

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

Forbidden Fruit

Turning a blind eye

A Welcome Response

A step in the right direction

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.

Forbidden Fruit

Turning a blind eye

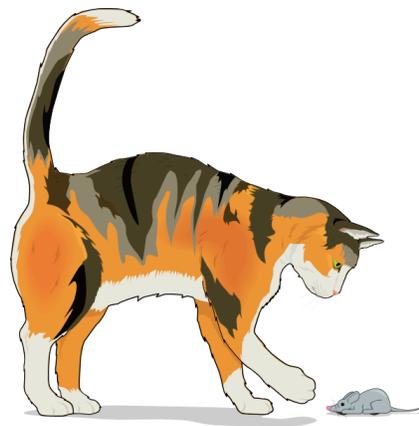
There is this undeniable truth: concupiscence—man's inclination to willfully choose what is counter to the good, that is, to sin against nature and nature's God—has been present in every age without exception. From first to now none, save one, has known such a nature; every age replete in rationalizing the irrational, excusing the inexcusable, justifying the unjustifiable, convicting innocence by denying guilt, sanctifying sin so as to blind the eye to scandal.

There are those of every time and place who would proudly scribe any sin to public witness—without remorse or shred of honest guilt—for truly they are over-proud in their rebellion; sin is seldom what they would say of it for of

themselves they care not admit to any heresy; the sin they would raise with alacrity is ever that of another. Like the mouse whose meal will with little doubt feed the cat, such scribes are more akin the cat than any mouse.

Sin, of its nature, seeks comfort in shadows of unknowing; sinners confess no guilt for the mind's mischief denies such nakedness with a lie. Modernity has long excised sin from its memory as a mere antiquated artifice of ancient rhyme; thus has sin been turned into virtue, the wages of sin—death—ignored and God denied.

Such do shadowed souls delight the darkness yet deny the light. Flickering fireflies luminesce then die among the darkness while innocents laugh, enjoying the cold firelight so held captive, heedless to the cold death now



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gently clasped within their warm and tender hands.

Every sin pays in counterfeit, the currency of death. All sin inflicts some measure of spiritual lethality for sin kills the capacity of the will to resist temptation. It is the direst peril to consider any sin harmless or insignificant for in so doing one crowns a fool and chains the soul a slave to sin. Such wounds inevitably tranquilize, numbing the will resulting in a loss of the sense of sin and an estranged relationship with God, who is perfect light. As the Evangelist writes:

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us* (1 John 1:5-10).

Sin effects not only the sinner but the whole of the community. That numbness, the loss of the sense of sin, desensitizes the sinner to the truth—like ripples, sin reaches beyond the sinner, spreading the lie that works of evil do not offend God, separate us from him or cause division among the community.

A manifestation of this loss of sense of sin is seen in the denial of objective moral truth or even of God himself. When questions of moral right and wrong are seen strictly as matters of personal opinion, the

awareness of personal sin and its consequences is diminished. This dismissal of the moral law ultimately puts a person's salvation at risk.

God's moral law... forms our foundation for discerning good and evil. Sinful choices can cause this power of discernment to become so clouded that the person cannot effectively perceive the seriousness of sin (Cf. CCC §37, §1954-1955). This diminishment of conscience, described as the "loss of the sense of sin," has several causes:

- **Moral relativism** is an outlook that denies objective moral truth and allows individuals to judge the moral value of a given act based on circumstances, feelings, and opinion. If "truth" is subjective, then no one can speak meaningfully of "sin." (Cf. CCC §1790-1793)
- **Faulty psychological theories** characterize guilt and shame as disorders or repression instead of the fruits of a good conscience. These theories blame personal sins on traumas or developmental factors. From a Christian perspective, such factors may mitigate guilt for sin but do not necessarily erase personal responsibility. (Cf. CCC §387, §1746)
- **Confusion between "moral" and "legal"** arises because civil and criminal laws do not always reflect divine law. Human laws cannot be trusted blindly and can lead to errors in moral judgment if they do not reflect the divine law. (Cf. CCC §1902, §1959)
- **Secular humanism** seeks to improve society or enrich the human condition solely through human effort in areas such as technology, science, and political or economic means with no reference to God or the moral law. Human efforts that either implicitly or explicitly reject God and his eternal law will have deleterious effects on society. (Cf. CCC §2124)¹

A modern heresy promotes the belief that for there to be sin the sinner must of necessity knowingly, with intentionality and purpose, explicitly act against the divine law of God and the teachings of Christ and his holy Church. Sin therefore must be explicit and overt; guilt is reserved solely with the sinner leaving the consciences of those who are aware of the sin clear. This is error; this is heresy; this is sin all the more heretical for it abets the sinner and approves the sin.

Those who by their silence would admit no active participation in the sinning contending they are but innocent observers would do well to attend to the words of the Evangelist pointing to those who would say they have no sin that they deceive themselves and the truth is not in them.

The apostle Paul bluntly directs those who are familiar with sinners and sin to cast them out of the community—to excommunicate them from the body of Christ—unless and until they repent and seek God's forgiveness.

Brothers and sisters, it is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my

spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens all the dough? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be new dough. For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the Church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Paul is unequivocal and unambiguous, honest and direct in proclaiming judgment against those who would defile the body of Christ; he judges not those outside the Church but those who call themselves brothers and sisters in Christ. It is clearly the duty of any and all Christians to judge in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to disassociate with “any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber.”

There ought not be any attempt to misconstrue what Paul is saying. He states it clearly, emphasizing that there can be no tolerance for immorality among the Christian community and to remove those who are unrepentant of immorality from the community. When a baptized Christian persists in sin which brings scandal upon the community and endangers the souls of believers, Paul correctly instructs the local Church to excommunicate the individual.

Never does the apostle suggest accompanying the sinner in hope of conversion and redemption, rather he calls for the community to remove the leaven of malice and evil and replace it with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. It is not for the community of believers to accommodate the unrepentant sinner; the sinner, with the grace of God, alone has the power and the duty to turn away from evil, seek forgiveness, and ask to be readmitted into the company of saints.

Jesus reserved his harshest words for those who held positions of civil and religious authority, chastising them for their hypocrisy when applying the law differently to others than to themselves.

While he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; so he went in and sat at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.

“But woe to you Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! for you love the best seat in the synagogues and salutations in the marketplaces. Woe to you! for you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it.” (Luke 11:37-44)

“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.” (Luke 12:1-3)

And in the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrates the level of hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in their midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:3-7)

Although it is perhaps a natural tendency to look upon those in authority with too critical an eye, to see them as defilers of the law which they profess to strictly observe, to do so is to miss a crucial point of the gospels—indeed,

of the whole of Sacred Scripture.

The central thesis of the gospels and that throughout all of Scripture should be viewed through the lens of our relationship with God tempered by our broken nature and our inclination to sin. This inclination to sin infects every human person from the moment of conception, rendering us vulnerable to sin by clouding our judgment and weakening our will. As a result, we are inclined toward disordered appetites, enslaved to our passions, and in need of God's grace to combat evil.

1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

1850 Sin is an offense against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight." Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become "like gods," knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God." In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.

1853 Sins can be distinguished according to their objects, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbor, or

oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man." But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds.²

It would be easy to lose sight of the universality of sin and evil within the context of the gospels if we turn our focus primarily or entirely on the often antagonistic relationship that existed between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities. Certainly, his contempt for the hypocrisy of the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees is readily apparent and well-documented and yet, Jesus neither ignores nor disregards the sins of anyone, without regard to their religion, nationality, wealth, power, or status.

There is a palpable difference, however, which at first glance may not be apparent. This dichotomy is exemplified with near perfection by the parable told to those who thought themselves to be righteous, while they despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house

justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14)

Both were sinners: the tax collector was keenly aware of his sinfulness and knowing he was owed nothing from God, humbled himself, begging for God's mercy and forgiveness. The Pharisee was full of himself; filled with arrogance and pride he saw no sin in himself, only in the tax collector and others. He asked neither for mercy nor forgiveness for he had no need of such; boasting only of his "holiness," his "goodness," at being better than other men. His god was himself, it was himself to whom he was thankful.

There are then two kinds of sinner: those who admit their own sinfulness and those who admit the sinfulness of others. The first, knowing they are not worthy of God's mercy and forgiveness, prostrate themselves before God, unable to lift their eyes toward heaven and ask for that which they have no right to expect or receive. The second kind, believes only in themselves, finding no need of God's mercy and forgiveness because they see no sin in themselves, only in others.

The gospels are replete with examples of both. Those who know they are sinners come humbly before Jesus, often with only the desire to be in his presence or to merely touch the hem of his garment. These Jesus heals—showing his mercy and forgiveness—because of their honest faith and their openness to believe: "rise, your faith has healed you," "go, your sins are

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forgiven." Never does he chastise or scold them for their sins, never does he question their motives, never does he turn these away. He shows mercy and kindness, love and forgiveness to anyone who admits to sin and brokenness, to anyone who truly seeks God's mercy and pardon. All he asks is that they "Go, and sin no more."

It is to those who find fault in others and none in themselves (e.g. scribes, Pharisees, priests, elders,) that Jesus calls hypocrites for the damage they inflict upon the people of God by and in their sanctimony, pride and arrogance. It was for these that Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutation in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against

men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte³, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. (Matthew 23:1-15)

Take careful note: Jesus tells his disciples to practice and observe all that the scribes and Pharisees teach for in this they are the lawful authority, they sit in the chair of Moses. Jesus, in effect, tells them to obey the Law given to Moses by God and handed down to the priests and those whose responsibility it is to teach the Law to the people. It is the Law which is important, not those who teach it. Jesus makes its importance perfectly clear when he tells his disciples:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

While they have the knowledge and understanding of the law and have been given the authority and duty to teach what they know and understand to the people, Jesus clearly advises his disciples to do as they say and not as they do. Just because they

know the law does not mean they follow the law; it is that nuance which is important to remember.

Here we see the hypocrisy of the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees in full view. "They preach, but do not practice." They practice what they do not preach; they demand strict obedience to the law but follow the law only when advantageous to themselves; what they do in public bears false witness to what they do when hidden from view. It is for this they conspired to find fault in Jesus; Jesus presented a clear and present danger to their subterfuge, to their pretense and their lies.

There were, of course, those who were members of the scribes, Pharisees, priests, and elders who were good, honest, and forthright. One mentioned three times in the Gospel of John was Nicodemus, a well-respected and devout Pharisee and an important member of the Sanhedrin.

Nicodemus sincerely sought to learn more of what Jesus taught and argued for a just hearing before the Sanhedrin. His argument then, as much as it is the same today, fell on deaf ears; he convinced no one for their hearts were hardened and their souls darkened by envy and fear. His reputation was seriously damaged; he was subsequently subjected to denigration and derision for his honesty and forthrightness.

And as Paul writes to the church in Corinth, sinners such as these will never inherit the kingdom of God. Whether Jew or gentile, lay person or

clergy, free person or slave, rich or poor, none but the righteous will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

How unchanging are the winds of insolent disdain and overweening hubris, the breath of stale stench lingers still and foul upon the air with no *entr'acte*. The voice of the ancient preacher echoes above the sordid fray:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; in the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new?" It has been already, in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any re-

membrance of later things yet to happen among those who come after. (Ecclesiastes 1:2-11)

Sins by men sneer at God, sins by men of God blaspheme; one wounds and scars but heals, the other kills and damns the soul to hell. Gangrenous flesh must be sloughed away else the body rot a rotted death; soft bandages and soothing aloes are but vanity healing nothing, hiding death. Vanity accuses scandal of the accuser while vanity is silent partner to the play; all is vanity, there is nothing new under the sun.

In these times, it seems like the 'Great Accuser' has been unchained and is attacking bishops. True, we are all sinners, we bishops. He tries to uncover the sins, so they are visible in order to scandalize the people. The 'Great Accuser', as he himself says to God in the first chapter of the Book of Job, 'roams the earth looking for someone to accuse'. A bishop's strength against the 'Great Accuser' is prayer, that of Jesus and his own, and the humility of being chosen and remaining close to the people of God, without seeking an aristocratic life that removes this unction. Let us pray, today, for our bishops: for me, for those who are here, and for all the bishops throughout the world.⁴

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What noxious hubris to admonish the confessor so to absolve the sinner. Is it not vanity to distort the word of God to disabuse the querulous?

Job was a righteous man of whom the Lord said to Satan⁵, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then

God allowed Satan to test Job by destroying and killing all that he had, including his family. Though sorely tested beyond normal human endurance, he would not blame God for what had befallen him.

Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. (Job 1:8, 20-22)

One could readily apply this wisdom narrative in a different but perhaps more apropos way to better accord with the present scandals effecting the Church. The issue with the preacher's application is a fundamental one: Job was blameless and upright in the eyes of God. Evidence strongly suggests that some—and possibly far more than previously revealed—members within all levels of the hierarchy of the present Church are far from blameless or upright but have inflicted grave damage upon the bride of Christ and the people of God. That this can be posited even as the remotest of possibilities demands serious, thorough and immediate investigation and resolution.

The preacher makes a concerted effort to ignore the obvious by deflecting the attention away from the scandalous and illicit behavior of some of his brothers as well as others among them, who, although innocent of any sin of commission have been aware, whether through suspicion, hearsay or

direct knowledge of the guilt of some of their brothers, proving with their silence sins of omission.

Furthermore, the reasoning of the preacher is dangerously flawed, suggesting the "Great Accuser" is targeting bishops, who by implication are likened to Job, blameless and upright, while ignoring all evidence to the contrary. In an odd bit of casuistry the preacher admits the sin but blames the accuser for uncovering that which the preacher submits ought never have been revealed. Thus, the preacher suggests: the sin is not the scandal, the scandal is in revealing what was hidden, hidden to avoid scandal wrought by their own hand.

According to this *ad hominem* argument then, the revealer must be reviled and reputation calumniously ruined for revealing what was never to have been revealed.

Hypocrites! No condemnation, no excommunication, no scorn or briefest mention of those who have perpetrated such evil under the aegis of their levitical tribe. Hypocrites!

They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. (Matthew 23:5-7)

Hypocrites! Is there humility in being chosen; would not refusal be the modest response for is there not honor in being chosen a successor to the apostles? Is there not one who recognizes the honor bestowed and does

not in the smallest way feel worthy? Should not anyone who, upon being chosen, refuse be accused of humility?

But here the preacher adds a subtle caveat, limiting such humility to those chosen who remain "close to the people of God, without seeking an aristocratic life..." How many apostles so humble now remain?

The remainder of the preacher's remarks are saccharine sophistry; failing utterly to address the culpability and depraved behavior of those who were chosen to be brothers in Christ Jesus and apostolic successors, commissioned to go forth and spread the good news.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Most assuredly, honest and sincere prayer can be of enormous benefit in combating the temptations of the devil and man's concupiscence. But in this instance, prayer is as meaningful as sterilizing a wound on a corpse and as useful as stamping out a fire with gasoline. What has been done cannot be undone; what may be done may be left undone; what will be done is in the hands of God. Prayer, no matter how fervent, will neither banish the horror nor dissolve the evil nor erase the damage inflicted upon the body, mind and spirit of the children of God. Pray-

er does not address the scandal; what the preacher proffers is but salve upon a gaping wound; a wound so severe the Church will struggle mightily to recover, if ever possible.

The people are not scandalized, the people are angry, angry at the betrayal of those in whom they have placed their souls in trust. The people are lost, bewildered and confused by shepherds who like hired hands run away in fear when the wolf comes; the flock only now realizing that some are wolves hidden in plain sight. The worst of it is in learning that many of the shepherds knew there were wolves among them but kept silent, hoping nothing evil would this way come. The scandal rests solely upon the shepherds' shoulders for they have steadfastly refused to acknowledge any culpability in perpetuating this wretched scandal.

As the preacher says, "Let us pray for our bishops" that they may rid the body of Christ of all who like Lucifer have come to believe they are somehow exempt from the law of God.

1. The Didache Bible, *An Apologetical Explanation of the Loss of the Sense of Sin*, Ignatius Press, 2015, p 1500.
2. Catechism of the Catholic Church.
3. The biblical term "proselyte" is an anglicization of the Koine Greek term προσήλυτος, as used in the Septuagint for "stranger", i.e. a "newcomer to Israel"; a "sojourner in the land", and in the Greek New Testament for a first century convert to Judaism, generally from Ancient Greek religion. It is a translation of the Biblical Hebrew phrase גר תושב.
4. Homily at Mass in Casa Santa Maria, Tuesday, September 11, 2018, cited by Vatican News.
5. At the time the book of Job was written, the name "Satan" had not yet been applied to the Devil. Here, it refers to one in the heavenly court who makes accusations about the weakness of certain individuals and seeks to test their faith with trials and tribulations. Here, the Satan claimed that Job's faithfulness was on account of his prosperity and comfortable life.

A Welcome Response

A step in the right direction

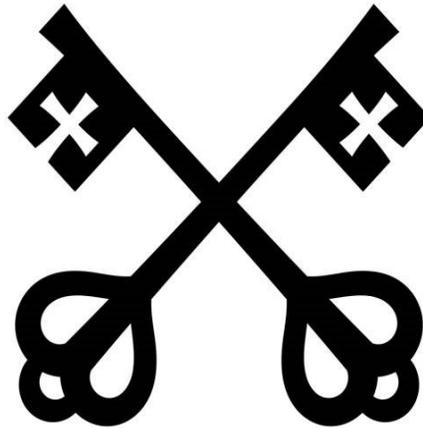
When Jesus asked who the disciples thought he was, Simon Bar-Jona replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Such a statement of faith! So rock solid was his response that from then and forevermore he was known as Πέτρος (Petros), a Greek name meaning rock; English: Peter. It was then that Jesus instituted his Church on earth and appointed Peter to be first shepherd of his fledgling flock.

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Two-thousand years and the powers of death have yet prevailed against Christ’s Church; the forces of evil have ceaselessly waged war against her but to no avail, just as Christ foretold. Although Peter was far from perfect, he would have moments of weakness, at times his heart filled with doubt and fear, and he would make mistakes—he was a man after all, subject to the same concupiscence as any other—Jesus chose him to lead his Church. Together, with the Apostles, they spread the Good News throughout the world and the Church prevailed and grew. There were persecutions, heresies, and al-

ways the evil one working to destroy what Christ had instituted, but the Church has and will always prevail because Christ said it would.

The present crisis within the ranks of the Church hierarchy is yet another battle forced upon her by the powers of evil. It is not the first nor will it be the last. Neither is it the first and only instance of abuses of power and position perpetrated by clergy upon the faithful.



Just as Peter would deny Jesus, as Paul would persecute members of the Church, as the 4th century Alexandrian presbyter Arius would rock the Church with heresy, as the papacy would be split in the 14th century by a series of popes and antipopes, or as scandals would ultimately result in the Protestant reformation, there have always been unsettling and turbulent times for Christ’s Church. Throughout her history, there have been saints and sinners, good times and bad, heresies and clerical abuses, but the Church has prevailed, as it will prevail against the current scandals.

The sexual abuse scandals currently rocking the foundation of the Church and the hierarchy represent a formidable assault by the forces of evil, and as stated in the previous article much of the burden rests upon the shoulders of the bishops for ignoring or covering the problem for so long. But the shepherds have been shaken from their slumber and out of their complacency by the tsunami of voices now threatening to sweep them away.

This has clearly been the long-needed wake-up call for which the long-suffering faithful have been waiting. In a statement issued on Wednesday, September 19, 2018, the Administrative Committee of the USCCB outlines the steps begin taken by the Bishops in response to the most recent sex abuse scandals. Their statement enumerates four specific measures as a first step in addressing the crisis of sexual abuse in the Church. Their statement is reprinted below and can also be found on the USCCB website:

When each of us was ordained as a bishop, we were told: “Keep watch over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you to shepherd the Church of God.”

We, the Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, assembled last week in Washington at this time of shame and sorrow. Some bishops, by their actions or their failures to act, have caused great harm to both individuals and the Church as a whole. They have used their authority and power to manipulate

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and sexually abuse others. They have allowed the fear of scandal to replace genuine concern and care for those who have been victimized by abusers. For this, we again ask forgiveness from both the Lord and those who have been harmed. Turning to the Lord for strength, we must and will do better.

The Administrative Committee took the following actions within its authority:

1. Approved the establishment of a third-party reporting system that will receive confidentially, by phone and online, complaints of sexual abuse of minors by a bishop and sexual harassment of or sexual misconduct with adults by a bishop and will direct those complaints to the appropriate ecclesiastical authority and, as required by applicable law, to civil authorities.
2. Instructed the USCCB Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance to develop proposals for policies addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or resigned because of allegations of sexual abuse of minors or sexual harassment of or misconduct with adults, including seminarians and priests.
3. Initiated the process of developing a Code of Conduct for bishops regarding the sexual abuse of a minor; sexual harassment of or sexual misconduct with an adult; or negligence in the exercise of his office related to such cases.
4. Supported a full investigation into the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick, including his alleged assaults on minors, priests, and seminarians, as well as any responses made to those allegations. Such an investigation should rely upon lay experts in relevant fields, such as law enforcement and social services.

This is only a beginning. Consulta-

tion with a broad range of concerned parents, experts, and other laity along with clergy and religious will yield additional, specific measures to be taken to repair the scandal and restore justice. We humbly welcome and are grateful for the assistance of the whole people of God in holding us accountable.

As these initiatives get underway, the Administrative Committee invites each of our brother bishops to join us in acts of prayer and penance. This is a time of deep examination of conscience for each bishop. We cannot content ourselves that our response to sexual assault within the Church has been sufficient. Scripture must be our guide forward, "be doers of the word and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

In all of this, we do not want anyone – ourselves included – to lose sight of those who have suffered from those who have acted or failed to act as the Gospel demanded. For survivors of sexual abuse, these days may re-open deep wounds. Support is available from the Church and within the community. Victims Assistance Coordinators are available in every diocese to help you find resources. We are grateful to hundreds of dedicated people who, since the adoption of the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, have been working with the Church to support survivors and prevent future abuse.

To anyone who has been abused, never hesitate to also contact local law enforcement. If you don't feel comfortable for any reason with the Church providing help, your diocese can connect you with appropriate community services. With compassion and without judgement, the bishops of the United States pledge to heal and protect with every bit of the strength God provides us.

Acting in communion with the Holy Father, with whom we once again renew our love, obedience, and loyalty, we make our own the prayer of Pope Francis in his August 20 letter to the people of God, "May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them."¹

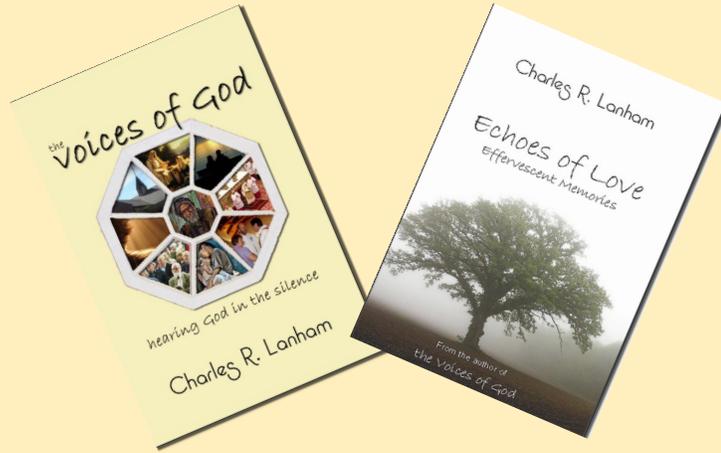
This is welcome news! As the Administrative Committee emphasized these steps are "only a beginning." Perhaps the most welcome is the bishops' commitment to begin consultations with laity, clergy, and religious in order to find specific measures which can be taken "to repair the scandal and restore justice." and that they "humbly welcome and are grateful to the whole people of God in holding [the Bishops] responsible."

It is especially important to note that for perhaps the first time there has been direct and clear admission that the bishops were and are accountable for this scandal either by commission or omission: "Some bishops, **by their actions or their failures to act**, have caused great harm to both individuals and the Church as a whole."

Noteworthy also is the call for every bishop to join "in acts of prayer and penance," and that it is a time "of deep examination of conscience for each Bishop."

Let us pray for all of the clergy, Bishops, priests and deacons, all the religious men and women, and for the Church, that this too shall soon pass.

1. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee Statement on Sex Abuse Scandals; Committee Releases Actions to be Taken Within Its Authority, September 19, 2018, Available also at <http://usccb.org/news/2018/18-152.cfm>.



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

deaconscorner.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://deaconscorner.org>.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

deacon.chuck@deaconscorner.org

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4742 Cougar Creek Trail

Reno, Nevada 89519