



The spirit of the Law

Epikēia is a Greek word I learnt and loved when studying theology at the Seminary. Roughly it means: “Interpreting the mind of the lawgiver when the lawgiver is absent.” It is a notion that has stood me in good stead all my life. When our professor was five minutes late at the Seminary, we would flee the lecture hall, discerning the mind of the lawgiver; he decided not to teach that day!

Epikēia came to mind recently while reading and reflecting on the daily Gospel readings and witnessing Jesus so aptly and beautifully applying Epikēia. “The sabbath is made for us and not we for the sabbath,” (Mark 2:27) – when the disciples were accused of breaking the sabbath by eating heads of wheat as they walked through the fields.

“Is it lawful to do good or bad on the sabbath?” he asked when he cured the man with the withered hand on the sabbath, (Mark 3:4).

The scribes and Pharisees followed the Law perfectly, to the letter, but never came to know the mind of the lawgiver – God. The Law seemed to have become their God. Jesus, on the other hand, knew, intimately, the mind of the lawgiver, his Father, also his heart.

How do we see the Law?

In these days, almost a year now, we have been deprived of our faith community, Sunday Eucharist, the Sacraments. After years and years of keeping the Law, the Church teachings and living them, have we come to know the mind of the lawgiver? Do we practice Epikēia? Jesus has this wonderful freedom regarding the Law, he finds space in it, he applies it, interprets it, with compassion and largesse.

“Remember what David did when he and his companions were hungry, how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?” (Mark 2:25-26) What freedom.

Perhaps we all need a good dose of Epikēia. We are no longer kids, we’re adults, so it’s not a cold-hearted, blind adherence to the Law nor rushing out of the classroom when the lecturer is five minutes late; but doing what Jesus did, getting into the mind and heart of God and acting and living from there. Not the *letter* of the Law, but the *spirit* of the Law, the Holy Spirit.

The Pharisees said to him, “She was caught in the very act of adultery. The Law says she should be stoned to death, what do you say?” (John 8:5). He replied, “Let the one without sin be the first to throw the stone,” (John 8:7). He is so good at it, it’s liberating and empowering.

Love,

Michael

Daniel Lattier

“St. Thomas Aquinas classified epikēia as a virtue, because it recognizes that it’s sometimes necessary to set aside the law in order to protect justice and the common good. In an age where we see an increasing number of laws and regulations, and a decreased emphasis on prudence, epikēia helps remind us that laws are made for men, not men for laws.”

Daniel Lattier is a former Senior Fellow at Intellectual Takeout. He received his B.A. in Philosophy and Catholic Studies from the University of St. Thomas, MN, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. You can find his academic work at Academia.edu.

Michael news

Michael remains in seclusion – now moving from the sabbatical stage to one of discernment.

Given the ongoing uncertainty involving the pandemic, Michael has made the decision to cancel all in-person retreats for the foreseeable future.

However, Randy and Laura Hipke, working together with Patrick, Michael’s brother in South Africa, are looking into the possibility of Michael offering a different form of retreat experience online.

This idea is still in the very early stages of development. In the coming months we will let you know if it proves to be viable. Your prayers for this project are much appreciated as is your understanding and patience.

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<https://hermitfish.com/audio-retreats>

Thanks for your support

Michael is grateful for everyone’s prayers, good wishes and support. Donations to Hermit Fish, his 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization are fully tax deductible. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated. FID: 82-2489475

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Creative and logistical support for Michael, his *Buen Camino* newsletter and HermitFish.com website are provided by Enigma | LA, enigmala.com