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A journal for restless minds

# Colloquī *: to discuss*

**That is Not Happening**

*But it is good that it is*

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**Deacon's Diner**

*Food for a restless mind*

# That is Not Happening

*But it is good that it is*

When I was a mere lad of five and knew nothing of the world, Whittaker Chambers wrote a letter to his children (actually the foreword to his memoirs *Witness*) in which he said, "There has never been a society or a nation without God. But history is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that became indifferent to God, and died."<sup>1</sup> We have become a nation indifferent if not outright hostile to our Creator. Whether one believes or does not believe or is agnostic, that is, somewhere in the middle, it is difficult to find a true believer among us, myself included, for we all fail to some extent. We are too easily distracted from giving God our complete surrender, our unconditional devotion. It is not that we wish to ignore God or diminish him—though there are certainly those who so wish it—rather, it is that temptations are so enticing they make ignoring *them* near impossible. And, when temptations entice, we quickly lose sight of what is truly important, God.

It seems to me there are two sins we most are guilty of committing, though, I dare say most will vociferously deny such indulgence: the first, ignorance and the second, mendacity. Both are related, like siblings, fruit of the same vine, the vine of selfishness, self-interest and pride. We have become too enthralled with the self and in the process have forsaken our moral compass. Why? Because we have made God forgettable, we have chosen a lesser god, too often elevating self to the divine.

We have quit asking questions. We have quit seeking answers. We have quite simply quit, smugly satisfied as long as we can squat before the boob tube and watch crass mindless drivel pushed as entertainment. Our ignorance is astounding, at least it would amaze us if we cared a whit. Why put any effort into learning when there is an opinion poll to approve of what you *know* to be true? Why learn a

skill when it is far easier to simply purchase what you desire online, delivered straight to your door? Why look for a job when the world is your oyster and the government will pay you to sit on your recliner and eat cheese all day long. Why read a book, buy the audio version and have someone else do the reading while you play *War Craft* on your computer? Why go to church or read the Bible or get down on your knees in prayer; don't worry, be happy, it is so easy to push the easy button; after all ignorance is bliss.

Perhaps you may think this too harsh an indictment. You think? When was the last time you had a thought deeper than deciding what to have for dinner? How many hours do you spend watching television every day? What was the last thing you learned that was not learned from social media, mass media, or opinion poll? When was the last time you read a book? What new skill have you made

any effort to acquire? How many hours do you spend in prayer, on your knees, in church? How many hours do you spend thanking God for all the blessings you have received? Of course, most will dismiss these questions, not worth the effort of a response. And yes, I meant hours for I know with certain

certitude the response will be "I simply do not have the time, not a second or a minute let alone an hour for there is a football game to watch or the latest version of *The View* to view."

Thus, we have come to the point of our self-induced ignorance and it is the highway that leads to perversion and slavery to the senses—or, more aptly, to the nonsenses. We have become addicts to propaganda. We are no longer individuals but a replaceable cog in a machine. The problem is we no longer have the knowledge to recognize our own enslavement for we have become tethered, having grown accustomed to the collar locked around our necks and the chain that keeps us shackled to the group to which we have been assigned. We have been fed slop, convinced it was caviar; offered hemlock laced with peyote, an aphrodisiac; pulp fiction, great literature; socialist utopia, heaven on earth. And, we have by-in-large



welcomed it. It is easier and safer if you comply; try not to think too much or at all and you will be happy, so they tell you.

Isolation, loneliness, desperation, addiction, and suicide all will increase as ostracization condemns heretic after heretic to a sort of internal exile. ... And every step of the way, the narrative's reply to those who raise the alarm will be: *That's not happening, and it's good that it is.* You're a paranoid lunatic for even suggesting that censorship, de-platforming, or un-personing are problems—and also a racist who deserves it.<sup>2</sup>

Please! It is important to note what is being said. First the denial—*that's not happening*--then tacit approval for what has just been denied—*it's good that it is*. Such debauched illogic, and yet, we fall for it hook, line, and sinker, with nary a pause to draft a salient thought. Ignorance. Culpable ignorance. Guilty, guilty, guilty. And we are not at all bothered by our ignorance, rather we relish in it, we pride ourselves in just how ignorant we have allowed ourselves to become.

The ruling class has built a well-honed apparatus to inculcate docility in the people. Components include cheap, puerile mass entertainment, ubiquitous smartphones and social media, video games, porn, drugs, sportsball, and so on across the whole dreary panoply of lowest-common-denominator "culture" in the current year.

We should expect all this to increase. The ruling class' recent and ongoing enthusiasm for marijuana legalization and its total indifference to the opioid epidemic suggest that they're seeking to drug as many non-elites as they can out of any potential resistance. Combine these factors with leftism's top-down, total control of thought, and the picture becomes bleak indeed. The times are already quite vapid; very little (if anything) of lasting merit has been produced in literature, philosophy, music, film, or the other arts in several decades. The trend seems to be getting worse.

But at least we still have that older stuff to fall back on, right? Not necessarily. The cherished and iconic works of our past are also threatened, in two ways. First, the movement that originated on campus more than a generation ago to get rid of core curricula and reinterpret in light of leftist orthodoxy those bits allowed to remain has borne fruit. We've now "educated" generations of students—even (especially) elite students—either 1) to have no familiarity with the Western canon; and/or 2) to despise it as inherently evil; or 3) to see it only through leftist lenses that make it seem as if it merely confirms current orthodoxy; or 4) to believe it was all "stolen"

from other cultures. That last one, of course, is a bald-faced lie, but one that at least implicitly concedes there's something valuable in the tradition. But the point is never made to spur anyone to actually read the books, rather only to validate in-group confidence. My people, and not yours, did that, hence we are great and you are not. The result is that the whole Western tradition is at risk of atrophy, and even death, simply from ignorance and neglect.

Far more likely ... [it] is a time in which all the institutions that teach the canon, and the scholars who write about it seriously, will be attacked over petty and invented infractions. The real purpose of those attacks will be to silence those scholars and eventually shutter their institutions.

The climate of acceptable opinion in this country—already very narrow—will constrict further still. The necessity for self-censorship will increase dramatically. The core function of the narrative will remain telling you what to think—and more important what not to think—but its message will get even more tendentious, hateful, omnipresent, and so, so much louder. Imagine TV screens playing CNN, volume cranked to 11, not just in airport waiting areas, but everywhere—forever.<sup>3</sup>

Current cancel cultural norms demand silence so as not offend, compliance and complete assent, no dissent no matter how trivial, and ignorance of the truth. We see it everywhere these days, despite the prevailing admonition "not to judge" in the face of judgment; such judgment takes the "form of judging people of the past by current standards, a failure to consider them in the context of their time and culture, a narrow focus on certain attributes rather than the whole person."

Terms for this way of looking at the past range from *intertemporal bigotry* to *chronological snobbery* to *cultural bias* to *historical quackery*. The more clinical label is "*presentism*." It's a fallacious perspective that distorts historical realities by removing them from their context. In sports, we call it "Monday morning quarterbacking."

Presentism is fraught with arrogance. It presumes that present-day attitudes didn't evolve from earlier ones but popped fully formed from nowhere into our superior heads. To a presentist, our forebears constantly fail to measure up so they must be disdained or expunged. As one writer put it, "They feel that their light will shine brighter if they blow out the candles of others."

Our ancestors were each a part of the era in which *they* lived, not ours. History should be something we learn from, not run from; if we analyze it through a presentist prism, we will miss much of the nuanced milieu in which our ancestors thought and acted.

A profoundly good historian restrains his preconceptions, biases, and political agenda and seeks to understand the whole of a past event or person. He doesn't erase them. There are degrees of presentism but the most radical form shows up in the destruction of monuments, the banning of books, and the flushing of entire generations down the Orwellian memory hole—all tactics employed shamelessly by history's worst totalitarian regimes and now by many protestors and their presentist professors.

Amazingly, rioting presentists in Britain recently demanded the destruction of the Egyptian pyramids of Giza because they were built with slave labor. How could such an act possibly improve our understanding of the people of that age?<sup>4</sup>

Again, one can readily attest to the growing tide of deliberate ignorance, exemplified physically by riotous protestors almost entirely indoctrinated by radicalized campus presentist professors along with the twitter tweeps and perverted denizens of social media. Tragically, far too many have drunk the Kool-Aid of presentism, unwilling to contradict the narrative of the leftist elite and the social media mob. In an interview with author Robert R. Reilly, Joseph Pearce asks, "At a time when statues are toppling, including statues of the Founding Fathers and of former presidents of the United States, how can we make a reasoned defense of the founders and of the founding principles of our nation?" Reilly, author of *America on Trial*, responded, "You cannot make a reasoned defense against those who have abandoned reason. The American founding was based on the primacy of reason as against the primacy of will and power."

**Pearce:** Much of the identity crisis that many Americans are experiencing is due to the acceptance and embrace of relativism and the demands for radical self-autonomy, which is a logical consequence of relativism. What do the Founding Fathers say about relativism?

**Reilly:** Moral relativism is antithetical to the American founding, which relies on transcendent, immutable truths as in "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God"—for its justification. "That all men are created equal" is articulated as a moral principle in the Declaration of Independence. Either that is true universally, at all times, for all peoples, and you can therefore have something like the American Republic, or it's not, and you get something like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, or communist China.

**Pearce:** How would you respond to Justice Anthony Kennedy's statement in *Planned Parenthood versus Casey* (1992) that "at the heart of liberty is the right to define

one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life"? Can Justice Kennedy's understanding of liberty be reconciled with the concept of liberty expressed in the Constitution?

**Reilly:** The founders would have found completely objectionable Justice Kennedy's misunderstanding of freedom. The idea of freedom as contentless choice was totally alien to them, as would be the idea that liberty is the right to define one's own meaning of the universe. For them, the meaning of the universe originates not in ourselves but in "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Man's obligation is to conform himself to those laws. That is what leading a moral life means. The Founding Fathers were unanimous in saying that the success of the American Republic was wholly dependent on the virtue of the American people, and that it could not survive without it. Much less could it endure the erasure of the distinction between virtue and vice, which is what Justice Kennedy's nonsensical statement achieves.

**Pearce:** You write that the whole crisis is based on two opposing conceptions of reality, whether it's constituted by reason or by will. What's the difference between these two conceptions and why is it so important?

**Reilly:** Primacy of reason means that "what is right" flows from objective sources in nature and the transcendent, from "what is," as Plato said. Primacy of will, on the other hand, means that "What is right" flows from power, that will is a law unto itself. In other words, right is the rule of the stronger.

The key issue, including in theology, is: Does the will follow reason, or does reason follow the will? Everything hinges on the answer to this question. Either the intellect directs the will, and the will then acts in accord with reason, or the will is in charge and reason becomes the servant of the will. There are huge political ramifications to this issue. As French writer Bertrand de Juvanal said, "The man who finds in God before all else will and power, will be disposed to the same view of human government." If reason is primary, you get things like natural law and the rule of law as reason. If the will is primary, you get things like tyranny.

**Pearce:** You quote Robert Bellarmine as saying that "a bad law is not a valid law." If this is so, what constitutes a good law? How is the validity of the law to be judged?

**Reilly:** The validity of law is judged in accordance with its conformity to natural law. Another way to state this is that a bad law is not reasonable. Let me expand upon this from my answer to the preceding question. If God in his essence is Logos or Reason, then one must have reasons for law because law is Reason at the very source of creation. Therefore, the constitutive element

of law is not will, but reason.

Reason is obligatory in man's behavior and in his laws because it exists in nature's order and as the law of God's essence. That's why bad laws are defined as unreasonable. Bad laws are a reflection of the primacy of the will over reason.

**Pearce:** John Locke, who was a major influence on the founders, stated that "the taking away of God, even if only in thought, dissolves all." What did he mean by this? How important is it that the United States remains "one nation under God"?

**Reilly:** In the "Second Treatise," Locke wanted to demonstrate the inviolability of the human person as God's property. "For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during His, not one another's pleasure."

Like his predecessors, Locke believed that human life is sacrosanct because of its provenance. Obviously, man's life cannot be sacred unless there is a God to sanctify it, which is why Locke was so adamantly insistent on God's existence. This also helps explain Locke's revulsion at atheism: "Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon or sanctity for an atheist."

Locke maintained that "the belief of a deity is not to be reckoned amongst purely speculative opinions, for it being the foundation of all morality, and that which influences the whole life and actions of man, without which a man is to be counted no other than one of the most dangerous sorts of wild beasts and so incapable of all society."

The "infinitely wise Maker" is also the guarantor of man's equality, as no one is any less the workmanship of God than anyone else. This is the sacred basis of equality in Locke, as well as in the Declaration of Independence.

I would only add that the Declaration mentions God four times. It is no exaggeration to say that American independence was based on dependence on God. When I mentioned that the American founders were unanimous on the necessity of virtue, I should have also said that they all agreed that religion was the principle source of virtue. Should Americans today think that they are autonomous, no longer dependent on God, then they should prepare for what prior attempts at total human autonomy have produced: The Great Terror of the French Revolution and the charnel houses of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and com-

munist China.

**Pearce:** You claim that "failure is written into the DNA of the modern project." What do you mean by this, and why is it a cause for hope?

**Reilly:** Radical modernity and its project for man's total self-sufficiency is parasitic. It will fail to the extent to which it succeeds. It cannot survive its own erasure of natural law and Christianity. Paradoxically, the loss of faith and reason is a cause for hope. It proved the downfall of the Soviet empire, which imploded from its own hollowness. The West's moral, social, and political implosion proceeds apace for similar reasons. Yet we can avoid the cataclysm anytime we choose to, by returning to reality, to reason, to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Reality is resilient because, as Plato said, it is "what is"—not whatever one fancies. Logos wins in the end.<sup>5</sup>

I began this essay claiming two sins, ignorance and mendacity, fruit of the vine of selfishness, self-interest, and pride. So far, I have focused on ignorance, how pervasive our culpability is by and through our firm conviction that we are the final arbiters of truth. We choose to remain ignorant because we choose the primacy of will over the primacy of reason, in other words, we choose to believe what we want to believe with neither evidence nor proof. Thus, what we believe and what we affirm as the gospel truth is more often than not mendaciousness, untruth. What we believe we know to be true is too often a lie we tell others and, more importantly, ourselves.

There are many forms of mendaciousness, many ways to tell a lie. Mark Twain supposedly once quipped, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Unfortunately, there are more than three, though, I suppose, generically, these three covers the vast majority. There are, however, mendacities of omission, commission, subterfuge, obfuscation, disinformation, deliberate misinformation, fraud, hypocrisy, deception, insincerity, perjury, propaganda and on and on and on. Our politic and the fourth estate (the media) have elevated mendacity to an artform worthy of the devil himself. The Big Lie, (German: *große Lüge*) is a propaganda technique originally coined by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* (1925) which describes the use of a lie so "colossal" that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously." Now, Hitler did not prescribe this to himself or his political proponents, but to his perceived enemies, the Jews and the Marxists. "But it remained for the Jews, with their unqualified capacity for falsehood, and their fighting comrades, the Marxists, to

impute responsibility for the downfall precisely to the man who alone had shown a superhuman will and energy in his effort to prevent the catastrophe which he had foreseen and to save the nation from that hour of complete overthrow and shame.”

All this was inspired by the principle—which is quite true within itself—that in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods.

It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propagandist, would subsequently turn the Big Lie into a formal propaganda technique that remains prevalent to today, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.” Goebbels would add further, “The essential English leadership secret does not depend on particular intelligence. Rather, it depends on a remarkably stupid thick-headedness. The English follow the principle that when one lies, one should lie big, and stick to it. They keep up their lies, even at the risk of looking ridiculous.

The phrase also found its way into a report prepared by the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War. “His primary rules were: never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or wrong; never concede that there may be some good in your enemy; never

leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it.” Read that again and again. Sound familiar?

1. Whittaker Chambers, “*Witness: Letter to my children*” (1952; as cited in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, March/April 2019, 9. For those who have never heard of Whittaker Chambers, he was an American writer-editor, who, after early years as a member of the Communist Party member and Soviet spy, defected from the Soviet underground, worked for *Time* magazine, and then testified about the Ware group in what became the Hiss case for perjury, often referred to as the trial of the century, all described in his 1952 memoir *Witness*. Afterwards, he worked as a senior editor at *National Review*. US President Ronald Reagan awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously in 1984. In 1924, Chambers read Vladimir Lenin’s *Soviets at Work* and was deeply affected by it. He now saw the dysfunctional nature of his family, he would write, as “in miniature the whole crisis of the middle class,” a malaise from which communism promised liberation. Chambers’ biographer Sam Tanenhaus wrote that Lenin’s authoritarianism was “precisely what attracts Chambers.... He had at last found his church.” Chambers became a Marxist and, in 1925, joined the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), then known as the Workers Party of America. In his examination of Chambers’s conversion from the left to the right, author Daniel Oppenheimer noted that Chambers substituted his passion for communism with a passion for God and saw the world in black-and-white terms both before and after his defection. In his autobiography, Chambers presented his devotion to communism as a reason for living, but after his defection, he saw his actions as being part of an “absolute evil.”
2. Michael Anton, “*A Tyranny Perpetual and Universal?*”, *The American Mind: Essay*, August 31, 2020. This essay originally appeared in *American Greatness*. Michael Anton is a lecturer and research fellow at Hillsdale College’s Washington, D.C. campus, a senior fellow at the Claremont Institute, and a former national security official in the Trump administration. He is the author of *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return*.
3. Michael Anton, “*A Tyranny Perpetual and Universal?*”
4. Lawrence W. Reed, “*Presentism*” *Imperils Our Future by Distorting Our Past*, *Foundation for Economic Education*, August 25, 2020; *The Epoch Times*, September 9-15, 2020, B6. Lawrence W. Reed is President Emeritus and Humphreys Family Senior Fellow at FEE, having served for nearly 11 years as FEE’s president (2008-2019). He is author of the 2020 book, *Was Jesus a Socialist?* as well as *Real Heroes: Incredible True Stories of Courage, Character, and Conviction and Excuse Me, Professor: Challenging the Myths of Progressivism*.
5. Joseph Pearce, “*Defending America’s Rule of Reason: An interview with author Robert R. Reilly*”, *The Epoch Times*, September 09-15, 2020, B9.
6. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. I, ch. X

## 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.intellectualtakeout.org](http://www.intellectualtakeout.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**

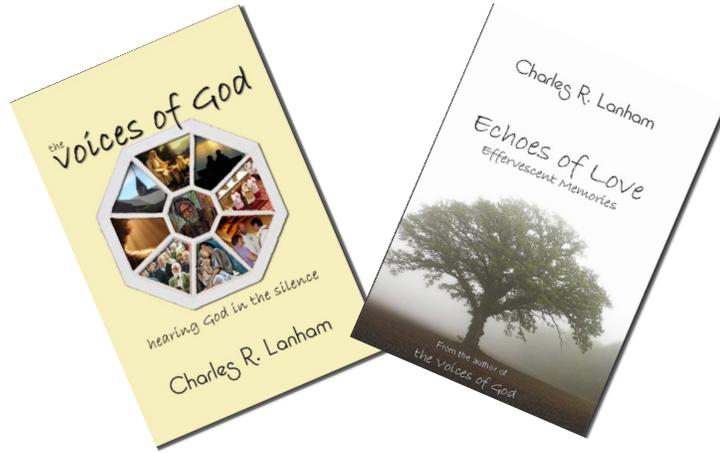
[www.catholicvote.org](http://www.catholicvote.org)

**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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