the tribe/collective that the collective is more important than the individual. You would be in error to think that as [these] measures become more absurd, more people will wake up to the insanity, but that is an illusion. The more absurd the measures become, the more blinded certain people will become.

During the Nuremberg Trial (1945) Hermann Goering was asked "How did you convince the German people to accept all this?" to which he replied: "It was easy ... The only thing a government needs to turn people into slaves is fear. If you can find something to scare them you can make them do anything you want." Perhaps it was Frank Herbert (*Dune*) who said it best: "Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration."

According to a University of Minnesota health report,

Fear can interrupt processes in our brains that allow us to regulate emotions, read non-verbal cues and other information presented to us, reflect before acting, and act ethically. This impacts our thinking and decision-making in negative ways, leaving us susceptible to intense emotions and impulsive reactions. All of these effects can leave us unable to act appropriately.

It is difficult to overcome fear, especially when you are surrounded by it. Power corrupts and fear is an awesome weapon in the hands of those who would wield it. And yet, it should never be forgotten that such corrosive power exists within each of us, the power over future generations.

C.S. Lewis (*The Abolition of Man*) stated it with alarming perspicuity:

In order to understand fully what Man's power over Nature, and therefore the power of some men over other men, really means, we must picture the race extended in time from the date of its emergence to that of its extinction. Each generation exercises power over its successors: and each, in so far as it modifies the environment bequeathed to it and rebels against tradition, resists and limits the power of its predecessors. This modifies the picture which is sometimes painted of a

progressive emancipation from tradition and a progressive control of natural processes resulting in a continual increase of human power. In reality, of course, if any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after it are the patients of that power. They are weaker, not stronger: for though we may have put wonderful machines in their hands we have pre-ordained how they are to use them.

This then is the result of our progressive madness. We have successively been made weaker as we have engineered machines (technology with artificial intelligence) progressively stronger, more to our image and likeness. Our weaknesses, in the hands of the experts, will be our undoing. The greater our ignorance, the more terrible our fear; the greater our reliance on technological advances, the less in the image and likeness of God we appear to ourselves. Man thus becomes a poorly made, vulgar, dispensable machine. "For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means ... the power of some men to make other men what *they* please." And what they please, their protestations to the contrary, is to make disposable machines of us all. Lewis said it with a bluntness that should shock us all.

But the man-moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omniscient state and an irresistible scientific technique: we shall get at last a race of conditioners who really can cut out all posterity in what shape they please.

Man's conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men. There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger.

The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by prenatal conditionings, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. *Human* nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. The battle will then be won. We shall have taken the 'thread of life out of the hand of Clotho' and be henceforth free to make our species whatever we wish it to be. The battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it?

The last thing Lewis would have wanted to say, I am sure, would have been "I told you so," but he did tell us,

and even the most naïve among us must surely recognize the truth of it now realized.

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.

The abstraction of man

In a bit of retrospective pique, I found it rather an unlikely miracle to discover the meeting of two of the greatest literary and philosophical minds of the twentieth century: G.K. Chesterton and the Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. Nearly a century in the past (1925), Chesterton introduced the first of what would eventually come to sixty-six books written by Dr. Sheen as he then called him, *God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy*. In his introduction Chesterton recalled an "incident of a modern skeptical heroine going into a confessional box and telling the priest that she did not believe in his religion."

He asked her what she did believe in and she said reflectively, "Well, I don't believe in the Bible, and I don't think I believe in the immortality of the soul, and I'm not sure that I believe in God," and so on. And the unmoved cleric replied, "I didn't ask you what you didn't believe, but what you do believe." "Well," said the lady, "I believe that two and two make four." "Very well then," said the priest, "live up to that."

Chesterton followed noting that it was probably around the same time that Ibsen would have been writing: "Who knows that two and two do not make five in the fixed stars?" This seems to me the crux of the crises now before us. Just as Orwell imagined in 1984: we are terribly slow learners.

"You are a slow learner, Winston," said O'Brien gently. "How can I help it?" he blubbered. "How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four."

"Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane."

"These are the times that try men's souls" wrote Thomas Paine two-hundred forty-six years ago, then, evermore so today. The trying, however, is exacerbated by a foolish agnosticism that wills neither to acknowledge nor deny the very existence of the soul or God for the matter. In *God and Intelligence*, Sheen considers the nature of God as perceived by the nature of man, pointing out that the problem is much confused by a sort of sentimental version of the divine dignity of man. "As in every other modern matter," Chesterton writes, "the people in question seize on the sentiment without the reason for it."

This sentiment is a sediment; it is the dregs of our dogma about a divine origin. They begin by bowing down to man as the image of God; and then forget the God and bow down to the graven image. ... It is the view that Being is Becoming; or that God does not exist yet, but may be said to be living in hopes. The blasphemy is not ours. It is enough for us that our enemies have retreated from the territory of reason, on which they once claimed so many victories; and have fallen back upon the borderlands of myth and mysticism, like so many other barbarians with whom civilization is at war.

The problem is generational: each succeeding generation grown *in vitro* weaker and, through ever more selective grooming, less 'human'. It is as Lewis saw so clearly: "They are, rather, not men (in the old sense) at all." Our humanity has been sacrificed at the altar of the Conditioners, the *experts*, in order for the high priests of Nature to "devote themselves to the task of deciding what 'Humanity' shall henceforth mean." It is ironic how as man conquers—or believes to have conquered—Nature, "we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely 'natural'—to their irrational impulses. Nature, untrammelled by values, rules the Conditioners and, through them, all humanity." The evidence is obvious and yet, so few find themselves the least interested in the knowing. The preponderance of men prefer not knowing for they have been indoctrinated into believing ignorance is strength.

We no longer rule with the mind but with unquestion-

ing sentiment. Reality and truth are what one is wont to make believe through the oracle of Oculus. "When all that says 'it is good' has been debunked, what says 'I want' remains." As Lewis would claim, "those who stand outside all judgements of value cannot have any ground for preferring one of their own impulses to another except the emotional strength of that impulse. We may legitimately hope that among the impulses which arise in minds thus emptied of all 'rational' or 'spiritual' motives, some will be benevolent." It is a false hope doomed to utter despair. *Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate* (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here).

Sheen wrote in *God and Intelligence* of the radically different ways of approaching God. The Intellectualist once argued for the *God-proved-by-reason-to-be-existent* while the post-modern argued that such a God was and is too far removed from human needs, therefore, the *God-I-feel-I-can-use* is of much greater value. "The gods we stand by are the gods we need and can use."

Hence it follows that, although we cannot prove the existence of God, it does not mean that God has lost all His value. The idea may be "theoretically worthless," it is quite true, but it still has a "regulative use." Individual need is to be the judge of God. "The voice of human experience within us, judging and condemning all gods that stand athwart the pathway along which it feels to be advancing," is the measure by which individuals prefer certain gods at one time and certain gods at another. Professor Leuba writes:

The truth of the matter can be put this way: God is not known, He is used—sometimes as a meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as object of love. If He proves Himself useful, the religious consciousness asks for no more than this. Does God really exist? How does He exist? What is He? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse.

There once was an age when man searched for truth no matter where it lay or how hard it rubbed raw the ragged scars of mindless preconception. Once upon a time, wisdom was an aching hunger seeking satisfaction, knowing (epistemology) what was true and real was the noblest of pursuits, the pursuit of knowledge attained through reason was held essential to becoming fully human. And

no one cared to be considered subhuman or in the least inhumane. Not everyone could walk with Aristotle, argue Plato or Socrates, philosophize with Augustine or Aquinas, theorize as Galileo, hypothesize as Einstein, or follow faithfully the teachings of Jesus Christ. And yet, all could aspire to know more truth than yesterday, to dream of one day standing on the shoulders of such formidable ancestral giants and reaching the heights of heaven.

Man knew he had been made in the image and likeness of God; he could not explain it, but he knew it because the Church was God's voice, instituted by Christ, the Word Incarnate, instituted to teach all that he had commanded. In order to fulfill its mission, the Church founded schools and universities where the fundamentals of education through rigorous research and open debate were not only encouraged, but rigorously defended. Reasoned argument was the overarching pedagogical approach to learning. Each successive generation passed on what was then known, with frustrated taunts to the yet to be discovered unknown, with the firm resolve that the next generation would add further wealth to the treasury.

Anthony Esolen, *Our Church and Our Elites* (The Catholic Thing) recently observed that at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, they teach students who read and discuss Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Shakespeare and Cervantes, Michelangelo and Rodin.

When the young Augustine was at Carthage studying rhetoric among other young men who strove for power and influence in the world of law, he happened upon a book we have since lost, the *Hortensius*, by Cicero. That book changed his life, because it kindled in him a hunger for wisdom, what the Greeks called philosophy. I guess that in a bad world, we need a *Hortensius* now and again.

Many other works belong, so to speak, to all the world, but the world has cast them aside, or slandered them, or mangled them beyond recognition. The world will have to turn to the Church not only for Christ, then, but for Cicero too, not only for wisdom regarding the things of Heaven, but for human wisdom about human things, not only for Paul, but for Plato. And more.

Alas, somewhere, somewhen the *passing on* has become passé, or perhaps, merely too much to bear repeating. Truth has become an itch one dares not scratch. Those

obligated to pass on the accumulated wealth of knowing have found it easier and more entertaining to tilt at windmills and chase social butterflies than form novice minds so that they too can increase and *pass on* their ancestral inheritance. Disinherited from the past, each succeeding generation has become more an abstraction, further distanced from the knowing that was rightfully their inheritance of Nature and of Nature's God. Lewis acknowledged as much when he said, "no generation can bequeath to its successors what it has not got." As Walter Hooper wrote (1970) in the introduction to *God in the Dock*, "I can see that much of the ignorance today is rightly attributed by Lewis to 'the liberal writers who are continually accommodating and whittling down the truth of the Gospel.'"

This is the truth that now confronts us: generation upon generation upon generation of the blind teaching the blind to see what they care not nor do not know. Consider an art class. The teacher knows little and cares less about art than what nose ring to wear—a reminder of the now ancient practice of ringing the snouts of pigs to prevent rooting in the dirt—or the insanity of asking what *pronouns* the students might most prefer. The students are told to paint, not an object before them such as a vase or lamp, but their internalized interpretation of Pablo Picasso's *Totem Faces* which they have never seen but contextualized through the impoverished eye of the pink-haired, thoroughly inked and illustrated instructor. Now, consider a subsequent art class where the students are instructed to express their internalized interpretation of the previous class's internalized interpretation of Pablo Picasso's *Totem Faces* which they are not shown, have never seen, only described. And so on, generation upon generation upon generation. As abstract as Picasso's art is, ever more garish gibberish would be the product of each succeeding generation of novel artistry.

Chesterton, speaking of prehistoric man, wrote of what we know and do not know; of what "we do know is that they did have pictures; and the pictures have remained."

And there remains with them, as already suggested, the testimony to something that is absolute and unique; that belongs to man and to nothing else except man;

that is a difference of kind and not a difference of degree. A monkey does not draw clumsily and a man cleverly; a monkey does not begin the art of representation and a man carry it to perfection. A monkey does not do it at all; he does not begin to do it at all; he does not begin to begin to do it at all. A line of some kind is crossed before the first faint line can begin.

No matter how convinced one might be that a thousand monkeys given enough time sitting before a thousand typewriters might reveal the Word of God, it is but a foolish fantasy. The same must be said for the countless students who will to become “educators” by matriculating in pseudonymous studies of gender, ethnicity, identity, culture, multicultural, diversity, or the *étudier du jour*.

Thus, it is with the approaching abstraction of man. As man is confounded into abstraction, the value of man *qua* man becomes mundane, worth less, worthless. No more is individual man in the image and likeness of an unseen, unknowable God; man is crudely drawn and redrawn in the poorest image and likeness of his carnival mirrored self, as his Controllers deem sufficiently compliant and, to the end, but useful idiots.

The elites have been in the vanguard of cultural evisceration, in all kinds of ways. Only the Church can recover the abandoned land, and till it with love. By comparison with what people still within living memory once took for granted, there are now no dances, no socials, no local ball leagues, no community singing, few parades—and those but exercises in garishness and obscenity. And no genuine common life.

While I agree with Esolen in so far as the Church may be the only hope for recovery of the soil that has long been abandoned and now lies barren, the questions which must be asked are “Will it? Can it?” Where is the traditional catholic stainless steel, the zeal to till the fallow soil, to catechize, to teach all the nations all that Christ commanded? I am reminded of a parable. Jesus once told the crowd:

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It

came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold (Mark 4:3-8).

As Jesus explained, the sower (clergy) sows the Word but not all the seed will fall on fertile ground. That is as it must be, but if the sower refuses or neglects to sow the Word, it matters not where the seed *may* fall. If the sower prefers popularity, avoids or stirs controversy, speaks not of the existence of evil, bears false witness, mixes bad seed with the good and thus fouls the harvest: of what good will come of it. Likewise, if the sower knows nothing or little of the proper method for sowing, how fruitful the harvest?

Like the aforementioned remarks by Lewis, no generation of prelate (sower) can bequeath what they have not got. Over decades, liberal theologians and wastrel prelates have continually whittled down the truth of the Gospel, subjected the faithful to false or erroneous teaching, and promoted controversy by their personal behavior and public pronouncements they then hubristically nailed to the cathedral door. Jesus told Peter three times to feed his sheep. Tragically, too many of the current crop of successors have failed to feed their flocks a healthy meal.

It is generational. There are so few heroes anymore, no Thomas More (beheaded), no Stephen (stoned), Lawrence (grilled), Sebastian (clubbed), no Andrew (crucified) or Bartholomew (skinned). Fewer today: Clement Shahbaz Bhatti (gunned down), Annalena Tonelli (shot in the head) or Father Jacques Hamel (throat slit). Such as these seldom get any notice beyond the customary tabloid obituary. Those that are noticed seldom practice what they preach and what they preach is often heretical and at times nothing more than apostatizing rhetoric. And poor rhetoric anointed with the salve of heretical clerisy.

For the most part, it is vincible ignorance that fortifies their teaching; years of advanced education provides no assurance of proper preparation for the care and feeding of their appointed flocks. To put it bluntly, ignorance knows both saint and sinner, and yet, it would seem, so few have been given even a modicum of well-trained tongue. A cleric is equally as capable as a historian in propounding a pseudonymous epistemology, that is: uttering falsehoods and heresies. The only difference, the cleric

proudly proclaims to be speaking in *Persona Christi* when in truth his breath smells of rotten eggs and sulfur and his silver-tongued oratory leads the flock on a crooked path to the very gates of *Gehenna*.

Lewis never identified the Conditioners, those high and mighty few who would form men into something more—but ultimately no longer—human. It is easy, far too easy, to recognize those who aspire to such a lofty throne. Be they heads-of-state or bureaucrat, rich as Croesus corporate oligarchs, or pompous hierarchs seeking earthly glory, they wear their green badge of C(onditioner) with overweening pride. They are in it for themselves; they are masters of their own unwinding, masters of none, even of themselves. They believe they are lords of the universe and hold such power over men to use and discard. Like Saruman standing atop Orthanc, they believe they are in command of all they survey, but they are but fools, ensnared by the Dark Lord Sauron who would rule them all.

This then is the conundrum of the times in which we find ourselves participating: there are signs everywhere of corruption, both societal and ecclesiastical. We could say never has there been such a time but that would be untrue. Less than six months before this aging soul breathed his first, the Venerable Fulton Sheen delivered a radio address (January 26, 1947), a sermon to begin the seventeenth year of the *Catholic Hour*. In it he spoke of what was “contained in the Papal Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*: the all important subject of Communism.” He began by asking, “Why is it that so few realize the seriousness of our present crisis?” a question that remains on many lips today. He went on to answer and his answer should give us more than a moment’s pause:

Partly because men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because it involves too much self-accusation and principally because they have no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world. The great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on. The tragedy is not that the hairs of our civilization are gray; it is rather our failure to see that they are. The very day Sodom was destroyed, Scripture describes the sun as bright; Bal-
thasar’s realm came to an end in darkness; people saw

Noah preparing for the flood one hundred and twenty years before it came, but men would not believe. In the midst of seeming prosperity, world-unity, the decree to the angels goes forth but the masses go on their sordid routines. As our Lord said: “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not till the flood came, and took them all away; so also shall the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:38, 39) Well may Our Savior say to us what He said to the Sadducees and Pharisees in His time: “When it is evening, you say: It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning: Today there will be a storm, for the sky is red and lowering. You know then how to discern the face of the sky: and can you not know the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:2, 3)

The signs of our times point to two inescapable truths, the first of which is that we have come to the end of the post-Renaissance chapter of history which made man the measure of all things. More particularly the three basic dogmas of the modern world are dissolving before our very eyes. We are witnessing: 1) The liquidation of the economic man, or the assumption that man who is a highly developed animal has no other function in life than to produce and acquire wealth, and then like the cattle in the pastures, be filled with years and die. 2) The liquidation of the idea of the natural goodness of man who has no need of a God to give Him rights, or a Redeemer to salvage him from guilt, because progress is automatic thanks to science—education and evolution, which will one day make man a kind of a god as H.G. Wells said, with his feet on the earth and his hands among the stars. 3) The liquidation of rationalism, or the idea that the purpose of human reason is not to discover the meaning and goal of life, namely the salvation of the soul, but merely to devise new technical advances to make on this earth a city of man to displace the city of God.

Sheen finished his sermon with words still true and relevant now seventy-three years advanced: “The only way out of this crisis is spiritual, because the trouble is not in the way we keep our books, but in the way we keep our souls. The time is nearer than you think.”

This essay will appear in the February 2022 issue of *The Postil* (<https://thepostil.com>.) Please visit this online magazine for the many other essays from a wealth of internationally renowned authors.

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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

God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy

Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Longmans, Green & Co., 1928;

Cluny Media, 2019, 322 pages.

Religion Without God

Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Longmans, Green & Co., 1928;

Cluny Media, 2019, 270 pages.

The Everlasting Man

G.K. Chesterton

Dover Publications, 2007, 270 pages.

After Humanity

Michael Ward

Word on Fire Academic, 2021, 241 pages.

Homo Americanus

Zbigniew Janowski

St. Augustine's Press, 2021, 259 pages.

The Cardinal Müller Report

Gerhard Cardinal Müller

Ignatius Press, 2021, 221 pages.

Knowledge and Decisions

Thomas Sowell

Basic Books, 1980, 422 pages.

Intellectuals and Society

Thomas Sowell

Basic Books, 2011, 669 pages.

Enemies of the Permanent Things

Russell Kirk

Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1984-88, 311 pages.

The Dying Citizen

Victor Davis Hanson

Basic Books, 2021, 420 pages.

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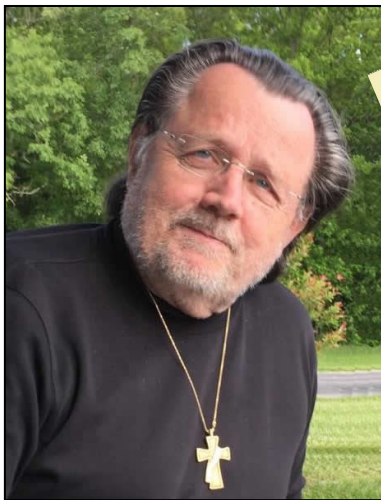
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) and a servant of God. He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the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

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