

## Reflections on Truth and Freedom in Christ

“...and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:32)

### I.

During the mystical supper Jesus declares that he is “the way, and the truth, and the life.” (Jn. 14:6) Therefore the life we share **with** and **in** Christ draws us to truth and freedom. Truth and freedom are the consequences of a living and ever growing relationship with Christ. There can be no truth i.e. life in Christ without freedom and there can no freedom without being caught in the embrace of divine-human love which is Christ’s.

Our drawing near to Christ is an act of freedom. We choose to draw near not because of fear of hell or the desire to gain heaven.( Cf. S. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*) Freely we draw near as a response to God’s overture of love manifested in his sending us his only begotten Son. “We love, because he first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:19) From before the ages we were predestined to share in the divine life. God “destined us in his love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” (Eph. 1:5) Before the creation God desired that all men and women should be his sons i.e. to share in the same intimate and filial relationship which he and his only begotten Son possess from all eternity.

Though we are predestined to be one with God we nevertheless are endowed with the freedom to counter God’s will. God, out of love for the one created in his image and likeness, permits this rebellion so as not to impose his will. “For, that which is done by force is not an act of virtue.” (S. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, II,12) Ultimately, this rebellion rooted in freedom imprisons the mind, heart and will within the realm of sin and death. Misused freedom is morphed into slavery which can only be overcome by divine intervention.

Christ’s call to repent summons us to freedom – freedom from sin and death which includes the liberation of closed minds and hardened hearts. The ascetical ordeal sustained and nurtured by the Holy Spirit opens the mind to the inexhaustible mysteries of God and creation. Through ascetical purification the liberated mind joyfully realizes its limitations as it concedes to the superiority of knowing beyond reason while the softened heart seeks and yearns to embrace the **other** as friend and equal.

### II.

Freedom in Christ is a never ending ascent to God. Yet, this ascent, through Christ’s birth, death and resurrection cannot be perceived as a withdrawal from the world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have ever lasting life.” (Jn. 3:16)

The world is the context in which we come to know Christ who is Truth. It is the context in which we live out our freedom in Christ. It is the place where we engage in the “unseen warfare.” Whether we live within or outside the monastic cloister we all bear responsibility for the world. All of us are called to love the world.

The world created and loved by God cannot be abandoned. God has given the world for us to bless, develop and sanctify. The realities of sin and death cannot deter us from embracing the world with the same love poured out upon it by God. In and through the world we commune with God and one another. All that is used in our worship comes from the world and is returned to God. The bread and wine, essential to the celebration of the Eucharist, come from the world through the labors of humanity and in the Holy Spirit are raised up by Christ (*who offers and is offered*) to God for our communion in divine uncreated life. The synergy of God, the world and humanity cannot be broken even by sin and death for our freedom in Christ allows us to repent – to change the mind and heart. Within this synergy we are commissioned as the *priests of creation* to make “*all things new.*” (Rev. 21:5)

We live in the world not as pharisaical judges who can only accuse and condemn its sin and revolt against God. Because our freedom draws us into the world we, like Christ, are called to co-suffer with it. The world’s misery and injustice cannot go unnoticed. Our freedom demands that we learn from Christ how to take upon ourselves the burdens and sins of the world so that with him we too become servants *to and for the life of the world.* With perseverance, patience and the resolve to bear the weight of human agony and fear our freedom will teach us how to counter indifference, tyranny, self righteousness and hardheartedness.

### III.

The gift of human freedom is a prelude to Golgotha. Inherent in this gift is the choice to live in communion with God or to rebel and withdraw from God. The gift of freedom is the most powerful possession of humanity. Yet, paradoxically, in his love for humanity - by offering this power - God humbles himself to a state of powerlessness. “The peak of all-powerfulness is thus received as a powerlessness of God, as a divine risk.” (Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, p.73) In this “divine risk” we choose between truth and falsehood, life and death. At this juncture *truth and freedom* are brought to the cross of Christ where the powerlessness of God is reflected in us. For if we are to love God, if we are to be released from the curse of the Law, if we are to “be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) then we are to embrace the powerlessness of the cross. In this process of powerlessness comes the renewal and integration of mind and heart, will and energy, body and spirit. By embracing the cross we will come to see that the “law was given to Moses” but “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (Jn. 1: 17)