



A journal for restless minds

## DOGMA OF LOVE

*Which is more important?*

## NOW AND NOT YET

*The wisdom to know the difference*

## AMAZING GRACE

*What it is and what it does*

## OF WHAT MIND?

*Discussion or polemic*

## 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

## Dogma Of Love

*Which is more important?*

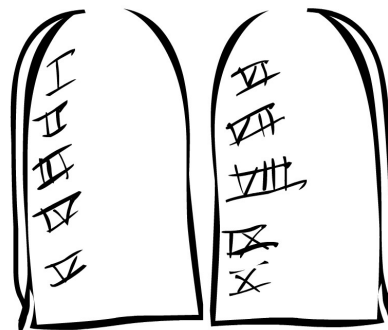
God is Love. How interesting it is to conjecture which is more important: dogma or love? And yet, how meaning-  
less the debate.

A recent Faith Forum column in the local newspaper with the headline: "Following strict dogma, or love—which wins out?" asked various religious leaders "What is more important: purity of dogma or integrity of love?"

The question was based on the definition for dogma of "a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true." The questioner prefaced the question with another: "How do we love others who are dissimilar from us in dogma?" There were a few who came close to addressing the question appropriately, but none who addressed the underlying issue with the question.

Let's consider the definition of dogma from a very personal point-of-view, that is, from God's point-of-view.

First, as stated at the beginning: God is Love. If that is true—which I posit is incontrovertibly so—then God / Love must necessarily be the highest authority over all others. Any and all truths issued by God, Who is Love, must by definition, always and forever, be incontrovertibly true. From the beginning, God has inscribed dogma on the human heart, moral principles which are incontrovertibly true.



God etched dogma onto stone tablets, defining principles of law for man to follow accordingly; commandments made by Love out of love for love. By our love for God we are measured; our love is measured by how well we follow His dogma, his commandments. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. Only in doing so, is it possible to love our neighbors and ourselves.

## Now And Not Yet

*The wisdom to know the difference*

**T**he Kingdom of God. Jesus speaks of it so often and yet, we cannot resist asking: *"what and where is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven?"*

Not surprisingly, there are in all 122 occurrences of these words in the New Testament, 99 in the three Synoptic Gospels and 90 on the lips of Jesus himself. Matthew refers to the *"Kingdom of heaven"* following the Jewish linguistic rule of never using the Name of God out of reverence for the greatness of his Holy Name. Mark and Luke use *"Kingdom of God."*<sup>1</sup> In either case, the meaning is the same.

But what is it, where is it, and most importantly, when is it? The Kingdom of heaven is both now and *"not yet."* It is both the presence in the here and now of God in our lives and, it is what awaits us beyond this earthly existence. It is now and *"not yet."* What Jesus wants us to understand is that the kingdom is ours to experience both now and later, not just later.

We attain the kingdom by choosing to live our lives the best we can; not out of fear of punishment, retribution or judgment, but out of love.

Think of how we live our lives. Do we choose to treat others honestly and fairly or are we motivated solely for personal gain? Do we treat everyone—even those we dislike or think unwor-

thy of our care and respect, lovingly, as children of God? Do we honor our commitments to our family and friends even when they might not? Do we help others who need our help, even if or when we owe them nothing, without expecting or demanding anything in return?

The kingdom is neither time nor place. When we hear *"the kingdom of heaven is like ..."* we conjure up an image of heaven as a place, a place we are traveling toward, a place to which we hope to one day arrive. But that is not heaven, that is not the *"Kingdom of God."*



**T**he Kingdom of heaven is first a reference to a relationship, not a place or a time. We don't have to wait for the eschatological *"end time"* to experience the kingdom of heaven. We experience it in the here and now when our relationship with God and our response to his love give meaning to our lives now while drawing us toward the *"not yet."*

Having a right relationship with God requires some serious soul-searching, it demands taking a hard

look at how we are currently living in the kingdom; looking at all aspects of our lives—both big and small. Are we living as if God is truly present to us? Where does our treasure lie? What is the pearl which we value most? How much would you give up to purchase it? If God offered you something, how would you respond?

**G**od said to Solomon, *"Ask something of me and I will give it to you."* Heady stuff for a mere youth, who had just recently succeeded his father, David, as king. Many might ask for wealth or power or long life, but Solomon asked for none of those things. *"Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."* Solomon asked for wisdom, for the ability to rule wisely, with good judgment.

How many leaders today ever truly listen to the people? How many of us truly listen to others, attempting to understand their perspective, what they are saying?

Far too often, what we perceive in others are but superficial trappings, masks which hide the true self. Buried deep within lies a darkness, filled with resentment, bitterness, anger, frustration, and jealousy. In this we all struggle, for it is in our nature as moral human beings. Anyone who has foregone dreams, ambitions, comfort, and pleasure for the sake of God, truth, duty, family, community, or country, will at times, feel resentment for the crosses they have quietly born

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

which have largely gone unnoticed and unappreciated by those who have chosen the easier path of pleasure and careless existence.

**T**hose among us who strive to live lives in service to others, to be good neighbors and to love God above all else, can too easily fall prey to envy, self-pity, and bitter moralizing over the faults and failures of others. How then can we resist the temptation while continuing to live faithful to the Gospel?

I suggest the answer lies within the gospel message for today: in the parable of the buried treasure which a person finds and buries again and in the parable of the merchant who finds a pearl of great price. We should always *"remember that a parable always points to 'something more' or 'something other'.* The key word here is 'joy'. God or God's reign is the hidden treasure. To find God brings great joy, but the discovery has a potential for disaster as well as for grace."<sup>2</sup>

Each, out of great joy, eagerly sells all that he has in order to obtain a treasure of great value or a pearl of great price. Neither regrets nor hesitates in the least for what he has to give up for the treasure obtained far outweighs the price they had to pay.

It is in the context of self-sacrifice where we determine our true treasure. *"If the pain of what is sacrificed overshadows the joy of what is discovered, that is, if the focus is more on what we have lost and given up rather than on what we have found, we will end up doing the right actions but with the wrong energy, carrying*

*other people's crosses and sending them the bill. And we will be unable to stop ourselves from being judgmental, bitter, and secretly envious of the amoral.*

*To the very extent that we die to ourselves in order to live for others, we run the perennial risk of falling into the kind of bitterness that besets us whenever we feel we have missed out on something. That's an occupational hazard, a very serious one, inside Christian discipleship and the spiritual life in general. And so, our focus must always be on the treasure, the pearl of great price, the rich meaning, the self-authenticating joy that is the natural fruit of any real self-sacrifice."*<sup>3</sup>

What is the one thing—the treasure, the pearl—for which we would be willing to sacrifice everything, willing to sell or give all that we have in order to possess? What Solomon wanted most was *"an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."*

**W**ould we want the same, or is what we want something superficial and selfish: possessions, security, power, pleasure, or comfort? What would be worth all that we have? What would we sacrifice everything to obtain? This is what the parables in the gospel are about: the reign of God, his kingdom, our hearts' desire and deepest existential longing.

*"Some seek pleasures in every variation imaginable. They fall away sated but restless. Some build shrines to the ego's power. They die alone, unloved, and uncaring. Others collect their things to die, like the movies' Citizen Kane, empty of substance.*

*Solomon dreamed long ago that a higher wisdom and deeper joy might be found. It would not be grasped in the accumulation of things, the collection of earthly delights, or dominance over others, even though these would be given to him in good time.*

His deepest desire was to know a good that was fully worth loving. His highest hope was to know what was right and to be able to do it. God saw this higher wisdom in him, this pearl of great price, and Solomon's wish was granted.<sup>4</sup>

**O**rigen, an ancient Christian thinker, wrote: *"To the seeker after fine pearls may be applied the words, 'Seek and you will find,' and, 'Everyone who seeks will find!' If you ask what is to be sought, and what will be found by everyone who seeks for it, I say with all confidence: pearls—especially that pearl which will be acquired by those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: 'I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ.' 'Everything' means beautiful pearls; 'to gain Christ' refers to the one pearl of great price."*<sup>5</sup>

Are you willing to pay the price "to gain Christ?" Amen.

Homily for the  
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
1 Kings 3:5, 7-12  
Romans 8:28-30  
Matthew 13:44-52

1. Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 24-25.
2. John J. Pilch, *Hidden Treasures*, The Sunday Website of Saint Louis University.
3. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: Searching for the Right Fuel*, The Sunday Website of Saint Louis University.
4. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *The Higher Wisdom*, The Sunday Website of Saint Louis University.
5. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel* 10, 9-10: SC 162, 173-177.

# Amazing Grace

*What it is and what it does*

*The following is adapted from a presentation delivered two years ago to an RCIA class. This week picks up from last week and concludes the discussion on grace.*

God is the uncreated, infinite Creator of all creation; all of creation has been willed into being by God. God has no beginning but we do; we began when God willed our unity (body and soul) into existence. Death separates our immortal soul from our mortal body, at least temporarily, for they *"will be reunited at the final Resurrection"* at which time we will live forever either wrapped within or excluded from God's presence. Whether we will spend eternity with God depends entirely on the sanctity of our soul at the end of our mortal life here on this earth.

To attain salvation, to be saved, our souls must be holy, filled with sanctifying grace and fully prepared for a supernatural life in perfect and absolute union with God. We are not born with soul sanctified and our concupiscence, that is our inclination to sin, can result in the loss of sanctification. To be sanctified, to fill our soul with holiness, we must first reconcile ourselves with God for all deadly or mortal sins.

While our soul will never cease to exist it can experience spiritual death and a soul that is spiritually dead cannot and will not see God. Through the mercy and grace of God we can respond to His gift of actual grace and regain the supernatural life

of the soul through genuine and contrite reconciliation.

Another word for sanctification, which is often used by our Protestant brothers and sisters, is justification. St. Paul wrote *"Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? ... but now you have had yourselves washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*<sup>20</sup>



Protestants often claim that justification is a mere rhetorical device, a simple declaration by God that one is abruptly *"justified."* Once you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you are now *"justified."* Even though your soul remains unchanged, perhaps even spiritually dead, you have been saved and are on the expressway to heaven. You are still expected to seek sanctification, but whether you achieve any degree of holiness is irrelevant since you have been justified and have therefore been saved.

This is an unfortunate scam since it places God at the center of a lie: God

says the sinner is justified when it really isn't the case at all. Justification without sanctification is de facto impossible, no less so than God prevaricating. Sanctification is necessary for justification; without sanctification, justification is lost and the soul spiritually dead.

We have been created with certain inherent talents that inform us intuitively and quite unconsciously as to what is right, what is moral, what is ethical, and what is good. It is a part of our nature, as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, to be good and to do good; goodness can be found within every human heart, even those who profess no belief or faith in a Creator God.

Instilled within every human heart are the elementary characteristics that cause parents to love their children, neighbors to respect and behave well toward neighbor, and employer to treat their employees with honesty and fairness. This moral code is part and parcel of the human experience; we are born with it and cannot rid ourselves of it, although unhappily we can and all too often do, ignore it and even deny it.

While it is within our nature to know what is right, moral, ethical, and good, we carry within us the inclination to sin inherited from our first parents when their eyes were opened to the knowledge of good and evil. Fundamentally we are flawed by concupiscence and cannot of our own strength hope to remain in perfect goodness for any significant length of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

time. Simply put, we are inclined toward sin, and will without assistance, find ourselves lapsing, falling upon occasion into grievous sin.

**G**od, who gives us life itself, desires us to be good, to be holy, so that we might live in his perfection for all eternity. He understands our willfulness and inclination to sin and although we clearly don't deserve it nor can we earn it, He gives us His grace to prop us up, to strengthen our will, and to build within us the humility to ask Him for forgiveness.

Saint Augustine, acknowledged as the Doctor of Grace, wrote *"It is the grace of God that helps the wills of men; and when they are not helped by it, the reason is in themselves, not in God."* Without God's free gift of grace we cannot hope to achieve or remain in holiness, in that state of sanctification necessary for salvation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that *"Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life."*<sup>21</sup> *"Grace is a participation in the life of God."*<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis says that *"Grace is not part of consciousness; it is the amount of light in our souls, not knowledge nor reason."*

Grace has been a part of the conversation within Christianity since the earliest days of Christ's Church. As Max Lucado points out *"The apostle Paul never seemed to exhaust the topic of grace - what makes us think we can? He just kept coming at it and coming at it*

*from another angle. That's the thing about grace. It's like springtime. You can't put it in a single sentence definition, and you can't exhaust it."* It is a topic upon which volumes have been written, and where both mystery and controversy surround it. What is essential to understand is this: God's grace sanctifies and leads us to salvation.

Virtually every rational human being accepts as axiomatic the absolute necessity to belong, to exist within the context of a community, to depend, in even a small way, on the existence of others. This associative dependence is an essential element of our humanity, gifted to us by God, a vital ingredient of our well-being. The English poet John Donne wrote *"No man is an island, Entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main"* and Joan Baez sang *"No man is an island, No man stands alone, Each man's joy is joy to me, Each man's grief is my own."*

God created us to depend on one another, to rely on one another for help and support. After God created man *"The Lord God said: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.'"*<sup>23</sup> God recognized from the very beginning, that His creation was not designed to be a solitary creature; that man could not long survive without companionship, without relationships with others.

**T**hus we recognize and admit that our human nature is fundamentally a social nature, designed for interdependence with others: family, friends, neighbors, tribes, communities, nations, and humanity in its entirety.

**W**hen God *"formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life,"*<sup>24</sup> he gave man a soul and the ability to live in His presence for all eternity, but only if the soul was pure, sanctified, and in a state of holiness pleasing to God. Man's arrogance and disobedience to God's covenant resulted in the loss of sanctification and an estrangement from God's presence and without God's help man's salvation would be forever lost.

Despite our inclination to sin, God loves us and desires for us to love Him and to ultimately dwell with Him for all eternity. And so, He gifts us graces to help us regain the sanctification that was lost through our own sin.

Salvation demands a soul that is filled with sanctifying grace, *"a habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by His love."*<sup>25</sup> *"It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism."*<sup>26</sup> And as Saint Paul describes it *"whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation."*<sup>27</sup>

When we are born our souls, because of the stain of original sin, are unprepared for heaven. What is missing is the sanctifying grace from God that is *"infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it."*<sup>28</sup> It is through the Sacrament of Baptism that our souls first become

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

sanctified and it is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we can regain sanctification when we commit mortal sin. There is nothing that we can do on our own to sanctify our soul. It is a supernatural gift from God and only through His boundless love and forgiveness can we receive it.

**I**nto every being there comes that defining moment when what did not before exist now does with unmistakable clarity and purpose. One moment there is simply nothing and then within the brief span of a fleeting thought a new life comes into existence, into being. While there are ongoing questions and serious debate concerning when exactly life does begin, there are two fundamental premises concerning life that should be accepted by everyone: the irreversibility of existence and the unknowable longevity of life.

The first premise states that existence cannot be returned to non-existence; that the threshold that lies between nothingness and existence can be traversed in only one direction. Existence is permanent, existence is forever. Whether a life once lived is remembered or forgotten does not negate the fact that a life once existed. There is a somewhat subtle corollary to this premise that should be made and that is that while existence cannot be undone, there is absolutely nothing that one can do about it. Once in existence you cannot wish or cause the cessation of your existence.

The second premise tells us that the length of any life is unknown and unknowable to the created. Whether a

life lasts for only a brief moment or for many years cannot be determined by anyone but God. A corollary to this is that to God the value of any life is not measured by its longevity; we are all children of God and loved equally no matter how long or short a time we might live.

Just as you have no control over your own existence; neither do you have any control over the sanctification of your soul. God freely fills your soul with sanctifying grace and you can do nothing to earn it, absolutely nothing. Your soul is eternal and there is nothing you can do to cause it out of existence. You cannot destroy your soul but you can lose sanctification by committing supernatural suicide through the commission of mortal sin. And if your soul is not sanctified you will lose the opportunity to spend eternity with God.

In order to restore your soul to supernatural life and receive sanctifying grace from God your soul must respond to actual grace, *"the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life."*<sup>29</sup>

**A**ctual graces are helping graces, given by God to incentivize or push us toward some supernatural act of faith or repentance. It is through God's assistance and our soul's response to these actual graces which we receive from Him that enables us to humbly seek forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to receive sanctifying grace and to once again regain supernatural life.

**T**he sanctification of our souls is not, as most fundamentalists and many of our protestant brethren will argue, a one-time event. This is not a position held simply by the Catholic Church, it can be found throughout Scripture. The truth is that sanctification is an ongoing process that demands reiterative human responses to God's gifts of grace.

When we commit grievous sin we lose sanctification; salvation is lost. Through the help of actual grace and reconciliation with God our souls are once again sanctified and salvation regained.

God's grace is freely given to all of His creation; every soul receives the gift of His grace but not all benefit from His unbounded munificence. It is incumbent upon each of us to recognize that without God's help we will most assuredly fail to overcome and remove sin from our lives.

We cannot solely of our own devices conquer our inherent proclivities, our concupiscence, our human inclination and natural attraction to that which is not good, to that which is sinful and deleterious to the sanctity of our soul. Without God's grace there can be no hope for salvation because we cannot on our own efforts sanctify our soul.

While it is outside of our control to achieve sanctification, it is totally within our nature to lose it, all we have to do is give into the temptation of sin. And temptation is a stranger to no one, for even Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

was exposed to temptation. *"Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil."*<sup>30</sup>

**T**emptation can be and often presents itself as an illusion, a chimaera, enveloped by wondrous delights and enticing goodness, which at its core contains the darkest of lies, and it is only through the grace of God that we can perceive beyond temptation's shell its true nature. Saint Paul freely admitted that he struggled with temptation and sin, *"that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."*<sup>31</sup>

We can never hope to overcome temptation and sin through our own strength and self-righteousness, for those are characteristics that place one's self above God. It is when we acknowledge our weaknesses, kneel before God, and ask for His mercy that we will find the true strength to overcome sin. In truth, we must determine whether we are approaching God like a Pharisee or a tax collector. As Jesus tells us *"The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of*

*humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.' But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'"*<sup>32</sup>

It is when we approach God with humility, when we are at our weakest, that we are the strongest, because only then are we filled with the power of God, only then do we fully benefit from His grace.

Let me close with a parable which illustrates the overflowing and beneficial power of God's grace:



**A** king who did not believe in the goodness of God, had a slave who, in all circumstances would always say, *"My king, do not be discouraged, because everything God does is perfect. He makes no mistakes!"*

One day, they went hunting and along the way a wild animal attacked the king. His slave managed to kill the animal, but could not prevent his majesty from losing a finger.

Furious and without showing his gratitude for being saved, the nobleman asked, *"Is God good? If He was good, I would not have been attacked and lost my finger."*

The slave replied: *"My king, despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good, and he knows why these things happened. What God does is perfect. He is never wrong!"* Outraged by

## 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

**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)

the response, the king ordered the arrest of his slave.

Later, the king left for another hunt, this time alone. He was captured by savages who engaged in human sacrifices.

On the altar and ready to sacrifice the nobleman, the savages discovered that their victim did not have one of his fingers. According to them, only a whole person with all his/her parts intact could be offered to the gods. The king without a finger was deemed an abominable sacrifice for their gods. So, they released the king.

Upon his return to the palace, the king authorized the release of his slave. He received the slave affectionately. *"God was really good to me! I was almost killed by the wild men, but for lack of a single finger, I was let go! But I have a question: If God is so good, why did he allow me to put you in jail?"*

The slave answered, *"My king, if I had gone with you on this hunt, I would have been sacrificed instead because I have no missing finger. Remember, everything God does is perfect. He is never wrong. He made you keep me in jail so I would not be with you on the hunt."*



Often we complain about life, and the negative things that befall us, forgetting that nothing is random and that everything has a purpose. What is often received with regret or sorrow contains the necessary seed from which joy and goodness will grow and flower. Too quickly

we blind ourselves, seeing only unhappy circumstance; never fully trusting in the goodness of God.

God knows the what, why, and when for our every thought and action. Although we are free to do what we will, God knows perfectly well what we will think or do. While he will not prevent us from doing what we have a mind to do, whether good or bad, through his grace he provides opportunities for good to come of all we experience. We just have to wait for it and be open to his love.

Outside of time, God is present then, now, and forever, watching, knowing, accepting, and always, always loving us, no matter what we believe or disbelieve, or the actions we do or choose not to do. Each serves a purpose ordained by God; it is neither for us to know nor approve.

Sometimes, what we most need to do is let go of our selves, give ourselves fully to God, and have patience. Rather than complaining about all the bad that happens in our lives, give it all to God. Every morning, offer your day to God; don't be in a rush. Ask God to fill your soul with grace, inspire your thoughts, guide your actions, and soothe your pain. And do not be afraid for God is never wrong.

- 
- 20. 1 Cor 9:11.
  - 21. CCC §1996.
  - 22. CCC §1997.
  - 23. Gen 2:18.
  - 24. Gen 2:7.
  - 25. CCC §2000.
  - 26. CCC §1999.
  - 27. 2 Cor 5:17-18.
  - 28. CCC §1999.
  - 29. CCC §1996.
  - 30. John 4:1-2.
  - 31. 2 Cor 12:7-10.
  - 32. Lk 18:11-13.

## Of What Mind?

*Discussion or polemic*

There was, as on occasion occurs, a *"disturbance in the force"* this last week, although it was more ripple than tsunami, more whisper than ear-splitting roar. A comment, directed at a repost on social media of an article originally posted some two years ago, initiated a tiny tremor which has since continued to increase in its intensity.

What most bothers the mind these days is neither the lack of civility to be found at any level of civil discourse nor is it the belligerent bellicosity of those who hold divergent views on almost any subject; neither is it the invective which has displaced and buried deep well-considered discourse nor the wanton and brutal disparagement of any and all conflicting opinion.

No, what troubles the mind the most is the severe and near total absence of thought, reason, and honest debate on matters which need be well-considered.

That small tremor in the force was, in many ways, a prime example of the mindless blather that has replaced reasoned discourse with *ad hominem* personal attacks. Although I did receive some thoughtful comments of agreement and encouragement, one commenter, who has previously taken umbrage with my views, wrote *"As unreasonable as I have seen you about our country I would not believe one thing you have to say."* While I take no issue with his unwillingness to accept or agree with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

my views, his response typifies the methodology adopted by those who have no sagacious views of their own—or if they do, are unwilling or reluctant to share them so publicly, unless perhaps they have reason to believe they would be proved the fool. Why else would one with so strong an opinion resort to diatribe and innuendo rather than offering a cogent and reasoned argument?

**H**is preface is telling in its deliberate attempt to mischaracterize and denigrate the character of another. “As unreasonable as I have seen you about our country” implies a fault where none exists, but if left unanswered gives tacit assent to the lie. It is a trap so commonly embraced by those who own no reasoned argument of their own.

The original post, to which this self-same commenter had previously objected, was, I must admit, a bit over the top. Portions of my post—concerning comments accompanying a photograph of the President leaning over and hugging a small boy dressed in his fallen father’s Marine uniform at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day—were largely vicious anti-Trump rants—were both churlish and unnecessary.

I shared the photograph along with my thoughts both on the photograph itself as well as my view of the comments of those who found it necessary to denigrate the president.

In a bit of peek, I lowered myself to a level on par with the dissenters. While those words did accurately express my views of those who had so viciously attacked the president, they

would have been better left unsaid. In a subsequent response, I wrote:

*“To those who took umbrage at portions of my post, I offer no apologies, no retractions, no words of appeasement. I won’t even offer an excuse, even though I could easily and quite verifiably do so. No, I stand by what I wrote because to do otherwise would be disingenuous and dishonest. It would also reduce what I wrote to the same level as those who can offer nothing but unsubstantiated, unnamed sources and negative diatribes against our current president.”*

*I will, however, admit to unnecessarily calling those on the left ‘nut jobs’ for I hold no license to adjudge anyone of unsound mind; seriously ill— and misinformed perhaps, but such misinformation can easily be corrected if one is of the mind to know and accept the truth.”*

We are all guilty, to a greater or lesser extent, of such sins, for it is far easier to spew bile than to swallow crow. It takes no thought to castigate another; any simpleton can lie and call others names. What demands more of us is what is most abjectly lacking: reason, thought, and honest debate. The domain of ideas has been hijacked for the expediency of the moment. Our minds have been turned to saccharine, mawkish globs of mush, incapable of interjecting any rationality into our thinking.

**A**n adage most often misattributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, “Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people,” nevertheless expresses truth which those so quick to spew forth thoughtless polemics ought to take pause to seriously consider. What could well be append-

ed to this adage is this brief aside: “Closed minds discuss nothing” for such minds are sealed to preclude thoughts antithetical to adamant preconceptions.

**I**n 1959, Admiral Hyman G. Rickover who pioneered nuclear propulsion in the Navy, in an article for the Saturday Evening Post observed:

*“To the uneducated, abstract ideas are unfamiliar; so is the detachment that is necessary to discover a truth out of one’s own knowledge and mental effort. The uneducated person views life in an intensely personal way—he knows only what he sees, hears or touches and what he is told by friends. As the unknown sage puts it, ‘Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people.’”<sup>1</sup>*

That “unknown sage” which Rickover gave mention is generally agreed to have been Charles Stewart. As a child in London, Stewart listened to the conversation of dinner guests such as history scholar Henry Thomas Buckle who would sometimes discourse engagingly for twenty minutes on a topic. Stewart would later recall:

*“His thoughts and conversation were always on a high level, and I recollect a saying of his, which not only greatly impressed me at the time, but which I have ever since cherished as a test of the mental calibre of friends and acquaintances. Buckle said, in his dogmatic way: ‘Men and women range themselves into three classes or orders of intelligence; you can tell the lowest class by their habit of always talking about persons; the next by the fact that*

*their habit is always to converse about things; the highest by their preference for the discussion of ideas."*

**W**hat this adage does so readily remind are words from the inestimable Bard, William Shakespeare, whose eloquence of pen did instruct Macbeth to speak:

*"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."*<sup>3</sup>

An article, published in the Jesuit-run magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* by editor Father Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa, Presbyterian pastor and Pope Francis-appointed Editor-in-chief of the Argentinean edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, has been analyzed and roundly criticized by two well-known and respected North American Catholic priests.<sup>4</sup>

According to Father Dwight Longenecker, *"The problem is that the authors are commenting on something they don't know about from personal experience. It's all theory from a few books they've read and perhaps a few conversations with fellow intellectuals in some coffee shop in Europe."*<sup>5</sup>

And, as Father Raymond J. de Souza points out, *"If Jesuit Father Antonio Spadaro was not the editor of La Civiltà Cattolica, his recent attack on the*

*'ecumenism of hate' he diagnoses in the United States never would have been published in that venerable journal.*

Indeed, had such a commentary on the theological roots of contemporary American politics been submitted to the Jesuit magazine *America*, the authors would have been invited to give it a major rewrite, or better, to choose another topic altogether on which they had some expertise.

Wrong on Protestant history, ignorant of contemporary Catholic life, tendentious in its analysis, patronizing in tone and damning with faint praise the very policies of the Holy Father it seeks to defend, it is hard to understand what ambitions were had for a piece that does not even rise to the level of mediocrity."<sup>6</sup>

**A**s Father Longenecker so keenly observes, *"The American Evangelical scene is far more complex and crazy than these guys understand. Their snide comment, for instance about Evangelical fundamentalists being mostly 'white men from the deep South' is a racist bigoted comment on the level of Obama's famous and fatuous wisecrack about country folk who 'cling to their religion and guns' or Mrs. Clinton's 'basket of deplorables'.*

*When will these people learn that not all conservatives are Wal-Mart shoppers with a gun rack in their pick up?*

But the main problem is that in the second half Spadaro and Figueroa attempt to throw Catholic conservatives into the same pick up truck as the 'stupid Evangelicals'. They come up with a name 'Catholic Integralists'. This shadowy group want to create a 'theocracy' and go to war with the Muslims etc. etc. As others have pointed

out, such American Catholics only exist in the imagination of Spadaro and Figueroa.

**S**padaro's attack on American 'Catholic Integralists' is an attack on a straw man. Its a scarecrow and like all scarecrows the article doesn't have a brain.

But there is a reason for Spadaro to create this straw man. He wants to create a scarecrow that is scary. By creating this imaginary creature 'the American Catholic Integralist' he has given a label to all the Catholic conservatives he wishes to demonize.

This follows the usual routine of conflict:

1. Generalize about your enemy,
2. Imagine they are organized,
3. Create a name for this shadowy group
4. Demonize them,
5. Marginalize them,
6. Exclude them
7. Get rid of them,
8. Feel good about it.

In other words, use a scarecrow to create a scapegoat.

The article is a classic example of the progressive passive-aggressive tactics. The talk is all about sweetness and light and tolerance and being nice, but while they smile they stab and while they kiss they twist the knife.

The fact that Spadaro and Figueroa blather on about 'Pope Francis is building a world without fences and borders—which calls for dialogue and not for war and conflict' makes this blatant attempt at stereotyping and scapegoating all the more ironic."

The disturbance in the force has now become palpable; it is literally and metaphorically tearing the social and cultural fabric of our nation and the world apart. We no longer stand on solid ground; we can no longer feel the ground beneath our feet.

"Our country is entering a crisis." as R. R. Reno observes, *"The once expansive, confident American middle class is dissolving. Economic globalization has eroded the wages of middle-class workers. An ever-cruder mass culture normalizes dysfunctional behavior. People are either winners or losers, and there's less and less in between. ... Everything, it seems, is fluid, mobile, and impermanent."*<sup>7</sup>

Reno believes that the crisis is far deeper than economic inequalities or the human costs of moral disintegration, rather as he sees it, it is *"a crisis of declining trust and stability, lost solidarity and permanence. We Americans like to compliment ourselves for our independence and self-sufficiency. But there's a dark side to our national character. A deep sadness comes when we realize, finally, that we're on our own, which is where secular individualism brings us in the end. Many now live without a Father in heaven. Political correctness denies them the patrimony of a workable cultural inheritance. For an increasing number of young people, there's not even a father at home. A nation of orphans, literal or metaphorical, will not long endure."*

What Reno touches here is the growing individualism and simultaneous self-alienation of the individual within the broader social and cultural environment. There once was a real

sense of solidarity, of belonging to a common purpose. Or, as Reno makes abundantly clear, *"Democracy requires civic solidarity, the shared sense that we're all in this together. As economic and cultural transformation splits our society into unequal parts, it's difficult to affirm our solidarity anymore. We're disintegrating into two increasingly estranged classes: a super-successful elite and the rest, many of whom lead troubled lives and are dependent on government assistance to get through life."*

Indicative of the ever-increasing emotive sensations of alienation, isolation and estrangement are the *"angry birds,"* knowing only to attack and scavenge the carrion of those too weak to defend themselves. Facts and reality are inconvenient truths which scavengers dismiss with neither rhyme nor reason. Thus, we feel the tremors, the growing disruption in the force.

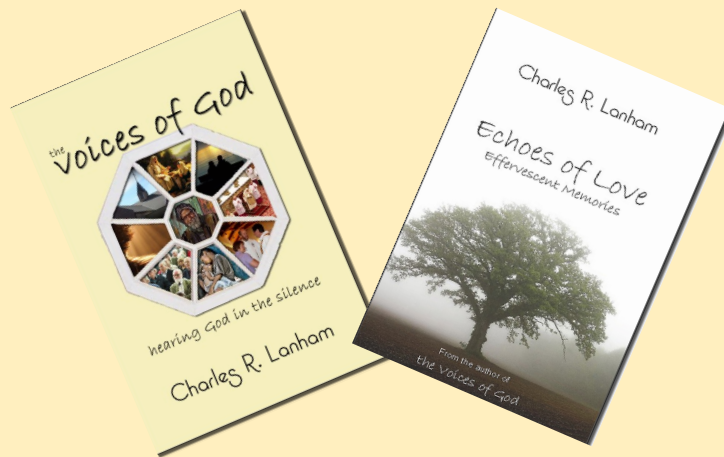
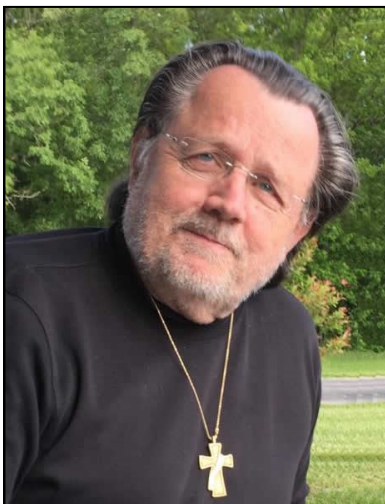
A rather mundane example—unfortunately, all too real—comes from a recent letter to the editor of the local newspaper. While the subject upon which the letter writer opines is a controversial one and deserves serious and considered debate, the letter offers nothing more than a deplorable *ad hominem* attack rather than any cogent argument.

*"Trumpcare is appalling. It affects one-sixth of our economy, yet dictators offer more public input than the GOP Senate does. We fought WWII and a Cold War to protect democracy and a constitutional form of government, only to have it stolen by Ryan and McConnell, the two most dangerous men in America (Trump being manifestly incompetent). The GOP has*

*become the party of cruelty, greed and anti-democracy. ..."*

There is more, but the point should now be sufficiently obvious: attack, demonize, marginalize, exclude, then destroy without ever providing a shred of evidence or a single objective fact. The adage *"Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people, closed minds discuss nothing"* begs the question: Of what mind are we? It is certainly something worth considering.

1. Vice Adm. H. G. Rickover, *The World of the UNEDUCATED*, The Saturday Evening Post, Volume 232, Issue 22, November 28, 1959, pp. 19-59.
2. Charles Stewart, *Haud Immemor: Reminiscences of Legal and Social Life in Edinburgh and London 1850-1900*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1901), p. 33.
3. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5, 1606, p. 2.
4. Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figuerora, *Evangelical Fundamentalism and Catholic Integrationism: A Surprising Ecumenism*, <http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/evangelical-fundamentalism-and-catholic-integralism-in-the-usa-a-surprising-ecumenism/>.
5. Dwight Longenecker, *Spadaro, Straw Men and Scapegoats*, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/standingonmyhead/2017/07/spadaro-straw-men-scapegoats.html>. Father Longenecker, an American who has spent most of his life living and working in England, is a former Anglican priest who, along with his family, converted to Catholicism in 1995. In December 2006 he was ordained as a Catholic priest under the special pastoral provision for married former Anglican clergy. He now serves as parish priest of Our Lady of the Rosary parish in Greenville, SC. He is the author of numerous books and a regular contributor to Patheos.
6. Father Raymond J. de Souza, *Article by Pope's Confidantes Adds Little to Understanding Trump's America*, Crux, an independent Catholic website operating in partnership with the Knights of Columbus, July 15, 2017. <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2017/07/15/article-popes-confidantes-adds-little-understanding-trumps-america/>. Father Raymond J. de Souza, in addition to being a regular contributor to Crux, is a columnist for the *National Post* newspaper, the Editor-in-chief of *Convivium Magazine*, and the parish priest of Sacred Heart of Mary Parish on Wolfe Island, Ontario, Canada.
7. R. R. Reno, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society*, (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2016), 1-2.



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

**deacons corner.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**.

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

**<http://deacons corner.org>**.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

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

**Colloquī** is a weekly publication of **Deacon's Corner Publishing**.

Copyright © 2016 by **Deacon's Corner Publishing**. All rights reserved.

## **Deacon's Corner Publishing**

4742 Cougar Creek Trail

Reno, Nevada 89519