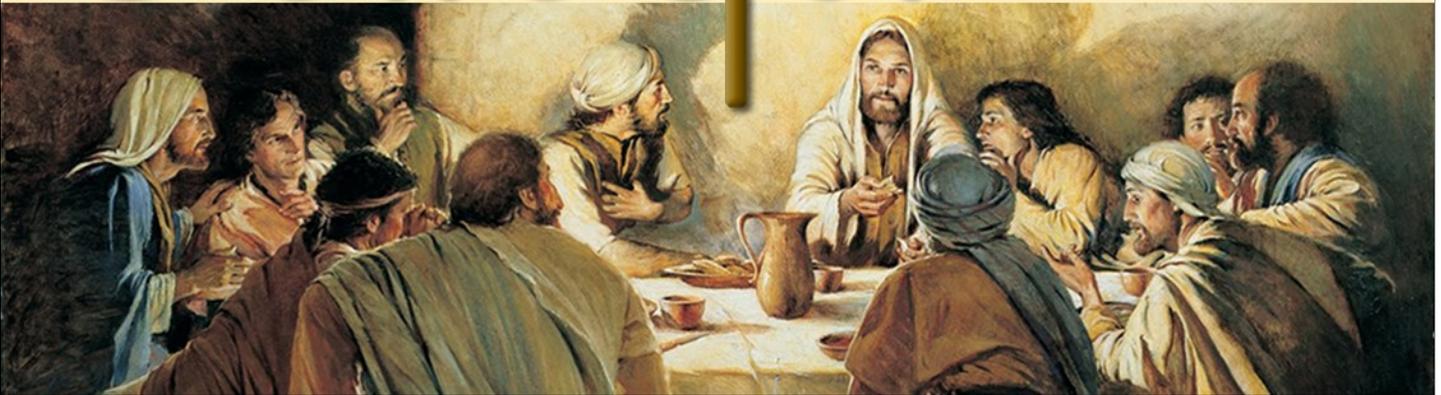


# Colloquī

December 06, 2019  
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A journal for restless minds

## To Stand A High Horse

*Whatsoever you desire*

### 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.

## To Stand A High Horse

*Whatsoever you desire*

**A**rrogance rides a high horse though seldom does overweening pride see fit to saddle, much preferring to stand because ego has the hubristic right to do so and in so doing is capable of providing a sufficiently high platform from which all present may ooh and ahh, fawn and adulate. That, of course, works only so long as the horse chooses to stand four hoof aground with a slow, steady gait or no gait at all. Should the horse decide to garner more of the attention by standing on two legs, not four, arrogance must of a sudden be set low, though the landing may be somewhat softened by what the horse has ever so kindly left behind.

There are those who would call themselves "activists" for some particular cause or another. No matter the cause

they quite vociferously claim they are defending or promoting or demanding someone, anyone other than themselves of course, to take action to remedy some ambiguous wrong, some nebulous grievance, some right that has been abridged—though they would never use such a word, for it will not be found in any elementary school vocabulary book. They are much too much enamored with themselves to bother with truth or to search for it.



Few today find it necessary or prudent to study the past. Even fewer find it profitable to study the classics, the Greek classics in particular, because it is but myth and tall-tales and has no relevance to the world as it now is. But then, not so fast!

**C**onsider the story—yes, a myth—of Narcissus who was known for his beauty. He loved everything beautiful; he was so proud of his beauty, so much so that he disdained

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

those who loved him, causing some to commit suicide to prove their devotion to his striking beauty. There are numerous versions of the myth, but the meaning of the myth remains the same. Narcissus happens by a pool of water, sees his reflection, becomes entranced by it, and kills himself because he cannot have the object of his desire.

**A**rrogance clothes an empty shell: a flashing neon sign warning those who would happen by to stare, "Beware, Elvis has left the building. Beam me up, there is no intelligent life in here!" A pretty face, flashy teeth and a facile tongue mask the truth: the heart is cold, the spirit dead and the mind an empty vessel. "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made" (Gen 3:1) which is to say evil dresses to the nines and wears a wholesome face that masks the guile and deceit inherent in its resolve.

**A brief aside:** Papal encyclicals and other documents promulgated by the Pope always have a Latin title. The title comes from the first few words of the document. For instance, the Encyclical "On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth" promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI on June 29, 2009 begins with the words "Charity in truth," which in Latin is *Caritas in Veritate*. This then becomes the title of the encyclical.

(1) **Charity in truth**, ... is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. Love—*caritas*—is an extraordinary force ... that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. Each person finds his good by adherence to God's plan for him, ... To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting and indispensable forms of charity.

Like so many words in vogue (truth, love, charity, rights, etc.) it all depends on what you mean or do not mean by it.

I am aware of the ways in which charity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning, with the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, detached from ethical living and ... undervalued. In the social, juridical, cultural, political and economic fields ... it is easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility. Hence the need to link charity with truth not only in the sequence pointed out by Saint Paul of *veritas in caritate* (Eph 4:15), but also in the inverse and complementary sequence of *caritas in veritate*. Truth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the "economy" of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed and practiced in the light of truth. In this way, not only do we do a service to charity enlightened by truth, but we also help give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living. This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence (§2.2).

**P**ope Benedict then further notes what should be understood by using the least bit of common sense, but seldom is: "Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality."

Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions, the word "love" is abused and distorted, to the point where it comes to mean the opposite (§3).

"Aye, there's the rub," Hamlet soliloquizes, as he contemplates suicide, "To die, to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream. For in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, ..." When *caritas* turns the opposite, what then is it? Hate is the absence of love but that may be too far the antipode, though not completely out of reach. What the pope is saying is that truth (*veritas*) and love (*caritas*) are inseparable, you cannot know one without the other. Emptied of true meaning, *caritas*, is thus reduced to subjective emotions, void of any virtue or moral value that is necessary for "true integral human development."

A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world. Without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations. It is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range, in dialogue between knowledge and praxis (§4).

**A**nother story, a myth—if that is what you wish to call it—of a more recent vintage is the Wizard of Oz. Most are thoroughly familiar with the tale of an innocent farm girl (Dorothy) suddenly whisked out of her mundane earthbound existence into a land of pure imagination. Dorothy encounters three companions—Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion—each feeling like they were missing something, something they believed they needed to be complete. The Scarecrow wanted a brain, the Tin Man a heart, the Cowardly Lion wanted courage and Dorothy wanted to go home.

When Dorothy reaches Oz and comes before the frightening visage of the mighty and powerful wizard, she and her companions' requests are preemptively dismissed. And as they prepare to leave disappointed, Dorothy's dog, Toto, rushes forward and pulls aside a curtain to reveal an ordinary man speaking into a microphone while operating the controls that produce the wizard's image.

The truth (*veritate*) is revealed, the objective truth, and the reality that there was, *in veritate*, no mighty and powerful wizard, just a con man, a humbug, or, as he insisted, "a good man but a bad wizard." The "wizard" was but a bit of technological skull-duggery, an projected image, a vision of arrogance standing a high horse. When the horse reared, arrogance was rudely unseated, with no where to go but to be set low.

The con-man wizard, now revealed, presents the Scarecrow a diplo-

ma, the Lion a medal and the Tin Man a ticking heart-shaped watch, helping them see that what each had so longed for and earnestly sought was already within them. Nothing material or external could or would ever give them what they already possessed: *veritate*, *caritas et ius*.

The Wizard of Oz is a 1939 American musical fantasy film, widely regarded as one of the greatest films in cinema history. Adapted from L. Frank Baum's 1900 children's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the film immediately became an American pop culture icon, shown and reshowed annually for eighty years.

There are, no doubt, those who would find much to be offended by the film. For those too easily skinned it would appear the obvious that the story was racist, sexist, misogynistic, and politically incorrect, it demeaned the height disadvantaged and was an existential threat to wicked witches and flying monkeys; notwithstanding its prejudices, they would claim it demonstrably prophetic, foretelling the coming ecological crisis, the end of life as we know it due to that progressive bogeyman, climate change. In a critical sense, current social and cultural values, mores and ethics are as phantasmagorical as the fantasy depicted in the Wizard of Oz, with neither love, charity nor truth present.

**P**ope Benedict notes that *caritas in veritate* is the principle for the Catholic Church's social doctrine, "a principle that takes on practical form in the criteria that govern moral action."

*Ubi societas, ibi ius*: every society draws up its own system of justice. *Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is "mine" to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is "his", what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot "give" what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice.* [Emphasis added] If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity; justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. ... charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.

**N**ow, what the Holy Father writes *in veritate et in caritas* is too easily misconstrued, distorted to the point of becoming quite the opposite to what was his intent. *Caritas in veritate* in the "social, juridical, cultural, political and economic fields ... is easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility." Too often, charity is drawn without love, without truth, without justice. Such is not charity but a loathsome burden impressed upon one by another under the guise of human decency and kindness; a burden that is neither decent nor kind nor just nor by any means, moral.

"Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other." To love is to give, to offer what is mine. *Caritas*, properly understood, can never be a burden imposed nor a demand by another. Love is an act of the will, not a duty. Love is offered, what is mine to give.

What is now called love seldom is *in veritate*. Love has been subjectivized, relativized, reduced to a strange alien thing akin to, yet far less than, the simplest emotion. I love, you love, we all love, but what do we mean when we say it; love has become just another four letter word. Without God, who is Love, there can be no *caritas in veritate*.

There is, then, the question of "Why?". Why is this thing we call love so often misconstrued and misunderstood? Why has the meaning of love been disabused, cheapened, made synonymous with "like", neutered and separated from the Truth? And, then, there is the question as to "Who?". Who is behind this concerted effort to deny love, to deny truth, to deny justice?

In 1947, Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen laid out some of the ways the Devil or the anti-Christ would use to destroy Christianity. He noted that the devil, whose trademark is twisting the truth to sell sin, will twist the minds of men to cause them to believe the anti-Christ is the "Great Humanitarian" who will "talk peace, prosperity, and plenty."

He will write books on the new idea of God to suit the way people live. He will invoke religion to destroy religion. He will even speak of Christ and say that he was the greatest man who ever lived.

In the midst of all his seeming love for humanity and his glib talk of freedom and equality, he will have one great secret which he will tell to no one; he will not believe in God. And because his religion will be brotherhood without the father-

hood of God, he will deceive even the elect.

He will set up a counter-Church, which will be the ape of the Church because he the devil is the ape of God. It will be the mystical body of the anti-Christ that will in all externals resemble the Church as the mystical body of Christ. In desperate need for God, he will induce modern man, in his loneliness and frustration, to hunger more and more for membership in his community that will give man enlargement of purpose, without any need of personal amendment and without the admission of personal guilt. These are days in which the devil has been given a particularly long rope.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the devil will and is playing us for suckers, using our weaknesses, our concupiscence to his advantage; decorating his devil's food cake with sugar and spice and everything nice to mask the poison behind it.

Catholic philosopher, Edward Feser, recently commented in an essay on the "idea that an inoffensive 'niceness' is somehow the essence of the true Christian, or at least of any Christian worthy of the liberal's respect. For it is an idea that even a great many churchmen seem to have bought into."

Niceness. Well, it has its place. But the Christ who angrily overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, who taught a moral code more austere than that of the Pharisees, and who threatened unrepentant sinners with the fiery furnace, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, was not exactly "nice."

This is evident from the innumerable vapid sermons one hears about God's love and acceptance and for-

givenness, but never about divine judgment or the moral teachings to which modern people are most resistant—and which, precisely for that reason, they most need to hear expounded and defended. And it is evident in the tendency of modern Catholic bishops to emphasize dialogue and common ground rather than conversion, orthodoxy, and doctrinal precision, and to speak of the Church's teachings on sexual morality, if at all, only half-apologetically, in vague and soft language, and in a manner hedged with endless qualifications.

Such "niceness" is in no way a part of Christian morality. It is a distortion of the virtues of meekness (which is simply moderation in anger—as opposed to too much *or too little* anger), and friendliness (which is a matter of exhibiting the right degree of affability necessary for decent social order—as opposed to too little affability *or too much*).

As always, St. Thomas illuminates where modern churchmen obfuscate. Where meekness is concerned, Aquinas notes that just as anger should not be excessive or directed at the wrong object, so too can one be deficient in anger, and that this too can be sinful. For anger is nature's way of prodding us to act to set things right when they are in some way disordered. The absence of anger in cases where it is called for is, for that reason, a moral defect, and a habit of responding to evils with insufficient anger is a vice.

On the subject of friendliness or affability, Aquinas notes that just as one can be deficient in this trait and thus difficult for others to get along with, it is also possible to go too far in the other direction. In *Summa Theologiae* II-II.114.1 he writes:

*[F]or the sake of some good that will result, or in order to avoid some evil, the virtuous man will sometimes*

*not shrink from bringing sorrow to those among whom he lives... For this reason we should not show a cheerful face to those who are given to sin, in order that we may please them, lest we seem to consent to their sin, and in a way encourage them to sin further.*

And in *Summa Theologiae* II-II.115.1 he describes such excess as a vice opposed to genuine friendliness:

*[A]lthough the friendship of which we have been speaking, or affability, intends chiefly the pleasure of those among whom one lives, yet it does not fear to displease when it is a question of obtaining a certain good, or of avoiding a certain evil. Accordingly, if a man were to wish always to speak pleasantly to others, he would exceed the mode of pleasing, and would therefore sin by excess. If he do this with the mere intention of pleasing he is said to be "complaisant," according to the Philosopher (*Ethic. iv*, 6).*

To be "complaisant" in this sense is to be agreeable, amiable, or keen to please. It is, in short, to be Mr. Rogers-like. And that is not only not *per se* Christ-like, it can, as Aquinas says, even be sinful if what is called for is talk that is bracingly frank and displeasing.

What is the root of these vices masquerading as the pseudo-virtue of "niceness"? I would suggest that it is twofold, in part an error of the intellect and in part a malady of the will. The intellectual error is the one that Pope Leo XIII referred to as "Americanism" – in particular, the

*principle... that, in order to more easily attract those who differ from her, the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some of her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions. Many think that these concessions should be made not only in regard to ways of living, but even in regard to doctrines which belong to the deposit of*

*the faith. They contend that it would be opportune, in order to gain those who differ from us, to omit certain points of her teaching which are of lesser importance, and to tone down the meaning which the Church has always attached to them.*

This is essentially the mentality that has come to prevail in the decades since Vatican II. Eternal damnation, the necessity of conversion to the Catholic faith, the immorality of contraception, and many other unpopular doctrines are simply not much talked about, and are hedged and softened and deemphasized on the rare occasions when they are talked about. By contrast, the rhetoric of freedom, human dignity, dialogue and ecumenism, and other themes and jargon congenial to the liberal mindset are trumpeted as if they were somehow at the very heart of Catholicism. The stern gravitas of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints has with many churchmen been replaced by a back-slapping, glad-handing affability.

Predictably, this has resulted, not in people being drawn to the Church in greater numbers, but rather in a massive decline in observance and orthodoxy among Catholics, and a general assumption among Catholics and non-Catholics alike that the unpopular doctrines are not really important after all and will inevitably be abandoned.

The malady of the will that underlies the contemporary Christian fetish for "niceness" is the one Aquinas labeled *effeminacy*, by which he meant a softness in the face of even relatively mild difficulties. In *Summa Theologiae* II-II.138.1, he explains:

*[F]or a man to be ready to forsake a good on account of difficulties which he cannot endure... is what we understand by effeminacy, because a thing is said to be "soft" if it readily yields to the touch. Now a thing is not declared to be soft through yielding to a heavy*

*blow, for walls yield to the battering-ram. Wherefore a man is not said to be effeminate if he yields to heavy blows... [P]roperly speaking an effeminate man is one who withdraws from good on account of sorrow caused by lack of pleasure, yielding as it were to a weak motion.*

Effeminacy in this sense is rife among modern churchmen, who seem to fear controversy above all things, and especially controversy that might earn them the disdain of the secular liberal intelligentsia. And for most of the last few decades, the worst they would have faced is some bad press. The way Western culture is turning now, they will probably face far worse than that in the not too distant future—and will face it precisely *because* they did not speak and act boldly and consistently enough when bad press was all they had to fear. Appeasement only ever breeds contempt among those appeased, and spurs them to greater evil.

**F**or many Christians, such "niceness" has replaced *caritas*, and in the end, will surely be the doom of those who practice it and those they fear to offend.

So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life (Ezek. 33:7-9).

We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. Is it love, then, to stay

silent so as not to offend? Within our silence—and tacit acceptance—, do we not place our own souls in grave peril? Whenever we see evil, we see someone drawing nearer with every step to the gates of hell. And, in our silence, we condemn both them and ourselves to the judgment of Almighty God .

**S**aint Anthony Mary Claret (1807-1870), was a Spanish Roman Catholic archbishop, missionary, confessor to Isabella II and founder of the congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, commonly called the Claretians. He once made this brief, but wise, observation:

When you see a condemned man on his way to the gallows, it moves you to pity. If you could do something to free him, you would do it. Well, brothers and sisters, when I see a person in mortal sin, I see someone drawing nearer with every step to the gallows of hell. And seeing him in this unhappy state, I happen to know the way to free him: that he be converted to God, ask God's pardon, and make a good confession. Woe betide me if he does not.

Neither can I understand why other priests who believe the selfsame truths as I do, as we all must do, do not preach or exhort their flock so that they might avoid this unbearable eternity of Hell. It is still a source of wonder to me how the laity—those men and women blessed with the Faith—do not give warning to those who need it. If a house were to catch fire in the middle of the night, and if the inhabitants of the same house and the other townfolk were asleep and did not see the danger, would not the one who first noticed it shout and run along the streets, exclaiming:

"Fire! Fire! In that house over there!" Then why should there not be a warning of eternal fire to waken those who are drifting in the sleep of sin in such a way that when they open their eyes they will find themselves burning in the eternal flames of Hell?"

Many Christians wrongly claim that Jesus preached only of his—God's—love for the poor and his animus toward the wealthy, the powerful, and the *dogmatic* religious leaders of his day. But, he did not, at least, not because they had dogmas.

The ability to formulate *dogmas* is what distinguishes humans from animals. A person's dogmas might either be correct or incorrect, but anyone who claims to be without dogmas hardly qualifies as human.

The principle of non-contradiction, the principle that one ought to do to others as one would have done to oneself: *Those are dogmas*. Dogmas are things you infrequently find necessary to recall to mind, but are, however, the foundation for deriving truths and making decisions.

**D**ivine Revelation, the Logos, the revealed Word of God, or the Truth as inscribed in Sacred Scripture is the source and foundation of Church Dogma. Those who preach the Word of God will be called "dogmatic" by those who resent what they say, but "faithful" by those willing to listen. Using "dogmatic," as an adjective applied to a religious leader, isn't necessarily a rebuke, even when intended as such. It might be the highest compliment anyone can give.

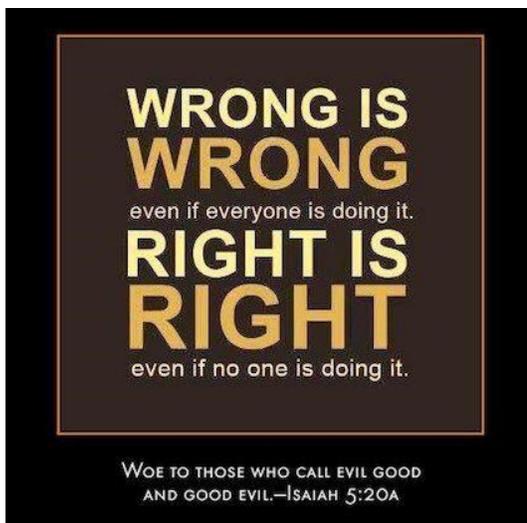
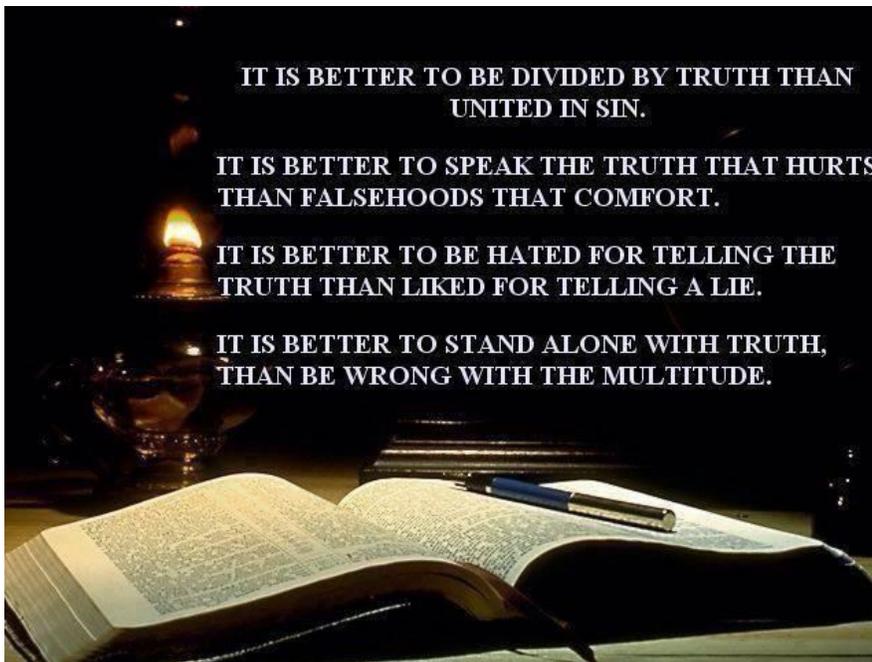
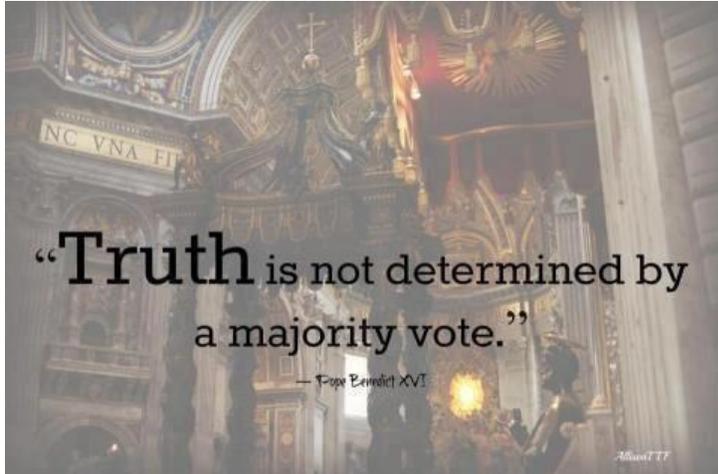
**T**hose for whom Jesus rebuked had dogmas, as do all human beings, but it was not for their *dogmas* but for their *hypocrisy* that he judged them so harshly.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men" (Matt 23:2-7).

Jesus called them out for their hypocrisy, their self-importance, their pride and their arrogance. Had he not done so, if he had preached only of mercy and compassion without mention or condemnation of sin and evil, then, he, himself, might well not have been condemned, but merely be forgotten, a blip on a footnote to history.

Arrogancy stands a high horse. It matters not the horse nor saddle. Whether church or state, overweening pride—arrogance—must eventually and inevitably take a terrible fall. Arrogance denies truth, rejects reality, and demands your soul as payment for promises never kept.

In the words of Saint Augustine, "If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself." In whom and of what do you believe?



## Deacon's Diner

*Food for a restless mind*

**F**or those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

### BOOKS

**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

**First Things**

[www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)

**Touchstone**

[www.touchstonemag.com](http://www.touchstonemag.com)

**Catholic Answers Magazine**

[www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)

**Chronicles**

[www.chroniclesmagazine.org](http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org)

**The National Catholic Register**

[www.ncregister.com](http://www.ncregister.com)

**Our Sunday Visitor**

[www.osvnews.com](http://www.osvnews.com)

### ONLINE

**Crisis Magazine**

[www.crisismagazine.com](http://www.crisismagazine.com)

**The Imaginative Conservative**

[www.theimaginativeconservative.org](http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org)

**Catholic Exchange**

[www.catholicexchange.com](http://www.catholicexchange.com)

**Intellectual Takeout**

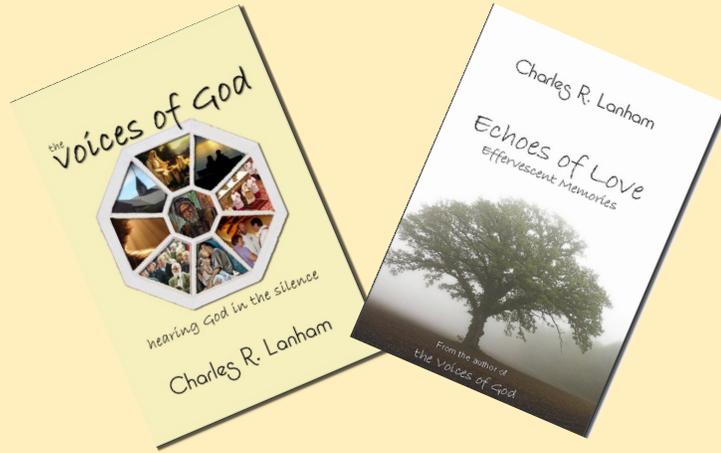
[www.intellectualtakeout.org](http://www.intellectualtakeout.org)

**Life News**

[www.lifenews.com](http://www.lifenews.com)

**Life Site News**

[www.lifesitenews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com)



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

**deaconscorner.org**

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

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

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

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