

Colloquī

November 08, 2019
Volume 04, Number 13



A journal for restless minds

A Dialogue To Truth

Listening is as important as speaking

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

A Dialogue To Truth

Listening is as important as speaking

Much has been written, as I have been occasioned to mention, on the sad state of affairs within the once hallowed halls of the Academy. As Plato envisioned it was first and foremost a place for and of dialogue; not a place for pleasantries or passing gossip, nor a place for argument, nor debate, nor idle conversation. Nor, gods in the heavens forbid, a charm school for snowflakes yet weaned of diapering.

But then, what did the ancient philosopher contend *was* the meaning of *dialogue*? If not idle banter concerning who won or lost the race in the arena the day before, what else should one possibly run on about? Of certain, there were a goodly number of half-clothed or un-

clothed statues to *trigger* juvenile embarrassment; should then dialogue be meant taking offense at such outrageous displays of unseemly nudity by tearing them off limb by limb, head from torso in fits of peak Greek pique?

Such madness was most assuredly not what the Greek philosopher was of a mind to encourage. "Dialogue does not take place simply because people are talking. Mere talk is the deterioration of dialogue that occurs when there has been a failure to reach it."¹ Thus, what we do not find within Academy walls is any *haute couture* of dialogue.



Plato, and those who followed, knew dialogue required some speaking but as much or more active listening; a two-way treat of the mind, a method of mutual comprehension and reciprocal understanding which

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“deepens and transforms the being of the interlocutors.”

Therefore, essential for dialogue to be productive it must consist not only of speech but also listening; in the same way, each must be more than superficial and each interlocutor must be fully engaged. Joseph Ratzinger expounds on the significance of each element in successful dialogue, first and foremost the element of listening.

The first element is listening. What takes place here is an event of opening, of becoming open to the reality of other things and people. We need to realize what an art it is to be able to listen attentively. Listening is not a skill, like working a machine, but a capacity simply to be which puts in requisition the whole person. To listen means to know and to acknowledge another and to allow him to step into the realm of one's own “I”. It is readiness to assimilate his word, and therein his being, into one's own reality as well as to assimilate oneself to him in corresponding fashion. Thus, after the act of listening, I am another man, my own being is enriched and deepened because it is united with the being of the other and, through it, with the being of the world.

Should one doubt the efficacy of listening a quick glance in any mirror will clearly prove hearing twice advantaged over muttering. Would that listening occupied twice the time spent talking; sadly though, by all accounts, the earflaps aside the head are most often considered mere useful places for mounting jewelry or resting the handles of one's spectacles. In brief, we have no time to listen for we are all too busy jacking jaws.

Listening is, as Ratzinger notes, more than a passive exercise; one must become open to the “reality of other things and people,” be ready to “assimilate” not only what you hear but all of who the other person is, their being, into your own. This may well be the most difficult and therefore the reason most of us fail so miserably at the task.

There is another reason—one which did not exist, at least in its present deterioration, nearly a quarter of a century ago, when Ratzinger made his observations—for the demise of dialogue: the so-called “smart-phone” with its varied and highly addictive “social” mediations.

Strategically located on the side of a high-rise building facing the freeway, four young adults, millennials by every indication, are posed leaning against a brick wall. Each with a vacuous smile as they gaze vacantly into the screen of the smartphone in hand, oblivious to the others standing within arms' reach. This is not dialogue. This is not conversation. This is suicide by inexorable self-induced mental asphyxiation.

Dialogue presupposes something more than words exchanged; something more than a technical exchange of heretofore well-understood empirical knowledge, that is to say, existing know-how. It is much more than opinion based on second- or third-hand hearsay.

When we speak of dialogue in the proper sense, what we mean is an utterance wherein something of being itself, indeed, the person himself, becomes speech. This does not

merely add to the mass of items of knowledge acquired and of performances registered but touches the very being of man as such, purifying and intensifying his potency to be who he is.

But a further dimension of dialogue, which pertains both to listening and to speaking, thus discloses itself. This is an element upon which the early Augustine set particular value. ... Analyzing these colloquies in retrospect, Augustine concludes that the community of friends was capable of mutual listening and understanding because all of them together heeded the interior master, the truth. Men are capable of reciprocal comprehension because, far from being wholly separate islands of being, they communicate in the same truth.

The greater their inner contact with the one reality which unites them, namely, the truth, the greater their capacity to meet on common ground. Dialogue without this interior obedient listening to the truth would be nothing more than a discussion among the deaf. [Emphasis added]

Here we come upon a circumstance which, aside from its extraordinary importance in today's debate, at the same time reveals the perils to which dialogue is exposed. The capacity to reach a consensus presupposes the existence of a truth common to all. Consensus, however, must not try to pass itself off as a substitute for the truth.

Without truth in common, there can be no dialogue. When truth becomes what each one makes of it, in truth, there is no truth, only make-believe. The academy has become fantasyland with fairy tales writ large and truth a corruption. The elevation of a mind to new heights is now anathema, victim to the madness of the mob.

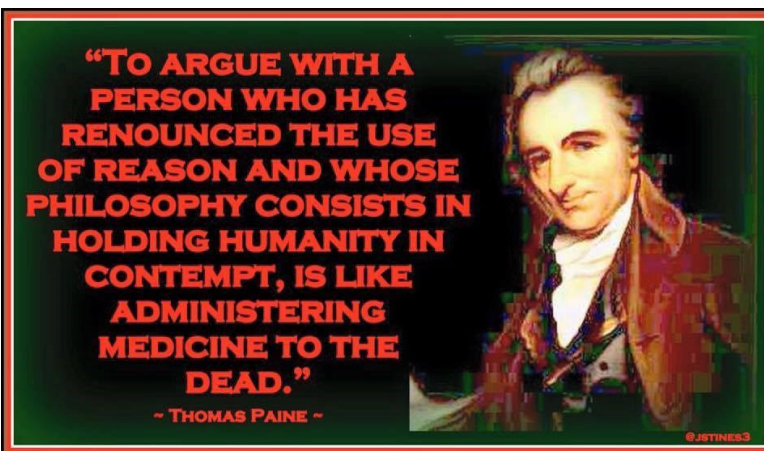
From the very beginning, freedom has belonged to the essence of the academy and of its search for understanding. In this context, freedom means essentially two things. In the first place, it is the possibility to think everything, ask everything and say everything which appears worthy of being thought, asked and said in the effort to find the truth. ... What justifies this freedom, which under certain circumstances can be so dangerous? What is its basis? What do we take this risk for? The answer, at least the only satisfying one, is that the truth itself, the truth for its own sake, is so precious that it warrants such a risk; otherwise, no one could dare to undertake it. However, we thereby immediately find ourselves in a dramatic conflict with all strategies of change and, at the same time, at the heart of the question concerning the foundation of our society in general.²

Academic freedom, according to Josef Pieper, has the distinctive feature that it is above all "freedom from the necessity of pursuing some profit aim—this is authentic 'academic freedom', which accordingly, is *per definitionem* wiped out as soon as the academic disciplines become mere technicians pursuing the objectives of some power interest of whatever sort." "You can certainly believe that you have taken philosophy into your service; but behold, what has been taken into service is not philosophy."

The question of freedom is inseparably linked to the question of truth. When truth is not a value in itself which merits both active interest

and the expenditure of time independently of its results, profit can be the only criterion with which to evaluate knowledge. If this is the case, knowledge has its *raison d'être* no longer in itself but in the objectives which it serves. It then belongs to the domain of ends and means. In other words, in one form or another it is subordinate to power and its acquisition.²

The madman shouts "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" without the least mind to know what he is



going on about. Freedom is never free to those disenfranchised from the truth. Only those risk averse or mad enough would deny the truth. "In reality, man must appear foolish to himself when he risks speaking of the truth yet has no choice but to expose himself to this risk—and he must do so precisely in the recognition of his own absurdity. Only the presence of both elements, that is, the courage to search for the truth and the humility to accept one's ridiculousness, enables man to maintain the right mean between truthless cynicism and self-righteous fanaticism."³

The madman is not he that defies the world. The saint, the criminal, the martyr, the cynic, the nihilist may all defy the world quite sanely.

And even if such fanatics would destroy the world, the world owes them a strictly fair trial according to proof and public law. But the madman is not the man who defies the world; he is the man who *denies it*.

... all true delusions have in them this unalterable assertion—that what is not is. The difference between us and the maniac is not about how things look or how things ought to look, but about what they self-evidently are. The lunatic does not say that he ought to be King.... He says he is King. The lunatic does not say he is as wise as Shakespeare.... The lunatic says he is Shakespeare. The lunatic does not say he is divine in the same sense as Christ.... The lunatic says he is Christ. In all cases the difference is a difference about what is there; not a difference touching what should be done about it.⁴

Chesterton penned those words nearly a century ago, writing on the evil then coming of the age, *Eugenics*, which was the harbinger of the murderous habits of abortion and euthanasia, among other murderous sins. It was the beginning for the end of dialogue, for asking difficult moral and ethical questions, for searching for the meaning and purpose of life.

He, being a genius of wit, the master of the turn-of-the-phrase, began with an admonition which quite tragically, by all appearances, fell on deaf ears or perhaps on ears so heavy with rings and trinkets the hearing part was stoppered shut.

The wisest thing in the world is to cry out before you are hurt. It is no

good to cry out after you are hurt; especially after you are mortally hurt. People talk about the impatience of the populace; but sound historians know that most tyrannies have been possible because men moved too late. It is often essential to resist a tyranny before it exists. It is no answer to say, with a distant optimism, that the scheme is only in the air. A blow from a hatchet can only be parried while it is in the air.

There exists to-day a scheme of action, a school of thought, as collective and unmistakable as any of those by whose grouping alone we can make any outline of history. It is as firm a fact as the Oxford Movement, or the Puritans of the Long Parliament; or the Jansenists; or the Jesuits. It is a thing that can be pointed out; it is a thing that can be discussed; and it is a thing that can still be destroyed. It is called for convenience "Eugenics"; and that it ought to be destroyed I propose to prove in the pages that follow. I know that it means very different things to different people; but that is only because evil always takes advantage of ambiguity. I know it is praised with high professions of idealism and benevolence; with silver-tongued rhetoric about purer motherhood and a happier posterity. But that is only because evil is always flattered, as the Furies were called "The Gracious Ones." I know that it numbers many disciples whose intentions are entirely innocent and humane; and who would be sincerely astonished at my describing it as I do. But that is only because evil always wins through the strength of its splendid dupes; and there has in all ages been a disastrous alliance between abnormal innocence and abnormal sin. Of these who are deceived I shall speak of course as we all do of such instruments; judging them by the good they think they are doing, and not by the evil which they really do.

Among free men, the law, more often the creed, most commonly of all the custom, have laid all sorts of restrictions on sex for this reason or that. But law and creed and custom have never concentrated heavily except upon fixing and keeping the family when once it had been made. The act of founding the family, I repeat, was an individual adventure outside the frontiers of the State. Our first forgotten ancestors left this tradition behind them; and our own latest fathers and mothers a few years ago would have thought us lunatics to be discussing it.⁵

Now to go on pulling Chesterton from his grave and having him do all the talking would be to commit him a grave injustice for he has written much more which he bound together on the subject and those words are his to enjoy just recompense. What I have cited I have done so for no one could have written or said it better, but also to lay a foundation for what is to follow; what follows is a conclusion to what I began at the beginning of this essay.

Now, it seems very much to me that Chesterton was far too much ahead of his time, or, perhaps it was time that upon waking up forgot to check the schedule. In either case, there were, as he put it, "a cloud of skirmishers, of harmless and confused modern sceptics, who ought to be cleared off or calmed down before we come to debate with the real doctors of the heresy." The first indication of a mounting storm are skirmishing clouds playing their childish game of hide and seek with the sun; only the fool would be so foolish as to ignore the warning.

Chesterton divided those sceptics into five sects—very much germane to this present discourse: Euphemists, Casuists, Autocrats, Precedenters, and Endeavorers. Bear in mind, such are true believers, a sycophantic chorus under the direction of a heretic conductor.

In speaking of the Euphemists—which remain in overwhelming overabundance—he wrote that most sceptics are Euphemists, that "short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing." To illustrate this he suggested saying "The persuasive and even coercive powers of the citizen should enable him to make sure that the burden of longevity in the previous generation does not become disproportionate and intolerable, especially to the females" and the Euphemist "will away slightly to and fro like babies sent to sleep in cradles." Yet, say "'Murder your mother,' and they sit up quite suddenly. Yet the two sentences, in cold logic, are exactly the same." Much the same euphemistic argument comes from the mouths of those who support "a woman's right to choose what happens with her own body" which of course is merely the same as saying "murder your unborn child." But, they will have none of such unmistakable language.

The Casuist uses absurd logic to superficially support an argument. Suppose I say "I oppose the killing of the unborn." Someone will no doubt say, "Well, then you no doubt are just

as opposed to eating unborn chickens." How should or might one respond to such an outlandish comparison?

The human race has excluded such absurdities for unknown ages; ... You may call it flogging when you hit a choking gentleman on the back; you may call it torture when a man unfreezes his fingers at the fire; but if you talk like that a little longer you will cease to live among living men.

The next superficial sect Chesterton described are the Autocrats (he initially thought to call them Idealists, but noted that "this implies a humility towards impersonal good they hardly show.") Alas, these people are more common in the here and now than they perhaps were in the there and then. The Autocrat of there and then is most attune to the Progressive of the here and now.

They are those who give us generally to understand that every modern reform will "work" all right, because they will be there to see. Where they will be, and for how long, they do not explain very clearly. I do not mind their looking forward to numberless lives in succession; for that is the shadow of a human or divine hope. But even a theosophist does not expect to be a vast number of people at once. And these people most certainly propose to be responsible for a whole movement after it has left their hands. Each man promises to be about a thousand policemen. If you ask them how this or that will work,

they will answer, "Oh, I would certainly insist on this"; or "I would never go so far as that"; as if they could return to this earth and do what no ghost has ever done quite successfully—force men to forsake their sins. Of these it is enough to say that they do not understand the nature of a law any more than the nature of a dog. If you let loose a law, it will do as a dog does. It will obey its own nature, not yours. Such sense as you have put into the law (or the dog) will be fulfilled. But you will not be able to fulfil a fragment of anything you have forgotten to put into it.

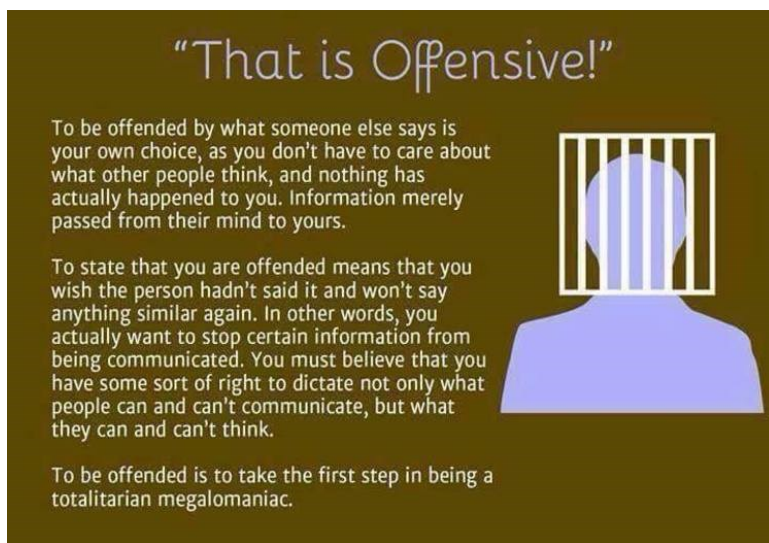
law, let us say, about keeping lepers in quarantine. He simply alters the word "lepers" to "long-nosed people," and says blandly that the principle is the same.

Much the same could be said for those who espouse and promote an "open borders" policy when they argue "After all, we are a nation of immigrants." To which one can only answer "Quite so. It should be easy enough to annex the rest of the world so everyone and no one may be unjustly accused of being an immigrant."

As Chesterton notes, it is perhaps the Endeavourers of whom he sees as the weakest and most helpless.

It is enough to say here that the best thing the honest Endeavourer could do would be to make an honest attempt to know what he is doing. And not to do anything else until he has

found out. Lastly, there is a class of controversialists so hopeless and futile that I have really failed to find a name for them. But whenever anyone attempts to argue rationally for or against any existent and recognizable thing, ... there are always people who begin to chop hay about Socialism and Individualism.... And for the rest, there is undoubtedly an enormous mass of sensible, rather thoughtless people, whose rooted sentiment it is that any deep change in our society must be in some way infinitely distant. They cannot believe that men in hats and coats like themselves can be preparing a revolution; all their ... philosophy has taught them



Then, there are the Precedenters; Chesterton said of them that they are those "who flourish particularly in Parliament." As will become immediately evident, they also flourish particularly well in Congress and other like bodies—such as episcopal synods.

They are best represented by the solemn official who said the other day that he could not understand the clamor against the Feeble-Minded Bill, as it only extended the principles of the old Lunacy Laws. To which again one can only answer "Quite so. It only extends the principles of the Lunacy Laws to persons without a trace of lunacy." This lucid politician finds an old

that such transformations are always slow.⁶

What is now coming uncommonly clear is that no one is listening anymore. Certainly, we are reading less, knowing less, understanding little, if anything at all; we are less interested in what is and what is not the truth. Freedom has become a four-letter adjective: *free* stuff, *free* love, *free* college, *free* living, *free* life.

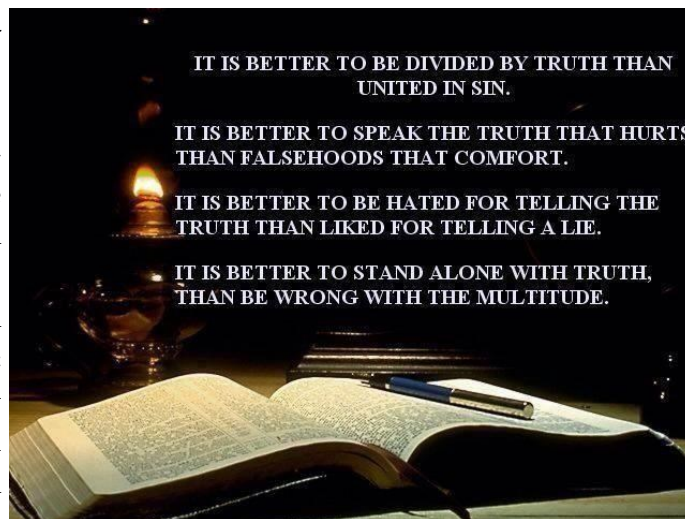
Guardini wrote in a journal entry of February 28, 1954: "Truth has such a clear and calm power. My aim in pastoral work is this: to help by the power of the truth." But, truth has become "my" and "your" truth, not "the" truth. Truth has acquired a harsher note; Pilate's enigmatic query "What is truth?" more a shrill shriek to the ear, for truth sounds like hate to those who hate truth.

With the denial of the truth, which is to deny reality, to make all things subjective and relative to the individual imagination, moral and ethical absolutes dissolve into thin air. Man no longer has the ability to judge right from wrong, good from bad, truth from untruth, moral from immoral, grace from disgrace.

The denial of the general human capacity to judge what concerns man as man creates a new class system and thereby degrades everyone, because then man no longer exists as such. The negation of the ethical principle, the negation of this organ of knowledge, prior to

any specialization, which we call conscience, is the negation of man.⁸

The Academy is no longer sacred ground for dialogue has been usurped, dialogue is dead. Free and open expression of ideas has been suppressed by the overbearing weight of ideology. "When ancient opinions and rules of life are taken away, the loss cannot possibly be estimated. From that moment we have no compass to govern us; nor can we know distinctly what port we steer."⁷



Jean-Paul Sartre upon arriving in America some 70 years ago, fresh from surviving the German occupation of France, was critical of the contradictions he saw between the American idea of freedom compared to the reality. "There is a myth of freedom and there is the dictatorship of public opinion. ... Nowhere will anyone find such a discrepancy between myths and men," he wrote.

Nowhere is the Dictatorship of Relativism more apparent than where there is a dictatorship of public opinion. Instead of forums for the open discussion of ideas, whether agreeable or not, we have succumbed to the poll-

ster elite, allowing public opinion polls to make all of our daily decisions for us. What we wear, what we buy, what we understand, what we believe are all subject to the vagaries of the daily opinion surveys, often contradictory and always within "the margin of error."

Allow me to conclude with a few other related thoughts. The American philosopher Richard Rorty, formulated a new utopia of banality, a idealized liberal society in which absolute values and standards no longer exist; the only thing worth the trouble of pursuing would be well-being. Ratzinger wrote that

In his circumspect but altogether determined critique of the Western world, [Andrej] Sakharov anticipated the danger looming in this emptying out of what is human when he spoke about the "leftist-liberal fashion" or denounced the naivete and cynicism that often paralyze the West when it comes to assuming its moral responsibility.

Here we are confronted with the problem that Sakharov poses to us today: How can the free world do justice to its moral responsibility? Freedom keeps its dignity only if it stays connected with its ethical foundation and mission. A freedom that consisted solely of being able to satisfy one's needs would not be a human freedom; it would remain in the animal realm. Deprived of its content, individual freedom abolishes itself, because the individual's freedom can exist only in an order of freedoms. Freedom needs a communal content that we could define as the guaranteed of human rights.

To put it another way: the concept of freedom by its very essence calls for supplementation by two other concepts: law and the good. We could say that part of freedom is the ability of the conscience to perceive the fundamental values of mankind that concern everyone. ... [Sakharov] saw clearly that freedom is often understood egotistically and superficially. One cannot wish for freedom for oneself alone; freedom is indivisible and must always be regarded as a mission for all mankind. This means that one cannot have it without sacrifices and renunciation. It demands that we take care that morality, as a public, communal tie, is understood in such a way that, although it is powerless in itself, people acknowledge its true power at the service of mankind. Freedom demands that governments and all who have responsibility bow before what stands there defenseless by itself and cannot exercise coercion.

It is difficult to see how democracy, which is based on the principle of majority rule, can uphold moral values that are not supported by a majority without introducing a dogmatism that is foreign to it.⁹

5 Truths You CANNOT Disagree With:

1. You cannot legislate the poor **into** prosperity by legislating the wealthy **out of** prosperity.
2. What one person receives **without working for**, another person **must work for** without receiving.
3. The government **cannot give** to anybody anything that the government does not first **take** from somebody else.
4. You cannot **multiply** wealth by **dividing** it.
5. When half of the people get the idea that they do **not have to work** because the other half is going to **take care of them**; and when the other half gets the idea that it does no good to work because somebody else is going to get what they work for, **that is the beginning of the end of any nation.**

1. Joseph Ratzinger Benedict XVI, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), 32-34.
2. Joseph Ratzinger, "Freedom and Constraint in the Church" in: idem, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Slough, 1988), 182-203.
3. R. Guardini, *Stationen und Rückblicke* (Würzburg, 1965), 41-50.
4. G. K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils*, (London, New York, Toronto & Melbourne: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1922), 31.
5. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils*, 3, 9.
6. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils*, 13-18.
7. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and Other Writings*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 425.
8. Joseph Ratzinger Benedict XVI, *Faith and Politics*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2018), 99.

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.

The Day Is Now Far Spent

Robert Cardinal Sarah

Ignatius Press

2019, 350 pages.

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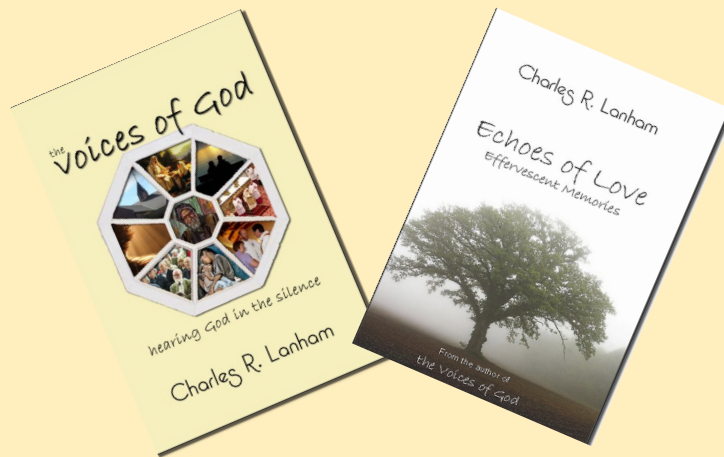
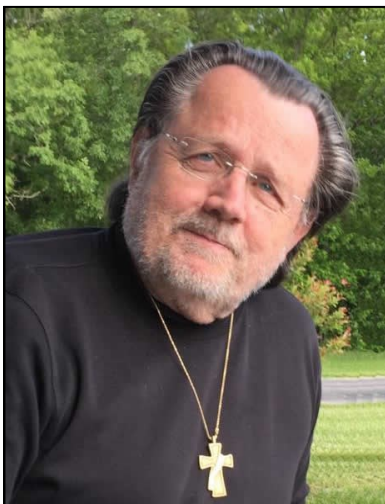
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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**.

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I hate it when people
don't know the
difference between
"your" and "you're".

There so stupid.

