



A journal for restless minds

**WHICH CAME FIRST***Cause and effect***HERE, NOW, FOREVER***Sooner than later***SOUND OF SILENCE***Independence Day***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.

**Which Came First***Cause and effect*

**F**amily or Faith. Which do you suppose came first? There is no way, short of heaven, to answer such a question, although there are many who have made the attempt. I am of the mind that it matters little in the grand scheme of things, yet I am wholly convinced of the relationship which unites them.

To use an analogy: family and faith may be likened to the two spiral strands, the double helix, of DNA. Each strand is essential and inseparable from the other, held together and in correct relation to one another by a myriad of short rods.

Remove, break, or sever the connecting rods and the bond between the two strands is weakened; at some point, the relationship becomes malformed, distorted, even irreparably corrupted.

So, what are the short rods that unite family and faith? They are none other than the rods of religious tradition,

teaching, doctrine, and dogma of the Church. The more coherent—that is, the better in uniting the whole—the rods to the spiral strands, the stronger the relationship between faith and family.

In *How the West Really Lost God*, Mary Eberstadt explains how “the sometimes revolutionary changes in Christian doctrine ... led inadvertently to even more weakening of the family as an institution across the West.”<sup>1</sup> Exacerbated and clearly accelerated by the rejection of traditional Chris-

tian mores in the 1960s, many Christian churches initiated, in retrospect, self-destructive alterations to long-standing doctrine in vain attempts to hold onto their rapidly fleeing flocks. “They initiated one doctrinal change after another that further weakened the ties

between family and church—a process that surely accelerated decline even more.

None of which is to say that anyone intended as much. These reform-minded religious leaders generally shared one goal that they thought of as humanitarian: they wanted to construct a Christianity with a kinder,



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# Here, Now, Forever

*Sooner than later*

**R**iddle me this: When Jesus says to his disciples, *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,"* does that make any sense to you?

Much of today's Gospel seems inexplicable, doesn't it? It feels as though what Jesus is saying is filled with riddles and contradictions; some parts come across as rather arrogant, dismissive, and condescending. So, what precisely is he telling us?

Perhaps a parable might help to explain the seemingly inexplicable.

Once there was a young man. He was born into a wonderful, loving family; never experiencing hunger or want, yet he was seldom allowed to engage in those idle pleasures which so many youth he knew were wont to enjoy.

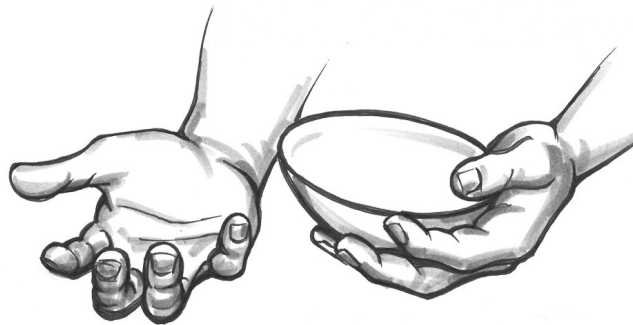
Over time, the young man began to resent all that he had. Nothing satisfied his need for what he did not have. Bitter and morose, he escaped the prison walls of family and friends, intent on living his life in his own way and in his own time.

And he did just that.

He worked hard and he played hard. He succeeded in his career and in time became very wealthy. He had it all: money, power, prestige. He was

finally living life to the full, and yet ... He was not happy. All that he had left him dissatisfied. He had everything he had ever desired but there was always something more to be purchased, always something left to be acquired. What he could not purchase or acquire, such as love or family, he paid little heed. All his relationships were brief and shallow for he loved only that which he could own and possess.

Despite all his achievements, his possessions, and his wealth, he felt dead inside. Life had become unbearable, empty, and meaningless.



One evening he received a call from his father, with whom he had not spoken for many years. His father told him that he was dying; cancer he was told by his doctors. He wanted nothing but to tell his son he loved him and missed him. Could he please come home so he could see him once more before he passed away?

**T**he son promised that he would come as soon as he could take care of a few things. Some months later, the man received another call informing him that his father had passed away and could he please come and take care of his father's estate. Reluctantly, he ac-

quiesced and made the journey to where he had grown up.

**T**hose who had known his father spoke well of his kindness to everyone. They recalled his devotion to his wife, his family, his faith and his God; and of how proud he was of his son. They admired his honesty and fairness in all that he did. But most of all they were amazed by his generosity, for though he never had much, what he had he would cheerfully give away to anyone who was in greater need. And, they all said, he was the happiest man they had ever known.

Later, the man sat at the worn kitchen table, in the now silent house, and thought of all the things he had heard of his father that day. And, in the silence, heard his father telling him that he loved him and only wanted to see him one last time before he died. In that moment, the man understood for the first time in his life, what was most important: more important than money, power, or prestige; more important than things which can be purchased or acquired, more important even than himself.

All those years acquiring possessions, which in the end, possessed him. He had spent his life craving false gods, idols which too soon proved inadequate; and when they failed to satisfy, when they failed to meet his expectations, his desires turned to hatred for their indifferent betrayal.

He realized then that all he sought

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was for his own benefit, his own pleasure. He had made himself the absolute center of his life, the purpose for his existence and in doing so had brought ruin on himself. He had knelt before the altar of his possessions, things he had worshiped and adored.

**W**ith a suddenness that surprised, the man found himself on his knees and for the first time in many, many years, he prayed—to God. In that moment, the man gave himself to God; all that had possessed him, all his narcissistic illusions, died along with his former life. In his dying, he was reborn, he found new life.

According to Matthew's account, Jesus says, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* Luke, on the other hand, recounts it this way: *"If you come to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and your own life too, you cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:26) which is much harsher than Matthew's telling of it. Here is an example of inadequate translation. The Gospels were all written in Greek although some portions originally written in Aramaic. Aramaic had no words for *"love more than"* which some scholars attribute to the use of the word *"hate"* in Luke.

Whenever we read scripture passages which deal with human relations, we must be aware of at least two possible dangers: the first is the relative importance expressed between the person or thing we love and the love of God, and the second is to keep in

mind that such love can and often does become possessive.

*"If the totality of our love is exhausted by any created thing or person, then that 'loved one' must become the anchor of our being, our purpose and fulfillment, our security and final hope. Sooner or later such a total object of our love becomes our idol, a false god."*

*But God must always be 'more than' any creature on earth. If we turn a human person into a god, either that person will eventually possess us, or we will try to possess and use the fabricated god as an idol....*

*If we say to another, 'you're my everything; you're my meaning; I am nothing without you,' then what is left of us to give that person? Why would he or she even be bothered with us, if we are nothing without them? ..."*

*"Only when we take up the cross of true love—'laying down our lives,' sharing ourselves freely with our family and friends, not demanding that they be our gods or we be theirs—do we find ourselves."*

*If neither I nor you are God, but only God is God, then we may love each other freely, non-possessively, and without jealousy. There is no question of domination or control. Then we know the greatest gift God has given us: the capacity to bestow our lives freely in covenants and promises to our dear ones, who even in eternity are loved in God."<sup>1</sup>*

**A**ll this is to highlight that there is a cost of discipleship, at times a very high cost. Jesus wanted to make sure that there were no illusions concerning how high the price might be demand-

ed of his disciples. Discipleship often requires us to make difficult choices; seldom is it peaceful and easy. Yet, Jesus reminds us that every good thing we do will be known to God, even if you give only a cup of cold water to someone.

**W**hat Jesus is telling us is to seriously consider what is first in our lives or to acknowledge what should be first, which is our relationship with God. Our ticket to heaven can only be purchased from God. It should be the most valuable ticket we might ever purchase. When we don't respond to God's offer, we are telling him that his offer holds little or no value to us, that his offer doesn't mean anything to us.

Jesus said, *"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."* Whether in this life or in the next, whenever we welcome and receive one another, we show our love for God who dwells in us and everyone else. Whether or not we will live for all eternity in the presence of Almighty God depends on our relationship with God in the here and now.

Unlike the young man in the parable, we need to ask ourselves where God is in our lives, not later, not tomorrow, not years from now, but today and each and every day of our lives. Amen.

Homily for the  
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
2 Kgs 4:8-11, 14-16A  
Romans 6:3-4, 8-11  
Matthew 10:37-42

1. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Letting Go of the Beloved*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

gentler, more inclusive face. They were also up against hard pragmatic reality that only added to the pressure for change: many members of the flock, especially as of the 1960s, were already living in ways that amounted to tacit defiance of church teaching—and churches that frowned on them weren't likely to keep them. For these reasons, both reformers within the churches and laypeople and women outside of them independently sought doctrinal change. From the acceptance of divorce to the okaying of contraception to the embrace of active homosexuality today, these realities have been the engines driving most changes in Christian doctrine."<sup>2</sup>

Here then is where the rubber met the road. In their zeal to reform through doctrinal change, they unwittingly unleashed a firestorm of unwanted and unexpected consequences, weakening both literally and figuratively the very foundations upon which they depended: the natural family.

*"In their efforts to reach out to individuals who wanted a softening of Christian doctrine," Eberstadt suggests, these reform-minded churches inadvertently, "appear to have failed to protect their base: thriving families whose members would then go on to reproduce both literally and in the figurative sense of handing down their religion."*

Historically, doctrinally, and traditionally Christianity has, from its inception, always been swimming upstream. From the beginning, it has held its members to a higher moral standard, to a stricter moral code, well beyond that of most other religions.

The modern mind, having no true interest in ancient history,—having little interest in what happened last week, let alone two-millennia past—is unaware that absent technological and scientific advances, human behavior has changed little since Jesus walked the earth.

In the early centuries after his crucifixion, infanticide was routinely practiced; abortions were not unknown, children were frequently born out of wedlock, divorce was legal and obtainable, and homosexuality was commonplace. Yet such generally accepted practices were morally forbidden, condemned by the upstart Christian church as grave sins against the will of God.

*"From pagan Rome two-thousand years ago to secular Western Europe today, the church's rules about sex have amounted to saying no, no, and no to things about which non-Christians have gotten to say yes or why not."*

*This code, in short, was always problematic from the perspective of people who resented its constraints. (It still is.) The historical surprise, therefore, is not so much that reformers would ultimately work to make it more user-friendly. It is rather that this code stood untouched at the center of Christendom for as long as it did—i.e., more or less until the Reformation. That was when churchmen first started picking apart the tapestry of Christian sexual morality—hundreds of years ago, long before the sexual revolution, and over one particular thread: divorce."<sup>3</sup>*

Led by Martin Luther and John Calvin, protestant reformers began to chip away at the Ro-

man Catholic Church's doctrine on the indissolubility of marriage, inaugurating the slow but ever steepening slide down the slope of social acceptance.

As with divorce, subsequent doctrinal concessions were made out of compassion for human weakness and to assuage the modern mind—and although initially characterized as the exception rather than the rule, such limitations almost immediately proved futile.

For nearly two-millennia, the whole of Christianity held that artificial contraception was wrong. The fall from grace of this long-standing moral doctrine began with the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1930, who passed Resolution 15 which allowed for the use of artificial contraception under carefully delineated marital circumstances. Despite its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception control motivated by selfishness, luxury, or convenience, Resolution 15 merely opened the floodgates, establishing artificial conception as the rule rather than the exception. *"In just a few decades ... contraception ... went from being an unfortunate option, to an unremarkable option, to the theologically preferable option in some cases."*<sup>4</sup>

Similar attacks on other long-standing doctrines and traditional Christian moral code are painfully obvious and especially appalling. Euthanasia, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, cohabitation, homosexuality, same-sex unions (a.k.a. marriage,) artificial insemination, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, prostitution, and today

transgenderism were in direct conflict with traditional Christian moral code.

In the 1960s, more and more began to reject Christian sexual mores, arguing that such moral strictures were based on an exaggerated sense of guilt, and that Christianity needed a “new morality” based on love and situational ethics rather than the legalism of yesteryear. As John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich wrote, “Nothing can of itself always be labeled as wrong.”<sup>5</sup>

Those churches at the forefront of reform, the ones that most aggressively loosened adherence to the traditional Christian moral code have come to rue their doctrinal relaxation. Some are even now facing extinction, as one headline declared, a few short years ago: “Will the last person to leave the Church of England please turn out the lights.”<sup>6</sup>

Just the opposite can be observed with churches that have refused to follow in the reformers’ footsteps, holding fast to the traditional moral code—“the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, for example; or the traditional-minded evangelical churches; or the Pentecostals; or the Anglican churches of what is now called the Global South, who tenaciously defend the moral teaching of Christianity against the paganism of their own societies and the secularized reform-minded Christians of the West alike.”<sup>7</sup>

As for Catholicism, the most vibrant areas are the most orthodox. Traditional morality remains strong within these churches and their flocks are growing because their families are growing.

What is clear is that the tinkering with doctrine, which began with the Reformation, has seriously weakened the churches that have rejected or loosened their doctrine and teaching on traditional Christian morality. “It weakened them demographically, as removing the emphasis on the family and the injunction to be fruitful and multiply has resulted in graying parishioners and empty pews across the Western world. It weakened them financially, as the failure of worshippers to replace themselves has left those churches with an ever-shrinking base of contributors—the same problem facing the West’s aging welfare states. And it has weakened the same churches in a wider sense of mission and morale.”<sup>8</sup>

The rods between faith and family have been sorely tested. The keys to the now shuttered doors to a revitalized and enduring faith rests in the hands of the “natural family.”

The moral code which was held sacrosanct for millennia calls all to lives of holiness, founded on the fundamental principle that all life is of infinite value because we have been created in God’s image and likeness. Faith and family are inseparably linked. Like the double helix model, both family and faith are needed to reproduce what God intended.

1. Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization*, (Templeton Press, June 9, 2014), 139.
2. Ibid 139-140.
3. Ibid 142-143.
4. Ibid 146.
5. John Robinson, *Honest to God*, 40th anniv. Ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 118.
6. Adrain Hamilton, “Will the Last Person to Leave the Church of England Please Turn Out the Lights,” *The Independent*, April 18, 2011.
7. Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 152.
8. Ibid 153.

## 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

### On Conscience

**Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger**

Ignatius Press

2007, 82 pages.

### How the West Really Lost God

**Mary Eberstadt**

Templeton Press

June 9, 2012, 268 pages.

### Strangers in a Strange Land

**Charles J. Chaput**

Henry Holt and Co.

February 21, 2017, 288 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)



# Sound of Silence

## *Independence Day*

**T**wo years ago, I retreated from the world for a week of silent reflection. It was perhaps one of the most excellent adventures I have ever undertaken. I keep thinking I should do it again; I am not quite certain why I haven't—inertia, I suppose. My week encompassed the Fourth of July, Independence Day, and as I was keeping a daily journal, I naturally wrote on that day thoughts on our national celebration. In rereading what I wrote that day, I found it all worth repeating, so what follows is my journal entry for day two of my weeklong silent retreat.



**H**appy Independence Day! It definitely has felt a bit off today, having spent what is normally a celebratory occasion with family and friends, yet another quiet reflective day on retreat. My thoughts today, compared with yesterday, were far more somber and troubled. It definitely was not the luscious treat that I was given yesterday although it was a good day all things considered.

In many ways my reflective mood has been tempered by thoughts of what this day, this national holiday, ought to mean to everyone who calls this nation home, and yet dampened by the sobering realization that citizen-

ship, patriotism, national pride, and love of country somehow may have been irretrievably lost, that a place that once was great and good and wonderful has been tossed away without so much a second glance or careless thought.



**I**t does not take a great mind or deep thinker to realize that this country that I love so much has fallen down the rabbit hole and, like Alice, has found itself wandering around dazed, lost, confused, and confounded by well...literally anything and everything!

As I wandered around the center grounds this morning I couldn't help but feel at peace, for within this small oasis little of what exists beyond the gate creeps in. I sat for a while and watched what appeared to be perhaps a hundred small birds, very much like hummingbirds it seemed, flitting in and out of a large dark-green tree. What I thought while watching them was just how contented and happy they appeared to be with whatever they were doing because they were doing what they were meant to be doing and giving it all their best. So many of them and yet there was no

fighting, no shoving, no animosity at all, just a lot of little birds doing what they were born to do.

**W**e humans, particularly those of us who call this nation home, could do ourselves an enormous service if we would but pause and regroup and simply watch the birds for a moment or two. We have problems, serious problems, in some cases even mortal problems that are in desperate need of addressing but it seems to me that the odds of resolving any one of them is so low it may be difficult to find a bookie to take the bet. The reason the odds are so against us is not because any one problem or all of them together aren't resolvable, but rather, I believe, it is because we no longer have the fortitude, the rectitude, and the will to change our attitude. In a word, we no longer give a damn! Not one fig, twig, or teddy bear. Yes Sam, we simply do not care.

A recent poll (I really do hate polls, I really do) reported that no more than 14% of the nation's young (I have no idea what age range that includes) knew the meaning of Independence day, knew when the Declaration of Independence was written and signed, or knew even one person who signed it. Whether that number is spot on, lower, or higher is of really little importance other than it serves as an indication of a problem. Ask our youth almost any question of historical significance and only a few will respond with any accuracy.

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**M**ost will answer, *"I dunno, dude, like man I ain't into that hysterical stuff!"* But... ask them whether racism, discrimination, climate change, corporate greed, or other social ills are prevalent in our society and prepare to be bombarded with slogans of hate, anger, and condemnation.

But it isn't just the young; far too many of us, no matter what the issue, problem, or challenge that comes before us respond thoughtlessly with vulgarity and spit. We have lost our moral compass, all sense of moral values, right judgment, and above all else just plain common sense. We have traded argument for conversation, debate for dialog, anger for reason, animosity for friendship, hatred for love, and division for community.

With almost every problem that now exists within, and even some outside our own borders we can no longer have a reasoned conversation because inevitably someone will disagree who would rather tear you down than discuss the issues. It is my way or the highway and by the way I own the road and you can't pay the toll! Instead of *"I must sincerely disagree and here's why..."* we hear *"You're a bigot"* or *"You're a racist"* or *"You hate gays"* or *"Liar, liar, pants on fire!"* Go ahead, write your own screed. Don't listen, rant. Don't communicate, scream. Don't converse, blame. And of course, never let the facts get in the way. Deny, denigrate, blame, obfuscate.

Moments like this are when I find myself wanting to do as Howard Beale once so famously suggested and shout

out of my window *"I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"*<sup>1</sup> Of course, I'm much too sanguine to actually do such a thing but it certainly made me feel better to at least have that thought rattling around inside my head. You certainly have my permission to do so if you wish.

These were some of my thoughts as I went about my day in quiet reflection. I told my Spiritual Director that I didn't hear God today, not because I wasn't listening, because I really was, but because I felt He wanted me to do some figuring out on my own. I can't decide whether that was a good thing or not but it is what it is I suppose and I will simply have to live with that and I guess, sleep on it too.



**S**ince I penned these thoughts two years ago our nation has become even more divided. As difficult as it is to believe, it is my admittedly one-sided assessment that we have gone from angry to slightly bonkers to completely stark raving mad! And I cannot help but wonder if or when we will ever regain our sanity and our senses.

On December 8th, 1941, then President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a brief seven minute speech to a Joint Session of Congress which he began with *"Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."* That date, *"a date which will live in infamy"* catapulted America into the Second World War.

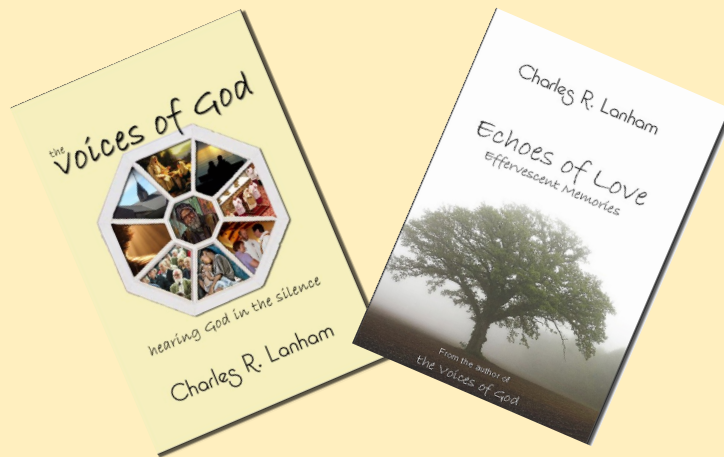
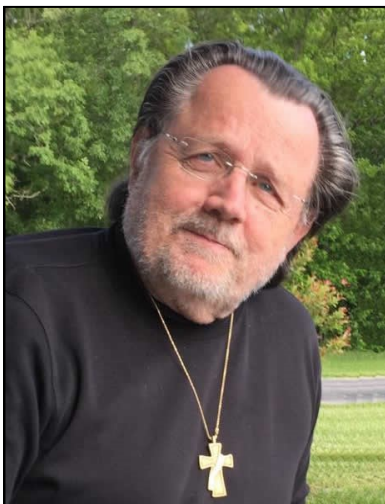
And for much of the following two decades America, a proud and great nation, stood together before the world as the last bastion of freedom.

**T**here were social, political, and religious differences, to be sure, but those differences were discussed, debated, and resolved peacefully and with respect for one another. Newspapers, radio, and television *"reported"* the *"news"* fairly and honestly. The media (and here I must include social media) today is nothing at all akin to the media during the 1940s and 1950s. Today, news is rarely reported, it is editorialized, op-edited, slanted, skewered, tortured, and bent beyond any semblance of the truth. Reasonable Americans can see this, but fed the same swill, day after day, even reasonable people begin to believe some of what they are digesting to be caviar and fine wine.

On this, our nations birthday, let us once again pray for peace, let us hope for justice, and let us try to find common ground for that which now more than ever divides us.

When our nation was founded, our forefathers were never in complete agreement, yet they sought solutions through reasoned debate and compromise; they sought solutions not division; they created a document and a government of the people, for the people, and by the people which has been sorely tested and tried for nearly two-and-three-quarters centuries. Let us remember that God has truly blessed our great land, the home of the free and the brave. God bless America.

1. Howard Beale, a fictional news anchor in the satirical film *Network*, 1976.



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

**deacons corner.org**

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