

MYSTIC LIGHT

Freedom

FREEDOM IS GENERALLY understood to mean exemption from controls and restriction, being able to do what one wants, having a free rein in one's affairs.

The history of ordering human societies shows that freedom is a late comer. Man's fledgling, untutored mind has long made external control of his actions necessary, even as close supervision of children best serves their developmental interests.

As the human spirit gathers wisdom distilled from the experience of many lives, increasing degrees of permissiveness and latitude for self-determination become feasible. Political systems change to accommodate this evolution of human consciousness.

The French Revolution was revolutionary because the entire populace wanted to be free from autocratic rule and to try their hand at self-rule. But they traded unjust monarchy for bloody anarchy and later, their designated liberator and defender of freedom became simply another dictator.

Thus far, the most successful experiment in political freedom has been achieved through the democratic governance of the American republic, which reserves to the people unalienable rights, including not only life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but ten additional rights or guarantees of personal freedom, as enumerated in the Bill of Rights, among which are the freedom of speech, the rights to assembly, privacy, the practice of one's religion, due process, legal representation, and others.



Detail, Fresco (c. 1512), Raphael (1483-1520), Stanza d'Eliodoro, Vatican, Rome

The "angel of the Lord" who freed Peter from prison (Acts 12:1-19) is esoterically the angel of the vital body, specifically, the soul body (golden wedding garment), which liberates the higher vehicles from the prison of the physical body.

External freedom is the fruit of a people's ethical maturity. Given prematurely, it results in excess, error, and both individual and collective disorder, because, as its abuse teaches, freedom is the product of hard-won human understanding and self-control. Being free to do as one pleases may pose grave dangers. Since an unsupervised child is a threat to itself, a perimeter to contain its activities is set up for its own protection. Its first boundary is its crib. Infant humanity is comparably delimited.

Equating freedom with a catalogue of externally conferred personal rights may well lead to severe self-restriction and isolation, including the suffering incident to self-indulgent living and the solitary confinement of vanity and me-firstism.

There are what may be called negative freedoms. These include demands or expectations that one be *free from* something or someone. While some of these are sane and reasonable, others are self-serving,

silly, and corrupting. Freedom from civil violence, vandalism of one's property, and attack from a foreign power are fundamental needs that promote a society's peace and security. But freedom from sickness is realistic only if it doesn't mean exemption from the consequences of one's actions, because, in all candor, most illnesses result from an ego's prior actions.

For instance, clairvoyant research has traced much of the current impairment or debility of the physical body to earlier abuse of the life force. Freedom from the weaknesses of old age, ever sought after, if granted would keep the spirit tightly coiled in its physical instrument, whereas the bodily frailty of old age, as well as debilitating illness, may permit greater soul growth as consciousness detaches from the world of the physical senses and becomes more attuned to supersensible reality.

Positive freedom designates that condition in which one is fully able to do. One is *free for* others. One is liberated from self-consuming egoism. This freedom is not given but earned, attained by conscious work on the inner person. It arises from self-discipline, sacrifice, self-denial, and altruism. Duties and obligations promote the experience of freedom and give it structure.

The juvenile equation of freedom with total absence of regulation or requirement describes an uninhabitable and unbearable condition of chaos. Chaos is ordered by the sounding of spiritual archetypes. It is the trinitarian work of will, wisdom, and activity.

If Old Testament freedom tended to mean freedom *from* God's wrath, from the anticipatory fear and retroflective guilt associated with wrongdoing, the almost inevitable violation of the all-pervading law, New Testament freedom centers in God's love, incarnate in Christ Jesus, whereby the abyss between creature and Creator is bridged by the God made man, Who redeems humanity from servitude

to sin and death to dwell in unbroken spirit consciousness. Freedom's promissory note of faith is honored and redeemed by the Holy Spirit, Who confers gifts that fortify the soul, enlighten the mind, and confirm the Self in its creative liberty in God.

Contemporary misguided freedom seekers, post-Nietzschian deconstructors, whose targets include the meaning of language itself, are seemingly blind to the contradiction involved in their proposing a world that has no intrinsic meaning, only what the individual person arbitrarily assigns it. At the same time they claim for *this* proposition and its language categorical and binding truth!

A toxic strain of the Aquarian impulse, based on this radical relativism, prompts its proponents to support or condone whatever they chose, uninformed by natural and spiritual law. Thus, all religions being equal, none is absolutely binding, and one may espouse one, all, or none, without consequence. The sanctity of life? Life can be taken by the one who has it,

since it is their's (the pregnant mother's child, the potential suicide's), not an absolute God's, which, they say, is but a human construct.

The exercise of these arrogated and arrogant rights or demanded freedoms assures purgatorial correction and subsequent lives of significantly reduced liberty of body and soul in order to teach the requisite lessons: that freedom and self-will are polar opposites; that willful doing is willing one's undoing; that living unto oneself is living against oneself; that full, positive freedom is only in God, and that one best knows and realizes what one knows by doing all in love, even as did Christ Who, by abdicating His heavenly throne for the earthly cross, gained a larger measure of freedom for all humanity.

Freedom comes with a price—constant vigilance. It is not a given. To presume it is to venture losing it, for it needs safeguarding, as the ACLU reminds us of our public or political freedom. Even less is

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psychological or soul freedom a sure thing, to be taken for granted. Its greatest enemy is ignorance and its greatest defense is self-knowledge. Nor does self-interest necessarily promote one's best interests.

The fruits of freedom are borne on the tree of knowledge which grows in the sunlight of faith and is rooted in the soil of humility. These fruits are formed and mature through the through the daily disciplines of self-restraint and patient continuance in well-doing. Freedom can't be known and maintained until its value is appreciated. Adamic man was not free because they were ignorant. Paradisal life may have been idyllic, but it was not free.

The confusion of independence with freedom is made by adolescents, of whatever age. While the acquisition of the ego first made possible man's self-consciousness and his ability to act from self-determined motives, we must ever remember that, absent God, man and creation cease to be. Thus, while he may advance by degrees in apparent independence, man's competence and autonomy are always relative, predicated as they must be on preexisting universal laws sustained by sublime spiritual powers.

To the extent man ceases being an automaton, acting instinctively as an animal responds to the direct impulses of its group spirit, to that degree he has introjected divine intelligence, humanized it. He is no less dependent on it. But now its wisdom passes before his mind's eye and illumines his consciousness. Now he is free to act on it or ignore it. In ever greater measure he is in charge of his own destiny and must answer for his actions.

A central paradox of human evolution is that there is no freedom without self-control, which the Old Testament Law was given to promote. The Commandments were not designed to curtail human expression and opportunity but to facilitate them by directing desire energies into constructive channels while discouraging and penalizing actions injurious to spiritual freedom. The belief that obedi-



Oil on canvas, Matthias Stomer (c. 1600-1650), 60 1/4 x 80 1/2 in. Acquired in 1795. Inv. 1363. Louvre, Paris

Pilate Washing His Hands

That Pilate should have to ask "What is truth?" and not be answered, is one with his belief that he could "wash his hands" and be free of the whole Jesus affair. His ignorance must entail difficult personal repercussions, as the law of consequence dictates. Living by the knowledge of this truth helps to set one free.

ence and self-control are inimical to freedom is naive and commonplace. Man's experience of freedom grows apace with the realization of his God-reliance.

The brazen claim to unassisted achievement cannot long be maintained in light of contrary evidence and one will in time either recant one's claim and acknowledge the living Creator or devolve on a course of existence woeful to contemplate.

The Lucifers, a "splinter" group of angels, seek to use man's brain and body for their own evolutionarily divergent needs and they prompt humans to become unduly enamored of self-styled freedom and to think more highly of themselves than is prudent—resulting in self-deception and moral havoc.

Although the Lucifers have contributed to the growth of man's self-consciousness and knowledge, their influence must be tempered by humility and charity.

While the Lucifers tempts to bogus forms of spiritual independence and achievement, while another class of supersensible powers, Ahrimanic beings, in the Bible collectively called "the Prince of this world," tempt man's intellect to reject all spiritual realities and to believe solely in the existence of the

material dimension.

Ignorance of his spiritual nature, fostered by Ahriman, drives man to be preoccupied with his physical body and to regard it as the sole source of this his only life, to subscribe to the cult of youth, and to dread the encroachments of physical death, which “ends it all.” So much for independence! With respect to Lucifer, Ahriman, and all other “rulers of the darkness of this world,” who are experienced as forces within our individual persons,

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Goethe reminds us that “From all the powers that hold the world in chains/ Man frees himself when self-control he gains.”

Humans were born into physical bodies under prohibition: Don’t eat of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. But eat we did and eat we will until sufficient knowledge gained from bitter experience shows the *reason* for this injunction. Laws are designed to inform conduct and advance right action, but their effect shall be experienced as restraint until they are interiorized and given personal assent as beneficent guides.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul says, “Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in [this] one word”—love (5:13-14). Addressing the brethren in Asia Minor as “free” beings in Christ, Peter warned them not to use their “liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16).

If we shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free (John 8:32), obviously knowing truth becomes a vital concern. But, like Pilate, we will get no answer to our inquiries, surely not the right answer, if our ruling thoughts and daily actions are not fully permeable to truth’s transformative power. If our pursuit is but an armchair exercise, a Sunday

ritual, or a curious dabbling, we can expect little soul growth. Truth bids us seek it with the same commitment and unity of purpose as Christ Jesus expected from his disciples when he said, “follow me.” For He Himself is the Truth (John 14:6). And he who hears aright will follow, will seek, because no other voice has truth’s authority and essential appeal. Truth always gives as much of itself as we can receive in the right way.

As long as we sin, we shall be unfree, for sin separates us from God, it enslaves us, and puts us in conflict with others. Or, reversing the standard sequence, separation from God is sin. Jesus told the Pharisees they would be free if they continued in His word, for they would then know the truth. They protested. As children of Abraham they had never been in bondage to anyone. How then can Jesus make them free? Jesus answered, “Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” If one objects to this word *slavery*, let him select any prominent negative habit or compulsion (addiction) and state categorically that it can be surrendered, *stopped permanently, now*.

How do we rid ourselves of self, and sin, and fear? *We* don’t. But God through Christ in and with us can. That is why evangelist John Stott calls Christianity a “rescue religion.” “It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins. This is the main theme of the Bible”—salvation, liberation from the three principal consequences of sin: alienation, egoism, and human conflict.

There is what some might call the ultimate unfreedom. Death. Not death as the laying down of the body by the Spirit which then rises to the heaven worlds, nor even that which utterly halts life, but death as either the interminable stagnation of limbo, or, even worse, the hell of endless self-torture.

Physical detention does not negate one’s real freedom, whether as in the form of bodily impairment, or imprisonment, such as Peter and Paul experienced. Consider the lot of Christ Jesus, God’s Son. What greater restriction can one conceive than to be nailed to a cross? All His bodily processes, through gradual loss of blood, are brought to near standstill. Notwithstanding excruciating pain, extremities of thirst, difficulty of breathing and retention of consciousness, He maintains such



Created by Ariel Agemian exclusively for the Confraternity of the Precious Blood

The difficult, for some insuperable, paradox of the Christian faith is that true freedom is gained through the cross of suffering, the crucifixion of the lower nature. Seen from the earthly below, sacrifice is of dubious merit. From above, it "makes whole," and wholly in God. "When thou art troubled and afflicted, then is the time to merit."—Thomas à Kempis

poise and moral grace that He can forgive His persecutors and look after His mother and beloved disciple, and hold onto consciousness until every atom of human flesh has been irradiated by His spirit—here is the figure of perfect *working freedom*, the assertion of will to commit to a goal that requires staying the course while all that adversarial powers can muster is thrown against that resolve—to no avail. No clearer instance have we that freedom is founded on spiritual will. Christ Jesus demonstrated this holy power of self-abnegating will and then, brace yourself, He tells us to follow Him that we too might be free.

Of the four kingdoms in physical manifestation, only humans can know freedom. Animals are not free because they cannot think. Thinking is a spiritual activity. The voluminous writer and Catholic apologist Gilbert Keith Chesterton knows this truth: "There is a liberty that has never been chained.

There is a liberty that has made men happy in dungeons...It is the liberty of the mind." Animals can be undisturbed in their natural element, but until they know conscious choice and can reason, freedom must refer only to unfettered physical movement and natural health uncompromised by environmental degradation.

A key to freedom of the spirit, which is ultimate freedom, is given by the word *service*. The Rosicrucian Fellowship's daily devotional prayer addressed to the Father God says, "we thank Thee for the privilege for serving Thee." Why privilege? Because loving service, through the indwelling of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit is *the way* we fulfill our divine potential as sons and daughters of God.

Paul urged the Colossians, "Do all things as unto the Lord, for ye serve the Lord Christ" (3:23-24), whose service is perfect freedom, even if one is in prison, where Paul, who called himself "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2, 9), and "the prisoner of the Lord" (Eph. 4:1), wrote several of his epistles. He knows that "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. 3:17). And he urges his fellow Christians to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1), which designates the effect of all human laws. No outward observance or conformity to manmade law can secure inner liberty.

Would you be free? Follow Christ to the cross. Would you be free? Submit patiently to unjust punishment, for this has God's approval and was perfected by His Alone Begotten. Would you be free? Make of your life a living sacrifice, for this is our calling, this is the way to beatitude. Of course this advice is foolishness to the worldly wise, and a stumbling block to the hard-nosed realist. But then both groups have either made this sense-based life sufficient to their needs, or, in a failure of spiritual nerve, have ceased to believe in any Divinity that would require what to them seems like suicide, not realizing that the *sui* (self) that is "killed" is the body-based, material world-rooted identity which, like a weed, is choking out awareness of the true Self.

The folly of the cross is accepted and embraced because by it we gain the highest freedom, freedom



From *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

With His 'I'-Staff Moses Raises the Serpent Nature in the Body's Wilderness

*"Prior to the dawn of the epoch of the 'I', the serpent still ruled over the human being, for, from below to above, it could become the staff of ancient clairvoyance in his spine. Increasingly, it emerged as the serpent of temptation and doom on the tree of man's being. Beginning with Moses, man could freely grasp the staff of his upright form at the forehead above and thus force the serpent into his service. Henceforth, he could lift the lower elements, given him merely by nature, into consciousness and thereby transform them into spiritual strength. Now, man himself was the Staff of Mercury on which the snake was crucified."**

from ourselves, freedom in God as his beloved Son.

Freedom's motto is not "me first" but "God first." Freedom is not the condition in which life waits on our every whim and is at our elbow to dispatch each "I want." It is more likely to open its supersensible vistas *after* we have ceased to insist on our personal preferences and *after* we have endured long sessions of personal injury, insult and humiliation, allowing God to order our lives according to His will.

Those for whom freedom means the absence of obliging connections to others may well be rehearsing for confinement in that prison without walls which is the limbo of forlorn egoism. Miserable, they yet think living in God a greater misery, for it means surrendering the fiction of the autonomous self, which for them is tantamount to annihilation. Sad and strange how the mind can fetter as well as free.

Theologian Karl Rahner's elaboration of the last phrase of the Lord's Prayer is "Deliver us from evil—from the evil of centering our lives upon ourselves, in order that we may learn that Thou art the center of all, and that only in Thee can we find freedom worthy of the children of God."

By deliberative thinking and conscientious willing in the service of God man creates the occult staff of freedom whose rudiments were first fashioned by Moses. In this occult staff the "serpent" force in the physical spine is taken hold of at the head, in the clearly conscious thought element, not permitting any interruption by subconscious or "natural" impulses to this clear consciousness which forms and maintains what may be called the freedom-axis in the etheric body—man's second, higher spine. As anthroposophist Emil Bock writes,* Moses "led [mankind] into the evolution of consciousness that takes hold of the human being from above

to below and makes freedom possible for man, thereby returning divinity to him....The line of freedom, the row of force centers, that develops from the forehead to the heart in the etheric body of man, by the ego's efforts, is none other than the location where the natural and the transformed life bodies, etheric body and life-spirit, permeate each other."

Finally, there can be no ultimate freedom until humans chose to be who they are created to be—Children of God and heirs to the Kingdom of Spirit. Which means what? That many of the earlier construals of freedom are actually forms of captivity, all of which can be grouped under the heading of egoism. It means that one is not truly free until one serves God, only and always, for in the deepest sense, God is our essential being and serving His will is serving and living through the Christ in each of us. □

—C.W.

*Moses: *From the Mysteries of Egypt to the Judges of Israel*, 224 pages, 1986, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, VT