

July 03, 2020  
Volume 04—Number 39



A journal for restless minds

# Colloquī *: to discuss*

## **Beauty at the Stroke of Midnight**

*The nihilist and the cancel culture*

---

## **Deacon's Diner**

*Food for a restless mind*

# Beauty at the Stroke of Midnight

*The nihilist and the cancel culture*

There are words that ring of truth and beauty; songs that sing of love enduring; memories that recall impassioned yearning. It is the substance, the sum and summit of accomplishment and beauty that should fill the pages of our lives, yet it is our sins and failures that survive in our collective memory. In his *Confessions*, Saint Augustine wrote of his pursuit of truth that can be found in worldly things, in lines, colors, and expanding quantities. He came to understand that “errors and false opinions corrupt our life if reason itself is vitiated.”

My mind moved among bodily forms; I defined and distinguished the beautiful, as that which is such by itself alone, and the fitting, as that which is fair because it is adapted to some other thing. I supported this by examples drawn from bodies. I turned to the nature of the mind, but the false opinion that I held concerning spiritual things did not permit me to discern the truth. Yet the force of truth itself dazzled my eyes, and I turned my flickering mind from incorporeal things to lines, colors, and expanding quantities, and because I could not perceive them in the mind, I thought that I could not perceive my mind itself. Further, since in virtue I loved peace and in vice I hated discord, I noted that there was unity in the one and division in the other. It seemed to me that the rational mind, the nature of truth, and the nature of the highest good lay in that unity. On the other hand, in my folly I thought that in the division of irrational life there was some kind of substance and nature of the highest evil. This would be not only a substance but actual life, and yet it did not come from you, my God, from whom are all things. I called the first a monad, as if it were pure, sexless mind. The second I called a dyad, like anger in cruel deeds and lust in shameful acts. But I did not know whereof I spoke. I had not as yet known or learned that evil is not a substance and that our own mind is not the highest and the incommunicable good.

Crimes are committed, if the mind's disposition for vigorous action becomes vicious and rises up in an insolent and disordered manner, and deeds of shame are done if that affection in the soul to drink in carnal pleasures is left unchecked. Just so do errors and false opin-

ions corrupt our life if reason itself is vitiated. Such was it in me at that time. I did not know that it must be enlightened by another light in order to be a partaker in the truth, since it is not itself the essence of truth, for you will light my lamp, O Lord my God, you will enlighten my darkness, and of your fullness we have all received. For you are the true light, which enlightens every man coming into this world, and in you there is no change or shadow of variation.

I strove towards you, but I was driven back from you, so that I might taste of death, for you resist the proud. What more proud, than for me to assert in my strange madness that I am by nature what you are? For while I was mutable, and this was manifest to me by the fact that I wished to be wise, so that I might pass from worse to better, I yet preferred to think that even you were mutable, than that I was not that which you are.

Therefore, you rejected me and you resisted my bold but fickle neck. I imagined for myself bodily forms, and being flesh, I accused the flesh. Like a wind that goes, I did not return to you, but I walked on and on into things that are not, neither in you, nor in me, nor in the body. And they were not created for me by your truth, but by my folly they were

fancied out of a body. I spoke to your faithful little ones, my fellow citizens, from whom I was an exile, although I knew it not. Full of words and folly as I was, I said to them, “Why, then, does the soul, which God has created, fall into error?” But I did not want anyone to say to me, “Why, then, does God err?” I would rather argue that your unchangeable substance was necessitated to err than confess that my mutable nature had gone astray of its own accord and that to err was now its punishment.<sup>1</sup>

Eloquent, deeply felt, and beautifully written, the *Confessions of Saint Augustine* have been praised throughout the centuries by men of many different faiths and walks of life as the greatest spiritual autobiography of all time. Augustine was a master of a Latin style that ranges from bare simplicity to the most elaborate rhetoric and from the utmost compression to very full and detailed expression. Yet his greatest concern in making his confession to God and before men was utter and complete truth. But note his endless search for beauty! As with every soul, he longed for beauty, never knowing Beauty had always been with him as also with us.



Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold, you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight! You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace.

At the stroke of midnight, darkness turns a blind eye from beauty, truth, reason, knowledge, wisdom, meaning, life, liberty, freedom, opportunity, justice, faith, hope, charity, goodness and from God by and for whom all things have been so wonderfully made. The nihilist rejects meaning as meaningless, all is meaninglessness, there is nothing to be gained or lost, neither good ... nor bad ... only meaninglessness. "God is dead!" so Nietzsche claimed. Fawning sycophants still kneel in awe before their golden calf (for there are no gods; God is dead,) never caring to learn or know how or what to think; uttering incoherent slogans they care not the slightest to decipher. After midnight, well before the dawning, hatred, bigotry, anger, lust, envy and perversion fuel the fires lit by mindless thugs shouting nihilistic shibboleths. It is a ruse, a deception designed to fool the foolish to their dark purpose: destroy all that is good, sully and denigrate achievement, tarnish beauty, trash art, vilify greatness. What is beauty to those who find no meaning in created things; who cannot smell the sweet fragrance of a rose, only to complain of the thorn that pricked the skin in its own defense; who cannot enjoy the simplicity of a sunrise or sunset so eloquently marking the beginning and the ending to the day, only to sneer at those who would dance to bird-song and sunbeams; who look upon the Mona Lisa or Pieta with contempt, wishing only to corrupt the masterpiece of Whistler or deface the genius of Michelangelo; who cannot kneel in supplication to the One who created all things beautiful, but would destroy it all rather than bow before Almighty God. Satan is their master and evil their master's bidding. Evil comes in many forms, more often under guise of delightful pastries and pleasant di-

versions; it is all an illusion, a fantasy that plays the guileless for the fool. The world is awash with the sibilant voices of Gríma Wormtongues<sup>2</sup>, agents of the one who would rule us all. It is pride that permits the heart to accept the lies, turns blood cold and leaves the soul void and empty.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature."<sup>3</sup> As I write, on this Independence Day, 2020, there are mixed emotions, as I cannot help believing are too common among my fellow Americans, citizens and patriots. I intended to write of different things but will leave those thoughts for another day. Instead, I must because I believe I am of lesser stuff, give audience to a better source.

Rod Serling and Jesus of Nazareth had at least two things in common. Both were Jewish. And both were marvelous storytellers. Both men knew that we can talk about ideas and rules all day long, and these things can be important. But if we want people's attention, the way to get it is through parables. Human beings love stories.

One of humanity's great skills, of course, is abstract thinking. Many of our modern advantages come from the abstractions of scientific and mathematical thought, translated into the benefits of practical technology. But abstraction always carries with it the risk of becoming unmoored from flesh and blood reality.

When we lump real persons into abstractions of class, or race, or religion – as we sometimes need to do, the better to understand our problems as a society – we *disincarnate* them. We abstract them as impersonal data. Abstract problems invite abstract solutions. And in the wrong hands that can lead, and *has* led, to final solutions like the Gulag and the Holocaust.

Parables and stories work in the opposite way. They're *incarnational*. They entertain and teach indirectly. But they do it by capturing the experiences of real or imagined individual persons. At their best, stories tell us truths, not merely facts. They help us see why we're alive, how we should live, and what the world means.

The strength of the stories that Rod Serling wrote for *The Twilight Zone* and *The Night Gallery* was their grasp of the humor, terror, ambiguity, and beauty of being human. For Serling, good and evil were real. Both had consequences.

One of his more memorable parables was “Escape Clause.” The plot is very simple. Serling’s main character is a man in perfect health. But he’s an obsessive hypochondriac. He’s terrified of death. He’s greedy to live forever. So one evening a “Mr. Cadwallader” – the Devil – shows up and makes him an offer that’s hard to refuse: eternal life for the modest price of his soul. There’s even an escape clause. Should the man tire of immortality at any point, the devil will gladly help him die. As to what might happen *after* he dies: Well, why focus on the fine print of something that may never happen?

The man has no intention of ever dying, so it’s a no-brainer deal. To test the bargain, he starts throwing himself in front of trains and arranging other fatal accidents. He always survives unscathed. At first this is fun and, thanks to the insurance settlements, lucrative. But gradually it gets stale.

The man’s death-defying stunts get increasingly extreme. Eventually he plans to jump off the top of his high-rise building as a new thrill. His wife, more and more frightened by his eccentric behavior, tries to stop him. In a tussle, she accidentally falls to her death. But the man sees this as an opportunity. He’ll plead guilty to first-degree murder. He’ll get the electric chair. And he’ll “ride the lightning” as many times as the state tries to kill him. It’ll be great laughs.

Except for one awkward detail. The court doesn’t cooperate. It sentences him to life in prison without parole: an endless, gray, “living death” in a six-by-ten foot space. And Mr. Cadwallader shows up in his cell that evening with the bargain’s escape clause – and to collect on his side of the contract.

The moral of the story is obvious: We’re never as smart as we think we are, and we’re usually less prudent than we need to be. It’s a fact we may want to ponder this Independence Day.

We’re the wealthiest and most powerful nation in history. Humility, though, is not our strong suit. A deep reservoir of good remains in America, with many good people working hard to preserve it. But reality can be cruel, and it hasn’t been suspended on our behalf.

We’re never “independent” of the consequences of our appetites, our assumptions and our actions. There’s no

convenient escape clause, no quick-fix solution, to problems we’ve behaved ourselves into. The devil will have his due. And he’s having it now.

We’re living through a summer of quarantines, COVID confusion, toxic election politics, and bitter racial conflict. These issues understandably demand our focus, and it’s a dangerous, weirdly biblical time. The country’s spirit of frustration is heavy and thick, like humidity before a storm.

There’s a curious quality of theater to the current wave of street demonstrations, monument desecrations, public confessions of guilt, news media hysteria, official cowardice, the irrelevance of the Church to the angry young, and Big Tech’s shoveling money at organizations committed to upending their economic system.



The wind is strong. I find myself bouncing from fear, to fury, to emotional fatigue. And there’s a small part of me, and I’m not alone, that longs irrationally for a purifying fire: *Burn it all down, and start over.* “The worse, the better” – the line so often (and wrongly) attributed to Lenin – starts to make

sense. But that road leads into very dark corners of the heart.

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* Those words of a very different kind of revolutionary are worth praying over this July 4.

As a nation we’re neither as good as our pride imagined, nor as bad as America’s chronic haters – their name is Legion – want us to believe. We’re simply another nation in the stream of time, with extraordinary strengths and some ugly weaknesses; gifted with things to contribute to the human experience, and captive to the sins of our own making.

So when we sing “God Bless America” this year, we need to really *mean* it, because conversion, beginning with the conversion of our own hearts, is the only real “escape clause.”<sup>4</sup>

This weekend marks the 244th anniversary of our nation’s independence. Ours is a nation founded and forged primarily by European immigrants of Protestant

Christian persuasion who came to this land to freely live their religious beliefs. The charters of each of the thirteen colonies were specifically Christian, e.g., "to the glory of God and in the name of Christ for propagating the Christian religion and invoking God's blessings."

The Continental Congresses were represented by Christian gentlemen of various denominations, but all shared a Bible-based, Christ-centered perspective and commitment. (This you wouldn't know from our modern history books or liberal media.) After much spirited and scholarly debate and deliberation and periodic days of fasting, repentance and prayer observed throughout the colonies, and many united worship services led by clergy of various Christian denominations, they unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 2, 1776, and proclaimed it ceremoniously two days later. Included in this short document are numerous phrases reflecting their shared Christian convictions, citing: "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God," "truths... that all men are created equal," with rights "endowed by their Creator," "appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world," "with a firm reliance on Divine Providence."

Many recognized that the practice of racial slavery was inconsistent with this declaration and opposed it, but under pressure to act in a unified manner, that issue was tabled, but the foundation was laid for its eventual demise.

No Constitution has lasted so long or afforded such freedom and blessings, and people of every ethnicity and nationality have sought to come here and stay here or to replicate our system of government.

Today mobs of godless Marxists, anarchists, and racists are trying to destroy our history and heritage. They do not gather for worship, fasting, or prayer. They cite no Scriptures or godly examples. They deface churches, burn buildings and topple statues of men they know little or nothing about. Instead of gathering to reason, discuss, and conduct civilized debates, they shout profanities and obscenities, and intimidate, silence, assault, and even kill people and police. They imagine that when they destroy and burn down everything, that something better will miraculously replace it. (Consider Chaz/Chop in Seattle.) They are the consequence of an anti-God movement that has invaded and progressively undermined our culture and that has been eroding and corrupting the beliefs and morals that undergird two centuries of blessings, which are now hanging by a thread.<sup>5</sup>

Now, while I could quite easily, and perhaps justifiably, rail against the wrongfulness and injustice of it all, I

will not. We are living in a time and place where civility has been overcome with rude behavior, where fact is now judged opinion and truth but baseless calumnies, where ignorance is beatified and destruction glorified, where logic and sound argument have been displaced *ad hominem*, where God and his only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and his Church are considered nonessential if they are at all considered. Life has become meaningless to far too many, regardless of race, color or creed.

A friend recently sent me a quote from a letter written by John Adams, the 2nd President of the United States of America to a friend in 1776 which I believe says it far better than I can. "*We may please ourselves with the prospect of free and popular governments, God grant us the way. But I fear that in every assembly members will obtain an influence by noise rather than greatness, and by ignorance and not learning, by contracted hearts and not large souls.*" I dare to say each of you would no doubt agree with that sentiment.

Someone, a year or two older than I, who I know from my long ago youth recently posted a meme on Facebook with a supposed quote from Mein Kampf (it sounded more like something out of the *Playbook for Radicals* of Saul Alinsky, if you ask me, but the source isn't the issue.) According to the meme, "The best way to take control over a people and control them utterly is to take a little of their freedom at a time, to erode rights by a thousand tiny and almost imperceptible reductions. In this way, the people will not see those rights and freedoms being removed until past the point at which these changes cannot be reversed." This acquaintance is so far off the progressive ideological deep end that I cringe to even go so far as to even acknowledge I know him. Of course, he attributed it all to our "Dictator in charge" which is typical of his all too frequent irrational diatribes. What struck me however was a comment he made when someone asked tongue in cheek, "You knew Hitler??" He said, and I quote, "Look, I flunked 10 hours of college history. What have you to say for (sic) your self?" He went on to say "0.5 for the 10 hours, made for a strain. Finally got the GPA over 2 and said to myself 'If that's all there is my friend, then let's keep dancing and I joined the Navy Reserve.'" Seemed mighty proud of his ignorance, a condition that has infected far more than the coronavirus with deadlier consequences.

My point in this is that whether young or old, these folks live among us and there is nothing we can say or do to extricate them from their self-imposed exile.

I am reminded of George Santayana who wrote in his *Reason in Common Sense, The Life of Reason* “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” which is often misquoted as “Those who ignore history are bound (or doomed) to repeat it.” Either way, the shoe fits.

As protestors around the country tear down statues, brutally beat rosary warriors, attack neighborhoods, threaten the destruction of churches, loot mom-and-pop stores, and place guillotines in front of the homes of the wealthy, it feels as if we have descended into hell or at least a third-world country. The brutality, chaos and anarchy these past several months have been nothing less than an assault on the very foundations of Western and American civilization. As we celebrate Independence Day, it is well worth considering exactly how much America has contributed to the world. Here are three things worth noting.

First, the Declaration of Independence asserts at a profound and fundamental level the inherent dignity of every human person. “All men are created equal.” Never since the foundation of Christianity has such a proclamation been made at any practical and meaningful level. It is well worth noting and celebrating that neither Thomas Jefferson, the principle author, nor the Continental Congress insisted that all Europeans, or all whites, or all Protestants were equal. It states quite directly and with utter clarity, *all men* are created equal. Though the Founders did not always live up to that promise, they made the promise nonetheless. Better yet, they declared the promise had been made at the beginning of creation by the very Creator Himself. “They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Again, this was about *all men*, not some men.

Second, the American republic secured a proper notion of the relationship of the human person to the community. Unlike much of early modern European political philosophy, such as that by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which sought to find the individual only within the national community, the American republicans understood that true solidity comes from the bottom up. That is, the human person finds his true strength and true

individuality, as a member of a local community. In this, the Americans followed the philosophy of Aristotle and Edmund Burke, not Thomas Hobbes or Rousseau.

Finally, America became religiously tolerant between 1774 and 1776. Despite what our primary educational textbooks might teach, the American colonies were brutally intolerant of almost every denomination not primarily their own. Baptists and Roman Catholics were especially hated throughout most of the colonies. During the American Revolution, necessity demanded and political philosophy recognized that all peoples—*all men*—were needed and praised in their fight for liberty. While religion remained the primary means by which to identify a person, that religion, when properly understood, valued republican liberty as a divine gift in this world.<sup>6</sup>

### God Bless America!

- 
1. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, translated by John K. Ryan, (New York: Random House LLC, 1960).
  2. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*; Gríma Wormtongue was the chief advisor to King Théoden of Rohan before being exposed as an agent and spy of Saruman. He ends up being the killer of Saruman, in the last climactic chapter of *The Return of the King*.
  3. G.K. Chesterton, (“What is America?,” *What I Saw in America*).
  4. Francis X. Maier, Senior Fellow in Catholic Studies at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, “Escape Clause” for *The Catholic Thing*, July 4, 2020.
  5. Ronald W. Stelzer, “In God We Trust: How to Remedy the American Crisis” for *The Imaginative Conservative*, July 3, 2020.
  6. Bradley J. Birzer, “Happy Birthday, America!” for *The Imaginative Conservative*, July 3, 2020.

## 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: What Every Catholic Should Know**

*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.

**G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Volume XXXVI**

*The Illustrated London News 1932-1934*

Ignatius Press

2011, 613 pages.

**Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism and the future of the West**

*R. R. Reno*

Regnery Gateway

2019, 182 pages.

**The Irony of Modern Catholic History:**

How the Church rediscovered itself

*George Weigel*

Basic Books

2019, 322 pages.

**Letters on Liturgy**

*Father Dwight Longenecker*

Angelico Press

2020, 164 pages.

**Immortal Combat**

*Father Dwight Longenecker*

Sophia Institute Press

2020, 144 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)

**Catholic Herald**

[www.catholicherald.co.uk](http://www.catholicherald.co.uk)

**Chronicles**

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

**Gilbert!**

[www.chesterton.org](http://www.chesterton.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.intellectuالتakeout.org](http://www.intellectuالتakeout.org)

**Life News**

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

**Life Site News**

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

**OnePeterFive**

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

**Catholic Vote**

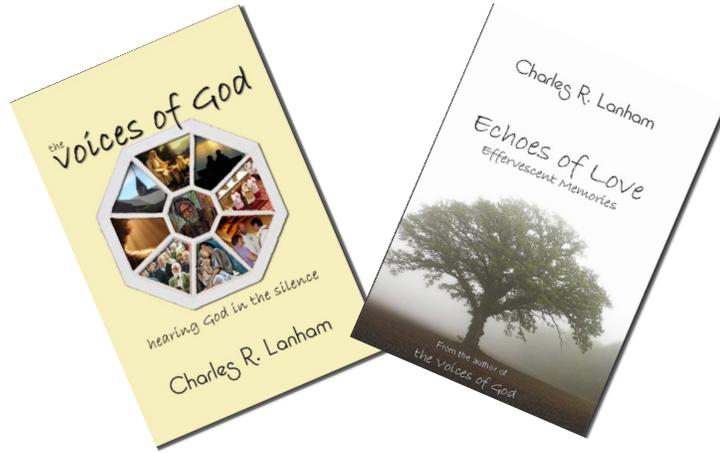
[www.catholicvote.org](http://www.catholicvote.org)

**The Catholic Thing**

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

**PragerU**

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



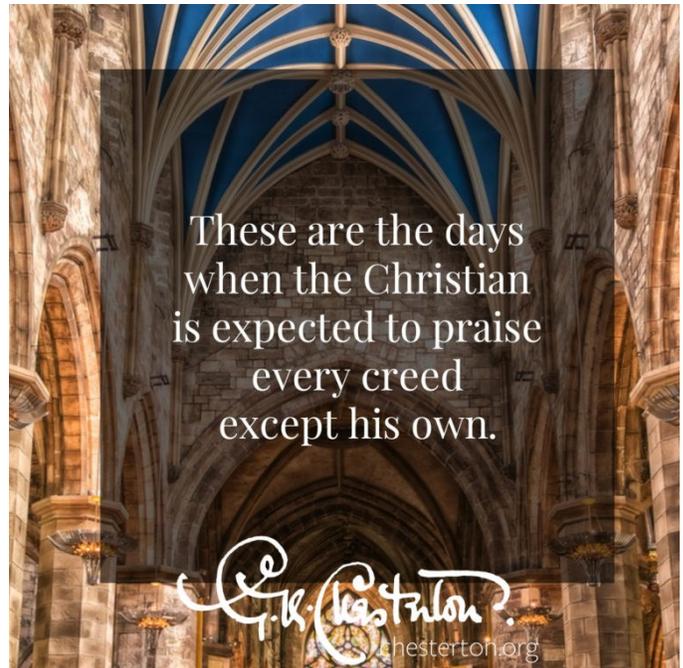
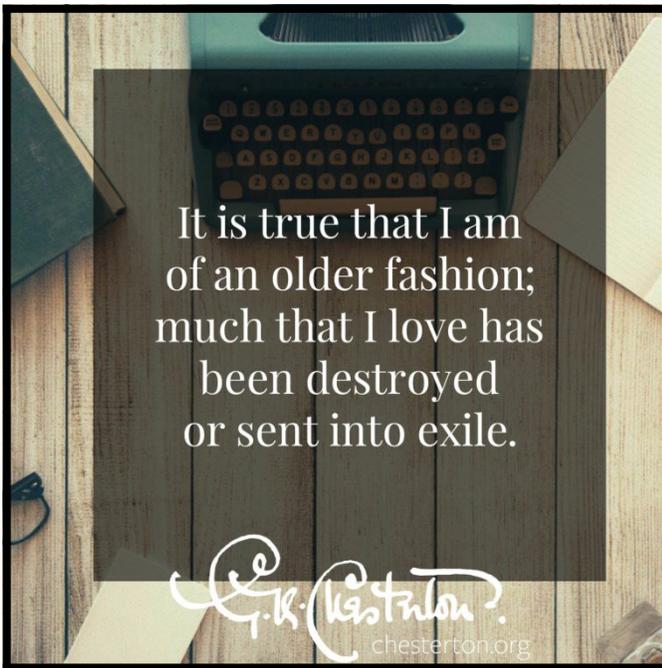
Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

[deaconscorner.org](https://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](mailto: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>.