



A journal for restless minds

## ... AM I?

*Those pesky existential questions*

## ARE YOU READY

*Behind the wheel*

## 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

## ... Am I?

*Those pesky existential questions*

**W**ho am I? What am I? Why am I? When am I? How am I? Such fundamental questions of existence and being, and yet, the answers seem to fail us, or perhaps, it is we who fail ourselves, refusing to admit to having the answers.

It seems so simple, really. And yet, we imperfect creatures are wont to twist and confuse our natures; dissatisfied with the miracle, unhappy with our lot. Without knowing who and what we are or why and how we are, we dare declare what we know not and we deny the truth. Frederick Douglas once said that *"there was no such thing as new truth. Error might be old or new; but truth was as old as the universe."*<sup>1</sup>

Despite the obvious, we deceive ourselves. Clothed in unhappiness; tormented by the misfortunes of our own existence, we wallow in self-pity and con-

demn what God has so wonderfully made.

We see imperfection. Yet in the mind, we find fault in only the visible, the tangible, the mortal self. For as the apostle Paul tells us, *"At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror,"* (1 Cor 13:12) we cannot see the whole of our being, we cannot see the perfect nature of the soul.



*"The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. The biblical account expresses this reality in symbolic language when it affirms that 'then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;*

*and man became a living being'* (Gen 2:7) Man, whole and entire, is therefore **willed** by God.

*In Sacred Scripture the term 'soul' often refers to human life or the entire human person (Mt 16:25-26; Jn 15:13; Acts 2:41). But 'soul' also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value to him,*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## Are You Ready?

*Behind the wheel*

**T**here are some things that will never change. Parents know this to be true, especially when “that” day arrives. You know of course to what I am speaking, that magical, marvelous, wonderful, stupendous, awesome day (according to your child;) that utterly appalling, frightening, unbelievable, anxious, not ready to admit sixteenth birthday. The angst you experience is not so much from the realization that time has flown so fast you’re your mind has not thought past that day when you became a parent. No, that sudden sinking feeling comes when your wee one, now suddenly grown so tall, asks to borrow the car!

Whoa! Where did that come from? You hesitate, wondering if they are ready for such a responsibility, worrying whether they will be able to curb their youthful exuberance and drive safely. Then again, perhaps it is you who isn’t ready to hand over the keys.

Letting go, ceding control, trusting another, these are never easy, especially when you know the other, your child, so well; their faults and failures, their strengths as well as their weaknesses—especially those. And yet, you know you must, whether you are ready or not, for they must learn to face the world on their own terms if they are to become the person they are meant to be.

But, you must be sure. You have to ask, “*Are you sure you are ready for*

*this?*” You have to show your concern. You cannot avoid lecturing them on the dangers they could face.

Jesus knew the time was coming when he would no longer be the teacher. The time was fast approaching when he would return to the Father and the disciples would have to go out on their own. Were they ready? Did they know enough? Had he adequately prepared them for the hard road that lay before them? Did they understand what he was asking of them? Did they have faith enough to have the courage to spread the good news despite the rejection they would most assuredly experience? Would they be able to endure the pain, the torture, and even death because of him?



**T**hese thoughts must have been on his mind when he asked, “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*” He must have wondered whether his disciples knew who he was, even if others did not. The disciples responded with what they had heard, not with what they knew or believed: some believed him to be John the Baptist, who had only recently been beheaded; from others they heard Elijah and Jeremiah or one of the

prophets. None made much sense for they were all dead.

**J**esus obviously was not satisfied with their responses for they offered no personal thoughts as to who he was, so he asked more directly: “*But who do you say that I am?*” Uh oh! Dead silence. Eyes wander; anywhere but looking at Jesus. What is Jesus asking? Why is he asking us who he is? He’s Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph of Nazareth. Everyone knows that. Their faith is still young and they are confused by this sudden questioning.

Simon, bolder than the rest, says what is on his mind: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*” Whoa! Where did that come from? The disciples are both relieved that they have escaped having to answer and shocked at such a brash declaration from Simon.

But Jesus knew. He knew precisely where it had come from: God. “*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*” Jesus was seeking the one who could be the foundation of his church; he found his “*rock*” in Simon bar Jonah.

Simon, now Kephias or Petras, seems at first blush to not be the best

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

choice. His faith has been decidedly tested, most noticeably in trying to walk on water, and we know how that went down. Peter, the apostle who was given the keys to the kingdom, the disciple who was supposed to be the rock upon which the church was to be built, would all too soon betray Jesus when he most needed his support. He would deny he ever knew Jesus; a poor testament to his wavering faith.

Judas also betrayed Jesus but there is a difference between him and Peter. Although both would repent of their betrayal, Peter came back to Jesus and begged forgiveness. Judas did not, he killed himself, rather than admit his betrayal and ask for forgiveness.

Peter, through his sorrow and pain, became the rock upon which the church is founded, a church filled with sinners, not the sinless. Peter loved the Lord and though a sinner held onto him anyway.

I am reminded of what another sinner once wrote. He was a philanderer and a pagan, a follower of a heretical sect, an admitted thief (although petty in its deed,) who sired a son out of wedlock by a woman to whom he never married. Yet, he found his way to God, converted to Catholicism, was ordained a Bishop, and became one of the most beloved theologians and a Doctor of the Church. I am speaking, of course of Saint Augustine, whose memorial we celebrate this coming Monday, August 28th.

Shortly after his conversion, Saint Augustine would write one of his most famous and beloved books, his Con-

fessions. In it he penned these immortal words: *"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness, I plunged into the lovely things that you created. You were with me, but I was not with you."*

*"Augustine, sincere, but pathologically restless, had been searching for love and God. Eventually he found them in the most unexpected of all places, inside of himself. God and love had been inside of him all along, but he hadn't been inside of himself."*

*There's a lesson here: We don't pray to make God present to us. God is already present, always present everywhere. We pray to make ourselves present to God. God, as Sheila Cassidy colorfully puts it, is no more present in church than in a drinking bar, but we generally are more present to God in church than we are in a drinking bar. The problem of presence is not with God, but with us.*

*Sadly, this is also true for our presence to the richness of our own lives. Too often we are not present to the beauty, love, and grace that brims with the ordinary moments of our lives. Bounty is there, but we aren't. Because of restlessness, tiredness, distraction, anger, obsession, wound, haste, whatever, too often we are not enough inside of ourselves to appreciate what the moments of our own lives hold. We think of our lives as impoverished, dull, small-time, not worth putting our full hearts into, but we aren't sufficiently present to what is there."<sup>1</sup>*

**T**here is a secret to prayer, just as there is to finding all that is beautiful, all the lovely things

which God has made. Like Augustine, we search for him outside ourselves, plunging into the world and all its pleasures; we cannot find God when we are not present to him, not with him.

**T**he secret lies within ourselves, not to try to make God present to us—God is always present, always—but to make ourselves present to God. *"Like the young Augustine, we are away from ourselves, strangers to our own experience, seeking outside of ourselves something that is already inside of us. The trick is to come home. God and the moment don't have to be searched out and found. They're already here. We need to be here."<sup>2</sup>*

Somehow the words of St. Paul in the second reading for today rings especially true. They bear repeating:

*"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!*

*How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!*

*For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid?*

*For from him and through him and for him are all things.*

*To him be glory forever."*

Amen.

Homily for the  
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
Isaiah 22:19-23  
Romans 11:33-36  
Matthew 16:13-20

1. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: Being Present to God and Life*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

2. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile*.

that by which he is most especially in God's image: 'soul' signifies the **spiritual principle** in man."<sup>2</sup>

**T**he human person is a unity of soul and body so profound that the soul is considered the form of the body. The body, made of matter, becomes a living body because of its spiritual soul.

*"According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown.*

*But what is man? About himself he has expressed, and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions. In these he often exalts himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair. The result is doubt and anxiety. ...*

*Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created 'to the image of God,' is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God's glory. 'What is man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet' (Psalm 8:5-7).*

*But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communication. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential."<sup>3</sup>*

*"Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. **For this reason man may not despise his bodily life.** Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day."<sup>4</sup>*

The Catholic Church teaches and as Catholics we are called to believe that every soul is created immediately by God—it is not "produced" by the parents. While the body is mortal, the soul is immortal. When the body dies, the soul lives on, separated from the body until reunited at the final resurrection.

**Y**et this is but a partial response to the fundamental question "What am I?" For there is more to it than mere body and soul. God has also willed equality and difference into our being.

*"Man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. 'Being man' or 'being woman' is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which come to them immediately from God their Creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity 'in the image of God.' In their 'being-man' and being-woman,' they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness."<sup>5</sup>*

**H**owever, a grave error made by far too many is anthropomorphizing God, that is, making God in man's image. "In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective 'perfections' of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband."<sup>6</sup>

*"The woman God 'fashions' from the man's rib and brings to him elicits on the man's part a cry of wonder, an exclamation of love and communion: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2:23). **Man discovers woman as another 'I,' sharing the same humanity.**"<sup>7</sup>*

It is so seldom remembered and so quickly forgotten—so seminal a discovery—that we share common heritage with one another. We are quite literally, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," genetically connected with one another.

We are creatures. Few, even the most ardent unbelievers or agnostics would disagree, even those who believe solely in evolution would classify man as a creature. Yet, the nature of any creature is predicated upon its existence and its existence is predicated upon its creation. A creature cannot create itself; cannot cause itself into existence.

Only man, of all living creatures since the beginning, has had the chutzpah, the arrogance, and the conceit to believe otherwise. Only man dares to

believe what God has made, man can remake and improve. Only man dares to climb Olympus so he too can become a creator god.

Unlike any other living thing, the human creature has the ability to reason, to think in abstractions, concepts and ideas, to love and to be loved, to know beauty and wonder, joy and laughter. Man alone has a conscience, an interior compass to guide, to temper our thoughts and our actions. It is the conscience that allows us to distinguish moral from immoral, good from evil, justice from injustice, right from wrong.

We are created with a mortal body, like all other living creatures, yet endowed by God with a spiritual soul. No other creature has been so endowed; it is what differentiates man from animal.

Each of us is created unique unto our own self. We are uniquely made: we share common traits, features, and body parts, yet we come in an infinite variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. We are the same yet different. Such a marvelous collage is God's design.

Yet we find ourselves dissatisfied, unable to live as God designed. We believe we can do better, perfect ourselves through genetic manipulation and scientific reengineering. God created male and female, perfectly suited for one another, capable of producing offspring through mutual self-giving love.

Man believes he can create a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Rubbish! Alchemy was a false dream, a scam, a

hoax played on fools. Shakespeare wrote, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," and that is true for roses, but a rose can never be a gladiola or a daisy, no matter how much it might wish to be. Some things simply are not meant to be.

I am, as I have always been, male. Were I to wish to be female, which I decidedly do not, no amount of wishful thinking, psychological mumbo-jumbo, surgical manipulation, drug therapies, or makeup could or would alter the fact of my maleness.

**WHO** made me? God made me.

**WHAT** am I? I am a male creature composed of a body and a soul, made in the image and likeness of God.

**WHY** did God make me? God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in heaven.

**WHEN** did God make me? Somewhere around 71 years ago.

**HOW** did God make me? Through the conjugal love only possible by a man and a woman, my parents, and with his love and infinite creative power.

Any more questions?

1. Lucas E. Morel, Ph.D., Professor of Politics, Washington and Lee University, "Frederick Douglass, American", adapted from a speech delivered at Hillsdale College on May 12, 2017.
2. Catechism of the Catholic Church §362-363.
3. Gaudium et Spes, §12.
4. Gaudium et Spes, §14.
5. CCC §369.
6. CCC §370.
7. CCC §371.

## Deacon's Diner

*Food for a restless mind*

**F**or 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.

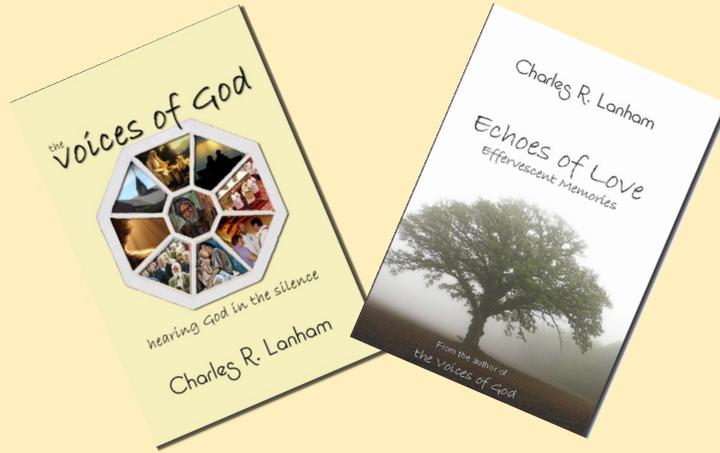
**Strangers in a Strange Land**  
*Charles J. Chaput*  
Henry Holt and Co.  
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

### PERIODICALS

**First Things**  
Institute on Religion and Public Life  
Editor: R. R. Reno  
Ten Issues per year.  
[www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)

**Touchstone**  
A Journal of Mere Christianity  
Editor: James M. Kushiner  
Bi-Monthly.  
[www.touchstonemag.com](http://www.touchstonemag.com)

**Catholic Answers Magazine**  
Share the Faith, Defend the Faith  
Editor: Tim Ryland  
Bi-Monthly.  
[www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

**deaconscorner.org**

**Deacon Chuck Lanham** is an author, columnist, speaker, 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 is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

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

**<http://deaconscorner.org>**.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

**[deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org](mailto:deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org)**

**Colloquī** is a weekly publication of **Deacon's Corner Publishing**.

Copyright © 2016 by **Deacon's Corner Publishing**. All rights reserved.

## **Deacon's Corner Publishing**

4742 Cougar Creek Trail

Reno, Nevada 89519