

May 22, 2020
Volume 04—Number 33



A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Facing the Sunset

Losing sight of the sunrise

Awaiting the Return

Hadley Arkes

The Anti-Thing

David Warren

Facing the Sunset

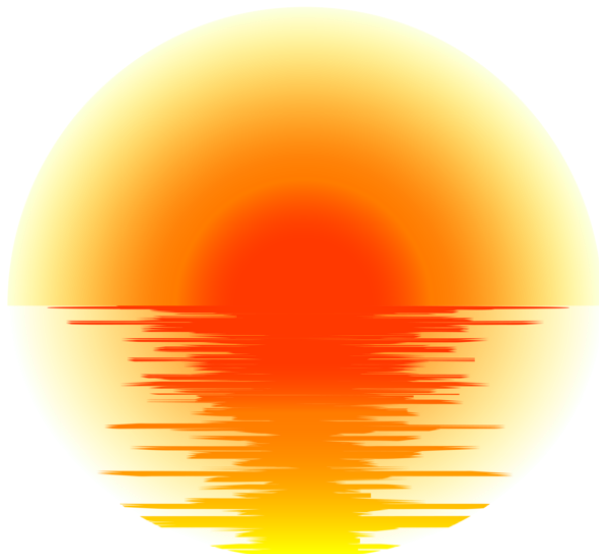
Losing sight of the sunrise

This virus has been called the invisible enemy, though one could rightly argue it is neither invisible in the truest sense nor an enemy in the literal. It is more akin to an unwelcome guest, a ne'er-do-well freeloader, an uninvited squatter who finds no compelling reason to get up and leave. A virus is an infectious agent that only replicates inside the cells of an organism. Viruses are found in almost every ecosystem on earth and are the most numerous type of biological entity. This virus, like any virus, is what has been described as an "organism at the edge of life," since all viruses possess genes and reproduce by forcing the host cell to rapidly produce thousands of identical copies; and yet, viruses possess no cellular structure which is generally considered the basic unit of life. Lacking a metabolism, a virus can neither long survive nor naturally reproduce outside a host cell.

Though not visible, it is not invisible. It is a submicroscopic organism, not a lifeform. It has no brain, no mind, no will, no soul, no emotions, no feelings; it cannot think, plot, scheme, strategize or plan; it has no objective, no desire nor need for power, fame or prestige; it has no concept of morality, no capacity to know good or evil, right or wrong, truth or falsity, love or hatred. It is not the enemy; it is a virus doing only what any virus can do: inducing the host cell to reproduce itself in vast quantities. All too readily we ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics to these organisms, granting them human qualities to turn them into the "invisible enemy," a thing we can target, an enemy we can defeat.

If not then the enemy, who is? Who is to blame for allowing this virus to spread and infect us? As Pogo quipped many years ago, "We have met the enemy and it is us." We are to blame, if anyone is truly to blame, though

blame may be far too strong a word for it. We are to blame for providing the host cells to infect, though unwitting and unwilling as that may be. We are to blame for our false belief and our insistence on our ability to eradicate the irradicable, making ourselves more vulnerable to new and ever more deadly infections. We are to blame for believing human science and political will can keep us safe. We are to blame for relinquishing our individual inalienable rights to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness for political expediency. We are to blame for pacifically following unjust and irresponsible orders by those who we elected to represent us. We are to blame for our silence in the face of evil. We are to blame. We are.



We have too long enjoyed the sunset, staring *ad plagam* (to the west) and have lost sight of the sunrise *ad orientem* (to the east). Pope Saint John Paul II once said, "We are the Easter people, and Hallelujah is our song," but we have forgotten that. We have forgotten who we are and what we are and why we are. We have forgotten we are neither for nor of this world and all its fleeting sun-

sets but for the everlasting rising of the Son. We have forgotten, whether unintentionally or deliberately, what St. Paul wrote to the Romans.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:6-8).

We have turned our faces away from God, turned our hearts and minds inward toward ourselves. "Hence the final, desperate ways in which we seek to manage death: preemptive strikes." We have forgotten or otherwise ignored, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to

the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:22-23). While it may strike many as inappropriate, maudlin or, at the very least, distasteful, it seems what ultimately we are so desperately trying to avoid is the merest mention of our mortality. As Carl Trueman writes, "Most human beings want life to continue and will do a great deal to avoid its cessation."

Cicero was right: No man is so old that he does not think he can live another year. We accept our own mortality in theory, but we approach each day as if we expect to live for an indefinite time. Far from allowing death to heighten the significance of our experience, for the most part we work hard to keep it out of our minds.

And for many, death renders life not meaningful but meaningless. ... This theme is not a modern monopoly. Ancient literature, too, sounds notes of futility. Euripides's tragedies evoke the nihilism that death brings, and Medea's infanticide and the death of Pentheus at the hands of a Bacchanalian mob render their lives meaningless.

We fear death, we fear that it makes life absurd, and we flee from it at every opportunity. Death imparts a bleak futility to life, as in Act V of Macbeth:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

The most common response, especially in our era, is simply to ignore death. This is one reason why funerals are so difficult and involve conflicting emotions. We see the dead body before us; yet we manage to persuade ourselves that this is not our destiny, that somehow death, which comes for everyone, will never touch us.

Our ability to ignore our mortality is surely one of our species' most impressive features. In a.d. 410, the Eternal City fell to the Goths. When refugees began arriving in Hippo, Augustine observed that, even when faced with the reality of their own vulnerability, these people preferred to go to the theater rather than come to the church to hear the truth about life and death.

The role of entertainment in our lives is extreme in comparison to any other period of history. And death has been pushed to the margins. Once, churches stood next to graveyards and the weekly rituals of worship could not be attended without one's first passing by reminders of our mortality. Today, the death industry is kept at a safe distance except at funerals.

With human nature under attack, Christians may well

wonder how we can still speak to the world. But death provides an opportunity. You can choose your sexuality, you can choose your gender, you can even choose the time of your death. But you cannot choose whether or not to die. The problem of death persists and cries out for an answer, even if one claims that no answer can be given. As long as death exists, people will ask about the meaning of life.

But do we have the words the world needs to hear? Contemporary Christian attitudes to death are too much in accord with the age's strategies of distraction and denial. We often judge Christian accommodation to the world in terms of lax attitudes to sex and sexuality. But if our rebellion against nature is more fundamental, then attitudes to death may be a more significant measure of our worldliness.

Part of the Christian's witness is thus to be realistic in our acknowledgment of the power of death and the tangible reality of the abiding losses it inflicts upon those left behind. We might add that part of Christian witness is to point to the fragility of life.

Of course, Christianity involves the hope of the resurrection. As Paul declares, if Christ has not been raised, then Christians are of all people most to be pitied. Yet herein lies a paradox: Christians grieve, too. Indeed, Christians grieve acutely. The hope for the resurrection has to be set within the context of the reality of death, yet that very hope perhaps intensifies the pain. Abraham, the recipient of the covenant promise, weeps for his beloved Sarah. And Jesus himself sheds tears at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, even as he declares himself the Resurrection. Why so? I suspect it is because the very framework of the covenant promise highlights the tragedy that is death. As he stands at the tomb in Bethany, Jesus sees the full horror of what sin has wrought, which only his death and Resurrection can overcome. He knows—he sees—that death is not some part of the natural life cycle. It is a powerful and evil incursion. Yes, we look to the resurrection, but Christians, of all people, should understand the pain and horror that make the resurrection necessary.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought us all a little closer to Bethany. Death, for the moment, is nearer to most of us than we like to think. It is no longer hidden away in hospices and care homes, or domesticated by the cartoonish violence of the movies. It is real. And in this climate, the Church has a moment to think about her priorities. Your best life now? Funerals as celebrations? Liturgies and praise songs that focus on the feelings of the congregants as they struggle with first-world problems? That is not biblical Christianity, and it is wholly inadequate to the current situation—and therefore to our ultimate fate. It is unfortunate that the

sense of loss and longing the thought of death brings us should be better expressed in the poetry of Dylan Thomas or the films of Ingmar Bergman than in the contemporary liturgies of many Christian churches.

Can the Church be honest about death in an era addicted to the pleasure of the moment? That is the challenge we face, and it demands that we reorient our thinking from this world to the next, that we prepare ourselves not just to live as God's people but to die as God's people. Death should not be, but it is. Only the Church understands this, and only the Church can provide the answer through her preaching, her sacraments, her liturgy, and her pastoral care. But first, she must acknowledge the unfathomable and inevitable nature of the final enemy. COVID-19 poses the question in an acute and unavoidable form. It is doubtless severe, but in pressing the cruel reality of death upon us all, it is a severe mercy.¹

As we near the tenth week of this unprecedented shutdown, I am of a like mind with a growing number of Americans, Christians, Catholics, and those of other faiths who have been forcibly denied their right to freely assemble to worship and to pray. In this, I find myself in agreement with Monsignor Charles Pope when he writes, "I do not argue that we should flip a switch and immediately return to what we called 'normal daily life' just a couple of months ago. Further, I am neither an epidemiologist nor an immunologist, and I accept that some degree of protective measures is necessary to protect the vulnerable and to minimize the spread of the disease."

However, I am also concerned about the serious and potentially deadly effects of this unprecedented shutdown. I do not support every action or position of the demonstrators, but I am sympathetic to their essential concern that the "cure should not be worse than the disease." The lives of those afflicted by or particularly susceptible to the new coronavirus matter, but so do the lives of others who are experiencing mounting losses and struggling to provide for their families.

Many with this concern are demonized and told that they are selfish and don't care if other people die. This is, of course, an unfair accusation. Those who are calling for a gradual reopening want people to live, too. Living consists of more than having a pulse. Living involves thriving, interacting with others, cultural enrichment. Living involves the dignity of work, contributing our labors and sharing in their fruits. **For a Catholic, living means the Holy Mass, receiving the sacra-**

ments and gathering for communal worship. (*emphasis added*)

I ask those who support the continuation of the current shutdown to respect, rather than demonize, those of us who think that the balance is too heavily tilted toward safety and that other essential goods are being neglected. If you don't agree, present your position. Describe your criteria for reopening and how you think it should be managed.

In my opinion, two things are required for individuals and our country in order for us be more disposed to a gradual reopening of the economy and culture.

First, we must face our fears and accept that illness, suffering and death are a part of life in this world we call "Paradise Lost." Life is filled with countless risks; we must be sober and prudent but at the same time courageous and accepting. To be cognizant of risks and to try to minimize them is wise but to avoid *all* risk is neither possible nor healthy.

It is highly unlikely that the risk of contracting the coronavirus will be brought to zero. At some point we are going to have to return to our "normal" lives. The debate is around determining the right time and the acceptable amount of risk given the economic and social cost of continuing to remain locked down.

Even if we were to find a treatment or cure for COVID-19 tomorrow, there are countless other viruses, bacteria, allergens and toxins all around us. God has equipped us with immune systems that do an almost miraculous job of keeping us healthy in the face of a daily onslaught of attacks. For believers, trusting in God's care and in what he has provided to keep us healthy plays an important part in overcoming our fear. Life has many risks, but our lives remain in God's hands and we in his care.

This is not a call to recklessly abandon all the measures currently in place to reduce the spread of the virus, but it is a summons to remember that life has many risks, that accepting them is part of our life in this world, and that God is with us through it all.

Second, we have to accept the hard truth that people die. They die of many things, COVID-19 among them. The vast majority of people who get the coronavirus will survive. Some will be only mildly symptomatic, some will be severely ill, and yes, some will die. People will also keep dying every day of heart disease, cancer, from strokes, and in automobile accidents. Each of us is going to die one day, at a time and in a manner that is not of our own choosing.

It is alarming to me as a priest and believer how little we as a Church have had to say about death. Death is a

reality, but it is not something we should excessively fear. Christ has conquered death and made it a doorway to the glory of Heaven for the faithful.

St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “Brothers, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you grieve like the rest, who are without hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

He also wrote this rather well-known passage: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is thy victory? Where, O Death, is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and immovable” (1 Corinthians 15:55-58).

We all have a natural fear of death, especially the dying process itself, but as Christians we are taught to confront and conquer our fear of death. The grace to do so has been given to us by Christ. Scripture says: “Now since the children have flesh and blood, Christ too shared in their humanity, so that by his death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Pay attention, fellow believers: Christ has conquered death and summoned us, by his grace, to become free of the fear of death through which the Devil keeps us in bondage.

Death is not the end; it is a birth unto new life. For the faithful Christian, the day of our death is the greatest day of our life. Though we may require some purgation, we leave this world of sorrows and journey to that place of joys unspeakable and glories untold.

It is right that we should grieve the death of every human being, but something far more than grieving is going on in this current situation. What we have today is a gripping fear that so dreads suffering and death that almost everything else must be sacrificed. *(emphasis added)*

Much of this, I am convinced, is because in this increasingly secular world, suffering and death have lost their meaning. Such an attitude is unacceptable for a Christian. Jesus taught us that the cross is a tree of life and that suffering produces glory. He taught us that to truly find our life, we must lose it to this world.

As Christ’s voice in this world, we have been too silent about these truths. We should be summoning people to a courageous stance in the face of suffering and death.

This does not mean reckless risk-taking. I am not advo-

cating the complete, immediate reversal of all safety measures. **But the widespread, gripping fear in the face of this virus is unprecedented in my lifetime. I have never seen anything like it. Its worldwide scope tells me that it is demonic in origin, and thus the Church must speak more vigorously to exorcize the demons of fear. Instead we have remained strangely quiet.** *(emphasis added)*

As usual, our muting of the Gospel message likely stems from a fear of appearing to be “insensitive.” If we were to speak out against the gripping fear or to suggest that not all of the limitations are necessarily good ideas, we might be accused of not caring if people die! We have allowed this bullying and misrepresentation of our views to silence us. Accepting reasonable safety measures, and making proper distinctions, we must preach the Gospel anyway to a world that is increasingly scornful of the cross and dubious that death has been conquered by Jesus Christ.

It is time to face our fears in this country we once called “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Some degree of fear and anxiety is understandable, but the paralyzing fear manifest in the news reports and displayed by many Americans is destructive as well as unbecoming.

It is time for prudent, incremental measures to reopen the economy and to resume public Masses. Different regions will open according to their situations, but in all cases it is going to require us to face our fears, master them, and accept that people are going to continue to die of COVID-19 in the months and years ahead (although the vast majority will not). People will also suffer and die from many other causes.

*Dear Lord, may those who have died rest in peace. May those who are ill recover. May those who are unemployed due to the shutdown find work. May those deprived of the sacraments soon be restored to them. And may all those who suffer in myriad hidden ways find solace. Calm our fears, Lord, and help us to remember that our life is in your hands. Amen.*²

As Susan Brinkmann writes and according to the USCCB’s *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* which is based upon Pope Saint John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*, On the Value and Invulnerability of Human Life, “A person has a moral obligation to use ordinary or proportionate means of preserving his or her life.” Please note that it is the moral obligation of the “individual” to use ordinary or proportionate means of preserving his or her life. In the document’s introduction, it begins by stating, “The Church has always sought to embody our Savior’s concern for the sick.”

The gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry draw special attention to his acts of healing: he cleansed a man with leprosy (Mt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-42); he gave sight to two people who were blind (Mt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52); he enabled one who was mute to speak (Lk 11:14); he cured a woman who was hemorrhaging (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34); and he brought a young girl back to life (Mt 9:18, 23-25; Mk 5:35-42). Indeed, the Gospels are replete with examples of how the Lord cured every kind of ailment and disease (Mt 9:35). In the account of Matthew, Jesus' mission fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Mt 8:17; cf. Is 53:4).

Jesus' healing mission went further than caring only for physical affliction. He **touched people at the deepest level of their existence; he sought their physical, mental, and spiritual healing** (Jn 6:35, 11:25-27). He "came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). (*emphasis added*)

This virus, in one way or another, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually, has infected and affected us all. It is increasingly clear and undeniably obvious that the souls of the faithful have suffered and are suffering from the shuttering of their churches and the suspension of the Sacraments. God and his Church are essential to our spiritual health and well-being, without the Church the vine will quickly wither and die. Make no mistake, this is, as Monsignor Pope writes, "demonic in origin" and the Church has the solemn responsibility to "speak more vigorously to exorcise the demons of fear." It is long forgotten and well-advised to recall the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Jesus warned us that the world would hate us and persecute us in his name.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they

would not have sinned; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father (John 15:18-24).

Yet, there are signs of hope, small beginnings of renewal of the Spirit that will soon be upon us. In Minnesota, the Catholic bishops along with the state's Lutheran leaders have informed their governor that they will defy his continued lockdown order for houses of worship and will begin public religious services in time for Pentecost. As Archbishop Bernard Hebda stated, "Darkness and despair have taken hold of so many of our fellow Americans in the face of the economic and social hardship of the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith has always been a source of comfort and strength and now more than ever it is of the utmost importance that we are able to meet the spiritual needs of our community."

The Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford, president of the Minnesota South District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod echoed those sentiments, "Throughout this crisis, we have been committed to modeling Christ's love by protecting people from the spread of illness. That's why it is so disheartening that the Governor has subordinated our spiritual well-being to the economic well-being of the State. Now that the State has deemed the risk of spreading coronavirus low enough to reopen non-essential business, we respectfully believe that it is our right and duty to safely resume public ministry to the faithful even without the support of the Governor."

A 1,500-word letter addressed to the faithful and signed by the bishops of the state's seven dioceses announced their intent to re-open their churches.

An order that sweeps so broadly that it prohibits, for example, a gathering of 11 people in a Cathedral with a seating capacity of several thousand defies reason... Therefore, we have chosen to move forward in the absence of any specific timeline laid out by Governor Walz and his Administration. We cannot allow an indefinite suspension of the public celebration of the Mass.

The human cost to this pandemic has been extraordinary, not just in terms of lives lost to the virus but the rapidly growing problems of job loss, depression, crime and violence, and substance abuse. As Pope Francis has said, the church must be a field hospital, ministering to all, but especially the poor and vulnerable. He has cautioned that overly drastic measure that limit church life

will have a disproportionate impact on “the little ones” and those who have no one to rely on.

Lisa Bergman, co-founder of the St. Charles Borromeo Society praised the move. “We rejoice to see that Archbishop Hebda and the other Minnesota bishops have shown true pastoral care for their flock in challenging their Governor’s policy. It renews our confidence to see good shepherds like Archbishop Hebda insisting upon the right to feed their flock during this difficult time. We hope that other bishops will soon follow his lead.”

A Baptist Church pastor recently ripped a Cease and Desist order during a service in defiance of his Governor’s mandate. As one pundit noted, “Invariably, what many will say is you are putting people in jeopardy in having in-person church services. People have been infected when they have been at in-person church services and so forth. And your response?” The pastor responded, “We all know that coronavirus only goes to church. It doesn’t go to Home Depot, it doesn’t go to the grocery store, it doesn’t go anywhere except to church and we have all had to come to believe that line from all those so-called experts that you can have 300 people at Walmart, you can have 250, 300, 400 people at Home Depot standing in line touching stuff, bumping into one another but for some reason or another coming to church and checking people’s temperature at the door and practicing this long list of social distancing protocols and guidelines that we put in place and having families sit together and having everybody else sitting six feet apart we know that if we do that they are going to get sick but you can go to the store and touch everything in there and you’ll be fine.”

And the interviewer, who is Catholic and a lawyer, observed, “It has been a shocker to me that so few members of the clergy have actually come out and said that we are just not going to do this anymore. These rights are inalienable, you can’t take them from us so put me in jail for civil disobedience.” The pastor agreed and said what should be obvious to everyone. “We are just going to church. When a man can take his daughter to an abortion clinic but can’t take her to church, when a mother can take her son to a liquor store but can’t take him to church, when the marijuana dispensaries are flourishing but

churches are shuttered, it is time to say something. I’m shocked at how many pastors and ministers and church members are content to sit on the couch and watch the church services on television without going to church. The word “church” in the Greek is *ecclesia* which means an assembly of people together. The word “church” means coming together. You can’t have church the way God intended it through livestream and all those things. We have those things for those who can’t come, not for those people instead of coming.”

As someone, whose name I cannot now recall, said of the government overreach, “First they tell you not to go to church and then they tell you how to worship.” This was in direct response to a state government official declaring that choirs were a known viral hotbed and that singing had been found to spread the virus, therefore, all singing was forbidden.

We have long known that we have certain constitutional and inalienable rights. And yet, though we know it we are seldom mindful of their importance. Too often, we remember them only when they are threatened. Many are of a singular mind, focusing only on the separation of church and state, willingly and deliberately ignoring the sudden and none-too-subtle State taking unwarranted control of our lives, our liberties and our freedom to worship as we choose. As someone recently remarked, “when you speak of rights and such, that is political. I’m only interested in our faith.” But the state has made church political and to ignore the political is to do so at grave peril to our inalienable and constitutional rights, to our religious liberty, to our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

If this pandemic, this crisis has brought any good with it, it is that we have now tasted what it’s like to live without the right to assemble, the right to exercise our religion freely, and in a smaller sense, the right to speak freely. We can now better understand how our forefathers felt when their rights were so grievously abridged by those who would rule over them.

In his impassioned 1788 speech debating the merits of the forthcoming Constitution, Patrick Henry expressed the need for Americans to have a Bill of Rights. “Guard with

the public liberty," he said. "Suspect every one who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force: Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined." He then reminded his fellow patriots how easily liberty can be lost.

But we are told that we need not fear; because those in power, being our Representatives, will not abuse the power we put in their hands: I am not well versed in history, but I will submit to your recollection, whether liberty has been destroyed most often by the licentiousness of the people, or by the tyranny of rulers? I imagine, sir, you will find the balance on the side of tyranny: Happy will you be if you miss the fate of those nations, who, omitting to resist their oppressors, or negligently suffering their liberty to be wrested from them, have groaned under intolerable despotism. Most of the human race are now in this deplorable condition....

Fear is a powerful emotion; it is at times rational but can and does often cloud our reasoning and our judgment. In a strange and unthinkable way, we are being carefully taught *anthropophobia*, the fear of human beings. Social distancing, shelter-in-place, isolation, quarantine, touch avoidance, masks are all signs of our unreasoned fear of others. Such social isolation leads to depression and despair, which leads to suicide and deaths of despair when people are reduced to misery and loss of hope.

California, with a population of 39.56 million, was thrown into panic mode by one death from coronavirus. By way of comparison, nearly 4,300 Californians killed themselves in 2016, a 50 percent increase from 2001. Deaths of despair include not only deaths by suicide, but also drug and alcohol poisoning, as well as alcoholic liver disease and cirrhosis, to which I would add heart failure where the patient is depressed. The rate of such deaths has been steadily rising.

Such deaths have two social causes, economic insecurity and social isolation. I need not choose between these explanations: both of them are certain to be increased by the measures taken against COVID-19. Hence we see another fallacy at work in the COVID-19 debate: a precautionary principle (better safe than sorry) that neglects the costs of staying safe.

Suicide prevention hotlines have been kept very busy during the COVID-19 crisis. Domestic violence cases have spiked during the pandemic, as have cases of child abuse. Though the courts are now closed, a surge of divorces is expected when the crisis ends.

Democracy requires a *demos*, which can gather in places like churches, bowling alleys, and bars to establish solidarity, and peaceably assemble in parks for the redress of their grievances. Social distancing destroys the possibility of such assemblies.

Some comforting myths conceal from us the devastating social effects of the COVID-19 panic.

We are told that staying home and watching Netflix is an act of heroism like that of the soldiers who fought in the invasion on D-Day. We are told that avoiding our fellow human beings (and wearing a mask when you cannot avoid them) is an expression of human solidarity. Even crossing the street to avoid other people, as people did in the past to stigmatized groups, is supposed to be an expression of love. We are told forcing troubled families to spend more time together will improve their harmony.

One good effect of the crisis has been the reduction of air pollution. To sustain this result, we will need to rely far more heavily on public transportation. But the mentality of *anthropophobia* which invites us to view our fellow human beings as sources of contagion until they prove otherwise can only make us more unwilling to share vehicles with strangers.

We should not neglect reasonable precautions, but we should take into account their costs as well as their benefits. An 85-year-old woman in a nursing home might reasonably risk her life to see her grandchildren.

We must cultivate a skeptical attitude toward people who urge us to distrust one another, play upon our fears like a violin, and exude contempt and condescension to those people who do not accept their models. Staying sheltered in place is not conducive to democracy.³

Neither, I must add, is closing our churches conducive to the salvation of our souls. Spiritual suicide is far more deadly and everlasting than physical death. As Pope Francis has rightly noted, the church is a spiritual field hospital, ministering to the spiritual needs of God's people. It is far past time—indeed it never should have been so—for our churches to reopen and provide spiritual healthcare through her preaching, her sacraments, her liturgy, and her pastoral care. It is time for our churches to recall the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ... I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is

coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father (John 14:27, 30-31).

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ... And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? ... Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day (Matthew 6:25, 27, 31-34).

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

Amen.

-
1. Carl R. Trueman, "The Final Enemy", First Things, June 2020.
 2. Monsignor Charles Pope, "Coronavirus, Where is Thy Sting?" – Why This Gripping Fear is Useless, National Catholic Register, May 24, 2020, p. 2.
 3. Philip Devine, "Social Distancing Can Kill, Too", Intellectual Takeout, May 21, 2020.

The following essays are from *The Catholic Thing*. They seem appropriate to this week's essay.

Awaiting the Return

Of the Public Mass

Hadley Arkes, May 19, 2020

Our late, beloved friend, Cardinal Francis George, made his way back to our mutual native ground, to serve with wisdom and panache as Archbishop of Chicago. On a plane once to Argentina, he found himself next to an Evangelical woman, a missionary, who turned and asked him earnestly, "Have you been saved?" He paused for a moment, because he had never had the question put so directly to him. And finally he said, "Yes, I've been saved by Christ, but from within a

sacramental system that demands my free participation."

Chief among those sacraments, of course, is the Eucharist. And now the matter comes back to us with more vividness precisely because we have been without it for so many weeks. Thanks to the dedication and verve of Fr. Christopher Pollard and his colleagues, I've been able to "attend" Mass, via podcasting, at St. John the Beloved in McLean, Virginia.

I've been especially grateful for Fr. Pollard giving even more time to the homilies that make our services more distinctive. And yet, I confess: I do miss the press of those friends all around me at Mass. They do help form "the body of the Church," and I do feel fortified by their presence.

The podcasting has been comforting, but there has not been, in the sight of the camera, a single Crnkovich or Spence child; and it is highly unlikely, at any in-person Mass at St. John the Beloved, that one could be any further than a few feet from a Crnkovich or Spence.

The churches are now trying to find a way to return to the public Mass and the Eucharist. And we wonder of course: how is this going to be done in this time of COVID-19? But the question of how this is properly done cannot be detached from what we think is being offered here in the first place.

There is not a natural, but a *cultivated* concern about "handling" the Body of Our Lord, an awareness that comes into being only when the recognition kicks in of "what this is." The problem dissolves, of course, if the bread is only a symbol.

Paul VI warned about the temptation to "reducing [the Eucharist] to a kind of symbolism." He would invoke one venerable sage to remind us that "The Lord did not say: This is a symbol of My Body, and this is a symbol of My Blood but 'This is My Body and My Blood.'"

We are often reminded of how that bit of news played, even among the disciples. According to John's report, some recoiled, saying "This is strange talk, who can be expected to listen to it?"

I heard the report years ago of an Irish priest throwing the record in the face of those people holding to *sola scriptura*, insisting that we be governed solely by the words of

the Bible: "That is what Jesus said – this is my Body and My Blood – and I believe him!" And if He said it, why should we not believe Him – or doubt that He had the power to bear out what He had promised?

The promise is borne out now by the priest speaking, in his place, over the bread and wine. But as St. John Chrysostom said, "the priest standing there in the place of Christ says these words, but their power and grace are from God." And yet, dare we say: from the presence of Christ in the sanctuary?

As Cardinal George observed, "The Risen Christ acts now through the sacraments because he is totally free, and not bound by space and time. He passes through a rock sealing a tomb and through closed doors ... having passed through the great limitation of death itself. ... He can be anywhere he wants to be, and he wants to be with us."

Still, accomplished priests are prudent enough to know that the bread may still bear germs these days, even as the words are spoken. But even so, as Paul VI said, the bread and wine "no longer remain ordinary bread and ordinary wine." They contain, as he insisted, "a new 'reality' which we may justly term ontological."

That is, nothing metaphorical, but the real thing. But with an evident awareness of all the dubiety and sniggering over the years, he moved instantly to the anchoring ground of our conviction: "the power that accomplishes this is that same power by which God Almighty, at the beginning of time, created the world out of nothing."

And this has been, for me, the source of enduring puzzlement when people ask, in a bantering way, whether I really "believe that stuff about the bread and wine." I ask some of them if they really believe that God made a covenant with Abraham and went on to split the Red Sea.

With Christians, I'll ask whether they credit the account of Jesus coming back from the dead. And in general, I'd ask if people appreciate the wonder of that Big Bang, or that moment of Creation, which brought forth this universe, with the universal laws of physics in place, or this finely balanced galaxy, allowing human life to flourish on this earth (and parts of New Jersey) – if all of this could plausibly be explained as an "accident."

But if they can credit any of these items, it is hard to

see why the bread and wine would offer a tough trick. And so yes, as I head back to Mass, I return serenely, untroubled. God bless us, one and all.

The Anti-Thing

David Warren, May 22, 2020

The recent Batflu epidemic has been a learning experience.

We have learned not to trust epidemiologists in particular, and godless medical experts in general. We have learned that the "gotcha" media really are psychologically twisted. We have learned that much of our political class is formally committed to the persecution of Christians, and the suppression of the Catholic Church. That they are anti-Semites, too. That even when not directly in the pay of Red China, they are tendentiously pro-communist nonetheless. Also: instinctively pro-criminal, and lawless.

These were not learning experiences for everybody. I, for instance, already knew these things; and I know others equally well informed. And it goes without saying that those working almost contractually for infernal forces do not learn anything.

If one of my gentle readers is outraged by these assertions, I give him permission to express his inner berserker. To my mind, it is all of a piece with what Christ told us to expect, during our sojourn in this world, to assist us in maintaining our serenity.

Some readers might accuse me of being overly political but, while I recognize that evil assumes political forms, I am habitually unpolitical. I, like many, regret being compelled to make political arguments, or adopt political stances, for such "political" causes as being left alone.

The agenda of Satan cannot allow this. Not only must the lives of faithful Christians be consistently invaded in both petty and alarming ways; the agenda requires implicating them in what they know to be evils.

This is evident in the phenomenon that is glibly called, "political correctness." For more than a generation, I have noticed that every "politically correct" assertion is a flat lie, and often a significant one. But by agreeing to be silent about it, we agree to the protocols of a new Gulag.

By increments we become like “zeks,” following the rules in a new lockdown state.

We know that our livelihoods and personal independence may be threatened if we speak up. In extremes, we know that people visibly seething with hatred seek targets to accuse of imaginary “hate crimes.” We also know that they have thoroughly infiltrated our legal, bureaucratic, and educational establishments so that they have acquired real, arbitrary power.

I often think back on the late (and now unfashionable) Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who told us to take risks. His principal message was “stop lying”; and to refuse, regardless of consequences. He suggested that if everyone agreed to stop lying for a full morning, the Soviet tyranny would collapse by noon.

It did, eventually, from the slow drip, drip, of irresistible truths. Suddenly, finally, its Berlin Wall came down. The same must ultimately happen in other evil empires; and as Christians we can know that God will prevail.

Patience is a virtue, in mundane situations, but the process by which evil is defeated can be immeasurably accelerated and enhanced by telling the truth, inconveniently. As another of my late mentors, George Grant, said, the place to discuss abortion is at a polite academic sherry party. Shouting is unnecessary in such a venue.

This process creates martyrs for sure, and is sometimes responsible for creating disorder, as those who depend on all the lies for their livelihoods are “triggered” out of their minds.

Verily, we get glimpses of a secret war, behind the scenes of every totalitarian order, as its apparatchiks are confronted by their own lies, and left twisting on them. The most hardened functionaries sometimes bolt, or defect, as we saw across Europe a generation ago.

But today I use this memory mostly as an analogy for our own times, a long generation later, when evil has regrouped as it has done throughout history.

Communism provided an organizing focus to the anti-Christian presence in our modern age, once the alternative Satanisms, Nazism and Fascism, had collapsed. But for this very reason, it collapsed itself – the nothingness in its foundations exposed.

Paradoxically, our millennial Leftists – by which I don’t mean “millennials” generationally, but those who came to politics after the Cold War – benefit from being so poorly organized. Like summer black flies, they are harder to defeat. Their unity consists in a revolutionary attitude, only – they are destructively opposed to the old order, but lack the consistency of a fixed party line.

Moreover, it is operating from a base not outside the West, or at least partially outside, but entirely within it. This may seem counter-intuitive to those who imagine that Red China, the surviving Communist superpower, is “outside.”

It is unquestionably inside, of our end-of-history world of “globalism” – what we actually received from the triumph we declared at the end of the Cold War.

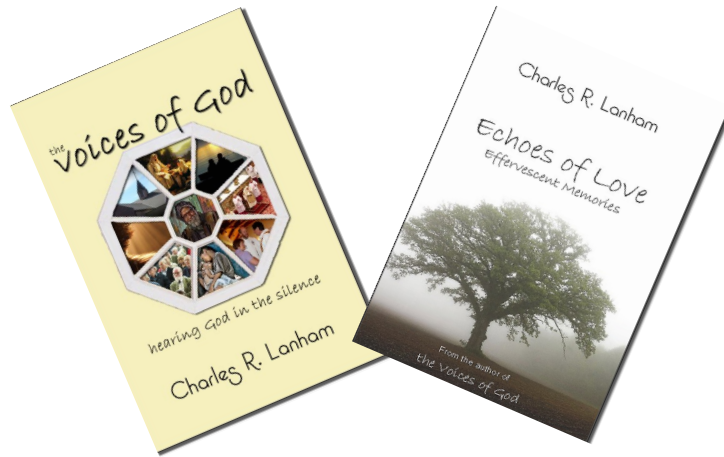
In a sense, Deng’s China won. The “ideal” of free trade for the pursuit of wealth, and a complementary, secular Nanny State built on the “ideal” of safety, was universally embraced. By that pincer movement, “Western Civ” was obviated.

Henceforth, whether in Shanghai or New York, our freedom would have to be “managed” – and by men themselves necessarily free of spiritual or any other principles.

While plenty remains beneath, we have seen the scum floating to the surface with the Batflu. The lockdowns began in the hope that we could “flatten the curve” for overloaded hospitals. By rapid increments it became an end in itself – for various “bad actors,” who could be identified by their fruits, easily.

This struck me when, to give just one instance, I noticed governors in several American states, simultaneously forcing nursing homes to receive infected elders. The plan was as murderous as the Politburo tactic of quarantining Wuhan from the rest of China, while leaving hundreds of international flights open to infect the world.

I am not so paranoid as to think that the (all Democrat, coincidentally) governors had a nefarious plot, to “cancel” as many oldies as possible. Rather I think, that Satan himself was their “community organizer.”



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

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) 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 has written over 400 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org



Colloquī, the present infinitive of *colloquor* (Latin: *to talk, to discuss or to converse*) 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! Essays may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the expressed intent to seek the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, so help us God.

Colloquī is published weekly by Deacon's Corner Publishing. Each issue of **Colloquī** is available online: <https://deaconscorner.org>

Copyright © 2020 by **Deacon's Corner Publishing**. All rights reserved. Produced in the U.S.A. <https://deaconscorner.org>.