



A journal for restless minds

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DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī 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! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

Through A Glass, Dimly

Non quod scriptum est

Saint Paul wrote of many things yet perhaps his discourses on love and our imperfect nature are what offers us the greatest food for thought, words for us to mull over and consider.

Several readers took umbrage with a recent article (*Ecumenism Run Amok*, Colloqui, 1/18, Sep 23, 2016, pp 2-3), expressing their deep disappointment and anger, in personal letters, to what they clearly perceived to be an effort to denigrate Pope Francis as well as Lutherans and non-Catholics in general.

As I have made clear on several occasions in the past, whether reader comments are appreciative or not, I always welcome what they have to say and these latest letters offer no exception. I thank those who wrote for their thoughts and will respond to their concerns with the utmost respect and love.

As Saint Paul wrote "*At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror,... At present I know partially...*"¹ and that is perhaps truer than we imperfect creatures are want to admit at times. We often see, or in this instance, read indistinctly and know but partially, and in such instances we see what we are inclined to see while blinded to what we perceive to be irrele-

vant or of little import. We impart meaning without understanding and see phantoms where none exist. Such, it would appear, is the case in this instance.

One reader wrote: "*Saying Lutherans and Protestants are heretics and we should not show mercy or have anything to do with them is not what Jesus came for.*"



Had I written such a statement I most certainly would have to agree with the reader, but nowhere in that article did I make such a statement, either directly or by implication. That is simply *non quod scriptum est*—not what was written.

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What I did write, backed up by reputable and verifiable sources, was that *“Protestantism” is a heresy*, one clearly established and acknowledged as such by the Catholic Church and every pope from the Council of Trent up to and including the present Pope. Catholics have been proscribed from attending *“protestant services”* since the Council of Trent; nothing however precludes Catholics from any non-religious association with non-Catholics. We are called by Jesus to love our neighbor as ourselves, that means everyone, not just Catholics.

While the Second Vatican Council called for *“dialogue”* with all faiths, it neither altered or abolished any long-standing doctrine nor did it promulgate any new doctrine. What precisely was meant by *“dialogue”*—within any council documents—was not and never has been clearly defined.

Whether dialogue is clearly defined is of little consequence with respect to the proscription banning Catholics from attending non-Catholic worship services. That proscription remains in force.

I stand by the statement that for the Pope to *celebrate* the 500th anniversary of one of the grave heresies by presiding in common worship with Lutheran Bishops is wrong. It is wrong to do so because of the public celebratory statement it makes concerning an event that did grave and

long-lasting harm to the Church. It is wrong because it ignores the ugly truth concerning the actions of the heresiarch Martin Luther who hated the Catholic Church and all she represented.

The Catholic Church excommunicated Luther and anathematized the heresy which he developed and supported. No mercy is owed Luther for the damage he inflicted upon Holy Mother Church; to celebrate the anniversary of his heresy and excommunication is simply unconscionable.



Frequently mentioned was the Year of Mercy. I firmly believe that we must be merciful as Jesus taught us. As disciples of Jesus Christ we must show mercy to the less fortunate, the hungry, the poor, those falsely imprisoned, and to all who share in our common humanity. We should show mercy to those who are not members of the one true Catholic faith and ask God the Father to help them find their way home to the Church instituted by his Son, Jesus Christ—the Catholic Church.

However: it is not mercy to give

false hope of rapprochement by conceding theological principles.

It is not mercy to imply that grave doctrinal issues are somehow inconsequential or of little consequence in the search for *future unity*.

It is not mercy to imply that through *ecumenism* and *dialogue* the Catholic Church will alter fundamental doctrine and dogma to meet somewhere in the middle.

It is not mercy to imply acceptance of beliefs antithetical to the Catholic faith (e.g. true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, papal authority, apostolic succession, the sanctity of marriage, the inestimable value of every human life, etc.) which are not subject to papal or magisterial revision.

It is not mercy to deny, through word or deed, that there is only one true church, the Catholic Church.

The same reader continued: *“You sound like we should go back to the Dark Ages and forget about the Vatican II Council. A number of popes worked on it and approved it.”*

I have no desire to return to the dark ages although I readily admit to a deep and abiding hope that one day the Second Vatican Council may be forgotten much as the Church has forgotten the Second Council of Constantinople, held in 553.

What? You have never heard of such a council?

There is a reason why you have not. It has been purposely and effectively erased, forgotten because it was so disastrous. A number of popes worked on that council and approved of it as well but that doesn't change the fact that it was later decided to let it languish in the dusty forgotten annals of irredeemable Church history.

And yes, I personally would love to see the Church return to pre-council form, that is, to return the Mass to its former regal beauty and remove the decidedly protestant influence of the current rite. And before you decide to write angry letters, if would do well for us to remember the stated intention of Pope Paul VI, the author of the current liturgy, to turn the traditional Catholic Holy Mass into a more collegial protestant service:

*"The intention of Pope Paul VI with regard to what is called the Mass, was to reform the Catholic liturgy in such a way that it should almost coincide with the Protestant liturgy.... There was with Paul VI an ecumenical intention to remove, or at least to correct, or at least to relax, what was too Catholic in the traditional sense, in the Mass, and, I repeat, to get the Catholic Mass closer to the Calvinist mass."*²

This position contradicted *every* pope from the very beginnings of the Catholic Church up to and including his predecessor, Pope John XXIII.

We should also remember that popes are not of themselves infallible. They are men, subject to the weaknesses which plague all men, and are capable of making mistakes, errors in judg-

ment, and yes even sin. Pope Saint John Paul II received the Sacrament of Reconciliation every week. We ought not place the Pope, any pope, on too high a pedestal or canonize him before he leaves this mortal coil. The first and only duty of any pope is to defend and protect the Catholic Church and her doctrinal and dogmatic teaching, the faith which all Catholics are to believe.

Another reader quoted Pope Francis: *"We are called to be one in Jesus Christ and to avoid putting disharmony and divisions between the baptized first, because what unites us is much more than what divides us."* While I admire the sentiment I cannot agree to the minimization of what divides us, for what separates us are truly grave and serious matters, not so easily diminished or dismissed.

The reader continues: *"Pope Francis reaches out to all people, showing us that we're all one human family. Why would you want to judge his living the message of Christ?"* Here is perhaps the crucial point. There is nothing wrong with Pope Francis reaching out to all people, to show us that we're all one human family (that in itself should be obvious) but in reaching out he should be asking all to come into the loving arms of Christ's Church, not walking into theirs. Jesus said, *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*³

Notice *what* he did not say: he did not say go out to all the nations and worship and believe as they worship and believe. Nor did he say to incorpo-

rate their beliefs into our own. He said go, teach them *to observe all* that he had commanded.

Jesus consistently said, whenever he encountered a sinner, to *"go and sin no more."* Yes, he forgave sinners and he showed love and mercy to those willing to hear his voice but he showed no mercy to those who refused to change their sinful ways.

The reader continued: *"They have been and continue to be examples of seeing Our Lord in each and every person regardless of religious affiliation and status and wealth. We must live by their examples of reconciliation, dialogue and forgiveness and not by shortsightedness and/or pharisaical views. ... This means showing loving concern for all people, caring for one another and respecting one another."* Seeing Our Lord in each and every person is true and right and just. Loving, caring, and respecting one another are what Jesus says we are to do. We are called to love everyone because we are all created by God but we are not called to accept what they believe. We are called to evangelize.

Living by their (the recent popes) examples is problematic due to the ambivalence of the terms *reconciliation* and *dialogue*. To reconcile differences implies acceptance, in some measure, with the heretical views that caused the original separation. If it was heretical 500 years ago, precisely how is it no longer heretical? Acceptance of any part of a heresy *is* heresy. There can be *forgiveness* but no *dialogue* between right and wrong or truth and heresy.

1. 1 Cor 13:12.

2. Apropos, #17, pp. 8f..

3. Mt 28:19-20.

The Gift Of Gratitude

Giving thanks for the gift of life

Shakespeare once observed: *"Blow, blow, thou winter wind thou are not so unkind as man's ingratitude."* It is perhaps the most common of all human failings: ingratitude. How often an undeserved gift grants no favor in return; a gift received, no gratitude expressed.

It is our attitude of self-sufficiency that denies thoughts of gratitude for all the gifts we have received. We are far too self-absorbed, reluctant to grow beyond our childhood, believing we are owed simply for existing. We treat gifts received like children tearing through wrapping paper, caring nothing for the gift, while but anticipating the next. Each gift cast aside, so soon forgotten as we look for the next new thing, too quickly discarded.

Why do we crave such gifts without appreciation? Life is fleeting yet we savor none of it, unaware of all we have received, searching aimlessly for what, we do not know? We cannot rest within the gift—we fail to understand what Augustine wrote: *"Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."*

If we could count the endless deliverances, the rescues and the healings, the worries and the fears which even now pursue us; if we would thank the Lord for all the dreaded outcomes never met, we would breach no limit to our gratitude. Yet we have no desire to think of God and all the gifts he has bestowed and thus we fail to stop and say, *"Thank you, Lord."*

Rather, we continue in our fog, never realizing we have yet to live at all. The greatest gift is that we live and yet we squander it on petty nothings, never taking full possession of our lives because we find no joy in what we have received.

It is only when we clear away the fog and glimpse the wondrous gift of our existence that we begin to live. It is then, when we will come to know what it means—like lepers Naaman and the Samaritan—to be saved.



Perhaps it is the story that best describes the gift gratitude provides: it is a story of a woman, well advanced in age, residing in an extended care facility. Afflicted with an incurable wasting disease, her body slowly fading away as the months quickly pass.

One day a young woman, visiting another resident, was drawn by the unrestrained joy that radiated from the woman's face. Though she could no longer move her arms and legs, she would say, *"I'm just so happy I can move my neck."* When she could no longer move her neck, she would say, *"I'm just so glad I can hear and see."*

When the young woman asked the

old woman what would happen if she lost her sight and hearing, the gentle woman said, *"I'll just be so grateful that you come to visit."*¹

Gratitude is in itself a gift, returning heartfelt appreciation for what has been received. Gratitude is at the heart of our readings for this weekend.

In our first reading we hear of Naaman, a Syrian leper, who like the Samaritan in the Gospel passage, was an outsider, a foreigner who did not worship the God of Israel. When he came to Elisha and asked to be cured he expected something spectacular and thus was rather annoyed when Elisha told him to go plunge seven times into the Jordan. But he did as he was told and was cleansed of his disease.

In his joy, Naaman rushed back to Elisha in gratitude, proclaiming: *"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant."*² Inexplicably Elisha refused. While we find no explicit reason for his refusal, Elisha undoubtedly saw in Naaman's cure the hand of God; Elisha had done nothing but speak the word of God. Naaman owed his gratitude to God; Elisha's reward was God's love and grace.

When Elisha refused to accept any gift from him, Naaman makes a strange request:

*If you will not accept,
please let me, your servant,
have two mule-loads of earth,*

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*for I will no longer offer
holocaust or sacrifice
to any other god
except to the Lord.*

Why on earth would Naaman ask Elisha for permission to haul off a pile of dirt? Unlike the Israelites at the time, every group had their own local god or gods. The God of Israel, Yahweh, differed in that the Israelites knew Yahweh was both Creator of all and God of all.

Thus when Naaman, a Syrian, was healed, in the name of Yahweh, he came to the same conclusion: there is only one God, Yahweh, the God of Israel. He asked for two mule-loads of dirt to honor Yahweh in gratitude by taking a portion of the land of Israel back to his home.

Likewise, we hear Saint Paul remind us Christ suffered and died for our salvation, a gift from God. It is through our gift of gratitude that we must bear everything for the sake of others “so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory.”³

If we deny his gift he will deny us; but—and this is most important—even when we are *unfaithful* he will remain *faithful* for that is his nature and he cannot deny himself. He offers himself and the opportunity to live and reign with him as unearned gifts whether we are want to accept them or not. We show our gratitude by remaining faithful, our ingratitude by our failure to remain in Christ Jesus.

Bruno of Segni suggested that the ten lepers in the Gospel represent the sum total of all sinners. He observed that they stood at a distance and called out to Jesus, “*Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!*” They did so because no one in their condition dared come close.⁴

It is the same for us while we continue to sin: sin turns us away from God and damages our relationship with him. He continually pours out his gifts of love and grace and in our sin we ignore his gifts and display our ingratitude.

“As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.”⁵

One out of ten upon realizing he had been cured returned to show his gratitude; only one and he was a Samaritan. What is remarkable is the dilemma the Samaritan then faced when Jesus told the ten to show themselves to the priests: to which temple should he report? For the Jews, this would be the temple in Jerusalem but Samaritans recognized Mount Gerizim as the true place to worship God and the Samaritan priests were at Gerazim.

The Samaritan realized that the *sacred place* no longer was in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim but now resided in the person of Jesus and so he returns to him, “*praising God in a loud voice.*”

Here we meet the inadequacy of language, for Luke writes *euchariston*—a word that is used in the Greek bible only for thanks and praise given to

God. And “*God*” in Luke’s writings is reserved for the Father. Thus, in Luke’s language, this sentence is in effect saying the Samaritan was acknowledging the proper place to encounter the presence of God was in the person of Jesus.⁶

Returning to Bruno of Segni, he said of the Samaritan, “*He stands for all those who, after their cleansing by the waters of baptism or healing by the sacrament of penance, renounce the devil and take Christ as their model, following him with praise, adoration, and thanksgiving, and nevermore abandoning his service.*”

We should not ignore that ten lepers were healed although only one returned to express his gratitude. All ten were healed; none lost the gift of healing; none were punished for their ingratitude.

Gifts of God are always without condition, repentance is neither asked for nor demanded. True gratitude has no ulterior motivation; one cannot express gratitude expecting further gifts or blessings. Amen.



Homily for
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C
2 Kings 5:14-17
2 Timothy 2:8-13
Luke 17:11-19

1. John Kavanaugh, S.J., *The Word Engaged: Gratitude*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

2. 2 Kgs 5:15.

3. 2 Tm 2:10.

4. Bruno of Segni, Bishop, *On Luke’s Gospel 2*, 50: PL 165, 426-428.

5. Lk 17:14-16.

6. Dennis Hamm, S.J., *Let the Scriptures Speak: What the Samaritan Sees*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

Private Judgment

In whom is your faith?

There is certitude in divine faith which transcends faith of a more general nature. In general, faith, which includes human faith, is a firm assent of the mind to things unseen.

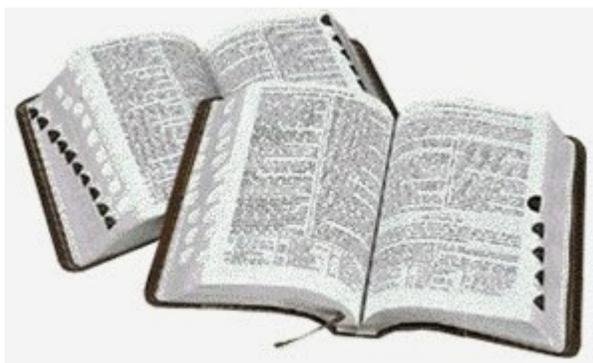
We frequently choose to act, relying on the witness of other people who have seen what we have not. All education begins with human faith in our parents and teachers. We learn primarily by human faith, trusting in the authority of teachers, books, the media, public opinion, and friends.

Lawrence Feingold writes *"The essence of faith is that one does not directly see the intrinsic reason for the truth of a given proposition. In this sense, it is like opinion. However, faith differs from opinion in its certitude. In the act of faith, one sees clearly that the proposition merits firm assent on account of the authority of those who teach it, though not on account of its own intrinsic evidence. It is held as certain, and so mere opinion or deliberate doubt cannot coexist with faith, for they are mutually exclusive. A religious opinion is distinct from an act of religious faith, for the former is held to be uncertain or without sufficient foundation."*¹

Divine faith is much the same as human faith, but concerns unseen objects such as God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, heaven, etc. *"The act of divine faith is made possible when one*

grasps that God, who is the First Truth who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has indeed revealed Himself. This is the source of the firmness of divine faith and the grounds for the moral duty of believing."

The First Vatican Council defined divine faith as a *"supernatural virtue whereby, inspired by the grace of God, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because the intrinsic*



*truth of things is recognized by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither err nor deceive."*²

The Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum* adds to Vatican I's definition by speaking of faith as the *"obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,' and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him."*³

Feingold adds *"The light of divine faith, unlike human faith, is not subject to error, for faith is properly divine or supernatural only insofar as it is belief in what has actually been revealed by God. For this reason, divine faith is strong enough to be described as 'the substance of things hoped for.' Divine faith has a certainty that comes from its*

divine source that enables it to be a sufficient foundation for man's journey to his supernatural end.

However, it sometimes happens that a believer is mistaken in thinking that something has been revealed by God that has not in fact been revealed. When someone believes something false in matters of religion, the error should not be attributed to the virtue of divine faith, but rather to human faith in some heresy or false interpretation or insight that is mistaken for divine Revelation. *Something has been believed out of ignorance or negligence that ought not to have been believed."*

Martin Luther radically altered the definition of divine faith by disconnecting it from

the witness of the Church and her Magisterium. In a dispute with Johann Eck, a Catholic theologian, Luther publicly stated that ecumenical councils could err. Eck responded that if ecumenical councils were subject to error, then there could no longer be any certainty on any point of faith. The denial of the infallibility of ecumenical councils and popes undermines the faith of the Church. For, how does the believer know what truths God has revealed if there is not infallible authority to interpret Revelation.

The result of Luther's disconnection was the Protestant principle of *private judgment*. Used by Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, it inevitably led to the division of the churches and the multiplication of sects.

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The nineteenth-century Spanish writer, Jaime Balmes wrote: *"If there be anything constant in Protestantism, it is undoubtedly the substitution of private judgment for public and lawful authority."*⁴

As Feingold notes, *"In consequence of the multiplication of Christian denominations, faith has increasingly become identified with mere religious sentiment or opinion. At first, such a view was characteristic of liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century. It has since come to be shared by many Catholics as well, aptly referred to as 'cafeteria Catholics.'"*

Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote of what he called the dogmatic principle and of private judgment. First, dogmatic principle:

"That there is truth then; that there is one truth; that religious error is in itself of an immoral nature; that its maintainers, unless involuntarily such, are guilty of maintaining it; that it is to be dreaded; that the search for truth is not the gratification of curiosity; that its attainment has nothing of the excitement of a discovery; that the mind is below truth, not above it, and is bound not to descant upon it, but to venerate it; that truth and falsehood are set before us for the trial of our hearts; that our choice is an awful giving forth of lots on which salvation or rejection is inscribed; that 'before all things it is necessary to hold the Catholic faith'; that 'he that would be saved must thus think,' and not otherwise; that 'if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if though seeketh her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of

*God,'—this is the dogmatic principle, which has strength."*⁵

And then the principle of private judgment:

"That truth and falsehood in religion are but matter of opinion; that one doctrine is as good as another; that the Governor of the world does not intend that we should gain the truth; that there is no truth; that we are not more acceptable to God by believing this than by believing that; that no one is answerable for his opinions; that they are a matter of necessity or accident; that it is enough if we sincerely hold what we profess; that our merit lies in seeking, not in possessing; that it is a duty to follow what seems to us true, without a fear lest it should not be true; that it may be a gain to succeed, and can be no harm to fail; that we may take up and lay down opinions at pleasure; that belief belongs to the mere intellect, not to the heart also; that we may safely trust to ourselves in matters of Faith, and need no other guide, —this is the principle of philosophies and heresies, which is very weakness."

Feingold concludes, *"The notion of private judgment, ... is weakness because it attacks the very possibility of making the total gift of one's mind to God. Divine faith is the supernatural submission of the intellect to God, the divine Teacher. This submission is actually a great liberation, freeing the mind from ignorance. But this submission will never be total if one retains the prerogative of private judgment."*

While recent writings within these pages have dwelt upon the issue of heresy—which to some may appear to be much to do about nothing—it is,

on the contrary, the very real presence of heresy held by so many and our inability or unwillingness to admit to it that makes it of particular relevance to us all.

Let us remind ourselves of what heresy means and who is a heretic: *"Heresy is a particular kind of disbelief by which someone who believes in Christ obstinately rejects the authority of the Church to define doctrine and corrupts or denies some truths of faith. They 'choose' and obstinately hold their tenets of faith according to their own reason and will, which they put above the authority of the Church. Interestingly, the word 'heresy' comes from the Greek for election or choice. Every heresy involves a kind of picking and choosing of the faith according to one's own personal (or group) criteria. This is the same spirit that leads to 'cafeteria Catholicism.'"*

While we must love everyone as God loves us, that does not preclude us from recognizing, either in ourselves or others, those actions and beliefs which are heretical, antithetical to the divine faith and the teachings of the Church and the magisterium on matters revealed by God. Catholics *do not* have the right to pick and choose what to believe. To do so is heresy, to believe so is heretical, and a heretic.

1. Lawrence Feingold, *Faith Comes from What is Heard: An Introduction to Fundamental Theology*, Emmaus Academic, July 8, 2016.

2. First Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith Dei Filius* (1870), ch. 3 (DS, 3008)

3. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, ch. 1, 5.

4. Jaime Balmes, *Protestantism and Catholicity Compared in Their Effects on the Civilization of Europe* (Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1851), 26-27.

5. Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 357-358.

Pulpit Politics

We must speak out

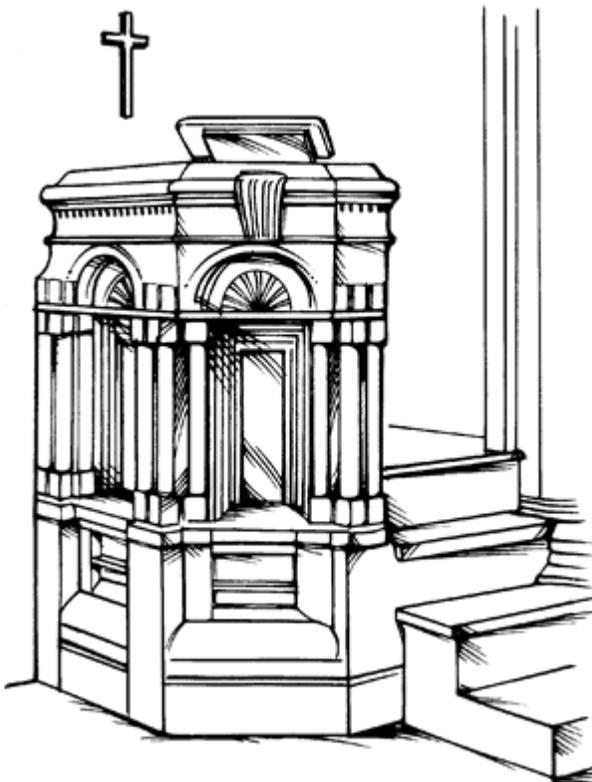
There is a palpable sense of urgency and consequence coursing through the veins of citizens of faith these days. Few would deny that whoever is elected this year will determine the course of our country for the foreseeable future; few would deny that the choices leave much to be desired. But choose we must or the choice will be made by others who may have a far different and less palatable vision of the direction our nation ought to go.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have spoken out on many of the issues that lay before us, those that threaten our religious freedoms and our right to freely worship God through our Catholic faith. Many bishops have spoken publicly whenever Catholics in public office and those who are seeking office, have through their actions and words expressed beliefs counter to the teachings of the Church and her magisterium.

The bishops have been forthright in calling upon all clergy to speak out from the pulpit, if and when necessary, on these issues. It is crucially important that we speak up whenever our fundamental freedoms are threatened. It is not only our responsibility and our duty to speak up; as citizens, we have a solemn obliga-

tion to do so. To keep silent is to ignore those obligations incumbent upon all free members of society.

There are some who hold the notion that the practice of preaching politics from the pulpit is somehow inappropriate, wrong, or forbidden. This is a common assertion, but fortunately an incorrect one.



A 1954 amendment to the U.S. tax code states that tax-exempt organizations (churches fall into this category) are “absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, **any political campaign** on behalf of (or in opposition to) **any candidate for elective public office.**” An online guide for churches and religious organizations states that “Violation of this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the imposition of certain excise tax.”

Please note what this amendment to the **tax code** prohibits. It prohibits the promotion of “*any candidate for elective public office.*” It does not prohibit nor preclude, in any form or fashion, the free exercise of speech on any subject or matter that endangers, threatens, or limits our religious freedoms.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have clearly stated:

“That is our American heritage, our most cherished freedom. It is the first freedom because if we are not free in our conscience and our practice of religion, all other freedoms are fragile. If citizens are not free in their own consciences, how can they be free in relation to others, or to the state? If our obligations and duties to God are impeded, or even worse, contradicted by the government, then we can no longer be a land of the free, and a beacon of hope for the world.”

“[From the earliest days of our nation,] Catholics in America have been advocates for religious liberty, and the landmark teaching of the Second Vatican Council on religious liberty was influenced by the American experience.... We have been staunch defenders of religious liberty in the past. We have a solemn duty to discharge that duty today.”

“We need, therefore, to speak frankly with each other when our freedoms are threatened. Now is such a time. [It is incumbent on every American] to be

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on guard, for religious liberty is under attack, both at home and abroad.”

Those who would believe that our religious freedoms remain secure from encroachment by those who find no necessity for them are deluding themselves. The continual erosion of our religious freedoms has been intensifying over the past several decades.

A recent video of Catholic priest, Father Michael Orsi, the host of the pro-life TV show Action for Life, warned of the seriousness of the battle that must be fought between those who are for religious liberty and those (the state) who wish to deny or diminish the right to freely worship as one chooses. Father Orsi urged Christian church leaders to speak up about abortion and religious freedom in his message on the National Day of Remembrance for the Unborn on September 10th of this year. He said in his speech:

“The churches have to begin to speak out fearlessly. For too long, pastors and churches have been bullied into believing that they can say nothing political from the pulpit. Let me remind you the Bible’s a political document. The prophets, including John the Baptist and Jesus, lost their lives because they spoke the truth to those in power.

Too many of the pastors—too many, practically all—in Germany refused to speak against national socialism...the result: millions of Jews, pastors, priests, homosexuals, gypsies all lost their lives because everyone was afraid. What are you afraid of, a couple of bucks? Your tax-

exempt status? What’s that going to do to you? Your churches may be closed anyway, because if a certain party gets elected, this certain party said, if the churches do not agree with our interpretation of women’s reproductive rights, they’ll just have to change their doctrine.

We are in a battle for the soul of America. Somehow, Christians have come to buy the story that you cannot be political in church. Let me tell you right now, oh yes, you can, and oh, yes, you better be. Because you might not have a church to go to if you don’t vote the right way in November.”

Some consider Father Orsi’s view to be nonsense, claiming that Christ promised that his church would endure forever. There is some merit to that position, at least from a holistic view, because Jesus did say, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* But that does not guarantee that we will be free to worship as we choose and to live as our faith and our God have called us to live. All we have to do is look at past and present states such as the former Soviet Union, Communist China, and much of the middle East countries to understand how quickly religious freedom can be taken away, eroded, or trampled into the ground.

The Church may indeed endure forever but how well and how openly we can proclaim it and live it remains an open question. It is incumbent upon all who cherish their religious freedoms to choose wisely next month. We can do so only if we are well informed.

1. Mt 18:20.

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

Faith Comes From What Is Heard
Lawrence Feingold
Emmaus Academic
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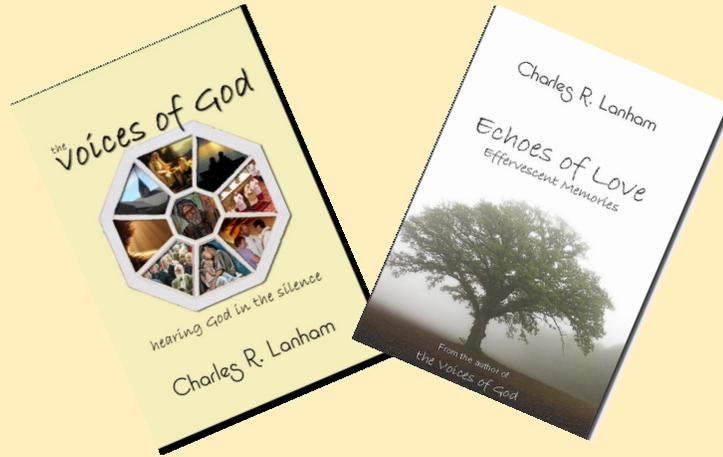
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