

October 09, 2020
Volume 04—Number 52



A journal for restless minds

Colloquī *: to discuss*

Spirituality of the Divine Polyhedral

An infinity of persons

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Spirituality of the Divine Polyhedral

An infinity of persons

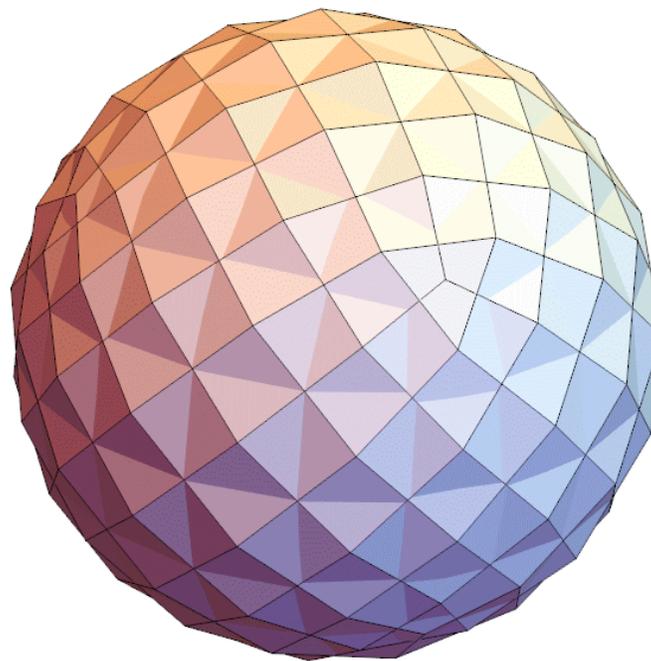
According to these aging eyes, this essay, number 52, marks the ending of yet another colloquial year. Despite the dreadful artificiality of these months of quarantine and lockdown, life continues at a reckless pace; I truly do not know where the days have flown so fast away. For the past few months, I have been reminiscing, spending time reflecting on what I have written, the thoughts that I have so diligently penned to paper. For the most part I am satisfied; I have no regrets, nothing to wish away even if I could. With this issue I will conclude the fourth volume of collected essays. It does not seem possible yet the evidence rests before me; there is simply no denying the presence of some 1,500 pages. Whether anyone will ever suffer through them all is of little note, though I hope a few will bother if nothing else to bend the cover of one or two. I prefaced the first volume in part with the following brief citation.

On the sixty-ninth anniversary of my birth, which now seems far distant, the first issue of *Colloqui* was published. I had previously written some 230 essays for the parish bulletin under the guise of *Conversations at Table*.¹ Though well-received, budget constraints resulted in a number of cost-cutting measures, including further continuation of *Conversations at Table*. Thus, *Colloqui* was born. Now, four years and some two-hundred issues later, it remains a labor of love.

Some number of readers have asked whether I should consider binding these weekly musings into a book. As Chesterton noted introducing his marvelous book *Orthodoxy*: “It was perhaps an incautious suggestion to make to a person only too ready to write books upon the feeblest provocation” and so, in order to satisfy those who have made such an “incautious suggestion,” in late January 2020 I began the tedious process of do-

ing just that.

Now, as *Colloqui* is but a toddler, a mere four-and-a-half years of age, I thought there might be enough for a small book or four (one for each volume). But, like many a guileless parent, I was caught completely unawares at my child’s prodigiousness. The fifty-two issues of Volume I (June 2, 2016—May 19, 2017) soon filled well over 500 pages, well beyond my poor expectations, and more than the small book or four which I had thought to bring up into adulthood. It became appallingly clear that some corrective discipline would be necessary. As I bent to the onerous task of reexamining old annoying habits, I discovered inattention to trifles a problem most in need of disciplinary action and serious remedy.



I have tried my best to remove some “nonessential” pages without cutting the heart out of it and for the most part I am satisfied with the results. What is missing from the first volume of *Colloqui* has not been permanently lost but merely moved to another book which needs only another “incautious suggestion.”

While every issue can still be found on my website (deaconsconer.org) I sincerely hope this book will find a place on more bookshelves and enjoy a wider audience. As you will quickly discover—at least I hope that to be the case—I have a bias toward objective truth and a severe prejudice against deliberate ignorance. As I have noted in every issue:

Colloqui 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 *Colloqui* 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.

As you will quickly discover, or perhaps not, the essays are a motley lot, often akin to strangers met for an instant or of distant cousins far removed. It is the nature of my wandering mind to question and to ponder but more than mere mental exercise, I blame the Holy Spirit for my rambling muse. There are threads throughout which weave a tale, a tapestry bearing witness to the Divine and the profane. Each thread unique, every note a song unto itself and, yet, by themselves, a symphony incomplete.

I must warn you that some essays have indeed generated unsettling controversy to which I have been quite rightly taken to task. I have not, however, nor will I keep them from seeing the light of day. I wrote them, they were my words and thoughts, and I published them. Others have read and commented on them and I have responded; in other words, we discussed our differences. You, dear reader, must judge for yourself the truth.²

Little did I realize how promiscuous my pen when I started this collection for what I wrote each week was quickly shadowed memory, seldom recalled given the pressure of another week ever urgent, pressing feverishly upon this fevered mind. Needless to say, I have written far more than I suspected, which for that I do apologize—though not enough to forgo wasting more paper with my scribblings, God willing. I have every intention of continuing as long as the Lord God permits my doing so; I cannot help but pray of Him (channeling Augustine) “Lord still my pen but not yet.” I cannot help but sorrow for having come to writing so late in life; I often wonder what might have been; but no matter, there is no turning back, no rewind, no reset. I can only pray for mercy and forgiveness from a Love beyond all measure. Like Augustine, I submit to His will, He touched me, and I burn for His peace.

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.³

All that maudlin memory aside, let me make quick work of this essay so to bed this longish volume. The title may challenge the querulous, but I beg of you, have patience, in due course I will explain. I believe I shall begin with a few sage words from the ever-present, but of late friend, G.K. Chesterton, who more than one-hundred and twelve years ago complained, “In what religious age was a man allowed to thunder from the pulpit with a mask on his face?”⁴ One could readily come to believe he was asking on this very moment were he not known to have been so long ago laid to rest. That is, perhaps, what most surprises me, his ancestral prescience over so much that now demands our attention. Yet a decade later, Chesterton would write, “It is evident that while we believe in progress we never progress. Like other simple things, it dawns on us very slowly; but in the light of it many things are clear. Progress is the protection of all oppressions today; because progress tells us we are better than our fathers, even where conscience tells us we are worse than ourselves.”⁵ But another decade would advance when he would observe, “People are always prone to talk nonsense about race,”⁶ while a mere four years further he would note, “We Catholics must realise that by this time we are living in Pagan lands; and that the barbarians around us know not what they do.”⁷

Two thoughts come pressing hard to this point: first, that not much has changed—one could argue that any change has but regressed from bad to worse—from then to now, and second, how stupid and intransigent the human race, since the creature God created to be “fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28) has shown itself to be utterly incapable of learning how to tie a sturdy knot or come in out of the rain. One could reasonably argue, like the domesticated turkey that will drown staring up with mouth agape at downpouring rain, the human race any less foolish.

There comes a point when even a fool must admit the absurdity of foolishness, the irrationality of stupidity, and the silliness of insanity. Whether we have reached such a point is debatable but there are small cracks in the veneer which indicate a increasing disturbance in the force. Consider the public service announcement from the Office of the Governor of California on October 3, 2020 which strongly “encourages” those going out to eat with members of your household: “Don’t forget to keep your mask on in between bites. Do your part to keep those around you

healthy. #SlowtheSpread.” Oxymoronic, in the same PSA, the California COVID-19 task force (covid19.ca.gov) provides “COVID-19 DINER TIP 1: Minimize the number of times you take your mask off.” Which is it? On between bites or bites through the mask? It is certainly one way to encourage chewing your food slowly, slow the intake. I suppose one approach would be to remove the mask, place all your food in the mask, then replace the mask using it as a feedbag. Yeah, that would make sense. Seems Chesterton’s, “In what religious age was a man allowed to thunder from the pulpit with a mask on his face?” is after all not that outrageous. In fact, current California (and elsewhere) politics appears to have gone Chesterton one better, putting a lock on church doors and throwing away the keys. For public safety, of course.

We have exchanged fear for courage, opinion for reason, subjective feelings for objective truth, progressive ideology for reality, the material for the spiritual, the mundane and immanent for the transcendent and the divine. We have replaced the extraordinary with the mundane, the glorious with the banal, destroyed what is good and beautiful, mocked and scourged those with hopes and aspirations toward greatness, crucified dreamers—thus killing their impossible dreams, condemned the hero who dares march into hell for a heavenly cause.

We have lost the desire to love God, love our neighbor. Why? Because we have lost the ability to love, even of ourselves; all that is left is hatred and hopelessness, anger, and despair. Nowhere is such hopelessness more evident than in the arenas of academia and public discourse. Where once, the academy existed to open minds to new ideas, to explore the wisdom of the past so to stand upon ancestral shoulders to reach the stars, alas, no more; today the academy rarely produces little more than godless socialist indoctrination and the inculcation of mind-numbing ideological propaganda. Argument and unfettered debate are no longer allowable exercises for the malleable mind, rather the classroom has become padded

cells where minds are “rehabilitated,” not educated. Wisdom is neither sought nor welcome. It is as the apostle asked, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor 1:20)

Out of the academy, the crops of ideological proselytes spew forth, fodder for the riotous mob, the progressive-powered elite, and the radical prelates of the new church of State. Armed with slogans and minds of mush, they trade public discourse for mindless rage, singularly cancelling (silencing) any who would dare oppose them. Those who would dare express “objectionable” opinions must be opposed, first by an uproar, often on social media, which soon leads to targeting the offender with some serious repercussion, such as the loss of a job, a smear on his or her public reputation, or, as has occurred more than a few times, driven some to suicide.

“Cancel culture” is used to describe the phenomenon of people—

sometimes just one person, often groups of varying sizes—who call for people to be fired, shamed, or otherwise penalized for an offense. This can be for perceived improper actions, expressing opinions others dislike, or even based on no other reason than that someone is standing in someone else’s way personally and professionally and therefore must be destroyed.

Very often, it works. A mob of people, often on social media, complain, and a company or other institution swiftly caves and punishes, demotes, or terminates the employment of the target of the ire. Often, the target is not given sufficient chance to defend himself. The only thing that figures in charge are aware of is a fiery throng of anger, and they seek to quench it as quickly as possible. It is ironic, that as increasingly vociferous calls are made to abolish the official police force and close prisons, there is a growing push towards giving power to an uncredentialed outrage mob, and wrecking people’s reputations and livelihoods without any semblance of a fair trial.

There is a way to fight this, however. Surprisingly, the proponents of “cancel culture” will frequently abandon their attack after someone stand up to them, returns the attack, or simply ignores them. The outrage mob simply falls dormant or moves on to a new target.



The problem, of course, comes when those whose duty it is to protect the citizenry refuse to do so to placate, pander and encourage the mob. Those who fall victim to the mob, whether businessman, clergyman, beggarman, or chief (of police), have too often found themselves standing alone, powerless—and in many cases, thwarted by political morons who rather enjoy the misery and the cruelty inflicted upon those they view of little consequence; they would rather side with those who they perceive, mistakenly, to be the stronger and in line with their own ideological views. Chris Chan explains how “in today’s society, it seems extremely likely that Chesterton himself could be the focus of multiple ‘cancel culture’ attacks.”

Gone are the days when two opponents could rent out a lecture hall and state their opposing viewpoints, and the audience attended out of an interest to watch the battle of ideas play out on a stage. Now, many proponents of “cancel culture” contend that even the slightest opposition or contradiction of their accepted worldviews is an act of cruelty and even violence that must be eradicated, ostensibly in the purpose of creating a better and more just world.

If Chesterton was alive today and using the technology available today to promote his message to the world, it is likely that a lot of people would take umbrage to his takes on ... well, everything. Therefore, they would call for Chesterton’s social media platforms to be shut down, his YouTube videos to be demonetized, his speaking gigs to be cancelled, his publishers to stop printing his books, and essentially, do everything in their power to remove his influence on the world and reduce him to penury.

I remember that just two decades ago, pundits were hailing the advent of the Internet as the coming of a new golden age of shared information and opinions, potentially uniting the world in an enlightened time of understanding and compassion. From a 2020 perspective, this opinion no longer seems so much sweetly naïve as it feels completely detached from reality. A recent poll showed that a large percentage of the populace is afraid that sharing opinions will lead to terrible consequences for them.

When speaking one’s mind, writing an essay, or voicing disagreement are seen as a terrific gamble that’s not worth the trouble or risk, what does that do to culture, society, intellectual life, and human interaction as a whole? The whole point of my series of Chesterton’s debates was to illustrate how people could take their disagreements and use them to create literary art, drawing in people to watch or read along with them, poten-

tially persuading people to their side, or at least leaving them with a deeper perspective of why people held opposing perspectives.

The purpose of debate ought not to be to crush or humiliate, for the ultimate goal of crafting a genuine argument is to convince rather than destroy. If “cancel culture” wrecks someone’s life, people may have advanced their cause, or have they? And what has been lost in the process? Freedom to interact, courage to express oneself, encouragement to think, and motivation to go against the flow are sacrificed.

To those who may believe that some people deserve to be removed from the public sphere, or for those who despair over the current state of public discourse, I shall conclude with Chesterton’s insights: “Charity means pardoning the unpardonable ... Hope means hoping when things are hopeless ... And Faith means believing the incredible.” Adding to that, if we are to popularize Chesterton’s approach to debate and controversy to the public square, we must be prepared to build bridges where the ground seems too unstable to support the weight of a unifying structure, and we must also be prepared to stand by those opinions that we believe to be true, even in the wake of a firestorm of criticism.⁸

There is an ill wind blowing over this land; a global tempest coming from east and west carrying a surfeit of death to freedom wherever it expels its cruel and fetid breath. It is not a submicroscopic agent, a virus, for such an agent can be found out, fought, and conquered, such is the ingenuity of man. No, this is a pernicious thought, nothing more, and yet, far more lethal, for it is a killer of the mind, a destroyer of the soul, the human spirit. It is known by a common surname (*ism*), a family much too familiar: progressivism, humanism, materialism, utopianism, relativism, socialism, Marxism, fascism, communism, terrorism, atheism, nihilism, pantheism; it is a profane and prolific lot, sired by Satan to raise unholy hell upon the human race. How sapient Chesterton proclaimed “Progress is the protection of all oppressions to-day” for progressivism demands protection, above all else, from their own self-produced oppressions.

The successors of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ, have long condemned Satan’s *familiae profectum*, *familia malum*. Pope Leo XIII issued his first encyclical, *Inscrutabili Dei Consilio*, in the first year of his pontificate by acknowledging and urging his brother bishops to engage in the battle then being waged for the salvation of souls.

For, from the very beginning of Our pontificate, the sad sight has presented itself to Us of the evils by which the human race is oppressed on every side: the widespread subversion of the primary truths on which, as on its foundations, human society is based; the obstinacy of mind that will not brook any authority however lawful; the endless sources of disagreement, whence arrive civil strife, and ruthless war and bloodshed; the contempt of law which molds characters and is the shield of righteousness; the insatiable craving for things perishable, with complete forgetfulness of things eternal, leading up to the desperate madness whereby so many wretched beings, in all directions, scruple not to lay violent hands upon themselves; the reckless mismanagement, waste, and misappropriation of the public funds; the shamelessness of those who, full of treachery, make semblance of being champions of country, of freedom, and every kind of right; in fine, the deadly kind of plague which infects in its inmost recesses, allowing it no respite and foreboding ever fresh disturbances and final disaster.⁹

Now, the source of these evils lies chiefly, We are convinced, in this, that the holy and venerable authority of the Church, which in God's name rules mankind, upholding and defending all lawful authority, has been despised and set aside. The enemies of public order, being fully aware of this, have thought nothing better suited to destroy the foundations of society than to make an unflagging attack upon the Church of God, to bring her into discredit and odium by spreading infamous calumnies and accusing her of being opposed to genuine progress.¹⁰

It is perfectly clear and evident, venerable brothers, that the very notion of civilization is a fiction of the brain if it rest not on the abiding principles of truth and the unchanging laws of virtue and justice, and if unfeigned love knit not together the wills of men, and gently control the interchange and the character of their mutual service.¹¹

Furthermore, that kind of civilization which conflicts with the doctrines and laws of holy Church is nothing but a worthless imitation and meaningless name. ... Undoubtedly, that cannot by any means be accounted the perfection of civilized life which sets all legitimate authority boldly at defiance; nor can that be regarded as liberty which, shamefully and by the vilest means, spreading false principles, and freely indulging the sensual gratification of lustful desires, claims impunity for all crime and misdemeanor, and thwarts the goodly influence of the worthiest citizens of whatsoever class. Delusive, perverse, and misleading as these principles, they cannot possibly have any inherent power to perfect the human race and fill it with blessing, for "sin maketh nations miserable" (1 Tm 6:10). Such principles,

as a matter of course, must hurry nations, corrupted in mind and heart, into every kind of infamy, weaken all right order, and thus, sooner or later, bring the standing and peace of the State to the very brink of ruin.¹²

Pope Leo XIII would soon follow with *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, which called out the evils of socialism, communism, and nihilism.

We speak of that sect of men who, under various and almost barbarous names, are called socialists, communists, or nihilists, and who, spread over all the world, and bound together by the closest ties in a wicked confederacy, no longer seek the shelter of secret meetings, but, openly and boldly marching forth in the light of day, strive to bring to a head what they have long been planning—the overthrow of all civil society whatsoever.

Surely these are they who, as the sacred Scriptures testify, "Defile the flesh, despise dominion and blaspheme majesty" (Jude 8). They leave nothing untouched or whole which by both human and divine laws has been wisely decreed for the health and beauty of life. They refuse obedience to the higher powers, to whom, according to the admonition of the Apostle, every soul ought to be subject, and who derive the right of governing from God; and they proclaim the absolute equality of men in rights and duties. They debase the natural union of man and woman, which is held sacred even among barbarous peoples; and its bond, by which the family is chiefly held together, they weaken, or even deliver up to lust. Lured, in fine, by the greed of present goods, which is "the root of all evils which some coveting have erred from the faith" (1 Tim 6:10), they assail the right of property sanctioned by natural law; and by a scheme of horrible wickedness, while they seem desirous of caring for the needs and satisfying the desires of all men, they strive to seize and hold in common whatever has been acquired either by title of lawful inheritance, or by labor of brain and hands, or by thrift in one's mode of life.¹³

In June, 1881 Pope Leo XIII promulgated his fifth encyclical, *Diuturnum*: On the Origin of Civil Power.

Although man, when excited by a certain arrogance and contumacy, has often striven to cast aside the reins of authority, he has never yet been able to arrive at the state of obeying no one.¹⁴

Indeed, very many men of more recent times, ... say that all power comes from the people; so that those who exercise it in the State do so not as their own, but as delegated to them by the people, and that, by this rule, it can be revoked by the will of the very people by whom it was delegated. But from these, Catholics

dissent, who affirm that the right to rule is from God, as from a natural and necessary principle.¹⁵

But, as regards political power, the Church rightly teaches that it comes from God, for it finds this clearly testified in the sacred Scriptures and in the monuments of antiquity; besides, no other doctrine can be conceived which is more agreeable to reason, or more in accord with the safety of both princes and peoples.¹⁶

Those who believe civil society to have risen from the free consent of men, looking for the origin of its authority from the same source, say that each individual has given up something of his right, and that voluntarily every person has put himself into the power of the one man in whose person the whole of those rights has been centered. But it is a great error not to see, what is manifest, that men, as they are not a nomad race, have been created, without their own free will, for a natural community of life. It is plain, moreover, that the pact which they allege is openly a falsehood and a fiction, and that has no authority to confer on political power such great force, dignity, and firmness as the safety of the State and the common good of the citizens require. Then only will the government have all those ornaments and guarantees, when it is understood to emanate from God as its august and most sacred source.¹⁷

His holiness, Pope Pius XI wrote in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) of Pope Leo XIII, who had warned against the evils of Liberalism and Socialism¹⁸, “for the one had proved that it was utterly unable to solve the social problem aright, and the other, proposing a remedy far worse than the evil itself, would have plunged human society into great dangers.”¹⁹ Pius XI further added that “the Apostolic voice,” of Leo XIII, “did not thunder forth in vain.

On the contrary, not only did the obedient children of the Church hearken to it with marveling admiration and hail it with the greatest applause, but many also who were wandering from the truth, from the unity of faith, and nearly all who since then either in private study or in enacting legislation have concerned themselves with the social and economic question.²⁰

However, in spite of such great agreement, there were some who were not a little disturbed; and so it happened that the teaching of Leo XIII, so noble and lofty and so utterly new to worldly ears, was held suspect by some, even among Catholics, and to certain ones it even gave offense. For it boldly attacked and overturned the idols of Liberalism, ignored long-standing prejudices, and was in advance of its time beyond all expectation, so that the slow of heart disdained to study this new social philosophy and the timid feared to scale to so

lofty a height. There were some also who stood, indeed, in awe at its splendor, but regarded it as a kind of imaginary ideal of perfection more desirable than attainable.²¹

With regard to civil authority, Leo XIII, boldly breaking through the confines imposed by Liberalism, fearlessly taught that government must not be thought a mere guardian of law and of good order, but rather must put forth every effort so that “through the entire scheme of laws and institutions ... both public and individual well-being may develop spontaneously out of the very structure and administration of the State. Just freedom of action must, of course, be left both to the individual citizens and to families, yet only on condition that the common good be preserved and wrong to any individual be abolished. The function of the rulers of the State, moreover, is to watch over the community and its parts; but in protecting private individuals in their rights, chief consideration ought to be given to the weak and the poor.”²²

Pope Paul VI would subsequently issue his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*: On the Development of Peoples, in 1967 in which he would take note of the conflict between traditional civilizations and the new elements of industrial civilizations.

The conflict of the generations is made more serious by the tragic dilemma: whether to retain ancestral institutions and convictions and renounce progress, or to admit techniques and civilizations from outside and reject along with the traditions of the past all their human richness. In effect, the moral, spiritual and religious supports of the past too often give way without securing in return any guaranteed of a place in the new world.

In this confusion the temptation becomes stronger to risk being swept away towards types of messianism which give promises but create illusions. The resulting dangers are patent: violent popular reactions, agitation towards insurrection, and a drifting toward totalitarian ideologies. Such are the data of the problem. Its seriousness is evident to all.²³

These few mentions should be sufficient evidence of the consistent magisterial teachings of the Church condemning the evils of Satan’s *familiae profectum, familia malum*. This then brings this essay’s cryptic title to the fore. For two millennia the encyclical has been the principal teaching instrument of the magisterium, the apostolic successors under the authority of the occupant of the Chair of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ.

There are many other documents and teachings, but the encyclical is the *prima epistola, primum in ordine dignitatis*, only an *Apostolic Constitution* ranks higher in importance. In 1740, Pope Benedict XIV wrote a letter titled *Ubi primum*, which is generally regarded as the first encyclical in a modern sense. The term is now used almost exclusively for a kind of letter sent out by the Pope. For the modern Roman Catholic Church, a papal encyclical is a specific category of papal document, a kind of letter concerning **Catholic doctrine**, sent by the Pope and usually addressed especially to patriarchs, primates, archbishops and bishops who are in communion with the Holy See. The form of the address can vary widely, and may concern bishops in a particular area, or designate a wider audience. Papal encyclicals usually take the form of a papal brief due to their more personal nature as opposed to the formal papal bull. They are usually written in Latin and, like all papal documents, the title of the encyclical is usually taken from its first few words (its *incipit*).

Pope Pius XII held that papal encyclicals, even when they are not of ordinary magisterium, can nonetheless be sufficiently authoritative to end theological debate on a particular question.

Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their Teaching Authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which it is true to say: "He who heareth you, heareth me" (Luke 10:16); and generally what is expounded and inculcated in Encyclical Letters already for other reasons appertains to Catholic doctrine. But if the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the same Pontiffs, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians.

It is also true that theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living Teaching Authority is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they can really never be exhausted. Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh; on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile, as we know from experience. But

for this reason even positive theology cannot be on a par with merely historical science. For, together with the sources of positive theology **God has given to His Church a living Teaching Authority to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Teaching Authority of the Church.** [*emphasis added*] But if the Church does exercise this function of teaching, as she often has through the centuries, either in the ordinary or extraordinary way, it is clear how false is a procedure which would attempt to explain what is clear by means of what is obscure. Indeed the very opposite procedure must be used. Hence Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, teaching that the most noble office of theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation, added these words, and with very good reason: "in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church."²⁴

It is essential and crucial to understand that the full purpose of the encyclical is to elucidate and explain, with explicit clarity "what is contained in the deposit of faith." The teaching authority granted by Christ to the apostles and their successors is directed toward instructing the faithful on what we are to believe and how we are to act for the salvation of our immortal souls.

As one writer recently noted, "The kindest thing one can say about Pope Francis's new social encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is that it's totally incomprehensible."²⁵ Another writer wrote: "In his longest encyclical yet, offering 'a new vision of fraternity,' Pope Francis restates his frequently repeated pronouncements on migration, markets, media, interfaith dialogue, populism, nationalism, redistribution of wealth and the death penalty."²⁶ Yet another, "One of the first things that will strike readers of Pope Francis's new social encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is its sheer length. At about 43,000 words in English (including footnotes), that's more than the Book of Genesis (32,406) and three times the size of the Gospel of John (15,635)."²⁷ What is true, after wading through this overweight "letter" is it follows precisely Francis' words to "make a mess." It is a stark departure from what has long been the sole purpose (as shown above) of the encyclical; it is, in fact, antithetical to previously established doctrine and the deposit of faith. I do not suggest this lightly nor do I intend any disrespect of

the pope, I only wish to state the obvious: *Fratelli Tutti* is an incomprehensible mess which adds nothing toward a greater understanding of the deposit of faith, and just as Pope Pius XII noted, “it is clear how false is a procedure which would attempt to explain what is clear by means of what is obscure.”

Where, always and everywhere, the Church has rightly and with great vehemence condemned Satan’s *familia ma-lum* (progressivism, socialism, liberalism, etc.) Pope Francis openly embraces such isms, contradicting long-established Church teachings. As Michael Warren Davis writes,

I was startled by one particular section-heading: “Liberty, equality, and fraternity”—the motto of the French Revolution. (Just to be sure, I checked the Vatican’s official French translation. Sure enough, it reads: “*Liberté, égalité et fraternité.*”) Why, I wondered, would the Vicar of Christ appropriate the slogan of the most violently anti-Catholic regime in history? The holy Martyrs of Compiègne must be darting about in the heavens like sparks through stubble.”

The Revolution crucified the Church in France. When we hear a Catholic cry, “*Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*” we can’t help but hear, “I have no king but Caesar... Free Barabbas!”

And that’s only the most obvious offense. The document is full of confusion and contradiction. ... What the Holy Father condemns is not nationalism, but nationhood. What he condemns is not liberalism, but liberty. He doesn’t believe that countries have a right to their own culture and customs, to security and welfare. In this, he is unique in the 2,000-year history of Catholic social thought.

What’s unfortunate is that *Fratelli Tutti* has some excellent moments. Francis warns against “a kind of ‘deconstructionism,’ whereby human freedom claims to create everything starting from zero, is making headway in today’s culture. The one thing it leaves in its wake is the drive to limitless consumption and expressions of empty individualism.” This is a legitimate pastoral concern, and one that Catholics—of all political stripes—ought to heed.

The Holy Father is also spot-on, as usual, about the dangers posed by modern technology. He observes that, amidst a “frenzy of texting,” a “new lifestyle is emerging, where we create only what we want and exclude all that we cannot control or know instantly and superficially.” That, too, is perfectly valid pastoral advice.

The key word is *pastoral*. That is Francis’s strong suit. Whenever he veers into politics, the Holy Father completely loses the plot. The few incisive, relevant observations are buried in so much sentimental nonsense about immigration and nuclear war that the encyclical becomes unreadable.

At one point, Francis opines: “**Our model must be that of a polyhedron, in which the value of each individual is respected.**” I’ve read that section four times and still have no idea what he means. **The whole document is littered with such pseudo-poetic, Postmodern jargon.** [*emphasis added*]

There’s a broader point to be made here. None of Francis’s social encyclicals do what they’re supposed to do, which is help Catholics come to grips with the important political and cultural issues of our time. They only wind up confusing the faithful, particularly on the Pope’s own priorities.

For instance, the Holy Father has stated on at least one occasion that abortion is the preeminent political issue of our time. He has spoken against the barbarous practice in the strongest possible terms, including comparing it to the Holocaust. For the informed Catholic, there can be no question where Francis stands. Yet *Fratelli Tutti* makes one passing reference to the matter. Why does he spend so much time talking about the environment and refugees when tens of millions of unborn children are killed in the womb every single year?

This is the great danger behind Francis’s rambling mis-sives. I don’t doubt that he cares deeply about the plague of abortion, but he gives the impression that it’s less important than saving the rainforest or thwarting “populism.” It’s inevitable, then, that millions of Catholics follow suit.

Like Davis, I have tried to understand what Pope Francis means, not only in his specific mention but for much of his social letter (I cannot honestly call it an encyclical). Pope Francis is clearly a progressive, a liberal, and arguably, a socialist in papal robes. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis is long on politics and short to absent on doctrine. It has become perfectly clear that German bishops, led by Francis’ old ally Reinhard Cardinal Marx, in their synodal journey, are headed toward heresy and schism. The German bishops convened their earlier synod to discuss “authority and separation of powers,” “sexual morality,” “the priestly mode of life,” and “women at the service of ecclesiastical offices.” “That is Modernese for Gallicanism²⁸, legitimizing sodomy, abolishing clerical celibacy, and ordaining female deacons, respectively.”

It became perfectly clear that Cardinal Marx and his fellows were not only looking to bring the German Church into heresy and schism: they were keen to set an example for other bishops' conferences looking to do the same. Some have argued that, even by proceeding with their synod—in direct defiance of the Pope—they are already in a state of schism.

Church-watchers have long known that Cardinal Marx is a crypto-Lutheran, though he comes less *crypto* with each passing year. In a 2015 interview, he insisted that Martin Luther “did not aim to split the Church but, with his calls to reform, wished to draw attention to grievances that obscured the message of the Gospel.” His Eminence went on to say that, after five decades of dialogue with German Lutherans, “it is possible for a Catholic Christian to read Luther’s texts appreciatively, and to learn from his thoughts.”

Cardinal Marx is also, unsurprisingly, a communist. In 2018, he said that Karl Marx “quite impressed” him. The Cardinal learned from his namesake that “human rights remain incomplete without material participation,” and even claimed that, “without him, there would not be any Catholic social doctrine.” (That would come as a great shock to Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.) “We are all standing on the shoulders of Karl Marx,” he concluded—to which every faithful Catholic replies, “Speak for yourself, Eminence.”

Cardinal Marx wants to turn the Catholic Church in Germany into another mainline, left-wing Protestant sect which uses religion as a front for radical left-wing politics. That isn’t a conspiracy theory, because there’s no conspiracy: Cardinal Marx and his comrades are all perfectly open about their agenda, and perfectly happy to defy Church authorities who stand in their way.

Some would argue that Pope Francis is at least partly responsible for the German disaster due to his emphasis on “synodality” and interreligious dialogue, and his penchant for progressive politics. They would be correct.

These two events are happening simultaneously: the United States presidential election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and the German “synodal journey” that will commit the *Deutsche Bischofskonferenz* to heresy, separating it from the Catholic Church, and potentially leading tens of millions of Germans into apostasy.

On October 3, Pope Francis published one of his longest and most sweeping encyclicals to date. *Fratelli Tutti* does not mention heresy or schism once, but the word “xenophobia” appears four times. “Walls” (meaning those that defend national borders) are mentioned thir-

teen times, always derogatorily. “Populism” appears twelve times, never in a positive light. There are also references to “local narcissism” and “violent nationalism,” among other buzzwords that might seem more at home in *The New York Times* than in a papal encyclical.

It seems the Holy Father is a little preoccupied, and not with the Church in Germany.

Francis’s constant forays into politics—particularly his invectives against President Trump—have always baffled orthodox Catholics. Of course, we do not defend “local narcissism,” whatever that means. And should anything like a “violent nationalism” appear in the United States, we would readily oppose it. At present, the only political violence in this country is being committed by Black Lives Matter, Antifa, and other left-wing groups supported by Joe Biden and the Democratic Party. Curiously, there was no mention of such progressive violence in *Fratelli Tutti*, even though several American bishops have voiced their support for these insurrectionists.

Now that I think of it, there’s no reference to the fact that Catholic churches and statues of the saints across the country have been vandalized by these mobs. It is silent on the fact that most self-identified Catholics in this country support Mr. Biden, who supports partial-birth abortion, and who blasphemously claims that his position is compatible with the Catholic faith. And the Holy Father appears to be unconcerned that Mr. Biden’s running mate, Kamala Harris, has tried to bar orthodox Catholics from holding public office on account of their faith.

Francis seems oblivious to the real situation here in the United States. And why should it be otherwise? Francis is the pastor of one billion Catholics worldwide; he can’t spend all day watching Fox News and reading *The Wall Street Journal*. He’s also an elderly Italo-Argentinian who doesn’t use a computer; all that he knows about this country is what’s fed to him by Vatican bureaucrats. Yet that only makes his interventions into U.S. politics the more confounding.

We honor, love, and respect the Holy Father. But only the most fanatical Mottramist²⁹ could regard Pope Francis as a qualified analyst on current events in the United States. Contrary to what some super-duper-ultramontanists suppose, the Bishops of Rome do not enjoy a universal competence. When Pope Francis isn’t speaking *ex cathedra* on faith and morals, it’s entirely possible that he has no idea what he’s talking about. That isn’t insolent, or even disrespectful. It’s just a statement of fact.

In fairness to the Pope, he is obviously working to bring

the German bishops back into line. If he's doing so quietly, that may be to his—our—strategic advantage. I don't know. Francis and I rarely speak on the phone anymore, and all my spies in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* were told to work from home during Covid.

All we can do is make an earnest plea, as children to our Holy Father, that he focus on cleaning up the mess in Germany. We can only pray that he does everything in his power to keep the bishops from leading their people over a cliff, and to prevent them from exporting their Modernism to other countries.

Sadly, perhaps even tragically but certainly deliberately, Pope Francis seems wont to ignore the wisdom of his Predecessor, Pius XII, who stated unequivocally that “speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile.” *Fratelli Tutti*, in the entire, neglects the deposit of faith, instead reiterates and embellishes much of what Pope Francis has previously written. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he wrote that “the whole is greater than the part” which is antithetical to the belief that every human being is a unique and sovereign creature made in the image and likeness of God.

Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone.³¹

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis mentions the polyhedron again, not once, but four times. “The global need not stifle, nor the particular prove barren; our model must be that of a polyhedron, in which the value of each individual is respected, where ‘the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts.’”³² “Political charity is also expressed in a spirit of openness to everyone. Government leaders should be the first to make the sacrifices that foster encounter and to seek convergence on at least some issues. They should be ready to listen to other points of view and to make room for everyone. Through sacrifice

and patience, they can help to create a beautiful polyhedral reality in which everyone has a place. Here, economic negotiations do not work. Something else is required: an exchange of gifts for the common good. It may seem naïve and utopian, yet we cannot renounce this lofty aim.”³³ “I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which “the whole is greater than the part”. The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences co-exist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations.”³⁴

As previously noted, it is difficult, if nigh impossible, to ascertain the precise meaning intended using the word “polyhedron”, although one can make a reasonable approximation based on surrounding passages. What is most troubling is Francis’ frequent turn of the phrase “the whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts ” which may be either an Aristotelian misquote or a inappropriate reference to Euclidian mathematics, but more closely, a Marxian axiom. Whichever interpretation one may exercise, what has become a trademark of Francis is what appears to be a papal expression honoring the Spirituality of the Divine Polyhedral, a religion predicated on the divinity of man, an infinity of persons in one polyhedral godhead.

Finally, let me return to Chesterton: “We Catholics must realise that by this time we are living in Pagan lands; and that the barbarians around us know not what they do.” I must add that it seems to me we Catholics are sailing on the same barbarous ship of fools, for we know not what we do, or what we are to believe. If I have misinterpreted or misunderstood what the pope is saying, I for one in all humility ask only for papal clarification.

-
1. All essays can be found at <https://deaconsconer.org/topics/reflections>.
 2. Charles R. Lanham, *Collected Essays: Colloqui Volume I - 2016-2017* (Reno, NV: Deacon's Corner Publishing, 2020), Preface.
 3. Saint Augustine. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (New York, NY: Random House LLC, 1960), 220.
 4. G.K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, July 25, 1908.
 5. G.K. Chesterton, *New Witness*, July 19, 1918.
 6. G.K. Chesterton, *G.K.'s Weekly*, August 18, 1928.
 7. G.K. Chesterton, *G.K.'s Weekly*, December 31, 1932.
 8. Chris Chan, *Interlude—Confronting Cancel Culture*, *Gilbert: The Magazine of the Apostolate of Common Sense*, Sept/Oct 2020, 22-23.
 9. *Inscrutibili Dei Consilio*, §2. Endnote 1: This description of what is usually called a “corrupt government” or the government of a “corrupt party” is, in fact, the description of what necessarily happens to any government, or ruling party, when it rejects the moral rules taught by the Church. A religious error is the main root of all social and political evils.
 10. *Inscrutibili Dei Consilio*, §3.
 11. *Inscrutibili Dei Consilio*, §5.
 12. *Inscrutibili Dei Consilio*, §6.
 13. Pope Leo XIII, *Quod Apostolici Menuris: On Socialism*, December 28, 1878, §1.
 14. Pope Leo XIII, *Diuturnum: On the Origin of Civil Power*, December 28, 1878, §4.
 15. *Diuturnum*, §5.
 16. *Diuturnum*, §8.
 17. *Diuturnum*, §12.
 18. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum: On Capital and Labor*, May 15, 1891.
 19. Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno: Reconstruction of the Social Order*, May 13, 1931, §10.
 20. *Quadragesimo Anno*, §12.
 21. *Quadragesimo Anno*, §14.
 22. *Quadragesimo Anno*, §25.
 23. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples*, March 26, 1967, §10, 11.
 24. Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis: On Human Origin*, August 12, 1950, §20, 21.
 25. Michael Warren Davis, *Towards a 'Beautiful Polyhedral Reality'*, *Crisis Magazine*, October 7, 2020.
 26. *'Fratelli Tutti' Restates Pope's Progressivism*, *Church Militant*, October 4, 2020.
 27. Dr. Samuel Gregg, *Fratelli Tutti is a familiar mixture of dubious claims, strawmen, genuine insights*, *The Catholic World Report*, October 5, 2020.
 28. Gallicanism is the belief that popular civil authority—often represented by the monarch's or the state's authority—over the Catholic Church is comparable to that of the Pope. Gallicanism is a rejection of ultramontanism; it has something in common with Anglicanism, but is nuanced, in that it plays down the authority of the Pope in church without denying that there are some authoritative elements to the office associated with being *primus inter pares*. Other terms for the same or similar doctrines include Erastianism, Febronianism, and Josephinism.
 29. According to Rod Dreher: I would like to propose a name for this phenomenon of inveterate support for any and all Papal actions, imputing to him wisdom and spiritual insight beyond all the Saints and Popes of past ages: **Mottramism**. This takes its name, of course, from Rex Mottram, Julia Flyte's husband in *Brideshead Revisited*. At one point, Rex decides to convert to Catholicism in order to have a proper Church wedding with Julia. But the sincerity of his conversion becomes suspect when he is willing to agree with any absurdity proposed in the name of Catholic authority, and shows no intellectual curiosity into its truth or falsehood. As his Jesuit instructor, Father Mowbray describes his catechetical progress: “Yesterday I asked him whether Our Lord had more than one nature. He said: ‘Just as many as you say, Father.’ Then again I asked him: ‘Supposing the Pope looked up and saw a cloud and said ‘It's going to rain’, would that be bound to happen?’ ‘Oh, yes, Father.’ ‘But supposing it didn't?’ He thought a moment and said, “I suppose it would be sort of raining spiritually, only we were too sinful to see it.”
 30. Michael Warren Davis, *Marxists Love Fratelli Tutti*, *Crisis Magazine*, October 12, 2020.
 31. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, November 24, 2013, §236.
 32. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, October 3, 2020, §145.
 33. *Fratelli Tutti*, §191.
 34. *Fratelli Tutti*, §191.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

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

BOOKS

Salvation: 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

Touchstone

www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

www.catholic.com

Catholic Herald

www.catholicherald.co.uk

Chronicles

www.chroniclesmagazine.org

Gilbert!

www.chesterton.org

The National Catholic Register

www.ncregister.com

Our Sunday Visitor

www.osvnews.com

ONLINE

Crisis Magazine

www.crisismagazine.com

The Imaginative Conservative

www.theimaginativeconservative.org

Catholic Exchange

www.catholicexchange.com

Intellectual Takeout

www.intellectuالتakeout.org

Life News

www.lifenews.com

Life Site News

www.lifesitenews.com

OnePeterFive

www.onepeterfive.com

Catholic Vote

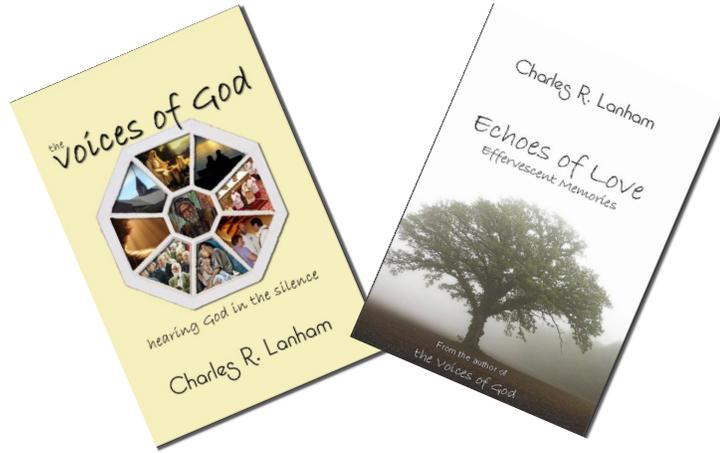
www.catholicvote.org

The Catholic Thing

www.thecatholicthing.org

PragerU

www.prageru.com

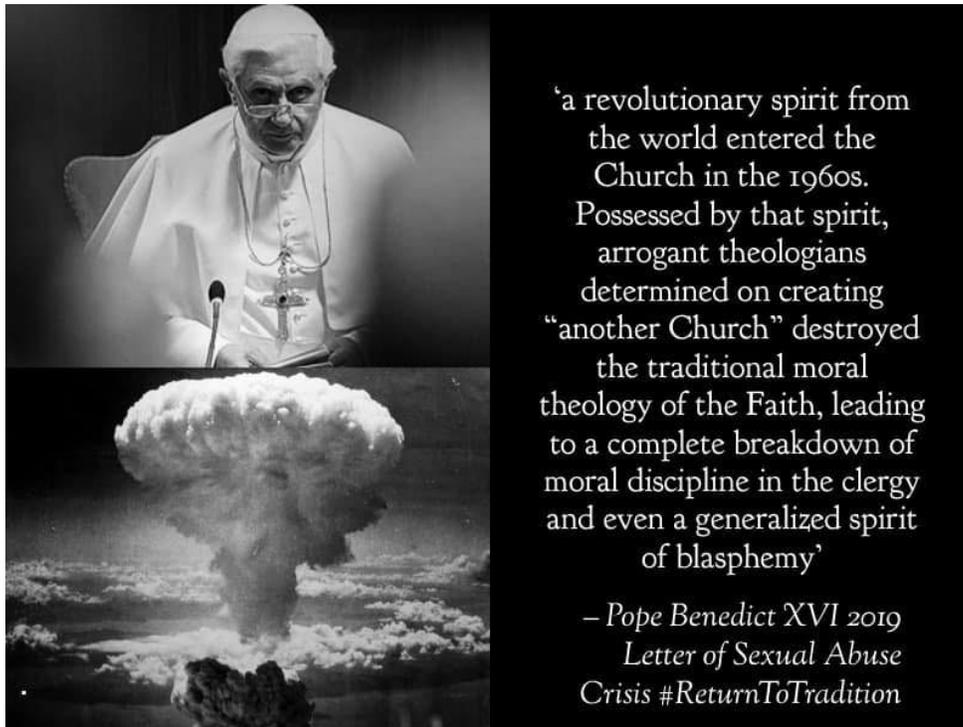


Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

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 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at



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>.