

Freedom in Truth and Love. A Biblical Message of Salvation to a Fallen World

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Abstract:

The exaltation of freedom, by the post-modern society, as man's absolute good based on the supremacy of will over reason led to the negation of any transcendent truth and objective good. The consequences of such direction on human behavior are disastrous. The paper will explicit the Christian understanding of human freedom as a mean to human perfection and divinization by placing it in relation to divine freedom which is necessarily concomitant to and a consequence of divine intelligence and goodness. The definition of human freedom will be drawn from the word of God: its relation to intelligence, goodness and sacrifice in the Trinitarian communion and the act of creation; its relation to image and likeness in the making of Adam; its relation to alterity and love in the extraction of Eve; its relation to obedience and its loss in the fall; its relation to liberation and responsibility in exodus; and, finally, its relation to redemption and perfection in Jesus Christ.

Keywords:

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Introduction

During the French revolution God was rejected, Notre Dame cathedral was desacralized and dedicated to the goddess reason. By rejecting God, the very foundations of reason and its quest for the truth was undermined and the west became slowly disenchanted from the cult of reason under the influence of relativism and individualism. By exchanging “the truth about God for a lie” (Rom 1: 25), “man’s capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and skepticism (*cf.* Jn 18: 38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself” (John Paul II 1993, 1). Now, in a revolution no less bloody and chaotic than its predecessor, post-modernity is exalting freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values” (John Paul II 1993, 32) and man’s ultimate good. Now too, by rejecting reason and truth, freedom is uprooted from its matrix (John Paul II 1993, 34), voided of its purpose, instead of being man’s way to life it became his instrument of annihilation, instead of being the way to perfection and bliss, it became man’s hell.

To the average modern opinion, freedom - as Benedict XVI summarizes it - “would mean that our own will is the sole norm of our action and that the will not only can desire anything but also has the chance to carry out its desire” (Ratzinger 1996, 16-35). This is the natural outcome of the abolition of truth. There is no objective truth, so what I want is the truth. I create myself, I define reality, I become god. I’m free to define my sexuality, do whatever I please with it, or simply abolish it. I’m free to define my age [Husband and father-of-seven, 52, leaves his wife and kids to live as a transgender SIX-YEAR-OLD girl named Stefonknee. (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3356084/I-ve-gone-child-Husband-father-seven-52-leaves-wife-kids-live-transgender-SIX-YEAR-OLD-girl-named-Stefonknee.html>)] regardless of biology. Free to define my life and the life of others if it is worth living or not and act accordingly. Free to define my very nature [Man spends \$50,000 on over 100 procedures to transform into a ‘genderless’ ALIEN. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4274396/Man-spends-50->

000-transform-genderless-ALIEN.html] and the nature of things. The supremacy of the will over reason and natural law, and reason has no freedom to object to the will unleashed, it will be bullied into silence. We are facing a new totalitarianism and we need to question its very foundation like Benedict XVI did in his fine essay: "How free is the will after all? And how reasonable is it? Is an unreasonable will truly a free will? Is an unreasonable freedom truly freedom? Is it really a good?" (Ratzinger 1996, 17).

Now more than ever the Church, as an "expert in humanity" (Paul VI 1965), moved by charity (*cf.* 1Pt 3, 15), has a sacred duty to offer and explicit God's revelation to the world as a remedy to man's fallenness and his tendency to self-destruction. God, throughout the Judeo-Christian revelation, would constantly present Himself as the liberator of His people. Set my people free! From Pharaoh, from sin, from death. Although freedom is at the very heart of God's redemptive action, it is not man's ultimate goal nor his highest good ["Finally, the purpose or fruit of Sacred Scripture is not simply any kind, but the fullness of everlasting happiness. For these are writings whose words are of eternal life; they were recorded, not only that we might believe, but also that we might possess that life everlasting, in which we shall see and love and our desires will be completely satisfied. Then we shall really know that love which surpasses all knowledge, and thus *be filled with all the fullness of God.*" (Bonaventure 2005, 53)]. God wants us to be perfect: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) by knowing Him (Jn 17: 3) ["Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ." (Jn 17: 3)] and loving Him (Jn 14: 23) ["Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." (Jn 14: 23)] and freedom is one *sine qua non* condition to reach this perfection ["Genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man «in the power of his own counsel» (*cf.* Sir 15: 14), so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at *full and blessed perfection* by cleaving to God". (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council 1965, 17)]. Perfection cannot

be reduced to an illusionary total unbridled capacity to do whatever we wish. Perfection has its conditions. It should be understood in truth: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8: 32) willed by a being capable of free choice : "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7: 7), lived in love : "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Luc. 10: 27) because "Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called" (John Paul II 1993, 17).

In the present reflection we will learn from selected books and figures in the Bible lessons on freedom.

1. Lesson from God's identity: The Trinity

The Christian God is a Trinity of Persons/Relations in one divine essence. An eternal self-subsistent relation. God is one, yet there is alterity in this oneness. The Father the "Being-For" gives Himself totally to His Word, emptying Himself "Everything that the Father has is mine" (Jn 16:15), denying Himself to be in the other, the Son the "Being-From" who, in return, gives himself totally to the Father, the love in which the Father gives Himself to the Son and the Son to the Father is the Holy Spirit, the "Being-with". The implications of this revelation on theology and anthropology are abysmal.

God is relational, He is Love. In God's simple essence being and love are one, they are concomitant. So being is relational in its essence: to be, is to be in relation. A sublime contradiction where to truly be, you need to sacrifice yourself, to give, lose yourself in love to the other: you can't love, thus you can't be and you can't be free, if you remain trapped in your egoity: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 6: 25-25). The communion of love in the Trinity is the archetype of sacrifice. A sacrifice in beatitude, that is the very essence of beauty. Thus, being is in its very essence sacrificial.

In this divine community of love God, the Being is supremely perfect, supremely good and supremely free. His will is moved by nothing but His essence that is love, and as Thomas Aquinas says: “He has free will with respect to what He does not necessarily will” (Thomas Aquinas 1920). The Father necessarily knows himself in His Word the Son, He necessarily wills Himself in the Holy Spirit and this necessity is not a limit to His free will, it is His very being. Being self-subsistent, God freely wills everything that is not himself i.e. the creation, in intelligence and goodness. To say God is free is to say that He is moved by nothing outside His very essence that is Intelligence and Love. For man to be free, as we shall see, he has to participate in God’s Intelligence and Love.

2. Lesson from the act of Creation

Creation in the Bible is *ex-nihilo*, out of nothing. There is no chaos to put in order like in the Greek mythology. Creation *ex-nihilo* means that God is the creator of the world, He is not part of it thus He is not the notion of order in the word.

The act of creation has its archetype in the sacrificial love in the Trinitarian communion. Because “God is Love” (1 Jn 4: 8) He can create otherness and because He is self-subsistent, He is free and He doesn’t create it out of necessity and personal need, therefore He governs it with love and intelligence and can bring into existence rational beings who are capable of love and free will.

Creation is an act of divine sacrifice (i.e. love) made in total liberality. The Creator, the Eternal negates Himself to bring into existence something and someone who is not Him: free beings whose freedom escapes both, God’s omnipotence and governance, making them co-creators of their own being, as we will see with the creation of Adam.

The Father created the world through His Son, the Word “All things came to be through Him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1: 3) in overabundance of love, and found the word He created to be good: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [...] And God saw that it was good” (Gn 1: 1, 25).

Here we need to highlight two fundamental principles:

- Creation has been thought by God into existence. Things have their archetype, their ultimate reference, their truth in God. The nature of every being is a gift from God. While every creature receives its nature by the very act of creation, rational creatures –as we shall see- have to freely accept their nature from God and perfect it by corresponding it to its thought in the Word, then and only then can the creature be in the truth of what it is meant to be.

- The goodness of creation is distinctive of the Judeo-Christian revelation because religious myths see evil as a structural necessity of the word (Bouyer 1982, 96: “Pour le mythe, il n’y a pas distinction entre le monde et sa chute, car le monde ne vient l’être que par la chute des dieux, soit qu’ils se divisent et dégènèrent, soit qu’ils entrent en conflit les uns avec les autres. Pour la Parole, la création, au contraire, est une livre activité de Dieu, qui, procédant de sa pure bonté, est toute bonne en elle-même, quoique d’une bonté limitée et dépendante. Le mal est donc inhérent à l’existence, des dieux comme des hommes. Pour la Parole, il n’y a aucun mal en Dieu, et il n’y en avait aucun dans la créature telle qu’elle est sortie de ses mains”). God is good and there is no evil in him. The creation is good and evil is not part of it nor is it necessary for the use of freedom: evil is an unfortunate consequence of the misuse of free will like in the story of the fall. So, freedom is not a matter of choosing between good and evil, it is the condition to love.

3. Lesson from the creation of Adam and the extraction-formation of Eve

“Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gn 1:26) « *Na’aseh Adam betsalmenu kidemutenu* », “*tselem*” צלם and “*demut*” דמות have always been translated “*image*” and “*likeness*” based on the Septuagint “*eikon*” and “*homoiosis*” and the Vulgate “*ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*”. At first glance the two words might seem similar to us. Almost saying the same thing. Among the wide interpretations [(cf. Westermann 1994). For an extensive review of the history of exegesis on image and likeness (Gen 1: 26)] of both words, I chose to follow the interpretation of J.F. Froger (cf. Froger 2017, 186-188)

who closely linked both words to their semantic roots (shadow for image and blood for likeness) putting in evidence a rich difference in symbolism and meaning.

In “*tsalmenu*” (our image) we see *tselem* to shade (Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon #6754) from the root צל *tʃal* shadow: at the heart of the idea of image there is the concept of shadow, “our shadow”. As for “*demuṭenū*” (our likeness) we see the root מד blood (Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon #1818). The idea of likeness is based on consanguinity: having the same blood.

Thus, we obtain: “Let us make man in our shadow, according to our consanguinity”. Although the meaning hasn’t been altered but the elements offered introduce us to an abysmal symbolic dimension that will help us gain a new depth in our understanding of the revealed text.

3.1. Made in God’s image/shadow

The shadow is the first possible image of an object. It doesn’t exist per se but as the interaction of 3 elements: a source of light, the light and an object that absorbs the light. In order to be perceived it needs a screen to project on. A typical example is the shadow of a tree on a sunny day.

If God has a shadow, he needs to have 3 elements: a source of light, the light and an object that absorbs the light. We can see here retrospectively a sketch of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The image can be an independent duplication of the form of an object on a screen, while a shadow can never subsist independently from this interaction, this emanation in act. Thus Adam, created in the shadow of God, exists only in relation to the “*us...in our*” that created him. As noted by Gregory of Nyssa (*cf.* Grégoire de Nysse 2002, 92-93) all creatures were created by a simple word or command but man was the fruit of a deliberation between the three Persons of the Trinity [“As if the Creator [...] drew man from the mystery of his own Being. [...] The image must “reflect”, it must, in a certain way, almost reproduce “the substance” of its Prototype. The Creator says, furthermore, “after our likeness”. It is clear that it must not be understood as a “portrait”, but as a living being, who will live a life similar to that of God.” (John Paul II 1978)]. While in God relation is concomitant to existence, for the created world and for Adam in particular

relation is prior to existence. As we saw above, we are thought by God into existence: “let us make Adam” that’s why Descartes’s adage “I think therefore I am” is half true: I am capable of thinking because I was made participant in God’s image, having intelligence and freewill like Him. So it is more truthful to say in faithfulness to the word of God: “I am thought therefore I am” and the more I correspond to the thought of me in God the more I am: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you” (Jr 1: 5).

The earth (*Adamah*) from, which Adam was molded, holds the imprint of God in negative. It is Him, but not yet. Like a program or a metamorphosis that needs to unfold, a potentiality that needs to be enacted.

The image in which man was created, like Origen (Origène 2003, 60-64) among many fathers saw it, is not an impersonal similitude with the divine, but the very person of the Savior. The completion, the perfection of the “*homo capax Dei*” is to become united to his Archetype, the Word of God, the Son who receives the Father in the Holy Spirit like the tree receives the sun in the light: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1-15). The shadow-image of the Son leaves in us an ontological hunger and thirst, an infinite void and craving, a lack of being that can only be fulfilled by Him the divine saliency that will inseminate our souls with eternal life: His very union with us. Apart from Him nothing can satisfy the human heart.

Thus, in creating Man, God not only takes His son as model but he commits to realizing Him in us at the price of the redemptive incarnation by assuming our very nature. In the gospel of Luke, we see the completion of this prophecy in the molding of the New Adam: “And the angel said to her in reply, the holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will *overshadow* you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1, 35).

Mary the holy *adamah* was overshadowed by God so that from her will germinate the New Adam, the Savior, the son of man in whom “*dwells the fullness of the deity bodily*” (Col. 2, 9).

Being created in God's image is a journey, a covenant that culminates in "it's no more I that lives but Christ that lives in me" (Ga 2: 20) and it is in Him that each one of us will find his uniqueness, his true identity and personality since every one of us corresponds to a unique particularity in god's infinite essence.

Man can be defined as the only created being who has to appropriate his quiddity. So, he is necessarily unfinished and necessarily endowed with intelligence and free will in order to know and want to become 'man' in his essence.

Let us now give a closer look at Likeness.

3.2. After our likeness/Consanguinity

Being of the same blood with God means having the same life (*cf.* Gn. 9, 4), having the strongest similarity, being related to him, having his spirit, being driven by His will.

When image gives the idea of capacity and potentiality, likeness is act. It is the very loving union that makes him our Father and us his children.

Jesus in the Gospel of John chapter 8 has shown us exactly in what consists our likeness/filiation in His argument with the Pharisees:

You are doing the works of your father! (So) they said to him, We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God. Jesus said [...] You belong to *your father the devil* and you willingly carry out *your father's desires* (Jn 8: 41, 42, 44).

Desires define likeness and resemblance. Our father is the one whose desires we have and willingly carry out. The revelation Jesus is making here is of primordial importance. Not only God has desires – his essence is love -, being made in his image and likeness we too are made to love and to desire: we can't be desireless thus we can't be fatherless. Since we are bearers of desires, we should carefully choose the source of our desires: our decisions, morality, life and purpose will depend on it. Only the desires of the true God that are perfectly good and intelligent can make us free.

3.3. The extraction-formation of Eve

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gn 2: 18).

It is not good that Adam (human nature) should be undifferentiated, not self-aware. So, God will give him a helper, to help the human nature be aware of its essence as given in the act of creation. The extraction of the woman and the awakening of the human nature to its femininity is a fundamental step in the initiation of man to freedom. You can't be free if you don't know who you are. And Adam was made in God's image in precisely the fact that he is man and woman: "God created Adam in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gn 1: 27).

The archetype of male and female are the activity and receptivity in the Trinitarian processions. Being made in God's image, Adam should not only gain awareness of his activity towards the creation that God ordered him to govern but also his receptivity in relation to God his creator and Father. Adam is not made free only by exercising dominion over creation but also by receiving his nature and essence as a gift from God, by gaining awareness of the image and likeness in which he was made.

So, God starts the beautiful extraction-formation of Eve by asking Adam to name the animals:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and *brought them to the man to see what he would call them*; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; *but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him* (Gn 2: 19-21).

It is interesting to see that the extraction-formation of Eve started by naming the animals. Adam named the animals that symbolize man's psychic instances and became aware that he is not an animal, he did not find in them a helper fit for him, he can't find his quiddity in his psychic life. He is in this world but not from this world.

Without divine intervention, his ignorance would make vain any attempt of free decision, because freedom supposes self-knowledge and the disposition of one's own nature. No animal can access freedom

because an animal does not have access to its own nature. Adam must not only want life but know the gift by which he receives it.

So, the LORD God caused a *deep sleep* to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his *ribs* and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and *brought her to the man*. Then the man said, *this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gn 2: 19-21).

God took Adam's interiority (his holy of holies) while he was in ecstasy [Deep sleep (*Tardemah*) is translated ἔκστασις in the *Septuagint*: "getting out of oneself."] and projected it outside and He personally brought it to Adam who now became differentiated and representative of the masculine, and Eve of the feminine. God invites Adam to gain self-awareness, he offers him otherness and invites him to become fully relational like his creator: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". He recognized his essence in a vis-à-vis initiated by God himself. It is the first exodus (Gen 2: 24) [That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (Gen 2: 24)] to which God calls Adam from his egoity to the ecstasy of love with his precious other rooted in sacrifice, responsibilities and duties. This nuptial relationship is co-creative, the family, the matrix and cradle of humanity, each person's first experience of God if we freely commit to love, or hell is we sacrifice love on the altar of egoity.

Man's realization and freedom cannot be accomplished outside the communion of persons where responsibilities and duties are involved.

4. Lesson from the fall or the loss of freedom

Eve's extraction-formation came in the context of man's initiation to the accomplishment of his very being, his initiation to freedom and perfection. It took place in a very interesting garden:

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, *with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* (Gn 2: 8-9).

From the names of the trees we see the symbolic significance of this text.

The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to *cultivate* and *care* for it. The LORD God gave the man this order: *You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die* (Gn 2: 15-17).

Adam's mission is to cultivate and care for the garden. Man's perfection requires a constant work of intelligence, the acquisition and development of knowledge, so much that God gave him a twofold order: to eat from the trees, and not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We usually focus on the second part of the order and we miss the first part. Adam should eat from all the trees, the trees being categories of knowledge, in order to grow in wisdom. Being created like God with intelligence and free will, we glorify him by acquiring wisdom and it is wisdom that will guide us in making good choices, wanting the right thing and loving. While ignorance is a natural state for a child, it becomes sinful for an adult. We fail to comprehend the evil of ignorance until we see the damage and devastation its consequences bring on us and on our loved ones [We have a tendency to see ignorance as an excuse maybe because of a false interpretation of Jesus's words during his passion when he asked the Father to forgive those who were causing all his suffering because "they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23: 34). The Father didn't need to be convinced to forgive them, were their ignorance invincible. Their sin is that they didn't want to know when they ought to, and the consequence of their ignorance is an unfathomable evil. Their sin is so big that it requires God's forgiveness and redemption].

The second commandment is to refrain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The tree wasn't put there to test Adam, God wasn't tempting him, He doesn't tempt (*cf.* James 1: 13). The tree is a consequence of man's free will: because Adam was created free, God can only invite him to consent to the rules that allow him to be free; thus, freedom includes the possibility of breaking these rules, by ignorance or by rebellion. Breaking the rules is not necessary to experience freedom (as our culture wants us to believe) but it is necessarily possible. The fruit of

knowledge is the fruit par excellence that Adam must not desire and by doing this he loses himself, his egoity, only to find himself perfectly in God. Not eating from it is the ultimate sacrifice in trust and love that man had to do as an echo of God's sacrifice in creating him: negating himself to be in the One who is. Adam the masculine of creation had to accept his receptivity in relation to the Trinity. To have his principle not in himself but in God he had to accept not to be self-referent, the ultimate reference for good and evil, the legislator, the alfa and omega. He had to accept not to be his own god so that God can be his God.

But in order to do so, Adam needed to be himself aware of his receptivity, his spiritual dimension, his holy of holies longing for God's dwelling in it. Adam needed help, and help was given to him in Eve. Because she symbolizes Adam's openness to deification, the void in the human nature that has the shape of God and longing for its fulfillment, Eve was very logically the sole interlocutor Satan would have in order to tempt humanity into following him in his own rebellion against God. And Eve was the one who's mission as helper was to reject such a temptation, such a desire.

Satan an angel originally created good by God, decided to be self-referent, he wanted to be absolutely free by rejecting God as his ultimate principle, he wanted everything for himself, even God. He refused to echo in his being the Trinitarian relation by being in a loving relation with God. He closed on himself in a mortal solipsism and hatred by negating otherness: his fall consists in his irrevocable decision not to sacrifice, in fact Satan is the anti-sacrifice, the anti-love. By negating love, he negates being itself because being is relational so he became "murderer", and by negating being he negates the truth becoming "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8: 44).

Rejecting deification in the One good and true God, Satan became a lonely, egoistic, capricious malevolent god, and it is precisely this image he projected on God in his discourse with Eve. "But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil" (Gen 3: 4-5). Satan's message was clear: God is lying to you. He is

jealous of you: he doesn't want to lose some prerogatives he has and he certainly doesn't have your best interest in mind. So, you better be your own self-referent gods, defining good and evil. Be free! Free from God, free from any transcendent truth (*cf.* John Paul II 1993, 32). A message we keep on hearing every single day!

Eve believed Satan, and she gave to her husband who ate from the fruit. Adam who received the commandment directly from God, disobeyed Him and instead he obeyed Eve. From that moment, Eve became a deity for Adam. Adam now listens to his self-referent inspiration and unconsciously makes it a god. From that moment on, as human history shows, humans will invent their deities and their cults, projected from the more or less conscious collective imagination and desires, "the latest being atheistic scientific rationality. And now with the advent of individualistic subjectivity, there will be as many gods as there are men" (*cf.* Froger 2017, 391-392).

Both ate and "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gn 3: 7) Instead of opening their eyes to the truth, the beauty and goodness of God and be part of it, their eyes were opened to their nothingness. The same nothingness that was calling God to fill it, became unbearable to them. *It became man's source of constant fear: "I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid"* (Gn 3: 10).

Adam had to sacrifice his egoity to be in the One who is. Instead, like the devil, he refused to sacrifice. *As soon as we abolish self-sacrifice, we institute the sacrifice of the other in a desperate attempt to fill our emptiness, our poverty, our lack of being.* It is inevitable, because the being is sacrificial in its essence: I sacrifice myself to the other in truth and love so "rivers of living water will flow" from within me (*cf.* Jn 7: 38), or I sacrifice the other for my egoity in lie and hatred so I become "liar and murderer" (Jn 8: 44).

The consequences of the original sin on the human nature were devastating (*cf.* 400 – 405): "The soul's spiritual faculties over the body are shattered", "the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, marked by lust and domination", "creation has become alien and hostile to man", human nature became "deprived of original holiness and

justice”, “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death and inclined to sin”. In the words of the beloved apostle: “the whole world is under the power of the evil one” (1 John 5: 19).

If this is not slavery then what is? Humans lost their freedom, by losing the truth, goodness and love. By believing Satan’s lie, humankind lost God because “Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord” (John Paul II 1993, 1). Man became ignorant, wounded, lonely and rebel.

St. Paul describes this reality in a very poignant way:

For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. [...] For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? (Rm 7: 19, 22-24).

Humanity is in need of liberation, salvation and redemption.

5. Lesson from *Exodus*

In the process of the redemption of man, Exodus is a source of profound wisdom. We will highlight two moments: Moses’ encounter with God in the burning bush and the Decalogue.

Moses received his mission as liberator of his people in his face to face with God in the burning bush on mount Horeb.

The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So, Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this *marvelous sight*, why the bush is not burned up” (Ex 3: 2-3).

The marvelous sight was the inhabitation of the fire of divinity in the human nature without consuming it. The burning bush is the first “*Ecce Homo*” a vision of the Son of Man in whom dwells the fullness of deity (Col. 2: 9). It is also a revelation of what the human nature is supposed to be according to God’s will i.e. the tabernacle of the Holy Trinity: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (Jn 14: 23).

Before becoming the liberator of his people, Moses had to be liberated himself and his liberation necessitates two elements:

- God's revelation of his own name that is a communion with him, an access to his intimacy, "God said to Moses", "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations" (Ex 3: 14-15).

- And the true worship of the true God: "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you *shall worship God at this mountain*" (Ex 3: 12).

But first of all, Moses, and later on his people, had to leave Egypt, so "God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; *remove your sandals* from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3: 4-5).

Moses was ordered to remove all his mental representations, his a priori, the cultural legacy that he brought with him from Egypt in order to see God in purity, to understand him in truth, as He wants to be understood. By removing his sandals, Moses left Egypt for good and he let the holy land sanctify him, exactly like the apostles had to let Jesus wash their feet: "Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me" (Jn 13: 8).

Entry into freedom always necessitates a painful exodus, a destitution to see God in a nudity that became unbearable to us, but necessary to know and love God like He wants to be known and loved without projecting on Him any idol, fruit of our imagination, desires and fantasies.

After liberating the Israelites from the slavery in Egypt God brought them to the desert of Sinai. They were liberated but were not free yet. Inner freedom requires the adoration of the true God, an inner exodus

from error and sin to truth and goodness in full obedience to the One who is the Truth and Love:

Then the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying: This is what you will say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites: You have seen how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, if you *obey* me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine (Ex 19: 3-5).

Then He gave them the Decalogue who is, as Benedict XVI beautifully said it:

at once the self-presentation and self-exhibition of God and the exposition of what man is, the luminous manifestation of his truth. This truth becomes visible in the mirror of God's essence, because man can be rightly understood only in relation to God. To live the Decalogue means to live our Godlikeness, to correspond to the truth of our being and thus to do the good. Said in yet another way; to live the Decalogue means to live the divinity of man, which is the very definition of freedom: the fusion of our being with the divine being and the resulting harmony of all with all (Ratzinger 1996, 32-33).

Living by the Decalogue is not a matter of following a set of rules in a legalistic way. It is honoring the very essence of man in teaching him to be relational (loving) in relation to God and his brothers and sisters who share with him the same image and likeness. It is "*the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point*" (John Paul II 1993, 13). The Decalogue is the true promised land and the journey to it is a long process (like the 40 years of the Israelites in the desert) that requires an assiduous work of growth, purification of our ideas and desires, humility, the acquisition of wisdom and all the virtues (*cf.* Wisdom 8: 1-8), but above all, the grace of God: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, *because without me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15: 5).

He is free indeed, he who adores the one true God and is not enslaved to idols, he who doesn't kill but builds people up spiritually, mentally and psychologically, he who is faithful to his precious other having control over his impulses and desires. He is free he who doesn't steal but is generous because money is his servant and not his master, he who is truthful, he who is capable of looking at a woman and not reduce

her to a sex object or a commodity and treat her in honor and respect like a sister. He who doesn't use, abuse and take advantage of others but blesses them: rejoicing at their blessings and mourning at their sorrows.

Living by the Decalogue is the entry into freedom, the only way to accomplish our being. And if we choose not to accomplish our being, we have no other choice but turn bad, become slaves to evil: "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin" (Jn 8:34), or as C.S. Lewis said it:

When he said, 'Be perfect,' He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder - in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad (Lewis 2001, 198-199).

6. Lessons from the Son of Man, the Messiah

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [...] And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1: 1, 14)

Jesus Christ is the awaited Messiah, the divine intelligence manifested in a man. It is in Him that we contemplate the union between divine intelligence and human intelligence, divine will and human will. He is the fruit we should eat in order to access God's intimacy and eternal life. He offers himself to us on the tree of the cross to be desired and taken.

He is the "the way, the truth and the life", in Him man's intelligence becomes united with God's intelligence: "eternal life is to know you the one true God and the one you sent Jesus Christ" (Jn 17: 3) and men will become united with God's will. In Him our likeness with God is restored. The consanguinity that we lost in the original sin is given back to us through the covenant of His blood that we are invited to drink. Jesus, prefigured by Moses, is the liberator of God's children and the victor over the devil: "Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned

from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 Jn 3: 8)

But Jesus too, like Moses, had to be prepared in His human nature for His salvific mission. He was “growing in grace, stature and wisdom” (Lk 2: 40-52) and He was made “perfect through suffering” (Heb 2: 10) [“For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb 2: 10)] not because of any intrinsic value to suffering per se but because it is precisely in His suffering that we see the perfect union of Jesus’ human will with the Father’s will. Jesus redeemed Adam’s sin in yet another garden the garden of Gethsemane where like Adam he was offered to fully unite His will with the Father’s will, but this time not in the bliss of the garden of Eden but through unfathomable pain, taking on Him all the evil of the rebellion of His brothers and sisters. Paradoxically Jesus became perfect, thus perfectly free, by accepting to be chained, tortured and nailed on a cross... out of infinite love: “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” (Lk 22: 42)

Jesus is the liberator, the savior, “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rm 8:29) in Him and in Him only we reach true freedom, freedom in truth [“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will become free?’” Jesus answered them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So, if a son frees you, then you will truly be free” (Jn 8: 31-36)] and love [“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13: 34-35)].

In His life and teaching Jesus did not limit His salvific action to the metaphysical reality, He went into practical and existential details to make the “yoke easy” and “the burden light” (Mt. 11: 30) on us and to make us

experience freedom in our everyday reality so that we “might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10: 10). Given the width and depth of the topic of freedom in Jesus’ teaching we will limit our reflection to some aspects of freedom Jesus offers in His teaching to His followers: “Freedom from sin, from the dominion of the evil one, from the slavery of darkness, giving us the grace to know the truth and to act accordingly, to “do his works, and do greater things” (*cf.* Jn 14: 12).

Freedom from time, space (Cantalamessa 2007, 48-53), the absurdity of an ephemeral life and death. He rose our eyes and heart to the kingdom of God, our true place, the answer to the longing of every human heart and by doing so he gave us meaning and purpose to our life on earth. The more our eyes are gazing at him the more difference we make in this world and the more we see death as the long-awaited moment of our face to face with the love of our life: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1: 21).

Freedom from the loss of value and dignity, from the crippling awareness of our imperfection, inadequacy, self-loathing. We are sons and daughters of the King, and we were bought at a very high price (1 Co 6: 20). The price of His blood (Ga 3: 13).

Freedom from our deadly dependence on money, power, fame and people’s opinion to give ourselves a sense of being and value. Our worth is His love for us, His image and likeness in us (Mt 6: 19).

Freedom from elitism and an inflated ego. “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Mt. 11: 25).

Freedom from the fear from the future and its uncertainties because our Father knows what we need before we ask Him and to Him we are more important than birds and flowers (Mt. 6: 25-26).

Freedom from the consequences of our wrongdoings and the wrongdoing of people on us because “all things work for good for those who love God” (Rm 8:28). Not only our souls are redeemed but our life too.

Freedom from the absurdity of pain. United with Christ's pain and sacrifice our pain has an eternal value (*cf.* Rm 5: 3-4; 2 Co 4: 17; Mt 10: 38).

Freedom from the prison of anger and revenge through forgiveness. In his commandment to forgive and pray to those who hate and persecute us (*cf.* Mt. 5: 44) Christ gave us the power to resist being contaminated by the evil done to us. He set us free too from the captivity of hatred and revenge that makes past hurts perpetually present to our mind and soul stealing from us the present, God's precious present to us and the only place where we can encounter Him.

Freedom from the fear of commitment and sacrifice by restoring the exclusivity and perpetuity of marriage as covenant (*cf.* Mk 10: 9) and the consecrated life (*cf.* Lk 9: 62). In the modern understanding commitment and responsibility are perceived as obstacle to freedom, yet in fact they are its natural culmination. Man cannot remain perpetual potentiality, eternally unformed, free to be without ever being able to be. This looks more like a curse than freedom.

Freedom from lies and half-truths and the strength to say the truth and be assertive: "let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" (Mt. 5: 37).

Freedom from our gifts to others by expecting nothing in return. Doing good for the sake of goodness, not for human glory, not for return on investment. Just to glorify God thus protecting our heart from disappointment. (*cf.* Mt 6: 3)

Freedom even from God's gifts, from the drunkenness of the supernatural: "Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Lc 10: 20)

Like saint Paul said: "For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Ga 5: 1) and the yoke of slavery is "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like" (Ga 5: 20). How many lives have been wasted and how many families have been devastated because of this insane search of man to find his fulfillment

outside of God. While those who live by the Spirit of God bear the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Ga 5: 22-23).

Conclusions

In Christianity man’s freedom is an echo of God’s freedom that is inseparable from His divine intelligence and will in the Trinitarian communion. Man (human nature) is made in the image and likeness of God endowed with intelligence and free will, he is made unfinished thus participant in the very act of his creation by God. He needs to acquire his quiddity through the union of his intelligence with the divine intelligence and his will with the divine will. This act of union should be the result of a free choice.

In order for Man to be capable of such a choice, he needs to be self-aware and initiated to otherness: the extraction-formation of Eve is Man’s acquisition of the necessary conditions of freedom: the awareness of being in the image and likeness of God and his openness to the other – Eve – where he can actualize his being in a relation founded on responsibilities, duties and sacrifice (i.e. Love).

Tempted by the devil to follow him in his rebellion against God, Man deified himself in an act of self-reference rejecting sacrifice and closing on himself in a mortal solipsism. He broke free from God but instead of finding freedom, he became slave of evil, ignorance, pain and death.

God, in His covenantal love, committed to save humanity by showing them the way to freedom with Moses through the revelation of His Name and the gift of the law, the Decalogue: there is no true freedom outside a relation with the true God and a filiation with Him by following his desires (the Decalogue) and thus restoring in us His image-consanguinity that we lost in the fall.

The fullness of God’s revelation of His intimacy and the restauration of man foretold in exodus were fulfilled in Jesus, the Word incarnated. In His life, teaching, sacrifice and His Person he offered His followers the way to perfection in the union with the Trinity where divine freedom is found in Truth and Love. To be free is to be fully human in truth and love, fully in

God's image and likeness: to know Him and in Him to know all things, to love Him and in Him to love all things: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8: 32).

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