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# Colloquī *: to discuss*

## **Dead Things Don't Float Upstream**

*Without religion, culture withers and dies*

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*Not my will, but thy will be done*

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*Food for a restless mind*

# Dead Things Don't Float Upstream

*Without religion, culture withers and dies*

We have heard it before: “Politics is downstream of culture, and culture is downstream of religion.” Bruce Frohnen, in *The Lure of Integralism* an essay for *Chronicles* (February 2022 further explicates this oft repeated aphorism. “Religion binds people to a way of life that shapes their character and the character of their society—the culture. The culture then shapes, or at least should shape, politics and law.”)

He notes this shaping is indirect, that whenever “the religious seek to dictate the shape of politics directly,” it can only be done through political power and ideology, thus becoming “just another source of political propaganda and power.” The diverse flavors and transcendental nature of religious cults would thus preclude such direct shaping of the political landscape. Unlike the motto of the highlander, “there can be only one,” there are many religious beliefs; each in some ineffable way influencing and shaping the culture downstream.

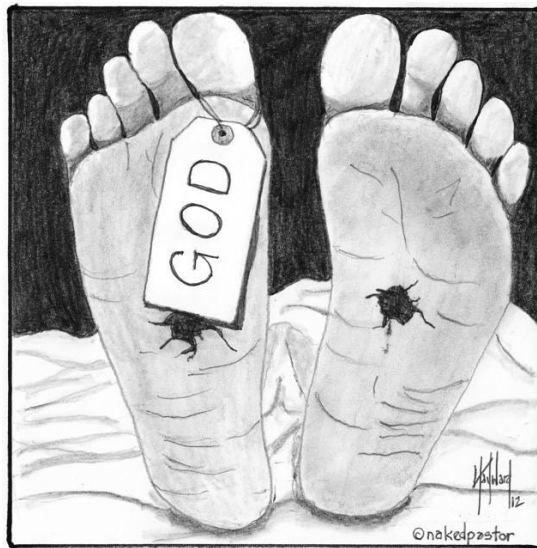
There is much discussion today—it has been ongoing for a very long time—about the derivative relationship between religion, culture, and politics; it is the unanswerable anachronistic question of which came first, the chicken or the egg, though in the case in question the hierarchy is historically clear: first religion, then culture, eventually politics. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, history was replete with totalitarian regimes ruled by monarchs whose political authority was theirs by divine right granted to them by religious authorities. Philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau and Burke were among the most influential thinkers of a movement away from totalitarian monarchical rule to other forms of government. According to Jonah Goldberg,

The Lockean vision holds that man is the captain of his

soul, that his rights come from God, the individual is sovereign, that the government exists because men of free will cede certain authorities to it in order to best protect their lives and property.

The Rousseauian vision holds that the collective comes before the individual, our rights come from the group not from God, that the tribe is the source of all morality, and the general will is the ultimate religious construct and so therefore the needs—and aims—of the group come before those of the individual.

Fascism, like Communism, Socialism, Progressivism and all the other collectivist isms are all based on the Rousseauian vision of the group, the tribe, the class taking precedence over the individual.



Rousseau believed the body politic was a moral being possessed of a will. In “The Social Contract” (*Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*), Rousseau argued that there was an implicit agreement among the members of a society to cooperate for social benefits such as sacrificing individual freedoms for state protection, in other words for the *common good*. But as Ryan T. Anderson argues, “it is certainly true that government serves the com-

mon good of a political community by protecting the honorable liberties of its members, but why think that in a so-called state of nature only our liberty is insecure?”

So, too, is our flourishing in a vast range of its dimensions. Outside of a political community, both our rights and our goods, our liberty and our flourishing, are insecure. So if we form a social contract, why would it be only to protect human rights and not human goods? The social-contract theorists have never had a persuasive response. So even on their own terms, the social-contract theorists fail to justify a political concern focused solely on liberty rights.

Better, then, not to think in terms of a “state of nature” and “social contract,” where political community is something artificial to human nature and human flourishing. Better to see that it is part of man’s natural perfection to live in political community. Man is a social and political animal. And membership in a political community is a perfection of man’s nature.

## No Religion Too

Taking religion out of the socio-political equation condemns all that is further downstream; culture soon enough withers and dries up leaving political propaganda and power unimpeded by upstream religious and cultural constraints. As Allen Guelzo and James Hankins (*Western civilization at the crossroads- I : Civilization & tradition*, The New Criterion, September 2021) write:

A civilization is a complex system of customs, practices, and beliefs that binds a society or family of societies together over long periods of time. To survive, a civilization needs to have the means to defend itself, usually military and diplomatic, from external threats. It needs systems of internal order, usually defined by customs, laws, and magistrates. Above all it needs moral and spiritual resources that generate loyalty to recognized authorities and allow individuals to actualize their full potential as human beings. The spiritual resources of a civilization provide those who share them with an identity that transcends the identity belonging to individual peoples united merely by common descent (the pre-modern meaning of “nation,” *natio* in Latin). They produce a common culture that may last many centuries and even outlive the collapse of civilizational order.

In a sense too nonsensical to take seriously, it is as Chesterton once described (*The Everlasting Man*, Chap. VI) “a river turning backwards from the sea and trying to climb back into the mountains,” an improbable task at best, a clear violation of the laws of physics. And yet, not only were people—vincibly ignorant of the immutable laws of physics—“so certain about the direction that they only differed about the pace.”

In short, the whole world being divided about whether the stream was going slower or faster, became conscious of something vague but vast that was going against the stream. Both in fact and figure there is something deeply disturbing about this, and that for an essential reason. A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it. A dead dog can be lifted on the leaping water with all the swiftness of a leaping hound; but only a live dog can swim backwards. A paper boat can ride the rising deluge with all the airy arrogance of a fairy ship; but if the fairy ship sails upstream it is really rowed by fairies. And among the things that merely went with the tide of apparent progress and enlargement, there was many a demagogue or sophist whose wild gestures were in truth as lifeless as the movement of a dead dog’s limbs waver-

ing in the eddying water; and many a philosophy uncommonly like a paper boat, of the sort that it is not difficult to knock into a cocked hat. But even the truly living and even life-giving things that went with that stream did not thereby prove that they were living or lifegiving. It was this other force that was unquestionably and unaccountably alive; the mysterious and unmeasured energy that was thrusting back the river. That was felt to be like the movement of some great monster; and it was none the less clearly a living monster because most people thought it a prehistoric monster.

“We can better understand what a civilization *is* by grasping what it *does*.” And yet, at the same time, to fully understand what it means to be civilized, we must understand what it means to be uncivilized. Guelzo & Hankins say that to be civilized “is to act in ways that make us and those around us better and happier,” though to be clear, they argue it is not as straightforward as it would seem. In the world we find ourselves it seems we have drifted more toward the uncivilized, away from God, the world’s great religions, and by every indication away from what beauty and happiness comes from God.

I know I should not let it get to me, but it has and it does, for it feels reminiscent of the phrase “the beatings will continue until morale improves.” I grew up and was raised vastly different from these so-called millennials, these thirty-something self-centered, egotistical nihilists who have been convinced by those who should know better but don’t or won’t; who have declared themselves masters of the world and all it contains. I feel enormous sadness and anguish for them, but most of all for those they so carelessly allow the dimmest glimpse of starlight. I simply cannot imagine being so self-involved as to see nothing in the least inhuman in their singular self-attraction. Such attitudes are the signature of those who do not believe in anything but themselves, especially God; such are those who deny the inestimable value of every human life. Life is meaningless: you are born, you exist, you die; lights out. Until that end, until darkness comes, they exist only for themselves. All in their way must be destroyed, resistance is futile. There can be no true joy, no love, no life, no happiness, no future.

Thus, society is increasingly confronted with the inexplicable, such as the high-priced assisted suicide of sisters Lila Ammouri and Susan Frazier. Two healthy, affluent

medical professionals. Perhaps though it is something crueler, colder, less human, something fueled by vanity and narcissism, something out of Fyodor Dostoevsky's bitter classic, *Notes from Underground*, which begins, "I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased." As Jordan Peterson notes, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, "It is the confession of a miserable, arrogant sojourner in the underworld of chaos and despair. He analyzes himself mercilessly, but only pays in this manner for a hundred sins, despite committing a thousand." Or, could it be, as Peterson suggests, something less obvious that one wishes to avoid at all costs.

...consider this: failure is easy to understand. No explanation for its existence is required. In the same manner, fear, hatred, addiction, promiscuity, betrayal and deception require no explanation. It's not the existence of vice, or the indulgence in it, that requires explanation. Vice is easy. Failure is easy, too. It's easier not to shoulder a burden. It's easier not to think, and not to do, and not to care.

Maybe your misery is the weapon you brandish in your hatred for those who rose upward while you waited and sank. Maybe your misery is your attempt to prove the world's injustice, instead of the evidence of your own sin, your own missing of the mark, your conscious refusal to strive and to live. Maybe your willingness to suffer in failure is inexhaustible, given what you use that suffering to prove. Maybe it's your revenge on Being.

Success: that's the mystery. Virtue: that's what's inexplicable. To fail, you merely have to cultivate a few bad habits. You just have to bide your time. And once someone has spent enough time cultivating bad habits and biding their time, they are much diminished. Much of what they could have been has dissipated, and much of the less that they have become is now real. Things fall apart, of their own accord, but the sins of men speed their degeneration. And then comes the flood.

The world has become a very angry place, where far too many have no firm belief in anything, even themselves; deeply angry at the banality of their lives, of their existence; angry at what they perceive to be the purposelessness of it all. Too many do not believe in any God at all; they believe that they are the creators of their own reality, that there is no objective reality, that what defines a man or a woman or some altogether undefinable other, is

a personal choice, an individual decision. They don't believe in objective, unchangeable values. They believe man has created it all, that this here and now is all there is, all there will ever be; they see the suffering around them and see no value in it. They hate religion, all religions, unless it works for them politically. Suffering has no value; it is just plain suffering and that makes them angry. Anger fills their hearts for without God they find no soul. Thus, the world has passed judgment on God and religion. God is dead, religion too, culture soon to follow.

According to Algis Valiunas, (*Nihilism for the Ironhearted*, First Things, April 2022):

When a man proclaims nature malignant in all its parts and professes to hate life itself, one's first suspicion is that something is profoundly wrong with him. The man's grievance against creation must be the effect of some personal deficiency in body or soul or both, rather than a sound conclusion reached by a powerful, disinterested mind. Few things disturb ordinary, contented people more than the spectacle of a moral desperado (to borrow Thomas Carlyle's phrase) or metaphysical berserker raging against the order of the universe.

## Nothing worth remembering

Former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir recognized more than most the grave importance of knowing and remembering the past, once making the observation: "One cannot and must not try to erase the past merely because it does not fit the present." And as writer and philosopher George Santayana so famously opined "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Another George (Orwell) said much the same in his dystopian novel *1984*, through the rather annoying habit of denying an inconvenient past by those who would be otherwise inconvenienced by the ever-changing present.

—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. "Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, "controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. "Reality control," they called it; in Newspeak, "doublethink."

It is odd how modern technological contrivances can capture every moment for eternal posterity and yet, those once impaled on their own petard, on lies they thought well-forgotten, declare victory time and again over their own memory, thus convicting themselves of their own truth, their own reality. Victor Davis Hanson notes how the “now unfettered woke revolution seeks to Trotskyize American history and its heroes” and in doing so “has turned over the reins of its deterrence chariot to a ninny and his gurus.”

It is as Joseph Ratzinger warned in *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*:

[Man] has investigated the farthest recesses of his being, he has deciphered the components of the human being, and now he is able, so to speak, to “construct” man on his own. This means that man enters the world, no longer a gift of the Creator, but as the product of our activity—and a product that can be selected according to requirements that we ourselves stipulate. ... Man is nothing more now than the image of man—but of what man?

Man has replaced the transcendent, the ineffable, the unknowable, not with a religion of a transcendent God, but with the ersatz religions of science and technology. The realms of science and technology are necessarily limited to the materialistic, knowable, discoverable, and scientifically provable. Morality, ethics, virtue, beauty, metaphysics, philosophy, society, culture, even politics are outside the proper realms of science and technology and yet, that does not halt them sticking their material scientific fingers where they have no business dabbling. The Astronomer Allan R. Sandage admitted to the recognizable limits of science in discussing the theory of the Big Bang, which most honest scientists today will admit is well beyond any rational hypothesis.

What is a superstring? [...] what is the nature of nothing? Does that statement make any sense, or is it gobbledy-gook? The nature of nothing. What they say seems to be absolutely nonsense. They say the universe could create itself out of nothing, a self-causing entity, because they say you could do it with zero energy.... Well, that’s just using words to convince themselves they can earn a living.

Do you believe in grand unification theories? Why? Because everyone you respect tells you to. You are se-

duced by its beauty. And because it is so beautiful, it has to be true. [...] Why do you believe that’s true any more than the existence of God, which is also a beautiful theory and also explains a great deal? It’s a hypothesis that is checkable in its consequences. [...] Yet you would reject that beautiful hypothesis.

There is the oft used Latin calque *Deus ex machina* “god from the machine” where actors who were playing gods were brought onto stage using some fashion of a machine. This invites the simple but perfectly obvious observation that *machina facta est homine*, the machine was made for man. John Crowe Ransom, in *I’ll Take My Stand*, writes that “Progress never defines its ultimate objective but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series. Our vast industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experimentation, and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace.”

In his essay *War Without End, Amen* published in the March/April 2022 issue of *Chronicles*, Anthony Esolen suggests that “Ransom was thinking of an industrialism that forgets that tools are to serve man and his human goods rather than to reduce men to tools or to the slaves of tools. ... We no longer work at the machines; we are ourselves the machines, working for work’s sake, ever in need of repairs that are costly, incessant, ineffective, and servile. This too is a progressive demand.”

I have often complained that the self-styled progressive of our time never tells us where he wants to go. Progress implies a destination, and rest—sweet and blessed rest—once you have arrived. But that would imply a natural human order to return to, or to attain. And then what?

Then what? The progressive sweats. He neither believes in a natural order, nor comes to terms with fallen man and his imperfection. If peace is, as Augustine says, the tranquility of order, the progressive promotes himself as a disturber of the peace. He is too tightly wound to stop. If you live in a town full of such, you will see the pathology all the time, the unrest of people who cannot let things be.

*Homo factus est machina*, man has become the machine to be used and discarded by the progressive state. God has been tossed from the building, given the progressive’s hard left boot.

One thing is for certain, serious, critical thinking has become, like everything else in this post-modern, dystopian world, critically in short supply and what little there is, for the most, comes labeled “Made in China.” Science demands critical thinking and the *eagerness* to be proven wrong. These days, science, which is, by definition, always unsettled, always subject to revision and/or disprovable through further discoveries, is declared “settled” with no allowance for debate. But that, my friends, is not science, but poppycock, mere irrational dogmatic hubris, not of a third kind, but of the worst sort. It is placing the cart before the horse encumbered by neither collar nor harness.

Thus, the high mountains are brought low and religion well-and-truly dammed. What the post-modern progressive denies is the inconvenient truth that rivers cannot flow upstream no matter how strong the tide or the gravitational pull of the moon. Culture is *always* upstream of politics; politics is *always* dependent on and shaped by the culture which, in turn, is *always* derived from and formed by natural law and the strongly held religious beliefs of society. To deny this downward flow is to deny the fundamental and necessary principle of subsidiarity: that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate or local level consistent with their resolution. As philosopher Peter Kreeft (*How to Destroy Western Civilization*) correctly points out, “Larger bodies interfering with jobs that smaller bodies can do is the road to totalitarianism.”

Every man is an end in himself. Man is the only creature God created for his own sake. Cultures, civilizations, nations, and even religions exist for man, not man for them. And they are judged by how well they serve man, not by how well man serves them. A good society is, as Dorothy Day says, simply a society that makes it easier for man to be good.

It is far too easy to succumb to the modern notion of man as the center of his own personal universe, each a black hole whose gravitational pull is irresistible. Though this canard has long been laid bare, declared dead since at least the fifteenth century (Nicolaus Copernicus), verified in the sixteenth (Galileo), it was Aristarchus in the third century BC who first theorized the heliocentricity of the world of man. And yet, dead things continue their vain attempts to float upstream. Vanity of Vanities.

## Stillborn Useful Idiots

Politics is a eunuch, born sterile and barren; while politics can destroy, it can never conceive, create, or nurture a culture fit for man. It is, of and by itself—in every malevolent sense of the word—a mind-killer, a cultural grim reaper. Without religion, culture owns no moral foundation, what politics might attempt is but a cold, artificial culture created in a petri dish stillborn, anencephalic, *sans* heart or soul. When culture dies or is murdered by a godless, soulless polity, humanity becomes a commodity, nothing more. No other than Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn explains what happens when men forget God and culture dies.

Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this happened.” Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this happened.”

Peter Kreeft, though perhaps more academic, more philosophical, in expressing similar thoughts, points beyond the borders of Solzhenitsyn’s ancient homeland, to the connection between culture and the natural moral law (religion).

All healthy cultures have believed in the natural moral law. Ours is the first whose mind-molders, both official and unofficial (media), do not. We are certainly doomed to extinction unless this is reversed, because there is simply no alternative. (Denial of any universal, objective, and absolute moral law also imperils one’s salvation, for if there is no law, there is no sin, and if there is no sin, there is no repentance, and if there is no repentance, there is no salvation.

In one of his controversial essays “*Useful Idiots*”, Thomas Sowell observes how “Lenin is supposed to have referred to blind defenders and apologists for the Soviet Union in the Western democracies as ‘useful idiots.’”



The most famous of these was the *New York Times'* Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, who won a Pulitzer prize for telling people what they wanted to hear, rather than what was actually happening. Duranty assured his readers that "there is no famine or actual starvation, nor is there likely to be." Moreover, he blamed reports to the contrary on "rumor factories" with anti-Soviet bias.

For those for whom the Cold War and the Soviet Union are but myth and fairy tale told and retold by those now standing with one foot on a banana peel and the other foot in the grave, the term "useful idiots" may not resonate, even though the term has never lost either usefulness or relevancy. Walter Duranty's reporting was an enormous lie, a fabrication of horrendous consequences.

The defector and former Soviet KGB operative, Yuri Bezmenov, acknowledged the origins of the term, describing "useful idiots", as leftists who "when they get disillusioned, they become the worst enemies."

That's why my KGB instructors specifically made the point: never bother with leftists. Forget about these political prostitutes. Aim higher. [...] when they get disillusioned, when they see that Marxist-Leninists come to power [...] they think that they will come to power. That will never happen, of course. They will be lined up against the wall and shot.

It was Thomas Jefferson who wrote, "Tyranny is defined as that which is legal for the government but illegal for the citizenry." Maximilien Robespierre said that the "secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant." Both were absolutely correct. "Ignorance is strength" for the tyrant. No matter how one dances around a cow paddy, it is still a pile of manure you would rather avoid toe tipping if at all possible. Perhaps, I suppose, that is why so many prefer to avoid the sulphureous smell of hate so prevalent in our society. Let's face it, there is a rancid odor of corruption and decay that spews from the mouths of autocrats, oligarchs, dictators, and tyrants. The "free" press no longer is free but has been coopted to be the mouthpieces of those who would enslave us. It was C.S. Lewis, however, who described the most oppressive form of tyranny.

Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may

be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber barons cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.

Perhaps it should be obvious, but it never is to those who wish only to live lives unencumbered by the crude cruelties of politics: the progressive feeds on chaos and carrion, never satisfied with what is, only what is not. Progress means change, change demands chaos, chaos breeds war and destruction. It is as Esolen writes:

War, endless war, war with no aim—that is the banner of Satan the adversary and accuser. Thus the restless instigator in Milton's poem determines "To wage by force or guile eternal war / Irreconcilable to our grand foe," no matter that all his actions will make him and his fellows more miserable, as he admits. ... Satan is like many an environmentalist who hates man more than he loves trees. He cannot let even the natural world alone if it means that Adam and Eve may enjoy their lives in peace and harmony with God. Satan knows that the world is beautiful, but its beauty, the peaceful tranquility of its varied and sweetly interchanging orders, goads him on to hatred.

## Not in my backyard

It is revealing, given the present Russian unprovoked incursion into Ukraine, that the Western media has so far incredulously ignored Russo-Ukrainian history, most notably early twentieth century Eastern European history, beginning with the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) through the current attempts by Putin to restore hegemony over what he considers the whole of Russia.

The *Povolzhye* famine (1921-1922), instigated by Lenin, killed an estimated 5 million people, mostly people from what is now known as Ukraine, which, according to Duranty, was merely the unfounded output of "rumor factories." Nowadays, the *New York Times* and other leftist propaganda outlets call these "right-wing conspiracy theories." This is, of course, nothing new, but only goes to prove what Santayana so astutely observed, that for those who would dare ignore the past, history does indeed repeat itself.

Known as the *Holodomor*, or “murder by starvation”, Stalin engineered a famine in Soviet Ukraine (1932-33) which killed an estimated 3.9 million people. The cruel purpose of the *Holodomor* was to crush the spirit of the Ukrainian people in retribution for the staunch resistance (1917-1920) of the Ukrainian peasantry against the forced rule of the Soviet State. Stalin perceived the peasants were acting in league with the Ukrainian republic’s intellectuals who were defending the rights of Ukrainian culture. Stalin engineered the famine by collectivizing the bread-and-butter agricultural economy of Ukraine—seizing supposedly hoarded grain and any other foodstuffs discovered during searches while preventing peasants from fleeing their starving villages. In addition, Stalin blacklisted more than a third of the Ukrainian villages, blockading them from the delivery of all supplies.

Today, agricultural products (Cereals, animal/vegetable fats, oils and oil seeds make up nearly 35% of Ukraine’s domestic product. In the first half of the twentieth century the people of Ukraine were critically dependent on agricultural production for survival. Thus, Stalin effectively starved them to death by state diktat; production fell almost immediately, and people died by the millions. The fact that the current conflict continues unabated with cessation of hostilities an unrequited dream begs for answers to the increasing likelihood of global food shortages since Ukrainian farmers are thus far unable to plant crops.

Obviously, or so it would at first appear, Putin is a selective student of history. Both he and Patriarch Vladimir Kirill, the Russian Orthodox bishop of Moscow and all of Rus’, look through the lens of pre-revolutionary history, both wanting a return to a new kind of Russian world view. The West sees Putin as wanting a return to Soviet hegemony but that is a mistake worth noting. As Mark Jenkins writes (*Putin, Kirill and the Vatican*, The Catholic Herald, Issue 6624) Patriarch Kirill sees Russia’s future “in terms of a new, transnational, trans-ethnic Orthodox *oikoumene*, stretching East to West.” Jenkins further notes that “it is Kirill’s vision of a Christian empire, rather than the Enlightenment’s vision of a secular nation state, that reflects the historic Christian position.”

Kirill’s vision of a Russia modelled along the lines of

the Byzantine Empire, however, was condemned on 13 March 2022 by over 300 Orthodox clergy who said in an open letter that Kirill and Putin’s *Russkiy mir* (Russian world) vision for Russia amounts to nothing more than Russian nationalism and is a heresy of the kind condemned by an Orthodox Church Council of 1872.

The letter said that the invasion of Ukraine is “rooted in a form of Orthodox ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character, a false teaching which is attracting many”. The letter accused Putin and Kirill of having repeatedly invoked and developed *Russkiy mir* over the last 20 years and, in addition to specifically condemning the pair for the invasion of Ukraine, the letter also accused them of imperialist activities in Africa. The *Russkiy mir* view is, said the letter, “profoundly un-Orthodox, un-Christian and against humanity” and, just as Putin had invaded Ukraine, so, the letter said, had Kirill “invaded the Orthodox Church”. The letter quoted St. Silouan the Athonite: “The grace of God is not in the man who does not love his enemies.”

History shows a proud Ukrainian people willing to fight for their faith, cultural heritage, and their country. Both Kirill and Putin appear to have underestimated the will of the Ukrainian people believing that Ukrainians speak Russian and therefore are Russian, while ignoring the upstream religious and cultural traditions that have sustained them for a very long time.

Or perhaps, like Nikole Hannah-Jones, it is enough to rewrite history with no mention of the past, though altered yet never altered, trusting no one to be sufficiently aware to call into question the obvious lie. There is a tendency for the commonsense majority to hear the cockeyed rooster crow and roll back to sleep. After all, who cares what a few ideologues think, they are the fringe, and no one will remember what they had to say tomorrow. Really?

## Failure is not an option

Wherever Marxism and all its godless derivatives have been attempted, disastrous results have followed; none have ever been long accepted by the unwilling, the enslaved and the dead. Why have they been tried, and failed, so many times? You would think people would learn, but that has only “motivated attempts by the unrepentant would-be present-day adherents to clothe such malevolent ideologies in new garb and continue forward,



as if nothing of significance has changed.” Such isms have been around for centuries; nothing has changed except the sheep’s clothing. We in the West have become too busy to care. Those, like Putin and Xi, are committed to a slow march and that has been and will be our undoing. Jordan Peterson (*Beyond Order*) is one who is awake and aware of the long slow ideological campaign.

For the ideologue, however, nothing remains outside understanding or mastery. An ideological theory explains everything: all the past, all the present, and all the future. This means that an ideologue can consider him or herself in possession of the complete truth .... There is no claim more totalitarian and no situation in which the worst excesses of pride are more likely to manifest themselves (and not only pride, but then deceit, once the ideology has failed to explain the world or predict its future).

Beware of intellectuals who make a monotheism out of their theories of motivation. Beware, in more technical terms, of blanket univariate (single variable) causes for diverse, complex problems. Of course, power plays a role in history, as does economics. But the same can be said of jealousy, love, hunger, sex, cooperation, revelation, anger, disgust, sadness, anxiety, religion, compassion, disease, technology, hatred, and chance—none of which can definitively be reduced to another.

The ultimate question of Man is not who we are, but who we could be. [...] The conceptualization of the monster in the abyss is the eternal predator lurking in the night, ready and able to devour its unsuspecting prey. That is an image that is tens of millions of years old, something coded as deeply in the recesses of our biological structure as anything conceptual can be coded. And it is not just the monsters of nature, but the tyrants of culture and the malevolence of individuals. It is all of that, with the latter dominant, terrible as that is to consider. And it is in the nature of mankind not to cower and freeze as helpless prey animals, nor to become a turncoat and serve evil itself, but to confront the lions in their lairs.

You would think—but then who bothers with the difficulties to think anymore—that in this modern age of “science,” confusion and bewilderment would be but long disregarded relics of those bygone ages of witchcraft, alchemy, virgin sacrifices, fire-breathing dragons, and the three-headed hound of hell. We are beyond such primitives, so we are told, so we tell ourselves, but are we? Jordan Peterson suggests we are not, only the monsters have become more *civilized* “tyrants of culture and the malevo-

lence of individuals.”

Dwight Longenecker contends we are “weighed down with internal quarrels, immorality, and corruption,” that we are “confused and bewildered—knocked sideways by the modern world with its strident ideologies and shallow solutions.”

Modern Christianity has lost sight of its true purpose and mission. Twisted into political activism, therapeutic bromides, and sentimental, subjective devotions, infected with silly New Age self-help theories and weighed down with internal quarrels, immorality, and corruption, Christians are confused and bewildered—knocked sideways by the modern world with its strident ideologies and shallow solutions.

We have been bamboozled into believing that whatever makes us happy is necessarily in our own best interest. We have been bewitched by the *Happy* song, but like a narcotic, such happiness never lasts, leaving us bewitched, bothered, and bewildered all the more.

# The Divine Dilemma

*Not thy will, but thy will be done*

**ON THIS MOST HOLY WEEK** of the year, when we celebrate and commemorate the Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, it is fitting to recall the reason. What follows is taken from my last homily given on the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 2018. It is, in my mind, most appropriate to reconsider why Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, had to suffer and die for us. Easter Blessings!

Not long ago, my wife suggested I might enjoy a small book, a mere sixty pages, written in the fourth century by Saint Athanasius, the twentieth bishop of Alexandria, Egypt. Athanasius played a major role in the First Council of Nicaea. Convened in the year 325 by the Emperor Constantine, it was tasked with addressing the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God and distinct from his Father.

His treatise "**On the Incarnation**" expands with clarity on the conclusion reached by the First Council of Nicaea, that is, that God became man through His son, Jesus of Nazareth, and through Jesus, we too may become one with God. In just a few pages Athanasius explains **why** God became flesh through Jesus and **why** this transformation was necessary to save the corrupted human soul and prepare it for a perfect and immortal union with God.

What I found most compelling is found early in the second chapter, which Athanasius, in perhaps a moment of divine inspiration, titled "**The Divine Dilemma and its Solution in the Incarnation.**" Since man had become so corrupted, he asks "what then was God, being Good, to do?" Athanasius was uncompromisingly blunt in his harsh commentary, arguing that man's wickedness and corruption placed God in a divine dilemma.

When this happened, men began to die, and corruption ran riot among them and held sway over them to an even more than natural degree, because it was the penalty of which God had forewarned them for transgressing the commandment. Indeed, they had in their sinning surpassed all limits; for, having invented wickedness in the beginning and so involved themselves in

death and corruption, they had gone on gradually from bad to worse, not stopping at any one kind of evil, but continually, as with insatiable appetite, devising new kinds of sins. Adulteries and thefts were everywhere, murder and raping filled the earth, law was disregarded in corruption and injustice, all kinds of iniquities were perpetrated by all, both individually and in common. Cities were warring with cities, nations were rising against nations, and the whole earth was rent with factions and battles, while each strove to outdo the other in wickedness. Even crimes contrary to nature were not unknown, but as the martyr-apostle of Christ says:

Their women exchanged the natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26–27).

Athanasius then examines the Divine Dilemma and why God did what he did:

Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them? In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning? Surely it would have been better never to have been created at all than, having been created, to be neglected and perish; and, besides that, such indifference to the ruin of His own work before His very eyes would argue not goodness in God but limitation, and that far more than if He had never created men at all. It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.

He took our body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of human father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men.

## 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

#### God and Intelligence in Modern Philosophy

*Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen*

Longmans, Green & Co., 1928;

Cluny Media, 2019, 322 pages.

#### Religion Without God

*Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen*

Longmans, Green & Co., 1928;

Cluny Media, 2019, 270 pages.

#### The Everlasting Man

*G.K. Chesterton*

Dover Publications, 2007, 270 pages.

#### After Humanity

*Michael Ward*

Word on Fire Academic, 2021, 241 pages.

#### Homo Americanus

*Zbigniew Janowski*

St. Augustine's Press, 2021, 259 pages.

#### The Cardinal Müller Report

*Gerhard Cardinal Müller*

Ignatius Press, 2021, 221 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.

#### The Dying Citizen

*Victor Davis Hanson*

Basic Books, 2021, 420 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

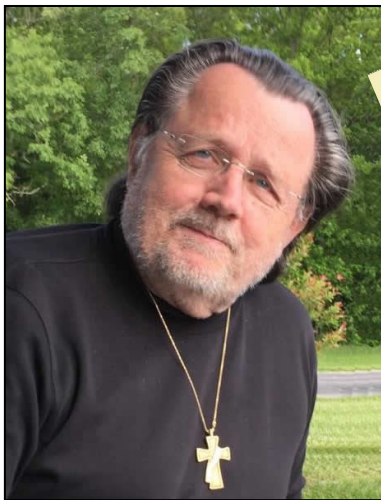
[www.catholicvote.org](http://www.catholicvote.org)

#### The Catholic Thing

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

#### The Postil Magazine

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



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**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.

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