

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

Still, Life In The Shallows

On the meaning of becoming ...

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.

Still, Life In The Shallows

On the meaning of becoming ...

Quite frequently, it seems, though perhaps less often than my thoughts would betray, someone inquires where these words come forth with such regularity and purpose. That they come is obvious, and yet, I must confess, from where and when and why, your surmise is just as good as any, for I honestly do not know the reason for their hebdomadal¹ congregation.

The truth? There is always—always a gazillion thoughts floating aimlessly in that void between these ears—so many disarticulated notions resisting any attempt at making sense of their utter nonsense, and yet, each clamoring for their moment on the stage of undivided attention. I suppose the clamor would subside were I but to refrain

from scrutinizing with such avidity the pages set before me but alas it is the thorn that pricks the mind, the bane to my existence which leaves me so intrigued, seeking answers before the questions, searching for meaning beyond the meaninglessness for which societal and cultural ideologies are wont to sacrifice in holocaust to their idols.



There are gifts and talents bestowed on every human heart—not of human origin but divine estate—each gift unique, no gift the better or the worse than another; as the apostle Paul noted:

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12:4-7).

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The Spirit breathes into every soul the Word of life. Thus, it is a duty owed Almighty God that requires the very best of man. It is in gratitude that we should bend the knee in prayer; it is in contrite humility that we should plead for undeserved mercy and Divine forgiveness. Our gifts are not of our own hand; they are from and of God to use solely for and to his glory.

I have discovered, quite late in life, a talent—if that is what one thinks to call it—for the *written* word; of the spoken word, alas, a facile tongue belongs to others; I have not been blessed with such a gift. Of the three Rs (Readin', Ritin', and Rithmetic) I find the first a treasure, the second a pleasure, of the last, unsparing frustration. And yet, it is a challenge I care not nor dare not ignore for this inquiring mind wants to "know" what truths there are yet undiscovered.

Words tease and taunt my soul, just as formulae must delight the mind of those inclined to waltz toe-to-toe with imaginary figures. Every sentence, a portrait; every phrase, a song; every word a color or a note. More than this, any writer must humbly submit to the Author of all that is for wisdom, inspiration, vision and imagination; for "with men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). In truth, I am but an instrument played creatively by the hand of God. Though the words I write are indeed my own, the inspiration is from the Spirit, who leads me where? I do not know. I often remind myself of His

words, spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:6-9).

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

—Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman

How unlovely, dull and dreary must it be: a wordless, silent, still existence, a life in the shallows never knowing the meaning of becoming ... fully human. Such hopelessness, self-sentenced to a life of just enough, nothing more. And yet, the worse of it should be a shallow satisfaction of little more than mere existence, never looking for the Truth, never touching what is real, never seeing all the wondrous beauty God has made.

There is a dreadful tendency, now quite prevalent, which is to know a thing with absolute confidence without first knowing of it. If that seems a bit off-putting, it should. And yet, legions mindlessly subscribe to the mantric insult of their unknowingness, smugly satisfied they know all they have a need to know. There is no argument to disabuse their folly, no room for doubt, no surrender; the truth is their believing, not their knowing.

Once upon a time, saints and heroes inspired the mind to dream dreams of greatness while humbly acknowledging that all were gifts gratuitously bestowed by Almighty God. Once there were men unafraid to kneel in prayer to a greater power than their own. Once man submitted to the Divine will, knowing God had a plan for each and every soul he created. Once, but then, alas, now no more.

Once I dreamt of Camelot, of a universe, an infinite source of goodness and light; once a promise made was a promise kept, one's word was one's bond, one aspired to greatness, decried mediocrity, loved deeply, forgave easily, abhorred hatred and despised evil. Where has that once now gone?

I never found a use for sordid tales except for those that told of heroes and courage and marvelous deeds. Neither have I been inclined to delve into the dark and evil mysteries that seem all the rage. In truth, I do not understand what purpose such prosaic contrivances serve beyond denying the goodness

of Almighty God in order to bow before the devil. Heroes and saints, it seems to me, are no longer seen as such, demons and losers have captured minds and hearts, filling souls with hatred and bigotry, lust and pornography, bias and ignorance, lies and half-truths, and worst of all, a terrible loss of meaning and of being human.

Once there was a man, a priest, an archbishop, Fulton J. Sheen, who told the world "Life is worth living;" he meant it and the world believed it. Once there were men and women—heroes I submit—who loved unreservedly their families, their neighbors, their country, and their God. I, for one, have had the great fortune to know more than a few such as these; fortunate to have met those who exemplify what it means to be an honest human being.

I recently wrote of a man of whom I have the greatest respect and admiration, Col. John H. LaVoy USMC. I will not repeat what I then wrote but will add a great deal more, for such is the high esteem I hold of him and what he has to say of a time and place seldom seen or heard in these dark unsettled times.

Perhaps nothing can be said of John but that he loved life to the full. In the prologue, he says:

... I spent 28 years in The Corps and the fact that they were the prime of my life made them memorable years. It seems impossible that I now have been out longer than I was on active duty, but as I have told my boys, "Don't blink because when you open your eyes thirty

years will have gone by." (I must have blinked.) During those years many wonderful things happened: I married a perfect wife, had four wonderful children, saw a lot of the world and made friends that have lasted throughout the years. Among the unpleasant events I served in three wars, but on the bright side I was never wounded and enjoyed being the Commanding Officer of four different squadrons.²

From beginning to end—nearly 300 pages—his autobiography was of someone who lived every minute with purpose and devotion.

High Flight

*Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds,—and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air. . . .*

*Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew—
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.*

John Gillespie Magee, Jr., 1941

On one of the final pages he placed the poem *High Flight* by John Gillespie Magee, Jr., written in 1941, it is a psalm to pilots. While living, John may not have touched the face of God but he most certainly has done so now.

In describing his early years growing up in Sparks, Nevada, you cannot avoid coming to the conclusion that John was full of it, life that is. He loved his family and it is obvious from the very beginning.

My parents, Lewis and Hazel first met in Adams Jewelry Store in Sparks, Nevada where my mother was working. Railroad engineers were required to have their watches checked for accuracy and had to leave their watches and take a loaner for a couple of days so this gave my dad a legitimate excuse to visit this girl who won his heart. My father was a cradle Catholic and when he met my mother she was a Baptist Sunday School teacher but converted to Catholicism before they were married. They were married in Sparks at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and bought their first home in Sparks at 325 Tenth Street.

The things I remember best about my father whom I always addressed as "Pa" was his love for his family. He was always busy doing something. He spent many hours making things to entertain his children: merry go a rounds, teeter totters, huge swings, sleighs for winter snow, ice rinks for skating, cages for animals and birds. We always had dogs and cats and he provided them with comfortable houses. We went on many family hikes, and he made a two-wheel cart using buggy wheels to carry the smaller children when they got tired.

My mother was such a gentle soul and spent her life being a mother. With eight children and few conveniences it was a full time job. What a cook! Everything she made tasted good, and it seemed we always had a guest or two at evening meals, usually a school friend of one of the children or a friend of my parents. Sunday meals were always special. An apple, berry or lemon pie or a beautiful cake was always on the dessert menu. After my oldest sister Anna Louise learned to cook she would whip up a cake with seven minute frosting for the evening meal. If I wanted to get into

serious trouble with her it was to sneak a piece before dinner and I did manage to get in that kind of trouble on several occasions. In the summertime my dad would hand crank homemade ice cream for the Sunday dinner or Sunday evening.

... After the meal my sisters would clear off the table and do the dishes very quietly so as not to miss any of the stories that were being told. After the evening meal was the time for family communication, and it was a time that was shared by all. It was a time of togetherness, family love, education and fun. There wasn't any radio or television as competition for our attention.³

When John came home at the end of the war in the Pacific, he wasted no time marrying "the love of his life," Marian Elizabeth Hennen at St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral, September 26, 1944.

I don't remember too much about the ceremony as I was so excited seeing my bride to be so beautiful in her white gown, my long awaited dream about to come true, wow!!!! I don't remember seeing anyone else in the church except Joe bringing his daughter up the aisle and giving her to me. I do remember making our vows and kissing my bride but the rest of the morning was a bit blurred. Lots of activity but I think my eyes were sort of locked on someone who had just changed her name.⁴

Born in Sparks, Nevada October 31, 1919, Colonel John LaVoy, USMC, Ret'd passed away on Easter Sunday April 20, 2014, at the age of 94, five months short of his and Marian's 70th wedding anniversary. Over their 69+ years together, they moved countless times, lived in countless homes, ac-

cepted the many separations, enjoyed the inevitable reunions, and dealt with the ups and the downs of life. Together they had four children (Matthew, John Jr., Michele, and Donald).

Another story mentioned in John's autobiography bears telling—not that it was an earth-shattering, newsworthy event—but because it is a marvelous reflection of a good man, a good Catholic man, a loving husband and father, and a true hero.

A story that I must pass on to you unfolded while I was in Vietnam. My oldest son, Don, was in high school in Reno where I had moved the family when I left for the Orient. In his English class he wrote a paper on, "Employment Of The Handicapped." It was a regular assignment but also a contest among all high schools. He was notified that he had won the honors of having written the best essay in the State and was invited to go to Carson City and have lunch with the Governor. At that time the governor of Nevada was Grant Sawyer. Don and Marian did just that, they went and had lunch with the Governor and after lunch Don was presented with a savings bond and then much to his and Marian's surprise the Governor announced that Don was the National Winner for his essay. With that honor he was invited to bring his parents to Washington and have lunch with the President of the United States. At that particular time the President was Lyndon Johnson. This is where I come into the story. Don was having lunch with the President and he asked my son, "Where is your Dad?" "Sir he is a Marine in Danang, Vietnam." "Well, lets give him a call," and with as little effort as that, the phone rings in Vietnam at the Joint Army, Air Force and Marine Headquarters. The conversation went something like this, "Do you have a

Lt. Col. John LaVoy there", "Yes we do", "Well, President Johnson wants to talk with him." "He is out on a flight at present." "Can you have him return and take this call?" "Yes sir we will have him here as soon as possible." I was on a combat mission leading about a dozen birds in the flight when I receive this radio transmission. "Turn the lead of your flight over to some one in your flight and return to base immediately, do you understand?" "Roger, Wilco your message", (meaning yes I understood and would comply). No explanation as to why, but several transmissions asking what my position was. When I landed there were two staff cars to meet me, and three Bird Colonels indicating for me to hurry. I figured we had rush orders for an important mission or we were going to re-locate. I jumped into one of the staff cars and their first question was, "Why does the President want to talk to you?" My answer was asking "What president", and they informed me it was our president of course, and he asked for you by name. Then they asked "Why wouldn't he ask us, we are the senior command here"; then their next question was "What do you think he wants?" I didn't have a clue and just as I got to the phone and said a couple of words radio communication broke down because of sunspots that time of day. After all their efforts to get me to the phone and still no answer to their questions caused further concern. Finally a dispatch arrived explaining the whole affair and giving the senior commanders some peace of mind. My son was awarded a thousand dollar savings bond for being the national winner and he and Marian were treated royally while in Washington.⁵

Having been blessed and entrusted for the brief time with Colonel John

LaVoy's autobiography has truly been an honor; reading it has been a great pleasure.

What rang true from first to last was what was notably absent: not a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph spoke of hate, every page spoke of love and the goodness of God; a rare thing these days. He was a Marine who flew combat missions in three wars over a 28 year career; he saw death and injury, he experienced first hand the inhumanity of man. And yet, of such he refused to mention except in passing: "Among the unpleasant events I served in three wars, but on the bright side ...". For John, dwelling on the dark side was a complete waste of time, there simply was too much of living and loving to harbor "unpleasant" thoughts.

Of bigotry and discrimination, John would have none of it. Traveling by train to his first duty station with Marian, shortly after their marriage, he recalled one of his first serious encounters with institutionalized bigotry.

We got on this train after several days of travel and found we had to sit on our suitcases as it was so crowded and we didn't have too far to go so opted not to wait for another train. After many miles of discomfort I decided I would work my way to the rear of the car for a drink of water and to stretch my legs. I crossed the platform in between cars and took a look into the car behind us and to my utter amazement it was empty, not one soul. Not wanting to cause a stampede I very quietly spread the word and practically everyone sitting in the aisle picked up his bags and was as

tickled as I to have a seat. We had just gotten comfortable when the conductor came through and informed us that we couldn't stay there because it was designated as a colored car. I immediately acted spokesman for the group and pleaded that no one was using it and we had paid for a seat. My plea fell on deaf ears; "No it was for colored people and we would all have to move back into the other car." I refused and said that I had paid for my seat and that I was staying. He threatened to put me off the train at the next stop so we retreated back to the other car to the aisle and our suitcases. I shook my head in utter disbelief at the cold logic of it all.⁶

His words have refreshed my weary soul; they are a reminder of what man, created in God's image and likeness, has always meant to be. John's life is a true testament to what it means to be a good man, a good and faithful husband, a father, a leader, a Catholic and a hero. Were there a greater abundance of such men and women. And yet, it is of small matter as to their abundance but of far greater importance that those few who dare not surrender to the power of evil continue to fight against the hellish horde of Satan.

For the most part, man has succumbed to the subtle temptations of the devil. Allured by material possessions and vague, ambiguous promises of a heaven on earth, the world of man has lost the sense of the Sacred, the Spiritual and the Transcendent.

For many, man has become little more than an amorphous mass to be molded and reshaped according to current fashion. Science has long known that the genetic makeup of the

human body, in all its complexity, consists of chromosomes, DNA molecules which contain the genetic information for every human being. Among the most significant for our purposes are the characteristic XX/XY chromosomes that differentiate male and female. There are only two, XX and XY, although there are any number of aberrations (Down syndrome, Edwards syndrome, Klinefelter syndrome, etc.) but the human species is indisputably, irrevocably binary. None of the aberrations alter or add from the fundamental fact that humans are genetically hard-wired either male or female.

Human fancy and desire coupled with scientific, medical, and pharmaceutical advances cannot, will not nor are not capable of ever making a silk purse from a sow's ear. Wishing doesn't make it so.

A question or two may be begging to be asked at this point, "Where did this come from? What does this have to do with that?" Have patience, dear reader, I will endeavor to explain.

Heroes and villains have been around since God first breathed life into man. The story of man is made of both the good guys and the bad, success and failure, right and wrong, truth and falsity. You get the picture. Human nature is binary shaded in a variety of shades of gray. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, choose your poison. Human history is replete with heroes and villains but there has always been a common theme: ultimately, with the help of Almighty God, the hero always overcomes, the hero wins

and the villain/evil loses. It is seldom as black or white as that, but the track record clearly shows good having a near-perfect record over evil. Evil never wins in the long run but for lengthy stretches it may appear ahead in the game.

Some issues back I mentioned a Latin proverb: *Vox audita perit lettera scripta manet*, which can be translated, “The heard voice perishes, but the written letter remains.” What this illustrates is the contrast between fleeting orality and settled literacy. No doubt, a better explanation lies with my self-admitted fleeting memory; I simply cannot remember anything spoken longer than a millisecond. I simply do not trust myself to remember your name any longer than it took for you to utter it. Thus, should I have an occasion to speak, such as to deliver a homily or a presentation, I write it down and then I read from what I wrote. As I stated earlier, I have not been blessed with the gift of tongue.

Wilfred McClay, a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma asks,

What does such a proverb mean today, when our civilization—in which the great majority of inhabitants, as Christians and Jews, have been People of the Book—is fast becoming a civilization inhabited by People of the Screen, people tied to the ever-changing, ever-fluid, ever-malleable presentation of the past made possible by the nature of digital technology?

Professor McClay had prefaced this question earlier, noting:

Professional American historiography has made steady advances in the breadth and sophistication with which it approaches certain aspects of the past, but those advances have come at the expense of public knowledge and shared historical consciousness. The story of America has been fractured into a thousand pieces and burdened with so much ideological baggage that studying history actually alienates young Americans from the possibility of properly appreciating there past.⁷

One simply cannot ignore the level to which our historical ignorance has sunk. The evidence is material: demands to remove “offensive” statues from the public square, names from buildings of those who may or may not have owned slaves, any mention of God and Christian symbols from public display.

The list of offenses is in and of itself offensive. What is truly offensive is how “ever-changing, ever-fluid, ever-malleable” truth has been drawn and skewered. Tragically, this *progressive* need to change for the sake of change is no longer confined to the secular state; such a progressive ideology has claimed a foothold within the Catholic Church.

Venerable Fulton Sheen—in what can only be described as prophetic—once spoke of the times in which we are now living.

It is a characteristic of any decaying civilization that the great masses of the people are unconscious of the tragedy. Humanity in a crisis is generally insensitive to the gravity of the times in which it lives. Men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because it involves too much self-accusation and principally because they have

no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world; the great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on, because they have lost the vision of the heights from which they have fallen. The tragedy is not that the hairs of our civilization are gray; it is rather that we fail to see that they are. As Reinhold Niebuhr put it: “It is a strange irony of history that a commercial and industrial civilization which might have had special reasons for being apprehensive about its vitality and longevity, should have been particularly optimistic.” The basic reason for this false optimism he attributes to the fact that our civilization is mechanical rather than organic. Nothing is more calculated to deceive men in regard to the nature of life than a civilization whose cement of social cohesion consists of the means of production and consumption.⁸

Archbishop Sheen would later speak of the end of Christendom, making clear he didn’t mean Christianity or the Church, explaining:

Christendom is economic, political, social life as inspired by Christian principles. That is ending—we’ve seen it die. Look at the symptoms: the breakup of the family, divorce, abortion, immorality, general dishonesty.

He then reiterated what he had written before, that men do not want to believe their own times are wicked. He wondered whether we were even aware of the signs of the times because “basic dogmas of the modern world

[were] dissolving before our very eyes." He went on to say these basic dogmas were being replaced with the assumptions that man has "no other function in life than to produce and acquire wealth," the idea man is naturally good and "has no need of a God to give Him rights, or a Redeemer to salvage him from guilt, because progress is automatic thanks to science-education and evolution, which will one day make man a kind of a god," and the idea reason isn't discovering "the meaning and goal of life, namely the salvation of the soul, but merely to devise new technical advances to make on this earth a city of man to displace the city of God." Sheen went on to point out the signs of the times reveal we are

Definitely at the end of a non-religious era of civilization, which regard religion as an addendum to life, a pious extra, a morale-builder for the individual but of no social relevance, an ambulance that took care of the wrecks of the social order until science reached a point where there would be no more wrecks; which called on God only as a defender of national ideals, or as a silent partner ... but who had nothing to say about how the business should be run.

Then Archbishop Sheen said something which might at first seem shocking: "The new era into which we are entering is what might be called the religious phase of human history." This did not mean men would "turn to God" but rather, they will turn from indifference to having a passion for "an absolute."

[The struggle will be] for the souls of men ... The conflict of the future

is between the absolute who is the God-man and the absolute which is the man god; the God Who became man and the man who makes himself God; brothers in Christ and comrades in anti-Christ. ... his religion will be brotherhood without the fatherhood of God, he will deceive even the elect. ...

God will not allow unrighteousness to become eternal. Revolution, disintegration, chaos, must be reminders that our thinking has been wrong, our dreams have been unholy. Moral truth is vindicated by the ruin that follows when it has been repudiated. The chaos of our times is the strongest negative argument that could ever be advanced for Christianity ... The disintegration following an abandonment of God thus becomes a triumph of meaning, a reaffirmation of purpose ... Adversity is the expression of God's condemnation of evil, the registering of Divine Judgement... Catastrophe reveals that evil is self-defeating; we cannot turn from God without hurting ourselves.⁹

On Sunday, October 13, 2019, another heroic figure of the Catholic Church, John Henry Cardinal Newman will join the assembly of canonized saints. Books have been written of him and most importantly by him, so many, in fact, that some have suggested him to be the patron saint of writers. Saint John Henry Newman, give me words.

1. *Hebdomadal*: Adjective: weekly, once a week.
2. John H. LaVoy, Colonel, USMC Ret'd., *Once A Marine: An Autobiography*, p. ii.
3. John H. LaVoy, *Once a Marine*, pp. 7-8.
4. John H. LaVoy, *Once a Marine*, p. 86.
5. John H. LaVoy, *Once a Marine*, pp. 233-234.
6. John H. LaVoy, *Once a Marine*, p. 89.
7. Wilfred M. McClay, Ph.D., *Rediscovering the Wisdom in American History*, Imprimis.
8. Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West*, Refuge of Sinners Publishing, Inc., 1948, p. 15.
9. Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West*.

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.

The Day Is Now Far Spent

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Ignatius Press
2019, 350 pages.

PERIODICALS

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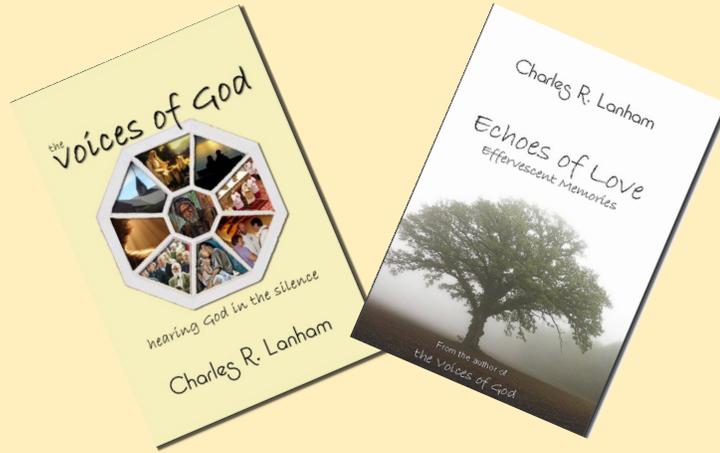
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Does anybody have a recipe for "I don't know" or "I don't care" ? It's what my family requested for dinner and I can't seem to find any recipes.