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ABOUT THE COLLEGE

A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education

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IV. FREEDOM AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Christian Faith and the theological tradition of the Church present a view of freedom which is altogether opposed to the foregoing notions. Rather than supposing that men can attain the truth by the exercise of freedom, they teach that men become free by finding, or being found by, the truth and abiding in it. For the Christian believes that Christ Himself is the Truth, and believes Him when He says, "If you make my words your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free." (John 8, 31-32.) Indeed, Christian belief considers the attempt to gain knowledge by the assertion of freedom as the original cause of human enslavement, for it brought sin into the world, which is at once the worst slavery and the cause of every other slavery.

Divine Revelation therefore frees the faithful Christian from those specious and yet absurd notions of freedom which, because they are false and subvert the life of reason, deceitfully enslave all who believe in them. In particular, it teaches that self-rule is not the same as independence, but rather that the assertion of complete independence destroys the capacity for self-rule. For to say that a man governs himself is to say that he has within him the principle which governs him. But when a man seeks to achieve total independence by subjecting every belief to criticism, and puts his intellectual life outside of every principle given to him (either from his experience which is formed by and thus dependent on nature, or from faith), he loses by this act every possible source of rational direction, and is in fact proposing the nothingness of total ignorance as a principle. Thus, it happens that will and appetite, no longer subordinate to reason, give life whatever definite form it has, since reason, in the indeterminacy of the critical attitude, can no longer direct itself or anything else. And so the human mind, refusing to submit to any rule, becomes subject to its natural inferiors.

This paradoxical self-enslavement is clearly taught by the Christian tradition, in the history of our first parents, whose disobedience to God was immediately followed by a loss of self-control, and in the teaching of St. Paul, who speaks at once of the fact of human bondage and of deliverance from it by faith and obedience:

I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the

law that my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!

(Romans 7, 22-25)

The Christian tradition also teaches that true freedom does not essentially consist in the removal of whatever stands against and limits the human will, nor in the creative expressions of that will, but rather in the inward re-birth and transformation of ourselves by the grace of God.

Yes, even today, whenever Moses is read, the veil is over their minds. It will not be removed until they turn to the Lord. Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.

(II Cor. 3, 15-18)

Though St. Paul is speaking here of supernatural freedom, his doctrine serves to reform the notion of freedom in general. Men do not become free by leaving behind or stepping outside of all that they have received, but rather by receiving, keeping what they receive, and growing into it. No doubt they leave behind ignorance, falsehood and vice, but in so doing they relinquish precisely that alone which enslaves them. Ignorance, falsehood and vice consist in man's measuring all things from his own authority alone, leaving him enslaved by error. "Everyone who speaks from himself is a liar." Thus, no one becomes a man by outgrowing childish things, but outgrows childish things by growing into the things of a man. Only accidentally is true freedom *from*; essentially it is the formation of the inward man by the true principles of thought and action.

The Christian tradition, insisting on the primacy of revealed truth, distinguishes it from the truth which is discoverable by human reason. Because it maintains, however, that grace presupposes and perfects nature, it has always defended the natural power of human reason from its skeptical critics. The fundamental competence of the human mind, even for discovering profound truths, has always been upheld, in modern times by the first Vatican Council, but also at the very beginning by the apostle Paul:

The anger of God is being revealed from heaven against all the impiety and depravity of men who keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness. For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity--however invisible--have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made.

(Romans 1, 18-20)

Accordingly, to speak in summary, the Christian intelligence is formed by an acceptance of certain fundamental distinctions and a recognition of the order among the objects of thought: some are of faith, others of reason; some certain, others doubtful; some self-evident, others not; some demonstrable, others not; some subject to criticism, others not. This awareness of the distinction between the primary and the secondary in human knowledge makes true freedom of inquiry possible, for only the recognition of the difference between the unquestionable

foundations of criticism and doubtful matters subject to criticism can give reasonable direction to inquiry. Or to speak generally, to live in freedom is to live by the truth.

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