

July 24, 2020  
Volume 04—Number 42



A journal for restless minds

# Colloquī *: to discuss*

**Life as You Know It**

*Merely a matter of matter*

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**Deacon's Diner**

*Food for a restless mind*

## Life as You Know It

### *Merely a matter of matter*

**T**here are only two ways of looking at life, only two: life is either of infinite, incalculable value or it is not worth much or nothing at all. Now, there will be those who would argue otherwise, suggesting those are too extreme for their taste, somewhere in-between more the happy measure. That, my friends, is self-indulgent dodgeball, leaving ample room for some adjustment should the need arise—and you can count on that as sure as the sun tomorrow. There is nothing wrong with thinking; God did give us a mind to reason and to cogitate, and to this mind, the world would be a far more pleasant place if people spent more of their time in deliberate thought rather than merely occupying game space.

It seems to me an inverse relation between the value one places on life and one's belief in Almighty God. Those who submit to being creatures made in the image and likeness of the Divine for the most hold life of utmost value; those who grant little or no credence to a Creator tend to rely solely on their own fallible, flawed, imperfect measure to determine what a life is worth—too often, that means: not worth much.

What was once common has become exceedingly rare—the love of God, love of neighbor, love of self; what was once rare has become all too common—hatred for all that is good, for beauty, for innocence, virtue, morality, decency, justice, freedom, and fairness. Hate is a squatter, ready to occupy the soul when love exits with the spirit.

St. Paul, writing to the Romans, “charged that all men ... are under the power of sin, as it is written:”

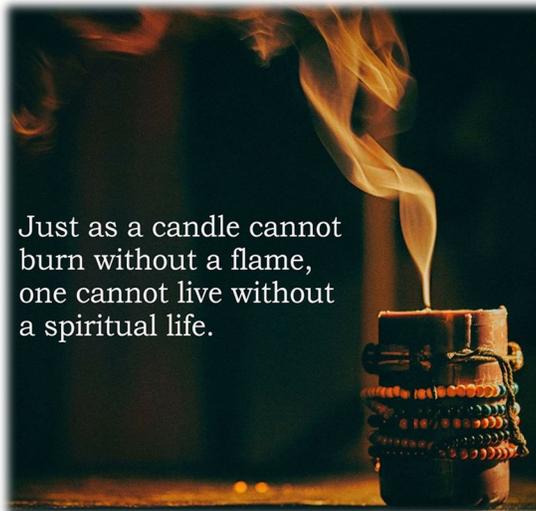
*“None is righteous, no, not one;  
no one understands, no one seeks for God.  
All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong;*

*no one does good, not even one.”  
“Their throat is an open grave,  
they use their tongues to deceive.”  
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”  
“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”  
“Their feet are swift to shed blood,  
in their paths are ruin and misery,  
and the way of peace they do not know.”  
“There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:9-18).*

There is no *good* reason for all the decadence and immorality, no rationale for love's exit and hate's occupation other than there is no fear of God before our eyes. Perhaps, the reason for all the hate can be explained in that ancient rhyme of Saint Augustine.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new,  
late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was  
outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my

unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.



Just as a candle cannot  
burn without a flame,  
one cannot live without  
a spiritual life.

Out of growing contempt for intellectual gravitas, Augustine is often dismissed as too complicated, too erudite for the picture book crowd. Previous ages—any age before the present digitized age—considered his thoughts rooted in the deepest mysticism, and Catholic intellectual tradition has always placed him among those who correctly emphasized that God is infinitely above human thought. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8).

Just as so many have either forgotten or simply relegated Augustine to the dustbin of historical novelty, so also God. So many have succumbed, as did Augustine, to the desires for lovely created things. “In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You

were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all.”

Of all the remarkable ideas—there were so many, it is terribly difficult to focus on just one—upon which this nation was conceived, the one principle upon which all else was predicated was “In God We Trust.” No revisionist gerrymandering of history can prove God from the nation’s birthright. Without God there would be no country founded upon the principle that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Without self-evident truths there would be no hope for a stable society made up of people who largely agree on matters of consequence, on common beliefs, and core values.

From the beginning, the bedrock upon which American society was constructed has been “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” The very essence of America imbues her citizens with the awesome power and majesty of a loving God; God is in our DNA, but then, he is everywhere and, in all things, because he created all things out of love.

Why, then, have we forgotten that? I would suggest it a mere matter of matter. Without the inconvenience of obeying the law of Nature and Nature’s God, all things soon devolve into mere matter. We are merely the sum of the matter which becomes us and the whole of the matter is nothing more than the sum of our parts, worth less than the price of a small cup of coffee at the nearest Starbucks. In other words, humanity is hardly worth the bother; life as you know it is meaningless; there is no soul, no spirit, no life beyond this brief moment. Without God, faith, hope and charity are religious nonsense.

The sharp turn away from God has left many with neither oar nor rudder to propel them away from the violent rapids that will inexorably catapult them over deadly

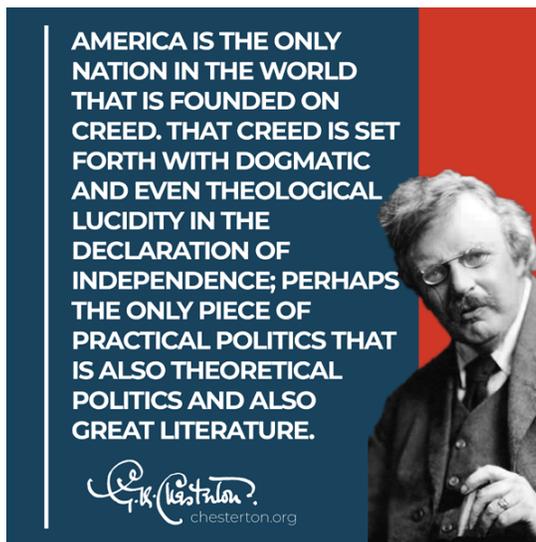
cataracts. Without God, self-evident has become “self” evident, that is, what one *feels* is self-evident; no one may doubt these self-evidentiary feelings for if you dare you will be cancelled, called a lunatic or mad and perhaps even dangerous. In increasing instances, you may be punished, threatened, ostracized, outed, physically assaulted and your property—including your Starbucks life—destroyed. Whether one or one-hundred-million, when human life is but a mere matter of matter, no life matters. Why is that so difficult to comprehend?

Friendships matter. Whether new friends or old friendships, or a long-lasting passionate relationship with the Divine, all matter for they recognize, acknowledge, reinforce and sanctify all of creation; all life is sacred, every life is beautiful and marvelous and wondrous and infinitely valuable to the One who creates and sustains us.

Last evening mattered for we met new friends, familiar faces yet unfamiliar, two marvelous people, Michael and Joannie Cassity, no longer strangers, now welcome companions traveling the same direction along the same road toward eternity. He, a retired college professor of English; she, a retired real estate agent; married fifty-seven years toward forever together. As Lawrence Welk would say,

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” It *was* wonderful. As one might suspect from a college professor, where the golden rule is “publish or perish,” he has published several books, and at the end of the evening he gave me a copy of one of them. Now I am in his debt and have promised to return the favor, post haste. I have only just begun to read his book but in the few pages that I have it seems as though I have met a kindred spirit which adds meaning to this essay.

Kids aren’t hooked on books anymore. They’re wired instead. Wired to music, video games, texting, and tweets. They are likely to have an iPad or MacBook in the backpack as they walk past my house on the way to school these days with earpieces plugged in or smartphones pressed against two thumbs.



I look back on the four decades I taught English, most of those years in a slower and quieter world bereft of these electronics, and I wonder how increasingly difficult it must be for teachers today to compete against these unbroken waves of technology, each generation of which demands more of their students' time, attention, and interest—becoming, finally, an end in itself: our primary social connection to each other is through our computers and other cyberworld devices. The new world of instant sharing of ideas across multiple continents is a spectacular renaissance, but it needn't stifle what it means to be human. We have not yet learned how to use technology to the extent that it does not use us. It is both fabulous and scary.

An anonymous proverb says that for every person wishing to teach there are thirty not wanting to be taught. In a loud, raucous world of immediate gratification, students would rather talk than listen. This is hardly surprising. Early in the new millennium when we seem to be losing our collective responsibility for an entire generation of students, the proverb prompts us to remember that there is a good deal more to teaching than merely showing up. We've lost our grip on the idea that education, like the technology that consumes us, is an end in itself.

Teaching and learning are not primarily matters of *doing*. They are first matters of *being*. The new teacher who asks *What am I to do?* is really asking for a convenient, hopefully effective, way to teach a lesson. But he or she is well on the way to becoming a "practitioner" instead of a teacher. And although the craft of teaching literature can be learned by putting these tactical models to use as a practitioner, only teachers disciplined to *be* literature teachers will ever have any lasting and meaningful success in matters of *doing*. The fundamental question is this: *What am I to be?* This may seem a subtle abstraction. So let me explain this idea with these examples: The teacher who *is* a lover of literature can help others to be lovers of literature. The teacher who *is* an observer and listener will come to understand that each day brings its stories. The teacher who reads with a degree of enthusiasm and intensity *is* a teacher who infects others to develop the same habits. The teacher who *is* a listener can instill the joy of listening in others. The teacher who *is* responsive can expect a life of sharing. The teacher who *is* unafraid to trust his honest reactions to literature will value the novelty of others' responses. The teacher who *is* a risk-taker will instill the same sense of adventure in students.

Good books are the best teachers I know. We all are children as we experience great art, and we learn in spite of ourselves—even stumbling over the pedagogy along the way. I first learned about the power of literature as a father. I remember that as a young father, be-

yond the natural experiences that make up the daily life of a close family, my memories are made up mostly of the stories my wife and I told our children, the hundreds of books we read to them, the drama we attached to narrative. I can, for example, recall the evening that we asked our children, then ages nine and twelve, to sit down and listen to a long story. After dinner, by the heat of our wood stove, sprawled across two couches in our isolated mountain farmhouse, their mother and I read aloud William Armstrong's *Souder* in its entirety.

I didn't have to fight for their attention. With no television, no computer, no cell phones, and an antiquated landline that rarely rang, we had an easier time escaping into the world of reading aloud. Today, I see a trending need for families to do a "technology detox," or what the *Wall Street Journal* has called a "cleanse" from habitual, compulsive addiction of texting, *Facebook*, and computer games.<sup>1</sup>

I could not agree more. Over the few hours we spent together last evening we shared our stories and discovered how small the world has become. Mutual friends, neighbors, crossed paths, places and similar life experiences all came to light over a meal at table. And there was laughter and warmth and faith over a eucharistic celebration to life and new friends.

How terribly sad it must be to know no love; how tragic to hate in bitter anger; how despairing to hold no hope; how dreadful to believe in nothing; how wretched to have no faith; how desperate to have no future beyond the grave.

Recent events have heightened a feeling that the world is rapidly devolving into chaos, anarchy, and terrifying tyranny. There is a sense that normalcy has been turned upside down and that we have lost or are losing control. It is real and it is frightening. We are listening for answers but only hear the rapid beating of our hearts in the silence. We ask for reassurance and are assured that everything is peaceful and fine. We see with our own eyes but are told what we see is but an illusion or a delusion. A recent essay caught my attention. Written by David Carlin for *The Catholic Thing*, and titled *The Great Progressive Propaganda Machine*, he began by acknowledging that for "most of human history" self-evident truths "have been the result of a slow and largely spontaneous growth."

But in the twentieth century the Communist Party (CP) in the Soviet Union demonstrated that it was possible to manufacture a social consensus suddenly and intentionally. (Something very similar happened in Nazi Germany). In the USSR, all organs of propaganda – newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, movies, radio, TV, schools, colleges, universities, and more – were controlled either by the CP or by the state, which was in turn totally controlled by the CP. Only messages approved by the CP got access to the general public; all political dissent was effectively silenced.

Of course the official propaganda didn't persuade everybody. But in the absence of counter-propaganda it persuaded vast numbers of people. As for the unpersuaded, they were usually prudent enough to shut their mouths. And if they were so imprudent as not to, they were either shot or sent to the Gulag.

This exact thing cannot happen in the United States since we are not a one-party state and we value freedom of speech, thought, press, and religion. Largely on account of our Protestant heritage, we value the right of private judgment; in other words, the right to dissent, to think for ourselves.

Here, I must interject. Although we are not now a one-party state, as things now stand, the fate of our two-party system lies squarely with the results of the November elections. While our country has long valued freedom of speech, thought, press, and religion, the radical left along with the Great Progressive Propaganda Machine do not value the same. While we value the right to dissent, to think for ourselves, those same progressive forces believe otherwise. Be aware and forewarned.

But if the Soviet (or Nazi) model cannot exist here, something very like it can – and does. Let me call it the *Great Progressive Propaganda Machine* (GPPM). It is made up of a number of apparently independent elements: (1) the mainstream journalistic media, both print and electronic; (2) the entertainment industry: movies, TV, popular music; (3) our leading colleges, universities, and law schools; (4) most of our public schools; (5) liberal Protestant and Jewish denominations; (6) the Democratic Party.

The propaganda message put out by this GPPM is so well coordinated that some people believe there is a conspiratorial command-and-control apparatus lying behind the whole system. I myself don't believe this, but I'm not surprised that many do. It certainly gives the appearance of being controlled from behind the scenes.

And what is the content of the propaganda that the GPPM disseminates among the American public, especially among the younger generations thereof?

1. That, with the exception of adultery (or equivalent kinds of infidelity), there is nothing morally wrong with sexual relations between (or among) two (or more) consenting adults provided they take reasonable precautions against disease and unwanted pregnancy.
2. As for adultery, it is not intrinsically wrong; it is wrong only insofar as it involves deception and promise-breaking. Provided it is done with the express or tacit consent of the cheated-upon spouse, it is quite unobjectionable.
3. That abortion is morally unobjectionable, and often admirable.
4. That homosexual conduct is natural for many persons – those who are “born that way.” Hence homosexual conduct is not only morally permissible for such persons, it is virtually obligatory; for it would be a perversion of nature for a person having a nature-given (or God-given) homosexual orientation to abstain from conduct consistent with this orientation.
5. That same-sex marriage is a splendid thing, fully as splendid as opposite-sex marriage.
6. That if you object to homosexuality or same-sex marriage you are a hater.
7. And if you object, not because you personally feel hatred, but because your religion tells you to object, then you have a religion of hatred.
8. That a trans man/boy is a man/boy, and a trans woman/girl is a woman/girl.
9. That voluntary euthanasia is morally unobjectionable, often admirable.
10. That involuntary euthanasia is morally unobjectionable in many instances.
11. That all conduct is morally permissible that does no direct and evident harm to others.
12. That the USA is – not just in the remote past but even today – a profoundly racist country; it is and always has been a “systemically” racist society.
13. That if you disagree with proposition #12 you are yourself a racist.
14. That the typical white police officer is strongly prejudiced against black males, especially young black males, and is psychologically prepared to harass such males and even to inflict bodily harm on them.
15. That the typical Donald Trump supporter is at a minimum deplorable and at a maximum a

barbarian or fascist.

16. That Christianity – at least in its ancient forms, e.g., Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism – is an outdated and wicked religion (as implied by items #1 through #11 above).

How many Americans actually believe the items on this list of GPPM doctrines? Well, most persons who earn their living within the GPPM are believers, or at least half-believers – though no doubt a few merely pretend to believe in order to keep their jobs.

Further, most young persons (ages 17-29) believe, especially young persons who aspire to being “cool.” Many corporate executives, especially executives of really big corporations, either believe the items or have no objection to them; for if they were to object their businesses would be subject to public denunciation and perhaps even boycotts. Better to “buy protection” by agreeing with the doctrines and contributing money to the cause.

As for the remainder of the American population – most of us are intimidated. Like anti-Communists in Russia (and anti-Nazis in Germany), we have decided that discretion is the better part of valor. We’ve decided to shut up and mind our own business.

But as millions learned under Communism and Nazism, cowardice—sooner or later—won’t protect you.<sup>2</sup>

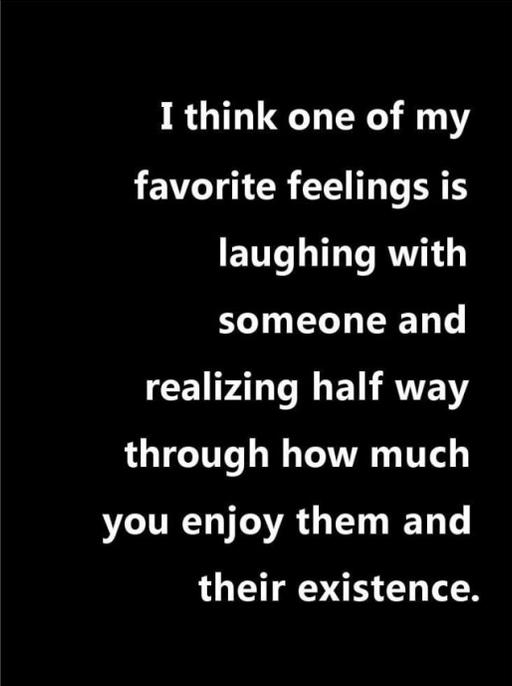
I understand by mere mention, let alone copiously reprinting what Carlin wrote will likely result in this writer being accused of hate speech, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, gender-phobia, etc., etc., ad nauseam. I am none of these; it is you who say that I am. Those who would assign such labels are but impaling themselves on their own petards. For as Jesus once said, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’” (Matthew 4:10). And again, as Joshua said to all the tribes of Israel:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods

your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:14-15).

I *choose* to kneel before the Lord, my God and him alone will I serve. I will *never* kneel for any false god or for any human being. Amen.

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1. Michael Dennis Cassity, *What Happens Next? Celebrating Stories with Children*, (Reno, NV: CreateSpace, 2012), vii-ix.
  2. David Carlin, *The Great Progressive Propaganda Machine*, The Catholic Thing, July 24, 2020.



**I think one of my  
favorite feelings is  
laughing with  
someone and  
realizing half way  
through how much  
you enjoy them and  
their existence.**

## Deacon's Diner

*Food for a restless mind*

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

### BOOKS

**Salvation: What Every Catholic Should Know**

*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.

**G.K. Chesterton Collected Works: Volume XXXVI**

*The Illustrated London News 1932-1934*

Ignatius Press

2011, 613 pages.

**Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism and the future of the West**

*R. R. Reno*

Regnery Gateway

2019, 182 pages.

**The Irony of Modern Catholic History:**

How the Church rediscovered itself

*George Weigel*

Basic Books

2019, 322 pages.

**Letters on Liturgy**

*Father Dwight Longenecker*

Angelico Press

2020, 164 pages.

**Immortal Combat**

*Father Dwight Longenecker*

Sophia Institute Press

2020, 144 pages.

### PERIODICALS

**First Things**

[www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)

**Touchstone**

[www.touchstonemag.com](http://www.touchstonemag.com)

**Catholic Answers Magazine**

[www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)

**Catholic Herald**

[www.catholicherald.co.uk](http://www.catholicherald.co.uk)

**Chronicles**

[www.chroniclesmagazine.org](http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org)

**Gilbert!**

[www.chesterton.org](http://www.chesterton.org)

**The National Catholic Register**

[www.ncregister.com](http://www.ncregister.com)

**Our Sunday Visitor**

[www.osvnews.com](http://www.osvnews.com)

### ONLINE

**Crisis Magazine**

[www.crisismagazine.com](http://www.crisismagazine.com)

**The Imaginative Conservative**

[www.theimaginativeconservative.org](http://www.theimaginativeconservative.org)

**Catholic Exchange**

[www.catholicexchange.com](http://www.catholicexchange.com)

**Intellectual Takeout**

[www.intellectuالتakeout.org](http://www.intellectuالتakeout.org)

**Life News**

[www.lifenews.com](http://www.lifenews.com)

**Life Site News**

[www.lifesitenews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com)

**OnePeterFive**

[www.onepeterfive.com](http://www.onepeterfive.com)

**Catholic Vote**

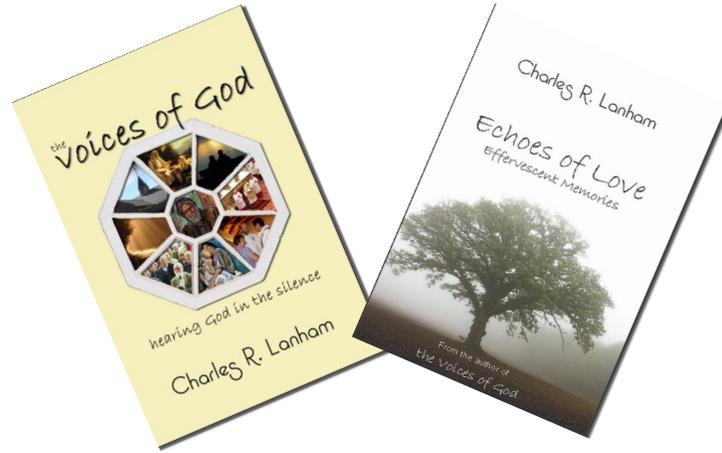
[www.catholicvote.org](http://www.catholicvote.org)

**The Catholic Thing**

[www.thecatholicthing.org](http://www.thecatholicthing.org)

**PragerU**

[www.prageru.com](http://www.prageru.com)



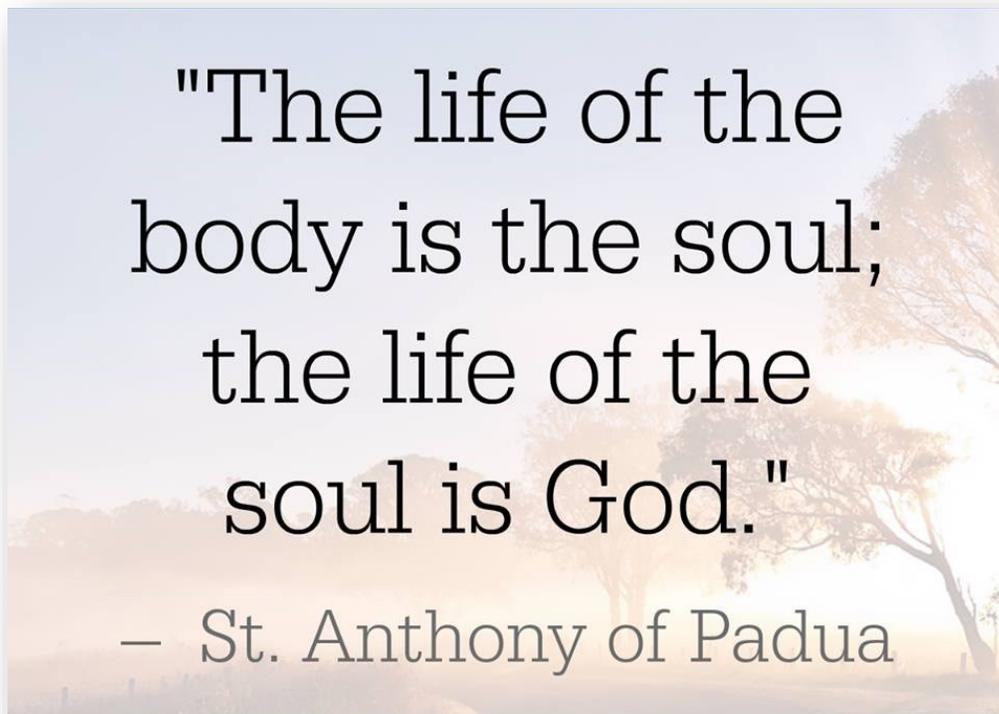
Books are available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or from the author's web site at:

[deaconscorner.org](https://deaconscorner.org)

**Deacon Chuck Lanham** is a Catholic author, columnist, speaker, theologian and philosopher, a jack-of-all-trades like his father (though far from a master of anything) 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 has written over 500 essays on religion, faith, morality, theology, and philosophy.

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**Colloquī**, the present infinitive of *colloquor* (Latin: *to talk, to discuss or to converse*) 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! Essays may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the expressed intent to seek the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, so help us God.

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