



A journal for restless minds

## LOVE LIFE LOST

*Nothing left to lose*

## WHOSE IMAGE?

*The coin of the realm*

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.

## Love Life Lost

*Nothing left to lose*

**T**here once was a word called *love*. Oh, what a marvelous, wondrous word it was! So rich in meaning! At once evoking such a delicate sentiment, fragile beauty, tenderness, and soft caresses, even as it gave sway to fiery passions, strong emotions, steadfast devotion, and a self-less giving of one's self to another.

It was, in its highest form, a symphonic synonym, the existential essence of the Creator.

**GOD** is **LOVE**, we have heard it said, and so it has been written. **LOVE** created all that is, all that was, and all that ever shall be. **LOVE** created man out of love to know love; no other creature, only man has been bestowed with such a gift: to know what it means to love and to be loved.

**LOVE** and love have been lost. Oh, not through any absent-minded carelessness or foolish forgetfulness. If that were

so, **LOVE** might well excuse us for our weakness. No, both have been discarded, unwanted detritus laying claim to rot and mildew among the weeds of yesterday's fleeting fads and flagging fashion.

Some few may perhaps recall the apostle's glorious paean to love's necessity, yet fewer still will abide it:

*"If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have the gift of prophecy, and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away*

*everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing"* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

**W**ithout love, life is diminished; without love, our humanity is forfeit; without **LOVE**, all that is would not, could not be. **LOVE** never ends.



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## Whose Image?

*The coin of the realm*

**H**ave you ever wondered why we do certain things a certain way? So much of what we do in life, it seems to me, we do without ever asking why; we do them ... out of habit or just because: just because that's the way we have always done them, or just because that was what we were taught to do, or well, just because. We never stop to question why.

Have you ever considered just how much of something is enough? At what point does a thing become too much? And when it becomes too much, what, if anything, should we do about it?

Or have you ever had someone respond to a question with a question? Frustrating, isn't it? And yet, we often hear Jesus respond to those who sought to test him with a question, just as he does today.

The people of Israel followed the Mosaic Law, found in the first five books (the Pentateuch) of Sacred Scripture, which they call the Torah. The Torah is their history, the story of their covenantal relationship with God, but in a broader sense it documents man's constant need for governance, for rules first set forth by God.

In the beginning, there was only one rule, one commandment, *"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good*

*and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die"* (Genesis 2:16-17) and we all know how quickly that rule was broken.

The problem with rules is not the rules themselves or even that someone will inevitably find the ways and means to break them; the problem is that as soon as a rule is broken, more rules are created to correct the weaknesses in the original rule.



**I** used to be of the mind that, as marvelous a document as our Constitution might be, the framers made a serious error when they wrote the First Amendment. Their mistake was: they wrote far too many words! They should have quit after the first five: *"Congress shall make no laws!"* How much better would life be if only they had stopped there.

God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments. Ten rules to follow, only ten. And before the ink was dry on those tablets, the people had broken the first rule! Which, of course, caused Moses to throw the tablets down in disgust and stomp back up the mountain to ask, *"Lord, what am I to do with these stubborn stiff-necked people?"* God's response was to spend the next forty days adding more rules to the original ten. By the time God

was done, Moses had 613 laws to impose on the chosen people of God!

**W**hile following 613 commandments would be hard for anyone, over time Jewish leaders slowly added to these laws in what is called the Midrash. The Pharisees of Jesus day not only zealously followed the 613 commandments, but the literally thousands of additional new laws which had been created to clarify the original 613 laws as well. They prided themselves on following not just the letter of the Mosaic Law, but even the letter of the man-made rules designed to clarify the Law.

One example: the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, which means that Jews were not supposed to work on Saturdays. To clarify this, Jewish scholars created 39 separate categories of what *"work"* means, and within those 39 categories there are many sub-categories containing literally thousands of sub-rules to follow, including how many steps you can take and how many letters you can write on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were zealous followers and defenders of the Law. In their zeal to follow every commandment, rule, and statute to the letter, the Pharisees lost sight of the intent of the Law, that the Law was a gift aimed at making it possible to know God's will and to follow it.

They quite literally could not see the forest for the trees, and because of

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this, they were often scandalized by Jesus' apparent indifference to the Law, and thus tried to trap him in his words.

**T**he question posed to Jesus was a duplicitous question, designed to trip Jesus up. Only Roman coins could be used to pay the taxes and each coin carried an image of the Emperor or a member of his family and words inscribed such as *"Tiberius, Son of the Divine Augustus."* For the devout Jew, each coin was a graven image and a symbol of their own oppression.

Pharisees were particularly disturbed by the attribution of divinity to Caesar but also considered possession of this graven image to be idolatrous. They even devised ways to pay this tax without actually possessing or handling the coin, for it would be extremely shameful for a Pharisee to possess one.

So amazingly, before realizing Jesus' trap, one of them hands him such a coin. That someone in their group possessed and produced the coin was, in and of itself, a shameful act.

Jesus then responded to their question with a question of his own, *"Whose image is this and whose inscription?"* When they replied, *"Caesar's"* Jesus was able to respond, *"then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."*

Over the millennia there have been countless commentaries, reflections, sermons and opinions on what Jesus meant with his response. His words have been used to argue for the

separation of Church and State as well as for their collaboration. They have been used to prove a Christian's obligation to pay taxes as well as authority for Christians to avoid taxes. Depending on your particular point of view, these words have encouraged Christians to respect the sovereignty of the state or to reject it; to actively participate in civil government or to stand apart from it.

In his response, Jesus does not condemn money, for money is in itself a good, and it belongs to the government that mints it or prints it. Money is an agency of human government, and it's within this context that we can see its role.

Governments are formed by human beings who use right reason to organize their relationships with others. As such, the idea of government comes from God, since God by His creative and sustaining power governs the whole universe. In human government, money is a useful part of governing our relationships with our neighbors.

**P**ersonally, I don't believe that Jesus was charting a roadmap for relations between Church and State. Neither do I believe he was saying money has no place in religion. Nor should we return every coin with a government image to the government or count ourselves free to ignore our responsibilities as citizens of a sovereign state.

Rather, I believe Jesus is inviting us to examine the coin and then examine ourselves. Whose image does the coin bear? Whose image do we bear?

**W**hile Caesar is in the business of minting coins, God is in the business of minting souls. Caesar gets his own image returned to him in taxes and tribute, but because our souls bear the divine image of God, our lives, our hearts and our talents should be *"repaid"* to God. For Jesus, the question isn't *"How much do you owe?"*, but rather, *"Who do you look like?"*

Whether we know God or not, acknowledge God or not, we belong to God. There is no *"other."* We are each minted in God's image.

Who we serve affects the way we live. When we struggle as Christians it is invariably a struggle about whether we will serve God by our decisions or serve someone or something else. When we clearly grasp who God is, and how much he loves us and how he has redeemed us through our Savior, that understanding evokes a radical shift; a radical shift of lifestyle, a radical shift of priorities, a radical shift of allegiance, a radical conversion of the heart.

As Christians and Catholics we are called to recognize the living and true God, to love him with all our heart, mind, and spirit, and to place ourselves and all that we have into his service, all for the glory of God. A 20th century martyr, Jim Elliot, put this into perspective: *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."* Amen.

Homily for the  
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
Isaiah 45:1, 4-6  
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5B  
Matthew 22:15-21

**W**ithout **LOVE**, there is no soul, no spirit, no reason, no purpose. Without love there is no will, no morality, no purity, no beauty, no understanding, no truth. Without love, man is but an animal, driven by instinct to survive. Life is thus reduced to existing in the moment; there is no future, only now; there is no hope, no faith, nothing beyond the dreary sameness of all our yesterdays.

But what is this love which we have lost? Again, we hear from the apostle: *“Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:4-13)*

And yet, from the beginning, man has chafed at the injustice of his creaturehood; wanting, believing, desiring to be more, to share equality with **LOVE**.

**LOVE** and love were once considered essential truths, cornerstones upon which our natures, cultures, and relationships were and are so necessarily nurtured, developed, and sustained. Our dependence on **LOVE** was readily acknowledged; we bowed in humble supplication to our Creator.

Despite the denials and protestations of today’s academic and political elites, belief in and a faith in Almighty God was not merely a context upon which the American republic was founded, it was much more than that: *it was a necessary condition for it.* The founders banked on a strong religious citizenry.

**A**s John Adams put it: *“We have no government armed in power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion.”* George Washington concurred with Adams. *“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to a political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”*

*“While many today assume that a benign and tolerant society could be sustained if people would only be nice to each other, this hope in its present form is almost entirely dependent on the moral labors of previous generations, who built our society’s economy, technology, culture, and institutions of government, higher education, science, and healthcare. Healthy societies are never self-sustaining; to endure, they require the same measure of disciplined labor and self-restraint that was required to create them in the first place. No dynamic system can coast indefinitely; there are no perpetual-motion cultures.*

*Only the character-building power of true religious faith can address our cultural decay. If traditional Christianity does not serve as a dynamic and corrective restraint on man’s fallen inclinations, then more coercive faiths and political ideologies will fill the moral and spiritual vacuum, replacing our freedoms with the unyielding constraints of servitude.*

*When moral governance ‘from above,’ i.e., true religion, is lacking, self-restraint withers, and as self-restraint withers, the need for coercion expands. When a fixed, divine moral code is replaced by a code of merely human construct, raw political will to power will dominate the public square. This is the way of the serpent, not the dove. ... A secularized nation stands alone, ..., naked except for its constitution, a mere fig-leaf of paper that blows in the winds of degrading passions.”<sup>1</sup>*

We are reaping the fruits of the moral and spiritual desuetude which has enveloped our nation and our culture. **LOVE** and love, and all that is good, have been discarded, replaced by loathing and lust, and what is good for the self.

**L**ife without love has turned the extraordinary into the banal, cheapened and distorted the beauty of that which has been created in the image and likeness of **LOVE** which is God. It has left us empty vessels, soulless, void of any sense of our common humanity.

What is now called love is anything but; call it affectation, call it lust, call it sex, call it what you will, what we call it matters not; equating base desires for pure chaste love does not remove a leopard’s spots.

*"The reason our nations, communities, and souls cannot be capacious is that they are not stable. A great deal now falls under the sign of choice. Young people race to get ahead in the competition for degrees, internships, and jobs. We manipulate our bodies with piercings and tattoos. Even our gender is chosen. We are increasingly deprived of trustworthy civic inheritances. We are told that Western history is a long tale of discrimination, exclusion, and genocide. Monuments are purged. Commissions are set up to conduct heresy trials, bringing to the bar of judgment long-dead people, movements, and societies. All of this gets compounded by a growing number of Nones, those without any connection to the most trustworthy place to stand, which is God's covenant.*

*... spiritual integrity and cultural hospitality flag under conditions of limitless, spontaneous, and open-ended possibility. The soul becomes beautiful when it is formed within the well-measured confines of God's holy sanctuary."*<sup>2</sup>

**T**ruth that is malleable is not truth; falsity cannot become truth, no matter how much one wishes it. Neither affectations, nor lust, nor casual intimacies are love; euphemistically soothing our consciences does not alter the tawdry character of such base desires.

Our sexuality has become a malleable commodity, something to cultivate. *"We talk about a person's sex life, rather than a relationship with another person. We decreasingly even remember that sex can generate life. Fertility seems like a design flaw now, rather than the primeval reason that sex feels good. We rank order sexual experiences."*<sup>3</sup>

The truth is we've lost the capacity to know what honest love is, and in our loss we neither know nor care to discover what it means to be human. We have become indifferent to our own humanity, unwilling to open ourselves completely to another.

It is far safer to place our trust and affection in pets. *"Pets permit us to enjoy companionship without commitment and tenderness without sacrifice. They are bred to our liking. They arrive on our terms and live at our pleasure. Human at one moment but not at another, objects of adoration that we can 'put down' without sin, pets are more perfect versions of what children become when we refuse to welcome human life that is weak or strange. As playgrounds become dog parks and pets are put into strollers, the symbolism is hard to miss. Dogs are stalking horses of the culture of death."*<sup>4</sup>

**P**ope Francis, in 2014, condemned those who chose not to have children because they fear poverty and sickness. As he observed, such people think *"it's better ... more comfortable—to have a dog, two cats, and the love goes to the two cats and the dog."* Their love of animals shows their indifference to man.

This indifference toward man can best be seen in the tortured logic of those who espouse the philosophy of choice, such as Elizabeth Harman, a philosopher at Princeton, who explained her views on unborn life this way: *"Among early fetuses there are two very different kinds of beings,"* she said. She then went on to explain the difference by claiming that she and others who had been born *"had moral status in virtue of our futures.... But some early*

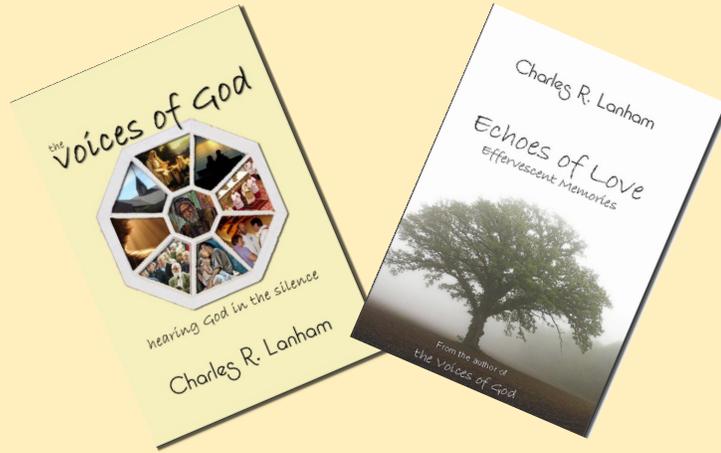
*fetuses will die in early pregnancy due to abortion or miscarriage. And in my view, that is a very different kind of entity. That's something that doesn't have a future as a person and it doesn't have moral status."*

Which, according to her, means *"if you do abort, abortion is okay, but if you don't abort, abortion would have been wrong."* Such a view might assuage a guilty conscience, but it further proves our casual indifference to our own kind, especially when you consider the sixty million American children who have been aborted since 1973 or that eighty-five percent of those diagnosed with Down syndrome are now killed in the womb.

*"Harmon's argument may sound absurd, but judging by our lack of protest, our absence of mourning, we quietly share her judgment. The victims of abortion are not our dead; they must be creatures of another kind."*<sup>5</sup> At least one state, Illinois, follows Harmon's tortured logic. Recent legislation (HB 40) removes language [from state law and policy] *"that the unborn child is a human being from the time of conception and is, therefore, a legal person for purposes of the unborn child's right to life."*

**LOVE** and love have been lost. Let us pray we may soon find them again.

1. James m. Kushiner, *American Gadara*, Touchstone: a Journal of Mere Christianity, Nov/Dec 2017, p.3.
2. R. R. Reno, *Building Bridges, Not Walls*, First Things, Nov. 2017, pp. 65-66.
3. Sociologist Mark Regnerus in an interview by Judy Roberts for National Catholic Register on his book *Cheap Sex: The Transformation of Men, Marriage, and Monogamy*, Sep 5, 2017.
4. Matthew Schmitz, *The Back Page: Beware of Dog*, First Things, Nov. 2017, p. 71.
5. Matthew Schmitz, *The Back Page*, p. 71.



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

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