

Freedom

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Is man free?

Man has always talked about freedom; but never so much as today. If he talks about it more, presumably it is because he is more concerned about it. Is this because there is more freedom in the world? Or is it perhaps because there is less?

On the one hand, it is very arguable that man's freedom, politically and economically, is diminishing (he is more under the power of the State and of state-controlled economic conditions; he is more subjected to taxes, more tied by red-tape, etc.).

Nevertheless many people would maintain that personal freedom - freedom in personal conduct - is increasing, at least in Western societies. People are 'freer' to do what they like morally; e.g. where sex is concerned. It seems undeniable that people in general accept fewer restrictions in the area of sex than formerly. But it seems equally undeniable that this greater 'freedom' in conduct somehow doesn't seem to have produced greater happiness in life; and most men would agree that there is something unsatisfactory about a greater freedom that doesn't lead to greater happiness.

Others deny the idea of freedom altogether. Man is not free. He is really a conditioned being, and the pattern of his actions is determined by his hereditary traits and his circumstances. Man therefore is only fooling himself in talking about his freedom. Clearly the first thing one must do is to try to clarify this. When we talk about freedom, are we talking about a real thing, however difficult to define? Or are we talking about something imaginary?

(Footnote: The author feels bound, in justice and gratitude, to say that most and probably all of his ideas about freedom have been inspired by the words and writings of Mgr Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, and he recommends the works of Mgr Escriva to all those who want to understand what freedom - and especially the greatest freedom of all: Christian freedom - really means.)

Free: and not yet free

Is man free? Or is he not free? I would be prepared to defend both propositions! - that man is free; and that he is not free...It all depends on what one understands by freedom. Because there is a certain ambiguity in the word. When one says man is free, if one means that man has free will, that he possesses a power of intelligent choice, I would defend that, as against all determinists. There may indeed be moments in which we feel our free will was lessened, or perhaps completely overwhelmed, by circumstances. No one will deny that this can really occur in certain cases. But no one, I imagine, will deny either that we can easily fool ourselves about such moments, and that when we say we were swept away by passion or temper or circumstances, what perhaps really happened is that with our free will we freely chose an easier course rather than a harder one. It is handy to be a determinist if one is not prepared to choose the harder options; if one is not prepared,

for instance, to control one's sensuality, or to restrain one's tendency to criticize others, or to face up to one's responsibilities, or to check one's self-centred ambition.

So, in allowing that there may be cases in which one's free will is lessened or removed by circumstances, I would maintain that such cases, in normal persons, are few. The normal person has only to look back on the actions of any one of his days to be perfectly convinced that he could quite easily (or at least quite definitely) have varied many - most - of them: he could have not got up in the morning, or he could have got up on the dot; he could have written this letter first instead of that; he could have watched a different TV programme to the one he actually saw; he could have had a row with his wife instead of having avoided it - or he could have avoided a row instead of having had it.

In other words, the normal person has only to reflect a little to be quite convinced that each day he has exercised a power to choose in certain directions and that he could have exercised that same power in other directions. And that is to be convinced that one has free will.

But free will - the power to choose - is not yet the same as freedom. I can choose this or that: fried eggs or boiled eggs, for instance - if I am given the choice. If I am only offered boiled eggs, I am free to eat or to go hungry, which is not so much of a free choice. No; free will and freedom are not synonymous. With my free will I may choose to go to New York; yet I may not have the cash to do it. Therefore I am not free to do it. The slave has free will. But he has not freedom. So freedom is not just having free will. It is something more. And I would maintain that we do not yet possess that something more, that we do not yet possess freedom in all its fullness.

Is freedom the same as independence?

If freedom is not just having free will, what is it? Is it independence? Some people appear to think that freedom essentially means independence. And when they say that man is free or ought to be free, they are implying that he is independent or is meant to be independent. Now this is something that I would absolutely deny. It seems quite evident to me that man is not independent. He is in fact an extremely dependent creature. One of the obviously false things often said in remarks about freedom is that 'man is born free'. Born free? Can you imagine anything more helpless and dependent than a new-born baby? No; man is born with evident dependences. At the start of his life his dependences are quite involuntary, almost unconscious: air, light, warmth, food... As he grows up he begins to choose things, and very often creates new and voluntary dependences or needs. He depends on a train or a car to get around, on smoking to calm his nerves, on aftershave lotion to stop his cheeks itching, on popularity to boost his ego, on newspapers for his views, on a wife and family for affection...

To think, as many people do, that true human development means reaching a state of total self-sufficiency, is false, for total self-sufficiency is just not possible for man. In the truest sense, the more you live, the more dependent - and therefore the less self-sufficient - you become. You become more dependent on few things, or on many things, on important things or unimportant things, on things that make you more of a man or less of a man, things that make you more free or less free... The quality of your life is really determined in fact by the type of things you are dependent on. And we are approaching the real problem of freedom when we say it is the problem of the type of dependences one acquires in one's life. The man who is dependent on drink or drugs or lust is scarcely free. To crave for sex and to centre one's life on it can be the most abject slavery.

But man, precisely because he is not self-sufficient, must want something. And freedom really has very much to do with wanting and depending on things that raise a man up, develop him, ennoble him. So, to want and long for truth or goodness or love is part of the process of becoming free. Gustave Thibon speaks of a 'dead dependence, which oppresses a man, and a living dependence which opens him out and elevates him'. And he adds: 'The first of these dependences is slavery; the second, freedom.'

Defining freedom

So far I have deliberately avoided the difficult problem of defining freedom. But perhaps now we can attempt to say what it is. Most people, if pushed, would probably say that freedom is the 'power to do what you like'. This is a superficial idea of freedom that just won't stand the test. You can do many things you feel like doing, and be less free as a result; for instance, to use the simple example given by Frank Sheed, you can eat as much as you feel like and the result is that limitation of your freedom that we call indigestion.

No; freedom is not the power to do what you like. It is something much more important. It is the power to be fully oneself; the power to become fully oneself, to realize fully one's potentialities as a man.

Man is not born free. But man is born with the power to become free, to become master of his own actions. More paradoxically still, one can say man is born with the power to become a man... A lion cub just naturally grows into a fully developed lion; he doesn't have to worry about it. But a child doesn't automatically or inevitably become a man. You don't become a man just by reaching 21 or 33. You may never become a man. Some people don't.

A man is not someone who is well developed physically. His physical powers develop automatically. But he also has spiritual powers, and these may not develop, or may develop insufficiently. They may remain underdeveloped. You meet fully grown men, who have underdeveloped minds, and especially have underdeveloped wills; they have little or no will-power. They are not yet men. They are not yet masters of their own selves or their own choices. They are not yet free. Therefore they don't yet properly possess what most distinguishes human nature; and they may end up by losing it completely.

The person who normally acts according to what he feels like doing is likely to be very underdeveloped as regards freedom. He is not really in possession of it. He is largely moved by comfort or instinct or passion - which is to be moved very much like the animals.

Future freedom

So, I insist, freedom is the power to realize one's potentialities, the power to develop, to grow, to become oneself, not to be forced to drift into something else, not to be forced to be less than a man.

This is the paradox. This is why we are free and yet not free - not yet. We are free because we have free will. But we are not yet fully free because not all of our possibilities or even our wants have been fulfilled. Most people would readily agree that as long as one has unsatisfied desires or wants, one is not fully free. At one stage in World War II the Allied war aims were expressed in a declaration of Four Freedoms. I forget three of them, but one, I think, was Freedom from Want. This, properly understood, is real freedom. Not just freedom from hunger or from material want. This is essential, but it is not enough. To be a beggar and suddenly to inherit a million pounds doesn't bring freedom from want. Such a person will still want more: more love, fame, pleasure,

companionship, even more money. Real freedom from want is to have come to a state where one wants nothing further; not by reduction to Nirvana, where one is satisfied because there is no desire left; but by the full satisfaction of the true needs of human nature. What these true needs are each one has to work out for himself; he has to decide, for instance, whether love is a truer need than sex, or whether a man can be happy and free if he leaves unsatisfied his immense need of goodness and truth and beauty...

If freedom is the power to be fully oneself, it is obviously a power in motion. It looks forward to a state where at last, we hope, we will be truly ourselves, where we will have fulfilled all the potentialities of our nature and possess ourselves fully. Now clearly we do not yet possess that state. When we speak of freedom in this sense, we are speaking of some future freedom - of the ultimate goal of our life towards which we try to tend and away from which we try not to drift.

Choices matter

But let us look more closely at that present freedom which is our free will, our power to choose between different alternatives, our power to say Yes or No. This is the freedom that characterizes man and forms the basis to his dignity and makes him someone who can carry personal responsibility. He is free and responsible because he can choose. What makes imprisonment such an indignity is that it deprives a man of so many choices. His freedom of choice is brutally narrowed. He can walk the prison yard, but not the city streets outside or the countryside. He can eat the food offered him or go hungry. He cannot go out and buy a Wimpey or a meat pie. From this it is very evident that the extent to which a man has no real choice, he is not free. He is only free when he can choose this or that, when he can say Yes - or No. If he can only say Yes, he is not free. We will return to this point.

Another point is that some of our free choices develop us more, some develop us less, while others hinder our development. We are not static personalities. We are changing all the time - whether we want it or not, or like it or not. In part, circumstances force us to change. But what basically affects our changing personalities is our own free choices - whether we say Yes when we could have said No, whether we say No when we could have said Yes. We are like men constantly on the road, coming to cross-roads all the time (every choice means a cross-roads) - and choosing. Very clearly, therefore, it is important to know what sort of things one chooses, and how they affect one's own development as a person, as a personality. Because choices, like roads, are not indifferent. They tend to lead you somewhere - uphill or down, to your goal (if you have one) or away from it. They may lead nowhere; they may be dead ends, tracks that sink into a swamp or run out in the sands of a desert.

Underdeveloped people

If we look back at any stage in our life - say over the last four or five years - if we look back at our own personal history, we see that we have chosen certain things, and we are conscious that we could have chosen different things: and that we would be different persons today if we had chosen differently. My own personal history could have been so different: for better or for worse. If, with hindsight, we could relive those years again, I imagine most of us would vary some of our choices. Because we see they were poor choices, they didn't help us; and we feel that some other alternative would probably have been better. Of course, we can't change the past. But we can try to learn from past experience, so as to judge our future choices better.

We hear a lot today about underdeveloped countries. Generally one is speaking of countries that are making great efforts precisely to develop, and perhaps are showing more signs of life and vitality than many 'developed' countries. But what a great lot of underdeveloped people there are around: people whose lives move in very narrow circles, whose horizons are limited to small personal interests and satisfactions, bored at work and bored at home; living for their golf or bingo or telly... ; and who are making practically no efforts to develop.

Free and easy choices

How do people get into such a state of apathy? Generally by their own free choices: by their free and easy choices; by systematically choosing the easy options, the more attractive or smoother road, at every cross-roads that comes up. And the result of using one's freedom that way is, at best, a rut; perhaps a dead end; at worst, it is a desert or a precipice.

A rut is simply a conditioned way of choosing, an unfree way of choosing. Sometimes a person gets into such a rut without being aware of it. He always says Yes to the same things and never thinks of the fact that he is not really living as a free man - making deliberate choices - but simply drifting. Sometimes a person is aware of the rut, or becomes aware of it. Then he would like to get out of it. But he finds perhaps that it is not that easy. The habit has taken hold of him and he can't break it. If he really can't, then he is not free. The person who can't help sliding into an armchair whenever he sees a television set switched on... or the person who realizes that he is smoking too much and wants to quit altogether, but who can't, has, at least in relation to these matters, lost his freedom. He can no longer say No. And to be free it is essential to be able to say Yes or No. To be free it is essential to have at least two choices. If you have only one choice, if you can only say Yes, you're not free. (One choice is of course not really a choice at all. When, in fact, a person finds himself with only one choice, he says afterwards, 'I had no choice'. He is right.)

Freedom and sex

I feel that a note of urgency could well enter here into our consideration of freedom. We are free, free to choose, and we are constantly exercising this freedom of choice, choosing roads that take us somewhere. Where? A man is completely at sea about his own life unless he can say where it is leading him. He is not really in charge of his life unless he has set himself a goal, and is using his choices - his free will - to attain that goal.

It is only if you have a goal in life, a goal of personal development, that you can use your free will intelligently. You can use it intelligently in a positive exercise: to choose things that help your development, that can enrich your personality and your life. And you can use it intelligently in a negative exercise - to avoid those choices which can limit your development, to avoid choosing things which keep you small and underdeveloped, which set you in a rut; and, much more important and urgent, to avoid those choices that are really dead ends - or worse: to avoid choosing things which are capable of enslaving you more and more, and perhaps of finally destroying you.

Take an obvious heading: 'Sex and Freedom'. Take the person who practises some form of restraint in sex, who chooses to observe the restrictions of a traditional morality, who believes therefore that sex is for marriage, and who believes that sexual thoughts should be controlled, and that certain types of books and films or shows are to be avoided. Is he less free than, say, the man who follows his every instinct, who acknowledges no restraints, who does what he likes?

Restrictions and freedom

Is a person less free because he accepts restrictions? Do all restrictions imply a loss of freedom? Yes? Reflect well on it... No! I would not agree that all restrictions necessarily involve a loss of freedom. Certain restrictions are in fact a safeguard of freedom. A man may accept them because he is personally convinced that they help to keep him free; and convinced that if he doesn't observe them, he can lose his freedom.

The cabin of an airliner is definitely a restricted area, normally in fact a rather cramped one. Yet the man who wants to get to New York, has the cash, buys a ticket, and enters the cabin, is not likely to step out of it in mid-flight - in order to assert his freedom! The freedom that interests him is to get to New York, and the restrictions of the cabin (air-pressurized and heated, when outside there is scarcely any oxygen and the temperature is -45°C; and travelling at 600 miles per hour) help him to exercise his freedom to the maximum advantage.

A road is a restriction. It has a certain paved width; it has curves and cambers. But the man who suddenly decides he will no longer be a slave to these restrictions and who, instead of following the next curve, drives straight on, will probably find that this assertion of his freedom leaves him at the bottom of the ditch or wrapped around the nearest tree. A motor-way illustrates the point even more clearly than a normal road. It has more restrictions; it is fenced in, has limited entrance and exit points, maximum, and sometimes minimum, speed limits... Yet no man in his right senses, when he chooses to travel by motor-way, thinks of these restrictions as limiting his freedom, but rather as helping him to make better use of it.

If a man loves a woman, if a boy loves a girl, he wants to love her truly (to love her purely, if one may be old-fashioned but clear), he wants to be free to love her. And if he is normal and sincere, he knows that his sexual nature - which can be directed towards serving and expressing his love - has to be directed towards that end. It has to be controlled, so as to be subordinated to his love. And that is something it doesn't easily accept. It tends to accept no control. It wants its own satisfactions on its own terms. And if it is left unrestrained, it takes over, it destroys love and enslaves.

'I chose slavery'

Those who acknowledge no restraints in the matter of sex, are in danger of losing their freedom to love, of losing their freedom altogether. By saying Yes to such an imperious instinct as sex, as often as it makes itself felt, they are losing their ability to say No. And - the point needs to be repeated - a man is not free unless he can also say No. 'I can resist anything except temptation', quipped Oscar Wilde. He wasn't free. He was a slave (though at least he realized it). And there are many people around today who are deliberately and quickly forging their own slavery (even though - perhaps - many of them do not realize it).

I Chose Freedom was the title of a famous book of 25 or 30 years ago. Someone, I forget who, objected to the title; that it didn't make sense, that you can't choose freedom. Oh, but you can. And you can choose the opposite of freedom. I fear that the autobiography of many people today may sadly have to be entitled 'I Chose Slavery'.

A person's choice in doing this, in seeing or reading that, may indeed be a free choice; there lies its responsibility. But, in so many cases, it is by no stretch of the imagination a choice for freedom. It is a choice for slavery.

Freely to choose slavery!... This may sound absurd. And in a sense, yes, it is crazy and irrational. But no more absurd or impossible than the case of the people, in one country or another, who freely

and democratically vote themselves into a Communist or Fascist regime. They have freely chosen slavery.

I feel there are lots of people today who talk loudly about their freedom, and who are in fact riding a runaway car, hurtling down a road which ends in a precipice; and they just don't know how to stop. So perhaps they boost their own morale by pretending they have made a break-through into a new dimension of freedom. And they haven't. They have simply and sadly lost control over their own lives. Their choices are becoming more and more determined and predictable. They are heading for total destruction or total captivity.

Free for what?

A large part of the present-day confusion about freedom is because we think of freedom as being free from external restrictions; and we forget that it is much more a matter of being free from internal restraints, from self-imposed or self-sought restrictions which hinder our development as true personalities. It is a matter essentially of having, and being able to exercise, an internal and personal power, a power which includes self-dominion, self-possession and self-realization in intimate relationship.

'Free a man', the American Negro Civil Rights leader, James Farmer, has said, 'and he is not yet free. He must still free himself.' And Nietzsche wrote: 'You call yourself free? I would hear of your master-thought, not of your escape from the yoke. Are you a man that should escape from the yoke? Many have cast off all their values when they cast off their servitude. Free from what? How does that concern Zarathustra? Let your eye answer me frankly: Free for what?...'

Modern man wants to be free from. But he doesn't know what he should be free for. And as a result he is in danger of losing or abandoning his freedom, even if simply because he is less and less capable of seeing any really worthwhile use to which it can be put.

Stuck at the cross-roads

In the end freedom is of little use to the man without values or ideals, just as it is of less use still to the man who is afraid to commit himself. And it so happens that modern man is both very unsure of his ideals and very suspicious of almost any real commitment.

Freedom is of little use to the man lacking in values or ideals, for if he has no worth-while goals to his life then his choices can mean little to him; fundamentally his problem is that he cannot respect the things he chooses. Even if it were true that there is more freedom in the world today, of what use can this be to a world with a lessened sense of values? It is sad to boast of at last having all the roads open and unrestricted before one, if at the same time one has a growing feeling that none of them seem to lead anywhere...

And what is the point of having all the roads open before one, if, deep down, one is afraid to choose any of them, or afraid at least to make more than tentative and very temporary choices; ready to take a few steps along one road, but even readier to retrace those steps as soon as one gets bored with it or finds the going tough; and then to try another road (another job, another cause, another husband, another wife...), and another, and another?

Man today is so suspicious of committing himself that he is in danger of voluntarily paralysing his power of choice, his own very freedom. For every choice is a commitment. And those who are afraid to choose, or exercise tentative choices and quickly revoke them, contradict and annul their

own freedom. Modern man, like the men of all ages, stands at the cross-roads of choice. But since modern man is afraid to commit himself, he remains at the cross-roads.

Progressive paralysis

This progressive paralysis of freedom, this growing inability to make a real and lasting choice of anything that demands 'sticking power'... this is not just the ordinary difficulty inherent in the power to choose, the difficulty which derives from the simple fact that the choice of any alternative involves the exclusion of all other alternatives. (Mgr Escriva puts the point with typical clarity, and adds a thought that those who are afraid of a Christian commitment would do well to ponder. 'The choice of one thing means that many other things, which are also worthwhile, are excluded. This, however, does not imply a lack of freedom; it is simply a necessary consequence of our limited nature, which cannot embrace everything. Nevertheless, if, in each moment, one chooses God - who is the ultimate end also of the natural order - in him one somehow possesses everything.' {Italics mine.})

This has always been true, and that is why any thinking man has always hesitated before a serious choice, before marrying, for instance. In choosing this woman, I am excluding all the rest; in committing myself to one girl, I renounce all the ever so many million other girls. There is an evident risk in this; and so there should be. Freedom has always been a risk for man. But in the past most men have, sooner or later, preferred to accept the risk. In the case given, they have preferred to put the question - with the idea, moreover, that it meant a life-long commitment! As it used to be put popularly, they preferred to 'take the plunge' rather than risk remaining 'high and dry'.

This is changing today. That a man is no longer prepared to buy a washing machine or a car without a twelve-month warranty may be no more than a sign of reasonable caution. But that more and more men and women are not prepared to enter into marriage without a proviso - perhaps a very implicit or even unconscious, but a real proviso - for the possibility of divorce, is a sign of a deep-rooted mistrust and a fear of commitment, which is ultimately a fear of love.

It is true that the advertiser-dominated world we live in does not encourage trust. We are told so much about the incredible qualities and extraordinary good value of practically everything that we end up believing in the real value of practically nothing.

But if we can perhaps blame the advertisers for our mistrust of the quality of so many man-made goods, we have only ourselves to blame if we mistrust such God-given goods as social relationships, friendship, love or marriage. We have abused so many of the good things God has given us that they no longer work in our service. We no longer trust them because we have deformed them and made them what they were never meant to be.

Commitment and love

It is clear that if a man is not free, he cannot love. But it should also be clear that if he does not love, he cannot ever truly be free. Freedom is really meant for love, and freedom, without love, makes little sense and is practically worthless.

To choose things that one cannot love, or that one cannot at least respect, is to choose a life without values; it is to degrade one's human nature. Pushed to the limit, it is hell, for hell is a state where one only chooses what one hates. The will that can only choose what it hates is not a free will; it is absolutely enslaved. So, every choice that is made without love is, at best, a poor exercise of freedom - so poor an exercise that, at the worst, it can be a step towards a total loss of freedom.

One has to love - and to love something worth loving - so as to be really free. Then one will freely commit oneself, and all of one's commitments will be commitments of love, for the essential need of love is to commit itself to the loved one.

There is a necessary interconnection between freedom, commitment (choice) and love. As Mgr Josemaria Escriva puts it: 'Any opposition felt between freedom and commitment is a sure sign that love is weak, for freedom resides in love. For that very reason I cannot conceive freedom without commitment, or commitment without freedom; one reality underlines and affirms the other'. (Italics mine. Cf. Chesterton's remark in *Orthodoxy*: 'I could never conceive or tolerate any Utopia which did not leave to me the liberty for which I chiefly care, the liberty to bind myself.')

Doing what you like...

Earlier on we rejected the idea that freedom is 'the power to do what one likes'. As we pointed out, this is an idea that won't stand examination. If it has nevertheless always enjoyed popularity as a notion of freedom, this must be put down either to superficial thinking, or else to a desire to propagate a libertine idea of freedom, to bestow the noble name of liberty on what is simply uncontrolled impulse. And it is clear, from what we said earlier, that when a man is not in control of his impulses - when he is controlled by them - he is not free, and the end of such runaway selfishness can only be the submergence of self in total slavery.

It is interesting to recall St Augustine's dictum, 'Ama et fac quod vis', which in other times, when libertines were more cultured, if not more sincere, was a popular classical quotation among them. Ama et fac quod vis: 'Love and do what you like'... Yet it wasn't in his libertine period, but after it - after he had fully experienced how freedom without real love can enslave - that St Augustine formulated this striking phrase. A little reflection makes his meaning clear. The love - the liberating love - he refers to is the love of God. The person who tries to make love for God the motive of all his actions, wants what God wants, he likes what God wants. Therefore, since it is always possible to do what God wants, he can always do what he likes, and will be the freest of men. Freedom, for him, is indeed the power to do what he likes; and, as long as he keeps on loving, he will always be doing what he likes.

We might add, incidentally, that the person who tries to live this way has solved one of the major problems of morality: that of liking what one ought to do. He will do what he ought, what God wants of him (or at least he will try to do it), because he wants to do it, because he likes to do it.

Roads to freedom

Freedom, as we said earlier, is the power to be fully oneself. There is the goal: to become what one has the potentiality to be. That is why many roads freely chosen are not roads to freedom. They are roads that prevent man from becoming fully a man. They are roads of self-limitation, self-frustration, or self-destruction. A man is limiting himself or destroying himself if he chooses the road of pride or lust or self-pity or insincerity or meanness.

The road to freedom is an uphill road, and the difficult steps by which a man follows it are truth, justice, service, humility, chastity, love... The more a man fights his way uphill along this road, the freer he becomes. And the freer he becomes, the more he possesses himself, the more he exercises full possession and control over all his faculties. His is the freedom of having one's lower faculties or instincts properly and dynamically subordinated to one's higher faculties - lust to love, anger to justice, for instance - and of having one's higher faculties joyously related to higher values: love to

goodness, knowledge to truth. It is along this uphill road that a man must struggle if he wants to find freedom.

Facts that make the search vain?

And yet two facts seem to make his quest vain. The first is the fact of death. No matter how free a man may become, no matter how much he possesses himself in the realization of his possibilities, if death ends all, he loses all in death.

The second fact is that full self-realization seems a necessarily impossible goal for man, that he is destined to the frustration of never being able fully to realize himself or fully to satisfy all his wants; destined therefore never to be fully free. After all, if, as we indicated earlier on, freedom particularly implies freedom from want, it seems clear that man is destined never to be fully free in this world, for no matter how much he possesses he will always want more. And the man who is conscious of some unsatisfied desire, does not feel fully free.

Man's desire for pleasure or for goods can perhaps be fully sated. Yet the fact that man can actually come to a point of feeling disgust at pleasure or boredom with consumer goods, is a sure sign that his self-fulfilment does not lie along the path of these desires. However, there are two needs of man - precisely his greatest and noblest needs - that can never, in human experience, be fully satisfied. These are man's need for truth and his need for goodness, his need to know and his need to love.

These are man's greatest needs. They are needs that may be dulled or deadened. But it has remained a constant of human history that, if they are kept keen and alive, nothing, on earth, can fully satisfy them.

Man wants God

Man wants to know all truth; he wants to know truth without limit. And he wants to find and possess goodness, and still more goodness, and still more. He wants eternal and infinite goodness, and eternal and infinite love. In other words, he wants God. This is why, even on the natural plane, it is clear that man is made for God, and nothing less than God can satisfy him. Only in the possession and enjoyment of God can man be truly himself and truly free.

Those who do not believe in God can seek perfect freedom, but they will not find it. If they feel themselves called to be Messiahs, they can promise full freedom to others, but they cannot give it. God is the only Messiah who can do that.

Salvation and self

One finds one's self, or one loses one's self, in finding - or losing - God. And the finding or the losing of one's self is what, on the natural level, is implied in the terms salvation or perdition. Salvation, on the natural plane, means to save one's self, to achieve real selfhood, to possess one's self fully, in full and free exercise of all one's powers and faculties.

And perdition or damnation is to lose one's real self, to end up as a being without any unity or consistency or direction, a personality (if it can still be called that) that is no more than a battlefield between conflicting forces and desires, a being that has been reduced to torn and scattered remnants of bitterness and frustration and hatred and pride.

The difference between salvation and perdition is really the ultimate difference between freedom and slavery. The process of becoming free (of gradually conquering one's freedom), or the process

of losing one's freedom (of gradually degenerating into a slave), is a process that is worked out here on earth, during the lifetime of each individual. But the final result of this process, the state of final freedom or of final slavery, is lived forever in eternity.

We can never therefore possess full freedom here on earth. All we can achieve here are 'freedoms', possibilities and capacities to freely act and move and realize ourselves: the freedom to fight one's way forward, to battle and overcome self-centredness, to learn to love. We have to fight constantly to exercise these freedoms, we have to fight even to maintain them, since they are freedoms that are in constant danger and can be lost.

For we can also fall into slavery here on earth; into one or many slaveries: the slavery of a proud self-centredness, the slavery of a resentful or envious spirit, the slavery of lust, or of drink, or of drugs... And yet, while we are still travellers on this earth, these slaveries are not yet final, and can be shaken off or at least fought and prevented from getting more than a slippery and troublesome - but ineffectual - hold on us.

It is only when our journey has reached its end, when death has cut short for ever the struggle (or the lack of struggle) and terminated the process of development (or of degeneration), it is then that man 'sets' in his definitive and eternal self, in the glorious and joyous expansion of his freed self, or in the enslaved remnants of his lost self.

The gift of God's freedom

Two further things must be mentioned. Man cannot save himself on his own. Only with God's help can he find salvation. If he neglects or refuses God's help, he will lose himself. Man has always hoped for perfect freedom - to be fully master of his own nature, in full possession of all his faculties, and to be able to exercise all of them without restraint. But only God can give man this freedom.

The Christian, however, does not stop there, in this question of freedom. For God, who loves man, has not stopped there. God's plan, in Christ, is to give man infinitely more than he could have ever hoped for. It is to give him not only the full possession and enjoyment of his own human nature, with all the freedom this implies. It is to give him the possession and enjoyment of the divine nature. It is to put him in possession of God's own freedom.

So God's plan is that man, in the end, should not just find and possess himself. It is that he should find much more than himself, that he should possess infinitely more than himself. Only the Christian realizes what the fulfilment of man's potentialities can mean in the plan which God has revealed in Jesus Christ. For God has made man capable of God. He has made man capable of knowing and loving God - infinite Truth and Goodness - not only in a natural fashion, as a rational creature, in his natural fulfilment, might come to know and love God, but in a supernatural fashion. He has made man capable of knowing and loving God as God knows and loves himself; capable, that is, of living divine life and divine freedom.

This freedom is of course a free gift - a grace - of God. Grace, for the Christian, means just this: the gift which God bestows on man to enable him to live divine life and become an heir to divine freedom.

Freedom then, for the Christian, is something quite unique. It is the freedom which Christ himself has won for us (cf. Gal 4:30). The Christian vision of freedom is of a totally different order to any mere human dream of freedom. What the Christian looks forward to is, in St Paul's ecstatic words,

the glorious freedom of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8:21). And that freedom, as God's very own, is both eternal and infinite.
