



A journal for restless minds

## CARRYING THEIR CROSS

*Even Jesus had help*

## WHEN WILL WE LEARN?

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## DEACON'S DINER

*Food for a restless mind*

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

## Carrying Their Cross

*Even Jesus had help*

**G**rief is excruciatingly painful and timeless. No one welcomes grief, yet uninvited it enters in without surcease. Grief's dark shadow descends upon the soul far more than the cold kiss of death would allow, for life presents other crosses as difficult to bear.

But what of those who look upon such pain and sorrow and see love grieving so? What acts of kindness, gifts of love, or thoughts expressed might ease the suffering, salve the dark despairing pain that salts ragged wounds too soon to heal?

The greatest gift for the grieving is such a simple thing, yet for most, far too difficult to gracefully deliver. Give the gift of *Silent Presence*; be there, nothing more. Lift their cross and walk with them for "*some things in life cannot be fixed. They can only be carried.*"<sup>1</sup>

Their grief is theirs and theirs alone. You cannot take any part of it or accept it as your own. You cannot fix it. You can only help them carry it.

Even Jesus needed help to carry his cross. What good would have come of platitudes and encouragement shouted at him along the way to Calvary?



Imagine how Jesus would have felt to hear "Go Jesus Go! You can make it!" or "It will all be better soon." or "Something good will surely come from all of this." or best of all, "Everything's going to be alright." If these wouldn't have worked for Jesus how then can they possibly be

alright for those who are grieving? Obviously they can't, yet we still want to say them, generally without thinking.

**L**et those who grieve, grieve; be a silent presence; there, when and if, through the anguish and the pain, they realize that they don't have to carry their cross alone.

1. Megan Devine, *Refuge In Grief*, <http://refugeingrief.com>.

## When Will We Learn?

*Where have all the children gone?*

**L**et me address this head on: I have a sincere disaffection for polls, polls of any kind. My animus for polls runs deep, so much so that any lawmaker who would propose legislation to proscribe them would have my full though admittedly completely inconsequential support.

At the heart of my opposition to polls is the reliance on the statistical pseudo-science so ardently supported, it appears to me, by charlatans selling pure unadulterated snake-oil. Some of course are easier on the palate, but all are much too difficult to swallow and seldom benefit anyone except to line said seller's pockets.

Polls are like sots, incapable of standing upright or walking a straight line; they either lean one way or slant another, preconditioned to generate predetermined results from preselected respondents—fodder for those whose sole function is to convince that the emperor is fully clothed.

Disregarding the political swill that is fed into the public trough on a daily basis, the results of two national studies (polls) conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) have recently been released for further indigestion. Keep the Alka-Seltzer handy.

These two studies/polls were conducted to determine why young Cath-

olics are leaving the faith. The first study surveyed a random, national sample of young people, ages 15 to 25, who had been raised Catholic but no longer self-identified as such. The second surveyed a random sample of self-identified Catholics, ages 18 and older, focusing on matters of religion and science. The conclusions derived from both studies were made and reported in a 4-page article in OSV by Mark Gray.<sup>1</sup>



**A**s previously observed, the studies/polls are textbook examples of how to turn stuporous assumptions into besotted results with pickled conclusions.

The report by OSV's Mark Gray begins with this introduction which should be read with great care: "*Young Catholics are leaving the Faith.*

*Multiple national surveys indicate that only about two-thirds or fewer millennials (those born in 1982 or later) who were raised Catholic remain Catholic as adults."*

**N**ote how this introduction leads the reader toward a false understanding and a probable misreading. The first sentence sets the unwary reader up for the bad news that is sure to follow. The next raises the level of concern stating that "*multiple national surveys indicate*"—leading the reader to assume certainly more than two surveys which undoubtedly surveyed a large number (a number never provided.) Then the kicker which gives the reader the distinct impression that it must be really bad news: *only about two-thirds or fewer millennials who were raised Catholic*—OMG, that is absolutely terrible news! Dare I read more? But wait! What is this: "*remain Catholic*"? Two-thirds remain Catholic? But...but...

In other words, Mark, what you are really telling us is that only about one-third leave the faith. True, that is far too high but why the scam artist come on? It makes the rest of the article highly suspect, and after reading the entire article several times with highlighter in hand, this reader remains skeptical.

Perhaps most problematic are the conclusions that are derived from the scant data provided in the report. There is however sufficient information to determine that the conclusions that were made failed to identify

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the root causes for the increasing number of young people leaving the faith.

To be fair to CARA, the OSV report fails to provide access to the full results from either study further reducing confidence in the conclusions reported. That being said, the results that OSV did report are both informative and worrying, notwithstanding the inadequate and misleading conclusions derived.

Perhaps the most relevant information provided comes from a single paragraph:

*"The interviews with youth and young adults who had left the Catholic Faith revealed that the typical age for this decision to leave was made at 13. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed, 63 percent, said they stopped being Catholic between the ages of 10 and 17. Another 23 percent say they left the faith before the age of 10. Those who leave are just as likely to be male as they are female, and their demographics generally mirror those of all young Catholics their age. So why are they leaving?"*

A reporter once asked Willie Sutton, an infamous bank robber, why he robbed banks and he replied, "because that's where the money is." Asking Sutton why he did what he did was puerile and provided no insight as to the root causes of his criminal behavior. It did sell magazines however.

And here is where the CARA studies leaves orbit. Asking those who have left the faith why they left is equally fatuous and fails to lead us to the why. It does make for some mildly annoying juvenile responses which I

suppose some like the author find somehow informative.

CARA interviewed former Catholics and asked them an open-ended question "What are the reasons that explain why you are no longer Catholic?" The responses reveal a level of ignorance but little more. Here are a few of the responses:

*"Because I grew up realized it was a story like Santa or the Easter Bunny."*

*"Catholic beliefs aren't based on fact. Everything is hearsay from back before anything could be documented, so nothing can be disproved, but it certainly shouldn't be taken seriously."*

*"I realized that religion is in complete contradiction with the rational and scientific world, and to continue to subscribe to a religion would be hypocritical."*

In another study conducted by the Pew Research Center, they report a variety of reasons why young people are leaving Christianity, including:

- Learning about evolution when I went away to college
- Religion is the opiate of the people
- Rational thought makes religion go out the window
- Lack of any sort of scientific or specific evidence of a creator
- I just realized somewhere along the line that I didn't really believe it

There are many more but no need to belabor the point. It all comes down to a level of understanding that is painfully absent in our youth and young people concerning God and his Church.

But the question remains unanswered: why are they leaving?

OSV's Mark Gray provides an observation, laying the primary reason for the increasing exodus of young people from the faith on a decline in Catholic school attendance. While this may certainly be a factor, Gray wastes far too much space on the declining numbers receiving a Catholic education and the increasing numbers of those who see no relationship between faith and reason or compatibility between science and religion.

While important, the decline in attendance is a symptom rather than the cause of the infection.

Bishop Robert Barron remarks: "I don't doubt for a moment the sincerity of those who responded to the survey, but the reasons they offer for abandoning Christianity are just so unconvincing. This is to say, any theologian, apologist, or evangelist worth his salt should be able easily to answer them. And this has led me to the conclusion that 'we have met the enemy and it is us.'"<sup>2</sup>

While I agree with Bishop Barron that the reasons are unconvincing I respectfully disagree with who he holds responsible for rectifying the growing problem of our children leaving the faith. He says in closing, "My *cri de coeur* is that teachers, catechists, theologians, apologists, and evangelists might wake up to this crisis and do something about it."

I hold Bishop Barron in the highest regard but his passionate appeal is misdirected, aiming at those who can

## Place God First

### *Purchasing gifts on layaway*

**H**ate is such a harsh word, devoid of any sentiment or tender feelings. It is the antithesis of "Love". It darkens the soul and hardens the heart. Yet today Jesus tells us that *"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."*<sup>1</sup> It is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to reconcile his instruction to hate ourselves and others with his constant message of love and forgiveness.

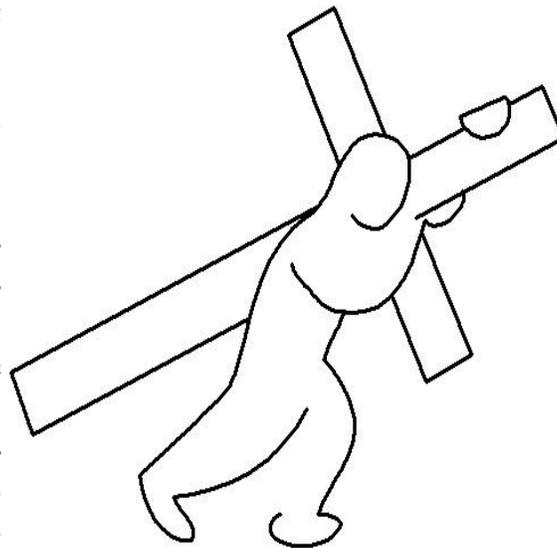
Throughout his public ministry Jesus always taught of love. He called it the greatest commandment. *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your soul, with all your heart, and with all your mind....You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*<sup>2</sup> He gave us another commandment: *"love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*<sup>3</sup>

At issue then is this word "hate" which is found uniquely in the Gospel of Luke and only in this particular passage. Luke used the Greek word "miseo" which is literally translated as "hate. But biblical scholars have argued that in this instance "to hate someone" could arguably and justifiably be construed as "to love someone less" which is something different altogether.

Jesus is not telling us to "hate" as we know it, but to order our love, to love God first above all else, above

father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even more than our own lives. Discipleship then requires a deeper commitment than family or friends, it requires us to love God first.

Beyond this message to "hate", Jesus also demands that we renounce all possessions and carry the cross. This is the price of true discipleship and it isn't easy; in fact it comes with a very heavy price tag, it costs us everything. Small wonder many choose to not pay the price.



**C**hoosing Jesus, paying the price, is like purchasing gifts on layaway, we have to pay now for future reward. For those willing to pay the price, Jesus offers the gifts of eternal life and everlasting peace and happiness with God.

We are taught from an early age to always read the fine print, to understand completely what will be required or what it will cost before signing up for anything. Jesus was brutally honest; he spared no words to tell his disciples that it would cost them everything to follow him. There can be no

room for compromise or concession with God. We either give our lives over to him entirely or we keep them for ourselves.

**S**aint Paul tells us *"We are not our own. We were bought with a price."*<sup>4</sup> That price is the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed for us upon the cross to redeem us from slavery to sin and death.

The love of God compels us to choose who or what will be first in our lives. To place any relationship or any possession above God is a form of idolatry. Jesus challenges us to examine who we love first.

A perfect example of loving God before all else can be seen in the life and death of Saint Thomas More. When the Pope refused to grant King Henry VIII an annulment from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon so that he might marry Anne Boleyn, Henry declared himself Supreme Head of the Church in England and demanded that Sir Thomas More sign an Oath of Supremacy.

Sir Thomas refused to sign the Oath, resigned as Chancellor, and went home. This angered Henry so much that he stripped Sir Thomas of all his property and imprisoned him, leaving his wife and children destitute and homeless.

Sir Thomas More lost everything; he lost it all, all his possessions, his wife and children, and ultimately, his life; all for love of God. This is the kind of hatred of life and loved ones that Jesus demands of us. Saint Thomas More

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loved his family and his life, but he loved them less than his love for God.

**H**e was steadfast in his love of God and true to himself. He could not have loved himself or his wife or his children or his neighbors better than he did. He simply placed God first. And that is what Jesus commands us to do as well.

There is another thing that is often misunderstood here and that is in what Jesus requires of us to be his disciple. How can he be so callous and uncaring as to demand that we carry our own cross? Are we to take him literally? Father Ron Rolheiser suggests that there are six things that will lead us to a deeper understanding of what Jesus meant.<sup>5</sup>

*“First, it means accepting that suffering is a part of our lives.”* As long as we deny this, as long as we believe that pain and suffering are unnatural, something that we don’t have to accept then we will in effect be refusing to carry our cross.

*“Second, taking up our cross and giving up our lives, means that we may not, in our suffering, pass on any bitterness to those around us.”* Passing the buck on suffering seems like the natural thing to do but inflicting pain on others, making others suffer because of our suffering is the wrong thing to do.

*“Third, walking in the footsteps of Jesus as he carries his cross means that we must accept some other deaths before our physical death, that we are invited to let some parts of ourselves die.”* These are not physical deaths but rather daily deaths, death from a loss, letting go of

unnecessary burdens, forgiving yourself and others, giving some part of yourself for another, or leaving one life for another.

*“Fourth, it means that we must wait for the resurrection, that here in this life all symphonies must remain unfinished. ... So much of life and discipleship is about waiting, waiting in frustration, inside injustice, inside pain, in longing, battling bitterness, as we wait for something or someone to come and change our situation.”*

*“Fifth, carrying our cross daily means accepting that God’s gift to us is often not what we expect.”* I have spoken and written about this before. We are impatient and often expect to hear God respond as anyone else might. The problem is, God is not anyone else, he isn’t like us, his ways aren’t our ways. While God always answers our prayers, his response may, and often does, differ from what we desire. God knows better than we what we truly need and we need to learn to accept his gift. We also need to learn how to hear his voice.

*“Finally, taking up your cross and being willing to give up your life means living in a faith that believes that nothing is impossible for God.”*

**H**ere’s the thing: we are incapable of understanding what God can do. It is beyond our ability to discern and to truly know God. There is a song by Mercy Me with the title *If I Could Only Imagine* that expresses this very well for we can only imagine what God is like and no matter how great our imagination—God is greater.

**W**henever we feel or believe that there is nothing anyone, including God, can do to relieve our pain, we have forgotten the power of God. We have in effect made God in our image and likeness and embodied him with our own limitations.

Jesus tells us that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with *all* our heart, with *all* our soul, with *all* our strength and the second is to love our neighbor. The order of our love is absolute and unchangeable.

If asked to place something else before God, we must have the courage to refuse and say yes to God. Place God first and leave the rest behind, for nothing else matters.

He also makes it clear that we must be willing to carry our cross daily, without complaint, in order to be his disciple. Jesus never promised it would be easy to follow him but he did promise that carrying the cross would lead to the resurrection and our salvation. Amen.



Homily for  
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C  
Wisdom 9:13-18B  
Philemon 9-10, 12-17  
Luke 14:25-33

1. Lk 14:26.
2. Mt 22:37, 39.
3. Jn 13:34-35..
4. 1 Cor 6:19b, 20.
5. Father Ron Rolheiser OMI, *In Exile: Carrying Our Cross*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

and should be actively involved in any solution but teachers, catechists, theologians, apologists, and evangelists are secondary, not primary in any corrective action to be made.

**T**he question as to why so many are leaving is important no doubt but before we can hope to discover the why we must first know the when and the who. The problem didn't begin with millennials (those born in 1982 or later.) They are but the most current to be infected with a disease first contracted nearly sixty years ago.

The genesis of the infection first arose in the 1960s with the confluence of two events: the convening of the Second Vatican Council and the launch of the Great Society. While neither promised to effect great and lasting change, the unexpected and unintended consequences that occurred as a result of these two seminal events were nothing short of catastrophic.

On the face of it, the objectives of the two events, to most observers, seemed to be unrelated in nearly every possible way: one considered traditionally conservative and the other progressively liberal, one religious and the other secular, one global in scope, the other geographically limited. But it was not the onset of these two separate and distinct events that created the pandemic but the confluence of their output which, like co-reactant epoxy resin, altered the course of human history, resulting in the moral desuetude that exists today.

There is far more to be said on this subject but far more than need or can be written here.

For all the good and needed, even necessary changes for the Catholic Church that resulted from the Second Vatican Council, there were serious unintended consequences.

From many quarters and especially in America there was an overwhelming sense of release from the rigid, hard-bound strictures long-held by the Church and demanded of its members. Finally, the Church was moving into the modern age—despite and in spite of Pope Paul VI and *Humanae Vitae*—and Catholics were quick to take advantage of this apparent relaxation of the strict rules of conduct imposed on them for two millennia.

The complete failure of the magisterium to address these misperceptions directly and with the necessary seriousness required resulted in the false belief (heresy) that Catholicism was now self-defining. Catholics could now decide for themselves what it meant to be catholic. Catholics were now free to accept or ignore what had heretofore been doctrinally and dogmatically imposed. The Commandments were now suggestions, the moral law optional, and natural law suspect. Free at last, free at last, thank Vatican II, we are free at last!

**T**hose who came of age then (of which I am one) quickly saw this as an opportunity to define their own relationship with God if they wanted to do so; many

chose to simply ignore God because there were no longer any serious consequences (no heaven or hell) of much concern. Like religion, God was now self-defining as were his laws. It was indeed a heady time for young Catholics.

**Y**et the changes that came about within the Catholic Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council would most likely have been far less reaching had it not been for the launching of the liberal and progressive policies that began with the launching of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

The growing sense of entitlement and secular progressive attitudes engendered and encouraged the sexual revolution of the sixties resulting in a near total moral collapse within American society.

The landmark and disastrous 1973 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court legalizing abortion precipitated an even faster rate of decline in compliance and acceptance of moral and natural law, respect for the sacredness of the human person made in the image and likeness of God, and the belief that every life, from conception to natural death should be valued and protected.

That generation, my generation, as a result became ever more distracted by the secular and less attracted to the holy. Even if one continued to believe in God, no one really cared because there didn't seem to be any reason to be seriously concerned.

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**W**hat was happening during the sixties and seventies was a steady erosion in faith and a turning inward to the self. As Joseph Sobran accurately describes it: *"Being self-centered leads inevitably to hating others who are obstacles to selfish desires. What is 'natural' in fallen human nature easily descends to the diabolical. And our modern, post-Christian, liberal culture treats the self-centered life as normal, rejecting abortion laws as tyrannical impositions on what has been called 'the imperial self.'"*<sup>3</sup>

Even as the general population was turning away from God and inward toward themselves, many clergy were following, or in some cases, leading the charge toward this new moral order. For the most part however, the clergy in American churches simply fell silent, and their congregations quickly became unchurched. Catholic clergy, never admirers of 'fire and brimstone' preaching, picked up the liberal mantra of tolerance and acceptance of immorality.

Thus, as a result, we are witness to the leadership of the USCCB euphemistically dancing around the serious issue of same-sex unions officiated by the second highest office holder in America who sardonically calls himself a Catholic. Rather than publicly denouncing Vice-president Biden for his insolence and obvious disdain for the church he professes to be a member (sounds like a raspberry to me) they proffered neither punishment nor absolution.

For Catholics the clear message is (with apologies to Barry Goldwater),

*"intolerance in defense of righteousness is no virtue. And tolerance in the pursuit of immorality is no vice."*

Most of us who aged into adulthood in the sixties and seventies eventually found ourselves with families. Having been infected with a virulent distaste for authority and authoritarian rules, we consciously or unconsciously readily infected our progeny.

I for one must admit to rarely darkening the entrance to any church and giving little notice to God. Religious education was never a priority, to the point that there was none. Although baptized Catholic, that was much the extent of my children's religious upbringing. While they eventually and completely on their own received the Sacraments and were married in the Catholic Church, they have over time walked away from active participation in their faith.

Their children have fared even less and have little or no understanding of God, faith, the Catholic Church, and all that Catholics should and ought to know and believe.

So why are young people leaving the faith? Don't ask them because they really have no idea of what that means. If you really wish to know why young people are leaving, don't look to a poll for answers, look in a mirror. The answer will be staring back at you.

1. Mark M. Gray, *Young People Are Leaving The Faith: Here's Why*, Our Sunday Visitor, August 28, 2016, pp 9-12.
2. Bishop Robert Barron, *Apologists, catechists, theologians: Wake up!*, September 1, 2016.
3. Joseph Sobran, *Subtracting Christianity*, FGF Books, June 20, 2016.

## 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

#### **Subtracting Christianity**

*Joseph Sobran*

FGF Books

June 20, 2016, 428 pages.

#### **Practical Theology**

*Peter Kreeft*

Ignatius Press

November 28, 2014, 400 pages.

#### **Disorientation: How to Go to College Without Losing Your Mind**

*Edited by John Zmirak*

Ascension Press

December 21, 2010, 188 pages.

### PERIODICALS

#### **First Things**

Institute on Religion and Public Life

Editor: R. R. Reno

Ten Issues per year.

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

#### **Touchstone**

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

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

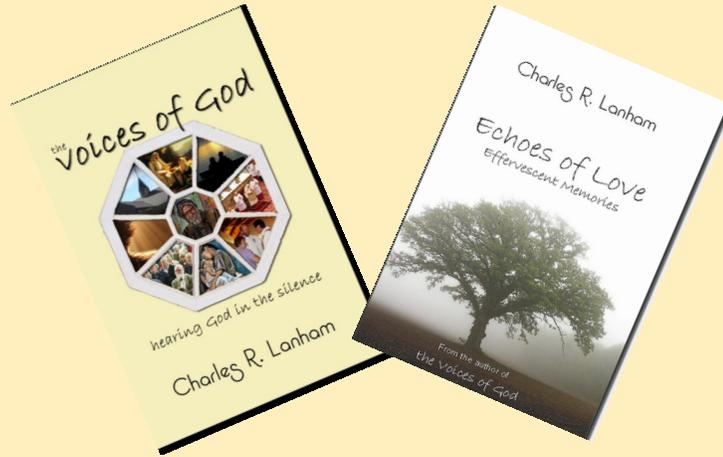
#### **Catholic Answers Magazine**

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

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



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

**deaconscorner.org**

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

He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

He is the bulletin editor for Saint Albert the Great Catholic Church. He has written over 230 articles on religion, faith, morality, theology,

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

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

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

**[deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org](mailto:deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org)**

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