



Freedom

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS



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UNIVERSITY

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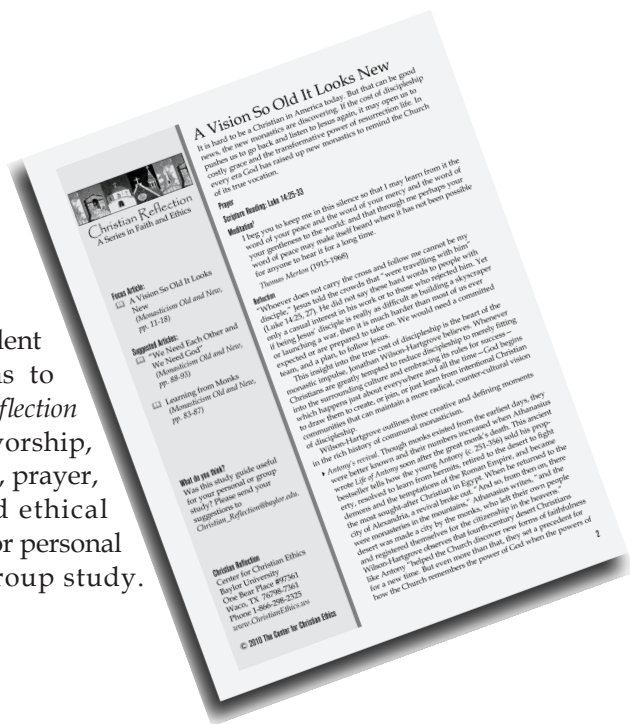
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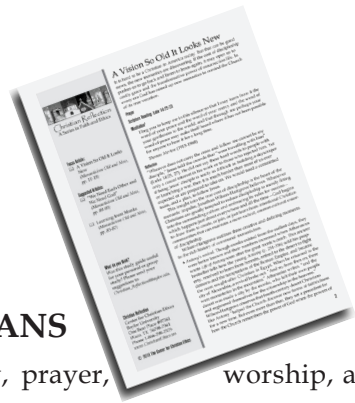
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Freedom is so potent a word today that it can be dangerous. Indeed, some ways of understanding and practicing freedom make it destructive of community. How can resources in Scripture and Christian tradition help us construct a positive relationship between freedom and belonging?

PAUL'S ASSESSMENT OF FREEDOM

In an awkward but memorable phrase, Paul declares: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." The story of Jesus Christ, as it comes to life in his followers, is a story of freedom, to be sure, but a freedom constrained by the Cross and deeply at odds with individualistic notions of liberty.

AUTHORITY AND THE FREEDOM TO LOVE

We should be critical of the modern idolatry of autonomy even as we continue to be skeptical about unchecked authority. But if freedom as detachment does not produce real freedom and if authority as coercion only feeds resentment, what alternative vision can the Church offer?

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As freedom becomes the single ambition that possesses Hazel Motes – the protagonist in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* – freedom's competing definitions dramatically play out through plot twists and turns. "Freedom cannot be conceived simply," O'Connor notes. "It is a mystery and one which a novel...can only be asked to deepen."

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Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

**Beyond popular notions of political and moral freedom—
as freedom *from* others' control or freedom *of* choice—is
the deeper freedom *for* loving God, people, and the created
order. How do resources in Scripture and Christian tradition
teach us this freedom of living with God?**

Much contemporary moral reflection assumes something called freedom is the highest human good. Indeed, "Freedom is the fundamental principle of understanding what it means to be human in the modern (and post-modern) era," Christoph Schwöbel has noted. Yet if we make freedom our highest value and reduce it—as is often done—to freedom *from* others' control or to freedom *of* choice, our view of humanity is cheapened and our liberty is reduced. Thinking of ourselves as self-created individualists cuts us off from moral tradition, community, and authority, and this, ironically, allows us to be more easily manipulated.

Our contributors go beyond these popular notions of political and moral freedom to articulate the rich notion of freedom found in Scripture and the Christian tradition—the freedom *for* loving God, people, and the created order.

In *Freedom and Belonging* (p. 11), Richard Bauckham describes how several views of freedom—as absence of limits, as maximal independence, and as consumer choice—are destructive of community. These conceptions actually distort freedom and undermine its value. "For freedom to be worth anything we have to have notions about what it is good to choose," he says. "This is only possible when hyper-individualistic, modern or postmodern persons are able to transcend their supposedly autonomous, self-sufficient, wholly self-determining selves, and find their true selves in relation to God—the truly determinative reality that graciously gives to us selves that subsist in freedom and relationships." In *Paul's Assessment of Christian Freedom* (p. 19), Bruce Longenecker unpacks this conception of freedom from the Apostle's

awkward but memorable phrase: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Longenecker concludes, "The story of Jesus Christ, as it comes to life in his followers, is a story of freedom, to be sure, but a freedom constrained by the Cross and deeply at odds with individualistic notions of liberty."

Some embrace the notion of freedom as autonomy because it seems like the only option to obeying unchecked, oppressive authority. But in *Authority, Autonomy, and the Freedom to Love* (p. 28), Scott Bader-Saye presents an alternative: a "faithful human authority that points to God's peaceful rule" and is consistent with true freedom. "True authority is not the power to coerce but the power to persuade," he writes; "in the Church it is power that is transparent to God and thus dispossessed of purely private interests."

Bader-Saye's analysis helps us understand how seventeenth-century Baptists thought about freedom in relation to authority. Jason Whitt explains in *The Baptist Contribution to Liberty* (p. 36) that early Baptists strongly resisted the nation state's power to coerce belief, yet they embraced a commitment to mutual discipline. They believed "True freedom is found in a community that recognizes its submission to the authority of Christ," Whitt writes. "Far from the modern attitude that cuts individuals free from every authority that might hinder their desires and intentions, true freedom submits itself to the authority of the Church and acknowledges its need of all who share Christian community together."

Matt Cook's *A Picture of Freedom* (p. 78) notes two startling images of freedom in Scripture – Christ's blessing of the poor and the hungry (Luke 6:20b-21a) and his resistance to the Devil's temptation to make bread out of stones (Luke 4:3-4). "In a wilderness devoid of bread, but full of stones, we learn a powerful lesson from Christ," he concludes. "True freedom comes not when we can do whatever we want, when we want to do it. True freedom is not in-dependence, but *in* dependence."

This image of Christ's freedom in the wilderness helped shape the fourth-century story of the demonic temptation of St. Anthony the Great. In *Under Assault* (p. 44), Heidi Hornik and I explore the iconography of Martin Schongauer's famous engraving *Saint Anthony Abbot Tempted by Demons*. In *Liberation from Tyranny* (p. 48), Heidi Hornik notes how Raphael's fresco *Liberation of St. Peter* (cover) develops a typology of divine liberation from tyranny.

In *Freedom* (p. 74), Will Willimon unmasks ironies in the modern idea of freedom "to choose whatever life I want to live with a minimum of external attachments." Our consumerist culture turns the search for life's purpose into a shopper's drudging march down an endless supermarket aisle: "Lacking any basis of discerning what counts for wise choices, I tend to grab a bit of everything, flitting from this enticing experience to that one, never alighting anywhere for long. Thus there is a kind of drivenness about modern life that is anything but free." Willimon concludes, "At the heart of the Christian life is a holy paradox: the more securely we are tethered to Christ, the more obedient we are to his way rather than the world's ways, the more free we become."

This paradox dramatically plays out through the plot twists of Flannery O’Conner’s novel *Wise Blood*. As Heather Hughes explains in *Deepening the Mystery of Freedom* (p. 64), the protagonist Hazel Motes desperately seeks to create his own identity, to become untethered from Christ. While he creates the “Church Without Christ” to preach “not the peace of God but the peace and quiet of being left alone by him,” he cannot escape his attraction to the holy. If you think belief in Christ is no great matter, “Hazel’s integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind,” Flannery O’Connor has written. “For the author Hazel’s integrity lies in his not being able to.”

The liturgy (p. 55) by Burt Burlinson leads us to worship the God who gives us freedom. Burlinson’s new “A Hymn for Freedom” (p. 53) relates a petition for justice “for all enslaved, captives of power’s errant way” with a confession of the “bonds of sin” we suffer from fear and ignorance, lust and greed.

In *Being Christian in a Democratic State* (p. 88), Coleman Fannin reviews perspectives that move “beyond polarizing political positions” and “point toward a rich shared life in families, communities, and cities oriented toward the common good.” Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* appreciates the new traditionalism promoted by Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and others, who desire “not the establishment of a state church, but the flourishing of communities marked by the virtues and free from the state’s claim to absolute sovereignty.” Yet Stout’s view that democracy has a sufficiently rich moral tradition of its own may not satisfy the new traditionalists—a point Hauerwas makes in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*, co-written with Romand Coles. In *The Limits of Liberal Democracy: Politics and Religion at the End of Modernity*, Scott Moore reflects on this important debate and wonders “how Christians might approach politics when they cease to assume that the answer to the question ‘What is the good life?’ is ‘Being a good American.’”

“We rarely consider that what Scripture and tradition mean by ‘freedom’ may be seriously at odds with many assumptions that underwrite everyday American usage and practice,” Philip Kenneson notes in *The Nature of Christian Freedom* (p. 82). He commends three sets of essays by Richard Bauckham (*God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives*), Gilbert Meilaender (*The Freedom of a Christian: Grace, Vocation, and the Meaning of Our Humanity*), and Reinhard Hütter (*Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism*) that develop “a robust and theologically-informed notion of positive freedom.” Kenneson concludes that in a society that employs freedom “primarily to cut ourselves off from God, from one another, and from meaningful and responsible interaction with the rest of the created order,” Christian theology—precisely because in Meilaender’s words “it is free to talk about more than freedom”—has “something vitally important to say and embody before a world bent on defacing, if not erasing, its own humanity.” ❖

Freedom and Belonging

BY RICHARD BAUCKHAM

Freedom is such a potent—even a magic—word that it can become dangerous. Indeed, some ways of understanding and practicing freedom make it destructive of community. How can resources in the Bible and Christian tradition help us construct a positive relationship between freedom and belonging?

Freedom is a hugely potent word, especially in our contemporary world. It could plausibly be claimed that freedom is the primary value of modernity, and that postmodernity, while changing many things, has certainly not changed that. Of the three components of the slogan of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity—it is liberty that has worn best and come to be most widely valued. But this is not to say that freedom always means the same thing. Big words like that rarely do. Isaiah Berlin said that the meaning of freedom “is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.”¹ It is a potent, even a magic, word and for that very reason can also be dangerous.

There is a widely perceived contemporary problem with the compatibility of freedom and community—between the human need to be independent and the human need to belong. The increase in both the desire and the concrete opportunities for individual freedom—along with doubtless other connected factors like increased mobility—have led to an atomized society; community is no longer a given context of relationships in which individuals find themselves embedded, but results only from the free choice of individuals to associate. Most people want to belong, but many experience this as in tension with the desire for freedom, and contemporary cultural and economic factors give a strong advantage, in this tension, to individual freedom. Community loses out.

Is freedom necessarily destructive of community? Does community necessarily inhibit freedom? Must we be content with some kind of uneasy balance between the two? Or does the dilemma result from particular constructions of freedom and community in modern Western culture? Are there ways of understanding and practicing freedom that actually enable community rather than destroy community? I would argue that there are resources

in the Bible and the Christian tradition for constructing a positive interrelationship between freedom and belonging.

If freedom conceived as opposed to belonging, exalted as a value purely in itself, leads not only to the destruction of community but to the distortion of freedom itself, then that is an aspect of a wider point: in a pluralistic society like the modern West there is a real danger of freedom becoming the only com-

mon value. If this happens, freedom will be seriously distorted, even destroyed, because freedom only really flourishes for human good when it is valued in a context of other prime values and virtues. A so-called freedom-loving society will be no more than a jungle of competing interests unless it values other goods as well as freedom. The pioneers of modern democracy, in the United States and elsewhere, took this for granted, but we can no longer afford just to assume it.

Since freedom is such a big word – susceptible to so many interpretations and uses – we need to consider a variety of kinds of freedom that have become culturally dominant in the modern and contemporary periods in the West (and exported to other parts of the world).

DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS

Since the rest of what I say about the legacy of the European Enlightenment, the culture of modernity, will be mostly critical, I want to stress at the outset the positive aspects of freedom that the Enlightenment has bequeathed to us. The Enlightenment insisted, with some degree of novelty, on the rights of the individual over against the power of society or the state. Ideas of the dignity of the individual and the fundamental human rights of the individual that must be universally respected took their modern form through the Enlightenment, though arguably they have roots in the Christian tradition.

The notion of human rights – though it is probably not a matter of self-evident universal values as the Enlightenment believed – has proved very useful legally and internationally. Some people now associate talk of rights with contemporary hyper-individualism and the decline of social obligation; yet this view of rights without responsibilities is not the fault of the idea of human rights itself, but of the decay of a wider context of values.

FREEDOM FROM ALL LIMITS

However, modern concepts of freedom range much more widely than those enshrined in democratic political systems. In the spirit of modernity there is an aspiration to absolute freedom or freedom from all limits whatever. A famous and remarkable passage from the fifteenth-century philosopher Pico della Mirandola will illustrate this well. Pico imagines God addressing Adam, just after creating him:

The nature of other creatures, which has been determined, is confined within the bounds prescribed by us. You, who are confined by no limits, shall determine for yourself your own nature, in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand I have placed you.... We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, more freely and more honourably the moulder and maker of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer....²

In his own voice Pico continues, “O sublime generosity of God the Father! O Highest and most wonderful felicity of man! To him it was granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills.”³ This is a portrait of humanity as the creature with no given limits, absolutely self-determining, able to choose what it will be – in effect, self-creating. What Pico has really done in this passage, following the tendency of the Italian Renaissance to treat humanity as a god, is transfer to human beings a theological understanding of God as the absolutely self-determining reality.

It says something about the continuity of this notion of human freedom from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment that Pico does more or less what in the early nineteenth century Ludwig Feuerbach advocated. For Feuerbach our ideas of God are just projections of human qualities and potentialities, and thus we need to reclaim our humanity by rejecting the transcendent God and re-appropriating for humanity our own true divinity. This is what Pico was doing, except that he did not give up belief in God. What he effectively gave up was the finiteness of humans as finite creatures, investing humanity with the infinite freedom to transcend all limits that theology had attributed to God.

One cannot deny that the rejection of given limits in the project of modernity was genuinely liberating in important ways. It rescued people from fatalism – from simply acquiescing to circumstances out of a general conviction that

nothing can really be changed. It gave huge energy to the project of improving human life and its conditions. But it had a Promethean tendency — a tendency to suppose that all given limits can be transcended and abolished. We have seen the downside of this understanding of freedom in the ecological crisis, which in many ways has been a very hard lesson in learning that there simply are given limits in the nature of things, and that humanity's attempts to dis-

The modern notion of individualistic freedom is a full-scale revolt against the given. It rejects dependence. It is not received from others or enhanced by others. It is an inherent capacity the individual deploys in an exercise of self-creation.

regard these have been reckless and ignorant, bringing on disasters that no one predicted. This rejection of human finiteness — the understanding of freedom as an ability, even a right, to break out of all restrictions and to recognize no limits — has been very damaging when adopted as an idea of individual freedom.

Modern individuals came to think that the more freedom they have the better and that the freedom they

wanted was self-determination. In this understanding of freedom, other people can only be restrictions on freedom. Society becomes a sort of contract in which we promise not to exercise our own freedom to the extent of impinging on other people's freedom. John Stuart Mill's famous definition encapsulates this notion: "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to attain it."⁴ Freedom here is something one exercises as an independent individual. It has no positive relationship to anyone else's freedom. Essentially it sees freedom as competitive. On this definition of freedom, my freedom really would be increased if I denied other people their freedom, overruled their freedom, and subjected them to my will.

For someone really driven by this kind of freedom other people simply get in the way. For society to be possible at all, according to Mill's argument, we must in fact compromise our own freedom in order to allow others theirs. But this restriction of our freedom is precisely a restriction: we would be able to be freer if it were not for other people. So freedom and society pull in different directions.

This is where we first see the incompatibility of freedom and community. Obligations to other people restrict freedom. Accordingly, the lowest-common-denominator morality of contemporary Western culture puts obligation to others in an entirely negative form: do what you like so long as you do not

harm anyone else. This is what we are left with if freedom for the individual is understood as transcending all limits and if freedom is the only common value left in a pluralistic society.

FREEDOM AS MAXIMAL INDEPENDENCE

Modern individualistic freedom is a full-scale revolt against the given. This means not only that it accepts no given limits, or does so only grudgingly, as a concession; it also means that freedom is conceived as complete independence. That is, it rejects dependence. Freedom is not received from others or enhanced by others. Freedom is an inherent capacity that the individual deploys in an exercise of self-creation. Each has, in Pico della Mirandola's words, the freedom to choose who they will be.

This kind of freedom as maximal independence makes people unwilling to make long-term commitments or to stick with relationships or situations that are not going well. People want the right to move on. They want to keep their options open. They hate being dependent on others because it is restrictive. All these facets of freedom are antithetical to community, which requires such old-fashioned virtues as faithfulness and commitment. Or, to put it another way: maximal independence is incompatible with belonging.

Of course, people still want to belong, but contemporary people experience the desire to belong as in considerable tension with freedom. They get divorced and then they regret it. Or they want lifelong loving commitment to a partner, but feel it would be unbearably restrictive actually to marry. Family relationships are obvious victims of freedom as maximal independence, but neighborliness is another. Even spirituality is affected: private versions of new age spirituality leave one freer in this sense than so-called institutional religion that requires commitment and obligation.

Lest we think of this solely in terms of attitudes in people's minds, we should note that economic factors play a role: it is hard to belong when you have to keep moving from one job to another or from one place to another. How many people now have neighbors they have known all their lives or colleagues they have worked with all their careers, as most people did not so long ago?

FREEDOM AS CONSUMER CHOICE

Alongside freedom as maximal independence the other dominant aspect of freedom in contemporary Western culture is freedom of consumer choice. Having choice can certainly be a good thing. Even rather trivial forms of choice make life more enjoyable. But we may well wonder whether our society has not gone about as far as it can in simply multiplying choice in every aspect of life that can be bought. Consumer choice certainly can be a means of commercial manipulation cloaking itself in the illusion of freedom. But probably the worst manifestation of a consumer culture occurs when the model of consumer choice is applied to things other than those we purchase, such as choosing our moral values.

The effect of a culture that overvalues consumer choice is to give the impression that freedom is really enhanced by the mere multiplication of choices, regardless of how we exercise choice. What matters is having the choice, not making the right choice, not choosing well or rightly. This is one of the points where one may fear that freedom is becoming the only value. Distinguishing good choices and bad choices is serious when there are accepted notions of good and bad. In a culture that socializes people into a range of values and virtues that constitute the good life, the main value of choice will be that it enables the making of good choices. Freedom is a faculty, and choice is an opportunity for the good. But without a widely accepted range of values and virtues, choice becomes the good that is valued in and of itself.

FREEDOM AS DOMINATION?

A question that must always be raised about freedom is whether it has domination as its corollary. In other words, is it freedom for some at the expense of others? Is it the freedom the master enjoys only because he has slaves? It is easy for us to see that ancient Athenian democracy was possible for the free citizens of Athens only because their slaves and their wives did all the work and left them the free time to engage in the democratic debates and decisions of direct democracy. Modern democracy was for a long time really a kind of plutocracy in the sense that there was a property qualification for voting. Universal franchise came late in the day. The economic relationships that free some while enslaving others are not always so obvious, but there are always economic aspects to freedom. What is happening in a democracy where the poor have the vote but few of them actually turn out to vote? How far does consumer choice in the West depend on cheap labor, not to mention child labor, in parts of the developing world?

We have already observed that for freedom conceived as maximal independence for the individual, other people appear only as restrictions on the freedom of the individual. But we also have to press, in some cases, a harder critique: are freedoms we value ourselves only possible because others are denied freedoms?

Freedom, we have to conclude, is such a magic word, such an alluring notion, that it is also a powerfully ideological word—in the bad sense of “ideology,” meaning that it mystifies a situation we would dislike or be ashamed of if we saw it more clearly. Freedom can cloak oppression and justify selfishness. It covers a multitude of goods and a multitude of evils and a lot of rather ambiguous things. It deserves a lot more critical attention than our society usually affords it, while priding itself precisely on its freedom.

BEYOND HYPER-INDIVIDUALISM: RECIPROCITY

To construct a notion of freedom that can serve as an adequate alternative to the kinds of freedom that in the contemporary world are proving inimical to human flourishing, there are two motifs that I draw from my understanding of the Bible and the Christian tradition: freedom is finite and freedom is relational.

Freedom is finite. That means, partly, that it is given, just as for finite creatures all goods are received. Freedom is given ultimately by God, but also in the concrete circumstances of life it is given by social structures and traditions and by other people. We do not simply win freedom for our individual selves; we receive it. We grant freedom to each other (or fail to do so); we enhance each other's freedom (or suppress it). In a well-functioning community we are not restrictions on each other's freedom, but enable each other's freedom. Freedom is not a zero-sum game, so that the more freedom I have the less you have. The more freedom we give each other the more we all have.

If we are given freedom by others, then it is a mistake to want a kind of independence that excludes any sort of dependence. The independence of finite creatures is always rooted in their more fundamental dependence on God. But the same is, less absolutely, true of our dependence on other people. Children grow to independence from the dependence they have on adults, and are forever indebted to those adults for the independence they acquire. But adult independence also is always only an aspect of the complex web of interdependence that human society is. Moreover, in the context of current ecological threats, it is vital to recover a lively sense of human dependence on the rest of the natural world. Human independence is rooted in dependence on nature, just as all creaturely existence is rooted in dependence on God the Creator.

That freedom is finite also means that it has limits. It is the condition of a finite creature to live within limits. But of course finite creatures are created such as to find fulfillment

within limits. Limits belong to the good of finite creatures. I would not be happier if I could be in two hundred places at the same time, because I have not been made to find happiness in such a capacity. This does not mean that we can always know in advance where we shall find the limits to be (could humans, for example, colonize Mars?).

But we should not find the very idea of limits alien and restrictive, and so we should be open to discovering limits at the same time as we may discover new possibilities. In other words, we must abandon that element in the modern spirit that aspired to the limitless freedom appropriate only to God. Feuerbach was wrong: in the concept of God we recognize necessary distinctions between God and ourselves; we recognize ourselves to be finite, not infinite.

To construct an adequate alternative to the kinds of freedom that today are proving inimical to human flourishing, there are two motifs that I draw from the Bible and Christian tradition: that freedom is finite and that freedom is relational.

Freedom is finite, and it is also relational. Not only do we give and receive freedom, but furthermore freedom is fulfilled in being freedom for. The contemporary concept of freedom is deficient in having no real idea of what freedom is for. When freedom is the only value, it becomes no more than having the choice to do whatever one chooses, which in itself is entirely without value. What I choose to do with my freedom could be wholly destructive to myself as well as to others. For freedom to be worth anything we have to have notions about what it is good to choose. Once we see this truth, the tension with community disappears. Freedom is for the common good.

However, in order to sustain such a notion of freedom as rooted in givenness and dependence and fulfilling itself in serving the common good, we need a good deal more than this notion of freedom itself. We need a context of other beliefs and values. This is only possible when hyper-individualistic, modern or postmodern persons are able to transcend their supposedly autonomous, self-sufficient, wholly self-determining selves, and find their true selves in relation to God – the truly determinative reality that graciously gives to us selves that subsist in freedom and relationships.

NOTES

1 Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958), in Henry Hardy, ed., *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 160-217, here citing 168.

2 Quoted in Delwin Brown, *To Set at Liberty: Christian Faith and Human Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 6.

3 Ibid.

4 Quoted in Alexander Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Notion of the State: An Introduction to Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 204-205.



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Paul's Assessment of Christian Freedom

BY BRUCE W. LONGENECKER

In an awkward but memorable phrase, Paul declares: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." The story of Jesus Christ, as it comes to life in his followers, is a story of freedom, to be sure, but a freedom constrained by the Cross and deeply at odds with individualistic notions of liberty.

The Apostle Paul assures the Galatian Christians, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free" (Galatians 5:13a, TNIV).¹ These words were written in the middle of the first century, but they resonate strongly with fundamental sentiments of many Western societies, with their mixture of individualistic and democratic liberty. It has often been the case, however, that Christians have unwittingly extracted Paul's emphasis on Christian freedom from its larger discursive and theological context. As a consequence, Christian ethical convictions that seem to be based on solid Pauline grounding have at times run against the grain of Paul's ethical theologizing.

As we seek to delineate the complexity of Paul's discourse on Christian freedom, we will return to Galatians 5:13 as a theme verse on three occasions. In each case we will be able to add yet another level of meaning to Paul's understanding of the gospel of freedom.

FREE FROM MORAL LIBERTINISM

Freedom is an important motif in several of Paul's extant letters. This is true especially of his letters to Christians in Galatia and Rome. In his allegory of Abrahamic offspring in Galatians 4, for instance, Paul likens Christians to offspring of the "free woman" (Sarah) instead of the "slave woman" (Hagar), concluding the allegory with the claim, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (5:1, TNIV). The sentence might look somewhat awkward, verging

on tautology or redundancy. But Paul has constructed it in this way for a particular purpose, as we will see toward the end of this essay.

For now it is enough to note that Paul uses the notion of freedom as a kind of short-hand for the conviction that gentile Christians need not “enslave” themselves to observing the Torah. When some proposed to the Galatians that gentile Christians should be circumcised, Paul understood this to be a

Evidently Paul had gained a reputation for “libertinism,” in which one could live without any kind of moral restraint, and all to the glory of God. He says about people who misunderstand his gospel in this way that “their condemnation is just.”

way of undermining “the freedom we have in Christ Jesus” and a way of “mak[ing] us slaves” (Galatians 2:4, TNIV). So too, Paul’s claim that “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” is followed by the exhortation to “stand firm” against those who inspire gentile Christians to be circumcised, lest the Galatians “be burdened... by a yoke of slavery” (5:1). For Paul, then, Christian “freedom” could be used as a shorthand slogan for

“salvation has nothing to do with observing the stipulations of the Torah.”

In this daring and dramatic conviction lie many of the rich resources that came to prominence in the Reformation period, when Paul’s theology was rightly used to counter the deficient view that salvation could be manipulated by people’s actions, not least through penitential purchasing of the “rights” to salvation through “indulgences” sold (in essence) by the pre-Reformation church. Quite appropriately, the reformers applied Paul’s gospel of “salvation by grace through faith” to their own day, standing firm against those who demanded that Christians should (for all intents and purposes) purchase their salvation, being burdened by a yoke of slavery placed upon them by the leadership of the pre-Reformation church.

So it is that Paul’s gospel of “freedom” is embedded with rich and important theological resources that have contributed to vital changes in the history of Christianity – in relation both to Galatian Christians and to Christians of the Reformation period.

But it is also important to note that Paul’s discourse of freedom is extremely vulnerable to misinterpretation. This became all too clear to Paul himself when dealing with Christians in Corinth. Some of them began to imagine that, if Christians are not required to observe the Torah, it follows that they really have no ethical constraints upon their behavior. Based on Paul’s gospel of “freedom,” they came to the view that “I have the right to do anything.”

Paul reiterates this view of theirs on two occasions in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23, where he makes it clear that Christian freedom requires careful handling, lest it should result in a kind of ethical servitude. This will be developed below; for now it is enough to note that this Corinthian view of “having the right to do anything” may have plagued Paul’s ministry beyond the confines of his relationship with the Corinthians. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul articulates this Corinthian slogan more pointedly, and in a fashion suggesting that others were suspicious that his gospel of freedom was ethically deficient. So, he writes: “Why not say – as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say – ‘Let us do evil that good may result?’” (Romans 3:8, TNIV). On two occasions in Romans 6 Paul rearticulates the same view: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” and “Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” (6:1, 15, TNIV).

Evidently Paul had gained a reputation for promoting what might be called an ethical “libertinism,” in which one could live without any kind of moral restraint, and all to the glory of God. After all, if grace is freely given “apart from law” (Romans 3:21), then perhaps those who have faith in Jesus can live in any fashion they choose, without worrying about being condemned as sinners. This might even be thought to enhance God’s reputation as a gracious God who does not hold sin against those who have put their faith in Jesus. Paul says about people who misunderstand his gospel in this way that “their condemnation is just” (Romans 3:8, TNIV).

Returning to the theme verse of Galatians 5:13, we can now recognize how Paul builds his case there. Whereas the first sentence of the verse calls Christians to “be free,” in the second sentence Paul gives this critical stipulation: “But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.” The translation “sinful nature” is the TNIV’s interpretation of the word “flesh,” by which Paul usually means something like “the human reinforced proclivity towards sinful living.” Here we get a glimpse of what Paul does more fully in his letters to qualify what Christian freedom involves, putting a fence around how it should and should not be understood.

FREE FROM SELF-INTERESTEDNESS

Accounting fully for Paul’s theology of “freedom from” requires an examination of the middle chapters of Romans. We have already noted instances when Paul articulates the view that others have attributed to him – that is, it might actually be a good thing for Christians to be free to commit sins, since that would only enhance divine grace (Romans 6:1, 15). On each occasion, Paul immediately rejects this view with a most vociferous ejection, “that must not be the case!” This stance might seem obvious, but for Paul it was more than just a matter of ethical common sense. It involved cognizance of an apocalyptic scenario that the Romans were in danger of losing sight of (like many Christians after them). That apocalyptic scenario

needs to be clearly in mind when considering Paul's emphasis on freedom, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Front and center in this regard stand the "powers" that give shape to human existence. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul outlines two separate spheres of influence in which different "cosmic powers" are operative. Highlighting Paul's notion of sin makes the point well. Paul did not simply imagine Adam's act of sin to be the first in a never-ending line of sins replicated by his offspring; instead, and much more dramatically, Adam's sin provided the occasion for suprahuman powers to gain a devastating foothold within God's good creation. Paul introduced one of these powers already in Romans 3:9, the power of Sin, and in Romans 5:12-21 he associates that power with another, the power of Death. At times in Romans 5:12-21 Paul seems to have human sinfulness and human death in view, while at others he seems to have the cosmic powers in view – not least when speaking of them as "reigning" or being the overlords of the sphere of influence in which sin and death are human inevitabilities (5:14, 17, 21). In Paul's view, the cosmic dimension and the personal dimension are intertwined parts of the same fundamental problem. The death and resurrection of Jesus introduces a situation of "freedom" not only in relation to the human inevitabilities of sin and death but also in relation to the cosmic powers of Sin and Death.

In Romans 6, Paul spells out the mechanisms whereby this "freedom from the suprahuman powers" is brought about. Central to his thinking is baptism. Christians have been baptized into Christ Jesus and have been united with him in death, and in this way, the power of Sin is hoodwinked, since it gets no inevitable traction in the lives of Jesus-followers. Death is the key here. When people die, the power of Sin no longer has a foothold in their lives; since Jesus-followers have died with Christ, the power of Sin has thereby been duped. But these "died with Christ" people are not trophies for the power of Death. Instead, they have come alive in a new "sphere of lordship," a sphere in which their lives are instruments of God's grace and righteousness.

For Paul, the power of Sin is no longer the controlling overlord of those who follow Jesus, and those who follow Jesus are no longer "slaves" to the power of Sin. So he writes: "do not let [the power of] Sin reign [or be the lord] in your mortal bodies...for [the power of] Sin shall no longer be your master [or overlord]" (6:12, 14, TNIV). Having been "slaves to sin" (6:20), Christians are now "set free from the power of Sin" (6:7, 18, 20, 22).

This does not mean, of course, that they are therefore free to commit sins. Paul recognizes that it is still possible for Christians to "offer" their bodies to the power of Sin, allowing that suprahuman power to influence their lives. But he sees this as a perversion of Christian freedom. Christians are, instead, exhorted to offer themselves to the power of God.

Paul's conviction of "freedom from the Torah" plays a part within this larger context of Paul's "apocalyptic" thought about the suprahuman powers

that oppress God's world. In Romans 7:1-6, Paul observes that dead persons (like those who have died with Christ) are not bound to laws that bind others, and he draws from this the view that there is no salvific necessity to observing the Mosaic law. In fact, Romans 7:7-25 outlines how the power of Sin hijacks the God-given law so that the law itself serves the purposes of Sin. That allows Paul to designate the Mosaic law as "the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2, TNIV), perhaps connoting the Mosaic law engulfed within the program of the powers of Sin and Death. It is this law in its inadvertent association with powers of Sin and Death that Paul says Christians have been "set free" from.

There is nothing "Corinthian" about Paul's position, however. Having been set free in one sense, Christians have become "enslaved" in another sense, becoming "slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:18; cf. 6:20, 22 TNIV). And this notion of Christian enslavement introduces the second dimension of what it is that Christians have been freed from. What the power of Sin induced in the person who speaks in Romans 7 is covetousness. Whereas the law commands "You shall not covet," the power of Sin seized "the opportunity afforded by the commandment" and "produced in me every kind of coveting" (Romans 7:7-8, TNIV). If we can uncover what "every kind of coveting" looks like to Paul, we can unmask what it is that the power of Sin promotes within enslaved humanity.

To discover what "every kind of coveting" looks like for Paul, we only need to expose its opposite within Paul's thinking. Later in Romans Paul encourages Christians to be

debtors to each other in love, adding "for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" and noting that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8, 10, TNIV). This resonates with what Paul said earlier in Romans 8:4, when speaking of the "righteous requirement of the law" having been "fulfilled in us" by means of the Spirit. Although Christians do not observe the law, there is a sense in which the law

itself is fulfilled in Christians through the Spirit, who brings alive loving patterns of life within Jesus' followers. For the one who is "sold as a slave to the power of Sin" (Romans 7:14), the law inevitably becomes associated with the powers of Sin and Death (Romans 8:2). Conversely, for the one who is "enslaved to righteousness" (Romans 6:18), the law finds its true fulfillment, not by doing its commandments but by living through the

It is the law in its inadvertent association with powers of Sin and Death that Christians have been "set free" from. However, having been set free in one sense, they have become "enslaved" in another sense, becoming "slaves to righteousness."

Spirit, who inspires patterns of love, whereby the law is (inadvertently) fulfilled. It is in this matrix that we find the converse of “every kind of coveting.”

We are now in a position to return to our theme verse for a second time. Whereas the first sentence of Galatians 5:13 calls Christians to “be free,” and whereas the second sentence warns against allowing freedom to promote sinfulness, the same verse concludes with the exhortation to “serve one

another humbly in love.”

Freedom, for Paul, is freedom to serve, through love. And once again, Paul immediately brings the Torah into this matrix of thought, giving an assurance similar to that of Romans 13:8-10: “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14, TNIV).

Paul says more about what love looks like throughout Galatians, but note here how he contrasts it with what

Christian freedom is not individualistically configured. This is what Paul presents in his analogy of the Church as “the body of Christ,” with each part of the community playing its part (whether large or small) to enhance the community.

might be thought of as a relational amplification of the phrase “every kind of coveting” in Romans 7:8: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:15, TNIV). If we unwrapped what this impetus of biting and devouring looks like throughout Galatians, we would find it to be little more than self-interestedness, a self-interestedness that results only in chaotic relationships (i.e., “you will be destroyed by each other”). In essence, and in the arena of practical ethics, Paul’s gospel of freedom translates into the moral character of self-giving, in contrast to the character of self-interestedness. For Paul, then, the bottom line is that the gospel frees Christians from the chaos that results from enslavement to self-interestedness.

ENSLAVED TO ONE ANOTHER

Moral chaos is precisely what Paul found among some of the practices of Corinthian Christians. Over and over, they interpreted their freedom in Christ along individualistic lines, without regard to the health of the Christian community. The issue of spiritual gifts is a case in point, especially for those Corinthian Christians who exhibited the gift of tongues. Finding the Spirit to have gifted them with notable spiritual powers, those whose gift was tongues found that their gift could so easily be used to enhance their own status within the community, promoting them over against others whose gifts were of a different kind. Despite their impressive spiritual speech, such people are (says

Paul) merely like “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1, TNIV). In contrast to this, Paul imagines the Christian community to be a well-oiled machine, in which all the parts work together in perfect coordination. This is what Paul presents in his analogy of the Christian community as “the body of Christ,” with each part of the community playing its part (whether large or small) to enhance the community.

The fact that, for Paul, Christian freedom is not individualistically configured is evident elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, not least in relation to the eating of meat that may previously have been used in a sacrifice on an altar to a pagan god. In that context, while Paul affirms the liberty of Christians to eat freely, he spends more time and effort crafting out what freedom looks like when it is wielded responsibly within Christian community. Properly understood, Christian liberty is constrained by Christian conscientiousness toward others (e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:1-13).

When the Corinthians align themselves with Paul's gospel, he finds them to be his letter of commendation—“a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:3). Paul uses the Greek word for “Spirit” seven times within 2 Corinthians 3, and concludes the chapter with an emphasis on the transformation of Jesus-followers through the Spirit of freedom:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

What is this “same image” that the Spirit of freedom transpires “from one degree of glory to another” within Christians? It is likely that the image is Christological in its content and outline. That is to say, Christians are being transformed into the “image” of Jesus, so that they, as if reflecting Jesus among each other, are progressively reflecting his own way of life within their communities.

What, then, is this “way of life” that Jesus embodied? For Paul, the characteristic that most defines Jesus' own “way of life” is the way of self-giving. This motif is in virtually every one of Paul's letters, not least in the “kenotic hymn” of Philippians 2:6-11, with its emphasis on Jesus having “emptied himself” and “humbled himself” (2:7-8). To track the motif throughout the Pauline letters would be an exercise in itself, and falls beyond the scope of this essay. But it lies at the heart of Paul's gospel of freedom, with cruciformity (a cross-shaped life of self-giving) lashing Paul's soteriological and ethical discourse together in an inseparable union.

This union of salvation and ethics is likely to explain the otherwise intolerable claim (as noted above) that “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). The phrase “Christ has set us free” pertains to the salvation of Jesus’ followers, while “for freedom” pertains to the ethical lifestyle of Jesus’ followers. In essence, Christians have been set free from the enslavement of chaos-inducing self-interestedness in order to allow the self-giving Christ to become incarnate within their own self-giving way of life.

Running along similar lines are Paul’s notable claims in Galatians 2:20, a passage that has been called the “touchstone that every proposition in theology, every course of action prescribed in ethics, every Christian institution must be brought.”²

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God [or better, perhaps: I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God], who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20 (TNIV)

Having been crucified with Christ, Christians become the means for the self-giving Christ to live through them.

The same theme emerges elsewhere, such as Galatians 4:19, where Paul incorporates the imagery of childbirth: “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed *in you*” (italics added, TNIV). The formation of Christ in the Galatians is rooted in their having been baptized “into Christ” and having been “clothed with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Paul imagines that the lives of the Christians are so altered as to suggest that Christ himself has been “draped” around them, as if they themselves were “performing” the self-giving Christ.

All this transpires from Christian participation in the story of Jesus Christ, as his story comes to life within his followers. It is a story of freedom, to be sure, but a freedom constrained by its Christological basis and its corporate and relational contours.

It is also a freedom that is eschatologically “apocalyptic” in its configuration, with the self-giving one having come “to rescue us from [the bondage of] the present evil age” (Galatians 1:4, TNIV) as his loving self-giving becomes embodied within his followers. The freedom that God empowers “in Christ” through the Spirit involves the shattering of the cosmically-ingrained power (bifurcated in terms of “Sin and Death”)—a power that embeds itself within the insatiable drive of self-interestedness, destroying healthy human relationality in the process and leaving moral chaos in its wake. God, in Christ and through the Spirit, is smashing all permutations of the suprahuman force that animates human self-interestedness and fosters moral chaos. In this way Jesus’ followers are being restored to “right relationship” with him and, as a consequence, with all other components

of God's creation. Enslavement to cosmic forces of moral chaos has been undermined in the process, resulting in the freedom that equates to enslavement to others in the love that the Spirit inspires within those who are enslaved to God.

We return one final time to the verse that began this essay, Galatians 5:13. Noting that Christians were "called to be free," Paul exhorts the Galatian Christians not simply to "serve one another humbly in love" (as in most translations); instead, the verb Paul uses is "enslave" (*douleuô*)—literally, they should "enslave themselves" to each other in humble, enacted, practical love. Paul was no doubt aware of how jarring this exhortation must sound within its immediate context. In the seven instances when Paul employs the notion of slavery prior to this verse in Galatians, that notion functions to depict the condition from which Christians have been freed and to which they should not return (4:3, 7-9, 24-25, and 5:1). As one whose gospel advocated "freedom" from non-essentials (i.e., law observance) and from the cosmic power that translates into chaotic self-interestedness, Paul's choice of verb in the phrase "enslave yourselves to one another humbly in love" was no doubt as intentional as it was ironic.

NOTES

1 Scripture passages marked TNIV are from the *Holy Bible, Today's New International Version* ® TNIV ® Copyright © 2001, 2005 by Biblica, www.biblica.com. All rights reserved worldwide.

2 C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), 88. In some presentations of the text, the phrase "I have been crucified with Christ" is the final phrase of Galatians 2:19.



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Authority, Autonomy, and the Freedom to Love

BY SCOTT BADER-SAYE

We should be critical of the modern idolatry of autonomy even as we continue to be skeptical about unchecked authority. But if freedom as detachment does not produce real freedom and if authority as coercion only feeds resentment, what alternative vision can the Church offer?

From the 1970's bumper sticker that told us to "Question Authority" to the crowds in Monty Python's *Life of Brian* shouting in ironic chorus, "We are all individuals," contemporary culture celebrates the autonomous self even while tacitly acknowledging that there is no escaping the very authority that tells us to be individuals. Indeed, if there is a commanding creed of modernity, it is, paradoxically, "think for yourself." We live in a time when individual autonomy ranks among our highest cultural goods, yet it has become that which is inescapable and so is experienced as necessity. We moderns are *fated to choose*. Peter Berger calls this the "heretical imperative," noting that "heresy" comes from the Greek *hairesis*, meaning "choice" or "opinion."¹

The rise of the Tea Party with its anti-government rhetoric reflects this widespread cultural distrust of authority. We imagine that each individual is his or her own best ruler, rarely acknowledging that we are also often our own worst tyrants. All the while, we are at a loss to explain what our autonomy is for, and we lack good ideas for how to create a common life among all of these isolated and self-ruling individuals.

Ronald Beiner describes the modern obsession with freedom, choice, and autonomy this way:

The liberal way of life, upheld by a particular dispensation, a particular ethos, is one where the liberal self draws its constitutive identi-

ty from its capacity to choose autonomously how and where it will work, who it will marry, where it will live, how and where it will seek means of leisure, where it will drive its car; in short, what it will be. This is a way of life centered on choice, mobility, and maximal personal freedom.... The problem with liberalism is not that it deprives us of the delights of communal attachments, whether national, ethnic, sectarian, or whatever, but that it tends to cause us to forget that our destiny in this dangerous world of ours is a collective destiny, and that the perils of insufficient citizenship are likewise shared.²

For all its protestations to the contrary, the modern way of life that is grounded in individual "*liber*" (freedom) does not in fact elevate the human being or free it from external forces. Rather, it produces a kind of person who is sufficiently detached from community and tradition to become captive to a market that reduces citizens to consumers and a state that presents minimal opportunity for meaningful deliberation or choice. It is not that the modern world has eradicated coercive authority and freed the individual for self-fulfillment (though it claims to do so), rather it has freed the individual from one dispensation (shaped by Church, tradition, and a shared story) in order to deliver the individual to another (shaped by the free market, nationalist interests, and private values).

There are reasons for Christians to be critical of the modern idolatry of autonomy even as there are reasons to continue to be skeptical about unchecked authority. As to the first, we know that our fallen selves are always tempted to act out of self-interest, to sacrifice others for our desires, to justify the pursuit of selfish ends in the name of choice. As to the second, we know that human authority is only as good as the character of the one who wields it and that, as Tolkien reminds us in *The Lord of the Rings*, great power can easily corrupt even the best of people. Assertions of authority that lack persuasive reasons may rightly be seen as a cover for self-interested abuse of power.

The standoff between authority and autonomy arises because modernity teaches us to imagine a world fundamentally shaped by competing wills. In such a world *authority* is simply one will subjecting another, while *autonomy* is simply one will left to its own devices. Having given up on the belief in a public and reasonable truth about the world, we are left with only competing desires and opinions. Lacking the ability to persuade (because we lack a common vision) we turn instead to manipulation, "spin," and intimidation. The root problem, of course, is that we have detached both authority and obedience from a common source and goal. Lacking a shared understanding of what we seek as human beings or citizens or neighbors, we lack the ability to make sense of social, ecclesial, and political rule as anything other than struggles and compromises between competing interests.

If freedom as detachment does not produce real freedom and if authority as coercion only feeds resentment, what alternative vision can the Church offer? What would it look like, for instance, for the Church to reclaim the goodness of authority and to proclaim that we are not always the best rulers of our own lives? The challenge is to reframe authority and obedience as a shared pursuit of goodness and truth that issues in a perfect freedom and fulfills the self in the service of God.

TRUE FREEDOM IS NOT AUTONOMOUS

True freedom is not an arbitrary license to choose but rather the capacity to become who we are. Autonomy, as “self-rule,” describes not freedom but detachment, isolation, and unaccountability. Self-rule can quickly and easily devolve into a captivity to desires that fail to be directed to any good outside of themselves. In contrast, Jesus promises his followers, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31b-32). Note that freedom is not the starting point, the place of pure neutrality from which we make choices. Rather, freedom is the end point, an achievement of the soul; it is the result of formation in the word and practices of discipleship. Such discipline leads one to know the truth and knowing the truth, one is set free. Abstract and arbitrary choice, which is but an adolescent fascination with “doing whatever I want,” proves not to be freeing at all, but only a means of enslaving ourselves to our own basest desires and wants. True freedom arises when we know the truth about ourselves (who we are and what we are made for) as well as the truth about the world (what is real and good and thus worth pursuing). An untethered will is not free but rather open to endless manipulation by forces that are happy to capture and direct one’s desires for someone else’s benefit.

Autonomy seems to name something that Scripture would describe as moral chaos. The book of Judges, for instance, describes a time when everyone “did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25) and what ensued was anarchic violence. The problem, according to Judges, was that “in those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). The implication of the text is that what was needed was a bit of kingly authority to keep the people in line. Of course, as we read through the rest of the Old Testament we find that the kings were often unfaithful rulers who abused their power, turned from God, and led the people astray. Neither autonomy nor monarchical authority seemed to provide the answer to the formation of a faithful people.

One is struck by how this Old Testament dilemma parallels Alasdair MacIntyre’s description of authority and autonomy in modernity:

There are only two alternative modes of social life open to us, one in which the free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign and one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign, precisely so that it

may limit the free and arbitrary choices of individuals. Given this deep cultural agreement, it is unsurprising that the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest.³

Of course, the difference between MacIntyre's account of modernity and the Old Testament account of ancient Israel is that Israel's struggle to find the right political structure – confederacy or monarchy – was situated within a theological conversation about what it meant to be God's chosen people, to be a light to the nations, to embody God's ways in contrast to the Gentiles. So, while the struggle between more or less centralized power is not a new one, the people of Israel knew that the ultimate question was what made possible their faithful obedience to God. Today, the question seems to be reversed – how does a particular form of authority help me follow nothing but my own choices.

TRUE AUTHORITY IS NOT COERCIVE

True authority is not the power to coerce but the power to persuade; in the Church it is power that is transparent to God and thus dispossessed of purely private interests. Humans are never simply and properly rulers over one another except insofar as we mediate God's rule to one another ("there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God," Romans 13:1). This mediation, however, is no easy task. The danger is that a human authority will interpose itself between God and God's people, as when the Israelites call for a king in 1 Samuel. Their demand is seen as a rejection of God, a desire to replace God with an earthly authority ("they have not rejected you," God tells Samuel, "but they have rejected me from being king over them," 1 Samuel 8:7). The kind of rule that displaces God finally rests on idolatrous power. And so, notwithstanding the logic of Paul's description in Romans 13, the apostles in Acts knew that there were times to say, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).

True authority is not the power to coerce but the power to persuade; in the Church it is power that is transparent to God and thus dispossessed of purely private interests.

What, then, does it mean to "obey God"? First, we know that obeying God always involves some mediation of God's authority – through a text, a person, a community, or one's own conscience. There is never a pure, unmediated obedience, which means that we must always be aware that our specific interpretations of divine authority have the provisional and

unfinished quality proper to finite and inescapably self-interested human judgments. Second, we must be careful not to think of God's authority as just a bigger version of human power (a theological mistake played for great humor in the film *Bruce Almighty*). God is not simply one being among others who happens to be bigger and stronger and thus able to get his way. Rather, if God is the creator of all that is, then God is not a "thing" among others

Divine authority rests not on what we might call "blind obedience" but on participation in a common mind or common *logos*—as Paul describes it in Philippians 2:5, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

but is that deep reality in which "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Therefore, God can never be one will competing with others. God's "will" (metaphorically speaking, of course) is that in which our wills rest and which gives capacity to our acting.

God's power does not mean God is "free" to make arbitrary and binding pronouncements—arbitrary

power is a mark of the demonic not the divine. God's power, rather, means that God is free always to be true to God's self. And if, as John says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), then God is always free to love and so wills love. To ask "what is God's will?" is to ask "what does divine love look like here and now?" God's will is not like ours because God does not compete for space in the world. God *is* the world's space and so the rule or authority of God is God's eternal determination to draw the creation into joyful participation in its own deepest truth—that we were made to image God in graced, excessive, reciprocal gifting. God's authority not only calls us to be what we are, but judges our failures and refusals. God's judgment is but God telling the truth about our lives. Divine authority, then, simply extends God's truth in the form of command—really only one command in two forms: love God; love neighbor.

A COMMON MIND, A COMMON LOVE

Divine authority rests not on what we might call "blind obedience" but on participation in a common mind or common *logos*—as Paul describes it in Philippians 2:5, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." To be under Christ's authority is to let one's mind be conformed to that of Christ, so that his self-giving pattern of life arrives not as a coercive, external demand but as the true inclination of one's own heart. Paul makes a similar point in his description of the Church as "the body of Christ." In this metaphor, Paul does not give teachers, apostles, or pastors the role of "head" of the body. Christ is the head of the body (Ephesians 4:25, 5:23; Colossians 1:18) and

therefore human leadership in the Church can only gesture to Christ as the true head. Yet the imaging of Christ as head and not, for instance, the *heart* of the body, leads us back to Paul's words in Philippians 2—growing up into maturity as the body of Christ means coming more and more to share the mind of Christ, to be drawn into his wisdom, to participate in the *logos*, the very mind and reality of God that became incarnate in Jesus.

In this way we might understand the words of sixteenth-century Anglican theologian Richard Hooker:

For men to be tied and led by authority, as it were with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary not to listen unto it, but to follow like beasts the first in the herd, they know not nor care not whither, this were brutish. Again, that authority of men should prevail with men either against or above Reason, is not part of our belief.⁴

Hooker was trying to find a middle way between Roman Catholic and Puritan arguments over where authority resides. He saw in each the danger of substituting human power for a true authority that points to God. One way to resist the kind of authority that binds rather than frees, he suggests, is to test whether the commands of authority are "against or above Reason." His point was not that human rationality should stand above the Word of God, but that God's Word, being true to God's nature, would be consistent with the deep logic of creation—the same logic, or *logos*, embodied in Christ.

Faithful human authority that points to God's peaceful rule seeks, like Paul, to shape a community to "have the same mind" as Christ, a common mind ordered to self-giving, kenotic love. Faithful authority, then, will always require persuasion—giving reasons and exchanging arguments. To test human authority by reason is to confess that human authority is justified by its transparency to God's rule and so must be shown to be consistent with the logic of divine love.

In John's gospel, Jesus stands before Pilate and offers an account of kingship as grounded in truth and enacted in peace. Such a way of ruling, of course, Pilate cannot understand.

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify

to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

John 18:33-38

Jesus marks off his kingdom from the kingdoms of the world not by contrasting the spiritual and the material but by contrasting a worldly power based on fighting with a divine power based on speaking the truth. Pilate confirms his own commitment to coercive power and worldly authority by showing himself deaf to the truth who stands before him.

True authority takes the risk of persuading, of speaking the truth, testifying to the truth, and trusting that those who belong to the truth will hear and respond. As Stanley Hauerwas writes,

Christian social ethics depends on the development of leadership in the church that can trust and depend on the diversity of gifts in the community. The authority necessary for leadership in the church should derive from the willingness of Christians to risk speaking the truth to and hearing the truth from those in charge. In societies that fear the truth, leadership depends on the ability to provide security rather than the ability to let the diversity of the community serve as the means to live truthfully. Only the latter form of community can afford to have their leaders’ mistakes acknowledged without their ceasing to exercise authority.⁵

Because the Church is made up of many members with many gifts, those in authority have the task of unifying and ordering those gifts for the common purpose of serving God’s kingdom. Leadership in the Church is not about making up for the weaknesses of the community but about naming and nurturing the gifts of the community. Recognizing this giftedness means that leaders do not have a monopoly on authority. Each person in the community bears an authority in relation to their area of giftedness. Each one, then, becomes at different times both leader and follower. The gathering up of gifts into common purpose comes through the authority that is transparent to the mind of Christ – that gives reasons and calls forth reasoning from the entire community. It is a leadership and authority that must rely on persuasion to draw others more deeply into the love that is the *logos* of creation. Such authority is rooted in “answerability.” Those in authority are answerable to those whom they oversee, and they have authority precisely because they answer to something beyond themselves.

This understanding of authority and obedience counters the cultural tendency to focus authority on moving the will rather than persuading the mind. It counters the cultural tendency to reduce authority to management, controlling and directing others for the sake of efficiency and productivity. It counters the cultural tendency to reduce freedom to autonomy, mistaking

choice for a good in itself. It counters all of these with a vision of true freedom as the *telos* of discipleship, the capacity to do the good and thus, beyond authority and obedience, to become friends of God.

NOTES

1 Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979), 17.

2 Ronald Beiner, *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 32, 34-35.

3 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 35.

4 Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Volume I (London: Everyman Library, 1965), 271.

5 Stanley Hauerwas, *Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 11.



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The Baptist Contribution to Liberty

BY JASON D. WHITT

Any contemporary view of religious freedom that isolates and internalizes faith is contrary to the freedom envisioned by the early Baptists who called for religious liberty. They aimed to create a distinct people whose lives were disciplined by and bound to God and one another.

Baptists have long considered themselves to be at the forefront of calls for religious liberty. From their origins in seventeenth-century England to the early days of the fledgling American republic, and now into the twenty-first century, Baptists have claimed religious liberty as one of the characteristics that distinguishes them as a unique people. It was this commitment to religious liberty that spurred Baptists such as Isaac Backus (1724-1806) and John Leland (1754-1841) to call on the framers of the American Constitution to instantiate the separation of church and state as a hallmark of the new nation.

For most Baptists in the United States today a corollary to their understanding of religious liberty is the belief in soul competency, the idea that each individual believer stands before God alone in a relationship that is a personal matter between that soul and the divine. They say that religious liberty secures every individual's freedom to determine his or her own religious beliefs apart from coercion by government (or any other institution).

While this understanding of religious liberty as individual freedom has become the standard for contemporary Baptists in the United States, it is not the conception of religious liberty first promulgated by Baptists in England. This contemporary view — that each individual has the right to choose theological beliefs from a vast array of options based on which ones best suit the

individual's desires apart from coercion by any authority — misses completely the intent of the early Baptist calls for religious liberty. The early English Baptists were not primarily concerned with individual human freedom, but with divine freedom. Religious coercion of belief was not primarily an affront to the individual's rights, but to the sovereignty of God. It was God's freedom that was at the center of Baptist calls for religious liberty.

Contemporary accounts of religious freedom that isolate the individual from all sources of authority save for personal reason betray a deep influence from Enlightenment thought rather than Baptist origins. These accounts tempt us to think of ourselves as isolated individuals whose faith is solely interiorized and who have no true connection with fellow believers other than our voluntary and changeable associations with them. How did we arrive at this point of confusion, and what are the implications of this turn from original Baptist ideals for believers today?

EARLY BAPTIST CALLS FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

When Baptists began voicing their appeals for religious liberty to King James I (1566-1625, ruling England from 1603), they based their arguments in the familiar language of two swords: the sword wielded by the civil authorities and the sword of the ecclesial authorities. The conventional view held that the civil sword and the ecclesial sword were to work together to enforce religious conformity and unity in all the lands of Western Europe. Thus, heresy was punishable not merely by church censure, but also by the powerful justice of the state authorities. While Protestants might offer hearty criticisms of imprisonment and corporal punishments at the hands of Catholic princes, their charges were based on what they believed to be the theological error of the Catholic Church. They had no qualms with making use of the state to punish religious offenses. Even in England it was commonly accepted by religious leaders that the best means to secure the peace and order not only of the Church, but also of the state as a whole, was enforced conformity to the national church — at the edge of the sword of the king's soldiers if necessary.

Baptist appeals for religious liberty in the seventeenth century stand out not because they deny the theory of two swords, but for the radical suggestion that the civil sword has no authority in ecclesial affairs. Thus, Thomas Helwys (c. 1550-c. 1616) inscribes this message to King James on the flyleaf of his now famous work *The Mystery of Iniquity* (1611/1612): "The king is a mortall man, and not God therefore hath no power over ye immortal soules of his subiects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them."¹ Articulating for the first time the principle of religious freedom that would become one of the hallmarks of Baptists, Helwys argues that the king's authority and power are limited to civil affairs, and that any attempts to legislate beyond those bounds, particularly to matters pertaining to the soul, impinge upon what belongs solely to God. That is, for the king to attempt to compel religious belief is to usurp not the rights of the

autonomous human individual, but the sovereignty of God.

The earliest English Baptists believed the key point at issue in calls for religious liberty is the matter of salvation. They developed their case with a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, they appealed to Christ's parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30) as support for their cause, pointing out that the Son of Man will withhold judgment until "the end of the age" (cf. Matthew 13:40), allowing both the good and the bad to grow together. The great concern for these Baptists was not punishment, but rather the hope that all persons who might be saved would be saved. John Murton (1585-c. 1626), a member of the original Baptist congregation in Amsterdam, wrote in 1620:

...they that are now tares may hereafter become wheat,...they that are now no people of God, nor under mercy, as the saints sometimes were, may hereafter become the people of God, and obtain mercy, as they. Some come not till the eleventh hour: if those that come not till the last hour should be destroyed because they came not at the first, then should they never come, but be prevented. And why do men call themselves Christians, and do not the things Christ would?²

These Baptists sought to convince the English authorities, both civil and ecclesial, that the proper concern for Christians is the salvation of all those who would come to Christ. To punish non-believers by exclusion from the public life of the nation, or even worse, to inflict on them torture or death because they would not believe (or believed wrongly), is counter to the very purpose of Christ who is willing to hold off judgment to the end. Ultimately, humans cannot know God's purposes and work, so to impose punishment for religious non-conformity is an abridgment of God's freedom to call resistant souls even up to the "eleventh hour."

The second prong of the Baptist argument claims that enforced conformity to Christian faith actually works contrary to the ends of God, since compelling religious practice will "cause men and women to make shipwreck of faith and good consciences, by forcing a religion upon them even against their minds and consciences."³ In other words, those who perform even right acts of worship apart from faith conviction thereby commit grave sins. From the Baptist perspective, then, enforcing religious conformity not only fails to bring salvation, but also ultimately causes those so compelled to bring damnation upon themselves. A further concern is that in any country where faith is enforced under the threat of persecution, people who are not of the faith will avoid that realm. As a result, in such a land there will be no opportunities for true evangelistic witness. Speaking to a monarch and state church that believed they were defending God's kingdom by compelling worship and combating heresy, the Baptists contended that the opposite effect is actually achieved. Civil compulsion of religious faith only hinders those who are outside of God's kingdom from having their consciences swayed and convinced.

THE CHURCH AND LIBERTY

The Baptist concern, of course, was the establishment of a true Church of baptized believers. Speaking of the Church, Leonard Busher asserts in his 1614 work *Religion's Peace: A Plea for Liberty of Conscience*: “they that will be of the true faith and church, must be called thereunto out of the world, by the word of God, in every nation.”⁴ For Baptists, the words “church” and “world” designate divergent polities where Christ’s authority is either accepted or rejected by people’s consciences. Busher points out that it is through the preaching of the gospel that the Spirit of God convinces people’s consciences so that they move “out of the world” and into the Church. The work of the Church is the preaching of the gospel so that those of the world can become part of the Church. Therefore, the Church positions itself as a distinct body politic within the land, one that seeks to continually expand as people are free to respond to the sovereign calling of God. The early English Baptists were expressing their rejection of a medieval and Magisterial Reformation social imagination that conceived of the Church and state together as encompassing a single society.

In their calls for religious liberty, the early English Baptists sought freedom from a conception of Christendom that imagined true Christian faith could be compelled by the civil authorities and that the faith must be defended against dissenters by the sword of the state. Positively, the freedom they desired is freedom for God’s activity of calling all people to salvation such that persons move from the

world into the Church—the society in which Christ’s authority is recognized as ultimate. The freedom they imagined in religious liberty is not a freedom grounded in individual rights or understood as each person being autonomous (literally, a “law unto one’s self”). These are modern understandings of liberty. Instead, for early Baptists freedom is first God’s nature, and only derivatively are humans free

as God calls them from bondage to sin that is characteristic of the world, and into God’s own freedom that characterizes the Church. This freedom for humans comes by God’s gracious activity: when they are oriented to God as their end, they can enjoy lives that rightly exhibit the practices of God’s kingdom. The Church must be a disciplining body that forms in its members those practices of living that do not inhibit this freedom, but are

The early Baptists thought the proper concern for Christians is the salvation of all who would come to Christ. To impose civil punishment for religious non-conformity is an abridgment of God’s freedom to call resistant souls even up to the “eleventh hour.”

consistent with the kingdom ethic. The state might still claim from its Christian citizens their obedience to civic laws, taxes, and even military service. Nevertheless, the state's authority always meets its limit when it confronts those demands upon persons made by Christ.

THE MODERN ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM

A very different conception of freedom dominates in contemporary society. The modern conception of freedom—a product of the Enlightenment thought of such seventeenth-century luminaries as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704), and entrenched in American political thought by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and James Madison (1751-1836)—holds above all else “the inviolable liberty of personal volition, the right to decide for ourselves what we shall believe, want, need, own, or serve.”⁵ On this view, liberty belongs to the individual's will, which is free only when it is not bound by any constraints greater than itself. Its sole authority is that individual's unaided reason, which Enlightenment thinkers assume is innate (i.e., it exists prior to any social conventions, traditions, or religious beliefs), universal (i.e., the same in all human beings), and neutral (i.e., not unduly influenced by or in the service of any moral perspective).

This Enlightenment account of the impartiality of reason is the basis of the idea that everyone should appeal only to reason when debating matters of public interest. It is alleged that violent disputes in the public square—from the persecution of religious dissenters by state churches to the long warfare among newly-formed European states—are rooted in cultural particularities and sectarian interests, but reason allows us to transcend all that divides us. Now for reason to take its proper place, on this view, religion must be relegated to the individual's private life. Once it is interiorized in this way, one's religion is properly a matter of no one else's concern.

In his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), John Locke borrows from Baptists the view that the concern of the civil government reaches only to those matters that secure the good of the commonwealth. He famously writes, “the Care of Souls is not committed to the Civil Magistrates...,” a sentiment with which the early English Baptists would heartily agree. But notice how Locke concludes this statement: he adds “...any more than to other Men.”⁶ That is, the care of souls is not the concern of civil authorities, but neither is it the concern of anyone else, including the Church.

Such a radical individualizing of the Christian faith was foreign to the earliest Baptists who understood the Church as a disciplined and disciplining community. Locke, however, is clear: “A Church then I take to be a voluntary Society of Men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the publick worshipping of God.”⁷ If the Church is merely a voluntary society, it has no claims on an individual beyond what that person allows. Each individual chooses (volunteers to join) the particular congregation that she finds most acceptable to her conscience. If that congregation ceases to be

appealing, she moves on to another group that agrees with what she has deemed, according to her reason, to be correct for herself. The individual is the final arbiter and authority for all questions of belief; in the end, an individual needs no one else for the religious life.

Isaac Backus and John Leland are the key Baptist leaders in the fledgling American republic who worked to have religious liberty enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Unlike their English Baptist forebears, however, Backus and Leland do not ground their calls for religious liberty in a concern for God's sovereignty. Instead they are influenced by Locke's political theory when they ground religious liberty in an emphasis on human rights that must be guaranteed by the civil state. Their view of the Church betrays a similar modern influence when they imagine it is a voluntary organization of individuals, not the disciplining community envisioned by English Baptists a century earlier. With Backus and Leland, a clear trajectory is set among American Baptists towards an internalized faith that understands freedom as personal volition unhindered by the claims of any external authority.

In the twentieth century, many Baptists continue down this path of thinning out their ecclesiology so that the Church is little more than an association of like-minded individuals whose privatized faith exists prior to their joining an ecclesial community. I frequently encounter this way of thinking

among my Baptist students, who describe their religious pilgrimage like this: "Though I was raised in the Church, my faith was really my parents' faith. Yet when I was [here they describe some seminal experience], I made the decision to follow Christ and my faith became my own." While their making faith personal is very commendable, these students' "Jesus and me" way of expressing their commitment betrays a disturbing modern mindset. First, they think that their faith can be "possessed," that it is (like other things they own) something they have chosen apart from any authority or tradition in their lives. Furthermore, they think that their faith is completely internal. The implication is that their Christian commitment is authentic only because it has been disconnected from the particularities of their history and tangle of their relationships.

The radical individualizing of the Christian faith—based on John Locke's idea of the Church as "a voluntary Society"—was foreign to the earliest Baptists who understood the Church as a disciplined and disciplining community.

FREEDOM IN CHRISTIANITY

This modern approach to religion—though it may at first glance seem unobjectionable to many raised in Baptist or other evangelical congregations—is inherently dangerous. Its call for individuals to choose a faith (and by their choice to validate that faith) stands opposed to the witness of Scripture. The Christian assertion has always been that it is God who chooses us, not we who choose God. On this crucial point Calvinists and Arminians agree: it is only God's grace that allows people to respond to God's saving claim on their lives. The modern conception of the human individual as independent from all attachments one has not chosen for oneself, as an autonomous entity freely choosing what one will accept or reject, is not Christianity, it is idolatry. As Rodney Clapp observes, this is the self being worshipped as God.⁸

When freedom is confused with the unhindered play of our desires, Christian faith is reduced to an unmediated one-on-one relationship between God and the individual believer. The Church becomes secondary, and often superfluous: it becomes a collection of individuals who share similar spiritual interests and perhaps feel obliged to cooperate for the pursuit of certain good works. Yet, because each individual is autonomous, living a faith disconnected from anyone else or any authority other than one's own reason, the ecclesial communion is not essential to anyone's salvation. Salvation becomes a matter of personal accounting. Curtis Freeman describes this modern view of freedom and Church well when he writes,

The individual offers faith and in return God provides salvation. In the economy of this individualistic scheme, salvation is severed from membership in the church, since believers enjoy private fellowship with Christ and must subsequently enter into voluntary fellowship with the church. Christians that choose not to unite with fellow believers may be in violation of the admonition not to neglect meeting together, but their relationship to Christ remains unaffected by their isolation from the church.⁹

In this scheme, the Church has little to offer the individual beyond spiritual encouragement.

Freedom, as understood by the Church through most of the Christian tradition that the early English Baptists inherited, finds its source in God's sovereignty. It never separates individuals from one another or from all external authorities, but results in people fully living their humanity, rightly oriented to God and in relationship with one another. Baptists express this conviction in the 1644 *London Confession* when they they proclaim the Church to be "a company of visible Saints, called and separated from the world, . . . and joyned to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement, in the practical injoyment of the Ordinances."¹⁰

Any notion of freedom that isolates and internalizes faith is simply contrary to the freedom envisioned by the Baptists who first issued calls for religious liberty. They called on the king not to preserve individual rights, but to rec-

ognize God's sovereignty to call all people to faith. Importantly, they aimed at creating a distinct community, a people whose very lives were disciplined by their participation together in the faith, bound to God and one another. They never sought to uncouple people from one another, as if an individual's faith could exist apart from life in community with other believers. "This interconnection between belief, the believer, and other believers is such that relation with Christ is never simply between the individual and Christ but rather between the believer and 'the whole Christ' (*totus Christus*) who is head and body," Freeman notes.¹¹

True freedom is found in a community that recognizes its submission to the authority of Christ, a community where individual members can express their faith only as they remain bound to one another in Christ. Far from the modern attitude that cuts individuals free from every authority that might hinder their desires and intentions, true freedom submits itself to the authority of the Church and acknowledges its need of all who share Christian community together.

NOTES

1 A photocopy of this handwritten note is reproduced in Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, edited by Richard Groves (1611/1612; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), vi.

2 John Murton, *An Humble Supplication to The King's Majesty; as it was presented 1620*, in Edward Bean Underhill, ed., *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661* (1846; New York: Burt Franklin, 1966), 215.

3 Leonard Busher, *Religion's Peace: or A Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, in Underhill, ed., *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience and Persecution 1614-1661*, 36.

4 *Ibid.*, 55.

5 David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 22.

6 John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, edited by James H. Tully (1689; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 26.

7 *Ibid.*, 28.

8 Rodney Clapp, *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 47.

9 Curtis Freeman, "Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Communion Ecclesiology in the Free Church," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31:3 (Fall 2004), 259-272, here citing 263.

10 *First London Confession*, Article XXXIII, in William Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 165.

11 Freeman, "Where Two or Three Are Gathered," 263-264.



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Through his struggle against demons in the desert,
St. Anthony participated in God's gift of spiritual
freedom from sin.

Under Assault

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK
AND ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

The freedom to truly be followers of Jesus Christ, the unhindered discipleship that we seek, is constantly threatened by various temptations. Martin Schongauer's famous image of St. Anthony being pulled in many directions at once by demons reminds us of the daily distractions that draw us away from prayer and faithful living.

St. Anthony the Great of Egypt (c. 251-356) became a larger-than-life hero in late antiquity. He was only about eighteen or twenty years old when he inherited his family's wealth upon the death of his parents. Several months later as he was thinking about how the first Christians in Jerusalem shared their possessions (Acts 4:32-35), he heard in church the reading of Jesus' instruction to the rich young man, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21-22; cf. Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22). "When he heard this, Anthony applied the Lord's commandment to himself...[and] immediately went home and sold the possessions he owned," notes his biographer, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria.¹ Anthony became a humble and devoted disciple, learning self-restraint, cheerfulness, gentleness, prayer, diligence in reading, and compassion from the more mature Christians around him. "He did this in such a way that although he surpassed all others in glory, he was nevertheless dear to them all," Athanasius writes, such that "they called him God's friend."² Nevertheless, during this period Anthony was haunted by sexual temptations.

Precisely because Anthony continued to grow in goodness through loving others (and drew them to love him in spiritual friendship), Athanasius suggests, Satan decided to send subordinate demons to attack Anthony when he was thirty-five years old. In many ways, these trials echoed the devil's temptation of Christ in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; Mark 1:12-13). Just as Christ resisted temptation by quoting God's instruction – e.g., "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3); "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16); and "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him" (Deuteronomy 6:13) – so Anthony responded to Satan by singing a psalm: "The Lord is my helper and I will exult over my enemies" (Psalm 118:7).

Athanasius describes the later stages of the devil's temptation of Anthony as a physical attack by demons masquerading as wild animals of the desert:

Then...a horde of different kinds of demons poured out. They took on the shapes of wild animals and snakes and instantly filled the whole place with specters in the form of lions, bulls, wolves, vipers, serpents, scorpions and even leopards and bears, too.... The face of each of them bore a savage expression and the sound of their fierce voices was terrifying. Anthony, beaten and mauled, experienced even more atrocious pains in his body but he remained unafraid, his mind alert.³

Athanasius's account of vicious demonic assault reflects the early Christian interpretation of Psalm 91, where God defends the believer from a desert attack. This is the psalm, by the way, that Satan mockingly sang to Christ in the desert (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:11).

Saint Anthony Abbot Tempted by Demons is one of the most popular depictions of this key event in Anthony's pilgrimage. It is one of 116 engravings attributed to the German painter and engraver Martin Schongauer; at the bottom is the monogram "M+S." Schongauer was a student at Leipzig University in 1465 and was probably an apprentice between 1466 and 1469. The technique of engraving allows, through fine strokes and crosshatching, an expressive quality for modeling and shading. Schongauer's excellent craftsmanship is seen in the extraordinary line quality and intricate detail of each of the demons who tug on every possible part of Anthony.

In Schongauer's engraving each demon has a monstrous form—with frog scales, raptor talons, or bat wings supporting its maniacal human, fish, goat, dog, hawk, or apelike face. Such grotesquery is entirely foreign to Athanasius's account of Antony's temptation in which the demons take on recognizable animal forms and only their "savage expression" and "fierce voices" betray their demonic nature.

While the Christians of late antiquity knew stories about creatures with mixed and monstrous forms, they did not associate these fabulous beings with evil. Indeed, it was said that Anthony himself once encountered a friendly centaur (half human and half horse) in the desert, and conversed with a faun ("a man of no great height, with a hooked nose, his forehead sprouting sharp horns, the lower part of whose body ended in goats' feet") who asked the saint to pray for Christ's blessing on his tribe.⁴ In *The City of God*, Augustine opines that "certain monstrous races of [rational mortal animal], spoken of in secular history" may indeed exist, but he is confident that "no matter what unusual appearance" these monstrosities have, they share our human nature and are redeemable.⁵

David Jeffrey suggests that Augustine's broad-minded view of fabulous creatures endured "until virtually the end of the Middle Ages. The more skeptical and negative views come after that."⁶ Drawing on Germanic sagas of hairy beasts, dragons, and giants, the artists and writers of the northern

Renaissance saw the humanoid monster as “an evil force representing a threat to society from outside its moral and domestic order.”⁷ The fearsome monstrosities depicted in Schongauer’s image may reflect this later tradition. Their grotesque outward forms serve as analogues of their deformed souls.

About the conclusion of Anthony’s trials it is reported that “Jesus did not fail to notice his servant’s struggle but came to protect him.” The vicious assault ends when Anthony raises his eyes to see the light of the divine presence above him. As might be expected, the weary Anthony asks his Lord: “Where were you, good Jesus? Where were you? Why were you not here from the beginning to heal my wounds?” A voice answers, “Anthony, I was here, but I was waiting to watch your struggle.”⁸ Jesus saw Anthony’s success in resisting the demonic temptations and that his faith was not weakened.

Like Anthony, we are not immune to life’s temptations. They are opportunities for faithful obedience and resistance to evil. Through our struggle against them we participate in God’s gift of spiritual freedom.

NOTES

1 *Life of Anthony by Athanasius*, chapter 2, in Carolinne White, translator and editor, *Early Christian Lives* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 9.

2 *Life of Anthony*, chapter 4, in *Early Christian Lives*, 11.

3 *Life of Anthony*, chapter 9, in *Early Christian Lives*, 15.

4 *Life of Paul of Thebes by Jerome*, chapters 7-8, in *Early Christian Lives*, 78.

5 Augustine, *The City of God*, XVI, 8, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950).

6 David Lyle Jeffrey, “Medieval Monsters,” in Marjorie M. Halpin and Michael M. Ames, eds., *Manlike Monsters on Trial: Early Records and Modern Evidence* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 47-64, here citing 51.

7 *Ibid.*, 62

8 *Life of Anthony*, chapter 10, in *Early Christian Lives*, 16.



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In *Liberation of St. Peter*, Raphael develops a typology of divine liberation from tyranny.

Liberation from Tyranny

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

In Acts 12, Luke recounts how King Herod – after he ordered James, the brother of John, “killed with the sword” – imprisoned Peter for preaching the gospel about Christ. The believers in Jerusalem had identified King Herod and Pontius Pilate specifically as political leaders who conspired against Jesus (Acts 4:27); now the King was laying “violent hands upon some who belonged to the church” (Acts 12:1).

The King intended to deliver Peter to his enemies after the Passover, but before this happened, Peter was delivered from prison.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, “Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.

Acts 12:6-9

Raphael’s fresco *Liberation of St. Peter* shows the critical elements of the story in three scenes from left to right: the soldiers in front of the prison door, the sleeping Peter being awakened by the angel, and the freed Peter walking with the angel past the sleeping soldiers.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the High Renaissance style was firmly established in Rome; and Raphael, known as the great assimilator, had been called to decorate the Pope’s private apartments, today part of the Vatican Museum. Pope Julius II della Rovere (pontiff from 1503 to 1513) was a powerful leader who planned to create a Second Golden Age of Rome in terms of artistic production. Michelangelo was just completing the painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Pope’s private chapel, when Raphael began this Room of Heliodorus, or *Stanza d’Eliodoro*, in 1513.¹ The room was used for private audiences with the Pope. Each wall is painted with an historical or



Raphael (1483-1520), *LIBERATION OF ST. PETER* (1513). Detail of center. Fresco. 154 x 200 cm. Stanza d'Eliodoro, Vatican, Rome. Photo: © Scala / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

legendary narrative with special significance not only for the papal devotions, but also the political aspirations of freeing Italy from French military control: the miraculous bleeding of a Eucharistic wafer during the *Mass at Bolsena*, the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* from the Temple of Jerusalem, the *Repulse of Attila* by Pope Leo I, and the *Liberation of St. Peter*.² Each of these scenes depicts God's miraculous protection of the Church.³

In the *Liberation of St. Peter*, the artist portrays the Apostle with the features of Pope Julius II. This allows the depiction of Peter's salvation to double as a celebration of a victory for the papacy over an invading French army. Pope Julius had been praying at San Pietro in Vincoli (St. Peter in Chains) – the church in Rome where the chains that bound Peter are displayed – when he learned of an unexpected victory against the French in 1512. To commemorate the victory, that evening Julius II staged a re-enactment of the liberation of Peter and led a procession to Castel Sant'Angelo with more torches than had been previously used.⁴

The architectural prison setting in this fresco is inspired by the contemporary High Renaissance style of Donato Bramante (1444-1514), the architect of St. Peter's Basilica. For instance, the monumental arch is constructed of rusticated blocks seen in Roman palaces of this time. The grate continues the visual tradition established for other scenes depicting the imprisonment of John the Baptist and Peter. Raphael exhibits an exceptional handling of light in the clouds that drift in front of the Moon (in the scene on the left) and the torches that flicker off the guards' armor (on the right). The central scene truly has a transcendent and radiant light (see cover detail in color).

The contemporary New Testament scholar Susan Garrett argues that Luke regarded Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension as an "exodus" because in these events Jesus, "the one who is stronger," led the people out of bondage to Satan. Luke believed that Satan had long exercised authority over the peoples of the world (Luke 4:6; cf. Acts 26:18). Jesus' "exodus" from Satan's power (through his resurrection and ascension) becomes a typological model for subsequent events in the life of the Church, especially Peter's miraculous release from prison and King Herod's ensuing fall. Peter (like Jesus) is freed from a horrible tyrant and "led out of bondage" and (as at the resurrection) the miraculous rescue is followed by the tyrant's demise.⁵

Whether the story of Peter's liberation is interpreted by a fifteenth-century artist and pope or by a first-century New Testament scholar, its symbolism of freedom from spiritual and political oppression is evident. As modern disciples, we too can find comfort in this scene where God's freedom succeeds over tyranny.

NOTES

1 In addition to the Heliodorus, there are three other "Raphael Rooms" in the papal residence. Raphael was first commissioned to paint the Room of the Segnatura, which was originally a library and study. He adorned its walls with representations of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. For a discussion of the most famous fresco in this room, The School of Athens, see Heidi J. Hornik, "Pursuing Knowledge," *Schools in a Pluralist Culture*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics, 31 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics, 2009), 46-49.

The Room of the Fire in Borgo originally held the meetings of the highest court of the Holy See during the time of Pope Julius II. Raphael did not fresco this room until it was appropriated as a dining room during the time of Julius' successor, Pope Leo X. This room

was decorated with images of two previous popes who took the name Leo.

The Room of Constantine was to be used for receptions and official ceremonies. Raphael died before this room was finished so its paintings depicting the life of Constantine were completed by the school of Raphael. For more information, see the Web pages on the Raphael Rooms at *Vatican Museums* (accessed March 22, 2011), http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/x-Pano/SDR/Visit_SDR_Main.html.

2 Nicholas Penny, "Raphael," in *Grove Art Online* (*Oxford Art Online*, accessed March 14, 2011), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T070770.

3 The *Expulsion of Heliodorus* depicts Pope Julius II witnessing a second century BC event recorded in 2 Maccabees 3:21-28, when God sent a horseman and two youths to drive Heliodorus out of the Temple in Jerusalem before he could steal its treasures on behalf of the King of Syria. The *Repulse of Attila* shows the legendary appearance of Peter and Paul armed with swords during a meeting between Pope Leo the Great and Attila which caused the Huns to desist from invading Italy in 452 AD. In the *Mass of Bolsena*, Pope Julius II observes a miracle in 1263 that convinced worshippers that Christ was present in the Eucharist. As the Vatican Museums sums up the artistic program of this room: "Faith had been threatened (*Mass of Bolsena*), in the person of its pontiff (*Liberation of St. Peter*), in its site (*Encounter of Leo the Great with Attila*) and in its patrimony (*Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple*)." (*Vatican Museums*, accessed March 22, 2011), http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/SDR/SDR_02_SalaElio.html.

4 Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance Art* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 523.

5 Susan R. Garrett, "Exodus from Bondage: Luke 9:31 and Acts 12:1-24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990), 656-680, here citing 659-660.



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A Hymn for Freedom

BY BURT L. BURLESON

Lord, hear our prayer for all enslaved,
captives of power's errant way.
Let cries for justice all be heard
and sleeping consciences be stirred.

Lord, hear our prayer for fearful minds,
captives of thin and dark confines.
Let deaf ears hear and blind eyes see,
that truth confront and set them free.

Lord, hear our prayer that we are freed
from life's oppressive lusts and greed.
Let every need that serves conceive
meet deeper loves as we believe.

Lord, hear our prayer and haste the day
when bonds of sin will not hold sway.
Let passionate goodness be our will
and freedom's longings all fulfill.

A Hymn for Freedom

BURT L. BURLESON

SOUTHERN HARMONY (1835)

Lord, hear our prayer for all en - slaved, cap -
 Lord, hear our prayer for fear - ful minds, cap -
 Lord, hear our prayer that we are freed from
 Lord, hear our prayer and haste the day when

3

tives of pow - er's er - rant way. Let cries for jus - tice
 tives of thin and dark con - fines. Let deaf ears hear and
 life's o - pres - sive lusts and greed. Let ev - ery need that
 bonds of sin will not hold sway. Let pas - sioned good - ness

6

all be heard and sleep - ing con - scienc - es be stirred.
 blind eyes see, that truth con - front and set them free.
 selves con - ceive meet deep - er loves as we be - lieve.
 be our will and free - dom's long - ings all ful - fill.

Worship Service

BY BURT L. BURLESON

Call to Worship

Seek first the kingdom of God.
And all these things will be added unto you.

Chiming of the Hour and Choral Introit

“Blessed Be the God of Israel” (v. 1)

Blessed be the God of Israel, who comes to set us free,
who visits and redeems us, and grants us liberty.
The prophet spoke of mercy, of freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise to bring our people peace.

Michael Perry (1942-1996)

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Silent Meditation

All of us are made
according to the image of God.
But only those who through great love
have enslaved their own freedom to God
are in his likeness.
When we no longer belong to ourselves,
then we are similar to him
who has reconciled us to himself through love.

Diadochus of Photikē (5th Century)¹

Invocation

O God, source of all, savior of all, and sustainer of all,
we lift our hearts to you now in worship
and pray that we might be present
as you are present now.

Receive our adoration,
our confessions,
our petitions,
and our longings
as we offer them in surrender and in hope to you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
we pray and worship. Amen.

Hymn of Praise

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”

Immortal, invisible,
God only wise,
in light inaccessible
hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious,
the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious,
thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting,
and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting,
thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains
high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains
of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest,
to both great and small;
in all life thou livest,
the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish
as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish—
but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory,
pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee,
all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render,
O help us to see
'tis only the splendor
of light hideth thee.

Walker Chalmers Smith (1824-1908), alt.
Tune: ST. DENIO

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 3:7-10

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Epistle Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13-15

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery....

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Gospel Reading: John 8:31-36

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Very

truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

The Word of the Lord for God's People.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn of Response

"Make Me a Captive, Lord" (vv. 1a, 2, and 4)

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free;
force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.

My heart is weak and poor until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move till you have forged its chain;
enslave it with your matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.

My will is not my own till you have made it yours;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown abjure.

It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on your bosom it has leant, and found in you its life.

George Matheson (1842-1906), alt.

Suggested Tunes: ST. MICHAEL or TRENTHAM

Offering

Hymn of Preparation

"A Hymn for Freedom"

Lord, hear our prayer for all enslaved,
captives of power's errant way.
Let cries for justice all be heard
and sleeping consciences be stirred.

Lord, hear our prayer for fearful minds,
captives of thin and dark confines.
Let deaf ears hear and blind eyes see,
that truth confront and set them free.

Lord, hear our prayer that we are freed
from life's oppressive lusts and greed.
Let every need that selves conceive
meet deeper loves as we believe.

Lord, hear our prayer and haste the day
when bonds of sin will not hold sway.
Let passionate goodness be our will
and freedom's longings all fulfill.

Burt L. Burluson (2011)

Tune: DISTRESS

(See pp. 53-54 of this volume.)

Sermon

Meditation in Preparation for Communion

In the Passover Seder, the ritual meal in which Jews celebrate their freedom from Egyptian slavery, contemporary Jews are reminded that God "freed us from the yoke of Egyptian slavery so that we might be slaves to him."

Why are the Hebrews freed from slavery – because God is in favor of liberation? No. In Scripture the slavery of sin is false worship, submission to false gods. The Hebrews are freed from slavery to the Pharaoh so that they might find their true freedom in service to Yahweh as a holy people, a nation where everyone gets to be a priest.

At the heart of the Christian life is a holy paradox: the more securely we are tethered to Christ, the more obedient we are to his way rather than the world's ways, the more free we become. Or as Jesus put it, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

*William H. Willimon*²

Communion

Let this cup and this bread remind us
of the cruciform nature of our freedom in Christ.
Let this table fellowship teach us
how to give our talents, time, and resources
in service to one another, just as he gave his life for us.

Response (based on 1 Peter 2:9-10, 16)

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
**in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him
who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.**
Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
**once we had not received mercy,
but now we have received mercy.**
As servants of God, live as free people.
May we not use our freedom as a pretext for evil.

Passing of the Peace

Benediction

To God be the glory,
to God be the glory and honor and power,
the glory and honor and power,
forever and ever,
forever and ever.
Amen
and Amen.

NOTES

1 Diadochus of Photikē, *Discourses on Judgment and Spiritual Discernment*, chapter 4, in Cliff Ermatinger, trans., *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photikē* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

2 William H. Willimon, "Freedom," pp. 74-77 in this issue, here citing p. 77.



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❖ Other Voices ❖

Freedom is at the heart of our existence. It would seem that there is nothing about ourselves that we are more aware of.... And yet, when we question ourselves about the nature of human freedom, when we attempt to grasp, describe, and define it, it always escapes us.

SERVAIS PINCKAERS, O.P. (1925-2008), *THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS* (1995)

In our day-to-day thinking and conversation we tend to confuse three levels of freedom.

First, when the topic of freedom comes up, we tend to think of political freedom: ...that is, Jefferson's, Franklin's, and Washington's freedom, and by extension, the freedom sought by Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. Yet when we reflect longer and push further, we arrive, *second*, at that freedom that is the very presupposition of political freedom. It is moral freedom: the freedom on the grounds of which we are morally responsible. This aspect of freedom was most famously and lastingly developed by Immanuel Kant in his concept of autonomy....

Moving to the *third* level, we suddenly find ourselves in strange but exhilarating company. There are Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Jonathan Edwards and Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edith Stein and Sergius Bulgakov....

At stake on this third, most fundamental level is the question, *What constitutes the human as human? What makes us who we essentially are?*

REINHARD HÜTTER, *BOUND TO BE FREE* (2004)

The Christian Gospel is an offer of freedom which is often accused of being the opposite.

COLIN E. GUNTON (1941-2003), *ENLIGHTENMENT AND ALIENATION* (1985)

In this prayer [of quiet]...the will is occupied in such a way that without knowing how, it becomes captive; it merely consents to God allowing Him to imprison it as one who well knows how to be the captive of its lover. O Jesus and my Lord! How valuable is Your love to us here! It holds our love so bound that it doesn't allow it the freedom during that time to love anything else but You.

TERESA OF AVILA (1515-1582), *THE BOOK OF HER LIFE*, 14.2, TRANS. BY KEIRAN KAVANAUGH AND OTILIO RODRIGUEZ

There is no way to address what Christian ethics should look like in the contemporary matrix of the Western world without considering and correcting the deeply problematic opposition that is widely assumed to exist between freedom and law. Because “freedom” most often is understood as the license of autarky, any concept of “law” must be seen as random legislative imposition. Yet if “freedom” is understood as the movement of the human toward good – any good, but especially toward God – “law” can be seen as the external principle of action that gives shape and form to this freedom in its directedness toward both God and created goods.

REINHARD HÜTTER, *BOUND TO BE FREE* (2004)

Christianity teaches that you should choose the one thing needful, but in such a way that there must be no question of any choice. That is, if you fool around a long time, then you are not really choosing the one thing needful. ...The very truth of freedom of choice is that there must be no choice, even though there is a choice.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1813-1855), *JOURNALS AND PAPERS, II, 68*, TRANS. BY HOWARD V. HONG AND EDNA H. HONG

[In Galatians 5:13] Paul understands freedom not as the opportunity to pursue one’s own interests but to be even more at the service of others. That this is costly service can be seen in the fact that in this charter of Christian freedom he also refers frequently to the cross.... Paul may be doing something quite radical here: he is holding up traditionally feminine values as ideals for everyone, male and female.... Women too need to appropriate these values, but they need also to balance this ideal carefully against their legitimate psychological needs. Bearing the cross in freedom does not mean enduring abuse and victimhood, but living genuinely for others out of one’s own inner freedom by claiming the inheritance of the “sons of God.”

CAROLYN OSIEK, “GALATIANS” IN CAROL A. NEWSOM AND SHARON H. RINGE, EDS., *WOMEN’S BIBLE COMMENTARY* (1992)

Stations on the Road to Freedom

Discipline

If you set out to seek freedom, then learn above all things to govern your soul and your senses, for fear that your passions and longing may lead you away from the path you should follow. Chaste be your mind and your body, and both in subjection, obediently, steadfastly seeking the aim set before them; only through discipline may a man learn to be free.

Action

Daring to do what is right, not what fancy may tell you,
 valiantly grasping occasions, not cravenly doubting—
 freedom comes only through deeds, not through thoughts taking wing.
 Faint not with fear, but go out to the storm and the action,
 trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully follow;
 freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.

Suffering

A change has come indeed. Your hands, so strong and active,
 are bound; in helplessness now you see your action
 is ended; you sigh in relief, your cause committing
 to stronger hands; so now you may rest contented.
 Only for one blissful moment could you draw near to touch freedom;
 then, that it might be perfected in glory, you gave it to God.

Death

Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal;
 death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish
 the walls of our temporal body, the walls of our souls that are blinded,
 so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden.
 Freedom, how long have we sought thee in discipline, action, and suffering;
 dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906-1945), *LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON* (1953)

A key characteristic of a liberal society is its ambivalence, its propensity to tell two stories. The first of these stories is of individual freedom as the source of creativity and diversity, as the warrant of critical reason to constantly reform social institutions for the sake of the common good; this story proclaims the right of even the most apparently insignificant to make their voices heard in the debates that concern their destiny. The other story is of freedom as a voluntarism that destroys the ethical and cultural substance of tradition, leaving only the emptiness of self-indulgent whim; it is a story of a society with astonishingly sophisticated means of communication but with little more than trivia and sensationalism to communicate. This ambivalence about freedom suggests a particular role for the Christian church in the context of liberal societies: to assist those societies in telling their positive story of freedom by illuminating the sources of freedom in human dignity and by acting in solidarity with those who commit themselves to enhancing our consciousness of this dignity and to giving it practical effect.

ROBERT GASCOIGNE, *THE CHURCH AND SECULARITY: TWO STORIES OF LIBERAL SOCIETY* (2009)

Deepening the Mystery of Freedom

BY HEATHER HUGHES

As freedom becomes the single ambition that possesses Hazel Motes—the protagonist in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*—its competing definitions dramatically play out through plot twists and turns. “Freedom cannot be conceived simply,” O'Connor notes. “It is a mystery and one which a novel . . . can only be asked to deepen.”

Freedom is at the heart of Flannery O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*. As freedom becomes the single ambition that possesses her protagonist, Hazel Motes, its competing definitions in Western culture are dramatically played out through the narrative. “Freedom cannot be conceived simply,” O'Connor observes in the author's note to the second edition of this work. “It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.”¹

Wise Blood contrasts the qualities and extreme consequences of two conceptions of human freedom: a popular modern view of freedom as personal autonomy and a Christian view of freedom that includes the limitations inherent for humans who are made in God's image and live in a world that is divinely ordered. The novel provides an awful vision (i.e., one that inspires deeply respectful fear) of a freedom to participate in our own sanctification and to grow more deeply into the people we were created to be.

Wise Blood is the product of an imagination formed by a Catholic education and a profound faith, but that does not make its depiction of Christian freedom immediately palatable. Like much of O'Connor's fiction (and the life of faith itself), *Wise Blood* can give a rough first impression. O'Connor has been denounced by such popular publications as *Time* as “a retiring,

bookish spinster who dabble[d] in the variants of sin and salvation like some self-tutored backwoods theologian."²

I am sorry to say that my initial response to Flannery O'Connor was similarly unflattering. After reading one of her stories for the first time, I was determined not to make the mistake of reading another one. Her stories, famous for their grotesquery, contain a parade of characters who suffer from physical deformities and mental disabilities, not to mention a disproportionate number of back-woods murderers, religious conmen, and viciously sentimental old women. However, years after my first encounter, I find myself returning to Flannery O'Connor again and again not only as a source of medicinal truth-telling to the modern world, but of great hope as well.

Her use of the grotesque is not a gratuitous indulgence; rather, it is a distortion meant to reveal truth. She warps her stories, like a fish-eye lens, around a central focus they are meant to emphasize. "I don't think you should write something as long as a novel around anything that is not of the gravest concern to you and everybody else," O'Connor once wrote in a letter to the novelist John Hawkes, "and for me this is always the conflict between an attraction to the Holy and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times."³ Both of O'Connor's novels center on this tension — these concurrent desires to embrace God and to reject God's existence, and the free will that we are given to choose between them.⁴

FREEDOM AS IMPOSSIBLE AUTONOMY

In *Wise Blood* this tension plays out spectacularly in the life of Hazel Motes. Raised in the shadow of an imposing traveling preacher grandfather, but outliving every member of his family by the time he is eighteen, Haze is agonizingly aware of the limitations of human freedom at a very young age. However, rather than embracing these limitations and striving to grow freely in the path to God shaped by them, Haze feels trapped and outraged by his lack of control over his own life. This may be why he fantasizes about his family members resisting burial after their deaths — fighting against the inevitable, unpreventable end that awaits us all.

Listening to his grandfather preach the "good" news that Jesus had redeemed him and "would chase him over the waters of sin," Haze is not comforted (p. 22). He does not acknowledge with Paul the plain fact that he "can will what is right, but [he] cannot do it" (Romans 7:18). Thus, he resents his grandfather's claim that "Jesus would have him in the end!" and is determined not to require saving (p. 22). Even as a boy he refuses to cry with Paul:

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 7:24-25a, 8:1-2

To Haze, even the law of the Spirit of life is an undesirable law because it exposes the lie of his desired self-sufficiency. Knowing that there is no alternative to dependence on God besides bondage to the devil through sin, Haze does what he can to limit his dependence:

There was already a deep black wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.... Later he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown. Where he wanted to stay was in [his hometown] Eastrod with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track, and his tongue not too loose. (p. 22)

If freedom is defined as an absence of constraint, as an ability to determine one's life without any external standard or influence, then Christ's atoning sacrifice becomes not a gift engendering the freedom to become more fully oneself, but a coercive force hindering the self-fulfillment of one's desires. Haze is so desperate for an impossible freedom that he avoids sin merely to eradicate the need for a salvation external to his own faculties. He is willing to accept the strict limitation of "the known track" because it is self-imposed, while the idea of following Christ's direction is refused as a temptation to stray into a realm of dependence, away from that realm where he is dependent solely on himself.

When Haze does fall into sin as a boy he does not repent and ask for forgiveness, but instead undertakes the terrible (and impossible) task of paying for his own transgressions. Knowing that Hazel had seen something illicit in a tent at a local fair, his mother reminds him that Jesus died for his redemption. Haze replies "I never ast him," then fills his shoes with rocks and walks in self-imposed pain until convinced he has satisfied his debt (p. 63).

FREEDOM FOR NOTHING

As Hazel Motes grows older, his confidence in the possibility of total autonomy undergoes a radical transition. Drafted by the army at eighteen, Haze is forced to leave the "known track" of his hometown. While in the army, his peers invite him to visit a brothel. In a torrent of defensive piety, Haze responds that he will not endanger his soul through such action. Before leaving for the brothel, his friends inform him that he does not have a soul. This flippant remark alters Haze's life profoundly, for "All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of [his soul] once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of evil" (p. 24). It is an opportunity that Haze takes, believing he has finally discovered an alternative to the old choice between God and the devil. Perhaps converting to nothing will free him to be his own master,

to determine his own fate apart from any external manipulation.

When he is discharged from the army years later, Haze returns to find his hometown deserted. He decides then to head to the city, ready for the new experiences he used to avoid. No longer constrained by the wild ragged figure of Jesus, Motes makes a point of beginning his stay with a local prostitute—for believing in nothing frees one from the imposed standards of morality.

Hazel Motes' need to prove his disbelief becomes even more apparent when he forms the disturbingly humorous Church Without Christ after encountering a begging street preacher named Asa Hawks. Hawks seems heroically devout, having apparently blinded himself for the sake of Jesus. Attended by his licentious daughter Lily Sabbath, Hawks intrigues and offends Hazel. Haze's encounter with the pair leads him to attempt to convert others to what he has come to believe, or rather to what he has come not to believe.

Hazel Motes becomes what Ralph Wood has called a "scandalized preacher of nihilism."⁵ His curb-side sermons are one of Flannery O'Connor's most acute portraits of the nihilistic trajectory of freedom as total autonomy. These extreme manifestations of the attraction to disbelief are so humorous because they express the logical consequences of all-too-familiar contemporary sentiments. "There are all kinds of truth, there's your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth," Hazel Motes preaches. "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach!" (p. 165). Sound familiar? Despite the dramatically exaggerated nature of Haze's character and speech, these ideas are clearly recognizable everywhere in the moral relativism of our consumer culture. The convergence of so much personal subjective truth implies that there is no truth at all.

This becomes hilariously clear with the introduction of Onnie Jay Holy, a religious conman who wants to use Hazel in a money-making scheme. Hearing Hazel's street preaching, Onnie Jay considers not the validity of his message, but the potential profit that can be gained from it. Onnie Jay Holy knows that "If you want to get anywheres in religion, you got to keep it

**If freedom is an absence of constraint,
an ability to determine one's life without
an external standard or influence, then
Christ's atoning sacrifice becomes not a
gift engendering the freedom to become
more fully oneself, but a coercive force
hindering one's desires.**

sweet" (p. 157). Renaming Hazel's Church Without Christ to the even more nonsensical Church of Christ Without Christ, Onnie Jay jumps into Hazel's sermon and couches genuinely preached nihilism in terms of a falsely optimistic relativism more palatable to his audience: "You don't have to believe nothing you don't understand and approve of. If you don't understand it,

Hazel Motes preaches not the peace of God but the peace and quiet of being left alone by him. Yet even as he preaches the Church Without Christ, he cannot wholly escape his attraction to the God he has rejected. His attraction to the Holy is never fully eradicated.

it ain't true, and that's all there is to it. No jokers in the deck, friends" (p. 152). Ultimately, this fine sounding sentiment covers the kind of nihilism that Haze preaches like a pit trap. Hazel strongly rejects Onnie Jay's insistent business offer because, though he may believe that life has no meaning, he has no patience for dishonesty and self-deception. He knows what is at stake in preferring autonomy to

Jesus. Thus, his repeated response to Onnie Jay is, "you ain't true" (p. 155). Not surprisingly, Onnie Jay Holy is unfazed and quick to continue with his business plan using a lookalike replacement for the resistant Motes.

With typical backwoods flair, Hazel Motes articulates the essence of his message: "nothing matters but that Jesus don't exist" (p. 54). This simple statement of negation is necessary for the kind of freedom that Hazel seeks. For Flannery O'Connor, it is also a poignant, countrified expression of how profoundly impossible that kind of freedom is. In her letters O'Connor remarks: "Haze knows what the choice is...either throw away everything and follow Him or enjoy yourself by doing some meanness to somebody, and in the end there's no real pleasure in life, not even in meanness."⁶ If Jesus exists and is truly who he claims to be, then there is no opportunity for moderation. Nothing can be defined apart from him, there is no meaning to life that excludes him, and no one is autonomously free from dependence. If you admit that Jesus exists, then there is no part of yourself that you can keep from him.

For Hazel Motes, the reality that Christ's existence entails is a terrible vision of bondage. This is why, as he is preaching on the street, he literally shouts:

If you had been redeemed...you would care about redemption but you don't. Look inside yourselves and see if you hadn't rather it wasn't if it was. There's no peace for the redeemed...and I preach peace, I preach the Church Without Christ, the church peaceful and satisfied!" (p. 140).

This is at once a comment on the very real cost of Christianity – the cross of Christ is not easy to bear – and a scathing critique of a cultural Christianity that prefers to be satisfied without Christ than to enter into his suffering for true peace. Haze preaches not the peace of God but the peace and quiet of being left alone by him.

HAUNTING DOUBTS ABOUT AUTONOMY

Yet even as he preaches the Church Without Christ, Haze cannot wholly escape his attraction to the God he has rejected. He is fascinated by the street preacher Asa Hawks, who is apparently so free from the constraints of selfish will that he was able to blind himself for God. Haze seems to want to find in Hawks someone who has given up false autonomy in favor of a Christian freedom bound to Christ. He goes so far as to attempt to seduce Hawks' daughter Lily Sabbath in order to get close to him – though Sabbath turns out to become more seducer than seduced. Even at his most extreme, Hazel's attraction to the Holy is never fully eradicated.

Through all of Haze's loudly and clearly proclaimed unbelief, he is never able to completely devote himself to his brand of nihilism either. This is most apparent in a bizarre episode involving the comic character Enoch Embry. Upon hearing Haze preach that

The Church Without Christ don't have a Jesus but it needs one!
It needs a new jesus! It needs one that's all man, without blood to waste, and it needs one that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him.

the overly literalist Enoch realizes that he has seen this new jesus (p. 140)! Enoch breaks into the local museum and steals the shrunken mummy that he knows Hazel Motes is after. He delivers the new jesus to Sabbath Hawks who is staying with Hazel: "She had never known anyone who looked like him before, but there was something in him of everyone she had ever known, as if they had all been rolled into one person and killed and shrunk and dried" (pp. 184-185). Though Sabbath accepts this alarming apparition like a baby she can love, Hazel cannot. When finally confronted with the new jesus he preaches, Haze cannot embrace the idol of humanity severed from its *telos*, emptied of the ultimate meaning and purpose that Christ's existence brings.

In the course of the novel, Hazel Motes buys a dilapidated automobile that becomes a symbol for the idea of freedom as autonomy. Privately owned cars are something that most people living in North America know a lot about. They allow us to go where we want to go, do what we want to do when we want to do it, without anyone's help, and without needing to take anyone else into account. In the United States, not owning a car is considered restrictive to the point of disability; poverty is the only reasonable excuse for an adult not to own or lease his or her own car. As Hazel Motes expresses

this theologically and positively: “Nobody with a good car needs to be justified” (p. 113). For Hazel, anything is made possible with the freedom and independence of a car—“something that moved fast, in privacy, to the place you wanted to be” (p. 186).

However, like the people in them, cars are not as autonomous as they

For those who think belief in Christ is no great matter, “Hazel’s integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind,” O’Connor notes. “For the author Hazel’s integrity lies in his not being able to.”

seem. Hazel Motes’ rat-colored Essex is a piece of junk: it stalls, it leaks oil, and it will not start. In fact, it requires constant maintenance and the help of skilled professionals to keep running. Despite the car’s obvious deficiencies, Hazel insists that it is a good car that will not let him down. His deluded obsession that the car is high-quality leads him to ignore the assessment of honest mechanics and get swindled by an opportunistic flatterer. He refuses to

acknowledge what his car is actually capable of, just as he refuses to acknowledge the limitations of what he is capable of.

Though I do not want to ruin the culmination of the novel for those who have not read it, I will say that Hazel Motes achieves the ultimate violent potential of the kind of freedom that can be represented by a car. He is then made crushingly aware of that supposedly autonomous freedom’s inadequacy. True freedom is not something that can break down, be wrecked, or stolen; it is not something that can be driven wherever you would like it to go. True freedom, whose author and conductor suffered himself to be crucified, is achieved only within limitations.

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

In her note to the second edition of *Wise Blood*, Flannery O’Connor comments on Hazel Motes’ inability to wholly embrace unbelief. She writes that for readers who prefer to think of belief in Christ as no great matter, “Hazel’s integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind.” However, “For the author Hazel’s integrity lies in his not being able to” (p. 5). The strength and persistence of Hazel’s attraction to the Holy is not some psychological compulsion that he finally succumbs to. It is not a coup of the will won by a coercive God. There is no trick here. Integrity can lie in inability because, “free will does

not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man" (p. 5). Hazel's attraction to the Holy is his willing response to the reality of God, even as he wills to be rid of it. Love cannot be forced; it requires the opportunity for rejection, even if the beloved is created to receive it.

Flannery O'Connor portrays the consequence of these diverse wills through her writing, working them out dramatically:

I can't allow any of my characters, in a novel anyway, to stop in some halfway position. This doubtless comes of a Catholic education and a Catholic sense of history — everything works toward its true end or away from it, everything is ultimately saved or lost.⁷

In the end, any kind of freedom that does not lead us to God's love is a freedom that leads to ultimate loss. Hazel Motes initially chooses to live with only what he can give himself: absolutely nothing. By seeking to preserve himself in autonomy, Hazel is in fact working against who he actually is. It is this that offends modern readers so deeply in O'Connor's work — far more than grotesque mummies and violent nihilist preachers.

We are made in the image of God, and have no say in the matter. We do not choose most things about our existence: to be alive, to inherit traits from our families, to be raised the way that we are. If freedom is defined as wholly autonomous choice made in a vacuum devoid of external influence, then freedom is impossible. If we are seeking self-invention, then there is no hope for us. However, if we can finally come to accept the inherent and irreversible limitations of being humans made in the image of God, living in a world that belongs to God, the path of freedom opens before us. We can either see our very existence as an affront because we did not choose it, or we can accept what we are and move forward.

In saying no to our God-given identities we cannot remake ourselves; but we can damage ourselves. This is apparent in Hazel Motes' young life when he already does not want to be defined by Jesus. To avoid his relationship with Christ by avoiding sin he knows that he must stay in his hometown with "his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track, and his tongue not too loose" (p. 22). Yet his trying to hide from God is impossible. Creation is so bound to its Creator that any part of it can become a conduit of God's love and grace. Even if Hazel could avoid God in creation by controlling himself so strictly, he could never escape the image in which he is made. It is who he is — to deny it is to deny himself. This is why the freedom of autonomy is truly imprisoning. There is so little that we can control and master for ourselves that pursuing a freedom of autonomy forces us to become smaller and smaller, increasingly bound and limited by what we can claim as our own: ultimately nothing.

This sounds like a harsh reality, and in some ways it is. However, as Ralph Wood astutely observes:

The theological key to Flannery O'Connor's comedy lies in her thoroughly Catholic (and specifically Thomistic) conviction that grace does not destroy but completes and perfects nature. She seeks to recover, amidst the secular absence of God, the divine presence that is sacramentally at work in every living thing.⁸

For O'Connor, freedom is not an impossible autonomy but a gift of grace that allows those who accept it to become more completely and perfectly their true selves. Accepting this gift does not make us less by taking away our individual identities but makes us more by working to complete and perfect us as individual members of the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

The prospect of following the path formed by our limitations to God can be daunting—even terrifying. The portrayal of this process in O'Connor's fiction is certainly devoid of false comfort and cheap sentimentality. But the secondary world of her fiction reveals to us the world created by God, with every part defined by God's love even when falling short of it. It is this that makes O'Connor's characters play out such fascinating depictions of human freedom.

As G. K. Chesterton says, chaos is dull. No matter how diverse and unusual the outward form of negation takes, saying no to God's love is always the same. "I will not serve" is a tired phrase, no matter how it finds expression. It is Christ who makes things new. There are as many ways to live in Christ as there are souls to receive him. Cutting ourselves off from dependence on him is like freeing plants from sunlight and water. Christ is what makes us free to grow into our various selves. It is the acceptance of his love that makes creativity possible through participation in our own sanctification. This is the focus of Flannery O'Connor's vision: not the impossibility or foolishness of Hazel Motes' brand of freedom, but the call to true freedom—the call to accept Christ like sunlight and water for our own good and the fulfillment of our best will and true nature.

Ultimately, I know that my selfish will is boring; I am just not that creative. Freedom to fulfill our true purpose, to participate in an identity larger than ourselves is far more beautiful and interesting than the freedom to do whatever we would like. Flannery O'Connor taught me that.

NOTES

1 Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, second edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1949] 1962), 5. Further page citations to the novel will be in the text.

2 Connie Ann Kirk, *Critical Companion to Flannery O'Connor: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2008), 131.

3 Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 349.

4 Flannery O'Connor described her other novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), as "a more ambitious undertaking" than *Wise Blood* (*Habit of Being*, 350). It fleshes out O'Connor's understanding of freedom, providing more subtle variations of response to God's call. Most importantly, it offers positive examples of Christian freedom: characters are shown actually choosing to live into their true identities in Christ. In some ways, *Wise Blood* contains just the seed of Flannery O'Connor's vision of freedom that grows into fruition in *The Violent Bear It Away*. I focus on *Wise Blood* in this article because it offers a less complex introduction to the freedom depicted in O'Connor's fiction.

5 Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O'Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 166.

6 Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being*, 350.

7 *Ibid.*, 349-350.

8 Ralph C. Wood, *The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 80-81.



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Freedom

BY WILLIAM H. WILLIMON

The freedom of American, democratic, popular, capitalist culture is based on the fiction of a self-constructed self. Thus, the heart of the Christian life seems a holy paradox: the more securely we are tethered to Christ, obedient to his way rather than the world's ways, the more free we become.

Before I read very far into Jonathan Franzen's latest book *Freedom: The Novel*, I realized the ironic point of his title.¹ Franzen has a wonderful ability to construct rounded characters who win our interest and sometimes even our affection. He is a master of dialogue and character development. Everyone in the novel talks about their freedom but they are anything but free. Characters leave home, end marriages, have sex with multiple partners, abandon children, sally forth bolstered by various drugs and alcohol, and change jobs all in the exercise of their freedom. "Free" is defined by all of them in the conventional modern American way—I am most free when I am least attached to anyone other than me. Their servitude would be funny (*Freedom* is very funny in many places) if it were not so sad.

If there is one thing that we Americans believe in, it is freedom. In fact, freedom has become the whole point of being an American. We are currently expending a fortune in young lives and money to bring the blessings of freedom to the enslaved people of Afghanistan. Curiously, many Afghans are unimpressed by our brand of glorious freedom.

Freedom has become our favorite definition of a human being. Freedom—defined as the maximum ability to choose whatever life I want to live with a minimum of external attachments—is the essence of our humanity. A person who is externally determined, who lacks freedom of choice, who has succumbed to any limitations upon self-expression is hardly a person.

This American freedom project is full of irony. Our attempts at unfettered license occur only by the dogged denial of our widespread suspicion that

contemporary Americans are anything but free. Jerked around by invisible forces beyond our control – the economy, government meddling, hormones, DNA, giant corporations, environmental pollution, peer pressure, advertising (the social sciences continually adds to the list of external determinants of human behavior) – in our more lucid moments we suspect that our vaunted contemporary boasts of freedom are but the rattling of our collective chains.



Of course I would know none of this if I were not a Christian. Augustine, I suppose, was the first to note that a pagan world specializes in the construction of guilt cages. It is the particular genius of paganism to hide its various mechanisms of enslavement. Modernity is that form of paganism that enjoys thinking that it has at last achieved humanity with unconstrained vistas. People of the past were tied down, prejudiced, limited by their gender and class, but we are free. I can now choose from one hundred and twenty different channels on my television. I am free to do anything I want to do. I can write my own script – all the while failing to see how modernity fails to give me anything worth doing or a life worth living.

In my more cynical moments I think that American democracy has created something called the free individual because it has found that allegedly free – that is, unattached – individuals are easier to manage than people who are tethered to a tribe, a family, a community, or a church. If you give me a maximum amount of freedom with a minimum amount of responsibility, you can lead me just about anywhere you like.

The world tells us that our exuberant self-expression is validation of our personal freedom. We fail to see that we are free to say about anything we want, except to say, “No thanks.” We are free to construct any story for our lives except one denying the rigidly enforced story that the point of our lives is to be unfettered, unconstrained, unattached, and free of any story other than the one I have freely chosen. Ironically, the story that the point of life is to be free to choose the life we want is a story that we did not choose – it was externally imposed upon us by a culture that cannot think of any purpose for living other than to be free to choose our own self-constructed purpose for living. We relish our freedom to have anything we like, failing to see how advertising creates our desires, limiting our ability to know what we like other than what advertising tells us to like. The modern world – bewitched by the fantasy of the role-less, unattached, free individual – fails to acknowledge its own peculiar forms of servitude.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Madame Roland was brought to the guillotine to face execution on trumped-up charges in 1793. As she prepared to die, she bowed mockingly toward the statue of liberty in the Place de la Révolution and uttered the words for which she is now remembered: “liberty, what crimes are committed in your name!”

Christians, attached as we are to the story of Jesus Christ, are busy in our lives and in our liturgies trying to believe two countercultural ideas about freedom: most of what passes for “freedom” around here is a lie; and there is no real freedom apart from the freedom to be who God has created us to be.

The freedom of American, democratic, popular, capitalist culture is based upon the fiction of the self-constructed self. It is the freedom of the

Christians, attached as we are to the story of Jesus Christ, believe two countercultural ideas about freedom: most of what passes for “freedom” around here is a lie; and there is no real freedom apart from the freedom to be who God created us to be.

supermarket. My “free” society offers me the maximum number of choices. So I move my cart down the supermarket aisle grabbing this and that all in the hope that I might thereby accumulate the right stuff to make my life worth living. Lacking any basis of discerning what counts for wise choices, I tend to grab a bit of everything, flitting from this enticing experience to that one, never alighting anywhere for

long. Thus there is a kind of drivenness about modern life that is anything but free. I not only can choose but I must.

Surely this is what Paul meant when he said that some live as if “their god is the belly” (Philippians 3:19). Gluttony is an unavoidable sin among us: gluttony is mandatory to keep the economy functioning.

As the great theologian Bob Dylan has noted, “you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”² So when it comes to the modern usage of “freedom,” there is a sense in which Christians do not believe in freedom. Most of what passes for “freedom” is servitude. Everybody is standing somewhere. Everyone is attached to something. All of us are busy living out stories that were externally imposed upon us, lives that we did not freely choose. As Spinoza said, if a rock could think, and if you threw that rock across a river, that rock would think that it was crossing the river because it wanted to.³



Christians hold the curious view that there is no freedom apart from God and the Creator’s intentions for his creatures. It is Augustine’s “our hearts are restless until they rest in thee,” but it is also that freedom is not a personal achievement or discovery. True freedom is a gift. The patriotic bumper sticker that proclaims “Freedom isn’t free” lies.

While freedom is a favorite subject of pagan philosophers—one of their beloved philosophical abstractions—it is rarely discussed in Scripture. Jesus,

good Jew that he is, shows little interest in the subject. In one of those rare occasions when Jesus uses the word “free” (*eleutheros*) he says to those who believed in him, “If you continue in my word...the truth will make you free” (John 8:31). In indignation his disciples rattle their chains and protest, “What is this ‘make you free’ bit. We have never been slaves to anyone!”

They lied. Egypt, Assyria, then Babylonia...and now with the heel of Rome on their necks, they had been in servitude to anyone with an army big enough to blow through town and put them in shackles. Jesus reminds them of their enslavement to sin (8:34) then reiterates, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (8:36).

This short exchange reminds me that freedom is not a right, not a possession, certainly not a gift of the U.S. Army. Freedom is a gift of God; it is grace that only God can give. There is no freedom to be who God means us to be, no freedom from sin and from the alluring servitudes of this world except in servitude to Christ.

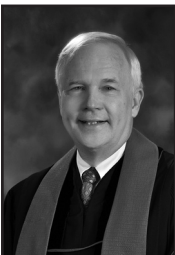
In the Passover Seder, the ritual meal in which Jews celebrate their freedom from Egyptian slavery, contemporary Jews are reminded that God “freed us from the yoke of Egyptian slavery so that we might be slaves to him.”

Why are the Hebrews freed from slavery – because God is in favor of liberation? No. In Scripture the slavery of sin is false worship, submission to false gods. The Hebrews are freed from slavery to the Pharaoh so that they might find their true freedom in service to Yahweh as a holy people, a nation where everyone gets to be a priest.

At the heart of the Christian life is a holy paradox: the more securely we are tethered to Christ, the more obedient we are to his way rather than the world’s ways, the more free we become. Or as Jesus put it, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

NOTES

- 1 Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).
- 2 Bob Dylan, “Gotta Serve Somebody,” © 1979 Special Rider Music.
- 3 Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) gives his famous thought experiment involving a conscious rock in Letter 62 to G. H. Schaller (The Hague, 1674).



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A Picture of Freedom

BY MATT COOK

In a wilderness devoid of bread, but full of stones, we learn a powerful lesson from Christ. True freedom comes not when we can do whatever we want, when we want to do it. True freedom is not in-dependence, but *in* dependence.

When is the last time you smelled raw sewage? For me it was on a recent visit to an “informal settlement” just north of Johannesburg, South Africa. “Informal” is a nice way of describing the ramshackle collection of houses made from tin, cardboard boxes, and the occasional piece of plywood.

Our group was led by a tiny woman with a larger than life presence. Sister Jean Stewart is a nurse who wanders the slums in the region just north of South Africa’s capital city. Day after day she returns to care for the people living there – many of them immigrants, many of them HIV positive, and all of them caught in the harmful web of poverty and dislocation.

Yet even in the slums, there is hope. Jean and many of her patients radiated joy, which surprised our healthy, middle-class group from the suburbs of America. One woman in particular stood out. In her late twenties, she had three children. After her husband cheated on her with a prostitute, he had come home and transmitted to her the AIDS virus. She was at the point of death when Jean gave her the powerful new class of drugs that can turn HIV into a chronic disease rather than a death sentence.

“I have so much to be thankful for,” the woman told us. “God is so good to me!”

After we walked away, Jean could tell that I was somewhere between intrigued and puzzled. “That woman is happy,” said Jean “because she has learned that no matter what else is taken from her, she can always depend on God.” Jean kept going...right on to my toes! With a gentle smile she said, “in my experience the problem with wealthy people is that sometimes we have so much, we don’t even realize that we’re always trying to do things all by ourselves.”

Is that what freedom looks like: in-dependence? Is freedom the state we arrive at when we can live our lives without having to depend on anyone or anything else? Or is it something else?



When is the last time you were hungry enough to eat a rock? In the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel Jesus has been out in the wilderness for forty days, and he has not eaten a thing. That is when the tempter shows up, saying: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread" (Luke 4:3). That is a dare if I ever heard one! Not only that, it's a chance to kill two birds with one stone, or loaf, as the case may be. Jesus can prove he the Son of God *and* he can get rid of his hunger in one fell swoop. Of course Jesus does something a little different. He stays hungry but quotes Scripture. "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone'" (Luke 4:4). Including a bit more of Jesus' allusion to Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew's gospel has it: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Forty days in the wilderness without food followed up by a Bible memory exercise is not exactly my picture of "freedom." How about you?

What comes to mind when we hear the word "freedom"? Maybe we think of two weeks away from work, with a week of that away from the kids, preferably in the mountains, or on the beach. A few good books, some nice restaurants, and (most of all) time to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. "If we could just get away from it all," we say to ourselves, "we would be free and then we would be happy." Is that our picture of freedom – being un-encumbered?

Or maybe it is not personal freedom that comes to mind, but political freedom. Maybe the freedom we are thinking of is the freedom of journalists to critique the government, or the freedom of individuals to assemble without the government putting a stop to it, or the freedom to pray aloud whenever and wherever we want without the government getting in the way. Is that what freedom looks like to us?

Those pictures of political freedom are not bad; indeed, compared to a few days at the beach they are downright noble. Yet both pictures, the beach and the Bill of Rights, are highly contingent on favorable conditions. In the first picture of personal freedom we can only be happy when all or most of those conditions are met: when our families are not demanding our attention, when our jobs are laid aside, and so on. And in that second, nobler, picture we are only free when the government allows us to do what we want, when we want.

If that is what we mean by freedom, then most people around the world are not free. It is a well-known statistic that more than two billion people live on less than two dollars a day, but did you know that ninety-five percent of

people live on less than ten dollars a day?¹ For more than three quarters of the world's population, the idea of a few days at the beach is laughable, if not inconceivable. Regarding political freedom the numbers are just as staggering: less than thirty percent of the world's population live in nations that guarantee freedom of religion² and only thirty-five percent of them live in countries with a free press.³



If those are our pictures of freedom, then we really are not free. Or are we? Let me answer that question by directing our attention away from the beach and the Bill of Rights to a different but related passage from Luke's gospel. Two chapters later in Luke, Jesus tells a large group of his disciples:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.”

Luke 6:20b-21a

There is a great temptation to misinterpret Jesus by making poverty and hunger (either material or spiritual) praiseworthy conditions that earn us a ticket into the kingdom of God. If that were true, then these passages would have very little to say about true freedom. Indeed, on this misinterpretation quite the opposite would be true: the kingdom that God intended to be free would now have a cost.

But that is not what Jesus is saying. These are not conditional statements, they are declarations. In Jesus, God proves that he is faithful, regardless; God's kingdom and the freedom it engenders are not contingent, but are given to us.

Indeed, the idea that the poor and the hungry are blessed is absolute nonsense – unless the God who blesses the poor and the hungry actually exists. But if that God exists, then why are we so busy chasing after so much bread? Why are we so desperate for just a few days of joy? The irony is so pronounced, it is a shock that we miss it: rather than producing freedom, wealth only seems to get in the way of true freedom. (And if you are reading this, let's face it: you probably are one of the wealthy.)

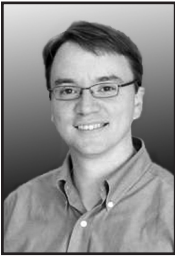
This takes us back to the ramshackle collection of houses made from tin, cardboard, and plywood. Or if you prefer, back out into a wilderness devoid of bread, but full of stones. In such places we learn a powerful lesson. True freedom comes not when we can do whatever we want, when we want to do it. True freedom comes not in our ability to accomplish this, that, or the other all by ourselves. True freedom is not in-dependence, but *in* dependence.

NOTES

1 Martin Ravallion, Shaohua Chen, and Prem Sangraula, "Dollar a Day Revisited," *Policy Research Working Paper WPS 4620* (Washington, DC: The World Bank Development Research Group, May 2008), 3. Available online at <http://econ.worldbank.org> (accessed February 19, 2011).

2 *Global Restrictions on Religion* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, December 2009), 1. Available online at <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=491> (accessed February 19, 2011).

3 *Freedom of the Press 2010* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2010), 38. Available online at www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pfs/371.pdf (accessed February 19, 2011).

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The Nature of Christian Freedom

BY PHILIP D. KENNESON

In our “freedom”-saturated culture, we rarely consider that what Scripture and tradition mean by “freedom” may be seriously at odds with many assumptions that underwrite everyday American usage and practice. Three fine books offer insight into critical issues regarding the nature of Christian freedom.

Only someone who has been locked away in a closet for a very long time could be unaware of how utterly pervasive the language and imagery of “freedom” is in American culture. Every day we hear politicians of all stripes proclaiming freedom’s praises and rallying citizens to its defense. Each night we are inundated with television commercials for SUVs with names like “Liberty” and “Escape” that peddle images of vehicles conquering remote and exotic landscapes while seemingly limitless vistas provide the backdrop. And at least several times a year we are urged to stand up and be proud of our national heritage, singing boldly that at least we know we are free.

But are we *really* as free as we think we are and pride ourselves to be? Answering that question would, of course, require us to do something we are rarely asked to do: inquire into the very *nature* of this freedom we so incessantly extol. Such an inquiry is particularly important for Christians living in this “freedom”-saturated culture, since what Scripture and the Christian tradition mean by “freedom” may be seriously at odds with many of the assumptions that underwrite everyday American usage and practice. Fortunately, these three fine collections of essays, while exploring many other important matters, offer us a wealth of insight into a number of critical issues regarding the nature of Christian freedom.

THE CRISIS OF FREEDOM

One excellent starting point for sorting through the range of issues around our contemporary notions of freedom and the tensions and contradictions between those notions and the nature of human freedom as revealed in Scripture and tradition is the fine set of essays by Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002, 224 pp., \$29.95). Penning his introduction to these eight essays only weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001, British New Testament scholar and theologian Bauckham wastes no time in articulating the urgent need for a careful examination of our concept of freedom. He insists that the term in our context is “fraught with ideology,” clearly functions with “mythic power,” and is exalted “as the one thing that must at all costs be achieved and defended” (pp. 1, 2). Yet despite the central role that the language of freedom plays in the rhetoric of daily life, its meaning has become dangerously unstable, not least because it has become untethered from other traditionally important goods of human life (such as justice, community, authority, and God) and now stands largely alone as the only unquestioned good remaining. As a result, the crisis of modernity is a crisis of freedom, and the most pressing question is whether any freedom worth having is ultimately sustainable apart from these other goods, including God—the ground of all good and of all freedom.

To address this crisis Bauckham takes up a number of salient subjects. He begins by tracing the trajectory of the notion of freedom and liberation across the pages of Scripture. He underscores that the liberation of the children of Israel from Egypt involved not simply freedom *from* their oppressors but freedom *for* the service of the living God. The New Testament extends and deepens this insight by insisting that real freedom also includes “liberation from enslavement to self-interest and freedom to give oneself for others” (p. 24).

In the essays that follow, Bauckham carefully explores many of the tensions which the notion and practice of freedom elicit in contemporary Western societies. For example, he examines the tension between individual liberty and the common good within the libertarian tradition, as well as the tension between freedom and coercion in the socialist tradition. He also fruitfully critiques the tendency within modernity to view freedom in largely Promethean terms, as the unrestrained capacity to engage in self-creation. This denial of limits and human creatureliness effectively displaces God as creator and subsequently underwrites the modern notion that the world is no longer to be understood as setting limits to human freedom, but is simply “the material with which human beings can construct their freely chosen future” (p. 33). According to Bauckham, this myth of unrestricted freedom decidedly informs both the misleading rhetoric of “freedom of opportunity” and the trivializing practice of “consumer choice.”

Bauckham is at his best when he is either drawing illuminating distinctions or unmasking the many false oppositions that underwrite our modern

love affair with freedom and our uncritical suspicion of all those forces we presume stand against it. For example, he explains how God's freedom is different from human freedom, and therefore why obedience to God is different from obedience to human authority. Likewise, he delineates the important difference between exalting freedom of choice for its own sake and honoring freedom because it allows the space to choose the good. In

Bauckham shows why freedom is not opposed to all constraints, but requires relations of dependence; and why authority is not to be equated with authoritarianism, obedience with coercion, and the biblical notion of dominion with domination.

essay after essay, Bauckham carefully and convincingly shows why freedom rightly understood is not opposed to all limits or constraints; why freedom requires (rather than is opposed to) relations of dependence and belonging; and why authority is not to be equated with authoritarianism, obedience with coercion, tradition with oppression, and the biblical notion of dominion with domination. In so doing,

Bauckham reveals why the contemporary celebration of unbridled freedom leads, ironically, to one of the most insidious forms of human bondage.

FREEDOM WITHIN LIMITS

A number of tensions pertaining to human freedom are generated from within the Christian faith itself. One of these tensions involves the relationship between grace and freedom, and thinking through this tension is the focus of the first third of Gilbert Meilaender's fine collection of essays, *The Freedom of a Christian: Grace, Vocation, and the Meaning of Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006, 192 pp., \$23.00). As a Lutheran theologian and ethicist, Meilaender wryly names his volume after Luther's famous treatise on freedom while rightly acknowledging that the theological issues addressed in his own volume are not peculiarly Lutheran, but inherent to any thoughtful Christian theology. For example, stated simply, the tension between grace and freedom is this: "If the gospel announces that sinners are pardoned and that God is pleased with them, what more could possibly need doing? Why should we talk about these pardoned believers needing to learn to follow Christ, obey the command of God, or to grow in grace and virtue?" (p. 10). In the three essays of Part One, "Freedom for the Obedience of Faith," Meilaender skillfully and pastorally explores these issues by showing how the gift of grace as pardon is linked with the gift of grace as power for transformative obedience, and how as such, grace does not in any way cancel out human freedom but empowers us to obey in ways we could not apart from

the Spirit's grace. In ways that echo Bauckham's work, Meilaender helps us see why God's grace, rather than undermining freedom, makes possible a kind and degree of freedom that expands and enriches our humanity.

In the three essays of Part Two, "Freedom for God's Call," Meilaender again explores the tension between freedom and obedience, though here with reference to the notion of vocation. In cultures like ours that equate authenticity and genuine personhood with autonomy and self-determination, how may a person obey their calling without sacrificing their very freedom for self-determination and thus their genuine humanity and personhood? Meilaender offers considerable wisdom here, reminding us first of all that if God ultimately knows us better than we do ourselves, then God's call invites us to greater authenticity not less. In addition, Meilaender pushes an important Christological point: "The story of Jesus' own obedience makes clear that what looks like an annihilation of the self may, in fact, be its enlargement" (pp. 108-109).

In the final section of his collection, "Freedom for Embodied Humanity," Meilaender works out some of the possible implications of these reconfigured assumptions about human freedom, particularly as they pertain to issues surrounding biotechnology. As he does in nearly all of his essays, Meilaender explores these issues by deftly combining well-chosen examples from Western literature with clear, cogent theological reflection. He reminds us, for example, that we must learn, like Homer's Achilles, that to be human is to live and love within limits, and that "the temptation to be more than human may leave us less than human" (p. 127). Embracing these limits means that we are free to choose certain kinds of lives and certain kinds of deaths; free *not* to do certain things—even seemingly good things—if doing them ultimately diminishes our humanity; and therefore free to resist the notion that human beings have god-like responsibilities for eradicating all human suffering, as if "suffering has no point other than to be overcome by human will and technical mastery—that compassion means not a readiness to suffer with others but a determination always to oppose suffering as an affront to our humanity" (p. 164).

THE GIFT OF FREEDOM

Although all three collections emphasize that human freedom is first and foremost a gift of God rather than a right or presupposition of human existence, this theme of giftedness is most profoundly worked out in the learned, demanding, and yet deeply rewarding essays compiled in Reinhard Hütter's, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004, 324 pp., \$28.00). Here in twelve essays Hütter explores the deep connections between Church, freedom, and truthful speech, notions which, far from being at odds with each other as we normally suppose, mutually interpenetrate each other. Because no brief summary can possibly do justice to

Hütter's carefully crafted and closely argued essays, I will highlight only a few insights he offers that enrich our understanding of human freedom.

In Part One, "Free to Be Church," Hütter argues convincingly that the Church is only free to be what it has been called to be—the eschatological gathering of the people of God who bear embodied witness of God's salvific economy—if it is bound to a particular set of normative doctrines and practices through which the Holy Spirit transformatively works. Though Hütter

Hütter argues convincingly that the Church is only free to be the eschatological gathering of the people of God who bear embodied witness of God's salvific economy if it is bound to normative doctrines and practices through which the Holy Spirit works.

is well aware of the modern aversion to anything "binding," especially "dogma," he wisely sees that the alternative is to make everything a matter of personal choice, which leads not to greater freedom, but to what he calls a "Babylonian exile into privacy" (p. 41) and the inevitable reduction of the Church to simply another private and irrelevant religious association.

As Hütter insists repeatedly, but particularly in Part

Two, "Free to Live with God," all of this matters because "genuine freedom denotes the truthful enactment of created existence" (p. 113), which is nothing less than participation in the divine life, as well as in the divine mission of service to our neighbor. Furthermore, this freedom has a particular shape, a form found in God's commandments, preeminently shown in the first commandment, which teaches us that we are creatures. Thus, rather than the law and commandments being opposed to freedom, rightly understood, they are in fact the very form of freedom that liberates us to desire our ultimate good.

Finally in Part Three, "Free to Speak Ecumenically," Hütter offers three relatively brief examples of concrete reflections on church documents in which he seeks to speak truthfully and ecumenically in service of the gospel and the unity of the Church. If the "very core of any positive freedom...is the truth" (p. 177), as Hütter suggests, then the unity of the Church and the practice of truth-telling cannot be set in opposition as they so often are. These truth-telling essays echo and build upon Hütter's point made earlier in the volume where he displays beautifully the interrelationship between the practice of hospitality and truth-telling by bringing into conversation C. S. Lewis's *Great Divorce* and Luke's story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

LIBERATING FREEDOM FROM ITS MODERN CAPTIVITY

Taken together, these three collections offer us a powerful account of the nature of genuine human freedom. At a minimum, they rightly underscore how desperately we as Christians need to recover a robust and theologically-informed notion of positive freedom (freedom *for*) to counter-balance the atomizing and alienating effects of living in a society that conjures “freedom” almost exclusively as negative freedom (freedom *from*). Indeed, in a society where negative freedom stands as the only common value, and where we are urged to employ that freedom primarily to cut ourselves off from God, from one another, and from meaningful and responsible interaction with the rest of the created order, Christian theology – “because it is free to talk about more than freedom” (Meilaender, p. 11) – may have something vitally important to say and embody before a world bent on defacing, if not erasing, its own humanity.



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Being Christian in a Democratic State

BY COLEMAN FANNIN

Moving beyond polarizing political positions, the three books reviewed here uncouple democracy from the violent and commodifying machinery of the modern nation-state. They point toward a rich shared life in families, communities, and cities oriented toward the common good.

Democracy and freedom may be inseparable in the popular mind today, but this was not always the case. After the American Revolution many people wondered whether Americans were up to the task of direct self-government, a concern that led to the incorporation into the Constitution of the Electoral College and other measures that protect the rights of minorities. In time, however, citizens came to treasure liberal democracy as the means to guard against infringement on their freedom by the government and to express their will constructively. Christians, especially the Free Church Christians like Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Mennonites, and others that flourished in the absence of formal establishment, came to assume the fundamental harmony of democracy and the gospel.

With the expansion of the modern nation-state, the decline of intermediate institutions, and a growing plurality of moral perspectives have come additional concerns and polarizing debates. The decline of church denominations, the rise of consumerism, and the cult of religious personalities have left Christians divided, with little to help them negotiate competing claims or meaningfully engage the wider culture. For most, love of America and freedom remains a given. For a few, however, critics such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre have aroused or confirmed suspicions that something is wrong and that Christians must rethink their commitments to the American state. They point out that liberal democrats (as represented by

thinkers such as John Rawls) view substantive religious claims as inherently exclusionary and therefore seek a secular rational foundation for public discourse. Further, because this rational foundation cannot be found, our society is propped up by inherited norms and marked by wildly divergent forms of moral reasoning with no common core, no tradition, to adjudicate them.

For decades Hauerwas and MacIntyre have been engaged in friendly arguments with theorists who share some of their views but also stress the importance of democracy. No one has contributed more to these arguments than Jeffrey Stout, and *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004, 368 pp., \$28.95) will likely stand as his magnum opus. Though an atheist, Stout appreciates the work of Hauerwas, MacIntyre, and others who long for a new version of traditionalism – not the establishment of a state church, but the flourishing of communities marked by the virtues and free from the state’s claim to absolute sovereignty. At the same time, he believes these “new traditionalists” have wrongly assumed the position of John Rawls and Richard Rorty to be the norm.

The heart of the book is the consideration of whether religion is, in Rorty’s words, a “conversation-stopper.” According to Stout, the liberal secularists threaten the democratic spirit by staking out a rigid, albeit rhetorically effective, position. While acknowledging that a common theological perspective is no longer possible, he chastises secularists for excluding religious arguments and (in Rawls’ case) for having a narrow, foundationalist view of what all “rational” persons believe. Doing so risks undermining the Martin Luther Kings of the world – a very bad idea.

Ultimately, however, Stout is more worried about the new traditionalists like Hauerwas and MacIntyre who seem on the verge of abandoning the democratic process just as, post-9/11, it is threatened by expediency and corporate power at every turn. Their preoccupation with the secularists’ worst excesses leads them to become mired in theoretical issues (e.g., disputes over the meaning of “justice”) where agreement is elusive at best, while neglecting practical matters where diverse coalitions and particular policies can make a difference in our common life. Stout’s appeal is that democracy is itself a moral tradition that “inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues,” particularly courage and generosity (pp. 2-3). More to the point, democracy requires the accumulated wisdom and practices of other moral traditions, religious and otherwise, to cultivate the habits of citizenship.

In the first part of *Democracy and Tradition*, Stout examines the emphasis on what Walt Whitman termed “the important question of character” in American pragmatism from Ralph Waldo Emerson to John Dewey. He also considers the debate over Black Nationalism in which James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison suggested an alternative mode of black participation in American life. After assessing the secularists and the traditionalists in the second

part of the book, Stout turns in the final part to what a culture of “democratic traditionalism” might look like that prioritizes democratic social practices and resists the concentrated power of political elites and corporations. Importantly, it would require neither reaching agreement on foundational theories (in metaphysics) nor relativizing truth claims; rather, all beliefs and justifications are welcome so long as they are open to scrutiny and share the

As Romand Coles presents it, radical democracy is like what Hauerwas says about the Church and Stout says about democracy. The key is to cultivate practices of caring for the least of these, welcoming the stranger, and listening patiently to one another.

goal of supporting moral commitments. “As I see it, the issue is what kind of people we are going to be—a matter of self-definition and integrity. It is about what we care about most, of what we deem sacred or supremely valuable or inviolable, not the desire to have clean hands” (p. 200). For Stout the “we” is often America. Thus, readers who share Hauerwas’ commitment to the Church and the difference God makes in eth-

ical reasoning will remain skeptical of Stout’s optimism about the hospitality of the state and the virtues of the *demos*. Still, they will be encouraged that in this “we” Stout includes a variety of local groups as well as creative thinkers such as Wendell Berry and Dorothy Day.



Stout’s book has reenergized the academic discussion of democracy by redirecting it away from a preoccupation with liberal theory. For his part, Hauerwas responds in equally charitable and constructive fashion in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008, 378 pp., \$39.00), written with political scientist (and atheist) Romand Coles.[†] Rather than a unified argument, this book is an uneven but candid dialogue between Hauerwas and Coles that emerged from a course they taught together at Duke University. It is carried out in the form of essays, letters, even a lecture, and is grounded in the authors’ shared criticism of the modern liberal “megastate” and appreciation of each other’s work and influences.

Hauerwas and Coles say that their book is “about the politics of death and life...one that refuses to let death dominate our living” (p. 1). This is in contrast to the political thinking of “empire, global capitalism, the megastate, and even many forms of cosmopolitanism” in our culture that fearfully seeks

to stave off death, while simultaneously producing it (p. 3). Yet all is not lost, for both “radical democracy” and “radical ecclesia” are capable of enacting a shared life that is nonviolent, centered on shared goods, and willing to engage the particulars of human encounter and the vulnerability of human existence.

Christianity, at least Christianity not determined by Constantinian or capitalist desires, is training for a dying that is good. Such good dying is named in the gospel as trial, cross, and resurrection. Radical democracy names the intermittent and dispersed traditions of witnessing, resisting, and seeking alternatives to the politics of death wrought by those bent on myriad forms of immortality-as-conquest.... Both radical democracy and Christianity are lived pedagogies of hope inspired and envisioned through memories of the “good, at its best.” Such training is a resource for sustaining the politics of the everyday, that is, the politics of small achievements. (pp. 3-4)

As Coles presents it—and his voice is more prominent, though it brings out the best in Hauerwas—radical democracy sounds a lot like what Hauerwas says about the Church *and* what Stout says about democracy. The key is to cultivate practices such as caring for the least of these, welcoming the stranger, and listening patiently to one another. The way to learn how to do so is to observe models like the civil rights leaders Ella Baker, Will Campbell, and Bob Moses; Jean Vanier, the founder of the L’Arche communities in which people with and without disabilities share their lives together; and the Industrial Areas Foundation that creates independent local organizations to tackle a public need. Still, theory remains important, and essays on Cornel West, Sheldon Wolin, and Rowan Williams (all by Coles) are helpful for understanding the authors, who, in a sense, perform the politics Stout advocates and they themselves describe. Coles, like Stout, thinks current political matters are more urgent, while Hauerwas displays the patience of one shaped by a Christian understanding of time and humanity’s final end or *telos*. Free Church Christians will also appreciate the interplay between Coles’ radical egalitarianism and Hauerwas’ affirmation of the unity enabled by episcopacy and hierarchy, particularly in their exchange on the work of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder.



In *The Limits of Liberal Democracy: Politics and Religion at the End of Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009, 161 pp., \$18.00) Scott Moore offers not only a primer on how the Church has uncritically adopted the conservative and liberal perspectives that dominant public life, but also a way forward that avoids either accepting this dichotomy or withdrawing from culture. His premise is that although “the world did not fundamentally change that

September [11] morning,...it is true that we have come close to the end of an age which has defined our world and given meaning to our many endeavors" (p. 14). Modernity is increasingly defined by "political and moral extremes" that nonetheless share many assumptions and commitments. With the breakdown of modern politics and what Moore terms "the end of convenient stereotypes," the Church has the opportunity to rediscover a different vision.

Animating Scott Moore's book is the question of how Christians might approach politics when they cease to assume that the answer to the question "What is the good life?" is "Being a good American."

In the modern world it is often assumed that what is most important about politics can be reduced to statecraft. But *politics* refers to so much more than statecraft.... Politics is about how we order our lives together in the *polis*, whether that is a city, a community, or even a family. It is about how

we live together, how we recognize and preserve that which is most important, how we cultivate friendships and educate our children, how we learn to think and talk about what kind of life is really the good life. (p. 15)

Animating the book is the question of how Christians might approach politics when they cease to assume that the answer to the question "What is the good life?" is "Being a good American." The first five chapters revolve around two largely academic controversies from the mid-1990s, but along the way (and especially in chapter six) Moore weaves them into a sweeping narrative of the development of "Enlightenment Liberalism" and the nation-state. This development is well represented today by the philosophies of John Rawls and Richard Rorty, and the politics of political liberals and conservatives who prize individual liberty despite their contrasting views of government. Moore traces the reduction of politics to statecraft and the emergence of the autonomous individual that makes this possible through the writings of Immanuel Kant and Max Weber, among others. At times Moore's argument is too sweeping. Readers unfamiliar with such a critique will benefit from consulting other works for the details, but will be inspired or at least provoked by this section of the book.

In the final two chapters Moore explains how liberal politics is manifested in our "culture of convenience" that equates happiness with consumption and values efficiency above all, offering examples as varied as the universal remote control and no-fault divorce to capital punishment and euthanasia.

In contrast, the “extraordinary politics” of the Church, already partly visible in the earlier episodes, recognizes that we are souls created in the image of God and must be formed by a community in order to flourish and achieve our proper *telos*. At the center of this politics is not mere tolerance—a sign of failing to reason together—but hospitality, which takes our disagreements seriously while acknowledging our vulnerability and being willing to sacrifice for the common good. “Hospitality is always particular; it is an offer made to the stranger or the one in need,” Moore writes. “Through the exercise of the practice of hospitality, I learn how to become both a cheerful giver and a gracious receiver.” (pp. 148-149) In the end, Moore arrives at a prescription close to that of Stout, Hauerwas, and Coles, which makes up for the underdeveloped aspects of his argument.

The strength of all three books reviewed here is that they are *mediating*: at their best they move beyond polarizing positions and, to borrow a phrase from Ludwig Wittgenstein, “back to the rough ground” of democratic practices, while continuing to uncouple democracy from the violent and commodifying machinery of the modern nation-state. For this, readers will be grateful, and from it they will have much to learn.

NOTE

† Stanley Hauerwas also responds to Jeffrey Stout’s view in the postscript to *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).



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