

Having celebrated the 4th of July, it might be well to consider what freedom is. But to do so, we have to step back from our modern American sense of freedom. Unfortunately, our American notion of freedom, which could be called the freedom of indifference, falls short of a true and deep understanding of what freedom is. It separates freedom from goodness in that it holds up freedom as a good in and of itself. Where in reality it is a means that we are to employ to help order ourselves, with God's grace, to happiness which is none other than God Himself. Authentic human freedom means: freedom from constraint of freedom for excellence.

What's the danger of espousing this 'freedom of indifference'?

For starters it implies that God, who is Goodness Himself, is in competition with the good of His creatures. As if somehow what God wills is oppressive and constraining for His creatures, and is opposed to their perfection and flourishing; it elevates evil to the same level as good, because it says freedom consists in being able to choose evil. And if evil is on par with the good that implies that evil is just as legitimate as good: the line of morality between good and evil become blurred. Freedom, so it holds, consists in ultimate self-assertion. Freedom becomes a good in and of itself, and the true good is cast aside - freedom becomes an idol. Lastly, the Gospel and the moral standards taught by Jesus and upheld by the Church are seen as oppressive. Submission to anyone or anything, let alone God, is to be avoided at all costs.

It eventually breeds chaos.

Of course, these notions above are so much nonsense. In principle God could never be nor ever was a threat to the perfection of His creatures. In fact, such a position undermines (unsuccessfully) the fact that God freely created so that His creatures would accept the free proposition of participating in His infinite goodness, His infinite perfection, the happiness that is Him: outside of whom there is none. There is no escaping the reality that God is the source and necessary condition for happiness, goodness, perfection, etc.. If there were something desirable outside of God, then God wouldn't be God. We only experience authentic human happiness insofar as we are in right relationship with God. We experience slavery to the extent that we choose or desire evil. To think that God or His will is oppressive or imposes upon our freedom and flourishing and perfection is as silly as saying that electricity is oppressive and imposing to an air conditioner (a/c), even though the a/c needs electricity to fulfill its purpose.

As an example of freedom for excellence consider language. If you wanted to be free to speak a certain language like French, you would have to submit your will and intellect to the rules/laws of speech, grammar, syntax, spelling that are intrinsic and constitutive of the French language. Yet, they are also perfective aren't they? You couldn't memorize a few words and ignore everything else and truly be free to speak the language. Nor could you randomly spout off French sounding jargon and claim fluency. I can't be free to speak French if I ignore the rules of grammar, etc. But if you wanted to be free to speak perfect French you have had to submit to the rules of the language. Sure, there would be a period of time where one has to be disciplined (meaning 'student of,' not punished) to the rules until they are interiorized. Once they are interiorized, then you would be free to excel in French and be free from the constraint of ignorance and free for excellence. Now take that and apply it to life. On a natural level: the language is happiness; the rules/laws of speech, grammar, and syntax are virtues such as justice, fortitude, prudence, temperance, patience. On a supernatural level the language would be: the rules/laws of speech, grammar, and syntax are the Gospel, Tradition, faith, love, hope, and teachings of the Church regarding matters of faith and morals.

"It is for freedom (from evil) that Christ has set us free (for Heaven). Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery (sin-evil)" - Gal.5:1

Your servant in Christ,

Seminarian Joe