

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

Without The Past

The future never comes

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.

Without The Past

The future never comes

Some years ago—it seems as yesterday—I penned an essay, “God’s Exit is her entrance,” for Deacon’s Corner #111, January 8, 2014, in which I observed:

Life is a journey, with neither a marked beginning nor a distinct ending, for God has known each of us before we came to be and the essence of our life, our spirit, will live beyond time and place with and in Him. We exist in differing forms, both material and ethereal, both within time and beyond and how we choose to live, the paths we choose to take will, as Robert Frost wrote in ‘The Road Not Taken’, make all the difference.



Throughout our journey of life we will be faced with many challenges and obstacles to overcome. Some will present themselves as opportunities that require choosing between one direc-

tion or another, others will arise as barriers, suddenly or abruptly closing or shutting off options or paths.

My mention then of Frost’s marvelous poem was but a brief reprise to a homily I had delivered a year before on the third Sunday of Easter, “The Road Less Traveled By has made all the difference,” April 14, 2013. It bears repeating.

I enjoy poetry and one of my favorite poems is “The Road Not Taken” by the American poet Robert Frost. I find it especially fitting as a poetic metaphor for the gospel today (John 21:1-19). The poem begins:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
and sorry I could not travel both
and be one traveler, long I stood
and looked down one as far as I could
to where it bent in the undergrowth;*

Throughout our lives we come upon many divergent paths, moments when we must make a choice, choose one thing or another, decide to change direction or stay the course. It is seldom easy to decide. More often than

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not, when in doubt, we choose to return to what we know, to remain within our comfort zone. When the road ahead is unclear or uncertain, our first inclination is to play it safe, to turn back, and to choose the familiar. The poem continues:

*Then took the other, just as fair,
and having perhaps the better claim,
because it was grassy and wanted wear;
though as for that the passing there
had worn them really about the same*

Jesus had died, and his disciples were confused and afraid. What were they supposed to do? Where should they go? Well, they chose to go fishing! They chose to do what was comfortable, what was familiar, to return to what they knew how to do. But the going back was not as easy as they had imagined. They fished all night and caught nothing.

They almost certainly questioned whether their decision had been the correct one. They may have even been thinking that they could follow Jesus later, return when the way was a bit safer, when things had calmed down. But as the poem states:

*And both that morning equally lay
in leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

We seldom are allowed the opportunity to retrace our steps, to go back and try a different path. Life just doesn't work that way. Deep within their hearts the disciples knew this, but they felt that their future had died along with Jesus and they could think of nothing else to do. What they failed to understand was that although Jesus had died he had not abandoned them. He had shown them the path they were to travel and his light was pointing the way. And the poem concludes:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
somewhere ages and ages hence:
two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.*

Once again, Jesus shared a meal with his disciples and assured them that the path they were to travel was with him. He showed them that only through him—only if they followed in his footsteps—would they travel the road that leads to eternal life with God.

Jesus told them that they had not been called to travel the road of familiarity and comfort, but rather, the road less traveled by; a road marked with uncertainty, suffering, and even death. The road they were to travel, the path they were to take, would bring new life, hope, and salvation to the world.

And, as we know—that—has made all the difference.

No one travels the same path through life, though some roads are more traveled by than others. Some choose to take the less traveled by, either by circumstance, happenstance or purpose, while most dare not risk becoming lost among the unfamiliar, uncomfortable or unknown. Every breath, every step, every thought moves us inexorably forward no matter how strong the impulse might be to stop, exhale, retreat and forget.

Fifty-one years ago, April 27, 1968, not yet old enough to vote or to purchase and imbibe adult beverages (you had to have reached the age of 21 years, commonly though questionably considered the age of maturity,) I married the love of my life at St. James Catholic Church in Decatur, Illinois.

At the time I had not the vaguest thought in my love-addled brain that

it would last so long or be so enduring. To the young, old is anyone born before them, whether for a day, a year, a decade, or worst case, over the brink of antiquity, that is, the far side of fifty.

There is poetry within each of us, the measured beating of our hearts the meter of our living. Most, or many, never discover the source or know joy and happiness, though they are qualities of life few would deny an audience. I once wrote:

Love is often complicated, messy, and poorly understood by those who believe they are masters of it. What is often taken to be love is seldom love at all but rather infatuation or a desire for intimacy coupled with passion. We live in an age where casual hookups and one-night stands have replaced intentional long-lasting relationships built upon authentic mutual self-giving love.

One thing I have learned after nearly one-half century of being in love with my love is that love must be nourished and sustained for it to endure for a lifetime. You must provide the food to feed your love and that requires a lot of hard work and devoted energy. Love is never easy nor is it free or cheaply purchased for you indeed get what you pay for, yet forever love is priceless and worth everything.

In order to love one another you must first like one another, respect one another, be proud of one another. It is crucial that you remember those things that attracted you to each other and hold onto to those when times get tough—and there will be tough times.

For myself, I have always been inordinately proud of my wife who I know is much smarter than I and far more capable. She is simply

Irreplaceable to me, as I firmly trust I am to her. It is our love that became one so many years ago and it is our love that binds us still.

You have to feel that same way about each other. In a very real sense when you marry, you lose yourself and become one body, one spirit. Just as parts of your bodies are irreplaceable, so must you be to each other. Take care of that which is irreplaceable and your love will be well-fed and complete.

No one should interpret what I have just said as a proclamation of a perfect and saccharine relationship borne without occasional strife, discord, or hardships for that would simply not be the case.

Many years ago prior to my own wedding my mother offered me sage advice, advice which I have never forgotten and have always tried to honor. She told me that marriage is not a 50/50 proposition—it is a 150/150 proposition. You must always be willing to give more than you ever expect to receive. And in giving more you will receive more.

Support one another, accept one another's faults and failures as your own, and live together as one body with and for the honor and glory of God. Keep God close to you, make Him an essential part of your life together, and He will bless you with an abundance of gifts of love and happiness for the rest of your lives.¹

The preceding introduced and, I hope, added some small measure of meaning and understanding to the accompanying poem "Wanting More, It is enough to know we love" included in my second book, *Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories*. Time goes flying ever faster, it seems, as it is hard to imagine the years now

since I first wrote this.

*Oh how we once did soar with grace
to lofty heights above the clouds,
and we did fly too near the sun
and thus our hearts did melt
from the torrid heat of our desire
while our descent from heaven's gate
left us wanting, wanting more.*

*Once upon a time, so long ago,
across a crowded room we met,
and talked and talked and talked
and talked of many things, and yet,
we could not fill our souls with knowing
all that was the other, for it merely
left us wanting, wanting more.*

*The days of yesterday have slipped away
all but forgotten among the boxes
filled with "what might have been-s"
and "what was never meant to be-s".*

*But there were moments, oh such moments
when joyous gifts thrice surprised and
left us wanting, wanting more.*

*Do you ponder as I wonder
when the knowing of the other
was enough to simply be
in quiet presence, nothing more?
When did we soar beyond the sun
into cathedral silence, knowing nothing
left us wanting, wanting more?*

*It does not matter why or wherefore,
it is enough to know we love
the other more beyond the telling,
beyond the heat of passion's breath,
beyond the knowing of the other.
It is enough to love, my love,
forever wanting, wanting more.*

*Love whispers soft and low such
sweet music from the heart and
every note and measured beat
sings with such perfect harmony
a melody so pure the soul cries out
in sublime and joyful agony
echoes of love, wanting more.*

The first of three joyous gifts was delivered one day shy our first anniversary, April 26, 1969, with the birth of our daughter Cherie Jean, who despite our best efforts to hold back the progress of

time has managed to arrive at that seminal moment, that somewhat dubious crossing between the alpha and omega of one's journey thru life. Cherie became a Nurse, like her mother, and eventually a Nurse Practitioner, while having three children, Brendan, Jenna, and Lea.

Our second joyous gift arrived ahead of schedule, six weeks, but without the benefit of modern medicine, Charles Joseph's time in this world was all too brief. And yet, we know he is in the hands of God and watching over us from heaven.

Our third joyous gift, Charlene Jene', arrived on November 16, 1971, at the Frankfurt Military Hospital, Frankfurt, Germany. Charlene became an attorney, and has two children, Daniel and Veronica.

There are times when life takes an unexpected turn, when the road dips and rises, twists and turns or the pavement goes from smooth to potholed in an instant or suddenly becomes a dusty, narrow, rutted trail difficult to navigate. Such is life.

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith (1 Jn 5:1-4).

Over the past few months, we have been exposed to the unremitting assaults by Satan and his legions of evil; our faith shaken, our lives threatened, our hearts broken, our trust shattered. We have become lost and confused, knowing not on whom to rely to tell us the truth.

After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:66-69).

It is easy to despair, to lose hope, to doubt whether God is really with us. And yet, God is with us. Some of us complain that what Jesus has spoken are "hard sayings", some of us give up, dismissing what Jesus says we must do to be his disciple, murmuring as we walk away from the difficulties that confront us, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

As Bishop Paul S. Loverde observed in his homily back in 2006 for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time:

Yes, as we listen to Christ and to the Teaching Office of the Church, the Magisterium, which echoes Christ's voice and the Truth He proclaims, we hear "hard sayings," that is, teachings that clearly challenge our own preconceptions of what the Catholic Faith is all about and challenge the contemporary culture in which we live. These teachings direct us to live in the world but to be not of the world, to live in the way

Christ points out by His own example and through His Church.

For example, we are to forgive while holding on to a grudge or even taking revenge is how society would counsel us to act. We are to uphold and protect human life from conception to natural death while attacks on human life, like abortion, embryonic stem-cell research and physician-assisted suicide are judged by the culture of death surrounding us as acceptable and politically correct. We are to defend marriage as the union only of one man with one woman while the society around us would say that doing this is discriminating and unfair.

Other examples could also be cited. In the end, we are to make our own "to obey" all of Christ's teachings made clear through the Church while many in society, even within the Church, try to pick and choose only those which seem convenient to them in a "cafeteria-style" approach.

So, now, as centuries ago, Jesus is asking us, "Do you also want to leave?" What is our response ...?

Our response is rooted in a process of deepening faith in Jesus. Like Simon Peter, we too admit, "We have come to believe." This deepening faith is ongoing. It is purified by our struggles to put aside our own preconceptions, our own personal preferences, in loving obedience to Jesus, Who speaks to our hearts "words [that are] Spirit and life, words that are truly life-giving. Christ tells us that He alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Christ founded the Church with the guaranteed guidance of God the Holy Spirit so that we would follow His way in safety, know His truth with certainty and live His life in union with Him. In the end, our obedience is to Christ Jesus Himself, as He speaks to us and leads us through His representatives whom He gives

us, especially the pope and the bishops, who are in union with St. Peter's successor. We give to Christ our "obedience of faith." "We have come to believe and are convinced that You are the Holy One of God."

Most movies these days are not, to put it mildly, worth the price of admission. This is primarily why I seldom frequent the cinema. But within the last few weeks I have found myself sitting down to watch two movies of which I cannot say enough. Everyone who has not seen *Unplanned* or *Breakthrough* should take the time to see both. I promise, no spoiler attacks follow. Both are true stories, films of actual events and real people. The first will no doubt change your heart and mind, the second will renew your faith in God.

As one review of *Breakthrough* suggests, "'Breakthrough' inspires with a BK rating (bring Kleenex,) the film is a heartfelt but not maudlin story based on the 2017 book, "The Impossible" written by Joyce Smith concerning the miracle that happened to her adopted son John.

[On a warm day in January 2015,] John Smith, 14, and two friends decided to skate around on the thin ice of Lake Saint Louis in St. Charles, Missouri, just northwest of St. Louis. The day was warm because of an early thaw, and the boys wore shorts and tank tops. Although warned by the manager of the lake's clubhouse to get off the ice, they didn't and the worst happened.

They suddenly fell through the thin ice. It was 11:33 a.m. One of the trio, Josh Sander, swam to shore.

But John struggled as he tried to help the other skater, Josh Rieger, onto the ice. He yelled to Rieger's sister, Jamie, on the shore, "Call 911! I don't want to die!" Then he disappeared beneath the surface.

Local police and first responders were on the scene within minutes. The Wentzville fire trucks arrived, and, using poles, firefighter Tommy Shine and another rescuer prodded the rocky bottom for the softness of a human body. Divers were already in the murky water looking for John. At 11:51 a.m., almost 20 minutes after John had fallen into the water, Shine found him.

He was not breathing. Although dirty lake water spewed out of his mouth and nose, he had no pulse and no heartbeat. The EMTs rushed the teen to St. Joseph's Hospital West (now call SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital Lake St. Louis), just six minutes away.

Trauma doctor Kent Sutterer was sure that, after 43 minutes without breathing, John would not survive. As John's mother, Joyce, sat anxiously in the waiting room, a tiny nun in her 60s, dressed in a gray and white habit, sat down and took her hand.

Ten minutes later, Joyce was allowed in the trauma room where John lay surrounded by medical personnel. All she could see of her son were his colorless feet as a doctor continued doing CPF. Joyce sat on a chair and the nun stood behind her and placed her hands on the worried mother's shoulders. Dr. Sutterer squatted near Joyce and introduced himself. Then he told her she could go and talk to her son.

A doctor was still trying to pump air into John's lungs. Tubes and wires snaked everywhere. Joyce grasped her son's cold feet and quietly prayed. But later she learned that it came out as a roar that everyone, even down the hallway, could

hear: "I believe in a God who can do miracles! Holy Spirit, I need you right now to come and breath life back into my son!"

At that moment, John's heart monitor began to beep.²

Now, as Paul Harvey used to say, here is the rest of the story. In this case, it is personal. My oldest daughter, Cherie, had formerly worked in the emergency room at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in downtown St. Louis where John would be transferred from St. Joseph's. She now works in the emergency room at St. Joseph's hospital where John was first attended to by Dr. Sutterer and the ER staff. She lives nearby and knows and works with Dr. Sutterer and the other doctors and nurses who attended to John. She has told us that the movie is verifiably accurate with only a few minor exceptions not worth mentioning. Dr. Kent Sutterer can be seen talking about this moment and the miraculous event on youtube:

[youtube.com/watch?v=W5khSpb1-cs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5khSpb1-cs)

The movie *Unplanned*, is the true story of Abby Johnson, a former director of Planned Parenthood clinic in Texas. When asked to assist a physician by holding an ultrasound for the physician performing an abortion, she sees for the first time the horror and murderous dismemberment of a living human fetus struggling for life. Ultimately she converted to Catholicism, is active in 40 Days for Life, has testified before congress against her former employer, spoke earlier this year in San Francisco at the Walk for Life Rally. She currently has eight children.

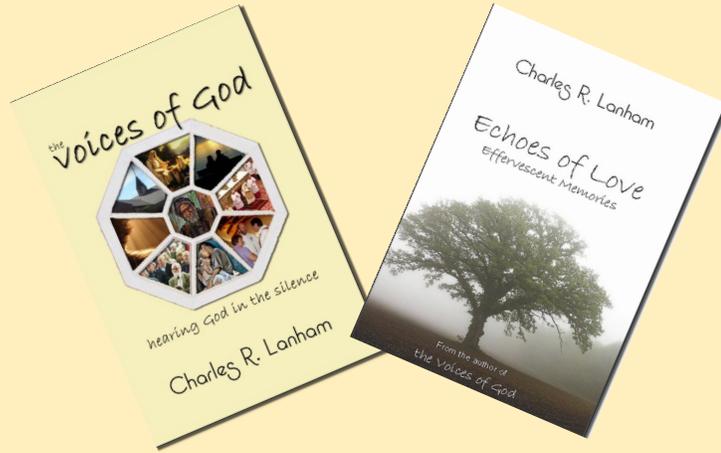
Other significant moments in the film include the scene with the abortionist who is played by a physician, Dr. Tony Levantino, who had actually performed over 1200 abortions before a life-changing event changed the course of his life.

There are a number of youtube videos on his conversion which are well worth watching, just do a search on youtube for Doctor Tony Levantino. There are numerous videos available on Abby Johnson and her conversion and revealing aspects of Planned Parenthood as well. Just do a search for Abby Johnson on youtube.

Life is a precious gift from God and living life in gratitude and as God intended is an imperative we cannot choose to ignore or abuse. We are created in the image and likeness of God. And as Dr. Levantino tells it, if it is wrong to kill a human being, it should not nor does not matter what size it is, an inch, two inches, ten inches, or more, all are human beings and deserving of our love and respect.

Tonight I will celebrate with my love of fifty-one years. We will celebrate as two become one, united for most of our lives. We will celebrate all the gifts we have received from God: each other, our children and grandchildren, our siblings, parents, and all our many friends and family. But above all, we will celebrate and give thanks to Almighty God who gave us life.

1. Charles R. Lanham, "Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories", (Reno, NV: Deacon's Corner Publications, 2015), pp. 49-52.
2. Feature Story from St. Anthony Messenger, April 2019.



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.

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