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FOREWORD

Since the dawn of history, the human odyssey has in large part been a quest for freedom. In this respect the present age is no different. With varying degrees of success, we continue to explore diverse models of freedom -- political, psychological, religious, and economic.

In the first century the Christian message encountered and joined issue with alternative views of freedom. It is equally important that Christians today join in the ongoing conversation regarding the nature and significance of human freedom.

These essays, originally presented in a seminar conducted with the Administrative Board of the Institute for Christian Studies, are here made available to a wider audience as an expression of the Institute's commitment to the task of encouraging reflection on the implications of Christian faith for life.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the faculty of the Institute for their patience and cooperation in this task. Special recognition and thanks are also due to Mrs. Frances Horn, Institute Secretary, and Ms. Kathryn Pinkerton for their valuable aid in preparing the manuscript for printing.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

FREEDOM AT CORINTH

A Conversation between Paul the Apostle and Lucian,
a Corinthian Christian

By Allan McNicol and James Thompson

Lucian (James Thompson):

As a native of Corinth and a Hellenist in my cultural background, I find myself in the very happy situation of saying that I've found in Jesus Christ what my entire cultural heritage has tried to offer. There is no more precious word for us in our heritage than the word "freedom." We have in our past the heroic stories of the men who gave their lives for the freedom of our Greek people. As a child, I learned in school about those who gave their lives to protect us from the Persians coming from the East. Thus freedom is a very precious word to all of us in the Greek tradition. Consequently, I have a special appreciation for the freedom I have found in Jesus Christ.

Of all people, we Greeks know what freedom is all about. If I were to define the word "freedom," I would say that freedom means not being someone else's slave. Freedom means doing what I want to do, going where I want to go, and not being bound by obligations to institutions and to others. To be free is to be my own master, to control my own destiny and to determine my own outcome as a human being. To be free is to control

my life and not to allow others to control my fate.

As many of you know, we Greeks have in our history the most noble political experiment in human rights that the world has ever known. There was a time when we had a democracy; and under that democracy, there were rights for all free citizens. Those rights insured to us by the common laws that we had the right to speak and to act and to go where we wanted to go. Under our constitution, our rights were protected and our laws gave us the structure of our freedom. Unfortunately, our experiment did not last.

No one knew more about freedom than our philosophers. On the street corners, I used to hear the teachers talk about freedom. I heard stories about the oracle at Delphi where we would go to get messages from the gods. One important slogan that we knew from the Oracle from Delphi was “Know yourself.” Thus we knew that to be free was to be in touch with ourselves and to develop our full human potential. How very appreciative I am of the great teacher, Socrates, who told us to develop our own potential and who taught us that we must examine our own lives and discover that man is the measure of all things. But I owe more gratitude to my Stoic teachers than to anyone else, because they taught me that within my own self there is a divine spark. There is a bit of the divine reason that permeates the universe. Those Stoic teachers taught me that because I am in touch with God, I can transcend all of the rules and obligations that others feel duty-bound to follow.

It is a very liberating experience to rise above and transcend those things that enslave us. They taught me that above all, I should abhor enslavement by other people. Indeed, I learned to shun anything which might enslave me. Because I do not want to be enslaved by

possessions, I do without those things in order to be free for myself. Or if there are other people, laws, or institutions that are going to enslave me, I back away from them, because the freedom to develop my own potential is more important than any of them. I especially appreciate the fact that the Stoics taught me that if I want to be free, I must realize that some rules, obligations, laws and institutions are very petty and indifferent. The laws of family and marriage as well as the laws of a city can be very limiting. I must rise above those things in order to develop my full freedom, because if I am going to be free, I can't be enslaved by other people, cities, or institutions.

As a Corinthian who has come to Christianity, I want to give full credit to Paul. It is Paul who taught me that what I was really looking for is found in Jesus Christ. Paul taught us that if anyone is in Christ, he lives in a whole new world. I learned from Paul that because the new age has come and because I have been baptized into Jesus Christ, I am above all of the laws and institutions that hold people captive. I am thankful that Paul taught us that we can reign with Jesus Christ, and that indeed those of us who have been born into him are already reigning with Jesus Christ. That is a liberating word!

I appreciate especially the fact that I have been taught by Paul that I have been saved apart from law. And if I am saved from the law--saved without the obedience to the law--then I know that Paul would never tell me that, having been saved apart from the law, I must go back to the obedience to rules and regulations. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. He is reigning with Christ. This fact suggests that we are saved without the law. Certainly Paul would not make us return to rigid legislation, for that would take away our

freedom.

Before I met Jesus Christ, I knew that freedom was achieved through developing the inner self. The most important thing for me was to develop my human potential and to see my rights; those rights I found in Jesus Christ. I found that, because I had been baptized into a personal relationship with him, I now have the opportunity to realize my potential. Long ago, I was taught that there is a bit of the divinity, a bit of the divine spark that lets us rise above customs and traditions. Paul has taught me the name of the spark; it is Jesus Christ. Jesus allows me to be really free. Having seen all of this, how very indifferent, how very petty, how very insignificant are all the laws and rules that some immature Christians would lay upon me! And trivial are the laws of family and marriage when you know that you have become free to develop yourself. Or how unimportant are those laws that have to do with what you eat or what you don't eat! We have a saying, "Food is for the belly and the belly for food." It doesn't matter--those laws and those customs are irrelevant when you have been freed up in Jesus Christ. All of the roles and customs which traditional laws have placed on us are useless burdens. All of those are petty when it comes to exercising my rights. I am grateful that Paul has taught me about my rights, because I intend to go ahead and experience my rights to the full and to develop my own human potential in order that I, along with others, can be free from the various laws and restrictions that enslave us.

Paul (Allan McNicol):

I have a good deal of sympathy with your pilgrimage, Lucian. As you know, I was

raised in Tarsus and learned thoroughly the Greek language; and I listened to a number of teachers who were associated with the great university there. They taught me much about the concept of freedom. I particularly appreciate the emphasis of some of your teachers that man bears the imprint or the spark of the divine so that he has the capacity in his own life to bear witness to and live out that divine inner freedom in his personal life. But I must point out to you that to attain equanimity, self-mastery, and above all the ability to live rationally and wisely is a difficult goal. It is only achieved by our own personal striving and power.

I think at Corinth you thought that ideal would be fulfilled among you with the acceptance of Christ. You thought that you could live on your own power, totally free, but I assert that you are still at an immature stage of life in Corinth. I cite as examples of this immaturity the appeals by you and your friends to different religious authorities, your lawsuits against one another in the Gentile courts, and above all, the lack on your part to create any sense of a common life together with your fellow believers in the Lord. It would appear that instead of arriving at this inner freedom which you love to talk about--and your spiritual equanimity--you are competitive, full of strife, puffed up with false pride, and have adopted a dangerous form of individualism where each of you at Corinth tries to do his own thing. It seems to me that some fundamental things have gone wrong with your spiritual quest. I believe you are basically confused about the fundamental difference between God and man. This in turn, I think, leads to the source of your problem in your perception of the nature of freedom.

Now I grant it may be true that when we talk about God, he in his own self as Sovereign can be seen as truly and totally free. In fact, he has demonstrated his freedom by his acceptance of you at this late time--a Gentile. But when you talk about yourself as a king--already reigning, now--you say too much. You are human; you are not divinized, not set free from the powers of this world. You are still beset by alien forces, sinful, and corruptible. You have very definite limitations even as Christians. You must, as Job of old, learn to live within your limitations. One of these limitations is that you exist in an environment where you must live with other people, your family, your neighbors, and other Christians. You cannot be indifferent to these or subordinate them for some quixotic quest to make the self free and thus be inwardly free no matter what the consequences.

You cite Jesus as the inspiration for your "freedom." But don't you know that Jesus in his life showed the opposite of what you are doing? He sought not his own so-called inner freedom to do his own thing, but the will of the other, his Father. He died in powerlessness as far as this world is concerned; but in his suffering servanthood, he showed true freedom: the freedom to give up what was his interest, his own petty self-interest, for the other. It was in this way of love, which has the capacity to suffer for the other, symbolized by the cross, that we as apostles continually live and bear witness to the essence and ultimate triumph of our God. You may seek freedom in self-fulfillment. We find it in living out this faithful way of life. Or, as I have said in a letter to you, it is fulfilling the law of Christ.

So, to be succinct, we say that one is truly free in Christ when he is free enough to

subordinate partisan self-interest for the interest of another. This is true freedom.

Now, let me mention a couple of practical matters to suggest how this principle is implemented. In our own sexual relations, we should be free to subordinate our own interests for the interest of the community. I myself have personally chosen not to be married. I am free enough to give up those beautiful benefits and joys of family life for the sake of the mission of Christ in the world and the broader community as a whole. When I talk to married people, I talk about the need in marriage for fidelity and for mutuality. The husband does not demand for his own self-interest absolute right to the body of the wife when he pleases. The same applies to the wife. But they mutually share their lives together. What one gives, the other is free to give.

And finally, in regard to this question of eating meats sacrificed to the idols: we know that there are some brethren who are offended by this practice. I counsel you as a Christian brother not to seek your own self-interest here, not to demand your inner freedom--your rights--but to be free enough to give up what seems to us to be an innocent thing to you, for the sake of the faith and integrity and Christian growth of our brothers. The way of the cross is the heart of our faith. The way of the cross is not doing our own thing; it is doing the will of our Lord, the true source of freedom.

Lucian:

Paul, I must say that I am very disappointed that one who has taught me so much is unwilling to go all the way with what he taught. For if I am not sadly mistaken, you taught

us that all things are lawful--that means that we are saved from the law. Now I hear you talking about going back to the law of Christ. How much I wish that the one who taught us about freedom would be serious about the word! But when I hear that freedom is slavery, I know that this definition is exactly what freedom is not. Freedom is being your own master and your own boss. Once one is enslaved by others, one has given up freedom. And so I see as a tragedy that you, the great teacher, will not go all the way with what you taught us.

I know quite well that you taught us once before that if anyone is in Christ, that he is a new creation--that he has arrived. Now you are telling us that we haven't arrived. It's as if we still live in that old situation before we met Jesus Christ--still with the limitations and rules that others would lay upon us. Thus I want to know from you if we have or have not become a new creation. On the one hand, I hear you telling us that we have; on the other hand, I hear you telling us that we are still living in an old world, full of rules and laws that you would have us keep and observe.

My biggest concern is this talk about limitations. It seems that I've heard all this before--but I heard it before I became a Christian. I used to hear about being under the law. You taught us that we are freed and saved apart from the law, and now you want to give back to us what you once told us was taken away. I suppose I am bothered most by your lack of consistency. Once you gave us our freedom; now you want to take it back. You want us to be enslaved by others. There is no way that that can be freedom, because freedom is the capacity to move without restrictions--to do what you want to do.

Paul:

Lucian, I want to respond to you with a couple of brief points. First of all let me say something about this whole matter of the law. It is true to say that one is free from the law. Over in Jerusalem I spoke to many of my brothers, and I said to them that in Christ we are free from the law of Moses, we are free from developing a style of life characterized by earning God's grace--what I like to refer to as the performance principle. But I do not want to be heard to say that being free from this old way of life--whereby we felt that we needed to earn God's grace by our good deeds under the laws--means that we abandon any kind of moral integrity in our lives. No, rather, what I want to say is that by looking at Christ and seeing the faithful way that he lived under the law and embodied suffering love, we now can do something we could not have done before, we now have the impetus and freedom, if you will, to do what was never possible for Jews before Christ. By the Spirit of God we can now fulfill the law's demands and so live in keeping with God's norm of righteousness.

Now, that is not of our own performance, but is by the grace of God. And so, it's as though our first partner in marriage had died; and we, instead of going off to do our own thing, have found a truly free and new way of life by being married to another partner. That partner is Christ. Certainly in Christ all things are lawful; but not all things are beneficial. You say that food is for the body and that therefore what and how we eat is inconsequential. But one cannot make the exact equation and say sexual appetites can be fulfilled in such a random fashion. No, there are moral intentions and perspectives here that make the situation quite different.

My own thought has to do with your much-wanted call for inner freedom--for the indifference to the cares of life. Here I am aware of the Stoic teachers and how they say that one can be wholly rational and bring oneself under total control. One must be so disciplined that he can find a way of inner freedom just by pursuing the most rational style of life. I wanted to say that I, too, am indifferent in some things that I count as inconsequential. I, too, believe that I have reached equanimity and inner peace, but I come to it not in reflection upon some great ideal, not from rationality, but from an understanding that God in the future is going to change the world when he sends his Son Jesus Christ. And in view of the fact that God has already claimed the world for his own through the coming of Christ--that it is going to be changed and finally work out his way--I live in the present out of the values of that future. I am indifferent to certain things not because I have attained that inner indifference, but because God has shown the future of the world for me in Christ, and I can already live in the power of this reality.

COMMENT

Thompson:

Briefly--not now as Paul and Lucian--we want to reflect over what has been said here. We have tried to represent two views of freedom. I think that one could sloganize and characterize these in a lot of different ways, but I want to come back to one issue that we disagreed over in our discussion. I had lots to say about individual inner freedom--the development of the self. And, Allan, in your first presentation you talked about freedom with others--collective freedom over against individual freedom. I wonder about the issues

that came out in American life in the 70's where we have so many kinds of "rights movements." These are movements that variously impinge on the church. I wonder if you would reflect on these two poles and note if they are pretty well constant with the nature of the discussion as it goes on in the church now. Do you see that the discussion really is still played out around those two kinds of freedom--community over against the individual?

McNicol:

The reason that I did invest a considerable amount of time in thinking about this debate anyway, is because I believe that issues at stake are burning issues within the church today. In answer to your question, even though the names have been changed and the issues may look different, I believe that we have these two perspectives or ways of looking at the world very much with us in the contemporary Christian community. It seems to me that at the heart of many of the so-called human potential movements today is the belief that somehow or other through some technique, whether it be by reading the latest manual on sexual activities or through some mind control device, we can achieve inner peace and can make our own way in society. Along with that, I think, comes a more strident form of saying that since I can be my own master, I am in complete control; I should have my own way; my personal rights should be totally expressed. We have this in the political realm. Those politicians can't do those things to me. We have it certainly in the various rights movements that are operative in society and push into the church: "I don't agree with the elders' decision, I have my own view about this." Or, "I will go my own way; I will give my own contribution to my own particular group if the church doesn't agree with my

interests,” and so forth.

By contrast, Paul views the world as coming together through suffering service; I tried to spell that out in our discussion. And so the point is, I think, we are only whole, not in the sense of doing our own thing, or when we feel we are not oppressed, but when we have opened up to helping others and have enjoyment and satisfaction in our cooperative relationships with others and a sense of growing together in the community. And so I see in this individual-versus-community thing, a paradigm of the tension within American society. We can't find a common base to live with one another. It's pulling us apart because we all demand our own rights.

I think Christianity has a lot to say here, but we can only come together on a common basis. I believe the cross is this proper foundation. But let me ask you, James, do you think there is anything in Paul's position on freedom that we may have learned originally from the Greeks? We often say, “Well, look, Paul went out with his very Jewish background and brought the gospel of Christ into this alien Greek environment, and had all of these problems. Every church we know he started in Greece ended up in division--Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth.” But was there anything “Greek” that Paul might have learned in his early background? We talk about the Judeo-Greek tradition feeding into Christianity: Can this meeting between East and West be of some help to us today?

Thompson:

One can't be sure here, but one or two things come to mind. In the first place, the word “freedom” is a very Greek word, and Paul is using a word that came out of that whole

heritage. It is not a word that you would find often, if at all, in the Old Testament, and I don't know what the Hebrew equivalent would be. But it is a Greek word that he is using. It's a word that he inherited from Tarsus and pretty well gave us that word--it's his word, and he uses it many times--freedom from and freedom for. Beyond that I can only speculate. I see some common ground with some of the Greeks because in the Athenian Democracy we find the origin of our whole insistence of human rights. Today we talk about inalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence. That whole concept of inalienable rights comes out of the Athenian Democracy. They did believe that rights are insured by common laws. Common laws gave you a common view of the world, so that you have meeting grounds. You talked about our society being split apart; you--as Paul--said that my whole view was splitting apart the community. There is a track record for that. Individual rights are in tension with collective rights and therefore they may get out of balance. But in the Greek heritage, in the Athenian Democracy, it was believed that the laws were divine, therefore, they weren't just unlimited rights.

Now, I think that the real tragedy that I see in our culture is that once I don't believe any of the laws have divine sanction, there is no limitation or hold placed on my insistence that I can do whatever I want to do. Now, let's say that the framers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution believed in some divine, inalienable rights. But these rights also limited one's insistence on doing his own thing. Paul, as you indicated, still had legislation--it wasn't a performance principle, but there were structures within which one had to live, so he would have agreed with some of the Greek heritage in that regard.

McNicol:

In that matter of Paul's outrage at the man living with his stepmother in Corinth--in old Jewish law an incident like that would have brought death to the person and even in the Greek law there were some negative rules and regulations, so there is a kind of common ground there. But somehow the Corinthians were missing the mark in that they saw themselves as totally free from all restrictions. As a Jew, Paul would have been shocked at people seeking freedom to such an extent they abandoned any kind of norm. I see here parallels with today's Hedonistic existence--the so-called Playboy philosophy. I think that we should always remember when we talk about Paul that one is seen as human only in relation to God who is holy. One must bring himself into proper perspective with this holy God. Only bound in proper relationship to God (based on faith) are we truly free.

THE DISCIPLINE OF FREEDOM

By Michael R. Weed

The word freedom strikes resonant chords deep within the human breast. It designates something we perceive as somehow close to the mysterious core of what it means to be human. Consequently, it is not surprising that the word runs through our language at various levels, ranging from highly charged political rhetoric to advertising slogans and pop psychology's advocacy of being "freed up." Paradoxically, our use of the word freedom is as imprecise as it is widespread.

Still, the underlying view of freedom that informs its various uses appears to be a vision of release from the entanglements of mundane affairs, the engagements of day-to-day life, and the commitments and involvements that characterize life in the human community. This assumption, seldom examined, in many ways makes sense. Most of us become aware of our freedoms only after we feel them somehow threatened or jeopardized. And yet, such a view of human freedom as freedom-from-restraint not only is inaccurate; it is also responsible for much current misunderstanding and confusion.

Edward Engleberg makes the sobering observation that

everyone now wants freedom; it has been sought before. But without recognizing its contingencies imposed not by the corporate society but imposed by the very self for whom that

freedom is intended, there can be nothing but disaster.¹

Currently we are surrounded by those courting disaster through constantly translating freedom into the idiom of anarchy in the quenchless thirst for self-realization. This situation, at least partially, reflects a loss of adequate images of the nature or essence of the human self.

With this in mind I want to focus attention on the problem of freedom by suggesting two scenarios as capturing something of the complexity and essence of human freedom. First, consider this scene: a thirteen-year-old is sitting at a piano. Her fingers move rapidly over the keys to render flawlessly a Mozart sonata. Second, envision an anarchist exhorting a crowd. He espouses destruction of norms, standards, and rules. “Nothing,” he cries, “is obligatory. Everyone should be free to do his own thing.” And yet he finds it necessary, in order to communicate, to have mastered the grammar and syntax of the language he speaks. Without this he cannot proclaim, commend, or defend his views but would simply utter gibberish.²

Now, with these two images guiding reflection implicitly and explicitly, I want to outline in broad strokes two basic structures of human freedom and then bring them within hailing distance of the theological horizon.

Freedom Through Limitation

First, human freedom is finite or creaturely freedom. That is, the human self’s exercise of will and intention depends upon its aligning itself with certain restrictions and contingencies. At the simplest and perhaps most vivid level, this means that I will not be

free to mow the lawn tomorrow, or for that matter, to tell my wife when she asks me to mow it that I prefer to do my own thing, unless I go to bed tonight. The nature of my constitution dictates that I secure nourishment and rest, and that I take account of such matters as the “laws of nature.”

Curiously, when we fail to take account of the nature of human freedom as finite, freedom becomes impotent, abstract, and merely theoretical. True value in life is invariably attained through limitation.

Thinking is limitation of the infinite possibilities of mere imagination; willing is limitation of the infinite possibilities of desire; artistic creation is a limitation by selection; it is a process of elimination.³

Human freedom must be given structure and concreteness by the recognition of its limits. When limitations essential to the nature of the self and its context are ignored, the self does not become free. Rather its nature is distorted and it becomes the victim, not the master, of its world. Consequently, “creaturely freedom is progressively divested of its possibilities as it loses its limits.”⁴

By way of illustration, the artist is not free simply to do anything with her medium. One masters only through considerable difficulty and discipline the appropriate skills and techniques necessary to play a piano concerto--or to sculpt a Michelangelo's David. Human freedom is unintelligible except in relation to limits that bring it focus and specificity and endow it with the concreteness appropriate to finite selves as agents or actors. It is the freedom to will something rather than the freedom to will anything.

Thus, to state that human freedom is freedom in limitation does not merely mean

that there are boundaries imposed on the extent of such freedom. Rather, it means that certain limits are in fact the very conditions of human freedom. Human freedom is thus freedom through limitation.

Freedom in Community

A second and closely related basic structure of human freedom is that it is the freedom of persons in community. That is, human freedom receives its contours from the unique form of the personal. As John Macmurray states: “To be completely free we have to be completely personal, completely real as persons.”⁵ Human persons emerge within communities where they are formed as selves only in interaction with other selves. As the infant depends upon the parent not only for sustenance but also for presence and communication, all truly human existence is thoroughly social existence. Contrary to Sartre’s dictum that “hell is other people,” the way to truly human freedom lies not in the self but in the other.⁶ “Without love, without recognition and respect for the other, freedom is but an illusion of our neurotic self-preoccupation.”⁷

Consequently, the necessary conditions of human freedom, because of the nature of human existence as co-existence, must be sought in appropriate forms of community. Clearly, I cannot have the freedom to “be myself” as a personal self

. . . unless I am with my own people, who will hold me in peace, protect me, save and care for me, and in the deepest sense, love me, and towards whom I behave in a reciprocal way.⁸

Human freedom is not, in the first instance, to be obtained by destroying, discarding, or minimizing various limitations. Nor is society the state of those who have “fallen from

freedom” as they have become entangled with social restraints. We can only be ourselves and realize our freedoms as agents through our relations with others.⁹

Perhaps we can better grasp the importance of the link between the person and others by briefly considering how it is epitomized in the family. For it is in some form of familial setting that human beings emerge within a matrix of personal relationships. It is within the family that I receive my name and my place both socially and geographically. It is here that I learn my “mother tongue.” And the language I learn to employ (even perhaps eventually to exploit) is not “mine” but “ours.” It inextricably ties me to a community of others and the symbols with which our collective existence is understood and bound together.

Thus I find myself existing as a self within relationships which are both necessary and indispensable conditions for realizing and maintaining my personhood. It is within the family that I may initially recognize that the presence and claims of other persons--wife, child, friend--do not simply encroach upon my freedom but are actually the conditions of human freedom. I find that it is this very obligation to attend to these relationships and to act on behalf of certain others that is the essential condition of my own freedom and wellbeing. That is, others create avenues through which I am permitted to become fully personal as I become responsible as husband, father, brother, uncle, and friend.

It follows that human freedom is not to be found simply by abandoning or minimizing restraints but

...by gathering ourselves into...genuinely achieved communion. The true dignity of man is attained only by building forms of life which are held together by the ties which tie freedoms to one another.¹⁰

Accordingly, the isolated individual cannot be free. Human freedom is defined by constitutive relationships. It exists only through the exercise of responsibility to and for other persons. Hence language, which establishes and maintains human co-existence, is a primary means to forms of freedom appropriate to truly human identity.¹¹

Unfortunately, we are all too aware that our various communities seldom embody genuine communion. More often they are groupings characterized by egocentric strife and tribalistic loyalties. So many of our relationships with others prove bitterly disappointing, marred by suspicion, disloyalty, and duplicity. Even our families may become “uneasy armistices” or “demilitarized zones” between adversaries struggling for greater freedom through more advantageous balances of power. Our very words are marked with fear and mistrust; they separate and fragment us as often as they bind us together.

Nor can we be optimistic about the possibilities of such conditions yielding to newer techniques and strategies for attaining freedom. What is needed is a radically different way of being in the world and among others which is more than a strategy of survival--a new heart, new spirit, and new words which voice the true structure of humanity and therefore of human freedom.

Jesus: Exemplar and Guarantor of Human Freedom

The Christian tradition resounds with the affirmation that “Jesus means freedom.” It is the Christian confession that Jesus is the one through whom God both summons us and offers us freedom--and the one who accepts and perfectly exemplifies the offered freedom.

As the Second Adam, he is the Exemplar of a new way of being, the founder not just of a new humanity, but the restorer of true humanity. The first Adam was called to finite freedom but failed to acknowledge his creaturely limits and live in obedience and communion with the Creator. Seeking to gain God's freedom, he forfeited his creaturely freedom. His heirs tragically end in un-freedom, victims of their own ingenious creations and ruled by that which they were created to rule. Through his incarnation the Second Adam affirms the structures of temporality and corporeality and re-establishes the lost Adamic freedom. "Not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped," he accepts and illuminates the limits of creaturely existence as conditions for obedience and service.

In terms of the foregoing discussion, Jesus confers freedom by transforming the boundaries of human existence. The One who bests us through the very limitations of finitude is no longer met as an impersonal or alien force. Rather, he is known as the Creator and Father of us all. It is ultimately his presence and purpose that we encounter in and through every limitation and boundary to life.

Now, rather than resenting or merely tolerating the limitations imposed on me by existence, I am becoming able to affirm them. I am able to praise the One who calls me into existence and grants me this time and this place to be this particular person and not someone else.

The swift and inescapable movement of time which marks me with the pain of an irreversible past and thrusts me into the uncertainty of the future is being transformed. Jesus calls us into community with One who is not indifferent to the time he creates and

guides.¹² He is loyal to his creation and forgiving. And it is this unfailingly faithful and gracious One with whom we deal in every event, whose presence permeates and upholds all reality. It is he who in his faithfulness dispels the uncertainty of the future--promising always to be there. It is he who, as forgiving Father, relieves the crippling irreversibility of the past and enables us to begin anew. As the One who is both faithful and loyal, he enables us to utter, however stutteringly, two words necessary to restore and sustain genuine community and human freedom: "I promise" and "I forgive."

Footnotes

- ¹ Edward, Engleberg, The Unknown Distance: From Consciousness to Conscience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 249.
- ² Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers Inc., 1974). "The moral anarchist does not live a life that is determined by rules in the same way as a monk does. The difference between the two men, however, is not that the one follows rules and other does not, but is in the kind of rules each follows. The moral anarchist can certainly eschew explicit norms, but that does not mean he can eliminate the idea of rule from the description of his behavior. For so far as he wishes to claim that he has reasons for doing what he does, those very reasons presuppose the notion of rule (p. 17f.)."
- ³ Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1939), p. 267.
- ⁴ David Baily Harned, Images for Self-Recognition (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. 187. Elsewhere in the same volume Harned states: "Limits, rules, boundaries, and possibilities of penalty do not confront the self as its fate. Instead, they are actively embraced, becoming a world of coherent nomoi to which the autonomous self . . . freely obligates itself for the sake of the fulfillment of the self's own possibilities. . . . Freedom is vertiginous, sterile, and abstract until it is endowed with structures and concreteness by the acknowledgment of limits; only then does it become creaturely

freedom, latent with real possibilities, instead of the spurious freedom to do everything that is in fact identical with no freedom at all (36).”

- ⁵ John Macmurray, Freedom in the Modern World (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p. 203.
- ⁶ It is the experience of the other as truly other, according to Emmanuel Levinas, that liberates my freedom from the arbitrary and invites it to responsibility and justice. The Other thus awakens, promotes, and invests freedom, “arousing my goodness” within an order of responsibility. Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 84-88, 252.
- ⁷ Hauerwas, op. cit., p. 41.
- ⁸ Albert Hofstadter, “Reflections on Evil,” in Freedom and Morality, ed. by John Bricke (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1974), p. 160.
- ⁹ John Macmurray, Persons in Relation (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 119.
- ¹⁰ Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 158.
- ¹¹ Cf. Peter C. Hodgson, New Birth of Freedom: A Theology of Bondage and Liberation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 124f.
- ¹² William F. Lynch, Christ and Apollo (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1960), p. 62.

‘THE DISCIPLINE OF FREEDOM’: A RESPONSE

By Paul L. Watson

In reading this article and thinking especially about its two central theses, I found myself relating what was said to the biblical account of the Fall. That account, which is traditionally limited to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden in Genesis 3, may be better understood as including all the stories in Genesis 3-11.¹ In other words, the Fall was not so much a plunge from a cliff as it was an avalanche rushing down a slope, from the garden of Eden to the plain of Shinar. It was in the Fall that those two elements of freedom emphasized in the article--freedom-through-limitation and freedom-in-community--were lost by the human race.

The precise nature of Adam and Eve’s sin (Genesis 3) has been the subject of much debate. That sin has sometimes been connected with human sexuality; but Adam and Eve’s awareness of their nakedness was the result of their sin, not its cause. More often this original sin is defined as human pride which rejects the instruction of God in favor of the desires of the self. This is certainly closer to the truth than the former interpretation. But even here more needs to be said.

“Human freedom is thus freedom through limitation.” This last sentence of the first major section of the article goes right to the heart of the matter. Surely it was their

unwillingness to accept creaturehood, with all the limitations that creaturehood implies, that led Eve and Adam to sin. The serpent's offer was that of an alternative to creaturely limitations: "you will not die . . . you will be like God." The serpent was offering infinity in the place of finitude, transcendence over all human boundaries. In a word, the serpent was holding out what appeared to be freedom. But when this "freedom" was seized by Adam and Eve it turned out to be not freedom but bondage. Specifically, in Eve's case, it was bondage to husbandly rule and labor pains. For Adam it was bondage to a hostile environment from which he would have to wrest a living. Thus the real freedom they had in the garden, even with the restriction concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was abandoned in their pursuit of limitless freedom of which humans may dream but which, as humans, we shall never attain.

In Genesis 4, the avalanche picked up momentum when Cain killed Abel. Here again Cain feels his freedom infringed upon, in that the Lord's lack of "regard" for his offering implies certain limits upon what, when, where, or how Cain may make an offering to the Deity. For Cain, the standard of acceptable sacrifice was his own to set freely--"le loi, c'est moi." The Lord thought otherwise and overruled Cain's decision. The difference between Genesis 4 and Genesis 3 is that now Cain vents upon innocent Abel the frustration and anger he feels when he reaches his own limits. One might speculate upon how much evil is inflicted today on fellow human beings by those of us who cannot accept our own limits when we bump up against them, whether these limits be ones of physical beauty, financial resources, social skills, or whatever.

Humanity “progresses” to the third level of the Fall in the story of Noah: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). How aptly this verse illustrates the statement in the article that “Without love, without recognition and respect for the other, freedom is but an illusion of our neurotic self-preoccupation.” “Self-preoccupation” is precisely what we find in Genesis 6. Everyone is now “doing his own thing,” and “thinking his own thing,” as well. Limits which were recognized by Adam, Eve, and Cain (even if they went on to violate those limits) are now no longer considered. Nor is there any community in which “The necessary conditions of human freedom . . . must be sought.” There is instead only limitless individualism, the results of which are so disastrous that the Lord is sorry for ever having made human beings in the first place.

Rock bottom is not reached, however, until we arrive on the plain of Shinar in Genesis 11. Here humanity is struggling to establish a community and therein to secure freedom. We might expect such an enterprise to have received divine approval until we realize that this community defines “freedom” as the absence of both divine control and social responsibility. It turns out to be a project that is exclusivistic (“Come, let us build ourselves a city”), excessive (“and a tower with its top in the heavens”), self-centered (“and let us make a name for ourselves”), and motivated by fear (“lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”). Thus we have at the tower of Babel a group of individuals, but hardly the human community envisioned in the article as the social matrix

in which personal freedom may be found. As the story ends humanity is as un-free as it can be: out of touch with God, and therefore out of touch with what it means to be a creature; and out of touch with one another as well. It is in this situation that the human race finds itself when God's call to freedom goes out to Abram in Genesis 12.

Footnote

- ¹ For a fuller explication of this interpretation, see Gerhard von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 148-150.

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY: THE ESSENCE OF A SERMON

By Tony Ash

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

Thomas Carlyle said:

Great meanwhile is the moment, when tidings of Freedom reach us; when the long-enthralled soul, from amid its chains and squalid stagnancy, arises, were it still only in blindness and bewilderment, and swears by Him that made it, that it will be free! Free? Understand that well, it is the deep commandment, dimmer or clearer, of our whole being, to be free. Freedom is the one purport, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles, toilings and sufferings, on this Earth.

These are stirring words, vibrating in harmony with so much that matters in our world. To be free wars are fought. Those who seek racial equality join in the chorus "Oh freedom," and thrill to the words of Martin Luther King Jr., when he said "Free at last, free at last ...". The world earth is divided into the free world and that part presumably not free. Three decades ago and more four famous paintings by Norman Rockwell fired American patriotism by depicting the four freedoms. In more common terms, each day's life is a series of smaller struggles to get free. Free of a traffic jam, of a problem, of constricting clothes, of crying children, of the pressure of things that must be done, of housework, of

debt, of mental strain--and so on.

We face more terrible prisons as well. Thus we long to be free from purposelessness, from fear, from guilt, from loneliness, from despair, from worry, from besetting faults. If only the chains could be struck off, and we could soar away, unfettered!

We are talking about being free. In recent years the urge for liberation has focused on freedom from the constraint of authority. One result of this has been the philosophy of freedom which advocates doing whatever one wants--unfettered by authoritative constraints. Thomas Merton, in his spiritual autobiography, The Seven Storey Mountain, writes in detail of the time in his late teens and early twenties when he adopted this point of view. He celebrated his liberation from inhibiting powers through several years of sensual excess, until eventually his life was turned in other directions. He came to realize how empty such a procedure was. His story was reminiscent of the time in my own youth, when, with a best friend, the decision was made that we would be totally uninhibited. We would do just what we wanted, when we wanted, with absolute disregard for what anyone thought. The experiment got us nowhere, except that reflection on our resolution revealed it was impossible to accomplish. Yet the desire to have this kind of freedom was akin to that which many people adopt as a life philosophy.

Our age wants to be free. Free to grab all the gusto we can get, since we only go around once. Free to grab for the "brass ring"--as a lady seeking a new (and illicit) love once said to me. It is the promise of freedom offered by the "winning through intimidation" and "looking out for #1" point of view. A recent analysis of the 1970's said it could

probably be best characterized as the “me” decade. This evaluation doesn’t seem wrong. One can think of numerous illustrations of simple selfishness disguised as freedom.

In a television program produced by the Paulists, titled “When, Jenny, When?” a high school counselor speaks to Jenny, a student, about her sexual promiscuity. Jenny, who had been used more than once by boys in the school she attended, defended her behavior by saying, “it feels good.” Note the implication--Jenny thought that she was free to do whatever she wanted if it felt good. The counselor replied, “It also feels good to jump from a ten story building. It’s a great thrill to fall through the air . . . But you’ve got to hit bottom eventually.” This sobering thought gives us the opportunity to turn a corner in this sermon.

There are, indeed, many things a person is free to do. They may be sensual things, or greedy ones, or grasping ones, or selfish ones, or inconsiderate ones. But every such choice involves a consequence. One must “hit ground.” Note the following choices. We can eat as much as we can afford and want, but we must be prepared for the consequence of obesity. We can smoke if we wish, but the danger of lung cancer is terribly real. We can drink as much as we wish, but run the risk of becoming alcoholic. We can drive as fast and as recklessly as we want, but there are the law and the hospital room, not to mention the mortuary. We can cheat or lie, but the price in reputation must be paid. We can spend more than we make by the foolish use of credit, but debts eventually come due, and if they are not paid bankruptcy and/or poverty may result.

Here is the point. These so-called freedoms often end by producing a new bondage. One is convinced he has emerged from his cell, only to find he is really in another cell,

more difficult to escape than the first. Certainly it is not difficult to set aside liking for alcohol learned from youth, but it is exceedingly difficult to go on the wagon once alcoholism has occurred. Thus a misuse of freedom produces a greater slavery. Quite simply, the wrong use of freedom can bring about the loss of freedom. The acquisition of those things that fulfill lesser desires can make it impossible to acquire the satisfaction of greater desires. If the use of freedom leads to the loss of freedom, is there any real freedom at all? In a sense there is not. We are bound to be slaves, and cannot escape it, no matter how we try. But can we use our freedom in a way that will make us free indeed, while yet in bondage? Is there a form of bondage or limitation which is freedom?

If there is a way to find this genuine freedom, it certainly does not come by assuming we must answer to no higher authority than to the self. That was Eve's mistake. She was told she could become like God, knowing good and evil, overcoming all limitations, if she would eat the forbidden fruit. The temptation was most inviting. "You can rule your own life--be its absolute sovereign." Alas, the promise from the serpent was a lie. The result of Eve's eating was the terrible bondage of sin and death which we now experience, and which lies behind all human problems.

Consider these reasons why self cannot be the ultimate court of appeal for its use of freedom. The self does not know the nature of absolute freedom. No one has ever achieved this vision. The human mind, limited by its nature, and corrupted by sin, cannot know what lies beyond its powers. Even if, by some miracle, one could have this vision, his will could not will the perfect accomplishing of it. And even if, by a further miracle, one could will it

perfectly, it is doubtful if that will could be perfectly carried out.

Man is unable to be the ultimate authority because he is subject to another limitation. He may be free to transact business a certain way, or to behave a certain way in his home life, but he is not free to escape death. No matter how flamboyant his use of freedom, death comes stealthily onward. Death's mouth is open, and one day its jaws will snap shut. Man is free to spend money to preserve a youthful appearance, or to treat his physical maladies in the best ways. But die he must. Here is the great and inevitable bondage.

We did not create ourselves, nor are we completely free to mold our own destinies. Fate, divine intervention, the plans and designs of others--whatever descriptive expressions we use--all impose on us in such a way that only a limited number of things are possible. Some of freedom's desires are impossible of fulfillment. (Only one woman can marry a particular man; we cannot all be millionaires; what is good for labor may not be good for management.) Therefore freedom based in the self can never be absolute freedom. It always leaves us enslaved, because our options are always limited.

We asked earlier if there is a form of bondage which is genuine freedom. The Christian answer is a definite yes. Our bondage should be to the only one who deserves to be our master--to God himself. There we find that God is love, and that every aspect of that slavery is designed to set us free. Only by completely losing ourselves in him can we be completely free. By accepting this one constraint, we are released from all others that are of any significance. Since God is the perfect Giver, then his child will be the great receiver. God's gifts are freedom, in its various modes.

Thus the center of the self must lie outside the self. God has made us. Only he truly sustains us. When life is centered in God, we notice how we are genuinely free. We are free from loneliness, because we know he will never forsake us, and because we are in the midst of his loving people. Whatever good we miss in the absence of another person is found in perfection in the presence of God himself.

We are free from guilt, because he has forgiven, and will forgive. The guilt we ought to have is purged by his blood, and false guilt is driven away by a recognition of his love and acceptance.

We are free from anxiety, because he assures us he knows and cares for our needs. "Seek first God's kingdom, and all these things will be added . . ." All life is in God's hands. There is no more secure place for it.

We are free from meaninglessness. We know who made us, and why. We know where we are going. We know the ultimate purpose of history and the place of our lives within it. We have a reason to exist--for the glory of God in service to others.

We are free from a sense of worthlessness when we realize that he loves us more than any other has or can, and even more than we will ever be able to understand.

We are free from despair, since we know that, ultimately, his people will win through and share in the final victory assured by Christ's resurrection.

We are free from sin and are no longer held accountable for our misdeeds. We are given strength to become what he wants us to be.

We are free from death. We will still suffer physical death, but our view of it is

transformed, for we know that we are not going to suffer the real death--separation from God.

Here it is in a few words. If we strive to be free from God, we find we are really in bondage of the most horrible sort. But if we willingly become his slaves, then we are truly free.

Peter Richardson. Paul's Ethic of Freedom. Philadelphia:
Westminster, 1979. 182 pp. paperback.

By Don Crittenden

A doctor's waiting room is seldom a satisfactory environment for serious reading. Nevertheless, I began Richardson's book under such circumstances and with predictable results: I concluded at first that the book lacked substance. My initial conclusion was based on my supposition that Richardson was doing the groundwork for another in a tiresome collection of "liberation theologies." However, later perusal revealed that my hasty estimation was in error, and after my initial response was disarmed this volume's worth was demonstrated. At a time when freedom in the New Testament has fallen prey to the sloganizers, and become fodder for propaganda mills, Richardson's solid treatment of freedom appears as a welcome relief. Keenly aware that the liberal/conservative axis existed in the first century as well as the present one, Richardson explores Paul's sensitivity to the forces tearing at the life of the early church.

Richardson's impetus for this book grew from an early sermon on the question of Christian drinking. As he says it, "It struck me from the texts that were quoted that there was a much more dramatic view of Christian freedom lurking in the--at that time--dim mists of Paul's letters than was being acknowledged." Although he makes several points

about the freedom of the Christian as he examines Paul's letters, he does not weary the reader with too many personal biases.

That Richardson takes a realistic approach to Paul's ethic of freedom is seen in the limitations he sets for his work. His study looks first at the roots of Paul's view of freedom, then at some of the specific features of its impact on his ethics (along with some general Pauline ethical principles), and finally how his ethics worked out in the life of the church. His methodology is to survey the Pauline corpus in regard to the issues named above. This results in some repetition, but it enables the reader to examine Paul's writings from several perspectives.

Structurally, Richardson relies upon Galatians 3:28 as the watershed of the Pauline ethic of freedom. Thus the first three chapters are titled significantly enough: "Neither Jew nor Greek;" "Neither Slave nor Free;"; and "Neither Male nor Female." It is worthwhile to review the highlights of each.

Reflecting upon Paul's Jewish background, the writer quotes a traditional synagogue prayer: "Lord, I thank you that you have not made me a barbarian, a slave, or a woman." For Paul such a prayer is no longer appropriate. He points out that Paul's emphasis on Abraham as the prototype of a faith in God which is the root of justification suspends all distinctions between groups of people. The Pauline conflicts with Judaizing elements in the church are well-known and need no amplification. For Richardson's purposes, however, the outcome of such controversy is that Gentile Christians retain their identity as Gentiles. God has the freedom to call whom he will and the Gentiles are neither assimilated into a

Jewish church nor left as second-class citizens.

With regard to the slavery issue, Richardson permits Paul to accept the cultural limitations of his time. He accounts for this on three grounds. First, Paul's expectation of an early Parousia contributed to a social conservatism since social ills would soon be remedied with the return of Jesus. Second, Paul believed personal relationships, rather than social institutions, demand the Christian's primary attention. When both master and slave were "in Christ," the chasm between them could be readily bridged. Third, (and perhaps most significantly), Paul was not personally engaged in the slavery/freedom issue as he was some others. Its impact upon the life of the church was not as menacing as the Jew/Gentile controversy. Using the letter to Philemon as a case study Richardson contends that Paul "does not care so much whether Onesimus is freed, as long as he has the freedom to return without fear as a Christian to Philemon." To those who quarrel with Paul's social conservatism, Richardson reminds the reader that it is important to note that there was sufficient impetus in Paul's letters to prod the church's conscience and lead to the eventual capitulation of slavery.

In defending Paul against charges of anti-feminism, the writer warns his readers not to confuse twentieth-century attitudes and demands with first-century questions. Richardson explains Paul's ambivalence on the grounds of his being caught between two radical extremes. On the one hand, Paul refuses to subjugate women as they were in both Jewish and pagan society. They were permitted to sit beside their husbands and to participate in the worship through prayer and prophesying. On the other hand, Paul insisted

that women give due respect to their husbands, and to men in general as the sex more fitted for leadership roles. Men, on the other hand, were reminded of the nurturing attitude they should have toward their wives. Although Paul did not give a clear-cut solution to the male/female issue, he did give greater emphasis to the principle of mutuality than is generally recognized in biblical studies. In a later comment Richardson speculates that Paul would support the ERA. Regardless, Richardson raises interesting questions in his willingness to carry Paul's thought to modern conclusions.

In chapters four through seven the author repeats his survey of the Pauline corpus as he examines the contrasting themes of "Firmness and Flexibility," "Weakness and Strength," "Order and Charisma," and "Love and License." Such chapter titles underscore Paul's basic problem: he is fighting on two fronts against one-issue opponents. Paul's basic approach in each case was to set forth general principles and then apply them in an attitude of Christian charity. Richardson perceptively notes that the overriding criterion for all behavior is agape love, a love that indicates the Spirit's presence. This basic strategy is replayed in each of the situations Paul faced.

Richardson uses his concluding chapter to make some tentative suggestions about Paul's ethic of freedom for contemporary society. Although he could have addressed several current topics of thought, Richardson focuses on the place of women, the life of the church, and situation ethics. In each area he concludes that the church has not lived up to Paul's best insights. This is an encouraging word in view of the extensive search for an ethic of freedom among churchmen today. If Richardson is correct (and I believe he is),

then we are called back to interpreting Paul in ways that allow us to take his writings seriously in the face of our current struggles. This is no call to excise the “difficult” parts of Paul. Rather, it points out the need to hear all of his insights. As Richardson himself concludes about Paul’s ethic of freedom, “Its features are still powerful--a stress on the Spirit, personal responsibility, the corporateness of the Christian community, the mutuality of male and female.” Surely, this is a needed ingredient in any modern theology of freedom.

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