

December 03 2021  
Volume 05—Number 25



A journal for restless minds

# Colloquī *: to discuss*

## Follow the Yellow Brick Road

*Pay no attention to the cconman behind the curtain*

---

## Deacon's Diner

*Food for a restless mind*

# Follow the Yellow Brick Road

*Pay no attention to the conman behind the curtain*

How should one respond to those who believe in themselves? Once, a prosperous publisher remarked, "That man will get on; he believes in himself," to which Chesterton replied, "Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Supermen. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums."<sup>1</sup> I am often reminded of this by the large number of vain heretics to be met these days who so believe in themselves yet find no reason to submit to therapy or public penance

These days, of course, it has become deliriously impracticable to speak with such mad cruelty, which is why it must be there are so many free-range lunatics and so few asylums. It is easy to be convinced why all the lunatic asylums have been shuttered: those who believe in themselves would rather not be disabused of their ideological delusions. These days, those who so confidently believe in themselves are thoroughly convinced the only ones who are in need of asylum are those who profess no belief in themselves but rather in the one God in whom they worship and adore.

Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft has rightly called the Bible the greatest of books, and Ecclesiastes "the only book of philosophy, pure philosophy, mere philosophy, in the Bible. It is no surprise, then, that Ecclesiastes is the greatest of all books of philosophy." Sophists, of course, immediately cry out in sullen anguish, but Kreeft responds, "greatness comes not from the form but from the content." Which quite thoroughly humiliates that most modern of vanities: "it is better to look good than to be

good."

Vanity cannot detect itself, just as folly cannot detect itself. Only the wise know folly; fools know neither wisdom nor folly. Just as it takes wisdom to know folly, light to know darkness, it takes profundity to know vanity, meaning to know meaninglessness. Pascal says, "Anyone who does not see the vanity of life must be very vain indeed.

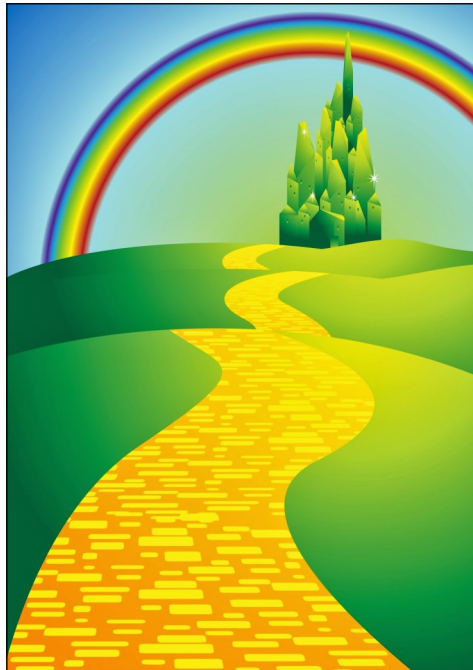
Compared with the neat little nostrums of comfort-mongering minds who cross our *t*'s and dot our *i*'s, Ecclesiastes is as great, as deep, and as terrifying as the ocean. If this philosopher were alive today and knew the reigning philosophy in America, pop psychology, with its positive strokings, OKs, narcissistic self-befriendings, panderings, patronizings, and bland assurances, of "Peace! Peace!" when there is no peace, I think he would quote John Stuart Mill that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; and William Barrett: "It is better to encounter one's own existence in despair than never to encounter it at all."<sup>2</sup>

What is it with those who so religiously believe in themselves? Obviously, they believe in nothing less, which is difficult to do, should one bother to think about it. "Thy will be done" becomes "My will be done" which is why I was not in the least confounded when someone who quite believed in himself wrote this brief missive.

*I no longer wish to be a member of this parish. After listening to the last few of Father's sermons, I've come to the conclusion that this parish demands a strict adherence to the Catholic doctrine and*

*mixes politics and religion. It's time for me to shop around for a parish that is less right wing conservative or find a religion that is more in tuned to my beliefs.*

The sentiment expressed is symptomatic of far too many who believe overmuch in themselves. Such vanity speaks loudly of misdirected faith—belittling the Church to the point that to *be* Catholic ultimately has no meaning. The Catholic Church exists only for as long as there is fidelity to one set of rules and those are Christ's commands; opinions and suggestions are welcome but only the Word of God is doctrine.



According to R.R. Reno, *First Things*: "One of the paradoxes of religious faith is that worshipping a transcendent God and fixing our hearts to Him above all else makes us better citizens here on earth. We have political principles and strong opinions. We work for the good of the earthly city. But we know that our efforts here below are secondary, not primary." This is truly the heart of the affair. Too many, like the writer, have come to believe worshipping a transcendent God is secondary to working for the earthly city. They come to church to be seen not to be in His presence in humble gratitude for all He has given.

Many Christians believe that the highest calling God has placed on us is to be nice. These Christians are wrong. God has not called us to be nice. Rather he has called us to be good. Here's the difference; nice people never confront evil. Good people do. Nice people are weak. Good people are strong. Jesus wasn't nice. He was kind, he was compassionate, he was caring, but he was unbending and unflinching when it came to standing for the truth. And it cost him his life.

Out of the post-conciliar concept of *oecumenism* has arisen the mistaken notion that "All are welcome." On its face, this kumbaya openness sounds reasonable but consequent to this unconditional welcomeness has been a forgetfulness of purpose, a lost desire to understand and obey the Word of God, and perhaps worst of all, the absolute necessity to repent and ask for forgiveness. Over time the language of right and wrong has become passé, replaced with the overused language of "mistakes." The language of sin has quite simply lost its flavor, tossed out and trampled underfoot.

The notorious hymn "All Are Welcome" is a symbol of the archaic notion of sin and error. The hymn, though possibly well-meaning, is problematic for reasons that should be obvious but are no longer: not all are welcomed into Heaven because of the choices made on earth. The sinner is welcome to be forgiven if he sincerely seeks forgiveness and is willing to change, but sin is never welcome. For those who refuse to change, all are not welcome, Jesus said as much.

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my

Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (Matthew 7:21-23).

The problem is, of course, those who believe in themselves are too much like the three monkeys: they see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil in, of, or by themselves. So much do they believe in themselves, engendered by vanity, they are blind to their own apostasy. An ancient Chinese tale—too long to give full account cautions against the pursuit of or indulgence in vanity.

Qi Jiguang was ... the only son [of Qi Jingtong] in the family and the father loved the child dearly. He personally taught Qi Jiguang to read books and to practice martial arts. However, he was very strict with Qi Jiguang's moral character and conduct.

One day, when Qi Jiguang was 13, he wore a pair of well-made silk shoes. He felt very happy about them, and walked back and forth in the courtyard. This was seen by his father. His father called him into the reading room and scolded him angrily, "Once you have good shoes, you will naturally dream about wearing good clothes. Once you have good clothes, you will naturally dream about eating good food. At such a young age, you have developed the mentality of enjoying good food and good clothing. You will have insatiable greed in the future. When you grow up, you will pursue delicious food and beautiful clothes. If you were to be a military officer, you would even embezzle soldiers' salaries. If you continue to be like this, it will be impossible for you to succeed in the undertaking of your elders."

Qi Jingtong learned that the silk shoes were a gift from Qi Jiguang's maternal grandfather. However, he still ordered Jiguang to take off the shoes, and he instantly tore them into pieces to prevent Jiguang from developing the bad habit of indulging in luxury.

Qi Jingtong ... cautioned Qi Jiguang, "If you pursue and indulge yourself in vanity, you won't be able to achieve great things when you grow up." ... He had learned that flaunting, indulgence, attachment to one's own appearance, acquiring wealth, achievements and status - these attachments aim at seeking other people's flattery and praise, and are all manifestations of vanity. The root of vanity is the attachment to one's ego. It will definitely ruin one's noble aspiration, and this person is doomed to fail in major undertakings.<sup>3</sup>

Vanity breeds contempt for others. For the vain, unhappiness and despair. Thomas Aquinas described despair as “the most grievous of sins,” because it is “unhealable”—it refuses offers of healing. As the angelic doctor observed, “Hope withdraws us from evils and induces us to seek for good things so that when hope is given up, men rush headlong into sin, and are drawn away from good works.” C.S. Lewis was likewise aware of the desperate despair that inevitably infected those who most believed in themselves: “If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.” Aldous Huxley once wrote:

No man can concentrate his attention upon evil, or even upon the idea of evil, and remain unaffected. To be more against the devil than for God is exceedingly dangerous. Every crusader is apt to go mad. He is haunted by the wickedness which he attributes to his enemies; it becomes in some sort a part of him.’ I can identify with that personally – and again, it’s not a bad picture of the direction a lot of the culture is going in in these apocalyptic times.

Politics is such a dead end. The culture war is like a fight to the death between two people who are so blinded by blood and adrenaline that they can’t even see each other any more, let alone remember what they’re fighting about. More and more at present I feel like I’m living inside a kind of giant hallucination—or maybe a Spectacle, as the Situationists labelled it perceptively, decades back. There are points in time at which whole cultures can become possessed. I mean that literally. There is something weirdly, unnervingly demonic going on at the moment, and it is not going to end well. I know that this is worse in America than it is where I live, but to different degrees it is overcoming the whole of the West.<sup>4</sup>

## Crossing the Rubicon

In the West, even the poorest of the poor are affluent in comparison to people in lesser *developed* countries. It is the delusion of material affluence that kills the spirit and turns the heart away from God. And the outcome is inevitable: the greater the affluence, the greater the accumulation of stuff, the greater the dependence on temporal earthly powers.

There is a mistaken belief, a foundation of modern

liberalism, that of man as primarily an economic being. Contrasted against the median daily income of \$94 per capita in the U.S.A. the average daily income (nationwide) for those in Burundi is less than \$2.00 a day, throughout the Philippines \$26.00, in Columbia, the 100<sup>th</sup> poorest country, the average daily income is \$42.58 or \$15,541 per year.

Compared to the poor in other countries who lack even the basic necessities for life, the poor in America are affluent. Affluence among the poorest, comes not from some bogus trickledown economic theory but from the redistributive largesse of the welfare state promising to elevate the destitute out of their deprivation into total unending dependency to a totalitarian profane god. As wealth is “redistributed” (tax the rich, make them pay their *fair* share) the affluence of the whole of culture and society metastasizes and declines. The result, no one is affluent until everyone is equitably destitute, subservient, and dependent on the gods who shall rule them all. The corrupting relationship between modern secular humanism—its singular focus on material affluence—and social and cultural disintegration—anarchy, lawlessness, suicide, violence, pornography, addiction—is obvious to anyone with eyes and an openness to see the truth staring back at them.

Margaret Thatcher once quipped, “The problem with socialism is that, sooner or later, you run out of other people’s money.” And, adding insult to injury, wealth redistribution under whatever label is used to describe it—socialism, democratic socialism, Marxism, progressivism, leftism, neo-liberalism, etc.—is undeniably and ultimately mass subjugation. Beyond economics, the problem runs much deeper with the full-on denial of God, of the transcendent, the spiritual, and the objective reality of truth, beauty, and virtue. In *The Gay Science*, Friedrich Nietzsche, through his madman, cries out “Where is God?”

We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from the sun? ... Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing?

It is the Church and its irrefutable, unyielding demands for “strict adherence to doctrine” that so grinds the axe of the disgruntled churchman. This is nothing new, neither is it the sole domain of laity. Condemned by Pope St. Pius X as “The intrinsic evolution of dogma,” it is known as *The Big Lie* and has been fought, even within the body of the Church, for well over a century.

Formally condemned in 1907, the false notion that the Catholic religion is little more than a mass of perpetually evolving “expressions of belief” about God, creation, and human moral activity (all continuously modifiable to suit contemporary interests) is certainly a much older error than its 20<sup>th</sup> century proscription. Like so many heresies in Church history, this error—a fundamental tenet of Modernism—went unnamed for many years.

Even so, The Big Lie was flatly condemned in the dogmatic declaration of the First Vatican Council (1870):

*If anyone says that it is possible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the Church which is different from that which the Church has understood and understands: let him be anathema.*

Sadly, this error of the *evolution of dogma* is still alive and well, and the ranks of bishops who understand and oppose it have grown depressingly thin. Indeed, over the last half-century, this error has become so deeply lodged within nearly every ecclesiastical structure that it has shaped the minds of most Catholic clergy and laity today.<sup>5</sup>

The Big Lie is as old as man, it has been told and re-told since the very beginning. Whittaker Chambers called what the serpent proposed the second oldest religion in the world: “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5).

It has always proved popular. In his [Whittaker Chambers] time, it took the form of communism. But the tempter is not so stupid as to appear in the same guise always; even human beings eventually get the idea that certain “moral mushrooms” will kill them, and they may even remember it for a few generations. In the meantime, the tempter must peddle something else, must appear as someone else. No trouble there. Mushrooms and mountebanks are always ready to hand.

I am thinking about the characteristic sins of our age. These have to do first or most obviously with the body,

but they seep their poison into social relations, economics, medicine, education, law, art, and politics, corrupting them all. If holiness is like a royal dye that ennobles all it touches, sin is like acid. And to accept a *principle of sin* is to introduce the sin in a concentrated and absolute form. Then it is mortal and not venial, meaning this: it won’t just make you sick. It kills you. Nothing merely human can then withstand it. Only the might of God can turn the acid to salt, and repair or recreate the things it has destroyed.

Here it is in our time. You can have the world of the sexual revolution, with its birth control, slowly suicidal birth rates, fornication with a shrug, abortion as the fail-safe, pseudogamous relations: both heterosexual and homosexual, a crude and coarse anti-culture, obscenities as common as verbal tics, suspicion and recrimination between the sexes, gender dysphoria injected subcranially into the minds of lonely and impressionable children, divorce a common and unremarkable thing, and moral chaos and dysfunction among the poor and the working class.

That world is founded upon the false principle that what you do with your body, sexually, is your business, so long as (for now) you don’t do it with children. But you cannot have that principle *and* have a world of strong marriages, healthy and happy children, a wholesome popular culture, a thriving working class, robust parishes and churches, and relations between the sexes that are marked by forbearance, gratitude, mirth, and peace, which is the tranquility of order, as Augustine says. We can no more create the moral laws of the world than we can create the universe.<sup>6</sup>

Esolen states what should be obvious, but, to the oblivious and intransigently obtuse it matters not. The aforementioned disgruntled parishioner parrots what those who unequivocally believe in themselves are inarguably convicted: truth, morality, and ethics are theirs alone to define. They deceive themselves, holding tight to a theology of self. Like Adam and Eve, they identify as creators of their own circumscribed universe; they would cancel God to prove their own *faux* divinity. In a more recent essay Esolen writes of the descent into what can only be diagnosed as Stage 4 *Aliquam Cultura Melanoma* (ACM). “A healthy culture may breed a latent cancer here or there; a sick culture is cancerous all over, with but an outpost of sanity here or there.”

The difference between a healthy culture and a sick culture is not that the former is full of saints and the latter is full of devils. It is that the healthy culture raises

high walls against evil and consciously directs its young people to what is good and noble, faithful and pure, while the sick culture hardly raises any wall, and, worse than failing to direct the young, fairly pushes into some participation in wickedness the last few souls who are by nature most averse to it.

In a healthy culture, the danger is pharisaism of the obvious sort: you look down upon those who have fallen. In a sick culture, pharisaism is *more common* and of a latent sort: you look down upon those who *have not fallen*. In the healthy culture, decent people avoid the peril of pharisaism by calling to mind their sins and remembering what close shaves they have had. “There but for the grace of God go I,” they say; and they mean it. But that sobering examination of conscience is not available in a sick culture. The pharisee in the sick culture, oppressed by a bad conscience, must subject the innocent to contempt. Misery demands company. Sin demands to spread the sadness around.<sup>7</sup>

Those so severely afflicted by pharisaic *Aliquam Cultura Melanoma*, while far from blameless, are in truth the product of multi-generational ecclesial malpractice. According to Fr. Timothy V. Vaverek, STD, recent attention that has “focused on the false witness given by several Catholic politicians and their reception of Holy Communion” are just symptoms of a much larger and longer-existing problem. As he writes, “It’s difficult to blame politicians when for more than fifty years many priests, bishops, and Vatican officials have explicitly or tacitly supported false teaching and taught the laity they can do the same.”

Christian belief and practice are thus ecclesial matters, not strictly private ones. Every mature person knows that conscience isn’t self-sufficient and that as individuals our ignorance and sinfulness can lead to misjudgments about ourselves, others, the world, and God’s specific intentions for our daily life.

For those reasons, Jesus entrusted the Church – and in particular the Apostles and their successors – with the task of making disciples by fostering the personal and ecclesial *metanoia* of prayer, self-sacrifice, and works of mercy lived in fidelity to the Gospel. He supported that disciplined life (or “discipleship”) by conferring on the Church the obligation and authority to correct those who through error or sin depart from Christian life and witness. He also obligated his disciples in conscience to accept that authority.

The terrible truth is that for multiple generations, the bishops and clergy haven’t systematically called us to

*metanoia*. For example, the USCCB hasn’t issued a pastoral letter on the spiritual life or norms for meaningful penitential observances. Consider our Lenten “discipline:” the Lord’s 40 day fast has been replaced by meatless Fridays and by 2 days of “fasting” which may include a full meal each day plus two smaller ones that together are less than the full meal (so, almost two full meals)!

Instead of a communal life of *metanoia*, we’ve allowed discipleship and witness to become individualistic and unaccountable. Close to the heart of that crisis is a corrupted teaching on conscience, which holds that Christians can follow their moral judgments provided they aren’t aware of any guilt.

This individualistic theory makes the Church and her communal witness “outsiders” to conscience, thereby destroying the internal foundation of the Lord’s command that the Church form disciples and that they accept correction.<sup>8</sup>

Fr. Vaverek acknowledges most Catholics, including hierarchy, have been deeply wounded by these multi-generational pastoral, catechetical, and formational failures. Moreover, to the extent they are product of these failures, they have difficulty seeing any need to engage corrective action. The further away from the reforms and accompanying failures of Vatican II, the less “catholic” members of the body of Christ have become. As post-conciliar Christians have inexorably slithered toward the naked tree of Modernism and bitten whole or in part the ideological fruit of secular Humanism, the Church has, perhaps inevitably, become a shallow shell of what Christ instituted and commanded his apostles to observe and teach to all the nations. Young Catholics—even young Christians of all denominations—without a firm foundation built upon generational tradition and faith, are adrift in an amorphous sea, lost and confused in a deep and abiding amoral fog.

This generational drift is so obvious even the walking dead are not immune to its rancid rot and decay. Sixty years wandering aimless in moral desuetude along the yellow brick road has left generations without a spiritual roadmap to guide them. In the absence of strong spiritual leadership, with scandalous and idolatrous demons at every turn, we have turned outward, to worship the only god we know and can believe in, the golden calf of the State.



Thus, the question everyone must ask of themselves: “What religion?” Tragically, far too many, those who believe in themselves, have succumbed to the allures of the world, traveling the yellow brick road not to the City of God but to the city of temporal pleasures. When leadership strays, the lambs are sure to follow. Current political and episcopal leadership serve to illustrate how far we have strayed. Monica Miller recently asked, “Is Joe Biden a ‘Good Catholic?’”

**One of the most bizarre and troubling episodes in the history of the Catholic Church occurred Friday, October 29, 2021**—and considering that the Church has endured heresies on the Person of Christ, the era of the anti-popes, and the Protestant Reformation, that’s saying something.

I am referring to the pastoral consequences of President Biden’s visit with Pope Francis. After their seventy-five-minute meeting, oddly closed to the press, Biden paused for a photo-op with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Asked by a reporter: “Did the issue of abortion come up at all?” Biden responded: “No, it didn’t. It came up—we just talked about the fact that he was happy I was a good Catholic, and keep receiving Communion.”

**If indeed Pope Francis actually said those very words to Biden**, we have to face the disastrous result—that *to be Catholic* ultimately has no meaning. We need to confront the situation objectively. Biden’s support for legalized abortion, contrary to the faith he professes, is not a mere “disagreement” over a Church doctrine, as was characterized by Cardinal Wilton Gregory. Moreover, Biden’s abortion advocacy isn’t simply a failure to support laws in defense of the unborn, as according to Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego.

Both Gregory and McElroy oppose denying Biden reception of Holy Communion. Biden is responsible for gravely evil actions. He not only supports and advocates legalized abortion; he is an actual *facilitator* of laws and policies that cause the murder of the unborn to take place—and this at the rate of over two-thousand per day. We may also add Biden’s promotion of “same-sex marriage” and transgenderism—all contrary to Catholic moral teaching.

If what I have said above is an accurate description of Biden’s complicity in mass murder, and despite that complicity he may be considered a “good Catholic and keep receiving Communion,” then my above conclusion is not hyperbole. To be Catholic doesn’t mean anything. After baptism, only purely subjective criteria need be applied: that one *claims* to be Catholic, one *feels*

that they are Catholic, one *holds* Catholic sentiments and perhaps *participates* in certain Catholic rites and practices. Perhaps it may be fairer to say that Biden is a Catholic, but his facilitation of the murder of the innocent makes him a “bad Catholic.”

Supposedly, however, the Pope called him a “good Catholic.” And thus, this is the pastoral fallout by which the People of God—and perhaps we can even say, the entire world—is confronted. Someone who commits gravely evil acts and defends the commission of those acts may be called “a good Catholic.”

**Thus, we are expected to accept a kind of madness**, expected to accept a grotesque absurdity. Pastorally speaking, there is no difference between those Catholics who cause the murder of the unborn and those Catholics who work hard to prevent their murder—as we can assume that both may stand side-by-side in the Communion line with equal access to the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Miller continues, writing, “Notice, however, that I said ‘if’ the Pope actually told Biden he is a ‘good Catholic.’”

**Perhaps we may conclude that the Pope never told Biden that he “was a good Catholic, and keep receiving Communion”** from the mere fact that the statement itself is weird. Biden’s words bear close examination. Biden most likely would not have made the remark had not a reporter asked him if the issue of abortion came up during his visit with Francis. At first, Biden said, “No, it didn’t.” Then he immediately did an about-face and said, “It came up.” This was followed with Biden stating the pope “was happy I was a good Catholic and keep receiving Communion.”

It is curious that Biden initially said he and the Pope did not talk about abortion, but suddenly the “No” became a “Yes.” Biden’s first response to the reporter most likely reflects the truth. He and the Pope did not discuss abortion. But the reporter’s question had to do with the issue of abortion, and Biden is fully aware that his Catholic credibility is called into question specifically in regard to the issue of abortion. Thus, Biden, by turning that “No” into a “Yes,” cleverly managed to seize the moment to create a papal vindication where he is most spiritually vulnerable—that despite his record on abortion, he is a “good Catholic” and should receive Communion.

Biden saw the opportunity to put words into the mouth of Pope Francis; and thus, Biden effectively fended off his critics—and smashed the threat that he will ever be denied Holy Communion through any form of ecclesial discipline. With the pontiff’s own stamp of approval,

the pro-abortion Catholic president is home free. The pastoral implications are enormous.

If Francis did tell Biden he was “a good Catholic and keep receiving Communion,” this would be the epitome of Eucharistic incoherency. And this may be another reason why it is unlikely that Francis made the statement. Francis has repeatedly condemned abortion as “homicide”—the hiring of a “hit-man to solve a problem”—and decried the “throw-away” culture abortion represents.

As recently as September 15th, Francis, during an in-flight press conference on his return to Rome from Slovakia, stated that if the Church were to accept abortion “it would be like accepting daily murder.” When Biden visited Francis, Francis indeed met with someone who, while claiming to be Catholic, not only “accepts daily murder” but actually causes these murders to occur.

Admittedly there are prelates who are more hired hand than faithful shepherd. But remember, Jesus warned us, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15). Jesus also told us to “[t]ake heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:5). He warned us “take heed”, to be vigilant. It is up to us to seek the truth thru Christ’s Church and his doctrine. What he did *not* say was to go on a shopping spree to the nearest *Pik-n-Chooz* convenience church located in your neighborhood strip mall.

Many of Jesus’ disciples, when they heard him say, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:53-54) argued among themselves, “This saying is hard; who can accept it” (John 6:60)? These days “hard” is often interpreted to mean difficult to understand, especially in the context of Jesus speaking of eating his flesh and drinking his blood (the Eucharist), but that is not what his disciples would have understood it to mean. Here “hard” means something offensive or intolerable, which is why Jesus asks, “Do you take offense at this” (John 6:61)?

He doesn’t ask if it confuses them, because by this point in the Bread of Life discourse, He has already clarified His teaching several times. They understand Him clear-

ly enough; they are simply unwilling to accept what He taught. The problem here is not in the intellect, but the will.

More to the point, they were unwilling to accept what He taught because then they would have to change their lives. He was inviting them to yield their earth-bound view to His supernatural truths: “It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is to no avail” (John 6:63). They intuited what His words meant: If this teaching was true, they would have to change their lives accordingly. So, they balked. Even after witnessing His miracles and signs, they still could not entrust themselves to His teaching. “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” (John 6:66).

Dietrich von Hildebrand writes that to be a disciple of Christ requires “the readiness to change, the waxlike receptiveness to Christ.” ... Again, von Hildebrand: “There are many religious Catholics whose readiness to change is merely a conditional one.” In other words, we’re always in danger of becoming like the disciples in Capernaum by limiting our readiness to change, finding His sayings too hard, and arriving at that point at which we say, “Thus far and no further.” Some come to that point when they encounter a hard teaching of Christ’s Church, others when they suffer some loss, pain, or scandal. Whatever the case, the result is the same: a hardness that resists His grace.<sup>10</sup>

As harsh as this might seem, the only response to such hubris by those who so believe in themselves should be a collective shrug and an admonition to mind the slamming door by those whose faith allows them to know in whom they believe, of whom they worship, and for whom they belong: their Creator God. Anyone no longer wishing to be a member of a parish predicated primarily on what was said in a sermon should at least admit to not being there for God but for one’s own self-aggrandizement. Such are the many, like the writer, who draw back when faced with hard sayings (doctrine) and no longer follow Jesus.

It is the narcissist, the one who believes in himself, much like the young man who asked what good deed he must do to have eternal life, who is never satisfied with the answer. “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:22). This, the young man could or would not do; he went away forlorn because he was possessed by his many possessions. So also is it with those who believe in themselves.



Nothing, perhaps, explains the lunacy and evil that now pervades than what Chesterton wrote at the turn of the twentieth century in the introduction to *Heretics*.

Nothing more strangely indicates an enormous and silent evil of modern society than the extraordinary use which is made nowadays of the word “orthodox.” In former days the heretic was proud of not being a heretic. It was the kingdoms of the world and the police and the judges who were heretics. He was orthodox. He had no pride in having rebelled against them; they had rebelled against him. The armies with their cruel security, the kings with their cold faces, the decorous processes of law—all these like sheep had gone astray. The man was proud of being orthodox, was proud of being right. If he stood alone in a howling wilderness he was more than a man; he was a church. He was the centre of the universe; it was round him the stars swung. All the tortures torn out of forgotten hells could not make him admit that he was heretical. But a few modern phrases have made him boast of it. He says, with a conscious laugh, “I suppose I am very heretical,” and looks round for applause. The word “heresy” not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word “orthodoxy” not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong. All this can mean one thing, and one thing only. It means that people care less for whether they are philosophically right. For obviously a man ought to confess himself crazy before he confesses himself heretical. The Bohemian, with a red tie, ought to pique himself on his orthodoxy. The dynamiter, laying a bomb, ought to feel that, whatever else he is, at least he is orthodox.<sup>11</sup>

And yet, the Church remains as Christ promised. “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Note: Jesus said, “my church”, not churches, denominations, religions, isms, sects, and certainly not the secular state; the word “church” is singular. So, as with his Church so also must it be with his doctrine.

Now, it should be made clear, while the narcissist counterfeits a nominal Catholic, he is more assuredly a heretic, not only in his shallow catholicity, but heretical to the very spirit of Christian theology and Catholic doctrine. Here I must pause to restate what Chesterton so cleverly submitted: I am not in the slightest concerned with the writer as a Heretic *per se*, but rather, a man whose philoso-

phy might be quite solid, quite coherent, but whose Catholic theology is nevertheless quite wrong.

## Rudderless, without oars

There is a rather odd notion held by those who most believe in themselves that life is good if only dessert is served. Should broccoli or turnips be offered, the egoist complains and demands more ice cream to soothe their weary tongues. Plato describes, in an allegorical tale known as the *Ship of Fools*, a vessel populated by deranged, frivolous, or oblivious passengers aboard a ship without a pilot. They are completely ignorant of where they are going and care nothing for the circumstances of their fellow passengers. Likewise, believing one can successfully cross the ocean in a rowboat, rudderless, without oars, sans compass or sextant, though readily recognized as lunacy by the commonest of men, is believed possible by demented fools who so firmly believe in themselves.

At the outset, the writer’s assertion that “this parish demands a strict adherence to the Catholic doctrine” displays a not atypical willful, vincible ignorance of what it means to be a faithful member of the Body of Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. Catholic doctrine is catholic in its universality, there is no parochial Catholic doctrine. Catholic doctrine is universal because Christ instituted the Church and commissioned the Apostles to “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Subsequent apostolic successors have been ordained to faithfully continue to carry out Christ’s great commission, to be the teaching body (magisterium) of the Church, to faithfully pass on the doctrine and teaching of Jesus the Christ, the Son of man, the Son of God. The great difficulty in perfecting their ordinary duties consistent with Christ’s commandments is due to the imperfection of human nature, the concupiscence which we all share. Catholic doctrine is what Christ taught and not subject to parochial interpretation nor is it up for debate or opinion—only a fool would challenge the Word of God. Just as the decalogue, God’s Law, is absolute—there is no room for interpretation in ‘Thou shall not ...’—Christ’s commandments

permit no personal indulgence. "The Ten Commandments are ordinances of right reason, promulgated by the eternally competent Authority, serving the common good. God's laws are inescapable and enforceable from eternity."<sup>12</sup> God's law is perfect and as God the Son tells us, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). And perfection can only be attained through "strict adherence to Catholic doctrine."

Faith is neither a radio program nor television show where you can tune in or out to whatever suits your fantasy or further bloats your supersized ego. The arrogance and hubris<sup>13</sup> of anyone who would dare suggest the church instituted by Christ should be conformed to one's own beliefs ("more in tune to my beliefs") or else "to hell with it" evidences the Great Apostasy and discipleship to the father of lies.

It's one of the cornerstones of American religion. It is the notion that the original Church founded by Jesus and his apostles went bust somewhere along the line and had to be restored by some latter-day prophet or reformer. Most of our Christian denominations here in the United States teach the idea in one form or another, though significantly, they usually disagree completely on which "Second Founder" ought to be followed.<sup>14</sup>

Faith is defined, first and foremost, as belief in God. This necessitates an unwavering belief in Christ, his Church, and the doctrines and teaching of his Church. Those who are skeptical, who believe in themselves, tend to think of faith as belief without evidence, thus impossible to prove and easy to disbelieve. Nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche went so far as to predict—quite accurately it seems—the immanent consequences of the loss of faith. "As the will to truth thus gains self-consciousness—there can be no doubt of that—morality will gradually perish now: this is the great spectacle in a hundred acts reserved for the next two centuries in Europe—the most terrible, most questionable and perhaps also the most hopeful of all spectacles"<sup>15</sup>

Tragically, far too many have come to believe faith should be easy. Faith is never easy, was never meant to be easy, unless of course, your faith is of your own mutable design. Some have forgotten that or rather have chosen to follow the yellow brick road which inevitably leads to the conman behind the curtain. Daniel H. Muegggenborg, Bish-

op of the Diocese of Reno, wrote that the teaching of our Lord, Jesus Christ, "presumes that Christians are, in fact, living 'for the Lord' in every aspect of their lives. It is easy, however, to become spiritually distracted and to find ourselves having put some other priority or value at the center of our lives instead of Jesus and the Gospel."<sup>16</sup>

The unhappy writer, like so many others, protests the mixing of politics and religion from the pulpit. This is a common complaint by those who fancy themselves learned churchmen—that they believe themselves to be so informed merely proves their culpability. Richard John Neuhaus once said, "politics is downstream of culture, and culture is downstream of religion." Looking at this in reverse religion is upstream of (influences) culture, and culture is upstream of (influences) politics. If this is true, which to this mind it is, then religion and politics are inseparable; like conjoined twins, you cannot have one without the other, religion was firstborn, tugged by the cultural umbilical cord, politics reluctantly followed.

Those who "shop around" for a faith community or a religion more in tune with "their beliefs" are oblivious to the fact they have chosen to lock themselves in "grey town," quite convinced they can accept Heaven while "retaining the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell." As C.S. Lewis notes in the preface to his classic Christian allegorical tale *The Great Divorce*, "You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind." Everyone, especially those who believe in themselves, should read *The Great Divorce* which tells of a bus ride from Hell (grey town) to Heaven. Tellingly, and I believe correctly, though given every chance to exchange eternity in heaven for the grey drudgery of hell, most chose the latter for they refused to give up the possessions they stubbornly carried in their baggage.

And yet, it is as Plato (427-347 B.C.) observed those who believe in themselves prefer the life of the senses to real knowledge.

At the pinnacle of Plato's hierarchy of Being is the Form of the Good. He taught that the Good was the single most real thing in the world and the highest object of contemplation. Plato tells us that "the greatest thing to

learn is the idea of the Good and that even if ... we should know all other things ... it would avail us nothing without knowing the Good."<sup>17</sup> The Form of the Good is the single most attractive thing in the world, drawing all things to it according to their own nature. Men, too, naturally seek the Good, though we see through a glass darkly in our quest for the Good. Because we are easily led off course by our appetites and our lack of understanding, we continually miss the mark, chasing things we believe to be good but that lead us astray as often as not. All things are moved by their perception of the Good, "which every soul pursues and for its sake does all that it does, with an intuition of its reality, but yet baffled and unable to apprehend its nature."<sup>18</sup>

As St. Pius X saw clearly, to accept the infinite malleability of settled doctrine finally terminates not in Protestantism, but in atheism. Today, this Big Lie must be manfully resisted, lest we find ourselves guilty of holding or teaching the error condemned over a century ago: "Christ did not teach a determined body of doctrine applicable to all times and all men, but rather inaugurated a religious movement adapted or to be adapted to different times and places."

It is more pressing now than ever to heed the advice of St. Vincent of Lérins:

What then should a Catholic do if some portion of the Church detaches itself from communion of the universal Faith? What choice can he make if some new contagion attempts to poison, no longer a small part of the Church, but the whole Church at once? Then his great concern will be to attach himself to antiquity, which can no longer be led astray by any lying novelty.

Or perhaps, in the plainer language of St. Paul: "Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught" (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:15)!

"No man can serve two masters," says the Lord. We cannot love both God and mammon. The principle is of general application. We cannot love both God and Belial. We cannot love both God and Moloch. We cannot love God while we want power over all the kingdoms of the world. We dare not say to God, "Thus far and no farther," giving Him authority over some portion of life, let us say an hour or so on Sunday, while doing as we please for the rest of the week. Nor does it matter how near we draw the boundaries. We dare not say, "Thus far and no farther," reserving for ourselves an hour or so on Monday, when we get to commit our

favorite sins, while granting or pretending to grant to God all the rest.

But, of course, this is what man does all the time. God is the eternal, and man is the temporizer. It's one thing to fall into a sin you acknowledge as such. It's another to refuse to acknowledge the sin—which is to try to circumscribe God. Milton's Eve, once she has eaten of the forbidden fruit, entertains the silly hope that perhaps God was too far away to notice what she did. "Heaven is far," she says.

That is as stupid as to say, "God will overlook *this* area of sin," as if He were an overworked Mister Zeus, too busy bothering about war and money to care about sex. It is as proud as it is stupid. It is as if *we could make ourselves*, providing ourselves with our own moral constitutions, saying, "We declare that aconite will no longer do us any harm." It is to engage in sheer fantasy.

"Be perfect," says Jesus, "even as your heavenly father is perfect." Now, He knows that man is weak in will, addled in the mind, easily distracted, prone to thinking well of himself as soon as he fulfills his favorite portions of the law. He said that Peter would deny Him. He said that the sheep would scatter. He did not trust the people who praised Him, because He knew the heart of man and did not need any instructors in that regard. Jesus is ready to forgive us the worst sins. "You will be with me in Paradise," He says to the repentant thief.

We will fall and fall again. But to accept a principle of sin is not to fall along the way. It is to leap from a precipice. We cannot have it. The Pharisee in the parable wanted to give everything to God except his heart. It cannot be. It is a self-contradiction. The publican said, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." He went from the temple justified, while the other did not. God can make such a man perfect. But God cannot Himself work a self-contradiction. He cannot welcome us into perfection while we retain our allegiance to some principle of sin. That would be like welcoming mammon, Belial, and Moloch into Heaven. God will not be fooled or blackmailed.

Of course, we must live in the world, and we cannot demand perfection here. But it is one thing to make allowances for human weakness and confusion and another, as I have said, to accept an evil principle. It's true enough that our worship of God will often be feeble and frail. But we must not raise up statues to mammon, Belial, and Moloch.

In our time, and not least for the welfare of children and the poor, the evil principle of the sexual revolution must be rejected, root and branch. People will fall. They always have. But not one minute of time, not one milli-

meter of space, , may be *devoted* to the false god, as if we could declare it off limits from God. Ultimately, it is all or nothing.<sup>20</sup>

In the end, it all comes down to theology, the systematic study of the nature of the divine and religious belief. Though “the institutional Church often appears to be an annoying impediment, ... especially true of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church,” for those who disagree with its teachings and doctrine, it is worth noting what Pope Benedict XVI observed as to its nature and mission. “This is,” he writes, “especially true of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, which presupposes that Christianity, especially in its Catholic variety, has a determinate content and thus confronts our thinking with a prior given, which cannot be manipulated at will and which alone gives to the theologian’s words their distinctive significance above and beyond all purely political or philosophical discourse.”<sup>21</sup>

It is in our nature to question authority, to strain at perceived limits, to believe somewhere elsewhere there are greener pastures beside still waters. As creatures of the Divine, we are called to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, knowing full well we are imperfect. Our imperfectability is nowise an excuse for not seeking perfection, for in seeking we will, in the end, find our perfection in the Perfect. We cannot find perfection on our own, we certainly cannot acquire it shopping around for a religion that is more in concert with our beliefs.

1. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1908; Dover Publications, 2004), 6.
2. Peter Kreeft, “Three Philosophies of Life” (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 15-16.
3. “Traditional Culture: Do Not Pursue or Indulge in Vanity”, Falun Dafa, <https://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2006/4/18/72101.html>.
4. Jeffrey Bilbro, “Spiritual Secession: A Conversation with Paul Kingsnorth”, Front Porch Republic, <https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2021/11/spiritual-secession-a-conversation-with-paul-kingsnorth/>, November 12, 2021.
5. Aaron Seng, “Cardinal Cupich and The Big Lie”, Crisis Magazine, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/cardinal-cupich-and-the-big-lie>, November 10, 2021.
6. Anthony Esolen, “All or Nothing”, Crisis Magazine, [https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/all-or-nothing?mc\\_cid=71250c79c2&mc\\_eid=1479d57492](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/all-or-nothing?mc_cid=71250c79c2&mc_eid=1479d57492), November 16, 2021.
7. Anthony Esolen, “Our Moral Edifice Has Fallen”, Crisis Magazine, [www.crisismagazine.com/2021/our-moral-edifice-has-fallen?mc\\_cid=46a4d2486d&mc\\_eid=1479d57492](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/our-moral-edifice-has-fallen?mc_cid=46a4d2486d&mc_eid=1479d57492), November 24, 2021.
8. Fr. Timothy V. Bavereck, STD, “The Bishops’ Bind and Their Cross”, The Cath-

olic Thing, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2021/11/21/the-bishops-bind-and-their-cross/>, November 21, 2021.

9. Monica Migliorino Miller, Is Joe Biden a “Good Catholic?”, Crisis Magazine, [https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/is-joe-biden-a-good-catholic?mc\\_cid=faf2b5cef0&mc\\_eid=1479d57492](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/is-joe-biden-a-good-catholic?mc_cid=faf2b5cef0&mc_eid=1479d57492), November 9, 2021.
10. Fr. Paul D. Scalia, “Hard Sayings”, The Catholic Thing – <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2021/08/22/hard-sayings/>, August 22, 2021.
11. G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, (London & New York: John Lane Company, 1905; republish New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006), 1-2.
12. Jerry J. Pokorsky, “Understanding Mortal Sin”, <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/>, November 7, 2021.
13. **Hubris**, *noun*: describes a personality quality of extreme or excessive pride or dangerous overconfidence, often in combination with (or synonymous with) arrogance. Arrogance comes from the Latin *adrogare*, meaning to feel that one has a right to demand certain attitudes and behaviors from other people. To arrogate means “to claim or seize without justification... To make undue claims to having”, or “to claim or seize without right... to ascribe or attribute without reason.”
14. Rod Bennet, *Athanasius and the Myth of the “Great Apostasy”*, Catholic Answers, May 5, 2016, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/athanasius-and-the-myth-of-the-great-apostasy>.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals” (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*), 1887.
16. Daniel H. Mueggenborg, Bishop of the Diocese of Reno, NV, “Come Follow Me: Discipleship reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C” (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 201,2020), First Sunday of Advent, 1.
17. Plato, *Republic* 6.505a.
18. *Ibid.*, 505e.
19. John Lawrence Hill, “After the Natural Law: How the Classical Worldview Supports Our Modern Moral and Political Values” (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016), 38-39.
20. Anthony Esolen, “All or Nothing”, Crisis Magazine, [https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/all-or-nothing?mc\\_cid=71250c79c2&mc\\_eid=1479d57492](https://www.crisismagazine.com/2021/all-or-nothing?mc_cid=71250c79c2&mc_eid=1479d57492), November 16, 2021.
21. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), “The Nature and Mission of Theology” (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), 7-8.

## 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

#### Things Worth Dying For

*Charles J. Chaput*

Henry Holt and Company

2021, 258 pages.

#### Homo Americanus

*Zbigniew Janowski*

St. Augustine's Press

2021, 259 pages.

#### Voyage to Alpha Centauri: A Novel

*Michael D. O'Brien*

Ignatius Press

2013, 587 pages.

#### The Everlasting Man

*G.K. Chesterton*

Dover Publications

2007, 270 pages.

#### Speechless:

*Controlling Words, Controlling Minds*

*Michael Knowles*

Regnery Publishing

2021, 362 pages.

#### Knowledge and Decisions

*Thomas Sowell*

Basic Books

1980, 422 pages.

#### Intellectuals and Society

*Thomas Sowell*

Basic Books

2011, 669 pages.

#### Enemies of the Permanent Things

*Russell Kirk*

Sherwood Sugden & Company

1984-88, 311 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)

#### The New Criterion

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

#### Catholic Vote

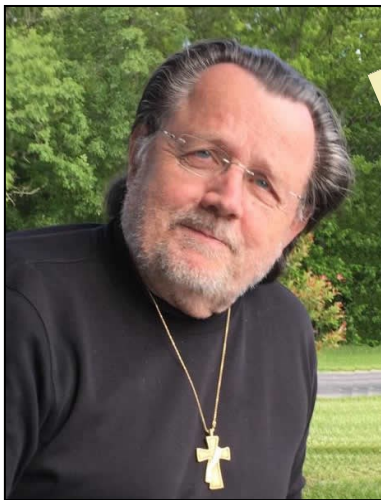
[www.catholicvote.org](http://www.catholicvote.org)

#### The Catholic Thing

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

#### The Postil Magazine

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



COMING SOON!  
**COLLOQUI**  
VOLUMES I, II, III, IV

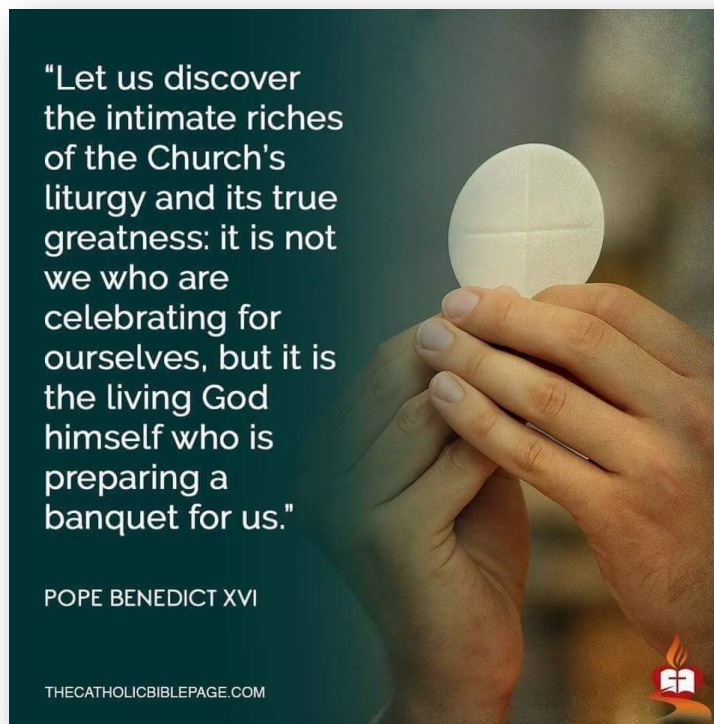


Books are available on  
**Amazon.com** or from the  
author's web site at:  
**deacons corner.org**

**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.

Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

**deacon.chuck@deacons corner.org**



**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.

**Colloquī** is published weekly by Deacon's Corner Publishing. Each issue of **Colloquī** is available online: <https://deacons corner.org>

Copyright © 2020 by **Deacon's Corner Publishing**. All rights reserved. Produced in the U.S.A. <https://deacons corner.org>.