The Stark Choice Before Us: Everything or Nothing at All

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All Around us is a Great Battle Between the True God and an Authentic Nothing, where there is no Life

By Elizabeth Scalia March 7, 2019

In today's Mass readings, we read from the book of Deuteronomy the ancient words of Moses:

"Today I have set before you
life and prosperity, death and doom.
I have set before you life and death,
the blessing and the curse.
Choose life, then,
that you and your descendants may live, by lov-
ing the LORD, your God,
heeding his voice, and holding fast to him.
For that will mean life for you,
a long life for you to live on the land that the
LORD swore
he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob." (Deut 30:15, 19-20)

He knew what he was about, did Moses, and even these thousands of years later we are called upon to make that harrowing choice, but we don't realize just how stark it is. We have been so long fighting among ourselves about life and death issues, and the ideologies into which they have been thrust and grounded over decades, that we barely hear what Moses is saying above our own internal knowing.

"Life and death."

"The blessing and the curse."

"Choose life."

Thanks to ongoing dialogues and demonstrations for or against abortion, for or against euthanasia, for and against "born alive" bills and immigration issues and death penalties, the words themselves almost roll over us, soft as buzzwords meant for overfamiliar concepts.

But there is much more going on here, and we cannot permit our thinking to rest on our acclimated understanding.

The choice before us, at its root, is between nothing and everything.

We can see it in the headlines, where women embrace a so-called "Birthstrike," declaring that they will forego having children in order to "save the planet." If you dismiss their idea as extreme, note that over 30% of Americans seem to think these women are on the right track.

If that doesn't sound like much, consider that once upon a time—not so very long ago—it was understood that infanticide was an unconditional evil. Now we're watching state assemblies cheer and governors light up skyscrapers as babies born alive during attempted abortions become legally kill-worthy. And that goalpost is already being pushed further:

A young Facebook friend reported that she'd just got home from a college class that had taken up abortion. Most students treated it as self-evidently good.

If aborting an unborn child is all right, she asked them, what about killing a five-year-old? Classmates argued that yes, if a mother found her five-year-old too difficult to raise, killing him would be "more humane." More humane, apparently, than letting him live with imperfect parenting. Or giving him to a family who wanted him.

Even as we are resisting the utilitarian urge to "compassionately" end lives that have become challenging, even as we endure the stupid pronouncements of some who declare they'd prefer to see their families spend money "on vacations" than on the cost of caring for them in their inconvenient dotage, we are seeing articles about adult children who, unwilling to care for an aged parent, simply decide to kill him.

Canada, we read, is "laying the groundwork" for child euthanasia.

On another front—one that on the surface seems not to touch on "life or death" issues at all—is the

rapid eclipse of the actual biology for the sake of personal happiness, the rise of gender theory over sex and fact. There is a wholesale sacrifice of understanding going on as society moves with unusual speed to affirm those dealing with gender dysphoria. Harvard Medical School is adjusting its core curriculum in the interest of “unearthing where wrong ideas are unwittingly getting cemented in people’s heads and correcting them from the beginning so they don’t have to be unlearned later. It’s about rewriting the stories and the language we use, built around a better understanding of how sex and gender really work in people’s lives.”

Most of us are all for compassion, and we’re all for treating people respectfully due to their innate dignity as humans loved into being by a Creator God, but we’re in such a worldwide rush to affirm each other that we’re not asking serious questions, like whether blocking puberty in a child, or offering mastectomies and genital-ectomies to the young, even without parental input, might be too much, too far, too fast.

We are treating what we do not fully understand—cannot fully understand—because we are not taking time to do actual research into learning, for instance, whether the rise in gender dysphoria (and the dramatic drop in male fertility for that matter) is connected to environmental damage wrought by artificial birth control and other hormonal abuse in both medicine and farming. Perhaps a lot of people suddenly are being “born this way,” as Lady Gaga sings, but shouldn’t we investigate why that might be before moving on to “whatever makes everyone happy,” which sounds far too much like the dark energy behind the philosophy of “Do as thou wilt.”

The questions matter, and the philosophies matter, precisely because of the choice Moses is bringing to us in today’s readings.

Because at the bottom of all of these headlines—all the upheaval, whether social or sexual, family-focused or focus-grouped—is one thing: the creation of an everlasting eclipse or, said another way, the inviting in of a great Nothing.

Nothing is the place without God—the place where God is not—because “with God nothing is impossible . . .” (Luke 1:37)

We don’t think about that, but we should—and a lot. We limit the thought to mean God “can do everything” which is true, but we rarely stop to think that with God nothingness becomes impossible because God IS. Where God resides there is life, creation, affirmation, all brought forth by the infinite force of his own divine Being.

All of these headlines—all of these strangely conceited human notions, formed to “save the planet” or to “empower us” to “free us” from our oppressive bodies, or the oppressive accountability we keep bumping into on the way to shaping our own ideas of what our oppressive lives should actually be—they all bring us to a sterile place, where life is not.

The great battle taking place all around us is really a battle between the True God and an authentic Nothing, where there is no life.

Have you ever gone to a wake and touched the hand of a corpse? You don’t even have to touch the body—even leaving your hand ten inches above you can feel the cold, the thorough cold, all around. The life is gone. The shell that remains will soon be only dust—sterile, absent of potential, and full of nothing.

Today we have set before us God or nothing. Let us choose wisely.

This originally appeared in the Word on Fire blog, March 7, 2019.

Biographical Note

Elizabeth Scalia is a Benedictine Oblate and an award-winning writer. She is a regularly-featured columnist at *First Things* and at *The Catholic Answer Magazine* and Editor at Large for *Word on Fire*. Read her books, *Strange Gods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life* and *I Don’t Want to Be a Hoo-er* (*And You Shouldn’t Want to Be One, Either), with Foreword by Cardinal Timothy Dolan.