



A journal for restless minds

## THE MEASURE OF LIFE

*The joy of an angel*

## FROM A DISTANCE

*An uncommon witness*

## ALL ARE ALIVE

*Life and love never end*

## 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.

## The Measure Of Life

*The joy of an angel*

**H**ow do you measure a life? The thought of placing some certain value, a price or measure upon a life, any life, repels us. Yet inevitably, it would seem, we are want to gauge, to weigh, to measure ourselves and others in some form or fashion. Why? God only knows.

God measures not a single hair or eyelash, for He looks upon each of his children with the same inestimable love. He cares not whether we have achieved greatness or fame, wealth or power nor does he concern himself with such vanities which we are want to measure ourselves and others, such things as height or weight, intellect or profundity, beauty or wit, longevity or brevity of life.

What is important is often not at all deemed important, for we seldom consider the intangibles, those things in which we have no means to measure. This past week there was a celebration of

life for one so briefly among us, a beautiful, vivacious young nine-year old girl, who, though so very young, was truly an angel of God.

As was written of her, "*Maddie endured and bravely fought aggressive brain cancer for well over a year. She knew no strangers, only friends that she had not met yet. She emanated love and compassion and touched everyone she met.*" She was in every sense of the word an angel of God and

she made the world a better place while she was in it.



**M**addie may not have achieved what many would dare call greatness or fame or fortune; her time here was too brief for that. But the true measure of her life was, is and

will continue to be far greater than our vanities could ever imagine or attain: she gave us joy, love, happiness, she brought sunshine when there was rain, she made us smile despite the pain, she inspired us to look beyond ourselves, to see sunshine and rainbows. She showed us that there is always hope of life eternal in the loving arms of God. The measure of her life is beyond ours to discover.

## From A Distance

*An uncommon witness*

Perhaps in the years to come humanity will grow up and learn how to live with one another in peace and harmony. Perhaps. But then the sceptic would argue: either humanity is incapable of growing up or owns no inclination to a deeper understanding of the human condition.

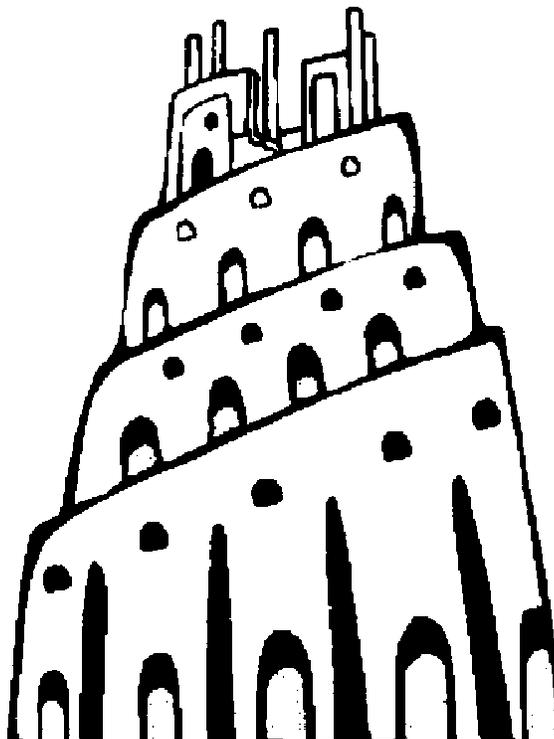
It requires no effort of the mind to realize how uncommon we have become, each a subspecies of one, incapable of sharing in our common humanity. We speak but do not communicate; we hear but do not listen; we see without seeing; we think without thinking; we feel without feeling; we know without knowing; we exist without living.

Once I wrote of *Bab-ili* and perhaps it should be offered anew as a reminder of what we have or are fast becoming.<sup>1</sup>

There once was a city that lay nestled upon the floor of a broad verdant valley. The first men to come upon the valley were so taken by its beauty that they named the place *Bab-ili*, which meant "gate of the gods" for they thought such beauty must surely be a worthy entrance to the home of the divine.

Alas, over time those who lived in *Bab-ili* lost sight of the beauty that surrounded them; a beauty which they had neither created nor had the power

to create. Yet in their arrogance and pride they convinced themselves that they were gods whose rightful place was in the heavens above the sky. And so they conceived a stairway that would extend beyond the clouds, a far more perfect entrance to their rightful home among the stars.



They believed solely in their ability to accomplish anything they desired and denied existence to any power greater than their own. They laughed at the very possibility of retribution from the divine for were they not gods themselves and none greater or more powerful than they? If indeed greater gods did exist then why would those gods not display their greater power and rain destruction down upon such weak pretenders? They laughed and jeered and scoffed at the preposterous

notion that in truth they were not gods at all. They refused to admit that they were but mortal creatures whose very lives or those of any other creature were beyond their poor powers to conceive let alone create.

Then one day, a day like all the days that had come before, the gods of *Bab-ili* awoke and discovered they could no longer understand one another; not one word from their neighbor or from anyone else for the matter. Imagine the frustration, the consternation, the irksome irritation that ensued when all those almighty self-important gods could no longer command, demand, or pontificate. Imagine the moment when familiar words were now so strangely unfamiliar, when *yes* was heard as *no* to one and *maybe* to some and *phooey* to others, when *up* sounded a lot like *down*, *in* meant *out*, *over* was *under*, *good* was *bad*, *hello* was spoken but *goodbye* was heard. Imagine the bitterness, the anger, the

hatred that resulted from the complete inability to communicate in any way with one another.

It was a tragedy, a disaster, a chaotic mess of epic proportions. Alone with thoughts and words only each could comprehend, the inhabitants of *Bab-ili* could no longer stand to live together and so they quickly dispersed to the far corners of the world, no longer pretending or believing themselves to be gods.

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**I**t is an ancient tale, first told at the dawn of time and retold over the millennia hence without any loss in weight as to its importance. But we forget the past or else we simply choose to do so in order to more readily convince ourselves of our own importance, our greatness, and our godhood.

God is watching and has seen it all before. No doubt he knows exactly what to do. If the ancient tale of *Bab-ili* holds true, then we have assuredly arrived at that seminal moment when we realize that we are but human and not gods at all.

Consider for a moment what this tale imputes upon the current state of man's affairs. No matter what the subject or the topic set before us we find ourselves babbling incoherent nothings to be heard by no one but ourselves. Reasoned debate has been replaced by *ad hominem*<sup>2</sup> assault. Language has become an arcane art, nuanced and crafted so as to articulate nothing of substance with unwarranted gravitas. Whether too close or at too great a distance to clearly discern what is truth is of impractical importance for the wise among us for they know this: we will unconsciously and vacuously submit to their self-proclaimed wisdom. There are questions we should ask and answers we should demand yet the truth is we have little want to be bothered beyond the mundane and inane.

Edward Pentin, Rome Correspondent for the National Catholic Register, reports on the solemn commemoration of 500th anniversary of

the Reformation and 50 years of Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, "*A lengthy document to coincide with the commemoration, 'From Conflict to Communion,' drawn up by the Lutheran-Catholic Commission for Unity, is meant to serve as the ecumenical basis of the meeting*" between Pope Francis and the leaders of the Lutheran Church in Sweden.<sup>3</sup>

Pentin continues, "*It [the document] notes how the Second Vatican Council led to leaving behind the 'charged polemic atmosphere of the post-Reformation era.'* It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations."

There has been significant progress over the past 50 years toward greater understanding. One Bishop stated that the document and the commemoration "*aims to turn past wounds and divisions into an attitude of hope and trust in God's will to bring about the reconciliation of all in Christ's body, the Church.*" Another, Bishop Anders Arborelius of Stockholm said that the commemoration was "*an historic and prophetic sign on the path toward full visible unity that sometimes seems so far away.*"

**B**ut Pentin reports, "*not all is rosy behind the scenes, particularly in Sweden, where the scars of the Reformation run deep. Apprehension is growing that the event will be used to gloss over significant Catholic-Lutheran differences.*"

#### More next week.

1. *The Gods Of Bab-ili*, Deacons Corner, 186, June 24, 2015.
2. *Ad hominem*: adv. directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining.
3. Edward Pentin, *Scandinavian Sojourn*, National Catholic Register, Oct 30-Nov 12, 2016, pp. 9-10.

## 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

#### Faith Comes From What Is Heard

##### *Lawrence Feingold*

Emmaus Academic  
July 8, 2016, 756 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)

## All Are Alive

*Life and love never end*

**S**adducees were the chief religious authorities among the Jewish people. They were strict adherents of the Torah, the Law of Moses, or the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of both the Hebrew and Christian bibles.

The Sadducees held a very conservative understanding of Scripture and did not consider the books of the Prophets, the writings of the Mishnah, or oral Tradition to be of any valid concern. Since they found no clear teaching on life after death or resurrection in the Torah, they did not subscribe to those Pharisaic doctrines. And that, so we are told, is why they were *sad, you see*.

Jesus told the Sadducees and us that our God *"is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."* What does that tell us then? First, we ought to recognize that our religion is not a religion of death but of resurrection and life, and second, we should know and understand that only the living can have a God.

God is God of the living. He knows that we can never die; that we will live on from the moment of our conception for all eternity. We humans have a difficult time accepting this for we see life as brief and temporary: we are born, we live, and then we die. We don't, won't, or can't see what exists beyond the grave. But we should at least ask what is the nature of the relationship, the connection between life ever after and life here and now?

There are many who believe there is a profound discontinuity between this life and the next. They see it as an either / or proposition: either be happy in this life and miserable in the next or miserable in this one in order to attain eternal happiness in the next.

There are then those who see nothing beyond this earthly life. They are the ones who contend that any notion of an afterlife, of a heaven, is a pipe-dream or so much *"pie in the sky"* imaginative nonsense. They say we should live this life without hope of heaven or eternal life with God. Their motto is *"eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die and that's all folks."*



**Y**et there is another choice, a far better one, which assumes there is no discontinuity between this life and the next. There is just life unending; a portion of our life is temporal and physical while another portion is eternal and spiritual.

If we have but one life to live, now and forever, then it would seem that how we live temporally in the here and now must determine how we will always live. In other words, how we live our lives while on this earth, so

shall we live eternally, outside the limits of space and time.

**T**he promise of our destiny is in how we live in the here and now. If we choose to live selfishly, living only for ourselves, caring for no one except ourselves, then why should we expect to live differently after our temporal life is at its end? We alone determine our heaven or our hell.

In **The Great Divorce**, C. S. Lewis' parable of heaven and hell, people are confronted with the choices they make. Those who cling to their fears, who hold for dear life their resentments, who refuse to let go of their prisons, can only be given what they endlessly demand: they are unable to accept the endless joys of heaven and thus choose of their own accord to return to hell.

Those, however, who lived their lives in hope and trust, who lived in the loving arms of God, will live on just the same. For them life will continue as before, without pain or sorrow, only love for all eternity.

Now the Sadducees clearly wished to challenge Jesus by presenting a hypothetical case of a woman with seven husbands. Did Jesus believe in the Torah or did he side with the Pharisees and accept their belief in the resurrection? To their way of thinking for him to do so would in effect subject Moses to ridicule. Jesus not only turns the Torah against them but adds insult to injury in the process.

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**T**he problem with the Sadducees is that they can't imagine anything bigger or better than the small world they know. In that world, a man needs a wife and gets a wife and certainly hopes not to share her with anybody. But, they think, if there were a resurrection of the dead, then any man whose wife outlived him and remarried would find that in heaven his wife had another husband in addition to him. Since that is plainly an intolerable thought, there can't be any such thing as heaven.

When you see their view this way, it seems so childish. They are like a child who reacts with dismay when he is told that he won't be sucking his thumb when he grows up.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus responds to their challenge: *"The children of this age marry and remarry; but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage."* People aren't married in heaven because they are like the angels of God, who are eternal beings and thus have no cause to marry.

He tells them, quite directly, of the facts of life and the necessity for reproduction. *"Thus, gentlemen, there will no longer be any need to reproduce for humans only do that to ensure the continuity of the race."*

He then tells them that those who are deemed worthy of the resurrection will be immortal. *"They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise."* The Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits.

Now of course Jesus offers that Moses himself provides the proof of resurrection in the passage of the burning bush, where God describes himself as *"the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* Obviously these three patriarchs were long deceased by Moses' time.

How, you might ask, does that prove there is life after death? Since it would be meaningless for God to declare himself in relationship with persons who have no existence, then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must still exist with respect to God.

God has revealed himself in biblical experience as the God of the living. In biblical history, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God enters into a personal relationship with each of us and that relationship cannot and will never be destroyed.

**R**on Rolheiser writes: *"As Christians we believe that the dead are still alive, still themselves and, very importantly, still in a living, conscious, and loving relationship with us and with each other. That's our common concept of heaven and, however simplistic its popular expression at times, it is wonderfully correct. That's exactly what Christian faith and Christian dogma, not to mention deep intuitive experience, invite us to. After death we live on, conscious, self-conscious, in communication with others who have died before us, in communion with those we left behind on earth, and in communion with the divine itself. That's the Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints."*

*As Christians, we believe that we are given eternal life through Jesus' death.*

*Among other images, the Gospels express that in this metaphor: Jesus death, they tell us, 'opened the tombs' and emptied graveyards. For this reason, Christians have never had a huge cult around cemeteries. As Christians, we don't do much in the way of spiritual practices around our cemeteries. Why? Because we believe all those graves are empty. Our loved ones aren't there and aren't to be found there. They're with Jesus."<sup>2</sup>*

**A**dding to this thought is this, *"Hoping against hope, we affirm that they have fallen not into nothingness but into the embrace of the living God. And that is where we can find them again; when we open our hearts to the silent calmness of God's own life in which we dwell, not by selfishly calling them back to where we are, but by descending into the depth of our own hearts where God also abides."<sup>3</sup>*

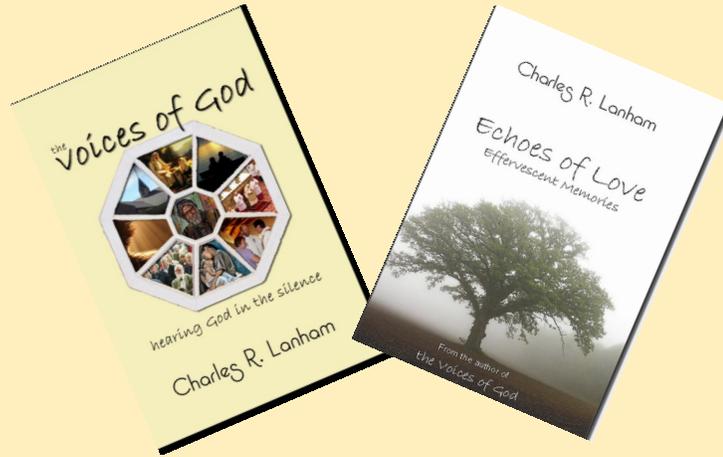
There is great comfort in knowing that those whom we love now gone are yet among the living; in knowing that life is more than the brevity of time, but eternally timeless.

Saint Paul may have said it best: *"Neither death nor life ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>4</sup> Amen.*



Homily for  
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C  
2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14  
2 Thessalonians 2:16—3:5  
Luke 20:27-38

1. Eleonore Stump, *The Real Thing*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
2. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: Gospel Challenge*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
3. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: Gospel Challenge*.
4. Rom 8:39.



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

**deaconscorner.org**

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

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

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