



# Boston Catholic Journal

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## A DEADLY SILENCE

"On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. In front of him there was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus spoke to the scholars of the law and Pharisees in reply, asking, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?" But they kept silent; so he took the man and, after he had healed him, dismissed him. Then he said to them "Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" But they were unable to answer his question."

(Saint Luke 14:1-6)

### ***"But they kept silent ...."***

If the scholars of the Law concede that they would pull out their son or their ox (which, of course, they would), then they acknowledge that they would be willing to break the Law – albeit for a good.

If they do *not* concede that they would pull their son or ox out, then they are liars.

There is no middle way – as we find *so* often in the teachings, and always in the most *important* teachings, of Jesus Christ. It is not that a "middle way" is denied us – there *is* no "middle way" *to be* denied of us.

To the Scholars, the Law was an inexpungable good. To pull a man or an animal out of a pit is also an undeniable and necessary good. But if you do the second you violate the first.

Just as you cannot choose between two *evils* without incurring sin, it would appear, at least in this confrontation between Jesus and the Scholars of the Law, that you equally cannot choose between two *goods* without incurring sin.

Something is wrong, and they know it, so they are quiet.

Quite an enigma, yes?

Do not be hasty in dealing harshly with them. How would *you* answer? In fact, how *do* you answer this nearly every day?

You do. In your choices.

You *must* choose. You cannot, *not* choose. In *not* choosing you know that you have already made a choice, but have only pretended to have no complicity in the consequences of that choice.

## There is no Middle Way

Most of our moral choices, in the end, are rarely choices between good and evil, between what very clearly presents itself as either indefeasibly good or irredeemably evil.

In fact, we never *knowingly* choose what is evil for us, what is harmful to us (even the suicide thinks that he is doing a good: hoping to escape the pain of this life in the hope of a better one, or no life at all.)

In essence, it is not in our metaphysical and moral constitution to willingly *choose* irredeemable evil.

But we are clever, and still look for a path that spurs off the road, and circumvents the choice, a path that will not compel us to call good, "good" and evil, "evil." We wish to prove, to justify, ourselves, our cleverness to God. So perverse is this impulse that we are prepared to *deliberately* choose evil in order to assert our autonomy from God, our independence from any binding moral law.

However, even to consciously *choose* something that is evil, "as evil", is ineluctably to choose a good: the good of autonomy, of *freely choosing* – the perceived good of positing, of proving, that such choices held to be impossible, are, in fact, possible after all, through the exercise of the will. This ultimately spurious "*overcoming*" of the impossible is perceived, pursued, as a good, however intrinsically evil the consequences are upon having attained it, for even the "perceived" good of the achievement will not exceed the very real evil that it necessarily entails. It is, in the end, a factitious effort to translate evil into good.

We are very clever at concealing this from ourselves, at explaining away our sinful choices. The fact of the matter is that real moral decisions involve *competing goods* apart from glaring contrasts in light and darkness. We always construe our poor choices as, in some way, good, as

beneficial, to us. If we follow the skein, it will always lead to the *presumption* of a good.

And now you are quiet, too, like the Scholars of the Law. And for the same reason.

Every day you are confronted with competing goods between which you must choose – and for all your subtleties and equivocating, you ultimately *do* choose.

## **You must**

But do you choose well and wisely? In choosing one good, you forsake another. Fidelity is a good. So is sexual pleasure.

How do you choose? Both are good and both are incompatible (except in marriage – for those of you who are quibblers).

Ultimately the answer does not depend on **WHICH** you choose – but on **WHAT** you choose – really, *on what you have already chosen*. For in choosing the **WHAT**, you will immediately and concomitantly choose the **HOW**.

Your choices are only two: yourself ... or God. There are no other choices. Every other nuance of choice is just an inflection of the one or the other.

**Which** you choose will depend on **what** you have already chosen.

"Which would **I** choose?" ... or "Which would **God** have me choose?"

You will immediately utter the latter if you have **already** chosen God – and the "*which*" that you choose will follow from it.

The Scholars of the Law knew this, too, and were silent because they cherished what they wished to keep and what God wished them to surrender. In this sense, it was a deadly silence ... that ultimately became a deafening silence.

Choose God, then. In all things. At all times.

Everything else will follow.

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