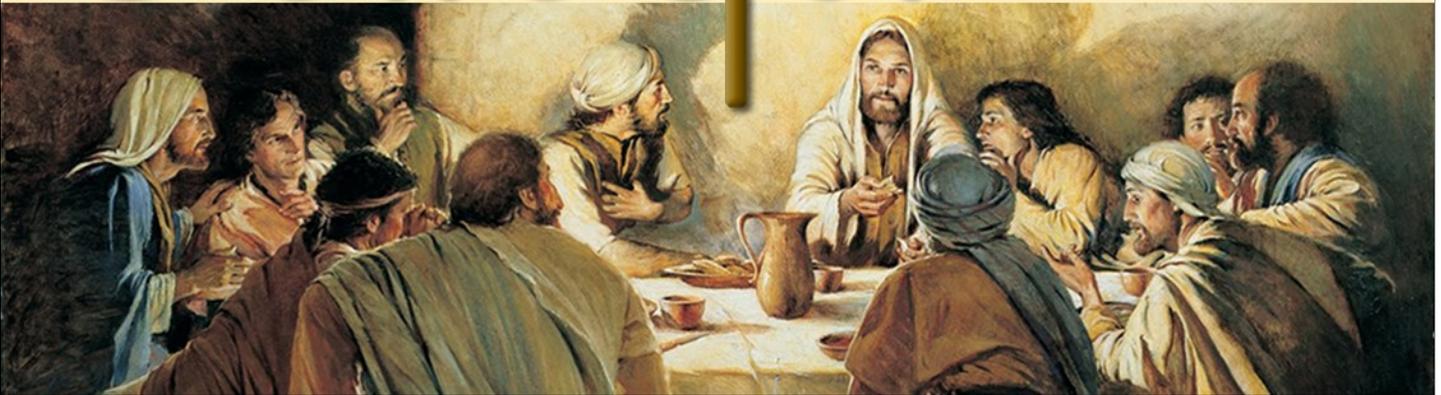


Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

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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.

The Dishonest Dodger

In the age of conceit

Honesty is quite honestly a dishonest virtue when adjectivally attached to those who regularly chew the fat off tender hides with their bloviating prevarications—the obvious conceit of an *honest* politician. Politics and politicians—I personally prefer the mid-19th century nominative, *snollygoster*¹—were frequent targets for the acid wit of Mark Twain. Two of the most frequently quoted deadly darts and personal favorites:

Politicians and diapers must be changed often, and for the same reason.

Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but then I repeat myself.

Now, not every barb was aimed at the political buffoonery. One that epitomized Twain's keen understanding of the human condition is especially apropos for this age of fake news, moronic punditry and social media trolls.

It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled.

This sounds oddly familiar, similar to the line often attributed to Abraham Lincoln.

You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.

Of course, Twain would have readily agreed with Lincoln since it only goes to further prove his point, perhaps best explained with this bit of poli-wit, "How can you tell when politicians are lying? When their lips are moving."



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Both Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, and I were born in Hannibal, Missouri though in completely different centuries and of no relation other than we were both born into a state of Miz-er-ee. What tickles the synapses a bit is the fact we both would eventually end up in northern Nevada. Strange how life works out at times.

While I will admit to lacking his rapier wit and sharp tongue, I do greatly appreciate his humor. There is a great deal of wisdom and truth in what he had to say, especially for these days. Here are a few that I find arrow true and straight to target.

All political parties eventually die, choking on their own lies.

We have the best government money can buy.

The nation is divided, half patriots and half traitors, and no man can tell which from which.

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.

Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it.

If you don't read the newspapers, you are uninformed. If you do read them you are misinformed.

Its name is Public Opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it is the voice of God.

A clear conscience is the sure sign of a bad memory.

The secret of getting ahead is getting started.

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small peo-

ple always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.

The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.

If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.

Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.

That these aphorisms were not penned yesterday beggars modern credulity; that they were written when our nation was sorely divided, when hatred and anger split families and reason was cast off confounds the spirit of the modern mind. This age is purblind and parboiled, ignorant to the realities that have come before. Born in 1835, Samuel Clemens was witness to a century of divisiveness and turbulence in this nation's history unimagined before or since. And yet, time cannot tarnish the truth of his remarks.

Booker T. Washington, (c. 1856 – November 14, 1915) was an American educator, author, orator, and advisor to presidents of the United States. Washington was from the last generation of black American leaders born into slavery and became the leading voice of the former slaves and their descendants; between 1890 and 1915, he was the dominant leader in the African-American community.

Washington was a key proponent of African-American businesses and one of the founders of the National

Negro Business League. His base was the Tuskegee Institute, a historically black college in Tuskegee, Alabama.

As lynchings in the South reached a peak in 1895, Washington gave a speech, known as the "Atlanta compromise", which brought him national fame. He called for black progress through education and entrepreneurship, rather than trying to challenge directly the Jim Crow segregation and the disenfranchisement of black voters in the South. Though a former slave, he never considered himself a victim of it. He understood the merit and the value of the American dream and embraced it. He, would no doubt have agreed with much of Twain's observations. He once observed, with seeming prescience to our day and time, that majority opinion cannot alter reality.

A lie doesn't become truth, a wrong doesn't become right and evil doesn't become good just because it's accepted by a majority.

It is perhaps the signature of the present day that scribes crude graffiti on ugly walls in rankerous protest against the truth, the right and what is good. Ideological tyrannies deny objections to their cause by castrating all opposing argument. Haters feed on hate; each bite burns,—like capsaicin in chili peppers—the intensity increasing until its acid corrodes the soul.

Hate, at first glance, is a subtle vice from mild reprove to acid bitterness it seethes beneath the surface as it dements the mind to mindlessness. Hate owns no logic, no reason, no thought beyond its hatred for what it hates. If

truth be told—which hate dares not submit—hate, by its nature, feeds upon itself like a *gollum* devouring its own spirit. It cannot know love, for in cruel ignorance the hater, unknowing the meaning of the word, loves to hate and thus denies love its pardon.

Language has been boiled in acid, corroded beyond cognition; words turned into weapons of mass obstruction, used to obfuscate truth, to divert attention away from the septic tank of caustic waste formerly considered academe of higher education.

Though Shakespeare wrote “that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” one cannot deny the painful prick that awaits the unwary from the thorn. A name cannot affect the essence of a thing or person; it is but a label. It has neither worth nor value; an individual or thing has value in its being, existence and its nature, a name has none of these.

The language of love is often expressed with roses—for their beauty and sweet bouquet—and yet, the unloved would deny the gift to everyone so to deny the slightest chance of being pricked. If it matters not such sweet reward, what does it matter then at all? Oh yes, I must remember this, it is that thorny prick. Thus it is, what once was prized is now despised, and all diminished in its demeaning.

Consider the qualities of the rose, each bloom the same but different, each soft petal painted by an unseen hand: red, white, pink, yellow, even

black and purple. And yet, each a beauty that smells as sweet, each a rose, a fragile flower so much desired; should not such wonder be provided some small sword for its defense?

If the rose—a royal flower, a leafy plant without regard its size, shape and color, and its thorns—commands such dear respect, what then of mankind, made in God’s image and likeness? Why then reduce man to insignificance, to no more than a noxious weed or grain of sand?

There is no guilt by mere distinction, no shame in being human. Every soul, transparent, without form lacks distinction, yet each is a child of God, each in his image and likeness. Like the rose, our bodies come in many shades that add color to this existence. How dismal would it be if all were every bit the same; what artist would dare to paint with but a single hue so as to not discriminate?

There is a pattern in the method, a madness that turns meaning on its head, thus giving lie to truth and truth to lie. Placing blame for faults recognizably one’s own on any but the one at fault is a sin far worse than the fault itself. I do not know the author but I find this well worth a moment’s reflection.

I used to think I was just a regular person, but I was born white, which now, whether I like it or not, makes me a racist. I am a fiscal and moral conservative, which by today’s standards, makes me a fascist. I am heterosexual, which now makes me a homophobe. I am mostly non-union, which makes me a traitor to the working class and an ally of big business. I am retired, which makes

me useless. I think and I reason, therefore I doubt much that the mainstream media tells me, which must make me a reactionary. I am proud of my heritage, which makes me a xenophobe. I value my safety and that of my family and I appreciate the police and the legal system, which makes me a right-wing extremist. I believe in hard work, fair play, and fair compensation according to each individual’s merits, which today makes me an anti-socialist. I believe in the defense and protection of my country and I honor those who served in the Armed Forces, which now makes me a right wing-militant. Please accept me for who and what I am; I did not set out to offend anyone, but I manage it just by being me. It doesn’t matter that the points I make are valid, I must be an angry and misinformed idiot. Well, if you will accept me, I will do the same for you.

Whenver I look upon a rose, no matter the color, I see a rose; I do not see a dandelion or a tree, though each has a beauty unique unto its own. Each rose, each rose owns a beauty of itself, whether red or white, yellow, blue, black or purple. I marvel at the wonder of it all. How much more so when I look into the eyes of another human being do I see the glory of our God, and I wonder at the miracle of creation, so much the same but yet so different, each a unique reflection of the One who made us out of love.

What daggers the heart is the terrible loss of our humanity, the inestimable loss of our kindred spirit. We have lost the will to be. We have lost faith in ourselves, in our neighbors and, most importantly, in our God. We are born,

if someone is willing, and then we die. End of story. Life is a chore, a meaningless existence, without purpose, each day, each minute a dullish gray drudgery like the one before and will be after. Is it any wonder the sentiment of worthlessness that pervades the culture?

We are taught that we must show mercy; we are told to forgive others, to show compassion for those who are in need, to love our neighbor as our self. Jesus taught us these; he told us these are necessary in order to obtain eternal life. But in order to follow him, we must first believe. And we have lost it, lost our desire, lost our will to believe. We no longer believe in ourselves let alone in God.

We have turned away from what is good not because we are evil but because we no longer know what is good, what is just, what is moral, what is right. God is no longer the center of our lives; his name no longer holy but an expletive, a curse word, spoken without reverence or awe. We no longer fear the Lord because we no longer believe.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment of the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:35-40).

Without faith in God, the two

commandments hold no meaning. Without God, there is no eternal life, nothing beyond this mortal one. Without eternal life, there is no salvation, no need to seek what is good and avoid what is evil, to put it rather crudely but in gaming terms: all bets are off. Anything and everything goes, the skies the limit. Sin is merely an antiquated term, because without God there is no forgiveness. As Cardinal Robert Sarah says, "Don't deceive people with the word 'mercy'. God forgives sins only if we repent of them." But then, there's the rub. No God, no sin, what's to forgive?

While there are more than a few atheists who confidently declare there is no God, who "know" there to be no divine being, the rest of humanity is less confident in such absolute assertions. Most—agnostics—are willing to give God the benefit of the doubt without much thought and with little need to go on about it. Maybe there is and maybe there isn't, either way, it matters not for their daily lives.

Agnostics are like *Ents*—tree-like creatures—in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, perfectly content to live out their lives without wasting time bothering to think or concerning themselves with such trivial notions. Agnostics, more often than not, admit God exists. They may even live, for the most part, by his commandments and the moral code that he has instilled in every heart. But, only so far as they work for them, only as long as such laws fit within their personal notions of what is good and right and just. Agnostics live a relaxed faith believing there is no need to strictly observe God's commandments,

no need to sacrifice or suffer from the strictures of church or religion, no need to worship, no need to seek forgiveness, no need for mercy, no need to worry for tomorrow may never come. But it always does.

Current cultural ideological slants celebrate victimhood, promote group identity, and demand reparations. Social justice warriors demand solutions to perceived social injustice no matter how rare or how ancient. The worst is nothing matters anymore. Nothing is sacred, nothing is sacrosanct, nothing is holy. The creed of the victim is the destruction of all who deny them their self-defined rights. The creed of the oppressed is the oppression of the oppressor. The creed of the feminist is the elimination of the anti-feminist male. The creed of the poor is the redistribution of wealth. The creed of the powerful is to acquire more power.

Heaven forbid, should someone be offended! What can be said without offense is silence and even that might well offend. Everyone must be a winner, no losers are allowed for losing will most certainly offend. Even participation trophies run the risk of offending those who choose not to participate. Rejection has become anathema, bigotry of the most grievous kind. Everyone must be accepted lest offense be taken.

In one of my aunt's books, *Angel Riding Shotgun*, she wrote an essay on the merits of rejection.

Everyone receives rejection at one time or another. Writers probably are privy to the most visible sign of

rejection, for anything marketed is rewarded by a check, or rejected with that fatal pink slip.

For beginning writers, I offer this advice. Look upon rejections as signs of passage. If you want to be a writer, you must experiment, you must test the waters, you must market your work. Few editors seek out authors. The reverse is true.

Look upon rejection as feedback from trying something. You will improve little when your article, story or poem is accepted, other than knowing it was o.k. But when your work is rejected, it is time to consider. Was it to the wrong market? Was it too long, too short for their requirements? Was the grammar poor? The sentence construction ragged?

Now is the time to learn. I follow a policy of sending each article to five publications before I tear it to pieces. But if and when five editors have rejected it (feedback), there must be something wrong with it. I try and find out what it is.

Let me cite a personal example. I give many writing workshops. At one seminar, the participants wrote critiques of the instructors and those critiques were given to us. In one class I had 30 students. Twenty-nine said I was great, fine, wonderful.

One person said I had wasted her time because ... She enumerated what she felt was superfluous, omitted, or needed to be said.

From whom did I benefit? The 29 who said I was o.k.? That was balm for my ego, but the learning experience came from that lone person who had the courage to force me to go over my entire presentation and clean, tighten and eliminate. I presented a better lesson the next time. This is applicable to any job.

It might be well to remember that the English novelist, John Creasy

had his first book rejected 737 times before he wrote and sold 500 books. Even Babe Ruth, remembered for his home runs, struck out 1330 times. No one remembers those rejections. As the old baseball adage goes, "If it is to be, it is up to me. Swing at the ball." And when you swing, sometimes you miss. And learn.

Rejection hurts, even to those of us who live and die by it. But it is also a learning process. Sometimes our best friends can be our worst enemies.

The same applies to life. All of us are rejected in one way or another. Too much rejection can warp a person, especially a child, just as too much praise can alter a child's vision of himself. But occasional rejection is good for us. Buckminster Fuller said, "Whatever humans have learned, had to be learned only as a consequence of trial and error experience. Human learn only through mistakes." Thus rejection becomes education.

William Faulkner once said, "They kilt us, but they ain't whupped us yit."

Look on rejection slips, or rejection in life that way. You may feel it's killing you, but it doesn't have to "whup you yit."²

We have stopped learning, and that is a problem of immense proportions. If Buckminster Fuller is correct, and I believe he is, the altering of our lives for safety's sake, eliminating pain and suffering, removing any opportunity for error, handing out participation trophies, grading on the curve so that everyone gets an 'A', creating safe spaces and trigger alerts, rewriting history and suppressing debate will lead inevitably to ignorance. If we do not learn from our mistakes, if we cannot handle rejection, how then are we

to live as productive human beings?

Something I read not long ago gave me pause, not because it was deep or great literature but because it was the truth.

Just because you had a crappie childhood does not mean you can use it as an excuse to be a crappie human. We all have a choice as to what kind of person we are and how we treat others regardless of our backgrounds and the conditions we grow up in.

What truth there is in that. No matter what life throws at you, no matter what hand you were dealt, you have a choice to make. You can cry "that's unfair" and throw a tantrum or you can make it a learning experience and grow. There are plenty of examples of how one can make lemonade out of lemons. Here are two:

Augustus Tolton was born a slave of slave parents. His father fought for the North in the civil war. He was called to the priesthood when no seminary would accept him. He did not let that deter him. He went to Rome and upon returning was assigned to a parish in Chicago, IL where he died at a young age. He has been made venerable by Pope Francis.

The first African-American to receive the Medal of Honor in the Civil War was Sgt. William Harvey Carney who, despite being shot in the face, shoulders, arms, and legs, refused to let the American flag touch the ground.

1. *Snollygaster*: noun, mid-19th century; a shrewd, unprincipled person, especially a politician.
2. Juanita Yates, "Angel Riding Shotgun: We ain't whupped yit", (Chicago, IL: Adams Press, 1992), 49-50.

An Elegy To Sisterhood

Remembering my mothers

There has been an abundance of weather this year from sea to shining sea, snow and rain mostly, slaking the dryness of the earth in the west and refilling rivers and lakes run low across the country. Too much of good things are seldom appreciated; all things in moderation. Traveling rural Missouri roads these last few days showed evidence of the unhappy effects of overabundance. As the song goes, corn should be as high as an elephant's eye by the fourth of July. Not this year, most would scarcely reach the knee of a very short farmer. Soybeans, normally knee-high or higher appeared to have sprouted yesterday. Planting was obviously much delayed this year if at all for there were many fields still fallow.

I was born here. I grew up here. I remember here. This place is home, though I must admit I no longer live here; I haven't for more years than I can now recall. But it is home, it always will be so. I may die somewhere far away but lay my bones beside my ancestors beneath Missouri mud. Just stubbornness, I suppose.

Friday, I spent some moments with my aunt, my second mother if truth be told. She looked the same, just older, as the years must take their toll. It was hard, terribly difficult to see her again, knowing it would be the last this side of heaven. And yet, seeing her again bought some small measure of penance for all the other moments missed, being able to tell her, "Go in peace, go in peace, go in peace."

My mother wrote a weekly column (*The Pen Point*) for the Monroe City News; my aunt did the same (*Country Style*.) It is fitting then that Aunt Nita passed away this morning, what would have been her sister's 93rd birthday. In one of her columns, written nearly 27 years ago, Aunt Nita wrote of the emotions that she experienced attending the wedding of my oldest daughter, the first grandchild of my parents. It is a fitting tribute to her sisterhood with my mother. Here it is in its entirety.

THEY WERE THERE

by Juanita Yates

I told one of my children it had been an emotional weekend. She said, "Mom, most of your weekends and weeks are emotional."

This is probably true, but this one was especially so.

My late sister and brother-in-law's first grandchild got married at Lake St. Louis. Our first grandchild had married last summer and it was a wonderful experience. But this one carried with it, not only laughter and happiness, but many tears.

Several of their children have married since the couple's untimely deaths in an auto accident in 1985 and I, along with others in the family, shared that sense of loss even then. We were present as their children married and began new lives, but they did not get to see it.

It was even more touching when it was their first grandchild. One generation had passed and the next one had come, and they are still gone.

Many of us felt, as we have so many times that we much absorb it all—for them. We felt as grandparents do when their granddaughter makes that walk down the aisle—for them. We felt it when their youngest daughter introduced her

new baby saying, "Wouldn't her grandmother and granddaddy have been proud of her?"

The new bride, who is heading in the direction of medical school, was a tiny little thing who remembers her grandparents well, having been there in the *Little House In The Woods*. The younger ones will never know them.

That is what makes family so important. We tell stories, most of which are true, to the children, and in turn to the grandchildren, much as my mother used to tell us of her family, whom we knew for a long time solely through the wondrous tales she wove.

These stories are important for they fill in blanks. When I was gathering material for a story on my sister, the grandmother of the bride, for a book to be published by University of Missouri Women, I showed the material to one of the daughters. She said, "I didn't know that about my mother."

That is because I knew her as a child, as a sister, a grandmother and a writer. She knew her a mother. She was mother and sister and friend, and only the shared stories of all of us can capture the total mother she was and the father through his family's stories.

The other grandparents, the uncles and aunts on both sides shed tears too. It was the only thing we had to share with the parents who were not present.

But when the uncle of the bride, who has sung at so many weddings, and even at his parents' funeral, began the beautiful wedding song, there was not a dry eye in the church. I thought, "They are here. They are here in this beautiful bride who has set such big goals for herself; they are here in the voice of their son on his niece's wedding day; they are here as they marry in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

the faith their grandparents cherished; they are here in the values and aspirations and the love that has enriched us all.”

Yes, Nellie Ann and Bob, you were there.

Need I say it? But I will. Aunt Nita, welcome home. Kiss your sister and wish her happy birthday. Give her all our love. We miss you both.

Epilogue

There was a funeral on Friday last; my aunt would have enjoyed the feast. The church, Holy Rosary, was full though nearly half were family, children, 37 grandchildren, 82 great-grandchildren, and 4 great-great-grandchildren, along with spouses and relatives from near and far away. She was a special person.

She was 94, a year older than her sister. Each gave the world eleven children, each was a co-mother to twenty-two. These days it is hard to imagine or to understand what motherhood is truly all about. So few are wont to practice it, to give everything you have and more to God and family, to bear the burdens and the sorrows, the hardships and the loss, those are the wounds of motherhood which only special women can bear with such joy and gratitude.

Aunt Nita—for that is what we called her—loved. She loved her ever-expanding family, she loved her nieces and nephews, her brothers and sisters, her friends and enemies, but above all else, she love her God. One of her

daughters spoke at the funeral of how they were raised to attend Mass more than just on Sundays, to pray the rosary every night, to keep God always in their hearts.

Much of my youth I spent “working” on their farm. I seem to recall although there were days of hard work there were more days spent in the woods or along the banks of a pond or swimming in one. But no matter what or when, at night before bed, there was prayer.

From her obituary:

Juanita was a well-known author and writer who worked for the Monroe City News for 20 years. She had six books published, contributed to numerous historical books and magazines, wrote a syndicated column that ran in several Missouri weeklies for over 20 years, and wrote for the Catholic Missourian for a number of years. She was named to three National and one International Writing Societies. Juanita was on the board and a presenter at the Mark Twain Writer's Workshop in Hannibal, MO during its 10 years of existence; conducted writing workshops, in schools kindergarten through college and on an adult level, and was an inspirational speaker.

In 1976 she was named Missouri Press Woman of the Year; in 1981, Missouri Press Woman of Achievement; 1982 Missouri Mother of the Year; and a runner up to the National Mother of the Year. In 1985, Governor John Ashcroft named the Yates family Missouri Family of the Year. She won hundreds of awards for her writing throughout her career, several on the national level.

I will always be grateful for my two mothers. Until we meet again.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

Salvation

Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press
2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press
2018, 269 pages.

Catholicism & Modernity

James Hitchcock

The Seabury Press
1979, 250 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine

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Chronicles

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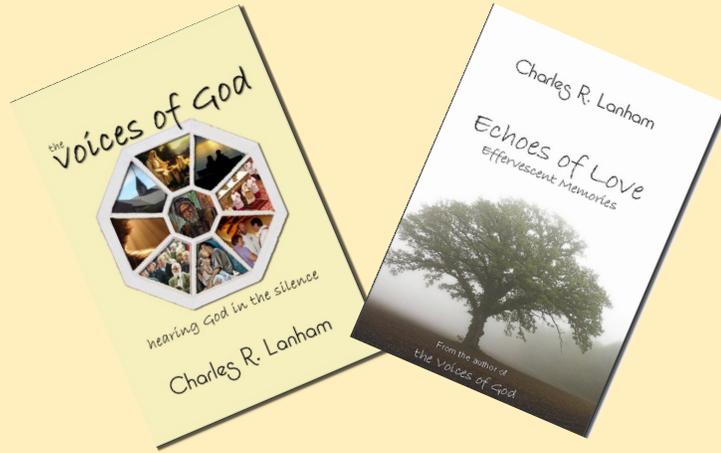
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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

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