

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

The Enemy Within

Don't read, don't write, don't think

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.

The Enemy Within

Don't read, don't write, don't think

Montesquieu, as one writer recently observed, saw the necessity for predictable rules of law; the essence of ordered liberty requires such certainty if people are to have the confidence to forge their own lives rather than rely on government. As he noted, political liberty embraces "a tranquility of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety." To have such liberty, "it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another."

And no, dear reader, I am not referring to that 14th-century Italian urban legend, Romeo Montague, made known through the pen of William Shakespeare,

but of the real life 18th-century French nobleman, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu. I dare you to say his full name five times in rapid succession. Which is probably why he is generally referred to simply as Montesquieu.

Published anonymously in 1748, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu first articulated the theory of separation of powers which greatly influenced the American framers of the United States Constitution. Interestingly, many of his works were included in the 1751 Index of Prohibited Books by the Catholic Church.



Montesquieu is widely credited as being among the progenitors of political anthropology, surveying the variations in form of human societies in order to develop theories of government.

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Separating governmental powers, Montesquieu argued, was necessary to preclude tyranny and despotism. People living under the arbitrary rule of one person who wrote, enforced and adjudicated the law were thus necessarily consigned to the rule of men rather than the rule of law. Rulers having such power would be able to violate their own laws with impunity, the people would be in constant fear of being subject to the arbitrary will of the ruler and could therefore never enjoy the "tranquility of mind" essential for liberty.¹

Montesquieu was limited in a sense by the forms of government and the politics of his time. The monarchy ruled most of Western societies and had so for more than a millennia. Modern forms of governance—democracy, republicanism, socialism, communism, fascism—were yet to be found to any significant degree within the body politic. Perhaps, most notable of Montesquieu and those of like mind who followed—including the framers of the U. S. Constitution—was their failure to foresee the enormous political power that would soon be amassed by unbridled interest groups (e.g. political parties) and an uncontrolled and unelected bureaucratic state.

Alexis de Tocqueville saw a functioning community in America's early republic that had a sense of self-governance, free, and possessed of at least the possibility of virtue.

The free institutions of the United States and the political rights enjoyed there provide a thousand continual reminders to every citizen that he lives in society. At every

moment they bring his mind back to the idea, that it is the duty as well as the interest of men to be useful to their fellows. Having no particular reason to hate others, since he is neither their slave nor their master, the American's heart easily inclines toward benevolence. At first it is of necessity that men attend to the public interest, afterward by choice. What had been calculation becomes instinct. By dint of working for the good of his fellow citizens, he in the end acquires a habit and taste for serving them.²

It is a common enough refrain, one we certainly hear repeated often enough, that battle cry of the disaffected, "there ought to be a law!" There is an admonition which should follow as inevitably as the next sunrise, "be careful what you wish for," for laws *always* "have unintended consequences, and in their very instantiation they crowd out important, informal incentives for right conduct, as well as social institutions, beliefs, and practices critical for the formation of good character and the maintenance of a decent public life."³ Every law, no matter how small or insignificant, necessarily circumscribes our liberty and reduces our freedom.

Laws, seemingly benign, intended to correct an injustice or prevent injury, may, and too often do, bar incentives for administering justice and good elsewhere and for others.

Where once ours was a nation of custom and common law, we increasingly have become a nation in which law is considered the answer to social problems. Sadly, the result is less respect for the law and, as important, an undermining of the customs and personal relations on

which real, functioning communities rely.

By all appearances, contemporary American society has lost its way, following in the footsteps of the Israelites, wandering aimlessly in its own cultural and social wilderness. Yet, too few seem the least interested in asking what is at the root of America's cultural and social malaise. Why are so many communities lacking the social cohesion necessary to making them *real* communities? By all indications, if social capital is the oxygen the American Dream needs, then American society is in desperate need of a ventilator.

According to Timothy Carney the root cause is the "unchurching of America," particularly among the working class. Fueled by the disappearance of factories and the jobs that came with them, Mr. Carney submits that social factors, such as marriage rates, church attendance, and civic engagement are the real root of the cultural and social malaise. "The woes of the white working class are best understood not by looking at the idled factories but by looking at the empty churches."⁴ What is perhaps most telling is that where jobs have gone so too have ancillary institutions—churches, school groups, coffee clubs, bowling leagues—social groups that cohere communities into "little platoons," as Edmund Burke described them. Such declines in economic, social, religious, and civic involvement have played a significant role in undermining community cohesiveness.

In *Quest for Community*, Robert

Nisbet said much the same, clearly influencing Mr. Carney.

Other and more powerful forms of association have existed, but the major moral and psychological influences on the individual's life have emanated from the family and local community and the church. Within such groups have been engendered the primary types of identification: affection, friendship, prestige, recognition. And within them also have been engendered or intensified the principal incentives of work, love, prayer, and devotion to freedom and order.

Russell Kirk knew the importance of the small community, once observing that "a nation is no stronger than the numerous little communities of which it is composed."

A central administration, or a corps of select managers and civil servants, however well intentioned and well trained, cannot confer justice and prosperity and tranquility upon a mass of men and women deprived of their old responsibilities. That experiment has been made before; and it has been disastrous. It is the performance of our duties in community that teaches us prudence and efficiency and charity.

What follows is but a brief interlude but germane nonetheless.

Open before me are eight books. So many books, so little time. There are, of course, several thousands more spread throughout the house and an equal number more stored in my digital library. The number grows with each passing day. The truth is I have long ago lost count; it seems such a futile exercise anyway. One thing I

know for sure, every one is a treasure and a friend and I simply cannot bear to bid a single one goodbye.

Of the eight before me, two are showing signs of frequent but careful use, a Bible and a Catechism; another, *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law) is infrequently referenced, although more so with each passing day out of unfortunate necessity.

The Bible is one of perhaps a dozen, or more, I have no desire to inventory them; I know one is in Hebrew which requires reading from back to front and right to left. The one in front of me, *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* (RSVCE) is called upon with frequent regularity. I once read that one could tell whether the home was occupied by Catholics or Protestants simply by the amount of dust covering the never opened Holy Bible prominently displayed on the coffee table.

On October 11, 1992, Pope John Paul II published his apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum: The Deposit of Faith*, promulgating the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). The Pope envisioned the Catechism as a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Second Edition) is an indispensable source for answers to any question one might entertain concerning the Catholic faith. At a bit more than 900 pages, it can be daunting, but then it is not meant to be read as a novel but as a resource reference. In 2006, the USCCB published the

Adults as a means of taking into account the local situation and culture, while at the same time preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to Catholic teaching found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. A companion Reader's Journal was also made available for reflection and personal thoughts.

On June 28, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI issued a *Motu Proprio* approving and publishing the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In it he wrote:

The *Compendium*, which I now present to the Universal Church, is a faithful and sure synthesis of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It contains, in concise form, all the essential and fundamental elements of the Church's faith, thus constituting, as my Predecessor had wished, a kind of *vademecum* which allows believers and non-believers alike to behold the entire panorama of the Catholic faith.

Armed with a Bible and the Catechism (and optionally, the Compendium, the U.S. CCC for Adults, and the Reader's Journal,) anyone can learn and come to an understanding of the Catholic faith, Catholic doctrine, what the Magisterium professes and teaches, and all that Catholics are called to believe and to follow.

But, knowledge and wisdom come with a price. One must make a concerted effort to *read and reflect* on the Word of God and what the Catholic Church holds to be true. Such knowledge cannot be obtained by osmosis, one cannot simply place the Word of God, the Bible, under one's pillow at night and expect to absorb the Wisdom of God.

Yet another small but interesting book, currently displayed on one of my computer screens, is Augustine's *On Grace and Free Will*, a masterful work written to counter Pelagianism or the Pelagian heresy. A monk of questionable origin, Pelagius rejected the Biblical concept of grace, teaching that moral perfection was attainable in this life without the assistance of divine grace through human free will. Pelagianism was condemned at the Council of Carthage (418) and again at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Augustine's small tractate offers an excellent explanation of the relationship between human free will and God's divine grace.

One of two recent acquisitions, *The Regensburg Lecture* by Fr. James V. Schall, is a fascinating discourse on Pope Benedict XVI's lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2006 in which he argued for freedom of conscience in religious matters and a reasoned debate. And, as Fr. Schall notes on the cover, "Not everyone agreed."

Pope Benedict's lecture was just that, a lecture delivered at a University, one he was well-acquainted, having taught there years before. Though his lecture was a brief 4,000 words, it was not without serious controversy, quickly garnering worldwide attention. In his introduction, Fr. Schall writes of his reaction after first reading the lecture. "I knew something momentous had happened in the human mind. Something was said here that no one else had been saying."

To understand the controversy

that resulted from this lecture requires a honest retrospective on the origin and purpose of a University—something not particularly welcome in today's academic environs.

What, then, is a university lecture? This question presupposes the very idea of a university. The university as we know it grew out of the structure of the medieval Church. It was intended to be, in one very precise sense, a place set apart.⁵

The university is a specialized institution; it is not a normal organ of any society. What then is its specialty?

Basically the university specializes in knowing, in pursuing the central perfection of our nation, with the added implication that it is seeking to know the truth. ...knowing what is true in itself involves certain conditions, certain standards and principles of discourse and argument.⁶

Schall adds that the university is not the only institution interested in the truth, it would be dangerous if it were. He notes that it is not just popes or university professors who are interested in what is true.

Certainly the Church is and must be interested in and devoted to truth. Indeed, what it is to be a human being includes, at bottom, a desire to pursue and know the truth. Universities, as their best, exist because we respect and defend this deepest of human purposes while providing a place for it to flourish.

Yet university professors themselves, among all human beings, as we learn from someone like Augustine, are most likely to be tempted to conceive their own versions of truth to be the only correct ones. More than any other human group, they are tempted to pride, to identifying too hastily their own ideas

with *what is*. Thus, the university is a special place, protected in its existence in a legal and political way. It is designed freely to pursue its proper purpose. But I do not wish to imply it cannot be a spiritually dangerous place both for those in it and for those influenced by it. Almost all disorders of private or public life somehow begin in the souls of an educated elite, of the dons, including the clerical dons, perhaps more especially in them. When academic ideas filter down to practice, they are diluted and often received out of context. But their origins are found in some mind, some mind not necessarily of one's own time or place, some mind free to pursue the truth as it wants it to be for its own purpose or free to pursue it as it is.⁷

Jesus tells us "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). How often have we heard this passage without thinking of what he meant or was suggesting? Think about it. Free isn't free; we are not free just to be free. Schall points out that "Were that the case, were freedom, without further distinction, simply interchangeable with truth, then everyone's truth would be checked only by itself."

Pope Benedict began his pontificate speaking of the "Dictatorship of Relativism." How often these days is the refrain, "my truth" uttered without thought for what such truth entails?

Unless some objective criterion of truth is available and acknowledged, unless some reality in fact exists, freedom means little. What after all could it mean to maintain that "my truth is itself constituted by my freedom?" In that case, neither truth nor freedom could exist, but only power unchecked by anything outside itself.⁸

What then is this place we call a university? It is *supposed* to be a place set aside where things can be examined by reason, because all of humanity are capable of and are to be ruled by reason. It is *supposed* to be a place where coherent ideas are presented before those who are trained to listen and respond to argument without fear or consequence.

The whole latter part of Benedict's address, no doubt, is concerned with the fact that modern universities often betray their own purpose by defining reason solely in terms of verifiable scientific method, a definition that, however useful in its own limited area, narrows the scope of mind. This restriction of method results in a definition of reason that excludes the basic human questions of why we exist and what is our destiny, issues that concern every human being and most of the classic religions.⁹

What Pope Benedict said bears reflection, for the university—not all, but a vast majority—no longer seeks the objective truth, no longer pursues knowing what is true by the application of “certain standards and principles of discourse and argument.” As Schall notes elsewhere, “Universities are and should be ‘thought,’ not ‘action,’ places.”

#58) In the Western world it is widely held that only positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid. Yet the world’s profoundly religious cultures see this exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions. A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the

realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures.¹⁰

The purpose of the university—as originally conceived and instituted by the Catholic Church—is *supposed* to be a marketplace where the free exchange of ideas according to reason can occur. The university attested to the principle of free inquiry, clarity of statement, conditions of logic, and the comprehension of the whole. Within the classical canons of academic life, discourse had to be free, no subject excluded from consideration as long as it was addressed to reason.

What is to be presented and heard, no more, but no less, is a man’s understanding of the truth, with his reasons for it. No one at this point is asked to agree or disagree unless persuaded by argument and evidence. But the arguments as such, not agreement or disagreement, are the issue at hand. ... No one in a university, moreover, is free just to “disagree” on a whim. Argument, thought, must be confronted on its own terms. The refusal to do so or the not-to-allow-such-a-sphere-to-exist is, strictly speaking, a totalitarian position.¹¹

The modern university no longer adheres to principles of reasoned argument and objective truth. Pope Benedict spoke of “the modern self-limitation of reason” that had been “further radicalized by the impact of the natural sciences.” Such a concept relies “on a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism,” confirmed by modern successes of technology.

#41) On the one hand it presupposes the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality,

which makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently: this basic premise is, so to speak, the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature.

#42) On the other hand, there is nature’s capacity to be exploited for our purposes, and here only the possibility of verification or falsification through experimentation can yield decisive certainty.

#44) This gives rise to two principles which are crucial for the issue we have raised.

#45) First, only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements can be considered scientific. Anything that would claim to be science must be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon of scientificity.

#46) A second point, which is important for our reflections, is that by its very nature this method excludes the question of God, making it appear an unscientific or pre-scientific question. Consequently, we are faced with a reduction of the radius of science and reason, one which needs to be questioned.

#47) ... it must be observed that from this standpoint any attempt to maintain theology’s claim to be “scientific” would end up reducing Christianity to a mere fragment of its former self.

#48) But we must say more: if science as a whole is this and this alone, then it is man himself who ends up being reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by “science”, so understood, and must thus be relegated to the realm of the

subjective. The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective "conscience" becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical.

#49) In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.¹²

The Regensburg Lecture was, in a sense, a reasoned academic indictment of the modern university. Pope Benedict's "university lecture" addressed the shift within the modern academy, the ideological move from free exchange of ideas and reasoned argument toward the self-limiting radicalization and pompous conceit of the educated elite who now occupy tenured thrones upon which to proclaim "their own ideas of *what is*."

That the modern university no longer exists for the purpose of free exchange of ideas and to seek to know the truth would be to grossly underestimate the case. The university is beyond corrupt, something I will speak of further, but I must first attend to the remaining books before me.

Another recent acquisition, I must confess, was more impulse borne of curiosity than any peculiar necessity. But then, necessity is seldom of any bother in what book I might fancy.

The Degrees of Knowledge by French philosopher Jacques Maritain, is considered his *chef d'oeuvre*, his masterpiece. Maritain, though raised Protestant, was agnostic before converting to Catholicism at the age of 24. The author of more than 60 books, he was instrumental in reviving interest in Thomas Aquinas for modern times. He was a long-time friend and mentor to Pope Paul VI who seriously considered making him a lay Cardinal, but Maritain rejected the idea. His philosophical interests and works included aesthetics, political theory, philosophy of science, metaphysics, the nature of education, liturgy and ecclesiology.

Maritain completed his first contribution to modern philosophy in 1910, a 28-page article titled, "Reason and Modern Science" published in *Revue de Philosophie* (June issue). In it, he warned that science was becoming a divinity, its methodology usurping the role of reason and philosophy.

In 1920, he completed a textbook titled *Elements de Philosophie* (Introduction of Philosophy) which has become a standard text in many Catholic seminaries. In his introduction he wrote:

If the philosophy of Aristotle, as revived and enriched by Thomas Aquinas and his school, may rightly be called the Christian philosophy, both because the church is never weary of putting it forward as the only true philosophy and because it harmonizes perfectly with the truths of faith, nevertheless it is proposed here for the reader's acceptance not because it is Christian, but because it is demonstrably true. This agreement between a philosophic system founded by a pagan and the dogmas of revelation is no

doubt an external sign, an extra-philosophic guarantee of its truth; but from its own rational evidence, that it derives its authority as a philosophy.

There can be no doubt, *The Degrees of Knowledge* is not for the faint of heart. Whether I will find myself capable of full appreciation for what is contained within its pages remains to be seen. I have only begun the journey, but if the ending is as promising as the beginning, it will be a rewarding read.

In periods when shallow speculation is rife, one might think that metaphysics would shine forth, at least, by the brilliance of its modest reserve. But the very age that is unaware of the majesty of metaphysics, likewise overlooks its poverty. Its majesty? It is wisdom. Its poverty? It is human science. It names God, Yes! But not by His Own Name. For it is not possible to paint a picture of God as it is to draw a tree or a conic section. You, True God, the Savior of Israel, are veritably a hidden God!¹³

Should anyone be counting, that now accounts for seven. There is an eighth, which is not directly before me but is safely parked next to my reading chair, ensconced in a tightly sealed zip-lock bag. I dare not leave it lying carelessly about for it is on reluctant loan, a boon of a dearest friend; it is her only copy. It is a book I have long desired to hold and to read for it is the historical narrative of an American hero and of times and places too soon forgotten. It recalls to memory what Tocqueville encountered in this great land and what Carny, Nisbet, and Kirk have noted, that to know of the American Dream one must look to the heartland,

to the small rural communities. There one will still find the spirit of America and the soul of the patriot. Each page of *Once a Marine*, the autobiography of John LaVoy, is a hymn of praise, a Spiritual sung in gratitude for the gifts God has bestowed upon this land, and a prayer.

For those who never knew the man, those too young or of a different place, Colonel John H. LaVoy, Ret. USMC, was a big, big man, larger than life and then some. In his nineties, you shook his hand at the risk of losing yours for his hands were as large as a grizzly bear with a grip that could crush granite. And yet, like so many of small town, large Catholic family heritage, his was a kind and gentle heart, generous to a fault, with love enough for anyone who needed it.

John spent 28 years in the Marine Corps; he flew just about every type of fixed-wing aircraft, from the N2S open-cockpit biplane to the Douglas A4D jet built to carry atomic bombs; he also flew helicopters. As he tells it, "All in all I kicked a lot of different types of tires" and so he did during WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

What has impressed me most as I have so carefully turned the pages of his autobiography could be summed up in these few words, "John loved life, he enjoyed the experience."

To truly get the measure of a man (or woman) take a long hard look at how they live and love, what is their joy and how they meet the obstacles and struggles that come to everyone.

On the final pages, John listed 24 rules "meaningful to anyone who has flown." Number 7 struck a chord: "When in doubt, hold onto your altitude. No one ever collided with the sky." Hold onto your altitude. Semper fi!

To find the measure of a society, look no further than the small town, those tiny insignificant dots on a map so seldom thought or mentioned by important folk from grander places. Societies, the good ones, share a commonality of purpose, a bond of neighborhood and shared experience. Such communities are inhabited by ordinary men and women who know the importance of family, friends, neighbor and community and who have and hold throughout their ordinary lives an "altitude" of true love and devotion to God and country.

There is much more to say of this, but as Douglas MacArthur promised, "I shall return" next week.

1. Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1949), 151, 351-52.
2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper, 2000), 512-13.
3. Bruce Frohnen, *The Limits of Liberty*, The Imaginative Conservative, May 13, 2019.
4. Timothy P. Carney, "Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Other Places Collapse," (New York: Harper, 2019).
5. James V. Schall, S.J. *The Regensburg Lecture*, (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), 30.
6. *Ibid.* 30.
7. *Ibid.* 30-31.
8. *Ibid.* 31.
9. *Ibid.* 32.
10. Schall, *Appendix I, The Regensburg Lecture*, 145.
11. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 39-40.
12. Schall, *Appendix I, The Regensburg Lecture*, 141-142.
13. Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain: Volume 7, Translated from the fourth French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), *Chapter 1: The Majesty and Poverty of Metaphysics*, 1.

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

Salvation

Michael Patrick Barber
Ignatius Press
2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)
Ignatius Press
2018, 269 pages.

Catholicism & Modernity

James Hitchcock
The Seabury Press
1979, 250 pages.

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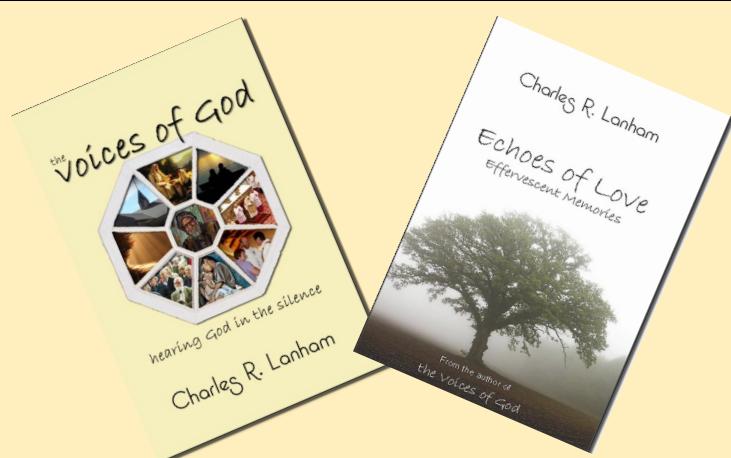
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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>.

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