

Thoughts on the paradox of gaining freedom

From the blog of Michael Haldas

“...the most paradoxical thing that lies in the fact of freedom is that man cannot “free himself” from it—if he wanted to do so—unless he extinguishes himself completely. This makes Sartre’s “man is condemned to be free,” sound quite true. For the alternative which freedom poses for man’s existence lies between accepting existence as a whole as something of which man freely partakes, or making existence something which man controls himself.” (Metropolitan John Zizioulas)

“...philosophy since Socrates had in effect chosen to cast its lot with the serpent rather than with a personal God, by accepting that “the knowledge of Good and Evil” is man’s best destiny and would make us the equivalent of gods. The knowledge of Good and Evil, no matter how systematically or thoroughly consumed, will by no means make us gods. Rather, modern ethics, modern psychotherapy, and modern political ideologies all tend to produce not superhumans but pitiable slaves to the rationalizations generated by our distorted human desires. In order to gain control over the world, we have been too willing to renounce essential aspects of our own freedom.” (Timothy G. Patitsas)

“Fearing immorality (or something similar), or seeking conformity at any cost, it is easy to reduce a person’s freedom, substituting a false obedience, that results in the creation of a “false self.”...“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” The paradox of our relationship to God is that obedience in our relationship to Him does not enslave us – but sets us free...It’s paradox is that this life within revealed limits is the only true freedom. Freedom is not the ability to do anything, to have no limits, but the ability to truly be who and what you are, which can only be known through the revelation of limits.” (Father Stephen Freeman)

“Self-denial gets a bad rap because denying ourselves doesn’t come natural due to the infection of sin in us which causes us to associate it with drudgery and unpleasantness. It’s counter-cultural too. The reality is that self-denial is really about gain and freedom not loss and confinement. We gain who we really are and become “set free” when we deny ourselves out of love for Christ, and with this comes peace, freedom, and contentment in our soul that no amount of self-indulgence can compete with. However, the paradox is that if we do this with the idea of gaining something as opposed to someone, we lessen the virtue of self-denial. We need to get to the place through prayer and practice where our love for Christ is what compels us and where we deny anything that keeps us from our union with Him.” (Sacramental Living Ministries)

“According to Christian teaching, freedom doesn’t lie in the untrammelled capacity to satisfy one’s personal desires. Such freedom is merely allowing our distorted selfishness to run riot. Which means it’s radically opposed to the Christian notion of freedom. Real freedom is part and parcel of the transcendence of our selfishness. This is the only way in which one person’s freedom doesn’t impinge on that of others. Real freedom has its source in God and is experienced as communion with him and with other people. The acquisition of such freedom requires complete self-denial on our part, and the observation of God’s commandments...With the acceptance of mortification, which is the culmination of the paradoxicality of the Christian life, human nature isn’t undermined, but, on the contrary, is brought to its perfection.” (George Mantzarides)