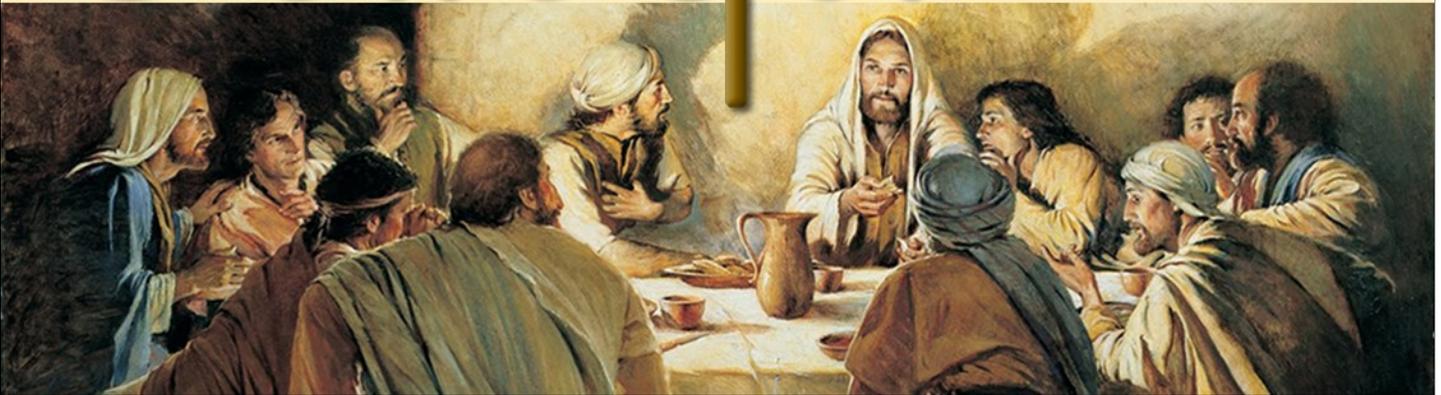


Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

Stirring The Potpourris

Wrongs can never be rights

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.

Stirring The Potpourris

Wrongs can never be rights

Alexis de Tocqueville in his classic *Democracy in America* wrote of his admiration for much of what he saw in the young republic but he was not an uncritical admirer, fearing that democracy carried too far might well undermine civic virtue.

There is . . . a manly and lawful passion for equality which incites men to wish all to be powerful and honored. This passion tends to elevate the humble to the rank of the great; but there exists also in the human heart a depraved taste for equality, which impels the weak to attempt to lower the powerful to their own level, and reduces men to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom.¹



Noted American economist and Nobel Prize recipient Milton Friedman once wrote:

Liberalism, as it developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and flowered in the nineteenth, puts major emphasis on the freedom of individuals to control their own destinies. Individualism is its creed; collectivism and tyranny its enemy. The state exists to protect individuals from coercion by other individuals or groups and to widen the range within which individuals can exercise their freedom; it is purely instrumental and has no significance in and of itself. Society is a collection of individuals, and the whole is no greater than the sum of its parts.

The ultimate values are the values of the individuals who form the society; there are no super-individual values or ends.

In politics, liberalism expressed itself as a reaction against authoritarian regimes. Liberals favored limiting the

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rights of hereditary rulers, establishing democratic parliamentary institutions, extending the franchise, and guaranteeing civil rights. They favored such measures both for their own sake, as a direct expression of essential political freedoms, and as a means of facilitating the adoption of liberal economic measures.

In economic policy, liberalism expressed itself as a reaction against government intervention in economic affairs. Liberals favored free competition at home and free trade among nations. They regarded the organization of economic activity through free private enterprise operating in a competitive market as a direct expression of essential economic freedoms and as important also in facilitating the preservation of political liberty. They regarded free trade among nations as a means of eliminating conflicts that might otherwise produce war. Just as within a country, individuals following their own interests under the pressures of competition indirectly promote the interests of the whole; so, between countries, individuals following their own interests under conditions of free trade indirectly promote the interests of the world as a whole. By providing free access to goods, services, and resources on the same terms to all, free trade would knit the world into a single economic community.

"Liberalism" has taken on a very different meaning in the twentieth century and particularly in the United States. ... in politics there are some not unimportant differences: in any issue involving a choice between centralization or decentralization of political responsibility, the nineteenth-century liberal will resolve any doubt in favor of strengthening the importance of local governments at the expense of the central government; for, to him, the main desideratum is to

strengthen the defenses against arbitrary government and to protect individual freedom as much as possible; the twentieth-century liberal will resolve the same doubt in favor of increasing the power of the central government at the expense of local government; for, to him, the main desideratum is to strengthen the power of the government to do "good for" the people.

The difference is much sharper in economic policy where liberalism now stands for almost the opposite of its earlier meaning. Nineteenth-century liberalism favors private enterprise and a minimum of government intervention. Twentieth-century liberalism distrusts the market in all its manifestations and favors widespread government intervention in, and control over, economic activity. Nineteenth-century liberalism favors individualist means to foster its individualist objectives. **Twentieth-century liberalism favors collectivist means while professing individualist objectives. And its objectives are individualist in a different sense; its keynote is welfare, not freedom** [*emphasis added*]. As Schumpeter remarks, "as a supreme, if unintended, compliment, the enemies of the system of private enterprise have thought it wise to appropriate its label."²

Adam Smith, in *Wealth of Nations*, wrote of the role of the state in a liberal (*old style liberalism*) society.

Every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men. The sovereign is completely discharged from a duty, in the attempting to perform which he must always be exposed to innumerable delusions, and for

the proper performance of which no human wisdom or knowledge could ever be sufficient; the duty of superintending the industry of private people, and of directing it towards the employments most suitable to the interest of the society. **According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understanding** [*emphasis added*]: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society.³

Friedman referred to himself as a liberal in the original meaning of the term: a believer in freedom. In speaking on his personal beliefs, he would say he regarded "the basic human value that underlies my own beliefs as tolerance, based on humility. I have no right to coerce someone else because I cannot be sure that I am right and he is wrong."

On November 26, 1981, Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI, delivered a homily during a liturgy for Catholic representatives to the Bundestag in the Church of Saint Winfried

in Bonn. The readings for the day were 1 Peter 1:3-7 and John 14:1-6. In his homily, "Christians Faced with Forms of Totalitarianism" he made note of three important statements contained within the readings "that have significance also for political action among Christians." [*emphasis is mine*]

1. **The state is not the whole of human existence and does not encompass all human hope.** Man and what he hopes for extend beyond the framework of the state and beyond the sphere of political action. This is true not only for a state like Babylon, but for every state. The state is not the totality; this unburdens the politician and at the same time opens up for him the path of reasonable politics. The Roman state was wrong and anti-Christian precisely because it wanted to be the totality of human possibilities and hopes. **A state that makes such claims cannot fulfill its promises; it thereby falsifies and diminishes man.** Through the totalitarian lie, it becomes demonic and tyrannical.

But when the Christian faith falls into ruins and faith in mankind's greater hope is lost, the myth of the divine state rises again, because man cannot do without the totality of hope. Although such promises pose as progress and commandeer for themselves the slogans of progress and progressive thinking, viewed historically they are nevertheless a regression to an era antedating the *novum* of Christianity, a turning back along the scale of history. And even though their propaganda says that their goal is man's complete liberation, the abolition of all ruling authority, they contradict the truth of man and are opposed to his freedom, because they force man to fit into what he himself can make. **Such politics, which declares that the kingdom of God is the outcome of politics**

and twists faith into the universal primacy of the political, is by its very nature the politics of enslavement; it is mythological politics.

The mythical hope of a self-made paradise can only drive man into inescapable anxiety—into fear of the failure of the illusory promises and of the immense emptiness that lurks behind them; into fear of his own power and of its cruelty.

Thus the first service to politics rendered by the Christian faith is that it liberates man from the irrationality of political myths, which are the real threat of our time. Taking a stand for sobriety, which does what is possible and does not cry with an ardent heart after the impossible, is of course always difficult; **the voice of reason is not as loud as the cry of unreason.**

The cry for the grandiose project has the cachet of morality; restricting oneself to what is possible, in contrast, seems to be the renunciation of moral passion, mere faint-hearted pragmatism. But, as a matter of fact, political morality consists precisely of resisting the seductive force of the big words for which humanity and its chances are being gambled away. **The moral thing is not adventurous moralism, which tries to mind God's business, but rather honesty, which accepts man's limits and does man's work within them.** Not the uncompromising stance, but compromise is the true morality in political matters.

2. Although the Christians were being persecuted, they did not have a negative view of the state in principle, but, rather, they still recognized in it the state *qua* state and did what was in their power to build it up as a state; they did not try to destroy it. Precisely because they knew that they were in "Babylon", they applied to themselves the guidelines that Jeremiah had written to the children of Israel

who had been exiled to that place. The letter of the prophet that is recorded in chapter 29 of the Book of Jeremiah was by no means an activist's manual calling for political resistance and the destruction of the slave state, as understandable as that would have been; it is, rather, an instruction on how to preserve and strengthen what is good. Thus, it is a lesson in surviving and at the same time in preparing for better days and new prospects. In that sense, this morality of exile also contains basic elements of a positive political ethos. Jeremiah urges the Jews not to persist in contradiction and denial but, rather, to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ... Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:5-7). We can read a very similar admonition in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, which tradition dates to the time of Nero, where it says to pray "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim 2:1-2). Along the same lines, the First Letter of Peter itself admonishes the readers to "maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12).

What does this mean? The Christians were by no means fearful, gullible people who were taken in by the authorities and did not know that there can be a right to resistance and even a conscientious duty to resist. ... they recognized the limits of the state and did not bow to it in matters where they were not allowed to bow to it because it opposed God's will. Even more importantly, the fact remains that they still did not attempt to

destroy that state; rather, they tried to build it up. **Amorality is fought by morality, and evil by a determined adherence to the good, and in no other way.** Morality—doing good—is the true resistance, and only the good can be a preparation for a turn for the better. There are not two kinds of political morality: a morality of resistance and a morality of ruling. There is only one morality: morality as such, the morality of God’s commandments, which cannot be temporarily suspended in order to bring about a change in the status quo more quickly. **One can build up only by building up, not by destroying—**that is the political ethics of the Bible from Jeremiah to Peter and Paul. The Christian always supports the state, in *this* sense: he does the positive, the good things that hold states together. He has no fear that he will thereby favor the power of the wicked, but he is convinced that evil can be dismantled and the power of evil and of evil men can be diminished only by strengthening what is good. **Anyone who accepts the killing of the innocent and the destruction of other people’s property as part of the bargain cannot appeal to the faith.** The words of Saint Peter are quite explicitly against such methods: “Let none of you suffer [condemnation] as a murderer or a thief” (4:15)—and at that time he was speaking also against this sort of resistance. **The true, Christian resistance that he is demanding occurs only in the situation where the state demands the repudiation of God and of his commandments, where it demands evil, against which good is still commanded.**

3. A final point follows logically from this. **The Christian faith destroyed the myth of the divine state, the myth of the earthly paradise or utopian state and of a society without rule.** In its place, it put the objectivity of reason. But that

does not mean that it brought an objectivity devoid of values, the objectivity of statistics and mere social dynamics. **True human objectivity involves humanity, and humanity involves God. True human reason involves morality, which lives on God’s commandments.** This morality is not a private matter; it has public significance. Without the good of being good and of good action, there can be no good politics. **What the persecuted Church prescribed for Christians as the core of their political ethos must also be the core of an active Christian politics:** Only where good is done and is recognized as good can people live together well in a thriving community. **Demonstrating the practical importance of the moral dimension, the dimension of God’s commandments—publicly as well—must be the center of responsible political action.**⁴

The reader will no doubt intuitively discern a common theme present in the works of Tocqueville, Friedman, Smith and Ratzinger. Unlike the conundrum “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” which yet begs for an answer, the authors, each in their own time and place, acknowledge God at the center, recognize man to be God’s creature and the state a creation of man.

God endowed man with free will, the freedom to choose between what is good and what is evil; instilled within every human heart is the knowing of right and wrong, a genetic moral code gifted by our Creator. To remind us, because of our forgetful nature, God gave us ten commandments, ten rules of conduct that are immutable and universal.

God created man and woman, male and female he created them, each with an immortal soul made in his image and likeness. We are not gods, although, one day, we may be *like* him in heaven. Pope Francis, in the foreword to *Faith and Politics: Selected Writings* reiterates the question asked by his predecessor with regard to *how* redemption is suppose to come about: “Does redemption occur through liberation from all dependence, or is its sole path the complete dependence on love, which then would also be true freedom?” He then goes on to remark how prescient Ratzinger was in “understanding our present day, which testifies to the unchanged freshness and vitality of his thought.”

Today, indeed, more than ever, the same temptation is being proposed again: to reject any dependence of love that is not man’s love for his own ego, for “the I and its desires”; and, consequently, the danger of the “colonization” of the conscience by an ideology that denies the fundamental certainty that man exists as male and female, to whom is assigned the task of transmitting life; the ideology that goes so far as to plan rationally the production of human beings and that—perhaps for some end that is considered “good”—goes so far as to think it logical and licit to eliminate what it no longer considers to be created, given as a gift, conceived, and generated, but considers, rather, to be made by ourselves.

These apparent human “rights”, which all tend toward man’s self-destruction ... have one common denominator, which consists in one great denial: the denial of the dependence on love, the denial that man is God’s creature, lovingly

made by him in his image, for whom man thirsts like the deer for running streams (Ps 42). When this dependence of the creature on the Creator is denied, this relation of love, one basically relinquishes man's true greatness and the bulwark of his liberty and dignity.

Thus the defense of man and of what is human against the ideological reductions of power proceeds today once again by way of establishing man's obedience to God as the limit of obedience to the state.⁵

The preface to *Faith and Politics* is taken from a text sent by the Pope Emeritus to Professor Marcello Pera on September 29, 2014 under the title "Points for a discussion of Marcello Pera's book *La Chiesa, i diritti umani e il distacco da Dio* (*The Church, Human Rights and Estrangement from God*). In this, the Pope Emeritus points to the Postconciliar theology of Saint John Paul II.

He regarded the idea of human rights as the specific weapon against the totalitarian claim of the Marxist state and of its founding ideology, an idea that limits the totality of the state and thus offers the necessary free space not only for personal thought but above all, too, for the faith of Christians and the rights of the Church. The secular paradigm of human rights, as it had been formulated in 1948, plainly appeared to him to be the rational counterforce against the all-encompassing ideological and practical claim of the state founded on Marxism. Thus, as pope, he mobilized worldwide against all sorts of dictatorships the concern for human rights as a power acknowledged by universal reason. ... John Paul II knew that he was also intrinsically in continuity with the early Church. She was faced with a state

that, although it was quite familiar with religious tolerance, still clung to an ultimate identification of governmental and divine authority, which Christians could not endorse. The Christian faith, which proclaims a universal religion for all mankind, thus necessarily included a fundamental limitation of the state's authority through the right and duty of the individual conscience. At this point, though, the idea of human rights had not been formulated. It was instead a matter of contrasting man's obedience to God with obedience to the state as a limit on the latter. But it seems to me that it is not unwarranted to formulate man's duty to obey God as a right vis-à-vis the state, and in this respect, it is probably quite logical when John Paul II found in the Christian relativization of the state for the sake of freedom to obey God the expression of a human right that preexists all state authority.

...it seems to me, nevertheless, that everything ultimately depends on one's concept of God. If God exists, if there is a Creator, then one can also speak about his Is and demonstrate to man an Ought. If not, then ethics is ultimately reduced to what is pragmatic. This is why, in my preaching and in my writings, I have always insisted on the centrality of the question of God. ... **The idea of human rights holds up in the final analysis only if it is anchored in faith in the Creator God. From there it receives its limit and at the same time its justification.**⁶

Here, then, is the cross upon which all moral authority must rest. The founders of this great nation, despite their human flaws and divers faiths, came to the table with an unwavering belief in the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God, a Creator who created every human being, endowing them with certain rights

as well as certain obligations.

The founders clearly understood where the state derived its powers—that government existed only for as long as it had the consent of the people who established it.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

For nearly two centuries, the people of America held steadfast to the principles of God and country, to a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Unalienable rights, though universal—applicable to every person *qua* human—are necessarily and objectively individual rights, rights granted separately to each human person by their Creator. With each right belongs a duty which

must be adhered.

In the exercise of a right, such as the right to life, every individual human being is free to live according to the dictates of their conscience and to pursue their own interests as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of another human being.

1730 God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. "God willed that man should be 'left in the hand of his own counsel,' so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him."

Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts.

1731 Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.

1732 As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of *choosing between good and evil*, and thus of growing in perfection or of failing and sinning. This freedom characterizes properly human acts. It is the basis of praise or blame, merit or reproach.

1733 The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is not true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to "slavery of sin."

1738 Freedom is exercised in relationship between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order.⁷

That human freedom comes with limitations is too often ignored. Simply put, the exercise of freedom is never without limits; freedom is never free.

1740 The exercise of freedom does not imply a right to say or do everything. It is false to maintain that man, "the subject of this freedom," is "an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods." Moreover, the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that are needed for a just exercise of freedom are too often disregarded or violated. Such situations of blindness and injustice injure the moral life and involve the strong as well as the weak in the temptation to sin against charity. By deviating from the moral law man violates his own freedom, becomes imprisoned within himself, disrupts neighborly fellowship, and rebels against divine truth.⁸

Neither the state nor any group holds claim to such freedom or rights. A state, being instituted by men, is by definition a slave to the people that created it. It exists solely to serve the will of the people and in its capacity to serve has three duties and *no* rights. Those duties are 1) to protect the whole of

society against violence from a foreign power, 2) protect each member of society from injustice or oppression from any other member or group through the institution, enforcement and administration of just laws, and 3) provide public works and institutions which *benefit the whole of society* and not just any individual or group.

Though the founding fathers knew well enough that freedom and rights were inalienable gifts from Almighty God to each individual human person, such profound ideas ran counter to dominant political philosophies then, and for this nation since the end of the Second World War. The law of unintended consequences played an enormous role in what seemed at the time to be a good idea. As with such things, politics and power soon turn good intentions into sour mash.

When Eleanor Roosevelt and a small group of people gathered at the behest of the U.N. in early 1947 to draft the world's first "international bill of rights," they cannot have had very high hopes for their endeavor. The world was awash in colonial oppression, discrimination, poverty, and conflict. Though the Great Powers had just ended a war that saw unimaginable violations of human dignity, the Allies were reluctant to establish any system that threatened their national sovereignty. The idea of "human rights" barely existed in the public imagination, and had almost no role in international law; it had only recently gained currency as a phrase among scholars and policymakers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Latin America. The idea that some rights could be universal—applicable

across all the world's different societies — was controversial.

Yet in the decades that followed, this very idea had a transformative influence on the post-World War II political order. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the most prominent symbol and instrument of these changes, successfully challenged the view that sovereignty provided an iron shield behind which states could mistreat their people without outside scrutiny. In thirty short articles, the Declaration gave expression to deep yearnings among men and women everywhere, strengthening the movements that would soon bring an end to colonialism, and later apartheid, and eventually communist rule behind the Iron Curtain. ... And it gave the weak members of any society an instrument to amplify their voices.⁹

What is missing from the UDHR is crucial to its misapplication; the document ignores the God/man relationship and reverses the master/servant relationship between man and state. Human rights are no longer God-derived but determined by the state. Rights and moral authority are no longer immutable and inalienable but mutable and subject to the whims of the politically connected and politically correct. This has understandably resulted in an uninhibited proliferation of “basic human rights.”

Groups harnessed the moral authority of the human rights idea to champion their causes. Today there are calls to make everything from access to the Internet to development aid to free university education a right. The Universal Declaration's modest thirty articles have burst into potentially more than a

thousand rights provisions in agreements that many governments have signed. A 2013 article in *Foreign Affairs* notes with disappointment that “much of the human rights community has not only shied away from expressing qualms about rights proliferation, it has often led the process.” At the same time, activists followed the selective approach of the old Cold War antagonists, promoting some rights and ignoring others.

Given that individual rights were gaining ascendancy, the role of social institutions and non-individualistic values were deemphasized. A one-size-fits-all approach triumphed over the idea of a common standard that could be brought to life in a variety of legitimate ways. The indivisibility and inter-dependence of fundamental rights were forgotten.¹⁰

Another one of those pesky unintended consequences, especially within Western societies: growing political divisiveness and ideological diversity have weaponized the idea of rights, turning them from shields that protect every individual into spears opposing groups hurl at one another.

In European countries such as Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, and France, there is a growing divide between the secular state (backed by a secularized majority population) that pursues animal rights, children's rights, and non-discrimination, and minority religious groups defending their right to practice their faith. Jewish and Muslim groups, for example, now must defend circumcision—an ancient ritual integral to their faiths—against human rights groups declaring it a violation of children's right to bodily integrity. The capacious right to religious freedom in the Universal Declaration's Article

18, which includes the right to “manifest” one's religion in “teaching, practice, worship and observance,” is being narrowed to mean only a right to believe and worship—not a right to practice and observe.

In the United States, the reliance on rights and courts to solve disputes encourages a winner-takes-all attitude, at the expense of tolerance and compromise. Whereas most democracies introduced policies on controversial matters, such as abortion and sexual freedoms, through legislation and compromise, in the U.S. they have often been dictated by courts, thereby alienating parts of the population and reducing the scope for political settlements.

These trends risk undermining one of the West's greatest achievements: its ability to tolerate difference and to host minority groups. Instead of providing a home to a great variety of viewpoints and belief-systems—including dissenters from mainstream views—the positive tradition of human rights risks becoming more conformist and less ideologically diverse.¹¹

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI stated clearly and unequivocally, everything ultimately depends on one's concept of God. Either rights are from him or, if not, then what is moral, what is ethical, what is right must inevitably be reduced to what is pragmatic; what is pragmatic inevitably comes under the purview of the state.

When the state assumes power over its rightful masters, the members of the society who instituted it for their own *good* purposes, the state inevitably sets itself above the people and declares itself divine and God irrelevant. And no, never so obvious in words lest they offend, but *de facto* in its deeds.

As man turns away from God, abdicating his freedoms and his rights to the sovereign state, the state assumes moral authority of its now subjects. This leads inevitably to despotism and tyranny, anarchy and chaos and as Milton Friedman has observed:

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to be born in the United States in the twentieth century naturally take freedom for granted: it seems to us that a relatively free society is the natural state of mankind. But that is a great misconception. Freedom is very far from being the natural state of mankind; on the contrary, it is an extraordinarily unusual situation. If one looks back through history, in any place on the globe, one finds that the natural state of mankind in most periods in history has been tyranny and misery. If one looks over the globe geographically at any point in time, one finds that most of the people in the world were living in a state of tyranny and misery.¹²

Liberal Catholic theologians, have consistently suggested, since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, a more relaxed way of practicing Christianity with greater trust and candor.

Of course, behind it something deeper is noted: we have a sense that, actually, we do not have to be redeemed by Christianity but, rather, from Christianity; there is an insistent feeling that, in truth, Christianity hinders our freedom and that the land of freedom can appear only when the Christian terms and conditions have been torn up. Amid the hopes that sprang up at and around the Second Vatican Council, a very similar

mixture of motives was at work. Here, too, initially the expectation of a simpler, more candid, and less regulated Christianity gave wings to the joy of the Gospel. But immediately it became obvious that behind a loosening of dogma and behind the abandonment of confession, the promised land of the happy freedom of the redeemed does not appear—far from it—but, rather, a waterless waste that only becomes ghastlier the farther one walks. The landscape now on display was mapped by Jean-Paul Sartre with the crystal-clear logic that is characteristic of Gallic wit. In the migration out of the realm of Christian tradition, Sartre had already taken the final step: to him it is clear that the real constraint of all man's constraints is God; in casting off inhibiting ties, man has not done the decisive deed until he has rid himself of this fetter. God's nonexistence, he says, is the prerequisite for human freedom, for if there were a God, then indeed the space of human existence would be predetermined by him and obedience would be the inescapable fundamental condition of our lives. Nothing set in advance, but only if there is no God; then there is no idea of man as creation, no nature of man that predetermines for him who or what he is and ought to be. With that, he is then in fact completely free; everyone must invent for himself what he thinks it means to be human, and no standard limits him when he does. "Man is what he makes himself to be"; so the French thinker formulates the quintessence of his philosophy of freedom. But this complete freedom is the opposite of redemption. Man is the unhappy being that does not know what it is, what it is for, what it is supposed to do with itself. In the ocean of nothingness, he must first plan what he wants to be, because the fact that there is no idea of him naturally implies also that there is no meaning. Freedom from God is

logically freedom from meaning, too: meaninglessness. The freedom that Sartre discovers is in truth man's condemnation: animals simply are what they are, and they are happy; man, who must make himself, is precisely for that reason in hell—he himself is hell to himself and to the other.¹³

Ratzinger adds that Sartre was heavily influenced by the writings of Karl Marx who a hundred years earlier had elaborated his thoughts into a program for human liberation.

In the writings of Karl Marx we read the propositions: "A being is only considered independent once it stands on its own feet, and it only stands on its own feet once it owes its existence to itself. ... A man who lives at the mercy of another regards himself as a dependent being. My life necessarily has a reason outside of itself unless it is my own creation." The argument that Marx uses here to develop his groundbreaking view of liberation and man's salvation is altogether sensible: If I have to expect redemption from someone else, I am dependent. If I am dependent, I am not free. If I am not free, I am also exposed to uncertainty. After all, I cannot do the decisive deed myself; whether the other does it is not up to me—it just might not occur. If I am not free and uncertain, then I am unredeemed. Therefore the decisive thing must be to overcome all dependence. Liberation from all dependence—in essence, liberation from waiting for God—must then be the heart of any theory of redemption, which itself, consequently, shows the way for the praxis of redemption and turns into it: If that is how it is, then redemption can be brought about only by smashing dependencies, by doing and not by waiting or receiving.

Christian faith and logically consistent paganism along the lines of Marx and Sartre thus have in common the fact that they revolve around the theme of redemption, but in exactly opposite directions. It immediately becomes evident that the real difference does not lie in the question of whether redemption is thought of as being earthly or heavenly, spiritual or secular, otherworldly or this-worldly. These alternatives, which usually dominate the field, are far too shortsighted and conceal the real problem. They are only imprecise consequences of the real alternative: Does redemption occur through liberation from all dependence, or is its sole path the complete dependence of love, which then would also be true freedom? Only from this perspective is the true difference made clear in practical decisions. If redemption means that being under orders or indebted in any way must be overcome as a demeaning lack of freedom, then the praxis of emancipating deeds necessarily follows from this immediately; then I must try to bring about conditions in which no one needs to thank anyone anymore but, rather, in which each one now stands on his own. Someone who refuses, however, to let the indebtedness of love be slandered as dependency that is contrary to freedom, someone who sees precisely therein the liberating fulfillment of man—he must walk a different path. He must, first of all, increase man’s interior depth and open him up to true love; he must struggle for the mind and heart of man. This by no means makes his activity merely spiritual and merely otherworldly: it will be much more present to man today, much more directly related to his here and now than the other program, which does have its heaven on earth but in a future that is much farther away from the present than the heaven of faith, which always stands over the earth and

takes aim into its today. We must go another step farther. “A being ... only stands on its own feet once it owes its existence to itself”, Karl Marx said. This is logical, no doubt. But is it also true? Can my life ever be my own creation, so that it does not have to thank any other creator? Can the emancipation of man from God, from his Creator, ever lead anywhere but into untruth? And can untruth be freedom? Here we must appeal to the modest authority of common sense: It cannot go well if man tries to claim for himself a freedom that fundamentally contradicts his own truth and if he constructs the program of all his activity on this denial of the truth.¹⁴

There is so much more that should be said but time and space are short. A final thought from the Pope Emeritus: “the aim of technology and politics is to make man his own god.” Two wrongs don’t make a right; rights not from God are wrong, dreadfully wrong. Something to think about.

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., 2d ed., trans. Henry Reeve. Ed. Francis Bowen (Boston: John Allyn, Publisher, 1863), vol. I, pp. 67-68. First French edition published in 1835.
2. Milton Friedman, *Milton Friedman on Freedom: Selections from The Collected Works of Milton Friedman, “One—Liberalism, Old Style” (1955)* (Stanford University, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 2017) pp. 1-2.
3. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1930) II, 184–85.
4. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Selected Writings: Faith and Politics*, with a foreword by Pope Francis, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2018), pp. 89-94.
5. *Ibid*, Foreword by Pope Francis, p. 11.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 15-16, 19.
7. Catechism of the Catholic Church, §1730-33, §1738.
8. CCC, §1740.
9. Mary Ann Glendon and Seth D. Kaplan, *Renewing Human Rights*, First Things Magazine, February 2019, 33-34.
10. *Ibid*, p. 35.
11. *Ibid*, p. 36.
12. Milton Friedman on Freedom, “Seven: The Line We Dare Not Cross” (1976).
13. *Faith and Politics*, pp. 32-33.
14. *Faith and Politics*, pp. 34-35

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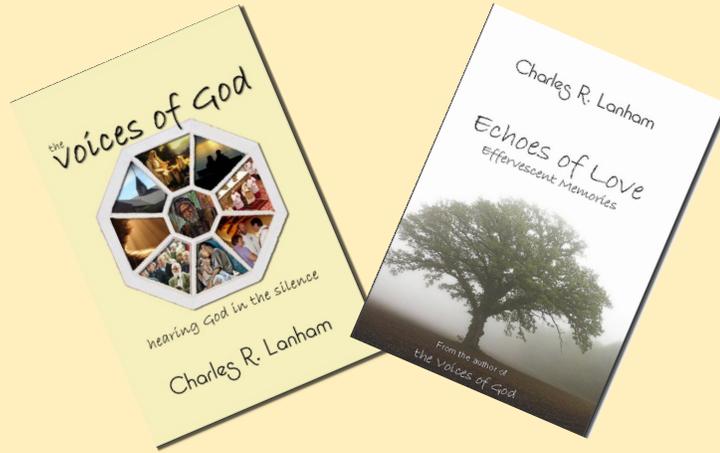
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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