

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

FOUR KINDS OF FREEDOM

by the Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough

Everyone longs to be free, the Writings tell us (see *Divine Providence* 148), and inside ourselves we know this is true. Today more than ever people are arguing about freedom, and in some countries they are even making war over freedom. Freedom is so important because it lies at the very heart of everyone's life. Mankind, old and young have always struggled for freedom, and with good reason. But they usually haven't understood what freedom really is, or how you get it. Too often people have fought only for the freedom to do what they wanted, without understanding that the really basic freedom is something spiritual that comes from God.

In His Second Coming the Lord makes all things new, and the Writings give us a new understanding of freedom that can help us to become truly free. In fact the Heavenly Doctrines say so much about freedom that in this space I can only summarize the teachings about four different kinds of freedom.

“The first and most basic kind of freedom is the Lord's gift of free will...”

The first and most basic kind of freedom is the Lord's gift of free will, or liberty. This is something He gives to all human beings. In fact, it is what makes us human. (See *True Christian Religion* 463-508, especially 475-482.) Everyone is given by the Lord to choose freely between good and evil, right and wrong. You can love and think what is good or what is evil. Even if you can't *do* and *say* everything you think and *will* (or love), still no one can make you *will* (love) some way you don't want to will. We are even free to love and think the most awful, foul things. We can choose to go to hell if we *want* to. This freedom to will as we wish, is the real reason we live forever, in heaven or hell. Animals do not have free will, but all humans have something of it. Even infants and children have a beginning of freedom, and can choose, in limited ways, to do good or bad, depending on their maturity. But it is important that you do not come fully into this freedom until you are adult and can reject evil by means of your own rational (See *Arcana Coelestia* 10225). In other words, the Lord gives children and young people gradually more free will as they mature and take responsibility. But it is only when you become adult that you are fully free to choose for yourself whether you love the goods of heaven or the evils of hell.

It is sad how many people today don't believe in this freedom. Some think God decides everything for you, including whether you go to heaven or hell (this is called predestination). Others believe you become nothing but what your environment, education and experiences make you to be - as though we were slaves to all the things that happen to us from other people. But the Lord is love, and because He loves us He wants us to feel as full of life as possible. And we can only feel our life is our own if we are free - free to love good or evil. So the most important freedom of all is a freedom of our spirit to *love* and think the way we want to. In that freedom lies the very secret of all human life.

But what do we *do* with our free will? People use their freedom of will to love all different kinds of things, good and bad. If throughout your life you use freedom of will to love what is good, and to turn away from evil, the Lord gives you "heavenly freedom." (See *Divine Providence* 43, 97-99.) This is the freedom the angels have, and it is called "freedom itself" because there is nothing you can't do. That is because everything you want is good and useful for others. No one stops you from doing these good things. In fact everywhere you go you are encouraged to do what you want, because your life is to love others. This beautiful freedom comes only from a lifetime of seeking to live the Lord's way.

"Hellish freedom is really slavery because you are always wanting what you can't have."

A third kind of freedom is just as bad as "heavenly freedom" is good. This is called "infernal" (or hellish) freedom, and it is the freedom you get in hell. (See *Divine Providence* 43, 97, 149.) Yes, in hell, you can still go on loving and thinking the way you want to, but everywhere you turn, you are limited and hemmed in by various punishments and obstacles. Why?—Because just about everything you want works against somebody else. And since you aren't allowed to damage other people (not even other evil spirits), you are constantly being frustrated by your own selfish loves.

Hellish freedom is really slavery because you always want what you can't have. It's like being in a closed-in box you have built up around yourself, out of your own selfishness. Yet you are still you, free to *want* and *think* the way you choose. You get hellish freedom (rather than heavenly) by spending your life on earth trying to please yourself and make yourself happy rather than working to make other people happy.

A fourth kind of freedom is freedom to do and speak—freedom of action in the world. This freedom comes from the Lord, but it is limited (and should be) by conditions in the world. (See *True Christian Religion* 498; *Divine Providence* 281.) We are not as free to say and do, as we are free to will and think. Especially there have to be limits to speaking and doing evil in the world. Otherwise evil people would be constantly doing terrible things to innocent victims. The purpose of governments and authority is to keep the freedom to do evil within definite limits. Yet we always have some freedom of action. And even when we are not free to do and say everything we want, we are still free in our spirit to will and to think the way we want to. The first kind of freedom, free will, always remains with us because it is the direct gift of the Lord.

Freedom is the Lord's most wonderful gift to man. Even though people often use it badly, the Lord goes right on keeping us free, trying always to lift us out of "hellish freedom" and into "heavenly freedom."

One more important thing to know about freedom is that it always goes together with order. Unfortunately, many people today think that order is against freedom, and that the only way to be free is to somehow get away from what is orderly. You can see how wrong this is by remembering some really disorderly, wild school or family situation, when everyone was being "free" to yell or fight or do anything he wanted. Maybe you *felt* free for a little while, but if someone didn't bring some order back, in the long run no one was free to get anything done at all.

In fact order and freedom always go together. The purpose of order is to lead us into greater and greater freedom. "Order" that stifles all human freedom (as in some countries) is really disorder. And freedom, which is possible only in a framework of order, has as its purpose to lead us into more and more order, and so into more and more freedom and happiness. Freedom and order make a kind of spiral: order makes us freer, and Freedom allows us to come into a higher and more enjoyable order.

When you're young and your freedoms are limited, you can get ready for the greater freedom you long for. First remember that free will is basically a gift of the Lord. As you get older the Lord gradually will give you more and more free will by keeping your mind in an orderly balance. This means that the best way to prepare for adult freedom of will is to learn not to just follow the crowd, but to follow what you know is right and good and true. Learn to listen to the Lord in His Word, because it is by means of His truth that the Lord can give you the greatest possible freedom (John 8:32). Learn to think for yourself, using the true ideas you learn from the Word. Listen to the wisdom of other people, and learn to think about it seriously even when you don't like it at first.

Especially, find ways to stay out of trouble, and to turn away from what you know is wrong. Spend some time by yourself, and think about how you can do good things for other people rather than just follow your crowd in finding ways to make yourselves happy. Learn the difference between good advice that will help yourself and others, and bad advice you should say no to. " You shall not follow a crowd to do evil," the Lord says (Exodus 23:2), and these are really directions to increase your freedom. The sooner you learn to think and will for yourself, using the truths of the Lord's Word, then the sooner He will give you fully the free will of adulthood, the more you will also be free in your actions, and the happier He will make you.