

Reflections

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Free of My Own Self

If we look at the world today, we see that freedom is one of the greatest values for modern man. The desire for freedom is very strong. Freedom is the supreme good for today's man. It is the root of his human dignity.

What is freedom?

In Michel Quoist's book TRIUMPH, we read: "If you submit to the will of your instinct, you have the 'freedom' of an animal. If you submit to the will of sensitivity, to your imagination, to your pride, to your egoism... you have the freedom of the perverted man who is limited by sin. If you submit to the Will of God, you have the freedom of the divinized man, the freedom of a child of God."

The freedom OF – FOR

For us, freedom is not an end unto itself, but freedom is the great means for achieving our vocation, our happiness. It is freedom **for**. Therefore, the Christian's freedom is fundamentally a restrained freedom. It is not the freedom of a leaf in the wind which remains sterile, rather it is the freedom of the seed: rooted in that earth which will nourish it and make it grow. Freedom allows us to grow, but to grow, we have to bind ourselves, become rooted. And our dilemma as men is: or we bind ourselves as children to the Will of God, or we bind ourselves as slaves to false gods, to idols. The freedom **of** then, means, to be free of all those attachments which are chains which keep me from growing.

God's rivals are the idols which promise me false happiness and which make me a slave. Ultimately there is only one great idol: my own self. The dilemma for my freedom is: do I give it lovingly to another who is not me, or do I selfishly wrap it around myself? Then a great number of idols can emerge...

The idols of comfort, laziness and irresponsibility... Self-will, the desire to do my will and not be opposed... Activity, that tendency to do – more than to welcome – is very strong in us, especially in males. Another idol is realism which motivates us to reject something key to the faith which is the mystery of the Cross. Some impulses which we do not control and which tyrannize us are also idols: moodiness, impatience and so many other things which we have not been able to control.

So then, if we want to be interiorly free, we have to battle against our own self. We have to conquer our freedom step by step. As long as we are bound to things or persons, we will not be free. Things do not bind themselves to us, we bind ourselves to things. We surrender ourselves to them as slaves.

To place ourselves on the road to inner freedom, we have to know ourselves: our possibilities, our limitations and our attachments. Thus begins the struggle to free ourselves from all that which hampers our true personality. To free ourselves from many things: complexes, anxieties, tyranny of the instincts, disorders, character flaws, etc. These are the areas for self-education.

But freedom does not end here. We want to be free for someone. Self-possession has as a goal the giving of oneself, commitment. The meaning of inner freedom is the surrender to the YOU, the solidarity for brothers, the surrender to God. Between both aspects (free of – to be free for) there is tension, a creative polarity: freedom – attachment.

Questions for reflection

1. Which are my idols?
2. Do I work regularly on my self-education?
3. Do I offer God my efforts for self-formation?

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