

It was only in 1981 that the first defence of "The devil may me do it" appeared in the American legal system. It was the trial of Arne Shayanne Johnson and has become known as "The devil made me do it" case. On November 24th, 1981 in Brookfield Connecticut Dwayne Johnson was convicted of 1st-degree manslaughter for killing his landlord Alan Bono. Johnson argued that as Satan possessed his son, and several priests had failed to exorcise him, he, in turn, was possessed. An ensuing argument with his landlord led to the manslaughter. The defence was squashed because it was not possible to prove or disprove, and thus, inadmissible.

The case, as you would imagine, created an instant uproar. This excuse 'that the devil made me do it led' to many books, articles, and now a film just released –"The Conjuring III: The Devil in Connecticut".

Such an excuse flies in the face of James 1:14. I quote, "each person is tempted when they are lured and enticed by their desire".

We sin, and it does not matter where that temptation comes from.

We sin.

Paul, in Romans 3.10 and following says "we are plagued by and infected with sin."

I'm not going to doubt there is such a thing as demonic oppression. However, when it comes down to what happens in temptation, it is our self who gives credence and surrenders to desire. We are ultimately responsible for our own decisions.

At our baptism, we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us overcome sin. (1 John 4:4).

Everything we need for a life of in godliness is given to us. (2 Peter 1: 3).

Therefore if we sin and we know the difference between right and wrong, we cannot blame the devil. We cannot blame the circumstances in which we transpire. Ultimately, we are responsible for our actions. Until we can recognise that this problem lies within us, we will never arrive at a solution. (Romans 7: 20)

For some people, it will sound very harsh than when they hear that the problem lies within. We need to be able, with God's help, achieve a victory over temptation. God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability (1 Cor 10:13)

We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us overcome sin ([1 John 4:4](#)). We have everything we need for life and godliness ([2 Peter 1:3](#)). If we sin, we have no excuse. We cannot blame the devil. We cannot blame our circumstances. We can only blame ourselves. And, until we recognise that the problem resides within us ([Romans 7:20](#)), we will never arrive at the solution.[\[1\]](#)

Let us, for a moment, revisit the first woman commonly called Eve. What was her temptation? Should we blame her on account of gender, weakness, or the devil? Or was she simply given a choice as any human, and failed in logic?

I'm ruling out the gender and backing logic, although flawed.

"You are not to eat the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and you shall not eat it for on the day you eat it you will surely die", said God. Therein lies the temptation. What if we could have self-will and determine our actions without having to bother the Creator?

The serpent replied, God knows if you eat this, your eyes will open, and you will be like God knowing the difference between good and evil.

Sounds good. God is very busy, and, well, if we know what is bad, we can be trusted to do the right thing...

Just emphasise that point. "You will be like God knowing the difference between good and evil".

The writer of Genesis continues that the human looked and saw that the tree was good for food. It was a delight to the eyes, and it being wise is desirable. The human took the fruit. She ate it and also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

And then their eyes were both opened.

They suddenly knew the difference between good and bad, right and wrong. What happened next is a psychologist's picnic!

They at once realised that they were naked. At that moment therein lies a lot of the problems of the world in terms of understanding our modesty! They sewed fig-leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

I digress for a moment looking back at my trip to Tasmania last week. I was talking with some of the carers who come in to see my parents. One of the daily tasks is ensuring that they are showered and making sure medical regimens are being followed. There are often moments of modesty to be considered. My father needed some ointment placed close up high on his legs. The carer doing this would not look on his nakedness and feeling embarrassed about this, Dad made a full-sized fig leaf out of paper and covered himself. The carer still has that fig leaf and in telling me, her eyes went watery at the ensuing mirth this caused!

There is no other hiding place we can have from the evils of the world other than in God. It is in God that we have the understanding and strength to overcome oppression. There will be times when there are torments, and there will be a time when it will be tough to overcome what we are facing. It is truly and only with gods help we will prevail.

The Messianic mission includes: the blind shall see, the lame shall walk, the mute will speak, the deaf will hear.

Sometimes that physical seeing hearing, speaking and hearing may not be the gift we have to give. It may well be that we are to use our eyes, ears and hands to advocate strongly for the rights of those people.

What is important to us is how we choose to respond to the circumstances and people around us.

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is significant. It is at the heart of what it is to be a Christian. Given that we are responsible for doing what we can for others, then the temptations of Jesus take on a new and more robust sense of urgency.

But what if an opportunity to make a difference comes with a decision of weighing one thing against another?

Proportionalism – the application of the 'lesser of two evils' is still evil. It's the same evil that we will hear in the passion gospels over Easter. "It is better for one man to die than for the entire nation to suffer." (John 11.50)

The temptations that Jesus faces is to be able to feed the hungry, to restore justice where justice is required and to do so without impunity. It's a great temptation. To achieve this, all we need do is renounce God and allow the one who is tempting you to have control.

Think of what we could do if we could solve all the food security and water security issues in the world. Think of what we could do if we could stop all the injustices to other people, ceasing wars, and ending oppression. What if we could return the refugees safely to their homes and ensure prosperity? Then there is the final temptation: to be able to use whatever means it takes and do it without being held accountable.

To act without impunity is to act without responsibility. "The devil made me do it." "I have the power." "History is on my side." "Make the World Great Again." A convenient, comfortable and sinful route.

We are ultimately responsible for our actions.

Lent, for us, the time of atonement for our Jewish sisters and brothers, and Ramadan for the people of Islam is essential. In our scriptural and theological and personal journey, it is a time for us to take stock of who we are, where we are at, and what we need to leave behind.

Jesus answers all the temptations presented with this following command: "Away with you, Tempter! For it is written, "worship the Lord your God, and serve only him".

It was then that the angels came and waited on him – the messengers of God – tending to his needs and allowing him the strength to begin the Messianic mission.

Saying "yes" to God was in accord with the Father's will. It was not to take a desirable and easy path.

During this Lent, may we all find the time to look at the things we are to do.

Are we doing something under the teachings of Jesus, or are we doing it because it is easier to take a shortcut?

Are we seeking to have a short-term gain, without being mindful of the effects on others?

Love is to be our Lenten calling.¹ In love, there is newness of life and all we need for the morrow.

“You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: So I did sit and eat”².

May this time of Lent lead to newness of life, an affirmation of the Holy Spirit that dwells within you and bring love and goodness to all whom you meet.

[1] <https://www.gotquestions.org/the-devil-made-me-do-it.html>

¹ James McAuley

² George Herbert