



A journal for restless minds

GASPING FOR GOD

As if for air

SPEAK IN THE LIGHT

We belong to heaven first

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Altering the rhythm of life

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.

Gasping For God

As if for air

As much as we would like to believe in our own self-sufficiency, sooner or later, each of us will come face-to-face with a thing which we are incapable of accomplishing on our own. For some, it may be something so profound as to leave one completely breathless; for others, merely a trigger for an awakening to one's own limitations.

For myself, I experienced such a breathtaking profundity some years ago while scuba diving off the coast of Southern California. Exploring a sunken vessel some sixty feet below the surface, my fascination quite literally left me breathless.

As I began my prescribed ascent to my first safety stop, I took a breath only to discover I was out of air. Try taking a breath while pinching your nose and keeping your mouth tightly shut. Now,

imagine that panicked feeling with some forty feet of seawater above you and an ocean surrounding you. Suddenly, nothing else matters but to reach the surface, to be able to breathe air again.

After years of caring for others and enduring countless dangers, a woman wrote of facing a deep darkness within, a crisis of meaning, of feeling horribly maimed inside: *"And all around me the relentless pressure of everyone else's pain, making my own seem so trivial. ... I come to this time in life gasping for God as if for air, needing desperately some*



tangible sense of God's presence with and in me. My life only makes sense if God is alive at the center of me."

Like the air which we breathe and take for granted, so also do we too often take God for granted. It is only then, in our despair, when we acknowledge our brokenness, when we find ourselves desperately gasping for meaning, for healing, for love, it is only then that we too often find the need for God and acknowledge his presence.

Speak In The Light

We belong to heaven first

This past Wednesday, June 21st, marked the start of the U.S. bishops' annual "Fortnight for Freedom", a two-week campaign which will continue through July 4th, Independence Day. Begun in 2012, this annual campaign seeks to highlight America's "first freedom"—religious liberty, encouraging Catholics to work for religious freedom both here and abroad.

As Archbishop Charles J. Chaput writes, "This year's theme is "freedom for mission." The reason should be obvious. *Activist groups and public officials today increasingly try to force Church-related hospitals and social ministries to violate their Catholic identity. Catholic beliefs on marriage, family and the sanctity of life are targets in an on-going culture war against the biblical truths of human sexuality, nature and purpose.*

*The Church did not want this war and did not choose it. But she cannot in good conscience avoid it."*¹

At its core, it is a conflict over value—whether unborn, young, middle-aged or old; whether healthy, infirm, weak, strong or disabled; whether educated or uneducated; whether conservative, liberal or progressive; whether citizen, legal resident, visitor or illegal alien; whether rich, poor or middle-class; whether married, single, heterosexual, homosexual or trans; whether professor, politician, farmer,

rancher, clergy or just an ordinary joe—in the end it boils down to one basic, fundamental issue: who determines the value of human life—God or man.

Today we heard Jesus tell us, "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Yet, despite his admonition to "not be afraid," most of us still harbor a degree of fear; some more than others. We fear for ourselves, our loved ones, our friends, neighbors, our nation and even our world.



**Fortnight
for Freedom
2 0 1 7
Freedom for Mission
June 21 – July 4**

We search for meaning and purpose, too often leaving God out of the equation. At some point in our lives we come to the inescapable conclusion that the answers to the most important questions are outside of and greater than ourselves. Yet, evermore, when we look beyond ourselves, we find ourselves opting for manmade solutions, looking for answers from the government rather than the enduring and unending bounty of God's love.

We have become increasingly more reliant for our well-being on the state and less reliant on Almighty God. And this expanded welfare state, in turn, competes with the family as the dominant protector of the individual. "More people now expect their governments to perform tasks once assumed by sons, daughters, maiden aunts, and the like. As families have shrunk, disbanded, reformed, and otherwise come to reflect the reality that what were once permanent ties are now increasingly optional and fungible, Western men and women have ratcheted up the pressure on the state to operate as a family substitute—in particular, as a father substitute. ... family change has been

*an engine fueling statism—and statism in turn has been an engine fueling family decline."*²

Here is a fundamental truth: "All law involves the imposition of somebody's beliefs about the nature of truth, charity and justice on everyone else."

And here is another: "Hard cases make bad law."

This has been a legal principal in U.S. court decisions for at least 170 years. It is based on two premises: 1) that laws should be made for the benefit of the general population, and 2) that laws should reflect and regulate normal circumstances.

"Good law is not based on exceptions—and especially not exceptions wrapped in emotion. The law should embody sound reasoning rooted in a desire for justice, not warm feelings.

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The trouble comes when a good principle meets complicated reality. It comes when 'exceptions' become more the rule and less and less exceptional, and when enforcing a law does more damage than it fixes. ...

If hard cases make bad law, the evidence is irrefutable that bad law makes hard cases; cases of real suffering with human faces."

We conform our lives to what we truly believe. When we don't, then we are only fooling ourselves, because God cannot be fooled. When or if we claim to be "Catholic" yet don't conform our lives to what the Church teaches, especially in matters concerning the sanctity and inestimable value of the human person as the basis of law, then we are either confused or evasively foolish.

*"South Africa's Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said that, 'I'm always puzzled about what Bible people are reading when they say that religion and politics don't mix.' Of course they mix, because they both deal with struggles over the nature of right and wrong, justice and mercy. They've always mixed—and on matters of vital public interest, they should. People of religious faith need to act with charity and prudence, but they nonetheless need to demand from both political parties a real commitment to human dignity—always starting with the unborn child but never ending there; always starting with the unborn child, but always embracing the poor, the elderly, the hungry, the jobless, the immigrant and marginalized persons at every stage of human development."*³

"We need to remember that in the early Church, the words, 'Jesus is Lord' were—unintentionally but profoundly—a political statement. The emperor claimed to be Lord both in the private and public lives of the citizens of the empire. When Christians proclaimed Jesus as Lord, they were proclaiming the centrality of Jesus not only in their personal lives, but in their public lives and decision-making. That took courage. And it had huge consequences for their lives. Jesus was hung upon the cross because of his claim of Lordship. Christianity was illegal for the first 250 years of the Church's life because Christians proclaimed, 'Jesus is Lord.'

The President of our country deserves our respect, but he is not 'Lord.' Our political parties, whether Democratic or Republican, are not 'Lord.' Congress is not 'Lord.' The Supreme Court that gave us Roe and sacralized the right to kill unborn children is not 'Lord.' None of these people or things is Lord. Only God is God, and only Jesus Christ is Lord. And Christ's relationship with each of us as individuals, and all of us as the believing Catholic community, should be the driving force of our personal lives and for all of our public witness, including our political witness on matters of human dignity.

God need not be on our lips every minute of every day. But he should be in our hearts from the moment we wake, to the moment we sleep. Only Jesus is Lord. The Church belongs to him; not to us, **but to him**. And we should never allow ourselves to be pushed from the public square by those who want someone else, or something else, to be Lord."⁴

Saint Augustine taught that political engagement and public service can

be morally worthy but he also noted that all human structures are flawed by sin. The City of Man can never be the City of God.

Ultimately, it is not about finding meaning, purpose, or "our place" in this world; it is about our place in the next. Still, we have a duty and a responsibility to make this world, and especially the people around us, better for our passing through it. We cannot nor should we evade the challenges which come before us on this earth; as members of the human race and as Christians, we are called to be good citizens of this place we call home. But we cannot, we must not forget that our true citizenship and our true goal is heaven. We belong to heaven first.

Our nation is not *Lord*, it is not *God*, and it can never require our worship. It can never demand that we violate our religious identity and beliefs. The greatest witness, as citizens, which we can offer "is to speak, and to act on, and to organize our lives around, the words **Jesus Christ is Lord**. Defending our liberty to do that is why the 'fortnight for freedom' matters." May God bless us, Amen.

Homily for the
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Jeremiah 20:10-13
Romans 5:12-15
Matthew 10:26-33

1. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., *Piety and patriotism*, CatholicPhilly.com, June 13, 2017.
2. Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization*, (Templeton Press, June 9, 2014), 15-16.
3. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, *Blessed John XXIII And The Meaning Of Peace*, February 20, 2014.
4. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, *Roe v. Wade And Christian Witness, 41 Years Later*, January 15, 2014.

Family Matters

Altering the rhythm of life

Earlier this past week, a cousin of mine posted on Facebook a photograph she had uncovered while rummaging through her mother's attic. In it were eight women with thirteen preschool children, four small enough to be held in their mother's arms.

After some discussion and a bit of deduction, we concluded it most likely was taken in the summer of 1963. The eight women were all relatively the same age, give or take a year or two, all in their mid- to late-thirties. Assuming that 1963 was indeed the year it was taken, my mother would have celebrated her 37th birthday that July.

My mother stood at one end of the group of mothers holding her eighth child, and standing in front of her were numbers five, six, and seven. Further down the line, mother number six in the picture was my aunt, with one of hers in her arms and another standing in front of her.

A bit more deductive work determined that God would ultimately bless these eight wonderful women with sixty-five children; my mother and her sister accounting for nearly one-third with twenty-one of them.

As I was reflecting on this photograph and this week's readings, I remembered a treasured letter written by

my mother, some twenty-one years later, in May 1984. It was addressed to Andy Rooney, the curmudgeon of Sixty-Minutes fame, and was in response to a column of his concerning the death of David Kennedy, the fourth child of eleven children of Robert and Ethel Kennedy, who died April 25th, 1984 of a drug overdose.



In his column, Rooney concluded by simple assumptive logic that the cause of David Kennedy's long-standing drug abuse problems and ultimately his untimely and tragic death was not a result of watching (as a 12-year-old boy) his father's assassination on television; no, Rooney concluded that the cause of Kennedy's problems was due to him being one in a family of too many children.

A brief aside: the IBM PC was first introduced in August, 1981 and the Apple Macintosh in January, 1984. My mother used a manual typewriter, and used carbon-paper sandwiched between often used-one-side paper for copies. For instance, the backs of the two-page copy which I now cherish,

are from a workbook with the title: METRIC/U.S. CUSTOMARY UNIT EQUIVALENTS followed by various formulas for calculating metric units into U.S. units of measure. The Great Depression taught her never to waste anything.

As we older ones moved away, the number of copies increased. With well-worn carbon-paper and 3-4 copies the one who received the last copy often had a difficult time deciphering what she had written. On occasion, she would slip the carbon-paper in backwards, which added to the difficulty in reading her letters.

What follows is the letter she wrote to Mr. Rooney, followed by his eventual response.

May 14, 1984

Dear Andy Rooney:

I enclose a column I wrote a few weeks ago, just to show you that I enjoy and often quote from your column.

But like so many of my own critics, I did not write until I had a complaint. Alas, I find that my idol has feet of clay.

I refer to the column which you wrote about young David Kennedy's death. It was done in your usual magnificent style, until you reached the conclusion that the cause of his problems was being one of too many children.

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You have a right to your opinion about the propriety or downright error of having 11 children. But when you make the simplistic assumption that David's problems were the result of being one of 11, I have to take you to task.

You might just as well say, "I have a rose. This rose is red. Therefore all roses are red."

Would it not be just as logical to say, "His parents were too involved in the world of politics and power—therefore he had problems," or "They had too much money—his upbringing was not normal," or "There was too much attention paid to his famous family and he could not stand the pressure"?

Or is it just possible that all of these facts, plus the terrifying experience he had watching his father die, plus whatever was his own personal make-up, combined to produce such tragic results?

I find it frightening and sad that you would blame this sad case on the size of the young man's family. I have known people who had no siblings who turned to drugs, crime and/or suicide. I have known some from families of two or three who did not turn out so well. But I have never heard anyone say, "If they had just had more children, this would not have happened."

I, too, am a mother of 11. We do not have wealth or fame. It has been a struggle to train them, feed and cloth them and educate them. They all learned to work, they helped take care of each other, and my husband and I were always here when they needed us.

Twice within recent weeks, we have been told, "Mom and Dad, I am so happy that you made us

carry papers and have other jobs and save our money. It is amazing the young people who have no idea what the real world is all about."

We have four college graduates, whom we helped a little. Beyond that, they have worked to pay for their education. Two more are in college, two daughters have helped put their husbands through college with their own good jobs.

When my husband came home from school, I was not off playing bridge, at a cocktail party, or off to Europe. Although I wrote for several newspapers, I made arrangements to do so at home, and many a column was written with one baby on my lap and others at my side. I could so easily say it was not the size of the Kennedy family, but their preoccupation with politics and the good life that caused young David's problems.

But that would be just as wrong as your assumption. Each of us has to do what we have to do, at the time and place and with the circumstances that are at our disposal. I was able to stay at home and work; many mothers can't. Our children had jobs; some are not so fortunate.

If mistakes are made, let's not blame them on one isolated fact. If David's problems were caused by the size of his family, how do you account for large families who are spared such grief?

I make no apologies for the size of our family. They are good young people, not perfect, certainly, but no worse than many from smaller families. Each one has much to give to society. I wonder which I should not have had. The one who, at age nine, was carrying 90 papers each day, and who at 27 became vice-president of his company? Or another, now working on his mas-

ter's degree in agronomy, doing research on natural ways to get rid of insects and weed pests? Or any of the rest, all productive members of society, good mothers and fathers, bright students, loving sons and daughters?

We could yet have tragedy in our lives. We are not immune, and I repeat that none of these 11 are saints or even heroes. But when you find me a child from a small family that is either, would you please let me know?

Sincerely yours,

Nellie Ann Lanham

Andy Rooney replied with a typewritten letter on October 12, 1984, three short months before my parents were killed in an automobile accident on January 16, 1985. Little did she know nor could have anticipated so soon would tragedy come calling with hers and Dad's untimely passing.

12 Oct 1984

Dear Nellie Ann,

I didn't answer your letter but it was too good to throw away.

It seems likely I was too strong in that column but I can't get away from thinking that anyone who has 11 children must have a very high opinion of the value of his and her progeny to the world. If all couples, married and unmarried, had 11 children, the earth would soon be uninhabitable.

It may be possible for parents who devote full time to their children to rear a large family successfully but the

Kennedy's had too much else on their minds to do the job properly.

But, as you say, it's just my opinion.

Thanks for writing. I've been asked to come to some Mark Twain festival in Hannibal next summer but doubt if I can make it.

Sincerely,

Andrew A. Rooney

These two letters between two people with dissimilar points of view stand in stark contrast to what currently serves as discourse (seldom is it *civil*), and should serve to remind us of how steep and precipitous the decline in *civil* discourse has been over the intervening thirty-three years. Neither found it necessary to lash out with vitriolic and vicious name-calling; each stated their "opinion" without resorting to unsubstantiated fake facts and hyperbolic generalities to "prove" the other to be misguided, uninformed, xenophobic, racist, sexist, bigoted, deplorable, cruel, uncaring, greedy, etc., etc., etc. Each genuinely recognized the other with respect, sincerity and graciousness. What a difference three decades make!

Here I must concede: I am unabashedly biased. As her firstborn, I agree with my mother substantially more than Mr. Rooney. One brief but inconsequential observation to illustrate: like my mother, I generally enjoyed Andy Rooney's commentary while never elevating him to the level of an idol.

There are a few additional points which these letters suggest further discussion; points that I will attempt—hopefully, with as much reason and civility as was displayed by my mother and Mr. Rooney—to add to their conversation. In the process, I will at some point return to the photograph with which I began this essay.

I shall begin here with a few thoughts on one specific statement made by Mr. Rooney in his response: "I can't get away from thinking that anyone who has 11 children must have a very high opinion of the value of his and her progeny to the world." Had my mother responded I am absolutely certain she would have been in complete agreement, even though I am equally certain Mr. Rooney's intentions were not meant to be complimentary.

Mr. Rooney clearly articulates the unwarranted and near-universally accepted argument that the value of the human person is determined by those who live in the world.

The Declaration of Independence claims equality for all ("We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, ..."), a claim verifiably false in its most common interpretation, for each of us is a unique creation of God, with different abilities, talents, levels of intelligence, desires, and inclinations. Every human being who has ever walked this earth and for those yet to come, not one is the same in physical stature, mental ability, or spiritual sanctity.

These are unique attributes granted to us by our Creator God. Man has

neither the authority nor the power to arrogate such to man. What man has not the power to grant, man has not the power to value.

My parents were parentally proud of the eleven "progeny" with which God had blessed them and they had high hopes for what each might one day accomplish for the good of society. But they knew from where the value of each was determined and they dared not offer such "very high opinion," for they knew the value of each was for God alone to determine.

Whenever such power is assumed by man, inevitably, false criterion are manifested. The most obvious and horrendous example of such is the complete and devastating devaluation of the unborn child, deemed of no discernable, even negative, value for no other reason than its inconvenient existence.

Mr. Rooney continues, albeit with a bit of hyperbole, that "If all couples, married and unmarried, had 11 children, the earth would soon be uninhabitable." To such a statement, no one, including my mother, would argue the raw, unvarnished truth to such a bald statement. However, such a statement belies the truth which is that at no time in human history has such an event occurred, nor is it probable to ever occur.

Human beings are not machines. Returning to the photograph, of the eight women pictured, their children numbered (not in order of appearance): 13, 11, 10, 8, 7, 6, 5, and 5.

Obviously, the number of children differed between these women. God gave each the number according to his plan. No more, no less.

What is perhaps the most telling statement in Mr. Rooney's response follows, "It may be possible for parents who devote full time to their children to rear a large family successfully but the Kennedy's had too much else on their minds to do this job properly." Again, superficially, what Rooney writes is true, superficially. Yet, to borrow from his own words, "I can't get away from thinking" there is much left unstated and a good bit of assumption in what he writes; so much it begs further parsing.

Modern parents have come to believe that parenting is somehow a part-time avocation. Mr. Rooney falls prey to this belief, accepting implicitly the notion that child-rearing does not necessitate full devotion to the cause of raising children.

As my mother admitted "many a column was written with one baby on my lap and others at my side." She also wrote of the difficulties which parents of any size, including large ones, must face, "It has been a struggle to train them, feed and cloth them and educate them." What she failed to mention were the sacrifices they made to insure that each of us received a private Catholic education. They were married for eighteen years before they took their first vacation, with or in this case on their own.

My parents and the parents of their generation, for the most part, believed in the providence of Almighty God and given one, two, or eleven

children to raise, took their vows and their familial responsibilities with great seriousness.

As for Mr. Rooney's rather simplistic assumption that "the Kennedy's had too much else on their minds to do the job properly" it is as he rightly admitted, just his opinion. Whether his claim bears any truth is but conjecture on his part, and who is he to throw the first stone, to cast judgment on the propriety of their childrearing.

Yet, we have become of late all too eager stone throwers. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Unlike the Pharisees, who "went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest," leaving Jesus alone with the woman accused of adultery, we ignore our own sinfulness and gleefully throw stones with great abandonment.

As a society, we have lost our understanding of sin, just as we have dismissed the idea of a Creator God who gives and sustains all life. We have elevated man to the divine, made ourselves in our own image and likeness, and dissolved all notion of sinfulness.

Children, once a precious gift from God, are now burdens to our lifestyle, crosses which we are forced to carry. Choices, once deadly to body and soul, are now casually made, without considering the evil of such a decision. Children are options, no longer gifts; a burden lifted, a cross discarded. My mother said it all when she asked: "I wonder which I should not have had?" Thanks be to God, they let him make that decision.

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

On Conscience
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Ignatius Press
2007, 82 pages.

How the West Really Lost God
Mary Eberstadt
Templeton Press
June 9, 2012, 268 pages.

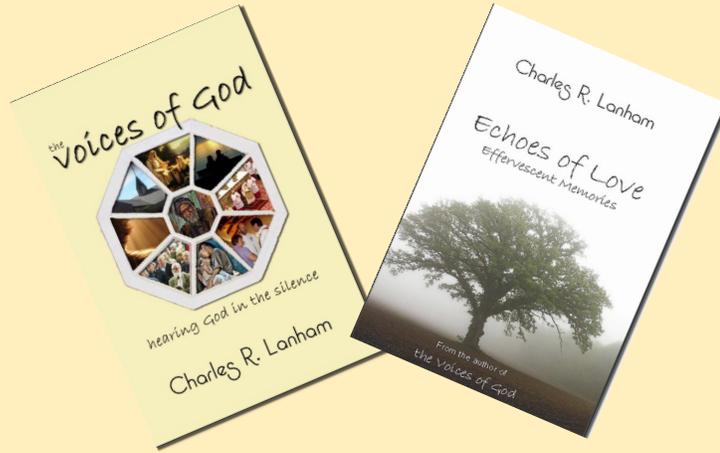
Strangers in a Strange Land
Charles J. Chaput
Henry Holt and Co.
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

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Each issue of **Colloquī** can be viewed or downloaded from

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