



A journal for restless minds

FOR WHAT WE HAVE

For those who have nothing

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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.

For What We Have

For those who have nothing

Those who have never wanted for anything so mundane as the next meal, warm clothing, or shelter from the weather have great difficulty finding compassion for those who have known nothing but endless want and emptiness.

Their lack of compassion is seldom a product of inhumanity or cruel indifference, rather, for most, such poverty is simply inconceivable, beyond their ability to comprehend, beyond their experience.

In many ways, poverty as described in those classic books and films, such as Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, were of a time long past and no longer relevant in this age of plenty. What salves the conscience is the belief that those who are poor are simply too lazy or unwilling to work because of all

the welfare programs. And while there is no doubt the cheat, the charlatan, and the free-loader, none such have ever been restricted to those who have nothing at all. Some would argue, quite correctly, that those who have, are equally as apt to attend to such decadent behavior as those who have not.

Jesus told us "... you always have the poor with you, whenever you will, you can do good to them ..." which ought to make us remember them in those moments when we give thanks for the bounty that we have received. We must remember the poor and do good to them.



Enjoy your bountiful feast if you are so fortunate but do not forget those who have nothing. St. Gregory Nazianzen, 4th century Archbishop of Constantinople wrote "*Give something, however small, to the one in need. For it is not small to one who has nothing. Neither is it small to God, if we have given what we could.*" Good words to remember and act upon.

Divine Enters Time

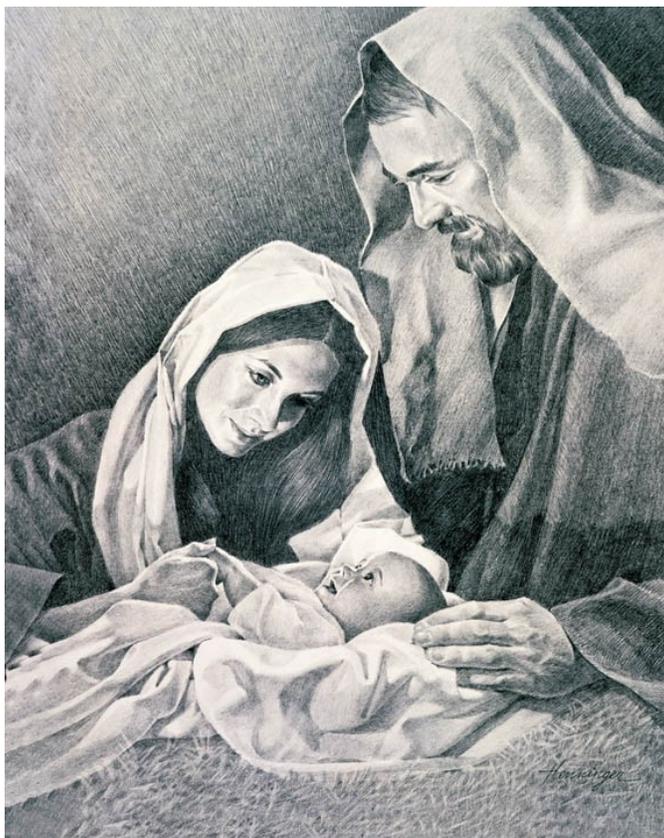
The Word became flesh

Some two-thousand years ago *"the divine entered time in the womb of a virgin, and from that day forward the world was stripped of divinity, political existence was cut down to size, and emperors and kings, powers and potentates, were called to bend the knee before Bethlehem."*¹

This view of a divinity in time was anathema to classical paganism, not because pagan religious thought was opposed to gods existing in time. What rankled was the Christian claim that there was only one God, who was outside of time, thus rendering false their multitudinous divinities who died and rose like the phoenix; ethereal and mythological creatures who were to be found in every household, ruling over such mundanities as gardens and household plants.

Antiquity was full of religion but it bent and used religion for its own ends. The Church would not bend or adjust its beliefs to pacify those who believed otherwise and that was more than the powers that be could approve. Thus the persecutions and slaughter of Christians ensued. No matter how bitter and vicious the persecutions became, Christians would neither deny nor refuse the reality which was the Incarnation.

What differed the Christian from pagan was the truth of their faith. The pagan gods, their rituals and pieties meant much to pagan man, but at its core, the pagan knew it all was a sham, a fiction, an untruth. Even Cicero whispered that *"there were probably no gods at all, but we must never say so out loud. Without them Rome would collapse, and what counts is the city of Rome: in that we do believe."*



Fast forward to modernity, to the heart of American society and culture. The obvious ties to ancient Rome can be seen throughout our neo-classical buildings, on our coins minted with the phrase *"In God we trust,"* at public sessions and court proceedings where we affirm our belief in God by prayers and oaths fore-sworn, just as we pledge our allegiance to *"one nation under God."* Yet does

this give proof to a Christian nation or something far less orthodox?

"If God became man, was incarnated in the womb of a virgin, then everything man did, has done, and will do, is totally changed. Everything moves forth from and returns to this shattering event. The Christian ethos means something to most Americans, and, even more, it means something to the corporate image that America has of itself. It is highly improbable, though, that this vague Christian sensibility converts itself into an affirmation of the truth of Christianity. ...

To say that man by nature is religious is to say that by nature he is a pagan. He feasts on a surplus that must be consumed. He sacrifices solemnly in duly appointed places hallowed by tradition. He thus admits his dependence on powers and forces sensed by him to buoy him up in being. He blesses his young and guards his dead in well-kept cemeteries. He sets up statues to his heroes, and he sings songs remembering their deeds.

*The Catholic Church has known this and embraced all of it. Thus many of her enemies have called her pagan. But if this natural religiosity be equated formally with religion, then we would have to admit in all candor that Catholic Christianity is no religion at all. Based as it is not on what man does naturally as a religious being but on what God did freely for man, the faith proclaims the good news that Christ the Savior is born."*²

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Consider what it is that we proclaim whenever we recite the Creed at Mass. Were we to pause to seriously contemplate the affirmation that “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” would we ever continue with the sacrifice of the Mass?

It is, it was, the most singular event in the long history of man. Of all the religions of the world only Christianity claims to have begun from a single historical event: the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Every truth, every doctrine, every dogma of the Christian faith is predicated on this orthodoxy: that God the Father, so love the world, that he sent his only begotten Son to save us from our sins and open the gates of heaven to us once again.

“The other great religions tend to dissolve in speculations about what their founders meant, upon truths they taught, upon dimensions of the real beyond themselves but discovered in their lives. But our Lord did not say: ‘I have the truth.’ He said, ‘I am the truth (and the way, and the life).’ This separates Christ from all myths and mystifications. He stands before all history as the God-Man who says, ‘Accept me or reject me.’

God is. Christ is, first as the eternal Son of the Father, himself God in all his glory, and then as Jesus in a manger, true man born of the Virgin. We affirm all these truths in the creed. To take these propositions literally is to undo everything that previously was in the order of nature. The world is turned upside down, transfigured, altogether itself yet so much more.

The God who names himself ‘I Am’ is

the same God who is in the manger on Christmas. The Catholic Faith begins and ends with a God who in every sense is Creator of the world that is, making each and every thing be at this very moment in time. An assertion of the priority of existence runs through the most basic catechism taught youngsters when they are first introduced to the Faith.”³

The world has seldom admitted to the Incarnation, for in doing so it must necessarily admit to the severe poverty of the creature that is man. Just as in the beginning, man continues to believe that gods are what we make of them, that they are creatures made in our image and likeness and thus hold no special power over us but exist to do our bidding.

Jesus Christ is God, the Word become flesh, and he was born and lived among us, sharing in our humanity, showing us the way to our heavenly Father.

“Theologians tell us that when he hung there those three hours, in which mankind was redeemed, he summed up all existence—both human and cosmic—in which all time came together in a supreme moment of salvation and the tears of history, from its first beginning to its final end in judgment, were wiped away by the incarnate Author of all that is.”⁴

Christmas is the time to acknowledge the power and the glory Christ, our Savior. Let us rejoice and be glad.

1. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Christmas Means What It Is: The Incarnation utterly changed all reality*, Catholic Answers Magazine, November-December 2016, pp. 10-15. This article first appeared in this magazine (when it was titled *The Rock*) in 1991.
2. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Christmas Means What It is*, p. 13-14.
3. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Christmas Means What It is*, p. 15.

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

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

Touchstone
A Journal of Mere Christianity
Editor: James M. Kushiner
Bi-Monthly.
www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine
Share the Faith, Defend the Faith
Editor: Tim Ryland
Bi-Monthly.
www.catholic.com

Maranatha

When will he come?

Anyone who has ever traveled with small children is intimately familiar with the question repeated incessantly throughout the entirety of the journey: *"Are we there yet?"* Small ones have little understanding of time or distance, only of anticipation and impatience when time becomes eternity. It is the destination not the journey which occupies their every thought. Thus it is that the question asked with ever escalating frequency is guaranteed to frustrate even the most stolid of parent.

Even adults find it difficult to refrain from continually asking *"when will he come,"* yet to which *"coming"* does our question refer: the coming of the birth of Christ or when he will come again? Either coming demands a wait, one within a time of our knowing, the other yet to be revealed by God.

The inexorable march of time brings us closer to that happy moment when all the earth kneel in silent prayer to hear the good news of his first coming, the Word made flesh, the birth of the Son of God.

We begin our annual journey toward Bethlehem and the birth of our Lord and Savior, and like children, we keep asking *"when will he come"* though we know the answer, we know the time, we know the place, for this journey we have met and traveled many times. It is familiar yet we never

lose that sense of awe and wonder which his coming builds within our hearts.

Strange then that we should begin this Advent season, this coming of his birth with such foreboding speech of his return, his second coming. We cannot help but wonder when, for we have no knowledge of it, neither day nor time, nor season. We only know what he has told us. *"Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come."*¹



Jesus warns us that just *"as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."*² Those who are not prepared will be left behind. Those who watched Noah build his big boat on dry land must have laughed at such foolishness. They laughed and enjoyed their lives as before, unworried of the future, living for the moment. And then the rains

began to fall and the land sank below the waters and Noah's boat began to float away, and they were all swept beneath the waves.

What are we to make of this? Are we to live in constant expectation of his second coming? Do we need to be prepared for the end of time every day of our lives? Will we be left behind if we aren't?

The ready answer to each of these is *"yes"* for as Jesus said, we do not know the day nor the hour of his coming. If we live our lives always in the presence of our Lord we ought not live in fear but rather in anticipation and impatience.

Saint Paul tells us *"it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand."*³ It would first appear that Paul was telling those who heard his words that the end would be any day, which in a way is true, for we know not the day nor the hour. Yet each day that we rise from sleep marks the end of the day before, a day that will never come again. Every minute of our lives

is both a beginning and an ending and we never know what lies before us.

If we live our lives in orgies and drunkenness, promiscuity and lust, rivalry and jealousy then we will be unprepared when the Lord comes again and will be washed away into the darkness.

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We neither know the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come again and that seems to worry a great many of us. Yet we have neither the foreknowledge of what lies before us nor of the time of our death, neither of which we bear much if any concern. We live, knowing that there will come a time when we will leave this mortal plain, and we give it little weight or thought.

We should heed the words of an ancient monk who said, *"If my conscience is burdened with sin what good will it do me to know when the Day of Judgment will be? Unless the Lord comes to my soul beforehand and makes his home with me, unless Christ lives in me and speaks his word in my heart, it is useless for me to know if and when his coming will take place.*

*Only if Christ is already living in me and I in him will it go well with me when he comes in judgment. If I have already died to the world and am able to say, 'The world is crucified to me, and I to the world,' then, in a sense, his final coming is already present to me."*⁴

We forget that whenever we receive our Lord in the Eucharist he comes to us again. When Christ is present in us we stand in judgment for to receive him unworthily is to deny his divinity and the blessings of salvific grace we have received through his incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Jesus said, *"Be sure of this, if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be*

*broken into."*⁵ We, who are accustomed to modern technological gadgetry, such things as electronic alarms, motion detectors, and remote cameras, should take heed for nothing man may construct or devise may give us advance warning of the coming of the Lord.

Just as there can be neither time machines nor devices to alert us to impending death, neither will there be warnings or visible signs to inform us that the time draws near when the Son of Man will come again to judge the living and the dead.

God is already present, always present everywhere. God, as Sheila Cassidy colorfully puts it, is no more present in church than in a drinking bar, but we generally are more present to God in church than we are in a drinking bar. The problem of presence is not with God, but with us.

Sadly, this is also true for our presence to the richness of our own lives. Too often we are not present to the beauty, love, and grace that brims within the ordinary moments of our lives. Bounty is there, but we aren't. Because of restlessness, tiredness, distraction, anger, obsession, wound, haste, whatever, too often we are not enough inside of ourselves to appreciate what the moments of our own lives hold. We think of our lives as impoverished, dull, small-time, not worth putting our full hearts into, but as with prayer, the fault of non-presence is on our side. Our lives come laden with richness, but we aren't sufficiently present to what is there.

Sometimes we aren't as lucky, our

health and our lives must be radically threatened or taken from us before we realize how rich these in fact already are, if only we made ourselves more present to them. If everything were taken away from us and then given back, our perspective would change drastically.

What do you do when someone you love very dearly and miss very much has been gone a very long time but promises to return soon? Do you ignore their absence, or do you anticipate their return and send them messages to let them know how much you long to be with them again?

When we expect some very important event to happen, we wait for it with excited anticipation. The Lord Jesus expects us to watch in great anticipation for the most important event of all – his return in glory at the end of time! While the second coming is for certain, the time is unknown. The Lord's judgment will come swiftly and unexpectedly. Jesus warns his listeners to not be caught off guard when that day arrives. It will surely come in God's good time!

Amen.

Homily for
First Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 2:1-5
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:37-44

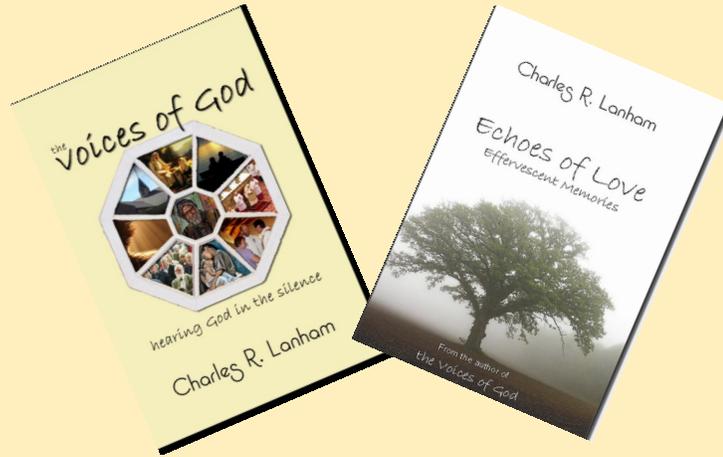
1. Mt 24:42.

2. Mt 24:37.

3. Rom 13:11-12.

4. Paschasius Radbertus, *Homily IV super Missus est*, 1-2: PL 183, 78-80.

5. Mt 24:43.



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

deaconscorner.org

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