



A journal for restless minds

### ON THE TRANSCENDENT

*Being outside our own*

### DEAD OR ALIVE

*No longer your own*

### AN UNEASY FEELING

*The inescapable context of the time*

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.

## On The Transcendent

*Being outside our own*

What so provokes the mind are thoughts which lie unknowable, not subject to empirical discovery or disproof. It is the transcendent nature of God which so utterly frustrates those who are of a mind to know all there is to know. In their unknowing the unknowable they are thus reduced to exhibiting a childlike hubris in their pronouncements, especially on questions for which empirical scientific methods are undeniably impotent.

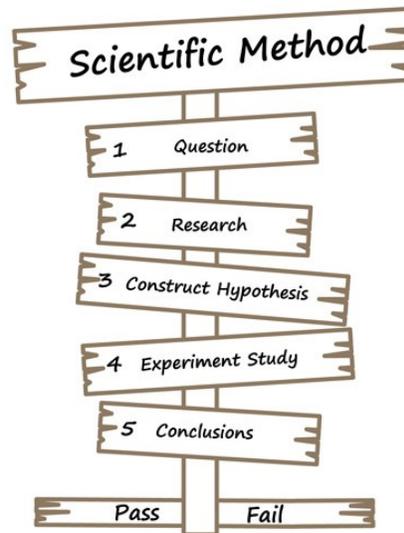
We are a curious species indeed, constantly seeking answers to questions, only to discover ever more questions to be resolved. It is an endless agonizing futile quest—to seek full understanding—yet we doggedly persist. The more the mysteries of the universe unfold, the

greater the largesse of our own pathetic ignorance.

A thought is what precisely? What proof can be reproducibly constructed to determine its existence? What shape, what color, what are the dimensions of pure whimsy; how long will it persist? Does thought exist or is it but a figment,

a brief interlude of neurons synapsing.

Perhaps there is empirical proof that thought exists, yet without such proof should we suggest there is no thought? How drear the thought of such thoughtlessness. Such devoted energy to disprove what common sense concludes.



Beyond ourselves there must exist, in fashion beyond our knowing, "being", without form or matter, without time or place, without beginning, without ending, beyond our understanding. Such "being" outside our own must be none other than our God.

# Dead Or Alive

*No longer your own*

**A** war is raging. The enormity of the loss in human lives is staggering. Mankind, God's greatest creation, is being irredeemably expunged from the annals of history by none other than man himself.

Such apocalyptic thoughts may, at first blush, sound unduly pessimistic, the ravings of a madman, yet alarmingly neither is the case.

Contraception, compulsory and voluntary sterilization, abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, suicide, murder, assassination, execution, genocide, global jihad, ethnic cleansing, religious persecution and martyrdom, the list is long and terrifying; all methods and means devised by man to prevent and/or end human life.

We are and have become our own worst enemy. Our genius at annihilating our own species consequently knows no bounds. In this endeavor to commit total and complete suicide we stand alone among all other living creatures. The question is why? Why the apparent urgent need to eradicate ourselves from the earth? Why do we hate ourselves so much?

We used to hear of the indomitable human spirit, the unquenchable quest for great achievement in spite of obstacles and hardships. Man's capacity for greatness was boundless, limited only by his own doubts and fears. The

human mind envisioned great ideas, looked to the stars, and eagerly and confidently reached out and made them his own.

Yet, in his heart, man always knew there was one greater than himself, God, to whom man owed everything, including life itself. Life was precious, life was of inestimable value because it was from God, of God, and for God. God loved life and so did man.

Yet, over time, as man grew in knowledge and conceit, God faded from their hearts and minds. Man declared: "*God is dead*," thus turning inward, dependent now only to himself for justification and valuation.



**L**ife was good until it wasn't. Self-worth held forth no value beyond the self. No medium of exchange now existed for which one might barter for one's life. Upon the ledger, life was now a debit not a credit, a liability not an asset. Life no longer was one's own but the mere possession of a faceless, sciolistic other, pretender to the throne of knowledge and the well-informed. And so the war against the worthless masses did begin.

**L**est we consider all this hyperbole—which it most assuredly is not—let us turn to what we know is true and telling:

The proportion of reproductive-age married women who use a modern or traditional contraceptive method rose from 55% to 63% between 1990 and 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1971 and 1977, China forced more than thirty million sterilizations of men and women. A 2014 report by the World Health Organization referenced ongoing targeted sterilization practices against specific population groups, including: women living in countries with coercive popula-

tion control policies, people with disabilities (including intellectual disabilities), intersex and transgender persons.

Since the beginning of 2017, the number of abortions performed worldwide has exceeded 11.2 Million and counting. Globally since 1980 over 1.45 Billion deaths have been the direct result of abortion.

Around the globe, a growing number of countries have instituted policies promoting "medically assisted suicide. In 2016, Canadian lawmakers passed legislation legalizing the practice nationwide. Doctors and nurses in Ontario are under enormous pressure to either perform assisted suicides or refer the patient to a willing physician. A similar law is in place in Vermont. Other states within the United States

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which have legalized physician-assisted suicide include California, Oregon, Washington, and Montana. Other states are currently in the process of enacting such legislation. The 2017 Nevada legislature currently has before it SB 261 which would permit physician-assisted suicide.

**M**any countries around the world have legalized not only physician-assisted suicide, but euthanasia as well—the intentional killing of one person by another. According to Alex Schadenberg, executive director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, *“You have this new attitude that it’s OK for a doctor to kill a patient just because they are suffering. But suffering is part of the human condition. The question is how do we as a society deal with those who are going through a difficult time in their life?”*

Colombia, Switzerland and Luxembourg now allow euthanasia. Legalized euthanasia in the Netherlands has been allowed since 1984. Today the government is pushing to expand euthanasia beyond those who are sick or dying, to encompass those who merely think their *“life is complete.”* In 2004, in the Netherlands, a Catholic nun was euthanized against her will by a doctor who argued that his patient was dying of cancer and was hindered by her religious beliefs from making the best decision—so he made it for her.

Belgium, with its liberal euthanasia laws, euthanizes mentally-ill patients without their consent. It also allows terminally-ill children to request euthanasia.

Over 130 Million people were murdered by three: Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler. Another 30 Million by others including Pol Pot, Kim Ilsung, Saddam Hussein, Sukarno, Mullah Omar, Benito Mussolini, Idi Amin, Ho Chi Minh, Hafez Bashar Alassad, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Robert Mugabe, and General Augusto Pinochet.

Tragically, the list is woefully incomplete and inadequate, lacking the emotional impact it should in order to truly show man’s inhumanity toward man. Consider the case of Stephanie Packer, a 34-year old mother of four, suffering from scleroderma, a terminal autoimmune disease attacking her lungs.

*“One week after California’s physician-assisted suicide law went into effect June 9, 2016, the Packers encountered a major hurdle when Stephanie received a disturbing letter from her health insurance company. Stephanie was told her doctor-recommended chemotherapy treatment that the company previously promised was now being denied. However, she was later informed that her plan would cover a lethal dose of suicide pills — at the incredibly low cost of \$1.20.”<sup>2</sup>*

**U**pon learning of Stephanie’s plight, a reporter friend set out to cover the story and asked the insurance company for comment, which they declined. The next morning Stephanie received a phone call from the insurance company informing her that the chemotherapy drug was once again approved.

Unfortunately, cases similar to Stephanie Packer’s too often fail to

capture the attention they so richly deserve. And, when they do, the overwhelming response is often brutally unkind and dreadfully dishonest.

**I**n early 2015, three years after her diagnosis at the age of 29, Stephanie took her story of life public, speaking joyfully of her choice to live and enjoy what remaining time she had with her family.

*“Stephanie’s outspokenness soon brought her to the attention of the national media. NPR, CNN, The Washington Post and other news outlets covered her story, and one media executive told her that her story had sent their ratings ‘through the roof.’”*

As we have come to expect, there were those who hated her message of hope, love and life. Her husband, Brian, received death threats and as Stephanie recalls, *“They just ate us alive after that. It was just comment after comment of nasty stuff. People told me that I should just off myself and that they feel bad for my kids.”*

On the day before the assisted suicide bill went into effect in California, Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles reflected on its disastrous and devastating consequences. *“The logic of assisted suicide leads inevitably to the government and corporate administrators essentially deciding which lives are worth saving and caring for and who would be better off dead. The criteria for such decisions will always be arbitrary and the process will always mean the strong and powerful deciding the fate of those who are weak and less influential in society. This is the beginning of tyranny.”*

## An Uneasy Feeling

*The inescapable context of the time*

Once again we proclaim him king; and yet anew we do betray him for the sake of our own base desires. The shame he bears with silent grace is ours; he owns no guilt or sin; the cross belongs to those who will not hang upon its beam. His wounds severe, inflicted with foul unclean hands and hearts made of stone, weep bloodied tears for our redemption; all forgiven, all are loved.

How quick does love flow into hate; rare does hate reverse its course. Consider their royal proclamations, proceeding inescapably and with undue haste to such ignominy and shame: such narrative, inextricably woven within the fabric of the times, past, present and what is yet to come, indicts us all, save one.

*“Christ died between two thieves. He was innocent; they weren’t. However, because his sacrifice was seen against that horizon, it was judged, by association, by those present to be tainted as were the deaths of those he died with. People watching the crucifixion did not distinguish between who was guilty and who was innocent. They assessed what they saw en bloc. For them, all crucifixions meant the same thing.”<sup>1</sup>*

Sadly, it remains as true today as then. We live in an age and culture suffering from great divisions, conflict, moral decline, and lost virtue. Our Christian faith and Christ’s church have been accused, tried, convicted,

scourged, and found guilty of many wrongdoings, some legitimate, others not.

Many have turned their backs on Church and God, just as those who first proclaimed Christ their king, covering the ground with cloaks and palm branches, and shouting: *“Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.”<sup>2</sup>*



In many ways, it was perfectly fitting that Jesus would suffer and die among thieves for throughout his public ministry *“Jesus walked with sinners, ate with them, was accused with them, and died with them.”<sup>3</sup>* It was for such as these—and for us—that the Son of God came into the world.

Paul, in writing to the Philippians, called upon them to *“do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”<sup>4</sup>* In

calling upon them to be humble and to rid themselves of selfishness and conceit, Paul admonished them to take on the mantle of Christ.

Paul continued by invoking the early church hymn *Carmen Christi*: *“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”<sup>5</sup>*

His pre-incarnate divine existence, equal to the Father God is acknowledged without explanation for it is beyond our capacity to understand. Yet he surrendered himself, becoming human in all things but sin, not to power and glory, but to lowly birth and servitude. In all things, he was obedient to the will of the Father, even accepting suffering and the scandal of death on a cross.

In Jesus we see God, made man for our sake and our salvation. His passion, death and resurrection made it possible for us to share in his immortality. As the Apostle so eloquently tells us, Jesus did not regard being God something to hold or use when confronted with suffering or death. Rather he became a slave to God and a servant to the people, suffering and dying for all of us. Crucified, Jesus was humiliated, shamed, and brutalized, but through it all he expressed only love and forgiveness.

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The *Carmen Christi* sets Christ's death within its proper context: it is at once the nadir of the divine condescension begun in the incarnation and the foundation of his exaltation and ultimate triumph over death and sin.

**A**ugustine taught that "The master of humility is Christ who humbled himself and became obedient even to death, even the death of the cross. Thus he does not lose his divinity when he teaches us humility....What great thing was it to the king of the ages to become the king of humanity? For Christ was not the king ... so that he might exact a tax or equip an army with weaponry and visibly vanquish an enemy. He was the king ... in that he rules minds, in that he gives counsel for eternity, in that he leads into the kingdom of heaven for those who believe, hope, and love."<sup>6</sup>

The triumphant royal procession as well as the betrayals of the human heart are tightly woven into the fabric of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

"The liturgy of Passion Sunday is a collision of themes: glorious hosannas and somber omens. Isaiah promised a servant of God who would have a 'face set like flint' to brave the pummeling, spit, and ridicule. Paul's lovely hymn in Philippians is one of triumph—'every knee should bend in heaven and earth and every tongue confess'—but only after disgrace and ignominious death.

It goes unnoticed, for the most part, that the inescapable context of the Passion is a national, tribal, and political struggle. The betrayals are always hatched in the presence of looming authorities who seduce

the betrayer—the Judas, the Peter, the disciple in us. You cannot avoid the sense that there is some profound geopolitical strife going on here. The stage is set for armed violence, the raised sword in the cause of right. There are secret police and public meetings of high priests, governors, assemblies. There are political prisoners. Finally, there is a crisis of authority. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Are you the king of Christians? Are you the king of Catholics?

*They are questions that history poses not only to Christ, but to all who follow him. What would be our answer? Who or what is the real object of our allegiance?"<sup>7</sup>*

It is easy to see the crisis of allegiance that the people of Jesus' time confronted. Jesus was condemned, not for any guilt on his part, but out of the leaders' fear of losing power and control; self-defense and corporate survival justified and motivated their actions.

The chief priests and leaders found themselves with an uneasy feeling—threatened by Jesus and his followers. To them, he was an existential threat to national and religious interests. We can almost hear the fear in their voices: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come in and destroy both our holy place and our nation." Even Caiaphas states what is too often in our own hearts and minds, "It is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."

**O**ver two millennia and yet there remains a lingering suspicion that the crisis of Palm Sunday is the crisis of every time and culture. Now, as then, we are torn

between Christ and tribe; uncertain as to where to place our full allegiance: with Jesus Christ or with the nation. With which king do we attend?

**W**ith every moral crisis faced, we dread the choices which must be made. Just as Jesus, in his time, was rejected and condemned for reasons of national security; so he is today.

Each of us has been tempted by evil and failed to resist its siren call. We have died to sin and in such death have found ourselves broken, humiliated and ashamed. But through Christ's humiliating crucifixion, horrifying death and salvific resurrection we have been given the opportunity to be reborn, to rise from the death of sin into new life with Jesus Christ.

As we approach this Holy Week, let us ask ourselves in prayer whether our faith is as strong as it ought to be. Are we willing to carry our cross to Calvary? Are we willing to suffer and be crucified for our faults and failures? Are we willing to die for him who suffered and died for us? These are questions we should, from deep within our hearts, ask ourselves. Amen.

Homily for the  
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (A)  
Matthew 21:1-11  
Isaiah 50:4-7  
Philippians 2:6-11  
Matthew 26:14—27:66

1. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: High Season for Religion Foes*, St. Louis University Center for Sunday Liturgy.
2. Matthew 21:9.
3. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: High Season for Religion Foes*.
4. Philippians 2:3-4.
5. Philippians 2:5-8.
6. St. Augustine, *Tractates on John 51:3-4*.
7. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Betrayal*, St. Louis University Center for Sunday Liturgy.

**O**n November 2, 2016, the Washington, D.C. city council voted 11 to 2 to legalize assisted suicide.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, noted that this was the most extreme assisted suicide legislation in the United States.

*"It goes beyond assisted suicide by allowing third parties to administer the lethal drugs, opening the door even further to coercion and abuse. Every suicide is tragic, whether someone is young or old, healthy or sick. But the legalization of doctor-assisted suicide creates two classes of people: those whose suicides are to be prevented at any cost and those whose suicides are deemed a positive good."*

What follows has been excerpted from an editorial in Columbia Magazine. What the editor, Alton J. Pelowski writes is profoundly on point and thus the bulk of it is reproduced here:

On October 7, 1979, during his first visit to the United States as Pope, Saint John Paul II celebrated Sunday Mass on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. He took the opportunity to reflect in his homily on the dignity of human life. *"I do not hesitate to proclaim before you and before the world that all human life — from the moment of conception and through all subsequent states — is sacred, because human life is created in the image and likeness of God. Nothing surpasses the greatness or dignity of the human person....All human beings ought to value every person for his or her uniqueness as a*

*creature of God, called to be a brother or sister of Christ...."*

Nearly four decades later, in an increasingly divided world, these words serve as an important reminder that our common humanity transcends any cultural, racial or political differences. The Declaration of Independence expresses this in the assertion *"that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."* Yet, from a spiritual perspective, we are called not simply to coexist peacefully, but also to see our relationships with our neighbors as integral to who we are.

In his message for the World Day of Peace Jan. 1, 2016, Pope Francis put it this way: *"Personal dignity and interpersonal relationships are what constitutes us as human beings whom God willed to create in his own image and likeness. As creatures endowed with inalienable dignity, we are related to all our brothers and sisters, for whom we are responsible and with whom we act in solidarity. Lacking this relationship, we would be less human."*<sup>3</sup>

Over the past fifty years our society, our nation has literally been transformed. We are no longer *"One nation under God, with liberty and justice for all"* but today a nation of egoistic amoralists seeking happiness for me, myself, and I.

**S**ince the sixties, we have seen the steady proliferation of rights as defined by man and the casual dismissal of those rights heretofore granted only by our Creator. The right to life, liberty, and the

pursuit of happiness have given way to the right to choose, the right to work, the right to a living wage, the right to own a home, the right to a college education, the right to healthcare, the right to a same-sex marriage, the right to kill oneself, the right to be happy, and so on and on and on. These so-called rights all have a few things in common: they are creations of man and therefore transitory and subject to the whims of their creators, they elevate the few at the expense of the many, and they enthrone man as master of his domain.

**I**n all actuality, these societal and moral changes are nothing new; such tectonic shifts have been occurring since the very beginning. Adam and Eve chose to determine for themselves whether what God had forbidden was really evil or whether he was simply playing them for suckers. What is important to understand is that the fall did not occur because they discovered the *meaning* of evil; the fall occurred because they *did* evil, they *disobeyed* God. They came to know evil by experiencing evil and becoming evil. And so it began ... and so it continues today.

Underlying the fall is this question: *"Why would man, created by God and happy in the Garden of Eden, wish to commit such a flagrant act of disobedience?"* Even one so universally revered as Saint Augustine had difficulty in providing an adequate response to that question. Saint Anselm however did provide at least one reasoned explanation in his dialogue *"On the Fall of the Devil"* where he argues that

angels, like humans have two motivations for doing anything.

**T**he first motivation is self-interest or happiness which basically means doing what benefits you, what makes you happy. The second motivation is justice or morality which means doing what God wants you to do. It is difficult to conceive of any action or decision that we might make that is not motivated in some way by either the desire to be happy or the desire to do what is right.

It is imperative that we occasionally remind ourselves that the God who created us chose to give us *Free Will* which means that we are free to choose what is moral and right, that is, what God wants us to do, or to choose what we believe will make us happy. I am free to choose my way or God's way and if I choose my way I can rest assured that God will do nothing to prevent me from doing whatever I desire. Choosing self-interest or happiness over justice or morality requires—to paraphrase and skewer John the Baptist—for God to decrease while I increase.

As we diminish our reliance on God and ignore our relationship with our Creator, we find ourselves in the devil's embrace, desiring only that which serves our own self-interest. We become addicted to achieving happiness and like any addict achieving that "*happiness high*" becomes all that matters. Nothing else, no one and certainly no God matters or holds any greater value.

The right to life, liberty, and the

*pursuit* of happiness have given way to the right to choose, the right to work, the right to a living wage, the right to own a home, the right to a college education, the right to healthcare, the right to a same-sex marriage, the right to kill oneself, the right to be happy, and so on and on and on. These so-called rights all have a few things in common: they are creations of man and therefore transitory and subject to the whims of their creators, they elevate the few at the expense of the many, and they enthrone man as master of his domain.

Sadly, few are entirely immune to this paradigm shift; it is simply a matter of the degree upon which we find ourselves tilting. So many, and I must include myself here, *escaped* from the supposed confines of a world created and ruled by God so as to live as gods in a world ruled by men. And we are now reaping exactly what we sowed.

The value of a single life has plummeted from the lofty heights of beyond measure to the abyssal depths of nothingness. The unborn, the old, the infirm, the weak, the disabled, the nonconforming, and the unwanted are considered fodder for the flames, dismissed as burdens, their elimination for the greater good. All that matters is what is in one's self-interest, what makes one happy, nothing more.

**T**he devil is a cunning creature who knows our weaknesses and our faults. He strokes our egos and entices us with all manner of delights; and he is winning.

We can fight against abortion, the

death penalty, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, co-habitation, divorce, poverty, and any other injustice or moral wrong but we will not win the war against the devil until we take up the fight in defense of God.

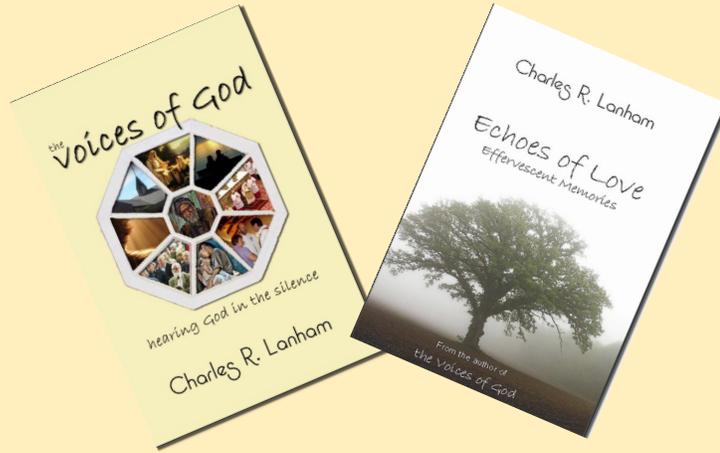
**A**s long as we believe in the primacy of man, the devil wins and we lose. It is far past time for the devil to lose and for God to win.

Each of us needs to once again acknowledge the return of the King to his heavenly throne, to his rightful place above all his creation. The King reigns supreme but we are his voices. We must elevate our voices so that those who deny the King his rightful place may no longer be heard above our joyful song.

It is well past time for us to step down from our self-deluded pedestals and to kneel before our God in humble obeisance to his glory. We are not gods. God loves each of us as if we are the only one he loves. Death is the devils domain; life belongs to God. Life is a gift from God and through him alone life is sustained.

Jesus told us exactly what we must do. "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Love God. Love your neighbor. Love the life within you.

1. Alkema L. et al., *National, regional, and global rates and trends in contraceptive prevalence and unmet need for family planning between 1990 and 2015: a systematic and comprehensive analysis*, *Lancet*, 2013, 381 (9878): 1642-1652.
2. Clara Fox, *Stephanie's Fight to Live*, *Columbia Magazine*, January 2017, 16.
3. Alton J. Pelowski, *Our Common Humanity*, *Columbia Magazine*, December 2016, 2.



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