

INTRODUCTION

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

—St. Paul¹

We will offer God our will, our reason, our mind, our whole being through the hands and the heart of the Blessed Virgin. Then our spirit will possess that precious freedom of soul, so far removed from tension, sadness, depression, constraint, and small-mindedness. We will sail the sea of abandonment, being freed from ourselves to attach ourselves to him, the Infinite.

—Mother Yvonne-Aimée de Malestroit²

This book is about a basic theme of Christian life: interior freedom. Its purpose is simple. Every Christian needs to discover that even in the most unfavorable outward circumstances we possess within ourselves a space of freedom that nobody can take away, because God is its source and guarantee. Without this discovery we will always be restricted in some way, and will never taste true happiness. But if we have learned to let this inner space of freedom unfold, then, even though many things may well cause us to suffer, nothing will really be able to oppress or crush us.

¹ 2 Corinthians 3: 17.

² Quoted in Paul Labutte, *Une amitié voulue par Dieu* (Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 1999).

Interior Freedom

The thesis to be developed is a simple but very important one: we gain possession of our interior freedom in exact proportion to our growth in faith, hope, and love. This book will look specifically at how the dynamism of what are classically called the “theological virtues” is the heart of the spiritual life. It will also underline the key role of the virtue of hope in our inner growth. Hope cannot really be exercised apart from poverty of heart, so that the whole of the book may be considered a commentary on the first beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”³

We shall return to certain topics that have been covered in my previous books⁴ and look at them more deeply: inner peace, prayer life, and docility to the Holy Spirit.

At the beginning of the third millennium, it is hoped that this book will help those who wish to open themselves to the marvelous inner renewal that the Holy Spirit wants to bring about in people’s hearts, and in this way reach the glorious freedom of the children of God.

³ Matthew 5: 3.

⁴ *Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart* (New York: Alba House, 2002); *Time for God: A Guide to Prayer* (New York: Pauline Books and Media, 2005); *In the School of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Scepter, 2007).

I

FREEDOM AND ACCEPTANCE

I. THE SEARCH FOR FREEDOM

Present-day culture and Christianity can, in a sense, find common ground in the concept of freedom. After all, Christianity is a message of freedom and liberation. To realize this, we need only to open the New Testament, where the words “free,” “freedom,” “set free” occur regularly. “The truth will make you free,” says Jesus in St. John’s Gospel.¹ St. Paul states: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,”² and, elsewhere, “For freedom Christ has set us free.”³ St. James calls the law of Christianity a “law of liberty.”⁴ What we need to do, and will try to do in the course of this book, is find out the real nature of this freedom.

Modern culture has been marked for the past few centuries by a strong aspiration for freedom. Everyone

¹ John 8: 32.

² 2 Corinthians 3: 17.

³ Galatians 5: 1.

⁴ James 2: 12.

Interior Freedom

realizes, however, how ambiguous the notion of freedom can be; false ideas of freedom have alienated people from the truth and caused millions of deaths. The twentieth century above all saw that happen, to its cost. But the desire for freedom remains observable in every sphere: social, political, economic, and psychological. Its urgency is probably due to the fact that, despite all the “progress” achieved so far, this desire still remains unfulfilled.

In the area of morality, freedom appears very nearly the only value about which people still agree unanimously at the beginning of the third millennium. Everyone more or less agrees that respect for other people’s freedom is still a basic ethical norm. Undoubtedly this is more a matter of theory than practice, as western liberalism becomes progressively more totalitarian. It may be merely a manifestation of the underlying selfishness of modern man, for whom respect for the freedom of the individual is less a recognition of an ethical law than a declaration of individualism—nobody can prevent me from doing what I feel like! Yet this aspiration for freedom, so strong among people today, even though it includes a large dose of illusion and is sometimes fulfilled in mistaken ways, contains something very true and noble.

Freedom and happiness

Human beings were not created for slavery, but to be the lords of creation. This is explicitly stated in the Book of

Genesis. We were not created to lead drab, narrow, or constricted lives, but to live in the wide-open spaces. We find confinement unbearable, simply because we were created in the image of God, and we have within us an unquenchable need for the absolute and the infinite. That is our greatness and sometimes our misfortune.

We have this great thirst for freedom because our most fundamental aspiration is for happiness; and we sense that there is no happiness without love, and no love without freedom. This is perfectly true. Human beings were created for love, and they can only find happiness in loving and being loved. As St. Catherine of Siena puts it,⁵ man cannot live without loving. The problem is that our love often goes in the wrong direction: we love ourselves, selfishly, and end up frustrated, because only genuine love can fulfill us.

Only love, then, can satisfy us; and there is no love without freedom. The kind of love that is the result of constraint, or self-interest, or the mere satisfaction of a need, does not deserve the name love. Love is neither taken nor bought. There is true love, and therefore happiness, only between people who freely yield possession of the self in order to give themselves to one another.

Here we can get some idea of how precious freedom is. Freedom gives value to love, and love is the precondition

⁵ "The soul cannot live without love, it always needs something to love: for it is made of love, and it is for love that I created it." *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena, chapter 51.

Interior Freedom

of happiness. The reason why people attach so much importance to freedom must be because they perceive this truth, however confusedly; and from that point of view, it must be admitted they are right.

But how do we achieve the freedom that will enable love to flourish? To attain this goal, let us look first at certain widespread illusions that must be put aside if we are to enjoy true freedom.

Freedom: Claiming autonomy or accepting dependence?

Although the idea of freedom, as we have seen, can be viewed as a meeting point between Christianity and present-day culture, it also appears paradoxically to be the point at which they are furthest apart. For modern man, to be free often means throwing off all constraint and all authority—“Neither God nor master.” For Christianity, on the other hand, freedom can only be found by submitting to God, in the “obedience of faith” that St. Paul speaks of.⁶ True freedom is not so much something man wins for himself; it is a free gift from God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, received in the measure in which we place ourselves in a relationship of loving dependence on our Creator and Savior. This is where the Gospel paradox is most apparent: “Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”⁷

⁶ Romans 1: 5.

⁷ Matthew 16: 25.